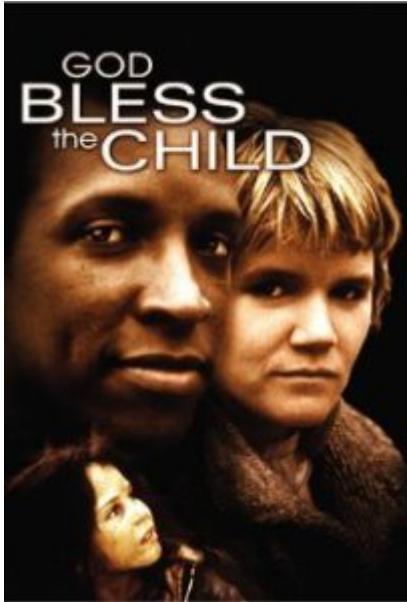


GOD BLESS THE CHILD (1988)

We again reach back to our Jan. 1995 issue to bring this timeless heartbreaker to your attention.



This 1988 made for television film provides a haunting look at the life of a homeless family, one equaled only by *The Saint of Fort Washington* (see the Sept. issue for a guide to this excellent production). Theresa Johnson (Marie Winningham) and her young daughter Hillary (Grace Johnston) are forced out of their low rent apartment when the demolition crew arrive with their bull dozers and wrecking balls.

Theresa works at a menial hotel job, so she has no spare funds for the deposit and advance rent required for another place, and her husband has long since vanished. Her pleas for “a temporary place” to a friendly woman and her co-workers are turned down. Thus, she and her daughter turn to the harrowing shelter system.

The shelter’s hours and rules are rigid, as are those of her workplace. Unable to mesh these with those of Hillary’s school, Theresa soon loses her job, causing the two to sink even lower into the homeless quagmire. Even the well-intention

efforts of a church-based social worker are of only temporary help. This incredibly powerful film should be seen by every church member, especially those who would blame the victims in the on-going debate over welfare and related issues.

For Reflection/Discussion

1. Theresa and Hillary go to see the woman to appeal to her to give them a few nights shelter. How would you feel if someone you knew only slightly made such a request of you? For what reasons would you say "Yes" or "No"? What changes would comply with such a request make in your schedule and lifestyle? What does the woman do to salve her conscience? How about ourselves?
2. How might you feel the first time applying for a bed at a shelter? What questions would you have? Why are the two almost turned away? (What do such rules force street persons to do when answering questions and filling out forms the system requires?)
3. What do you think of the delays at the welfare office and the lament, "I can't get a place unless I have a job, and I can't get a job unless I have a place"?
4. Describe Calvin Reed. How is his faith an embodiment of Deuteronomy 10:12-20 and James 1:27 and 2:14-17? Comment/reflect upon his two statements: "Poverty is like a disease. It grabs hold of you and doesn't let go!" and, after hearing a newscast about ICBMs, "If they'd give me enough just for one of those (misses), I could feed more people than it could kill."
5. Why was the African American family injected into Theresa and Hillary's story? What do they have going for themselves that Theresa and Hillary don't? What does young Ray learn from the talk with his father? What do you think of a welfare system that gives rise to the father's comment, "Your mother gets a welfare check because I'm not there. I'm worth more to her gone..."
6. How is Hillary's hospital experience more than an

ordinary ordeal for her mother? What must all the events since their first eviction be doing to Theresa's spirit and soul? How does this show in her plea and comment to Calvin, "People look at us like we're trash"?

7. How is Theresa's decision to abandon her daughter a sign of great love, even of a little crucifixion? (Compare to John 15:13.) If you were in Calvin's place, would you have tried to talk her out of her plan— or what? What do you think will be Hillary's reaction if she ever learns the real reason why her mother left her? What might the locket come to mean to her through the years? What do the blue Mardi Gras beads mean to Theresa? What do you think will become of the mother?
8. What do you learn about yourself and your own home and family from this film? What insights into poverty and its victims have you received? Can you accept as readily the hasty judgments of society, as reflected by so many politicians, on the poor? How does this film show that our society itself is poor in soul and spirit? What can we do in the face of such enormous problems by individuals; churches; other agencies; governments?
9. Where do you see God in the story of Theresa and Hillary?