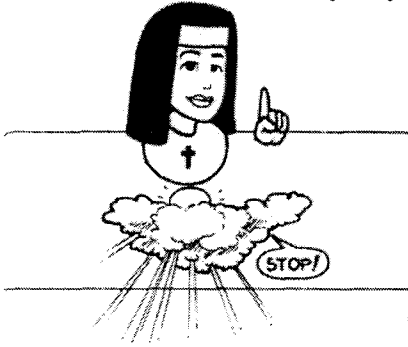


The Seven Deadly Symptoms



The church has determined that certain human emotions or concerns are the root of our problems. These emotions are called *capital sins*. The seven capital sins were immortalized in Chaucer's "The Parson's Tale" in *The Canterbury Tales* and in Dante's description of the terraces of purgatory in the *Divine Comedy*.

The seven capital sins are:

1. Pride
2. Envy
3. Anger
4. Sloth
5. Greed
6. Gluttony
7. Lust

Sister Says

Capital sins are the thoughts and behaviors that the church has determined to be dispositions toward sinning. These tendencies or weaknesses in the human character, if unchecked, may lead to sin.

For Heaven's Sake!

You can't sin in your mind or heart. People tend to regard feelings and emotions as having moral significance. Emotions and feelings are not sinful. Some Catholics confess anger and lust when they have not acted on these feelings. By themselves, the seven capital sins are human conditions that we all struggle with. It's acting on these feelings that is the sin.

These seven sins are said to be the wellsprings from which all sinful thoughts and behaviors flow. The term *capital* comes from the Latin word *caput*, meaning head, and refers to capital sins being the source or headwaters for sins. These sins have also been called the "seven deadly sins." Although they are called sins, these seven characteristics are not sins in and of themselves. Instead, they describe tendencies toward sinning or character weaknesses through which sin occurs.

Good Guilt and Bad Shame

We conclude our discussion of sin with a look at good old-fashioned guilt and perhaps answer the question of whether Catholics have more than their fair share of it. Guilt is a subject for consideration both in the church and in the world of psychology. Guilt, within the context of religion, is an intuitive understanding of wrongdoing. It seems to be an inborn feeling that helps to guide us in our selection of what to do and what not to do. As such, it is a healthy and helpful quality.

Guilt needs to be distinguished from shame. Guilt is innate; shame is developed. Guilt corresponds to a genuine violation of a value. Shame is the result of



childhood conditioning. If a child has been punished about his or her normal developmental processes (like bed-wetting or thumb sucking, for example) he or she may experience an inappropriate feeling of guilt that is better described as shame.

Your Guardian Angel

Check your terms. Guilt is feeling bad about something you've done. Shame is feeling bad about yourself. There is a big difference!

Shame is a problem at the spiritual and psychological level and is best addressed by both a minister and a psychologist. For example, many people who have suffered child abuse experience shame. When abuse occurs, a person is left with a broken relationship with God. Parents are our first understanding of what God is like. If parents fail to love and instead bring injury, the child's soul (psyche) experiences a loss of its natural connection to God. This loss results in severely damaged self-esteem, which progresses to despair and self-hate. Despair is a spiritual condition in which you believe you are beyond help.

When we are experiencing shame, we cannot operate fully and creatively, and even more damaging, we cannot experience forgiveness. Appropriate guilt, on the other hand, tells us we have done something wrong to ourselves or to another. After the wrong has been righted, we can experience forgiveness, and the guilt dissipates.

Confession is a healthy practice from both a spiritual and psychological perspective. Having someone to tell one's sin to and experiencing a formal process of forgiveness frees the participant of guilt. Absolution occurs after the person makes a confession, expresses sorrow, and makes clear the intent to change this behavior. The priest, allowing Christ to act through him, absolves the person of the sin and the guilt that goes with it. (We'll talk more about absolution in the next chapter.)

Free Will, Judgment, and Afterlife

Free will describes the human ability to choose a course of action. Both common sense and church teaching agree that moral responsibility depends upon free will.

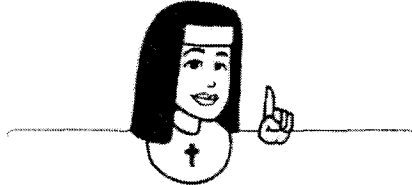
The nature and degree of free will are the subjects of much theological and philosophical debate. Studies of human personality and development have shown that a person's free will is subject to his or her conditioning. Some studies go so far as to claim that the ideal of free will is a complete illusion and that all actions are governed by external causes.

Catholic moral teaching functions much like civil law regarding free will. It teaches that free will can be greatly impeded by a variety of factors, such as fear, coercion,

Heaven: "Where the Elite All Meet!"

Heaven is the word used to define the final fulfillment for which we were created. It describes the ideal relationship between creation and God. Heaven is revealed in Jesus' resurrection, which shows us God's plan for the future of the whole creation.

The Old Testament uses the term *heaven* in a variety of ways. It describes a vault in the sky as the dwelling place of God. Later, the physical heavens were seen to be symbols of divine triumph. Heaven is associated with both the first creation as described in Genesis and the future action of God, who would create a new heaven and a new earth in which the hopes of Israel would be brought to fulfillment.



Sister Says

Heaven describes the ideal relationship possible between humans and God.

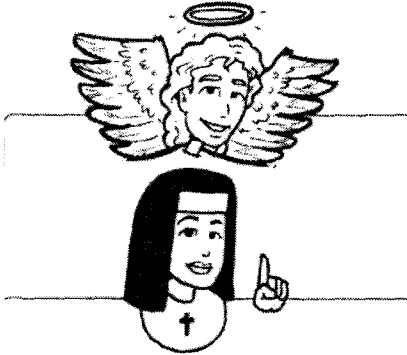
The New Testament explicitly associates heaven with Jesus Christ. The word of God comes from heaven to take flesh in Jesus. (John 3:13) After the resurrection, Jesus ascends to heaven to sit at the right hand of God. (Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69; Acts 7:55) From heaven, Jesus reigns as Lord and Messiah, and from there he will appear again as the judge at the end of time.

Through revelation, Pope John Paul II says, we are taught that "heaven or happiness" is "neither an abstraction nor a physical place in the clouds, but a living personal relationship with the Holy Trinity." In attempting to describe ultimate realities, language always falls short, he reminds us. In so doing, he has shifted to the language of relationship from the abstractions of traditional theology. In the new interpretation, heaven is not a place of ideal real estate, but a description of the soul when it is in its completed form.

Human Sexuality: "Male and Female He Created Them"

Human sexuality refers to the state of being sexual, being in the world either as a female or a male. It includes anatomy, behavioral characteristics, bonding, and reproduction. Sexuality is a fundamental aspect of personal identity. Our sexuality enters into all aspects of our life and all personal interactions with one another and all aspects of self-expression and activity. There are no asexual or nonsexual human beings.

The role of the church regarding sexuality is to help the faithful understand their sexuality and act in sexually responsible ways. Determining what sexual responsibility is is an ongoing process of assessment and discernment that church teachers have ad-



Chapter 19 >• *The Teachings of the Church: More Than Just the Party Line* called *Humanae Vitae* (Latin for "of human life"). The pope declared, "Each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life." *Humanae Vitae* set the church spinning. There were questions from bishops, theologians, pastors, and congregations that still have not been answered.

Sociological data reveal that approximately 80 percent of practicing Catholics do not follow the church's official and authoritative teachings on birth control. Catholics report that their parish priests support them in the decisions they make in this matter. However, abstinence and the rhythm method are the only acceptable forms of birth control.

Vatican II called for the renewal of church teaching in light of new knowledge from the physical and social sciences. In this section, we'll look at some of the issues in human sexuality that Catholics are struggling with today: birth control, homosexuality, and celibacy.

Birth Control: The Church's Big Headache

Contraception refers to the ways in which men and women can prevent conception of a new life from occurring as a result of sexual intercourse. The church's moral assessment regarding contraception is determined from the values considered to be important to human sexual activity. One value of human sexual activity is propagation, or having children. Until the twentieth century, the church taught that having children took precedence over all other sexual values. All attempts to block sexual action from the intention to procreate were considered wrong. The church considers them to be against *natural law*.

Vatican II introduced important changes in the church's teachings on sexuality. The mutual self-giving that is possible through sexual intercourse became a key value. Church teachings began to recognize that sexual intercourse strengthens the unity between couples. Church teachings also recognized that married couples had both the right and duty to limit the size of their family to correspond to their situation.

Following Vatican II, Pope Paul VI gave a strict interpretation of these teachings in an encyclical