

An Orthodox Commentary on the Ten Commandments

By Archpriest Victor Potapav

First and Second Commandments

Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.

The First Commandment proclaims that God is One, and the Second Commandment defines his worship, warning against the worship of false, pagan gods. Pagan worshipers can still be found among the unwitting, and even among some Christians. These worshipers of idols may recognize some relative value as their highest value: for example, the triumph of their nation (chauvinism), their race (racism), or their class (communism). An idol worshiper may sacrifice his better self for the sake of lesser goods such as money, personal glory, or wine, and other pleasures. All these choices betray God, substituting falseness for sanctification, which should be the goal of every life. The idol worshipers subordinate the whole to the part, and the higher to the lower. This way of life is a sickness, a deformity, and a sin. This sin helps to shred the character of the idol worshiper and frequently helps him to harm other people.

The following question might be raised: Does the Second Commandment prohibit making the sacred images called icons that Orthodox and certain other Christians use in their churches and homes for veneration? We have a distinguished answer in "Veneration of Icons" from Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, by Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky:

One of the outward forms of worship of God and the veneration of the saints is the use of sacred images and the respect shown to them. Among the various gifts of man that distinguish him from other creatures is the gift of art or of depictions in line and color. This is a noble and high gift, and it is worthy to be used to glorify God. With all the pure and high means available to us, we must glorify God according to the call of the Psalmist: *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name.* (Psalm 102:1). *All that is within me* refers to all the capabilities of the soul. And truly, the capability of art is a gift from God.

Of old under Moses, the Lord hath called by name Bezaleel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and He hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship; and to devise skilled works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in the cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of wood, to make any manner of cunning work. And He hath put in his heart that he may teach [others] . . . Them hath He filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer (Exodus 35:30-35).

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

Skilled artists made sacred material objects first for the tabernacle of Moses and later for the Temple of Solomon. Although some were merely sacred adornments, others sacred material objects were revered as exceptional places of God's glory. For example, so great was the Ark of the Covenant that its very touch without special reverence could cause death (II Kings [II Samuel]): at the time of the transfer of the Ark under David, Uzzah was struck dead because he touched the Ark with his hand. Just as holy was the Cherubim of Glory over the Ark, in the midst of which God deigned to reveal Himself and to give His commands to Moses. *There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two Cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel* (Exodus 25:18-22). These were the *visible image of the Invisible God*, in the expression of Metropolitan Macarius.

The Old Testament Temple had images on the walls and curtains, but no depictions of the departed righteous ones, such we see in Christian Church. They did not appear because the righteous ones themselves were awaiting their deliverance, waiting to be brought up out of hell. Christ's descent into hell and His Resurrection made their delivery possible. According to the Apostle, *they without us should not be made perfect* (Hebrews 11:40). These righteous one were glorified as saints only in the New Testament.

So Sacred Scripture strictly prohibits worship of idols, but it does not prohibit Christian icons. Idols are images of false gods, demons, or imaginary thing by worship of lifeless objects of wood, gold, or stone. The Sacred Scriptures strictly insist that we separate holy and unholy, *unclean and clean* (Leviticus 10:10). Whoever cannot see the difference between sacred images and idols blasphemes and defiles the icons. He commits a sacrilege condemned in Sacred Scripture; *Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?* (Romans 2:22).

Ecclesiastical archaeology has shown that the ancient Christians used sacred images in the catacombs and their other places of assembly for prayer, and then later in their churches. Certain Christian writers (such as those at the Council of Elvira, Spain, in 305) set themselves against statues and similar images, but they probably had contemporary pagan idol worship in mind. Their cautions and prohibitions also fit their historic conditions, when, for example, Christians needed to hide holy things from their often hostile pagan persecutors and non-Christian masses. From the start, the Christian missionary ideal had also been to draw people away from pagan idol-worship. Only later could the fullness of the forms for glorifying God and His saints in colors emerge in sacred images.

Records of the Seventh Ecumenical Council define expressed the Orthodox dogma of sacred icon veneration in the following words:

"We therefore . . . define with all certitude and accuracy that just as the figure of the precious and life-giving Cross, so also the venerable and holy images . . . should be set forth in the holy churches of God [for veneration] . . . For by so much more frequently as they are seen in artistic representation (that is, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Theotokos, the angels and saints who are depicted in the icons), by so much more readily are men lifted up to the memory of their prototypes, and to a longing after them. And to these should be given due salutation and

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

honorable reverence [Greek: *timitiki proskynisis*], not indeed that true worship of faith [Greek: *latreia*] which pertains alone to the Divine nature; but to these . . . incense and lights may be offered . . . For the honor which is paid to the image passes on to that which the image represents". *Seven Ecumenical Councils* (Erdmans), p. 550).

In a note to this excerpt, Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose), the English translator of Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, writes as follows: *This distinction between the worship of God and the reverence or veneration shown for icons was set forth first by St. John Damascene in his treatises on the icons. See his On the Divine Images, tr. by David Anderson, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY., 1980, pp. 82-88, and the Introduction, pp. 10-11.*

Orthodox canons say nothing about veneration of the statues in the religious art of the West in the middle ages and later. However, the virtually universal tradition of the Orthodox Church of both East and West and of the Eastern Church in later centuries has been to create two-dimensional depictions and bas-reliefs, but not to allow statues in the round. The reluctance seems to lie in the inevitably greater realism of three-dimensional images, which make them suitable for representing the things of this world (for example, statues of emperors), but not those of heaven, which neither our worldly thoughts nor our realism can capture. Two-dimensional icons, on the other hand, are *windows to heaven*.

The Third Commandment

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.

This commandment forbids us to pronounce the holy Name of God without reverence, and forbids any trivial mention of God in superficial conversation.

The Third Commandment safeguards prayer, which is the basis of our communion with God. By His Word, God created the world. Then the Word of God became incarnate to save the world. Therefore, our own word in prayer also (insofar as we are the image of God) has great power. We must pronounce each word carefully, especially the Name of God, which was revealed to us by God Himself. We may use it only for prayer, for blessing, and for teaching the truth. Saying the Name of God in vain disaccustoms us to using It properly, and we weaken our own ability for communion with God.

The Third Commandment relates also to swearing oaths. Jesus Christ warns us against swearing oaths: *But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne; nor by the earth; for it is his footstool (Matthew 5:34-35).*

Some sectarians point to these words of Jesus Christ as a prohibition against swearing oaths altogether. But we know of instances in the Old and New Testaments when oaths were pronounced. Thus, in the Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Hebrews we read: *Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath* (Hebrews 6:17). In the Apocalypse, we read that the Angel *swore by him that liveth for ever and ever* (Revelation 10:6). The Apostle Paul more than once said: *For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ* (Philippians 1:8).

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

The question might be raised: On what grounds and in what sense did Jesus Christ forbid swearing any oaths? The fifth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew--where the prohibition of swearing oaths by Christ is spoken of--relates how the Savior disclosed his sublime reinterpretation of the Ten Commandments given on Sinai. He made a series of comparisons between the ancient strict applications of the Law and His own gentle commentary. The Lord contrasted murder with wrongful anger, adultery with impure gazing, false oaths with the rejection of all oaths. All His concerns were in the state of a man's soul in his personal affairs. The oaths presented earlier here were impersonal and related to the general affairs of mankind, to the destiny of God's truth, and the fulfilling of God's Word--things important for the whole race of man.

This distinction in the grounds for swearing oaths allowed the introduction of oaths into Christian society, such as swearing by the Name of God to confirm promises or testimony in matters social, legal, or governmental. Oaths in the army merged each soldier's loyalty, which was common to all and founded on faith in God. The oath of a witness in court declares that his testimony will not contradict the truth.

On the other hand, reviling God, murmuring against God, blasphemy, and swearing are harmful. Each evil or false word is destructive. Such words can destroy friendship, family, and nation.

Concerning the necessity to bridle the tongue, the Apostle James writes with particular power in the third chapter (verses 2-12) of his Epistle:

If a man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things.

Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: but the tongue can not man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh (James 3:2-12).

If God and His Word is Truth Itself and Life, then the devil and his word are falsehood and the source of death. The Lord said that the devil was a murderer from the beginning . . . a liar, and the father of lies (John 8:44).

For many decades in the Soviet Union the word *God* was written entirely in lower-case letters to diminish the significance of our Lord. In all countries of the world, when referring to the One God of monotheism, one writes the word *God* using an initial capital letter to differentiate God

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

from the word *god* of polytheism. Even in reprints of the classics of Russian literature, for 70 years the capital letter of this great word was expunged. Fortunately, the situation has begun to improve. Often one can now find in Soviet print the great word *God* written with an initial capital letter. Of course, a reverent attitude towards our Creator requires the use of this capital letter.

In the 18th century, Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk wrote--

"Pronounce the Name of God and make mention of It with total respect, fear, and reverence and only then and there, when and where it is necessary; for the Name of God is holy and fearsome and anyone mentioning it disrespectfully sins gravely. And so, give respect to God's Name as unto God Himself. "

It is proper to mention or pronounce the Name of God in prayer, in glorification, in thanksgiving, in spiritual hymns of praise and in discussions and conversations appropriate for Christians; that is, when the conversation is about God's holy word, about the Law and the Gospel, about the advent of Christ into the world, about His sufferings and death that were offered for our sake, about death, about eternal torment and eternal life, and so forth. In other conversations do not make mention of the Name of God without extreme necessity, and if it is necessary to mention It, do so with all heedfulness and due respect.

Swearing has become habitual--something extremely indecent for Christians. Expressions such as *by God*, *God is my witness*, *God knows*, are used by people too often. Such swearing is a satanic invention to dishonor God's Name and to damn oneself. Take care not to swear, using these and similar expressions. When it is necessary to affirm the truth, let the words of Christ serve you: *Yea, yea; Nay, nay* (Matthew 5:37). Anything more is from the Evil One.

The Fourth Commandment

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God.

Our main concern must be to follow the path toward God, away from Whom we can find no rest. The Old Testament Sabbath was the image of God's resting after His creation of the world. It was also the image of His internal divine life, and the image of the higher spiritual, contemplative life of man, which the Sabbath rest summons to and schools us in. The Lord's day is Sunday: the Christian's day of prayer, a day for learning God's Word, and a day for Communion in the Eucharist, a day as well for good and charitable deeds.

Christ demonstrated the inseparability of love for God and love for man by healing the sick on God's day, on the Sabbath. The foremost sign of our undivided love for God and fellow man is our Sabbath participation in the Eucharist, in the mystery of Holy Communion, which grants us the strength to do good. Therefore, all Sundays and feast days see the Liturgy done in churches.

Each person must take part in the life of the Church just as each person is social, and takes part in the life of other persons in familial, communal, and civil life. Fulfillment of most

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

social obligations take place in the world, but the obligations of Church life involve communion with God and service to Him. According to the unerring word of the Savior, if two or three are gathered together in His name, He is there in the midst of them. Common prayer in church makes individual prayer easier when alone because the Holy Spirit and the unison prayers of other people intensify the power of individual prayer in church. According to the teaching of the Church, the prayers of the angels and the saints are joined to the prayers of the faithful standing in church. One hymn of the Church speaks of this: *Now the powers of heaven invisibly serve with us.*

Certain people call themselves Aspiritual Christians and vainly insist that the Church is unnecessary, that they have a temple in their souls. They forget that God Himself, through His prophets Moses, David, and Solomon instituted the temple and the divine. The Old Testament tabernacle--a moveable temple--was built according to a plan shown by God to Moses. Let us recall the moving prayer of King Solomon: *O Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath . . . Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded? Yet have thou respect unto the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O Lord my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer, which thy servant prayeth before thee today: that thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there: that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place. And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, which they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive* (I Kings 8:23, 27-30).

Christ Himself visited the temple in Jerusalem, kept the Law and the feasts, and loved to read in the synagogues. The Mother of God was brought up at the temple in Jerusalem. The apostles gathered together in the upper room on Zion to pray and to perform the Holy Eucharist. The earliest Christians came together for common prayer in the catacombs.

In his diary *My Life in Christ*, the holy and righteous John of Kronstadt wrote about prayer in church. Here is just one fragment:

"Here in church is the one thing needful; here is a refuge from vanity and the storms of life; here is the calm harbor for souls seeking salvation; here is incorrupt food and drink for souls; here is the light, which enlightens every man who comes into the world; here is pure spiritual air; here is the well of living water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:14); here the gifts of the Holy Spirit are distributed; here is the cleansing of souls. The reading and singing in church, continues the righteous man of Kronstadt, are performed in a sacred language; all Orthodox Christians must learn it, in order to comprehend the sweet sayings of their mother, who is preparing her children for heaven, for eternal life . . . Here in church, a man will come to know the true nobility of his soul, the value of life and its aim or his assigned path; here he dispels the fascination of worldly vanity and worldly passions by acquiring sobriety in his soul; here he comes to know his destiny, both temporal and eternal; here he comes to know his bitter, profound fall and seduction by sin; here the Savior is to be found, particularly in His holy and

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

life, creating Mysteries, and His salvation; here a man comes to know his true relationship with God and his neighbor or with his family and the society in which he lives. The church is an earthly heaven, the place where the closest union with the Divinity occurs; it is a heavenly school which prepares Christians for heavenly citizenship, teaching them about the ways of heaven, about the dwellings of heaven; it is the threshold of heaven; it is the place for common prayer, for thanksgiving, for glorifying the Triune God, Who created and preserves everything; it is unity with the angels. What is more precious and more honorable than the church? Nothing. During the divine service, as on a chart, the whole destiny of the human race is depicted, from beginning to end. The divine service is the alpha and omega of the destiny of the world and of men." [Quoted from *Thoughts About the Divine Service of the Orthodox Church* (Jordanville NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1954)]

According to the teaching of Saint Paul, Christians are to be living temples of the Living God (I Corinthians 6:19). God must dominate their feelings, thoughts, and desires. The Christian soul can become a living temple of God only by drawing nearer to the holy atmosphere of the Church, which is our refuge from the filth of the world and from the inclement storms of life. The soul was created for heaven. It is straitened and sorrowful on earth. During its best moments of spiritual exaltation, the soul yearns for the Heavenly Fatherland *the songs of the earth do not satisfy the soul*, as was well said by Lermontov:

*At length, in the world she languished,
Filled with wondrous desire,
And the sounds of heaven could not be replaced for her
By the tedious songs of the earth.*

If we are attentive to it, the divine service tears the soul away from the earth. Only in heaven can we hear something more beautiful than our Liturgy. Professor Svetlov, the Russian theologian-apologist, explains the powerful psychological action of the divine service on the soul:

In the rite, in the divine service, created by the faith and spirit of millions of believing people, there have been crystallized, so to speak, that faith and power of divine knowledge by which the rites and divine service were created. The divine service is the radiant robe of Christ, toward which every one looking for healing is drawn. In the divine service there is a hidden internal power. According to the teaching of physics there exist various types of batteries, which preserve hidden power, which at the proper time is revealed and acts. Such batteries in the natural world are, for example, electrical batteries, which store electrical energy. All that has been established by the creativity of the Church can be called just such a battery of spiritual energy, of power and faith. In the Church's centuries, old creation, has been crystallized and concealed by that effort of faith, prayer and love by which the people lived. It was in this experience of the life of the Church that everything in the Church was worked out. It is understandable that each contact with this condenser produces a spark, and frequent contact can

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

generate a flame, igniting anew the lamp of the spirit and of living faith hidden under ashes. And faith arises!"

To pray in church is different from praying at home. Here is what John Chrysostom says:

"They say: We can pray at home. Thou art deceiving thyself, O man! Of course, one can pray at home. But it is impossible to pray there as in church, where such a multitude of hearts are uplifted to God, merging into one unanimous cry. Thou wilt not be so quickly heard while praying to the Master by thyself, as when praying together with thy brethren, for here in church there is something greater than in thy room: Agreement, unanimity, the bond of love, and finally here are the prayers of the priests. The priests stand before us, then, so that the prayers of the people, being weak, would be united to their more powerful prayers and together with them ascend to heaven. The Apostle Peter was freed from prison, thanks to the common prayers offered for him. (.....) If the Church's prayer was so beneficial for the Apostle Peter and delivered such a pillar of the faith from prison, why, tell me, dost thou disdain its power and what kind of justification canst thou have for this. Harken unto God Himself, Who says that the multitude of people who pray to him with fervor moves Him to have mercy. He says to the Prophet Jonah: 'Shall I not spare Nineveh, that great city, in which dwell more than 120 thousand people.' He did not simply mention the multitude of people but that thou mightest know that prayer together has great power."

The Church is the only form of Christian fellowship. To be with Christ means to belong to His Church. The human soul cannot remain alone, apart from the souls of its neighbors. In church, especially at the moment of common unity at the Holy Chalice, we clearly feel the Lord and His truth and righteousness. And we cannot even imagine how great this power was in the meetings of Christians during the early centuries, when in the dark catacombs or in prisons or on the breast of a martyr (the Hieromartyr Lukian of Antioch, for example) when the Mystery of Unity, the Holy Eucharist was performed.

The Church of Christ is a union of those being saved, who dwell on earth, and of those righteous ones who have attained perfection. Both the Church militant and the Church triumphant have Jesus Christ as their common Head. Sanctified and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, they both make up His one mystical body, the One Church. The grace of God dwells in the Church, which directs Her children to salvation. Only to Her, to the one Church, is given the promise that *the gates of hell shall not prevail against Her* (Matthew 16:18). Christianity is not abstractable teaching, studied alone by each person. Christianity is a common life, best known in divine service, during common prayer in church, especially on Sunday, the Lord's day.

Those who oppose public ceremony may cite Christ's words in His Gospel conversation with the Samaritan woman: *God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth* (John 4:24). But here the Savior is clearly saying that to please God and to worship Him are not matters of place, that worship is possible everywhere, in Jerusalem as the Jews taught, and on Mount Gerizim as the Samaritans taught. The New Testament Sacrifice, the

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

Holy Mystery of the Eucharist, can occur everywhere. The Lord says that the worship of God must bear a spiritual character rather than occur only in a specific place.

The Church calls the faithful to rituals of worship. Christ does not reject rituals. The Gospel shows that the Lord recognized the rites of the Old Testament Church and that He took part in them: His naming, circumcision, and presentation in the temple in Jerusalem on the fortieth day after birth (Luke 2:21-22). Further on in the Gospel, the Savior healed some lepers. He sent them to the priests to show that the rite of cleansing might be performed to satisfy the law of Moses. When Christ healed the man blind from birth, he made clay from spittle (mixed with dust from the earth), anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay and commanded him to go wash in the pool of Siloam; Christ lifted up His eyes to heaven when he fed the 5,000 with the five loaves (Matthew 14:19). In the garden of Gethsemane before His passion, he bowed His knees and prayed (Luke 22:41) Christ sent forth His apostles to anoint people with oil and to heal them. During the days of the Old Testament Passover and on other great Jewish holidays, Christ undertook long pilgrimages with the apostles from Galilee to Jerusalem to perform the festal ceremonies. The Mystical Supper was also celebrated in accordance with Old Testament rites and customs. For celebrating the Mystery of Communion, He pointed at the bread and wine. *Think not that I am come to destroy the law: I came not to destroy, but to fulfill.* The law of Moses included so many rituals. And finally, as *He ascended to heaven: He lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them* (Luke 24:50-51). The lifting up of hands is also a ritual. Christ loved so many rituals. By His own example, Christ established the Mystery of Baptism and the necessity to perform it through the rite of immersion in water. The Savior fasted strictly for 40 days in the desert, and so He sanctified the rite of fasting. He gave rules for prayer and set the model Lord's Prayer--*Our Father*. He laid His hands on the children that were brought to Him and blessed them (Matthew 19:15). During His life on earth, a multitude of men and women surrounded Him. They awaited held and healing from Him. Others followed Him simply from the inclination of their loving hearts. They wanted to be closer to the Savior, to feel His presence close to themselves, to experience His Divinity. In a word, people thirsted for contact with the Living God, Who is near and tangible.

Church ritual drawing the living man nearer to the Living God. Church rituals are the outward signs of our immaterial relationship with the Living God. Dostoevsky wrote a remarkable parable about the growth of sectarian antiritualism in Russia during the last century:

They carry a vessel of very precious liquid; all fall down, all kiss and adore the vessel containing this precious life-giving fluid. And then, suddenly, people stand up and begin to cry: You blind! Why do you kiss the vessel? It is only the live-giving fluid contained in it that is precious; only the contents is precious and not the container; but you are kissing glass, simple glass; you adore the vessel and the glass, ascribing all the holiness to it, and you are forgetting about the precious fluid that it contains. You idol-worshippers! Throw away the vessel and break it. Adore only the life-giving fluid, and not the glass!

And the glass was broken, as we read further in Dostoevsky's parable, and the life-giving fluid, the precious contents, is poured out on the earth and disappears into the earth. *They have broken the vessel and lost the liquid. What miserable, unhappy, benighted people!* exclaims

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

Dostoevsky as he ends his parable. As we already said, man is a psychophysical entity. If we experience love, we express it in an external manner, by a certain ritual of love, as when a mother kisses and caresses her child. The same is true in religion. If we believe abstractly in God, then ritual is unnecessary. If our God is the living, personal God, then we need rituals of faith. They express our love and desire to draw near to God.

The Fifth Commandment

Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

The Fifth Commandment call us to love our parents. It tells us that must love those closest to us before one can love anyone else. In his first epistle to Timothy, the Apostle Paul writes: *But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel* (I Timothy 5:8).

The prototype of perfect love is Christ's love for his Heavenly Father. And during His earthly life, Christ also showed his love for His earthly parents many times. Thus, while His human nature was languishing in torment before His death, He was grieving in His soul for His mockers. And while His divine nature had turned to Redemption by His passion, He still showed His filial care for His Mother. In the Gospel according to John, we read: *When Jesus therefore saw his mother, ad the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home* (John 19:2-27).

Sacred Scriptures show that the Christian's recognition of human worth begins in the experience of the family. The family is the unit of community and society. The family is also the school for moral life. In his family, a child first begins to feel moral obligations. The moral well-being of family life determines the well-being of society and the state, which are both made of many families. Respect for parents and attentiveness to their counsel are the prototype of moral culture. Respect for parents is expressed by sacrificial love for them, which must in time take the place of natural attachment. This love shows in profound attentiveness to their counsel, which develops out of the earlier obedience we show them automatically. The internalized respect we have for our parents prompts our concern for them, which increases as they get older.

The breakdown of every society and of every desertion from the Church starts in disrespect for parents. This disrespect was personified by Ham, the second son of Noah. By laughing at the nakedness of his father, Ham became a standard figure of the sinful attitude of a son who does not respect his parents (Genesis 9:21-23).

The connection between a proper relationship with one's parents and the good things of this life--and likewise, long life--can be seen in the so-called "patriarchal families". The spiritual order of such families confers a certain nobility of life on everything. Patriarchal families preserve life from shocks that hurt the soul, and confer greater health and longevity. A spiritually balanced life, God's peace and good morals could be found formerly in Russia among peasants, Cossacks, and Old Ritualists.

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

The Sixth Commandment

Thou shalt not commit murder.

The sixth commandment speaks to a set of moral issues: violent murder, suicide, abortion, euthanasia, and war, as well as many others aspects of killing. Therefore, we shall devote more words than are usual, to the Sixth Commandment.

General

The Sixth Commandment forbids causing the death of another person by any means whatsoever. God created man in His image, and life is given to man by God. Whosoever commits murder encroaches upon God's image and on the Creator's possession, which no one has the right to do. *Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man* (Genesis 9:6).

Murder is the opposite of love. To love means to desire the fullness of every good thing for the loved one now, and, accordingly, for that person's eternal life. The motives and conditions opposed to love, and which have led to murder, are hatred, envy, vengeance, greed, self-love and negligence towards one's neighbor. In the book of the Prophet Ezekiel, God says, *Behold, therefore I have smitten mine hand at thy dishonest gain which thou hast made, and at thy blood which hath been in the midst of thee* (22:13). In the Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Romans we read, *And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents.*

Thus, both the Old and New Testaments rank murder with the malice, envy, and covetousness of those who, the Bible says, do not like to keep God in their minds. The devil is the first murderer of men, and his continual inspiration to murder. Concerning him, Christ said: *He [the devil] was a murderer from the beginning . . .* (John 8:44). The devil is smitten with envy and hatred because he knows that man will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. The suicide becomes the devil's submissive tool.

Suicide

Suicide destroys the basis of life, which is love. Suicides may have many motives and grounds. They all share the fact that the man who decides to kill himself has ceased to know the meaning of his life or has renounced it, as he denies faith, hope, and love. Passions may lead a such a man to suicide: Passion for money, blinding passion for a supposed and narrow understanding of "honor," jealousy, loss, disappointment, anger, every misfortune not illumined

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

by radiant faith, and self-hatred without repentance and humility before God. Of course, a man cannot in any way really deprive himself of life. He can only kill his mortal body, but he cannot kill his soul. Deprived of its living vessel (the body), the soul can pass only over to a different state, and, of course, to one much worse than the one it had its body. While suffering within the body, the soul of a man can still ease its sufferings morally, by giving them religious meaning, and physically, by helping the body with medication, for example. But when the soul has lost its body prematurely, nothing it can do can help.

By willfully fixing his own hour of departure from earthly life, the suicide makes his woe permanent. The repose of eternal, true, immortal life cannot come to a man from his own bullet shot against himself. God had given him the body for him o use it for spiritual maturation and preparation of the indestructible soul--God's image--for eternity. The Church sings abut eternal rest in the funeral service. Eternal rest comes as a consequence of faith, hope, and love. The suicide is deluded by himself and the devil. The devil, of course, desires that all people lose hope in God and put an end to themselves. That would mean his complete triumph.

In his book, *Concerning Suicide*, N. Berdyaev wrote that Dostoevski distilled the suicide brilliantly in *The Possessed* in the image of Kirillov. This character is possessed by the idea of man=s godhood. He wants man must become God. But, in order to become God, man must conquer the fear of death. He must consciously and freely kill himself, not because he feels hopeless and desperate. His suicide as a metaphysical experiment should satisfy himself of his own power, that he alone is the master of life and death. Without another master, he himself becomes God. Kirillov is a man of ideas without base motives. And he does not know fear. And so, the Kirillov is in every way opposed to Christ. The mangod must in everything oppose the GodMan. The final meaning of the Kirillov's metaphysical suicide is death. The final meaning of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross is resurrection.

Only God can judge each soul's conduct rightly, inasmuch as The God is Great created man to live. Suicide is desertion from life given to man by God. It rejects the Lord, Who says to man: *Be faithful to Me, even unto death, and I shall give thee the crown of life.*

Suicide is the heaviest of sins. It renounces trust and hope in God, as well as the possibility of repentance. It is the most unnatural thing a man can do. It betrays Christianity by its unwillingness to carry one's cross in life. The Church denies the bodies of suicides Christian burial. The egoistic suicides thinks only about himself, but not about family and friends and responsibilities in respect to them and other people. And how could the Church bury a suicide according to the church rite? After all, the main words are *Give rest, O Lord, to the soul of Thy servant, for on Thee hath he set his hope . . .* Pronounced over a suicide, these words ring false. And the Church cannot affirm them. The burial can be performed, however, with the special permission of the ruling hierarch if any grounds suggest that the suicide was "out of his mind".

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ, teaches the Apostle Paul (Galatians 6:2). We must comfort our neighbors and help them however we are able, so that they might be delivered from peril. If someone we know hints at the thought of putting an end to himself, his friends should listen seriously and show him every regard. Often the potential suicide openly speaks about his secret wish--calling out from the depths of his troubled soul about his

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

loneliness, despair, and confusion. If he does not feel the concern of his relatives and friends, this sense of loss can drive him to carry out the sinful desire to put an end to himself. Use all available means must to prevent the sin of suicide. Pray for him and direct him to a counselor--a priest or psychiatrist--who has experience in dealing with mentally ill people. *He which converteth the sinner from the error of his way*, we read in the Epistle of the Apostle James, *shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins* (James 5:20).

Murder

The direct and indirect methods for committing murder and suicide are many. One can kill with weapons or with one's hands, but also kill by words or even silence, and with a glance or the unwillingness to look at a person. Every seduction of one's neighbor to sin, every influence that damages his faith, every suggestion that separates a man from God means the killing of our neighbor's soul. Concerning such spiritual murder, the Savior said *but whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea* (Matthew 18:6). The harboring of ill feelings for one's neighbor can be called murder, even though never expressed in overt action. The Apostle of love, John the Theologian, writes: *Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him* (1 John 3:15).

Every action or deed against one's neighbor, which brings about his death, either immediately or afterwards, is equally considered to be murder: If a subordinate is placed by someone into such conditions of life or work that his health and life are threatened; if a judge convicts someone known to be innocent; if someone destroys the well-being of his neighbor by means of deception; if we did not warn another about danger or peril when this danger was known to us; if we did not try to call for medical assistance or, in general, did not avert misfortune from our neighbor.

Murder is also the unwillingness to defend or save another. Defense can require not only self-sacrifice, but also force, and sometimes murder. The soldier who kills during war is justified in this way to an extent, but only if he does not kill out of hatred or thirst for blood. This proviso, however, is far from justifying war, which is an evil. The main responsibility for war lies on the rulers and leaders of peoples. Both politics and the methods of conducting war are subject to moral evaluation: a fact is more and more forgotten in our age.

Euthanasia

All societies have attached great importance to death and dying. Our many forebears who lived in agricultural communities accepted death fatalistically: Death was just in the nature of things and accepted with customary ceremonies. Contemporary industrial and postindustrial societies, however, have new set of experiences and sensibility in the problems of death and dying. Medical science and technology permit us to prolong life, and we live much longer than our forebears. However, many older people do not find that the additional years turn out to be the

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

best time of life, but that they are a slow and steady advance into enemy country. @ For some, this experience can be unbearable.

In 1990, Americans were shaken by the following event: Dr. Jack Kevorkian, a retired pathologist, constructed and offered to interested persons a device that journalists christened "the suicide machine." At the request of a 54-year old woman who was suffering from Alzheimer's disease, he inserted into one of her veins a syringe connected to this machine. The patient pressed a button, a solution of potassium chlorate began to enter the vein, and within a few minutes her heart stopped.

In the Netherlands, the sick who experience unbearable sufferings can now ask a physician to help them die. If several physicians testify to the incurability of the illness, the sick person can get a lethal injection. Opponents of such "medical assistance" are careful to point out that such injections--when used to execute the death sentence for criminals in American prisons--are frequently called "a cruel and inhuman punishment."

Does a person have the right to end his life with dignity? Must a physician or a guardian prolong a person's life when it is obvious that he has no chance to lead a "normal life"? Can an ethical physician cut short the life of a hopelessly sick person to free him from unbearable suffering? These questions are timely because life expectancy keeps increasing, and mankind strives to better the quality of life on earth. Every physician and priest and every other person who has anything to do with the sick and dying must answer these questions. The Church does have a teaching concerning "euthanasia," which is a Greek word meaning "a good death."

The Orthodox Church teaches that euthanasia is the deliberate cessation of human life must be condemned as murder. However, the headlong progress of medical technology and artificial means of sustaining life requires that Church moral theologians define the Church approach more precisely, to the problem of euthanasia and the problematic "right of a person to put an end to his life."

To define more precisely, let us say that euthanasia is killing people painlessly who are hopelessly sick. Advocates point out that contemporary medicine for the hopelessly sick does not help their recovery but prolongs their dying. In turn, one must ask it is murder, not to use the good things of contemporary medicine to prolong the life of the hopelessly ill.

The Church Fathers taught that death is unnatural for man, because man was created not for death but for life. Along with suffering and illness, Death does not occur according to God's will. The Book of Wisdom says--*For God made not death: neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living. For he created all things, that they might have their being* (Wisdom 1:13-14). And in the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, we read: *For I desire not the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; wherefore, be converted and live* (Ezekiel 13:32).

The Holy Fathers taught that the meaning of Adam's sin is that man, who was created in the image and likeness of God and infused with breath by His Spirit, chose death instead of life, chose evil instead of righteousness. *And so death passed upon all men, for that in him [Adam] all have sinned* (Romans 5:12), says the Apostle Paul. And having sinned, man brought death also to his children, who share his nature and life.

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

Spiritual life for the Christian is first dying with Christ to sin and the world and then passing with Him through the experience of bodily death in order to be resurrected in the Kingdom of God. Christians must transfigure their own death in the affirmation of life, meeting the tragedy of death with faith in the Lord and conquering, according to the words of the Apostle Paul, *the last enemy death* (I Corinthians 15:26) by the power of one's faith. I am the resurrection, and the life: He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die (John 11:25-26).

The deeply believing Christian must be ready to accept any death, for his faith in the Resurrection and in the infinite goodness of God are measured by his acceptance of death. A Christian is called to have *the remembrance of death*, that is, not to forget his mortality, but to remember that the final triumph of light will appear only after the resurrection of the dead. Preparedness for death does not mean that earthly life loses its value. On the contrary, it remains the greatest good, and the Christian is called unto the fullness of the present life, insofar as he can fill each moment of this life with the light of Christ's love.

This patristic description of life and death implies that a Christian is forbidden to participate in the deliberate cessation of the life of others, including the lives of the hopelessly ill.

Although the Church suffers together with people in extreme misfortune, the Church cannot forget her mission to preserve the sacred gift of life. The Church approves the use of various medicines and even narcotics to decrease the physical pain of the sufferer. Where death is clear and inescapable, and when the person is spiritually prepared for death by means of confession and communion, the Church blesses that person to die, without the interference of various life-prolonging medical devices and drugs.

The Church tries to instill in the sufferer that his illness is caused by sin: his own and that of the whole world too. If he bears his sickness righteously, manfully, and patiently, that is, *with faith, hope and even joy*, then he becomes the world's greatest witness to God's salvation. Such patience is the glorification of God amid suffering and sickness. It is the greatest offering that man can ever make during his life on earth.

All the saints suffered some physical infirmity. Even those who healed others by their prayers never asked for healing. And the obvious example is Jesus Himself. *For as much then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh*, teaches the Apostle Peter in his First Epistle, *arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God* (I Peter 4:1-2).

According to the grace given us by the Lord, Christians must spiritually partake of the sufferings of Christ. Inasmuch as the Church blesses the hopelessly ill person to prepare for death consciously, not resorting to artificial means of life-support, the Church decisively parts from those who would call prolong the life of all of the dying by any means. In Her prayers *at the parting of the soul from the body*, the Church prays for God to send to the hopelessly ill a *speedy and painless end*. The Church teaches that prolonged life of the hopelessly ill conflicts with God's planning for that person. One ought not to generalize. Maintaining the life of the each

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

gravely ill individual needs a careful and all-round discussion with the relatives of the ill person, his physician, and spiritual director, together with prayer for God's guidance.

The Church makes carefully distinguishes between euthanasia and the decision not to use extraordinary means to maintain the life of someone hopelessly ill. The Church affirms the holiness of life, and it is the duty of each Christian to protect life as a sacred gift of God in every way possible. The only *good death* from the Church's point of view is the peaceful acceptance of the end of earthly life, in faith and trust in God, and in the certain hope of resurrection in Christ.

Abortion

Abortion is a burning issue in the contemporary United States. A ruling of whether to permit or not to permit abortions, in the opinion of many of the country's social and political figures, strikes a blow at the pluralistic system of the United States, which evolved to allow rather diverse considerations of moral and ethical questions.

The abortion controversy has two camps. Opponents of legalized abortion argue--on the basis of religious morality--that abortion is cessation of the life of the foetus, murder of an unborn person, and violation of the Sixth Commandment of God's Law, *Thou shalt not kill*. The advocates of legalized abortion may argue that each woman must have a free choice to abort or not to. Advocates argue that an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to forbid this choice would infringe the right of a woman to control her own body in whatever way she thinks best for herself. In most states in the 1960's, it was still illegal to perform an abortion, or difficult to get permission for it. Well-off women who decided to have an abortion traveled abroad, most often to Europe or Mexico. Women less well-off turned to poorly qualified obstetricians who performed abortions illegally for much money. Many of these abortions had harmful medical consequences. Then in 1973, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled to legalize abortion, deciding that each woman had the constitutional right to undergo an abortion without any limitation during the first three months of pregnancy, with only certain limitations during the second three months.

This Supreme Court decision immediately provoked a powerful negative reaction from some jurists, religious leaders, and ordinary citizens. This reaction has not subsided despite of subsequent Supreme Court decisions on abortion that limited its original breadth somewhat. Thus, in 1981 the Supreme Court decided that individual American states may require that physicians inform the parents of minors who request them to perform an abortion.

Since 1973, the number of abortions performed each year in the United States has doubled, to more than 1.5 million. In the (former) USSR, from 7 to 20 million abortions are performed each year. The Supreme Court decision and the rising number of abortions in America have provoked something akin to a crusade against abortion. This movement, Right to Life, is considered by many one of the most powerful in the contemporary American political life.

On the other hand, the organization called "Planned Parenthood" holds that the government must not interfere in the moral and religious concerns of the family. The organization "Planned Parenthood" favors preventing pregnancies, if they are not wanted, and it

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

fighters for the right to interrupt an unwanted pregnancy. Adherents of this organization consider the decision to undergo an abortion to manifest a personal freedom under attack by the opponents of abortion.

Abortion opponents, including the members of Right to Life, say that they respect freedom of choice, but that they oppose abortion, which they see as murder. At times they organize noisy protests at abortion clinics, and explain that they do so not to cause unpleasantness for women, but to defend the right to life of children yet unborn. In the controversy, the opponents are convinced that the main question is life. Their concern is not to define life and when it begins: life is life. One must not approach life casually. Instead society must revere life as sacred for the person born as well as unborn.

When does human life begin? From the scientific point of view, biological life begins at the moment of conception, when the egg unites with the sperm. It may be hard to see a tangle of biological cells as the beginning of human life. But some biologists think that conception really does signify the beginning of human life because the fertilized egg constitutes a definite and unique genetic individual. An embryo conceived by two human beings is a human being. Human life matters more than just life. This reasoning is advanced by Christian churches and other opponents of abortion in the argument against abortion.

Others would say that life begins roughly at a week after conception. After conception physicians already can determine the condition and activity of the embryo. Some others think that life begins four months after conception, when the heart of the foetus begins to beat. Still others hold the view that life begins two months after conception, with the foetus developed fully with external features of a human being easily identifiable. One should add that in recent years science has proven that human features appear much earlier in the foetus than previously supposed. Therefore, many believe that the unborn child is a human being well before the end of six-month period during which the current law now allows it to be destroyed.

Scientists in favor of abortion, however, may consider human life as beginning only when the foetus is developed enough for it to exist independently outside the mother's womb. The U.S. Supreme Court understood this argument in 1973 when it legalized performing abortions. It thought that the foetus could first live outside the mother's womb at a time between the 24th and 28th weeks of pregnancy. However, thanks to improved medical technology, physicians now can support the life of the foetus outside the mother's womb a full eight weeks earlier, that is, at the 20th week of pregnancy. Certain scientists even think that the day will come when the foetus can be supported outside the mother's womb at any stage of its development.

To the ethical question of abortion, Christian theologians also add the question about the human soul, which, although it is an independent substance separate from the body, nevertheless exists side by side with the body. Can one undergo an abortion without taking into consideration the soul of the foetus? We can get partial answer to this question from antiquity and Christian patristic literature.

The origin of each individual human being's soul is not fully revealed in Sacred Scripture. This is *a mystery*, according to the words of Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *known to God alone*. Therefore, the Church does not strictly define an answer to this question. The church decisively

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

rejected the view of Origin (an ecclesiastical writer of the first Christian centuries) inherited from the philosophy of Plato concerning the pre-existence of souls, according to which souls come to earth from the world above. This teaching of Origin and his followers was condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council.

In the view of some of the Church Fathers--Clement of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, Ephraim the Syrian and others--each soul is created separately by God. Moreover, some fathers timed its joining with the body to coincide with the 40th day of the formation of the body. In the view of other teachers and fathers of the Church--Tertulian, Gregory the Theologian, Gregory of Nyssa, Saint Macarius of Egypt and others, both substances--soul and body--receive their beginning and perfection simultaneously: The soul is created from the souls of the parents, just as the body is created from the bodies of the father and mother. In this way, *creation* here is understood in a wide sense, as the participation of God's creative power, which is everywhere existent and necessary for every soul.

Concerning the soul, Saint John of Kronstadt, in his diary *My Life in Christ*, reflects thus:

"What are human souls? They are one and the same soul or one and the same breath of God, which God breathed into Adam, which from Adam till now extends to the whole human race. All people, therefore, are as one person or one tree of humanity. Hence, the most natural commandment, founded on the unity of our nature, is: *Love the Lord Thy God* [Thy Prototype, Thy Father], *with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor* (for who is closer to me than the man who is like me, who is akin to me), *as thyself*."

The Orthodox Church and Roman Catholic and some other Christian confessions have a consistent answer. Conception is a sacred gift of God; anyone who encroaches on this gift, anyone who destroys it is, is criminally breaking God's law. The Church has always condemned abortion, trying with all Her powers to keep Her children from it. In the fourth century, St. Basil the Great, in his 8th canon, called those people murderers who by whatever means terminate the life of the foetus. We also find this prohibition in the 91st canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council.

The Church confesses that God creates each life, that human life is the supreme gift of the Creator. Human life, according to Church teaching, is not given unconditionally by God, but is given to man under the condition that he preserve it. The testimony that God respects life above all else is contained in the words of the Gospel: *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life* (John 3:16). The incarnation of the Second Person of the All-Holy Trinity, that is, the assumption of human flesh by the Son of God--the Logos--forever, unto the ages of ages, has sanctified the life of man, both his physical as well as his spiritual nature.

God created Man in His image and likeness of God. The fall of Adam broke the image and destroyed the likeness of God in man, but by the coming of Christ--the Second Adam--to the earth, by His Life, Death and Resurrection, the image and likeness of God were restored with

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

even greater brilliance. In His humanity, Christ restored the life of Adam, that is, the life of the whole human race. Human existence is a reflection of God's existence, for each man possesses the potential to become like God till he attains unity with Him. This change, transfiguration, deification, encompasses a man's whole being, his soul and body, as we see in the transfigured and incorrupt body of the Resurrected Christ.

Finally, in so far as God's perfection is beyond our understanding, the process of becoming like God, the process of developing our person is unending. It begins from the moment of conception and continues until the very hour of death. In this way, no one can say that he is a *person* or that he has become fully man, in the full spiritual sense of the word, so long as he has not attained the complete Divine Likeness. But each man possesses the potential to become a God-like person at whatever stage of physical development he is found in his mother's womb, in the prime of life, or on his deathbed.

We can be certain that the potential is present in the embryo to become a person to the fullest extent, not only by proceeding from the Church's concept concerning psychosomatic unity, but likewise if we turn to Sacred Scripture. The Church teaches that the Divine Logos--Christ--became flesh at the moment of conception; and the Virgin Mary's relative, Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, testified to the Virgin Mary, *For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my for joy* (Luke 1:44). In other words, the fruit of Elizabeth's womb sensed the approach of the Divine Foetus in the womb of the Virgin Mary and reacted to this approach with a joyful leap.

As we have already said, one of the most widely disseminated arguments in favor of performing abortions is that each woman has the right to control the functions of her body, in whatever way she finds necessary, right up to terminating the life of an unwanted foetus.

The Church rejects this argument. First of all, She points to the sacredness of God-given life, and likewise points to the fact that if it is forbidden for the Christian to raise his hand against his own life, all the more so does a Christian not have the right to terminate the life of another, even if this life has the appearance of a still not completely formed embryo.

Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, as the Apostle Paul teaches; this means that the cessation of the life of any other person is considered to be a crime not only in regard to that person, but likewise in regard to the Holy Spirit.

Can we allow the cessation of the life of the foetus, if the life of the mother is threatened by the pregnancy? From the ethical point of view, this is a very difficult question. Many theologians think that in such instances the termination of pregnancy is allowable. Such situations are tragic, especially for the mother, because they force her to make the difficult choice between preserving her own life or the life of the child. In these especially difficult instances, it is necessary to take into account possible negative consequences for the family. For example, if there are other children in the family, in the case of the mother's death, who will take responsibility for the orphans? It is necessary to approach similar situations in the spirit of Christian love and sacrifice. It would be completely senseless and irresponsible to preserve the pregnancy if it threatens the loss of both lives, both the mother's and the child's.

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

In the case of rape or incest, the Church urges the victim, first of all, to free herself from false modesty and as soon as possible to take the necessary measures to prevent the fertilization of the female egg. Another difficult question is the probability that the foetus will be born deformed or retarded. The Church teaches that such children are also created in the image and likeness of God and, therefore, it is not allowed to terminate their life.

In general, the Church calls upon all of society to make sacrifices in helping mothers who in one way or another are faced with difficulties connected with bearing children. Each family is a living unit of society; each cell is answerable for the well-being and health of the whole. The whole of society must also take care of each individual member. *Bear ye one another's burdens*, teaches the Apostle Paul, and *so fulfil the law of Christ* (Galatians 6:2). It is with special compassion that the Church regards the mother already after having an abortion, frequently performed under pressure from family, society, poverty, etc. Such unfortunates should not be beaten further, but compassionately supported and saved.

Death Penalty

Let us consider the appropriateness of the death penalty from the point of view of Christian ethics. We shall begin with the arguments advanced for and then those against the death penalty.

The first argument for the death penalty--the Equity argument is fairly simple. It maintains that elementary justice requires that an offender who has forcibly deprived another person of life undergo the same experience. This argument draws on the Old Testament, but is ruled out by the New Testament. A second argument for the death penalty--the Utility argument--draws its inference from the general benefit to society.

The Utility argument has some persuasiveness. Because the thought of death provokes primordial fear in most people, the death penalty may serve as an effective means of preventing murder. Accepting that, then certain offenses of a violent character must be punished by the death penalty in order to restrain potential murderers from committing similar offenses. If the death penalty does not stop other murderers, people may argue, society loses nothing except the life of the murderer. Argument may carry on, that the evil nature of some people does not yield to correction in confinement, and that they will inevitably return to a criminal way of life. Depriving these people of life may bring benefit to society.

Certain advocates of the death penalty may impart a philosophical cast to their words. They may say that the death penalty strikingly underscores the belief of society in the Sanctity of Life. They argue that not using the death penalty in appropriate instances will undermine belief in the sanctity of human life. This sanctity argument can be turned against itself.

Turning to the popular arguments against the death penalty, we can hear its opponents recall the Sanctity of Life. They may say that every life, including the life of a murderer, is sacred. Therefore, they characterize the institution of the death penalty as a "cold-blooded" and "barbaric" violation of the sanctity of life. Another popular argument against the death penalty is

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

that death penalty satisfies only the "base, barbaric" instinct of retribution. It is impossible to justify it because desire for vengeance is immoral.

Certain opponents of the death penalty also point out that human justice is fallible. Human error is so great as to allow such gross errors as a court sentencing an innocent person to death. This fact alone can justify repealing the death penalty. These are the few basic arguments "for" and "against" the death penalty in contemporary society. The problem of the death penalty, however, is more complex. Anyone who seriously ponders the problem of the death penalty knows no simple answers to this problem. All the more so for the Christian.

All systems of criminal justice, both ancient as well as modern, contain in themselves certain aspects of the principle of retribution as the basis for punishing the premeditated, violent taking of the life of another. The Old Testament expresses this idea in the phrase *an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth* (Leviticus 24:20). From this Old Testament principle we arrive at the inescapable conclusion expressed in the book of Exodus: *He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death* (Exodus 21:12).

The early Church, however, was opposed to the death penalty and based its opposition on the teaching of Jesus Christ. This teaching is expressed with the utmost clarity in the words of the Savior:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say into you, That ye resist not evil . . . love your enemies, bless them that curse you (Matthew 5:38-39, 44).

A little later, during the time of persecution, Christian apologists developed the teaching of Jesus against retribution. Early Christian writers raised arguments not only on the grounds of self-defense, but also because they wished to transfigure the pagan world through the Gospel of Christ. Early Christian authors considered the death penalty a violation of the commandment *Thou shalt not kill*. In this matter, Lactantius, a writer of the Western Church who lived in the third century, wrote--

For when God forbids us to kill, He not only prohibits us from open violence, which is not even allowed by the public laws, but He warns us against the Commission of those things which are esteemed lawful among men . . . a just man (ought not) accuse any one of a capital charge, because it makes no difference whether you put a man to death by word or rather by the sword, since it is the act of putting to death itself which is prohibited. Therefore, with regard to this precept of God, there ought to be no exception God willed to be a sacred animal (Institutes VI, XX, 15).

When Christians were themselves persecuted by the state, they could not conceivably hold governmental offices and oppose the death penalty through legislation. The problem of the death penalty acutely confronted Christians only after the Emperor Constantine the Great stopped the persecutions and made Christianity the state religion. Christians began to occupy government

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

posts as legislators, judges, and preservers of the social order. They began to act according to the principles of the words of the Apostle Paul:

He is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil (Romans 13:4).

Many Christians began to accept the death penalty as permissible for the sake of justice, and for the sake of law and order that might prevent violence. Of course, Christians never looked on the death penalty as something ideal or desirable but as an unavoidable evil in a world far from ideal.

Even if human logic can justify the death, all the same, the penalty is incompatible with the injunction of the Sixth Commandment *Thou shalt not kill*. Laws and customs must be more and more imbued with God's Laws. Judicial penalties must strive to awaken the conscience of the criminal. There is power in the spirit of mercy. *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*

The Seventh Commandment

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

In this commandment, the Lord God tells husband and wife to be faithful to each other, and for the unmarried to be chaste, that is, to be pure in deed, word, and desire. From the beginning, God set the rule that a man and a woman should be for one another only. It pleased God that they remain not just spiritually inseparable, but that they be also one body. Only in such unity of thought, feeling and desire could God's other command be fulfilled: *Be fruitful and multiply. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they (two) shall be one flesh* (Genesis 2:24), we read in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, and further, in the same book: *And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it* (Genesis 1:28). With regard to the duty of spouses to preserve mutual faithfulness, Christ said: *What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder* (Matthew 19:6).

Every extramarital union of a man and woman directly violates the commandment: *Thou shalt not commit adultery*. And every sensual overindulgence, and every action promoting such things also violates the Seventh Commandment.

In Christian marriage filled with deep love, sexual life does not disturb the psychic harmony of the spouses. Sexual life enhances love and adorns marital harmony. Outside of marriage the manifestation of sexual instinct can easily become an independent force that destroys the fullness of the personality. This damage is especially dangerous because all the high creative impulses of man are closely tied to his sexual life. Sexual restraint heightens spiritual powers, but sexual dissipation weakens them. Disorder in sexual life disorders most relations with other people and sometimes can cause severe enmity. Normal, pure relations of Christians

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

with persons of the opposite sex can go awry, and indecency can take over thought as well as fantasy.

St. John Chrysostom wrote on these theme. His 22d homily is a commentary on the First Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians. We read--

Look upon the adulterer and thou shalt see that he is a thousand times more wretched than those bound in chains: he fears everyone, and suspects everyone: both his own wife and the husband of the woman with whom he is committing adultery, and her herself, and his household, friends, acquaintances, and the very walls, and his own shadow, and himself; and what is worst of all, *writes Chrysostom further*, his conscience cries out and tears him daily. If he brings to mind God's judgment, he is unable to stand from fear. And the pleasure from the sin is short, but the pain is protracted; for evening and night, in the desert and in the city everywhere the accuser follows him What will excuse the violator of spousal faithfulness? *asks John Chrysostom in another place*. Speak not to me about passionate nature: because of it was marriage established, that thou mightest not overstep the bounds; for God, taking thought for thy tranquility and honor, for this reason gave to thee a wife, that thou mightest curb the rousing of nature through a spouse and be freed from all lust. And thou who art ungrateful in soul dost inflict on Him (God) dishonor, dost reject all shame, dost overstep the bounds set for thee and dishonest thine own glory.

Why turnest thou thy gaze on another's beauty, why lookest thou on the face of one not belonging to thee, why breakest thou thy wedlock, why dishonest thou thy bed, why offendest thou the member of thy body-thy wife? [*Homily on the 12th Psalm*].

In order not to sin against the Seventh Commandment, one must avoid whatever arouses indecent feelings, such as pornography and indecent language, especially in jokes. Not by accident did the Savior warn us beforehand in the Sermon on the Mount of the impure, lustful glance, even if the glance is not followed in a given instance by the deed: *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart* (Matthew 5:27-28).

In order to avoid impure desires, it is necessary to cut off sinful thoughts at their very origin, not to give them the chance to master our feelings and will. The Lord knows how hard it is for man to war with fleshly temptations; therefore He teaches us to be decisive and unsparing with ourselves when they approach: *And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell* (Matthew 5:29). These figurative words of Jesus can be paraphrased thus: *If someone is as dear to you as your own eye or hand, but entices you, then without delay cease all association with that enticer. It is better for you to be deprived of his friendship and services than deprived of eternal life.*

Homosexuality is a very grave sin against the Seventh Commandment. Libertines attempt in every way possible to justify this sin. Concerning this shameful sin, the Apostle Paul writes in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans *their women did change the natural use into*

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet (Romans 1:26-27). The ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by God, namely because of this sin (Genesis, chapter 19).

Regarding dissoluteness of the flesh, Scripture warns us: *He that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body* (I Corinthians 6:18). *Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge* (Hebrews 13:4). Preserve moral purity because our bodies, according to the word of the Apostle Paul, are members of Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit. In the warfare with sinful temptations, especially in the sexual realm, the direct powers of the will are insufficient. Here it is needful to cultivate in oneself other, higher interests, and, of course prayer and participation in the grace-filled life of the Church, and, the main thing, a lively love for God and for people.

The Eighth Commandment

Thou shalt not steal.

The Lord enjoins us to turn aside from stealing, which means conscious actions that aim to take the property of our neighbor or of our community for ourselves. Christ called stealing a serious crime, directly dependent on a malicious intent, of the same order as blasphemy, murder, and other sins proceeding from the heart (Mark 7:22). The Bible repeatedly warns us against breaking the Eighth Commandment. For example, in the Book of Proverbs: *Sweet to a man is bread obtained by unrighteousness, but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel* (Proverbs 20:17). In the Wisdom of Sirach, another Old Testament book, we read: *He that buildeth his house with other men's money is like one that gathereth himself stones for the tomb of his burial* (Ecclesiasticus 21:8). We hear a New Testament warning against stealing not only from the mouth of the Savior, but also from the Apostle Paul, who writes: *Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God* (I Corinthians 6:9-10).

Sin against the Eighth Commandment takes various forms. The simplest form of this sin is the secret theft of another's goods. The inclination toward this sin requires two elements: Lack of Love for one's neighbor and Falsehood. The thief perforce brings harm to another and usually makes it appear that someone else did the heft; i.e., he lies in order to divert attention away from himself.

Taking someone's property by fraud is a second form of stealing. This occurs when payment is made with counterfeit currency, or when an inferior item is sold for the cost of something better, when someone evades an agreement, and so forth. The structure of contemporary society, industry, and economy allow ample ground for organizing harmful fraud to our neighbor. In the capitalist world, for example, dealers may buy securities and suddenly sell them, which can make some rich while ruining others. In communist countries, the ruling

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

nomenklatura class deception use lies to exploit the workers, something which they had promised to free them from. One may recall such early communist slogans as "Steal what was stolen." And this type of theft can be called robbery or even banditry inasmuch as it takes another's goods openly by force. In this connection, one must also to call the introduction of slavery a form of stealing. This occurs when fear is used to introduce a new system of rule so that people are forced to labor for oppressive masters. This organized evil may cover itself with such inventive slogans as "social justice," reforging; and so on. Other forms of stealing also occur, of breaking the Eighth Commandment:

Swindling. Gaining dishonestly by taking advantage of the straightened circumstances of an indigent or defenseless person when buying or selling or in concluding some kind of deal.

Unjust Judgment. Abusing general trust by misuse of the office power of a judge for personal gain.

Bribery and Corruption. Taking gifts from subordinates and advancing the unworthy.

Sacrilege. Taking to oneself valuables consecrated to God or to the Church.

Extortion. Stealing during a crisis, which may sometimes be legal, but which denies evangelical love for fellow man, to be enriched by another's labor or through a neighbor's misfortune; as when the price of bread is raised during a famine; when loans are made at an excessively high interest rate.

Plagiarism. Taking another person's ideas, creation, or invention for personal gain.

The commandment Thou *shalt not steal* warns against a sin that can easily kill any love between people. Property is a necessary condition of human life; it is security for a man's future and his family and his descendants, and sometimes it is a connection with the past. Frequently it is a condition for creativity and, at times, is its fruit. Like a name, property is a symbol of the person himself. Therefore, the man who steals can wound very profound aspects of the robbed man's personality, inflicting real moral mutilation.

Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk wrote:

"Like fire, the stealing of another's goods consumes all other possessions when it enters a home, for where unrighteousness is, there can be nothing good, but every misfortune follows. Thieves and robbers are like a man who draws water with a sieve: all that they have stolen and collected flows through their hands as water drawn by a sieve. Steal and grab, O man; steal as thou wilt and what thou wilt; however, know that all will flow through thy hands, and thine own unrighteousness, as fire, shall consume it all" (*Works*, IV, 70).

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

The Ninth Commandment

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

We must be sure what a lie is before speaking about the Eighth Commandment, in which the Lord forbids us to slander our neighbors. A lie is a distortion or concealment of the truth. A lie is contrary to Truth, which proceeds from God. A lie proceeds from the devil. Christ calls the devil, the *father of lies*: *When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it*, says Christ (John 8:44). The Apostle Paul teaches that a liar works on behalf of the devil. In his Epistle to the Colossians we read: *Lie not one to another, seeing that you have put off the old man with his deeds* (Colossians 3:9).

The word of God often speaks of the pernicious habit of lying. *A lie is a foul blot in a man, yet it is continually in the mouth of the untaught*, we read in the Old Testament book of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus 20:24). King Solomon also bears witness to such a truth: *Lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight* (Proverbs 12:22). In another place the Solomon writes: *Therefore beware of murmuring, which is unprofitable; and refrain your tongue from backbiting: for there is no word so secret, that shall go for nought: and the mouth that believeth slayeth the soul* (Wisdom of Solomon 1:11). Indeed, lies and slander are tantamount to murder, for it is possible to kill not only the physical body, but also the spiritual body. *The disposition of a liar*, writes the wise Sirach, *is dishonorable, and his shame is ever with him* (Ecclesiasticus 20:26). The Apostle Paul writes that God punishes the liar: *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness* (Romans 1:18). *Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another* (Ephesians 4:25).

Life provides a wide field for lying by reason of faint-heartedness, vainglory, or gain, which last converges with stealing. The vainglorious pharisaical lie proceeds from self-love and is uttered for self-exaltation and condemnation of one's neighbor. Slander is a lie aimed to defame another. In this instance, malice may work together with lying.

The Fathers of the Church understood the Ninth Commandment as a warning against every sin committed by word and against idle talking, as well as the sin of bearing false witness in court. This form of lying turns against the one speaking. *Remember the words of Christ: Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant* (Luke 19:22). Whatever we speak does not disappear without a trace. If we speak about love, but in life take vengeance on those who offend us; if we speak about morality, but do not follow God's moral laws; if we speak about the dignity of the human person, but treat our neighbors badly, and so forth; then God's Last Judgment will deal with us by our own words. If we speak about good, we know about it; and if we know about good, and if we do not do it, all our talk was idle. And Christ said: *But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment* (Matthew 12:36). Idle talk is not merely vacuous; it is every word not justified by life-time deeds.

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

Saint John of the Ladder says: *Silence is always beneficial. One may speak, of course, but not idly. It is necessary to speak only that which we sincerely feel. But the tongue can no man tame*, teaches the Apostle James; *it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison*. And a little earlier the Apostle proclaims: *If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body* (James 3:8, 2).

The ascetical Fathers teach us to wrestle with condemnation. Here is one instruction of Saint Isaac the Syrian: *When someone begins to criticize his brother in thy presence, do not listen to him; but lower thy countenance. As soon as thou shalt do this, then before God and before him that shalt prove to be careful. The beginning of salvation is the condemnation of one's self*, teaches Saint Nilus of Sinai; and he says further: *Let us attend to ourselves that we do not begin to condemn others, for much of what we condemn in others is in us ourselves. Instruct the sinner, but do not condemn the fallen*, admonishes the ascetic of Sinai, *for the latter is maledictory, while the former evidences a desire to correct*.

Concerning condemnation, Abba Dorotheus writes thus:

"To disturb, to condemn and to harm, are not these demonic? And we are found to be helpers of the demons unto our own ruin and to that of our neighbor. Why is this so? What is there no love in us? For (according to the word of the Apostle Peter) *charity shall cover a multitude of sins* (I Peter 4:8). . . . The saints do not condemn the sinner and do not turn away from him further, but feel pity for him, sorrow over him, instruct, comfort and heal him as a sick member, and do everything in order to save him."

The Elder Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, the author of the book *Unseen Warfare*, writes thus concerning the evil of condemnation (pages 197-198):

Self-love and high opinion of ourselves give birth in us to yet another evil which does us grievous harm; namely, severe judgment and condemnation of our neighbors, when we regard them as nothing, despise them and, if an occasion offers, humiliate them. Since we value and think of ourselves so highly, writes Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, we naturally look at others from on high, judge and despise them, for we seem to ourselves far removed from such faults as we think others possess.....If you still feel the impulse to pass judgment, add to this the truth, that you are given no authority for this and that the moment you assume this authority you thereby make yourself worthy of judgment and condemnation, not before powerless men, but before God, the all-powerful Judge of all.

The holy Fathers of the Church use words to teach us about false witness and condemnation, but they also teach us by their lives. Here is one story from the book, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*:

"A brother at Scetis committed a fault. A council was called to which Abba Moses was invited, but he refused to go to it. Then the priest sent someone to say to him, 'Come, for everyone is waiting for you.' So he got up and went. He took a leaking jug, filled it with water

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

and carried it with him. The others came out to meet him and said to him, 'What is this, Father?' The Elder said to them, 'My sins run out behind me, and I do not see them, and today I am coming to judge the errors of another.' When they heard that they said no more to the brother but forgave him."

And how should a believer regard his slanderers? Concerning this, the holy righteous John of Kronstadt writes in his diary, *My Life in Christ*--

"When your brother sins against you in any way, for instance, if he speaks ill of you, or transmits with an evil intention your words in a perverted form to another, or calumniates you, do not be angered against him, but seek to find in him those good qualities which undoubtedly exist in every man, and dwell lovingly on them, despising his evil calumnies concerning you as dross, not worth attention, as an illusion of the Devil. The gold-diggers do not pay attention to the quality of sand and dirt in the gold-dust, but only look for the grains of gold; and though they are but few, they value this small quantity, and wash it out of heaps of useless sand. God acts in a like manner with us, cleansing us with great and long forbearance. How difficult this all is! But let us not become despondent, and let us recall the words of Christ: With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26)."
(Victor Potapov, Protopriest Parish Life, August 1992)

The Tenth Commandment

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's.

The Tenth Commandments warns us against sinful inner desire for taking another's worldly property. This commandment does not so much forbid actions as it forbids sinful thought and imagination. These inner forms of envy can bear offspring in terrible outward consequences.

Two terrible examples are in Genesis and in all the Gospels. The envy of man caused the first falling away from God--the fall of Adam into sin. Deicide--the handing over of Christ to death--was likewise born from the envy of the leaders of the people, the high priests.

The Wisdom of Solomon tells us that *through envy of the devil, came death into the world (2:24)*. Thus, envy is the child of the devil, who is the enemy of our salvation. To whomever falls into her nets, Envy will bring only the malice that bears death. Cain envied his brother, and so nurtured an extreme malice within himself, which brought about the physical death of his brother Abel and the spiritual death of Cain. One can say that envy is a two-edged sword, able to hurt both the subject and the object of the envy.

Saint Gregory of Nyssa writes that *envy is the beginning of malice, the mother of death, the first door of sin, the root of every evil*. The hierarch Basil the Great exhorts: *Brethren, let us flee from envy, that intolerable evil; she is the precept of the serpent-tempter, the invention of the*

From the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (Accessed on 3/13/19):

<https://stjohndc.org/en/orthodoxy-foundation/ya-gospod-bog-tvoy>

By Archpriest Victor Potapav (c) 1991-1992

devil, the seed of the enemy, the pledge of God's punishment, an obstacle to pleasing God, the path to Gehenna, the loss of the Kingdom of Heaven.

And Saint John Chrysostom says that even if someone should be a very virtuous man, and even a wonderworker, but be conquered by envy, then he receives no benefit from his deeds: *He who performs miracles, preserves virginity, keeps fasts, makes prostrations to the ground and in his virtues is compared with the angels, but has this deficiency (envy), he is the most miserable of men and more iniquitous than the adulterer and the fornicator and the grave-robber.*

The Tenth Commandment forbids us to desire the material goods of another. And just as much it forbids us to envy the success, talents, mind, beauty or other qualities of our neighbor.

How can we overcome envy in our soul? The Old Testament indicates one means: *Be not concerned about amassing wealth; leave off such thoughts--*we read in the book Proverbs of Solomon (23:4).

Saint Maximus the Confessor counsels us to conquer envy in the following manner: *thou canst restrain envy if thou begin to rejoice over the joys of him whom thou enviest, and sorrow with him over that which he sorroweth over, fulfilling the commandment of the Apostle: Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep (Romans 12:15).*

In *My Life in Christ*, the holy, righteous John of Kronstadt exclaims: *The Lord bestowed His image and likeness After that, what kind of earthly wealth is needful to me?*