

ANITA ZAWISZA (2023). PRZEZ OBIEKTYW KAMERY. POSTACIE OSÓB DUCHOWNYCH I ZAKONNIC W POLSKIM FILMIE FABULARNYM. [THROUGH THE CAMERA LENS. CHARACTERS OF CLERGYMEN AND NUNS IN POLISH FEATURE FILMS]. WARSAW: SBP; 352 PP., ISBN: 978-83-65741-98-1

Religious issues, especially those related to the institutional work of the Catholic Church, are becoming more and more attractive in Poland, both for filmmakers and researchers. Film messages presenting the profiles of the clergy have recently become a kind of social manifesto of cultural people. At the same time, the public discourse related to this type of artistic statements engages not only film critics, viewers, representatives of the Church, but also experts in various fields of research.

Anita Zawisza's monograph „Przez obiektyw kamery. Postacie osób duchownych i zakonnic w polskim filmie fabularnym,” [Through the Camera Lens. Characters of clergymen and nuns in Polish feature films] based on the author's research, is an interesting addition to the academic discussion in the field of religious film research in Poland. The author, in her introduction, listing research works in this field, stresses that she has created a monograph that „meticulously and extensively [approaches] the study of the spiritual ministry of priests and nuns, and at the same time is [above all] devoted to the analysis of the characters of clergymen and nuns in films ... examined with the help of the categorization key – the main tool used in media studies.”

The book consists of four chapters divided into theoretical and analytical sections. The author decided to create descriptions of the protagonists of Polish feature films based on selected cinematographic works from 1961 to 2018. Thus, this is quite a wide period covering transformations not only in film production and film art, but also in socio-cultural areas. Anita Zawisza tries to show how the image of the clergy and, as she stresses, „the entire institution of the Catholic Church in Polish cinematography” has changed over the decades.

The theoretical part introduces the reader to the historical context and tools for creating films. Chapter 1: „The Catholic Church and Film In 1961-1989 – History and Characteristics of Mutual Relations” describes the situation of Polish cinematography in the context of the relationship with the Catholic Church in Poland, whose caesura is the pontificate of John Paul II. Thus, we get synthesized information about the „Polish film school” in relation to religious cinema

and the Polish religious film during the pontificate of John Paul II overall. The author cross-examines the historical events with official Church documents and statements by the Pope relating to this sphere of art and the cinematographic industry itself. Chapter 2: „Film Message – Power, Components, Function” offers a systematized description of selected audiovisual elements relating to the perception of the film artwork and its interpretation. It outlines categories such as: sign, signal, word, image, sound in film and audiovisual-film message.

The next two chapters are research sections, presenting the results of the analysis. Chapter 3: „The Image of Clergymen, Nuns and the Catholic Church in the Polish Film – Analysis based on the Categorization Key” outlines the methodology of the research presenting the objectives of the analysis of selected film works. The author explains the issues related to the concept of „religious film”, deciding on the classification of the analyzed films as „parareligious” or „transcendent”. As she rightly points out: „The chosen (...) terms seem to be the most appropriate and legitimate in regard to seemingly vague works on the borderline of religious, moral, psychological, etc.”. Thanks to the method of anthropological-morphological analysis and the categorization key drawn up, the author has created an extensive research apparatus. The concept of the „image” became the starting point and an element of the eventual description of the analyzed film characters. The research material consists of 12 feature films (18 fictional characters of clergy persons: 12 priests and 6 nuns). The selection of films is divided into three historical periods: 1st period 1961-1989: “Matka Joanna od Aniołów” [„Mother Joan of the Angels”] (1961), “Drewniany różaniec” [“The Wooden Rosary”] (1964), “Przypadek” [“Blind Chance”] (1981), “Ryś” [“Lynx”] (1981); 2nd period 1990-2000: “Cudowne miejsce” [“Miraculous Place”] (1994), “Pokuszenie” [“The Temptation”] (1995), “U Pana Boga za piecem” [“In Heaven as It Is on Earth”] (1998); 3rd period 2000-2018: “Kto nigdy nie żył” [“Who Never Lived”] (2006), “W imieniu diabła” [“In the Name of the Devil”] (2011), “W imię...” [“In the Name of”] (2013), “Ida” [“Ida”] (2013), “Kler” [“Clergy”] (2018). Each of the three time periods is historically, ideologically, politically and culturally different, so the results of the analysis are thought-provoking, showing the diversity of clergymen characters created in those films. The author analyzed the profiles of the protagonists through the way they function in their environments i.e.: the attitude towards colleagues, the performed activities and motivation for their actions. Thereby, the author tries to answer an interesting question: are the selected film characters passive individuals or involved in their environments? Chapter 4: „The Analysis of Film Characters of Clergymen and Nuns in the Context of the Documents of the Catholic Church – The Influence on the Formation of Religious and Social Attitudes of Polish Film Viewers” is an interpretation of pastoral ministry in relation to the documents of the Catholic Church. The degree of concurrence and compliance of the portrayal

of fictional characters of priests and nuns with the legal regulations in force at a given historical time was compared. The author divides the analysis into subcategories: the dress of the clergy, pastoral service (preparation for the spiritual service of priests, spiritual formation of nuns, the meaning of the vocation – the model of priesthood, spiritual direction of nuns, penitential practices, commitment to society and democracy, charitable and social activities), the celebration of the liturgy (celebration of Mass, the sacrament of penance, prayer), and celibacy. The picture of the clergy's activities that emerges from the analysis is heterogeneous, and the interpretation is subordinated to two indicators: consistency or inconsistency with the Church documents. On this basis, the author evaluates selected film characters and their attitudes as positive or negative.

The book by Anita Zawisza is neither a theologian's nor a film scholar's look at religion in film, which results in a somewhat unique scientific and research perspective on this issue. As the author points out, her intention was not to study the context of the film genre, the conventions of the work of art, the director's intention, or to cover the entire context of political, societal or theological perspectives. Above all, she analyzes the characters created for selected films in the Polish cinematography to evaluate the types of clergymen and nuns and the role of the Catholic Church. She describes in detail the image of priests and nuns as people who constitute the religious institution and presents an interpretation of their attitudes in confrontation with the documents of the Catholic Church. The author sees the film worlds as related to real problems, crises that existed in the Church over the analyzed historical period (1961-2018). Leaving out some of the interpretive and aesthetic-axiological issues, the author describes the researched characters as representatives of the real church community. Thus, she offers an interesting venue for confrontation of assorted interpretations. The book is a noteworthy voice in the discussion about the broadly considered religious cinema sheltering under the convention of „parareligious” or „transcendent” cinema. It is also an interesting statement on the ever-present social impact of cinematography.

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