

Closed Circuit

Rated R. Our ratings: V -4; L -2; S/N-3. Running time: 1 hour
36 min.

*The eyes of the Lord are in every place,
keeping watch on the evil and the good.*

Proverbs 15:3

*They sit in ambush in the villages;
in hiding-places they murder the innocent.*

Their eyes stealthily watch for the helpless

Psalms 10:8

Director John Crowley and screenwriter Steven Knight demonstrate that a thriller does not have to include blazing guns, falls from great heights that do not injure, or cars making impossible maneuvers through heavy traffic and crowded sidewalks to hold the interest of the audience. (Though there are a couple of foot chases we must admit, but these do not require stunt drivers or CGI effects.) Just give us a story that is relevant and characters that are more normal than the impossible to stop heroes of the CGI-enhanced blockbusters. With all the debate over the US government's intelligence gathering, no film is more relevant than this one, even though it is set in London and not in Washington, D.C.

The film opens with a split screen showing images from a dozen or more security cameras. We see shoppers and vendors in a large London market. We can hear snatches of the subjects' conversations as they pass close to a camera. A white truck pulls up, and vendors call out that it cannot park there. Suddenly an explosion demolishes the place. Over a hundred bodies are found amidst the rubble. The police quickly track

down the alleged perpetrator, an Arab immigrant Farroukh Erdogan (Denis Moschitto) who has recently entered the country from Germany.

Barrister Martin Rose (Eric Bana) is assigned to defend the man because the original lawyer had died. Because the Crown wants to protect the secret intelligence the prosecution will submit as evidence, a vetted defense lawyer, Claudia Simmons-Howe (Rebecca Hall), also has been appointed as a Special Advocate to review the classified evidence in the government's case. The two are ordered to have no communication between them that would taint the evidence. The problem is that Claudia had once been Martin's lover, which had led to the breakup of his marriage. How will they relate in their common cause to defend their client?

Two other important figures are the Crown's Attorney General (Jim Broadbent), who often approaches Martin with warnings about his going too far in his investigation. New York Times reporter Joanna Reece (Julia Stiles), successfully maneuvering to meet Martin at a dinner party, really sets the intrigue into motion by suggesting that the original defense lawyer did not just die, but was murdered because he learned too much about M15 and its operations.

Though this seems far-fetched at first, upon further investigation Martin learns that his client had been arrested in Germany on a drug charge. Despite this he was able to come to London with no problems. How could this happen? Also, Martin is worried because the same taxi keeps showing up when he needs a ride. Hmmm. The intrigue becomes more complex as the trial at Old Bailey proceeds and a special M15 and Farroukh's teenaged son Emir are brought into the case.

Interspersed throughout the film are shots of clusters of surveillance cameras and then a screen full of multiple images of people going about their business. Often we see Martin and Claudia in them, so we, and they, know that they are under

constant surveillance. With M15 brought under suspicion, the film reminded me of *Three Days of the Condor*, the 1975 film which was one of the first to portray the CIA as a dark force that could be as evil as the Soviet menace from which it was supposed to be protecting us. That film's conclusion pinned the hero's hope for justice on the New York Times' using the documentation he is shown delivering to it in the last shot. But what if M15 can stop such a transaction "by any means necessary"?

Throughout the film I felt a chill or sense of creepiness each time the cameras and their images were displayed on the screen. The nagging question kept arising, in this world so dangerous that we need to have someone constantly watching for possible terrorists, "Who is watching the watchers?" For the author of Proverbs it was a comfort to believe that "the eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good." The Lord can be trusted to look out for our good, but how much trust can we place in those humans watching over us? What if the words from the 10th Psalm apply to them?

The full review with a set of 12 questions for reflection or discussion appears in the Sep/Oct issue of Visual Parables, which will be available on Sep. 23 when VP's new site is launched.