

# Teaching of the Catholic Church on Suicide

## From the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*<sup>1</sup>

Everyone is responsible for his life before God who has given it to him. It is God who remains the sovereign Master of life. We are obliged to accept life gratefully and preserve it for his honor and the salvation of our souls. We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of. (2280)

Suicide contradicts the natural inclination of the human being to preserve and perpetuate his life. It is gravely contrary to the just love of self. It likewise offends love of neighbor because it unjustly breaks the ties of solidarity with family, nation, and other human societies to which we continue to have obligations. Suicide is contrary to love for the living God. (2281)

If suicide is committed with the intention of setting an example, especially to the young, it also takes on the gravity of scandal. Voluntary co-operation in suicide is contrary to the moral law. (2282)

Grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering, or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide.

We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives. (2283)

## From the *Code of Canon Law and Commentary*<sup>2</sup>

Regarding “Those to Whom Ecclesiastical Funeral Rites Are Denied”:

### **Canon 1184 –**

§1. Unless they have given some signs of repentance before their death, the following are to be deprived of ecclesiastical funeral rites:

- 1<sup>o</sup> notorious apostates, heretics and schismatics;
- 2<sup>o</sup> persons who had chosen the cremation of their own bodies for reasons opposed to the Christian faith;
- 3<sup>o</sup> other manifest sinners for whom ecclesiastical funeral rites cannot be granted

---

<sup>1</sup> English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for the United States of America copyright © 1994, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—Libreria Editrice Vaticana. English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Modifications from the Editio Typica* copyright © 1997, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—Libreria Editrice Vaticana

<sup>2</sup> Coriden, James A., Green, Thomas J., and Heintschel, Donald E., editors, *The Code of Canon Law, A Text and Commentary*, Commissioned by the Canon Law Society of America, Paulist Press, New York/Mahwah, 1985.

without public scandal to the faithful;

§2. If some doubt should arise, the local ordinary is to be consulted; and his judgment is to be followed.

**Commentary:** The preceding canon listed those to whom ecclesiastical funeral rites could be conceded, while this canon speaks of those to whom they are to be denied. The penalty of denial of Christian burial has largely been dropped from this Code. However, this canon indicates the few times when burial is to be denied. It reflects the committee's effort to respond to requests that the law offer a listing of sins warranting denial of burial even if such a listing were not a taxative one. (*Comm* 12 (1980), 355-356) In applying this canon, one should follow canon 18 which states that laws which restrict rights should always be interpreted strictly....

...Certain categories of persons mentioned in the former law are not explicitly included in the prohibition of this canon, e.g., members of forbidden societies (CIC 1240, §1, 1<sup>o</sup>), those who deliberately commit suicide (CIC 1240, §1, 3<sup>o</sup>), those who are killed in a duel or die from a duel-related wound (CIC 1240, §1, 4<sup>o</sup>). The only situation about which there was any discussion was the case of a member of a forbidden society....

Compiled and Distributed by the



415 Michigan Avenue, NE Suite 95  
Washington, DC 20017  
202-529-2933; 202-529-2934 (tty); 202-529-4678 (fax)  
[www.ncpd.org](http://www.ncpd.org)