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THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS **A Spiritual Exercise**

1 Early in my career as Campus Pastor in Waterloo, I instituted a seven week program in our home in Waterloo. We lived in an enormous old heritage house, at 137 Albert Street in Waterloo, one of that city's original farmsteads, now completely surrounded by busy University campuses, Wilfrid Laurier University and University of Waterloo.

2 Our TV was located in a huge Family Room, so that was the venue for our program. We would screen a movie that included themes suggesting each of the Seven Deadly sins, one a week, and discuss them! We'd call the entire series "Movies and Meanings" and we'd serve coffee and tea and *M & M* candies!

3 The program I envisioned was designed chiefly with students in mind, , so I promoted it on both campuses. But I advertised it also in local Lutheran congregations, feeling there might be wide appeal in such a series. Each week we had an attendance of at least 20, students and townsfolk.

4 The Seven Deadly Sins are a classification of human immoralities that took shape early in the history of the Christian church, probably among the so-called Desert Fathers. They are: Pride, Anger, Envy, Greed, Sloth, Gluttony, and Lust. These seven human iniquities have played a significant role in succeeding church traditions and in subsequent literature in Western societies, including Dante's 13th Century masterwork, *The Divine Comedy*, and even in Chaucer.

5 So: I am commending them to you here as still another – an eighth – in my on-going series of Spiritual Exercises. These Seven Deadly Sins might well serve as a framework for personal reflection and introspection, or in a corporate setting, before engaging in a rite of Individual Confession or Corporate Confession. See *Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)* pages 238-244. Be certain to see also paragraph 19 below.

6 I'll also include, with each entry, a word about the movie we selected for each category, as I remember them. Just for fun!

7 Previous postings in this series include:

- 204 Signs of the Kingdom
- 208 A Spiritual Autobiography
- 214 My Ten Greatest Hymns
- 220 *Benedicite Omnia Opera* and *Berachah* (Two Exercises)
- 229 A Wound Map
- 233 A Supergraphic Mural

8 PRIDE (*Superbia*) is the first of the Seven Deadly Sins. (I give the Latin name in each case simply because I love the way that ancient language rolls off the tongue! The Sins sound, to me, so much more dreadful in Latin!)

9 Not incidentally, some scholars have suggested that the Sins, as I list them here, in 4 above, represent a sequence of priorities. Pride is the worst of the lot, in almost every listing, because it can impact so many others' lives. Lust is last, surprisingly, presumably because it can involve fewer individuals.

10 The movie we selected to illustrate Pride was *Citizen Kane* (black and white, 1941), Orson Well's masterpiece about an unscrupulous media baron who rises to political power. One of the two or three Greatest Movies of All Time! We could also have chosen *The Godfather* (colour 1972), another movie masterpiece!

11 ANGER (*Ira*: See the English cognate ire.) Is the second. Is there a difference between an anger that is immoral, "deadly", and an anger that is righteous or justifiable? Jesus after all drives the money changers from the Temple, in a show of anger. Such are the questions this listing provokes!

12 Our movie illustrating Anger was *Lord of the Flies* (b & w, 1963). It's the story of British schoolboys' descent into barbarism when they're stranded on a desert island after a plane crash. We could also have chosen *Deliverance* (colour, 1972), James Dickie's story of four urban businessmen canoeing on a Southern river, and collapsing into savagery. The famous *Dueling Banjos* sequence is its one moment of grace!

13 ENVY (*Invidia*. English cognate: invidious) is third. A debilitating moral failing wherever you find it. Shakespeare's *Othello* is a case in point. Our movie: Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus* (colour, 1984), which dramatizes the presumed envy of Antonio Salieri of the divinely gifted W.A. Mozart. That A initial in Mozart's name stands for the Latin for "beloved of God". Shaffer's play apparently stretches the actual truth. But the photography in Milos Forman's film – contemporary Prague stands in here for 18th Century Vienna! – and the movie's musical score are both glorious!

14 GREED (*Avaricia*. English cognate: Avarice) is the fourth Deadly Sin. Human Greed causes no end of human suffering. It could be argued – I'd personally be willing to argue – that unfettered free market capitalism is inherently rapacious.

15 Our movie? *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (b & w, 1948), a magnificent re-telling of B. Traven's tale of three gold prospectors in that Mexican mountain range whose relationships and whose very psyches are eroded by their steadily accumulating wealth. You can watch Humphrey Bogart, as one of the prospectors, disintegrating right in front of your eyes! One of Bogey's best! Walter Huston, John's father, won an Academy Award for his performance, without his false teeth!

16 SLOTH (*Acedia*. I don't know an English cognate of this Latin...) is a fifth Sin. The term Sloth is intended here to encompass a range of human failings. It can refer to simple laziness. It can also mean indifference, an attitude of not caring. It can even refer to faithlessness, a loss of faith. And I can't recall the movie we chose to illustrate Sloth. Are there readers out there who can suggest a title?

17 GLUTTONY (*Gula*. There's no English cognate I can find.) is a sixth Sin. Over eating is surely one of the sins particular to the 21st Century, at least among those with means. We chose the movie *Tom Jones* (colour, 1963) which features an hilarious scene of gluttonous feasting. But we could have chosen *National Lampoon's Animal House* (colour, 1978).

18 LUST (*Luxuria*. Cognate: Luxury) the seventh and final Deadly Sin. I was surprised to note that it's last in the list. Our movie? *Carnal Knowledge* (colour 1971), Mike Nichols' comedy featuring a young Jack Nicholson as a sex obsessed student. There are surely other films with a similar theme. Suggestions, anyone?

19 Note that this compilation of the Seven Deadly Sins is only one possibility for introspection leading to spiritual growth. You might also use the Ten Commandments, one by one. You can find these in Luther's *Small Catechism*, helpfully printed among the last items in *ELW*, pages 1160-1161.

20 Can a reader with a creative imagination – and a love of movies! – suggest a film series illustrating each of the Ten Commandments?

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