

Greed, 2001

Dear Friends,

The motivation for this year's holiday letter is not original to me. The seed was planted in my head a number of years ago during my schooldays by a friend of mine. The idea is basically this: Americans are so decadent that they base their holidays around the Seven Deadly Sins. (No, Osama didn't originate this idea. Mr. bin Laden was on the CIA payroll at the time, before he decided to turn our own training against us, demonstrating how difficult it is these days to find a mercenary with a sense of loyalty.) Thanks to America's remarkable public school system, I'm sure most of you can make the connection even without my help, but why don't I just enumerate the seven deadly sins anyway, for my own benefit? By the way, if you would like to obtain more information on the Seven Deadly Sins, I strongly recommend you go down to your video store and rent *Se7en*. Anyone who has seen this film will agree with me that the sins will be burned into your memory for the rest of your life.

1. Gluttony. This is traditionally the act of overindulging in bodily pleasures, most notably food. Noted Christian fantasy author C.S. Lewis, however, defined gluttony as refusing to eat what someone has prepared for you. This alternate definition should come as no surprise to anyone who's ever seen a photograph of C.S. Lewis. However, if we stick with the definition of gluttony with which we are all familiar, the obvious choice is Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is the day on which we celebrate the fact that our nation consumes 50% of the world's resources by consuming half of these resources in a 24-hour period. Most people believe that the first Thanksgiving occurred when the Pilgrims magnanimously invited the Indians to share in the eating of the Indians' entire reserves. However, there is an alternate theory that modern Thanksgiving evolved from the need to do *something* with all that darn squash.

2. Sloth. We indulge in this fine sin on the aptly named Labor Day. This is the day Americans celebrate how hard they work by not working. Actually, let me clarify this. This is the day that white-collar workers celebrate how hard they work by giving themselves the day off. Obviously, we can't give the American labor force the day off. We need them to keep America running on Labor Day; if I want to eat the last ice cream cone of the summer, there sure as heck better be someone available to sell it to me!

3. Pride/Vanity. This is essentially the same sin, but since it has two aspects, we celebrate it twice! Is there any doubt that pride is manifested in Independence Day? On this day, we are so proud to be Americans that regardless of race, creed, religion, or politics, we all gather around to commemorate via fireworks every occasion on which we wiped the floor with anyone who is not American. After Osama's attack, it's sort of like every day is Independence Day: all of us are united in the face of a great tragedy. Even our proud citizenry of Arabic heritage have patriotically decided to enlist en masse in the FBI. Or do something with the FBI, I'm not exactly sure what. Anyway, we celebrate the vanity aspect of this sin as Easter. Two thousand years ago, somebody mentioned to Christ that he looked pretty good for a guy who had been dead for three days, and the tradition of looking our best just sort of followed suit. (Get it?)

4. Lust. It is true that some commentators (Ayn Rand, for example) believe that there is nothing inherently sinful about the seven deadly sins, that all benefit the human condition. While not delving into this too deeply, I should point out that certainly the world would *not* be a better place if lust were to vanish, in that this would signal the end of the human species (or result in some sort of forcible and unpleasant means of procreation at the hands of the state). Additionally, this "sin" is peculiar in that you don't actually have to do anything to be sinning. (OK, sloth, by its very definition, also fits that category.) As any teenage boy will tell you, not even sleeping will necessarily prevent one from committing this indiscretion. Anyway, good old St. Valentine's Day fills the bill here,

though anyone who has been pursued by a determined piece of mistletoe knows that lust announces its presence on other days, too. In some parts of the country, lust is evidently the focus of Mother's Day, but it's probably best not to elaborate.

5. Envy. This, of course, is wanting something you cannot have. One day at The University of Michigan, I couldn't help but notice that about half the women wanted to be belly dancers. The other half wanted to be cats. Our secret fantasies become reality on Halloween, one of the few holidays correctly recognized by the conservative Christian community as being based in sin. While my friends were racecar drivers, movie stars, mythological beings, and the like, my traditional alter ego was an invisible man. Some might argue that gluttony also plays a role in Halloween, but the fact that I still have most of my loot from 1975 would indicate that the candy is really secondary.

6. Wrath. It's hard to imagine even needing a holiday for wrath, considering that this is a sin we like to celebrate 365 days a year. Road rage and hockey games make every day a holiday in America. Still there ought to be some specific day set aside for wrath. An earlier draft of this letter suggested that Superbowl Sunday was the day of wrath. However, further research revealed that this was simply an urban legend; married men only beat up their wives the normal amount on that day. Based on my observations over the years on college campuses, I might suggest that Columbus Day and Martin Luther King Day are days on which things get very heated. On the other hand, during my Cornell days, there was a fair bit of wrath thrown about when the dining hall ran out of Grape Nuts one morning. We all have our causes, I suppose. But outside of college, on what day do tempers flare on people who are nice and normal the other 364? This would, of course, be Income Tax day, the day in which Americans not only fork over a sizable portion of their income, but—adding insult to injury—also must do the accounting work to determine how much of their money they are going to pay. (An appropriate comparison would be to the condemned man being asked to mix the poison and sharpen the needle.)

There are other holidays, too, commemorating sins that are too minor to be deadly but are certainly sins anyway: drunkenness on St. Patrick's Day, lying on New Year's Day, and animal worship on Groundhog Day. However, the Holiday of Holidays in America, one of only two holidays for which I send out a mass mailing (the other being Change of Address Day), can only be devoted to

7. Greed. It ain't the Spirit of Goodwill that brings Santa to the mall in August or that allows children to be bribed for courteous behavior. I am personally appalled by predominance of Greed on Christmas, poorly disguised as peace on earth, goodwill toward men. In fact, I have started a charitable fund called Greed Is Meritoriously Marked for Elimination. If you wish to donate a large amount of money to the GIMME fund to get Greed out of Christmas, make your check payable to Andy Poe and mail it here for immediate processing.

Best wishes this holiday season,

Andy P O E
e n a
a r
c t
e h