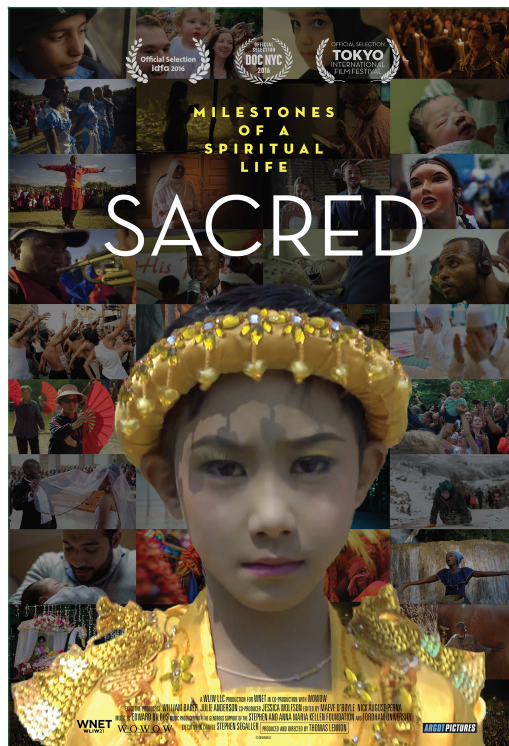




SACRED

A Film by Thomas Lennon

PRESS NOTES



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LOGLINE

At a time when religious hatreds dominate the world's headlines, this film, sweeping in global reach and yet intensely intimate, explores faith as primary human experience: how it is used to navigate the milestones and crises of private life. SACRED was shot by 40 filmmaking teams around the world.

SYNOPSIS

Shot by more than 40 filmmaking teams around the world, the film immerses the viewer in the daily use of faith and spiritual practice. At a time when religious hatreds dominate the world's headlines, this film explores faith as primary human experience, and how people turn to ritual and prayer to navigate the milestones and crises of private life. The film's director commissioned or sourced footage from top independent filmmakers from more than 25 countries -- and a wide range of religious traditions -- each team contributing a single scene. The film, sweeping in its global reach, yet intensely intimate, is a tour de force that unifies these scenes into a single work, told without narration, without experts and, for long stretches, without words at all.

Director Thomas Lennon has been nominated three times for an Academy Award, winning in 2007.

LONG SYNOPSIS

SACRED is a feature-length documentary that explores religious ritual as it relates to the life-cycle: birth, adolescence, marriage, aging and other key passages of life. The film is an experiment: a sweeping global film for which the director, Academy Award winner Thomas Lennon, never once left his office in New York. Instead he commissioned or sourced contributions from distinguished international filmmakers in order to capture more than forty stories dispersed across the globe. Sweeping in its global reach, yet intensely intimate, the film is a tour de force that unifies these disparate scenes into a single work, told without narration, without experts and, for long stretches, without words at all.

At a time when religious hatreds dominate the world's headlines, this film explores faith as primary human experience: how people turn to ritual and prayer to navigate the milestones and crises of their own lives. The film draws the viewer into a string of private moments, sometimes for just seconds, at other times in depth. Opening with a young Muslim father from Cairo chanting the call to prayer to his baby who is only minutes old, the film's approach is both lyrical and linear as it drives forward in time from the initiations of infancy (bris, baptism, and more) to coming of age ceremonies in Mandalay, Jerusalem and Andhra Pradesh for boys and girls at the cusp of adolescence. In Spain and then India, the film encounters teenagers as they lean on their faith to navigate the most intimate pressures of their lives-- the strains between two parents, the prohibitions of dating. The film arcs through marriage and the trials of adulthood through to the rites -- some of them solemn, others riotous and drunken -- by which we remember and treasure our dead.

Because of the novel way in which it was made, the film is able to hopscotch across geography to capture the crisis of faith triggered by the recent Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone, the stubborn determination of an ascetic in the Philippines to subject himself to pain, and the comforts that faith offers to prisoners in Angola prison in Louisiana who face life-sentences without prospect of parole. Epic and kaleidoscopic, the film journey comes to rest where it began --with the birth of a child, another life initiated into the rituals of prayer and faith.

Director Thomas Lennon has been nominated three times for an Academy Award, winning in 2007.

KEY STILLS (Hi-res links)

[Japan Monk](#)

[India Holi](#)

[Peru Dance Mask](#)

DIRECTOR HEADSHOT

[Color](#)

[Black & White](#)

Trailer

<https://vimeo.com/181213838>

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

THOMAS LENNON

When it comes to faith, we know what we think. Our minds are set. That's true of many issues, of course, but with religion, it seems especially so.

As journalists and documentary filmmakers, our training is to approach faith skeptically, and that's probably as it should be. Religion has wreaked a lot of havoc in recent years; it invites hard scrutiny. And yet that skepticism - a badge we wear proudly - is also limiting. With this film, we set out to take faith seriously as primary human experience. The goal was to capture that experience from the inside, and with enough immediacy that it disturbs some of our certainties, invites us to think.

Such a film lives or dies on the quality of its access. We didn't want to send film crews from the USA (or indeed anywhere) to parachute in with cameras rolling, run-and-gun. As much as possible, we wanted to be inside the language, the culture, the experience itself. We spent months researching potential scenes and mapping out our storyline, as any conventional film would do. But then we began a search for filmmaking talent across the world - in most cases working with local filmmakers who could shoot those stories with an immediacy and understanding that as outsiders we would never match. This was not a crowd-sourced film - far from it - but it was an intense international cooperation, carried out across the web for more than two years between filmmaking teams all over the globe and a director who never left his chair in New York.

I've never heard of a film put together this way. Can you make a film remotely, when your goal is immersion? Can you work without scholars, or experts, and for long stretches, without words at all -- when your goal is to make the viewer think?

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

THOMAS LENNON - Director/Producer

Lennon's work in documentary film has earned him an Academy Award and three Academy nominations. But more often his good fortune has come in pairs: two national Emmys, two duPont-Columbia awards, two George Foster Peabody awards, and two films that premiered at Sundance.

Lennon is currently directing *Sacred*, a multi-million dollar global documentary for PBS; two years in the making and drawing on the contributions of filmmaking teams from around the world, it explores the role of prayer in daily life.

He founded, with Ruby Yang, the China AIDS Media Project; their groundbreaking AIDS awareness messages were seen over 900 million times on Chinese television and the Internet, probably the largest AIDS campaign ever conducted anywhere in the world. This work got them profiled in the Washington Post, the San Francisco Chronicle, the LA Times and on PBS. Lennon and Yang made a trilogy of films set in China, including *The Blood of Yingzhou District*, which won an Oscar in 2007, and *The Warriors of Qiugang*, nominated for an Oscar in 2011. This film profiles a farmer's multi-year campaign to halt the poisoning of his village's water and land; the local authorities, as a direct result, began a multi-year, massive clean-up of the toxic site that continues to this day.

In 2003, Lennon was series producer and lead writer of *Becoming American*, a six-hour PBS series with Bill Moyers that traced Chinese immigration from the early 19th century to the present-day. "A model documentary that gets almost everything right," wrote the New York Times. The series won four Emmy nominations.

More than ten million viewers -- double the PBS prime-time average -- tuned in to the 1998 premiere of Lennon's *The Irish in America: Long Journey Home*. "The filmmaker is a consummate storyteller," wrote The Boston Globe; the work "looks and sounds like a labor of love," said The New York Times. Rated among the year's ten best by TV Guide, the series earned, again, four Emmy nominations, and its companion CD won the Grammy for best folk album of the year.

Lennon's *The Battle over Citizen Kane* (1996) was featured at the Sundance and Berlin film festivals among many others -- "a two-hour tornado of a documentary," according to Time Magazine. After the film's nomination for an Oscar, Ridley Scott's production company adapted it as an HBO dramatic film, starring John Malkovich and Liev Schreiber. Lennon also directed numerous films for the major contemporary and historical strands on public television, Frontline and The American Experience.

Before setting up his own production company, Lennon worked for almost a decade in the Close-up Division of ABC News, with assignments in the Soviet Union, South America and the Middle East. Despite a lifetime of earnest achievement, Thomas Lennon is still occasionally confused with the comic actor and writer with the same name (famous for his spandex hot-pants) and twice had to send back large royalty checks.

Filmography

Knife Skills (in post-production)

Sacred (2016)

Angle of Attack (2011)

The Warriors of Qiugang (2010)
Tongzhi in Love (2008)
The Blood of Yingzhou District (2006)
Becoming American: The Chinese Experience with Bill Moyers (2003)
Jefferson's Blood (2000)
Unchained Memories (2000)
The Irish in America: Long Journey Home (1998)
The Battle Over Citizen Kane (1996)
Battle of the Bulge (1994)
7 Days in Bensonhurst (1990)

END CREDITS

SACRED

Produced and Directed by
Thomas Lennon

Executive Producer
William Baker

Edited by
Nick August-Perna & Maeve O'Boyle

Supervising Editor
Maeve O'Boyle

Music by
Edward Bilous

Co-Producer
Jessica Wolfson

Associate Producer
Justin Levy

Associate Editor
Eric Hurtig

Production Coordinator
Briana Bierman

Executive Producer
Julie Anderson

Executive In Charge
Stephen Segaller

Full credits: <http://sacredthemovie.org/credits/>