Corpus Christi is the story of a 20-year-old Daniel who experiences a spiritual transformation while living in a Youth Detention Center. He wants to become a priest but this is impossible because of his criminal record. When he is sent to work at a carpenter’s workshop in a small town, on arrival he dresses up as a priest and accidentally takes over the local parish. The arrival of the young, charismatic preacher is an opportunity for the local community to begin the healing process after a tragedy that happened there.
Corpus Christi was actually inspired by true events. Was it just one particular story?

There was one case, which actually generated some headlines in Poland, of a boy who impersonated a priest for about three months. His name was Patryk and he was probably 19 years old at the time. Mateusz Pacewicz, who wrote the script, wrote an article about it and that’s how this entire film came into being. We changed his name to Daniel, but the characters are similar and so is the way that led him to this small town. This boy performed weddings, baptisms and conducted funeral ceremonies. He was fascinated by all this and really wanted to become a priest. So we based the film on his story, but Mateusz added the part about the juvenile detention centre and the accident that shook up the entire town, although there were many similar cases that he tried to fix. The whole controversy arose from the fact that he actually turned out to be much more efficient than his predecessor. That’s the thing – it was someone outside of the Church, who didn’t care much for the official dogma, and people were happy with his work! Later some of them felt betrayed, but he managed to attract many new believers. Anyway, similar cases come to light every year, and not just in Poland – in Spain, one man impersonated a priest for over a dozen years! The reasons why they do it can be very different. Very often they just try to hide from the justice system and it’s much easier to trick a small community that doesn’t ask too many questions.

It’s interesting that a person deprived of a traditional seminary formation would actually touch people on a much deeper level. Daniel’s sermons in the film are very direct and honest – how did you develop them?

In order to avoid making another broad comedy à la Whoopi Goldberg’s vehicle Sister Act, we needed to make sure the viewer would believe that these people believed as well. It was quite a challenge, both when it comes to the script and direction. One thing that helped us was that people always tend to forgive the young – newly minted priests often have these very “subversive” ideas, they try to incorporate contemporary music or singing. I mean; there is one priest in Poland, who raps [laughter]. That’s what the first part of the film was based on – these people actually seem to accept his shortcomings. He is a young man with a fresh take on things. Not to mention that Daniel, without having spent years in the seminary and any real involvement with the actual institution, talks straight from the heart. It’s the only thing he has. There are many people who try to do it and fail, but Daniel actually has this “divine spark” about him. Suddenly, in the spur of the moment, he is able to find just the right words. And for these people, especially in that particular moment in their lives, that’s more than enough. When we were looking for the right actor, we knew it has to be someone who is slightly different and Bartosz Bielenia emanates it very well. Because Daniel is no ordinary boy – he is special.
As you mentioned, the subject itself immediately brings to mind numerous comedies. But your film is quite dark, especially the scenes in the detention centre combined with graphic depictions of violence.

I think it was all about certain economy of the storytelling – if you only have few minutes to show some things, you better make an impression. If you make viewers feel uncomfortable, if you make them wince, in all likelihood they will remember this feeling. And when this troubled boy suddenly starts to sing in an angelic voice, there is a whole different energy. I decided to make these scenes even more violent – precisely to emphasize this contrast. Once you know what he has been through, when he leads a procession or talks to people you start to pick up certain words. They start to have an entirely different meaning, because we know what’s hiding behind them. When he tells people that the Kingdom of Heaven is here on earth, we know that for him it’s the only option. He needs to believe it – otherwise he could just as well commit suicide, because in the eyes of the society he is done for. It reminded me of *The Son* by the Dardenne brothers, another story of someone who did something terrible at a very young age; something that stigmatizes him for the rest of his life. What’s so tragic about it is that we are talking about committing a crime without really understanding its consequences – a bit like taking out a 50-year mortgage while still underage. For Daniel, spiritual guidance is the only pure thing left in his life. I see his actions as a desperate attempt to tell the world what he would do if he were given a second chance. Suddenly, it turns out this films is all about facing the cards we have been dealt, even when it seems so unfair. That’s why it could never be a comedy.

Daniel’s past makes *Corpus Christi* a rather unusual coming-of-age story. It’s not about him trying to find himself, as he already knows who he is. But he is denied his future. When making a movie, you always need to get to know your protagonist. We spent a lot of time asking ourselves this question. If Daniel hadn’t committed a crime, would he even feel drawn to the Church in the first place? I can easily imagine that he wouldn’t. It was interesting for me to think that the Church is something he clings to because nothing else makes sense anymore. And when there is no solution, and all the facts are against you, what else is left? Faith. People with twisted past and shameful things on their conscience very often turn to religion.

Especially when they are lonely. Each of your characters seems to lead an isolated existence, meeting only in front of the chapel commemorating their children. Do you think your film is about loneliness too?

This makeshift chapel is a common space, one that helps Daniel reach out to these people. During his time as priest, he does a lot of things for this community. But we decided to focus just on the accident as it resonates with his own experience. The death he caused, although it’s a secret, becomes a part of his mission and something he has to face. He knows how it feels, so when he sees those grieving people he also knows that in order to heal they have to address their pain. And that’s what he gives them – it’s his biggest contribution. He tells them: “Don’t pretend that you are not angry, that something wasn’t taken away from you. Don’t pretend that you understand.” But his idea of mourning is radically different and that’s what causes a conflict, because this town is like an open wound that just keeps on bleeding.
In Poland, we know that for some, mourning is all about commemorating. That’s what the Church seems to be teaching and the Smoleńsk catastrophe [2010 plane crash in Russia that killed all 96 people on board, including president Lech Kaczyński and his wife Maria] has certainly proved it. The woman responsible for this chapel uses it to control others. She is more powerful than the priest and maybe that’s why he cannot handle it anymore. He wants this young boy to take over. We wanted to show the mind of a fanatic, as it’s not just some mysterious illness that people occasionally suffer from. Everyone can become one.

Would you say that this inability to move on is an inherently Polish trait, or something to do with religion?

I don’t know if it’s something specific to Poland, although it’s certainly very common. We are deeply buried in this kind of narrative, we like to display our scars. It drives us and gives us our identity, because who can really oppose it? He will just seem like a soulless traitor. That being said, Lars von Trier’s *Breaking the Waves* told a very similar story about a small community in which the Church is very present, and that one person [Bess McNeill played by Emily Watson] who dares to do something different. Mostly out of love, at least according to von Trier, as he pretty much canonized her at the end. I don’t want my film to be viewed as one more take on our troubled Polish Catholicism – I actually prefer to think of it as a Protestant film. About, say, a small community in Scandinavia and this clash with puritan way of thinking, giving solace to people who just can’t find their place in the contemporary world.
In *Breaking the Waves*, Emily Watson's character faced immediate rejection, but Daniel is welcomed into the community. You don't even show him learn how to perform his duties, except for one scene when he tries to Google “how to conduct confession”. Why?

I didn’t want to waste my time. It could be interesting, but this film shouldn’t serve as a textbook on how to deceive innocent people. Instead, I wanted to dive right into the moment when he brings reconciliation to this tortured town, but sacrifices himself along the way. I wanted to get to this point as soon as possible. Because that’s when he starts his real work and you see the whole hypocrisy of these supposedly very religious people. You can try to help them all you want, but chances are, they will just make you leave. Or you will choose to do it on your own.

Daniel doesn’t even get to see what he has achieved. The biggest change happens when he is no longer standing at the altar.

Maybe that’s why my film ends on a somewhat fatalistic note. The person who has done the most for this community is also the one that can’t really count for any gratification. Daniel had his chance, but instead he chose to commit what could be described as a very slow suicide. It’s tragic, yes, but also beautiful because he actually managed to achieve something. Andrey Zvyagintsev’s *Leviathan* served as a reference point of sorts, but I tried to add some lightness to his pessimism. Mostly because regardless of anything else that has happened, these people still find enough strength to welcome another sheep to their flock. Which, incidentally, was also the working title of the film. What happens is not exactly a full-blown act of forgiveness—it’s more of a quiet acceptance. We called it, perhaps a bit ironically, the “miracle of reconciliation.”
BARTOSZ BIELENIA
Graduated from the National Academy of Theatre Arts in Kraków in 2016. He made his debut in 1999 on the stage of Teatr Dramatyczny in Białystok as the title character in The Little Prince directed by Tomasz Hynka. From 2014 – 2017 he belonged to the team of Narodowy Stary Teatr in Kraków, with memorable performances in Edward II by Anna Augustynowicz, King Lear by Jan Klata, Edward II by Anna Augustynowicz, King Lear by Jan Klata, Hamlet by Krzysztof Garbaczewski, Podpórzany by Paweł Miśkiewicz, and Platynowe by Konstantin Bogomolov. He has also appeared in films such as Clergy directed by Wojtek Smarzowski, The Man with the Magic Box directed by Bodo Kox, I am Lying Now by Paweł Borowski, Disco Polo by Maciej Bochniak and in The High Frontier by Wojciech Kasperski. For his main role in The High Frontier he received a special award at the International Cinema Festival Off Camera in Kraków and an award for new promising actor at the Młodzi i Film Festival in Koszalin. Bartosz Bielenia joined the Nowy Teatr ensemble in January 2018. He most recently played in a Netflix series 1983 directed by Agnieszka Holland and Kasia Adamik.

ALEKSANDRA KONIECZNA
For many years she appeared on the stage of theatres, cooperating with the best artists in Europe such as Grzegorz Jarzyna, Kristian Lupa or Ronald Pollesch. She directed performances on multiple stages, among others – the National Theatre in Warsaw and Kochanowski in Opole. She has appeared in many movies, tv series and theatres. Aleksandra acted as Zofia Beksińska in The Last Family by Jan P. Matuszyński and Iga Cembrzyńska in Janusz Kondratiuk’s A Cat and a Dog. For each of these roles she was awarded at the Polish Film Festival in Gdynia. She is also a laureate of the Polish Film Award (Only 2017).

CAST

ELIZA RYCEMBEL
Graduated from the Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw. Her film debut came with The Promise directed by Anna Rzeżuch. She was also cast in Carte Blanche by Jacek Lusiński, Innocent by Anne Fontaine, a musical entitled #Wszystkogra by Agnieszka Glińska and a short film Silence of the Polish Lambs directed by Maciej Stuhr. In 2016 she was one of the winners of the Talent Trijekt contest in the Film category for „the maturity and truth in acting; for proving one’s talent in challenging roles; for an expressive and interesting screen personality; and finally for being an acting discovery of recent years”. She also played in a Canal+ produced series Belfer. Currently we can admire her talent in a main role in Nina directed by Oliwia Chojnacka. Her most recent films are Dark, almost night by Borys Lankosz and Piłsudski by Michał Rosa.

TOMASZ ZIĘTEK
One of the most talented Polish actors of the young generation. Graduated from the D. Baduszkowa Vocal-Acting School of the Musical Theatre in Gdynia. He made his feature debut in 2011 in Czarny Czwartek. Janek Wiśniewski Padł by Antoni Krauze. He remains best known for his part in Stones for the Rampart by Rober Gliński, Demon by Marius Wnuka, Carte Blanche by Jacek Lusiński, Body by Małgorzata Szumowska, Convoy by Maciej Żak, Stas by Jan Kidawa-Błoński and Panic Attack by Paweł Małysz. For his role in Silent Night directed by Piotr Domalski he was awarded Polish Film Awards – Eagle for Best Supporting Actor in 2018. His most recent films are The Butler by Filip Bajon, Zuzel by Dorota Kędzierzawska, and tv series World on fire for BBC.

CAST

ALEKSANDRA KONIECZNA
Graduated from the D. Baduszkowa Vocal-Acting School of the Musical Theatre in Gdynia. She made his feature debut in 2011 in Czarny Czwartek. Janek Wiśniewski Padł by Antoni Krauze. He remains best known for his part in Stones for the Rampart by Rober Gliński, Demon by Marius Wnuka, Carte Blanche by Jacek Lusiński, Body by Małgorzata Szumowska, Convoy by Maciej Żak, Stas by Jan Kidawa-Błoński and Panic Attack by Paweł Małysz. For his role in Silent Night directed by Piotr Domalski he was awarded Polish Film Awards – Eagle for Best Supporting Actor in 2018. His most recent films are The Butler by Filip Bajon, Zuzel by Dorota Kędzierzawska, and tv series World on fire for BBC.
JAN KOMASA
Polish director, studied directing at the Łódź Film School. His short film Nice to See You world-premiered in Cannes Cinefondation competition, where it got the 3rd prize. His feature film debut, Suicide Room, premiered in the Panorama section of the Berlinale and attracted over 800,000 viewers in Polish cinemas. His second feature, a war blockbuster Warsaw '44, sold over 1.8 mln. tickets. Corpus Christi is his third feature film.

AURUM FILM
Aurum Film is a Polish company that produced feature films like: Carte Blanche by J. Lusinski (Grand Prix at the 18th Shanghai International Film Festival), The Last Family by Jan P. Matuszyński (premiered at International Competition at IFF Locarno 2016; many awards at Polish and international film festivals), Ready To Roll: Exterminator by Michał Rogalski and Dark Almost Night by Borys Lankowski. The newest one Corpus Christi by Jan Komasa (Polish-French co-production) will be premiered in Polish cinemas in October 2019. Aurum Film is an executive producer of two tv series for Canal+ Poland; The King directed by Jan P. Matuszyński and The Snakeville by Łukasz Palkowski - both now in production. Aurum Film is also in the pre-production stage of several film projects e.g. Magnesia by Maciej Bochniak and Leave No Trace by Jan P. Matuszyński (Polish-Czech co-production).

LES CONTES MODERNES
Les Contes Modernes, i.e. The Modern Tales, is aimed at taking part in intellectual debates within our contemporary societies by any means necessary: fiction, animation, creative documentary and transmedial. Les Contes Modernes federates authors and artists of various horizons (film directors, visual artists, choreographers, graphic novelists, philosophers, game-designers etc.) who question the world surrounding us in all its complexity and who put the aesthetic search at the heart of their creations. Les Contes Modernes supports projects which develop a humanist, empathic and creative approach on the world of today and of tomorrow. Les Contes Modernes is a production company based in Auvergne-RhôneAlpes region, South of France, between Lyon and Marseille, in La Cartoucherie, center of excellence for the animation industry.
**FESTIVALS**

World Premiere: Venice Giornate degli Autori
North American Premiere: Toronto IFF

**FILM INFORMATION**

- Original title: Boże Ciało
- English title: Corpus Christi
- Genre: Drama
- Country: Poland, France
- Language: Polish
- Year: 2019
- Duration: 116 min.
- Picture: color
- Aspect ratio: 2.39:1
- Sound: 5.1
- Available format: DCP

**CAST**

- Bartosz Bielenia
- Eliza Rycembel
- Aleksandra Konieczna
- Tomasz Ziȩtek
- Leszek Lichota
- Łukasz Simlat

**CREW**

- Director: Jan Komasa
- Screenplay: Mateusz Pacewicz
- Cinematography: Piotr Sobocinski Jr
- Editing: Przemysław Chruścielewski
- Production design: Marek Sawierucha
- Costume design: Dorota Roqueplo
- Sound design: Kacper Habisiak, Marcin Kasinski, Tomasz Wieczorek
- Music: Galperin Brothers
- Production company: Aurum Film
- Co-production companies: CANAL + POLSKA, WFS Walter Film Studio, Podkarpackie Regional Film Fund, Les Contes Modernes, Polish Film Institute, CNC

**With the support of:**

- Producers: Aneta Hickinbotham, Leszek Bodzak, Patrice Nezan, Piotr Walter, Manuel Rougeron, Frederic Berardi, Marek Jastrzębski

**PRODUCER’S CONTACT**

Leszek Bodzak
AURUM FILM
ul. Resorowa 20
02–956 Warsaw, Poland
www.aurumfilm.pl
+48 504 275 800
bodzak@aurumfilm.pl

**WORLD SALES**

New Europe Film Sales
Czerniakowska 73/79
00–718 Warsaw, Poland
www.neweuropefilmsales.com

**Festivals**

Ewa Bojanowska
+48 609 804 296
festivals@neweuropefilmsales.com

**International Sales**

Jan Naszewski
+48 600 173 205
jan@neweuropefilmsales.com
Katarzyna Śniarska
+48 698 900 936
kat@neweuropefilmsales.com

**INTERNATIONAL PRESS**

Stephen Lan
Lan.Stephen@sympatico.ca
+1-416-923-6327
www.StephenLan.com