

Chicano epic explores teen gangs, prison life

Rochester is one of three U.S. cities to premiere movie

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — A contemporary Chicano epic set in East Los Angeles, *Blood In Blood Out* (Hollywood Pictures) weaves a complex tale of three young men whose decisions — often made more under duress than reflection — lead to tragic consequences for all three.

The film's cast and crew members came to the Strathallan Hotel the weekend of Jan. 16-17 to speak about *Blood In Blood Out*, which premiered Jan. 20 in three test markets — Rochester, Tucson, Ariz., and Las Vegas, Nev.

The movie is slated to open nationally sometime in late February.

Miklo, a half-white Chicano, played by Damian Chapa, embodies the struggle for identity and power that all immigrant groups in the United States must undergo. Unfortunately, the blue-eyed Hispanic treads a path of prison gangsterism and betrayal to arrive at his long-sought goal of total acceptance in the Chicano world.

His cousin, Paco, portrayed by Benjamin Bratt, starts out as a delinquent

boxer who eventually rejects life in the streets for life in the police station. He trades the questionable power his tough-guy stance once garnered for the equally dubious power of a cop who polices his former friends.

The pain, anguish, and occasional triumph of both young men, and the liveliness of the barrio in which they grow up can be seen through the colorful paintings of Paco's stepbrother, Cruz, played by Jesse Borrego, best-known for his role as Jesse Velasquez on the TV series "Fame." Cruz succumbs to drug addiction over the course of his life, and his art attempts to reconcile the darkness and light raging to control him, Paco and Miklo.

In particular, the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of Mexico, recurs throughout the film as Paco's paintings evolve through stages of triumph and tragedy. Borrego noted that the use of the image was deliberate as she embodies the Chicano's religious and cultural mixing of the Indian and Spanish worlds.

He pointed to one scene in which an anguished Paco — whose drug addiction has tragically altered his family's life — paints her with a skeleton at her feet rather than the traditional angel.

"You have this beautiful image that is the symbol of hope in our culture that is suddenly distorted," he commented.

What is obvious about the film's undertaking is that none of those in-



Merrick Morton-Hollywood Pictures
An epic set in the Chicano culture of East Los Angeles, *Blood In Blood Out* traces the lives of three cousins who have been friends since childhood, (left to right) Paco (Benjamin Bratt), Cruz (Jesse Borrego) and Miklo (Damian Chapa).

involved see *Blood In Blood Out* as merely another commercial flick glamorizing the self-destruction of minority men. Instead, the film's cast and crew apparently see the film as a potential milestone in Hollywood movie-making since it spends nearly three hours telling an engrossing tale about a minority group heretofore virtually ignored by the industry.

"My hopes are Utopian," acknowl-

edged Jimmy Santiago Baca, one of the screenplay's co-writers, who also plays a cellmate of the Chicano prison gang leader in the film.

A former inmate of San Quentin prison, Baca noted that the film shows the many down sides of gang life, something that has destroyed many of his people.

"When we were filming in San Quentin, I kept remembering one guy who I was in prison with who told me: 'If you ever do anything on prison, tell it like it is,'" Baca said.

Indeed, no one in their right mind viewing the film would ever want to see the inside of a prison — save for a visit. The movie's graphic violence is not gratuitous, but it may be somewhat hard to stomach for some viewers. Unlike many bang'em-up, shoot'em-down flicks, *Blood In Blood Out* shows that even "minor" violent acts can make people bleed in their bodies and their souls.

The film's length may be a problem for some viewers, but *Blood In Blood Out* is anything but boring. Marked by some of the best dialogue (though a bit melodramatic at times) written for the screen this year, the movie will open the eyes of non-Hispanics to the rich culture of a bilingual people with a language all their own in this country.

Blood In Blood Out is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America and contains violence, brief nudity, and profane language.

Talbot book promotes a simple lifestyle for Christians

Simplicity, by John Michael Talbot, with Dan O'Neill; Servant Publications (Ann Arbor, 1989); 174 pages; \$7.99.

By David and Julianne Palma
Guest contributors

We live in an increasingly materialistic society, in which consumerism is a virtual religion and shopping malls are the temples of worship. It is very difficult to live a Christian life in this environment.

Yet in his book, *Simplicity*, John Michael Talbot challenges us to do just that. He insists that we make a conscious decision to — in the words of Ghandi — "live simply, so that others may simply live." (p.108)

Talbot is worried that more talk about trying to live simply than action occurs in Christian circles. It is easy to get worked up watching the evening news and seeing the terrible poverty in Third World countries. It is more difficult to see that the way we live might have some connection to their plight, and that we must change how we live in a deep and substantial way.

Talbot admits in his book that such

fundamental change is difficult, but possible. It must start with an inner attitude of simplicity. Only if we work on the interior can we make the necessary exterior changes. In addition to the theology of simplicity, Talbot offers plenty of practical suggestions for how to live simply.

The book is broken into two sections — "Inner Simplicity: Attitudes of the Heart and Soul," and "Exterior Simplicity: How We Can Simplify Our Lives." In both sections he draws inspiration from Scripture, papal encyclicals, and Franciscan spirituality.

Talbot writes that interior simplicity is built upon humility, obedience and prayer. He acknowledges that humility and obedience are held in contempt by American society. In defense of the former virtue he writes that the recognition that "we are all sinners saved by God's grace ... can only produce humility." (p.24) This humility moves us, not to think of ourselves as terrible people, but to offer ourselves in service to others.

Obedience is the second step on the journey to simplicity. Talbot sees obedience as a "mature, thoughtful sub-

mission to authority." (p.42) The primary authority is God, next the church, then secular governments and finally, all creation.

"Simplicity requires that we seek to unite with our Creator in prayer and in contemplation." (p.76) Talbot sees a strong relationship with God as the final essential element of the internal foundation for our external lives.

This third chapter is a basic introduction to prayer and meditation. Although his point about the place of prayer is important, his presentation is pedestrian. Other authors treat the subject of prayer with more eloquence.

However, when Talbot turns to the elements of exterior simplicity, he begins to achieve a certain eloquence himself. His passion for peace, justice and environmental responsibility comes through strongly. He says things like: "We must differentiate between our wants and our needs, because it is our wants that are killing the needy." (p.108) He calls us as Christians to action. We must realize that what we eat, what we wear, what kind of shelter we live in, what we do for work, and how we travel affect

others. The comfort of the few is gained at the expense of the many.

Talbot acknowledges that the simple lifestyle is very difficult to sustain. He writes that we need others to assist and support us. This can be accomplished in Christian community. In the final chapter he espouses, at some length, three community models he has personally experienced.

Overall, the book has a powerful message but lacks depth in its presentation. For readers beginning a critical examination of their lifestyles in light of Scripture and church teaching, *Simplicity* is an excellent starting point. It raises important concerns, offers study questions for further reflection and provides concrete examples of actions.

Most importantly, however, Talbot brings to our attention the fact that each of us is called, by virtue of our baptism and in light of the Gospel, to struggle with how to live a Christian life of simplicity.

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