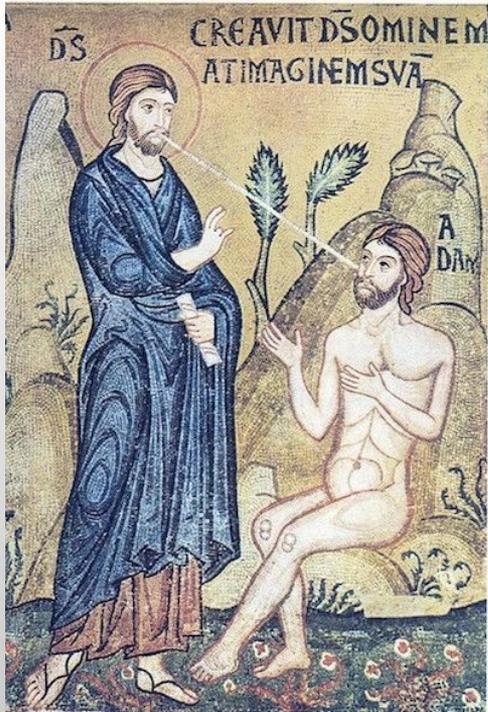


‘Thou Hast Formed Me and Laid Thy Hand Upon Me’
Value of Human Life



“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . . So **God created man in His own image**; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

- **Genesis 1:27**

“But the very essence of the person is the image of God, and this remains in him despite every disfigurement.”

- **St. John of Kronstadt**

The creation of human beings in the Image and Likeness of God gives each human being inestimable value as the handiwork of God and the reflection of the Creator.

While sin mars the Likeness of God, the Image remains in each human person - ‘despite every disfigurement’.



“Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” And He said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground.”

- **Genesis 4:8-10**

In one recorded generation, the initial rebellion against God grew to murder - the killing of the Image of God in a fellow human being. The blood of the innocent Abel cries out to God.

By taking a human life, one assaults God’s Image and cuts short his brother’s opportunity for repentance.



“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.’” Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?

Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that **on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.**”

- **Matthew 29:36**

The sin of murder finds its apex in the murder of the Son of God and those sent by Him (the holy martyrs).

The scribes and Pharisees were ‘sons of those who murdered the prophets’ since they saw evil in others (those before them) yet did not repent of the evil in themselves (“we would not have been partakers . . .”)



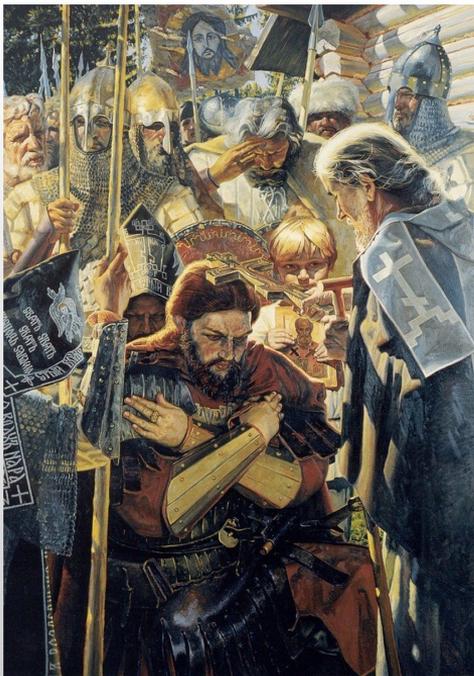
“Our fathers did not consider killings committed in the course of wars to be classifiable as murders at all, on the score, it seems to me, of allowing a pardon to men fighting in defense of sobriety and piety.”

- Canon 13 of St. Basil

St. Basil goes on to say that, despite not being murder, those who kill in war “perhaps” should wait a period of time before receiving Holy Communion since “their hands are not clean”.

One way to understand this is that human killing is habitually tinged with hatred, no matter how necessary or just the cause. However, the Lord commands Christians to love their enemies without exception. Even if the act of killing in the line of duty (military, police) is not murder, the presence of hatred in the human heart causes spiritual defilement.

The holy angels of God are in this sense the perfect model for Christian warriors - in the Scripture they are seen to kill only at God’s command, and without hatred.



“Go forth, my lord, fearlessly!
The Lord will help you against
the godless enemy.” - St.
Sergius of Radonezh to St.
Dmitri Donskoy before battle
with the Mongols (1380 A.D.)

“The soul that has not known the Holy Spirit does not understand how one can love one’s enemies, and does not accept it.’ The love of enemies is completely bound to the love of God . . . The Staretz also notes that he who does not love his enemies shows that he has not learned from the Holy Spirit to love God.”

- **St. Sophrony on St. Silhouan the Athonite**

The warrior saints canonized by the Church are either martyrs for the faith (i.e. St. Theodore the Recruit) or fought out of piety and selfless motivation (i.e. St. Dimitri Donskoy, St. Lazar of Serbia).

The spiritual task of the Christian warrior is to be transformed so as to fight out of love and self-sacrifice, rather than out of fear or hatred, and to pray even with burning love for the conversion of one’s enemies and their repentance.



“And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, **as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.**’”

- Luke 1:41-44

John the Forerunner was the first to recognize the Lord - and he was unborn in his mother’s womb.

The Lord became the Incarnate Son of God not at His birth or any other subsequent point of His life, but at the moment of His conception by the Holy Spirit.



“You shall not kill a child by causing abortion, nor kill what is begotten.”

- **Didache (1st century). Repeated also in the Epistle of St. Barnabas, and the Apostolic Constitutions.**

“Women who induce abortions are murderers, and will have to give account of it to God.”

- **St. Athenagoras of Athens (2nd century)**

The Orthodox Church clearly understands abortion to be murder.

The guilt of murder applies not only to the mothers who procure abortions, but also those who encourage them or enable them (advising, paying, etc.).

In cases of extra-uterine (fallopian tube) pregnancies, the Church may tolerate medical procedures to save the life of the mother which may result in the death of the child (consult a spiritual father).

Physical deformity or ‘defects’ are no more a justification for taking the life of an unborn child than they are for taking the life of an adult.



“Let her that procures abortion undergo ten years’ penance, whether the embryo were perfectly formed, or not.”

- **Canon II of St. Basil**

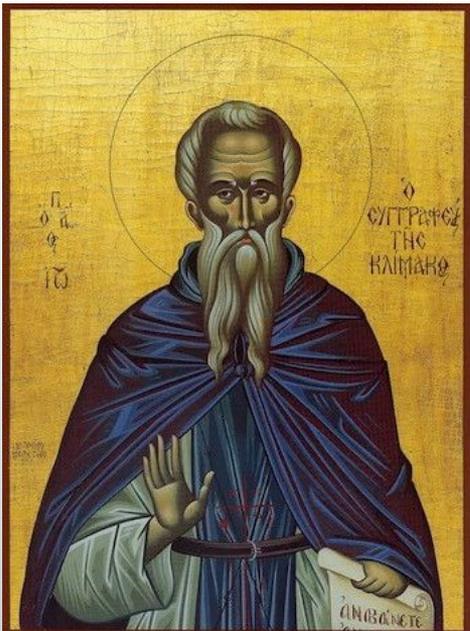
“If any bishop or presbyter does not receive him that returns from his sin, but rejects him, let him be deprived; because he grieves Christ, who says, ‘*There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents*’ (Luke 15:7).”

- **Apostolic Constitutions 52**

“There is no sin that cannot be forgiven but the sin of unrepentance.”

- **Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica**

The Lord forgives those who repent (while the ancient penances are rarely or never applied fully if one is truly repentant, the Church maintains the truth with the same force of conviction).



“Repentance is the renewal of baptism. Repentance is a contract with God for a second life.”

- **St. John Climacus**

“Do not be ashamed to enter again into the Church. **Be ashamed when you sin. Do not be ashamed when you repent.** Pay attention to what the devil did to you. These are two things: sin and repentance. Sin is a wound; repentance is a medicine. Just as there are for the **body wounds and medicines**, so **for the soul are sins and repentance.** However, sin has the shame and repentance possesses the courage.”

- **St. John Chrysostom**

Questions / Discussion