



Forget the Academy Awards!



The Academy Awards' 1978 Best Picture and Best Actor: *The Deer Hunter* (remember it?) and Robert De Niro in *The Deer Hunter*. If nothing else destroys the credibility of the Academy of Motion Pictures, and their Oscars awards, this single-handedly does. For 1978 was the year of the Great Picture *Animal House* and the year's obvious Best Actor - John Belushi! *Animal House* has two of the top 10 all-time great movie scenes – unheard of for a single movie or actor!

And the REAL Awards for **1978 Best Picture** and **Best Actor** go to . . .

John Belushi makes a rousing and stirring speech to motivate his fraternity brothers to get up and do something in light of the almost sure reality that their fraternity will be kicked off campus; more *Patton* speech scene! Belushi accompanying it, by rushing to “charge;” you fully expect conquering of any possible



inspiring than George C. Scott's memorable ends the speech, and the moving music through an archway leading his fraternity brothers them to follow Belushi to the defeat and enemies. Instead there is dead silence for several

seconds, as the shot remains frozen on the empty archway, UNTIL . . . no you couldn't guess it – John Belushi slouches back into the room with a hangdog expression – only then do you realize the truth that he didn't really believe what he was saying about routing the enemy, yet he thought MAYBE he could get others to believe it! That was a



Almost as good is the earlier cafeteria scene overflowing with food) with the campus proclaims: “That boy is a P-I-G pig!” It was found yourself liking the pig rather than the Motion Pictures missed an ideal opportunity to “crown” both a great movie and actor!

great scene by a great actor! in which Belushi sits down (his tray goody-two-shoes, one of whom such a great acting job because you prigs! Indeed, the Academy of

The Cafeteria – A Third Option

A good analogy for 21st Century America is a cafeteria in which there is so much grace, so much “food,” that we are being buried, rather than blessed, by it! What will we do with so much before us (overwhelming and potentially deadly) in this, life's, “cafeteria”?

1. We can be a pig, like Belushi certainly was, taking more food than we can possibly eat, becoming fat, wasting and even starting a fight with the excess.
2. We can be the prim and proper, self-righteous, goody-two-shoes thinking ourselves refined and sophisticated, perfect (or nearly so) in how we conduct ourselves. These people are not credible, nobody believes this is true, but they can act as if it is.
3. There is a third, better, option – to remain vigilant to the reality of the real danger of these great “blessings” and through thought and disciplines watch for and stay alert to our inevitable failures so, when we do stumble, we quickly see our sin, repent, seek God's salvation (again!) and return to Him, His Will and ways.

As the abundance increases and disciplines typically decrease (as they certainly do without thought and care) the picture is like one of untrained, immature and unsupervised children, in a cafeteria, fighting over the desserts – reminiscent of the *Lord of the Flies* mindset.

Two Distinct and Unrelated Graces

A life and *Bible* truth many (even “religious”) people cannot grasp is that more of what is good is not necessarily better and a blessing. Likewise, grace is not necessarily a blessing, it more often than not ends as a curse!

This paradox results from the fact that there are two, very different, types of grace – “common” and “saving,” special, grace. Common grace is what most people experience, in a particular setting (like 21st Century America), just because they are in the “neighborhood.” Unlike many times in history, and even in Third World countries today, no one starves in America – this is a great grace and a *potential* blessing! Likewise, no one walks around naked. There are shelters for those who do not, otherwise, have a place to live. No one in America need drink water that will make them sick . . . We take these graces for granted, but many, in other countries, long for them. These are “common” graces that will bless (to the extent we are thankful for them) or curse if we take them for granted, complain about the “desserts” we don’t have and are ultimately, in the end, condemned when we hear: “Where did you think these blessing came from? Who do you think gave them to you? Why did you not seek the greater, the eternal, blessings and graces?”

Interestingly, we are surrounded by so much common grace we must be careful, filtering it, so it does not damage rather than bless us. In this current state of so many and so much common grace, many people continue fighting over these “desserts” – money, pleasures, etc. Yet, they are still not satisfied because while “man cannot live on bread alone,” they can, even less, live on desserts alone! “Where’s the beef?” The beef (protein to build spiritual muscles) is in the disciplines of cultivating and growing in special grace, that which saves us now and eternally.

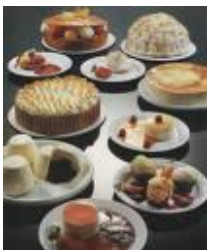
Time, money, pleasure of all kinds – are we living for and serving them or are they serving us for a greater, eternal, purpose? Is our focus on common or special grace? Which do we value more and perceive we need more of?

We live in a society obsessed with desserts so that should someone dare question the prevailing dessert-only diet others think they are nuts if not outright dangerous! What, they ask, could more important than sex, booze, drugs, TV, movies, rock-n-roll . . . more appealing than Las Vegas . . . a greater goal than to make it to retirement rolling in dough . . .? All the while the One who supplies both common and special grace says:

Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet?

Eze 34:18 - 19

“But it is mine! I earned it! Let others work as hard as I do – everyone knows ‘If they try hard enough anyone can accomplish and have anything they want . . .’ Others have not because they do not want or work hard enough for it!”



Yes, it is better to be a pig rather than a religious prig. That said, in the end, this is only true if the pigs wakes up to their plight (history has shown it is much easier for a pig to wake up to their predicament than the self-righteous who are too busy “saving” others).

The Gospel – an alternative, a hope, apart from being a pig or prig – grasping the hopelessness of being obsessed, enslaved, by the desserts of life, repenting, seeking and finding special, eternal-saving, grace ! Be thankful for our many common graces as a foundation for (not a roadblock to!) eternal blessings – there is more to a meaningful life than the desserts!