

Blessed

A film review by Rev Dr Steve Taylor

“Blessed” is a gritty exploration of parenting today. Directed by Australian independent film maker, Ana Kokkinos and starring three Australian actresses (themselves real-life mothers Miranda Otto, Deborra-Lee Furness and Frances O'Connor), “Blessed” is a disturbing exploration of the mother-child journey.

The movie is structured in two halves. The first half follows seven children through no ordinary Melbourne day, growing up through the complexity of child abuse, shoplifting, multi-ethnic relationships, breaking and entering.

The second half follows the mothers of these seven children through the same day. Waif-like Miranda Otto is superb. The mothers are equally adrift; seeking to parent amid the complexities of their own histories and insecurities, despite their mortgage struggles, gambling and drug addictions. All are bound by a fierce, if sometimes poorly expressed, love for their children.

An adaptation of the 1998 play, “Who’s Afraid of the Working Class?”, “Blessed” sits alongside recent creativity including the Australian novel “Slap” by Chris Tsiolkas and the New Zealand TV series “Outrageous Fortune.” All explore the black-jeaned world of the working class. All are probing portraits of what it means to be human today, with specific reference to parenting.

The movie works. Which does not make it any easier for the viewer, particularly those who raise teenagers in our contemporary world. A common charge leveled against the church concerns our ability to reduce parenting to sugar coated platitudes. By and large, our pews tend to be warmed by middle-class bottoms. Christianity is more known for its’ condemnation of solo parents and the alcohol addicted. “Blessed” invites us to get a more honest, more working-class grip on our reality.

As such, “Blessed” sits well alongside a book like “Family Fortunes. Faith-full Caring for Today’s Families,” by authors and parents, John and Olive Drane. Both explore parenting today. Both remind us that parenting is always an expression of both our light and dark sides, and it best nurtured by communities that bless, with encouraging love, rather than glances of condemnation.

The word “blessed” is a peculiarly Christian word. It is the word whispered to the mother of Jesus, firstly by an angel and secondly by an older parent named Elizabeth. It is the repeated introduction to the well-worn Sermon on the Mount.

Some twenty centuries later, “blessed” is now being cinematically applied to mothers. Not in a Hollywood happily ever after ending, but in a perfect parents not allowed. As such the movie is Biblically consistent. Parenting for the mother of Jesus was no easy task. The Beatitudes begin as words spoken to the peasant poor, to the persecuted and the patient, to the meek and those who mourn.

In a climatic scene in “Blessed”, a mother, faced with the unbearable pain of losing two children she loves, is reduced to describing herself as blessed. Such is love. It is costly. It is human. It is open to abuse and distrust. And yet without it, we are less than human. Such is the privilege of being blessed.

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