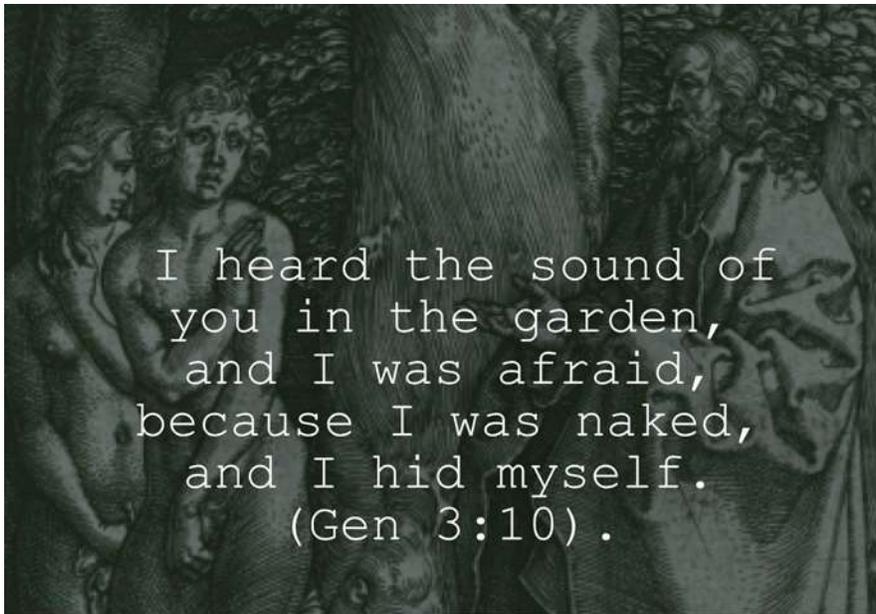


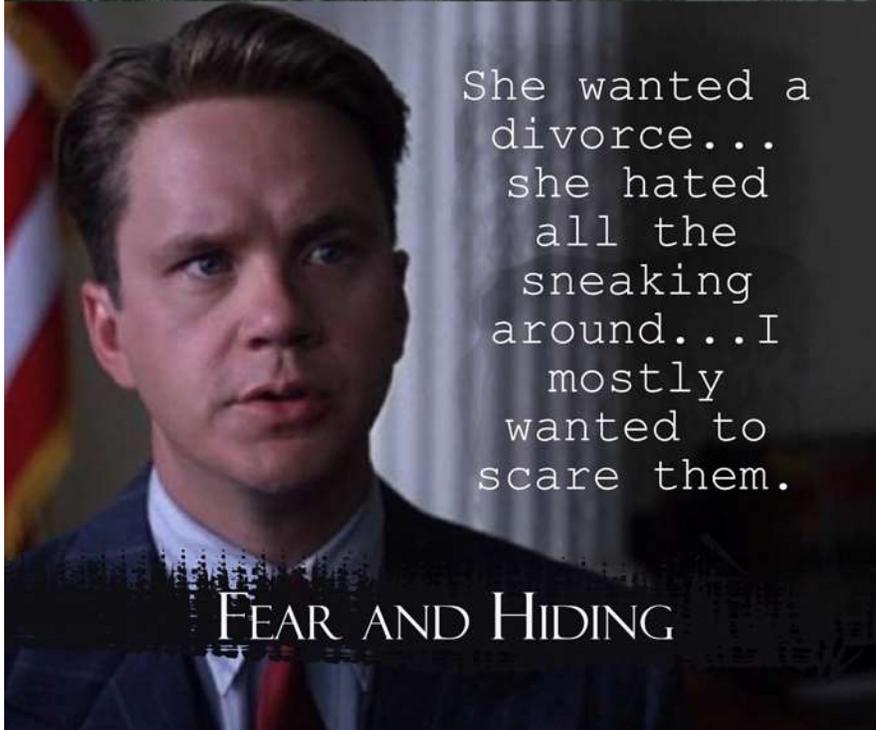
[shawshankspirituality.com](http://shawshankspirituality.com)

# THE 100 SHAWSHANK CANTOS

Brian Holmberg



I heard the sound of  
you in the garden,  
and I was afraid,  
because I was naked,  
and I hid myself.  
(Gen 3:10).



She wanted a  
divorce...  
she hated  
all the  
sneaking  
around...I  
mostly  
wanted to  
scare them.

## FEAR AND HIDING

## 1 – Fear and Hiding

The opening scene of Andy’s trial presents us with a symbolic portrayal of the Fall in the Garden of Eden, told from the “Lord God’s” perspective. If we substitute Andy, his wife, and Glenn Quinten as the “Lord God,” “Eve,” and the “serpent” respectively; and further see the act of “marital infidelity” as succumbing to temptation, the breaking of the vow of marriage, i.e., adultery as “the corruption of the chastity of the marriage between God and the soul”<sup>1</sup> a new and powerful symbolic narrative emerges:

Andy = “Lord God”

His “wife” = Eve, (Adam / Eve), (Humanity)

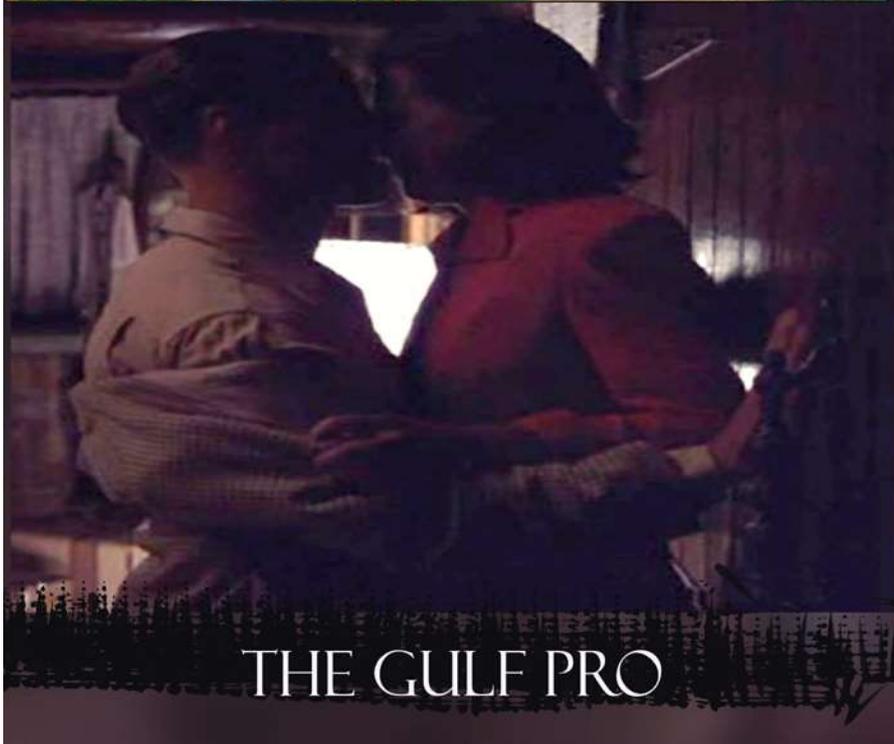
Glenn Quinten = The Serpent

Marital Infidelity = Succumbing to temptation

Andy’s statement that his “wife” hated all the “sneaking around” resonates with the “hiding” that occurred in Genesis; his declaration that he intended to “scare them” suggests the “fear,” and his reference to a “divorce”<sup>2</sup> carries the idea of the “separation” or “estrangement” from God that Adam and Eve experienced after their expulsion from Paradise.

The use of “Reno” is also noteworthy. Besides once being known as the “divorce capitol” of the United States, Reno’s swaggering declaration as the “biggest little city in the world” represents the post Edenic world, the “City of man,” the “Unreal city” where the “little” self-inflated ego reigns. This “biggest little city” contrasts sharply with Andy’s vision of “Paradise,” *Zihuatanejo*, which he later describes more humbly as “a *little* place on the Pacific.”

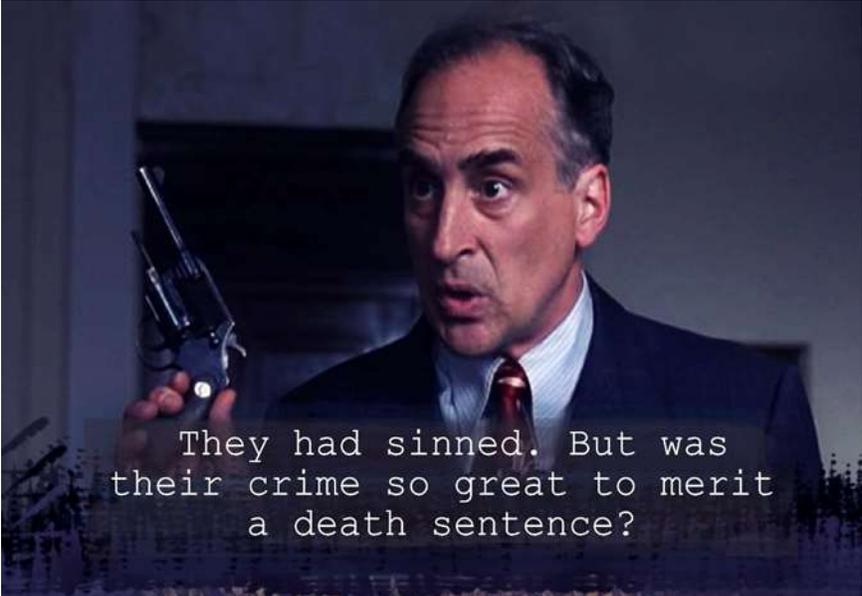
St. Augustine once declared: “Two loves have made the two cities. Love of self, even to the point of contempt for God, made the earthly city; and love of God, even to the point of contempt for self, made the heavenly city.”<sup>3</sup> Reno and Zihuatanejo are these two cities; one is “married,” united with God, the other “divorced” or estranged.



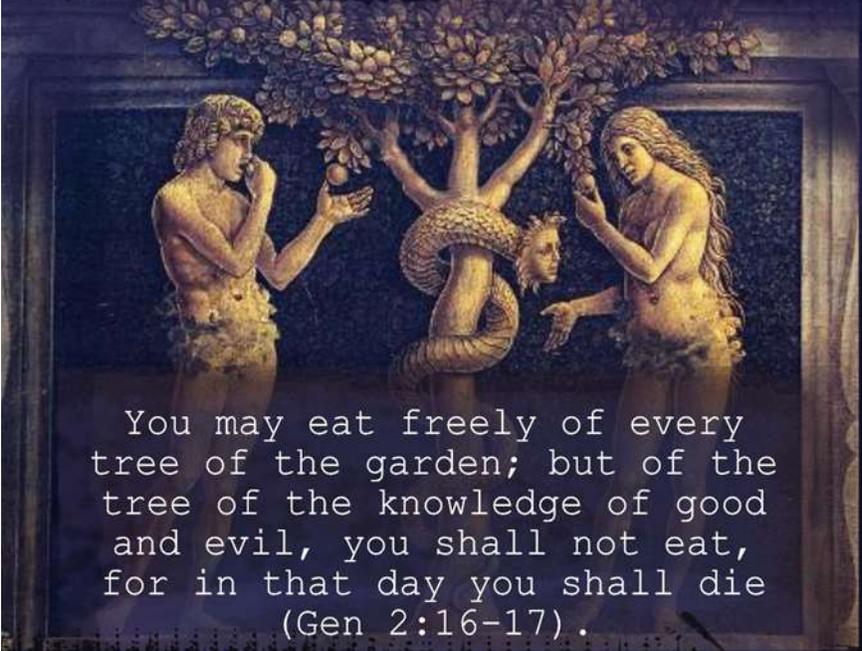
THE GULF PRO

## **2 – The Gulf Pro**

The profession of Glenn Quentin, (the symbolic “seducer-tempter”) as a “Golf Pro” alludes to the occupation or “mission” of the Serpent, to create a division, chasm or “gulf” between God and the soul: “And beside all this, between us and you there is a *great gulf* fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence” (Luke 16:26). The “Gulf Pro’s” last name also suggests and anticipates the idea of imprisonment as well: Glenn “San” Quentin.



They had sinned. But was  
their crime so great to merit  
a death sentence?



You may eat freely of every  
tree of the garden; but of the  
tree of the knowledge of good  
and evil, you shall not eat,  
for in that day you shall die  
(Gen 2:16-17).

THEY HAD SINNED

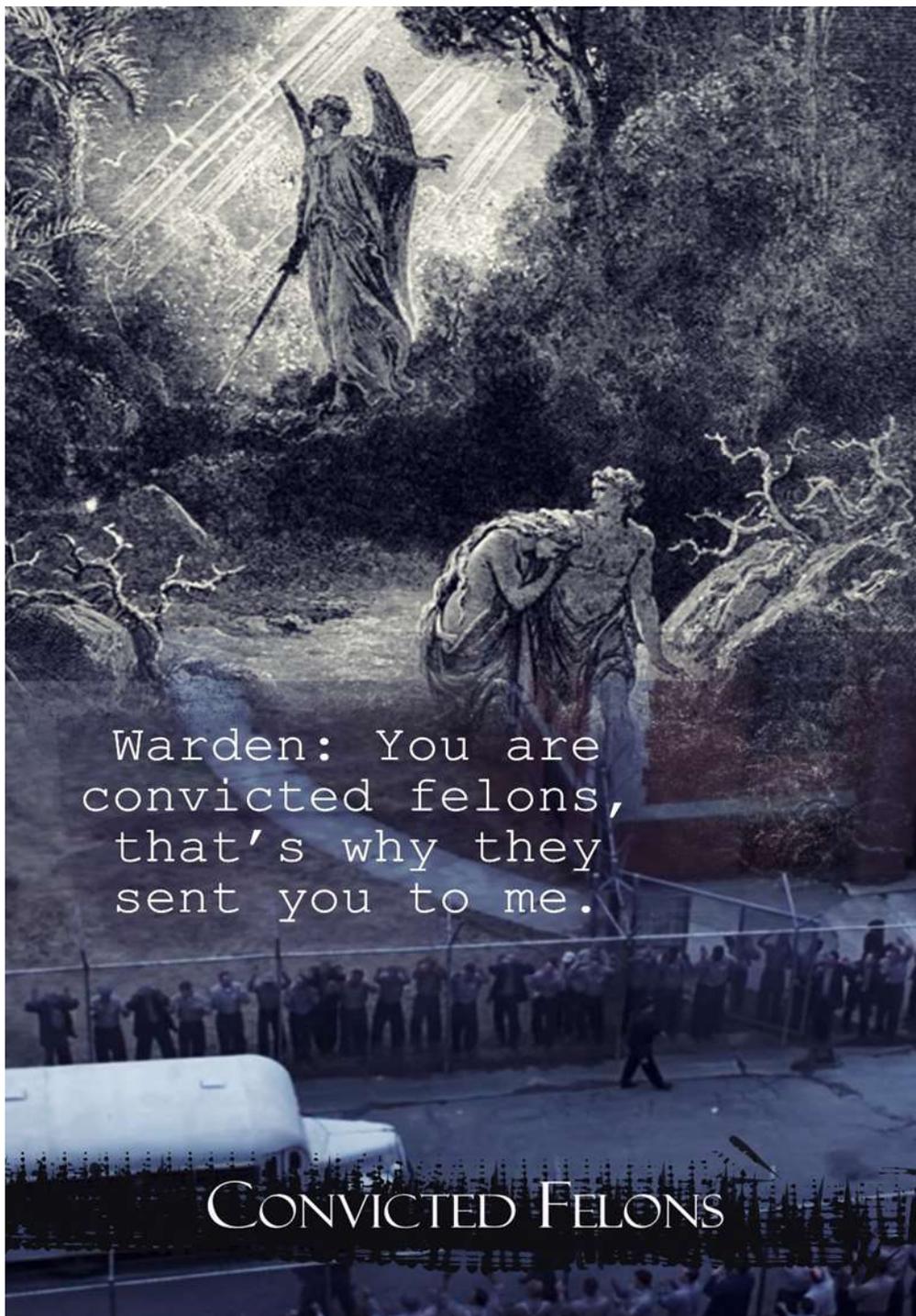
### 3 – They Had Sinned

The language of the District Attorney provides additional clues that the opening scene is symbolic retelling of the Fall in Genesis. The phrases “they had sinned;” and “death sentence” correspond directly to “original sin” and to God’s warning that “eating of the Tree would result in death.” The emphasis, that their deaths resulted from four shots; three to the body and one to the *head* also carries the Biblical notion that there are two kinds of “death:” a physical death of the body and a more draconian death of the Spirit; signifying estrangement, “divorce” from God as a result of the fall. “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, fear the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). When Tommy Williams is later executed by Byron Hadley, he also received four shots, but they were all to the *body*.



Finally, Andy’s supposed outburst to his wife: “I’ll see you in hell before Reno” suggests the preference of the “Powers that be” for a place of reconciliation and reunion, despite the “hellish” nightmare that the soul must experience and endure during its “captivity in Egypt.”

The opening scene, which at first looked like a stock “murder mystery” reveals itself symbolically as a Cosmic Drama of the highest order. Here begins the story the soul’s exile from God and resulting search for a path back to the “Promised Land.”



Warden: You are  
convicted felons,  
that's why they  
sent you to me.

# CONVICTED FELONS

#### **4 – Convicted Felons**

As a result of the “felony-high crime” of eating the “forbidden fruit,” Adam and Eve were driven out of Paradise and entered the “prison” of the isolated self, estranged from the direct presence of God that they once enjoyed. Shawshank Prison is a grand metaphor for the collective state of humanity that is “walled off” from Divine intimacy. Adam and Eve enjoy the “distinction” of being the first two inmates at Shawshank, #00001 and #00002.

Do you feel you've been  
rehabilitated? - Yes sir,  
absolutely sir.

I am not come  
to call the  
righteous, but  
sinners to  
repentance  
(Luke 5:32).

Try to grasp this...You  
are on a testing  
ground where God can  
judge whether you are  
capable of being  
translated into heaven  
and into his presence.  
You are on trial.  
- Pierre Teilhard de  
Chardin

**REJECTED**

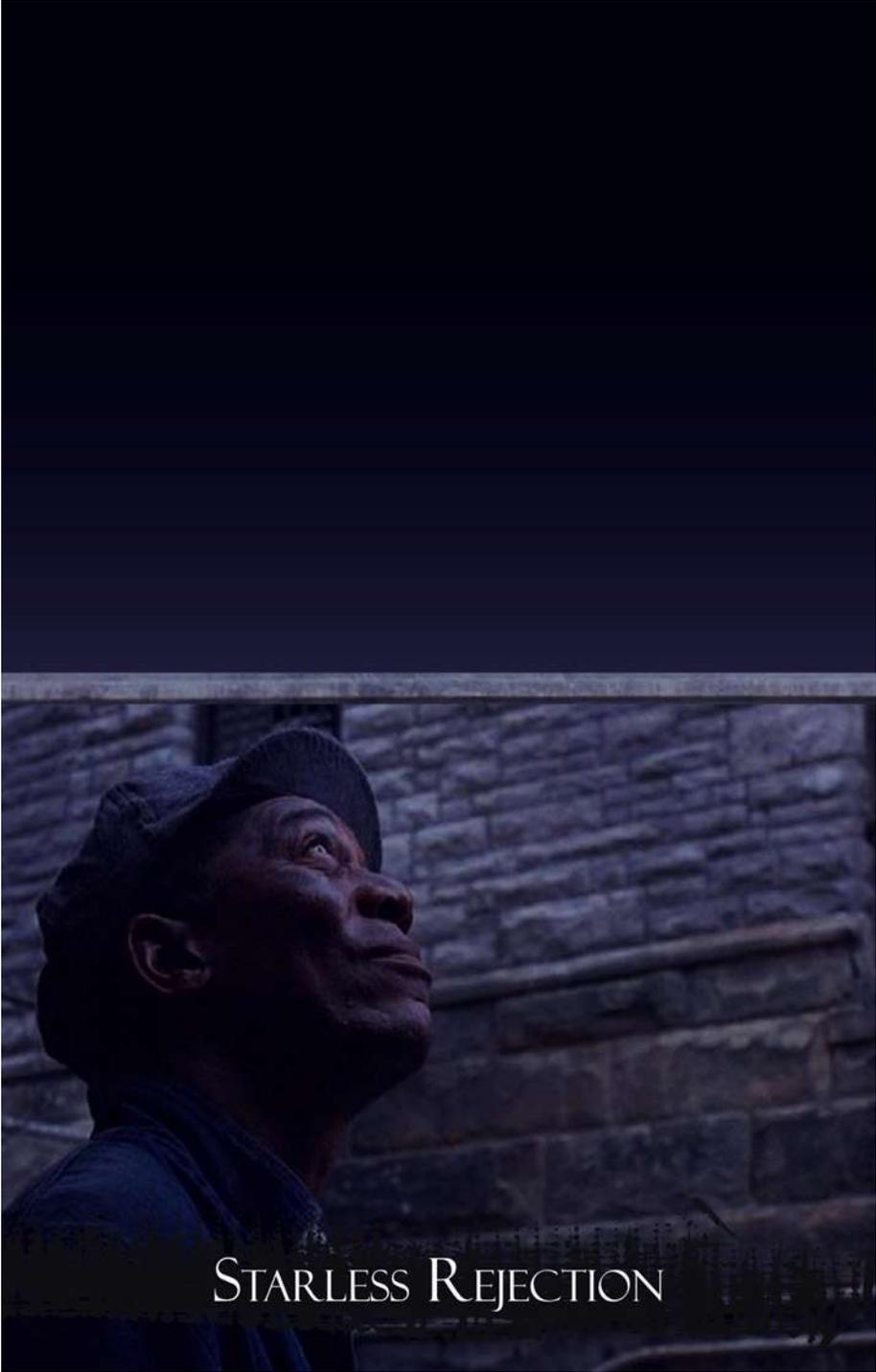
## 5 – Rejected

The parole hearings that appear at various points are symbolically “snapshots” of the spiritual health of the soul. The “powers that be” ask the potential parolee a question that exposes the inmate’s awareness of the interior condition of their being. Red’s “righteous” and prideful response, invoking the “God’s honest truth” that he is “rehabilitated,” a “changed man” is a clear indication that he is still under the sway of the ill effects of the fall. He is utterly oblivious to the underlying truth that he is “wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked (Rev 3:17). In this first hearing, Red symbolizes the collective state of humanity in the “Old dispensation,” *after* the fall, but *before* the arrival of Christ, the Redeemer.

It is also of high significance that Red’s name is not mentioned: he enters the room and hears one word: “sit.” Once again, as a result of the Fall, and the creation of a “great gulf” between the Divine and human, the alienated soul is, in essence, “not known,” “not recognized,” has become a “stranger.” It’s as if their identity has been “blotted out” or “erased:” “Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book” (Exodus 32:33); “Erase their names from the Book of Life; don’t let them be counted among the righteous” (Psalm 69:28).

This “anonymity” of being is what Thomas Merton calls the “false self.” “Every one of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self. This is the man I want myself to be but who cannot exist, because God *does not know anything about him. And to be unknown of God is altogether too much privacy.*”<sup>4</sup> In the *Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien suggested this idea of becoming “blotted out,” or “unknown” by the effect of wearing the “One Ring,” i.e., becoming “*invisible.*”

In effect, the initial journey of repentance and redemption can be seen as a quest to become recognized and “known” by the “powers that be.” In Red’s third hearing, we witness the dramatic emergence of his *full name*, indicating the friendship and intimacy that is now vitally present.



## 6 – Starless Rejection

After Red exits his parole hearing, he makes a quick glance skyward, and we witness the first tacit appearance of Dante's *Inferno*, a "starless sky." One again this "snapshot" captures well the status of Red's soul at this point; when he "looks within," he sees only the "sad light" of the lower self, not the Salvific True Light of Christ. This despaired frustration is aptly expressed in the Psalms: "Why, LORD, do you *reject* me and hide your face from me?" (Psalm 88:14). One of the breakthroughs of the interior life is the realization that God is not "hiding" from us, but rather, it is *we* that are "turned away" or "hiding" from the "face" of God.

When Andy arrives later, we will see an explicit appearance of this same dark sky; and after Red's third hearing, he makes a similar glance skyward and finally "sees the stars."



### 7 – Arrival in Hell

The arrival of a busload of new prisoners at Shawshank mirrors the scene in the *Divine Comedy* where Charon ferries a boatload of new souls to the *Inferno*.

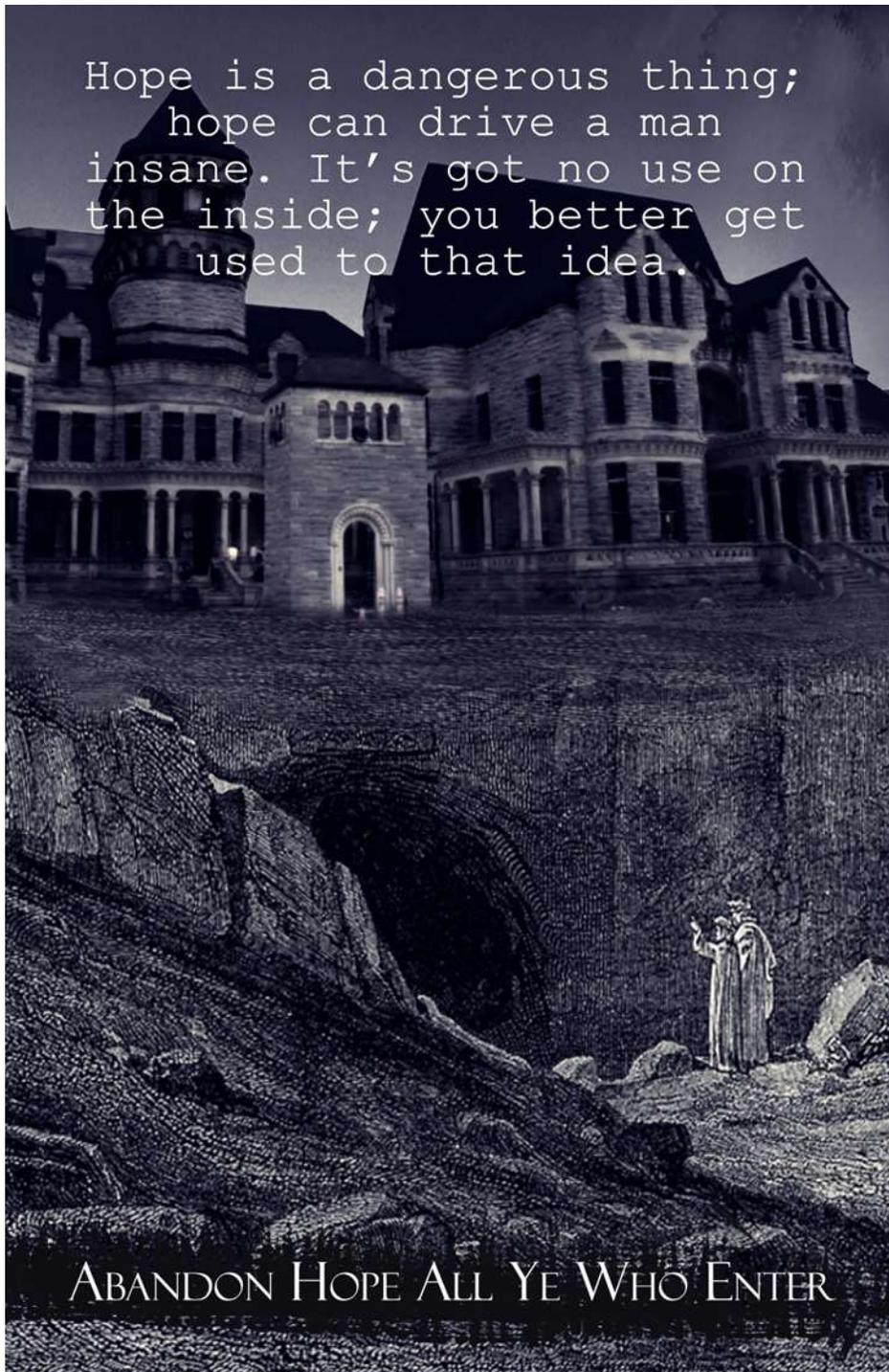


## **8 – Expulsion from Paradise**

Another Edenic reference appears when the new prisoners march to their cells holding their clothes in front, like Adam and Eve, who: “knew that they were naked; and sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.” Nakedness is often used spiritually to depict the “fallen state” of disgrace that lacks the awareness of the Divine Presence. According to Pseudo-Macarius:

The very first man, seeing himself naked, was filled with shame. So great a disgrace accompanies nakedness. If, therefore, in physical matters nakedness carries with itself so great a shame, how much more ashamed for that person that is naked of divine power, who does not wear nor is clothed with the ineffable and imperishable and spiritual garment, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ himself? Is he not really covered with greater shame and the disgrace of evil passions.<sup>5</sup>

Hope is a dangerous thing;  
hope can drive a man  
insane. It's got no use on  
the inside; you better get  
used to that idea.

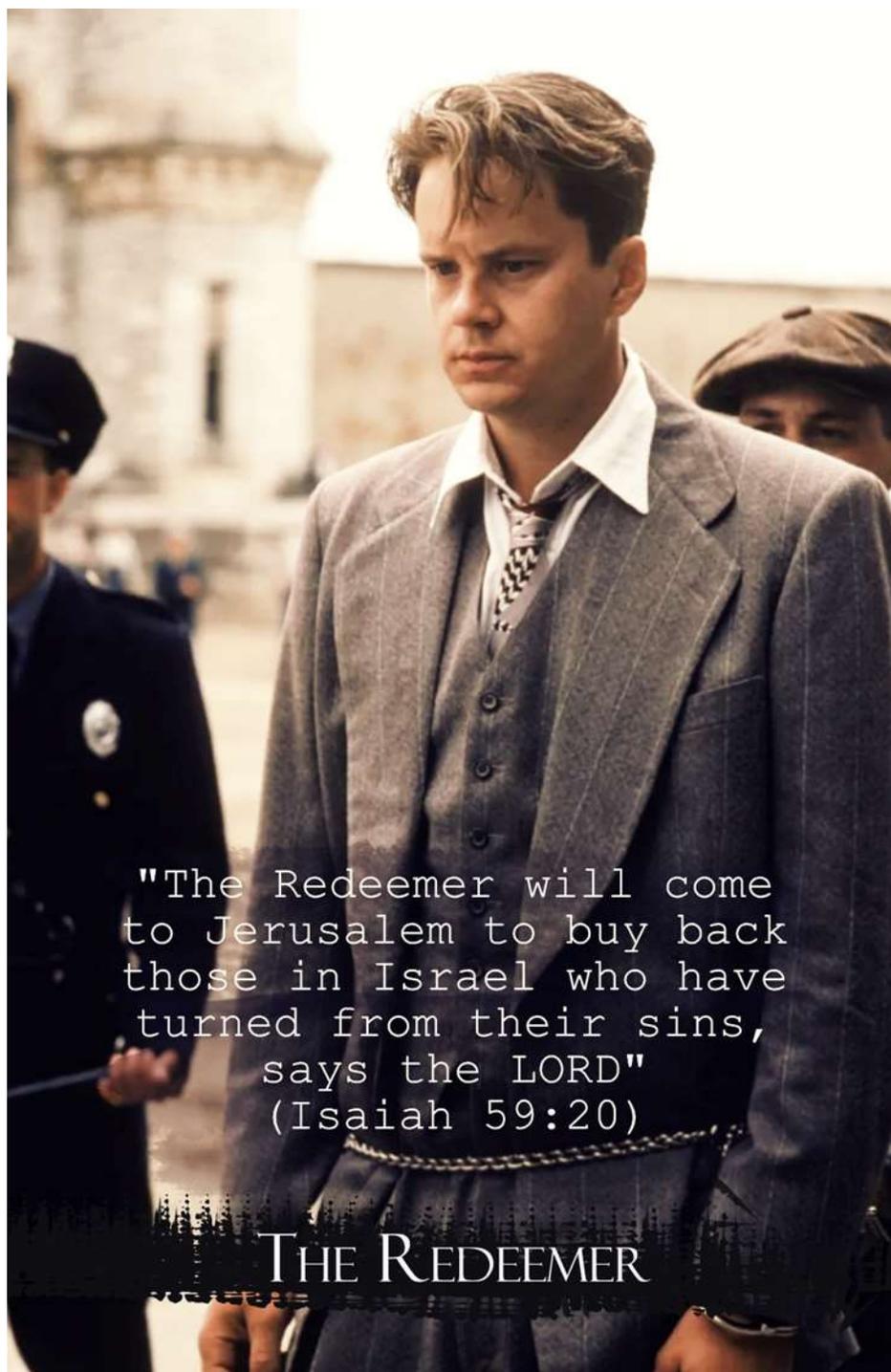


ABANDON HOPE ALL YE WHO ENTER

## 9 – Abandon Hope

Shawshank Prison and Dante's *Inferno* emerge as a united realm where authentic "Hope" of escape, of once again finding the "True Path" of Liberation from suffering seems "impossible" and hopeless. The creature, left to its own devices, existentially "divorced" from its Creator, lacks any capacity to liberate itself from the nightmare that it has entered. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; *apart from me you can do nothing*" (Joh 15:5).

Dietrich von Hildebrand adds: "He knows that...he is *in need of redemption*...Within him lives a deep yearning for the Redeemer, Who by divine force will take the guilt of sin and bridge the gulf that separates the human race from God."<sup>6</sup>



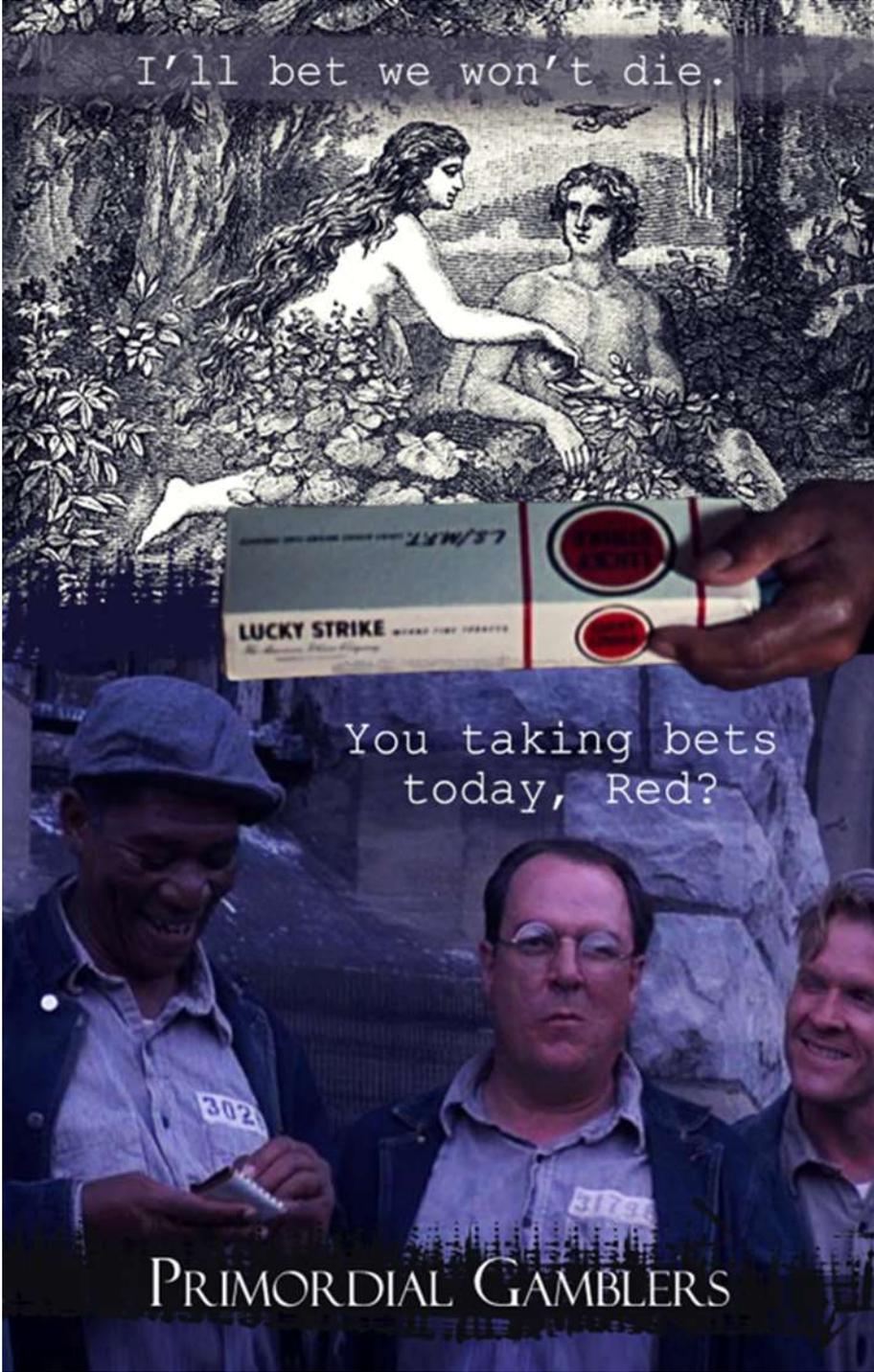
"The Redeemer will come  
to Jerusalem to buy back  
those in Israel who have  
turned from their sins,  
says the LORD"  
(Isaiah 59:20)

## THE REDEEMER

## 10 – The Redeemer

With Andy's<sup>7</sup> arrival in Shawshank as a "Christ-like" figure, comes the emergence of a truly new and dynamic form of Hope. The "yearning" for a Redeemer has been answered, and there now a manifest "call" to a transformative New Birth: "Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

*The Shawshank Redemption* is in many ways a story about the redemption of hope: from Red's initial conception of a dry, static hope that only frustrates, to Andy's new and dynamic brand of Hope that sparks a powerful transformation. Andy brings an "escape plan" never seen or heard before by any of the "inmates:" one based on the immortal words of the Warden – "*Salvation lies within.*"



I'll bet we won't die.

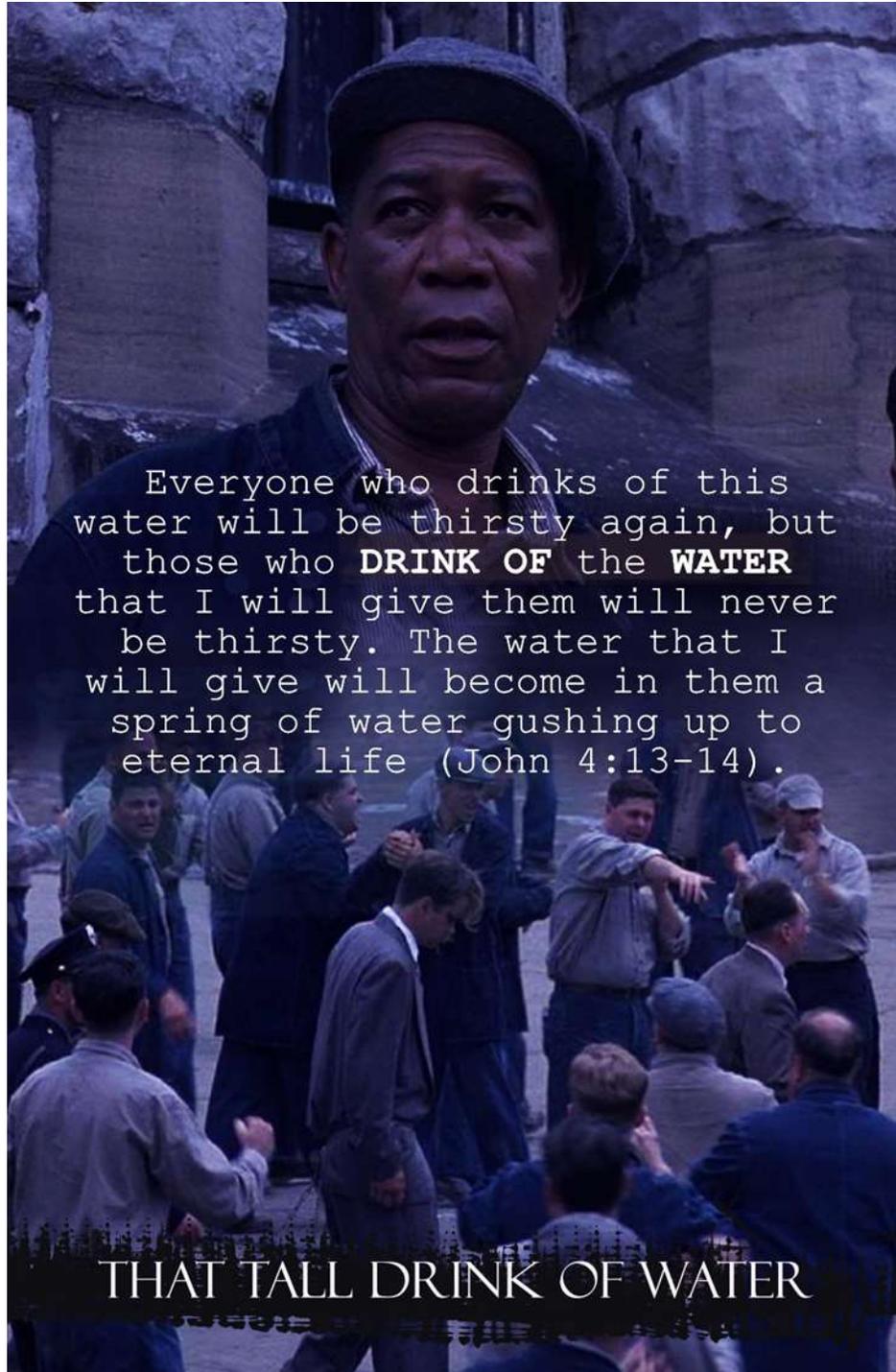


You taking bets today, Red?

PRIMORDIAL GAMBLERS

## 11 – Primordial Gamblers

Whenever gambling appears in a prison movie, as it does here and in *Cool Hand Luke*, there is the tacit connection to the Garden of Eden, where, an ill placed wager, “betting that the Serpent was right; that eating of the Tree would not result in death” cataclysmically fractured the intimacy between the human and Divine. The anecdotal phrase: “The devil invented gambling,” sometimes attributed to St Augustine is rooted in this primordial act of spiritual risk taking that resulted in spiritual exile from God. Here, in the fallen world that is Shawshank Prison, this “risk-taking” instinct appears once again. It is also not surprising that the “official cigarette” of the prison is “Lucky Strike.”



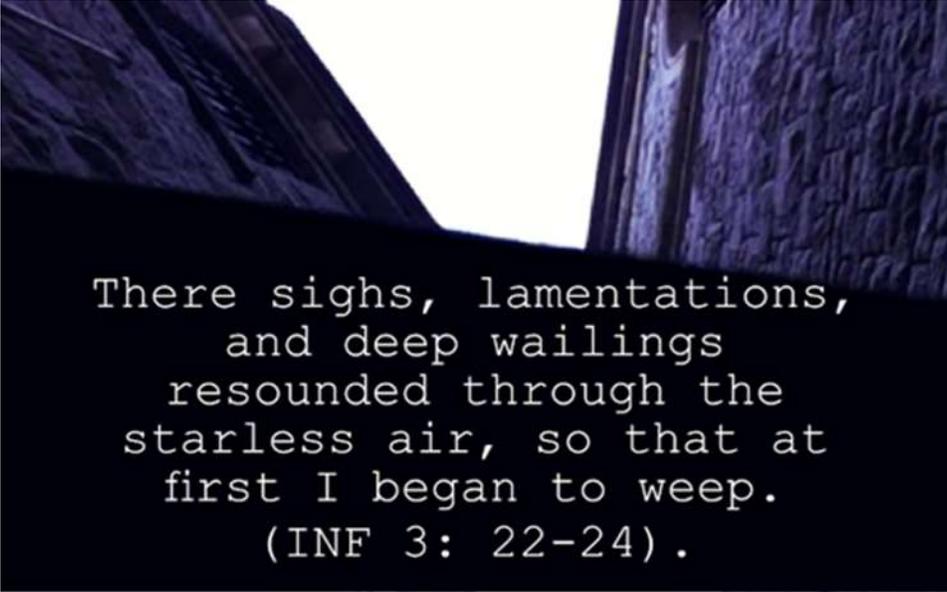
Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who **DRINK OF** the **WATER** that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life (John 4:13-14).

THAT TALL DRINK OF WATER

## **12 – That Tall Drink of Water**

As the new prisoners arrive, Red and his friends place their bets on which prisoner will break down crying first. Red's description of Andy as a "Tall Drink of Water" is the first of several allusions in the film that cast Andy as a "Christ-like" figure. The "tall stature" of Christ beckons us to full growth and maturity: "Until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ (Eph 4:13). Christ is also the "water of Divine Life;" "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water' (John 7:38).

Although Red loses his "short term" bet at the expense of a few cigarettes, his long-term wager on Andy will ultimately manifest to be a wise one.

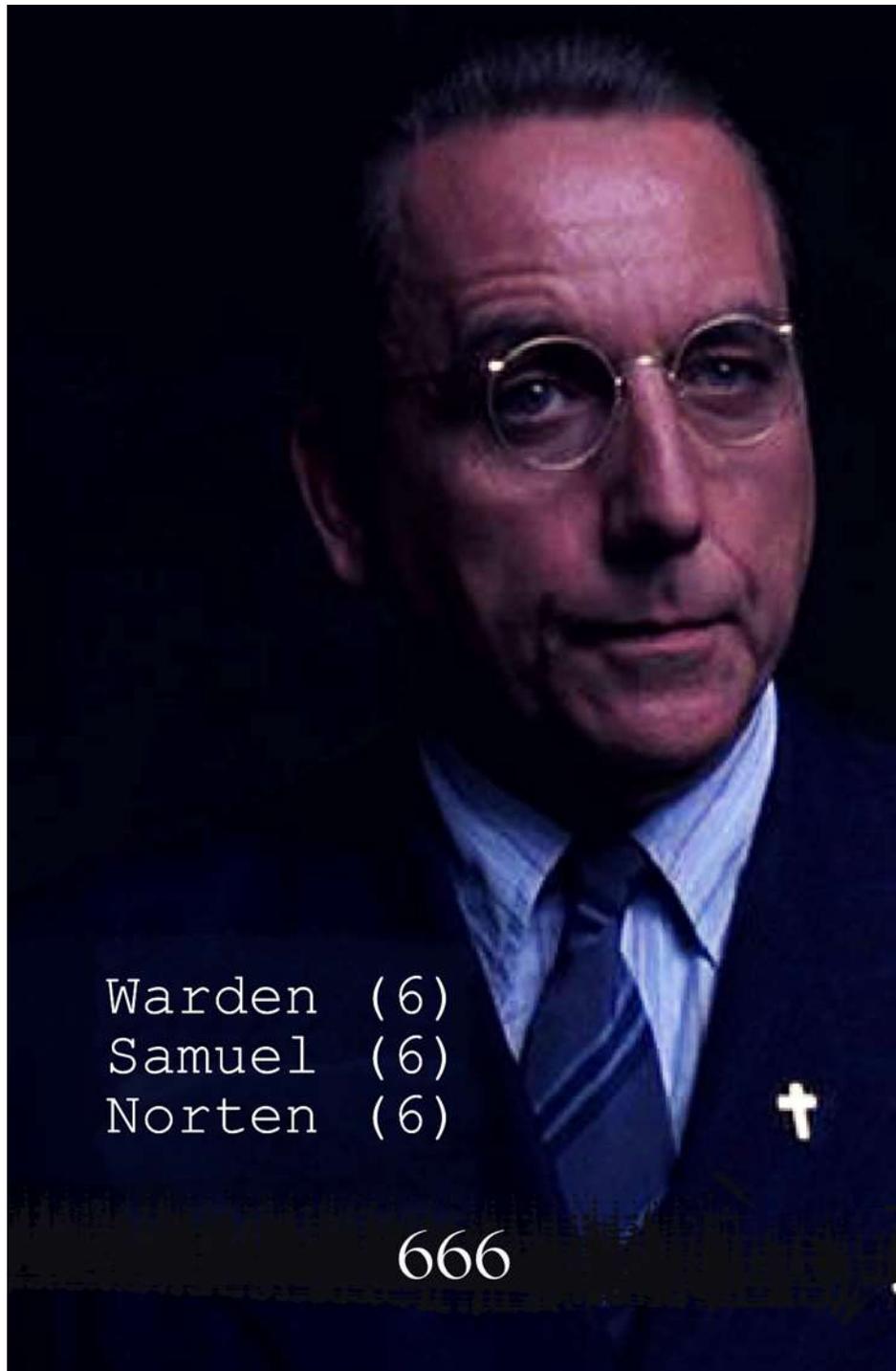


There sighs, lamentations,  
and deep wailings  
resounded through the  
starless air, so that at  
first I began to weep.  
(INF 3: 22-24).



### **13 – Where No Star Shines**

As Andy approaches the threshold of the prison building, he looks up and sees a growing expanse of “darkness.” This is clearly a “special effect” utilized in the movie to convey the first *overt* reference to Dante’s *Inferno* – where “no star shines.” In this “starless air” Andy beholds the collective soul of humanity and the darkness of the fallen world that lacks the True Light of Life.



## 14 – 666

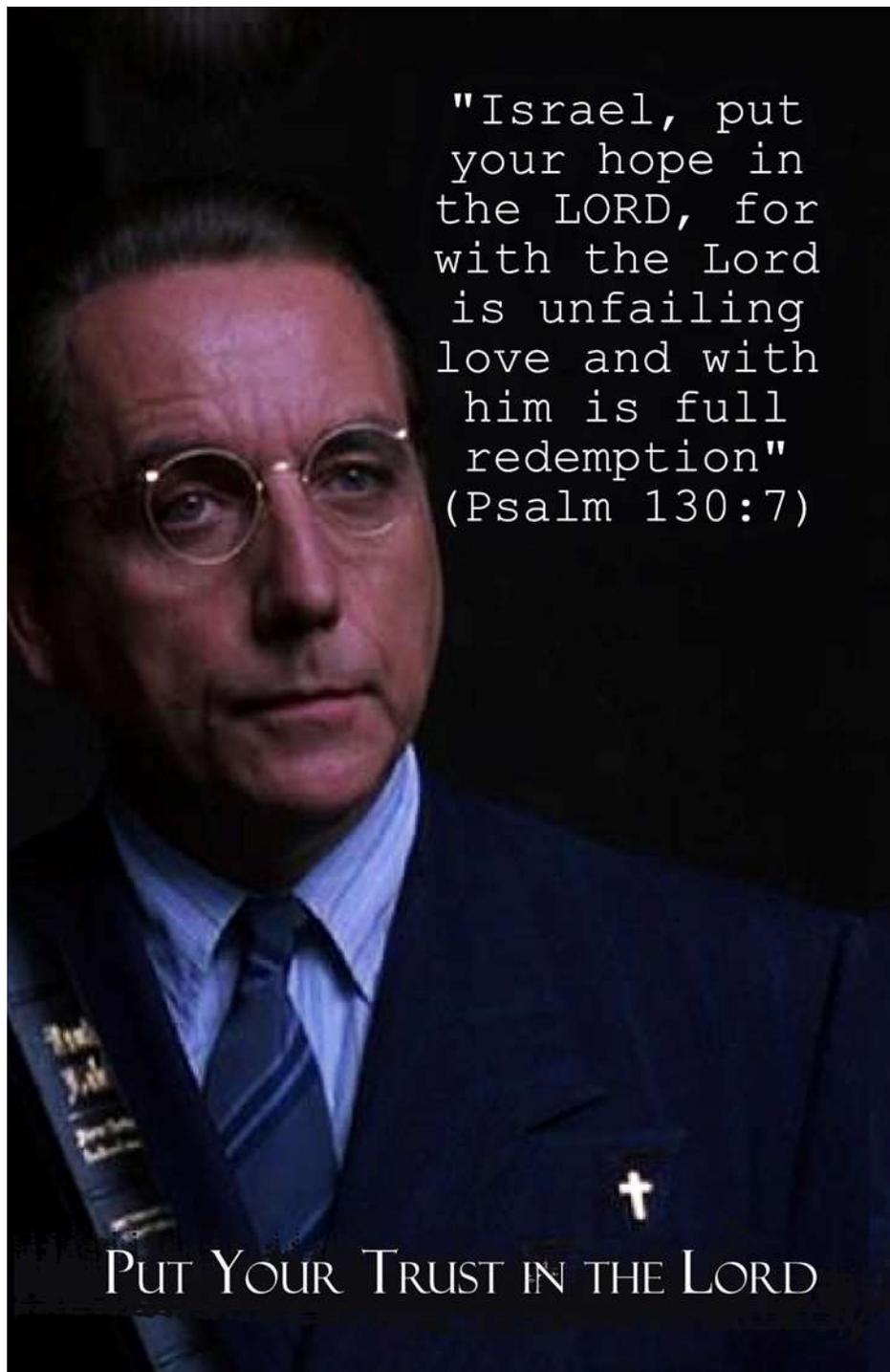
After the inmates enter the prison, the Warden emerges from the shadows and introduces himself. Just as Satan is the ruler of the *Inferno*, Warden Norton is the “principality” who governs the domain of the fallen world that is Shawshank. Although the numerical connection between the warden’s name and title as “666” might initially seem arbitrary or a coincidence, there will be two additional instances ahead that reinforce this “un-holy” attribution.

And Jesus said to  
them, 'I am the  
bread of life. He  
who comes to me  
shall never  
hunger, and he who  
believes in me  
shall never  
thirst'  
(John 6:35).



## **15 – When Do We Eat?**

After telling the prisoners that he “will not tolerate any blasphemy,” the Warden asks them if they have any questions. One of the new inmates then barks out in a gluttonous fashion: “When do we eat?” The “hunger” that the prisoner expresses is perhaps best understood in the dynamic context of the Fall, where the soul loses access to the “Mana of Heaven,” and thus experiences an “Eternal Hunger,” an existential longing for the Divine Water and Bread of Being that can only come from above. According to the French master Jean Grou: “This desire, this necessity of knowing and loving God is the hunger of the soul, and a hunger which God alone can satisfy.”<sup>8</sup>



"Israel, put  
your hope in  
the LORD, for  
with the Lord  
is unfailing  
love and with  
him is full  
redemption"  
(Psalm 130:7)

PUT YOUR TRUST IN THE LORD

## 16 – Put Your Trust in the Lord

The warden's closing comments to the inmates: "Put your trust in the Lord, your ass belongs to me. Welcome to Shawshank," once again invokes the Spector of Eden. One way of conceiving the Fall is to see it as an act of "theft" i.e., by successful temptation, the serpent "stole" or "took" from Adam and Eve their most prized possession; their intimacy, closeness, and living contact with God.

In the guise of the antichrist, 666, the Warden openly boasts of his most prized bounty: "Your *soul* belongs to me." The inmates of Shawshank, now imprisoned within the walls of the fallen self, have had, in Red's words, the "part that counts" taken from them.

The mission of Redemption can thus be cast as one where Christ "steals back" this Divine Treasure from the enemy and gives it back freely to all who will receive it. We see this very act later in the movie, when Andy "steals" \$370,000 of the warden's "money."

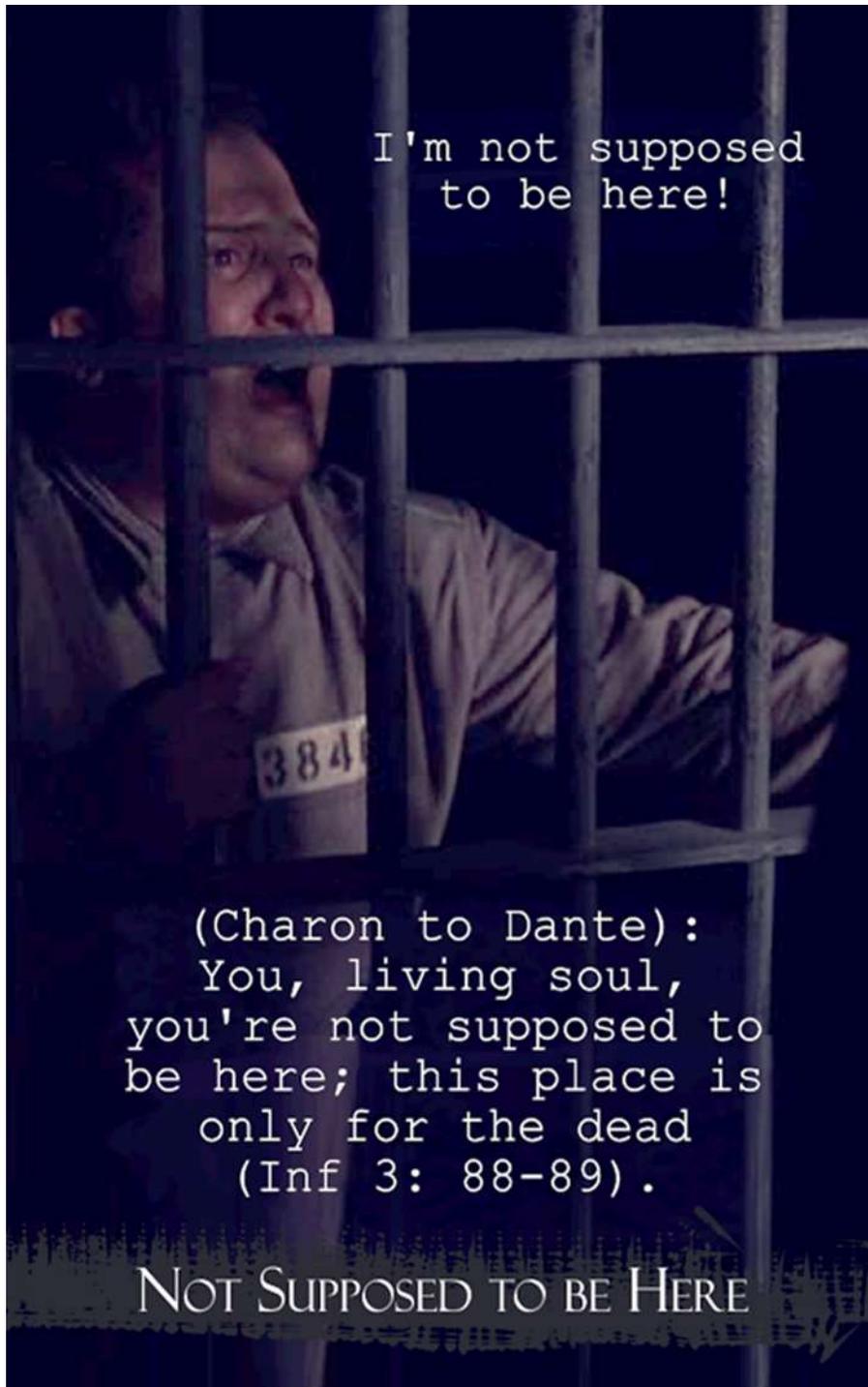


## 17 – The Baptism of Hell

After the warden’s “welcome,” the inmates receive their formal initiation to the God-forsaken “region of unlikeness.” In a mock parody of the rite of Christian baptism, where a gentle sprinkling of water is employed, water is violently sprayed with a “fire” hose to extinguish any “fire of hope” that might remain. Instead of a Sacred Altar, the “baptism” is done in a “cage.”

Red also mentions in his voiceover, that the delousing powder “burns the skin” and renders one “half blind.” The “burning skin” evokes the idea of the torment of hellfire. His remark about becoming “half-blind” references the blinding of the Spiritual eye of the soul; the inner eye that has the capacity to “see” God. As Julian of Norwich comments:

And in this I saw matter for mirth and matter for mourning – matter for mirth, that our Lord, our maker is so near to us, and we in him, because of his great goodness he keeps us faithfully; matter for mourning, because *our spiritual eye is so blind*, and we are so burdened with the weight of our mortal flesh and the darkness of sin that we cannot see clearly the blessed face of our Lord God.<sup>9</sup>



I'm not supposed  
to be here!

(Charon to Dante):  
You, living soul,  
you're not supposed to  
be here; this place is  
only for the dead  
(Inf 3: 88-89).

NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HERE

## 18 – Not Supposed to be Here

After the new prisoners are put in their cells, and the lights go out, Heywood successfully scares the prisoner he “bet on” to break down crying. This appears to be a variation of a scene in the *Divine Comedy* where the boatman Charon, about to ferry new souls to the *Inferno*, notices that Dante is “alive.” This prompts him to tell Dante that he is “in the wrong place” since, this place is only for the dead.

Unfortunately for the prisoner, after his continued outburst, Byron Hadley administered a beating that sent him to the infirmary and gave him the one thing necessary to “be here.” The next morning, when Heywood asked another inmate, who worked in the infirmary about his status, he said that he was “dead.”



## 19 – The Shawshank Scream

Another way of conceptualizing this moment in the film is to see it in the context of the Tragedy of the Fall. If we could imagine such a transition, from a state of conscious harmony and communion with the Divine to one of isolation, and loss of this intimacy, the prisoner’s reaction is quite appropriate.

When Edmund Van Munch commented about the inspiration for his famous painting, “The Scream,” he said:

I was walking along a path with two friends—the sun was setting—suddenly the sky turned blood red—I paused, feeling exhausted, and leaned on the fence—there was blood and tongues of fire above the blue-black fjord and the city—my friends walked on, and I stood there trembling with anxiety—and I sensed *an infinite scream passing through nature*.<sup>10</sup>

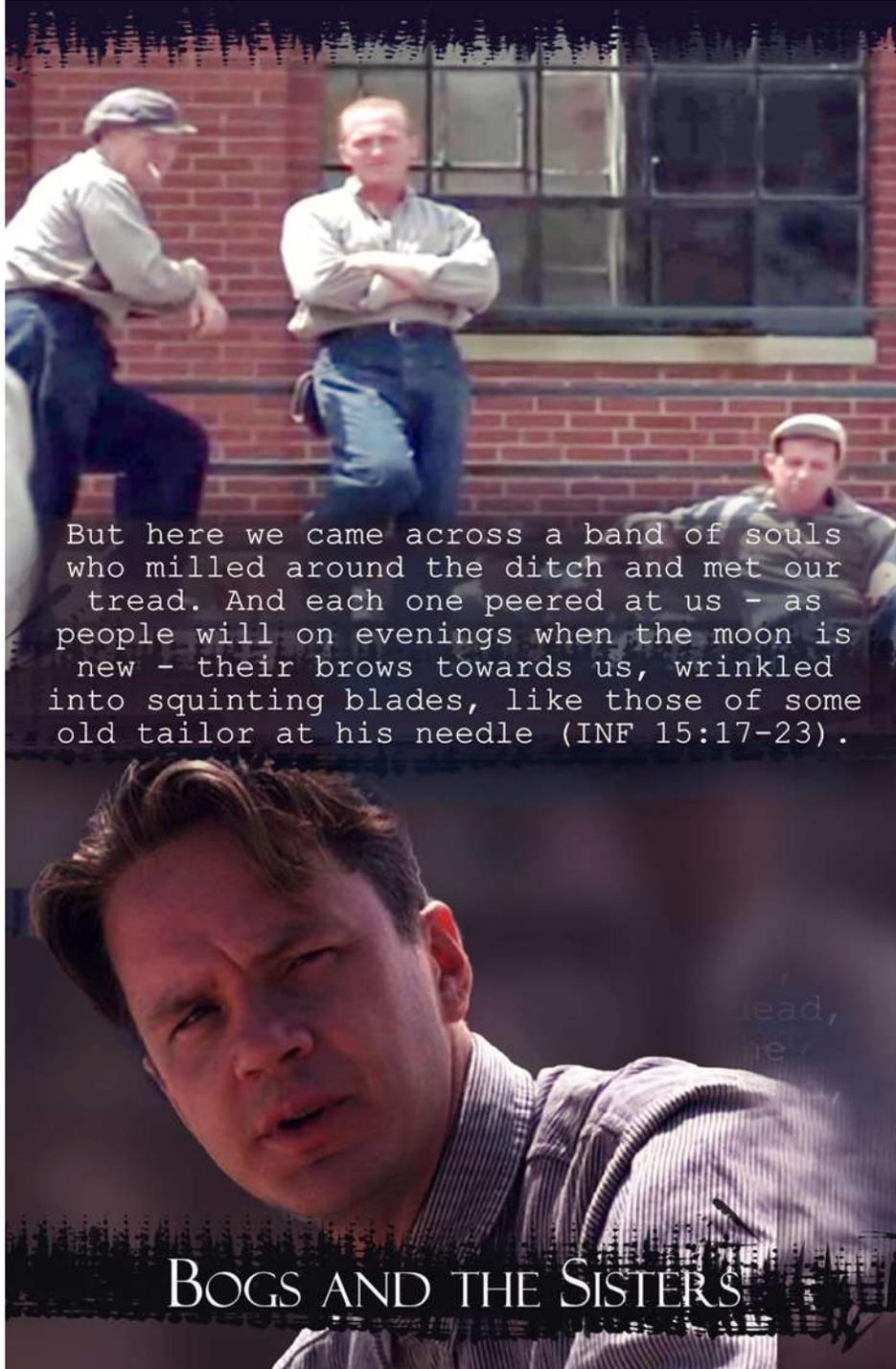
Here is the counterpart of Red’s later description of the Opera, as “Something so Beautiful it can’t be expressed in words;” the emergence of “Something so *horrific* that it can’t be expressed in words, only with an “infinite scream.” Here is born the original archetype for the classic “descent into madness.”



## 20 – Young Jake

At breakfast, we meet Brooks who is caring for a fledging bird, Jake, that had “fallen from his nest by the plate shop.” This idea of a “bird that has fallen from its nest” is found in writings related to the Jewish Kabbalah. For example: “Thus ‘like a bird wandered from his nest, so is a man who wanders from his home’ ... Since the temple was destroyed, the *Shekhinah* has wandered from her nest.”<sup>11</sup>

The *Shekhinah* is the feminine, Divine presence in the soul. The wandering or “exile” of the *Shekhinah* from the nest symbolizes the fracture or loss of intimacy between the human and Divine, the symbolic “divorce.”



But here we came across a band of souls who milled around the ditch and met our tread. And each one peered at us - as people will on evenings when the moon is new - their brows towards us, wrinkled into squinting blades, like those of some old tailor at his needle (INF 15:17-23).

BOGS AND THE SISTERS

## 21 – Bogs and the Sisters

As Virgil and Dante navigate their way through the *Inferno*, they see a band of Sodomites “peering at them” intently. Andy’s first encounter with Bogs appears to be patterned after this event.

Bogs is a somewhat complex figure in the film. On one hand, he emerges as Andy’s chief nemesis, singling him out for attack, he is thus a type of “anti-Christ” figure. On the other hand, his characterization as a “bull queer,” that “doesn’t qualify as human” and his violent, attempted rapes of Andy suggest his affinity with the “Malebolge” in the eighth circle of hell. This circle swarms with serpents that can morph back and forth from “men” to serpents.

In cantos 24 and 25 of *Inferno*, there are three violent sexual assaults – serpent on male, male on male rapes which align with Bogs’ three assaults on Andy. The serpents attack by “tying the hands of the victim behind their backs:” “Their hands were tied behind them by serpents which struck their heads and tails through their backs and were knotted together in front” (Inf 24: 94-96). In the movie, in two of the three attacks, Andy’s hands are held behind by the serpent-sisters.

Later in the film, Andy rebukes Bogs’ attempt to befriend him in the shower: “I could be a friend to you.” Surprisingly, in the *Divine Comedy*, Dante actually *did* become friends with the serpents: “From then on the serpents were my friends” (Inf 25: 4).



It's like he  
had on an  
invisible coat  
that would  
shield him from  
this place.

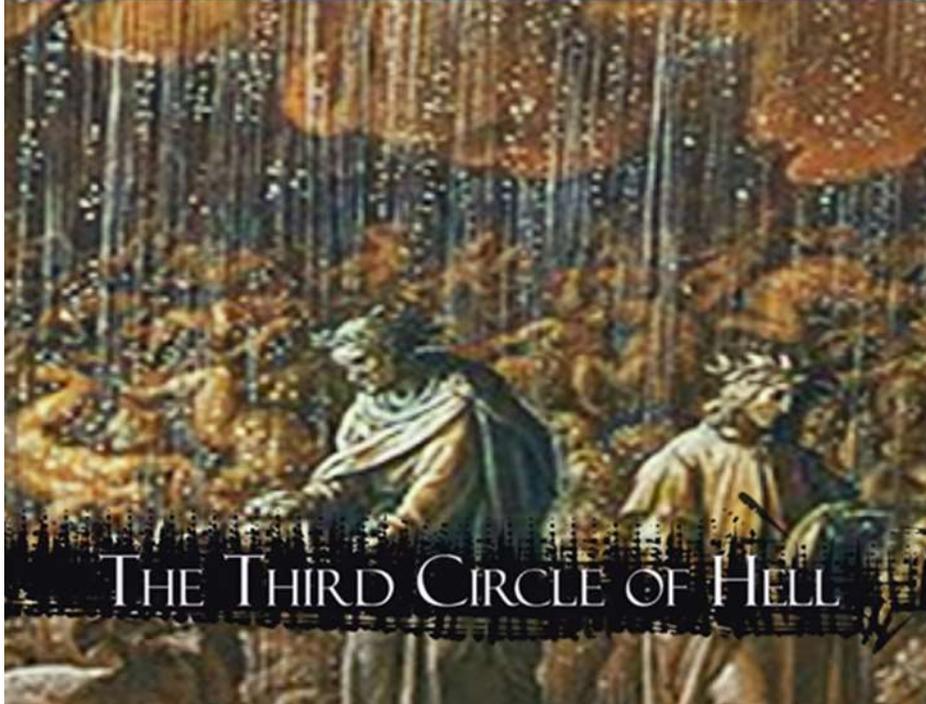
He will cover you with his  
pinions, and under his  
wings you will find refuge;  
his faithfulness is a  
shield and a buckler  
(Psalm 91:4).

AN INVISIBLE COAT

## 22 – An Invisible Coat

During their first meeting in the prison yard, Red makes additional comments that again suggest Andy's "Divine status." His remark that on the outside, Andy was the "*Vice* President of a large Portland bank," casts Andy as the "*Son* of God," since "money" and "wealth" in the film refer to "Divine Riches and treasures."

The comment about an "invisible coat" that would "shield him from this place" alludes to the "protective presence of God." "It is a spiritual power which protects and hovers over someone continuously; driving from him anything harmful which may happen to approach his body or soul."<sup>12</sup>

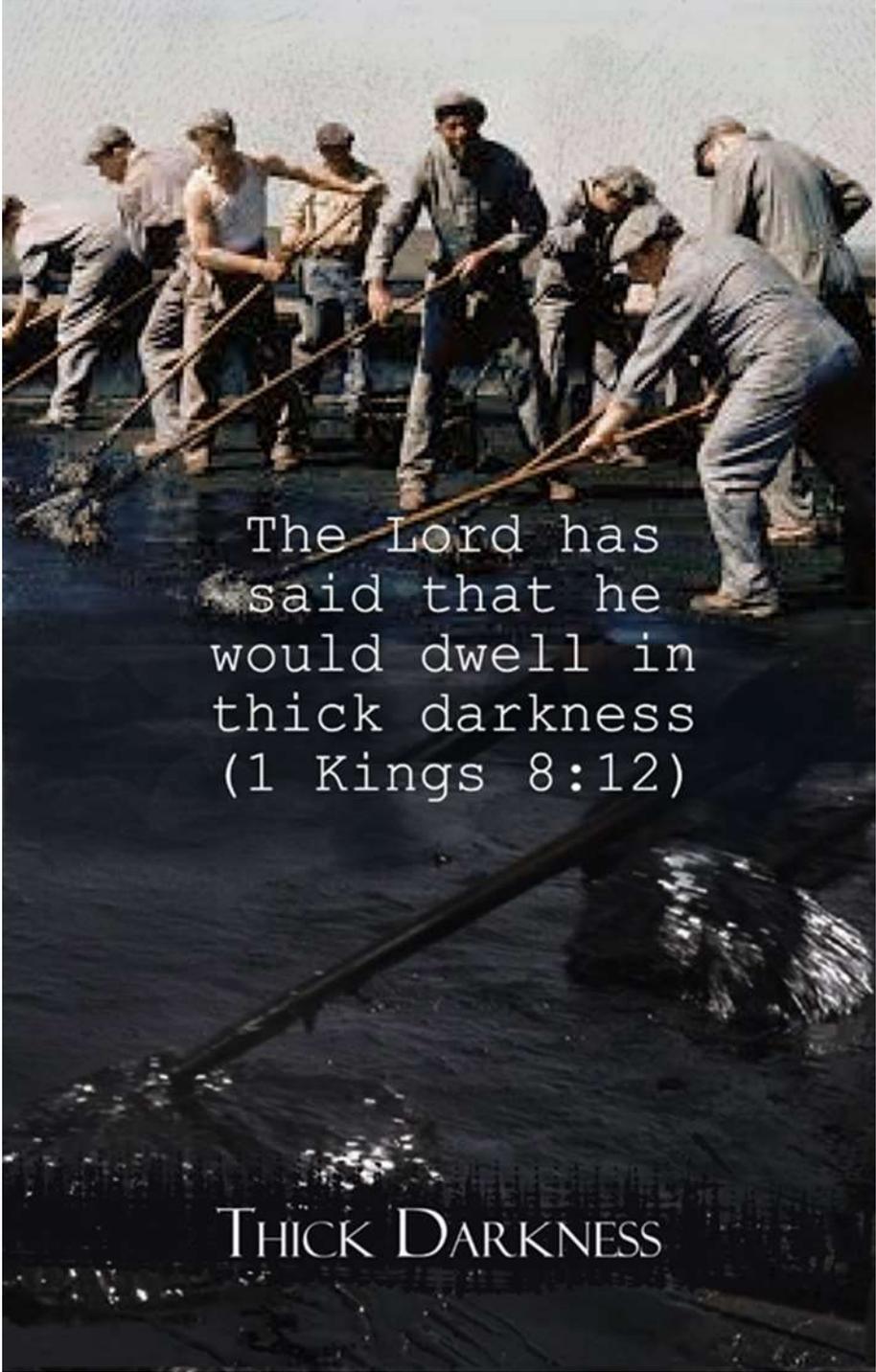


### **23 – The 3<sup>rd</sup> Circle of Hell**

After one of his encounters with Bogs and the sisters, we see Andy walking outside in a snowstorm that visually captures the third circle of hell: “And rain falls there, endlessly, chill, accursed and heavy...snow, massive hailstones, black, tainted water pour down in sheets through tenebrae of air.”<sup>13</sup>

The inclusion of this scene might have been employed to suggest “temporal movement” through the various circles of hell. Later in the movie, we will see another advance from this third circle to the ninth.

This image also conveys the idea that Christ entered the world and bore “persecution and suffering” for the sake of Redemption and Salvation of humanity.



## 24 – Thick Darkness

During Andy’s third year at Shawshank, the “powers that be” decided that the roof of the plate shop needed repair and twelve prisoners were invited to volunteer to tar the roof, working outside, in the month of May.

Tar is a classic symbol for the “numinous” Presence of God, i.e., the manifestation of the mysterious breakthrough of God’s Presence in the physical world. The resonant signature of this Presence is the appearance of a “miracle;” the experience of freedom, joy, laughter; release from bondage.

Black Tar made a dramatic appearance in the movie *Cool Hand Luke*, where the prisoners were assigned a drudging and laborious task of tarring a road on a hot summer day. The prisoner Luke was able to spark a “miracle” by convincing his fellow inmates to “work fast;” they responded to his suggestion, and the drudgery of tarring a road was transformed into a united task where *work was turned into play*. They finished two hours early, and there was nothing but uproarious laughter and joy in the prisoners’ souls. The very structure of space and time had been significantly altered by this “thick darkness.”



This big shot lawyer calls me  
long distance from Texas, and  
said your brother just died.



No one can come to me unless  
drawn [called] by the Father  
[Big Shot Lawyer] who sent me;  
and I will raise that person up  
on the [second] last day.  
(John 6: 44-45).

BIG SHOT LAWYER

## **25 – Big Shot Lawyer**

In this scene, we witness the “Divine” influence of Andy on both his co-workers and the guard Byron Hadley – the “hardest screw that ever walked a turn at Shawshank.” Hadley is “called / summoned,” “long distance / from Heaven” / “Texas” where there is a lot of “oil,” “thick darkness.” His brother is Christ.

That's what he left me,  
thirty-five thousand.



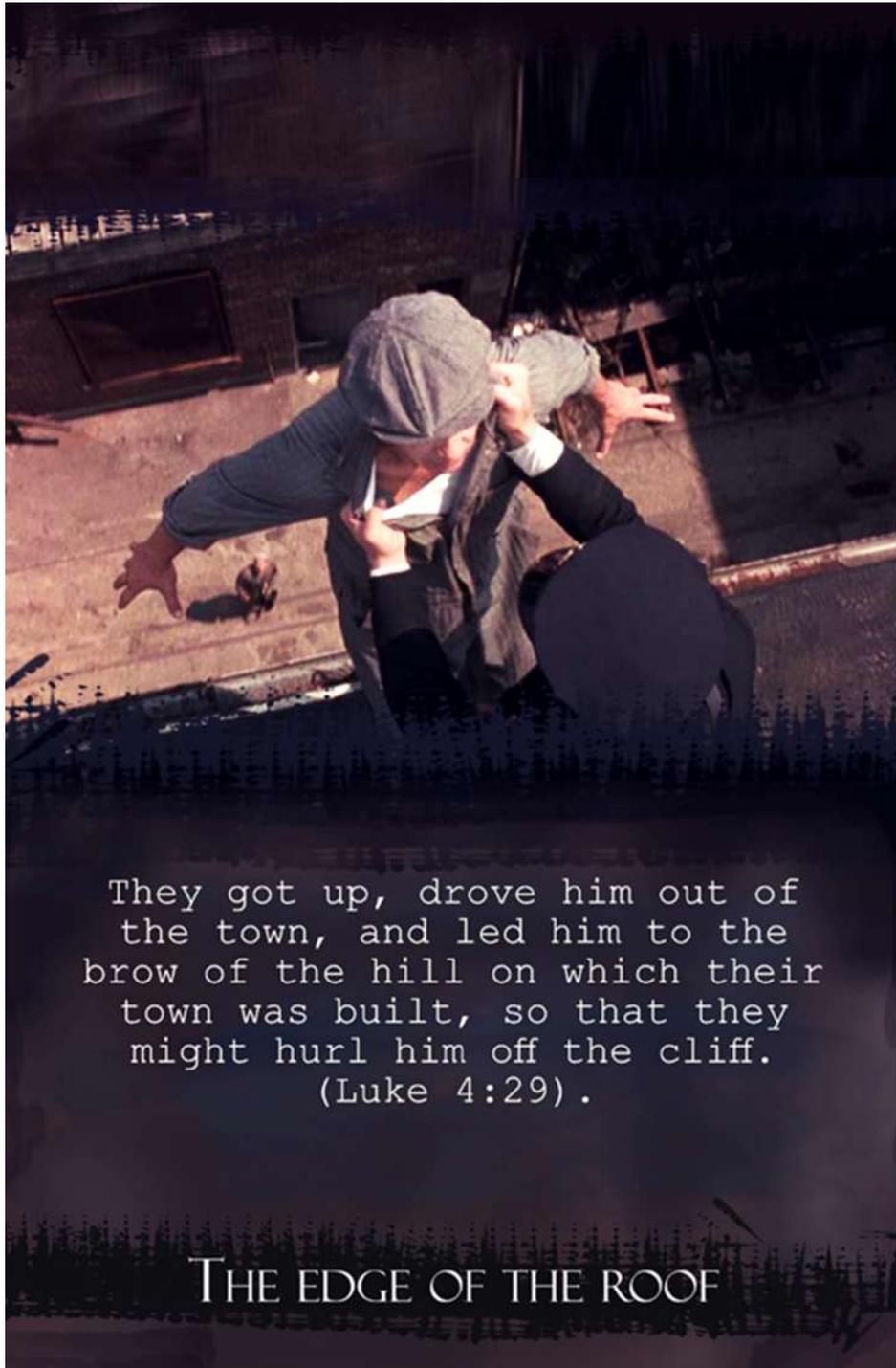
In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory (Eph 1:11-12).

## THE INHERITANCE

## **26 – The Inheritance**

A core concept of the interior life is the idea that every soul is given a “Divine Inheritance” – the rich treasure of God’s grace, but, and this is the “rub,” it largely goes unclaimed or actualized into one’s life. It remains hidden, dormant, untapped, like a “Sleeping Beauty” deep within the soul. The method, or approach, to “make a claim” to this Divine inheritance is largely unknown, is evanescent, is a “total flickering mystery.”

Here, Hadley has been “called” by God the Father unto Christ in the guise of Andy who proceeds to give him the necessary instructions to receive the “fullness” of his Divine inheritance.



They got up, drove him out of  
the town, and led him to the  
brow of the hill on which their  
town was built, so that they  
might hurl him off the cliff.  
(Luke 4:29).

THE EDGE OF THE ROOF

## 27 – The Edge of the Roof

When Andy tells Hadley how to get “all” of his inheritance, “tax free” by “giving it all to his wife,” he is symbolically communicating the approach utilized in the interior life of prayer to “receive” fully from God the “abundance” of our “inheritance.”

To “give it all to your wife” is another way of saying: “*Let your wife receive it.*” Every soul has an interior “wife,” the receptive feminine aspect called the “*Shekhinah.*” As St John of the Cross relates, in interior or contemplative prayer: “The soul conducts itself only as the *receiver* and as one in whom something is being done; God is the giver [of the inheritance] and the one who works in it, by according spiritual good in contemplation.”<sup>14</sup> Andy’s instruction to Hadley about his “inheritance” and his “wife” is a symbolic depiction of the interior life, where the soul adopts a “receptive” stance in order to “receive fully” from on High.

Andy’s request for *three* beers each for his co-workers is also noteworthy. As Bernard McGinn states: “Christian mystics...love to make use of patterns of threes in describing the soul’s progress to God, not only for trinitarian reasons but also because this is a natural way of portraying *a transformation by which two extremes, such as the divine and human, are somehow joined.*”<sup>15</sup>

The sad irony, depicted in this scene and elsewhere in the movie, is that when the “hard” and “difficult” yet *profound* teachings of Christ are given to us, there is a tendency to “scoff,” “turn away,” to become “angry” and “get offended;” even to the point of murderous rage; “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Andy will later share this very lament with Red when he says that his “wife” used to complain that he was a: “hard man to know...like a closed book.”

And the disciples were filled with  
joy and with the Holy Spirit  
(Acts 13:52).



May the God of hope fill you  
with all joy and peace in  
believing, so that by the power  
of the Holy Spirit you may  
abound in hope (Rom 15:13).

BOHEMIAN STYLE JOY

## 28 – Bohemian Style Joy

Once again, the resonant signature of this “thick darkness” appears, as it did in *Cool Hand Luke* when Red mentions that they felt like “free men, the Lords of All Creation.” This “release” from imprisonment to Freedom and Joy need not be a transitory experience that comes and goes, but an “ongoing” and permanent state of being when the interior life is faithfully adopted.

Red’s comment that Andy “did it just to feel normal again” might be stated more accurately as: “He did it so that his *fellow prisoners could feel normal again.*” The whole mission of Christ is to spread the Good news so that everyone can experience the joy, liberation and freedom of the Divine presence within the soul. Andy “did it” to show and remind them that the “normal” state of being *should* be infused with God’s grace, and that it is entirely “abnormal,” “unreal” to live an existence that is vitally estranged from God.

Finally, when Red mentioned the time - 10 a.m., and the fact that the sun was “on his shoulders,” this indicates that he is facing “west.” This initial direction will have symbolic significance when Red arrives in Buxton.



As for Andy, he spent  
his break hunkered in  
the shade.

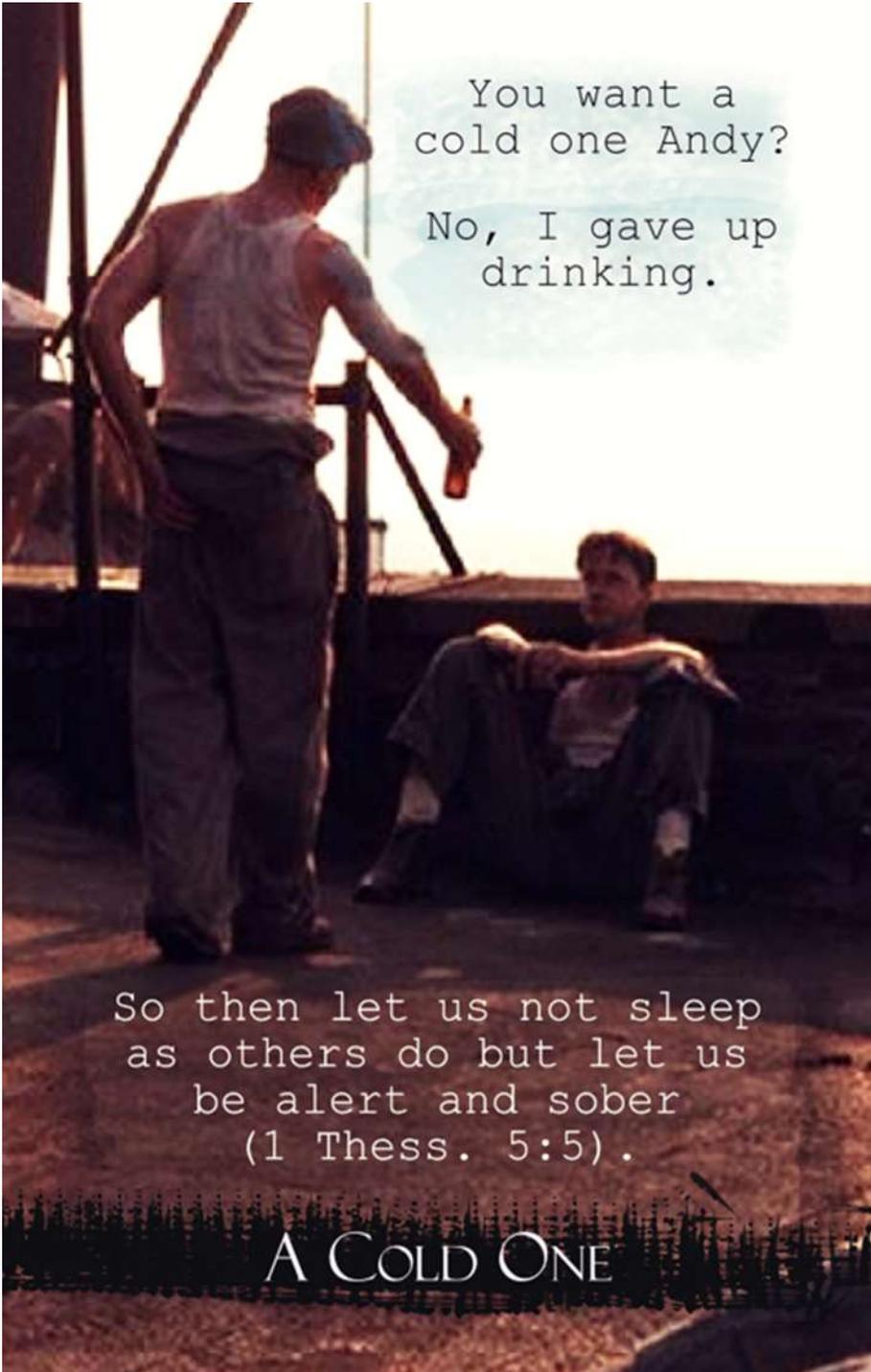
Whoever dwells in  
the shelter of the  
Most High will rest  
in the shadow of  
the Almighty  
(Psalms 91:1).

HE SAT IN THE SHADE

## 29 – He Sat in the Shade

Andy’s act of sitting apart from the men after the “miracle” of the cold beer is a classic depiction of *humility*, the foundation of the inner life. Instead of sitting in their midst and receiving “thanks” and “cheers” for the beer, he distances himself so that the Glory will go to God the Father.

After Andy *asked* for three beers for his co-workers, Hadley apparently received his full “inheritance” of \$35,000, and then “answered” Andy’s request by providing the beer, while Andy sat in the *shade*: “And the Angel *answered* the Holy Spirit will *overshadow* you (Luke 1:35).



You want a cold one Andy?

No, I gave up drinking.

So then let us not sleep as others do but let us be alert and sober (1 Thess. 5:5).

A COLD ONE

### 30 – A Cold One

At the beginning of the movie, we might recall Andy sitting in a car, sipping on a bottle of “Rosewood” bourbon. His renouncement of alcohol here establishes his new path of “sobriety.” According to Hans Urs Von Balthasar, “sobriety is one of the most frequently emphasized virtues in the New Testament.”<sup>16</sup> For example: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8); “But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer (1 Peter 4:7). We might understand the use of “sobriety” in these contexts as being in a state of “clear headed attentiveness to the deeper and sublime teachings of the Spirit.” Andy will later invoke the term that often appears with sobriety, *watching*, when he quotes his favorite passage of Scripture: “Watch ye therefore...”

Red’s mention that it was “outside work” implies a “Sacred” setting; a *Sacred Time and Space* “outside” the confines of the prison where the “business” or work of God unfolds and miracles manifest. The timing of the job in the month of May is also noteworthy since in Marian traditions, the month of May is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In the Book of John, we read: “On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine” (John 2:1-3).

The presence of Andy (as Christ), the twelve prisoners (as Christ’s Disciples), volunteers (as invited guests), the changing of water into beer (as water into wine), the “third year” (on the third day) and the month of May (implying Mary) suggests that this scene is a symbolic portrayal of the Marriage Feast at Cana, Christ’s first miracle, where: “the changing of water into wine, symbolizes the transformation of human nature into the divine, the mystical marriage of those who have heard the call of the Gospel, followed it, and entered into divine union.”<sup>17</sup>

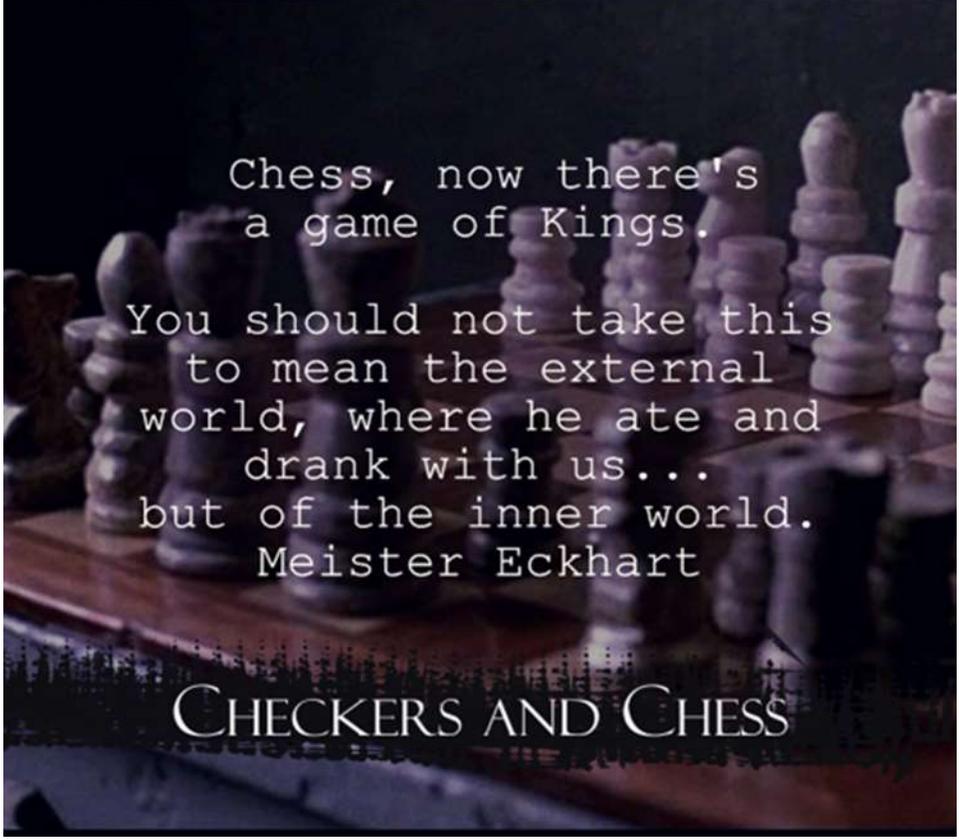
This scene is also the first of three appearances in the movie that has:

- (1) A marriage / wedding theme.
- (2) The presence of “thick darkness.”
- (3) The mention of “freedom.”



King Me

God sent his only  
begotten Son into  
the world  
(John 3:16).



Chess, now there's  
a game of Kings.

You should not take this  
to mean the external  
world, where he ate and  
drank with us...  
but of the inner world.  
Meister Eckhart

CHECKERS AND CHESS

### 31 - Checkers and Chess

In this scene, “chess” emerges as a symbol for the more advanced or “strategic” aspects of the spiritual life that are “designed to achieve a particular purpose.” These dimensions are more “civilized,” i.e. more “enlightened,” “educated” and “developed. Red’s comment to be “Kinged” exposes his inner desire to be “elevated in spiritual status,” to attain the “dignity” of receiving God’s Grace.

Although Red consents to Andy’s offer to teach him chess someday, his initial response that these teachings are a “*total f-ing mystery*” connects this domain as the realm of God’s “Mystery,” “This is a great *mystery*” (Eph 5:32), i.e. the more expanded area of “*mysticism*.”

Just as literature progresses from comic books to *The Great Gatsby* to *Finnegan’s Wake*; mathematics from arithmetic to algebra to calculus; spirituality has its own levels of sophistication beyond the “comic book,” “checkers” level. Checkers are to chess as the foundational outer rites of Christianity are to its interior or mystical domain. References to “inside,” “interior,” “within” will appear repeatedly in upcoming scenes.

Here, we also learn that Red is the “only guilty man in Shawshank.” As we will see, Red’s sense of “guilt” proves to be a key ingredient in his transformation and his eventual release. When Red asks Andy if he was guilty, he replies: “I’m innocent, just like every one else.” Andy’s wry declaration of his “innocence” mirrors various Scriptural accounts that proclaim Christ as being devoid or “innocent” of sin: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin (Heb 4:15); “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth (1 Peter 2:22).



RITA HAYWORTH AND  
SHEKHINAH REDEMPTION

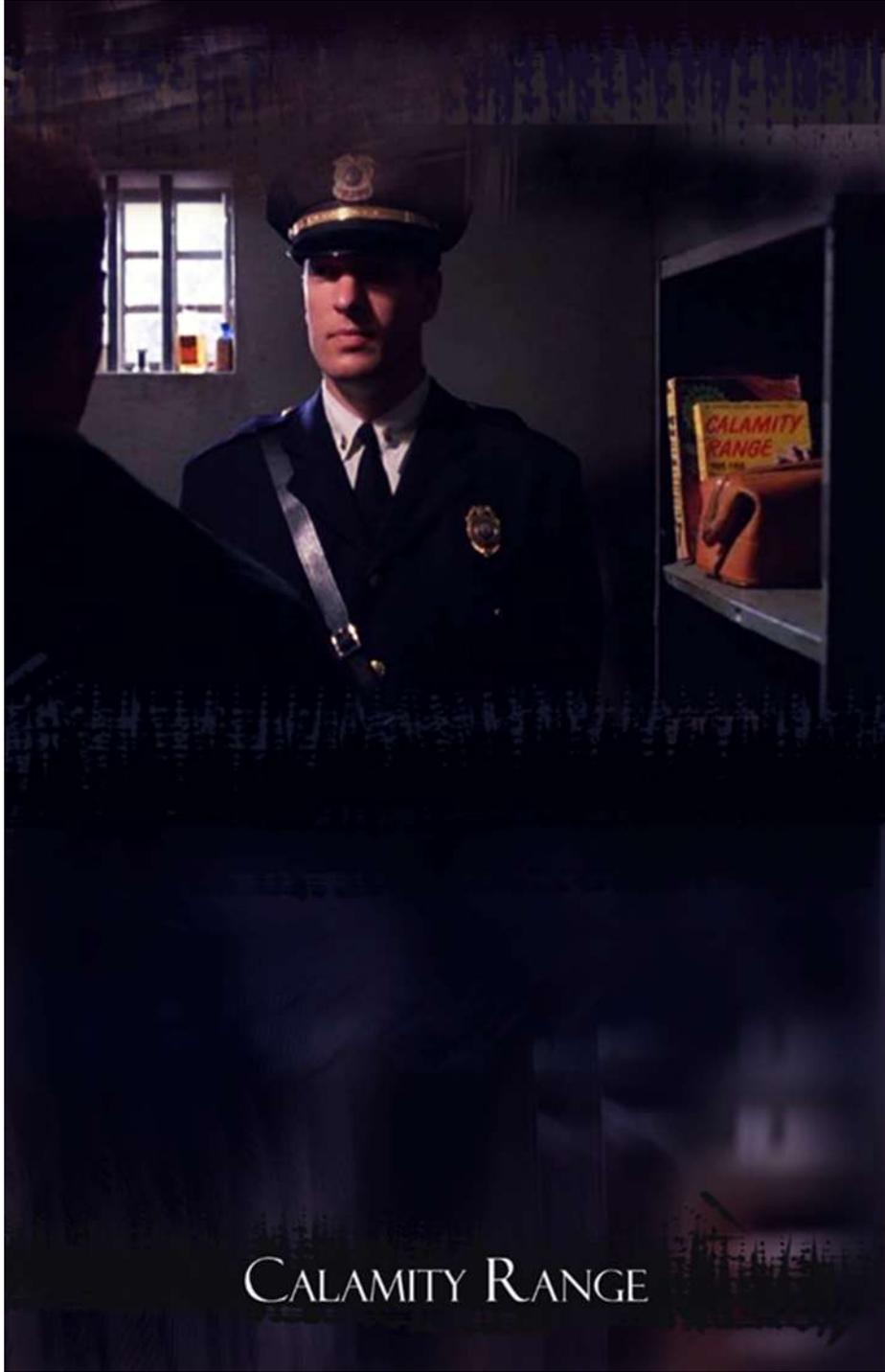
### 32 – Rita Hayworth and Shekhinah Redemption

In this scene, Rita Hayworth appears as the first visual depiction of the “Shekhinah,” which in the Jewish tradition is the receptive, Divine element in the soul. The underlying theme of the movie can thus be seen as the recovery, re-union or “Redemption” of this Divine Presence that was “lost” as a result of the Fall. “The reunion of God and His Shekhinah constitutes the meaning of redemption.”<sup>18</sup>

Rita Hayworth’s stunning beauty, hair, and smile are also suggestive of the *Shekhinah* equivalent in the *Song of Songs*, the famous “love song” between Christ, the “Bridegroom” and the human soul, the “Bride,” that is typically described in “glowing” terms: “How beautiful you are, my darling! - Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from the hills of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn, coming up from the washing” (Song of Songs 4:1-2).

The sad irony, that captures the tragic plight of the Shawshankers is the fact that this “immense beauty,” this “Divine element” of awe is apprehended “ephemerally,” as an outer “projection” on a screen, when in Reality this splendorous Presence is *within* their souls, but in a state of “exile,” “stasis,” in need of a “redemptive” joining. The fact that this scene was filmed in the prison’s former Chapel adds further irony.

Finally, we should mention that the one prisoner who is notably *absent* from this scene is Brooks. When Brooks is later paroled, and enters *Purgatory*, we will witness even more dramatic illustrations of his total estrangement from his inner “wife,” or his *Shekhinah*.



CALAMITY RANGE

### 33 – Calamity Range

When Bogs returns to his cell after a stint in solitary for assaulting Andy, Byron Hadley appears in the guise of “Michael,” the “Avenging Angel,” and gives him a retaliatory thrashing that lands Bogs in a wheelchair. This act of “Divine vengeance” is a direct effect of his earlier “involvement” with Andy where he learned the profound lesson of “trusting his wife.”

It is also noteworthy that after Hadley strikes Bogs and he falls to the ground, he literally “crawls out of his cell on his stomach” invoking the “curse” of the serpent: “So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! *You will crawl on your belly* and you will eat dust all the days of your life” (Gen 3:14); “Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon...that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth” (Rev 12: 7, 9).

Not surprisingly, we don’t find a red-letter version of the Holy Bible on Bogs’ shelf, but rather a book called “Calamity Range.” This is a western about a place called “lost valley” (Shawshank Prison) where “outlaws” (convicted felons) could find refuge by claiming that the “law wanted them unjustly” (lawyers’ fault, everyone is innocent).<sup>19</sup>



### 34 – Resist the Devil

Bogs' exit from Shawshank underscores a primary teaching of the interior life: that although the forces of opposition within the soul that resist and oppose transformation and are formidable, they are not all powerful and can be overcome with persistence and faithful resolve. Christ established the model for this with His victory over the devil during his forty days of temptation in the wilderness.

Bogs' prison number, #31804 might also be related to another Stephen King story called "1408." In this film, an "evil room" at a hotel becomes the setting of a "Kafkaesque prison" of horror. In the movie, the numbers (1,4,0,8) are added up to "13;" suggesting this number in its sinister, evil attribution. The last four digits of Bogs' number, "1804" is a re-shuffling of "1408." Thus, the number of "transformation," "3" is countered by the evil, sinister number "13."





### 35 – Watch Ye Therefore

In this scene, there are two references to Scripture that continue the pattern of invoking the interior life. While Andy's favorite passage: "Watch ye therefore for ye know not when the master of the house cometh" appears superficially to be a reference to the Warden, it is in actuality an allusion to the practice of "watching," or deep interior prayer. "Jesus admonished the disciples to watch and pray. This is what we are doing in centering [contemplative] prayer. Watching is just enough activity to stay alert. Praying is opening and consenting to God's presence and action within."<sup>20</sup> It is not surprising that this call to deep prayer is "Andy's" favorite passage of Scripture.

The Warden's preferred line: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life" exposes, like his earlier "666" attribution, the Warden's "clever disguise:" "And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14 ESV). The consciousness or "light" of the ego, the false self is *not* the "Divine" Light," the "Light of Life" that Christ speaks of. This is the insidious trap of "spiritual institutionalization," to lull us into a passive acceptance of this "light" as the True Light of the Divine.

Shakespeare also reminds us about the devil's treachery in quoting the Bible for his own ends: "The devil can cite scripture for his purpose. An evil soul producing holy witness is like a villain with a smiling cheek; A goodly apple rotten at the heart; O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!"<sup>21</sup>

It is this "Divine Light," the "light of Christ" that is vitally entered in deep silent forms of prayer: "You are that light beyond all light who gives the minds eye supernatural light in such fullness and perfection that you bring clarity even to the light of faith. In that faith I see that my soul has life, and in that light receives you who are the Light."<sup>22</sup>

A man in a dark suit and tie is looking out from behind vertical metal bars. The background is dark and industrial, with some blue light reflecting off the bars. The text is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

"There is but one point  
in the universe where  
God communicates with  
us, that is the center  
of our soul.. to seek  
him.. we must enter into  
our own interior."  
William Law

SALVATION LIES WITHIN

### 36 – Salvation Lies Within

“Salvation lies within” can be seen as either a reference to the “Salvation” that is engendered from the study and application of the *Wisdom of the Bible*, or as an allusion to the hiding place of Andy’s “Rock Hamer,” the instrument of his “Salvation.” However, in keeping with the numerous references to the interior life, it also continues the emphasis on the “within” associated with the tradition of contemplative prayer. Scripture maintains famously that the “Kingdom of Heaven” – the place where God dwells, is *within* (Luke 17:21).

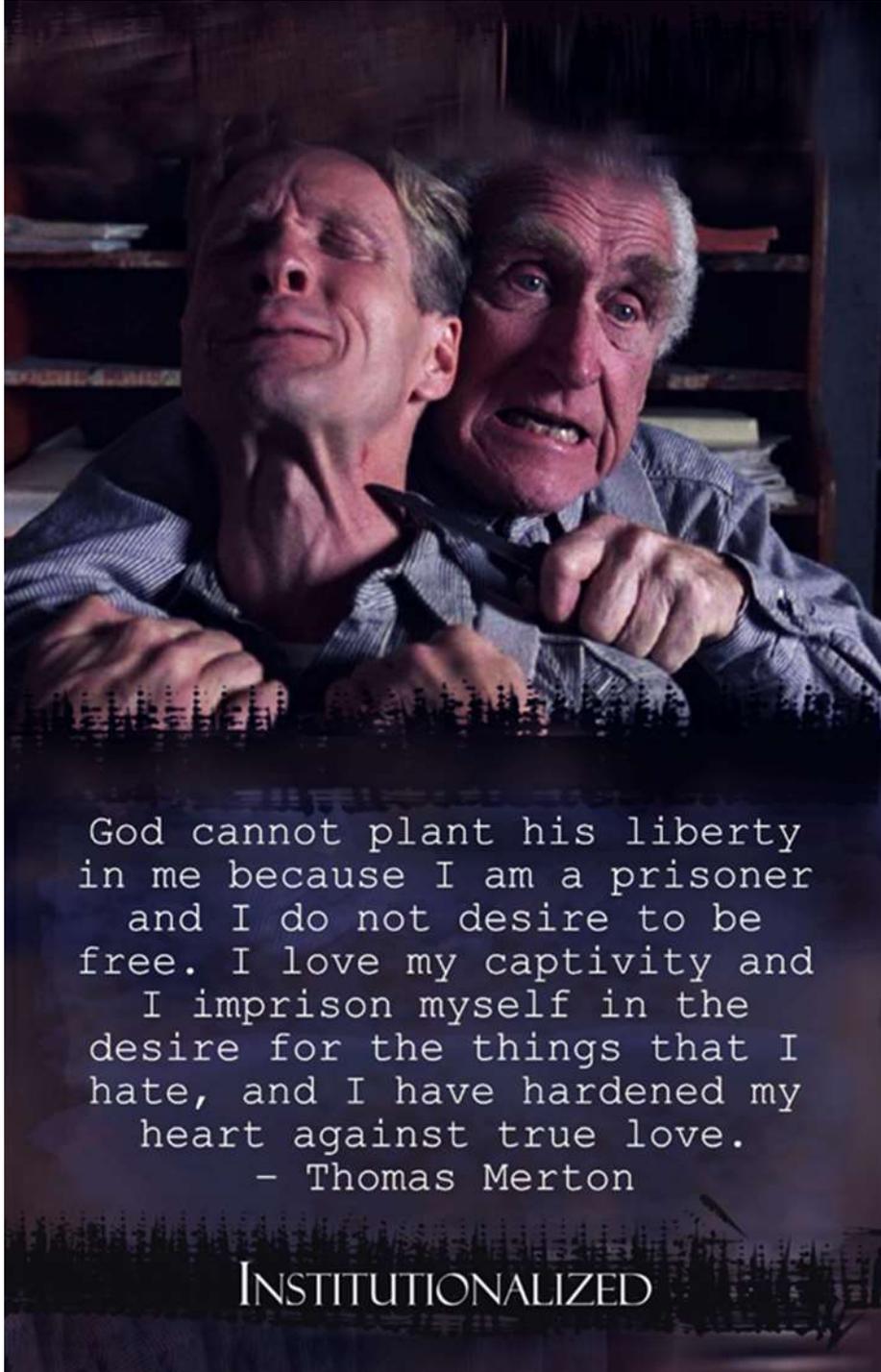
Scholar Bernard McGinn adds: “Augustine taught that ‘to go *within* is to go above,’...the...movement *into* the soul's ground would lead to a discovery of the God within who is infinitely more than the soul.”<sup>23</sup> The continued layers of stress on the interior life, here and ahead, are designed to break our casual apathy and indifference towards these dimensions and awaken us to the transformational possibilities that they offer.



THAT'S HIM - THAT'S THE ONE

### **37 – That’s Him – That’s the One.**

In this short scene, we witness yet another “spinoff effect” of Andy’s influence on Hadley. Here, Hadley appears in the guise of the “Archangel Gabriel,” the “messenger.” Of the many ways that Hadley could have introduced Andy to Dekins, the use of the word “One,” in the context of his “involvement” with Andy on the roof, suggests that he is delivering a “Message;” he is making a public announcement of Andy’s Divine status as the “One.”



God cannot plant his liberty  
in me because I am a prisoner  
and I do not desire to be  
free. I love my captivity and  
I imprison myself in the  
desire for the things that I  
hate, and I have hardened my  
heart against true love.

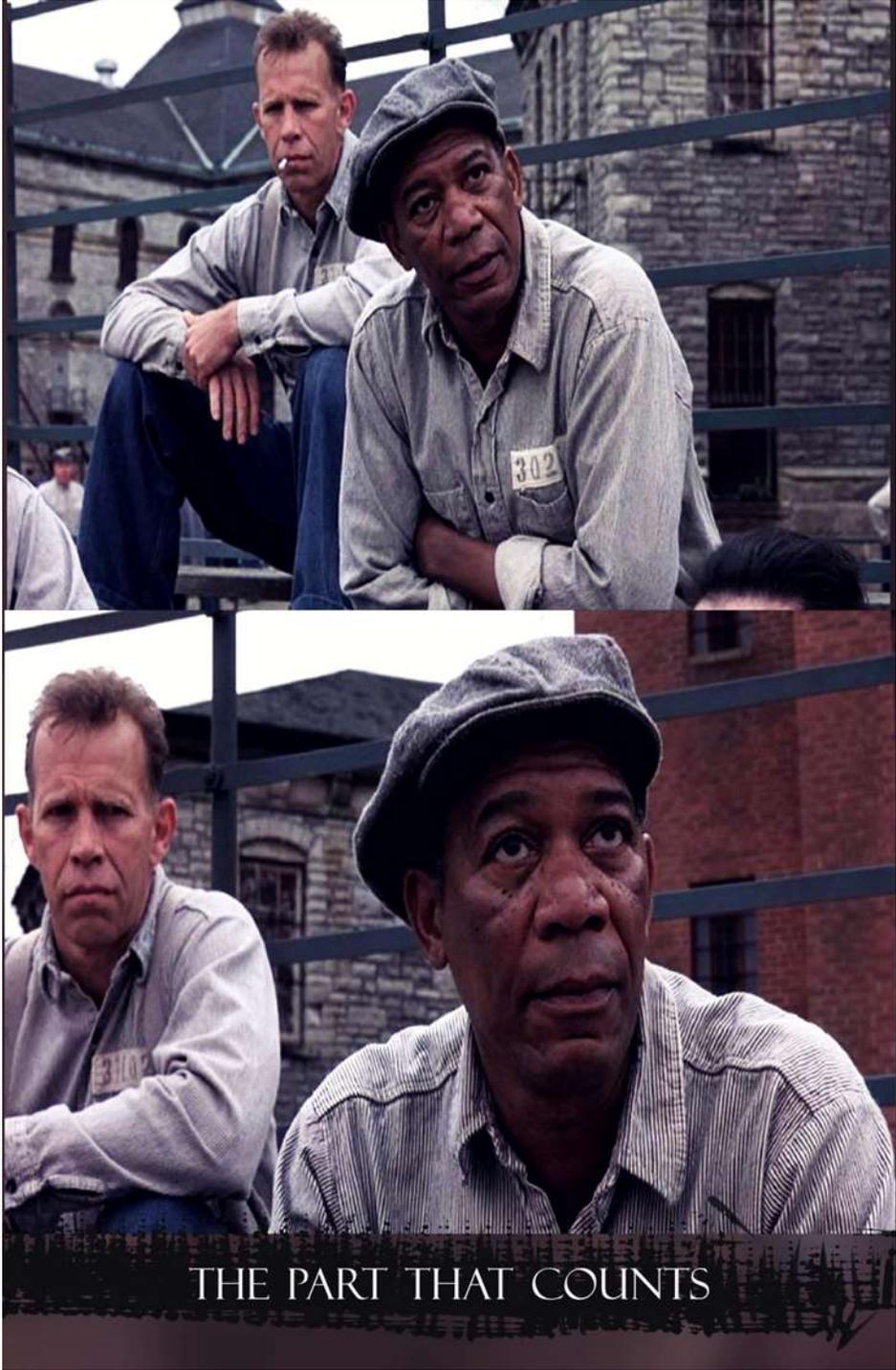
- Thomas Merton

INSTITUTIONALIZED

### **38 – Institutionalized**

When Brooks is granted his parole, we witness outwardly a dramatic case of “*spiritual* institutionalization.” Biblically, this is expressed as an attachment “the world:” “Those who love their life in *this world* will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity” (John 12:250).

Brooks is so attached and conformed the prison of the lower self that anything “outside” of the safety, security and mindless routine of his gray life evokes a fear so profound that he is willing to resort to the threat of murderous violence to avoid it all costs. The paradox of the spiritual life is that when Freedom, liberation, “transformation” and “renewing of the mind” is offered, it is typically rejected or avoided in some manner.



### 39 – The Part That Counts

Outside on the bleachers, Red offers a series of cutting insights that reveal the underlying motivations for Brooks' outburst. His comment about the "walls of the prison:" "These walls are funny. First you hate them, then you get used to them, and before long you depend on them," captures well the dynamic and progressive "fall" into the lower self that insidiously becomes attached, conformed and "loves / depends on this world."

Brooks' release after fifty years corresponds with the Jewish tradition of the year of "Jubilee" which occurred every fiftieth year. In Leviticus we read: "Even if someone is not redeemed in any of these ways, they and their children are to be released in the Year of Jubilee" (Lev 25:54). Notably here, although Brooks was paroled / released in his fiftieth year of Jubilee, he was *not redeemed in any of these ways*. Brooks exhibited no acts of distress or unease with his imprisonment that might "light a fire" to seek a transformative way out of his lower self; he was a friend of Andy, but never became a "disciple" in the way that Red did. In short: *He was not redeemed in any way* and entered the "outside" with his prideful disposition of "importance" and "education."

Red's classic closing line: "They send you here for life, and that's exactly what they take, the part that counts any way" again concisely captures the Fall in terms of the serpent's successful "theft" of humanities "Divine intimacy" with the Lord God (the part that counts).



## 40 – Brooks Was Here

Our first sight of Brooks “on the outside” is on the bus “trembling with fear.” Like an inhabitant of Plato’s dark cave that emerges for the first time into the Light of Reality, Brooks is spiritually unprepared / “unredeemed” for the transition to a new life beyond the walls of his familiar library at Shawshank, from *Inferno* to *Purgatory*, or in terms of the spiritual life as the shift from full blown imprisonment in the lower self to the “breakthrough” and freedom of the interior life.

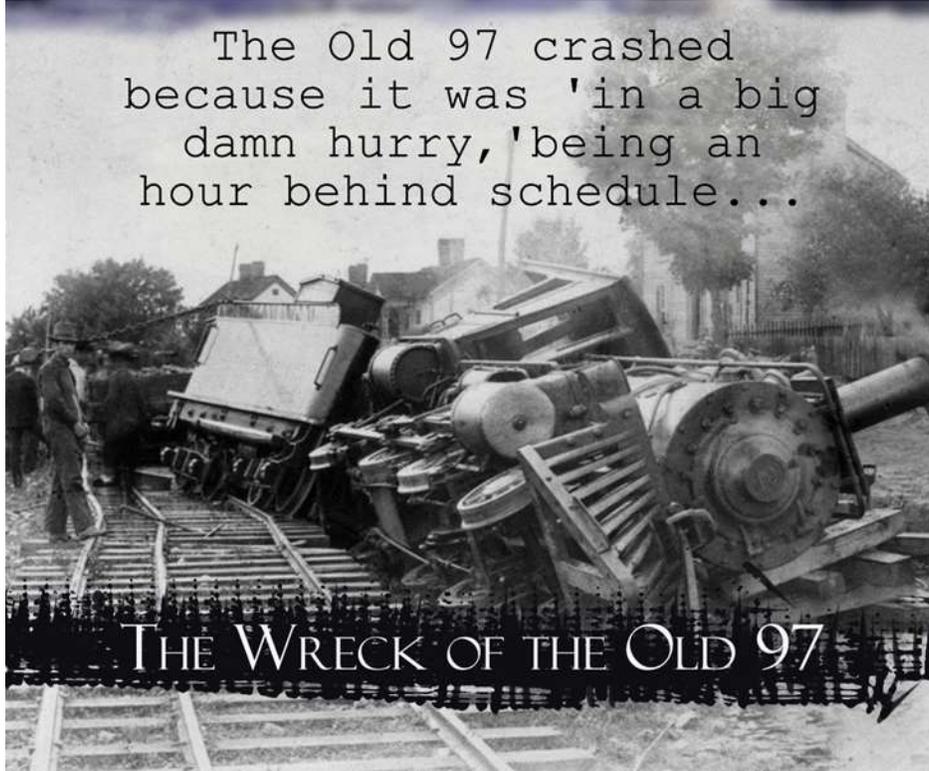
William Faulkner once commented: “What matters is at the end of life, when you're about to pass into oblivion, that you've at least scratched 'Kilroy was here,' on the last wall of the universe.” This suggests the idea of leaving behind a testament that inspires, moves, and stimulates others to “reach for the stars;” to aim for the Higher things in life, even the “Transcendent.” Although Brooks ultimately left a testament of disaster and catastrophe, his failure can serve as a motivational impetus to not “follow in his steps;” to embrace change and transformation, to let go of the attachment to “this life.”



Hey watch it  
**OLD** timer!  
Brooks: #300**97**

The world  
went and got  
itself in a  
big damn  
hurry.

The Old 97 crashed  
because it was 'in a big  
damn hurry,' being an  
hour behind schedule...



THE WRECK OF THE OLD 97

## 41 – The Wreck of the Old 97

In September of 1903, a train called the “Fast Mail” or “Old 97,” which had a reputation for always being on time arrived in Monroe, Virginia an hour behind schedule. When it departed for its next stop, the engineer increased the train’s speed from the normal 40 to 50 mph in an attempt to “redeem the time” that the train had lost. Tragically, because of its enhanced and frenetic pace, the train crashed and eleven people were killed. The song: “The Wreck of the Old 97” was written to commemorate this tragedy.

In “odd 5,” (1905) - two years after this disaster, Brooks arrived at Shawshank. Brooks shares three essential elements with this train:

- 1) Brooks was also “old,” and his prison number ends with “97.”
- 2) Brooks was also “late,” behind schedule” in the development of his soul; exhibiting no signs of “personal growth,” no desire to “leave the prison.”
- 3) Like the train, that was also “late” and “in a big damn hurry,” his life ended in tragedy and death.

The “translation” of his number, “30097” might be: “My potential transformation (3), ends in a “tragic wreck (97).”

Like the foolish virgins who “lacked oil” when the Bridegroom returned because of their willful abandon, and desperately sought to compensate for their negligence by asking for oil from the wise virgins, Brooks is similarly flailing on the outside and hurriedly trying to compensate for his own disregard of spiritual growth and development.



MOUNT PURGATORY

## **42 – Mount Purgatory**

The five-tiered Bisman building here serves as a symbol of the seven-tiered mountain of *Purgatory*. Here, Brooks enters the very first level of *Purgatory*, where the sin of pride and virtue of humility are principally addressed. The very top of *Purgatory* is the Garden of Eden, the place of “redemption” that will appear later in the film as “Buxton.”



Make sure your man double  
bags, the last time he  
didn't double bag and the  
bottom near came out...  
make sure you double bag  
like the lady said.

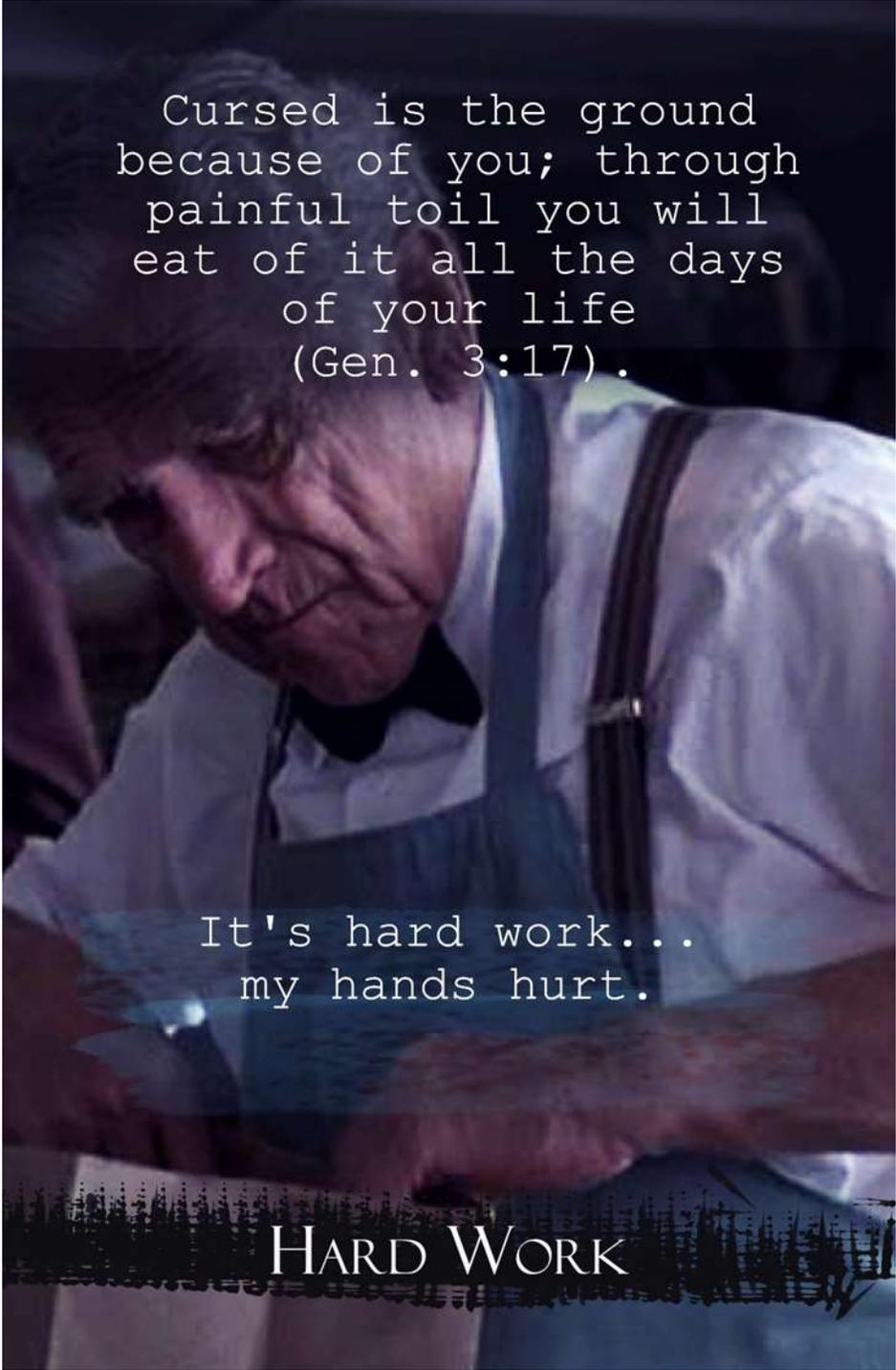
A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE

### 43 – A Failure to Communicate

In these two scenes, we witness a striking exposition of the state of Brooks' inner soul. On the bus, the young woman, his *Shekhinah* appears on the *opposite side*, suggesting alienation; she is also *younger*, and seated *behind* him, suggesting a past where she was abandoned, and never matured or advanced.

Brooks also carries his suitcase with his *left* hand, and here sits on the *left* side of the bus. As Mazzotta explains,<sup>24</sup> left is associated with *Inferno*, and right with *Purgatory*. Brooks is clearly “out of phase” with his new reality. (Red will later carry his case with his *right* hand and sit on the *right* side on the bus).

In the Foodway, Brooks and his *Shekhinah* “communicate” indirectly, through a “third party;” as if he is not “known” or even recognized; the epidemic of a “failure to communicate.” He even receives a cryptic “dismaying word” as well, since “double-bag” sounds very similar to the discouraging “double-back” (to Shawshank). After fifty years of neglect and avoiding the path of inner growth and transformation, Brooks now faces the inevitable consequence of his choices.



Cursed is the ground  
because of you; through  
painful toil you will  
eat of it all the days  
of your life  
(Gen. 3:17).

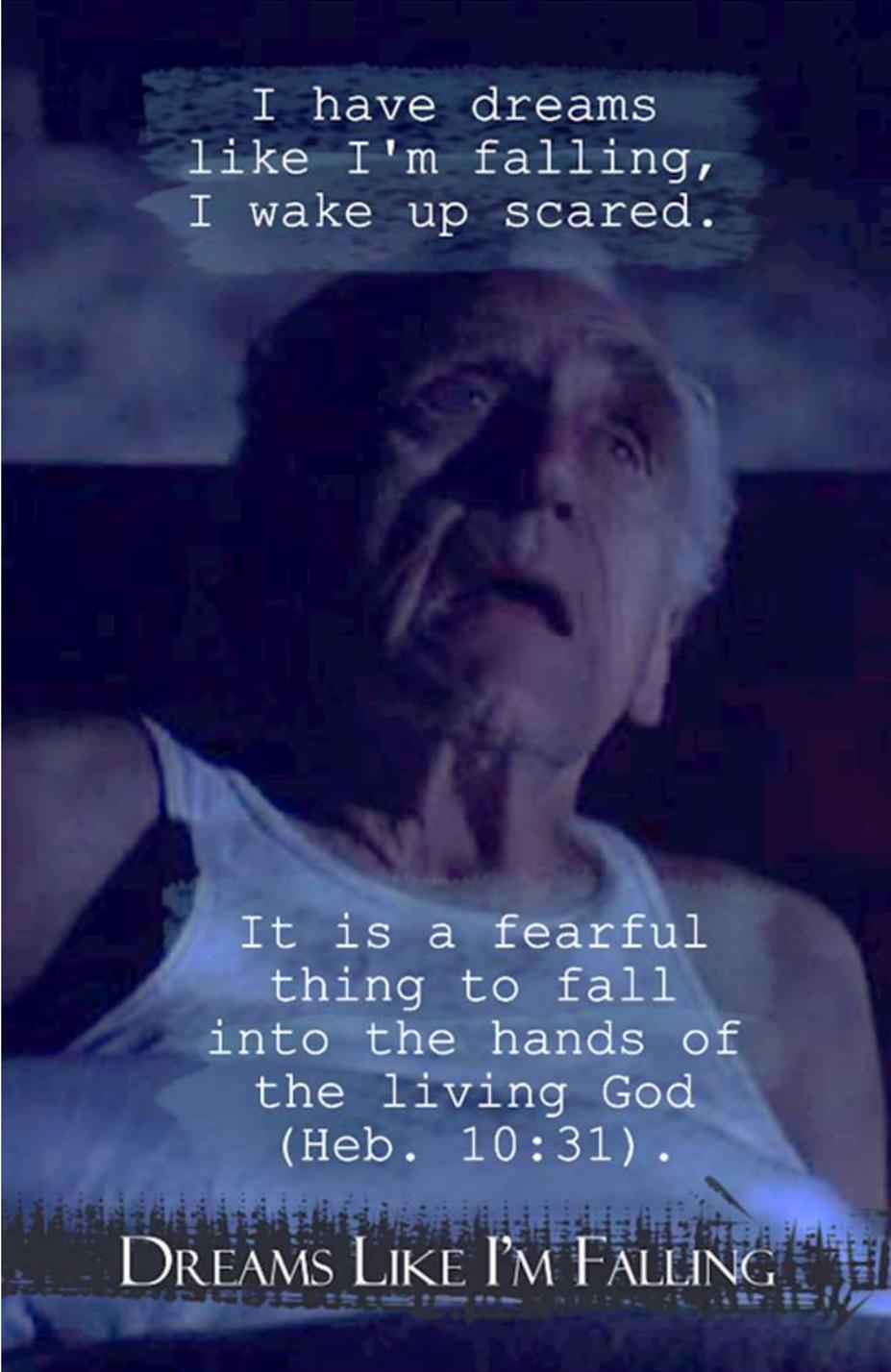
It's hard work...  
my hands hurt.

HARD WORK

#### 44 – Hard Work

In the interior life of prayer, here symbolized by the “outside,” the inner self receives the “Divine Manna,” the superessential “Daily Bread of Being” from God. This is what sustains and supports the growth of the “New Being.” In the “Foodway” we witness the “way” that the soul receives this vital “food” from on High. Brooks’ comment that his job is “hard work” and that his “hands hurt” is a direct reflection of the “painful toil” that was pronounced in Eden. His complete alienation from his *Shekhinah*, and the resulting incapacity to receive the vital “soul food” in this new world is another telling portent to the coming “train wreck” of his life.

Within the walls of the prison of the lower self, Brooks was able to subsist in his routine, mundane existence in exile from his *Shekhinah*, but on the “outside,” without a basic familiarity with his inner self, the soul dies from spiritual emaciation when it doesn’t receive the vital “Bread of Spiritual life.”



I have dreams  
like I'm falling,  
I wake up scared.

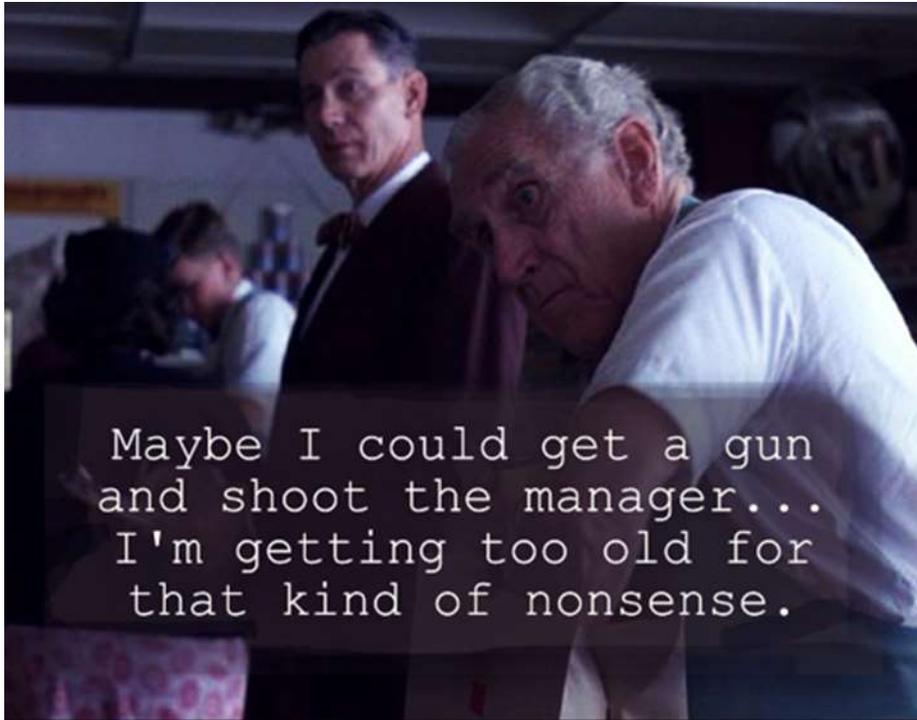
It is a fearful  
thing to fall  
into the hands of  
the living God  
(Heb. 10:31).

DREAMS LIKE I'M FALLING

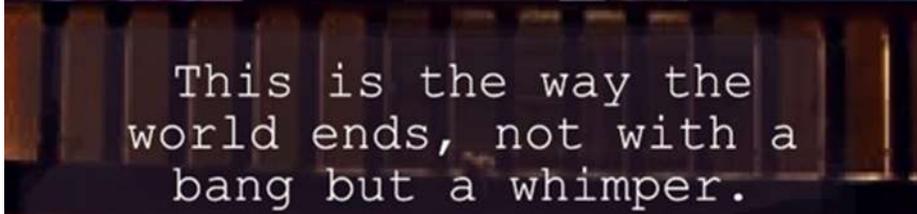
## 45 – Dreams Like I’m Falling

Unlike the walls of the prison, where the “powers that be” are kept at a comfortable distance, the transition to the “outside” introduces another dynamic where the soul moves progressively closer to the “numinous” Presence of God’s mystery. The dim awareness of this increasing Presence within the soul, elicits, as Rudolph Otto noted a “fascination” and a “fear.”

Original sin in Eden is classically depicted as a “fall;” as a movement *away* from God. The interior life can be seen as a type of “second fall;” the return to God’s presence – “*falling into* the hands of God” towards Redemptive union. In Brooks, we witness the “fear” of the soul’s increasing proximity to the Divine and the resultant “panic” that drives it away before it safely arrives in God’s presence.



Maybe I could get a gun  
and shoot the manager...  
I'm getting too old for  
that kind of nonsense.



This is the way the  
world ends, not with a  
bang but a whimper.

T.S. Eliot



THE HOLLOW MEN

## 46 – The Hollow Men

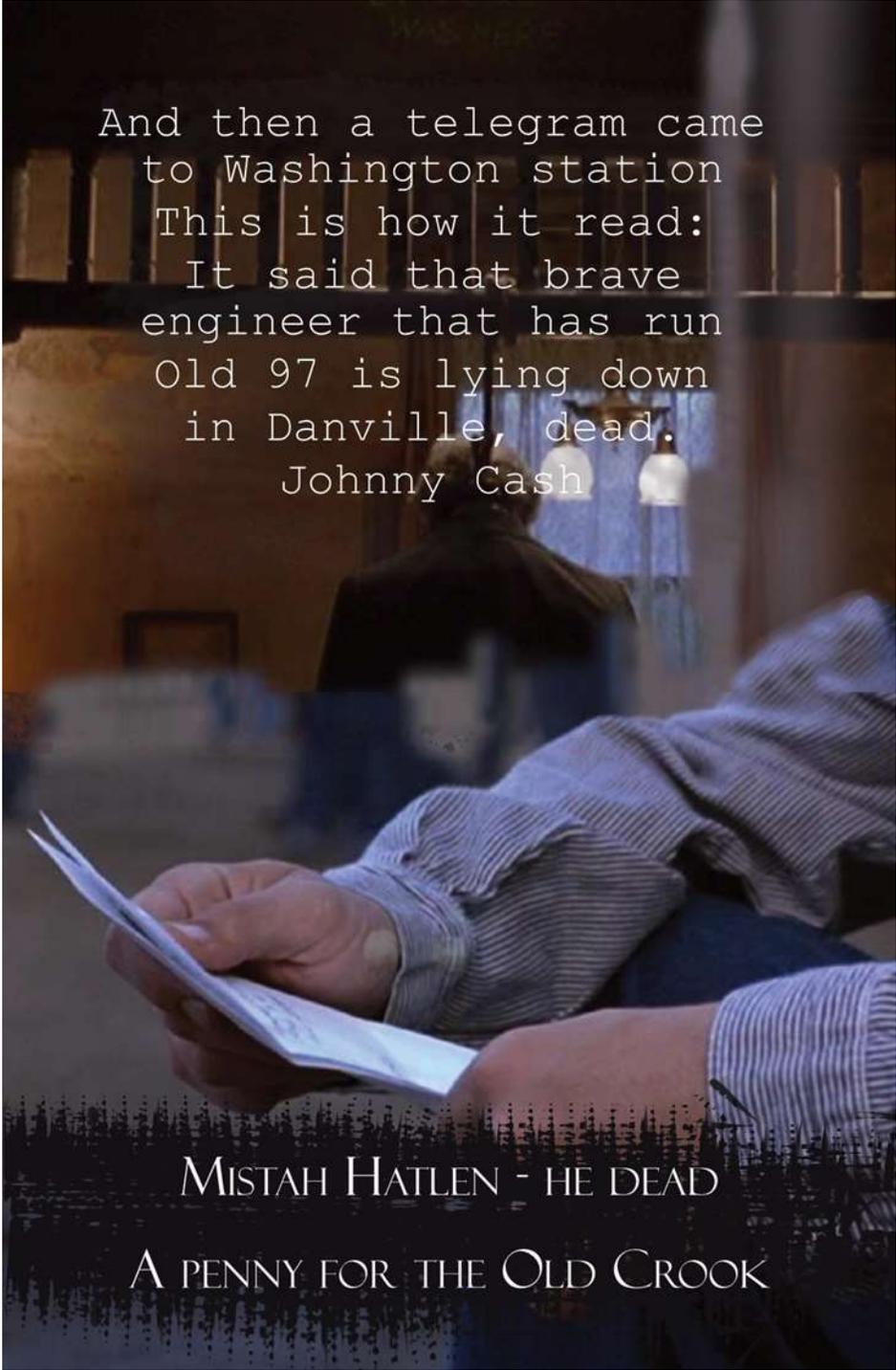
Brooks' comments about "robbing the Foodway" and "shooting the manager" again evokes the specter of the Fall. Like "an old crook," the instinct to "take" and "steal" emerges, in addition to the thought "murder." The choice to remain alienated from one's *Shekhinah*, to neglect interior growth and development renders the soul "Hollow" at the core, and it inevitably ends in a sorrowful whimper.



## **47 – The Mirror of the Soul**

This is another image that captures the final makeup of Brooks' soul. Instead of the glow of a "halo" or "light" above his head, depicting the presence of spiritual growth and development, we see "bars." In a later scene, we will see Red's reflected image in a mirror and witness a vividly contrasting portrayal.

Brooks is a "Gollum-like" figure; consumed and "possessed" by his "precious" self-identity; unwilling to let go of the passing "temporal riches" of the lower self for the Infinite Bounty and Eternal Life offered by Christ.

A person in a striped shirt is shown from the chest down, holding and reading a telegram. The background is a dimly lit station with a person in a dark coat standing in the distance. The text is overlaid on the image in a white, typewriter-style font.

And then a telegram came  
to Washington station  
This is how it read:  
It said that brave  
engineer that has run  
Old 97 is lying down  
in Danville, dead.  
Johnny Cash

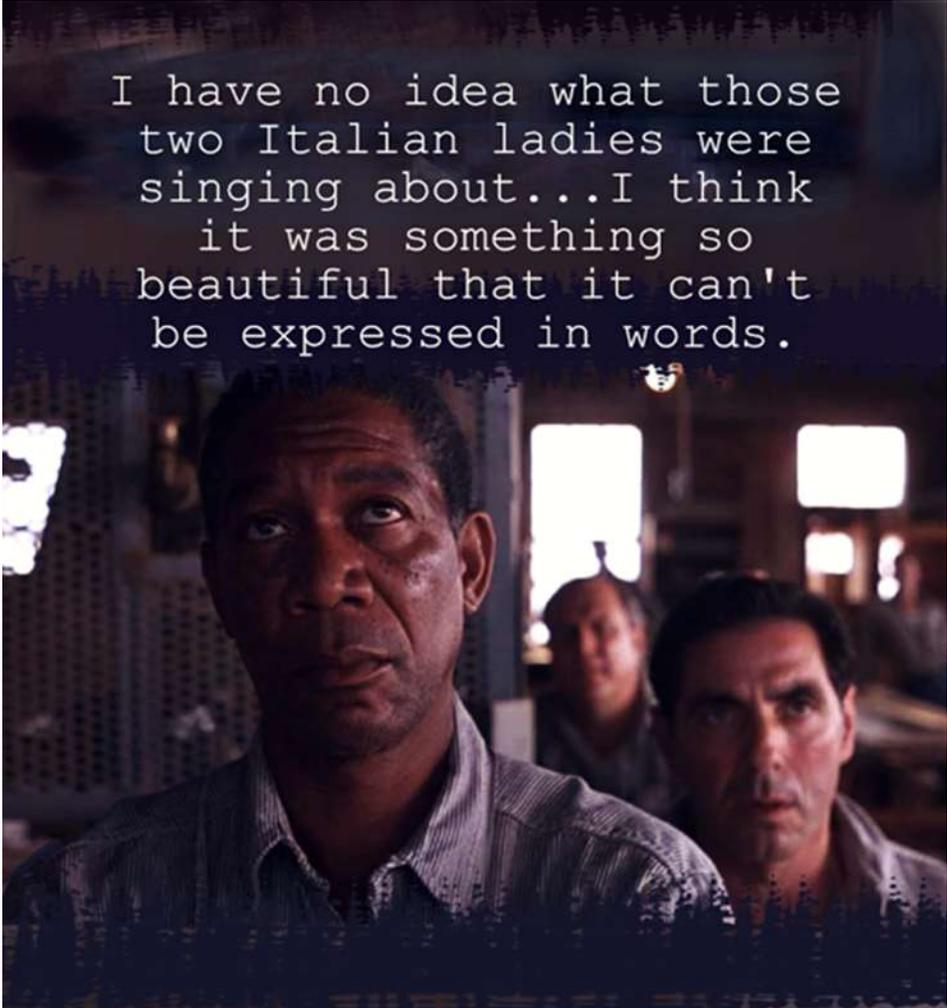
MISTAH HATLEN - HE DEAD

A PENNY FOR THE OLD CROOK

#### **48 – Mistah Hatlen - He Dead / A Penny for the Old Crook**

The tragedy of Brooks ends with the arrival of his letter at the prison. Although he was far from “brave” like the engineer in the Johnny Cash song, he left behind a telling testament for the importance of befriending one’s *Shekhinah* and the inner life of the soul.

We have adapted the epigrams from T.S. Eliot’s poem, *The Hollow Men*: “Mistah Kurtz – he dead...a penny for the old guy” to “memorialize” Brooks’ life. No doubt, Brooks’ lesson of spiritual neglect made an imprint on Red, it surely “lit a fire” and inspired him in his task of “reaching for the stars.”



I have no idea what those  
two Italian ladies were  
singing about...I think  
it was something so  
beautiful that it can't  
be expressed in words.

I did not understand the  
hymn...nor could I bear full  
beauty of its harmonies  
(Purg 32:61).

SOMETHING SO BEAUTIFUL

## 49 – Something So Beautiful

The translation of the Opera segment played in the prison yard, *The Marriage of Figaro* is: “On the breeze...what a gentle little zephyr...this evening will sign...Under the pine trees...and the rest he’ll understand.”<sup>25</sup> These lines closely resemble the following from the *Song of Songs*: “When the day’s cool breeze comes up and the shadows lengthen, [evening] I will get myself to the mountain of myrrh to the hill of Frankincense. Everything about you is beautiful, my love; you are without a flaw” (Song of Songs 4:6,7 CJB).

Both the Opera and the *Song of Songs* reference a *breeze* that is either *gentle* or *cool* and a *meeting* that is to take place in the *evening*. This scene is a prelude or precursor to Buxton. What is “so beautiful that it can’t be expressed in words” is the triumph and success of Red’s “Redemption.”

The *anticipated meeting* alluded to here, will later be *actualized* when Red arrives in Buxton, where the symbolic context of the scene will suggest the successful joining or meeting of “Heaven and earth,” Divine and human. As we will see, Buxton will contain a treasure trove of symbolic content that will “solve all the riddles.”

This is also the second of three appearances in the film that has:

1. A Marriage / Wedding theme (The Marriage of Figaro)
2. The mention of freedom (“For the briefest of moments, every last man in Shawshank felt free.”)
3. The presence of “thick darkness” (The black album).



This side  
and that,  
my eyes  
were walled  
about with..  
a holy  
smile.  
(Purg 32:4-5)

## A HOLY SMILE

## 50 – A Holy Smile

Unlike Red, who has “no idea of what those two Italian ladies were singing about,” Andy understands *completely* the significance of the Opera segment as well as the *future events* that are to unfold in Buxton and the success of his Redemption of Red’s immortal soul.

Andy’s beaming smile is the smile of Divine approval and admiration for Red’s efforts in successfully navigating his journey through *Purgatory* and arriving in Buxton in fulfillment of his earlier promise to “find that hayfield.” In the *Divine Comedy*, the “smile of Beatrice” also symbolizes approval from “on High.” This is: “Annui Coeptis,” the Latin phrase that appears on the dollar bill: “He [The Divine Power] has smiled upon our accomplishments.”

It is also not surprising that Andy “turns up the volume” of the Opera to gleefully relish “what he sees.”



## 51 – The Inner Music

Andy’s use of the term “music” is significant since it will emerge as a central symbol of transformation ahead. His statement that his time in solitary was “easy” because he had “music” in his “head” and his “heart” alludes to an aspect of the Orthodox tradition that portrays deeper forms of prayer as: “...standing before God with the *mind in the heart*.”<sup>26</sup> The presence of “music” in the *head and heart* suggests this form of prayer, *The Prayer of the Heart*, where there is a deep harmony and resonance between the soul and the Divine.

St Augustine was one of the earliest writers to use music as a symbol for intimacy with the Sacred. As Dom Cuthbert Butler remarks: “And so he [Augustine] comes to the mystic experience itself. Then he is struck dumb with astonishment. It is as if some strains of the music of the heavenly festival reached the ear of his heart, leading him on by a mysterious inward delight.”<sup>27</sup>



I played a mean harmonica  
as a younger man, lost  
interest in it though.

Something touched me  
deep inside - the day  
the music died.  
Don McLean

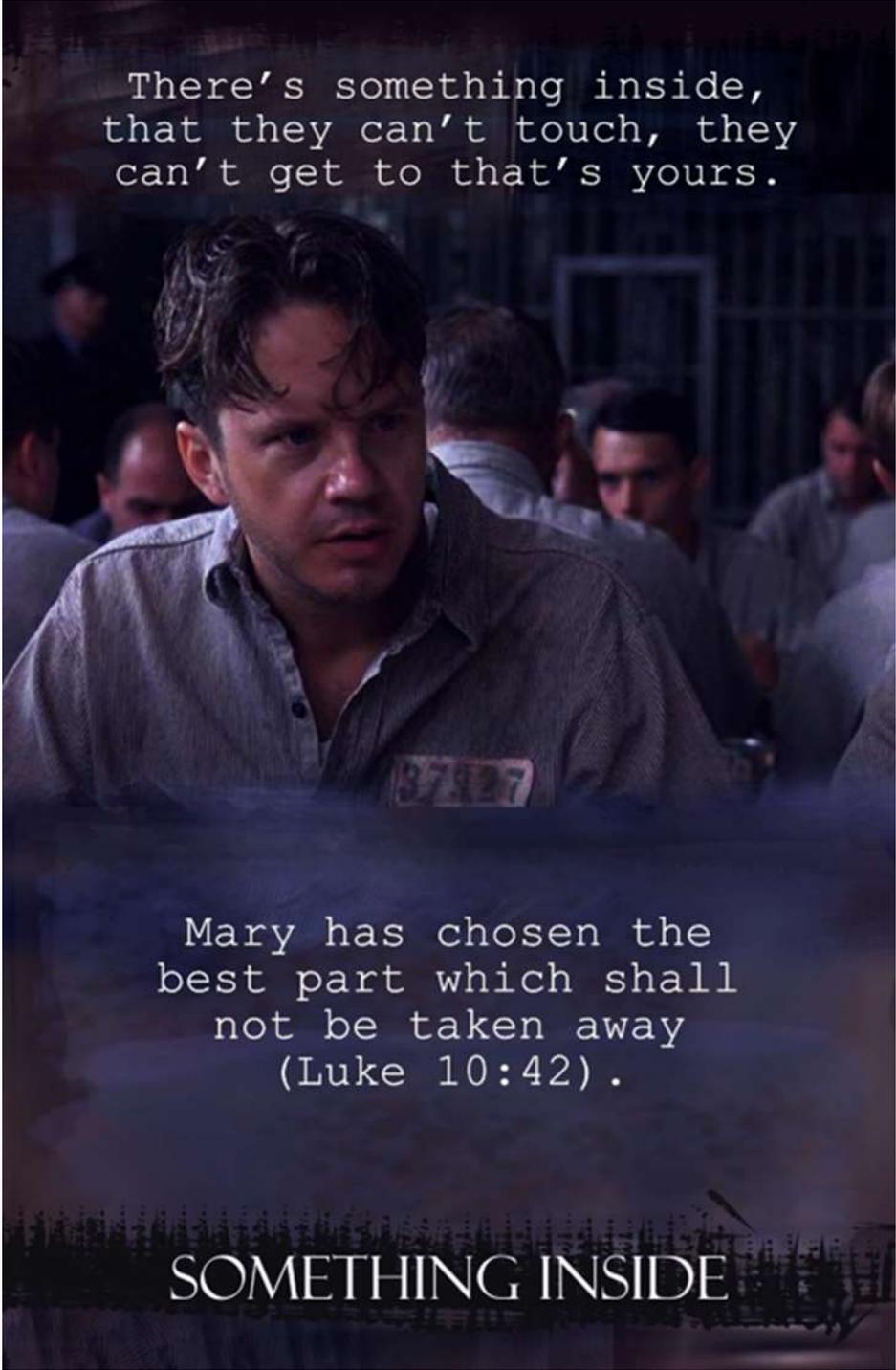
THE DAY THE MUSIC DIED

## 52 – The Day the Music Died

The line: “The day the music died” is a reference to a song by Don McClean called *American Pie*. While the song is ostensibly about a tragic plane crash that killed Buddy Holly, the Big Bopper, Richie Valens as well as other social events in that era, the song contains multiple “spiritual” references, such as “mortal soul,” “The Bible,” “broken church bells,” “Satan,” and “hell.” Most importantly, the lines: “The three men that I love the most / The Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost / They set sail for the coast / *The day the music died*” - can be seen as a symbolic depiction of the Fall in the Garden of Eden.

If “music” is used as a metaphor for the pre-Edenic time when the harmony, unity between humanity and the Divine (Father, Son, Holy Ghost) existed, the loss or fracture of this harmonious “music,” can be equated with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise; when the Trinity “set sail for the coast;” the “day the music died.”

Red’s comment that: “He played a mean harmonica as a younger man” can thus be cast as a “Cosmic” allusion to an earlier time, before the Fall when the sweet “music” between the Divine and human was in harmony; the time “*before the music died.*”

A man with dark, wavy hair and a serious expression is shown in a prison setting. He is wearing a light-colored, button-down shirt with a name tag that reads "37827". In the background, other prisoners are visible, some looking towards the camera. The scene is dimly lit, with a dark, moody atmosphere. The text is overlaid on the top and bottom of the image in a white, typewriter-style font.

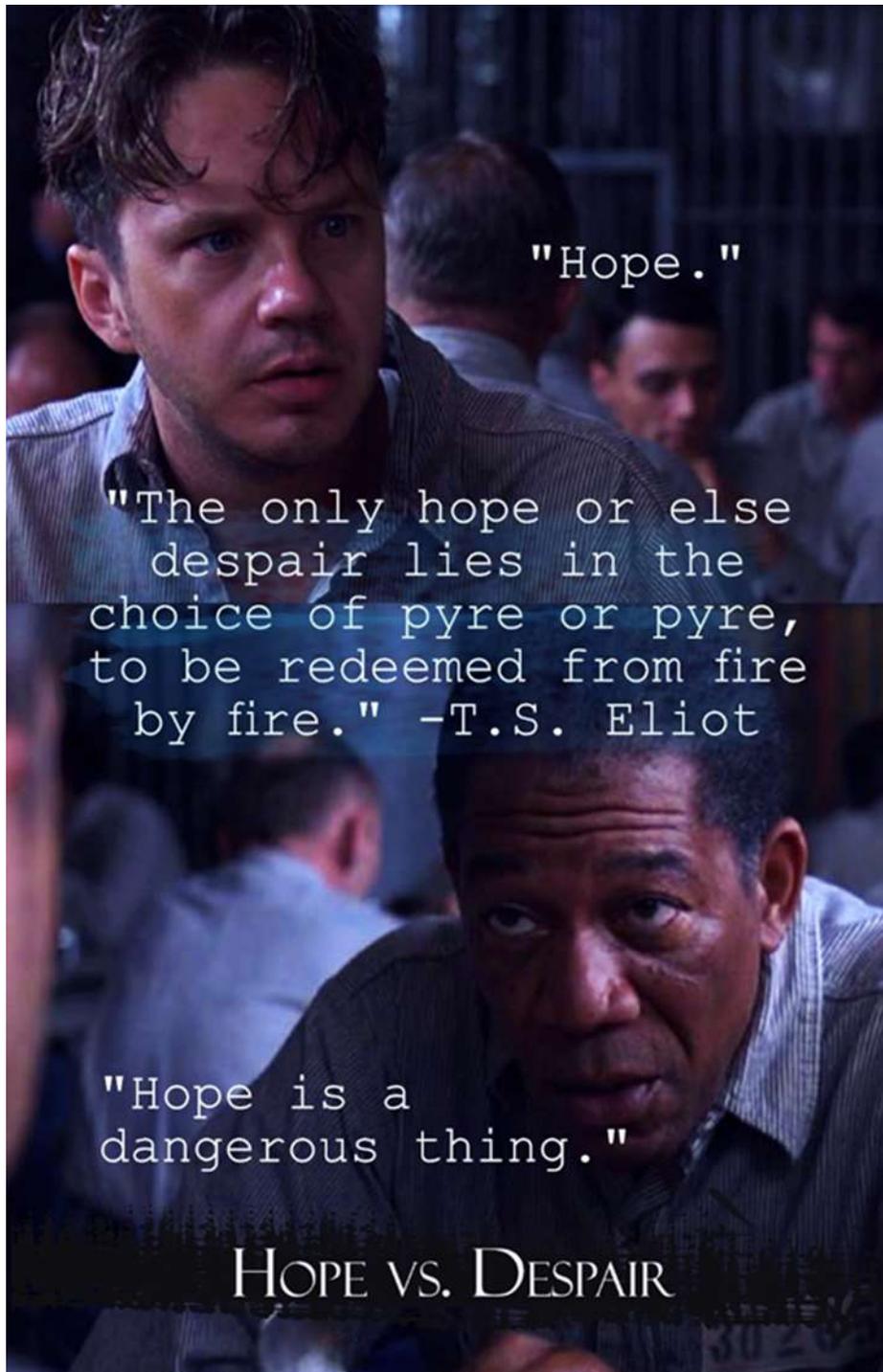
There's something inside,  
that they can't touch, they  
can't get to that's yours.

Mary has chosen the  
best part which shall  
not be taken away  
(Luke 10:42).

SOMETHING INSIDE

### 53 – There’s Something Inside

Andy’s remark about “something *inside*” re-amplifies the Warden’s earlier comment: “Salvation lies *within*.” This new synonym once again stresses the vital importance of that mysterious something “within” or “inside” the soul that can never be “touched” or “taken away” by anything in the universe because its very essence is from God; buried deep beneath the surface self, but nevertheless fully present. This is indeed the “Best part” of the human soul that the interior life seeks to awaken: “In the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is *untouched* by sin and illusion...it is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven.”<sup>28</sup>



"Hope."

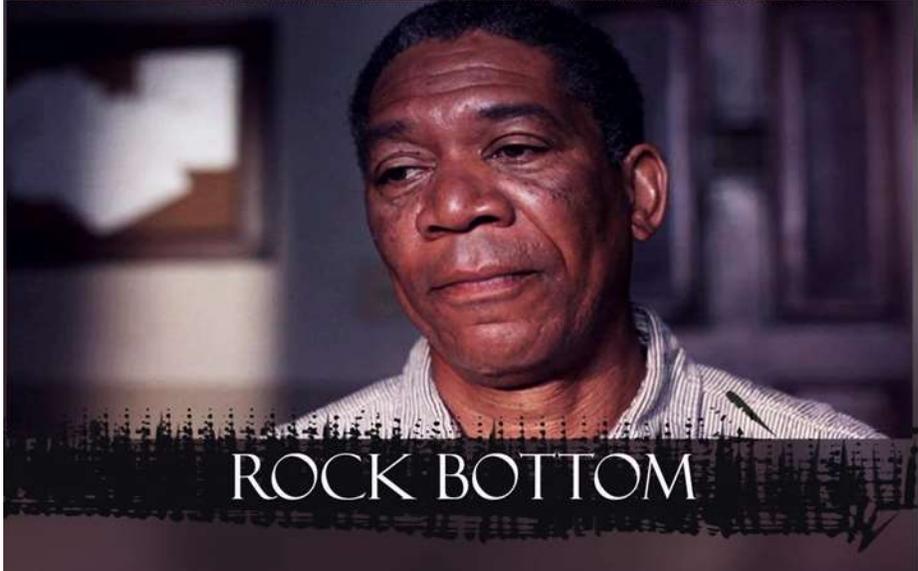
"The only hope or else  
despair lies in the  
choice of pyre or pyre,  
to be redeemed from fire  
by fire." -T.S. Eliot

"Hope is a  
dangerous thing."

HOPE VS. DESPAIR

## **54 – Hope vs. Despair**

Red's comment about hope being "dangerous...a thing that can drive a man insane" alludes to a form of hope that "does the same thing over and over expecting different results." Unfortunately, this is the only form of hope that Red has ever known, so he is currently caught in a cycle of endless frustration. Andy's "Hope" is of an entirely different order; Andy's Hope is again, associated with the essential turn within, to deeper forms of prayer that vitally connect the human and Divine.

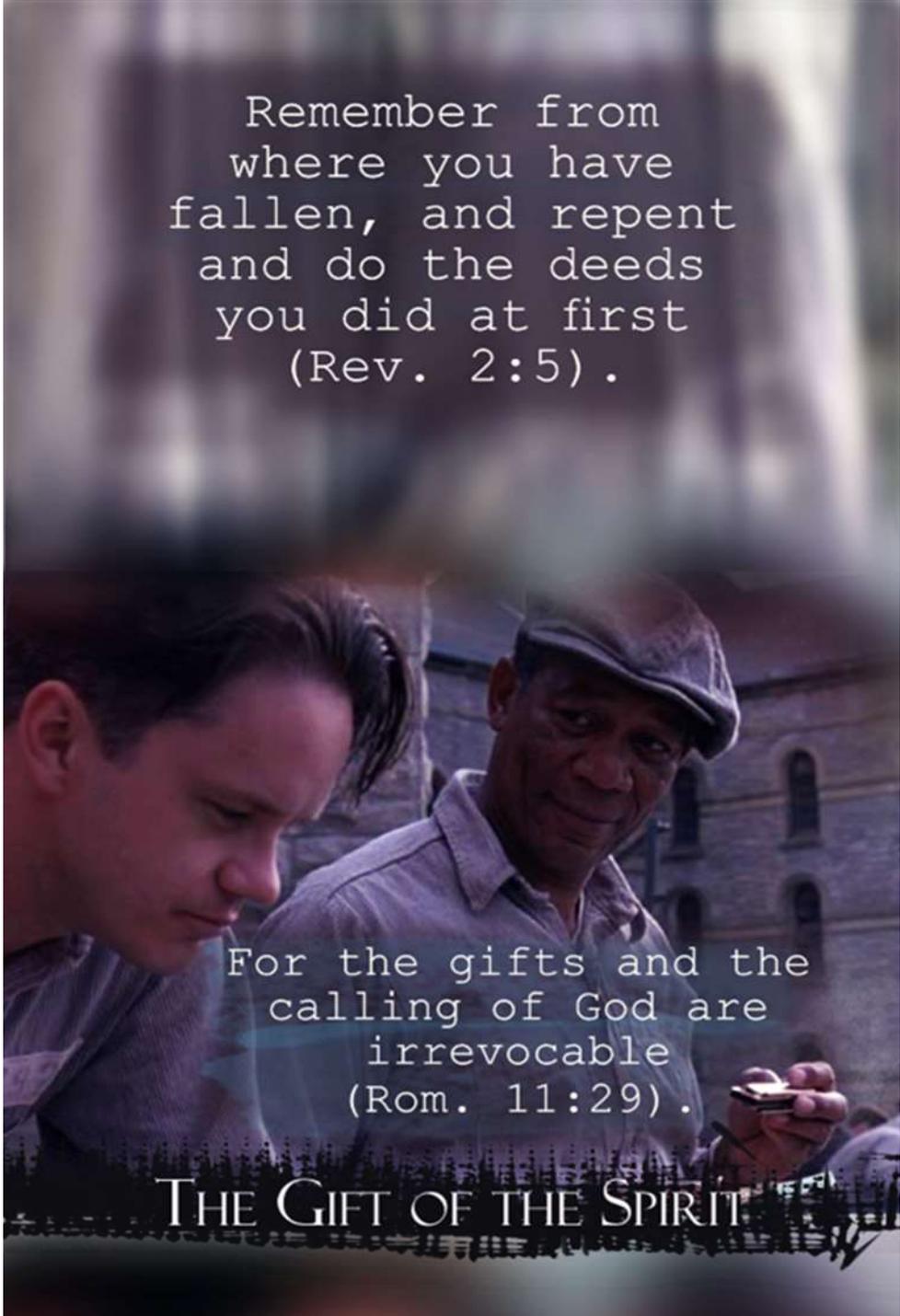


## 55 – Rock Bottom

In his second parole hearing, Red once again encounters the “wall” of five males, which again indicates his lack of internal change or transformation. And, for the second time, he fails to hear his name, suggesting that he is still a “stranger” to the “powers that be.”

The one noticeable difference from his first hearing is his energy and affect. In his first meeting, he was confident, hopeful, and “expected” to be released; but here, he essentially “goes through the motions.” He says all the right things, flashes a smile here and there, but it is clear from his affect that he expects to be rejected once again. Although not extinguished, the “Fire of Hope” that once burned in Red’s soul is now a flickering flame amidst the winds of despair.

Nevertheless, there is significant upside to this “rock bottom” point. Instead of continuing to do “the same thing over and over and expecting a different result,” there is the free choice to *not* do the same thing over and over; to do something *different*, to approach the problem from a new and fresh perspective. The endless cycle of rejection can be repeated, or a new, innovative and original direction can be sought.



Remember from  
where you have  
fallen, and repent  
and do the deeds  
you did at first  
(Rev. 2:5).

For the gifts and the  
calling of God are  
irrevocable  
(Rom. 11:29).

THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT

## 56 – The Gift of the Spirit

The timing of Andy's present comes at the moment when Red has exhausted his reservoir of hope and is looking for an alternative that might change the course of his fortunes. Andy's gift is a symbolic offer to "re-learn," and actively engage the "music" that Red recalls in his comment. On a practical level, the harmonica symbolizes the very first steps of reading about the spiritual life associated with the multiple references to "within," "inside" that have appeared. More specifically, instead of a harmonica, we might imagine Andy giving Red one of the introductory books listed in the recommended reading list, for example, *A Testament of Devotion* by Thomas Kelly or *On Union with God* by Albert the Great.

In terms of the Hero's Journey, this point represents the "Call to Adventure." It is a summons from the "powers that be" to enter the mystery of interior transformation. Red's initial refusal to "play" the harmonica also denotes the most common response: the *refusal* of the call.



## 57 – Repentance – Metanoia

Shortly after his refusal to play the harmonica, we see Red in his cell “contemplating” his harp for over ten seconds. He is in a tug of war between the hope of his gray but known familiar world and the Hope of an unknown, mysterious Reality, that calls him forward. He is like Neo in the movie *The Matrix*, who has been offered a somnambulistic blue pill, and a mysterious red one that beckons him “down the rabbit hole.”

Red’s ultimate decision to blow the harmonica symbolizes a “new direction,” a fundamental change in approach; a movement from static hope that only frustrates to a novel form of Hope that requires “letting go” of the reigns and handing over control to Divine influence and guidance. This is the radical moment of “Metanoia,” of entering the “Big-*Meta*” “Mind-*Noia*” of the Ultimate. The single harp blow represents the affirmative “yes” to Divine action. God will only work deeply within the soul when invited. Christ always knocks within, but *we* must “open” the door with an act of affirmative welcome.

This major transition is also reflected in a quote from *The Count of Monte Christo*: “The wretched and miserable should turn to their Savior first, yet they do not hope in Him until all other hope is exhausted.”<sup>29</sup>

Practically again, instead of a “harp blow,” we might see Red on his bunk reading from a book, with the following voiceover:

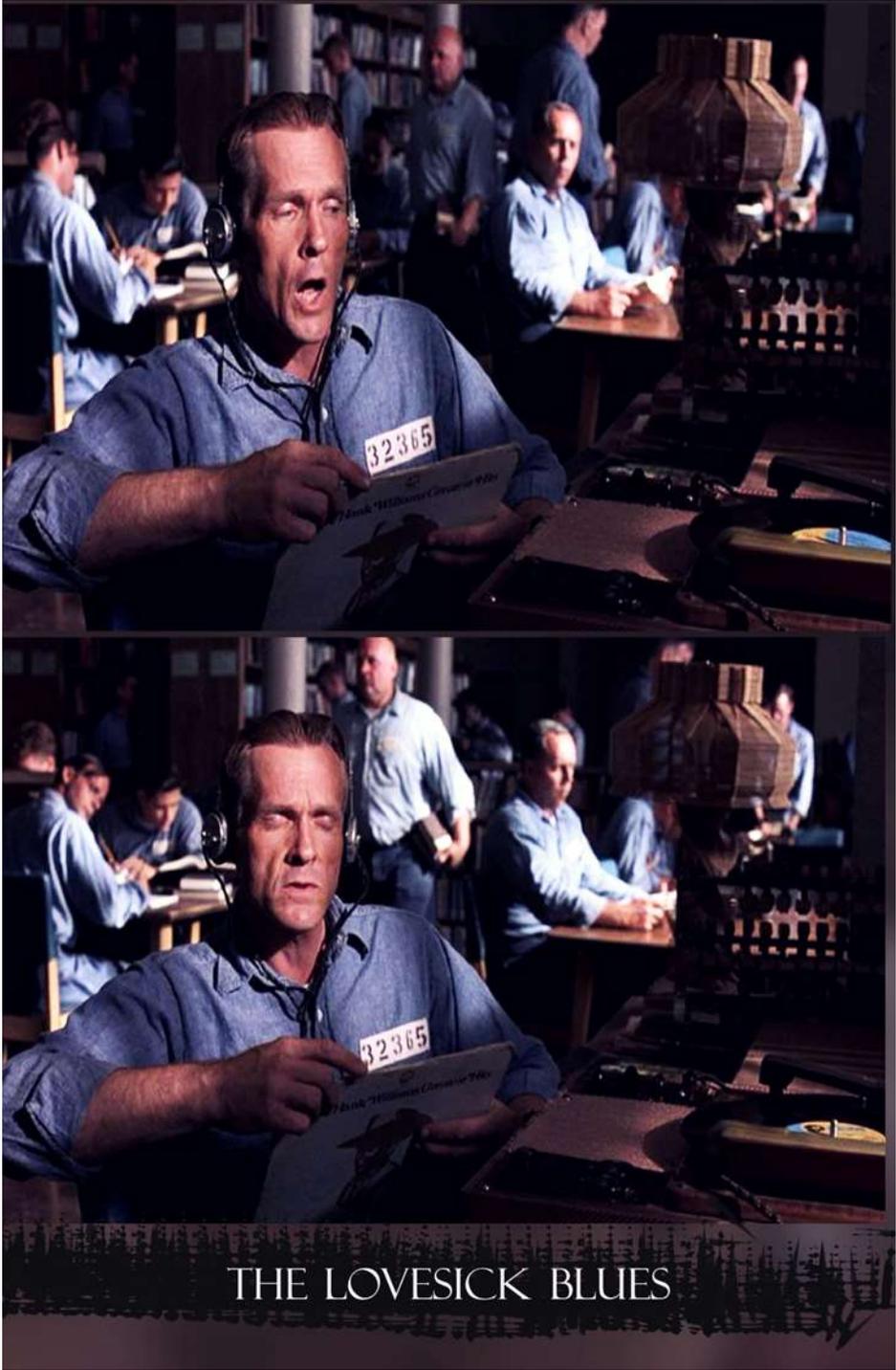
The Hound of Heaven is ever near us, the voice of the Sheperd is calling us home. Too long have we lingered in double-minded obedience and dared not the certainties of His love. For Him do ye seek, all ye pearl merchants. He is ‘the food of grown men.’ Hasten unto Him who is the chief actor of the drama of time and Eternity.<sup>30</sup>

In the Hero’s Journey, this is depicted as “Crossing the Threshold;” this is where all of the dynamic action, the meaningful transformation of the soul begins to unfold and manifest.



## 58 – Breakthrough

Immediately after Red blows his harp, the film transitions to a black screen and then a wall is broken through with a sledgehammer. We are caught up in Red’s voiceover about the “expansion of the library, etc.,” but what is most significant in this scene is the idea that Red has now made a “significant *spiritual breakthrough*.” It’s as if, as a result of his “Crossing the Threshold,” his “Metanoia” that Red’s *soul* has undergone an expansion. Red is now entering the unseen and mysterious depths of his own being; that place where the ground of God and the ground of human soul share a likeness.



## 59 - The Lovesick Blues

The Hank Williams song that Heywood listens to: “The Lovesick Blues” is noteworthy in two respects. The opening lines: “I got a feeling called the blues, oh Lord / Since my baby said goodbye / And I don’t know what to do / All I do is sit and cry;” ostensibly about the misery of missing a physical woman, can also be equated to the loss or exile of the Divine feminine in the soul, the *Shekhinah*. The fact that the lament is made to the “Lord” suggests this spiritual element. Ever since that primal “divorce in Reno,” the soul of humanity has been mired in the “blues.” A similar lament is found in the Psalms: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest” (Psalm 22: 1, 2).

From another perspective, “Love-sick” might also be seen as “Sick-love.” As Ruth Mary Fox notes: “...the *Divine Comedy* is an exposition of the abuse or right use of love as well as of freedom. Hell is disordered love; Purgatory is the setting of love in order; Heaven is perfect love.”<sup>31</sup> Shawshank Prison as the symbolic hell-Inferno is the realm of “sick” or “disordered” love where “self-love” is elevated and exalted over “Divine love;” “this world” over Heaven; creature over Creator. Scripture also communicates this idea as well: “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, *love for the Father is not in them*” (1 John 2:15).

Heywood’s number, #32365 also seems to hold significance. As we recall, Heywood told Andy that he was “Innocent,” and claimed that: “He didn’t do it, lawyer screwed him.” Heywood represents the majority of the Shawshankers who, by virtue of their claim of innocence, passively accept their incarceration in the lower self; they don’t have a sense of “guilt,” a core feeling that there’s “something wrong” that elicits an internal tension that might otherwise motivate them to seek an “escape.” In Scriptural language, they are “conformed to this world:” “Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom 12:2); or, to borrow Red’s term, the “Innocents” are the inmates who are “spiritually institutionalized” in the lower self.

The “365” part of his number suggests the “repetitious grind of daily life.” The number “3” again symbolizes change and dynamic transformation. The number “2” in this context seems to imply this number’s association with “defecation.” So, the “translation” of his number, 3-2-

365, might be: “My potential transformation goes to crap every single day.” This is unfortunately, the sad “mantra” of the Innocents, who are entangled in a “Love-sick” relationship with the “*Waste Land*” called “this world.”

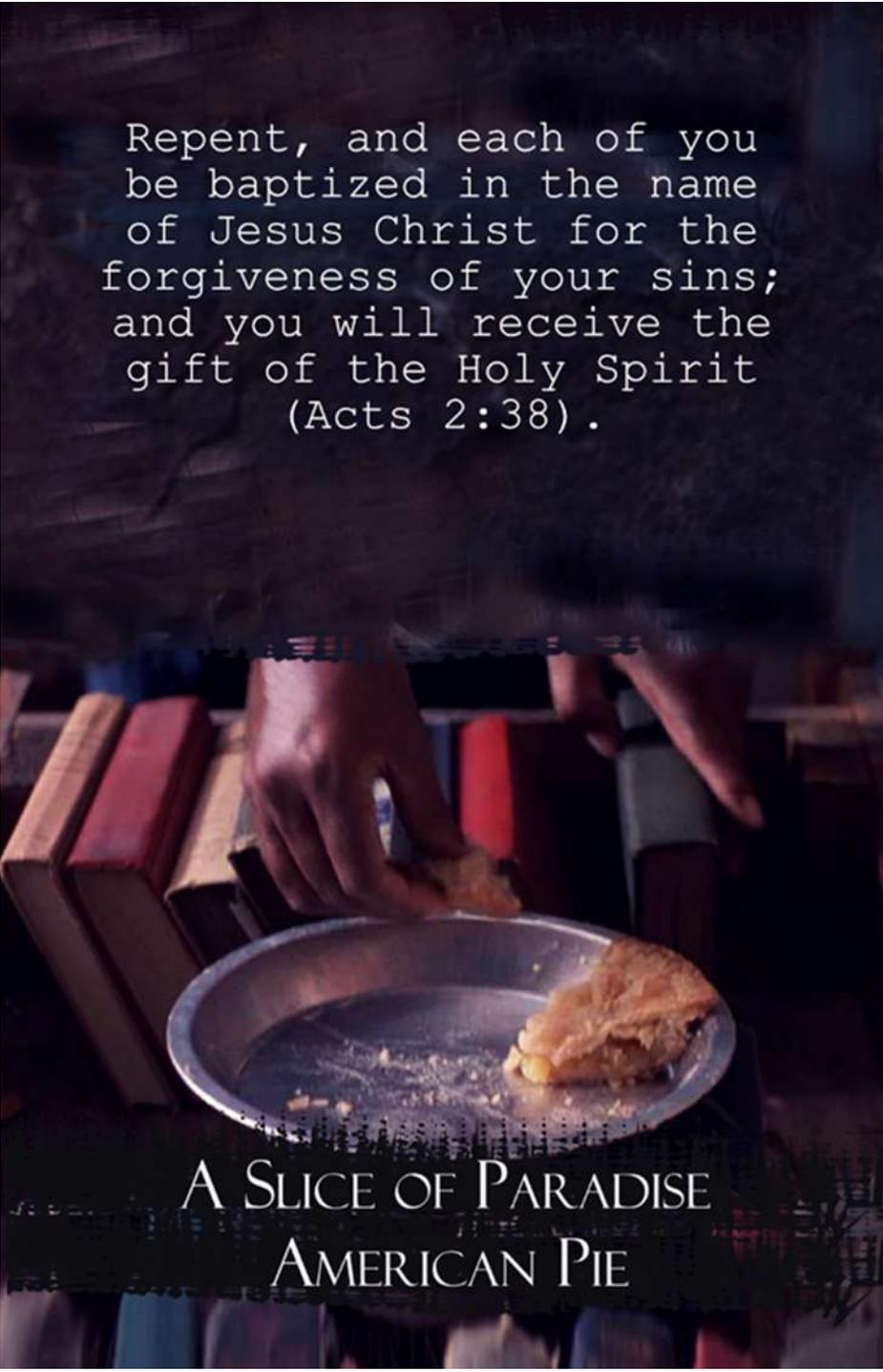


## **60- The Inside Out Program**

The Warden's inside out program can be seen as a grand metaphor for the interior life, whose Prime Directive is to "bring out" and "liberate" the "Inheritance," the "Divine Riches" that are buried or "sleeping" deep inside the soul. These Divine treasures are the very Ground of our Being and are meant to be consciously realized and integrated into the fabric of our life here and now.

While there are "no free rides" in obtaining these Riches - some degree of "sacrificial effort" beyond sheer participation in outer rites is required, this "inside out" program offers a genuine and progressive advance in the purification and sanctification of the soul and will likewise guide it on the redemptive path of liberation and freedom from the tyranny of the lower self. The soul that is successfully "turned inside out" is the one that arrives at the "Narrow Gate" of Life that is St. Peter's Gate.

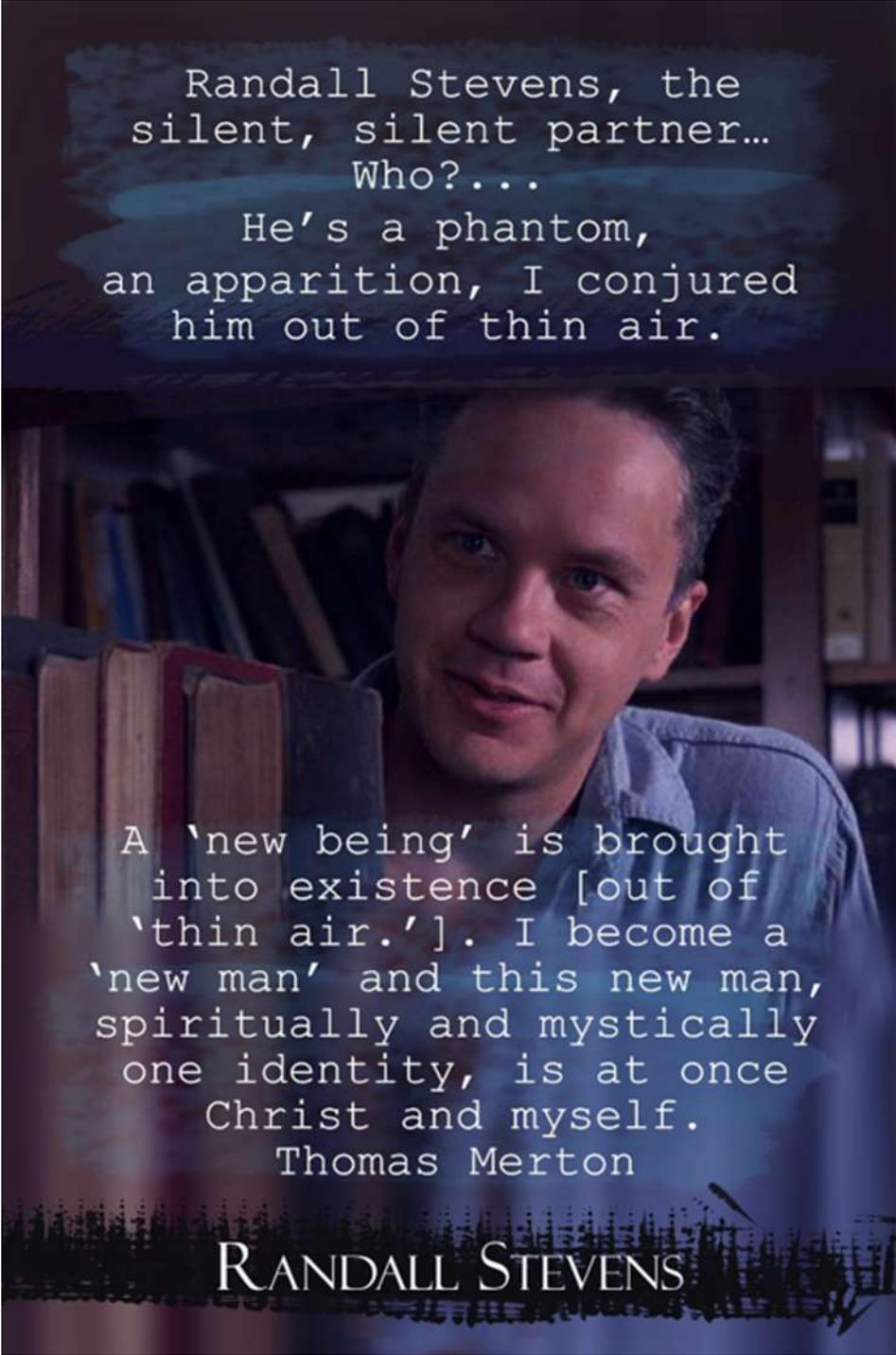
Repent, and each of you  
be baptized in the name  
of Jesus Christ for the  
forgiveness of your sins;  
and you will receive the  
gift of the Holy Spirit  
(Acts 2:38).



A SLICE OF PARADISE  
AMERICAN PIE

## 61 – A Slice of Paradise

In this scene, Red receives from Andy yet another “present” that is significant both in terms of its symbolism as well as its timing. The gift of an “apple” pie invokes the idea of the “Edenic apple,” the “forbidden fruit.” Here, this symbolic fruit is now *offered freely* as a *gift*. When the soul makes a committed and dedicated act of “Repentance,” this opens the gates to *receive* from God the soul nourishing gift of Divine manna. It is also not surprising that the “Warden” found this pie to be “distasteful.”



Randall Stevens, the  
silent, silent partner..  
Who?...

He's a phantom,  
an apparition, I conjured  
him out of thin air.

A 'new being' is brought  
into existence [out of  
'thin air.']. I become a  
'new man' and this new man,  
spiritually and mystically  
one identity, is at once  
Christ and myself.

Thomas Merton

RANDALL STEVENS

## 62 – Randall Stevens

Under the guise of a “fake identity” that he “made up,” through knowledge of the “system,” Andy proceeds to give Red a symbolic depiction of the Scriptural “New Man.” The “New Man” is the miraculous Spiritual Self that God creates “out of nothing,” out of “thin air” when a dedicated interior life is adhered to. To be “Born Again” in the deepest sense is to become this “New Being in Christ” that the New Testament speaks of:

Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:22-24).

Dietrich Von Hildebrand adds: “All true Christian life, therefore, must begin with a deep yearning to become a ‘new man’ in Christ, and an inner readiness to ‘put off the old man’ – a readiness to become something fundamentally different.”<sup>32</sup>

I had to come to prison  
to be a crook.

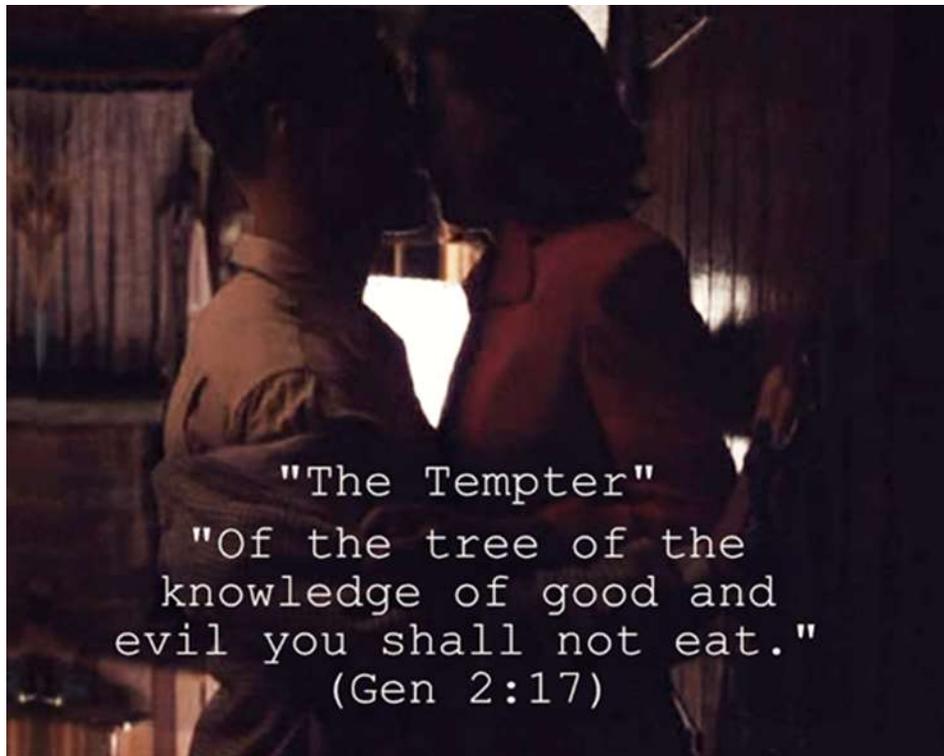
Behold, I come as a  
thief, blessed is he  
that watcheth and  
keepeth his garments  
(Rev. 16:15).

A CROOK

### 63 – A Crook

Here is another example of a Scriptural allusion via the use of a synonym. As mentioned earlier, The Fall in the Garden of Eden can be conceived as an act of “theft:” i.e., by successful temptation the serpent “stole” or took from Adam and Eve the treasure of Divine intimacy. Red again: “They send you here for life, and that’s exactly what *they take* - the part that counts anyway.”

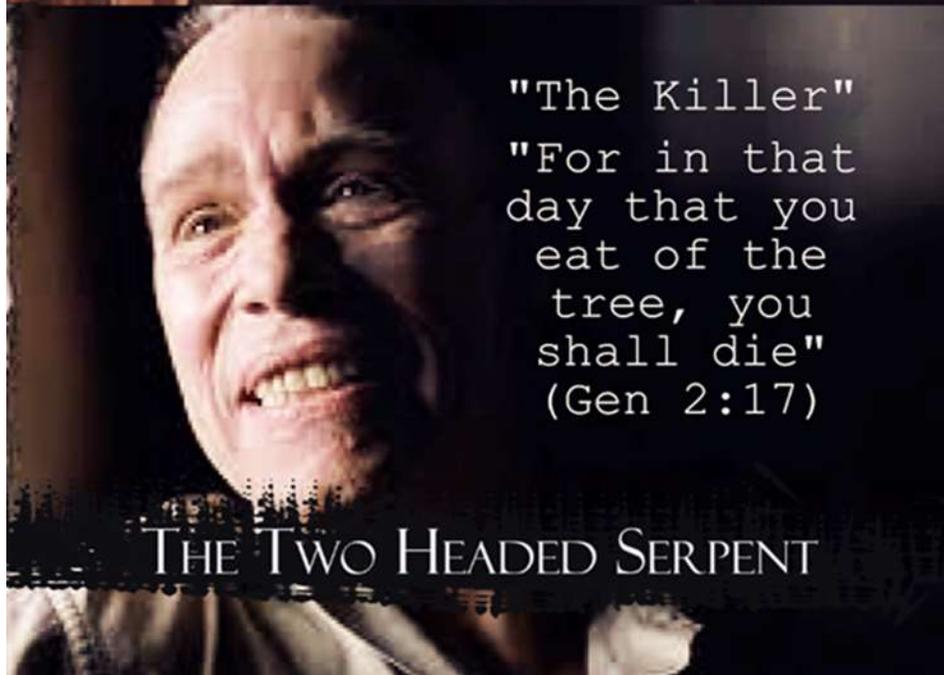
The essential mission of Christ is sometimes portrayed as one of entering our world of sin (the prison of self) and “reclaiming” or “stealing back” the Divine treasure, the Life Eternal from the enemy who “took it,” i.e., he had to “come to prison to be a crook.”



"The Tempter"

"Of the tree of the  
knowledge of good and  
evil you shall not eat."

(Gen 2:17)



"The Killer"

"For in that  
day that you  
eat of the  
tree, you  
shall die"

(Gen 2:17)

THE TWO HEADED SERPENT

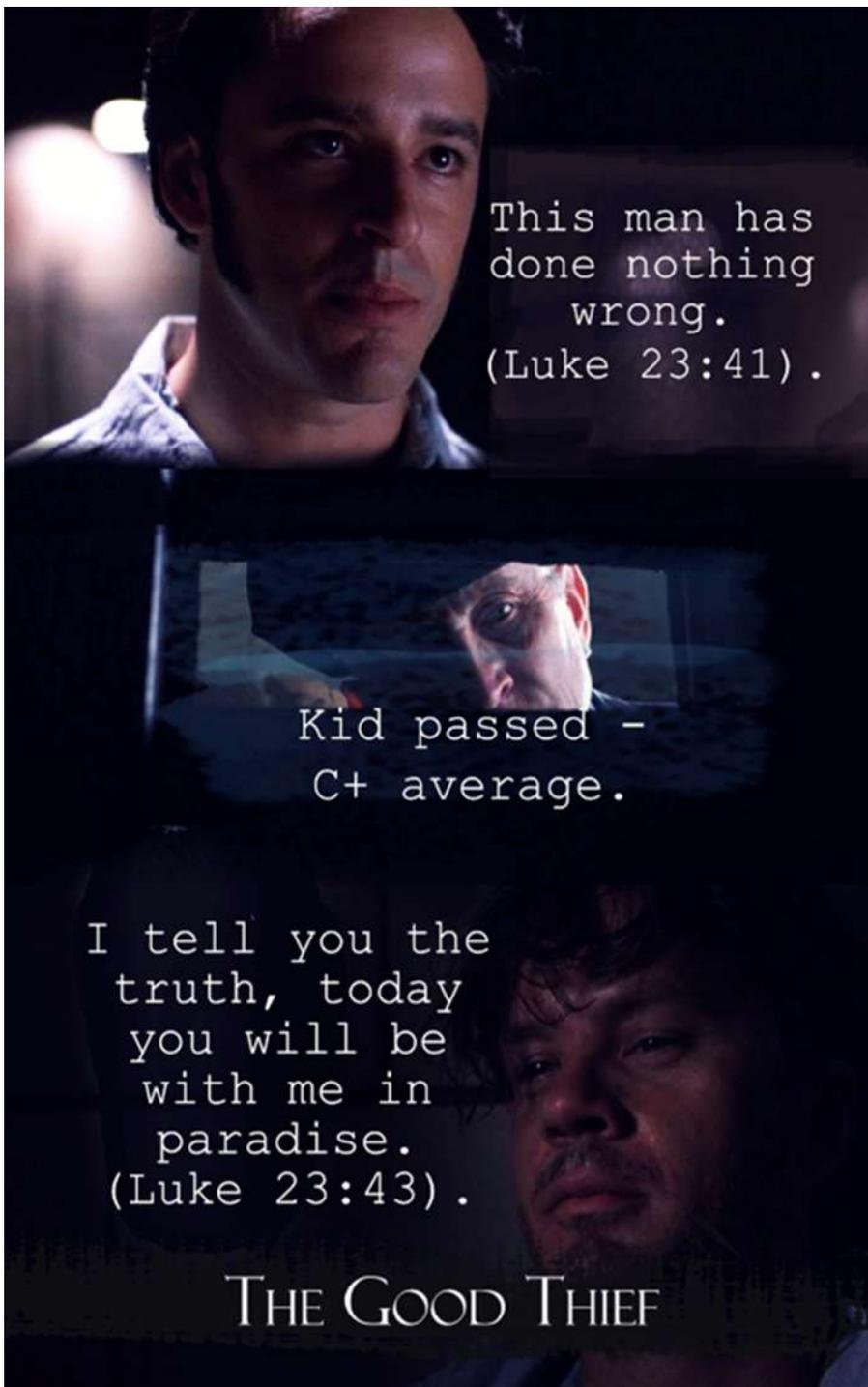
## 64 – The Two Headed Serpent

After Tommy tells Red and Andy about “Elmo Blatch” – the actual murderer of Andy’s wife and lover, we see the Edenic serpent reflected in yet another guise. The serpent appeared first as the “tempter,” in the role of Glenn “sin” Quinten, who “seduced” Andy’s “wife” to “sin.” Here, we witness the serpent in the role of “killer,” as the thief who shot Andy’s wife and lover four times, including one to the *head*, to symbolize the death of the Spirit; “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10).



## **65 – Three Missing Pieces –**

The chessboard reflects the three individuals in the movie that Andy, as a “Christ-like” figure had a profound effect on. Red, as the black Bishop, became Andy’s close friend and attained “Redemption.” Hadley received from Andy the essential teaching about “trusting his wife,” and demonstrated the effects of internal transformation, when he displayed remorse at the end for multiple sins; the “hardest screw” exhibited a “softened heart.” Tommy received one on one instruction from Andy and attained a “passing grade” in eternity.

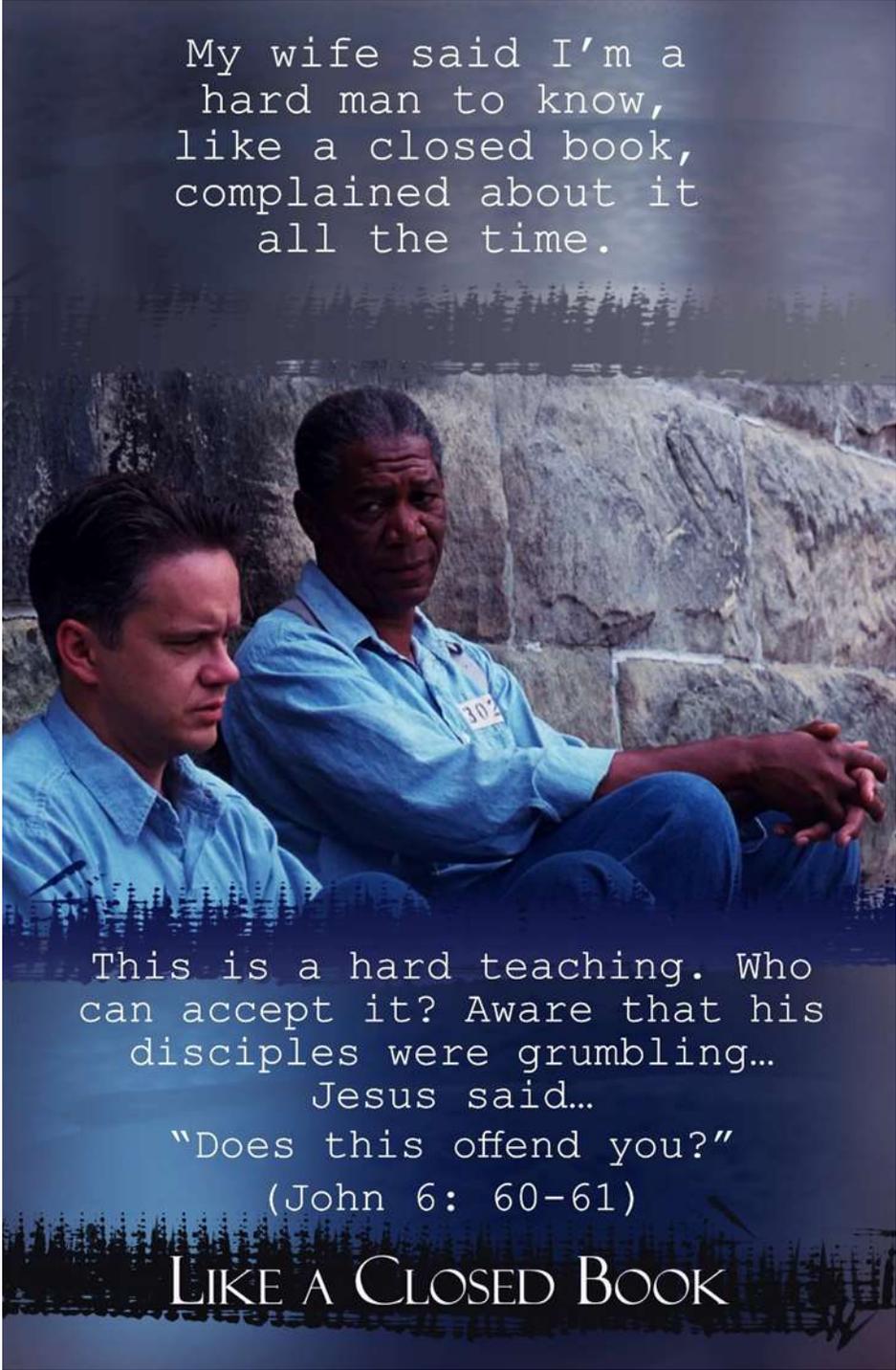


## 66 – The Good Thief

When Tommy first arrived at Shawshank and told his fellow prisoners in the cafeteria about his “failing life as a crook...being in and out of prison,” Andy responded by telling him that perhaps he should look for another profession because he didn’t seem to be a very *good thief*.

In addition to Andy’s use of the term “Good Thief,” there are a string of additional clues that suggest that Tommy is the Biblical “Good Thief:”

- 1) When Tommy arrived at Shawshank, he sat on the *right* side of the bus, like the good thief to the *right* of Jesus.
- 2) Like the Good Thief, Tommy was able to attain a “passing grade” in a very short amount of time.
- 3) Like the Good Thief, who died declaring Christ’s innocence, Tommy died declaring *Andy’s* innocence.
- 4) As noted earlier, Tommy received four shots, but they were all to the body. He did not receive a shot to the *head*, indicating the death of the Spirit. Thus, his Eternal Spirit was not destroyed, and so he “ascended to Paradise” like the Good Thief.



My wife said I'm a  
hard man to know,  
like a closed book,  
complained about it  
all the time.

This is a hard teaching. Who  
can accept it? Aware that his  
disciples were grumbling..

Jesus said..

"Does this offend you?"

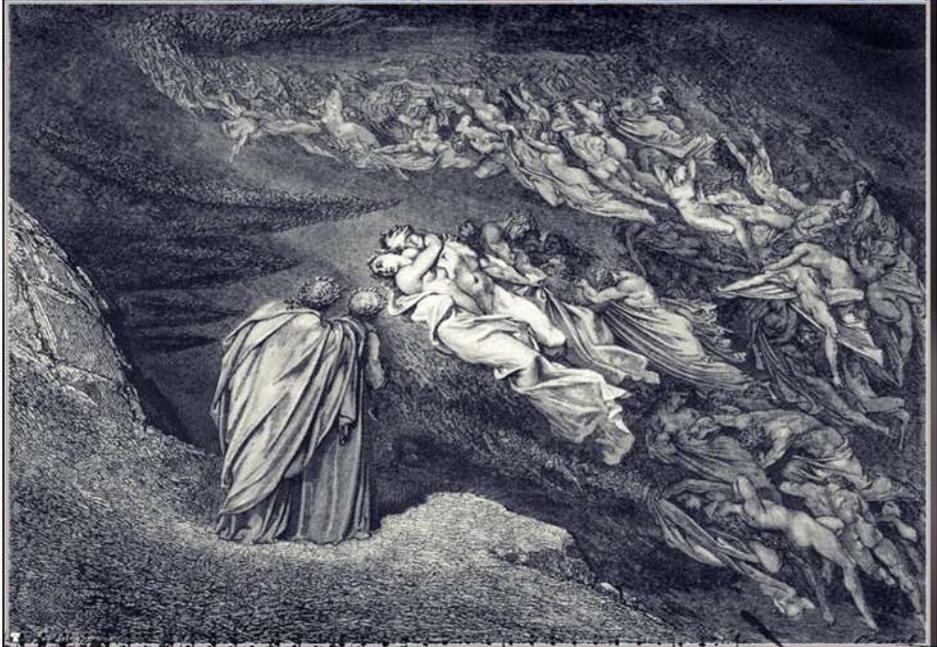
(John 6: 60-61)

LIKE A CLOSED BOOK

## 67 – Like a Closed Book

The “wife” that Andy references here is again, collective humanity. Without fail, the sublime teachings of Eternal Life are received like enigmatic riddles; like a “closed book.” During Jesus’ time on Earth, he encountered resistance and “grumbling” to his “hard” but transformative message of Salvation. During the movie, Andy experienced this friction as well: Hadley became “enraged” and “offended” by his advice about “getting his inheritance,” and threatened to throw him off the roof. In the cafeteria, when Andy attempted to communicate to Red the “Hope” that is associated with “something inside that they can’t get to,” Red responded brusquely and left the table. In the prison yard, Red characterized “chess,” the “deeper spiritual teachings,” in a disparaging way as a “total flickering mystery.”

Because the transformative interior domain shifts from seen, “visible, tangible” things to non-seen, “invisible, non-tangible” elements, it involves a deeper level of insight and trust; they are “like a closed book.” The inner life requires a “paradigm shift” in the concept of faith: “The kind of faith which is needed for the interior life is the kind which sees love reflected in what does not look like love, hope proclaimed in what does not look like hope;”<sup>33</sup> “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things *not seen*” (Heb 11:1).



THE PATH OF THE TORNADO

## 68 – The Path of the Tornado

Andy's cryptic remark: "I was in the path of the tornado...I didn't expect the storm to last this long," is a reference to Canto 5 of *Inferno*, where: "The infernal storm which never stops, drives the spirits in its blast, whirling and beating, it torments them."<sup>34</sup> In this circle, Dante encounters Francesca, who, like Andy's wife had engaged in an act of infidelity with another man, Paolo. They were later murdered by Francesca's husband and damned to hell for their adultery. The primal dynamic of an "infidelity that leads to death" is thus present in Paolo and Francesca; as well as Andy and his "wife;" i.e., Adam and Eve who broke their fidelity to God by eating of the Tree which resulted in *spiritual death*.

A man with dark hair and a light blue shirt is shown from the chest up, looking slightly to the left with a thoughtful expression. The background is a dark, rocky landscape with some greenery. The image has a dark, moody atmosphere.

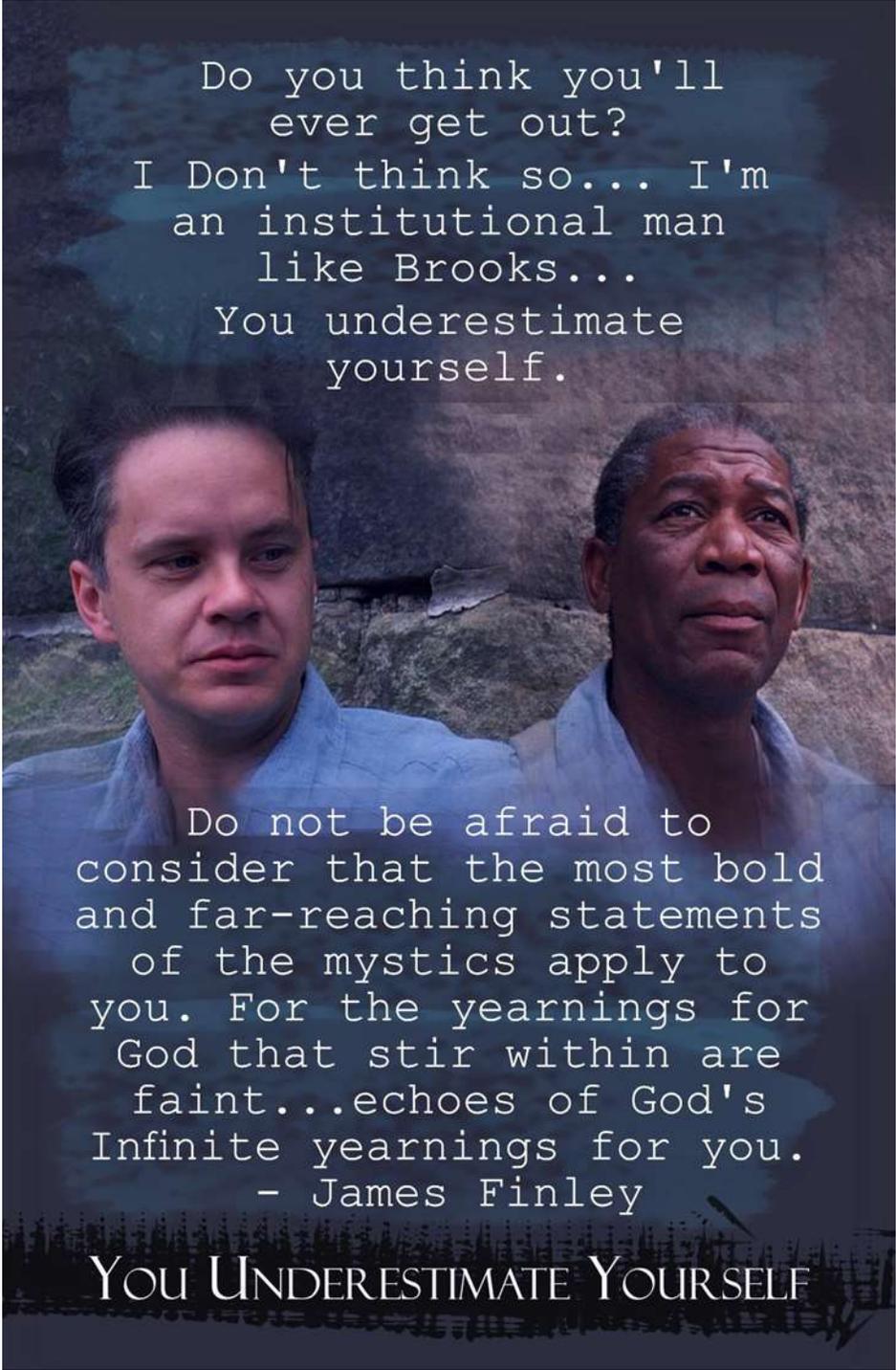
You know what the Mexicans  
say about the Pacific? They  
say it has no memory.

I do not recall that I was  
ever estranged from you  
(Purg 33:91-92).

NO MEMORY

## 69 – No Memory

The comment about the Pacific having “no memory” again, alludes to the *Divine Comedy*, where, after Dante reunites with Beatrice in the Garden of Eden, he tells her that: “I do not recall (I have no memory) of ever being estranged from you.” Once the soul attains redemptive union with God, by returning to the original *Paradise*, the “Garden of Eden,” it regains the essential intimacy with God that existed, in Red’s words, “a long time ago.” Because the soul now lives in “God’s time,” in the *Eternal Present*, it no longer has a “past” where the “memory” of estrangement existed.



Do you think you'll  
ever get out?  
I Don't think so... I'm  
an institutional man  
like Brooks...  
You underestimate  
yourself.

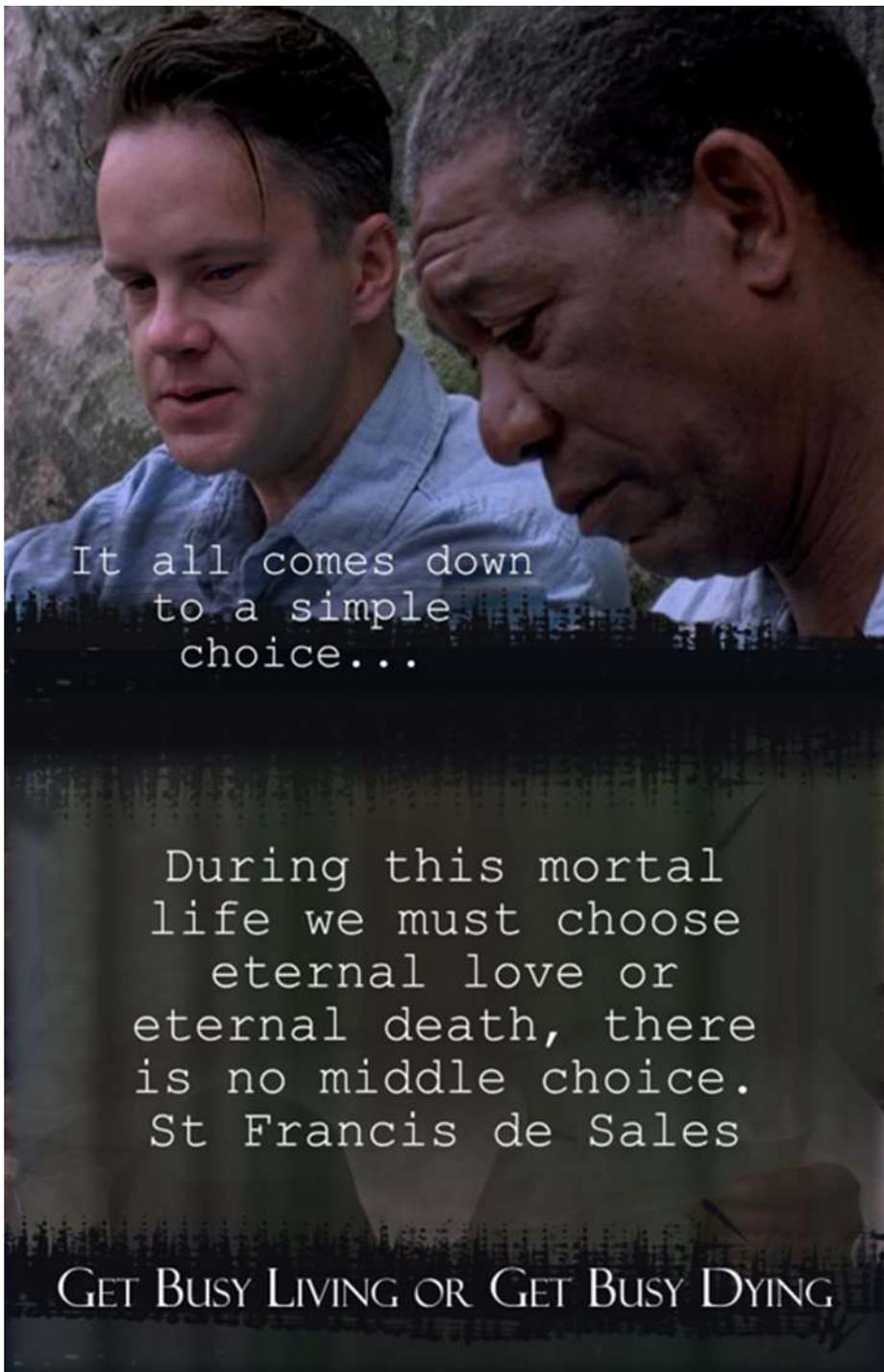
Do not be afraid to  
consider that the most bold  
and far-reaching statements  
of the mystics apply to  
you. For the yearnings for  
God that stir within are  
faint...echoes of God's  
Infinite yearnings for you.  
- James Finley

YOU UNDERESTIMATE YOURSELF

## 70 – You Underestimate Yourself

Even in this “late stage” of the game, after Red has participated in Andy’s various “miracles” that instilled the feeling of “freedom,” as well as his reception of the symbolic “harmonica” and “apple pie,” Red still expresses apprehensions and doubts about his capacity to “make it on the outside.” The actual “crossing over” to *Purgatory*, to a lived interior life requires a stout and dedicated act of faith. The soul truly enters a new and mysterious land that lacks the familiar props and assurances of mundane life and has to rely fully on the collective assurances of those who successfully walked this “desert” and maintain that a “Promised Land” indeed does exist.

Red’s doubt about “making it on the outside;” i.e., successfully navigating the interior life is similar to Dante’s own trepidation of his journey, where he tells Virgil: “But me? Why me? Who says I can? I’m not your own Aeneas. I am not Saint Paul. No one – not me! – could think I’m for this.”<sup>35</sup>



It all comes down  
to a simple  
choice...

During this mortal  
life we must choose  
eternal love or  
eternal death, there  
is no middle choice.  
St Francis de Sales

GET BUSY LIVING OR GET BUSY DYING

## 71 – Get Busy Living or Get Busy Dying

Here, Andy succinctly summarizes the only two existential roads that exist: a life that is busy *living*, or one that is busy *dying*. In scripture, these two broad domains are characterized in various ways: as “good and bad fish” (Matt 13:47-50); as “everlasting life and everlasting punishment” (Matt 25:46); as those on the “right” and those on the “left,” (Matt 25:41); as the “gift of God” and the “wages of sin” (Rom 6:23). In the poetry of T.S. Eliot, which we have already encountered, two forms of “fire” (one suffering, the other purifying) are used: “Our only hope or else despair lies in *the choice* of fire or fire. / To be redeemed from fire by fire;” “We only live, only suspire. / Consumed by either fire or fire.”

These notices about the absoluteness of these two domains are designed to serve as a “wake up” call, to shatter our lethargy and torpor. The New Testament calls to: “Repent – the Kingdom is *at hand* or *come near* - function in a similar way as calls to motivational expedience. No doubt, Andy’s “busy living / busy dying” reference was designed to prod Red in the “right” direction and not the one that Brooks chose.



PROMISE ME RED

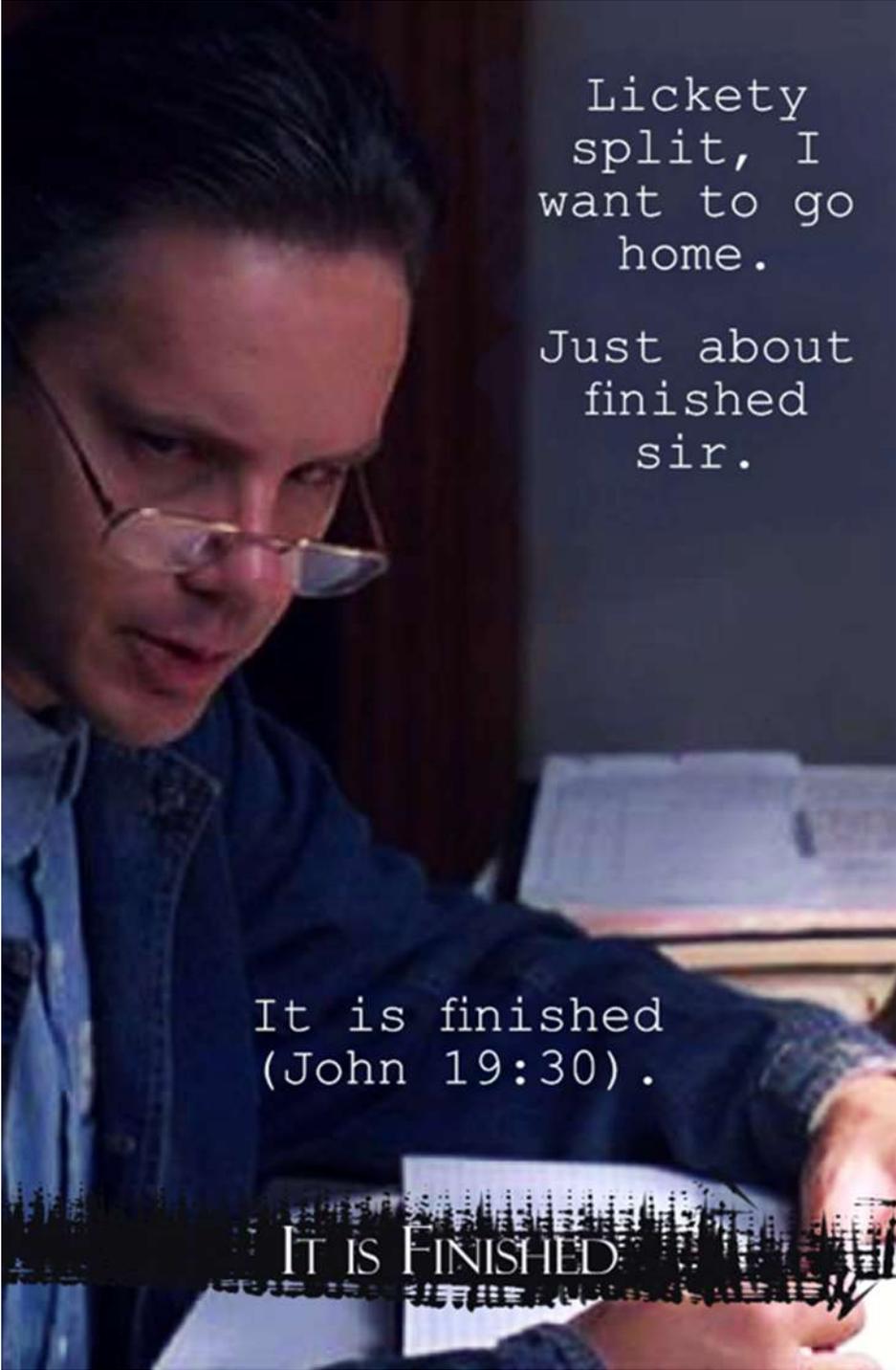
## 72 – Promise Me Red

While it appears on the surface that Andy is asking Red to someday make a journey to Buxton and unearth a mysterious present buried beneath a black rock, this is, in actuality yet another allusion to the *Divine Comedy*. As we have already alluded to, “Buxton” is the symbolic “Garden of Eden” in *Purgatory*, that place where Red, like Dante arrives and achieves a redemptive reunion.

Andy’s request of Red to “travel to Buxton” is perhaps understood as a vow or promise to “complete the full journey of *Purgatory* – *all seven levels*,” because you can’t arrive at this later stage (Buxton, the Garden of Eden) unless all seven virtues have been instilled. Andy is basically telling Red a version of what he said to Tommy: “If we do this, we do it *all the way*, nothing half-baked.”

In Scripture, this failure to “stay the full course of the journey” is sometimes referenced as “looking back.” “Jesus said to him, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God’ (Luke 9:62). In the *Divine Comedy*, when a soul passes through the gate of *Purgatory*, the Angel gives the following caution: “Enter, but be warned that whoever looks back must remain outside.”<sup>36</sup> Andy is essentially delivering this message to Red at this juncture, i.e., “Promise me” = “Don’t look back.”

Andy tells Red to look for an Oak Tree “in the north,” and also makes a cryptic remark about the hayfield in Buxton that will be revealed later: “It’s like something out of a *Robert Frost poem*.”

A man with glasses and a blue shirt is looking down at papers on a desk. The background is dark and out of focus.

Lickety  
split, I  
want to go  
home.

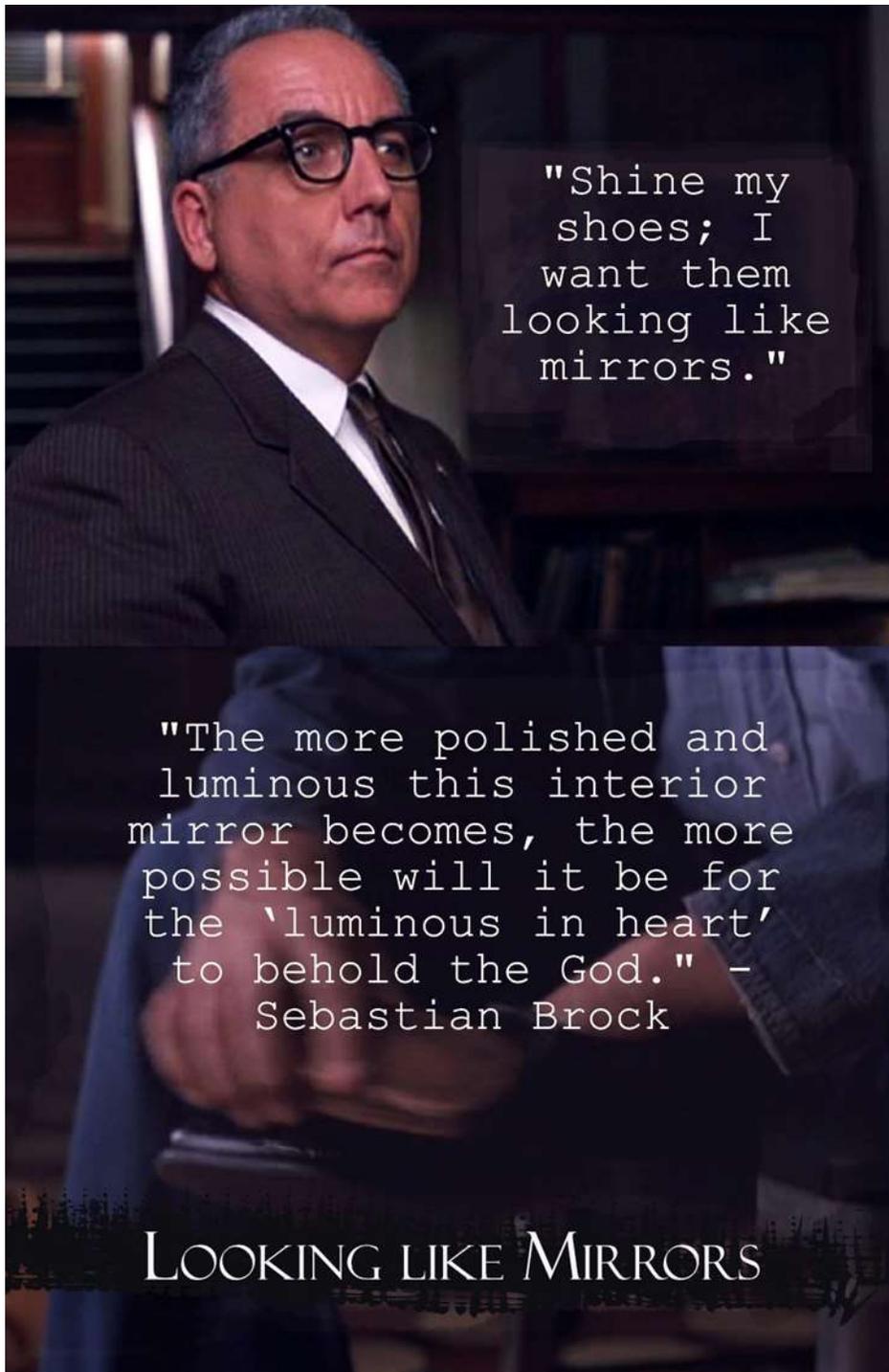
Just about  
finished  
sir.

It is finished  
(John 19:30).

IT IS FINISHED

### **73 – It is Finished**

After his two-month stint in solitary, (which suggests the “pre-Resurrection tomb,”) Andy returns to do the Warden’s “dirty work.” The famous last words of Jesus: “It is finished,” were uttered just before Jesus gave up his Spirit. Here, as Andy nears his escape, his theft of the Warden’s riches, and the culmination of his Redemptive Mission for the world, he utters in parallel fashion: “Just *about* finished.”



"Shine my shoes; I want them looking like mirrors."

"The more polished and luminous this interior mirror becomes, the more possible will it be for the 'luminous in heart' to behold the God." - Sebastian Brock

LOOKING LIKE MIRRORS

## 74 – Looking Like Mirrors

The shoes that the warden wants “looking like mirrors” is a reference to the first chapter of Genesis where man was originally created “in the image and likeness of God” (Gen 1:27). As a result of the fall, humanity has lost the “clean reflection;” the “mirror of the soul” that once exhibited a pure image of the Divine has become stained and tainted. “The image of God was man's life and blessedness. The injurious Satan had begrudged him this, however, and brought the greatest deception and haste to destroy the image of God in man, through disobedience and enmity against God.”<sup>37</sup>

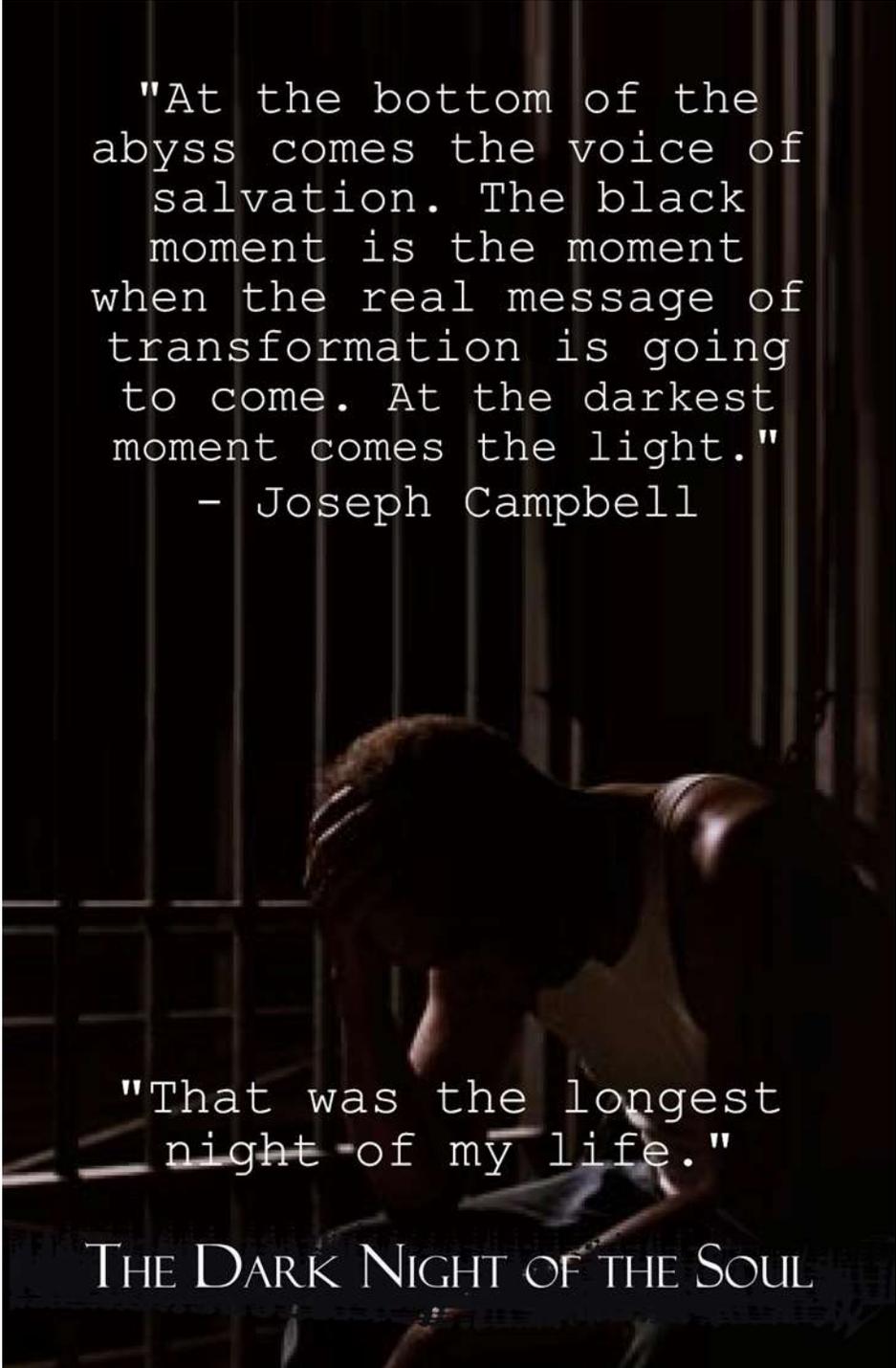
To “shine shoes and have them looking like mirrors” is to symbolically render the soul cleansed of any trace of sin, or “spot” that would distort the pure presence of Spirit. “The more polished and luminous this interior mirror becomes, the more possible will it be for the ‘luminous in heart’ to behold the God - in whose image they are created - reflected in it.”<sup>38</sup>

The interior life can be seen as one where the “mirror of the soul” is progressively cleansed to receive ever more clearly the “Divine Light” that effects the transformative new growth from within.



When the Warden tells Andy: “It’s good having you back again,” and exits the office, we see Andy with his outer shirt covering up the last three numbers of his prison number, showing only “37.” This is a significant moment, because this is the *last* interaction between the two. Later, after Andy’s empty cell is discovered, the Warden summons Red for questioning, and we hear: “Open 237.” And finally, Red’s voiceover later tells us that Andy made off with more than \$370,000 of the Warden’s money. The appearance of this number, 37, references a passage in Luke 1:37: “For with God nothing shall be impossible.” The presence of this number always announces, or predicts something “impossible, i.e., a “miracle.”

The 37 on Andy’s shirt announces the victory of Christ over evil and predicts the coming “miracle” of his escape, his “Resurrection.” The 37 in Red’s cell number forecasts the “miracle” of his forthcoming successful parole. The 37 in the “money” announces the “miracle” of Christ’s successful mission of “stealing back” the Divine riches from the evil one and making it available to all who will receive it.

A person is shown in a dark, confined space, likely a prison cell, with their head buried in their hands. The scene is dimly lit, with light coming from a window with vertical bars. The person is wearing a dark tank top and shorts. The overall mood is one of despair and suffering.

"At the bottom of the  
abyss comes the voice of  
salvation. The black  
moment is the moment  
when the real message of  
transformation is going  
to come. At the darkest  
moment comes the light."  
- Joseph Campbell

"That was the longest  
night of my life."

THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL

## 76 – The Dark Night of the Soul

The “longest night” is symbolically the famous “Dark Night of the Soul.” It is the time where all looks lost, where the specter of death looms heavy. If we recall the very first time we saw this movie, we were worried, just like Red. With Andy “talking funny,” Brooks’ recent suicide and his procurement of a “six feet” length of rope, we all thought that it was possible that Andy had finally “reached his breaking point.” For a brief moment, we experienced what it was like to be one of Christ’s disciples who believed that Jesus was “dead in the ground.”

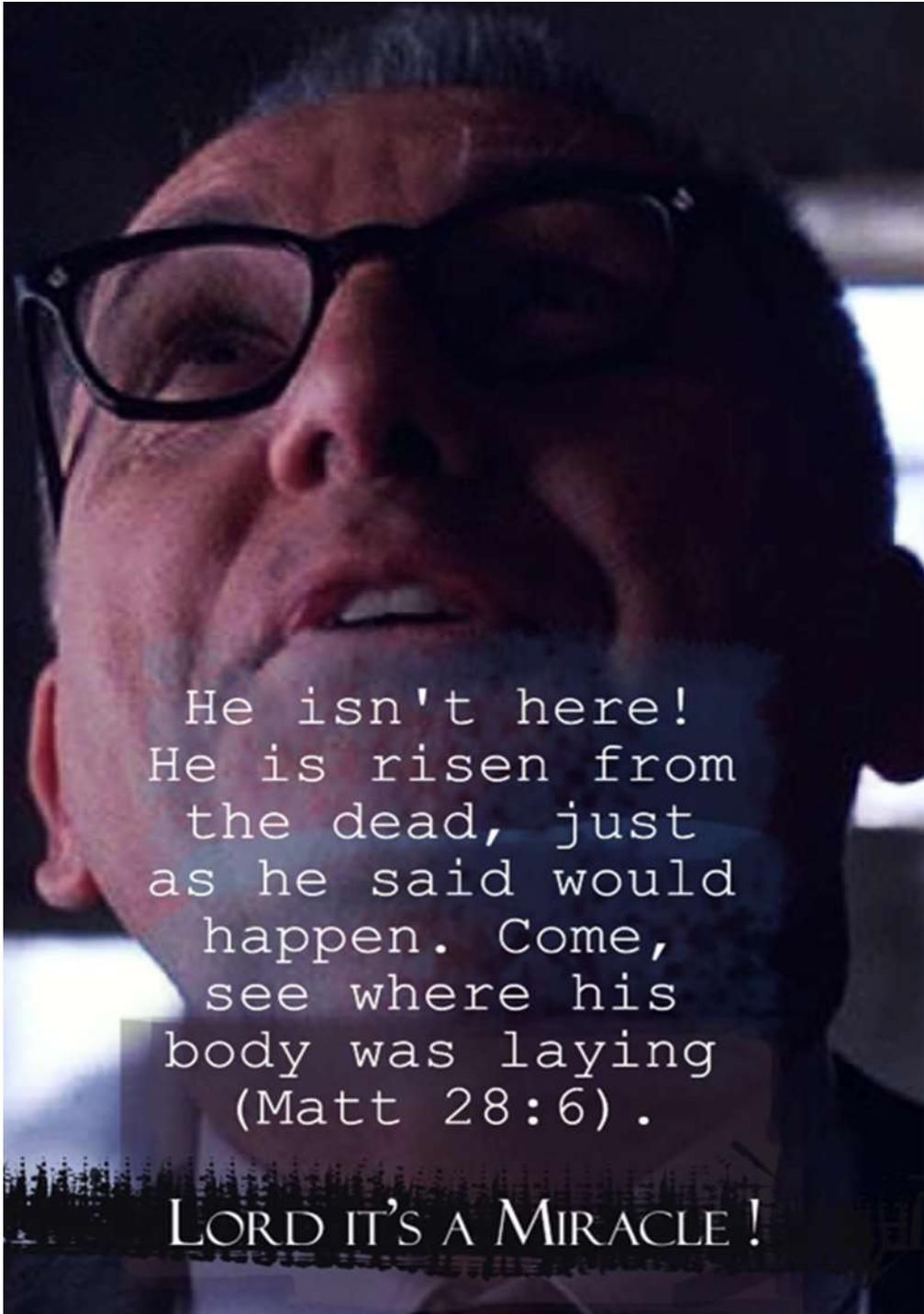
But as we know from the Gospel account, from the gloom of the tomb arises the victory of New Life. It is a fact of the mystical life that prior to the joyous glory of Resurrection there must be a “dark night” where things *appear* to be utterly lost. The seed must “die” before it bursts with new life. There is always a dark Holy Saturday before the glory of Easter Sunday.



## 77 – The Escape

The filming of Andy’s escape from Shashank appears to be modeled after the scene in the *Divine Comedy* where Virgil and Dante “escape” the *Inferno* and emerge in *Purgatory*. In the ninth circle of hell, Virgil and Dante encounter Satan, half-frozen in ice and proceed to make two essential movements to achieve their liberation: they first climb *down* the body of Satan, and then: “...make their way through a kind of *tunnel* to the surface”<sup>39</sup> Andy’s climb down the pipe of the prison and his crawl through the sewage pipe mirrors these dramatic episodes.





He isn't here!  
He is risen from  
the dead, just  
as he said would  
happen. Come,  
see where his  
body was laying  
(Matt 28:6).

LORD IT'S A MIRACLE!

## 78 – Lord, It’s a Miracle!

Andy’s “empty cell” symbolically depicts the “empty grave of Christ” – the dramatic “miracle” of the Resurrection. The “Resurrection” not only honors and celebrates Christ’s victory for humanity, but simultaneously *calls us to live and actualize this “miracle” in our own lives*:

“All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now *we live with great expectation*, and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay” (1 Peter 1:3).

“...that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, *to know the power of his resurrection* and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death” (Philippians 3:7-10).

“We live in Christ by his Spirit, and we at last became perfect in charity when *we share perfectly in the mystery of the Resurrection* in which Christ made us participate in His Divine Sonship. We will be perfect Christians when we have risen from the dead.”<sup>40</sup>

The Wardens rant about a “conspiracy” is also noteworthy. A conspiracy is defined as a “secret plan to do something illegal.” St Paul speaks of this “Secret Conspiracy:” “God revealed his *secret plan* and made it known to me... The secret is that by means of the gospel the Gentiles have a part with the Jews in God's blessings; they are members of the same body and share in the promise that God made through Christ Jesus” (Eph 3: 1,6 GNT). The Resurrection is the ultimate “Conspiracy of Freedom and Joy” because *we share in the promise of God’s blessings*, the Resurrected New life in Christ.

Christ’s victorious Resurrection is not just a historical artifact, but a summons, a call, and a promise: the imprisonment in the lower self is not necessarily a “life sentence;” there can be a real, intimate re-union with the Sacred, here, and now. This is the “Divine Conspiracy” that the Resurrection joyfully announces:

“As has been said, Christ’s resurrection and His glory are our glory. *Through His resurrection in us, it comes into being in us, shown to us, and is seen by us.*”<sup>41</sup>

I have been crucified  
with Christ; it is no  
longer I who live, but  
Christ lives in me.  
(Gal 2:20).



## 79 – I Live Not I

Andy's dramatic emergence from the sewer pipe, into a river, during a raging thunderstorm symbolizes Christ's "Ascension to Heaven." This also represents the later stages of the interior life, where the soul emerges as a "New Being:" "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

St Theresa once characterized this dramatic moment as a "Mystical marriage" and used water as a symbol of union:

The spiritual marriage, on the other hand, is like rain falling from the sky into a river or pool. There is nothing but water. It's impossible to divide the sky-water from the land water. When a little stream enters the sea, who could separate its waters back out again? Think of a bright light pouring into a room from two large windows: it enters from different places but becomes one light. Maybe this is what Saint Paul meant when he said, "whoever is joined to God becomes one spirit with him." He was probably referring to the royal marriage, presupposing that His Majesty has entered the soul through divine union.<sup>42</sup>



## 80 – The New Man: Randall Stevens

Here, we see an outward depiction of the Scriptural “New Man” that is “conjured out of thin air” within the soul adheres faithfully to the purification of interior life. The “shiny shoes, suit and tie” symbolize outwardly the *inner* “royalty” or instilled virtues that the soul now possesses. “Randall Stevens” is the “new name” given to those that “overcome” the imprisonment of the lower self: “To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone *a new name* written which no one knows except him who receives it” (Rev 2:17).

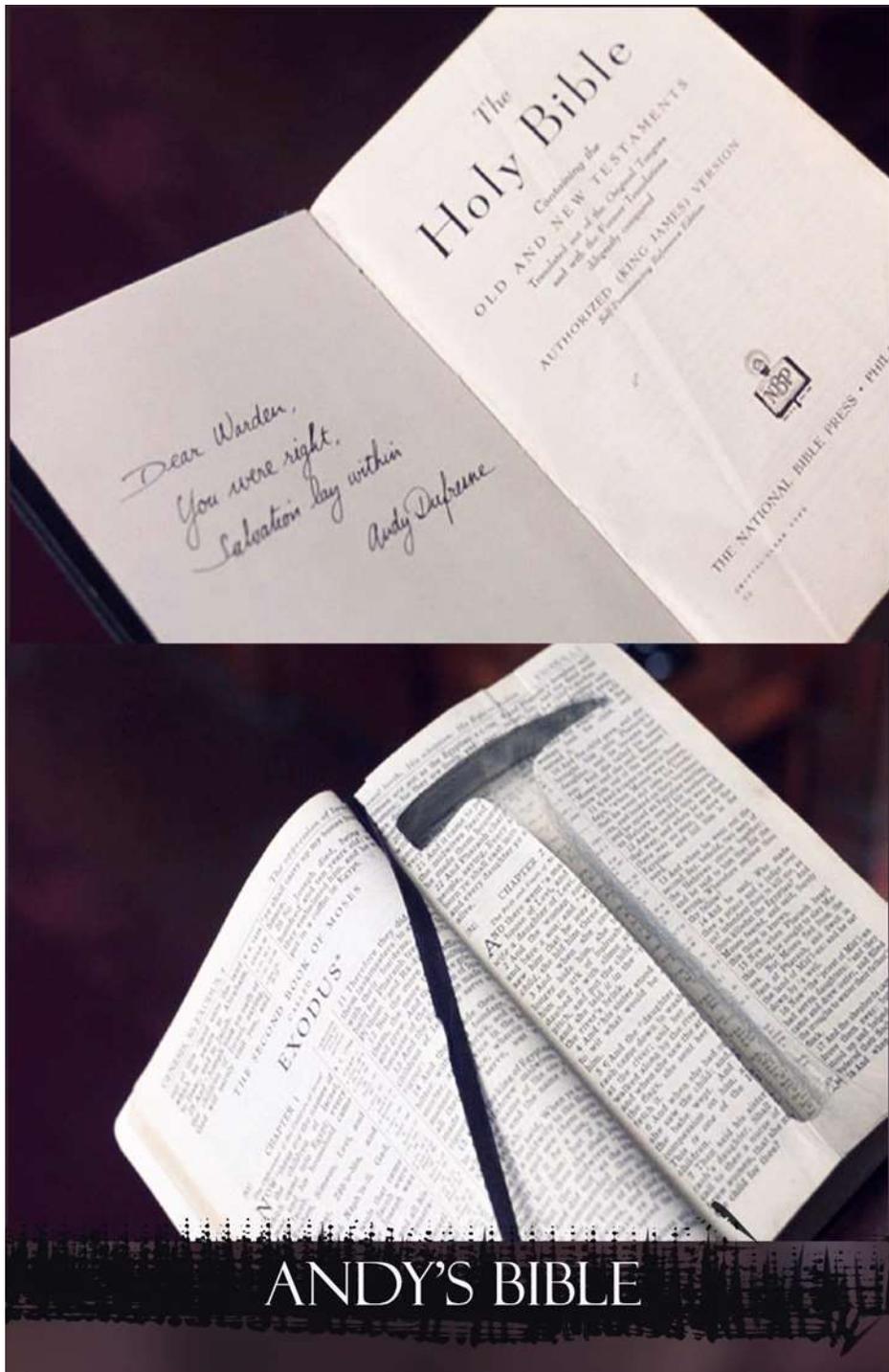
The chosen name “Randall Stevens” is encrypted with hidden meaning. The first and last name each have *seven* letters, implying mystical completeness; the “perfection of creation;” and the initials “R” and “S” suggest the related words “Resurrection” and “Salvation.”



THE PONTIAC PHOENIX

## 81 – The Pontiac Phoenix

The car that Andy drives, the Pontiac Phoenix is a clarion signal of his “Resurrection.” The Phoenix is a mythological bird that burns itself to ashes and arises to new life every five hundred years. This death and rebirth motif symbolizes the death and Resurrection of Christ: “God, who is fecund and fertile...wished that this memorable word be applied...to the mystery of his birth from his Father, to the mystery of his birth from his mother, and to the birth from the tomb, from which *he is reborn like a phoenix to a new life.*”<sup>43</sup>

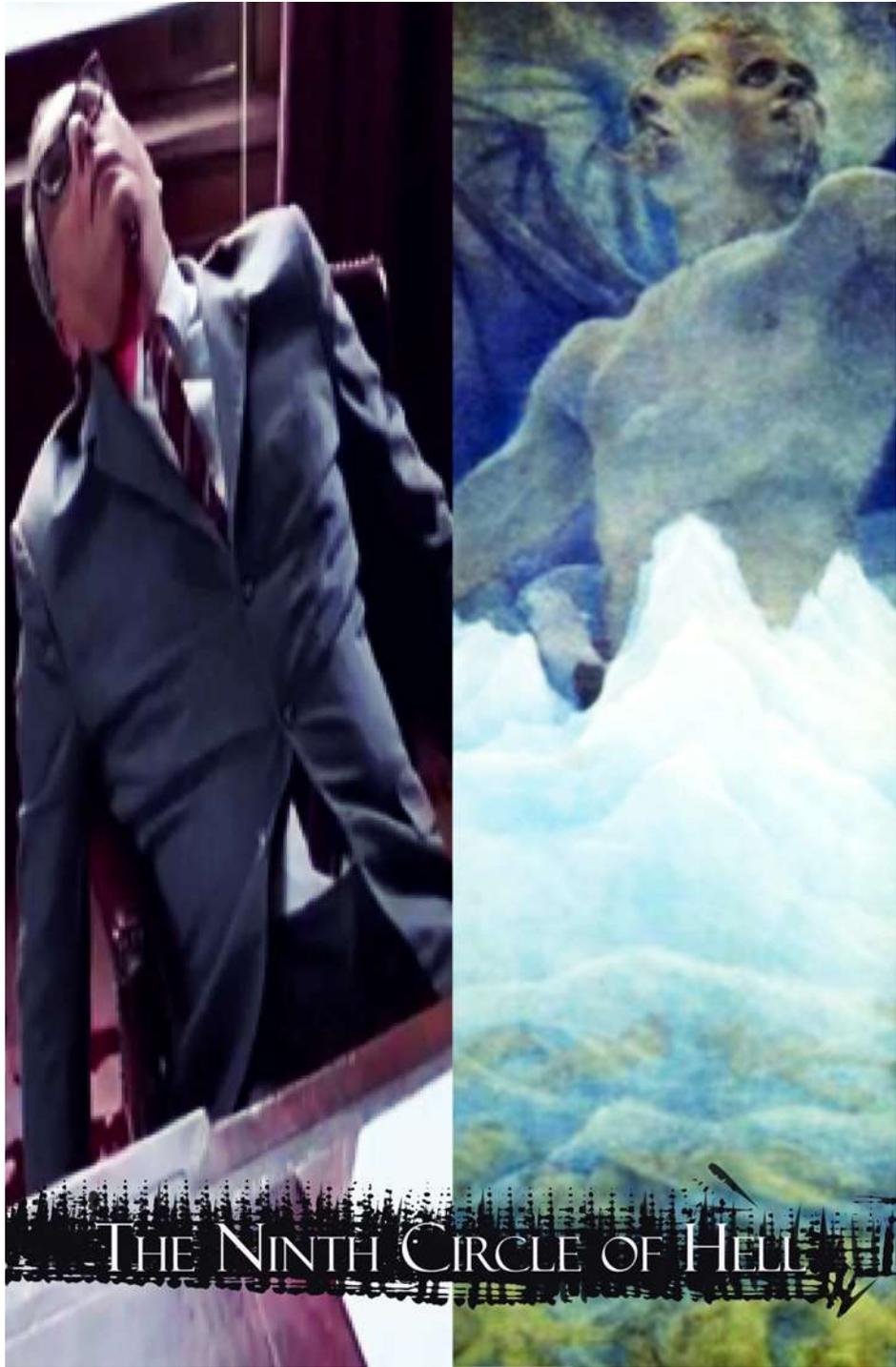


## 82 – Andy’s Bible

After the Warden discovers Andy’s Bible in his safe, we notice two important messages. First, Andy’s handwritten inscription, repeating the Warden’s earlier comment: “Salvation lies within,” yet again emphasizes the perennial message of the Saints and Sages as well as the film regarding the interior dimensions of the soul where the only Hope of Salvation lies.

The cutout of Andy’s “Rock-hammer” at the Book of Exodus is also noteworthy since this book recounts the slavery in Egypt of the Israelites and their successful emancipation across the desert, passing the Red Sea and their arrival at the Promised Land. This three-fold pattern of enslavement, journey across the desert and liberated freedom parallels the soul’s enslavement in the lower self, the “breakthrough” adoption of the inner life and the eventual arrival to the “Promised Land” of Redemptive-re-joining. As Thomas Merton relates:

At the very heart of the Bible is the theme of “Passover” and exodus, the procession of the redeemed out of a doomed society into the desert, on the way to a promised Kingdom ...and of course the true meaning of Easter is precisely that the Christian is called to make this journey with Christ and the people of God out of “Egypt” to the promised land.<sup>44</sup>



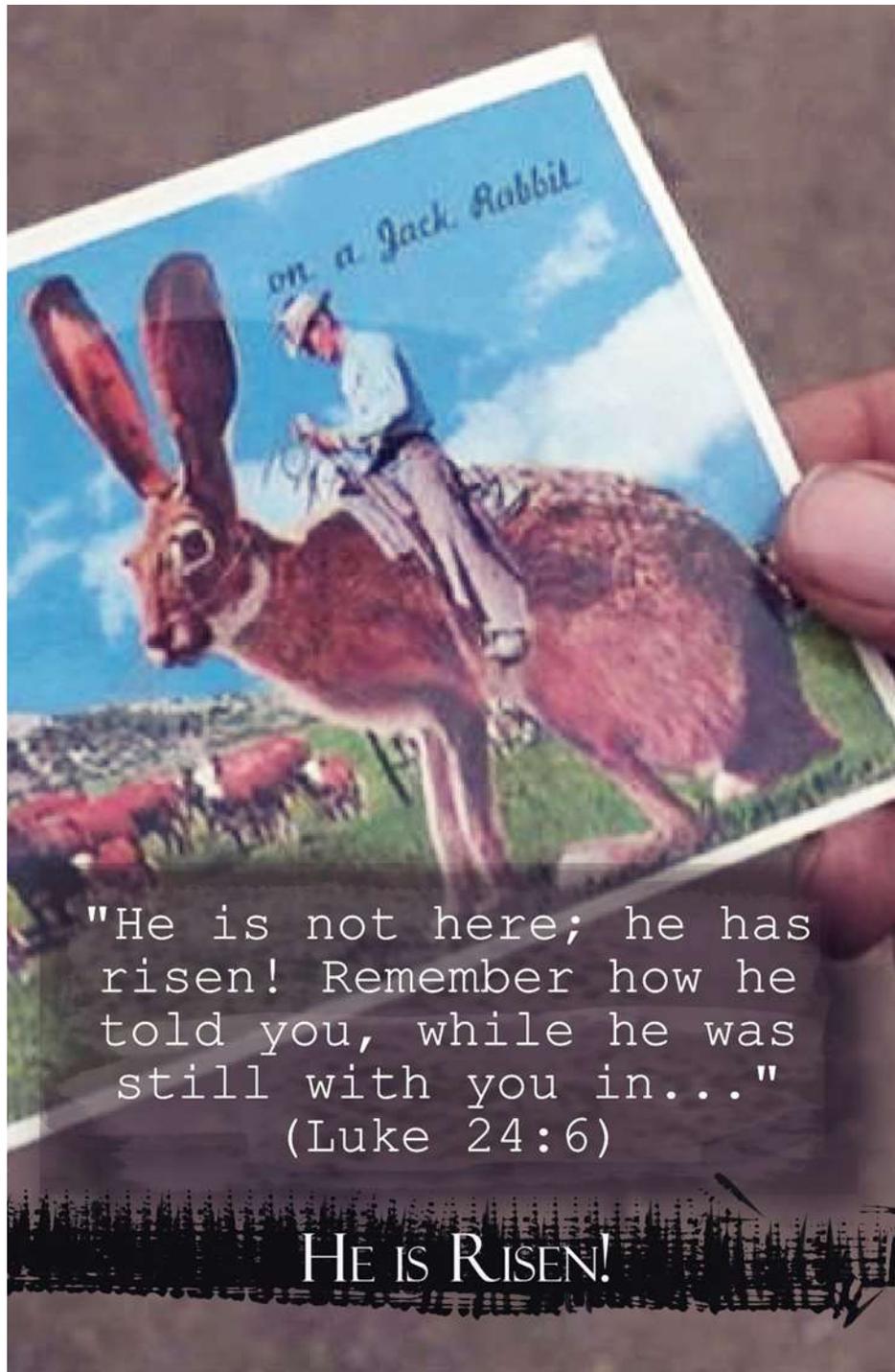
### 83 – The Ninth Circle of Hell

As the authorities arrive at the Warden’s office, we once again see the artwork that covers his safe: “His judgement cometh, and that right soon.” As the knocking on his door continues, the Warden ultimately decides to deliver his own “shot the head.” We then see him, motionless, sitting in his chair with the lower half of his body covered by the desk. This appears to be a depiction of Satan, in the *Divine Comedy*, with lower half of his body, “frozen in ice.”

The shot to the head, symbolically the “death of the Spirit” in this case is not delivered by an outside agent, but is “self-inflicted,” symbolizing the Satanic *self-willed*, remorseless rejection of the Sacred. Scripturally, this is the one unforgivable sin: “Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven” (Matt 12:31).

The wall plaque: “His judgement that cometh and that right soon” ironically merges with the “judgement” placed on Andy in his opening trial: “You strike me as a particularly *icy* and *remorseless* man, *it chills me* just to look at you.”





## 84 – He is Risen

After Andy's escape, Red receives a post card with a picture of a large rabbit. The "rabbit" and "post card" combine symbolically to represent a "post resurrection" appearance of the Risen Christ, since "rabbits" are classic symbols of Christ's victory: "He is Risen!"

As alluded to earlier, this is an important and transformative time for the growth and development of the soul. Andy's escape from the prison, like Christ's departure from his disciples reminds us of Jesus' instruction to his disciples that it is both *useful* and *necessary* that he leave them: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send him unto you" (John 16:7 KJB).

During this vital time, when Christ is "absent," the transition from the "milk" of *visible* signs, symbols, outer rights and observances must slowly give sway to the "meat" of the essential mystery working within the soul that is inherently *invisible*. The "attachment" to visible things must "go away" to facilitate the arrival of the invisible "comforter-spirit."

What I am getting at here is that words and concepts and images of Christ are not Christ. Let us at least reflect on the possibility that Christ can be known without ideas - that He can be known in the darkness, in the void, in the emptiness that transcends thought. The Scriptures are the finger (and we need the Scriptures just as we need the finger), but Christ is the moon. Let us not get so involved with fingers that we miss the moon.<sup>45</sup>

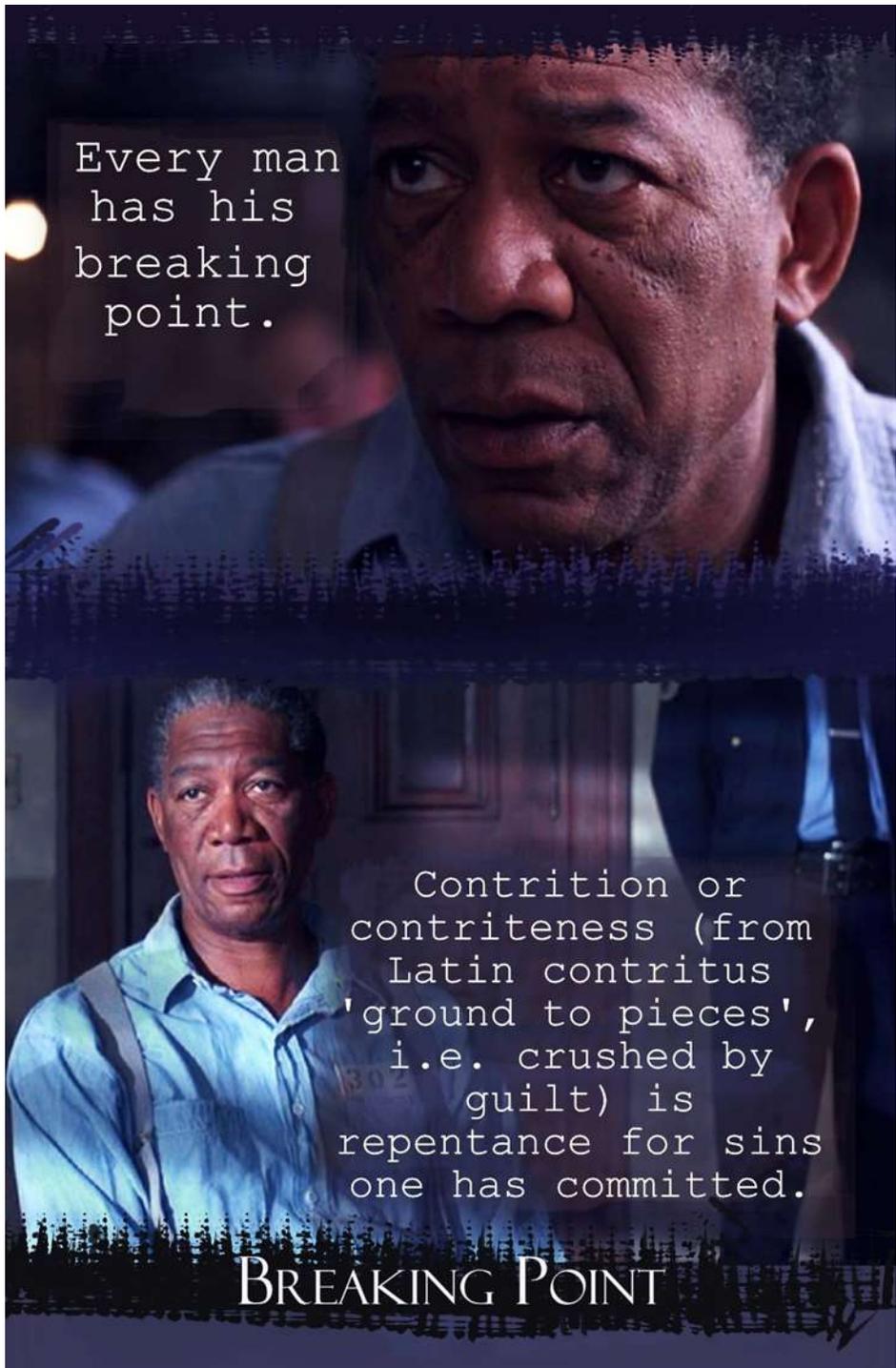


## 85 – Three Trinities

The culminating effects of Andy’s teachings and Red’s transformational act of Metanoia openly manifest themselves in Red’s third parole hearing. Unlike his first two hearings, where he encountered a “wall” of five men, here, Red is greeted by a *Trinity* that includes a female. Here also, for the first time he hears his *full name*, suggesting the idea that (again, as a result of his essential turn inward), he is now “known” and “recognized” by the “powers that be.” When he is asked if “he feels he has been rehabilitated,” he responds in a truly childlike and humble fashion: “I have no idea what that means.” The essential “change” in Red’s soul as a result of his Metanoia has given him a truly new and profound perspective: “Truly I tell you, *unless you change* and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 18:3).

The “female” represents a significant development in Red’s soul; he now has a vital and awakened receptive side, the *Shekhinah*. This is again the aspect of the soul that “receives” from God the transformational graces during interior forms of prayer.

The board’s statement that Red has been there “forty years” is noteworthy as well, since this number traditionally represents the “completion of a cycle.”<sup>46</sup>



Every man  
has his  
breaking  
point.

Contrition or  
contriteness (from  
Latin contritus  
'ground to pieces',  
i.e. crushed by  
guilt) is  
repentance for sins  
one has committed.

BREAKING POINT

## 86 – Breaking Point

Earlier in the movie, in the cafeteria, Red expressed concern about Andy reaching his “breaking point,” and possibly committing suicide. Here, Red has arrived at a “spiritual breaking point” of his own. Classically, the word “contrition” references a fundamental breakdown of the inner resistance to the presence and significance of guilt and sin, a “letting go” of the hubris and pride that smugly maintains that one is “rehabilitated.”

With this open and honest stance of humility before the “Powers that be,” Red makes the sacrificial offering that “opens the gates;” “My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise” (Psalm 51:17).

At this point, we also notice the emergence of three “tiers” of Shawshankers:

1. The “Innocent” – Heywood as spokesman, who have no sense of “guilt.”
2. The “Old Red” – who was “guilty,” but believed he was “rehabilitated.”
3. The “New Red” – still “guilty,” but humbly claims no knowledge of what “rehabilitated” means.

I look back on the way I was  
then; a young stupid kid who  
committed that terrible crime.



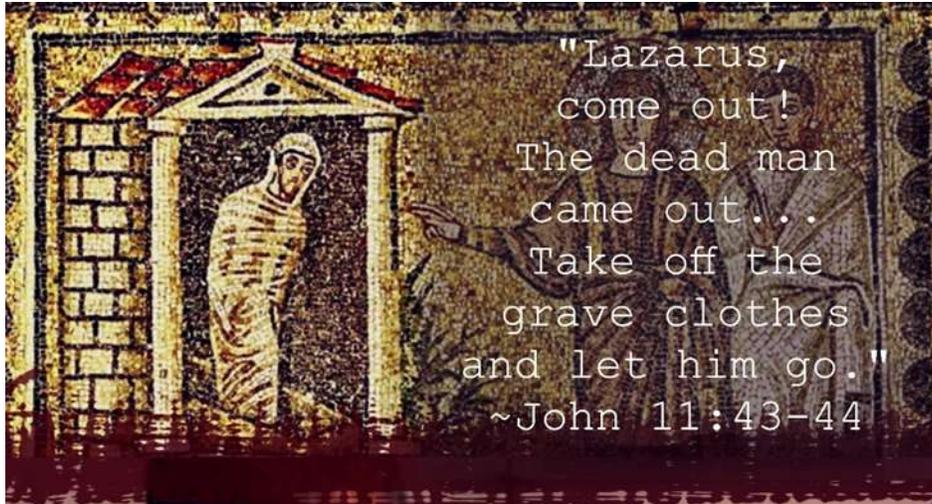
THAT YOUNG STUPID KID

## 87 – That Young Stupid Kid

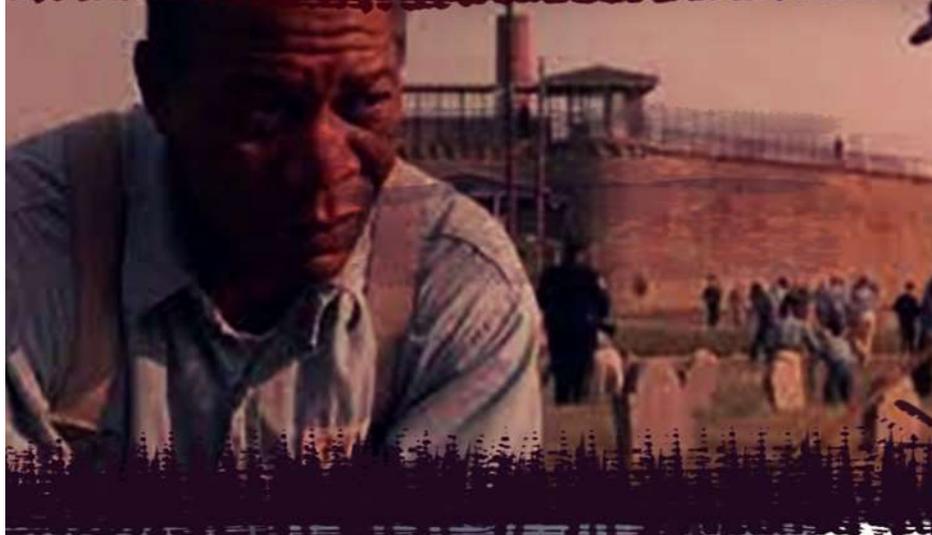
Once again, Red's comment about a "young stupid kid that committed a terrible crime" is a "Cosmic" one, referencing the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden, a "long time ago." Red's initial sense of "guilt" - that was perhaps vague and unformed earlier in the movie has now come full circle, and there is now a specificity to it that connects it vitally to the tragedy that shattered the union and harmony of the Divine and human.

The "regret," that he makes clear comes from *within*, and not from external indoctrination is a resonant indicator, that as a result of his Metanoia, and his essential turn inward that he glimpses the primal cause of his guilt and distress.

However, the "regret," the "mourning" that Red feels at this point has a significant "silver lining" because a "comforting embrace of the Spirit" is forthcoming: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matt 5:4). From this place of honest, existential humility comes the "exaltation" from on High: "Whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matt 23:12).



"Lazarus,  
come out!  
The dead man  
came out...  
Take off the  
grave clothes  
and let him go."  
~John 11:43-44

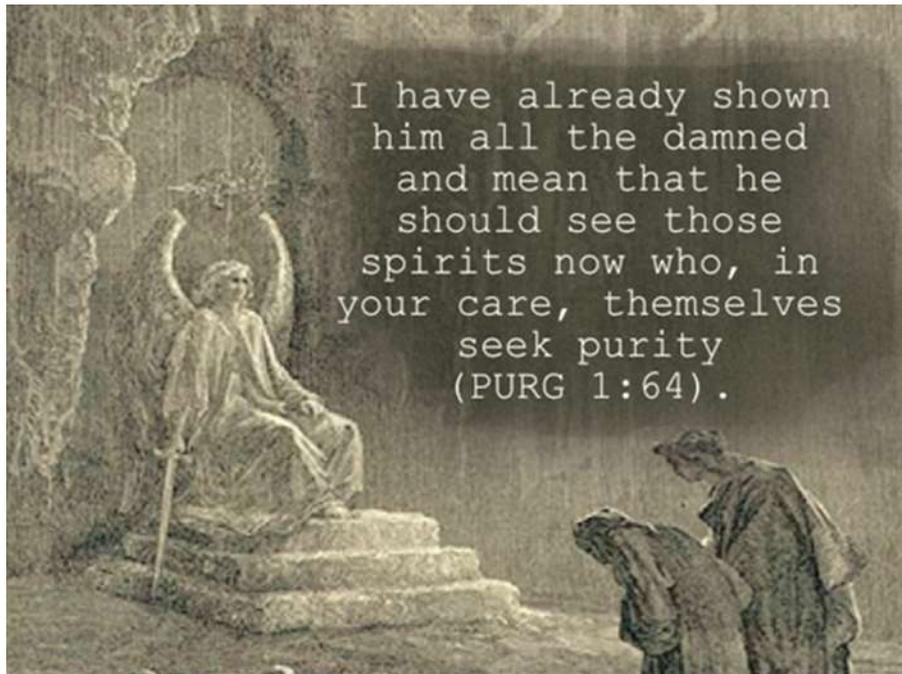


LAZARUS COME OUT!

## **88 – Lazarus, Come Out!**

The image of Red just prior to his third hearing in a “graveyard” evokes the Biblical story of Lazarus, who was “dead, in the grave for four days” without any “hope” of resurrection. For forty years, Red was also “dead,” imprisoned in the “grave” of the lower self that is Shawshank Prison. Andy’s “miracles” and transformative teachings collectively served as the “loud call to Come out!” Red is a living testament to the “Lazarus effect:” Though I was barren and left for dead, I have regained vital contact with the Divine ground of my Being.

This is the sublime supernatural “business of all business” that the “powers that be” are engaged in: “God is the resurrection business, calling us to shake off our graveclothes and emerge from the tombs in which we live.”<sup>47</sup>



I have already shown  
him all the damned  
and mean that he  
should see those  
spirits now who, in  
your care, themselves  
seek purity  
(PURG 1:64).



ST PETER'S GATE

## 89 - St. Peter's Gate

After Red's successful parole there are two indicators (one explicit, the other implicit) demonstrating his transition from *Inferno* to *Purgatory*. Overtly, the image from the movie of a guard with a gun, standing next to a threshold is a "spot on match" to Dore's classic drawing of this scene in the *Divine Comedy* where Virgil and Dante approach St. Peter's Gate and encounter an Angel with a sword guarding the threshold to *Purgatory*.

The three steps in Dore's drawing symbolize the three elements of confession: recognition of sin, contrition, and penance. We now see why Red's release was granted, because he has now met all three conditions for parole and entry into *Purgatory* – he has recognized his sin, the "only guilty man in Shawshank;" he has expressed contrition; "There's not a day goes by that I don't feel regret;" and finally his penance; that he can't change the past and has to live with the consequences of his sin in the present.

Traditionally, there are also two types of contrition: "perfect" (sin that offends God) and "imperfect (fear of hell, punishment)." His statement that his regret is not the result of outside forces, but rather originates from within indicates that his contrition is of the "perfect" order. It is not until the anguish of our alienation from God, burns into the soul that we can arrive at the "peace" that is promised to those that endure.

We might note parenthetically, that when Brooks was paroled, he never passed through this gate.

Now we came out, and once more  
saw the stars (INF 34:139).



## 90 – The Stars of Purgatory

Red's glance skyward implies the transition from the starless realm of *Inferno* to star lit domain of *Purgatory*; from the "sad light" of the lower self to the "Light of Life."

What is vitally lacking in the Shawshankers who are trapped in the starless, "non-being" of the prison of self, is what Paul Tillich calls the "courage to be;" that is, the bravery and valor to affirm their vital "Being;" their essential connection and relationship to Divinity. What Red exhibits in this hearing is the dynamic breakthrough of this courage; the "rehabilitation" of the soul's awareness that it comes from God and is destined to return to God.

This vital call to spiritual bravery and honor also appears in *The Lord of the Rings*. When Aragon entered the "haunted mountain Dwimorberg," (The equivalent of Shawshank Prison) he encountered a vast multitude of the "dead" and proceeded to summon them to battle: "Come, fight for us, and I will hold your honor fulfilled – What say you?"



## 91 – Communication, Communion

The inner constitution of Red's soul is revealed in these images of him on the bus and in the Foodway. We note first, that unlike Brooks, Red sits on the *right* side of the bus, in vital "alignment" with the direction of *Purgatory*.

The female on the bus, Red's *Shekhinah*, is the symbolic opposite of the one that was with Brooks. Here, she sits on the *same side*, suggesting a vital connection; she sits *in front* of him, implying the near future; and she is *older*, suggesting maturation and wisdom. Unlike Brooks' *Shekhinah* that was dissociated, less mature, and abandoned in his past, Red's soul shows an active presence that is in harmony and is headed for further growth.

In the Foodway, unlike Brooks who was addressed in the third person, Red communicates directly with his *Shekhinah*, suggesting vital familiarity.

My soul received the  
savour of the food that  
feeds us full and makes  
us thirst for more  
(Purg 31:127-130).

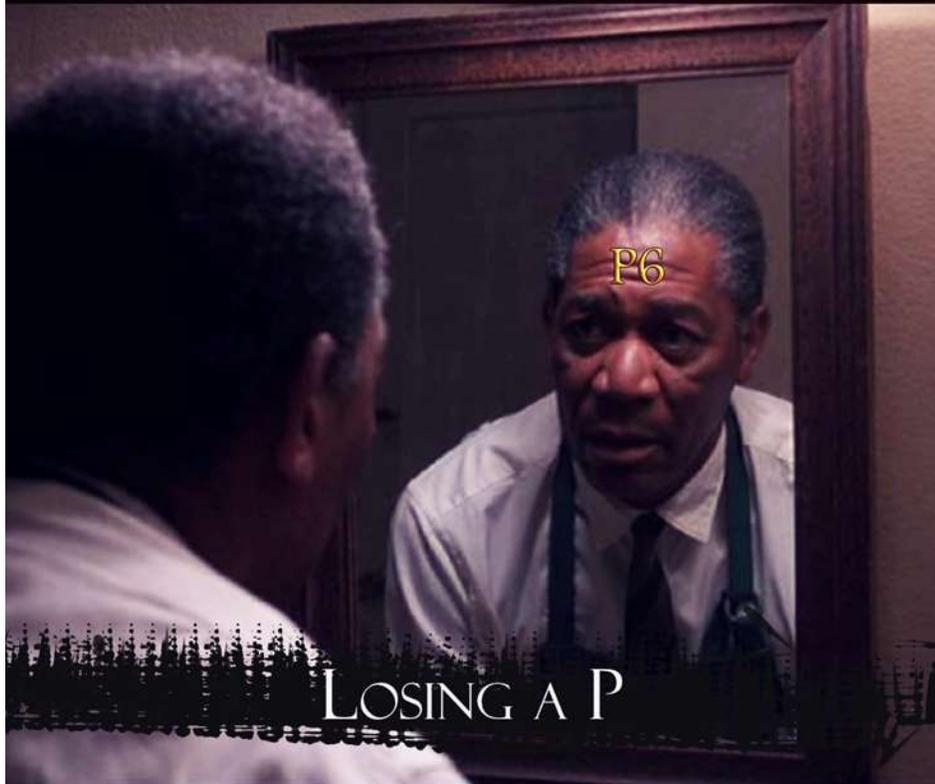
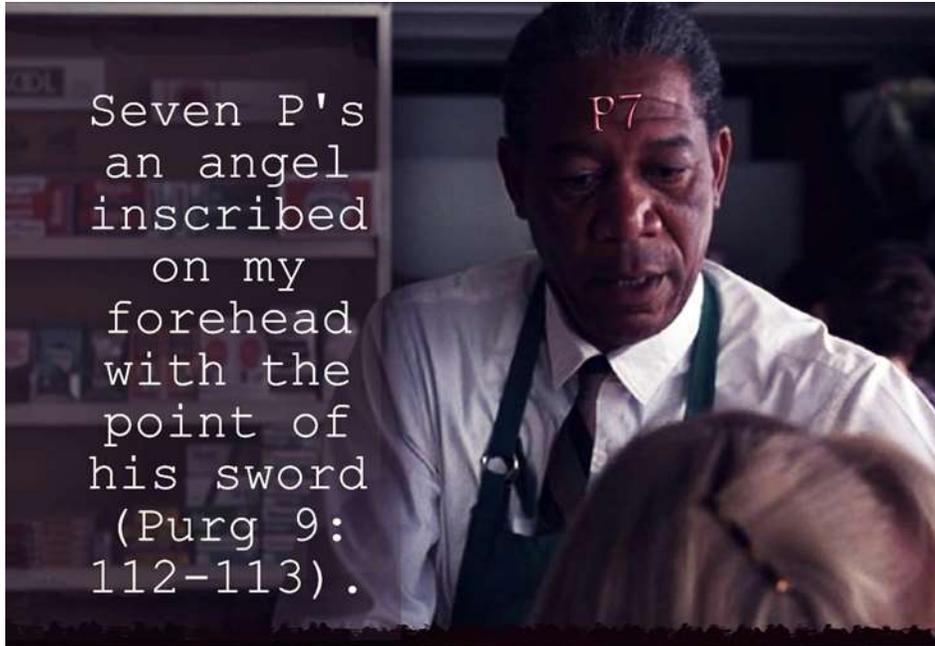


THE FOOD WAY: THE HEAVENLY MANA

## **92 – The Food Way**

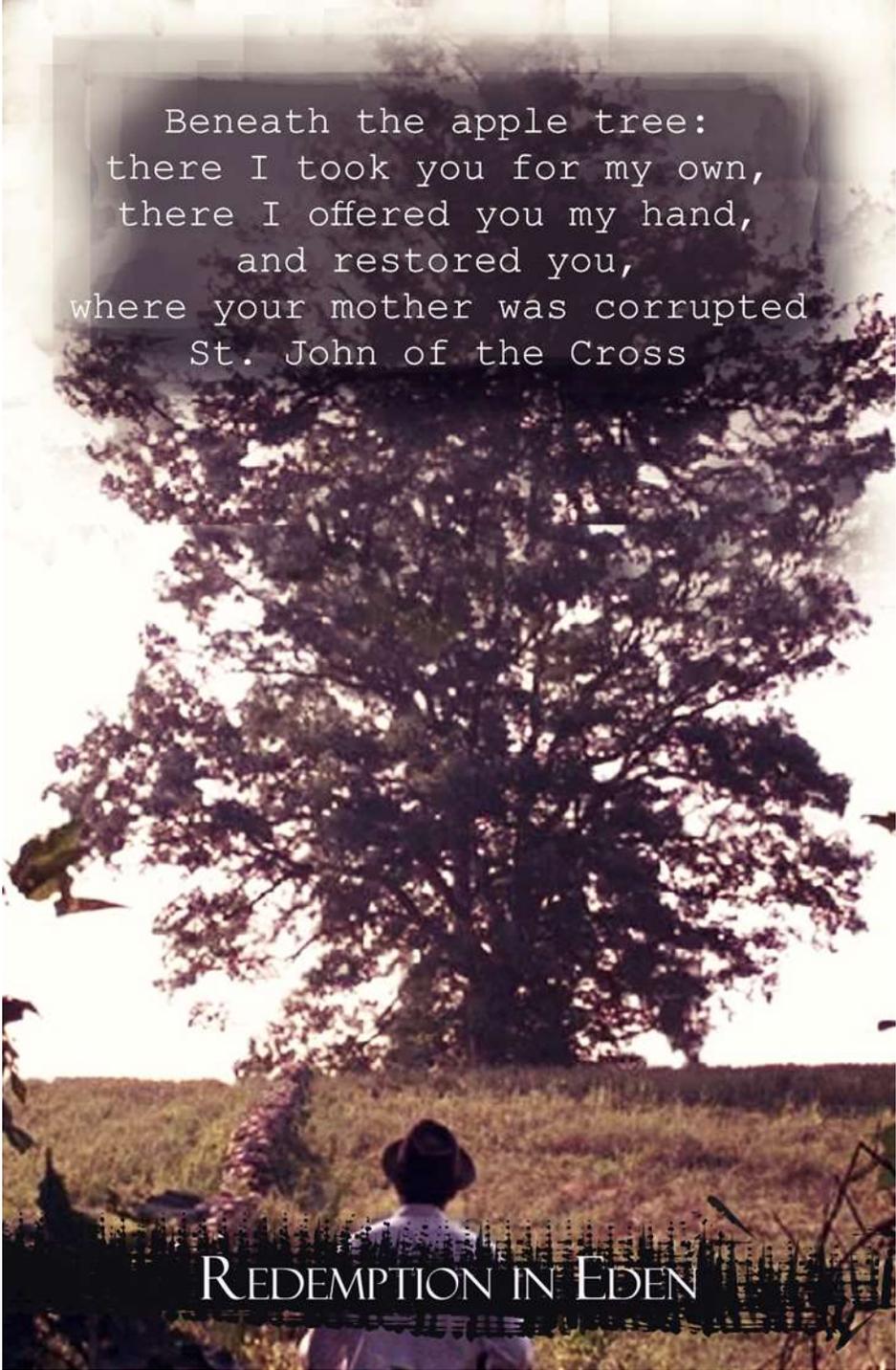
In the “Food Way,” we again see an external depiction of how the soul is receiving the “superessential bread;” the “way” the soul is receiving its “food” via the interior life. In stark contrast to Brooks, who found this reception to be “hard and painful,” Red performs the task of “food bagging” easily and without difficulty, indicating that his inner life is receiving the vital nourishment from on High. This suggests a degree of competence in his interior prayer life.

Seven P's  
an angel  
inscribed  
on my  
forehead  
with the  
point of  
his sword  
(Purg 9:  
112-113).



### 93 – Losing a P

In the *Divine Comedy*, when Dante and Virgil approach the gate to *Purgatory*, the Angel guarding the threshold scratched 7 p's on Dante's forehead, symbolizing the seven capital sins that are in need of purification in *Purgatory*. In this very first cornice, Red successfully demonstrates the virtue of "humility" when he *asks* the manager if he can use the rest room. In the *Divine Comedy*, after Dante instilled the lesson or virtue of each sin, a "P" was removed from his forehead. Red's use of the rest room here is the film's symbolic depiction of "losing a p." This "mirror image" depicting success and advancement also contrasts sharply with Brooks' "halo" of bars.

A large, leafy tree stands in a field. In the foreground, a person wearing a hat and a light-colored shirt is seen from behind, looking towards the tree. The scene is bathed in a warm, golden light, suggesting late afternoon or early morning. The text is overlaid on a dark, semi-transparent rectangular area in the upper left portion of the image.

Beneath the apple tree:  
there I took you for my own,  
there I offered you my hand,  
and restored you,  
where your mother was corrupted  
St. John of the Cross

REDEMPTION IN EDEN

## 94 – Redemption in Eden

We should note at the outset that Red's arrival in Buxton represents a *major temporal shift* in the spiritual journey. When Red first arrived at the "Brewer," he was in the first cornice of *Purgatory*, where humility is instilled. In the *Divine Comedy*, Buxton symbolizes the Garden of Eden, which happens much later, after the remaining six cardinal sins have been cleansed. For brevity's sake, the movie assumes that Red has successfully instilled the remaining six virtues when he arrives in Buxton.

This symbolic return to Eden, after the purification of *Purgatory* might be seen as the "end of our exploring:" "We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time."<sup>48</sup>

The journey of the interior life leads us back to "Paradise," that place "where we started," but we arrive at this place cleansed and transformed of the stains of the lower self, and for the first time we consciously realize our Divine heritage, and our Unity and Oneness with Sacred.

It's like something out of  
a Robert Frost poem.

Something  
there is  
that doesn't  
love a wall,  
that wants  
it down

(The Mending  
Wall,  
R. Frost).

Now see, son:  
this wall  
stands between  
you and your  
Beatrice  
(Purg 27: 36).

## THE MENDING WALL

## 95 – The Mending Wall

The composite image of Red in Buxton is a synthesis of multiple references to the later phase of *Purgatory* where Dante reunites with Beatrice in the Garden of Eden. The Oak tree, rock wall, the enigmatic comment by Andy earlier about a “Robert Frost poem” and Andy’s invitation to Red in his letter to “come a bit farther” all come together in this scene like pieces of a puzzle.

In a nutshell, in canto 27 of *Purgatory*, after Dante has completed his purification of the seven deadly sins, he nears his reunion with his beloved “Beatrice.” In their journey, Dante and Virgil encounter an Angel who tells them that they must pass through a “wall of fire” to proceed. Dante initially refuses, but Virgil then tells him: “Look my son, between Beatrice and you there’s just this wall.” They both pass through the wall of fire and approach the Garden of Eden. A Church procession then approaches, rich in symbolism. A member of the procession cries out three times a verse from the Song of Songs 4:8: “*Veni, spousa de Libano.*” (Come with me from Lebanon, my Spouse).

A veiled Beatrice then appears, the Church procession then advances to a Tree that was bare and despoiled. They encircle the tree and say “Adam” as one, in unison. A pole is joined to the base of the Tree, and it is instantly renewed and blossoms. Dante mentions a hymn that was sung that he “did not understand...nor could grasp completely the melody.” Dante and Beatrice are finally reunited. Dante tells her: “I do not recall that I was ever estranged from you, nor do I have a conscience that troubles me.”

Although we don’t witness any of these dramatic episodes in Buxton, the entire Redemptive drama is implied by the presence of multiple symbols either here or from the Opera scene earlier. The Rock wall implies Red’s passing through a “wall of fire;” the grand Oak tree symbolizes the redemptive renewing and blossoming of the Edenic tree.

The Opera, that Red described as “so beautiful that it couldn’t be expressed in words” aligns with the beautiful hymn that Dante “didn’t understand;” the verses from the Song of Songs, verses 6,7 – *anticipating* a redemptive meeting, are here *actualized* in verse 8. The “invitation:” “Come with Me” appears in a slightly altered form in Andy’s letter: “Come a bit further.” Red’s reunion with Andy is also modified, as this occurs in Zihuatanejo and not the Garden of Eden / Buxton.

There is also some clarity about the Robert Frost poem, the paradoxical “Mending Wall,” since after passing through the “wall of fire” Dante is re-united, rejoined, “mended” with his Beloved Beatrice. Andy’s earlier comment about the Pacific having “no memory” again implies Dante’s words to Beatrice, that he has “no memory of ever being estranged from her.”

Despite its idyllic and nostalgic appearance on the surface, this scene is a portrayal of the glorious “endgame” of this stage of the interior life. It dramatizes outwardly the very real and tangible actualization of vital contact and reunion with the Sacred here and now in this life.



THE BLACK ROCK AND QUEEN MARY

## 96 – The Black Rock and Queen Mary

The “Black rock” that Andy said that “has no Earthly business” in a Maine hayfield is a solidified form of “thick darkness” whose “business” is the “father’s business” (Luke 2:49). The boat on the box is the “Queen Mary,” which references Mary as “Queen of Heaven:” “Thus the circling melody...sounded the name of Mary...then they remained in my sight singing ‘Queen of Heaven’ (Par 23:108, 127-128). In this place of spiritual redemption, Mary assumes the role of the “New Eve.”

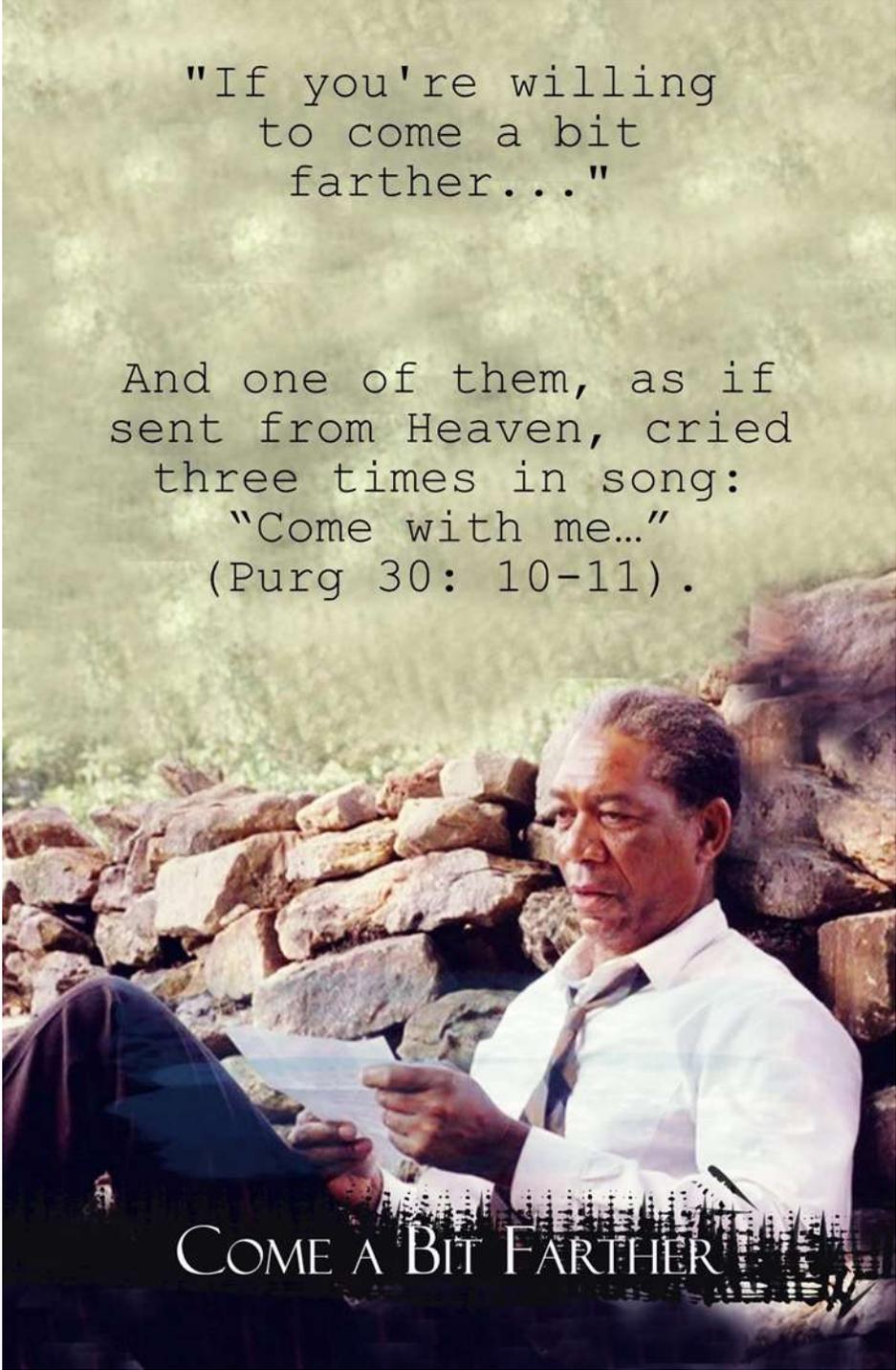
Inside the box Red finds a letter and an envelope of cash. The money symbolizes a “first instalment” of Grace; a “dowry,” an initial offering of the Infinite riches to come: “The Holy Spirit is the down payment on our inheritance, which is applied toward our redemption as God’s own people, resulting in the honor of God’s glory” (Eph. 1:14 CEB).

We also see the third appearance of:

1. A Wedding / Marriage theme – the implied “mystical marriage” of the human and Divine.
2. Thick Darkness – The Black Rock
3. The mention of Freedom – On the bus ride Red mentions the “excitement that only a free man can feel.”

"If you're willing  
to come a bit  
farther..."

And one of them, as if  
sent from Heaven, cried  
three times in song:  
"Come with me..."  
(Purg 30: 10-11).



COME A BIT FARTHER

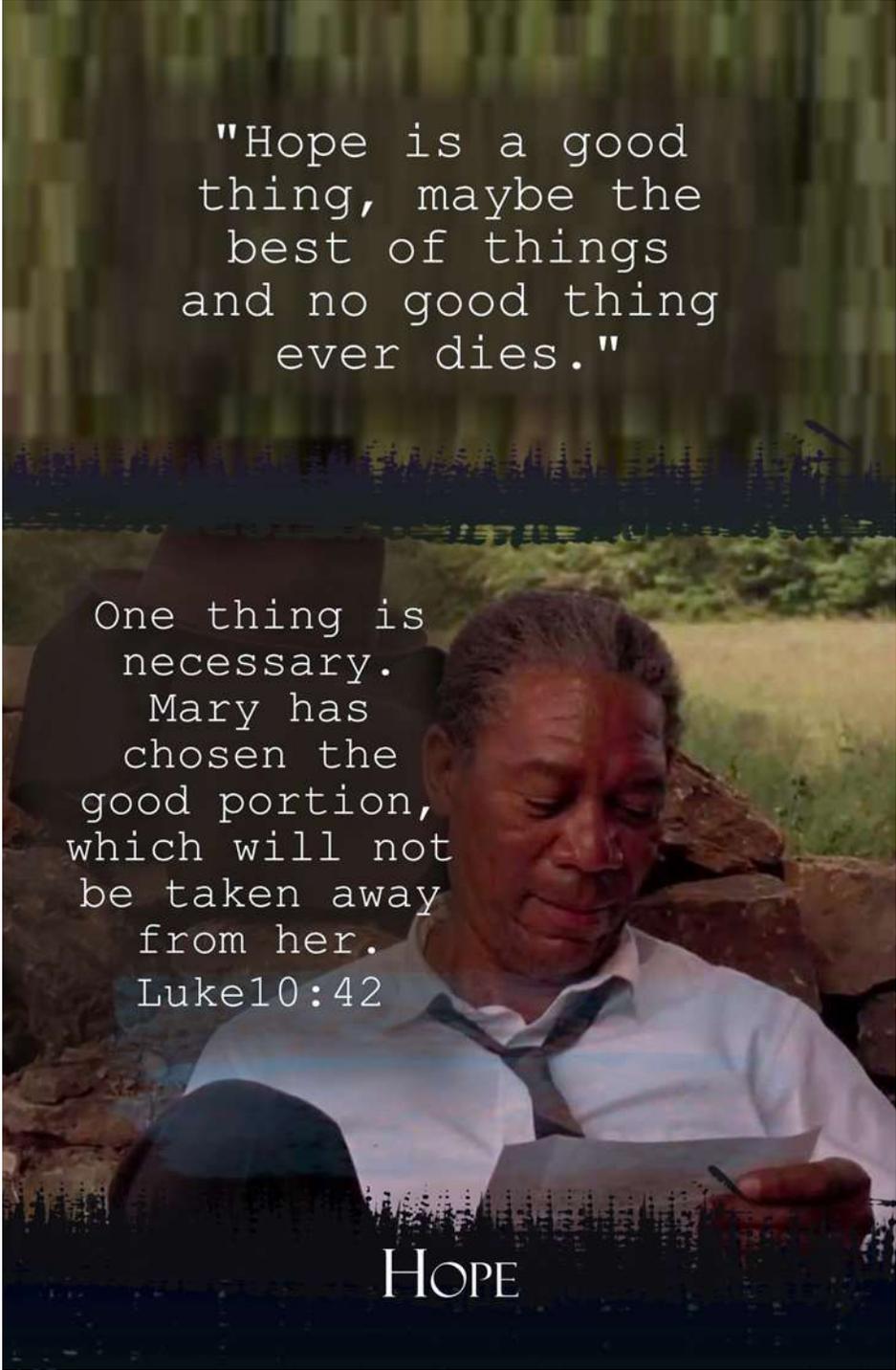
## 97 – Come Bit Farther

As already mentioned, Andy’s invitation to “Come a bit farther” serves as the corresponding parallel line in the *Divine Comedy*, from the Song of Songs – “Come with me from Lebanon my Bride.” This is a highly significant moment because this is the first time that the term “Bride” is used. This is the invitation to the “mystical marriage,” the joining of Christ, the Bridegroom, and the Bride, the human soul.

We might also note, in contrast to Red’s earlier “westward” orientation in the roof tarring scene, (10 a.m., sun on his shoulders), that here, he is facing “East,” since Andy instructed Red to look for an Oak tree in the *north*; and the tree in this scene is to Red’s *left*; he is therefore facing *east*. This symbolic turn from west to east was an important part of the early Initiation rites of Christianity:

To renounce Satan, his pomps and his works, the catechumen was invited to turn to the *West*, the region of darkness, cold and death. To swear loyalty to Jesus, he turned round again to the *East*, as though to await with confidence that “rising sun coming from on high to illumine those who were sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death.”<sup>49</sup>

The “East” is also the place in the Garden of Eden where God planted a garden: “And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed (Gen 2:8). Red’s soul is now clearly oriented to return to Eden, Paradise.

A photograph of a man with grey hair, wearing a white dress shirt and a light-colored tie, sitting outdoors. He is looking down at a book or document he is holding in his hands. The background shows a stone wall and some greenery. The text is overlaid on the image in a white, monospaced font.

"Hope is a good  
thing, maybe the  
best of things  
and no good thing  
ever dies."

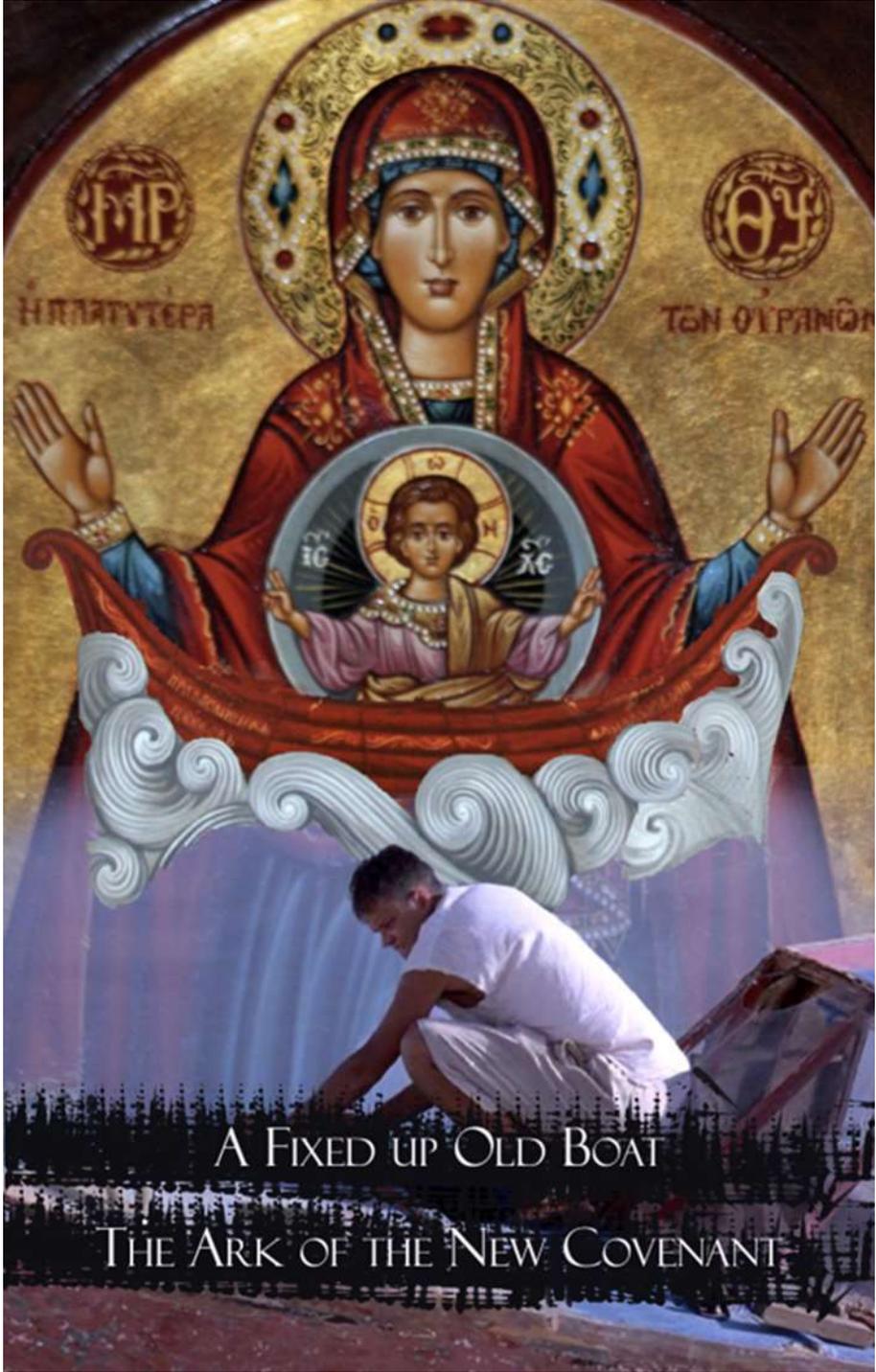
One thing is  
necessary.  
Mary has  
chosen the  
good portion,  
which will not  
be taken away  
from her.  
Luke 10:42

HOPE

## 98 – Hope

Andy’s letter contains one of the most memorable cliches in the film: “Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies.” While the outer communication of this sentence is certainly inspirational and encouraging, if we infuse its meaning with the implied reference to Mary as representing the Contemplative life: “Mary has chosen the good portion that shall not be taken away” (Luke 10:42), we get a version that is perhaps less melodious, but nevertheless delivers a vital communication that is eminently transformative: Hope is a good thing (the contemplative life that Mary chose) and no good thing ever dies (because eternal life never dies, it “shall not be taken away”).

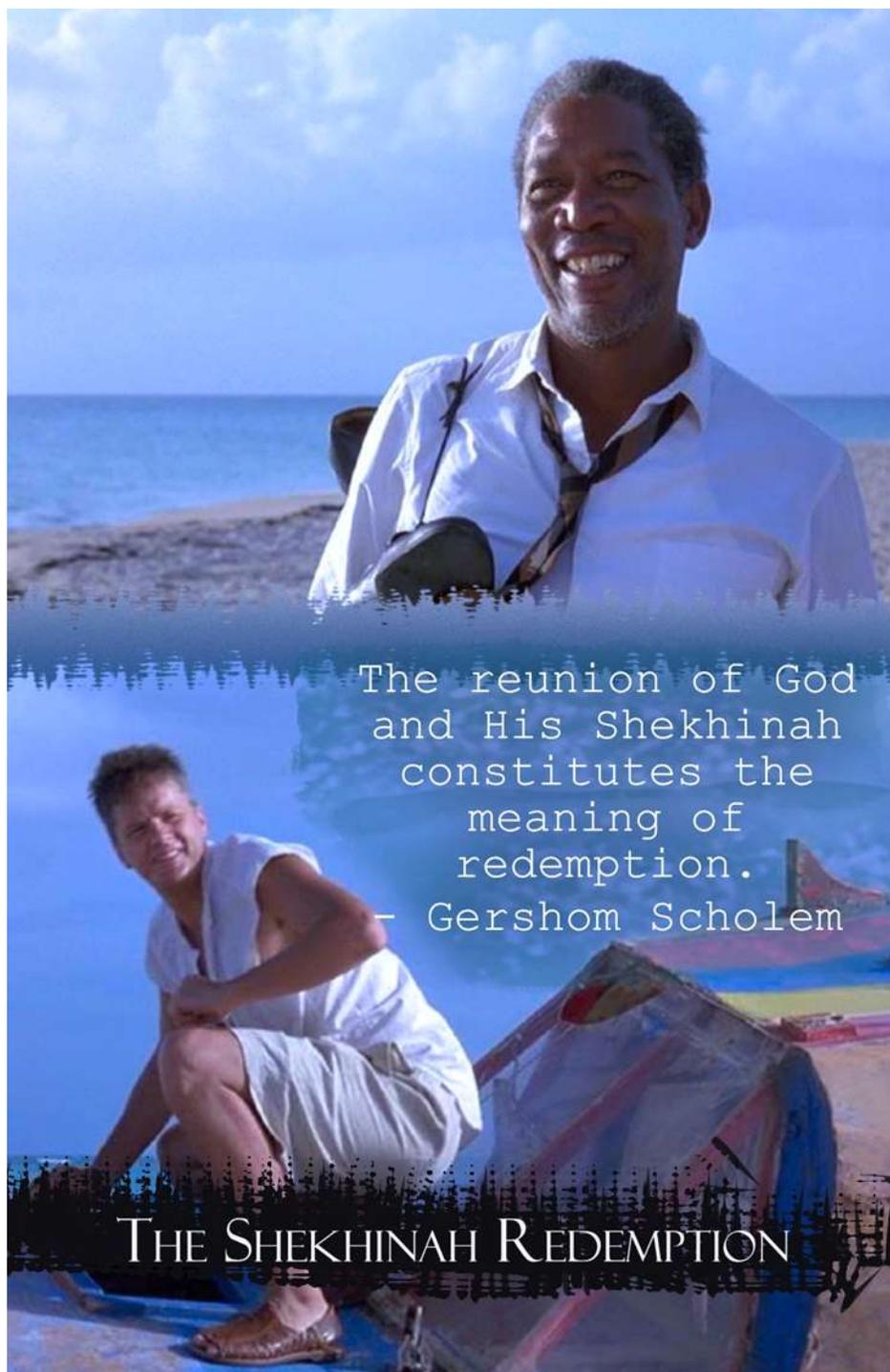
To grasp the essential message of *this* Hope, and not “grumble” or “get offended,” is the blossoming and fulfillment of the Spiritual Life.



A FIXED UP OLD BOAT  
THE ARK OF THE NEW COVENANT

## **99 – The Ark of the New Covenant**

Earlier in the movie, Andy made a reference about “fixing up a boat, opening a hotel and taking guests out charter fishing.” In the symbolic context of the film, the “*fixed* up old boat” equates with the “Ark of the *New* Covenant,” traditionally associated with Mary. Mary appears in the redemptive context as the “New Eve” who brings the promise of redemptive joining with the Divine. It is this in this “Ark” that the “guests” go “fishing” into the deep things of God via the inner life of prayer.



The reunion of God  
and His Shekhinah  
constitutes the  
meaning of  
redemption.  
- Gershom Scholem

## THE SHEKHINAH REDEMPTION

## 100 – The Shekhinah Redemption

Red's arrival in Zihuatanejo<sup>50</sup> is symbolically the Redemptive re-joining of Heaven and Earth; the reunion of the Divine and human in the here and now life on Earth, the regaining of "Earthly Paradise." The completion of this leg of the journey prepares the soul for the Ultimate quest to an ever deeper unification of God and the soul. In general terms, there is a time when "the soul lives in God;" and another where "God lives in the soul." Red is at the beginning of this second expedition.

The "embrace" between Andy and Red completes the grand mission of the Prodigal Son, who: "Left the Father and wasted his inheritance;" then, "Came to his senses, admitted his sins, and set out to return to his Father, and while he was still way off, his Father saw him and was filled with compassion and ran to him and threw his arms around him and kissed him" (Luke 15:17-20).

Red "left the Father" when he was imprisoned in the lower self and entered Shawshank. He "squandered" his inheritance, the riches of life and existence itself in the alienated, egoistic existence of "self-love." Red "came to his senses" when he "blew the harmonica," symbolically moving in a new direction by adopting an interior life, and thus "set out on the return journey to the Father." In his third parole hearing, he admitted his "sins," against God and Heaven, to the "powers that be," and humbly expressed contrition and regret. After his "release" he still had a long journey of internal purification, but he successfully arrived on the shores of Paradise and was "seen" by the powers that be who then compassionately "ran to him" and gave him a "Divine embrace."

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- 
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- <sup>2</sup> The idea of a “divorce” from God also appears in the *Divine Comedy*: “So love of this life then caught fire in me. I was, until that point a wretched soul. Divorced from God, my all was avarice.” Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Trans. by Robin Kirkpatrick (London, New York: Penguin: 2012), p. 106.
- <sup>3</sup> Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life, VI* (Middletown: Christ the King Library, 2017), p. 368-369.
- <sup>4</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. 34, emphasis added.
- <sup>5</sup> George Maloney and Kallistos Ware, *Pseudo Macarius -The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), p. 150.
- <sup>6</sup> Dietrich Von Hildebrand, *Transformation in Christ* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1948), p. 1-2.
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- <sup>16</sup> Raymond Gawronski, *Word and Silence: Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), p. 157.
- <sup>17</sup> Thomas Keating, *Reawakenings* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), p. 73.
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- <sup>20</sup> Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart* (New York: Bloomsbury, 1986), p. 27.
- <sup>21</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works (The Merchant of Venice)* (New York: Randon House, 1975), p. 207.
- <sup>22</sup> Louis Depre, James Wiseman, *Light from Light* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1988), p. 247.
- <sup>23</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (London: SCM Press, 1991), p. 242, emphasis added.
- <sup>24</sup> “When you move in a spiral, it's very difficult to see if you ever going left or right, of course, but Dante goes out of his way to say that he's always moving *leftward* [in Inferno]. And as soon as we get to Purgatory, he goes out of his way to tell us that he's now going *rightward*...” (Mazzotta, *Dante*, p. 39, emphasis added).
- <sup>25</sup> *The Marriage of Figaro*, Act 3, Scene 10: (<https://www.opera-arias.com/mozart/le-nozze-di-figaro/libretto/english/>)
- <sup>26</sup> E. Kadloubovsky, E.M. Palmer (Trans.), *The Art of Prayer* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 71.
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<sup>43</sup> William Thompson, et al, *Berulle and the French School* (New York: Paulist, 1989), p. 151, emphasis added.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1985), p. 71.

<sup>45</sup> William Johnston, *Christian Zen* (San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1971), p. 50.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Smoley, *Inner Christianity* (Boston, Shambhala, 2002), p. 80.

<sup>47</sup> David Benner, *Desiring God's Will* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005), p. 88-89.

<sup>48</sup> T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1980), p. 145.

<sup>49</sup> Louis Bouyer, *Christian Initiation* (New York: Collier, 1962), p. 66-67, emphasis added.

<sup>50</sup> Biblically, Zihuatanejo is the "Promised Land," the City of God's children, the "New Jerusalem;" "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev 21:2); or "Zion"... "For the Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place" (Psalm 132:13-14 ESV); 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion ... lo, your king comes to you' (Zech 9. 9). The Shekhinah appears as the "Bride;" the "Daughter of Zion," as well as in the native name of Zihuatanejo, which means "place of women." It is also noteworthy that Zion is embedded in **Z I huata N ej O**. This is a place, or a "state of the soul" that is "re-joined" with its inner Divine; the soul that has a redeemed Shekhinah. This "little place on the Pacific," suggesting humility, is again in stark contrast to "Reno," the "biggest boastful little city in the world." The word "Pacific" associated with "peace" implies the Peace of God, the "peace that passes all understanding." The "warm place with no memory" suggests the "warmth" of the continuous awareness of God's Presence with "no memory" of ever being estranged from God.