



EVANGELIUM INSTITUTE

TEACHING TRUTH - INSPIRING FAITH

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The Evangelium Institute is a Catholic 501(c)3 organization that provides dynamic formation to adults in the Archdiocese of Omaha, with the purpose of bringing the interior life of those we serve closer to a lasting experience of Jesus Christ and His Church.

Session 5: Life and Human Dignity

Key Themes:

- 1) God loves life
- 2) The Church's authority
- 3) The language of the body

Key CCC Paragraphs: CCC 2258-2330

Key Scripture Verses: On physical death: Exodus 20:13; Exodus 23:7; Matthew 5:21-22; Jeremiah 1:5; Psalm 139:15; On spiritual death Matthew 18:6

Definitions:

- **Fundamental Human Dignity** – the idea that every human person bears a dignity which they hold by virtue of being a human being, regardless of their abilities, race, culture, religion, sex, age or actions. This dignity is permanent, and must always be respected.
- **Consistent Ethic of Life** – the moral principle promoted the U.S. Bishop which states that many moral issues are connected with the fundamental right to life. It does not mean that all moral issues are equally important. There is a hierarchy of goods, thus some life issues are more fundamental and so more important than others.
- **Murder** – the intentional killing of an innocent human person.
- **Abortion** – the intentional and direct killing of the human person in the womb.
- **Euthanasia** – the intentional and direct killing of a human person, with or without their permission, who is sick, dying, or mentally or physically disabled.
- **Eugenics** – the term first coined in the late 19th century, it was a movement which sought to bring about a better future for humankind by selective “breeding” of human persons and/or causing the “unfit” to be sterile.
- **Scandal** – an attitude or behavior which leads another to do evil. In the theological sense, it is not merely an act which offends people. It must be connected in some way to leading others into sin.
- **Torture** – the use of physical or moral violence to extract confessions, punish the guilty, frighten opponents or satisfy hatred.
- **Punishment** – the means by which disorder in society is redressed. Along with protecting the public and restoring order, it ought also be aimed at correcting the guilty.
- **Just War Doctrine** – the moral theory within the Catholic tradition specifically which provides specific elements which govern going to war, practices in war, post-war work.

Suggested Reading List:

- Horn, Trent *Persuasive Pro Life: How to Talk about Our Culture's Toughest Issue* (Catholic Answers, 2014)
- Johnson, Abby *Unplanned: The Dramatic True Story of a Former Planned Parenthood Leader's Eye-Opening Journey Across the Life Line* (Focus on the Family, 2011)
- Kasun, Jacqueline *The War Against Population: The Economics and Ideology of World Population Control* (Ignatius, 1999)
- Marker, Rita *Deadly Compassion: The Death of Ann Humphrey and the Truth About Euthanasia* (William Morrow & Co., 1995)
- May, William E. *Catholic Bioethics and the Gift of Human Life* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2013)
- Wiker, Benjamin and Demarco, Donald *Architects of the Culture of Death* (Ignatius, 2004)

Consistent ethic of life

What Does the Church Mean by a “Consistent Ethic of Life”? In 2001 the U.S. Bishops Conference published their Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities: A Campaign in Support of Life. After the introductory paragraphs, the very first section of the document is titled “A Consistent Ethic of Life.” What does this phrase mean; what doesn't it mean; and how ought we apply it to our lives? The following is a brief explanation. What does it mean? A consistent ethic is one which governs behavior over a variety of different contexts social & political, private & public. The bishops want Catholics to approach issues in those different contexts with one overarching focus: that we always seek to protect and encourage life. What does this look like concretely? When we talk about society and politics in the United States, we like to talk about rights. Therefore, a helpful way to explain what the consistent ethic of life means is to show how various rights and duties of the human person are connected. Let's start first with the right to life, which is the most fundamental right and from which all other rights and duties extend. Without the right to life, all other rights are “false and illusory,” to use the phrase from Pope St. John Paul II's document On the Laity. Now, if you were living in a society in which the state could legally come and take your food and water for any reason whatsoever, you would agree that, as a matter of civil law, your “right to life” was meaningless, since the state would effectively have complete control over whether you lived or died. Therefore, your right to life requires not just the concept of the right to life but the correlating civil and societal right to food and water, because food and water are necessary for life. How do we access food and water? At a basic level, we must shoot something or grow something or gather something to eat. We dig wells or collect rain water or transfer water from one place to ours in order to drink. In other words, we labor for it. Therefore, since it is necessary for you to labor in order to access food and water, you must have the correlating civil and societal right to work. In fact, you also need to make sure the bow and arrow you use to kill game or the land you cultivate to grow your food or the barrel you use to hold water is yours not just now but in the future as well, so that you can secure your labor and so secure your food and water. Therefore, since ownership is necessary to secure the means for laboring, gathering and/or storing food and water, you must have the correlating civil and societal right to private property. But what if you cannot kill enough game or own enough land to provide yourself – much less your family – with the food and water necessary for securing life? Well perhaps you could exchange your labor for food and water that belongs to someone else, or for money with which you can purchase food and water. However, since your labor is itself a limited resource among other limited resources, you need to make sure that you can exchange enough

of your labor for enough food and water to live. Therefore, since it is sometimes necessary for you to labor for someone else, and since it is sometimes necessary for you to be able to exchange your labor for enough food and water to live, you must have the correlating civil and societal right to a just (or living) wage. But what if you cannot do any of those things where you live? There aren't enough resources or labor to feed everyone. Are you required to just lay down and die? No, if all of the above is true, and it is sometimes necessary for you to look for labor or resources elsewhere, you must have the correlating civil and societal right to emigrate so that you can find enough food and water to live. We see with the above, and one could include the right to health care and the right to an education, that every right is founded upon or connected to one's right to life. This is what it means to maintain a consistent ethic of life. In this way, many different societal and political issues could be called "life issues." And in this way, to be a "pro-life Catholic" means to approach all of these issues as though they are life issues. The U.S. Bishops write, "Taken together, these diverse pastoral statements and practical programs constitute no mere assortment of unrelated initiatives but rather a consistent strategy in support of all human life in its various stages and circumstances." What doesn't it mean? Some have called the consistent ethic of life the "seamless garment" theory, by which they try to argue that all the "life issues" are equal. They say securing the right to a just wage, for instance, is as important as ending partial birth abortion. This is not what the U.S. Bishops teach. The right to life is the most fundamental. Protecting it, therefore, is paramount. This is what the U.S. Bishops state: The question "Where does one begin?" is easy to answer: "We must begin with a commitment never to intentionally kill, or collude in the killing, of any innocent human life, no matter how broken, unformed, disabled or desperate that life may seem" (Living the Gospel of Life, no. 21). ... In this pastoral plan, then, "we are guided by a key insight regarding the linkage between abortion and these other important issues: Precisely because all issues involving human life are interdependent, a society which destroys human life by abortion under the mantle of law unavoidably undermines respect for life in all other contexts. Likewise, protection in law and practice of unborn human life will benefit all life, not only the lives of the unborn" (Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities: A Reaffirmation [1985], 5). This is why we focus here on the pervasive threat to human life arising from the widespread recourse to abortion, from public policies that allow, encourage, and even fund abortion, and from a growing effort to promote the taking of human life through euthanasia. Put simply, while many issues are connected to life, they do not all hold the same moral weight. And what's more, so long as the fundamental right to life is under threat in law, then the law undermines every other effort to protect life in those connected issues. How ought we apply the consistent ethic of life to our lives? Being a pro-life Catholic means supporting life in every aspect of our daily efforts. For instance, it means avoiding "killing" someone's reputation through lies or through gossip. It means making lifestyle choices that limit our excessive use of resources so that those resources are there for others today and for our children in the future. It means educating our children in the faith, so that they can learn what it means to protect life. It means avoiding entertainment that is scandalous, i.e. that will lead us or others to grave sin which is a spiritual death. It means avoiding, if we can, purchasing from companies that violate life directly or support the taking of life. This is not an exhaustive list, but it gives us a sense of what being "pro-life" truly means. It is not just something we take on for ourselves every two or four years at election time. It is a way of life that connects us to the communion of the saints. It is what it means to be a Christian.

Deacon Omar Gutiérrez

What Does the Church Teach About Abortion?

This may seem like a pretty straightforward question, but in reality there is a good deal of confusion about what the Church teaches and about some of the social science around abortion. The following is a brief answer to common misconceptions about abortion in the United States.

Statement 1: The Church once taught that abortion was allowed.

This statement which has been made by Catholic politicians in the U.S. is simply not true. The Didache is one of the oldest documents in Church history. Though we are not entirely sure who wrote it (tradition tells us it was written by the apostles), scholars agree that it dates back to the first century. The word “didache” is Greek for “teaching.” Therefore, you could say it is the oldest “catechism” in existence.

In it we read, “There are two ways, one of life and one of death; and between the two ways there is a great difference. Now, this is the way of life: ... The second commandment of the Teaching: ‘Do not murder; do not commit adultery’; do not corrupt boys; do not fornicate; ‘do not steal’; do not practice magic; do not go in for sorcery; do not murder a child by abortion or kill a newborn infant.” This teaching could not be clearer.

Still, Catholics argue this because St. Thomas Aquinas believed that the unborn child became a human person at the “quickening,” i.e. when the mother first felt the baby kick. Prior to this he thought there was no human person. Thus some have taken that to mean that the Catholic Church taught that abortion is okay before the quickening. Obviously this is not what Aquinas was arguing, and his ignorance of biology is no excuse for contradicting the Didache.

Statement 2: Our goal regarding abortion is to lower the number of abortions.

This argument stems from the idea that since we live in a fallen world, we know that there will always be abortion in human society. Therefore, as we will never totally eliminate it, our goal in terms of public policy is to lower the number of abortions. While not entirely wrong, this statement ignores an important fact.

What the U.S. Bishops have stated repeatedly and unanimously is that the goal of Catholics regarding abortion is to make it illegal. “A legal system,” they write in *Forming Conscience for Faithful Citizenship*, “that violates the basic right to life on the grounds of choice is fundamentally flawed.” Therefore, we can never achieve true social justice unless abortion is made illegal.

Statement 3: Making abortion illegal would require sending women in crisis to jail.

This statement ignores our own history. Abortion was illegal in the U.S. for almost two hundred years and yet women were not imprisoned. Rather, doctors were imprisoned or severely fined. In some cases, the father of the child was punished since oftentimes his abandonment of the mother is what drove the woman to seek out the abortion in the first place. The Church believes that women in crisis should not be further traumatized by the threat of force for seeking an abortion.

Statement 4: Making abortion illegal would subject women to back-alley abortions and so death.

In 1955, Alfred Kinsey reported that upwards of 90% of abortions were done by physicians. The “back alley” referred not to where the abortions took place but rather to how the women entered the doctor’s office on off hours. Studies from that same period show clearly that mortalities due to abortion were on a steep decline all prior to legalization. The claim that “tens of thousands” of women died every year from back-alley abortions was made by Dr. Bernard Nathanson, one of the co-founders of the National

Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) and himself an abortionist. After his conversion he admitted that the claim was completely made up. Even the Alan Guttmacher institute, the research arm of Planned Parenthood, admits that the nationwide number of deaths due to illegal abortion in 1972 (the last year for which we have data) was 39 women.

The Church supports women’s health and notes that abortion is linked with increases in cancer. The December 1990 issue of the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health reported that there was a correlation between abortion and increases in cancer rates in women. A 1993 study by Dr. Parkins of the National Cancer Institute demonstrated the same thing. Another study by the Hutchinson Cancer Research Center correlated abortions by women younger than 18 to a 50-90% increases in cancer risk.

Statement 5: Increasing public funding for social services does more to reduce the number of abortions than do pro-life laws.

This claim is based on the fact that the number one reason given by women who seek out abortion is poverty or the fear of poverty. Thus, by providing a more robust social safety net, we eliminate this fear and so fewer women will seek out an abortion. However, this statement fails to note that while poverty is the number one reason given, it is almost never the only reason. The lack of support from the father or from family, the fear that a child will endanger future career opportunities, the conclusion that one is just not ready to become a parent, and, increasingly, the rejection of a child who may be born with “defects” are all very common reasons given which would not be addressed by social services.

The one study which was released in 2008 claiming to have demonstrated that increases in funding to social services did more to reduce abortion rates than pro-life legislation, like parental notification laws, is no longer available. The study was so flawed that one of the authors removed his name. The other author eventually pulled the study entirely from the internet.

Statement 6: The example of Scandinavian nations who have lower abortion rates, but legal abortion and strong social safety nets demonstrates the validity of that approach.

This claim is based on the fact that Scandinavian nations where abortion is legal but where there is universal health-care tend to have lower abortion rates than Latin American nations without universal health-care and where abortion is illegal. The implication, then, is that we ought to keep abortion legal and increase social service spending to lower our abortion rates. However, this statement ignores the fact that Latin American rates for abortion are very unreliable. And it ignores the case of Costa Rica where abortion is illegal but the robust social spending has made the rate of abortion lower than that of Norway and Sweden.

This claim is also problematic because it ignores other factors in Finland, which has one of the lowest abortion rates in the world. There, abortion is not allowed after 12 weeks unless there are specific dire circumstances verified by two doctors. After 20 weeks, abortion is allowed only if the woman is younger than 17 and/or her physical (not mental) health is in danger which must be verified by the State Medical Board. Abortions after 24 weeks are allowed only if the woman's life is in danger. All abortions in Finland must be done in a hospital. These restrictions do not exist in the U.S. and are actively resisted.

The Church, as she does in many areas, calls for a both/and approach. Let us make abortion illegal and increase social spending so as to care for women in crisis and the unplanned children they bring to term. Having to choose between just one of these approaches harms women and the unborn.

What Does the Church Teach about Physician Assisted Suicide?

The Church has taught against euthanasia for millennia. Today, however, euthanasia is often referred to as "death with dignity" or as the "right to die." It is important to note that "euthanasia" is the term used when someone performs an act to end the life of another usually ill, injured or elderly person. The word comes from Greek and means "good(ly) death." As the ill, injured or elderly were seen as a burden on society in the ancient Greek world, the euthanized person's choice for suicide at someone else's hand was considered brave and so a "good" death.

Today, the debates around what is called "euthanasia" are not quite the same thing. Legislation introduced around the United States in the past five years or so seeks to allow a physician to prescribe lethal medication with the intention that that person will take it themselves. This is why this is most accurately called Physician Assisted Suicide (PAS) or Doctor Prescribed Suicide (DPS) and not euthanasia.

In 2015, 25 states had legislation introduced to allow this practice of PAS. It is currently legal in seven states (CA, CO, HI, OR, VT, WA, MT) and the District of Columbia. The laws between the states generally share the same fundamental parameters. These parameters are meant to try to protect the ill, injured or elderly from abuse. Naturally, this implies that these difficult situations at the end of life are prone to abuse and the state knows this. It is exactly this possibility for abuse which concerns the Church.

The parameters for eligibility for PAS require that (1) a patient be diagnosed with a terminal illness and have six or fewer months to live. (2) The patient must be informed of all options for treatment so as to ensure the patient has a choice. (3) If the patient chooses PAS, a psychological assessment is made of the patient by the attending physician to determine that they are mentally competent to make the choice. (4) The patient must then have two persons witness their choice, one of whom is not related and has no financial gain in the death of the patient. (5) The lethal drugs are provided to the patient to administer them him or herself. These parameters can be summarized this way:

1. Terminal Illness
2. Choice
3. Confirmed Mental Competency

4. Independent Witness

5. Self-Application

Terminal Illness:

Legislation makes a patient eligible for PAS if they are diagnosed with a terminal illness and given six or fewer months to live. However, that assessment of six months to live is without medical treatment.

Someone could qualify for PAS even if they could conceivably live much longer with medical treatment. What counts as “terminal” varies, and there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that terminal patients outlive their doctor’s predictions, sometimes by years.

Choice:

Oftentimes, advocates of PAS suggest that it is cruel to allow people suffering in pain to agonize until they die. However close to 60% of those who seek PAS do so not out of the fear of pain but because they fear they will be a burden on their family. The bills do not require that the patient inform their family about their fear. This robs families of the opportunity to assure their loved one that the illness is a burden they would gladly take on. The patient, therefore, is making a false choice between what they think their family can handle and what the family actually wants.

Physicians are required to let the patient know that there are alternative methods so that they can choose, however those alternatives often involve expensive treatments. The wealthy have a choice here, but the poor have no real choice and now are encouraged to kill themselves. Even more problematic are those cases where someone’s health insurance refuses to pay for expensive treatments but will pay for PAS. Insurance companies essentially make the choice and end up telling the patient they are better off dead. When that health insurer is the state, it becomes more problematic.

Confirmed Mental Competency:

The first assessment for mental capacity is made by the attending physician and not by a trained psychologist or psychiatrist. Physicians must look for signs of abuse or coercion without any expert training and so must make sweeping psychological assessments, sometimes after only having known the patient for two weeks. What’s more, if the attending physician declines the request for PAS, the family can seek a second and even a third opinion from a psychiatrist or psychologist of their choosing.

However, even these assessments must take place after only one session, and there is no universal baseline standard to which psychiatrists or psychologists agree for assessing consent in this area.

Independent Witness:

Legislation does require that one of the two witnesses for the patient who requests PAS be a nonrelative and completely independent from financial gain. However, there is nothing that keeps the other witness from being a relative with a direct financial benefit from the death of the patient. Nothing exists to keep that witness from coercing or bribing the other witness into cooperating with abuse.

Self-Application:

The patient is not actually required to pick up the lethal drugs. They can be mailed. There is no failsafe against someone taking the drugs and using them for some other purpose. Also, if the patient changes their mind, there are no protections for them as they become debilitated from their disease. The mental competency assessment is required at the time of the request for PAS not at the time of actually taking the dose.

Despite all the efforts on the part of legislators, conceivably an abusive family member can coerce a patient to request PAS, coach the patient through the psychological examination and/or doctor-shop until a positive assessment is achieved, be the witness for the PAS and bribe another party to cooperate, receive the lethal drugs through the mail and then administer the drugs against the patient's will. The current laws cannot guarantee against this happening.

As a practical matter the Catholic Church is against euthanasia and PAS because of the problems with the phrase "terminal illness," because of the difficulty in assessing psychological health in just one session and because of the almost certain abuse of the vulnerable. However, at the most basic level the Church is against PAS and euthanasia because at the heart of both acts is the notion that a life of dependence on others and of suffering is not a life worth living. Society has so thoroughly convinced us that unless we are productive, and specifically economically productive, we do not have value. This is diametrically opposed to the Christian message which has defended the dignity of the ill, injured and elderly since the time of Jesus.

What is the Church's Teaching on the Death Penalty?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church was recently changed by Pope Francis on the matter of capital punishment. The fundamental doctrine was not changed. However, the prudential assessment of the Church did change. What does that mean? Here is a quick explanation.

While there were in the early years of the Church some Church Fathers who rejected capital punishment entirely (for instance St. Ambrose and St. Cyprian of Carthage), the vast majority of the Church's leading theologians and popes have taught that this form of punishment can be applied morally. After all, Sacred Scripture in the Old and New Testament presume this form of punishment is legitimate.

Still, though the traditional teaching has allowed capital punishment, it was always allowed only as an exception to the rule. That rule is the fifth commandment against intentionally killing anyone. Revenge killing has always been condemned by the Church and has never been taught as justifiable.

The traditional teaching around capital punishment developed over time, but here are its main points:

1. Capital punishment is allowable, but its use is bound by certain parameters.
2. Those parameters have always included public safety, i.e. self-defense against the dangerous.

3. Enforcing the law of God and meting out justice was often explicitly stated as justification.

4. Later, in the late Middle Ages and beyond, theologians argued that capital punishment could bring about conversion in the sinner and so was also justifiable for that reason.

Previous language of CCC 2267 Looking at this tradition, the Catechism's original text used the language of Pope St. John Paul II and limited the traditional teaching on "recourse to the death penalty" to number 2 above. It states that the death penalty is allowed "if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor." This language follows the oldest defense of the use of the death penalty, which traces back to St. Augustine of Hippo.

Furthermore, the Catechism previously stated that "If, [], non-lethal means are sufficient to defend and protect people's safety from the aggressor, authority will limit itself to such means,...." In other words, the state must use "non-lethal means" if possible. Notice the firm language here. This is not a suggestion. This is a moral imperative. If "non-lethal means" are available, then the state is morally required to use them.

Almost in anticipation of objections to his point, the Catechism goes on to say, "...as these [non-lethal means] are more in keeping with the concrete conditions of the common good and more in conformity to the dignity of the human person." In other words, for those concerned about enforcing the law of God and meting out justice (number 3 above), the Church states that using non-lethal means achieves God's law and justice better than does killing the unjust aggressor. There is some debate on this, however, the crux is in how one defines "punishment." For the Church's definition of that, one must go to CCC 2265 and 2266, but we must limit ourselves to the current section.

What we have in the first two paragraphs of the previous language of CCC 2267 is the official doctrine of the Church: capital punishment can be used in situations where the state, which is charged with protecting the life and property of the innocent, has no other choice. However, if there is an alternative to killing, the state must use the alternative, non-lethal means. That's the doctrine.

When Pope Francis announced his change to the Catechism many of the headlines, in secular and Catholic periodicals, said that he changed Church teaching, making the death penalty wrong in every and all situations. That's not what happened.

New language of CCC 2267

Recourse to the death penalty on the part of legitimate authority, following a fair trial, was long considered an appropriate response to the gravity of certain crimes and an acceptable, albeit extreme, means of safeguarding the common good.

Today, however, there is an increasing awareness that the dignity of the person is not lost even after the commission of very serious crimes. In addition, a new understanding has emerged of the significance of penal sanctions imposed by the

state. Lastly, more effective systems of detention have been developed, which ensure the due protection of citizens but, at the same time, do not definitively deprive the guilty of the possibility of redemption.

Consequently, the Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that “the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person,” and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide.

The first paragraph certainly sounds like the teaching was one thing before, and so since it “was” one thing it must not be that way now. However, when the new language came out, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), which has oversight over the Catechism, released a letter to bishops explaining how we ought to read the new language. In that letter the CDF states:

Certainly, it remains the duty of public authorities to defend the life of citizens, as has always been taught by the Magisterium and is confirmed by the Catechism of the Catholic Church in numbers 2265 and 2266. All of this shows that the new formulation of number 2267 of the Catechism expresses an authentic development of doctrine that is not in contradiction with the prior teachings of the Magisterium. These teachings, in fact, can be explained in the light of the primary responsibility of the public authority to protect the common good in a social context in which the penal sanctions were understood differently, and had developed in an environment in which it was more difficult to guarantee that the criminal could not repeat his crime.

We see here that the state’s responsibility to protect the innocent has not changed. Thus, if the only way to defend the innocent is to kill the “unjust aggressor” then the state may do so. Thus, capital punishment could, under certain parameters, be allowed (number 1 above). What has changed is the assessment by the Church as to whether or not that situation is ever necessary today since, as the new language states, “more effective systems of detention have been developed.”

What has changed then is the prudential judgment about the current state of things in the world. Whereas the previous language of the Catechism said that it was highly unlikely that a government needed to use the death penalty, Pope Francis has judged that “non-lethal means” are available everywhere today. Therefore, no state can put people to death. If, however, the current state of things should change, then the Catechism would still allow the death penalty. Based on these teachings and their own prudential judgment the U.S. Bishops have repeatedly called for an end to the death penalty in the United States precisely because they have judged that all states have access to non-lethal means.

Deacon Omar Gutiérrez

Meditation

Mother Teresa of Calcutta will be remembered centuries from now as an ordinary nun personally touched by Jesus, called to abandon herself, to imitate his life in the slums, and to bring the good news of God's love to the poorest of the poor. ... Jesus gave her a mission of charity: by their love she and her sisters would make his love known. By becoming poor, they would make the poor rich with the promises of divine life. Mother Teresa always told her sisters that in this mission, their own absolute poverty was as crucial as any work of mercy they performed for the poor.

Since the beginning, her Missionaries of Charity have owned only a sari, a pair of sandals, some undergarments, a crucifix they pinned on their habit, a rosary, a prayer book, an umbrella for monsoon season, a silver bucket for washing, and a thin bed. Despite the heat of the Indian summers, they didn't even allow themselves to own a fan. They drew no salaries, did no fund-raising, refused to accept government or Church monies for their programs. They lived day to day and hand to mouth, begging alms and food, just like the poor they served. ...

In lifestyle matters, the saints tend to read the Gospels literally. Mother Teresa was no exception. The saints read Jesus preaching, "You can't serve God and mammon [money]" and "Blessed are the poor," and they put themselves on the downward mobility track, becoming conspicuous for their lack of consumption of the things of this world. They read that the Son of Man had no place to lay his head, and they try to live as he did. ...

She is most often compared to St. Francis, the rich boy who made himself poor and kissed the leper. But really she was more like St. Lawrence. He was roasted alive for impertinence in A.D. 258 because, when ordered by the emperor's men to turn over the Church's wealth, he showed up with a retinue of the destitute and smiled. "These are the treasure of the Church," he said.

Mother Teresa, too, wanted us to see in the poor the richness of Christ. "These are our treasures," she would tell visitors to her mission in Calcutta. "They are Jesus. Each one is Jesus in his distressing disguise." She taught us to meet our Maker in the poorest of the poor, to find our salvation there. Christ in his distressing disguise. It had a strange, oracular ring to it – frightening, but compelling, too.

Her patron, Thérèse of Lisieux, developed a deep devotion to the Holy Face – the image of the battered and bruised Lord crowned with thorns. For Mother Teresa, too, the face of the crucified Jesus could be seen in the poor. There was nothing symbolic or evocative about it. In the poor, she believed, we meet Jesus – not a reminder of Jesus, not a symbol of Jesus, but Jesus himself, face-to-face, hungering for our love, thirsting for our kindness, waiting to be clothed by our compassion:

The shut-in, the unwanted, the unloved, the alcoholics, the dying destitutes, the abandoned and the lonely, the outcasts and untouchables, the leprosy sufferers – all those who are a burden to human society, who have lost all hope and faith in life, who have forgotten how to smile, who have lost the sensibility of the warm hand-touch of love and friendship – they look to us for comfort. If we turn our back on them, we turn it on Christ, and at the hour of our death we shall be judged if we have recognized Christ in them, and on what we have done for and to them.

In doing unto the poor as if they were Jesus himself, she was again only reading the Bible to us, repeating ancient Catholic wisdom. Everything she said repeated what Jesus said more bluntly at the end of the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. Mother Teresa took his words on faith – that he would remain with us truly until the end of time, that he could come to us in the bread and wine we offer on the altar, and that when we look unto the eyes of the hungry, the homeless, and the unwanted, we'll find his eyes looking back.

Catholicism has always been a religion of the God who hides his face in the faces of our neighbors, the God who discloses himself in humble things – a wafer of bread, a cup of wine, the poor. Catholics believe that by joining his divinity to our humanity and by becoming “true God and true man,” Jesus has identified himself in some way with every human being born or yet to be born. In practical terms, this means that everyone you meet in some way bears to you the presence of Jesus, and vice versa.

Yet in the poor and in the Eucharist, we have a special presence of Jesus. In the Eucharist he gives his life to us, shows us his love. In the poor, he waits for us to give our lives to him, to show our love for him. ...

For [Mother Teresa], our failure to see Christ in the beggar was a sign that we had lost our ability to find him in the Eucharist. We might think we believe these things, but we're wrong. We were playing out the mystery recorded in the Gospel – of Jesus coming into the world and not being recognized as God. ...

This was her mission: to show us a living relationship with God. Although we didn't recognize it at the time, she was bringing us back, restoring the ancient understanding of Jesus – that our salvation is bound up in the mystery of his presence at the altar and in the poor.¹

Examination of Conscience:

In what ways have I failed to respect the dignity of those around me at work, at home, at play, or failed to see Jesus in those who are lonely, struggling, sad, hurting?

In what ways have I succeeded in loving others as though they were Jesus?

To what service of the poor am I drawn? Have I asked Jesus in the Eucharist to enlighten my heart so that I might know whom he would have me serve?

In what ways can I teach my students that their love for Jesus must translate into love of neighbor? How can we better connect our anti-bullying policies and rules for respect to a love for Jesus? How can we foster a devotion to the Holy Face of Jesus who suffers in those around us?

¹ Excerpts from *The Love that Made Mother Teresa: How Her Secret Visions and Dark Nights Can Help You Conquer the Slums of Your Heart* by David Scott (Sophia, 2013) pp. 61-66