

FILM REVIEWS

Joy Unspeakable. 59 minutes, videotape. Producers: Indiana University, Radio and Television Services (James Perry, John Winninger); Indiana University Folklore Institute (Elaine J. Lawless, Elizabeth Peterson). Distributed by Indiana University, Audio-Visual Center. Cameramen: Larry Reagan, Mick Renneisen, Mike Schaler, Andy Sellers; 1981. Sale \$300; rental \$30.

Reviewed by Jeanne Harrah and John Wolford

"Joy Unspeakable" is the product of the combined effort of three departments at Indiana University: the Radio and Television Services, the Audio-Visual Center, and the Folklore Institute. It is clear that the Folklore Institute played the primary role in determining its content, while the other two departments provided the technical and professional expertise that gives the film its polished finish. The combination of talents and direction has produced an enjoyable and useful film for a wide range of audiences.

The folkloristic premise of the film (never stated but clearly assumed) is that the Pentecostal religion is a folk religion, in the sense of the term espoused by William Clements.¹ The film focuses primarily on one congregation of Oneness Pentecostals in southern Indiana, and documents its activities during a regular church service, a gospel rock service, and a camp meeting revival. It provides excellent coverage of these settings, allowing one an objective perception of the uninhibited and sincere feelings of the Pentecostals in different natural settings. A further understanding of the Pentecostal experience is given by interviews with members of the church, including the pastor, the organist, a gospel rock singer, and members of different families. The film is visually effective in its ability to capture its audience and to make one feel both the scholar and the participant. Folklore films are reputedly less sophisticated and informative than many ethnographic films, but "Joy Unspeakable" attests to the potential of folklorists commanding high quality educational productions. The film has won several awards. It was shown

at the 1981 American Folklore Society Conference, won the Red Ribbon award at the 1981 American Film Festival, and was aired nation-wide on PBS on April 9, 1982.

The purpose of the film is to document the religious expression of members of a single Pentecostal church. For the folklorist, this film provokes questions concerning the interview techniques and details of context. In "Joy Unspeakable," those interviewed are at the center of Pentecostal involvement. However, the film ignores some concerns that are important to folklorists. For instance, there are no interviews with peripheral members of the church, nor is there much information given concerning the social backgrounds of the informants. Methodology of the interview is edited out as the viewer receives only the responses, never the questions. These are concerns the film does not fully address.

By sacrificing documentary depth, this film becomes not a "textbook" on Pentecostalism, but rather a study guide; it provokes interest in and questions about Pentecostalism. The film gives enough information to tantalize the viewer into wanting to know the Pentecostals. Moreover, it reaches a wider audience than folklorists alone. If a documentary cannot answer all the questions about a specific group, it must stimulate the questions. "Joy Unspeakable" does exactly this.

We believe this film is important for two reasons: it promotes folkloristic interests to a wide audience, and it focuses on folk religion, which is a little examined field in folkloristics. Moreover, it excites an interest in Pentecostalism. Probably no hour-long documentary could be as complete as we suggest and still maintain the technical professionalism that gives the film such a wide appeal. We should welcome more films like this one in our field.

NOTES

1. Clements defines folk religion as "unofficial religion, that system of behavior existing apart from the power structure in a community," in "The American Folk Church in Northeast Arkansas," *JFI* 15 (1978): 162.