



## HENRYK JANKOWSKI STATUE

Gdansk, Poland

54.3546269,18.6534993



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### Executive Summary

Henryk Jankowski was an eminent cleric in Poland renowned for his role in the anti-communist Solidarity movement during the 1980s. After the fall of communism in the 1990s, he became famous for his outspoken attitude. During his sermons, he would make political comments and anti-Semitic remarks that stirred controversy in Poland. After his death in 2010, private donors sponsored the construction of his statue in front of what had been his parish church. However, in 2018, a woman stated in *Gazeta Wyborcza* that Jankowski abused her from the age of 12 for many years. Her statement stirred the controversy around Jankowski's figure, and at one point, local protesters dismantled the statue at the time when the Vatican held its abuse summit. In March 2019, the City Council decided that Jankowski was no longer an honorary citizen and that his statue would be officially removed.

## Introduction

The statue of Henryk Jankowski was erected on August 31, 2012, two years after the prelate's death. It was funded by a private group that aimed to commemorate his role in the 1980s anti-communist movement Solidarity. However, following the exposure of his lengthy sexually predatory behaviour towards local children, it came to represent the endemic covering up of child sexual abuse by the Polish Catholic Church. Therefore, following scrutiny by the Polish press, acts of protest surrounding the statue and pressure from locals, the Gdansk city council voted to remove the statue from its public position by St Brygida Parish Church and to put it in storage instead. This case study examines the complexities of individuals' public memory and the tensions between secular and non-secular authority.

## Background

### *Biography of Henryk Jankowski*

Jankowski's position as a controversial part of Polish history began with his involvement in the Solidarity movement of the 1980s. He was the chaplain to the movement from its inception as the first trade union in a Soviet country, distributing Mass to striking shipyard workers and preaching against Communism in these services. He was also an intense nationalist, viewing Catholicism and the Polish identity as inseparable, to the exclusion of other religions within the Polish identity, preaching about this frequently. His role in the Solidarity movement meant that he developed a highly positive public reputation in Poland. For instance, Margaret Thatcher and George H. W. Bush visited his church, St Brygida's Parish Church, on their respective visits to Gdansk in 1988<sup>1</sup> and 1989.<sup>2</sup> In 1990, he was named honorary chaplain to the Pope<sup>3</sup>. He received honorary citizenship of Gdansk in 2000 (citation needed) as well as the Medal of the National Education Commission from the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education in 2007. He also had a close relationship with the leader of the Solidarity movement, Lech Walesa.<sup>4</sup> In addition, in 2007, he launched his own wine branded with his image under the name 'Monsignore.'<sup>5</sup> Overall, this rendered him a prominent public figure. However, these accolades were awarded despite his reputation as an anti-Semite and paedophile.

By the mid-1990s, Jankowski was a very controversial figure within and without Poland, following remarks that he made, stating that 'the Star of David is implicated in the swastika as well as in the hammer and sickle'<sup>6</sup> and that 'we cannot tolerate a Jewish minority in the Polish government, because that makes people afraid.'<sup>7</sup> These comments were similar to sermons that he had made in

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<sup>1</sup> LA Times, '20,000 Cheer as She Meets Walesa in Gdansk: Thatcher Finds 'Spirit of Poland', *LA Times*, 5 Nov, 1988

<sup>2</sup> PA News Agency, 'Statue of Polish priest dismantled following sex abuse allegations' *Oxford Mail*, 8 March, 2019

<sup>3</sup> Krakow Post, 'Solidarity Priest Dies', *Krakow Post*, 13 July, 2010

<sup>4</sup> Tamara Evdokimova, 'Polish Activists Topple Statue of Iconic Priest as Vatican Summit on Sex Abuse Begins', *Slate*, 21 Feb, 2019

<sup>5</sup> Reuters, 'Priest plans his own perfumes', *Reuters*, 3 July 2007

<sup>6</sup> Jerusalem Post, 'I only meant some Jews', *Jerusalem Post*, 28 June 1994

<sup>7</sup> John Connelly, "'Coming to Terms with Catholic-Jewish Relations in the Polish Catholic Church" In *Remembrance, History and Justice: Coming To Terms With Traumatic Pasts In Democratic Societies*, ed. V. Tismaneanu and B. C. Iacob (Central European University Press, 2015), 377

1980 while preaching to striking workers.<sup>8</sup> In 1997, he was suspended from preaching for a year as a result of these remarks, and his close relationship with Walesa ended.<sup>9</sup> Jankowski continued to make headlines throughout the 2000s due to his extravagant lifestyle, as he was widely criticised for his taste in luxury cars and expensive clothes.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, the Henryk Jankowski Institute, an organisation that he and his colleagues founded and ran to sell Jankowski T-shirts and cigarette lighters in order to finance a potential film about his life, further presented him in a bad light.<sup>11</sup> Further, while an investigation into allegations of Jankowski abusing young boys was stopped in 2003,<sup>12</sup> a year later, Archbishop Tadeusz Gocłowski revealed the continuation of the problem in a letter to Jankowski, stating that he was 'disturbed' by Jankowski's 'approach to young men and boys' who 'are constantly wandering around the rectory, walking in your rooms, pouring wine during lunch or dinner – as I pointed out to you previously.'<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, little action was taken to discipline (or control) him in this regard. He was defrocked in 2005 as a result of his antisemitic remarks,<sup>14</sup> but was not publicly known to be a paedophile and sex offender until 2018. The issue of clerical sex abuse<sup>15</sup> in the Polish Catholic Church was significant in this period.

### *The Statue of Henryk Jankowski*

Jankowski's statue was completed in 2012, two years after Jankowski's death on 12 July 2010. The construction of the monument was achieved through the efforts of a local baker, entrepreneur and friend of Jankowski, Grzegorz Pelowski and head of the Gdansk 'S' (the Independent and Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarnosc), Krzysztof Dozla, who appointed a committee to organise the erection of this monument. This committee eventually raised around 130,000zł.<sup>16</sup> The model was made by Giennadji Jerszów, a friend of Jankowski, for free.<sup>17</sup> The archbishop of Gdansk, Archbishop Sławoj Leszek Głódz, took honorary patronage of the monument's construction and unveiled it on August 31, 2012. Głódz was later accused of being complicit in covering up Jankowski's sexual abuse of children,<sup>18</sup> and was controversial in his own right for his defence of antisemitism and conservatism.<sup>19</sup> This process of raising funds for the statue and building it took place after the sexual assault investigation of 2003 and well after Jankowski's publicised antisemitic remarks in the 1990s. However, at this point, there was no public opposition to the statue's construction.

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Carpenter, "Civil Society or Nation? Re-evaluating Solidarity Ten Years After the Revolution" *Polish Sociological Review*, no. 127 (1999): pp. 336

<sup>9</sup> Gabriela Baczyńska, 'Poland's Solidarity chaplain Jankowski dies at 74', *Reuters*, 13 July, 2010

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>11</sup> Agence France-Presse, 'Controversial Polish priest Henryk Jankowski wants Mel Gibson to film his life story', *Krakow Post*, July 22, 2007

<sup>12</sup> PA News Agency, 'Statue of Polish priest dismantled following sex abuse allegations' *Oxford Mail*, 8 March, 2019; The Associated Press, 'Polish city removes statue of priest accused of sexually abusing minors' *CBC News*, 8 March 2019

<sup>13</sup> Paulina Guzik, 'Solidarity-era priest accused of abuse a monumental problem for Polish Church', *Crux*, 9 Mar, 2019

<sup>14</sup> Inyourpocket.com, Father Jankowski statue

<sup>15</sup> Kamila Rezman-Poltka, 'Activities of the Catholic Church in Poland Against Pedophilia in 2018', *Polish Political Science Yearbook*, Vol. 48, no. 2 (2019): 360

<sup>16</sup> Bożena Aksamić, 'The Secret of Saint Bridget. Why did the Church allow Father Jankowski to abuse children for years' *Gazetka Wyborcza*, 3 Dec, 2018

<sup>17</sup> Inyourpocket.com, Father Jankowski statue

<sup>18</sup> Elizabetta Povoledo and Antol Magdziarz, 'Polish Cleric Retires in Face of Cover-Up Accusations. It's Not Enough, Critics Say' *The New York Times*, 14 August 2020

<sup>19</sup> Paul Flückiger, 'Protests Against New Gdansk Bishop', *Die Welt*, 4 Dec, 2008

## Description of the monument

Jankowski's statue was displayed prominently in a square named after him outside St Brigida Church. In this church, Jankowski spent much of his career working and located on the same green as the Memorial to the Victims of the Extermination of the Polish Population in Wołyn. The area is pedestrian, with paths for walking around, and when the statue was still standing, it was surrounded by benches for pedestrians to rest on. The statue itself was physically imposing: 3.7 metres tall, made of metal on a stone plinth,<sup>20</sup> and bore the caption 'Prelate priest Henryk Jankowski, 1936-2010, chaplain of Solidarity'. Jankowski is depicted standing alone in his vestments, holding a Bible with three crosses around his neck. The references to Jankowski's role in the Solidarity movement are not particularly explicit here, apart from the three crosses on his chest; these reference the Monument to the Fallen Shipyard Workers in Solidarity Square.<sup>21</sup> As such, the monument draws together the work that he did in the Solidarity movement and his role as rector of the St Brygida Parish Church.

## History of the Contestation

### Start of the Contestation

The first public allegation of abuse by Jankowski was published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* in December 2018 in an expose of the experience of Barbara Borowiecka.<sup>22</sup> In this long-form article, details of Jankowski's abuse of Borowiecka and other individuals when they were children were revealed, establishing a long history of abuse dating from the 1960s.<sup>23</sup> Within this article, Borowiecka pointed out that the reason for her breaking a nearly 50-year silence on the topic was the statue of Jankowski that stood by St Brygida Church.<sup>24</sup> Besides Borowiecka's own experience, the article also included details on how children of Gdansk knew to raise the alarm and run away on hearing that Jankowski was coming and of a girl who committed suicide after being raped by Jankowski and becoming pregnant.<sup>25</sup> *Gazeta Wyborcza* had a history of breaking stories on child sexual abuse in the church, breaking the first story on this topic in Poland in 2001.<sup>26</sup> The article was published within a context of a sense of crisis around the issue of sex abuse and paedophilia in the Polish Catholic Church: movements such as Baby Shoes Remember in August 2018, the release of the film *Kler*,<sup>27</sup> and a landmark court decision in Poznan ruling that a religious order was responsible for the fate of a 13-year-old girl who had been abused by one of their priests, meant that there was an environment of great concern around this issue.<sup>28</sup> In the weeks following

<sup>20</sup> PA News Agency, 'Statue of Polish priest dismantled following sex abuse allegations' *Oxford Mail*, 8 March, 2019

<sup>21</sup> Inyourpocket.com, Father Jankowski statue

<sup>22</sup> Bożena Aksamić, 'The Secret of Saint Bridget. Why did the Church allow Father Jankowski to abuse children for years' *Gazetka Wyborcza*, 3 Dec, 2018

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>26</sup> Paulina Guzik, 'An Unfinished Story Of Conversion: Clerical Sexual Abuse In Poland', *Church, Communication and Culture*, vol 5, no. 3, (2020) 425

<sup>27</sup> Kamila Rezmer-Poltka, 'Activities of the Catholic Church in Poland Against Pedophilia in 2018', *Polish Political Science Yearbook*, Vol. 48, no. 2 (2019): 360

<sup>28</sup> Christian Davies, 'Polish film The Clergy sparks hundreds of allegations of abuse' *The Guardian*, 15 Oct, 2018

Borowiecka's story in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, more individuals came forward to the Do Not Be Afraid foundation with their own experiences of abuse by Jankowski, and protesters took to the streets to decry the continued veneration of the prelate.<sup>29</sup> The statue was a focus of these protests, with protesters pouring red paint over it in December 2018.<sup>30</sup> The mayor of Gdansk, Pawel Adamowicz, stated that it was inappropriate to have this statue in a public space.<sup>31</sup> Despite Adamowicz's support for the removal of the statue, his subsequent murder in the following weeks meant that, at this point, no action was taken by the government of Gdansk concerning the statue.

### *Toppling of the statue*

On the night of February 20, 2019, the eve of the Vatican summit on child sexual abuse, three activists pulled down the statue. They pulled it down using ropes, and it toppled onto a set of tyres they had placed on the floor to protect the statue itself from damage. Once the statue had been toppled, they placed children's underwear in one hand and an altar boy's vestments in the other to symbolise the sexual abuse that Jankowski was accused of. The activists published a manifesto online to explain their actions. Within this manifesto, they justified their actions by citing the various charters of human rights, stating that Jankowski was responsible for 'A vile and shameful violation of dignity;' they accused the institution of the Catholic Church of being 'fully aware of the evil committed by Henryk Jankowski' and that they 'tolerated the risk of further victims.'<sup>32</sup> They further accused local politicians and other secular figures of 'de facto consent to evil' through their silence and expressed their concern about how the Polish Catholic Church afforded priests 'a completely unique, unrestricted access to intimacy' through which 'hideous and dangerous pathologies are born.'<sup>33</sup> However, they also stated 'unequivocally and categorically that our action is neither aimed at nor can be treated as aimed at the community of faith', citing their motivations as driven by 'dictated by a concern for the common good', and a goal 'to break the false and hideous myth of Henryk Jankowski, not the matter of his monument.'<sup>34</sup> These activists posted a video of the statue being toppled and the symbolic clothing placed on the statue on YouTube, which, when writing the case study, had over 100,000 views. The three activists were named Konrad Korzeniowski, Rafal R. Suszek and Michal Wojcieszczuk, all of whom had a history of activism.<sup>35</sup> They cited the legal basis for their actions within the context of Art. 26 of the Penal Code of the Republic of Poland. They turned themselves in to the police that night and were detained on the crime of 'insulting a monument.'<sup>36</sup> The damage done to the monument reportedly came to around PLN 30,000zł.<sup>37</sup>

The three protesters went to trial for their actions in September 2021, with the verdict that they

<sup>29</sup> TVN24 Polska, 'She accused Father Jankowski, wanted a meeting with the curia' *TVN24 Polska*, 14 May, 2019

<sup>30</sup> Derek Scally, 'Polish protesters topple statue of Solidarity priest accused of abuse', *The Irish Times*, 21 Feb, 2019

<sup>31</sup> Reuters Staff, 'Statue of Polish Solidarity priest accused of paedophilia removed', *Reuters*, 21 Feb. 2019

<sup>32</sup> Konrad Korzeniowski, Rafal R. Suszek, Michal Wokcieszczuk, 'We accuse!', in 'At night they toppled the statue of Fr. Jankowski. "We accuse the prelate of a vile and shameful violation of dignity"', *OKO.press*, 21 Feb, 2019

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>35</sup> Editors of OKO. press, 'We accuse the prelate of a vile and shameful violation of dignity', *OKO.press*, 21 Feb, 2019

<sup>36</sup> Vanessa Gera, 'Polish activists pull down statue of priest in abuse protest' *AP News*, 21 Feb, 2019

<sup>37</sup> *Gazeta Prawna*, 'The court found guilty of those accused of overturning the statue of Fr. prelate Henryk Jankowski, but without punishment', *Gazeta Prawna*, 28 Sep, 2021

were responsible for destroying and damaging someone else's property, stating that the political nature of their actions was protected by the constitutional principle of freedom of expression. The court declared that the activists 'did not act with the intention of insulting the monument. They used the monument as a message amplifier, ensuring the arousal of attention and interest among a wide audience.' The court assessed the damage done to the statue as coming to PLN 30,000 zł, imposing a reparation cost of around PLN 7.8000 on each of the activists.<sup>38</sup>

### *Opposition to the Contestation*

There was a significant issue taken with this contestation of Jankowski's monument. For instance, after the statue had paint thrown on it, supporters of Jankowski, mostly members of Solidarity, cleaned the paint-splattered statue immediately.<sup>39</sup> Jankowski's supporters were not limited to the Solidarity movement: Archbishop Slawoj Leszek Glodz claimed that the attacks on the deceased prelate were equivalent to an attack on the church.<sup>40</sup> Glodz served as the Archbishop of Gdansk from 2008 to 2020, had been involved in the construction of the statue, and was specifically named in the manifesto of the activists who toppled Jankowski's statue as having 'tolerated the risk of further victims.'<sup>41</sup> Following the toppling of the statue on 21 February, the committee that had financed the statue demanded that it be reinstated, with the chairman of the Regional Board of Solidarity calling all claims against the priest 'slander, with no confirmation in reality, against someone dead for nine years.'<sup>42</sup>

### Decision-Making Processes

Following the statue's toppling on February 21, 2019, a verbal conflict between the city council and the committee that funded the statue's construction ensued. Despite the council initially sending a team to take the monument into storage, and a spokeswoman for the Gdansk City Hall stating that the statue would not return for the time being, citing the fact that the base was damaged, rendering it unsafe to re-erect.<sup>43</sup> However, resistance from the statue's committee meant that the plinth was restored on February 23,<sup>44</sup> and the statue was returned to its place on ... following some repairs to the damage caused by it being pulled down.<sup>45</sup> However, within a month, the council voted to remove the statue for good at a council session in March 2019. They also voted to rename the square that the statue stood in so that it was no longer named after Jankowski and established their desire for Jankowski to be stripped of his honorary citizenship of Gdansk.<sup>46</sup> The removal of this statue was one of the first acts of the newly appointed city mayor, Aleksandra Dukiewicz, in her official capacity.<sup>47</sup> Further, a petition addressed to the council with

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>39</sup> Derek Scally, 'Gdansk councillors vote to remove statute of controversial priest', *The Irish Times*, 10 Mar, 2019

<sup>40</sup> Reuters Staff, 'Statue of Polish Solidarity priest accused of paedophilia removed', *Reuters*, 21 Feb. 2019

<sup>41</sup> Konrad Korzeniowski, Rafal R. Suszek, Michal Wokcieszczuk, 'We accuse!', in 'At night they toppled the statue of Fr. Jankowski. "We accuse the prelate of a vile and shameful violation of dignity"', *OKO.press*, 21 Feb, 2019

<sup>42</sup> Derek Scally, 'Polish protesters topple statue of Solidarity priest accused of abuse', *The Irish Times*, 21 Feb, 2019

<sup>43</sup> Vanessa Gera, 'Polish activists pull down statue of priest in abuse protest' *AP News*, 21 Feb, 2019

<sup>44</sup> *Gazeta Prawna*, 'The court found guilty of those accused of overturning the statue of Fr. prelate Henryk Jankowski, but without punishment', *Gazeta Prawna*, 28 Sep, 2021

<sup>45</sup> Lulu, 'Gdansk. The monument to prelate Jankowski is to be returned to its place', *Gazeta Wiadomości*, 21 Feb 2019

<sup>46</sup> Derek Scally, 'Gdansk councillors vote to remove statute of controversial priest', *The Irish Times*, 10 Mar, 2019

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*

1128 signatures was circulated prior to the meeting, calling for the removal of the statue, stating that 'paedophiles do not belong on pedestals.'<sup>48</sup> The decision-making process within the council meeting is unclear, but prior to the toppling of the statue, the council had been looking for a legal means of taking the statue down.<sup>49</sup>

There was opposition to this decision, with Archbishop Slawoj Leszek Glodz agitating for the returning of the statue to its podium in the hours after it had been toppled, and the accusations levelled at Jankowski were formulated as a leftist attack on the Catholic Church. One supporter of Jankowski stated that the council's decision to take the statue down had 'divided Gdansk, divided Catholics and divided us all.'<sup>50</sup> They further alleged that the new mayor had 'trampled' on the memory of Solidarity by taking down the statue.<sup>51</sup>

The controversy surrounding the statue and subsequent public pressure to begin an investigation led by the conservative Archbishop Slawoj Leszek Glodz into Jankowski. The case continued for nine months, halting in October 2019 with the conclusion 'it is impossible when the person is dead.'<sup>52</sup> This, in turn, prompted protests from the public, with a group of 100 Catholics coming to the Gdansk curia to call for the archbishop's resignation. This opened a conversation with Archbishop Salvatore Pennachio, Vatican Ambassador, in a private audience. Here, the group asked what would be done concerning Glodz's abuse of power in cases of sexual abuse and what actions would be taken as reparations for the victims.<sup>53</sup> The case was reopened in April 2020; the extent to which this was a result of the actions of the group is unclear, but it resulted in the removal of Glodz from his position as archbishop.<sup>54</sup>

## Summary and Conclusions

Ultimately, through the actions of local groups of activists and the secular Polish government, the statue of Jankowski has been permanently removed from the square outside St Brygida Parish Church, despite dissent from individuals from the Solidarity movement and local religious figures. Within this debate, the statue increasingly came to symbolise many of the tensions within contemporary Polish society: the abuse of power within the Catholic Church, the increasing secularisation of Polish society, the increasing polarisation of Polish politics, and antisemitism in modern Poland. The controversy surrounding the statue reflects the wider trend within Polish media in opening conversations around abuses of power in the Polish Catholic Church. In further consideration of this issue, Elzbieta Halas' study on the symbolic construction of Solidarity in Polish collective memory is productive in establishing the role that the memory of lives of individuals involved in the Solidarity movement plays in the consolidation of Polish national identity.<sup>55</sup> This is of particular relevance to Jankowski's memory due to the double-edged nature of

<sup>48</sup> Razem, 'Down with Jankowski's monument!', YouMoveEurope

<sup>49</sup> Vanessa Gera, 'Polish activists pull down statue of priest in abuse protest' *AP News*, 21 Feb, 2019

<sup>50</sup> Derek Scally, 'Gdansk councillors vote to remove statute of controversial priest', *The Irish Times*, 10 Mar, 2019

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>52</sup> Wiesz, 'The case has been closed: The Curia refuses to the victims of Fr. Jankowski', *Wiesz.pl* 6 Oct, 2019

<sup>53</sup> Paulina Guzik, 'An Unfinished Story Of Conversion: Clerical Sexual Abuse In Poland', *Church, Communication and Culture*, vol 5, no. 3, (2020) 425

<sup>54</sup> Elizabetta Povoledo and Antol Magdziarz, 'Polish Cleric Retires in Face of Cover-Up Accusations. It's Not Enough, Critics Say,' *The New York Times*, 14 August 2020

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its sanctity: as a churchman and as an important figure in the Solidarity movement, it provided him with a particularly insulated memory from contestation. In the future, the space left by the removal of Jankowski's statue could be used to commemorate the previously marginalised voices of the victims of child sexual abuse by the Catholic Church; in keeping with the aims of the activists who toppled the statue, the aim should not be the removal of Jankowski from public memory, but rather a redirection in how we remember him. There should be some means of remembering the impacts of his predatory behaviour on the community of Gdansk. Still, the removal of this celebratory statue was a positive step in centring the voices of his victims.

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## About Contested Histories

Many contestations have been over memorials, street names, and other physical representations of historical legacies in public spaces in recent years. These contestations often reflect deeper societal tensions, whether triggered by political transitions, demographic shifts, inter-ethnic strife, or a growing awareness of unaddressed historical injustices.

Contested Histories is a multi-year initiative designed to identify principles, processes, and best practices for addressing these contestations at the community or municipal level and in the classroom. Conflicts about history, heritage, and memory are a global phenomenon. Although each case is different, comparative cases can indicate lessons learned and reflect best practices.

## About IHJR at EuroClio

The Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR) is a research centre at the European Association for History Educators (EuroClio) in The Hague, The Netherlands. The IHJR works with educational and public policy institutions to organise and sponsor historical discourse in pursuit of acknowledgement and the resolution of historical disputes in divided communities and societies.

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