

The Seven Deadly Sins

The way I remember *The Seven Deadly Sins* is by reviewing the cast of the 60's comedy *Gilligan's Island*. The Professor who makes a phone system of coconuts and \string is *Pride*. Ginger the temptress is clearly *Lust*. Mary Anne is *Envy* as she vies with Ginger for the Professor's attention. Gillian is undeniably *Sloth*. The Howell's are such thin characters it takes both embody *Greed*. The Captain is the most complex since he embodies two of the deadly seven: *Anger* and *Gluttony*. It's a morality play, and they are us!

In the Christian reading of the human condition we all have the same disease, the technical name for which is *original sin*. We are born East of Eden, marked by death, damaged in all our capacities and alienated from God, and to that awful legacy we make our individual contributions along the way. Guilt and shame are our companions, original innocence a distant memory. Now from this underlying condition emerge seven symptoms or passions that combine themselves in diabolical ways. Envy plus anger leads to murder. Lust plus greed yields the pimp and the prostitute. Sloth combines with gluttony for obesity and heart disease. Pride and Greed yield insider trading. Envy, defined as pain at another's blessing, is the only one with no pleasure attached. You get the idea.

The amazing thing about the deadly seven is their endurance. Today you find them displayed on T-shirts and on the silver screen. Since the fourth century when the original list of eight demons was formulated by the Egyptian monk Evagrius of Pontus, they've been used as a diagnostic tool in the care and cure of souls. I often use them with a dose of humor tossed in; people often squirm when asked to name them of themselves because they are so accurate and blunt. Today in our psychologized age we call them *disorders* or *hangups*, thus doing what ever we can to avoid the moral dimension of personal accountability for our character and its malformation. The truth is that we each have all seven, though with differing intensities and variations across the life cycle. In church teaching they are not only deadly, they are also capital, meaning they are the *heads* or *sources* from which all the forms of rebellion against God spring. The list as such is not found in Scripture, though all seven are found in it. A double list of seven vices that spring from the heart and defile the whole person are found in Mark 7:20-23 and a much longer list in Romans 1:28-32, and if you read the these lists with the daily paper you will see them all displayed. We have not changed!

If, as Jesus teaches, the path to healing is to love God with all we are and our neighbors as ourselves as he does, then the seven deadly vices can be recast as sins against the two great commandments. In *Pride* I lift myself above others and look down on them. In *Lust* I treat them like pleasurable body parts instead of precious persons. In *Greed* I live in fear and fail to give. In *Envy* I am never content and the spurn the love of others. In *Sloth* I am not moved towards human pain,, and in *Anger* I become unapproachable. The *Glutton* reduces life to flavors and fullness. So what is the proper response of those who find themselves so thoroughly exposed? There is just such a prayer. It's come from the monks of the Eastern Orthodox tradition and is known as *The Jesus Prayer*. It reads, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner?" And he will. That is my testimony as one scarred with the lashes of all of the deadly seven. I am being healed by love.

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