

PT 29: The Seven Deadly Sins

Dr. Joyce Ann Mercer
Thursdays 8:55-11:45 am
Addison 109

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Course Description:

This course explores the classic “7 deadly sins” (lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy, and pride) from the perspective of pastoral theology and church’s ministry of reconciliation. As part of this exploration we will consider the dynamics of shame, guilt, and forgiveness from theological and social-psychological perspectives. Also addressed are the “contemporary” corporate manifestations of sins of racism, sexism, and classism and how these relate to individual and corporate understandings of sin and reconciliation. Participants in the course will choose one of the seven sins as a topic of special focus.

Intentions for Student Learning:

At the completion of this class, participants will:

1. Be able to articulate a basic, intelligible, credible and *pastorally sensitive* theological understanding of human sin in general;
2. Possess a deeper knowledge of at least one of the “seven deadly sins” and its particular effects upon individual and corporate life;
3. Relate classic formulations of sin to contemporary human situations, with attention to the role of *context* in a particular person’s or community’s specific experience of sin;
4. Be knowledgeable about the dynamics of shame, guilt, and forgiveness in human experience from theological and psychosocial perspectives;
5. Demonstrate increased awareness and insight into the participants’ own particular propensities for distorted desires expressed in Christian tradition’s formulations of sin, and how one’s personal history might affect attitudes toward, and pastoral care with, others;
6. Show practical knowledge of the church’s pastoral and liturgical resources for communicating the good news of God’s grace and forgiveness.

Texts:

Farley, Wendy. *The Wounding and Healing of Desire: Weaving Heaven and Earth*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

Jones, L. Gregory. *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995.

Lester, Andrew. *The Angry Christian: A Theology for Care and Counseling*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.

Various short articles and chapters on reserve (library or electronic reserves) as listed below.

Course Requirements:

We will operate this course in a seminar/learning community format. That is, each participant is viewed as an active agent of her/his own learning and a contributor to the learning of others. For that reason, attendance and full participation is the most basic course requirement. Only excused absences for unavoidable reasons will be permitted. If you have an emergency requiring your absence, please try to notify the professor by email or telephone prior to the class. Participants should come to class sessions prepared to critically discuss assigned readings for the day, having completed any assigned readings or written work prior to class.

Requirements:

I. A. There are 2 types of **written assignments** that focus around course texts and are as follows:

1. Weekly participation in a Blackboard discussion group in relation to the texts for the week. Class members will be divided into groups with specific roles for the discussion each week. Grading will be determined on the basis of timely, substantive participation in this on-line writing process. **NOTE: YOUR FIRST POSTING SHOULD BE MADE NO LATER THAN MIDNIGHT ON TUESDAY, SO THAT CLASSMATES MAY RESPOND TO YOU BEFORE 7 PM WEDNESDAY.**

2. Each student will elect one of the seven deadly sins as a topic for particular focus. Each week, in addition to the shared reading that all students will do, students who are “specializing” in the topic for the day will read one or two additional resources and bring those into on-line and in-class discussions. The “sin of choice” elected by students will also be the subject of a final class presentation and paper. This final paper 10-12 pages is due on the last day of class (seniors)/ two days following the end of class (all others). The paper involves three interrelated parts: (1) you will articulate a basic, intelligible, credible and *pastorally sensitive* theological understanding of human sin in general, drawing on course texts; (2) you will explore the particular sin you have elected to research more substantively; and (3) you will identify and explore individual and corporate pastoral theological issues in relation to your topic.

B. Each student will offer a 10 minute presentation on her/his selected sin in the last class session.

II. Roles for Blackboard Discussion:

For each of four weeks, you will be in a group of 3-4 persons, each of whom is responsible for a distinctive “role” in the discussion. *Everyone in the group reads all the common readings.* But then each individual has a different responsibility in relation to the discussion:

Commentator A: For a given week in which you have this role, select the readings listed as (A) in the schedule of work below. Give 2 paragraph (more or less) summary of the author’s thesis and the main ideas of her/his argument. Then, comment on that argument: what questions does it raise? What problems do you have with it? What points of agreement do

you find with this author and your own thinking on the subject. The point is to first grasp what the author is saying and then comment on it in terms of what you think about it.

Commentator B: Do the same, in relation to the “(B)” readings.

Bridge: Your job is to read across both sets of readings (A) and (B), identifying common themes as well as major points of divergence between these readings. Then, reflect on what we have been talking about in our class time in relation to these readings. Your task is to write 2 *integrating paragraphs* that point out the connections and disconnections among these various sources.

Specialist: If you are specializing in the “sin of the week” for that class session, you will have the additional responsibility of offering a summary of the specialists’ readings on your sin of choice.

After posting in your role, you must respond to another group member’s posting at least once in a substantive paragraph.

Expectations of Learners:

1. Attend class regularly. Come to class prepared, meaning that reading and written assignments have been completed prior to the start of class to facilitate engaged participation.
2. It is expected that students in this course will use gender-inclusive language in written and spoken expression about people. Similarly, when writing or speaking of God, all are asked to practice a fuller range of imagery and metaphor than the use of male language alone allows.
3. Observe seminary policies on intellectual integrity/plagiarism: students are expected to provide appropriate citation for sources, including internet sources, in written materials. Plagiarism will result in automatic failure of the course.

LAPTOPS AND CELLPHONES: This is a small class where face-to-face relationships are both our reality and in an important way, our subject matter--and we are meeting in a WiFi environment, where temptations to wander off into cyberspace are rife. Laptop computers and WiFi have transformed the way that we study, listen and write. But in a course like ours, laptop use can be distracting both to the instructor/students trying to make eye contact with you and to the computer-less student sitting next to you. We will be moving around the classroom in role-plays, pairings, etc. and you may or may not be near an electrical outlet. So please, for the brief minutes that we are together, go ahead and use your laptop if you must, but please stay off the Net, and remember that we are all in this discussion together. If you have a cell phone, kindly set it to its silent/vibrate mode during class or turn it off.

Sch **Plan of Work:**

Session I: Thursday, April 3rd
Sin, sins, and Seven Deadly Sins

Introduction to the Course and each other

Recommended background reading: Serene Jones, (blackboard reserve)

Session II: Thursday, April 10th Anger & Acedia

Is anger a sin? We will consider the “gifts” and problems of anger and the phenomenon of violence/hate crimes as an example of a corporate manifestation of anger.

Readings:

- (A) 1. Farley, pp. ix-69;
2. Marshall, “Communal Dimensions of Forgiveness: Learning from the Life and Death of Matthew Shepard” in *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 9, 1999, pp. 49-61 (Blackboard)
- (B) 1. Lester, 1-76, and 115-136 (in bookstore as “recommended” text; also on reserve in library)
2. Stafford, pp. 110-117 “Accidie” (blackboard)

Specialists’ reading: Anger _____ Acedia _____

Anger: *Lester, 137-225

Acedia/Sloth/Boredom: *Mercer, “Children, Church and the Problem of Boredom” (Blackboard).

*Norris, Kathleen, “Plain Old Sloth” in *The Christian Century*, 1/11/2003, Vol 120, No. 1, p. 8 (Blackboard).

Session III: Thursday, April 17th Lust and Gluttony

We consider these two sins in the context of contemporary phenomenon of internet pornography/sex trade, and also of various forms of distorted bodies shaped by affluence, sexism, etc.

Readings:

- (A) Farley, pp. 71-165
- (B) 1. Bringle, Mary Louise (1989, October). Confessions of a Glutton. *The Christian Century*, 106(31), 955. (Blackboard)
2. Frykholm, Amy. “Addictive Behavior” *Christian Century* V 124 No 18, Sept 4 2007 pp 20-22,

Specialists’ readings: Lust _____ Gluttony _____

Gluttony: *Swallowing the Shame: Pastoral Care Issues and Eating Disorders JPC 48 No 2 Summer 1994 pp. 135-144 (ATLA) (blackboard)

*Jane Dasher, “Manna in the Desert: Eating Disorders and Pastoral Care” pp. 179-191 in Moessner, *Through the Eyes of Women: insights for pastoral care* (library reserve)

Lust: *Selections, Brock and Thistlethwaite, *Casting Stones: Prostitution and Liberation in Asia and the United States* (reserve)

*Byassee, Jason, “Not Your Father’s Pornography”, (blackboard)

*B.W. Grant, "Lust and Chastity" in Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling (library reference)

Session IV: Thursday, April 24th _____ Envy and Greed

Some contemporary thinkers suggest that envy and greed operate as the most prominent sins in the context of globalization and North American consumer culture.

Reading:

(A) L. Gregory Jones, pp. xi-98

(B) Paula M Cooley (2004). Christian Perspectives on Overcoming Greed in a Consumeristic Society: Buying Fear as Collusion with Greed versus an Economy of Grace 1. Buddhist - Christian Studies, 24, 39-46. (Blackboard)

Specialists' reading: Greed/Avarice _____ Envy _____

Greed: * Mercer, "A Problem of Ambivalence: Children as Consumers in America" (library reserve)

Envy: *Selections, Ann and Barry Ulanov, *Cinderella and Her Sisters: The Envied and the Envy*

Session V: Thursday, May 1st _____ Pride _____ / _____ Racism

Sometimes referred to as "the root of all evil" and the quintessential human sin, theologians in the 20th century began to question whether having pride might be a virtue for some whose failing is a too-quick giving up of self-assertion. We will examine pride in relation to racism as one corporate form of this sin.

Reading:

(A) LG Jones, pp 101-204

(B) 1. J. Deotis Roberts, "Humanity, Sin, and Forgiveness," Ch 5 in *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology* (blackboard reserve)

2. McIntosh, Peggy, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies"

Specialists' reading: Pride _____

*McDougall, Joy Ann, "Sin—No More? A Feminist Re-Visioning of a Christian Theology of Sin" ATR Spring 2006, Vol 88. No 2 pp. 215-135 (blackboard)

*Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View" (blackboard)

Session VI: Thursday, May 8th _____

L. Gregory Jones, pp. 207-302

**Presentations

Group 1: Session 1

Commentator A: _____

Commentator B: _____

Bridge: _____

Specialist? : _____

Group 1: Session 2

Commentator A: _____

Commentator B: _____

Bridge: _____

Specialist? : _____

Group 1: Session 3

Commentator A: _____

Commentator B: _____

Bridge: _____

Specialist? : _____

Group 1: Session 4

Commentator A: _____

Commentator B: _____

Bridge: _____

Specialist? : _____

Group 1: Session 5

Commentator A: _____

Commentator B: _____

Bridge: _____

Specialist? : _____

Group 2: Session 1

Commentator A: _____

Commentator B: _____

Bridge: _____

Specialist? : _____

Group 2: Session 2

Commentator A: _____

Commentator B: _____

Bridge: _____

Specialist? : _____

Group 2: Session 3

Commentator A: _____

Commentator B: _____

Bridge: _____

Specialist? : _____

Group 2: Session 4

Commentator A: _____

Commentator B: _____

Bridge: _____

Specialist? : _____

Group 2: Session 5

Commentator A: _____

Commentator B: _____

Bridge: _____

Specialist? : _____