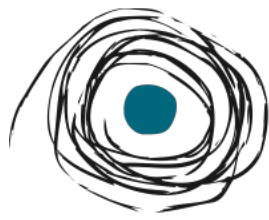


# SWORD OF GOD

A FILM BY BARTOSZ KONOPKA

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FILM MOVEMENT®

# SWORD OF GOD

a film by  
**BARTOSZ KONOPKA**

**“A stunning showcase of experiential horror...**

**There are clear inspirations from Nicolas Winding Refn’s *Valhalla Rising* at play, both thematically and visually. Every frame, shot, and sequence are exquisitely constructed, and the cast delivers spellbinding performances.”**

**–Meagan Navarro, *Bloody Disgusting***

**“Enrapturing, beautiful, and deeply uncomfortable...**

**one of the most fascinating works of Polish cinema, and horror in general, that I’ve had the pleasure to see...”**

**–Samantha Schorsch, *812 Film Reviews***

2018 | Poland | 104 minutes | 2.35:1  
Polish with English subtitles | 5.1 Surround Sound

**OPENING MAY 1ST ON VIRTUAL CINEMA IN THE U.S. & CANADA**

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## SYNOPSIS

In the early Middle Ages, a contingent of knights embarks on a dangerous journey to spread Christianity and baptize the pagan inhabitants of an isolated village hidden deep in the mountains of a faraway island. After being shipwrecked, the two survivors set out to complete their mission, but as they attempt to convert the tribe, their diverging beliefs put them at odds with each other. Soon, love is confronted with hate, peace with violence, sanity with madness, and redemption with damnation.

Directed by Academy Award-nominated filmmaker Bartosz Konopka, this genre-bending historical epic has been hailed as a “stunning showcase of experiential horror” (*Bloody Disgusting*) that “strikes with brutal clarity” (*ScreenAnarchy*).



## ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

One of the most awarded young Polish filmmakers, Bartosz Konopka studied film at the Jagiellonian University Cracow, the Krzysztof Kieslowski Film Department at Katowice University and the Andrzej Wajda Master School of Film Directing. He was nominated for an Academy Award for the documentary RABBIT A LA BERLIN (over 70 festivals and 12 prizes). His feature debut FEAR OF FALLING premiered at Montreal IFF and was awarded at Mannheim, Mumbai, Lecce, Vincennes and Gdynia.



SWORD OF GOD (THE MUTE)	2019
THE ROAD TO EXCELLENCE (Documentary)	2016
AZ PO SUFIT! (TV Series)	2015
NEW WARSAW (TV Documentary)	2014
FROM BED THOUGH Arose (Short)	2014
SZTUKA ZNIKANIA (Documentary)	2013
BEZ TAJEMNIC (TV Series) (7 episodes)	2013
FEAR OF FALLING	2011
RABBIT A LA BERLIN (Documentary)	2009
THREE FOR THE TAKING (Short)	2006
GOAT WALKER (Documentary)	2004

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Have you ever wondered about the origin of the world we live in today? Cities, clothes, inventions, humanism, art, culture, language and customs? It is partially the result of Christianity, Europe's dominant order. And all of it started with a single man carrying his cross through the wilderness. This is what we want to tell in SWORD OF GOD. We want to take a closer look at that desperate man. We want to enter into his situation, without paying attention to the contexts of politics, power and religion.

In the 6th and 7th centuries, after the fall of the Roman Empire, Europe was insecure and afraid. People went out of their depth. The great order had fallen and chaos took over. Until single missionaries, warriors of the cross, started to bring good news and change the world around them. We live the way we do thanks to them.

Several things inspired SWORD OF GOD. First, and most importantly, I opposed all incontestable dogmas and authorities. I felt the need to look for dialogue, alternative paths that can combine different ideas towards the world, and not inflame conflicts. Second, my interest in peaceful rebels, such as Christ, Gandhi, Martin Luther King and others. Third, the wisdom that results from silence and the search for inner contemplation. Influencing people with the presence, not empty words, the ubiquitous banter or ideology.

I want to tell the story of two people who only have each other, and only thanks to each other can they survive, defeating the terror of the outside world. They depend on one another and draw strength from this. They both want and need it. This seems very easy, yet out of reach. They are drawn to each other and need mutual compassion, but what they create is the craze of hatred. How difficult it is to build a deep connection, to protect it from claims, misunderstandings, wrongly defined honor, the feeling of betrayal and obstinacy. Mistrust, disobedience, pressure, disillusion, humiliation, jealousy, revenge, despair – the spiral of these emotions creates hell around our protagonists and leads to the tragic finale.

After that I thought about the historical context. I wanted to place the story in a difficult and primitive world, yet one full of spiritual passion. In a world of great contrasts. I decided on the Middle Ages – a world filled with image and mood. At the same time, I decided to keep it simple and expressive.



The stories of the first missionaries still have not made it to the big screen. And they do have the potential for a mysterious, mystical spectacular cinema on the one hand, and one unravelling the basics of Christianity on the other. It can show a culture that we owe so much, but which seems more and more distant to us.

In the background of the film we want to place the questions about the nature of faith. We want to believe, find providence and the answers about the meaning of life in God. But do we need the guardians of our faith? The Church as an institution? Maybe the trust we used to have in it has ended? How can we look at it from today's perspective?

When I started thinking about this, I approached professor Jerzy Strzelczyk, a great expert on the subject. I looked for a real story of one of Europe's apostles. None was sufficient, due to the lack of historical sources. I tried to combine several stories to present the actual protocols of their missions, the universal problems the crusaders had to face. Professor Strzelczyk agreed that this is a good and justified direction as all apostle biographies were hagiographies from the very beginning – they were the stories of saints, full of miracles and unbelievable events. A non-specific, individual reinterpretation of historical events may prove an interesting way to approaching this issue. That is why we do not set the film in an exact time and place. The story could have happened anywhere Europe so it could reference the common experience of many countries. We presented the project to many people in Germany, France, England, Scotland, Sweden and Ireland. Their common interest seems to confirm this.

During the process of writing the screenplay – together with Przemysław Nowakowski – we drew inspirations from the books of Jerzy Strzelczyk, Maria Miśkiewicz, Jacques Le Goff, Umberto Eco, Jacques Duquesne, Vito Fumagalli and Leo Moulin.

## FORM

I'm not interested in the typical historical film. Another tale about political relations, social contexts and the customs of the medieval world. I don't want to add any new chapters to schoolbooks. That's not what cinema is for. Film should be an emotional, sensual and visual adventure. One we cannot fully understand or describe. The image invokes more than just words, languages and rational notions. It moves other paths of sensations as well. With this film I would like to push the audience into a mysterious, unpredictable world stripped of any location or coordinates and thus fascinating. I'd like to turn watching this film into a form of survival. Alongside Willibrord and the Mute, let us feel how the protagonists cope with the simplest problems: how to dress wounds, how to recognize an enemy, how to find food, how to find shelter from the cold, how to talk to people who don't know your language, how to survive. I want to make this film as a dramatized documentary about the physical and spiritual life of the Middle Ages. That results in the reduction of the depicted world to just two protagonists in the wilderness, put to a test. As in a lab: can two people from one culture, with similar wants and needs, get on with one another? Can they open to another way of thinking? How will they react when facing death?



This film is a question about the ageless human condition rather than a historical narrative. That is why we do not set the exact date or place of action. We mix customs, costumes and relations. We avoid specificity. We search for rituals and mechanisms common to many cultures and different people.

The form of the film will be fitted to the "documentary" sense of the protagonists and their world. It will be a direct result of this concept. Similar to the construction of the represented world, reduction and minimalism are the main qualities of style.

The film will be told mostly by image. That is why the first 15 minutes of the film will have no dialogue – and even later on, language won't prove effective as a communication tool. We use different languages that do not "understand" one another. For the film we will create a pagan language based on a dead Slavic language. We will not translate from that language. The tension will be built on understatements, the mysterious and dreadful position of the protagonists. We want to show the age in a naturalistic manner, with no exaggerations, poeticizing or glamorizing. The camera will follow the protagonists and watch them as another participant of the events would. It will be the eye of the audience or of the protagonists. It will be human, it will breathe and feel. Sometimes scared, taken aback, in awe, sensitive to feelings and events. The scenes should flow naturally, without much staging, styling, directing, aestheticization or artificial design. On the one hand we avoid historical specificity but on the other we present the world sincerely, veristically, so that the viewer can easily believe it and give in to the life flowing from it.

In that sense this is a form close to the early films of Werner Herzog, where he developed fiction from "real" action, such as *Fitzcarraldo*, *Cobra Verde* and *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*. Films based on a mixture of real worlds in order to create the cinema of philosophical adventure. The language of our film will be more modern with a faster pace of editing, more expressive use of tension and mood, the flexibility gained from transgressive documentary.

A cinematographer that can live up to these challenges is young, courageous and ready to try different aesthetics. Jacek Podgórski is the regular DoP of my recent projects. Together we made the crazy, experimental *From Bed Thou Arose* (2014), the aesthetic documentary *New Warsaw* (2014) and the mixed documentary *The Road to Excellence* (2016). The distinctiveness of these films was appreciated and awarded at festivals.



Jacek was also recognized for his cinematography for *Moloch* (Szymon Kapeniak, 2015) and received numerous awards for his earlier work. I keep working with Jacek as he is the most original and expressive cinematographer I have ever met. He never stops looking for unique style. I know that he is a close observer of human behavior and an artist sensitive to protagonists' inner condition. His camera can feel them and lets us touch them with no protective barriers, in a direct and intimate manner.

Young viewers will recall the experience of a survival computer game. We follow two protagonists. We enter an unknown world composed of familiar elements escalated for impressive visual effect. It will bring to mind shows such as *Game of Thrones*, rooted in the world of fantasy rather than in classic historical cinema.

Other elements of form, such as editing, sound and music are also based on the ideas of minimalism. The music is built from diegetic sounds; it is derived from them so as to give the impression of the continuation of the sounds of nature or the instruments used by the pagans. It is harsh, unconventional, mystical, somehow related to witchcraft.

The rest of the team is composed of my regular collaborators who believe in the project and are not afraid of how original and unconventional it is. They are full of artistic bravery and are willing to share their creativity. Marek Warszawski is responsible for production design, Marta Ostrowicz for costumes and Andrzej Dąbrowski for editing.

We have been working on this film for several years with my regular producer Anna Wydra. We have made our most important films together, we have overcome many difficulties, and we understand and complement one another. *SWORD OF GOD* is a project where our world views meet. We are both fascinated with the above-mentioned subjects. We relate to the dilemmas of the protagonists and we feel their emotions. Their suffering and joy are close to our hearts. We look forward to presenting these emotions to viewers. This film has been the adventure of our lives. It is the fulfillment of a unique friendship and energy. We know that we hold something of special value in our hands and want to share it with others.

*Bartosz Konopka*



## CAST

Willibrord.....Krzysztof PIECZYŃSKI  
Unnamed.....Karol BERNACKI  
Prahwe.....Wiktoria GORODECKAJA  
Geowold.....Jacek KOMAN  
King.....Jan BIJVOET  
Karrenga.....Jeroen PERCEVAL  
Pem.....Olivier DE SAGAZAN  
Directed by.....Bartosz KONOPKA



## CREW

Directed by.....Bartosz KONOPKA  
Written by.....Bartosz KONOPKA, Przemyslaw NOWAKOWSKI, Anna WYDRA  
Edited by.....Andrzej DĄBROWSKI  
Produced by.....Anna WYDRA  
Co-Producers.....Andrzej BIAŁAS, Rafał BUBNICKI, Jurgen WILLOCX  
Director of Photography.....Jacek PODGÓRSKI  
Costume Designer.....Marta OSTROWICZ  
Producer Designer.....Marek WARSZEWSKI, Łukasz TRZCIŃSKI  
Sound.....Marcin LENARCZYK  
Music Composer.....Jerzy ROGIEWICZ



## ABOUT FILM MOVEMENT

Founded in 2002, Film Movement is a North American distributor of award-winning independent and foreign films based in New York City. It has released more than 250 feature films and shorts culled from prestigious film festivals worldwide. Its catalog includes titles by directors such as Hirokazu Kore-eda, Maren Ade, Jessica Hausner, Andrei Konchalovsky, Andrzej Wajda, Diane Kurys, Ciro Guerra and Melanie Laurent. In 2015, Film Movement launched its reissue label Film Movement Classics, featuring new restorations released theatrically as well as on Blu-ray and DVD, including films by such noted directors as Eric Rohmer, Peter Greenaway, Bille August, Marleen Gorris, Takeshi Kitano, Arturo Ripstein, Sergio Corbucci and Ettore Scola. For more information, visit [www.filmmovement.com](http://www.filmmovement.com).

