

Evangelical Protestantism

The Apostle, 1997

I'm a genuine, Holy Ghost, Jesus-filled preachin' machine this mornin'!

Production Information

Euliss “Sonny” Dewey (Robert Duvall), Jessie Dewey (Farrah Fawcett), “Momma” (June Carter Cash)

Film History

The “baby” of Robert Duvall—conceived of film, wrote screenplay, directed, financed (\$5 million), and starred. Again turned down by studios so financed himself. Evidence of “personal, participatory cinema” (Sklar, 373) No studio wanted to deal with a film about religion. Duvall’s interest in the South—his debut in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1972), *Tender Mercies*, *Great Santini*, *A Family Thing*, *Rambling Rose*. Includes many non-actors in film. Had been collecting stories and phrases for 13 years. Raised vaguely Protestant, wife’s Catholic.

Social History

Booming economy. In 1997, Clinton and the Republicans agreed on a deal that combined tax cuts and reductions in spending to produce the first balanced federal budget in three decades. City takes place in Forth Worth, Texas, boom towns of Texas and then shifts to “sleepy” Lafayette, Louisiana.

Clinton re-elected to second term in 1996. First Democratic president since Roosevelt to get a second term. Series of “issues” plaguing Clintons—financial mischief, questions about sexual harassment and sexual impropriety. Conservatives not liking Bill but especially not liking Hillary. Pursuit by “independent” counsel Kenneth Starr from 1994. Monica S. Lewinsky, an unpaid intern and later a paid staffer at the White House, in 1995–96. Starr accused as being conservative Republican out to get Clinton. Clinton accused of being immoral and a liar. Eventually resulting in his admission of the affair in August 1998 and eventual impeachment.

Men, women, power, sex.

Religious History

Shift of portrayal of African American religion. Pre-sixties: their religion as superstitious, overly emotional, negative, childish. Post-sixties: to white people being “healed” through contact with more authentic, spiritually rich black religion. Liberal rejection of conservative white religion but acceptance of conservative black religion (cf.

Gospel music, Civil Rights movement). Secular non-religious willing to “overlook” theological conservatism for progressive, Democratic votes. African Americans far more varied in religion than media allows.

Duvall treating religion with sensitivity and integrity. Moving beyond minister as charlatan. Fine-grained details.

Conservative Protestant churches—1) neopentecostal cities—big church, many ministries, modern music and instruments 2) rural churches, memorized music, few material goods. Duvall sides with rural churches.

Pentecostal history and race: men and women, multiracial, multiethnic worship—Azusa Street revival (1906-1909). Charles Parnham (in Topeka, KS, Houston, TX) and William Seymour (in LA). Unbridled religious enthusiasm. Healing, speaking in tongues, prophecy, interpreting prophecy. Importance of missionary work, spreading gospel. Doctrinal certitude and religious zeal. Soon back to racial, ethnic groups. Whites form Assemblies of God in 1914, African Americans—Church of God in Christ. Charles Parnham joins KKK.

Jessie belongs to city church with Women’s Aglow—Assemblies of God—meetings for women. Odd: black choir in white church—essentializing African American music as “real church music.” Inside joke of “youth ministers” getting in trouble. Same in *Saved* (2004).

Portrayal of generic southern folk Protestantism. Combination of Fundamentalist and Pentecostal—intimacy with God, importance of sermon, charismatic ministers, lively preaching, interpenetration of religion into everyday life (especially in language), popular gospel songs (“I’ll Fly Away”),

Resources

Interview with Duvall: <http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/apostle.INTERVIEW.htm>