

Bad Lieutenant: (2009)

Rated R. Our ratings: V-5; L-6; S/N- 5. Running time: 2 hours 2 min.

Moreover I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, wickedness was there, and in the place of righteousness, wickedness was there as well. I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for he has appointed a time for every matter, and for every work

...

*Then I saw the wicked buried; they used to go in and out of the holy place, and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity. Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the human heart is fully set to do evil. Though sinners do evil a hundred times and prolong their lives, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they stand in fear before him, but it will not be well with the wicked, neither will they prolong their days like a shadow, because they do not stand in fear before God.
Ecclesiastes 3:16-17; 8:10-13*

Werner Herzog, directing a New Orleans cop Lt. Terence script by William Finkelstein, McDonough's girlfriend Frankie supposedly was remaking Abelis a call girl.

Ferrara's 1992 film, but, except that both police Lieutenants are "bad," and I do mean BAD, there is little similarity between the two films. The beginning of Herzog's film reminds me more of that of Terrence Malik's fine *The Thin Red Line* in that each begins with a shot of a reptile. In the latter it is a crocodile,

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and in this one, set in New Orleans, it is a water moccasin swimming in brackish water. It is the day after Hurricane Katrina has devastated the area, and Terence McDonough (Nicolas Cage) and his partner Stevie Pruitt (Val Kilmer) are checking the jail cells for any prisoner left behind. Sure enough, they find one, panicked because the water level has risen up to his shoulders. The two cops tease the captive by saying that he is not worth getting their fine suits—and McDonough's expensive underwear—wet and soiled.

As the story progresses we see that although McDonough is praised by his superiors and raised to the rank of Lieutenant, he really is deserving of a "Most Corrupt Cop of the Year" badge. He snorts dope, managing to steal it from the police property room or taking it from cops of lesser rank and falsifying the weight after he takes a portion; he uses his badge at night to waylay a couple coming out of a bar, accusing the guy of having more dope on him than he does and raping the female escort while the hapless man watches; and seeks to make deals with those controlling the drug trade. His current case is tracking down the killers of a group of West Africans (women and children among them) who had encroached on the territory of a drug gang, but he seems as interested in enriching himself as in solving the case. His girlfriend Frankie Donnenfield (Eva Mendes) is a drug-taking hooker: sometimes she supplies McDonough with drugs, other times he returns the favor.

Nicholas Cage is a chameleon-like actor, able to play ordinary

type guys caught up in bizarre adventures (Night at the Museum), and bad guys like McDonough, to whom he wins us over despite the cop's corruption. Having injured his back rescuing the prisoner, Cage conveys through his off-kilter posture the pain that has led to his drug addiction. Unlike the "Bad Lt." in the earlier film, there is no epiphany of Jesus standing in the aisle of a church for McDonough. Indeed, only at the ending of this film was I fully aware that Herzog had delivered a dark comedy, indeed, a very black comedy, even more so than Woody Allen's great Crimes and Misdemeanors.

For Reflection/Discussion

Spoiler at the end.

1. How does the shot of the water moccasin at the opening of the film have on you? What does it suggest as to the nature of the story or its protagonist? What about the later shots of the alligator, and then of the iguanas?
2. Compare the film and its protagonist to Abel Ferrara's 1992 film. (And if you have not seen that one, you owe it to yourself to do so as soon as possible. There is an R-rated version of the NC-17 film that is more watchable for most adult groups.)
3. Were you surprised that it was McDonough who jumped into the water to rescue the prisoner from his cell? What effect does this have later in the film?
4. How is the son much like his father? ("The apple doesn't fall far from the tree" ?)
5. How is this the story of another person giving in to one of the three temptations faced by Jesus (see Matt. 4)? Do you see any hope for this man with so much blood on his hands? How did you feel at the end of the film? Surprised by the fate of our

heel-ro? Compare it to Crimes and Misdemeanors. And to the Ecclesiastes passage.