

## CHANGING LANES

US, 2002, Roger Michel



Changing Lanes, with its grim picture of human failings, might seem an unusual choice for such an award. However, many 'secular' critics have been favourably impressed by its attempt to dramatise ethical issues (even though most did not notice or mention the Good Friday connection). The film is directed by British Roger Michel (*Persuasion*, *Notting Hill*).

The characters are not particularly sympathetic. They show the 'shadow' side of all of us. Ben Affleck is the upwardly mobile lawyer who has married the daughter of the boss and is involved in a case where pressure has been brought to bear on a senile client so that the firm can manage his estate as a charity. Samuel L. Jackson is an insurance officer who is an alcoholic, separated from his wife and children yet trying to do the right thing by them. On Good Friday morning, both are hurrying to the courts. The lawyer changes lanes and they crash.

We live in an era of rage. What begins as road rage escalates into out and out war as two grown men indulge in meanness and cruelty under the intense pressure of their personal problems. The lawyer needs to retrieve documents found by the insurance man. The insurance man needs a loan to buy a house for his wife and children.

At the Catholics in Media function, co-writer Michael Tolkin said that elements of the dialogue were specifically religious. When the angry and desperate Jackson sits in a bar, he telephones his AA counsellor (William Hurt) who tells him that 'he has broken his covenant'. When Affleck passes a Church, he sees the veneration of the Cross of the Good Friday liturgy. He goes in and vents his anger and bewilderment to the priest in the confessional.

The struggles of the two men remind us of our own struggles to control our animosities and angers. The two men are also challenged by their wives and other associates to reflect on who they are, on the integrity that ought to be essential in our lives. Jackson is described as being addicted to chaos. Affleck is continually tempted by the law partners to sell his soul for profit.

Maybe the ending is more optimistic than is justified. On the other hand, the sufferings of Jesus on Good Friday are spoken of in terms of reconciliation between us sinners and a forgiving God. After the passion comes the resurrection. On a modest scale, this is what happens in *Changing Lanes*.

