

# PARENTLESSNESS, A PRIMARY DEPRIVATION

A theological commentary on  
the year-2000 film  
"YOU CAN COUNT ON ME"

While there's some comic relief, the tale of double wreckage (our film-group agreed) is **somber** (with appropriate sound-track, including heavier passages in Bach)--as a deprivation tale should be. Children--Sam(antha) ca.12, Terry 8--lose their parents in a car accident (in 1982, we learn as late in the film Terry returns to his parents' graves). The secondary wreckage is the children's orphan-lives. Sam is promiscuous, but tries to maintain the family home & "be there" for her brother when he returns from his wanderings (for which "Alaska" is his Shangrila). Boyfriend Bob proposes marriage, but Sam isn't having any: "The world is a terrible place," she says to him.

1 The redemption theme appears always as penultimate: nobody "gets saved." Terry's inner life is frozen--its clock stopped--at age 8. We hope that his returning to his parents' grave will give him a new start (especially with a Bach "Heiland" chorale throughout the otherwise worldless scene [though not all viewers would know that "Heiland" is German for "Savior"]), but it proves to be nothing but prelude to a good-bye conversation with his sister as they, on a public bench, await his bus. (On the CD after the movie, producer Martin Scorsese remarks that the scene is just made for great acting, showing the mixed emotions of these child-adults, their brother-sister love but inability to help one another forward in life.)

When Terry gets into trouble, the pastor (we guess at Sam's invitation) calls & asks Terry if anything is "important" to him. Answer, no. Then this: "Terry, do you think your life is important?" Silence. Then, grudging affirmation. But again, penultimate: on the brink of change, the orphan (male here; also true of the female orphan) does not take the step into repentance, the gate of new life--and so not the step of faith, the entrance into "born again" new life. A member of our group has a son-in-law who recommended the movie to her as "great," for it exhibits his generation's high resistance to commitment.

2 Atop of, & derivative from, the theme of parentlessness is the theme of anticommitment, which requires some faith in the stability of the universe/world/society. Because "The world is a terrible place," Sam won't commit to Bob. Terry has girlfriends he borrows money from, then abandons. Says Sam to her brother, "Terry, I fucked my boss, and his wife is six-months pregnant": the pregnancy gives her satiation of her sexual appetite without fear of commitment: physical closeness without true intimacy. When Terry comes to help take care of Sam's 8-year-old son (chiefly by taking him to school, so she can comply with her boss' demand that she arrive at her bank-desk on time), Sam asks him to leave when he proves too much trouble for her to handle: she uses him as helper but isn't enough committed to him to put up with him as burden.

3 Church? We're in church for the parents' funeral, which a clergywoman is leading; we see her mouth moving, but hear no words. When Terry comes to be responsible for getting age-8 (!) Rudy Jr. to school, Sam asks "Do you go to church any more [the implication being that they went when their parents were living]?" Terry: "It's bullshit." She: "If you go to church, you will have an anchor" (the implication being she does & has). After "fucking" her boss, Sam goes to church & confesses to a clergyman who's reluctant to condemn what she's done until she presses him to--whereupon he says "It's a sin."

4 The Terry/Rudy bonding is affectional, but pathetic in that both are age 8 in spite of Terry's middle-aged body. Having said he'd child-sit Rudy at home, Terry takes him to a poolhall, where T. loses \$100 & R. is literally behind the 8-ball. In a further act of irresponsibility, T. takes R. to meet R. Sr., a degenerate who'd shotgun married Sam--& the police handcut T. because of the ensuing fisticuffs.

The scripter plays the clergyman, & on the CD after the film comments that his characters are "not getting enough guidance from above": the story is without benefit of deity, though not entirely without benefit of clergy.

5 Accident-orphaned Sam & Terry are anomic (ruleless, so unruly). The title is ironic, said by Terry to Sam in the final (bench-)scene: nobody can count on anyone to whom the world "doesn't mean anything" (said the scripter) "because of the loss so early in his life."

Elliott  
△  
Chinifshets

309 Lake Elizabeth Drive  
Craigville, MA 02632  
Phone/Fax 508-775-8008 S20 per year  
elliottw1@comcast.net

Noncommercial  
reproduction  
permitted

10.19.03

3190