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Even before it was shown in the Warsaw Screenings at the Polish capital's 34th International Film Festival, *Clergy* had broken the Polish box-office record at the beginning of October 2018, with 935,000 admissions during its opening weekend and over three million tickets sold before mid-October.

Director **Wojciech Smarzowski** (*The Mighty Angel*, *Traffic Department*) wrote the screenplay together with **Wojciech Rzehak**, creating what seems to be a unanimous objection to the historically influential and nowadays increasingly unquestioned role of the Catholic Church in the country. Three priests and an archbishop are the particular focus of their story, and different “sins”, as per the Catholic teachings, are explored through each of them.

Priest Andrzej Kuku?a (played by **Arkadiusz Jakubik**), despite appearing to be the most devoted of them all, becomes an outcast once he is accused of sexually molesting a boy in his parish. The alcoholic Tadeusz Trybus (**Robert Wieckiewicz**), a village parson, ministering to a poor community, is involved in a secret affair with Hanka Tomala, played by **Joanna Kulig** (*Cold War*, *Ida*), and even suggests to have an abortion after she finds out that she is pregnant. Finally, Leszek Lisowski (**Jacek Braciak**) has designs on being promoted to a position in the Vatican, and doesn't consider any means – including corruption and blackmail – off limits in order to get it.

Clergy could easily have been a much lesser film than it actually is. At a time when political beliefs and attitudes are being radicalised at both ends of the political spectrum, it feels more natural than ever to demonise the other side and support one's own, without leaving any room for different perspectives or understanding the underlying reasons for the current developments in politics and society. In countries such as Poland, where the extreme right and its manifestations of nationalism, racism, sexism and homophobia have been gaining

momentum in recent years, it is perhaps even easier to put up a fight against individual politicians and institutions, without taking into account the bigger picture of the overarching dysfunctional system.

Clergy makes no such mistakes. While the actions of the priests are set out in clear contrast with the teachings of the Church to which they belong, ultimately, *Clergy* concedes that they are no more than individuals and as such can't be held responsible for all that is wrong with Polish society. Furthermore, despite unwaveringly exploring the faults inherent in the authoritarianism, discrimination, exploitation and hypocrisy of an institution, the film isn't content with only looking for responsibility there. Ultimately, the blame lies with society as a whole, too, with its willingness to blindly accept unfair treatment when it comes to others, its apathy towards decision-makers, and its righteousness when it comes to fear of the unknown. Smarzowski has explored such inconsistencies in Polish society before, in films such as *Hatred* or *Rose*. But with *Clergy*, it seems he has finally got the people to listen.

Clergy was produced by Polish outfits Profil Film, Showmax, Moderator Inwestycje, Atlas Sztuki, Tovares, Studio Metrage and Kino ?wiat. It is being distributed domestically by Kino ?wiat.

by Cineuropa

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