

TANGAZA COLLEGE
THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

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SUICIDE: A CONTEMPORARY MORAL ISSUE
A Case Study of The Catholic University of Eastern Africa

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A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies

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To

I dedicate this project to my family, relatives, friends, Spiritan members, benefactors and benefactresses.

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Theology. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed:.....*Christian*.....

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Date:.....*19 / 12 / 05*.....

This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

Signed:.....*P. Mugo*.....

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Chapter I

General Introduction

1. Introduction

Suicide is not a new phenomenon in our society. It has been there for a long time. It happens everywhere in the world. It remains a big moral issue and challenge in our day.

The first chapter is aimed at presenting to us the objective of this study and the main idea behind the three essential key concepts that enable us to have a common ground in our study. These concepts are: suicide, direct suicide and indirect suicide.

Before we start, let us say something about the background of the problem.

2. Background of the Problem

I would like to mention some concrete events that struck me about the issue of suicide.

In 1994 a novice from a female congregation committed suicide. She jumped into the pool. Nobody knew the reason.

Three years ago one of my former classmates in primary school killed herself because of disappointment in love. After she discovered that her boyfriend cheated her, she went and threw herself into a river.

In the same year a young religious from a male congregation preferred committing suicide by taking poison because he was accused of sexual violation of a minor.

In May of this year when I went for holidays, I was very surprised and shocked because I was told that a priest from my diocese killed himself by taking poison. Nobody knows the reason. His burial was done secretly.

Lastly, we hear from the radio and television about suicide bombings that occur almost everyday in Israel or in Iraq or somewhere else.

Having been in Kenya since 2002, I have heard many cases about this issue from the radio, television, and press. That is why I have decided to write this work and to bring my contribution on how to remedy this situation.

3. Statement of the Problem

Death is one of the realities which human beings fear. Many do not want to think about it or speak about it. However this fear of death in every human being cannot prevent some people from committing suicide. Generally one may commit suicide because of: increased stress, boredom in life, anger, hopelessness, incurable disease, loneliness, disappointment in love or failure in marriage, financial setbacks, loss of self esteem, etc. In other words, one may decide to take his own life because he is not feeling happy or he feels that his existence is useless.

In this essay we are going to look at this problem in line with Christian morality. Direct suicide is an act against Christian morality. It is intrinsically evil whatever are the causes that drive people to do it.

We do not however have a right to judge those who have committed suicide or those who have attempted it. The judgement belongs only to God. What we are supposed to do is to pray for them so that God may forgive their sins and receive them in His kingdom as the Church's teaching says: "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.”¹

4. Objectives of the Study

Realising that suicide is a big pastoral challenge for the Church today, Father Pazhayampallil says: “A living faith and religious convictions are the best protection against suicide. Religion is of decisive importance for the prevention of suicide.”² Hence, the objectives of this study are:

- To bring awareness that life is a precious gift from God, He is the only One who has a right to determine its course.

- To examine the value and dignity of human life.

- To investigate the teachings of the Church about suicide.

- To call each one of us to work together for the common task of protecting life: solidarity of promoting life.

- To propose recommendations on how to remedy the problem of suicide.

5. Significance of the Study

Speaking from a Christian and African understanding of life, this essay may be a means of informing people about the sanctity or the sacredness of human life.

It might also be a means for re-educating people’s conscience on the value of human life.

This study is not aimed at giving information that will help people to commit suicide. In the contrary, it is done so that people could be informed that suicide is a sinful

¹ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2283

² T. PAZHAYAMPALLIL, *Pastoral Guide II*, 1041.

act that is forbidden by the fifth commandment “You shall not kill”(Ex.20: 13). It is morally wrong, sinful and illicit.

Lastly, as a future missionary of the Church, it helps me to pay more attention to the threats or dangers to human life.

6. Scope and Limitations of the Study

Though we shall mention something about the indirect suicide, it is important to note that our main focus is on direct suicide.

We collected data from the following libraries: Spiritan house, Tangaza college, CUEA, Marist Centre, Hekima College. From these libraries, we got literature that included published books, unpublished theses, different researches, periodicals, dictionaries, church documents and other classroom materials. In the course of this research we only considered the relevant materials that could help our readers in further research.

In the second chapter, we are going to speak about the teaching of the Church on suicide. Four important documents are mainly used:

Vatican Council II - The Conciliar and the Post Conciliar Documents

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

Declaration on Euthanasia prepared by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF)

The Code of Canon Law

It is true that this *Declaration on Euthanasia* prepared by the CDF deals mainly with the teaching of the Church on Euthanasia. However we can also find in it the Church's condemnation of suicide.

As suicide mainly affects young people, we decided to choose the Catholic University of Eastern Africa as our field of research. Questionnaires were distributed to some of the students in order to know their opinions on suicide.

We also interviewed some priests who are specialised in different fields such as in Canon Law, Moral Theology and Psychology etc in order to be sure of getting enough light on this subject matter, and to contribute on the pastoral suggestions of preventing suicide.

7. Definition of the Key Terms

7.1 Suicide

Etymologically the word suicide is derived from the two Latin words “sui”, which means of one self, and “cidium”, from “caedere”, which means to kill. Therefore, the word suicide literally means self- killing. In the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* Kane explains that “in the broadest sense suicide means a voluntary act in which one causes his own death and in the strictest moral sense it is defined as an unlawful moral act, positive or negative, by which one directly causes his own death.”³

There are two kinds of suicide: direct suicide and indirect suicide.

7.2. Direct Suicide

According to the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, direct suicide takes place “when one has the intention of causing his own death as a thing desired for its own sake (as when death is preferred to the meaninglessness of life) or a means to an end (as when one hangs himself to avoid prosecution or to provide his heirs with insurance.”⁴

³ T.C. KANE, “Suicide”, 781.

⁴ T.C. KANE, “Suicide”, 782.

For Pazhayampallil, a person commits direct suicide “when he places a cause whose proper effect is death, and he places the cause in order that death may follow.”⁵ In this case death is really intended as an end or planned as a means to an end.

Therefore for a person to be considered to have committed direct suicide four conditions must be fulfilled:

- He must have intended to kill himself
- He must not have been forced
- He sets up the conditions and facilities for suicide
- He executes the act

The death of Judas Iscariot is one of the concrete examples of this kind of suicide (Matt 27:5-6).

Direct suicide can be done by: shooting oneself, taking poison or medicine (overdose), setting oneself on fire, stabbing oneself with a sharp object, jumping into a pool, drowning oneself in a river, hanging oneself, etc.

We have already mentioned that our work deals mainly with direct suicide. However in order to understand it in a deeper way, let us just mention a few points about indirect suicide.

7.3. Indirect Suicide

Indirect suicide is defined as the laying down of one's life in which death is not directly willed or sought but foreseen or permitted. According to Kane's explanation suicide takes place “when death itself is not desired, either as a means or as an end, but when it is simply foreseen as a likely consequence of an act, the immediate effect and

⁵ T. PAZHAYAMPALLIL, *Pastoral Guide II*, 1035.

purpose of which is something other than death.”⁶ Tending plague victims and becoming a victim to the disease is one of the examples of indirect suicide.

In a word, indirect suicide is placing an act that causes death without that end being willed or sought.

Indirect suicide is generally forbidden because it is wrong to put one's life in unreasonable risk. However, there are some instances when indirect suicide may be tolerated or permitted by reason of the principle of double effect. This principle says:

- The action by its nature must be good or at least indifferent, not evil.
- The evil effect may not be willed but only foreseen and tolerated.
- The good effect should not come through the evil effect, that is, the evil effect should not be the cause of the good one.
- A proportionate reason is necessary to place the act.

Catholic theologians hold that the death of Samson is considered as an example of indirect suicide. (Judges 16: 15-30)

8. Conclusion

Suicide is one of the realities, whose existence we cannot deny. It is defined as direct and intentional killing of oneself. It confronts men and women, young and old, black and white, poor and rich, Christians and non-Christians. Suicide is one of the moral problems which needs serious and urgent attention in our modern society. It is a big challenge for everybody.

⁶ T.C. KANE, "Suicide", 782.

We now proceed to chapter two which consists mainly of literature review. It can be divided into three parts: suicide in pre- Christian era, suicide in the Bible, suicide and Catholic morality.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

1. Introduction

The Church has traditionally condemned suicide. Her teaching is based on Scripture, Tradition and on sound reason. Before exploring the teaching of the Church on suicide let us mention some different aspects of suicide in the pre-Christian era.

2. Pre-Christian Era

In the pre- Christian era, suicide already existed. During that time, there were some people who defended it and there were other people who condemned it. Suicide was both rejected and honoured.

In Greece, the state eventually approved suicide. “Moreover, a supply of poison was kept by the magistrates for those who wished to die. The only requirement was the reasons for the act must be submitted, such as hatred of life or a feeling of being overwhelmed by fate or grief.”⁷ However though suicide was approved by the state some Greek philosophers completely condemned it. Plato opposed it because “a man is a soldier of God and must stay at his post until God calls.”⁸ Aristotle objected to suicide as an offence against the State, which thus loses a citizen: “...he who kills himself in a fit of passion, voluntarily does an injury which the law does not allow. Therefore the suicide commits injustice; but against whom? It seems to be against the state rather than against himself; for he suffers voluntarily, and nobody suffers injustice voluntarily. This is why

⁷ R. CRAWFORD, *Can We Ever Kill?* 5.

⁸ R. CRAWFORD, *Can We Ever Kill?* 5.

the state exacts a penalty; suicide is punished by certain marks of dishonour, as being an offence against the state.”⁹

Some philosophical ideas like Stoicism and Hedonism also favoured suicide. According to the stoic philosophy, happiness is to be found in being free from pleasure and pain. So suicide is tolerated in order to avoid pain. It is also considered as an act of courage and strength, an exercise of human freedom. Hedonism argued that pleasure is the norm of morality. When pleasure is no more possible, suicide is accepted.

In Roma, suicide is tolerated but for honourable reasons. “However slaves and masters were forbidden to commit suicide, for masters could ill afford to lose their slaves and the state its soldiers.”¹⁰

According to the Jewish religion suicide is not allowed because man is not the owner of his life (Gen 9:5). A man is permitted to sacrifice his life only to avoid committing murder, adultery and idolatry, which the Jews consider as three cardinal sins.

In the Jewish community, when a person committed suicide, he was to be buried in a separate part of the cemetery. However, a recent rabbinic ruling considers those who commit suicide as being of unsound mind, and as such they are allowed to be interred with others.¹¹

⁹ D. NOVAK, *Suicide and Morality*, 60.

¹⁰ R. CRAWFORD, *Can We Ever Kill?* 5.

¹¹ Z. WERBLOWSKY–G. WIGODER, “Suicide” 367.

It is also good to mention that until now the Jews have still honoured the deaths of the fighters of Masada who preferred killing themselves in order to escape slavery during their battle against the Romans in 73 C.E. They consider it as an honourable death.¹²

3. Suicide in the Bible

If we read the Bible well we can find a number of suicide cases in it: four in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament.

- In Judges 9: 54 we have the story of Abimelech who was injured by a millstone dropped by a woman from a tower. As it was considered a dishonour for a man to be killed by a woman, Abimelech called upon his servant to kill him.

- Judges 16:30 tells us about the death of Samson who brought a temple down on himself and his enemies.

- In 1Samuel 31:4 we have the story of Saul who killed himself by falling on his sword after realising that his servant refused to help him.

- 2Samuel 17: 23 speaks of the death of Ahith'ophel who committed suicide by hanging himself after feeling that Ab'salom rejected his counsel.

- Lastly, in the Gospel of Matthew we have the story of Judas Iscariot who killed himself by hanging himself. (Mt 27:3-6)

Perhaps we may ask this question: Does Scripture condemn suicide?

Strictly speaking there is no general condemnation of suicide in the Bible. That is why the philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) is right when he held that Scripture never

¹² During the Jewish revolt against the Romans in 73 C.E, 960 Jews killed themselves and their families in order to avoid slavery. Elazar, the leader of Masada said: "We were the very first that revolted from them, and we are the last that fight against them; and I cannot but esteem it as a favour that God has granted us, that it is still in our power to die bravely, and in a state of freedom.... Let our wives die before they are abused, and our children before they have tasted of slavery; and after we have slain them, let us bestow that glorious benefit upon one another mutually." J. TELUSHKIN, *Jewish Wisdom*, 275-276.

condemned suicide.¹³ However there are some verses in Scripture, which can be interpreted as condemnation of suicide like: “For your life blood I will surely require a reckoning” (Gen 9:5); “You shall not kill” (Ex 20:13).

Despite these we do not find a clear and direct statement which condemns suicide in the Bible, “we cannot say that such silence means consent. Since the early followers of Jesus were Jews and Judaism condemned suicide, the writers of the New Testament may have thought that there was no need to mention such condemnation.”¹⁴

4. Suicide and Catholic Morality

4.1 The Church’s Condemnation of Suicide Before Vatican II

From the time of the early Church, Christianity has traditionally condemned suicide. In the second and third centuries the Church insisted that anyone who committed suicide should be refused a Christian burial and that his goods and property should be confiscated by the state. The reason is that the one who commits suicide violates God’s gift of life and His right to dispose of it.

It is important to note that in the history of the Church, some people actively sought death because they wanted to escape persecution or to gain the glory of martyrdom. But the Church did not accept such an attitude.

In the fourth century, Saint Augustine strongly opposed suicide. He said that suicide is a form of homicide. It is an act that precludes the possibility of repentance. Augustine did not agree with the position of St Jerome affirming that suicide is not condemned in defence of virginity. Augustine argued that rape cannot violate the soul’s chastity.

¹³ R. CRAWFORD, *Can We Ever Kill?* 8.

¹⁴ R. CRAWFORD, *Can We Ever Kill?* 8.

- In the thirteenth century St. Thomas of Aquinas contributed a lot on this issue. He reflected on suicide in line with the three human relationships: relationship with self, relationship with society and relationship with God. From this reflection he gave three arguments against suicide.

In the first argument, Saint Thomas stressed the fact that suicide is a sin against nature: "Everything naturally loves itself, the result being that everything naturally keeps itself in being (*conservat se in esse*), and resists corruption so far as it can. Wherefore suicide is contrary to the inclination of nature... Hence suicide is contrary to the natural law..."¹⁵

In the second argument, he emphasised that suicide is a sin against the community or the society: "because every part as such belongs to the whole (*est totius*). Now every man is part of the community (*pars communitatis*), and so, as such, he belongs to the community (*est communitatis*). Hence by killing himself he injures the community."¹⁶

In the third argument he underlined the fact that suicide is a sin against God: "because life is God's gift to man, and is subject to His power, who kills and makes to live. Hence whoever takes his own life sins against God (...) it belongs to God alone to pronounce sentence of death and life, according to Deut 22:39, I will kill and I will make to live."¹⁷

-From fifteenth century onwards, the councils of the Church did not only deny funeral rites to suicides but also threatened excommunication.

¹⁵ D. NOVAK, *Suicide and Morality*, 44.

¹⁶ D. NOVAK, *Suicide and Morality*, 59.

¹⁷ D. NOVAK, *Suicide and Morality*, 70.

The Catechism of the Council of Trent stated that the fifth commandment does not say: *Thou shall not kill another*, but simply: *Thou shall not kill*. Therefore it forbids both murder and suicide.¹⁸

-The 1917 Code of Canon Law also maintained the denial of ecclesiastical burial to those who committed direct or wilful suicide: "The following persons are to be deprived of ecclesiastical burial, unless they have before death given some signs of repentance: ... culpable suicides; those dying in a duel or from wounds received in it..." (Canon 1240, 3-4) It also forbade books favouring suicide: "By the very law are forbidden: ... books which declare duels, suicides, divorce as licit..." (Canon 1399, 8)

4.2 The Present Church's Condemnation of Suicide

4.2.1 Suicide as a Rejection of God's Sovereignty and Love

First of all, the Catholic Church condemns suicide by appealing to the principle of the sanctity of life and the sovereignty of God over life. The Church argued that God has given life to us so that we may use it and make it fruitful, but it ultimately belongs to God not to us to dispose of it. As Creator, life is the property of God. He has the absolute priority over human life. Therefore, direct suicide is a sin against God's sovereignty because only God has dominion over human life: "See now that I, even I, am He; there is no god besides me. I kill and I make alive"(Deut 32,39). When a person intentionally takes away his own life, he shows that he is the master of his life hence superior to himself.

The Sacred Congregation for Declaration of the Faith states clearly that "intentionally causing one's own death, or suicide, is therefore equally as wrong as

¹⁸ *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 423.

murder; such an action on the part of a person is to be considered as a rejection of God's sovereignty and loving plan."¹⁹

In addition, suicide is not only an infringement of God's sovereignty but also it is an offence against God's love and love of self.²⁰ The CDF adds, "Most of the people regard life as something sacred and hold that no one may dispose of it at will, but believers see in life something greater, namely a gift of God's love, which they are called upon to preserve and make fruitful."²¹

In line with the Church's condemnation of suicide, Pazhayampallil says, "Human life is a gift from God. We show our love for God by respecting and fostering the gift of the Lord. (...) One way to show our love for God, for ourselves and for others is to prolong human life. Thus it is not an act of responsible human love wilfully and directly to end one's life or the life of other."²² So as a crime against life itself, suicide can never be considered good because it offends the honour of the Creator.²³

4.2.2 Suicide as a Denial of Self- Respect and Responsibility

If a person loves himself, he has to respect himself by taking care of his life. He has to carry out his duty and responsibility towards his life. Therefore the Church condemned suicide because it is a flight from one's duty and responsibility towards his life. Life is a gift from God, and on the other hand death is unavoidable; it is necessary, therefore, that we, without in any way hastening the hour of our death, should be able to

¹⁹ CDF, *Declaration on Euthanasia*, 7.

²⁰ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2881.

²¹ CDF, *Declaration on Euthanasia*, 6-7.

²² T. PAZHAYAMPALLIL, *Pastoral Guide II*, 1037.

²³ *Gaudium et Spes*, 27.

accept it with full responsibility and dignity.²⁴ “Every one 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 honour 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.”²⁵

As a social being, a human being has responsibility towards his / her neighbours. Suicide is not only a refusal of one’s responsibility towards himself but also it is a denial of one’s duty towards his fellow human beings. That is why the Catechism of the Catholic Church condemns suicide as an offence against love of neighbour because “it unjustly breaks solidarity with family, nation and other human societies to which we continue to have obligations.”²⁶ It is “...a flight from the duties of justice and charity owed to one’s neighbour, to various communities to the whole of society.”²⁷

4.2.3 Suicide as a Denial of the natural instinct to live

According to the teaching of the Church, the natural inclination to preserve life and to avoid death is present in each human being. So as self-destruction, the Church condemns suicide because it denies the natural instinct to live or self- preservation. It “contradicts the natural inclination of the human being to preserve and perpetuate his life.”²⁸

²⁴ CDF, *Declaration on Euthanasia*, 13.

²⁵ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2280.

²⁶ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2281.

²⁷ CDF, *Declaration on Euthanasia*, 7.

²⁸ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2281.

5. Conclusion

Let us summarize this chapter by saying that from the beginning up to now the Roman Catholic Church has strongly condemned suicide. According to the Church's teaching, suicide is forbidden by the fifth commandment "you shall not kill".²⁹ It is an evil act because it is a crime against life and an offence against self. It is morally wrong because it is an offence against neighbour towards whom one has responsibilities and obligations to fulfil. It is sinful because it is an offence against God who is the author of life. The revised canonical legislation also considers it as a crime. That is why those who have attempted suicide are considered as irregular for the reception and the exercise of the Holy Orders. (Can.1041,5; 1044,1). However this revised canonical legislation does not withhold Christian burial from one who had committed suicide. In civil law suicide is not considered as a crime. In addition, the law punishes anyone who helps another to commit suicide, even when the suicidal attempt was unsuccessful.

The Church also affirms that it is necessary to "distinguish suicide from that sacrifice of one's life whereby for a higher cause, such as God's glory, the salvation of souls or the service of one's brethren, a person offers his life or puts it in danger."³⁰

Lastly, it is very important to say that though the Church strongly condemns suicide, she accepts that there are some factors which can reduce the responsibility of the one committing suicide such as grave psychological disturbances, anguish or grave fear of hardship, suffering or torture.³¹

²⁹ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2325.

³⁰ R. CRAWFORD, *Can We Ever Kill?*, 20.

³¹ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2282.

In the following chapter, we shall now analyse and interpret the data collected from the questionnaires.

CHAPTER III

Field Research

1. Introduction

In this chapter we present analyses and explanations to the questionnaire that we distributed to some students of CUEA. The aim of the questionnaire is to see if suicide is a contemporary moral issue in our society or not. This chapter is very important because unless we know exactly who the victims are, the reasons and modes for suicide we cannot give pragmatic pastoral suggestions and recommendations on how to remedy the problem of suicide in our society.

2. Questionnaires

Realising that the students of CUEA represent the youth from different parts of the whole of the country (Kenya) the researcher chose to direct a total of thirteen (13) questionnaires to them. In addition since they are in third level education, we believe that they could understand many things better.

50 forms of the questionnaires were distributed in August 2005. The researcher used random sampling to obtain the subjects. However he included the lay students in order to avoid one- sided information that could come from the religious students. 44 (88%) forms were returned answered and 6 (12%) forms were not returned. 23 (52,3%) of our respondents were men and 21 (47,7%) were women.

14 (31,8%) respondents from the faculty of education were involved in the questionnaires, 12 (27,3%) from science, 9 (20,5%) from philosophy and 7 (15,9%) from the faculty of theology and 2 (4,5%) did not mention their fields. Many of the respondents

did not also mention their names and their ages. It is important to mention that our respondents answered the questionnaires spontaneously, that means, they tried to give their answers from their personal experiences on our topic.

3. Analysis and Data Interpretation

Table 1: The response to the question: Have you heard about suicide in Kenya?

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
YES	44	100
NO	0	0
UNABLE TO JUDGE	0	0
TOTAL	44	100

The above table shows that students we reached were 44(100%) in number. All of them said **Yes** to the question. None of them (0%) said **No** to it and none of them (0%) said **I don't know**. The data analysed justifies the fact that suicide is a reality, it exists in Kenya.

Table 2: The response to the question: Do you agree that suicide is one of the serious moral issues in our society today?

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
YES	36	81.9
NO	6	13.6
UNABLE TO JUDGE	2	4.5
TOTAL	44	100

The above table shows that 36(81.9%) respondents agreed. 6 (13.6%) respondents did not agree. 2 (4.5%) were unable to make a decision. This data seems to justify that suicide is one of the serious moral issues in our society today.

Table 3: The response to the statement: Suicide is one of the alarming situations in Kenya

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
YES	27	61.4
NO	14	31.8
UNABLE TO JUDGE	3	6.8
TOTAL	44	100

This table designates that 27 (61.4%) respondents said that suicide is one of the alarming situation in Kenya. However 14 (31.8%) respondents disagreed with the statement. 3 (6.8%) were unable to judge.

It seems that the statement “suicide is one of the alarming situations in Kenya” is justified by the above table.

Table 4: The response to the question: Do you agree that young people are more exposed to suicide than older ones?

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
YES	30	68.2
NO	9	20.5
UNABLE TO JUDGE	5	11.3
TOTAL	44	100

This table indicates that 30 (68.2%) respondents agreed to the above question. 9 (20.5%) said No. 5 (11.3%) were unable to make a decision. From this we can draw a conclusion that the suicide rate among young people is higher than among of the older ones.

Table 5: The response to the statement: Women are more exposed to suicide than men.

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
YES	15	34.1
NO	21	47.8
UNABLE TO JUDGE	8	18.1
TOTAL	44	100

This table shows that 15 (34.1%) agreed with the above statement. However 21(47.8) respondents opposed it. 8 (18.1%) were unable to judge. Both those who said

“Yes” to the statement did not reach 50%. Likewise those who said “No” did not reach 50%. What we can say is that suicide affects both women and men.

Table 6: The response to the statement: Educated people are more exposed to suicide than uneducated ones.

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
YES	20	45.5
NO	20	45.5
UNABLE TO JUDGE	4	9
TOTAL	44	100

This table shows that 20(45.5%) respondents said **Yes**. 20 (45.5%) said **No**. 4 (9%) said **I don’t know**. We see that there is equality between those who agreed to the statement that educated people are more exposed to suicide than uneducated ones. Those who agreed to the statement did not reach 50% and those who disagreed as well. However we cannot deny the fact that suicide affects both educated people and uneducated ones.

Table 7: The response to the hypothesis: Rich people are more exposed to suicide than poor ones.

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
YES	16	36.4
NO	20	45.5
UNABLE TO JUDGE	8	18.1
TOTAL	44	100

This table shows that 16 (36.4%) agreed to the above hypothesis. However 20 (45.5%) did not accepted. 8 (18.1%) were unable to judge. Those who responded “No” to the statement supported their stand by affirming that poverty is one of the major reasons for suicide.

Table 8: The response to the question 8: Can you give three 3 majors reasons for suicide in Kenya?

Poverty	23
Quarrel in the family	21
Incurable disease	19
Unemployment	16
Betrayal in love relationship	13
Frustration	13
Loss of hope	8
Depression	7
Loneliness	6
Loss of self esteem	3
Rape	2
Pleasure	1

Each respondent was asked to give three major reasons for suicide in Kenya. This table shows that the respondents mentioned twelve (12) different reasons. It also shows

that **poverty, quarrel in the family and incurable diseases** are the leading causes of suicide. Out of 44 (100%) respondents, 23 (52.3%) mentioned “**poverty**”. 21(47.7%) out of 44 (100%) mentioned “**Quarrel in the family**”. 19 (43,2%) out of 44 (100%) mentioned “**Incurable diseases**”.

Table 9: The response to the question 9: Can you give 3 frequent modes of suicide in Kenya?

Hanging oneself	40
Self- poisoning (drugs or overdose)	39
Jumping over buildings	28
Self drowning (in the river, in the sea or in the pool)	13
Burning by fire	9
Stabbing oneself with sharp objects	2
Self shooting	1

Each respondent was asked to give three frequent modes of suicide in Kenya. This table shows that the respondents mentioned seven different modes. This table also shows that the most frequent modes of suicide are: **hanging oneself, self poisoning and jumping over buildings.**

Out of 44 (100%), 40 (90.9%) mentioned **hanging oneself**. 39 (88.6%) mentioned **self-poisoning** and 28 (63.6%) mentioned **jumping over buildings**.

Table 10: The response to the question: Do you agree that the fifth commandment “you shall not kill” also forbids suicide?

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
YES	44	100
NO	0	0
UNABLE TO JUDGE	0	0
TOTAL	44	100

This table shows clearly that all of our respondents answered positively to the above statement. None disagreed, and none said “I don’t know”. They all agreed that suicide violates the fifth commandment “You shall not kill” as the Church teaches.

Table 11: The response to the statement: People with incurable disease like AIDS have a right to commit suicide.

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
YES	0	0
NO	42	95.5
UNABLE TO JUDGE	2	4.5
TOTAL	44	100

This table shows that none of our respondents agreed to the above statement. 42 (95.5%) said “No”. 2 (4.5%) were unable to make a decision. This shows that the

statement “people with incurable diseases like AIDS have a right to commit suicide” was rejected by the majority.

Table 12: The response to the question: Do you agree that intentional self-killing reveals one’s lack of faith in God?

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
YES	29	66
NO	9	20.4
UNABLE TO JUDGE	6	13.6
TOTAL	44	100

This table indicates that 29(66%) gave a positive answer. 9 (20.4%) said “No”, and 6 (13.6%) said “I don’t know”. It seems that the statement “suicide reveals one’s lack of faith in God” is justified. The majority of the respondents agreed.

Table 13: The response to the question: Do you think that suicide can be remedied or avoided?

OPTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
YES	42	95.5
NO	0	0
UNABLE TO JUDGE	2	4.5
TOTAL	44	100

This table shows that 42 (95.5%) were in support of the statement “suicide can be remedied or avoided.” None opposed it, and 2 (4.5%) were unable to make a decision. The majority of the respondents accepted. The statement is therefore justified by the data.

4. Conclusion

In chapter three, we analysed the finding from the questionnaires we distributed to some students of CUEA. Their responses gave us the opportunity to know their opinion on our topic. We now move on to our last chapter, chapter four, for recommendations and the general conclusion.

CHAPTER IV

Recommendations and General Conclusion

1. Introduction

We now come to the close of our research study. This final chapter will give a summary of our study. We shall start by recapitulating what we have already written in the previous three chapters. After analysing the implications of our study, we shall also give some recommendations and pastoral suggestions on how to remedy or avoid suicide. These recommendations will mainly consist on the role of the family, school, government, and the Church. Finally, we shall give a comprehensive conclusion.

2. Recapitulation

The study, as a whole, has four chapters. Chapter one is about the general introduction. We mentioned that our focus is mainly on the moral problem of direct suicide. Direct suicide is defined as an intentional and direct self -killing. It is not a new phenomenon in our society. It has been there for a long time. It has existed everywhere in the world. People's opinions on it differ. Some tolerate it others reject it. Some condemn it others honour it. The main objectives of the study, as we stated, is not only to bring awareness on the value and dignity of human life but also to call each one of us to work together for the common task of protecting life.

Chapter two is about the literature review, which deals with the teaching of the church on suicide. From early centuries up to now the Church has strongly condemned suicide. The Church states that suicide is a sinful act. It is a violation of life itself, a denial of God's sovereignty over life and His love. It is an offence against self and a denial of

one's duty towards his or her neighbours. The Church also stresses that suicide is forbidden by the fifth commandment "you shall not kill". In other words direct suicide is a murderous act that must be forbidden and discouraged. It is morally wrong and unacceptable.

Chapter three consisted on the analysis and interpretation of the questionnaires distributed to the students of CUEA.

3. Implications of the Study

So far, from the data analysis we have come to the conclusion that suicide is one of the serious moral issues in our society. It is also justified that it is one of the alarming situations in Kenya. Suicide affects many young people. It also affects both women and men, rich and poor, educated and uneducated people. The majority of the respondents mentioned that the three major reasons for suicide are poverty, quarrels in the family and incurable diseases. From the analysed data we also see that the three frequent modes of suicide in Kenya are hanging oneself, self-poisoning and jumping from high buildings. All of the respondents agreed that suicide is forbidden by the fifth commandment "You shall not kill". The majority of them accepted that it reveals one's lack of faith in God. It is also justified that people with an incurable disease have no right to commit suicide. However though suicide is a serious problem in our society, it can be prevented or avoided.

4. Recommendations and Suggestions

4.1 *The Role of the Family*

The family plays an important role in preventing suicide. It is the primary place where all family members should feel loved and accepted. In the family one's feelings should be shared freely and openly. Parents must show their love and care to the children. Emile Durkheim says, "The only way to reduce the number of suicide due to conjugal anomy is to make marriage more indissoluble.³² Hence couples must be faithful to their covenantal marriage

The family home is a place where exclusion should not exist. It is a shelter where everybody should find happiness. So it is recommendable that:

- If someone in the family has an incurable disease, each family member has the duty to take care of him in a loving way, to support and accompany him.

- If someone in the family feels lonely, all the family members should take away his or her loneliness by giving him or her company.

- If someone of the family members is in a painful situation or state, the whole family should help him or her to solve his or her problem, and encourage him or her.

- If someone in the family attempted to commit suicide, each family member has the responsibility to encourage him or her face the realities of life.

Lastly, it is very important to limit the availability of the means by which most people kill themselves, that is handguns, prescriptions of lethal medication.

³² E. DURKHEIM, *Suicide*, 384.

4.2 The Role of the School

The school has a paramount role to play to make sure that the possibility of suicide does not penetrate in the minds of the students. Hence the teachers should always pay attention to the feelings of the students.

For the adolescents, parents and teachers must collaborate for the education of the children. Both should share their feelings about the life of the children. School is a place for education where exclusion at any level (familial, economic, social, cultural, religious...) should not take place.

It is advisable that schools should organise a kind of animation program such as a seminar on the dignity and value of life once a year. Schools should offer the availability of different activities like sports, music, etc...because they may be a source of health and optimism.

4.3 The Role of the Government

As we have found in the analysed data, poverty, incurable disease and unemployment are classified among the major reasons that may drive people to commit suicide. So it is recommendable that:

- The government must take concrete steps in the task of fighting poverty.
- The government should intensify moral and economic assistance to the poor, the needy, and the orphans.
- Efforts must be intensified to increase employment.
- The government should not neglect their special care for those who have incurable diseases like HIV/AIDS.

- The government should set up centers for counselling people with suicidal tendencies.

As we have seen that young people are more exposed to suicide, the government must pay attention to their needs.

4.4 The Role of the Church

Pazhayampallil says, "A living faith and religious convictions are the best protection against suicide. Religion is of decisive importance for the prevention of suicide."³³ So let us now talk about the important role that the Church should play in the task of preventing suicide. It is recommendable that:

- The Church should actively continue its activity for the education of people's conscience on the dignity of human life through different means of communication (radio, television, journal, newspapers, magazines, videos).

- The Church has a fundamental option for the poor. So assistance to the poor, the needy, and the orphans should be intensified. And Jesus himself said, "as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt.25: 40)

- The Church should increase its special comfort for the sick especially those who have mortal sickness, the handicapped, and those who are in a painful state or situation.

- Special attention and care of the youth, the widows and the lonely must be intensified.

- Efforts on the task of promoting justice and peace should be intensified.

- The church should endlessly carry on its task of fighting against all forms of discrimination and exclusion.

³³ T. PAZHAYAMPALLIL, *Pastoral Guide II*, 1041.

- Counselling centers should be set up in different parishes or dioceses. Realising that the young people are more exposed to suicide, Fr. O'Reilly stresses, "The priests have to be sensitive and listen to the feelings of the people especially the youth."³⁴

Concerning the fact that suicide occurs among the clergy, religious, seminarians, Fr. Obetia says, "A seminarian or a priest is not only a spiritual being. He has also physical and emotional needs or problems. The latter must be taken care of so that he may not think that life is meaningless"³⁵

- It is commendable that there must be a fruitful collaboration between the Church and the state, between the Church and other religions on the task of promoting the culture of life.

5. General Conclusion

In the last chapter we have presented some suggestions and recommendations on how to prevent or avoid suicide. We mentioned the paramount role that the family, school, Church and government play for the common task of eliminating suicide and promoting the culture of life. In the family each member should feel loved and accepted. He or she must feel the sense of belonging to his or her family. Schools must also join in the effort of fighting against suicide. The Church and the state must take their responsibility to help people in their struggle against poverty, anger, hopelessness, discrimination, hatred, and frustration.

In addition mass media has an important role to play in the task of making sure that the possibility of suicide does not penetrate the minds of the people.

³⁴ Fr. J. O'REILLY, S.P.S, is a chaplain at Mater Hospital Nairobi Kenya. He was interviewed on 20/11/05.

³⁵ Fr. R. OBETIA, A.J, is a lecturer of Canon Law in CUEA, Tangaza College and Apostles of Jesus. He was interviewed on 18/11/05.

As Christians, we should not judge the people who commit suicide. Judgement is for God alone. What we should do is to pray and ask God's mercy for them. We should comfort their families through prayer, words of consolation. Fr. MacDonald states, "The former Code of Canon Law forbade Christian burial for those who committed suicide. The present one does not mention either interdiction or permission. It means that there is an evolution on the attitude of the church towards the suicide victims and their families...The Church should show love and compassion to the family through prayer."³⁶ In the same way, he makes reference to *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* saying, "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."³⁷

³⁶ Fr. T. MAC DONALD, C.S.Sp, is a parish priest at St John The Evangelist, Lang'ata. He was interviewed on 23/10/05.

³⁷ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2283.

Research Questionnaire for the Students of CUEA

I am a student of Tangaza College. I am carrying out an intensive research on suicide to find out if suicide is a contemporary moral issue in our society. Here are questions which will help me to do my research. Your co-operation in this project would be of great help not only to my research, but also to many people who will read it. I promise confidentiality and consideration of all your responses. Thanks in advance for your co-operation, and may God bless you.

Please indicate the following

Name(Optional)
Age..... Sex.....
Faculty.....

Instructions: Please use a tick to mark

- 1. Have you heard about suicide in Kenya?
Yes No Don't know
- 2. Do you agree that Suicide is one of the serious moral issues in our society today?
Yes No Don't know
- 3. Suicide is one of the alarming situations in Kenya
Yes No Don't know
- 4. Do you agree that young people are more exposed to suicide than old ones?
Yes No Don't know
- 5. Women are more exposed to suicide than men.
Yes No Don't know

6. Educated people are more exposed to suicide than uneducated ones.

Yes No Don't know

7. Rich people are more exposed to suicide than poor ones.

Yes No Don't know

8. Can you give three (3) major reasons for suicide in Kenya?

- a)
- b)
- c)

9. Can you give three (3) frequent modes of suicide in Kenya?

- a).....
- b).....
- c).....

10. Do you agree that the fifth commandment “you shall not kill” also forbids suicide?

Yes No Don't know

11. People with incurable disease like AIDS have a right to commit suicide.

Yes No Don't know

12. Do you agree that intentional self-killing reveals one's lack of faith in God?

Yes No Don't know

13. Do you think that suicide can be remedied or avoided?

Yes No Don't know

The Questionnaires for the Interviews

1. The former Code of Canon Law forbade Christian burial for those who committed suicide. The present one does not mention either interdiction or permission? What do you think about that?
2. What should be the attitude of the Church towards the family of the one who commits suicide?
3. Suicide occurs among the clergy, religious, seminarians. What do you think about it?
4. According to you, what is the role of the Church in the task of preventing suicide?

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AIDS</i>	<i>Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</i>
<i>BC</i>	<i>Before Christ</i>
<i>Can</i>	<i>Canon</i>
<i>CE</i>	<i>Common Era</i>
<i>CDF</i>	<i>The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith</i>
<i>CUEA</i>	<i>The Catholic University of Eastern Africa</i>
<i>EJR</i>	<i>The Encyclopaedia of the Jewish Religion</i>
<i>GS</i>	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i>
<i>HIV</i>	<i>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</i>
<i>NCE</i>	<i>New Catholic Encyclopaedia</i>

Biblical Books

<i>Deut</i>	<i>Deuteronomy</i>
<i>Ex</i>	<i>Exodus</i>
<i>Gen</i>	<i>Genesis</i>
<i>Matt</i>	<i>Matthew</i>

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I	
General Introduction.....	1
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Background of the Problem.....	2
3. Statement of the Problem.....	2
4. Objectives of the Study.....	3
5. Significance of the Study.....	3
6. Scope and Limitations of the Study.....	4
7. Definition of the Key Terms.....	5
7.1. Suicide.....	5
7.2. Direct Suicide.....	5
7.3. Indirect Suicide.....	6
8. Conclusion.....	7
Chapter II	
Literature Review.....	9
1. Introduction.....	9
2. Pre-Christian Era.....	9
3. Suicide in the Bible.....	11
4. Suicide and Catholic Morality.....	12
4.1. The Church's Condemnation of Suicide Before Vatican II.....	12
4.2. The Present Church's Condemnation of Suicide.....	14
4.2.1. Suicide as a Rejection of God's Sovereignty and Love.....	14
4.2.2. Suicide as a Denial of Self-Respect and Responsibility.....	15
4.2.3. Suicide as a Denial of the Natural Instinct to Live	16
5. Conclusion.....	17
Chapter III	
Field Research.....	19
1. Introduction.....	19
2. Questionnaires.....	19
3. Analysis and Data Interpretation.....	20
4. Conclusion.....	28

Chapter IV	
Recommendations and General Conclusion.....	29
1. Introduction.....	29
2. Recapitulation	29
3. Implications of the Study.....	30
4. Recommendations and Suggestions.....	31
4.1. The Role of the Family.....	31
4.2. The Role of the School.....	32
4.3. The Role of the Government.....	32
4.4. The Role of the Church.....	33
5. General Conclusion.....	34
Research Questionnaire for the students of CUEA.....	36
Research Questionnaire for the interviews.....	38
Abbreviations.....	39
Bibliography.....	40
Table of Contents.....	42