



What's What

A weekly communication that provides an opportunity for our faith community to grow together in faith.

CST: Life and Dignity of the Human Person

The fifth in a seven part series on Catholic Social Teaching

Issue 46

Catholic Social Teaching:
Life and Dignity of the
Human Person

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Modern Catholic social teaching is the body of social principles and moral teaching that is articulated in the papal, conciliar, and other official documents issued since the late nineteenth century and dealing with the economic, political, and social order. This teaching is rooted in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures as well as in traditional philosophical and theological teachings of the Church.

Human life is sacred. The dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. Direct attacks on innocent persons are never morally acceptable, at any stage or in any condition. In our society, human life is especially under direct attack from abortion. Other direct threats to the sanctity of human life include euthanasia, human cloning, and the destruction of human embryos for research. Catholic teaching about the dignity of life calls us to oppose torture*, unjust war, and the use of the death penalty; to prevent genocide and attacks against noncombatants; to oppose racism; and to overcome poverty and suffering. Nations are called to protect the right to life by seeking effective ways to combat evil and terror without resorting to armed conflicts except as a last resort, always seeking first to resolve disputes by peaceful means. We revere the lives of

children in the womb, the lives of persons dying in war and from starvation, and indeed the lives of all human beings as children of God. *See *Catechism of the Catholic Church #2297 below*

These themes are drawn from a rich tradition of principles and ideas that are more fully described in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* from the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005).

Scriptural Foundations

Every social decision and institution must be judged in light of whether it protects or undermines the life & dignity of the human person.

- Genesis 1:26-27 (created in the image of God)
- Deuteronomy 30:19 (Choose life)
- Psalms 8: 5-7 (humans made little less than a god)
- John 12: 32 (Christ will draw all to himself)
- 1 Corinthians 15: 22 (Christ died for all)

Quotes from Official Church Documents

"All offenses against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and willful suicide; all violations of the integrity of the human person...all offenses against human dignity, such as subhu-

man living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working conditions where men are treated as mere tools for profit rather than free and responsible persons: all these and the like are criminal: they poison civilization...and militate against the honor of the creator."

- Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, no. 27

"Every individual, precisely by reason of the mystery of the Word of God who was made flesh (cf. Jn 1:14), is entrusted to the maternal care of the Church. Therefore every threat to human dignity and life must necessarily be felt in the Church's heart; it cannot but effect her at the core of her faith in the Redemptive Incarnation of the Son of God, and engage her in her mission of proclaiming the *Gospel of Life* in all the world and to every creature (cf. Mk. 16:15)" -Pope John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life (Evangelium Vitae)*, no.3

References from the Catechism

1934 - Created in the image of the one God and equally endowed with rational souls, all men have the same nature and the same origin. Redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ, all are called to participate in the same divine beatitude: all therefore enjoy an equal dignity.

2270 - Human life must be respected and protected absolutely

from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person—among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life.

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.

My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth.

2297 - *Kidnapping* and *hostage taking* bring on a reign of terror; by means of threats they subject their victims to intolerable pressures. They are morally wrong. *Terrorism* threatens, wounds, and kills indiscriminately; it is gravely against justice and charity. *Torture* which uses physical or moral violence to extract confessions, punish the guilty, frighten opponents, or satisfy hatred is contrary to respect for the person and for human dignity. Except when performed for strictly therapeutic medical reasons, directly intended *amputations, mutilations, and sterilizations* performed on innocent persons are against the moral law.



Saint in the Spotlight — St. Marguerite d'Youville (1701-1771)

On Thursday this week, October 16, we celebrate the memorial of St. Marguerite d'Youville.

We learn compassion from allowing our lives to be influenced by compassionate people, by seeing life from their perspective and reconsidering our own values.

Born in Varennes, Canada, Marie Marguerite Dufrost de Lajemmerais had to interrupt her schooling at the age of 12 to help her widowed mother. Eight years later she married Francois d'Youville; they had six children, four of whom died young. Despite the fact that her husband gambled, sold liquor illegally to Native Americans and treated her indifferently, she cared for him compassionately in the two years before his death in 1730.

Even though she was caring for two small children and running a store to help pay off her husband's debts, Marguerite still helped the poor. Once her

children were grown, she and several companions rescued a Quebec hospital which was in danger of failing. She called her community the Institute of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal; the people called them the "Grey Nuns" because of the color of their habit. In time, a proverb arose among the poor people of Montreal, "Go to the Grey Nuns; they never refuse to serve." In time, five other religious communities traced their roots to the Grey Nuns.

The General Hospital in Montreal became known as the Hotel Dieu (House of God) and set a standard for medical care and Christian compassion. When the hospital was destroyed by fire in 1766, she knelt in the ashes, led the Te Deum (a hymn to God's providence in all circumstances) and began the rebuilding process. She fought the attempts of government officials to restrain her charity and established the first founding home in North America.

Pope John XXIII, who beatified her in 1959, called her the "Mother of Universal Charity." She was canonized in 1990.

Comment:

Saints deal with plenty of discouragement, plenty of reasons to say, "Life isn't fair" and wonder where God is in the rubble of their lives. We honor saints like Marguerite because they show us that, with God's grace and their cooperation, suffering can lead to compassion rather than to bitterness.

Quote:

"More than once the work which Marguerite undertook was hindered by nature or people. In order to work to bring that new world of justice and love closer, she had to fight some hard and difficult battles" (John Paul II, canonization homily).

www.americancatholic.org/Features/SaintOfDay



Want to know more about CST Life & Dignity of Persons?

USCCB Website for any of the following issues:

Abortion, Contraception, Cloning, Capital Punishment, Euthanasia, Health Issues, Pro-Life, and Natural Family Planning

<http://www.usccb.org/>

Pax Christi – Peace Advocacy

http://www.paxchristiusa.org/pc_home.asp

Journey of Hope –

Murder Victim Families against the Death Penalty

<http://www.journeyofhope.org/pages/index.htm>

Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities

A Campaign in Support of Life

<http://www.usccb.org/prolife/pastoralplan.shtml>

Church Teaching on End of Life Issues

<http://www.txcatholic.org/teaching-on-end-of-life.asp>

For further reading:

<http://salt.claretianpubs.org/cstline/tline.html> (condensed)

<http://www.osjspm.org/cst/doclist.htm> (entire document)

"What's What" is a publication of the Youth Ministry Department of St Mary, Canandaigua, and St Bridget, Bloomfield.

Our Youth Ministry Mission Statement:

Building on the mission of our parishes to follow the way of Christ in our thoughts, words, and deeds, and to make Christ more fully present in all who live within our community, the Youth Ministry mission is to empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the world today; to affirm the gifts of our youth and provide opportunities for young people to share their gifts with the larger community; and to meet the religious, spiritual and social needs of all youth with the committed leadership, guidance and support of our parish family, providing an opportunity for our entire faith community to grow together in Christian faith.