

Chapter 11: Lives of the Saints

“And I sit down and start reading *The Lives of the Saints* for Eudochius on March 1. What fables you can find in this book, and there is nothing omitted in these prologues. With such determination and warmth of heart did I read and memorize everything word for word! Where then today are those books that I used to hold in my hands! Alas, this golden age is lost forever! Even if I fled from Scylla, I would still fall into the clutches of Charybdis - from *The Prologue* into *The Lives*! Poor childhood, miserable youth, you will be dearly missed unto death! But then I thought: who can be happier than I? Read this great book *The Lives*! Nowhere in the world does anything comparable exist!”¹

Dositej Obradovic

“Do not read *The Lives* all the time – it is enough for you to read them once - You should start to read other, more intelligent books.”²

Abbot Teodor Milutinovich

In Orthodox Church literature, there is a special literary opus called *The Lives of the Saints*. This work compiles the descriptions of life (biography and hagiography) of the numerous saints of the Eastern Orthodox Churches (and before the year 1054, also for the Roman Catholic Church). These lives taught religious doctrine as well as numerous miracles ascribed to each individual.

The two largest collections of saints' lives available in the Serbian language are *The Lives of The Saints* in 12 volumes written by Archimandrite Justin Popovic and published by the monastery cells near Valjevo, and *The Prologue of Okhrid* by Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic. These works consist of daily readings for the entire year and reflect, according to the old Julian calendar, different events based on biblical, apocryphal and historical texts, along with various legends recorded over the centuries.

Justin Popovic writes in his preface to *The Prologue of Okhrid* by Velimirović something that merits detailed scrutiny in the light of Scripture:

“During the history of the Serbian people, no book with such wisdom and God-given wisdom has appeared like *The Prologue of Okhrid* by Bishop Nikolai. In fact, no other book in the Serbian language is more important than this book. The reason: no other book can compare with its usefulness because of the eternal benefit to the Serbian man both in this life and for the one to come.

The Prologue of Okhrid is the eternal Serbian Gospel. **In it is contained everything that the Serbian soul requires for the afterlife**, everything that

¹ Dositej Obradovic, *Selected Works*, 117-8.

² *Ibid.*, 123.

survives our earthly death, conquers all and stifles our sins and passions... So, this is *The Prologue of Okhrid*, the Serbian Gospel... *The Prologue of Okhrid* is the most essential manual – a holy textbook, the most essential ritual book - the holy ritual book for every Serbian soul, and the ecumenical soul of earthly Serbia, which will be succeeded by the heavenly Serbia.”³

So, according to the statements of Father Justin, *The Prologue of Okhrid* is the eternal Serbian gospel that is necessary for the salvation of our people, and the most important book that every Serb should own. Not one place in the entire preface mentions the Scriptures which, in fact, should be the most important book for salvation. Instead, of urging us to read the Bible and to live in harmony with God's Word, Popovic states that each of us can become a perfect, eternal man if we adhere to and live in harmony with the examples in the books of Bishop Nikolai:⁴

“How? *The Prologue of Okhrid*. Let us give it a try: we will live by it from day to day, night after night, let it lead us and guide us through all our days and nights, and we will feel within ourselves, and build inside ourselves, and eventually erect in ourselves the Eternal Man.”⁵

In any case, it will not be difficult to compare and contrast the religious teachings and narratives that stem from this “eternal Serbian gospel” with the truth of Christ and His truly eternal gospel as described in the Book of Books.

At the beginning of the chapter, I cited a text originally written by Dositej Obradovic, in which he described his regret at his wasted youth. Due to his own immaturity, he paid attention to and believed in the legendary stories of the saints of the past. However, was Obradovic right? Was this Serbian educator, on whose works were cast anathemas (curses) by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Anthimus V,⁶ indeed correct in light of New Testament Christianity's assessment of the value of fables as recorded in these “great books”? As we will examine, Obradovic was well acquainted with the gospel of Christ. He made an accurate assessment of *The Lives of the Saints* when he declared them to be “ridiculous and foolish fables”.

Before turning away from the Serbian giants to other examples mentioned in Orthodox literature, I want to examine the look at the life of the Most Venerated Paisius the Great by the educator commented on two centuries ago. In addition to looking at Obradovic's analysis, I also wish to add some details not mentioned by him from *The Lives of the Saints*.

The Life of the Venerable Paisius

³ *The Prologue of Okhrid*, (Voice of the Church: Shabac, 2000) Preface. Author's emphasis.

⁴ So far I have in this book cited numerous examples of a multitude of saints and teachings of church fathers taken from *The Prologue* that are unbiblical and wrong.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ See Milka Stankovic, *Prometheus in the Balkans*, 164-6.

“Whoever does not know what *The Lives* are, let him hear just one little story of the many thousands, that I have not read, but which I devoured and swallowed with all my throat, for I considered them on a par with the very Gospel itself, and **over which I cried so bitterly until my eyes appeared bloodshot.** I say, let him listen with a heart of humanity, may he not cry for me nor shed a tear over the misery of my youth, if he can.

In the Life of the Venerable Paisius, it is written that Christ came down from heaven to visit him. The Venerable Paisius washed the feet of Christ. Christ told him to leave the water with which he had washed His feet in the water basin.

Then a disciple of Paisius arrived from some place and asked for water to drink. There is none but for the dirty water. The elder tells him to drink water from the water basin. The disciple stared at the water and saw how murky and muddy it was, plus it smelled of sweat. He refused to drink the water and said, ‘How could I drink that water?’ The elder urged him, ‘Take it, drink, drink, otherwise you will regret it.’ The disciple was troubled, not so much because of his thirst, but rather because he did not want to show disrespect to the elder. He thought to myself, ‘Let me close my eyes and drink, even if the water turns out to be poison.’ The disciple looked again at the water basin and saw that it was empty. He says to the elder, ‘Elder, the water is gone! The basin had been full, now it is empty and dry as the desert!’ ‘Ha!’ answered the elder, ‘Isn’t it like I said? Drink, drink, otherwise you will regret it.’ And the elder explained what happened to the water.”⁷

“Then the Venerable said to him, ‘Oh child, thus you have earned the reward for your disobedience, that is, you are deprived of the gifts of God!’ His disciple heard this and trembled. He ran to the basin and found nothing. He told the elder, ‘Father, there is no water from the basin to drink!’ The righteous Paisius responded, ‘Well, how is it possible to find it when you have done such an unworthy thing, for disobedience deprives gifts from the disobedient, and obedience brings rewards to the obedient.’ And the disciple regretted what he had done and said, ‘Of what great gift was I deprived? And what disappeared from the water basin?’ The Venerable told him what happened, as mentioned earlier, and said, ‘Since you abided in disobedience, and have not agreed to drink the water that I commanded you to drink three times, so an angel from the Lord descended and took away into his own hands the sacred water back into Heaven.’ And when the disciple heard this, **he felt terrible** and wanted to cry, but at first **he was afraid to make any noise.** Keeping to himself, **he wept and mourned for his loss**, wailing, ‘Woe to me, a wretch! What great good that I lost! What cunning demon snatched away that which I would have enjoyed!’ With such words **he wept to himself**, repented, and with tears he sought mercy.”⁸

⁷ Obradovic, 118. Author’s emphasis.

⁸ Elder Paisios of Athos, *The Venerable Paisius the Great*, (Monastery of Archdeacon St. Stefan, Property of Mount Athos: Belgrade, Serbian, 1989). Author’s emphasis.

So, when the disciple of Paisius learned what was in the water basin and the big benefit that he had forfeited by regretting to drink it, he fell into great despair. He could never forgive himself for committing the sin of disobedience (the second of the three monastic vows, which we discussed in the previous section) against the commands of Paisius.⁹ After Paisius saw the distress of his disciple, the Venerable One encouraged him to henceforth be obedient to avoid ever again being deprived of a blessing. Although the disciple was consoled for a short while, later he began to despair again from having missed the blessing of heaven, which consisted of drinking the dirty water mentioned earlier. So he went back to his teacher. The teacher, an experienced elder, gave him another form to give him solace and relief:

“The godly Paisius took some bread, gave it to the disciple, and said, ‘Take this bread and go to another city. Near the city walls, on the right side, you will find a **poor man sitting on a rubbish heap**, stoned by some youth and ridiculed. Give him this bread. From this, you will find some solace for it is useful.’”¹⁰

After the disciple did as he was commanded and delivered the bread to the man who sat near the city walls, that man also reprimanded the disciple for his disobedience of Paisius. “Go therefore and submit to your elder, the great Paisius,” he said, “**for he who does not obey him disobeys the commands of our Savior Christ.**”¹¹ After this rebuke, the disciple of Paisius calmed down. Yet, his conscience again started to haunt him. Crying because of the damage suffered due to his disobedience, he again asked his teacher to let him go to the saint who was sitting upon the heap of garbage. Although Paisius told him not to return, yet again, the disciple was set on disobedience. After many appeals, the Venerable One told him that the man died. Having foreseeing his own death, he found two other saints, and altogether they plunged into some kind of grave and died. Paisius ordered his disciple to go to the grave and resurrect the dead man. He gave him the counsel needed to perform such a miracle. As the disciple ran and complied with the commands of the Venerable One, the dead man immediately stood up and said:

“‘Why cannot you obey what I tell you when you cannot even obey your elder? Go, therefore, and submit to him unconditionally. **Listen to his words if you want to save yourself, because whoever disobeys his words disobeys the commandments of Christ.**’ Then, the corpse fell dead once again. The disciple

⁹ Similar to this command to drink the water used for washing feet, the Church Fathers have documented other such incidents (which today would be called “brainwashing”). The historian Will Durant gives this brief account. “In the monastery, the abbot demanded **absolute discipline** and subjected novitiates to obey **bizarre commands**. One story says an abbot ordered a newcomer to jump into a flaming furnace. The novice obeyed, but the fire backed away so he could go inside. Another time, a monk was ordered to thrust a stick of sugar cane into the ground and make it grow. As long as it did not grow, he would have to return the two miles. For years, every day, he had to go to the Nile and brought water to the sugar cane rod. Three years later, God took pity on him and sugar cane finally grew.” Durant, *The History of Civilization, Age of Faith, Part I*, 80. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁰ Elder Paisios of Athos, 114. Author’s emphasis.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 115. Author’s emphasis.

marveled at these words and returned to blessed Paisius. He told him everything in detail including what the dead man had said.”¹²

Thus is a brief portion of the narrative on the Venerable Paisius from *The Lives*. The most important lesson we learn from this narrative is that God approves monasticism and monastic vows. He blesses the hermit monks by personally visiting them, leaving them with dirty water to be used as sacred drinking water, and commands disciples of monks to absolute obedience of their superiors. Additionally, we learn that some saints live in piles of garbage (living at the garbage dump is probably one of the examples that Father Justin teaches in order for one to achieve perfection and eternal life), they can resurrect from the dead,¹³ that the words of a saint are equivalent to those of the Savior, and that whoever disobeys church superiors disobeys Christ Himself! Previous chapters have already demonstrated that none of these teachings can be found in the Bible, and therefore do not conform to God’s will. The Eastern Orthodox Church, apparently lacking any Biblical arguments to prove her teaching, resorts to fabrications and propagation of various legends. So comments the wise Dositej on this parable in *The Lives*:

“Here, brethren, thousands and thousands of these fables fill *The Lives of the Saints*. This was the literature that I believed, and over which I shed many bitter tears. **Could a more stupid and superficial Egyptian dervish invent a funnier and crazier fable than this?** It brings shame not only to the holy name of Christianity, but indeed to the entire human race that this and other similar **mindless fables** are found in a Christian book that people actually read and believe.”¹⁴

¹² *Ibid.*, 115-6. Author’s emphasis.

¹³ That this resurrection is not a great miracle, and that in *The Lives* mentions numerous miraculous wonders, evidenced by the example of resurrecting the so-called "sleepers", the seven young men (Roman soldiers) who had fallen asleep in a cave on a hill near the city of Ephesus. That is, as they refused to obey the command of Emperor Decius (249-251 A.D.) to kill Christians, these young men hid in the cave mentioned in order to avoid the wrath of king.

“When the emperor learned of this, he commanded that the cave be sealed off. However, God according to His far-reaching Providence caused a miraculous and long-lasting sleep to fall upon the young men. The imperial courtiers, Theodore and Rufinus, secret Christians, built in that wall a copper sarcophagus with lead plaques on which were written the names of these young men and their martyr's death during the reign of Emperor Decius. More than two hundred years then passed. During the reign of Emperor Theodosius the Younger (408-450 A.D.), there was a great dispute about the resurrection. There were some that doubted the resurrection. Emperor Theodosius was in great sorrow as a result of this dispute among the faithful and prayed to God that He, in some way, would reveal the truth to men. At that time of turmoil in the Church some shepherders of Adolius, who owned the hill Celion began to build folds for the sheep and removed stone after stone from that cave. The youths then awakened from their sleep young and healthy, the same as when they fell asleep.” (See: Prologue, August 4, cited on <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/prolog.cgi> .)

The Elder Paithios of Athos says that these "sleepers" were able to sleep over three hundred years, which obviously does not match even with the historical data on the times of Emperor Theodosius and Decius. (See Elder Paithios, 74-75).

¹⁴ Obradovic, 118. Author’s emphasis.

Here is yet another episode mentioned by Obradovic from *The Lives of the Saints*:

On one occasion, when St. John Kolovos [the Short] wished to visit the Venerable Paisius in his cell, he came and heard someone in discussion with this servant of God. John waited for some time, so as not to disturb the monk. Then he made some noise to get the attention of Paisius that someone was at the door. When he came out of the cell, the Venerable Paisius rejoiced at the sight of his friend John. After entering the cell, the guest of Paisius was surprised by the fact that it was empty. No one else was in the room, yet John clearly heard a conversation between two men. After a series of questions and requests for an explanation of this mystery, Paisius gave the following answer:

“Dearest of friends! You just heard me talking with **the great Constantine**, the first emperor of the Christians, who descended from Heaven and was sent of God unto me, saying, ‘Blessed are you who you is worthy to have such a unique standing, because your perseverance truly is a blessing of the Savior.’ I replied to him, ‘So, who are you, my Lord, **you who say lots of happy things to a monk?**’ And I received this answer: ‘I am the great Constantine. **I came down from heaven to reveal to you the glory that monks enjoy in Heaven...** I wish to take a temporary leave of the kingdom, the royal robes, and crown, in order to become poor and don the frock and fulfill all other requirements to attain the monastic state.’”¹⁵

Wrapping up this story in the life of St. Paisius, Dositej considers it a fabrication as he implies with these words: “And please try to keep yourself from bursting out in laughter.”¹⁶

Indeed it is a fabrication. This story is incredible for several reasons. First, the Scriptures (which we will study in the chapter on “veneration of the saints”) forbid contact between the living and the dead.

Second, this fable apparently tells of a conversation between Paisius and the Emperor Constantine. Eastern Orthodoxy considers Constantine as a saint because he proclaimed religious freedom for Christians after centuries of servitude and persecution. Additionally, Orthodox adores Constantine for convening the First Ecumenical Council in which he condemned the Aryan heresy. This saint is celebrated on May 21 according to the old Julian calendar.

However, it is not clear how it is possible that this man is included in the list of saints. Moreover, Constantine is called “equivalent to the apostles” and “the thirteenth apostle” by Orthodoxy.¹⁷ Doubts about Constantine stem from his life and the fact that he was not a Christian (for he was never baptized in the Orthodox way). In fact, he was a follower of the cult of Mithras (the cult of the sun). During his life, the emperor bore the

¹⁵ Elder Paisios of Athos, 108-9. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁶ Obradovic, 119.

¹⁷ *2000 Years of Christianity*, (Belgrade: 2000), 66.

pagan title of Pontifex Maximus. He continued to oversee pagan worship and worked to protect its rights. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, at the dedication of Constantinople (Istanbul) in the year 330, Constantine used a ceremony that mixed both Christian and pagan elements.¹⁸ In the square was set up a chariot of the Sun God with a symbol of the Cross of Christ placed above its head. The coins that were forged under this emperor had both the sign of the cross as well as the figures of the Roman gods Mars and Apollo. He also continued to believe in the pagan magic rituals for protecting the harvest and healing from illness.¹⁹

In addition to all of the above, the famous historian Will Durant wrote in his work *The History of Civilization* that the historical record shows that the “venerable” Constantine remained a very evil man even after his “conversion”. Specifically, the ruler had been married twice. His first wife's name was Minerva, and with her he had a son Crispus, who later aided his father as a distinguished soldier.

However, in the year 326, only one year after the First Ecumenical Council, Constantine murdered his son Crispus. Constantine's second wife Fausta (with whom he had six children) claimed that Crispus had tried to rape her. Later, Helena, Constantine's mother (who is also revered as a saint), convinced her son that Fausta had concocted the plot so that one of her sons would succeed her husband as emperor and thus betrayed Crispus. The emperor Constantine murdered his second wife by drowning her in a bathtub with hot water.²⁰

Around the same time, he ordered his nephew to be flogged to death and the nephew's father (the husband of Constantine's sister) to be strangled, in spite of Constantine's earlier promise to spare his life. Above all, this brutal pagan at the end of his life was baptized by Bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia, a proponent of the very Arian theology that had been anathematized at the First Ecumenical Council. (Of course, this baptism was done with the wrong beliefs rooted in the early church and surviving in modern-day Orthodoxy, e.g. that baptism is the means for the literal absolution of all of one's sins.)

“Emperor Constantine died on May 22, 337. According to tradition, before his death, Constantine was baptized by Eusebius of Nicomedia in **an Arian spirit.**”²¹

This means that Constantine himself was administered baptism by an Arian, that is a member of a very non-Orthodox religious group. In order to gain a better understanding of the implications of this truth, consider how this scenario would translate into modern-

¹⁸ [Translator's note] Ed. Charles George Herbermann, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume 4, 299. Cited on http://books.google.com/books?id=u08sAAAIAAJ&pg=PA299&lpg=PA299&dq=catholic+encyclopedia+Constantine+330&source=bl&ots=x37mX0-3Po&sig=5R8Ekwh70pvAz3rj0R0VMFtO0kw&hl=en&ei=IsfBTerOM-uP0QGS6am3Cg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&sqi=2&ved=0CDMQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q&f=false

¹⁹ Woodrow, 56.

²⁰ Durant, 54-5. See also Durant, *The Story of Civilization, Caesar and Christ*, 66.

²¹ Momir Yovic, *Early Christianity in the Balkans* (Prosveta: Nish, Serbia, 1994), 36. Author's emphasis.

day terms. It would be akin to a situation in which a formerly brutal and wicked murderer before his death received baptism in a fellowship of Jehovah's Witnesses (who also deny belief in the divinity of Christ and the Holy Trinity similar to what the Arians believed). Add onto this scenario that he would be beatified as one of the saints of Eastern Orthodoxy! Since this modern scenario is still definitely impossible, then how was the historical example of Constantine possible?

However, recall that Paisius ignored the biblical prohibition on the living having contact with the dead. Furthermore, let us assume the Orthodox view of the Arians as “heretics” who have no place in Heaven is correct. (Orthodoxy would assert the Arians could never pass the test of heresy at the celestial toll-houses that Orthodoxy claims one must pass to enter Heaven.)²² Consequently, it would mean that Constantine never was in Heaven, and hence, Paisius never could have had the conversation with Constantine.

Nonetheless, it is likely that Orthodoxy beatified Constantine amongst the other Orthodox saints because his service to the church outweighed the numerous sins (even according to Orthodox teachings) he committed and did not receive forgiveness from God. Essentially, the basis for Constantine having been named an Orthodox saint rests more for political reasons rather than spiritual. Indeed, it demonstrates the sore lack of a sound theological foundation.

It follows that the pronouncement by “Constantine” that monks earn special grace from God and his regret for not having become a monk is a fabrication for the reasons given in this chapter.

Before examining the lives of the “accomplishments” of other saints, let us look at just a few more details from the life of Paisius. Paisius allegedly practiced the feat of “silence” (permanent silence), for which he ran away from the public and hid in a cave where he spent three years. His hair grew long, and he tied it to a pole nailed on the rocky floor. Day and night, he prayed without giving himself any repose or holiday. During this time, the Lord Jesus Christ visited Paisius several times and expressed admiration for his accomplishments. Other feats of Paisius included fasting for one or several weeks in a row without food. He even claimed to have fasted an entire 70 (seventy!) days without putting anything into his mouth!²³ This holy elder exceeded not only the Old Testament prophets Moses and Elijah, who endured without food for 40 days (Deuteronomy 9:18; 1 Kings 19:5-8), but also our Lord Jesus Christ who, after forty days of fasting, was still hungry:

*“Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was **hungry.**”²⁴*

²² More details on Orthodox teaching on life after death will come in the chapter on “Life after Death”.

²³ See Elder Paisios of Athos, 74.

²⁴ Luke 4:1-2. Author’s emphasis.

Miracles related to the saints are very famous. (Yet, these examples are short examples of numerous other fables.) The only weakness to them, however, is that they oppose the spirit and letter of Scripture. Thus, these alleged miracles are untrue.

The Life of George, the Saint, Victor-Bearer, and Great Martyr

Yet another saint whom we shall examine is Saint George the Great and Holy Martyr who is commemorated on April 23 according to the Julian calendar (e.g. May 6 on the new Gregorian calendar). We will explore two of his alleged miracles, specifically the resurrection of the ox in the name of Christ and his killing dragons in Sirofenikiji. The first miracle is thus described:

“While the Great and Holy Martyr was in prison, people came to him and believed in Christ because of his miracles... Among those who believed was a man named Glycerius, a simple farmer. It happened that his ox fell off a hill into the abyss and died. Hearing of the saint, Glycerius ran to him and pleaded for his ox. The saint laughed and quietly said: ‘Brother, go with joy, because **Christ has resurrected your ox.**’ The farmer humbly accepted the words of the martyr, departed, and behold, **he found his ox alive**, just as the saint had told him.”²⁵

According to the teaching of Scripture, the only beings worthy of resurrection are people. The Lord Jesus Christ and the apostles gave back life by divine power to deceased people (who later, of course, once again died) for the purpose of displaying the Lord's mighty power and authority over death (Rev. 1:18).²⁶ On the other hand, there is absolutely no evidence that anybody in biblical times resurrected animals. According to the Apostle Peter, God made animals to be killed and used for food and clothing by humans.²⁷ This story of the resurrection of the dead ox by the divine power of Jesus Christ is a mockery of the gospel in a very perfidious way. Dositej Obradovic truly was right when he said that *The Lives of the Saints* relate crazy and superstitious fables (fairy tales) which should embarrass those who are called Christians yet read and believe them.

Here is another example of George's alleged miracles:

“We should not conceal the notable miracle accomplished when the Holy Great Martyr St. George the Victory-Bearer **killed the dragon** in Sirofeniki near Beirut, near the sea, near the town of Lydda, where the body of this holy martyr was buried. This miracle has inspired various ancient icons. A passenger traveling in Palestine showed the place where this miracle happened. This is what happened. On the outskirts of Beirut was a very large lake, in which dwelt a huge dragon, an awesome hunter. Emerging from the lake, it grabbed many

²⁵ Justin Popovic, *Holy Lives*, (The Great and Holy Martyr George the Victor-Bearer), (Athos Monastery: 1995) 28. Author's emphasis.

²⁶ Examples of resurrection in the New Testament include: Matthew 10:8, Luke 7:11-17, 8:40-56, John 11:38-44, and Acts 9:36-42, 20:8-12.

²⁷ 2 Peter 2:12.

people, dragged them into the lake, and devoured them. Even though people on many occasions went to hunt for the beast, it would end up defeating them. When it came near the city limits, **it exhaled its breath into the air and filled it with deadly poison.** Many people became ill and died. And there was constant trouble, sorrow, and crying in this city inhabited by pagans. All of its inhabitants including the ruler were idolaters.

One day the locals had gathered in Beirut. Their ruler came outside, and they asked him: ‘What shall we do, because the dragon is killing our people?’ The ruler answered: ‘Let us inquire of our gods as to their advice.’ And through the revelation of the demons indwelling the idols, they who kill human souls, the inhabitants of the city received this counsel: ‘In order that not everyone should be killed, offer a daily sacrifice of one of your children, a son or daughter, for the dragon to eat.’ Then the ruler said, ‘And when it is my turn, I will also give my daughter, even though she is my only child!’

The population agreed with the ruler’s counsel, or more accurately, the counsel of the demons. They determined that every day, some person, either a leader or an ordinary citizen, would sacrifice their child as food for the dragon. It worked this way: every day, some family would bind their son or daughter and leave them at the shore of the lake. And so they did, although many mourned and cried for their children. The dragon would emerge and devour the children. One time, the citizens drew a lot which fell upon the ruler. The citizens came and said to him, ‘Behold, O king, we have obeyed your counsel and have sacrificed children to the dragon, now what do you want us to do?’ The ruler replied, ‘I will give away my only daughter, and then I will consult with the gods and reveal what they have said.’

Then the king summoned his daughter and ordered her to be adorned in the most beautiful fashion. He mourned for her and wept greatly along with his whole household, but he could not violate the decision, ostensibly divine but in fact demonic, for offering children for sacrifice. And he took his daughter to the dragon as a sacrifice to God for the abyss of Hell. With tearful eyes, the ruler brought the girl to a location on the lake shore, where the dragon ate the sacrifices. And she was standing, crying, and awaiting the hour of death when the dragon would emerge from the lake to devour her.

And, behold, the foreknowledge of God, who wants all to be saved and to save the city from both physical and spiritual death, sent forth the Great Martyr St. George, a soldier of the King of Heaven, riding on a horse and holding a lance in his hand. When he saw the girl standing by the lake and crying, he asked her why she was crying so much. She said to him: ‘Good youth, run away quickly from here with your horse, for you do not want to die together with me.’ The saint said to her, ‘Fear not, maiden, but tell me what troubles you while the people are watching from afar?’ The girl said to him: ‘O excellent young man, I see that you are brave and courageous, but why do you want to die with me?’

Flee quickly from this place.’ The saint then said to her: ‘I will not leave until you tell me the truth, which is why you stand here and cry, and what awaits you?’

The girl then told him all about the dragon and herself. St. George said to her: ‘Fear not, girl, because in the name of my Lord, the true God, He will deliver us from the dragon.’ She said: ‘Good soldier, you do not want to get killed with me instead of running away. Save yourself from a bitter death. The lot is cast that I should die here alone, because you will not deliver me from the dragon, and I shall die.’

Then the girl said to the saint, ‘Look out!’ Up from the lake emerged the terrible dragon. It stood and made its customary approach to its victim. Seeing the dragon, the girl cried strongly, ‘Go away, man, here comes the dragon!’ St. George made the sign of the cross and called upon the Lord by saying, ‘In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.’ With his horse, **he charged the dragon and thrust the lance into its throat by stomping it on the ground while the horse’s legs galloped. Then St. George put the dragon on a leash, and the girl led it back to the city like a docile puppy.** And the people were shocked by the sight of the water dragon led by the girl and started to flee out of fear. Then St. George said to them, ‘Do not fear, but trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and believe in Him who sent me to you to deliver you from the dragon.’ And St. George slew the dragon with a sword in the middle of the city. The people pulled its corpse out of the city and burned it with fire. And the ruler of that city and all the people believed in Christ and received the holy baptism. St. George baptized twenty-five thousand men along with women and children. At that point, they then built a large and beautiful church in the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary, daughter of the Heavenly King God the Father, His Son and mother, and bride of the Holy Spirit, in the name of St. George the Victor-bearer, for he delivered the girl who survived the dragon. He also kept spotless the Church of Christ, along with every Orthodox soul from the invisible lake of fire and from the sin of the deadly serpent.”²⁸

Let us highlight some details from this story of the life of St. George.

First, we observe that the dragon is described as very large and so powerful that even an entire army could do it no harm. But then, only one man with his horse stomping its feet on it end up mastering the dragon. (This detail leaves the impression that the beast was as large as previously reported). After all, this vast and terrible animal (if you can call it that) was then tied to a thin leash and led like a docile puppy by the king's daughter to the city. (Again, it is not exactly clear how the dragon did not die when St. George had plunged a lance into its neck.)

²⁸ Popovic, *Ibid.*, 59-63. Author’s emphasis. The author has not corrected the grammatical errors of Popovic in his original manuscript.

This fairy tale resembles many others in children's story books that tell about fictitious monsters. Yet, this tale that Eastern Orthodoxy teaches as truth is absurd for several reasons. If we allow the possibility that some forms of large aquatic reptiles, even dinosaurs, had existed at that time in history, it would have been impossible for such a beast like this dragon to contain such poisonous breath that could kill so many people. Although today there exist amphibians and reptiles that have poison glands, which serve to ward off predators or to attack prey (by paralyzing and killing animals for food), the poison does not come from the air it exhales, and certainly not in such concentration that it could kill an entire city. Such examples can be found only in the imaginative stories and modern science fiction movies. The Lord certainly did not create beasts whose breath was toxic enough to kill many people. Additionally, the Bible describes miracles, but nothing so unrealistic as this one described in *The Lives of the Saints*.

Following up on the miracle of the resurrection of the ox, there will be some more excerpts from the lives of saints who expressed their spirituality in friendships with animals. The examples that follow come from the "eternal Serbian gospel" of *The Prologue from Ohrid* by Bishop Nikolai.

Saints and Animals

“Saint Tryphon the Martyr. Tryphon was born of poor parents in the village of Lampsacus in Phrygia. In his childhood he tended geese. Also from his childhood he was able to **cure illnesses** that afflicted people and **livestock** and was able to expel evil spirits.” (February 1)

“The Priestly-Martyr Blaise. When the city of Sebastea was completely depleted of Christians - some were slain, and others fled - the Elder Blaise withdrew to Mt. Argeos and settled there in a cave. **Wild beasts recognized the holy man, gathered around him and he tenderly caressed them.** But the persecutors found the saint in this remote place and brought him to trial. Along the way, Blaise cured a young boy who had a bone caught in his throat. **To the plea of the poor widow whose pig had been snatched by a wolf, the saint, by the power of his prayer, commanded the wolf to return it...** People pray to St. Blaise for the welfare of their domestic livestock and for protection against wild beasts. However, in the West, he is also invoked for diseases of the throat.” (February 12)

“Venerable Mark the Ascetic. Mark was an ascetic and miracle-worker... He was very merciful and kind. He wept much for the misfortunes which had befallen all of God's creation. On one occasion, while crying, **he prayed to God for a blind puppy of a hyena and the puppy received its sight.** In thanksgiving the mother of the hyena brought him a sheepskin. The saint forbade the hyena in the future to kill any more sheep of poor people. He received Communion at the hands of the angels...” (March 5)

“**The Venerable Gerasimus**... On one occasion, he saw a lion roaring from pain because there was a thorn in his paw. Gerasimus drew near to the lion, crossed himself, and removed the thorn in the animal's paw. The lion became so tame that he returned with Gerasimus to the monastery and remained there until the elder's death. When Gerasimus died, the lion succumbed from sorrow for him.” (March 4) ²⁹

“Often, the Saints shared their meager food (mainly bread) with wild beasts (as was the case with St. Seraphim of Sarov and many others). Often the prayers of the saints before the caves or huts involved wild beasts. St. Seraphim of Sarov zaticali the visitors several times to pray in front of the cabin in the woods, and **bears and foxes with a look of respect** would form a circle around him. Lives of Christian hermits are full of examples of friendly relations between them and wild beasts, and it is not possible to mention them all individually.” ³⁰

However, despite these humorous stories, *The Lives* present accounts far more damaging that reveal the serious negative consequences brought by unbiblical theology and religious practice in the Eastern Orthodox Church for centuries.

Saintly Examples of Masochism to Gain Salvation

Among many church fathers along with venerable saints, it was well known that a number of them suffered “self-mortification” (masochism) in order to gain salvation. For example, some lived for years in graves, crying inconsolably over their future death and the uncertainty of whether the Lord will accept them in the Kingdom of Heaven. Others bound themselves with heavy iron chains. One ate earth and drank sea water for three years. These and many other narratives should be read by everyone, especially those of Serbs and all other Orthodox nations, who are fighting against “destructive cults”. Yet, at the same time, such people allow their children to visit the churches and monasteries of the Orthodox liturgical church. This is the very church that venerates self-mutilation as valid examples of how to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Here are some examples:

“**The Venerable Thalalaeus**... Thalelaeus was a Syrian ascetic. At first he resided in the Monastery of St. Sabas the Sanctified near Jerusalem but later he **settled in a pagan cemetery** known for the apparitions of evil spirits and frightening things. In order to conquer fear within himself through faith in God, Thalelaeus **settled in this cemetery where he lived for many years** enduring many assaults from evil spirits both day and night...” (February 27)

“**The Venerable Eustratius**... Eustratius was a native of Tarsus. He was a great ascetic and a man of prayer. During the seventy-five years he spent in the monastery, Eustratius never laid down to sleep on his left side but always on his right side. Throughout the Divine Services, from the beginning to the end, he

²⁹ Velimirovic, cited on <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/prolog.cgi> . Author's emphasis.

³⁰ *The Greatest Teacher*, 99. Author's emphasis.

repeated to himself: 'Lord have mercy!' He died in his ninety-fifth year." (January 9)

"The Venerable Theodore Trihinos... Theodore was a citizen of Constantinople and the son of wealthy parents. As a young man **he left his parent's home** and riches and entered a hermetical monastery in Thrace. Here, he imposed upon himself a most rigorous life of mortification. He slept on stones **in order to sleep less**. He traveled everywhere bareheaded and clothed himself in one garment made of "goat's hair," for which he was called Trihinos [Greek] Kostret [Serbian] for goat's hair..." (April 20)

"The Venerable Theodore of Sykeon... Theodore's life of mortification, by his ascetical severity, surpassed the living ascetics of his time. **He mortified his body through hunger, thirst, iron chains** and by standing at prayer all night." (April 22)

"The Venerable Mark of Trache... Distributing all of his possessions to the poor, he sat on a plank in the sea and with a tenacious faith in God's help, prayed that God direct him wherever He wills. God, in His Providence, protected him and brought him to Lybia (or Ethiopia) to a mountain called Trache. Mark lived an ascetical life on this mountain for ninety-five years, **seeing neither man nor beast**. For thirty years, he waged a violent combat with evil spirits and **suffered** from hunger, thirst, frost and heat. **He ate dirt and drank sea water.**" (April 5)

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The Pole Sitters

Among the great ascetics of the past are found those who have risen up to attain its greatest heights. They have done this both certainly in a literal and perhaps in a figurative sense. In fact, these are saints, monks-hermits, which would ascend to the top of a column (pillar) and in some cases have spent decades (or their whole life) in constant prayer, even without descending to earth. Here are some examples:

"The Venerable Theodulus... Theodulus was an eminent patrician at the court of Theodosius the Great. After the death of his wife, he renounced the vanity of the world and withdrew from Constantinople to a pillar near Ephesus, where he lived a life of **asceticism for thirty years.**" (December 3)

"The Venerable Daniel the Stylite... Daniel embraced the monastic rank at the age of twelve, visited Simeon the Stylite, and was blessed by him. Desirous of solitude, Daniel left the monastery and withdrew to an abandoned pagan temple on the shore of the Black Sea... Afterward he climbed up on a **pillar**. There he remained until his death, enduring both heat and cold, and attacks from both men and demons... Having lived for eighty years, this holy angelic man entered into

³¹ Velimirovic, cited on <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/prolog.htm> .

rest and took up his habitation in the Kingdom of Christ in the year 489.” (December 11)

“**The Venerable Luke the Stylite**... Luke scorned the vanity of the world and withdrew to a pillar near Chalcedon. There he lived a life of **asceticism for forty-five years**, cleansing his soul of all sinful desires and thoughts. Pleasing God, he entered into rest sometime between the years 970 and 980 and took up his habitation in a better life.” (December 11)

“**The Venerable Simeon the Stylite of the Wonderful Mountain**... At age six, he withdrew to the desert to a spiritual father John under whose guidance he submitted himself to a life of austere fasting and prayerful asceticism to the astonishment of all who saw him... He spent many years on a ‘**pillar**’ praying to God and chanting psalms... He at times lived **without sleep for thirty days and even longer without food** and received nourishment from the hands of angels.” (May 24)

“**The Venerable Nikita the Stylite**... Nikita left his home, **wife**, property and entered a monastery near Pereyaslavl, where he lived an **ascetical life of difficult mortifications** until his death. **He wrapped chains around himself and enclosed himself in a pillar** for which reason he was called a Stylite... Certain evil doers spotted the chains on him and, because of their brightness, thought they were made of silver. They killed him one night, removed the chains and carried them away.” (May 24)³²

The historian Will Durant in his *History of Civilization* also describes the life of one of the saints – a stylite who is revered today in Orthodoxy, and whose life modern Orthodox teachers (such as Justin Popovic and Bishop Nicholas) call us to emulate:

“The monastery founded by Martin of Poitiers in 362 was the first of many to appear in Gaul. Since the idea of monasticism came to Rome, thanks to *The Life of St. Anthony* by Athanasius and Jerome’s vigorous call to the ascetic life, the West first assumed the hardest and most austere forms of monasticism. The Western church applied a strict regime to monk who lived in less favorable climates than to those who basked in the Egyptian sun. **The monk Wulfilaich lived for years, with bare legs and feet, on a column at Trier; in winter the nails fell from his toes, and icicles hung from his beard.** St. Senoch, near Tours, enclosed himself so narrowly within four walls that the lower half of his body could not move; in this situation he lived for many years, an objection of veneration to the populace.”³³

“The Syrian desert was inhabited by anchorites (hermetic monks). Some of them, **like the Hindu fakirs, tied themselves with chains to immovable rocks.** Others abhorred permanent residence and **roamed the mountains eating**

³² Cited on www.westsrbdio.org

³³ Durant, 78. Author’s emphasis.

grass. Simeon the Stylite (390?-459), we are told, used to go without food through the forty days of Lent; during one Lent he was, at his own insistence, walled up in an enclosure with a little bread and water; on Easter they knocked down the walls around him, and the bread and the water were found untouched. At Kalat Seman, in northern Syria, about 422, Simeon built himself a column six feet high and lived on it. Ashamed of his moderation, he built and lived on ever taller columns, until he made his permanent abode on a pillar sixty feet high. Its circumference at the top was little more than three feet; a railing kept the saint from falling to the ground in his sleep. **On this perch Simeon lived uninterruptedly for thirty years, exposed to rain and sun and cold.** A ladder enabled his disciples to take him food and remove his waste. **He bound himself to the pillar by a rope; the rope became embedded in his flesh, which putrefied around it, stank, and teemed with worms; Simeon picked up the worms that fell from his sores, and replaced them there, saying to them, ‘Eat what God has given you.’**... His ‘stature’ established a model of devotion for the ascetic Stylite that lasted for twelve centuries and in thoroughly secularized form persists to this day.”³⁴

After reading these excerpts from the lives of these saints, once again we see that their struggle to attain salvation and the Kingdom of Heaven is manifested through various non-biblical methods. Examples include monks climbing pillars, abandoning their homes and families to seek greater devotion to monasticism, and subjecting themselves to extremely inhumane living conditions, including hunger, thirst, and various climatic conditions. Throw on top of that some masochism in tying oneself with chains. No explanation is needed the wide gap these practices compare to the true New Testament teaching on spiritual life and sanctification in Christianity. Moreover, such methods of sanctification through prayer and living on top of pillars resembles far more the practice of Buddhist monks and members of other Eastern religions, something that could not even remotely be considered Christian. Ernst Benz comments:

“The practice of Orthodox monasticism, particularly in its older form, still has very specific characteristics of oriental asceticism, **which in many ways resembles non-Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist ascetic practices.** Thus, Syrian monks developed the type of pillar sitting. On top of a pillar in the midst of a ruined temple sits a hermit who stays there in a position of ‘eternal prayer’. A state of constant meditation is also expressed in such a posture. **Contemplative prayer accepts posture as a permanent position,** so that at the end - at least so legends report - a few birds built their nests on the heads or outstretched arms of these Syrian saints.”³⁵

As for other practices by ascetic Orthodox saints seeking salvation apart from the way of salvation taught in God’s Word, Benz adds this commentary:

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 81. Author’s emphasis.

³⁵ Benz, 91. Author’s emphasis.

“And other ascetics on Russian soil performed extreme physical penitential practices not only in the form of continuous fasting for 40 days and prostrations repeated one thousand times, **when the petitioner threw his entire body with outstretched arms and hit the ground with his forehead. They also carried huge iron chains and barbed heavy iron crosses on their bare body under the robes as an instrument of torture.** These items can be seen in the museums of Eastern Orthodox monasteries.”³⁶

Will Durant also writes about this topic:

“Among the anchorites, there arose significant competition to be superior in asceticism. According to the abbot De Cheyne, Macarius of Alexandria ‘never heard of any deed in asceticism that could outdo him.’ If other monks ate no cooked food in Lent, Macarius ate none for seven years; if some punished themselves with sleeplessness, Macarius could be seen ‘**frantically endeavoring for twenty consecutive nights to keep himself awake.**’ Throughout one Lent he stood upright day and night, and ate nothing except, once a week, a few cabbage leaves; and during this time he continued to work at weaving trade... **For six months he slept in a marsh, and exposed his naked body to poisonous flies.** Some monks excelled in feats of solitude; so Serapion inhabited a cave at the bottom of an abyss into which few pilgrims had the hardihood to descend; when Jerome and Paula reached his lair they found a man almost composed of bones, dressed only in a loincloth, face and shoulders covered by uncut hair; his cell was barely large enough for a bed of leaves and a plank; yet this man had lived among the aristocracy of Rome. Some, like Bessarion for forty, Pachomius for fifty, years, **never lay down while they slept;** some specialized in silence, and went many years without uttering a word; **others carried heavy weights wherever they went, or bound their limbs with iron bracelets, greaves, or chains.** Many proudly recorded the number of years since they had looked upon a woman's face.”³⁷

Saints Longing for Martyrdom

Death is, in the words of the Apostle Paul, the last human enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26). For this reason, no man should ever long for death. Although the Lord Jesus Christ by His death and resurrection gives eternal life to all people who are born of God and eternal joy after their physical death, New Testament believers must value above all else life on earth, which its Creator also celebrates.

As is the case with many other biblical texts, vast portions of *The Lives of the Saints* misinterpret the Scriptures talking about death. Specifically, many of the “saints” inappropriately express their desire to prove their faith in God by dying a violent death of martyrdom. Some verses misinterpreted by the ancient “saints” include:

³⁶ *Ibid.* Author's emphasis.

³⁷ Durant, 79-80. Author's emphasis.

*“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”*³⁸

*“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.’”*³⁹

*“But none of these things move me; **nor do I count my life dear to myself**, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”*⁴⁰

*“We are confident, yes, **well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.**”*⁴¹

*“For to me, to live is Christ, **and to die is gain**. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, **having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better**. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.”*⁴²

Probably on the basis of these and other verses, some so-called “Christian zealots” throughout history have dreamed of their suffering and ultimate martyrdom. Here are some examples from *The Prologue of Okhrid*:

“The Venerable Martyr Anastasius... Anastasius was a Persian by birth... It was not enough for him to be baptized, but, in order to give himself completely to serving the Lord he was also tonsured a monk. Among his other mortifications, Anastasius joyfully read the hagiography of the holy martyrs and in reading them he moistened the book with his tears and **ardently yearned for martyrdom**... He suffered on January 22, 628 A.D., in the town of Bethsaloe near Nineveh.” (January 22)

“The Holy Venerable Martyr Roman... Roman was a simple and illiterate peasant from Carpenesion. Learning of the heroism and glory of the martyrs of Christ, the young Roman **desired martyrdom for himself**. He went to Thessalonica where he began to praise the Faith of Christ on the streets and referred Islam as a fable. The Turks tortured him horribly and then sold him to a galley captain. Christians ransomed him from the captain and sent him to the Holy Mountain [Athos] where he was tonsured a monk by the illustrious Elder Acacius. But Roman **further desired martyrdom for Christ**. With the blessing of the Elder Acacius, Roman traveled to Constantinople **pretending insanity** and began to lead a dog along the Turkish streets. To the question: ‘What are you doing?’ Roman responded that he is feeding the dog as Christians feed the Turks.

³⁸ Matthew 10:28.

³⁹ John 10:25.

⁴⁰ Acts 20:24. Author’s emphasis.

⁴¹ 2 Corinthians 5:8. Author’s emphasis.

⁴² Philippians 1:21-24. Author’s emphasis.

The Turks threw him into a dry well, where he remained without bread for forty days. They then removed him from the well and beheaded him.” (February 16)

“**The Holy Martyr Sabas of Gothland...** In Gothland, there was a brutal persecution against Christians... Finally, Prince Atharidus condemned Sabas to death and handed him over to the soldiers. Full of joy, Sabas arrived at the scaffold praising God. Recognizing him as a good man, **the soldiers wanted to release him along the way** and, because of that, Sabas **became very sorrowful** and said to the soldiers that they are duty-bound to carry out the order of the prince. The soldiers then brought him to the Mussovo river [at Targoviste, Romania, near Bucharest] tied a stone around his neck and tossed him into the water... Sabas, the saint, suffered at the age of 31 in the year 372 A.D.” (April 15)

“**The Venerable Martyr Onuphrius of Mount Athos...** In his youth, Onuphrius became angry with his parents and declared before the Turks that he was going to convert to Islam. Immediately following that, he repented because of these words and went to Hilendar where he was tonsured a monk. Tormented by his conscience, Onuphrius **decided for martyrdom**. Because of his determination and with the blessing of his spiritual father, he departed for Trnovo, Bulgaria where he reported to the Turks, proclaimed himself a Christian, and ridiculed Muhammad. Because of that, Onuphrius was beheaded on January 4, 1818, in his thirty-second year. The body of this spiritual knight is not preserved for the Turks tossed it into the sea.” (January 4)

“**Holy Martyr John the New of Ioannina...** To his torturers, he bravely said: ‘Do what you want in order to **send me as soon as possible from this transient life to eternal life**. I am Christ's slave, I follow Christ, for Christ I die that I may live with Him!’ After that, John was bound in chains and brought to the place of burning. Upon seeing a large fire prepared for him, **John ran and leaped into the flames**. His torturers seeing how he loved death in the fire removed him from the fire and sentenced him to be beheaded. After they beheaded him, they threw his head and body into the fire... Thus, St. John of Ioannina died a martyr's death and received the glorious martyr's wreath on April 18, 1526 A. D.” (April 18) ⁴³

These few examples demonstrate that these saints, whom the Orthodox Church venerates by lighting candles and reading about their lives, desired to end their lives much earlier than the Lord had planned for them. Some of them risked their fate and died at a young age (around 30 years old) for no reason. Others themselves jumped into the fire as soon as possible in order to reach the Kingdom of Heaven, while others refused to be released and intentionally sought their own death, having confidence that Christ would meet with in Heaven with a wide smile.

⁴³ Cited on <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/prolog.cgi>

Though one could argue that these “martyrs” are strong examples of unwavering faith in God and courageous testimony, the Scriptures actually reveal the opposite. Such “martyrs” violate in all seriousness and spirituality the commands of Holy Scripture. Simply put, we do not find one single example in Scripture, especially in the New Testament, of any person intentionally plummeting to his or her death in order to demonstrating his or her faith. Even though the Apostle Paul says that “to die is gain” and he would like to be with Christ, he never deliberately and carelessly risked his life without reason. Neither did Paul have an ardent “desire for martyrdom”, as did the Orthodox saints. In order to prove this point, let us examine a few examples from the apostolic writings.

When the Lord Jesus Christ spoke of the great plagues that will befall the residents of Judea, He instructed the believers living in that area to flee and avoid the disasters that threatened their lives:

*“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea **flee** to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes... And pray that **your flight** may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.”*⁴⁴

Also, Jesus commanded His faithful disciples to flee from persecutors:

*“**When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.**”*⁴⁵

After the martyrdom of the Apostle James, son of Zebedee, the apostle Peter was thrown into prison. During the night, the angel of the Lord freed the chains and let Peter out of the prison. After his release, Peter did not have the slightest desire to return to prison and await his death sentence. In fact, Peter rejoiced over his freedom and the angelic intervention that God had sent to free him:

*“And when Peter had come to himself, he said, ‘Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and **has delivered me** from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people.’”*⁴⁶

After Peter shared his report with the believers who were praying for him, under cover of night, Peter left that place so he would not be discovered and arrested again (verses 12-18).

A similar example is found with the apostle Paul. After he was interred in a Roman prison in Jerusalem and awaited trial, more than forty of his religious opponents took an oath that they would neither eat nor drink till they killed him. The plan entailed a

⁴⁴ Matthew 24:15-20. Author’s emphasis.

⁴⁵ Matthew 10:23. Author’s emphasis.

⁴⁶ Acts 12:11. Author’s emphasis.

diversion where the Roman military commander would be deceived into sending Paul with a light guard to the Jewish council for examination. During that moment, a group would have attacked and murdered Paul. Fortunately, Paul's nephew found out about this plot and informed his uncle. According to the Apostle's account, the young man then immediately reported everything to the Roman commander. Paul was kept safe and with a strong armed escort at night was taken to the city Caesarea.⁴⁷ There is nothing in this text that indicates Paul's delight at hearing of his own murder plot, let alone his reluctance to do anything to save his own life. Quite contrary to the so-called "Venerable Martyrs" in later centuries, the apostles used all available (and appropriate) means to save their own lives.

We also learn of Paul's escape from Damascus, immediately after his conversion to Christianity, from the raucous crowd who wanted to kill him. The hero of the faith had to flee in a rather "unheroic" way. His brothers in the faith had to lower him down the city wall at night hidden in a basket:

*"But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket."*⁴⁸

Another example occurred in Iconium. During a time when they were sharing the Gospel, the apostles were forced to flee to another city:

*"And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, they became aware of it **and fled** to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region."*⁴⁹

The apostle Paul, who repeatedly instructed Christians to imitate him as he imitated Christ⁵⁰ in obeying His will, gave instructions on how every Christian should behave in the event that his life were endangered:

*"For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; **but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar.**"*⁵¹

According to the Scriptures, every Christian is always expected to demonstrate sober behavior and use common sense, which precludes any kind of religious fanaticism, including the extreme of hastening one's death as an alleged token of one's loyalty to Christ. The deliberate efforts by Orthodox saints to seek death could be considered a form of suicide. The only nuance is that instead of they themselves taking their own lives, these Orthodox saints sought the first opportunity to give someone else a shot to

⁴⁷ See Acts 23:12-35.

⁴⁸ Acts 9:24-25.

⁴⁹ Acts 14:5-6. Author's emphasis.

⁵⁰ 1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 3:9.

⁵¹ Acts 25:14. Author's emphasis.

kill them. When St. Sabas the Goth rejected the offer to be released from his death sentence without any renunciation of faith in Christ, what is the practical difference between this act and suicide? Undoubtedly, any of the apostles would never have failed to seize the opportunity to be released and preserve their own life, as evidenced by Paul's claim that, because of his defense, he appealed to the Roman Caesar. Another example similar to the apostles occurred with the first of the Fathers of the second century. Polycarp, bishop of the church in Smyrna, was a disciple of the Apostle John:

“When Bishop Polycarp, the teacher of Irenaeus, went into exile, **he did not seek martyrdom**. He left Smyrna **to hide** somewhere in the countryside. However, in the end, he was spotted, arrested, and burned at the stake (155 or 166)... Polycarp did not boldly stomp off to his death because he hated the world and wanted to escape to the next. **He tried to save his life**, but when inevitably faced with the reality of martyrdom, he was comforted knowing that his body and soul will rise again.”⁵²

Irenaeus, the disciple of Polycarp and later bishop of the church in Lyons, acted in a similar manner at the time of persecution:

“Between the years 155-177s, rising tension in Lyons between pagans and Christians led to bloody persecution. At first, the uproar was started by a mob, but the Roman governor and his troops eventually took an active role. After the bishop of Lyons died during the persecution, Irenaeus became his successor. Irenaeus seems to have saved his own life by **hiding** in those years.”⁵³

These examples of some of the first religious teachers in the post-apostolic period would support the idea presented earlier in this section. The lives of the later “holy venerable martyrs” and “saints” exalted and venerated by the Orthodox in no way resemble the lifestyles shown by the early Christians. Instead, Orthodox saints display fanatical behavior similar to that found today among members of non-Christian religions, who believe that they can earn the favor of entering paradise by intentionally seeking their own death.

Dositej Obradovic admitted that after having read the *Lives* of saints such as the martyrs Anastasius and Roman, he too wanted to suffer as a martyr for Christ:

“Indeed, after having filled my childish head with the lives and the prologues, and not having any sobriety or common sense to analyze these ideas, I intended and devoted myself to becoming the perfect person. Contemplating how the martyrs suffered, **I could hardly complain that Christians were tortured**. I would have been the first one to give myself to be burned by the authorities.”⁵⁴

⁵² *A History of Paradise*, 72. Author's emphasis.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 71. Author's emphasis.

⁵⁴ Obradovic, 71. Author's emphasis. Praise God that Obradovic did not think of emulating what happened to the Venerable Martyr Onuphrius, who with the blessing of his spiritual mentor, in 1818 was “martyred” after he mocked the Muslim prophet Muhammad in front of the Turks. Although they were

Seeing that the examples of the venerated martyrs, who sought their own death by provoking their enemies to kill them, do not conform to the apostolic teachings, we have demonstrated that such behavior is irrational madness. Yet, there is another group of Eastern Orthodox saints that also highlights the clear misinterpretation of the Bible and the unchristian behavior venerated in Orthodoxy. This group is called “outcasts for Christ’s sake”.

Fools for Christ’s Sake

This part of our studies of the saintly lives will focus on a special kind of saint in Eastern Orthodoxy called “fools”. Here is how Milana Vujaklije defines this concept in *The Lexicon of Strange Words and Expressions*:

“Fool (Russian Юродивый, loony, lunatic) or “fool for Christ’s sake” is a name by which were called the Apostle Paul and other apostles. Russians believe that such fools, madmen from birth, fulfill the will of God, which is why they are called ‘God’s people’ and believe they have the power of prophecy; in the fifth century: those who were exposed to ridicule and mockery were considered morally perfect.”⁵⁵

Before we examine the Biblical answer as to what the Apostle Paul (and other apostles) meant by the phrase “fools for Christ”, let us take a brief look at the lives of these saints and their saintly deeds:

“**The Venerable Maximus Kapsokalivitos...** In the fourteenth century, Maximus led an ascetical life as a monk on Mt. Athos in his own unique way. That is to say, he pretended to be a little crazy and constantly changed his dwelling place. His place of abode consisted of a hut made from branches. He **built** these huts one after the other and then **burned them**, for this he was called Kapsokalivitos, i.e., ‘**the hut-burner**’. **He was considered insane** until the arrival of St. Gregory Sinaites to Mt. Athos, who discovered in Maximus a unique ascetic, a wonder-working intercessor and ‘an angel in the flesh.’ He died in the Lord in the year 1320 A.D.” (January 13)

“**Blessed Theodore, Fool for Christ from Novgorod...** Prior to his death, Theodore ran up and down the streets shouting to everyone: ‘Farewell, I am traveling far away!’ He died in the year 1392 A.D.” (January 19)

“**Blessed Nikolai, Fool for Christ from Pskov...** Nicholas lived as a ‘fool for Christ’ in the town of Pskov during the reign of Tsar Ivan the Terrible and died

almost contemporaries, Theodore, the spiritual mentor and abbot of Obradovic, opposed the approach taken by the spiritual mentor of Onuphrius. For a completely different reason and with all his might, Theodore restrained the young Obradovic from emulating such insane and fanatical “saints” and their ideas.

⁵⁵ Milana Vujaklije, *Lexicon of Strange Words and Expressions*, 378.

on February 28, 1576 A.D... Rare fearlessness was possessed by the fools for Christ's sake. Blessed Nikolai ran through the streets of Pskov pretending to be insane." (February 28)

"The Venerable Thomas Fool for Christ... Whenever he was in the city of Antioch on business for the monastery, Thomas always **pretended insanity** for the sake of Christ." (April 24)

"The Venerable Isidora Fool for Christ... Isidora lived in the fourth century and was a nun in a convent in Tabennisi. **She pretended insanity** in order to conceal her virtues and her mortification. Isidora performed the most menial tasks, **fed on the leftovers on the dishes**, served all and everyone, and was despised by all and everyone. At that time, an angel of God revealed to the great ascetic Pitirim about Isidora's secret. Pitirim came to the convent and when he saw Isidora he bowed down to the ground before her. And so, she also bowed to him. Then the sisters informed Pitirim that she was insane. 'All of you are insane,' replied Pitirim, 'and this one is greater before the Lord than I and all of you; I only pray that God will render to me that which is intended for her at the Dreadful Judgment!' Then the sisters became ashamed and begged both Pitirim and Isidora for forgiveness. From then on, everyone began to show respect for Isidora. And she, to escape the honors of men, fled the convent to a place unknown and died about the year 365 A.D." (May 10)

"The Blessed Isidore Fool for Christ... Isidore was a German by descent. Having come to Rostov, he fell in love with the Orthodox Faith and, not only became a communicant of the Orthodox Church, but **assumed the difficult life of asceticism** as a 'Fool for Christ.' He **spent nights in a hut made of branches which he had built in a swamp.**" (May 14) ⁵⁶

However, the "fools" do not deserve the epithet of saints merely because of the folly they demonstrated. Some of them performed incredible deeds that are not only not unbecoming of saints but also quite improper, even to the extent that the Apostle Paul said such deeds "should not even be mentioned among the saints". Here are some examples of the immorality of these foolish "saints", taken from Eastern Orthodox literature, including crucial moments during the "triumph of Orthodoxy" and in times of crisis "committing violations of spiritual harmony":

"Many fools in Russia walked in the nude, but the hagiographies ('lives of the saints'), tried to cover their nudity with the blessing of the church. Reading the lives of the Greek fool Simeon, we see that the paradox of 'foolishness for Christ's sake' includes not only the rational but also the moral aspect of personality. Here Christian holiness is covered up not only by the appearance of **insanity, but also immorality. The saints perform all kinds of objectionable behavior: fomenting disorder in the church temple, eating sausages on Good Friday, dancing with prostitutes, destroy goods in the market, etc.** Russian

⁵⁶ Bishop Nikolai, *The Prologue of Okhrid*, cited on <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/prolog.cgi>

hagiographers imitate the pattern of the lives of St. Andrew, in which not one element of immorality is present. Only the folk tales of Basil the Blessed give scant hints of the chronicle that reveal **even the slightest affectation of immorality among Russian fools**. The chronicles of their lives categorically cover up this other side of their mortification with the stereotypical phrase: ‘shameless wrongdoer.’ ‘Fool’ and ‘shameless wrongdoer’ (from the old Russian word ‘unashamed one’) are epithets used in the old Russia to mock the two sides of ‘normal’ human nature: rationality and morality.”⁵⁷

Dositej Obradovic lived in the monastery at Hopovo and read all of *The Lives of the Saints* several times. He was well informed about the lives of the fools. Obradovic write this commentary concerning these “fools for the sake of Christ”:

“Reading about some of the things done by these fools for Christ’s sake (let everyone notice: a fool for Christ's sake) brought me into temptation: what sort of fool would it take for someone not to consider them a saint but rather truly a fool? The Turks at this point would be considered Orthodox also, for anyone who is deprived of his sanity is revered as a saint, but how could a true Christian fall into this deception, especially having in his hand the wise and healthy evangelical doctrine? It is impossible to accept such an insane person as a saint. **But, apparently, someone tricked them to misinterpret the words of the Apostle Paul: ‘We are fools for Christ’s sake.’**⁵⁸ And where do we read that the Apostle did penance and sanctified himself by running through the alley naked,⁵⁹ which is the twisted and crazy interpretation that they make of his words? But what stupid and illogical superstition they teach!”⁶⁰

Gifted with great wisdom, Obradovic considered this Eastern Orthodox teaching - that the mentally ill (which today would be sent for treatment in psychiatric hospitals) are to be declared saints – to be stupid and illogical superstition. His position fully agrees with the teachings of Scripture. As evidence for this claim, of course, let us quote the “controversial” words of the Apostle Paul and then derive a detailed explanation of their meaning:

⁵⁷ Georgi Fedotov, *Saints of Old Rus*, (Logos: Belgrade, 2005) 171-2. Author’s emphasis.

⁵⁸ However, Orthodox teachers believe that the practice of “foolishness for Christ’s sake” arose from a proper interpretation of Scripture. Bishop Nikolai tells the story of the beatified Alexander, Bishop of Comana: “Alexander said that he was a Greek philosopher and that he enjoyed great honor and position but that he rejected all, humbled himself and **made himself to be a "fool for the sake of Christ" from the time when he had read and understood Holy Scripture.**” (*The Prologue of Okhrid*, August 12. Cited on <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/prolog.cgi> . Author’s emphasis.)

⁵⁹ Obradovic probably was thinking of the blessed Maximus: “Blessed Maxim, ‘fool for Christ’, walked about **unclad** throughout the streets of Moscow in winter. In response to the advice of men that he dress and protect himself from the cold, Maxim was known to respond: ‘Yes, it is bitterly cold, but Paradise is sweet!’” (Bishop Nikolai, *The Prologue of Okhrid*, May 2, cited on <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/prolog.cgi> . Author’s emphasis.)

⁶⁰ Obradovic, 127. Author’s emphasis.

*“For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. **We are fools for Christ’s sake**, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now... **Therefore I urge you, imitate me.**”⁶¹*

By studying the lives of the Orthodox saintly fools, especially a person who does not know the teaching of the Scriptures very well, one could draw some parallels between Paul’s words and the lives of the saints. However, on the other hand, someone well acquainted with the New Testament texts and the lives of the Apostles could never even think that Paul and others were fools (e.g. silly and deluded) like those of later centuries.

According to that which Christ and the apostles clearly taught and recorded in the Bible, as we have repeated on many occasions, it appears that many people reject the gospel message, because of their disbelief in the basic truth of the Christian faith. Indeed, only a minority of people received the apostolic preaching with a positive response. In contrast, the crowds mostly remained on the sidelines and mocked their sermons. Here is one example of such reactions to the Gospel as the Apostles preached:

*“And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some **mocked**, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter.’”⁶²*

Exactly because most people who heard the apostles preach the gospel would ridicule it and consider the idea of salvation through faith in a man who was crucified as a criminal to be impossible, Paul said:

*“For the message of the cross is **foolishness** to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks **foolishness**, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”⁶³*

All those who became Christians, accepting what is “crazy” in the eyes of the world, were regarded by non-believers and madmen, e.g. fools (for Christ’s sake), especially because they have rejected their traditional ancestral religion in favor of a Jewish sect, as the world viewed it. Without a doubt, of course, it does not mean that the first century Christians behaved like lunatics and the mentally ill as was the case with many Orthodox saints, even though the early Christians were regarded as outcasts by society because of their faith in Jesus.

⁶¹ 1 Corinthians 4:9-13, 16. Author’s emphasis.

⁶² Acts 17:32. Author’s emphasis.

⁶³ 1 Corinthians 1:18, 23-24. Author’s emphasis.

However, there is a deeper meaning to Paul's words when he refers to himself and the other apostles as "fools for Christ's sake." In fact, some of the believers in Corinth, where Paul addressed this letter, were not exactly the most disciplined. In fact, they lived contrary to Christian moral principles. Some went beyond Christian teaching and adapted their previous way of thinking, as it prevailed in the Greek world, to the church. Transferring these divisions to the church, the Corinthian believers created several factions:

*"For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.'"*⁶⁴

So, while some believers supported Paul's ministry, others felt that he was not worthy of respect. Other believers valued other teachers more highly, such as Apollos (probably because of his eloquence, see Acts. 18:24-28 and 2 Corinthians 10:10-11, 11:6) and Peter (because he was always the first among the twelve apostles - as opposed to Paul that during Jesus' earthly ministry was not his disciple). There existed a fourth group which participated in the rift and called themselves the followers of Christ. Although the situation in such a divided young church was difficult, many other problems existed as a result of carnality (lack of spirituality) of the local believers. Some of them were proud of their material wealth and belittled the poor (11:20-22), others refused to contribute toward the ministries of the apostles, i.e., their missionary service (9:1-15), others still visited and out of habit worshiped idols in temples (8:10-12), brothers sued each other and brought their litigation before the secular courts (6:1-9), and so on. Despite all the problems Paul addressed in his church, he decided to be deferential and humble, even though he could have reprimanded such behavior more harshly. Following Christ's example, Paul renounced himself and his rights (by not responding to the insults and disrespect of the Corinthians) and patiently endured and taught these immature converts in this Greek city. The Lord said, namely:

*"But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, 'You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. **And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all.** For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'"*⁶⁵

In obeying this commandment of their Lord, Christ's apostles not only received scorn and rejection from ungodly unbelieving people. They also received similar reactions, such as perceived insults and gossip, from believers around whom they have worked hard and faithfully. This apostolic sacrifice was such that, because of their service to the church (and all believers respectively), the apostles often suffered from hunger, thirst, and a variety of dangers (Acts 20:31-32 Corinthians 11:23-29).

⁶⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:11-12.

⁶⁵ Mark 10:42-45. Author's emphasis.

Uttering these words of reproach (this is the text from 1 Corinthians 4:6-16) and referring to himself and other ministers of the gospel that people belittled, insulted, and persecuted – even though they all suffered despite having no selfish interests or desire for revenge - Paul says that they are “fools for Christ's sake.” Simply put, Paul uses this phrase to describe the humiliation from both believers and godless people to which the apostles submitted. The fact was that the apostles received no material or visible benefits, nor did they have any form of greed nor did any of them give up his work in spite of having such heavy work from the ministry. On the contrary, these apostles obeyed the Lord and did something that no one else would ever do – they made fools of themselves in the eyes of various scoffers by serving them in humility.

But not one single word of Paul's writing endorses the “lunacy” that we encounter in the lives of those who allegedly imitated the apostles' examples in their “foolishness”. Further proof exists in another moment in Paul's life that he never intended to teach anything resembling the Eastern Orthodox conception of “foolishness” in a literal sense. Let us analyze one moment in Paul's life when he had a very significant opportunity to act as a true “fool”. During his imprisonment in Palestine under the rule of the Roman governors Felix and Festus, the Apostle had an opportunity to present his defense. Thus, before Festus and King Herod Agrippa, Paul presented the Lord's words and the content of his heavenly vision upon which Paul's ministry was based. Paul repeated the commandment given to him by the Lord before them:

“But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.” ‘Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come - that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.’”⁶⁶

Let us pay attention to the reaction by Festus to Paul's presentation:

*“Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, ‘Paul, **you are beside yourself!** Much learning is **driving you mad!**’”⁶⁷*

However, is it possible that Paul was a maniac? According to this conclusion by Festus, which he uttered aloud before all those present, this apostle was an insane person who

⁶⁶ Acts 26:16-23.

⁶⁷ Acts 26:24. Author's emphasis.

went out of his mind - and as such amounts to its listeners - rationalists different fantasies of celestial sightings, aliens, fairies and the like. But Paul was far from being crazy! Here is how to read his response:

*“But he said, ‘I am not mad, most noble Festus, but **speak the words of truth and reason**. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner.’”*⁶⁸

As we saw from these Scriptural texts, at times Christ’s apostles met with ridicule and labeled as crazy because they preached the true gospel truth that was incomprehensible to the pagan Greeks and Romans. However, the apostles’ teachings in no way resembled the modern Orthodox practice of “fools for Christ’s sake”. The apostles always taught in words that were true and reasonable. Not one of the apostles or their successors never acted insane before crowds, ate leftovers off the ground, or ran naked through the streets in order to hide his “deep commitment” to God. This madness of “fools” truly has nothing to do with Jesus Christ and His grave and holy doctrine which should be followed by His disciples throughout the centuries.⁶⁹

As we have examined the details of *The Lives of the Saints* and given them the only evaluation possible from the perspective of Holy Scripture, let us briefly reflect on a few examples from the “eternal Serbian gospel.” May the reader carefully consider them and arrive at a logical conclusion without further commentary. The following examples demonstrate the nonsense of numerous other examples of saints that simply could not fit in this chapter. All these examples can prove very harmful to the minds of young people in Serbia by encouraging them to embark on a lifestyle of self-destruction - without much opportunity to return to a fellowship of people with sound minds.

Deeds of the Saints as Examples for Serbian Youth

⁶⁸ Acts 26:25-26. Author’s emphasis.

⁶⁹ The only example of “foolishness” [madness] among biblical figures, with which we can compare the foolishness of the Orthodox saints, comes from David, son of Jesse, before he became king over Israel. In fact, when he was running away from King Saul in order to preserve his life, David committed a few sins. First, he deceived Ahimelech the priest by saying that King Saul ordered David to take out of the sanctuary the bread that only priests were allowed to eat. Then, David fled to Achish, the king of the Philistines, in Gath. When David realized that he made a poor decision by fleeing into the arms of the enemy against whose hero Goliath he had fought and killed, he did the following: *“Now David took these words to heart, and was very much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. So he changed his behavior before them, **pretended madness in their hands**, scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard. Then Achish said to his servants, ‘**Look, you see the man is insane**. Why have you brought him to me? Have I need of **madmen**, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?’”* (1 Samuel 21:12-15. Author’s emphasis.) It is obvious that God’s Word in no way praises David’s behavior. It clearly indicates that David son of Jesse was committing sin.

Therefore, the behavior of the “fools for Christ’s sake” through the centuries also merits a different assessment according to the Bible. The “foolishness” of these people, as revealed by the exaltation and declaration as “courageous saints” by the entire Orthodox Church, demonstrates how much this Church has deviated far from the original teachings of Christ spread by the apostles in the first century, and which evangelical Christians still diligently follow today .

“The Venerable John the Hermit... John was the son of Juliana, a Christian woman in Armenia. **As a young boy, he left his mother** and withdrew into the wilderness... Afterwards, the young John distanced himself and withdrew into solitude. **He lowered himself into a dry well** where he spent ten years in fasting, prayer and vigils... After ten years of difficult mortification in the well, St. John presented himself to the Lord.”⁷⁰(March 29)

“The Venerable John of the Old Caves... Finally, he settled in the Caves of Chariton, where he gave himself to rigorous asceticism spending days and years in fasting, prayer, vigils, continuously meditating on death, and teaching himself humility.”⁷¹(April 19)

“The Venerable Nilus of Stolbensk... He dug a grave for himself close to his cell and wept over it every day.”⁷²

“The Venerable Athanasius Recluse of the Monastery of the Kiev Caves... This holy man died after a long life of asceticism and was bathed, clothed and prepared for burial by his brethren. Athanasius lay dead for two days and suddenly came to life. When they came to bury him, they found him sitting up and crying. After that, he closed himself in his cell and lived for twelve more years on bread and water, not speaking a word to anyone.”⁷³ (December 2)⁷⁴

Our sarcastic tour of *The Lives of the Saints* naturally would be incomplete without addressing our beautiful Serbian daughters - girls and women – who think they should aspire to become like the ancient Orthodox saints who deceive themselves in thinking that they truly please God:

“Many of them (e.g., the saints - the monks and nuns) believed that physical obstacles hindered their purity of devotion. **The virgin Silvia refused to wash any body part except for her fingers. In a convent of 130 nuns, no one ever bathed nor washed their feet.** However, towards the end of the fourth century the monks were given access to water. The abbot Abbe Alexander despised the decadence and with nostalgia recalled the time when priests ‘never ever washed their faces.’”⁷⁵

⁷⁰ For a Serbian teenager to become “Venerable” like John and deserve to be ranked among the Orthodox saints, according to this example, he should leave his parents and live in a waterless well, where he will eventually die young.

⁷¹ In the event such wells cannot be found, a cave would substitute as a place where one can continuously think about his future funeral.

⁷² It does not hurt someone to dig their own grave in advance and grieve for his own death on a daily basis.

⁷³ If it happens that after a long time of mourning and separation from the soul, and then in some strange way, you rise again, you ought to be shut up in a cell, never come out nor talk to anyone until the end of life, and engage in constantly crying and sitting up.

⁷⁴ Bishop Nikolai cited from <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/prolog.cgi> .

⁷⁵ Durant, Vol. 1, 80. Author’s emphasis.

Still a Useful Guide for Serbian Security

In addition to showing to youth models for living, *The Lives* also instruct the Serbian nation on how to treat criminals. The Serbian Orthodox Church alleges that Serbia is a nation that was baptized one thousand years ago, which means that all Serbs are Christians. By their logic, it is certain that the saints are examples by whom everyone should lead their lives. By the way, our fiscal budget would be greatly relieved because it would not have to pay the salaries of the police – for they would have no reason to exist:

“Returning once from the path to his cell, Macarius the Great saw a certain thief removing his belongings from his cell and loading them onto a donkey. Macarius **did not say anything to him** but rather began to assist him to comfortably load all the things on the donkey, saying to himself, ‘*For we brought nothing into the world.*’ (I Timothy 6:7). Another elder, when the thieves stole everything from his cell, looked around, noticed that they did not take a bundle with money which lay hidden somewhere, and immediately took this bundle, called out to the thieves and **gave that to them also**. Again, a third elder came across thieves as they were robbing his cell and cried out to them: ‘Hurry, hurry before the brothers come that they may not prevent me to fulfill the commandments of Christ.’ ‘From the one who takes what is yours, do not demand it back.’ (St. Luke 6:30).”⁷⁶

Conclusion

What can we say to conclude this chapter? *The Lives of the Saints* is an established collection of very strange narratives about the bizarre behavior of people whom the Orthodox venerate as saints. Along with the great educator of the Serbs (Obradovic), I hope that such Orthodox literature and its actors can vouch for the veracity of these “saintly lives”. As we also saw, *The Lives of the Saints* abounds with many legends about the miracles of the saints and stories about events that most certainly never happened, even in spite of the claims of the Church that it is “the pillar of truth”.

Furthermore, even the Eastern Orthodox historian Eusebius Popovic admits that the saints could not possibly have performed all the miracles ascribed to them in *The Lives of the Saints*. The historian comments on the multitude of saintly miracles (resurrection from the dead, killing the dragon, healing the sick, exorcising demons, fasting for several months, visits to the “Venerable Ones” by Christ and other biblical figures, etc.).

⁷⁶ Bishop Nikolai, *The Prologue from Okhrid*, cited on <http://josephpatterson.wordpress.com/2011/01/page/2/> (secondary source: <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/prolog.htm>).

“It is impossible that the miracles attributed by the hagiographies to the saints during their lifetimes or after their death **could even have come close to what occurred in reality.**”⁷⁷

It is time to conclude this section. The next argument concerns the veneration shown by the Eastern Orthodox Church on behalf of the saints.

⁷⁷ Eusebius Popovic, *General Church History*, Vol. 1, 651. Author’s emphasis.