

Life Is God's Gift To Man

Razors pain you Rivers are damp
Acids stain you
And drugs cause cramp.
Guns aren't lawful Nooses give
Gas smells awful
You might as well live. (Dorothy Parker)

As recently as November, 1960, *Saturday Night* magazine could write: "Comparatively rarely do children or adolescents kill themselves. Apparently it is more generally the result of the weariness, disillusionment and hopelessness of the later years of life rather than the disappointments of youth. At that time sixty percent of the suicide victims were between 35 and 64 years of age. This picture has dramatically changed. Among young Canadians self destruction has become a major cause of death-even higher than contagious diseases.

The incidence of confirmed suicides among teenagers and pre-teens have more than doubled in thirteen years. Dr. Sandy MacPherson, a McMaster University psychiatrist, notes that suicide is now the second most common cause of death in Ontario among those between 20 and 24 years of age. Similar increases are also noted in the U.S. Dr. Joseph Teicher, a University of Southern California specialist in adolescent psychiatry, remarked: "Teenage suicides have increased nearly 100 percent in Los Angeles County alone. This alarming trend represent a shocking manifestation of despair from a group traditionally seen as 'having everything to live for.'" Suicide has now taken its place on the list of North American's grave concerns. *Time Magazine* (June 12, 1972) commented that suicide seems about to join teenage drudgery and air pollution as one of the glum preoccupations of the decade. Since 1957 more than 1200 books on suicide have appeared, and leading newspapers and magazines are discussing the problem.

What is suicide? It has been defined as self slaughter by a person who has reached the age of discretion and is in possession of his senses. Why do people and especially so many young people voluntarily end their life? The causes are many. The drug sub-culture has provided many suicide candidates. Drugs have led to freak-outs and the ultimate loss of self control.

A person who attempts suicide sees no hope. He experiences life as sitting in a dark room with all the doors locked. There is no way out. Despair controls his thinking. The world is in a mess. Leaders who are supposed to give guidance sound so uncertain. Things alone cannot fill the emptiness of the heart and he attempts suicide because of utter frustration.

Loneliness is another cause for suicide. So many young people are friendless. They feel misunderstood and alone in a very materialistic world indulging itself in an ego satisfying trip.

In the case of some teenagers, the sense of loneliness is intense and acute. "He feels cut off, alone," says Dr. Teicher. He doesn't have a single meaningful relationship. There's no one to talk about his problems, no one to turn to. He sees no future improvement in his situation." Suicide attempts are cries for help. You can't ignore them. They should be taken seriously. Seattle's Crisis Clinic director Donald E. Berg warns: "The teenager who talks about suicide should be taken seriously. It is a disguised cry for help."

Nearly all teenagers who talk about, threaten, attempt or even commit suicide do not want to die. They can't cope with life. They just don't want to continue to live the way they have been living. Suicide is not an impulsive act. It is usually a result of deep seated problems for which no answers appear to be available. Death is deliberately chosen then as the final cure.

The Christian faith has never sanctioned suicide. Before the Christian era, life was held rather cheaply and suicide was viewed neutrally or even positively.

The Roman Stoic Seneca said: "Living is not good, but living well. The wise man, therefore, lives as well as he should, not as long as he can ... He will always think of life in terms of quality and not quantity ... Dying early or late is of no relevance, dying well or ill is ... even if it is true that while there is life there is hope, life is not bought at any cost."

With the Christian era a different attitude to life was introduced. St. Augustine considered suicide as sin because it precluded the possibility of repentance and because it violated the sixth commandment related to killing. St. Thomas Aquinas emphasized that suicide was a mortal sin in that it usurped God's power over man's life and death.

The history of the church tells of many Christians who choose death over life. Their convictions were stronger than their fear of death.

Martyrs have voluntarily laid down their lives. But the difference between the man who dies for the sake of a cause in which he believes whole-heartedly and him who dies for the sake of dying is marked.

A Christian is not permitted to voluntarily leave this life. His life may be very difficult. He may have to go through extreme hardships, but he has to remain on duty.

He is like a soldier who cannot leave his post.

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