

# The Seven Deadly Sins

Ranked in ascending order of severity (worst sins listed last) as per Dante's *Divine Comedy* (in the *Purgatorio*), the seven deadly sins are:

- Lust — Unlawful sexual desire, such as desiring sex with a person one is not married to (fornication). (Dante's criterion was "excessive love of others," thereby detracting from the love due God). In the Latin lists of the Seven Deadly Sins, lust is referred to as *luxuria*.
- Gluttony — Wasting of food, either through overindulgence in food, drink or intoxicants, misplaced desire for food for its sensuality, or withholding food from the needy ("excessive love of pleasure" was Dante's rendering). In the Latin lists of the Seven Deadly Sins, gluttony is referred to as *gula*.
- Greed (covetousness, avarice) — A desire to possess more than one has need or use for (or, according to Dante, "excessive love of money and power"). In the Latin lists of the Seven Deadly Sins, avarice is referred to as *avaritia*.
- Sloth (also *accidie*, *acedia*) — Laziness; idleness and wastefulness of time allotted. Laziness is condemned because:
  - Others have to work harder
  - It is disadvantageous for oneself, because useful work does not get done
  - It, like gluttony, is a sin of waste, for it wastes time, implicitly due to pride
  - An equilibrium: one does not produce much, but one does not need much either (in Dante's theology, sloth is the "failure to love God with all one's heart, all one's mind, and all one's soul" - specific examples including laziness, cowardice, lack of imagination, complacency, and irresponsibility).

In the Latin lists of the Seven Deadly Sins, sloth is referred to as *acedia*.

- Wrath (anger, hate) — Inappropriate (unrighteous) feelings of hatred, revenge or even denial, as well as punitive desires outside of justice (Dante's description was "love of justice perverted to revenge and spite"). In the Latin lists of the Seven Deadly Sins, wrath is referred to as *ira*.
- Envy (jealousy) — Resentment of others for their possessions (Dante: "Love of one's own good perverted to a desire to deprive other men of theirs"). In the Latin lists of the Seven Deadly Sins, envy is referred to as *invidia*.
- Pride (vanity) — A desire to be important or attractive to others or excessive love of self (holding self out of proper position toward God or fellows; Dante's definition was "love of self perverted to hatred and contempt for one's neighbor"). In the Latin lists of the Seven Deadly Sins, pride is referred to as *superbia*. In Jacob Bidermann's mediaeval miracle play *Cenodoxus* - *superbia* is the deadliest of all the sins, and led directly to the damnation of the famed *Doctor of Paris*, *Cenodoxus*.

Several of these sins interlink, and various attempts at causal hierarchy have been made. For example, pride (love of self out of proportion) is implied in gluttony (the over-consumption or

waste of food), as well as sloth, envy, and most of the others. Each sin is a particular way of failing to love God with all one's resources and to love fellows as much as self. The Scholastic theologians developed schema of attribute and substance of will to explain these sins.

As was previously mentioned, the Latin words for the sins are: *superbia, avaritia, luxuria, invidia, gula, ira and accidia* '. The first letters of these words form the medieval Latin word *saligia*, whence the verb *saligiare* (to commit a deadly sin) is taken. Various mnemonic devices exist for remembering the sins in English, e.g. PEG'S LAW (pride, envy, gluttony, sloth, lust, avarice, wrath).

In the official Catechism of the Catholic Church, consisting of 2,865 numbered sections and first published in 1992 by order of Pope John Paul II, the seven deadly sins are dealt with in one paragraph. The principal codification of moral transgression for Christians continues to be the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes, which are a positive statement of morality.

The opposite of these sins are the seven virtues (humility, meekness, charity, chastity, moderation, zeal and generosity).

### **Associations with demons**

In 1589, Peter Binsfeld paired each of the deadly sins with a demon, who tempted people by means of the associated sin. According to *Binsfeld's classification of demons*, the pairings are as follows:

- Lucifer: Pride
- Mammon: Greed
- Asmodeus: Lust
- Leviathan: Envy
- Beelzebub: Gluttony
- Satan: Wrath
- Belphegor: Sloth