

The Connection (2014)

Rated R. Running time: 1 hour 32 min.

Our content ratings (1-10); Violence 6; Language 4; Sex/Nudity 3.

Our star rating (1-5): 4.

O let the evil of the wicked come to an end, but establish the righteous, you who test the minds and hearts, O righteous God.

Psalm 7:9

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.

Ecclesiastes 3:16

This French film, directed by Cédric Jimenez, covers the same 1970s campaign against drug lords that William Friedkin's classic crime caper *The French Connection* did, but from the French side of the events. The two actors playing the cop and the drug lord are equally good, both showing dogged determinism—the one to bring down the criminal, even at the risk of losing his wife and children, and the other to maintain the lucrative trade that provides for the lavish lifestyle of his family. Both find that there is a high price to pay for their struggle.

Taking place in Marseille over a period of several years in the 1970s when the heroin trade was flooding Europe and America with cheap high grade drugs, Jean Dujardin plays real-life Pierre Michel, newly appointed magistrate with the mission of going after Gaetan Zampa (Gilles Lellouche), the ruthless drug lord who has bought himself protection from the authorities.

Pierre begins to discover just how high the corruption extends when his carefully planned sting operation is thwarted because Gaetan has been tipped off by someone in his department. While the magistrate watches the failure from afar, Gaedan mocks him with a wave of his hand to him. The policeman appeals to officials higher up, including a minister in the national government, but they all claim that they cannot do anything to help him in his pursuit of justice.

The camera switches back and forth to reveal some of the personal life of the two men, both being married with children. Pierre especially is pulled between his passion for justice and his desire for a good family life, his marriage threatened when his wife packs up and leaves because she is tired of his long absences, strange hours, and fear for his safety. Although at first she refuses to talk with him on the telephone, he persists, finally able to woo her back, but as we see, there is still a cross to be endured for uncompromisingly going after evil.

This is not as much of a thriller as its American counterpart, but for those interested in police procedurals it has much to offer. I saw it as more of a character study of two obsessive men, one for the bringing to justice a criminal who is greatly harming society, especially its youth, and the other a ruthless man willing to sink to any low in order to maintain his illicit business that affords him such a lavish lifestyle. This is a film that I think would have appealed to the author of Ecclesiastes!

This review with a set of discussion questions will be in the July issue of Visual Parables. A subscription to the journal will also give you access to Lectionary Links, a feature for preachers that links a film to one or more lessons from the Common Lectionary.