

Seven deadly sins alive and well today, says Jesuit journal

ROME - The seven deadly sins are still key to understanding and healing the social and personal ills plaguing humanity today, said an influential Jesuit journal.

The capital vices of lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride are not outdated and have not been made irrelevant by psychotherapy or other mental health counseling, La Civiltà Cattolica said.

The journal cited a survey commissioned by the British Broadcasting Corp. that found most people surveyed felt the list of deadly sins defined in the Middle Ages no longer applied to modern-day life and should be updated.

The survey, released in 2005, said most respondents were more concerned about actions that could hurt other people and listed "cruelty, adultery, bigotry, dishonesty, hypocrisy, greed and selfishness" as the worst sins the world is facing today. Greed was the only traditional vice that respondents included on the list of so-called "new sins."

The Civiltà article, written by Jesuit Father Giovanni Cucci, highlighted seven headlines from The New York Times illustrating how the seven deadly sins are still alive and well. The Rome-based biweekly journal is reviewed by the Vatican Secretariat of State before publication.

The headlines demonstrated greed as shown by a U.S. senator under federal investigation for corruption; the gluttony of millions of Americans whose deteriorating health was rooted in overeating, drinking, smoking and drugs; and sloth as shown by gang members who raped and fatally stabbed a woman 132 times because the assailants were bored.

The original seven sins do make up the nature of everyday passions, it said, and therefore it is worthwhile to reflect and elaborate on them further. Vices and virtues "sum up our whole existence - who we are and want to be"; everyone can recognize a piece of themselves in them, the article said.

The seven capital virtues of faith, hope, love, prudence, fortitude, justice and temperance help the individual realize his or her purpose in life: to know and be in communion with God, it said.

The opposing vices distance people from their purpose in life and bring about “the moral, mental and physical destruction” of the person, it said.

The human condition entails facing this “insuppressible tension between the ideal and limitations, between vice and virtue, which make life human,” it said.

It said the work of Sigmund Freud and the advent of psychotherapy did not usher in an end to the need for moral norms. In fact, the foundation of “psychology and psychoanalysis is extraordinarily similar to classic morality: indulging in vice leads to the disappearance of pleasure,” it said.

“An ethical and spiritual approach” in therapy gives a patient “concrete hope for living life differently” and gives meaning to one’s actions, it said.

The journal said the renowned Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist Carl Jung wrote that the root of most psychological problems is spiritual or religious in nature. Jung found that “the religious question always emerges in counseling or even becomes the key motivation that pushed the person to seek help,” it said.

The journal said reflecting on vice is not pessimistic but hopeful because it presupposes a “great faith in the freedom and goodness of humankind,” which is able to recognize good and act on it.