

Documentary Realism and Fundamentalist Religion in Ireland

*A Case Study of **Power in the Blood** together with **The Rocky Road to Dublin** and **The Road to God Knows Where***

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Introduction

According to many critics documentary helps to interpret history and promote human understanding while dramatising and bending reality. In general it does not draw conclusions, but rather consists of statements and assertions so that conclusions can be drawn. All the 'creative' documentaries discussed in this paper attempt to address the power and influence of religion in Ireland and to encourage audiences to reflect on such issues using a range of conventional strategies from direct address to *cinema verite* techniques, drawing upon the powerful influence of Robert Flaherty's poetic exposé of *Man of Aran* from the 1930s, together with more recent documentary techniques using more dialogical and reflexive formats. Peter Lennon, John T. Davis and Alan Gilsean's documentaries under discussion in this paper present a relatively raw yet somber aesthetic, combining many of these techniques in their varying attempts to understand and appreciate the historical power and legacy of religion for contemporary Ireland.

As illustrated in a recent survey of fictional representations of religious agency in Irish film, for a long time such representations were certainly favorable, validating the great reverence in which the people then held their Church (see Brereton, 2008). An apparent anti-Catholic agenda was given voice more recently, precipitated by the numerous Church scandals of the 1990s and reflecting an apparent move towards secularism within the country. Surprisingly however, it still took a long time for representations of

institutional violence and sexual deviancy by the clergy to be documented, while drawing upon scapegoating in particular to expedite this transformation.

In many ways, as these readings will demonstrate, documentary engagement with fundamentalist Protestantism and Catholicism has appeared much more direct and vitriolic, with filmmakers frequently proselytizing for a more secular society.

Three of the most influential and controversial documentaries in Ireland will be examined to flesh out some of these debates, and at the same time dismantle their evocation of a secret (non) space through some detailed textual analysis. Framed across a twenty year time period from 1968 to 1989 and covering both Evangelical Protestantism in the north, which has been most frequently cited as a central cause of 'The Troubles', placing Ireland on the international map of conflict areas for over three decades, and more conventional evocation of religion in the south as a struggle for modernity and moving out from the clutches of a monolithic Catholic orthodoxy. To begin this study I will analyze each documentary in turn, beginning with *The Rocky Road to Dublin*.

The Rocky Road to Dublin

A notable exception to the general historical portrayal of a benevolent clergy in Irish cinema is the polemical documentary *The Rocky Road to Dublin* (1968), which was made by Irish born journalist Peter Lennon. Writing a series of articles for *The Guardian* newspaper while working in Paris, Lennon caused much controversy in Ireland with his stinging criticism of the Irish establishment, including the Catholic Church. Recounting the revolutionary period of 1916 and the struggle for independence, Lennon, like many left-leaning critics of the time, affirmed in voice-over that the country had remained locked into a backward, Church-controlled state, which did not follow through on the heroic struggle of the revolutionary's vision for the future of the country. To dramatize his thesis, the director interviewed, among others, Catholic priests, to expose their pernicious influence on society. Lennon got permission to film one well-known (singing) priest, Father

Michael Cleary, who later caused scandal by fathering a child with his housekeeper.

Cleary's banter and insights on camera remain overtly pointed and hypocritical, especially when extolling the virtues of celibacy and how the church was 'not against sex' per se, but wanted it 'celebrated in an appropriate way', rather than being 'abused' outside of the sacrament of marriage. Cleary is shown singing for women in hospital beds and more conventionally being photographed outside a church with a wedding party before attending the reception and setting the 'spiritual tone' for the strangely unhappy looking newly-weds. Later he helps coach guests to perform some traditional dancing. Very little modesty is evident in talking to camera around why he became a priest, as he explains his skill of 'speaking to ordinary people on their wavelength', while extolling the virtues of celibacy and putting sex within its 'proper value' for married couples. 'Personally' as a priest, he concludes these apparently intuitive revelations by announcing, 'I would like to have a family' but, of course he cannot, as laid down by the Catholic Church.

These strange revelations are followed by a training session where we see Cleary encouraging very young boxers, followed by an almost surreal graveyard scene which is worth focusing on. In an unusual evocation of sanctified sacred space in a Dublin cemetery, he confronts gravediggers at work and shares a smoke, all the while chatting with them about life and death issues in a strangely gauche manner. 'Are you expecting a lot of business?' he inquires nonchalantly of the workers. Dispensing a few cigarettes, he quickly breaks the ice by mentioning a football match he played in, before continuing: '[S]eriously, do you get callous toward the dead at all ... [and] still keep silent and reverent ... [or] do you still feel upset?' 'No', the workers emphatically respond in unison and without any equivocation. 'They are strangers'. It only affects them when it comes 'home', was their clear response. These workers understand boundaries around life and death issues and provide some insight into this complex public persona who strives to be an 'everyman', which he equates with his role as a priest. He is therefore

incapable of maintaining an aloof sacred diffidence towards his environment. This graveyard vignette is reminiscent of a comic chorus in a Shakespearean drama and appears strangely uncomfortable and unconvincing for modern day audiences. Meanwhile, schoolboys in a Christian Brother's school spout their received religious beliefs and dogma for the camera, appearing anachronistic for a contemporary secular audience and very different in tone and mood to the more nostalgic evocation of such religious teaching in a recent Oscar nominated animation *Give Up Yer Auld Sins* (2001).

Nonetheless, this static scene of indoctrination clearly contrasts with the utopian closure of the documentary as the children run with great *jouissance* towards the moving camera, anchored to the back of a car. This *mise-en-scene* creates an evocative celebration of youth and hope rather than a picture of empty vessels passively being filled with an age-old religious dogma. This trope is further explored twenty years later in Gilsean's *The Road to God Know's Where* (1988), where we are informed how the Irish Development Association [IDA], a government organization charged with trying to improve the country economically in the depression-ridden 1970s, consciously used advertising posters of fresh-faced young Irish graduates to sell the country to foreign investors. As witnessed by the now dead Celtic Tiger booming economy, the strategy ostensibly succeeded. Many other scenes in *The Rocky Road to Dublin* also point towards a critical evaluation of Irish cultural fissures, which are summarized at one stage by the forthright short story writer Sean O'Faolain who speaks of 'urbanized peasants' and an 'obscurantist uncultivated church'. See also Paul Duane's 'making of' documentary which accompanies the DVD re-release and restoration of the original in 2004. While the filmmaker frequently rages against religious intolerance, they nonetheless speak from an insider's perspective – none more so than John T. Davis, who lives and works in Belfast and has produced some of the most poetic documentaries on the island.

Power in the Blood

Unlike Robert Flaherty's classic Irish romantic documentary/fiction *Man of Aran* (1934), which visualised the grand design of nature in a positive, even spiritual manner, Davis certainly extends this tradition, while also registering a contradictory discourse on 'man as outsider', unable to control his destiny. For example, even images that elevate the preacher as the centre of attention and of truth in his earlier 1998 foray into this territory in *Dust on the Bible* are alternatively counterpointed and transposed into another less complementary, more depressing side of man and his environment, from a media studies perspective. This corresponds to a more even-handed discourse on 'realism' and 'truth' than the monotheistic aesthetic style and sensibility of Flaherty. Flaherty exemplifies the pure romantic tradition of artists who metaphorically only turn the stones of nature to reveal a pre-given, self-evident romantic sensibility. Davis, on the other hand, is able to create an essentially romantic aesthetic, while also instilling a clear contemporary social reality, which captures 'the good of a person's life' through an engaging narrative.¹

Davis studied in the College of Art and has become one of the most innovative documentary filmmakers in Ireland today working out of his own studio. For instance, he jointly directed the experimental feminist fictional *Maeve* (1982) along with Pat Murphy. Picking up on his love of music, he initiated his documentary oeuvre with *Shell Shock Rock* (1978), dealing with the Northern punk music scene. Alongside music, Davis has remained fascinated with Americana making several documentaries on the topic, including *Route 66* (1985), exploring how forgotten communities fared along the famous road that linked the east and west of the continent and how this sacred space became a relative backwater as new high-speed motorways were built, bypassing many of the smaller towns. In *Power in the Blood* (1989) broadcast on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and made for the *Arena* arts slot, Davis continues to display his cinematic visual story telling powers, aided by the stunning cinematography of Sé Merry. In the opening scenes we are introduced to a real life evangelical, country and western singer Vernon Oxford. Soon he travels from his American homeland to try to save the souls of those in the North of Ireland. The documentary journey

(pilgrimage) includes a highly charged treatise on the power of religion to affect people's lives.²

Kathleen McCracken, in a study of Davis, suggests that his films differ most radically from conventional documentaries in composition and editing. 'In their concentrated juxtaposition of word and image, and by allowing the variety of meanings inherent in reality to emerge unaltered from the images themselves', she concludes that they 'approximate most closely to the modernist poem' (McCracken 1999, 15). I will illustrate Davis's poetic aesthetic, by providing a reading of the opening sequence of the documentary, followed by an examination of a turning point in the audience's identification with the main protagonist in a public house, when a drunk invades and disrupts this communal space. But first, it is helpful to sketch the hypnotic power of [tele]evangelist preaching to frame this exploration.

Christian fundamentalism³ is generally portrayed as an aberration on film and in literature as a strident search for answers through accepting the historical letter of Biblical law, without appreciating the contemporary context. S. Brent Plate, editor of *Representing Religion in World Cinema*, argues that film is a 'geo-religious aesthetic' - adapting Jameson's geo-political aesthetic - alongside being an 'imagistic, participatory and performative' space which can represent religion. Plate's hypothesis is that film and religion are analogous in the first instance due to their activities of taking the world-as-it-is and inventing a new world through the dual processes of 'framing' and 'projecting' (Plate 2003, 3), while even more controversially remaining predominantly an American phenomenon.

Davis' narrative strength lies in his ability to address such a seemingly one-dimensional subject and create a multifaceted web of interactive associations, which enrich the religious treatise encoded in the text, while at the same time counterpointing a deconstructive discourse, which ensures that Oxford's evangelism is perceived and framed within the context of Northern Ireland's sectarian politics.⁴ Such religious movements, even if they fail, are premised on the perceived 'moral instability' of society. Modern America is unstable, Richard Neuhaus has argued - long before the current polarisation

of religious beliefs across East/West axes - because religion has been removed from its centre to leave a 'naked public square' (Bruce 1990, 193). Televangelism feeds off such fears by reasserting that the 'old time religion' is a necessary antidote to such moral and spiritual nakedness. The phenomenon represents a form of conservative Protestantism which has adapted to the modern world, not rejected it, as is sometimes implied in their rhetoric of a return to the past and 'true' Christianity. Life's personal problems can be solved and society must be shaped by a guiding Evangelical hand that knows all the answers.⁵ In Northern Ireland, at least up to the recent affirmation and endorsement of a peaceful resolution, religious significance and sectarian conflict were dramatically overloaded, making the situation difficult for audiences to understand. Meanwhile, evangelism as a trans-cultural religious and marketing phenomenon provides a more universal package of signifiers for religious expression and understanding, without becoming stereotyped and confused within a parochial Irish setting.

Most pointedly with the current mushrooming of reality TV and its playful diegesis, the erstwhile documentary format, with its privileging of realist performance outside of the *Big Brother* artificial environment may seem somewhat anachronistic. Yet Oxford is not emoting or performing like in *Big Brother* or for that matter like Burt Lancaster is in the classic fictional study of an American preacher *Elmer Gantry* (1960). Lancaster's superb performance successfully walks the tightrope between easy moral indignation and cheap satirical sneers and in spite of Gantry's showmanship and money grabbing; there exists a genuine belief in what he preaches (see Butler 1969, 82) Meanwhile, Oxford's realistic documentary performance helps to induce a dramatic shock for an audience possibly lulled into empathising with his flawed persona. In an interview with the author, the director asserted how spirituality can break down cultural differences: 'I believe in a spiritual journey ... using the mythic language of religion. Travelling through an alien culture fitted like a glove'. Davis concluded our interview by suggesting that 'only with fundamentalism can guilt be expunged with emotional relief'. He ended

off-line by noting how the concept of a child born with 'original sin' really disturbs him and was 'difficult to intellectualise' (Brereton, 1990).⁶

The opening credit sequence of *Power in the Blood* contains four distinct medium to long shots of rural scenes in Tennessee, portraying the beauty of the landscape. For the cliché sunsets, a long telephoto lens is used to capture its romanticism and to highlight the cross connection between landscape, as symbolic of the spiritual quest which is to follow, and the man-made sign, solidified by the red title letters 'Power in the Blood' emblazoned on an evocative sunset. Universal religious metaphors and symbols are overlaid onto the conventional representations of a romanticised nature. Using no voice-over helps to firmly position the viewer inside the text, a strategy that is also frequently used in Gilsean's oeuvre, ensuring that the audience is not provided with an unambiguous or clear line of engagement. The pleasure of the documentary as poetic artefact, involves trying to decode and reconstituted landscape, in this instance as an objective correlatives for the power of nature, alongside engaging with its potentiality for spiritual transcendence.

For instance, Nina Danino, in a fascinating paper 'Creating the Sacred', at a multi-disciplinary academic conference at Sterling, Scotland in 2006, spoke of her ethnographic documentary *Temenos* (1998) which dealt with the 'Madjorie miracle'. She spoke of points of identification with Hollywood and how she used aspects of suture to artistically connect with the sacrality of space. Danino did not want to evoke a disembodied vision, but nonetheless spoke as a practicing artist at the conference. Experiencing film can be read as equivalent to a heightened experience attempting to access the divine dimension of the sacred. This effect can be produced through specific human experiences, especially suffering. To create such 'devotional cinema', Danino suggests, form and content need to be in particular balance. Film theorists have often cited studies like Paul Schrader's 'Transcendental Style in Film' (1972) and his study of directors including Bresson, Ozu and Dryer, where the style of cinema is paired down to help promote a deepened spiritual experience. The editing is usually flat, with no dramatic action or climaxes,

which in turn it is claimed make it possible for viewer engagement. The time continuum is maintained as far as possible with less manipulation of a time line promoting a form of religious art embodied by stasis, or as is often described as transcendent. I would also suggest in the hands of Davis and Gilsean in particular, film has the potential to create useful examples of Irish sacred space alongside an evocation of the transcendental.

On a narrative level, such conventional scenic shots at first appear to break the flow of the narrative storyline, but when appreciated in thematic terms, these shots continuously expand the meanings therein and as a consequence strengthen rather than diffuse the narrative drive. The camera begins to actively interrogate the action, panning downwards to reveal a circle of Born-again devotees, all singing and praising God. While the sound dominates the diegesis, the visuals establish the attitude and the mood of the text. The music and prayer of the congregation linger, as the camera cuts to establishing shots of urban landscape at night, contrasting with the opening rural sequence recorded in bright daylight.

While the evangelicals are praying in their man-made sacred space, preparing to send their pastor to Ireland, the camera cuts first to a clothesline,⁷ then to a horse looking over a fence and most significantly to a small bonfire where the rubbish around the church is being burned. Like the spatial transformation to the Maze prison earlier, the fire transposes into a 12th of July bonfire in Northern Ireland with the effigy of the Pope and the Irish tricolour burning in it. Davis's morphing of an erstwhile innocent image of fire, as a cleansing agent of dirt and waste into a potent symbol of Irish myth making is highly effective cinematically. Six separate apparently random establishing shots are quickly intercut with cars and people walking through some of them. One wonders if such imagery is contrasting the hypnotic purposefulness and intensity of the Evangelists with the aimlessness and corruption of urban street life, as against the romanticised pristine, people-less and sunlit landscapes of the opening shots.⁸

After a fade out, the buzzing sound of a phone engaging begins the expositional sequence, which combines and synthesises much of the above

and initiates the controlling narrative, namely the quest for meaning in Northern Ireland. Communication remains the dominant theme of the story, be it between fellow human beings or with their God. As the phone call continues, connecting America with Ireland, shots of hippos bathing in a pond are followed by images of children playing 'catch', while juxtaposed with telegraph wires marking the natural habitat. This alignment between nature and technology is ruptured as the camera closes in on a polluting chimney over the infamous Maze prison. Nature loses its naturalistic innocence with the pollution of a political prison in Belfast, when, like Martin Sheen's role at the start of *Apocalypse Now* (1979), Vernon is about to receive his mission to enter the 'heart of darkness'. In this essay it is impossible to do justice to the whole documentary; consequently I will jump to a specific pub scene to illustrate a key part of this paper.

In a *verite* documentary style, Davis decides to capture the counter-evangelism and speech pattern of a random drunk in a public house where they were filming. This extra-diegetic agent breaks the polemical rhetoric of the visiting preacher, while crying out in an extremely charged voice⁹ and referring to evangelists in general. 'It takes me to preach to them and they've got everything – they've got cars – yet they expect me to kneel to them ... Never, NEVER'. Both Vernon and most surprisingly the drunk are intoxicated by their own convictions and rhetoric; both can create drama out of language. By puncturing the uncontested rhetoric of the born-again preacher within the Western-like public space of the pub environment, such a framing strategy helps to break identification with the increasingly pathologised agency of a fundamentalist preacher.

Unlike Catholicism, Davis pontificates in an interview, which ostensibly adapts a healing almost matriarchal approach to guilt, Protestants, he believes, have no such safety valve and concludes that 'their religion is based on fear' (Brereton, 1990). Such a contentious notion also calls to mind Brian Friel's classic *The Faith-Healer*, which illustrates the awesome power and responsibility such gifts impose on all concerned, including the audience. Oxford certainly believes himself to be a faith healer, who both challenges his

congregation and himself to adapt a fundamentalist evangelical mindset for ethical living. By all accounts, Oxford ends his journey into this 'heart of darkness' in Northern Ireland, by affirming his belief in guilt and the power of redemption. Singing about a drunk who is saved closes the documentary, which began as a seemingly anthropological if also voyeuristic investigation of a 'primitive' religious sect, with one of its members communicating in tongues and using their body and music to express his spiritual communion with their God. The film succeeds by getting inside such religious experience and dramatising this sacred space through Vernon's subjective spiritual journey/pilgrimage, without feeling consumed or simply alienated by the experience. Finally, let us turn to a more mainstream documentary made by an equally passionate and even transcendental filmmaker, as defined by Paul Schrader.

The Road to God Knows Where

While Davis's documentary presents a very poetic and personal reading of Northern Ireland politics, Gilsenan's oeuvre maps a southern Irish perspective and is often more conventional while at the same time adapting an equally subjective point-of-view. Financed by Channel 4 as part of its series of documentaries on Ireland, 'Irish Reel', *The Road to God Knows Where* was broadcast on RTE in October 1988. The bulk of Gilsenan's filmed work has been in the documentary format, where he has focused on examining transitional periods of modern life. *Stories from the Silence*, for example, examines AIDS in Ireland before there was any real concern, *Prophet Songs* tackles the issue of disenchanted priests who left the Church, while more recently Gilsenan addresses major social issues through award winning series, including mental illness, dying and suicide in *The Asylum*, *Hospice* and *I see a Darkness*. However, the piece of work that garnered the greatest public attention at the start of his career in the 1980s was *The Road to God Knows Where*, a 'state of the nation' piece, which perfectly captured the pessimism of 1980's Ireland (a narrative which becomes more resonant in our current

global economic crises) and won the Special Jury Prize at the 1989 European Film Awards.

The Pope's only visit to the island, according to some cultural historians, represented the 'last hurrah' in the hegemonic control of Catholicism on the Irish populace.¹⁰ Such euphoric snippets of the crowds are contrasted with static landscape shots and long tracking shots of empty roads - echoing Davis' equally strong fascination with the metaphoric potency of the road as a journey and sometimes even as pilgrimage. As a Gaelic ballad is sung, a woman affirms: 'I still believe in God'. But at the same time the audience registers her criticism of Catholicism and 'leaving reason at the door of the Church'. Meanwhile, the internationally renowned group *The Dubliners* sing the well-known republican ballad: 'We're on the wrong road/ but we're together now how cares/on the road to God knows where'.

Gilsenan was only 24 when he made *The Road to God Knows Where* and captured the moment, by establishing 'a dialectic between the dispossessed and the rhetoric of progress' (O'Brien 2004: 209). The documentary begins with an extract from a poem by Padraig Pearse, (echoing the Republican rhetoric of *The Rocky Road to Dublin*) immediately establishing a link with the ideals of 1916 and taking on the legacy of Ireland's past, including its dark tone: 'I have turned my face/ to this road before me/ to the deed that I see/ and the death I shall die' (cited in O'Brien 2004: 209). The lives of young 20-somethings in the late 1980s are addressed as they register their feelings around what it meant to be Irish then - a continuing fixation within the new Republic - while questioning any notion of a coherent group identity. The documentary almost theatrically plays with and enunciates several well-worn phrases and clichés including; 'our young are our greatest asset'. Yet as is well known, earlier generations were unceremoniously displaced through mass emigration. Particular prominence is given to the aforementioned famous IDA promotion campaign for the faltering economy, using images of Irish graduates to sell the country to global capitalism – a strategy which eventually succeeded in attracting big multinationals into Ireland and helped re-float the depressed economy.

Incidentally, contemporary generations who have lived through a 'Celtic Tiger' economy often exhibit a form of historical amnesia, not recognizing this country of chronic unemployment and alarming emigration figures, hence such a documentary helps put the record straight. What comes across in this early exposé of this phenomenon however, is an angry, disillusioned, apathetic but intelligent young population that has been fragmented by emigration and unemployment.

Similar to *Power in the Blood*, the documentary is not framed or controlled by a voice-over or formal interviews with authority figures; consequently it does not have to appear balanced like in standard Public Service Broadcasting programmes. Gilson's visual style captures an urban landscape and cold wastelands with Celtic crosses and rolling hillsides. The images are often bleak but this fits the outlook of the majority of the young Irish who are interviewed in Ireland, London and New York for the documentary. More recently, Gilson talks about 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater', explaining how many of the things considered traditionally Irish are now apparently being rejected by society: 'I think you've got to be very careful that in the drive to modernise Ireland and become part of Europe and all that - that you actually lose out on essential parts of our heritage'. Very much speaking against the tide of liberal public opinion, he strongly believes that a 'Catholic spirit is [and continues to be] part of us' (Collins, 1995). The images of the urban landscape and the dirty faces of young children make a poignant rejoinder to its aspirations. The blame here is being laid both on the state (in the guise of the proclamation) and on the romantic ideals of the past which have, in Gilson's and Lennon's views mentioned earlier, stifled progress because of people's obsession with them. Like an increasing number of critics, he is both aware of the constructed nature of Ireland's image of itself and eager to question it.

Title cards are flashed up on screen which contain many well used aphorisms and enigmatic slogans that help frame these discussions, like 'it's a long road that has no turns' or 'the youth are our greatest asset', alongside the well used Irish and Christian greeting, 'may the road rise up to meet you'.

All of these aphorisms, it is suggested, serve to re-construct an everyday journey or transformation of a national culture into an almost spiritual pilgrimage of discovery.

Conclusion

Lennon, Gilsenan, and Davis most especially, remain fascinated, for varying reasons, by all forms of religions expression in Ireland on both sides of the border and not just as a convenient narrative trope, which individuates the island. Because all three directors perceive the religious culture from the inside out, their documentaries display greater insight into the psyche of the island and provide a highly nuanced exposition of the changing representations of religion in the country. An erstwhile sacred island of so-called 'saints and scholars' has, over recent decades, given way to a more secular society which apparently strives to ignore the past, or even dismiss religion as part of our national zeitgeist. However, as these directors strongly assert in their differing ways, dialogue with all forms of spiritual and religious expression is necessary both to expose institutional and personal corruption and at the same time to maintain a robust and healthy spiritual culture and society. Rather than remaining undifferentiated, obscure or designed simply to suppress religious demons from the past, documentaries (and to even greater extent fictional stories, [see Brereton, 2008]) must speak for and to new generational audiences as well as simply being a record of the past. The aesthetic form and dramatic content of these documentaries in particular help to promote a continuing dialogue with varying forms of spirituality and religious dogma and I believe effectively speak to a more secular contemporary Irish culture which seeks a clear separation of church and state for the benefit of both.

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¹ For instance in *After Virtue* (2007), Alasdair MacIntyre suggests that virtue resided not in certain rules or consequences, but in a particular sort of self, and humans understand their lives and themselves in terms of narratives.

² In one scene near the end, unable to film inside the Long Kesh prison, where his Loyalist friend is imprisoned, Vernon performs in a concert for the prison wardens who are members of a country and western fan club. Later, outside the clubhouse, some of the members (in full cowboy costume) let off steam by displaying their shooting skills. Given that these individuals are agents of a state which ostensibly maintained the "repressive state apparatus" of the troubled Northern Irish state, the scene ranks as one of the most incongruous and surreal representations of the Protestant community in this period.

³ At the core of fundamentalism, John D. Caputo maintains, ‘there lies a repressed fear that faith is only faith and as such a risk with no guarantee of anything, which is the truth about religion to which it testifies in the mode of repressing it’ (See Caputo, 2001: 124).

⁴ The Reverend Ian Paisley for example, the *bête noir* of Northern politics and larger than life preacher, chose *Power in the Blood* as his favourite desert island disk and certainly epitomises such strident fundamentalism in the North. One wonders what he made of the film documentary.

⁵ Of course there is a continuing danger of so-called ‘false consciousness’ arguments by pigeon holing the whole fundamentalist phenomenon as ‘poor people who know no better’ from a perspective of superior knowledge and dispassionate scientific analysis. Marxism remains committed to the view that all religion (unlike all politics or all literature) is alienating for the individual and a symptom of social malformation (McLellan, 1987: 169).

⁶ Extracted from interview with Davis for my research on his work in his offices in Belfast 17/6/90. Asking about the origins of documentary and his influences, Davis affirmed how films such as Ford’s classic *Grapes of Wrath* (1940) and the dust bowl fascinated him. ‘When preacher Casey announces as girls come into the tent, he sees them as “holy vessels needing healing”. What is it that gets into people that makes them so sure? Fundamentalism of course is the most obvious face of such faith and can be paralleled with politicians ‘mode of saying the same thing’ (Brereton 1990).

⁷ The clothes line image and associations of ‘dirty linen’. In my interview, Davis spoke about how ‘I look for poetic references which may seem out of place at first but when put together they add meaning. *Dust on the Bible* is full of such images: “dust images” I call them’ (Brereton 1990).

⁸ The binary opposition of light and darkness is continuously evoked through the cinematographic tonal palate used, with the Evangelical at the centre attempting to bring more light into the world. Later in the documentary Vernon literally brings light where there is darkness.

⁹ In an interview with the director, I asked if this scene was staged, but Davis asserted how he simply asked the cameraman to follow the action as it happened and capture the tension of the scene. Students find it the most revealing and provocative of the whole documentary, alongside the piece to camera when Vernon reveals ‘voices in his head’ and his total conviction that sinners will all go to hell (Brereton 1990).

¹⁰ A clip of Pope John Paul II’s visit to Ireland is used to comment on the sacred/secular space of religion in Ireland. This is followed by a sequence of interviews of emigrants from the ‘utopian’ space of New York – where anonymity and excitement emanates from the highly regarded American space - and various Irish voices who set the scene.