

SALVATION by EMOTIONAL LIBERATION "ORDINARY PEOPLE"

After a distinguished career as an actor, Robt.Redford got the best-director Oscar for this film. Donald Sutherland is the husband-father, & Mary Tyler Moore the wife-mother.

THE STORY "Upper-middle-class" family (filmed in Lake Forest, Ill.) of four. Older son drowns (before the film opens), younger son is emotionally frozen by survivor's guilt (from holding on to the upsidedown boat in a storm, instead of swimming underwater to find his brother). Also before the film opens, son **Conrad** attempted suicide, was four months in a mental hospital, & has been home (& going to high-school) for two months. Feeling utterly unloved at home & lonely at school, Conrad begins two sessions per week with **Dr. Berger**, psychiatrist, who gets him to ventilate anger & then express affection (to his mother, by kissing her on the cheek--but she is [seems always has been] emotionally frozen & is only startled).

The wife-mother forbids the grandparents to take a "family" picture of the three --a "family" they are not. She gets her husband to go off for a vacation, leaving Conrad; but the experience only deepens the alienations. When they return home, Conrad explodes in angry accusations of unlove; & the woman abandons the "family" after her weeping husband says to her, "You can't handle mess. Maybe you can't love anybody. I don't know who you are. I don't know what we've been playing at. So I was crying. And I don't know whether I love you anymore. And I don't know what I'm going to do about that." Next morning, after she's gone, the son finds his father weeping & says, "I love you." Father: "I love you too." Hug, end.

RELIGION This family is without benefit of clergy, deity, religious community. (True also, as far as we know, of the shrink.) The mother, says the son, lives only on "surface junk" (& "we just don't connect"). After the mother runs away, the father offers the son this sad bit of philosophy: "Things happen in this world, people don't know what they mean." To his girlfriend **Jenine**, Conrad says, "I don't believe in God"--to which she replies (near the end of an extended conversation while seated in a restaurant), "I believe in God."

Conrad has nothing to say to a girl (whom he'd met in the mental hospital) who tried to be nice to him. She went off & killed herself, deepening Conrad's guilt.

But Jenine had the spiritual resources & emotional freedom to help him think better of himself & to tell her (she being the only one ever to have asked the question) the feelings he had which led to his attempted suicide. She told him he had a great tenor voice (he stood right behind her in the highschool choir as at film's opening they sing (to Pachelbel's Canon, which music reappears at film-close), "Lord, we contemplate thy peace....Sing ALLELUIA!" After a Sunday-morning conversation (followed by breakfast in her home), he goes off singing repeatedly "Alleluia!" at the top of his voice. No God (he thinks) to praise, but he praises him anyway ("[H]alleluia" being Hebrew for "Praise the Lord"): will his emotional liberation (with shrink & girlfriend as saviors) now lead to spiritual salvation, or is the film (& the Judith-Guest novel on which it's based) preaching the 1960's gospel of emotional liberation as salvation? Robt.Redford offers us no clue as to which.

1 The vid-box says "an intense examination of a family being torn apart by tension and tragedy." Result? A SINGLE-PARENT FAMILY, which Dan.Pat.Moynihan (who died four days ago) designated as any society's most serious social pathology (detailed in his 1965 study of THE NEGRO FAMILY: The Case for National Action). For him, it wasn't just theoretical: his father abandoned the family, & he became a shoeshine boy in Times Square. However, Conrad & his father were better off (a loving) family without that woman, who was poor marriage-material & poor mother-material (her emotional frigidity reinforced by no-"mess" perfectionism: the sons regretted never having a pet).

2 The Gestalt shrink: "If you can't feel pain, then you're not going to feel anything else either." "How long are you going to punish yourself?" "Let yourself off the hook": forgive yourself. Accept that your mother can't love you. "Life is good....I am your friend; count on it [they then hug, as shrink & boy in "Good Will Hunting"]." Godless flatland, but good as far as it goes.

*The associated evil, bastardy, is the deepest social sickness: in '65, 29% African-American; today, 69% (all-American, 33%).

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