

Chapter 12: Veneration of the Saints

“To the Most Holy Mother of God and the saints who are venerated and praised on the Earth, may they be glorified in Heaven.”¹

*“As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I myself am also a man.’”*²

“Why should we recognize the veneration of so many saints, a practice on which Orthodoxy has not one hair to stand? Why not simply admit that such things were invented six and seven hundred years after Christ the Savior and the apostles?”³

Veneration and prayerful address to the deceased believers (saints) of the past is a very fervent and important component of the spiritual life of Orthodox Christians. According to the teaching of Orthodoxy, deceased Christians not only remain part of Christ’s body. The Orthodox Church considers deceased saints as believers capable of hearing the prayers of living believers who address them and cry out for spiritual aid. Through their response to the prayers of people living on the earth people, these deceased saints intercede with God to receive or even they themselves perform all kinds of miracles – for example, healing the sick or raising the dead to live. Objective study of this topic will reveal that Holy Scripture does not warrant the current Orthodox practice of veneration of the saints. The doctrine of the need for praying to deceased saints of the Orthodox Church is based entirely on the so-called “sacred tradition”, which the Orthodox consider as equivalent authority and a “supplement to the Scriptures.” I will repeat once again the statement of the Russian theologian Ivan Nikolin written in *Orthodox Apologetics*, which also happens to be quoted in the first chapter of this book. Here is what he wrote with regard to the origin of the practices of veneration and prayer to the saints:

“If Holy Tradition had needed the support of Holy Scripture, then many issues of religion (**veneration of the saints**, icons, prayer for the dead) **would remain without a favorable verdict.**”⁴

In this statement, Nikolin openly admits that Holy Scripture teaches nothing about the first century Christians addressing prayer for the dead, nor that these deceased saints

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

² Acts 10:25-26.

³ Obradovic, 138.

⁴ Ivan Nikolin, *Orthodox Apologetics*, 160. Author’s emphasis.

answered these prayers nor interceded to God for Him to answer prayer. Eusebius Popovic in his church history elaborates:

“In this period from 312 to 622 A.D.,⁵ the cult of angels and saints made deep inroads [into the church]. These angels and saints not only served as intercessors before God, but they also demanded honor from believers. The believers devoted temples to the memory of these saints and angels, as well as holidays. They did this in order to obtain patronage, i.e. protection, from the angels and saints in their intercession before God...”⁶

Therefore, according to the author, the cult of saints along with veneration and prayer to them made deep inroads only in the period after Constantine's proclamation of freedom to Christians. The veneration of saints began at the same time as the mass introduction of non-biblical doctrines and practices of church dogma. This Orthodox author ascribes the ascent of veneration of the saints to be absent from apostolic times until the ascent of Constantine. Until the fourth century, believers simply remembered the lives of the apostles, prophets, martyrs, and Jesus' mother Mary for their exemplary and God-fearing lives.⁷

At this point I must point out that the notion of “commemoration” of the apostles and other devoted Christians from history is very different from the idea of “addressing them for intercession and protection” and their “veneration” on the earth. It is certainly true that the Bible instructs believers in Christ to respect and imitate examples of people who lived lives holy and pleasing to God.⁸ However, the Bible never instructs the believer to contact deceased saints from past centuries nor that they could ever hear such prayer. Similar to the admissions of Orthodox author Ivan Nikolin and *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Ray Woodrow concurs that the Bible does not support the Orthodox practices of prayer to and the invocation of dead saints:

“What are the objections to such beliefs? We will let *The Catholic Encyclopedia* answer this question: ‘It is objected that the invocation of the saints and their intercession are contrary to the faith and reverence that belong only to God ... and that they cannot be proven from the Bible.’ With this statement we agree. Nowhere in Scripture does it say that lives may be blessed or have some benefit through the mediation of the dead, or because of their prayers. Instead, the Catholic doctrines concerning ‘saints’ are very similar to pagan notions about ‘gods’.”⁹

According to the same author, today's Catholics (and Orthodox), similar to followers of the ancient pagan Babylonian religion, venerated around 5,000 gods and goddesses who were believed to have once been human beings - and then were raised to a lofty position.

⁵ One can even say from the fourth century A.D. onwards – author's note.

⁶ Eusebius Popovic, *General Church History*, Vol. 1, 651.

⁷ *Ibid.*

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

⁹ Woodrow, *Babylon Mystery Religion*, 28-29.

Each month and day of the year was dedicated to a deity (similar to the saints in the church calendar). There were gods for every problem and natural phenomenon in the country.

How Does Eastern Orthodoxy Attempt to Justify Its Beliefs by Using the Bible?

Like many other beliefs that have emerged later in history and have no foundation in the Bible, Eastern Orthodoxy attempts to justify its teaching on the basis of unbiblical methods. One such method appeals to extra biblical sources such as “the Holy Fathers”. Another method involves distortions and misinterpretations of biblical texts that are adapted and quoted out of context. Responding in his book to Protestants who refuse to venerate the saints as it is done in the Eastern Orthodox Church, Lazar Milin cites several examples where the apostles called on believers to pray for each other:

“And we know that our Holy Scriptures command us to pray to God on each other’s behalf (James 5:16). The apostle Paul wrote to the Hebrews, “*Pray for us... But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.*” (Hebrews 13:18-19) It is clear that this is not a practice contrary to the Bible, but rather **it is exactly in accord with the Bible.**

Thus, when we prayerfully turn to the saints to pray for us, we not only do not commit sin, but **we actually obey Scripture.** The Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians with joy to pray for them in each of his prayers (Philippians 1:3-4). **Then why should he not pray for us if we ask him?** And the fact that God hears the prayers of the saints, this is not only common sense, but indeed it has immediate confirmation in the Scriptures. Regarding Abimelech, God promises to hear Abraham’s prayer to forgive his sins (Genesis 20:7). At the request of Abraham, God was willing to spare even Sodom and Gomorrah from judgment if only ten righteous people were found in those cities (Genesis 18:23-33). Moses’ prayer to God saved the people of Israel from God’s harsh punishment (Exodus 32:7-14). The prophet Elijah prayed to God to resurrect the deceased son of the widow at Zarephath in Sidon. God answered his prayer (1 Kings 17:17-23). Through Elijah’s prayer, God sent “fire from heaven” to accept his sacrifice at Carmel (1 Kings 18:30-38). God also answered Elijah’s request to send abundant rain after three and a half years of drought (1 Kings 17:1; 18:1-45). God says He will answer Job’s prayer on behalf of his friends, because Job is the one praying for them (Job 42:8).

In the Holy Scriptures, the New Testament shows that the apostles performed miraculous healing of people through their prayers and appeal to Christ and His power. They even resurrected the dead... The Scriptures testify to all these examples – **which contradict the teachings of the sectarians** – and make a serious argument that the prayers of the saints help those for whom they pray.”¹⁰

In parts of his discourse, Milin quotes examples from the New Testament within context. However, Milin’s implications are “debatable” as they apply only to the prayer

¹⁰ Milin, *Apologetic, Churches and Sects*, 209-210. Author’s emphasis.

of people who were living at the time. The Orthodox author in all his claims did not cite one single example from the Bible that would indicate to us that the Book of Books commands us to pray to dead apostles, or some other dead saints of the New or Old Testament. If the practice had existed in the New Testament period, it is quite certain that we would have found it in the apostolic writings. In such a case, the apostles would have commanded us to pray for the mediation, advocacy and spiritual support of those saints who would have died centuries ago: Abraham, Moses, Job, David, Daniel, Jeremiah, Isaiah and others. They would have instructed other New Testament believers in the epistles to have done this.¹¹

However, in reality, we find no such examples in the Bible. The Bible only commands believers to pray for their contemporaries – those who are currently alive even if they live physically close or far away from them. Orthodox teaching yet again goes completely contrary to Scripture, which states that *“For the living know that they will die; **But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten... Nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun.**”*¹² These verses certainly indicate that the deceased (regardless of whether they are in the heavenly paradise or where sinful souls reside) have absolutely no contact nor familiarity with the situation and activities of those living on earth. Yet, Orthodoxy appeals to them in a vain effort to rationalize its practice of venerating the dead. The High Priest Marinkovic mentions a couple of them:

“For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him.” (Luke 20:38)

¹¹ It is precisely this kind of Orthodox belief based on the Old Testament apocryphal texts that Archpriest Paul O’Callaghan describes in his book *An Eastern Orthodox Response to Evangelical Claims*. Specifically, he accuses Protestants of suppressing books that contain descriptions of prayers to dead saints by people living on the earth. He states: “Scripture clearly testifies that certain people were very powerful intercessors before God (Job 42:8; James 5:16-18). Such power is not limited to this life. **The apocryphal Second Book of Maccabees, which Protestants exclude from the canon of the Bible, gives the example of the deceased prophet Jeremiah who continually prays for the people of Israel (2 Maccabees 15:14).**” (Publisher: Bookstore “Your First”: Pancevo, Belgrade. Serbia, 1997. vol. pp. 14.) Author’s emphasis.

However, the Orthodox cite yet another example in support of the practice of praying and venerating the dead. Yet again, the Orthodox cannot cite an example from either the Old or New Testament. This second example comes from the apocryphal Book of 2 Maccabees, chapter 15. This passage describes the conflicts between the armed forces of Nicanor, the governor of Judea, and the insurgent forces of Judas Maccabees. Judas tried to encourage his troops and prepare them for battle by recounting a recent dream of his. The Orthodox interpret this text to mean that “the Bible” teaches that the prophet Jeremiah, even though he had died centuries before, still interceded before God for the people of Israel:

“He armed each of them not so much with confidence in shields and spears as with the inspiration of brave words, **and he cheered them** all by relating **a dream, a sort of vision**, which was worthy of belief. What he saw was this: Onias, who had been high priest, a noble and good man, of modest bearing and gentle manner, one who spoke fittingly and had been trained from childhood in all that belongs to excellence, was praying with outstretched hands for the whole body of the Jews. Then likewise **a man appeared**, distinguished by his gray hair and dignity, and of marvelous majesty and authority. And Onias spoke, saying, ‘This is a man who loves the brethren and prays much for the people and the holy city, Jeremiah, the prophet of God.’ Jeremiah stretched out his right hand and gave to Judas a golden sword...” *The Bible The Christian Gift*, (Zagreb, 1983). 2 Maccabees 15:11-15. Author’s emphasis.

¹² Ecclesiastes 9:5-6.

*‘Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.’ (Ecclesiastes 12:7)”*¹³

According to Orthodox apologists, such verses are a sort of proof that the dead are not really dead but alive. By this logic, the dead can hear and answers the prayers of Orthodox believers. However, what Orthodox theologians omit the fact that the contexts of these examples have nothing at all to do with praying to dead saints (and before the living God). Here is the entire context of Luke 20:28:

*“Then some of the Sadducees, **who deny that there is a resurrection**, came to Him and asked Him, saying: ‘Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man’s brother dies, having a wife, and he dies without children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. And the first took a wife, and died without children. And the second took her as wife, and he died childless. Then the third took her, and in like manner the seven also; and they left no children, and died. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife does she become? For all seven had her as wife.’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage **that the dead are raised**, when he called the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ **For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him.**”*¹⁴

So, this passage in its context describes Christ’s answer to the religious party called the Sadducees, a group who denied any possibility of a future resurrection. In fact, this religious group only recognized the Pentateuch to be God’s Word, while they rejected the other books of the Old Testament. The Sadducees seemed to believe that nowhere in the Pentateuch teaches any possibility of the future resurrection of the dead. It is for this reason that Christ cites the Pentateuch text of Exodus 3:6) which taught that the Old Testament heroes of faith as being alive, not dead, before God. By implication, Jesus infers that the deceased Old Testament heroes will also have a bodily resurrection.¹⁵ Regardless, the Lord had at His disposal more direct allusions to resurrection in other books of the Old Testament:

*“For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”*¹⁶

¹³ *The Greatest Teacher*, 92.

¹⁴ Luke 20:27-38. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁵ Read also Matthew 22:23-33 (especially verses 23 and 31) and Mark 12:18-27 (especially verses 18 and 26a).

¹⁶ Psalm 16:10.

*“For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”*¹⁷

*“Your dead shall live; Together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; For your dew is like the dew of herbs, And the earth shall cast out the dead.”*¹⁸

*“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.”*¹⁹

However, these Old Testament quotations would not have convinced the Sadducees of the possibility of a future resurrection, because they did not believe these other Old Testament books were inspired by God. Thus, it was necessary for the Lord to use texts from the books that they accepted. After He presented this evidence on the future resurrection of the dead from the Pentateuch, the Sadducees were silenced and could not offer any more excuses for their lack of faith. Jesus’s wise answer put them to shame.

So we find that the passage in Luke 20:38 has no connection whatsoever with what the Orthodox allege as proof that mandates us to pray to dead saints. This passage neither has anything to do with using dead saints for intercession in prayer. Jesus is only referring here to the future resurrection of the dead. Yet theologians of the Eastern Orthodox Church cite this Scripture to propagate their beliefs, in spite of the lack of evidence anywhere in the passage.

Orthodox apologist Lazar Milin misinterprets yet another Scripture with a very obvious meaning. He so skillfully distorts the verse so far beyond its context that even professional propagandists would be envious. Milin attempts to rationalize his beliefs through misusing Scriptures to attack evangelical Christians:

“For we have already cited the arguments sectarians make against veneration of the saints: examples mentioned in the Bible about saints while they were alive on earth, but not after their death. They are dead and therefore neither could hear nor would have been able to bring our prayers and intercede before God.

It is true that the holy people discussed in this chapter have departed this world. Yet, we must not forget the Savior’s words: *‘For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him.’* (Matthew 22:32) And that His words refer to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, people who were not alive on the earth when these words were pronounced, for *‘whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.’* (Romans 14:8) **We have a testimony that souls that have died a physical death remember us** from the Holy Epistle of the Apostle Peter writes Christian:

¹⁷ Job 19:25-27.

¹⁸ Isaiah 26:19.

¹⁹ Daniel 12:2.

'Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease.' (2 Peter 1:15)

According to the Epistle, Peter wrote these words before his death. But when he knows his death is near, Peter promises to 'ensure' that the believers will remember the teaching he gave them after his death. How could Peter make such a promise if he were nowhere to be found after his death?"²⁰

As we have seen, Milin twists the biblical texts with deception in order to defend his claims. Let us examine the entire context of 2 Peter 1:12-15:

*"For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. Yes, I think it is right, **as long as I am in this tent**, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent²¹, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease."*²²

As is evident from the text, the apostle Peter states that it is good for Christians that he can encourage and instruct them in the faith so long as he remains alive (hence "as long as I am in this tent"). Peter's words written at the end of this section emphasize that he will make every effort to remind the believers of the spiritual lessons he had taught them, even to the extent that they would remember them after his death. In contrast, Milin in his apologetics implies that Peter actually said he would do this only after his death, perhaps by praying for them, personally doing wonders, visiting and teaching them in dreams and visions in their monastic dwellings in later centuries. But any competent expert on Serbian language and grammar will agree with me that Peter's words bear no connection whatsoever to Milin's conclusion.

In order to demonstrate that the Orthodox doctrine of the intercession of dead saints for those still alive on the earth is not supported by Scripture, here is one example from the Old Testament. At a time when the prophet Elijah was about to be separated from his disciple Elisha, the following conversation ensued:

*"Now Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water; and it was divided this way and that, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground. And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, 'Ask! **What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?**' Elisha said, 'Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.' So he said, 'You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so.' Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of*

²⁰ Milin, *Church and Sects*, 212. Author's emphasis.

²¹ Tent or "tabernacle" (made of perishable materials, wood, and wicker) is a type of temporary residence, like a mortal human body. Speaking of "*the tent of his body*" and "*putting it off*", the apostle refers to his impending physical death.

²² 2 Peter 1:12-15. Author's emphasis.

*fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried out, 'My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!' So he saw him no more. And he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces. He also took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan. Then he took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, and said, 'Where is the LORD God of Elijah?' And when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that; and Elisha crossed over. Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, 'The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.'"*²³

As we see from this example (the entire text shown in context, in contrast to the poorly and incorrectly cited quotes by the Orthodox), the prophet Elisha was able to ask his teacher, Elijah, specific requests and answered prayers only while Elijah was physically alive. Elijah's response implies that after his ascension into heaven, Elisha could have no hope of receiving an answer to his request for the simple reason of their physical distance. If the case of Elijah shows that one who physically ascended to heaven could no longer hear people still alive on the earth, then it is even more clearly shown to be impossible for dead saints whose bodies are in the grave or have long since decayed to hear the requests of people still alive. This example thoroughly repudiates Milin's misquoting of Jesus who addressed the Sadducees and his misinterpretation that alleges the Lord to have truly taught us to pray to the dead (and "the living God") Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. According to Milin's interpretation, it would make sense that today's Christians venerate both New and Old Testament saints (including Elijah, mentioned above as an example of a righteous man whose prayer God hears). However, the Elijah of the Scriptures denies any possibility that after his departure to heaven that he would be able to hear prayers from those alive on the earth, let alone to intercede for them before God.

The Teachings of Sacred Tradition on Veneration of the Saints

As earlier noted, Eastern Orthodox theologians resort to extracting verses out of their actual context of clear biblical revelation to rationalize Orthodox doctrines that have arisen from sacred tradition. In fact, the doctrine of saints as intercessors before God is based solely on sacred tradition: a variety of dreams and "visions" of people who lived centuries after the death of the apostles and the completion of the inspired Word of God (which, as conceded by Ivan Nikolin, gives no justification to the veneration of the saints as practiced in the Eastern Orthodox Church). At this point I would like to name a few citations that "supplement the Bible" and teach us to venerate the righteous Orthodox saints:

“As obedient children of God, the saints received great mercy from God not just for their lives on earth but also in their transition to eternal life. They were full of the Holy Spirit, who worked through their deeds wrought in the other world and the works through their relics on earth ... If all these works of God through the saints and their relics for the salvation of people in this earth were to have

²³ 2 Kings 2:8-15. Author's emphasis.

been written down, the length of such a book would exceed that of all the other books in the world.

Saints are venerated and invoked in prayer: as God's chosen ones and friends (see John 15:14-15), as God's home and branches (John 14:23), set apart as the glory of God and His powerful presence (John 17:22-24), as well as moral heroes and examples, as our older brothers and beneficial intercessors before God, as patrons, protectors, helpers, and guides in the way of salvation.

149. The saints of God are not dead but living. The Blessed Bishop Nikolai asked the Very Reverend Jovan Boskovic if he believed that the saints of God lived.

'How can I not believe that, when they have themselves appeared to me and witnessed that they are living!'

One day my popadia (priest's wife) asked me to go to Ostrog with an offering for some misfortune that had occurred in our family. I was somewhat grieved and angry. 'What should I bring?' I asked. 'Leave those dead bones in the Ostrog cave to rest in peace! It is the living to whom you ought to turn to for help!'

The day passed.

That night **I had a vision** of St. Basil. He struck me with his staff and shouted at me, full of wrath, 'I am alive, not dead as you think! And be not faithless, but believing!' In great fear I jumped from my bed and asked my wife for the offering she prepared for my pilgrimage. I immediately went to Ostrog and took the offering to St. Basil. Since then I have been firm in my belief that God's Saints are living, not dead!' (Bishop Nikolai, *Emmanuel*, 29, p.35.)

150. The saints pray to God on our behalf. During the time of the Greek king Maurice, the Arabs attacked Thessalonika and put it under siege. Great fear seized the people. A pious man named Ilustrios went at night to the Church of St. Demetrius **where the saint's body was buried** in order to pray to the holy martyr for protection of the city. At the entrance to the temple in front of him, he saw two young men. They opened the door themselves and entered the temple. When they entered the temple, one of the youth asked, 'Where is the master who lives here?' Ilustrios was surprised and answered the young man, 'What do you need, Sir?' The young men were angels and answered, 'The Lord has sent us to give you a command.' The youth in the garb of a servant appeared at the tomb of St. Demetrius and said, "He is here", and opened the curtain that concealed the grave. Then St. Demetrius appeared just as the image shown in the icons and shined like the sun so brightly that it was impossible to look at him. The angels greeted the holy martyr, who asked them why they came. They answered that the Lord sent them to command St. Demetrius to depart the city and be with the Lord, because He wanted the city to surrender to its enemies. The holy martyr

asked the angels to bring his strong plea to the Lord to have mercy on the city and its inhabitants for whom the blood shed at Calvary still protected. **After the martyr said these words, he returned to his tomb**, and the angels became invisible. When the vision ended, Ilustrios was beside himself and fell to his knees to thank God and St. Demetrius for their concern for the city. The next day, Ilustrios told the people of the city about the vision. They cried out to God and St. Demetrius in prayer for help and salvation. And God soon heard their prayers: without a fight, the enemy lifted the siege and fled, and the people praised God and His Martyr Demetrius. (Life of St. Demetrius, 26 October).

This vision was part of God’s plan to make us believe in the power of the prayers of the saints for us before God and their protection for us from the troubles and dangers in this life.”²⁴

These are only but two examples of many similar incidents in Orthodox literature that describe the miracles of various saints and their prayerful intercession with God for the people on earth. None of this bears any resemblance, general or specific, to the teaching of the Bible, such as the “wrath” of Saint Basil of Ostrog, or the body and spirit of St. Demetrius remaining in the grave (as evidenced by the angels summoning Demetrius to leave the grave and be with the Lord, which means that he was never with the Lord after he died). Such Middle Age and New Age revelations touted by Eastern Orthodoxy “supplement” the Bible and form the foundation for its beliefs. Neither the apostles nor their successors ever taught such beliefs.

Anyone who reads the New Testament knows that the Lord Jesus Christ taught believers to pray only to God the Father and the Son with the mediation of the Holy Spirit. Here are some verses from the Gospels that speak specifically about this subject. Jesus Christ Himself said:

*“And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”*²⁵

*“And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full... In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.”*²⁶

The apostle Paul taught:

²⁴ Zhivan M. Marinkovic, *The Greatest Teacher*, 93-4. Author’s emphasis.

²⁵ John 14:13-14.

²⁶ John 16:23-24, 26-27.

*“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, **but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us** with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints **according to the will of God.**”*²⁷

Holy Scripture also emphasizes the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is our only mediator before God in any sense, and that He intercedes on our behalf:

*“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.”*²⁸

*“Who is he who condemns? It is **Christ** who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, **who also makes intercession for us.**”*²⁹

*“Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God **through Him**, since He always lives **to make intercession for them.**”*³⁰

²⁷ Romans 8:26-7. Author’s emphasis.

²⁸ 1 Timothy 2:5.

²⁹ Romans 8:34. Author’s emphasis.

³⁰ Hebrews 7:25. Author’s emphasis. Here is a response to this argument from Lazar Milin, who once again mixes up unbiblical concepts of the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of intercession of deceased saints in prayer with the Biblical command for believers to pray to God for each other on the basis of Christ’s atoning death:

“In an attempt to prove that our prayers addressed to the Mother of God and the saints violate the Scriptures, sectarians often quote the words of the Apostle Paul: ‘*For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.*’ (1 Timothy 2:5) Also refer to the words of St. John the Theologian: ‘*My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*’ (1 John 2:1) We add the words from the Epistle to the Romans (8:34): ‘*Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us*’”

Thus, according to the sectarians, the clear words of Scripture make any prayer addressing Mary and the saints to be entirely irrelevant. They have no right to serve as intermediaries between us and God. There is only one mediator, Jesus Christ, Who prays for us. Such sectarian reasoning is wrong and defies logic and the biblical point of view. From the logical point of view, it is a typical example of erroneous evidence that proves more than it should prove. **If we were to agree with the sectarians that the intercession of Christ renders prayers to the saints null and void, then such logic also would render null and void the prayers of people for their children, parents, and friends.** Yet, sectarians pray for other people. From the biblical point of view, the sectarian conclusion is also wrong because it overlooks the fact that Christ’s intercession with the Heavenly Father for us is something completely different than praying to the saints. Let the sectarians properly examine these quotations in context and see the truth we are teaching. ‘*Who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.*’ (1 Timothy 2:6) ‘*And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.*’ (1 John 2:2)” Milin, *Church and Sects*, 211-2. Author’s emphasis.

Contrary to Milin’s accusation of “sectarian” heresy, the Bible clearly teaches the falsehood of prayer through dead saints as mediators as taught by sacred tradition. Specifically, Milin’s allegation that Christ’s mediation before God is distinct from the prayer intercession of dead saints (which sectarians cannot possibly understand) because Christ’s mediation is valid only in terms of his vicarious death is simply false. Scripture teaches that Christ is the sole mediator between God and believers in every sense

On the other hand, veneration for Jesus' mother Mary, the apostles, and angels, as Eastern Orthodox teaches, does not correspond to the teaching of the Gospel. Regarding honoring His own mother as "The Most Blessed One", He stated that "*they are **more blessed who hear God's word and obey it.***"³¹ The Orthodox apologist previously quoted makes mention the fact that Mary herself, in fact, uttered the prophetic words that are honored by all believers in the Eastern Orthodox churches:

"But nowhere in the Bible does it say that we must pray to Bible, so claim the sectarians. We should only pray to God.

Indeed, the Bible nowhere ever issued an explicit command that we should offer prayers to the Virgin. But this command is not necessary. It is obvious to anyone who comprehends the spiritual majesty of the Mother of God how to relate to her, **whether she is venerated as more honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious than the Seraphim without comparison**, or else she is merely 'a beautiful and pious Jew' - one among many women named 'Mary' and one of the many 'wonderful and pious Jewish women', such as her aunt Elizabeth, or Hannah, the mother of Samuel, the mother of Moses, and many other known and unknown Jewish women. After all, even without an explicit command for believers to venerate her, **we still have a profound prophecy that Mary is to be called blessed among all generations** - that is, by everyone except by the sectarians. This prophecy was uttered by the very Mother of God herself, because she clearly understood the profound event that the angel of God proclaimed to her. She sings the wonderful hymn: *'My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the humility of his maidservant. Behold, henceforth, all generations shall consider me blessed.'* (Luke 1, 46-48)"³²

Therefore, it is only the "sectarians" who do not honor Mary! In reality, the opposite is true. Evangelical Christians honor Mary very much and consider her to be a prominent example of faith and humility that should be imitated. They consider her to be blessed, exactly as she called herself in the "prophecy". However, consider that being "blessed" (to have received numerous blessings on the basis of God's unmerited favor) does not mean that she should be exalted atop the heavens and be given him glory and honor that she does not deserve. After all, the Lord Jesus called anyone blessed who is poor in spirit, mourns, is meek, hungers and thirsts for righteousness, is merciful, is pure in heart, is a peacemaker, is persecuted for righteousness, etc.³³ Those who are blessed include every single believer in all history who has been saved by Jesus Christ - they

(including both salvation and intercessory prayer, as demonstrated in texts such as 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:13, Revelation 5:9-10, and others). In contrast, Holy Scripture makes absolutely no mention that would command believers to practice intercession by dead saints. (Unless, of course, one takes the "Eastern Orthodox way" of interpreting Scripture by distorting verses out of context. Such exegesis would lead one to make absurd conclusions about what the Bible teaches, even to the extreme that "God does not exist." See Psalm 14:1, 53:1).

³¹ Luke 11:28. Author's emphasis.

³² Milin, *Church and Sects*, 207-8. Author's emphasis.

³³ See Matthew 5:3-10.

number in the hundreds of millions. Moreover, the Scriptures reveal that those who believe in the risen Christ even though they have never seen Him physically yet see Him by faith in the sight of God enjoy a greater blessing than the apostles themselves (who despite the news of Jesus' resurrection still did not believe in His resurrection).³⁴ Jesus explains this point in the Gospel of John:

*“Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.’ And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. **Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**”*³⁵

A few decades after the Resurrection, the apostle Peter praised the faith of the blessed who never had a chance to see the Lord, yet firmly believed and loved Him:

*“...Jesus Christ, **whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory...**”*³⁶

After all, God's Word in general does not allow any practice for expressing veneration by worshiping the apostles and angelic beings (which, logically, would have been considered first among the saints) in contrast with veneration of the icons of saints in Orthodox homes and church liturgies. Since the apostles did not allow people to venerate them during their earthly lives, logically, they would have forbidden such veneration after their deaths. In all the texts of the New Testament which speak of the Church, and the mutual respect of believers, the apostles taught that all Christians constitute the invisible spiritual body of Christ – of which the head is the Lord and they are the branches.

In fact, the apostle Paul stresses that the Church should show greater respect for believers who are shown little respect in their fellowships (the so-called "ordinary believers"), as opposed to those set apart for ministry (such as elders or bishops), which enjoy “respect” because of their spiritual office. Here is the reason:

*“No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. **But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.**”*³⁷

³⁴ See Mark 16:9-13; John 20:25.

³⁵ John 20:27-9. Author's emphasis.

³⁶ 1 Peter 1:7-8. Author's emphasis.

³⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:22-25. Author's emphasis.

Always stressing the fact that people with the gifts of administration and teaching others have been given those abilities only by the grace of God, the apostles refused any excessive honor and warned believers not to show it:

*“As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him **and fell down at his feet and worshiped him**. But Peter lifted him up, saying, ‘**Stand up; I myself am also a man.**’”*³⁸

*“But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out and saying, ‘Men, why are you doing these things? **We also are men with the same nature as you**, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God...’”*³⁹

The Bible teaches the same message to believers today regarding the heavenly angels. On two occasions in Revelation, the apostle John fell to his knees and bowed to the angel who had given him the revelation:

*“**And I fell at his feet to worship him**. But he said to me, ‘See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. **Worship God!**’”*⁴⁰

*“Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, ‘**See that you do not do that**. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. **Worship God.**’”*⁴¹

Even the angels themselves reveal that they are sent to serve and help the Christians on the earth, not to receive ministry and worship from God’s servants:

*“Are they not all ministering spirits **sent forth to minister** for those who will inherit salvation?”*⁴²

After all, the apostle Paul warned that the worship and ministry to angels would lead to false, unchristian religion:

*“Let no one cheat you of your reward, **taking delight in false humility and worship of angels**, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the **Head**, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.”*⁴³

³⁸ Acts 10:25-6. Author’s emphasis.

³⁹ Acts 14:14-5. Author’s emphasis.

⁴⁰ Revelation 19:10. Author’s emphasis.

⁴¹ Revelation 22:8-9. Author’s emphasis.

⁴² Hebrews 1:14. Author’s emphasis.

⁴³ Colossians 2:18-9. Author’s emphasis.

Evangelical Christians, in accordance with biblical revelation, show respect to all the apostles and other men and women of God throughout history. Such people are respected for the lessons in piety based on their various experiences in life with the Lord. Yet, Christians reject what Scriptures forbid: to pray for their intercession before God and prayerful mediation of saints long deceased on behalf of the living based on the Orthodox church calendar.

Veneration of Holy Remains

In addition to addressing prayers to people deceased recently and long ago, the Eastern Orthodox churches also advocate the veneration, bowing, and kissing of human remains and various antique items said to have been owned by holy people. Orthodoxy explains the veneration of holy relics in this manner:

“The friends of God during their lives on earth were the temples of the Holy Spirit. And though their souls were removed to the Kingdom of Heaven, **their holy bodies remained in the world uncorrupted and wonder-working.** As the gracious power of God acted through the saints during their lives, so His grace also works through their bodies after their deaths. That grace and power is manifested in healings of numerous sick people and in other ways. Thus, the relics of saints and martyrs serve as instruments through which God manifests his power and grace.

‘Like the vessel that absorbs the flavor of the perfume stored within it for a long time, such is the body of the Christian where the permanent dwelling of Christ’s power has permeated in its fullest power. And since the power of Christ is incorruptible, it is only natural that this power in those who belong to Christ (see 2 Corinthians 12:9 and Galatians 5:24) **also makes their bodies incorruptible.** As the power of Christ is omnipotent, the essence of this power enables the dead body to work wonders when it pleases God.’ (Quote from Filaret, the Metropolitan of Moscow)

Because the relics of saints and martyrs of numerous are sources of miraculous healings, and thus demonstrate the power of God who acts through them, the Holy Church made a decree in the Seventh Ecumenical Council (year 787) to venerate the holy remains: **‘Our Lord Jesus Christ gave us the remains of saints as means of salvation** which in many ways pour out blessings on the powerless. Therefore, whoever dares to dishonor the bodies of a martyr (or saint)... let him be deprived of Holy Communion.’⁴⁴

The above text contains several inaccuracies and theological disagreements with the teachings of Scripture. First, Orthodoxy alleges that only some people (called “friends of God”) could be the temples of the Holy Spirit. For that reason, they allege that after his death, their dead bodies become incorruptible and wonder-working. In contrast, the

⁴⁴ Marinkovic, 125. Author’s emphasis.

apostle Paul writes in one of his epistles that absolutely all believers, justified and saved by faith in Christ, comprise the temples (more accurately, the temple) of the Holy Spirit:

*“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”*⁴⁵

*“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?”*⁴⁶

Paul the apostle explains that any believer who has in faith received Christ's teachings has the Holy Spirit inside himself. The Scriptures teach that the audience of this epistle was the Corinthians, a group whom Paul considered as small children (in terms of spiritual maturity). If you read the whole epistle, you will see that believers in Corinth were no special spiritual elitists or “friends of God”. In fact, some of them even suffered physical illnesses due to the great sin practiced by some. Paul is addressing this very group of Corinthian Christians. He admonishes them that they are the temple of the Holy Spirit. (As a consequence, they should abstain from sins that grieve the Spirit.)

Therefore, since Scripture clearly says that all believers belong to the Church of God, not just some special “saints,” it logically follows, according to Orthodoxy’s teaching, that the dead bodies of every single Christian throughout history should be incorruptible and wonder-working. Only the bodies of non-Christians should be subject to decay. However, as we will see, the Holy Scripture never ever teaches that a believer’s body after his death remains incorruptible. ((However, there could exist a few exception situations in which either natural conditions fossilize a dead body or else deliberate man-made means are employed to preserve a corpse.) The psalmist David, whom the Scriptures testify to be a true man of God,⁴⁷ wrote the following words:

*“For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”*⁴⁸

Although it might seem at first that David refers to his own body in this verse, the New Testament teaches us that he actually is describing a prophecy of the resurrection of Christ. The Apostle Peter in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the church, taught this point:

“For David says concerning Him:

*‘I foresaw the LORD always before my face,
For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.
Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad;
Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope.*

⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 3:16.

⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 6:19.

⁴⁷ See 2 Samuel 5:10; 1 Kings 9:4, 11:4; Psalms 89:3, 20-9, 35-7.

⁴⁸ Psalm 16:10.

***For You will not leave my soul in Hades,
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.
You have made known to me the ways of life;
You will make me full of joy in Your presence.***

*Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.”*⁴⁹

Indeed, David’s own physical body was subject to decay and eventually returned to dust:

*“And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: ‘I will give you the sure mercies of David.’ Therefore He also says in another Psalm: ‘You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.’ **For David**, after he had served his own generation **by the will of God, fell asleep**, was buried with his fathers, **and saw corruption**; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption.”*⁵⁰

The above words of the Apostle Paul are more than clear. According to what the Bible teaches, the only Person resurrected from the dead (Jesus Christ) is not subject to decay, while the body of King David did see corruption as did the bodies of all other deceased persons. There exists not one single word in either the Old or New Testaments that supports the doctrine of incorruptible and miraculous corpses as the Eastern Orthodox Church teaches. Nonetheless, the Orthodox theologians cite one text from the Old Testament which, in their opinion, supports their view that the Bible teaches about sacred relics. The high priest Marinkovic interprets the text:

“The oldest records showing the effect of God’s miraculous power operating through the remains of saints is derived from the Old Testament, almost 900 years before Christ. Elijah, the great Old Testament prophet and worker of miracle, had his body taken to Heaven by God (2 Kings 2). Elisha, his disciple, inherited his prophetic office and also worked miracles during his life and after he died. When Elisha died, he was buried in the ground. One year after he died, some other man died, and people came to bury his body. Suddenly, a company of Moabite enemies appeared from nowhere. The men who bore the dead man’s body were frightened. Since they had no time to dig another grave, they cast the body of the dead man into the tomb of the prophet Elisha. ‘...*When the man was*

⁴⁹ Acts 2:25-32. Author’s emphasis.

⁵⁰ Acts 13:34-7. Author’s emphasis. Baptist theologian Miroslav Zivkovic explains these verses even more clearly in his translation from the original Greek language: “*For when David had served God's will for his generation, died, and was buried next to his fathers, **his body decayed. But He whom God resurrected from the dead did not succumb to decay.***” *Acts of the Apostles: The Bible for Daily Use* (International Bible Society of Yugoslavia: Novi Sad, 2000).

let down and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet.’ (2 Kings 13:20-1)

This is not the only instance of God’s working miraculously through the relics of the Old Testament. **Probably** there were other examples, **but they did not record them.** But the New Testament shows many examples of how God’s grace worked through the remains of saints and martyrs. Such examples are more common and numerous.”⁵¹

However, this passage that defends what Orthodoxy teaches actually contradicts it. First of all, the text is clear that people who came to bury the dead came without any intention to worship the sacred remains of Elisha (unlike the custom in Orthodoxy). Secondly, the Bible tells us that these were the prophet's bones (which means that his flesh did see corruption and only a skeleton remained - the same situation with all other people), not an incorruptible body. Thirdly, this is the only instance recorded in the entire Bible which shows that God performed a miracle in this manner. In fact, the uniqueness of this miracle contradicts the claim by Orthodoxy that such examples abounded in Scripture (because they were not recorded). Finally, after this miracle done at Elisha’s gravesite, no one ever unearthed the bones and brought them to a special shrine where people came to worship them in organized pilgrimages and witnessed further miracles. God performed miracles in the lives of other Old Testament figures. However, no record exists that their dead bodies remained incorruptible (including that of Elisha), nor that their “remains” worked miracles.

Moreover, any scholar of the Scriptures knows full well that the Lord of the Old Testament (and the New) would never allow or approve the veneration and worship of corpses and bones of dead people, especially those who were His saints. The New Testament Scriptures never mention a single word about Christians in the first century digging up the graves in order to search for dead bodies and other incorruptible items to venerate them.

The Scriptures of the New Testament record the death of several “saints”, such as John the Baptist (Mark 6:17-29), the first deacon Stephen (Acts. 7:57 - 8:2), and the apostle James, son of Zebedee and brother of John (Acts. 12:1-2). However, this part of God's Word gives no indication that anyone had any interest in their “holy bodies”, since believer were aware of God's determination that the dead corpse decays and eventually disintegrates:

“Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return.”⁵²

Indeed, the New Testament Scriptures confirm this principle. They record that the disciples of John the Baptist took his body and buried it. They also mention that

⁵¹ Marinkovic, 126. Author’s emphasis.

⁵² Genesis 3:19.

Christians buried the body of Stephen the first deacon.⁵³ Let us not neglect that the Scriptures mentioned that both men were filled with the Holy Spirit (for instance, John the Baptist was filled even in the womb of his mother Elizabeth before his birth)⁵⁴ and that they both performed mighty miracles during their lives (in the case of Stephen).⁵⁵

Nonetheless, that proved of no “assistance” in making their bodies “incorruptible” (in contradiction to the Orthodox teaching that their dead bodies would never have decayed). Their friends simply buried the corpses in the ground without any interest in what would happen to them later. Stephen’s remains did not work any miracles, for if that were the case, the evangelist Luke, the author of Acts, would have neglected to inform Christians of their wonder-working power and, thus, yet another proof of the effect of God’s power within Christianity, at that time, a new and unpopular religion.

Dositej Obradovic noticed very clearly all the Biblical teachings that undermined the legitimacy for the incorruptible miraculous remains of the Saints. Obradovic noted that it would have been logical that above anyone else, the remains of Biblical personages (friends of God and above all the apostles) remain incorruptible and miraculous:

“Where are the bodies of the Apostles and St. Nicholas? Time and air have left nothing of them behind, so nothing shall come to pass. If God had wanted them to remain incorruptible, he could have doused the fire or violated time. But go and speak to those who have died, whatever is there.”⁵⁶

Eusebius Popovic reveals in his *Church History* that veneration for remains of the saints began to take place only in the period during and after the Emperor Constantine. Although Christians in Smyrna commemorated and occasionally visited the grave of the suffering martyr Bishop Polycarp (middle of the second century) – an instance not even remotely similar to the expression of veneration for “holy bodies” in modern Orthodoxy - veneration for the remains appeared more frequently and strengthened its appeal 150 years later:

“Veneration for the mortal remains or relics of saints and martyrs **won greater popularity in this period. By the time of Constantine the Great**, they laid the bones of the apostles and other saints in the temples which he had erected. **It seemed that it became a general custom to exhume saints' bones from gravesites and to inter them inside churches.** This custom eventually led to the rules of the Church that no church could exist without it having been dedicated to some saint. As a consequence, people searched for saintly remains with excessive zeal. **Some Christians even turned over each grave, which was unknown to them, looking for the bones of martyrs**, and took them from there to the walls or altar of the church...”⁵⁷

⁵³ See Matthew 4:12 and Acts 8:2.

⁵⁴ See Luke 1:15 and Acts 6:3, 5, 10.

⁵⁵ See Acts 6:8.

⁵⁶ Obradovic, 594.

⁵⁷ Popovic, *General Church History*, Volume 1, 654. Author’s emphasis.

Eusebius Popovic also informs us of the development of many abuses and unbiblical practices of the veneration of holy remains in the historical church (and centuries afterward):

“And greedy liars plundered the remains and sold the bones that they had stolen from the cemetery. In order to regulate other areas including saints' bones, both church and state laws were used to prosecute such criminals, **mostly itinerant monks.**”⁵⁸

However, this practice introduced by greedy liars, “itinerant monks”, persisted for centuries after the period described by the historian. Dositej Obradovic testified that in Serbia and Greece in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such practices still flourished. Many Orthodox monks wandered through villages and towns to peddle the remains and relics of very dubious origin. These itinerant monks deceived and materially exploited the religiously gullible and uninformed people:

“Right you say! We have here just like they do in Greece those Orthodox bishops and priests who groan and complain about the abuses that occur. They particularly bemoan **the wicked and perverse practices** of monks wandering in towns, roads, and homes as they peddle their boxes filled with bones of false hands, feet, backs, and entire corpses, along with a host of teeth. **God knew they had cherry picked those things that they are!** They say that those bones and teeth belong to such and such a saint; **they obligate people to kiss them and to donate alms.**”⁵⁹

Can the Dead Truly Be Incorruptible?

Scripture teaches us to expect as the norm for dead corpses to decompose due to the influence of air, moisture, microorganisms and other natural factors. However, many examples of intact remains found all over the world show that decomposition does not always occur. As cited earlier, some of the causes of incorruptibility stem from natural factors, while for some there is no clear explanation. Incorruptibility of human bodies can partially be achieved through techniques of embalming and mummification. In ancient Egypt, they would freeze bodies at very low temperatures, expose them to dry weather and air to retard decay, and processed or dipped the body into specific chemicals. On the other hand, there are wonderful examples of conservation of whole human body or any limb despite the presence of natural factors that should lead to their disintegration. Although I will mention examples of natural explanations for the incorruptibility of some dead bodies, we pay most attention to those cases that cannot be rationally explained and which the religious world considers as “God's miracles.”

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* Author's emphasis.

⁵⁹ Obradovic, 142-3. Author's emphasis.

It is important to recognize that intact remains of deceased people do not only include the departed saints of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Just as often, incorruptible remains also occur within the Roman Catholic Church among priests, monks, nuns, and ordinary laymen. What is more interesting, incorruptible relics can be found among dead atheists as well as among members of other, non-Christian religions.

(a) Natural Explanations for Lack of Decay in Bodily Remains

Two Western researchers of incorruptibility, Herbert Thurston and Joan Cruz, discovered several places in the world where this phenomenon occurs under very natural circumstances. In 1954, a natural mummy was found in the mountains of Chile. The mummy was the body of a boy. Five hundred years ago, he was condemned to death by freezing in a cave as a human sacrifice to the gods. Well-preserved bodies dating back to the Iron Age can still be found in the Irish, Scottish, and Danish wetlands. Due to various natural processes, their color has not significantly changed nor have they decomposed. Also, quite repulsive and fascinating pictures inside catacombs in Palermo or Malta show that a dead body can remain intact long after death. In fact, on the walls of these catacombs, in a manner like in a horror movie, hang the bodies of Capuchin friars still dressed in priest's clothes. We read the following from a travelogue of the nineteenth century:

“They still wear their frocks... The skin and muscles are as dry as cod. Although some of them died more than two hundred and fifty years ago, their bodies have not decomposed.”⁶⁰

Likewise, dead bodies buried in secure coffins in the cathedral in Bremen remained well preserved. By coincidence, it was discovered that these corpses never decomposed. They also found the intact remains of a worker killed during an earlier renovation of the cathedral. In 1901, it was recorded that they found the intact corpse of an infant that wore a faded wristband marked with the year of his death 1679 at St. Michan's Church in Dublin. Theory has it that extremely dry air contributed toward the preservation of the corpse.⁶¹ At a cemetery in Kiev, people look at intact corpses in open coffins protected by glass enclosures. This phenomenon is explained by the strong natural radiation along with some of the conditions that slow natural decay.

It follows that the deceased corpse that has not decayed might arrive at a state called “saponification”. Such a phenomenon occurs only under certain conditions and is not scientifically explainable. Namely, for some reason, bodies that are buried do not suffer exposure to the air, yet they might turn into a waxy substance like soap. This waxy substance is called “adipocere” (from the Latin words “adeps” meaning “fat” and

⁶⁰ *The Strength and Power of Faith*, (Zalozhba Mladinska Books: Ljubljana and Zagreb, 1991), 16.

⁶¹ Translator's note: intact bodies of Crusaders also can be found at St. Michan's in Dublin. (Source: <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:B5qq4TZQet4J:www.goireland.com/dublin/saint-michans-church-attraction-tourist-attractions-id11289.htm+Saint+Michan%27s+Dublin+infant+body&cd=8&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&source=www.google.com>)

“pocere” meaning wax). In 1785 Michel Thouret ordered the closure of the Cemetery of the Holy Innocents. His justification included the finding that many of the corpses turned into “adipoceri”. In general, the bodies had not decomposed but rather turned into a “goeey white mess” in his words. Yet, after five years, the eyes and hair still remained well preserved.

Saponification, although unusual, is not uncommon. Visitors to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC can see with their own eyes a preserved corpse of a soldier who died in the American Civil War that has undergone saponification. The incorruptible corpse of the Roman Catholic saint St. Marie-Euphrasie Pelletier (died in 1868) is another example of “saponification”. Thirty five years after her death, her coffin was opened. One doctor who saw the corpse said that her mouth was slightly agape and her eyes closed with thick eyelashes. When they took the clothes off the body, he observed that her body was covered with skin that had many similarities with that of mummies. Beneath the skin was hardened fat. The newspaper *News of the World* in the edition of May 8, 1977 reported the case of a deceased two year old girl named Nadia Mattei, who had died in 1965. Twelve years later, her mother in a dream saw her deceased daughter, who told her to exhume the body from the grave. After having overcome various legal hurdles, the mother carried out the exhumation. When they removed the little corpse, they found it had not decayed one bit.⁶²

In addition to these examples of incorruptibility, which stem from completely natural factors, the next section of the chapter will describe other examples of remains of people who lived in different periods of history. For the Eastern and Western churches ascribe many wonder-working qualities, aromas, and healing powers with these “incorruptible remains”.

(b) Intact Human Remains Preserved Supernaturally

The beginning of this chapter starts with a lengthy article from the magazine *St. Lazar the Prince* which describes one of the many miracles that occur in the Orthodox world and its relation to the actual preservation and incorruptibility of saints’ remains in Eastern Orthodoxy. The article discusses the remains of St. Alexander Svirskiy, who died in the sixteenth century:⁶³

“From the time when the remains of the Venerable Alexander Svirskiy were returned to his native earth, there they received many letters from various bishops of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. These letters informed of their petitions to obtain a part of the holy man’s remains. With the blessing of Vladimir, Metropolitan of St. Petersburg and Ladoga, the abbot of the monastery, Fr. Lukian (Kutsenko) unearthed parts of the remains. Just when he exhumed the first remnant, Fr. Lukian was shocked by what he saw. He had good reason to be surprised.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Translator’s note: see http://serafim.com.ru/site/nstr_130.html for details and pictures of Alexander’s remains.

‘I had expected to see flat and moldy tissue. Instead I saw from the cut I made with a knife under the layer **of wax-colored skin, there was white porous and soft tissue.**’

The abbot continued. ‘At the anatomical museum of the War Medicine Academy, they showed me dried-up human flesh, which was displayed on a human leg. Capillaries and large vascular bundles were preserved in fleshly strands that resembled twisted ropes. The color of the dried-out skin of the leg was yellow both on the surface and within. The tissue beneath the skin of the Venerable Alexander radically differed from that which we saw in the museum. Both the color and the structure of his remains amazed us by its whiteness, lightness, and looseness.’

The nun Leonida (Safonova), a PhD in biology and histology, participated in the search for the remains:

‘So here is how we can explain the preservation of the body of the saint Aleksander, including his lip, nose, hands, and feet, things which have stumped the experts. During the process of mummification, when they dried out the muscular and connective tissues located under the layer of epidermis, they ended up preserving the skeleton...

A similar result could never be attained by the methods of embalming known to us. During the process of embalming, the tissues contract and turn dark. But in this situation, we find lightness, almost as white as snow, and also inside the superficial layer of epidermis. Such differentiated technique of embalming is unknown to human minds and hands.’

Discussions with specialists (such as histologists and pathologists) revealed that they consider the saint’s remains to be an extraordinary phenomenon. It can be said that the condition of the flesh of the Venerable Alexander – his holy remains – can be ranked outside of the known laws of development and degeneration (decay) of tissue in the human body. The oldest resident of the War Medicine Academy, the anatomist and PhD M. V. Tvardovskaya, articulated her assessment of the extraordinary preservation of the remains in this manner: ‘In all my years of my work, I have never seen anything else like it.’ Radiologist E.R. Borisov (resident of SMES) who participated in the research on the remains of St. Joasafa (of Belgorod) also considers the preservation of St. Alexander’s remains to be unique. He suggested that this situation ‘will attract interest from science.’ Not only was St. Alexander’s physical appearance in life preserved, but also the skin on his face – not dried out and tight, but totally flexible and elastic; his skin color is light with yellow-amber hue.

It is not surprising that the remains of St. Alexander (exclusively) during ‘the campaign to exhume remains’ in 1919 were dubbed ‘a wax doll’. This negative,

deceptive, in its own way, attestation was together with the involuntary characteristic of an involuntary characteristic of the brilliant preservation of the skin tissues in the face.

B. N. Balin, the head dentist of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, the director of the department of facial surgery and dentistry, professor, and officer of medical services, drew his conclusion about the podium on which the remains of St. Alexander Svirskiy are laid: ‘Utterly unique preservation of soft tissue in the face and near the teeth: forehead, nose, cheeks, gums, which are recorded in the known testimonies about the exclusively skillful preservation of the remains of several saints compared to the mummification of the bodies of laypeople.’ So these remains have unique preservation and gave the possibility to conduct iconographic research similar to that in 1641, the moment when the remains of the first saint were obtained and which was performed by our forefathers. It must be noted that the piece of white flesh was seen from the very beginning of the study and now is visible on the exposed foot of the Venerable One shed cuticles. **The foot of the Venerable One emits oil with a smell that from the day they received the remains was always present in the temple. That smell attracted bees. The ‘visits’ of the bees to the oil-emitting remains of the Venerable One have been captured on video. Many pilgrims have also seen it.**⁶⁴

“The Venerable Alexander was born June 15, 1448 on the memorial day for the prophet Amos. He was named in honor of the prophet. His parents, Stefan and Vassa, were peasants living in the Ladoga region in the village of Mandera, which was on the banks of the Oyata, a tributary of the river Svira. From his childhood years, Amos, late and sober, distinguished himself from his peers. He fled from games, laughter, and bad words. He never worried his mother. At the age of 19, when he learned of his parents intentions to marry him off, Amos secretly fled to Valaam.

In 1508, the Venerable Alexander witnessed an appearance of the Living Trinity – Three Men, clouded in bright, white clothing and covered with Heavenly glory. The Venerable One received a command to build a church and found a monastery. When he asked in whose name he should build the church, the Lord answered: ‘Beloved, as you see the One speaking with you in Three Persons, in the same way build up the church in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, the Three in One. I leave you peace, and peace I will give you.’ This incident is the only one in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church of the appearance of the Divine Trinity.

The place for the church was shown to the Venerable One by the Angel who crossed the place three times and confirmed the vision to him in a vision. In that

⁶⁴ Translator’s note: translated from <http://vera.mipt.ru/chudo/aleksandr.html> . Author’s emphasis. Author’s source: *Holy Prince Lazarus*, 8th Year, Vol. 1-2, (Prizren: 2000), 29-30.

same year, he built a wooden church. In 1526, he built a stone church of the Living Trinity. The Venerable One entered the brotherhood, received a frock, and became an abbot. When he became an abbot, the Venerable Alexander became even more humble – he walked in rags, slept on the bare floor, and worked together with everyone. One time, when they ran out of firewood and the steward asked the abbot to send one of the servants who was not busy to get it. The Venerable One answered: ‘I am not busy’ and went to chop wood.

At the end of the life, the Venerable Alexander came up with the thought to build the Church of the Protective All-Holy Mother of God. One evening, after the performance of a standing hymn to the Mother of God, the Venerable One sat down to rest in the cell and suddenly told his cell-mate Athanasius: ‘Child, keep watch and be alert, because this very hour will bring a miraculous and terrible visitation.’ At the entrance of the cell where the elder hurried, a bright light shined upon him and spread throughout the whole monastery, and the Venerable One saw over the foundation of the Protection Church a figure sitting on the altar like on a throne. It was the Immaculate Virgin with Child being attended by a multitude of Angelic hosts. The Venerable One fell because he could not endure the light, but the Virgin strengthened him and blessed the monastery.

Before his end, the Venerable Alexander called the brotherhood and commanded them: ‘Tie up the legs of my sinful body with a rope and throw it into a swamp. Dig up some moss and cover my legs with it.’ But since the brothers could not agree amongst themselves, the Venerable One ordered them not to bury him in the monastery, but in the wilderness section of the Church of the Transformation of the Lord. The Venerable Alexander died at the age of 85 on August 30, 1533. **In 1641 during the reconstruction of the Church of Transformation, they found his uncorrupted remains.** Fifteen experts recognized them to be those of the Venerable Alexander Svirskiy, who was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church.”⁶⁵

During the reign of the Nemanjic dynasty in medieval Serbia, there lived one of the most unusual monks – a hermit of Serbian descent. His name was Peter of Korisha, whose remains were considered miraculous and wonder-working, and then his followers who paid him homage dismembered the body and spread the remains all over the place. This saint, according to popular belief, lived during the time of King Dushan whom he knew personally and who, after Peter's death, built a monastery over St. Peter's remains.

After the death of his parents, Peter divided all his assets with the monastery. Together with his sister, they went on a pilgrimage. He was tonsured in the church of St. Petra in Unjemir by an elder monk. To hide themselves from relatives and friends, the brother and sister fled and took refuge in the church of St. Peter in Altina (near Djakovica). Then they later went to the outskirts of Prizren, in the “wilderness” near the village of Korisa. On one occasion, while his sister slept, St. Peter ran away from her and settled in the rocky caves in the area:

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Author's emphasis.

“His sister cried and asked for her brother, whom she could no longer see. She died as a recluse in the wilderness... On leaving his sister, Peter climbed high into the mountains near the village of Korisha, east of Prizren, and found a cave in a cliff. Here he lived for the rest of his long life in that complete solitude that he had for so long desired, hidden from the sight of men. In freezing winter cold and burning summer heat, he continued his spiritual struggles as if he were an angel, living on wild plants and acorns. He sometimes was fed only by a pious neighbor who brought some bread. He slept very little and sat on a rock.”⁶⁶

The life of this saint also claims that he waged a great struggle with demons (with heads like bears and wild boars), fasted for 40 days, was aided by “the Archangel Michael” and fought against the devil, and so on. Here is his biographer’s account of St. Peter’s death and what occurred afterward:

“Shortly after his death he became blessed: his remains **gave off blessed myrrh and healing power**, which attracted a large number of pilgrims. According to Theodosius the Hagiorite, the write of this saint’s life, they built a church over his grave and venerated the remains. **But the remains of his head and many body parts had already been taken away.**”⁶⁷

Herbert Thurston lived at the end of the 19th century and was the first historian in the West to research this phenomenon. He postulated that there are six symptoms of imperishable bodies that do not have to all occur simultaneously. These symptoms include: the body emerges with a particular familiar smell, it lacks the stiffness of a typical corpse, it shows no signs of decay, blood continues to flow long after the body’s death, warmth remains in the dead body, and, even in some cases, movements occur that cannot be explained by muscle jerks. It also often occurs that these incorruptible remains appear in dreams and direct living people to dig up these “holy remains”. A special type of oil often oozes out from the numerous bones and remains of saints of both the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic saints. One such example is the body of St. Walpurga, who died in 779.

An interesting example comes from the exhumed body of St. Maria Anna Ladroni who died in 1624 in Madrid. One hundred and seven years after her death, clergy and prominent experts thoroughly reviewed her life and death. This is what they wrote in her official biography:

“Eleven of the finest and most famous professors of surgery and medicine of Madrid took part in the exhumation and examination of the sacred body of the deceased. Some brought instruments from their bags and started to cut deeply into her skin. Others opened up and examined her chest, while another searched the abdominal cavity. The rest carried out all kinds of tests, even the smallest

⁶⁶ Vasilij Markovic, *Orthodox Monasticism and Monasteries in Medieval Serbia*, 112-3. Translator’s note: see also <http://www.kosovo.net/stpeter.html>.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 114. Author’s emphasis.

opening through which it could be a means to instill conservation. Every piece of her innocent body was carefully examined. The internal organs, bowels and skin were as a whole, firm, moist and elastic. **The liquid** coming out of her body not only preserved the exterior of the body, but every single internal organ. The deeper they examined the body, the stronger they smelled **a special odor.**"⁶⁸

Some rather unusual examples of other saints in the Roman Catholic Church include St. Charbel, St. Catherine Bologna, and St. San Pacifico Severin. Their corpses were buried without coffins, but nevertheless their bodies have not even begun to decompose. The clothing of St. Teresa of Avila has utterly decayed, yet her body remains intact. This is also the case with the remains of St. Catherine of Siena. When they exhumed the body of St. Catherine Laboure in 1933, 56 years after her interment, they found that the wooden coffin had corroded significantly, yet the corpse had no trace of decay.

The remains of many Catholic saints, whose bodies had not decayed after death, also display yet another unexplained phenomenon. This phenomenon of the "stigma" involves the alleged "supernatural" appearance of wounds on the hands, legs, and ribs. These stigmata also result in the outflow of blood in places similar to those inflicted on Christ during His crucifixion on the cross. 217 years after the death of St. Catherine of Siena in 1597, they exhumed her body from the grave, and carefully examined the body. Her feet and hands were cut off from the body and venerated as sacred remains because of their lack of corruption and visible "stigmata", e.g., "Christ's wounds" that she had born while she was still alive. Three times a year, visitors to the Cathedral of Mantua can view the stigmata on the remains of the Blessed Osanna of Mantua (died in 1505). In fact, the stigmata became more visible after her death than when she was alive.

With regard to the phenomenon of the emanation of myrrh from the blessed remains, we have other examples in addition to those of St. Walpurga in the 8th Century, St. Peter of Korisa in the 14th Century, and St. Alexander Svirskiy in the 16th Century. Other examples include St. Charbel in the Makhoulf monastery of hermits of St. Maroun in Annaya, Lebanon. This man died in 1898 and was buried without a coffin. For weeks, some unusual lights were displayed on his grave. Forty five days after St. Charbel's death, the abbot of the monastery ordered the body of the deceased to be removed from the graveyard. Although the long rains made the tomb a quagmire, no visible changes were observed in the remains. Then they washed, dressed, and laid the dead body in a new wooden coffin, which was set on a bed in the chapel of the monastery. At that time, another miracle occurred. An oily liquid flowed from the pores of his skin. The scent of flesh blood flowed. It became so intense that they had to redress the body of the deceased twice a week. Each part of the clothing soaked in the bloody oil was ascribed to have healing powers. The body of St. Charbel underwent the same procedure frequently until 1927, when it was placed in a zinc coffin enclosed in wood. Many people witnessed it being housed inside the walls of the monastery. 23 years later in 1950, pilgrims claimed to see liquid dripping from the walls and reported it to church authorities. The coffin of the saint's body was opened in front of medical professionals and church leaders. The zinc inside the coffin had rusted, and the clothes

⁶⁸ *The Strength and Power of Faith*, 11. Author's emphasis.

that clung tightly to the corpse were soaked in liquid. Yet, the corpse remained solid and very well preserved. Since that time, his casket is opened twice a year. Sometimes the remains can be found immersed in eight inches of oily fluid that they drain out and use for the miraculous healing of various diseases.⁶⁹

The religious world takes great pains to justify their faith. They appeal to a wide variety of wonders to convince us that God is very gracious to them and shows their faith to belong to the only true God, Church, or religion. Clearly, members of the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches assure us that their religious organizations are the “one and true church” precisely because of the numerous miracles that the saints work for them “in the name of God”.

What is interesting is that the Eastern Orthodox ignore the numerous miracles of Catholic saints and vice versa. They assure themselves that only their “faith” is truly inspired by God.

What is more interesting is that such incorruptible remains of “saints” are also found in the worlds of Islam and Buddhism. Yet, few Orthodox or Catholics are interested in the claims of these religions.⁷⁰

Here is how the wise Serbian educator gave a commentary in his own, nationalistic way in an attempt to explain the existence of incorruptible remains of saints. Although the evangelical Christian cannot fully agree with Obradovic’s assertion that all incorruptible bodies have actually gone through the process of mummification, for reasons to be addressed at the end of this chapter, I still consider that the last sentence of his commentary conforms one hundred percent in line with the spirit of biblical teaching. Indeed, we know that the first century Christians, as proved earlier, did not ascribe miraculous power to remains of the saints, that is, the bodies of deceased believers and apostles, nor did they venerate Biblical personages whose remains did decay. Thus, then there is no room to believe that God created saintly corpses to be incorruptible and miracle-working centuries later:

“Regarding the veneration of the sacred remains and their odor - here is the misrepresentation. So: ‘Those who have ears, let them hear.’ And today in Egyptian tombs they find embalmed, imperishable bodies three thousand years old: total odor and oily substances from some rags... Now the English today

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷⁰ The most famous Chan (i.e., Zen) Patriarch Huineng died in 712 A.D. He was buried in the Kuo-en temple in the province of Kwantung. After the fall of the Sung Dynasty in 1276, Mongolian troops opened his grave to verify claims that his body had not decayed. These claims were true. 564 years after his death, the body showed no signs of decay. Organs like the heart and liver were completely intact. On the other hand, in Nigeria in 1980, an insurrection by supporters of a heretical Muslim movement led by self-proclaimed prophet Mohammad Marwa Maitatsine occurred. This prophet was killed during an armed conflict with orthodox Muslims. A few weeks after his body was removed from the country and laid on ice at a city morgue, news spread far and wide throughout the city about the prophet’s uncorrupted body. See: *The Strength and Power of Religion*, 14-15.

purchase such mummies with gold coins. **Such was a terrible time when Christians began to venerate the remains of the saints with their miraculous powers.** When Egypt was under the authority of the Greek rulers, all had their mummies, or else they would have needed to buy one. Many of the bodies of Christians were embalmed, but they were not as sophisticated as the ancient Egyptians. **A smart Christian might ask: where did they preserve the true bodies of the apostles? What will they search for, what will they write about next?"**⁷¹

Veneration of Saintly Relics

Besides the veneration of holy remains, Eastern Orthodoxy also practices the veneration, devotion, and kissing of holy relics. High Priest Marinkovic explains these practices:

“Relics include both remains and objects which belonged to the friends of God during their lives and served them. The grace of God which operated upon the saints during their lives also worked through their relics as it was pleasing and appropriate to God.”⁷²

According to Eastern Orthodoxy, the existence of holy relics and their miraculous properties is affirmed in the New Testament. Eastern Orthodoxy considers the garment worn by the Lord Jesus Christ to be the first relic.⁷³ A woman who suffered 12 years from constant bleeding touched Jesus’ garment and was healed, even though doctors were unable to help her (Mark 5:25-34). Eastern Orthodoxy believes this garment has been preserved to this day and is located in the German city of Trier. According to Orthodoxy’s claim, the Empress Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine, discovered the garment and gave it to the church for safekeeping. Even to this day, Orthodox pilgrims come and worship the garment in expectation of numerous miracles and healings. Parts of clothing worn by the holy apostles are also considered holy relics. Marinkovic elaborates:

“The beneficial power of God worked through the clothing of the Holy Apostles. *‘Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.’* So testifies the holy Evangelist Luke, the companion of Apostle Paul who witnessed all of this (Acts 19:11-12).”⁷⁴

So, according to the theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Scriptures not only confirm that sacred and miraculous relics existed in apostolic times, but that some of them still existed and contained the very same power which could help anyone in need. Consequentially, sacred and miraculous relics are looked upon with reverence, including

⁷¹ Obradovic, *Collected Works*, 657-8. Author’s emphasis.

⁷² *The Greatest Teacher*, 127.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

the relics and items that belonged to a number of saints later in history who also performed miracles during their lives. But before saying anything more about the relics which have been venerated for centuries in Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, let us examine briefly these previous examples. First, here is a word about Christ's wonder-working garment.

As any careful reader of the New Testament recognizes, the case of healing through Jesus' garment as written in Mark 5 (with parallel texts in Matthew 9 and Luke 8) is a unique example of healing in the Bible. Here is the full context of the passage:

*“Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment. For she said, ‘**If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well.**’ Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction. And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone **out of Him**, turned around in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched My clothes?’ But His disciples said to Him, ‘You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, ‘Who touched Me?’” And He looked around to see her who had done this thing. But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. And He said to her, ‘**Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction.**’”⁷⁵*

As is evident from the above text, this ailing and anguished woman had great faith in the Lord Jesus that He could heal the pain in her body. Like the Roman centurion, who sent friends to ask Jesus to heal his servant, she did not consider herself worthy to be under the same roof as the Lord. Just as the centurion believed that Jesus's one word was ample to work the miraculous healing of his servant, so the woman considered touching His garment with similar faith. Like the Roman who did not feel worthy to talk personally with the Lord, a faith confessed by Jesus Himself that He could not find anywhere in all of Israel, so the woman did not want her complaints of hemophilia to bother Christ on His way. The Holy Scriptures note that on this occasion, many people surrounded Jesus. He was nudged and touched, but no one had such faith to be freed from disease. Proving that nothing can be hidden from Him, the Lord stopped and asked who the person that by faith touched Him was.

It is very important to note that the text says that the healing power came from Jesus Christ Himself, and not from his garment, as if it itself were miraculous. This fact is displayed by another fact that no one before or after the event ever paid close attention to Jesus' garment with any particular reverence. Neither the holy apostles after the Ascension of the Lord nor Christians in the church of the first century ever bothered to preserve His garment, which shows that they never considered it as an object of reverence or healing diseases. Ironically, this garment is “discovered” during a time of the emergence of many superstitions and pagan practices within the church during and after the time of Emperor Constantine.

⁷⁵ Mark 5:25-34. Author's emphasis.

Regarding sweaty handkerchiefs and aprons brought to the Apostle Paul for healing illnesses and exorcising demons, one thing is abundantly clear. At the time of the initial spread of Christianity, God in apostolic times performed miracles in different ways. He did this to confirm that the people proclaiming the Gospel were telling the truth. Even before the miracles wrought by Paul's rags, many sick people were healed when Peter's shadow fell on them as he walked by.

However, despite the great miracles wrought by Christ's Apostles, many situations occurred when some close friends of the apostles of Christ became very sick and that the apostles were either unable or unwilling to even try to heal them. Examples include Epaphroditus, who was so ill that his life was in danger, and Trophimus, a fellow worker who became ill and whom Paul left behind (without healing him) in Miletus.⁷⁶ If the "holy relics" of Paul could have been useful, then surely he would have used them to heal the illnesses of his colleagues. The wave of healings of people who had not believed Christ and the apostles (as described in the Gospels and Acts) was temporary and intended to confirm the divine power operating in this new religious group of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. In contrast, the Bible teaches that we now live in a completely different time with regard to healing and recovery of sick Christians. James explains in his epistle:

*"Is anyone among you sick? **Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.**"*⁷⁷

So, James does not recommend that sick Christians go on pilgrimage to visit the miraculous relics of the apostles and saints. Neither does he advise us to call upon some healer or miracle worker. Rather, he tells sick Christians to turn to their church elders! As explained earlier in the chapter on the sacraments, these church officials pray over the sick person and anoint him with oil. According to His will, God will give an answer. The Apostle James gives Christians further counsel:

*"...pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."*⁷⁸

However, regarding the question of whether or not Holy Scripture commands us to venerate relics of the past (and today), as is practiced within Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, it would be useful to present some facts that will demonstrate the opposition of such practice to God's will.

Eastern Orthodox church historian Eusebius Popovic informs us of the origin and veneration of one of the most important relics - the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified:

⁷⁶ See Philippians 2:25-30 and 2 Timothy 4:20.

⁷⁷ James 5:14-5. Author's emphasis.

⁷⁸ James 5:16b.

“The first reason for the cross on which Christ suffered was the general opinion that it was located in Jerusalem. Since the middle of the fourth century, we have accounts of the location of the Cross. Primarily, in 348, Cyril of Jerusalem testifies in his catechism that the Cross is located in Jerusalem, **but that some small pieces have been scattered throughout the world.** In his letter to the Emperor Constantine in 351, Cyril vouches for the authenticity of the Cross, even though some doubted its existence, and that it was found during the time of Constantine. In 395, Ambrose, and many others after him, cited the year 326 when Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great, chartered an excavation at Calvary in order to find the Cross of Christ, and on that occasion they found three crosses. They were able to tell the difference between the Cross of the Savior, which wrought miracles, from the other two crosses. Helen divided the Cross into two parts, one that she stored in the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem, while her son kept the other part in his statue in Constantinople. **The part of the Cross kept in Jerusalem became the object of universal veneration, and many devout Christian visitors to Jerusalem broke off pieces of it, hence Cyril’s testimony that many pieces of the cross of Christ were spread throughout the Christian world.** Pious searching, storing, and veneration of the Cross in Jerusalem aroused others to seek the Lord's clothes, the clothes of His Mother, the apostles, and martyrs, and objects of martyrs and other Christians. They also searched for the bones and objects of the apostles, martyrs and saints, which people kept as relics in their churches and private homes. However, **fraud often occurred**, and the heads of the church condemned forgery, and laws of church and state were enacted. The same situation happened with the miracles and other relics of the saints as with the Cross. **Yet in the second period there is no further mention of the miraculous power of relics, unlike, for example, the case in the Eastern Orthodox Churches which makes no mention the flow of fragrant myrrh from the holy remains...** of the Martyr Demetrius, son of the proconsul of Thessalonika, during the time of Diocletian. We have in the Roman Catholic Church, the blood of the persecuted Januarius, the martyr and bishop of southern Italy. After his death, they stored his blood in two glass vials.⁷⁹ When they waved the blood in front of the saint’s head, it immediately turned from solid to liquid. Such a miracle occurs only later in Roman Catholic history.”⁸⁰

Let us reflect on this very important report on the events from the distant past. The Gospels give not even the slightest reason to believe that any of the apostles stole away the cross after Christ’s death. In fact, little attention was paid to this device for torture and execution. Nor do the apostles even tell us the location of where all the crosses were buried, certainly not at Calvary. Nonetheless, a wide variety of beliefs about the cross has spread throughout history.

⁷⁹ Translator’s note: also St. Gennaro. ‘This year the miracle took on special importance because it marked 1,700 years from **the martyrdom of San Gennaro (St. Januarius) in 305 AD... The first historical reference to the liquefaction of the martyr's blood is dated 1389.**’ See <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-religion/1487257/posts> .

⁸⁰ Popovic, *General Church History*, Vol. 1, 654-5. Author’s emphasis.

Specifically, historians including Eusebius and other anonymous sources dispute the authenticity of the cross relics. Some later historians doubt that the Empress Helena found the cross on which Christ was crucified along with the two other crosses that belonged to two robbers. According to data presented by J.G.R. Forlong, the date of 326 for Helena's visit to Jerusalem is probably historically accurate. However, the news of her finding the crosses did not occur until the year 440, that is, 114 years later.⁸¹ *Fausset's Bible Encyclopedia* says that the Jewish laws in force at the time of Jesus Christ mandated that all crosses used for crucifixion were to be destroyed by incineration.⁸² If this information is accurate, then it is certainly not true that these crosses could have been found three hundred years after Jesus' crucifixion. Simply put, the crosses would have been burned up into ashes long before Helena's visit.

Notwithstanding this issue, there is another problem with the theory that Helena actually found the crosses of Christ and the robbers. The probability of finding exactly these exact crosses that belonged to Christ and not to someone else would have been extremely low. This is because the crucifixion of political opponents of Rome and various bandits at that time in Judea was a common, almost daily occurrence. It is certain that the hill Golgotha was the place where the crucifixion had occurred. During and after the time of Christ, crosses of different shapes and dimensions were used to execute hundreds of people. In particular, there was a mass crucifixion, not only at Golgotha, but also throughout Jerusalem. Thousands were executed forty years after Jesus' crucifixion in the history of the famous "Judean War" and the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman army. The famous Jewish historian Flavius Josephus describes the plight of a multitude of starving victims being crucified:

“And when they were going to be taken, they were forced to defend themselves for fear of being punished; as after they had fought, they thought it too late to make any supplications for mercy; so they were first whipped, and then tormented with all sorts of tortures, before they died, and were then **crucified before the wall of the city**. This miserable procedure made Titus greatly to pity them, while they caught every day five hundred Jews; nay, some days they caught more: yet it did not appear to be safe for him to let those that were taken by force go their way, and to set a guard over so many he saw would be to make such as great deal them useless to him. The main reason why he did not forbid that **cruelty** was this: he hoped the Jews might perhaps yield at that sight, out of fear lest they themselves might afterwards be liable to the same cruel treatment. **So the soldiers, out of the wrath and hatred they bore the Jews, nailed those they caught, one after one way, and another after another, to the crosses, by**

⁸¹J.G.R. Forlong, *Encyclopedia of Religions*, Vol. 1 (University Press: New Hyde Park, NY, 1964), 494, cited in <http://www.scribd.com/doc/29617415/Babylon-Mystery-Religion-by-Ralph-Woodrow-1981> Ralph Woodrow, *Babylon Mystery Religion* (1981), 59.

⁸²A.R. Fausset, *Bible Cyclopedia, Critical and Expository*, (Scranton Co.: Hartford, CT, 1902), 145, cited in cited in <http://www.scribd.com/doc/29617415/Babylon-Mystery-Religion-by-Ralph-Woodrow-1981> Ralph Woodrow, *Babylon Mystery Religion* (1981), 59.

way of jest, when their multitude was so great, that room was wanting for the crosses, and crosses wanting for the bodies.”⁸³

Thus, we see that in Jerusalem during and after the time of Christ, numerous crucifixions occurred, particularly around 70 A.D. When one considers that virtually any available wood had to be used for making crosses, plus the fact that the plethora of these crosses around Jerusalem would have been like a forest, then it seems quite implausible that out of so many of these crosses that Helena could have truly found exactly where Jesus was crucified.

Additionally, the legends of the discovery of the cross of Christ describe the nails which pierced Christ's hands and were sent to the Emperor Constantine, who took one as a wedge fastened to his helmet and another for the reins of his horse. This was done, as alleged by many "holy fathers" and transmitted in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, so that the Scripture might be fulfilled as foretold in the book of Zechariah 14:20:

“In that day “HOLINESS TO THE LORD” shall be engraved on the bells of the horses.”⁸⁴

As for the medieval practice, according to Eusebius Popovic, of transporting pieces of the cross of Christ throughout the world to garner respect and veneration for them by the faithful, let us say a few words. Namely, the number of these smaller and larger particles of the “true cross of Jesus” proliferated so much throughout the world during the Middle Ages. So much so that the French reformer John Calvin once said that if they were all gathered in one place, they could form a good shipload! He implied that most of these pieces of wood were falsely and wrongly regarded as pieces of the cross of Christ! To explain the existence of large amounts of woody material ripped from the “true cross”, St. Paulinus originated the theory of "the reintegration of the cross." In other words, no matter how many pieces of it broke off, the original cross of Christ never diminished in their size.⁸⁵

What does the Bible say about such veneration for the pieces of wood alleged to come from the cross on which Christ was crucified? (In reality, historians doubt the veracity of the “discovery” of the Cross as a legend.) Would the Lord truly be pleased if his faithful were bowing down to the "Cross" and kissing it with their lips, if it actually existed? God's Word gives us more than a clear answer to this question.

The wooden cross on which Christ was crucified (we have no idea of its exact form) has already served its purpose on the day of the Lord's death on Calvary. After this grand

⁸³ Translator's note: Tr. By William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus*, (Hendrickson Publishers: Peabody, MA, 1987), 720 cited on <http://religiousstudies.uncc.edu/people/jtabor/cruc-josephus.html> . Author's emphasis.

⁸⁴ “Cross”, *Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, 523, cited in Woodrow, 59. The context of Zechariah 14:20 clearly shows that it has nothing to do with the nails on Christ's hands.

⁸⁵ Translator's note: Arthur Noble, *The Relics of Romanism*, cited on http://www.theonemediator.com/Catholicism/Doctrines%20and%20Decrees/relics_of_romanism.htm .

event of the redemption of the sins of mankind before God the Father, the rough wooden device that served this purpose was to be forgotten. Although the apostles in their epistles mentioned in several places the cross of Christ⁸⁶, not once did they ever consider the physical cross as an object that demanded veneration. The cross of Christ in the New Testament epistles is a symbolic metaphor, a picture of the exceedingly painful, shameful, and humiliating death that the Lord suffered in order to save sinners. Regarding worship, the thoughts and teachings of the apostles addressed to believers were always directed solely and only to Jesus Christ the Savior, not on a piece of wood. The apostles betrayed no reverence for the physical cross on which Christ was crucified. The evidence is that the apostles never instructed Christ's disciples to worship the physical cross. Sometimes in sermons, they simply said that Jesus was crucified "on a tree":

*“Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, **they took Him down from the tree** and laid Him in a tomb.”*⁸⁷

*“He who Himself bore our sins in His own body **on the tree**, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.”*⁸⁸

The Old Testament portrays a very good picture of Christ's cross, as the place from which Jesus saves anyone who view Him as Savior by faith. Here is what the Lord Jesus Christ Himself said about this image of the cross:

*“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”*⁸⁹

So, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so Jesus would be lifted up, so that anyone who believes in Him shall gain forgiveness of sins and eternal life. How exactly did the lifting up of the serpent exactly work? Here is the background of this event as recorded in the Old Testament:

*“And the people spoke against God and against Moses: ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.’ So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, ‘We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.’ So Moses prayed for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; **and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.**’ So Moses made*

⁸⁶ See 1 Corinthians 1:17-8; Galatians 5:11, 6:12, 14; Ephesians 2:16; Philippians 2:8, 3:18; Colossians 1:20, 2:14; Hebrews 12:2; 1 Peter 2:24.

⁸⁷ Acts 13:29. Author's emphasis.

⁸⁸ 1 Peter 2:24. Author's emphasis.

⁸⁹ 1 John 3:14-5

*a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, **if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.***”⁹⁰

This Old Testament event was a beautiful picture of salvation from eternal death and the forgiveness of sins that any person who acquires by faith, without any of their own merit or good works, and rely on the work of Him who was crucified on Golgotha. Having been poisoned by snake venom, the people of Israel had no time to do any good works in order to be saved. God's simple solution was for people to look at the serpent that Moses made of copper and placed on top of the staff. Even if someone was bitten, he could still be healed, and the snake venom would be neutralized. Consequently, the nation of Israel was saved by the copper serpent having fulfilled its purpose in the wilderness. However, several hundred years after Moses' time, after the death of Solomon and his spiritual adultery, the nation of Israel turned the bronze serpent into an idol. They worshiped and burnt incense to the bronze serpent. King Hezekiah of Judah, after he ascended the throne, destroyed the serpent, and the idolatry associated with it ceased:

*“Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea the son of Elah, king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign. He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah. **And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done. He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan.**”*⁹¹

As we can observe, the rod and the bronze serpent that had played such an important role in the past toward attracting people to salvation from certain death, and which God explicitly had ordered, in a later time had lost its significance. Moreover, people suffered adverse consequences from preserving the bronze serpent, as they began to venerate it as a kind of “holy relic” which violated the will of God.

A similar situation has occurred with the wooden cross on which the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified. The cross fully served the purpose for which it was intended. He Himself died on behalf of all the sins of the world. To this day, each individual who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins and eternal life. According to the text above (as well as the behavior of the apostles and other disciples in the New Testament, who attached no importance to the physical wooden cross from which Jesus’ body was long removed), no one gave any veneration to the cross on which our Lord was crucified even if it ever were to have been found. The cross could have served as firewood for a poor family in winter, or at best as a museum piece (though even then there was the danger that visitors would express unbiblical worship).

⁹⁰ Numbers 21:5-9. Author’s emphasis.

⁹¹ 2 Kings 18:1-4. Author’s emphasis. “Nehushtan” in Hebrew means “unclean”.

Let us consider briefly other data concerning relics as described by Orthodox historian Eusebius Popovic and others about their veneration in the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches.

Popovic reports specifically that after the news of the alleged finding of the “true cross of Jesus” (in the fourth century), many were encouraged to search for other relics, such as the robes of Jesus and the Virgin Mary, items that belonged to the apostles, and others. In the opinion of many, since such relics were fakes (although it is more likely that all these cases were fraudulent – Popovic concedes there were plenty of fake relics), they were placed in churches and private homes for worship. Since we previously found that holy remains and relics were excavated from unknown graves, being, according to Obradovic, “at that miserable time” when many people declared unknown things to be holy, when they happened to have dug up the bones of Christian torturers from previous centuries or even pagan priests and idolaters. Such details did not matter to those looking for holy and venerable remains and relics. Popovic also has very important information that the myth of the miraculous myrrh oozing from saints and relics only after “the Second Period”, that is, after the Seventh Century A.D. Prior to that time, no Christians believed in such myths. It is likely that there was deliberate fabrication to attribute miraculous powers to relics of saints that did not exist. Such was the reality of miracles. In the period after the seventh century, there is no evidence that such miracles came from God (as the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches believe and teach), and that God “had restarted the miracles” only centuries after the establishment of Christianity.

As for some other relics that have been venerated for centuries in the Roman Catholic Church (but not in Eastern Orthodoxy), their very mention assures us of their deception.

In fact, during the Middle Ages (does it bear mention that they were the Dark Ages?), sacred relics included the following:

- Christ's crown of thorns, which several churches claimed to possess;
- Vessels that carried the water that Jesus turned into wine at Cana in Galilee;
- Wine consumed at the wedding in Cana of Galilee;
- A piece of broiled fish that Peter offered to Jesus;
- The crib in which Jesus slept after his birth - which every year before Christmas is displayed in the Church of St. Mary Major's in Rome;
- Jesus's baby's clothes, which several churches claimed to possess;
- The altar on which they circumcised Jesus was laid in Jerusalem has been put on display in the church of St. James in Rome;
- Jesus' “holy prepuce” (the foreskin from the male's penis that is cut off during circumcision), owned by the monks of Charoux, who claimed that it released drops of blood as a sign of authenticity. Other churches, including a church at Coulombs, France, the Church of St. John in Rome, and the Church of Puy in Velay, disputed ownership.⁹²

⁹² It is interesting to point out the fact that Montenegro preserves the greatest veneration to the sacred hand of John the Baptist, who baptized Jesus Christ in the Jordan River. But there is one problem: namely, in the world there are about 300 different locations (churches and monasteries) that claim to possess the same “original” hand of the saint. Obviously, then, at least 299 hands are forgeries (and this is probably

Other relics included the carpenters' tools of Jesus' foster father Joseph, the bones of a donkey on which Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the Holy Grail (the cup from which Jesus drank at the Last Supper), an empty wallet of Judas Iscariot, Pilate's wash basin, the purple robe in which Jesus was dressed while his Roman soldiers taunted Him, the sponge with which he was force-fed with vinegar while hanging on the cross, the wedges on which He was nailed to the cross, locks of hair of the Virgin (some were blue, some brown, some red, and black), parts of the Virgin's dress, the Virgin's wedding ring, slippers, bathrobe, and even a bottle of milk from which Jesus drank (?!).⁹⁴ Even these relics enjoyed some degree of veneration from the Orthodox, of which Obradovic reminds us:

“We laugh at those who mocked the donkey on which Christ rode and turned it into a holiday, but who could not laugh at themselves as they celebrated the shackles⁹⁵... And if we judge by the right spirit, let us not venerate Christ's donkey, much less so should we venerate the shackles of the Apostle Peter.”⁹⁶

The Roman Catholic Church also believes that the house where the Virgin Mary lived in Nazareth was carried by the arms of angels to the Italian city of Loreto. Specifically, this house, which measures 10 x 4 meters and houses an altar to the Virgin Mary and her divine Child, is considered as the place where Jesus was conceived by “Mary, the most Holy Mother of God.” Catholics claim that this place was where Mary received the greeting from the angel and the eternal Word was made flesh. As the tradition goes, angels did not know where to put the house at first and so they left it in the city of Tersato (Trieste) in Illyria in 1291 during the papacy of Pope Nicholas IV. Three years later, under the pontificate of Pope Boniface VIII, the house was moved by angels to a forest. Subsequently, they changed its location twice a year, until they finally chose to locate it permanently in the Loreto area. More than 47 popes have expressed their respects to the Blessed Virgin, and countless letters and bulls firmly affirmed the identity of “Santa Casa di Loreto” as the Holy House of Mary of Nazareth.⁹⁷

the case with number 300 as well). Among these “original” hands of John the Baptist, probably some came from murderers of Christians throughout the centuries. However, the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics do not let such trouble hinder them from adoring and worshiping them - which only proves the high level of superstition present among them. (This information comes from the author's memory of a television show in which journalist Mira Adanja - Polak talks with Amfilokhia Radovic, Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Coast, in the late 1990's.)

⁹³ Woodrow, 59-60.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ The shackles refer to the chains of Peter's imprisonment by Herod Antipas in 44 A.D. and his miraculous deliverance by an angel. See Acts 12.

⁹⁶ Obradovic, 127.

⁹⁷ “Santa Casa di Loreto”, *Catholic Encyclopedia*, cited from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13454b.htm>.

A Spanish cathedral claimed to have found a feather allegedly lost by the angel Gabriel during a visit to the Virgin Mary in Nazareth. However, subsequent tests have proven that the beautiful feather came from some species of bird.⁹⁸

For many years, bones venerated as coming from martyrs and saints have turned out to be bones of animals. In the middle of the eighth century (before the schism between Eastern Orthodoxy and Catholicism), endless caravans arrived in Rome to peddle skulls and skeletons, which the Pope authorized for sale as relics. Graves were robbed during the night, and tombs in churches were guarded by armed guards. The historian Gregorovius said that Rome at that time resembled “a mouldering cemetery in which hyenas howled and fought as they dug greedily after corpses.”⁹⁹ When Pope Boniface IV around 609 turned the Pantheon into a Christian church, he ordered 18 cartloads full of bones from cemeteries and catacombs transferred and to be placed in the pool below the high altar of the church.¹⁰⁰ As we learn from Eusebius Popovic, no church in the Middle Ages could operate without the presence of holy remains and relics. In fact, the Seventh Ecumenical Council held in 787 in Nicaea specifically commanded their use.¹⁰¹

The unbiblical practice of venerating relics occurred in Serbia during the life of Dostiej Obradovic very similar to the practice of the Middle Ages.¹⁰² We read this fact from this excerpt of Obradovic’s letter to his Greek friend Zilotius (“Zealous One”). The abuses by Orthodox monks in Obradovic’s time did not differ in the least from the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church earlier in history:

“Not at all. They carry around some old rags and pawn them off as the garments of the Virgin, or any other saint. They carry around some iron junk and assure you that these are the chains of the Apostle Peter or Christ's nails. They can pull out thorns and deceive you that they were the crown of thorns that Christ wore. There is more. They drag around a mound of black dirt and take an oath that the dirt is mixed with the blood of the martyr so and so. **The Jews laugh and mock us by calling us worse than the old pagans, because they did not worship the bones, rags, lumps, iron and thorns.** And the Turks not only mock them, but they abhor it, swearing and spitting at the monks and their wares.

Do you really think it is reasonable for a Greek to see this farce with such passivity and disgrace, especially the bishops? But what are you going to do? **This ancient custom now has been introduced and taken root. How could**

⁹⁸ Translator’s note: see <http://karlshuker.blogspot.com/2011/02/gabriels-feather-plume-from-wing-of.html> .

⁹⁹ Translator’s note: H.B. Cotterill, *Medieval Italy during a Thousand Years (305-1313)*, (G.G. Harrap: London, 1915) cited in http://www.archive.org/stream/cu31924028279614/cu31924028279614_djvu.txt

¹⁰⁰ Translator’s note: see <http://www.romanlife-romeitaly.com/roman-pantheon.html> .

¹⁰¹ “Canon 7: Relics are to be placed in all churches: no church is to be consecrated without relics.” Translator’s note: see “The Second Council of Nicaea”, *Catholic Encyclopedia*, cited in <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11045a.htm> .

¹⁰² Translator’s note: Dositej Obradovic lived from 1742 to 1811. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dositej_Obradovi%C4%87 .

common people be left without relics and bones? Who would dare say that all the relics, bones, teeth, rags, and lumps of iron should simply be buried in the ground? Under the earth! The common people along with the monks along with their wares would be alarmed and call you a heretic! There is no other way, therefore, so may God have mercy to liberate those countries and allow logic to prevail, and so what if the result is to eliminate and eradicate superstition and abuse?"¹⁰³

Wonder-working Icons and Relics

Among the many existing icons and relics of saints, there are some that are believed to still manifest miraculous divine powers. In fact, as far as the icons themselves are concerned (of course, the ones that are consecrated), Orthodoxy considers each of them to possess miraculous powers, even if they do not show any strange signs such as flowing myrrh, shedding tears, bleeding, etc. This is because Orthodoxy believes that each icon is actually sanctified as a place of grace by the presence of the saint to whom the icon is devoted. In a sense, Orthodoxy considers this to be the greatest miracle of all. Here is what the Russian Orthodox teacher Sergey Bulgakov says about the principal miraculous quality of icons:

“In addition to purely spiritual communion with Christ, the Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit gives himself in the Divine Eucharist and allows Himself to be viewed in the form of an icon that possesses the distinct characteristic of the faithfulness and effectiveness of Christ's character. In general, **any icon can be considered to have miraculous power**, for in it dwells the power of the presence of God, even though it is not always visible. And only in the sense of peculiar sensitivity to the manifestation of this power, God only knows with which icons He will show it, thus icons are glorified as wonder-working.”¹⁰⁴

This section of the chapter will deal only with the truly “wonder-working” icons, that is, those that are alleged to manifest strange signs or healing powers. Such miraculous icons and relics, of course, show up not only within the Eastern Orthodox Church, but they also exist in the Roman Catholic Church. If one believes in such things, then it follows that God blesses both Roman Catholics and Orthodox. How ironic it is that each group believes that to them alone belongs the true original Christ, while the other group is supposed to repent, reject their heresies, and enter into canonical unity with the other group. Despite centuries of mutual exclusion and anathematizing, by East and West, the Bible offers a more accurate assessment. The miracles claimed by both churches do not come from God. Rather, they come from powers that oppose him. Before arriving at this conclusion, let us examine some examples of the various miracles alleged to occur through icons and holy relics. We will also discover that pagan idolatrous peoples shared in many similar religious phenomena.

¹⁰³ Obradovic, 143. Author's emphasis.

¹⁰⁴ Sergey Bulgakov, *Icons and Veneration*, 80. Author's emphasis.

Here are some examples of icons that wept in the Eastern Orthodox Church. Both cases occur in America and Russia.

The first example is the case of the icon of the weeping Virgin in the New York home of Pagona Catsounis in 1960. The lady was a member of the Greek Orthodox Church. As soon as she saw the tears on the face of the Mother of God, she called her home parish priest George Papadeas at the St. Paul's Greek Orthodox Church in Hempstead. This is her testimony:

“When I arrived, there was a dried tier under her left eye. Soon I clearly saw another tear in the same place. The water surprisingly had not collected at the bottom of the frame, but it had inexplicably disappeared.”¹⁰⁵

Over the next few days, about 4000 people visited her home in order to pray and see the weeping icon of the Virgin with their very own eyes. Soon, the icon was transferred to the church of Saint Paul. Suddenly, Mrs. Catsounis found yet another icon of the weeping Virgin. It belonged to her cousin Antonia Koulis, and it too, as in the first case, was an icon of the Virgin. She also informed the local priest, who took the icon and showed it to interested journalists. When they took the icon into their own hands, journalists confirmed that the miraculous image was still wet. Probes then followed, and analyses of liquid samples by a research institute found that these were not human tears. When the weeping icon was taken away for safekeeping in the church where she worshiped, Mrs. Koulis was given other icons, which also wept. The originality of these miracles was confirmed by Archbishop Iakobos (James), head of the Greek Orthodox Church in America, who also was photographed holding in his hands one of the weeping icons in the apartment of Mrs. Catsounis.¹⁰⁶

On the other hand, Russia recently conducted a detailed analysis of the substance of tears that have appeared on the icon of Our Lady of Kazan. These tears were first examined by experts at the Academy of Chemical Safety in Moscow. Working with the most perfected instrument, they recorded 34 types of proteins not found in nature. The research was then continued by a team from the Center of Forensic Medicine and Criminology of the Ministry of Defense of Russia. The initiator of this analysis was a military physician named Colonel Alexander Golovkov. Until the moment when he convinced himself that icons could shed tears, this expert did not consider himself a believer. However, when he saw the tears running down the icon in the military town of Klin, Colonel Golovkov decided to collect samples for analysis. Scientists of the research center analyzed the contents the tears from the icon of Kazan over 5 weeks. After that period, they concluded that particles of human blood were in the tears.

¹⁰⁵ *The Power and Strength of Faith*, 26.

¹⁰⁶ See Walter Martin et al, *The Kingdom of the Occult*, (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 1983), 347, cited on http://books.google.com/books?id=n1qaOUDfCeEC&pg=PA347&lpg=PA347&dq=Catsounis+weeping+Virgin&source=bl&ots=7oaxQboNwH&sig=UVh78dz6eCQOATBWxGUhADPoEoE&hl=en&ei=Fc8XTqKzA-Sp0AH7v4SXBO&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CCsQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=Catsounis%20weeping%20Virgin&f=false

Further analysis revealed that the blood came from a woman who possessed the antigen "A", or in other words, with blood type "A".

Five years later, the Russian Orthodox Church formed a special commission whose task was to explain why icons wept and how the icons changed color and faded in the walls of churches and monasteries.¹⁰⁷ Some time ago, members of the commission visited three homes in Russia in possession of a weeping icon. Moreover, the personal icons in these homes do not simply weep for the owners, but visitors also have witnessed it. Branko Vlahovic, journalist for *The Evening News* conveyed the words of academician Pavel Florensky, member of the commission, who was personally present at a home located near the city of Bryansk when oil appeared on the surface of an icon:¹⁰⁸

“The hostess was spread a clean tablecloth on the table, then a sheet of paper, on top of which she laid the icons brought by the distinguished guests. A priest uttered a prayer. And then the hostess asked the guests to leave the room: too bad that we could not be present to witness the miracle take place. We returned an hour later. All the icons that were on the table were covered with drops of dew. The critical moment came when the sheet of paper was covered with oil – only it was the edge which was under the image, but the part of the paper that lied underneath the icon was clean. I did not get the impression that the owners sprinkled them with oil as icons as we went out. **The various oils upon analysis were like olive or sunflower oil.**”¹⁰⁹

Miracles linked to religious icons around the world are numerous and very interesting to analyze. According to the magazine of the Diocese of Raska and Prizren, *St. Prince Lazar*, veneration of the Saints has two preconditions: veneration for the saint by the faithful and his posthumous miracles.¹¹⁰ At this point I will mention some alleged examples of miraculous holy icons, which secures the devotion of certain people.

The first example refers to the last Russian Czar, Nicholas II, whom the Bolsheviks, also known as the Communists (whom Z. Tucic, the author of the following text, claims were Satanists that arose from the ranks of the Jewish people) executed at night on the eve of July 17, 1918. Specifically, the Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church was supposed to hold its annual meeting in August in the year 2000 to observe the

¹⁰⁷ As to the question of the "restoration" of icons themselves by themselves, an answer will come from the well-known restorer of Russian icons, Oleg Nikolayevich Ovchinikov. He has stripped many famous icons of their dirt, but he never had seen one clean itself. However, he concluded, along with other experts, that some icons were capable of "restoring" themselves, specifically those produced at the end of the 19th and in the 20th centuries (Source: *Evening News*, June 7, 2004, 46) One example of the self-restoration of icons "themselves by themselves" comes from Russia. They would say that the icon of St. Nikolai was so dark that the saint was barely visible. However, after the service and prayer ministered by the Archbishop Sofronius, the icon became brighter. (See: *St. Prince Lazar*, 2000, No. 1-2, 157.)

¹⁰⁸ Translator's note: for more about the commission, see the article "Weeping Icons: Magic Tricks or Typical Miracles?", *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, May 27, 2004 (in Russian) on <http://www.kp.ru/daily/23285/29187/>.

¹⁰⁹ *Evening News*, June 7, 2004, 46. Author's emphasis.

¹¹⁰ *Holy Prince Lazar*, 8th Year, Volume 1-2 (29-30) (Prizren: 2000), 83.

occasion of the second millennium of Christianity. This council was to decide on the canonization of the last Russian tsar and his family, who were the personification of the Russian Orthodoxy when the Bolsheviks arrived on the scene.

Starting in 1998, the king's image began to reflect itself on the wall of one church. It was the church of the monastery dedicated to the Bogolyubski icon of the Virgin, which was built in 1155 by the Grand Duke St. Andrey Bogolyubski in a place called Bogolyubov. They had place a portrait of Emperor Nicholas II on the wall of the church where in most situations they would have place an icon of the Lord of the Sabbath sitting on His throne. Of course, the picture of the Lord at that time was not in its proper place as there were no other icons and frescoes. This is because the Communists in the 1930's destroyed all the images by smearing them with lime and acid. These images had still not been restored by the end of the twentieth century.

At the same time, when the black and white image of the Russian czar appeared on the wall of the church, over the next few years, many icons in the monastery started to pour out holy myrrh (oil) – in fact, more than forty of them. These included copies of the miraculous icon (Bogolyubski, Tikhvinski, Iverski, Kazan) and also a crucifix (cross) along with icons of various saints (Seraphim Sarovski, St. Nicholas, St. Panteleimon, and the Archangel Michael). Holy Myrrh appears on and beneath the glass in the form of many tear droplets:

“In the summer of 1999, they donated the miracle-working icon of Czar Nicholas for a national tour that flew throughout Russia. When they placed the icon in the middle of the temple next to the monastery's icons, **the icons almost immediately also began to emit oil.** The wooden frames of the icons oozed with thick drops of aromatic oil. For two years, in a castle tower built in the 12th century, a fresco showing the murder of Prince Andrey **began to emit tears.** The saint was crying as if he were still alive.”¹¹¹

This icon, which first emitted oil on November 7, 1998, repeated the performance before an audience of over one thousand people during the procession for the Czar's birthday in 1999. The sacred image was carried from one cathedral to another with its fragrance filling the whole church, allegedly demonstrating in this manner how to interpret the present that the anointing of Christ remained on the Czar even though he was ousted from the throne.

One copy of this icon produced tears and oil when it was under the authority of the Valaam Monastery with the nun Tatyana. This icon, which was originally awarded to the temple to be donated to the St. Seraphim Sarovski Cemetery in St. Petersburg, is now located in the Volkovski Cemetery at the Church of Job of Many Sufferings in St. Petersburg. (St. Czar Nicholas was born on the holiday of Job of Many Sufferings in 1868. This implies more than one connection to the miraculous power of these icons.)

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* Author's emphasis.

Before commenting further about the sacred images and statues of saints and Christ in Catholicism, which also shed tears and blood, I shall mention one example near and dear to the Serbian people. The icon is known as the Virgin Troyeruchitsa (of the Three Hands) and is preserved in the Monastery Chilandar . This icon was originally in the possession of St. John of Damascus, who lived in the eighth century B.C. At the time of iconoclasm, his right hand was cut off as a penalty for his writing articles in defense of icon veneration. After a long prayer before the icon, the icon restored John's severed right hand. In gratitude, St. John Damascene had an artificial hand made out of silver and added it to the Virgin's icon. This icon was brought to Serbia by St. Sava. The Virgin revealed its will and became the abbess of the Monastery Chilandar. According to legend, the Virgin prays for the Serbian people and the spiritual guidance of the monastic brotherhood.¹¹²

But we will now see that God did not bless Eastern Orthodoxy alone with miracle-working icons as evidence of His grace on them for their "true faith" in the next few examples.

The book *The Strength and Power of Faith* describes many examples of miracles claimed to have occurred amongst the faithful of the Roman Catholic Church. One example is the case of Mrs. Poore who possessed a statue of Jesus. This statue suddenly began to bleed. As its owner recovered from her shock, she chose to put it in her yard to so other religious people could witness it. The statue was later transferred to St. Luke's Church in Eddystone, Pennsylvania, and placed three feet above the altar. Fr. Chester Olszewski, the priest who serves in this church, later said:

"It [the statue] stands on a shelf ten feet above the altar, where nobody can touch it. It has bled as long as four hours. I know there can be no trickery. Several times I've seen the palms dry, then, minutes later, observed droplets of blood welling from the wounds.' The other priest, Henry Lovett, said he was initially very skeptical about this phenomenon, but when he saw it with his own eyes, he was convinced that it was a miracle: 'I've personally taken the hands off the statue – they are held in place by wooden dowels – and examined them. They're solid chalk, nothing else... and they bled profusely even as I watched in astonishment.'" ¹¹³

Similar to the cases where bloody tears flowed from religious icons and the blood was subjected to analysis in the laboratory, Doctor Joseph Rovito of Philadelphia performed a blood test and X-rays on the statue. The tests did not show anything unusual (e.g., its

¹¹² *Holy Prince Lazar*, Volume 2, (Prizren: 1994) Brochure 1, 74. (Translator's note: see also <http://www.rs.risjak.net/chilandar/Miracles.html> .)

¹¹³ *The Strength and Power of Faith*, 26-7. (Translator's note: see also *National Enquirer*, January 20, 1976 edition, cited in ed. Adam Sisman, *The World's Most Incredible Stories: the Best of Fortean Times*, (Barnes and Noble Publishing: 1998), 64 from http://books.google.com/books?id=VdGD8x_7NRwC&pg=PA64&lpg=PA64&dq=Doctor+Joseph+Rovito+Philadelphia+blood+statues&source=bl&ots=6YjmpOd6d_&sig=8cV6PTzRbD7e2VG3J8U7k_76eP0&hl=en&ei=lxQZTrOtEoPL0QH08PSWBQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=5&ved=0CDYQ6AEwBA#v=onepage&q&f=false .

findings showed nothing fraudulent), though the blood test was more difficult to interpret. Although it no doubt was human blood, it was extremely low in erythrocytes (red blood cells), which suggest that it was very old. However, the fact that it took a lot of time to clot led Dr. Rovito to the conclusion that the blood was quite fresh. Doctor Rovito said that the blood was so old that its blood type could not be determined. Some Catholic priests and others were convinced that it was the blood of Jesus Christ.

However, icons in the Western world do not weep and are not consecrated as oil-emitting icons of saints like in the East. There is one recorded instance when even a plain plastic card with the image of Christ wept tears of blood. It happened in 1979 in the state of New Mexico. A woman named Kathy Mallot bought a postcard for her grandmother Willie Mae Seymore. When Mallot with her husband visited her grandmother Kathy noted that a dark stain appeared under the right eye of the picture of Jesus. Soon, real streams of blood flowed, such that the picture made one small puddle below.

The news of Christ's miraculous postcard spread rapidly, and many flocked to see the miracle. No holes were found in the postcard which would have indicated fraud. They carried out tests on the blood at the Eastern New Mexico Medical Center in Roswell. A representative of the hospital guaranteed that it was human blood. Even more surprising, the blood did not clot over the next 24 hours. After several nights, the husband Zach Mallot alleged to have had a dream in which the Lord Jesus Christ informed him that He had sent him a miracle as a sign of his imminent return to the earth. Mr. Mallot claimed that no one in his family was religious. Since that time, he has become a committed Catholic believer.¹¹⁴

Many other miracles are happening today. Not only do statues and images bleed, but also gravestones, and blood appears in homes where ghosts of victims appear in places where the murders allegedly took place. In addition to statues and pictures of the Madonna (Virgin), weeping also occurs among secular images of people. Miraculous healings of sick people also occur.

All the fascination with such phenomena certainly proves that the Roman Catholic Church, like Eastern Orthodoxy, is captivated under the strong influence of direct supernatural spiritual powers such as the miracles listed above. Although some miracles fall into the category of exaggeration by witnesses, as some “miracles” undoubtedly are fraud¹¹⁵, one cannot deny the fact that great religious miracles exist within both Roman

¹¹⁴ Translator's note: see <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-religion/1771989/posts> .

¹¹⁵ Dositej Obradovic wrote these words to describe a case of well-known religious deception: “Take the Italians and their famous Pope Sixtus: Papa Sisto non perdona ne a Giesu Cristo. [Pope Sixtus would not even absolve Jesus Christ.] This is what gave rise to this saying. The Jesuits in Rome had a statue of Christ in their monastery and decided to put a sponge on the statue's head, for they wanted the statue to weep and perform miracles – well with water in a sponge, it will give you as many tears as you want! Complaints came to the Pope to let all the people come visit the statue. So he went with the Jesuits where the weeping Christ. The Pope carried a hammer in his pocket. Then the statue began to weep, and the Pope hit the statue on the head with the hammer, and what did he find: a sponge full of water. And so the

Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. It assures the faithful of these Churches that God is blessing them because they are, in fact, the “one and only God-pleasing faith”.

Yet, when identical miracles occur in the other "faith", usually nobody cares, or else they claim a certain level of disbelief. In any case, why would Orthodox believers in Serbia go on pilgrimage to the Catholic “Our Lady of Medjugorje”, when they can worship the relics of St. Basil Ostrovski? In either case, miracles happen in both places, and each ought to be able to worship the saints from their “ancestral” millennial faith.

So where do those forward-looking evangelical Christians fit into all of this? Do they have some powerful argument to persist in denying God’s inspiration of these miraculous manifestations within the traditional Christianity in the East and West?

I personally believe that they have some powerful arguments not to buy into these “miraculous manifestations”. The first argument would be that Holy Scripture never describes any cases of this type of miracle - from the creation of the world until apostolic times. This chapter earlier detailed this argument. The miracles in Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism have some commonality with those in pagan religions, but they have nothing to do with those performed by the true Lord God.

Secondly, Orthodox theologians resort to rationalizing their beliefs in these miracles by misinterpreting the verses they cite beyond their actual biblical context.

Thirdly, the Bible convinces us that veneration of the saints and their portraits (icons and images) does not please God, as proven by the Bible and church history. Indeed, they point to a much later origin for the introduction of such practices, yet Orthodox theologians portray themselves as traditionalists.

Fourthly, these miracles “of God” occur in the teachings of two churches diametrically opposed and anathematizing one another.¹¹⁶ Common sense would dictate that such a condition should not be possible. (Lest one wishes to engage in speculation that one group’s miracles come from God and the other group’s miracles come from the Devil.)

Finally, let us cite a few texts in favor of the belief of evangelical Christians that take the position that no current or ancient miracle without its foundation in the pages of God’s Word can ever be attributed to Him.

Let us briefly consider the statement of Oleg Nikolayevich Ovchinikov, the Russian restorer of frescoes and icons, who observed the tendency only for icons recently made in the late 19th and 20th Centuries to “restore” themselves. Why only this time period?

Pope fulfilled his holy work, so Christ, the eternal truth of God, could in no way lie to him ever again. The fact is that the Pope neither believes nor knows Christ.” Source: Obradovic, 661.

¹¹⁶ Anathema (denunciation) dates back to the Great Schism of 1054, when the Roman Catholic Church and Orthodox Churches broke off relations until 1965. At that time, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Athenagoras and Pope Paul VI renewed a dialogue. It still appears quite unlikely that church reunification will be achieved in the near future.

According to Z. Tucić, the author of the article "Miracles in Orthodoxy" in the journal *Holy Prince Lazar*, in the last century (e.g., the 20th) Russian Orthodoxy has only experienced two great miracles:

“In the twentieth century, **there were two periods of waves of miracles in the history of the Church.** The first period refers to the beginning of the mid-twenties **at the time of the fiercest campaigns against the church.** At that time the whole area had been affected by the ‘epidemic’ (the Bolshevik term) of flowing oil, restoring icons and crosses, and even the gilded domes. **It can be assumed that the Lord wanted to show his presence and to strengthen the faith that was badly shaken by the surge of atheism.** The second period began in the early nineties (a watershed in the history of Russia) and continues to this day. Since 1991, testimonies came forth from various parts of Russia: icons pouring oil, tears, and even blood, others that can regenerate. It is important to emphasize the diversity of the external manifestations of miracles.”¹¹⁷

So, the first wave of miracles occurred during the ravages of the Orthodox churches by the Communists, allegedly to show that God is still on the side of Imperial Russia and the Russian church and not on the side of a godless government.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, God began again to perform “miracles” at the end of the century for the Russian people coming out of Communism after the collapse of the USSR at a time when by her own efforts and hopes the Russian Orthodox Church yet again sought to regain its lost prestige possessed at the beginning of the century.

But the same kind of miracle-working power broke out during the eighteenth century in Italy, especially in Rome, when various saints manifested miracles in support of papal secular power and the feudal social order:

“Miracles in the Christian religion as a means of its defense appeared ‘at the end of the Middle Ages, a period of transition from feudalism to capitalism.’ This evolution of ‘the ‘miraculous’ impacted the new productive forces and the emergence of the bourgeoisie as a class force on the stage of history. ‘From May 1796 until January 1797, when French troops began to conquer the Papal States and up to the final victory over the very center of power of the Papacy, **over one hundred miracles can be counted,** especially with the saints in Rome proving that the deity remained on the side of the ruling powers. **Pictures and statues of the Virgin became alive with moving eyes, shed tears, and miraculous sweat.**”¹¹⁹

These excerpts reveal that the current social order and church government used the saints in Roman Catholicism as well as in Eastern Orthodoxy for working their many

¹¹⁷ *Holy Prince Lazar*, Volume 8, (Prizren: 20004) Brochure 1-2 [29-30]. Author’s emphasis.

¹¹⁸ See the statement by the Apostle Paul in Romans 13:1-7, where he teaches that all governments are appointed by God. The context Paul addresses is one in which the pagan government of the Roman Empire is hostile to Christians at the time of the apostles.

¹¹⁹ Veselin Ilich, *Religion and Culture*, (Prosveta: Nis, 1995) 171. Author’s emphasis.

wonders during “critical moments” of history. Meanwhile, during 1796 and 1797, there was plenty of reason to cry tears of blood, because of what followed in 1798. The Roman Pope was taken prisoner by the army of Napoleon Bonaparte, and his religious and secular authority for some time was interrupted.

However, what is most interesting is the fact that such tactics were used fairly recently before in history. In the fourth century A.D., when the pagan idolatrous system was collapsing before the onslaught of Christianity of Constantine, similar such miracles also occurred in pagan temples. These miracles were done by Roman gods, desperate to attract to themselves again the masses of the Roman Empire and thus avoid going into oblivion from the invading force of Christianity:

“In the second half of the fourth century, when the Roman Empire began to crumble ‘under the impact of new social and economic forces with their religious expression contained in Christianity’, **then miracles flourished, pagan idols and saints opened or closed their eyes and shed miraculous sweat and tears.** Miracles abounded at a number of temples and chapels and shrines of other deities such as Aesculapius at Epidaurus, at Delphi, in Athens, and on the Island of Tiberius as manifestations of ‘grace’... Such emphasis on the miraculous failed to save polytheism and the ideology of Christianity still advanced. But that same Christianity in the Middle Ages later used the miraculous as a primary means of its ideological strategy. The miracle becomes a defining element in the Christian hagiography of saints.”¹²⁰

As a Christian believer who based his belief on God’s revealed Word, and who knows the prophecies of the Spirit-inspired apostles and Christ himself, there is no way that the author could ever agree with the theologians of the Eastern Orthodox Church who claim that the miracles alleged to come from the holy icons and relics originate with God. In fact, the Lord and the apostles in their lives indicated that a time will come when on the stage of humanity will appear false teachers, prophets and healers who will present themselves as the only true Christian way. The apostles also prophesied that these false teachers will deceive many religiously ignorant people, and will even attempt to deceive the elect of God:

*“For false christs and false prophets will rise **and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.**”*¹²¹

The apostle Paul said that the future coming of the lawless one (the Antichrist) will be preceded by the occurrence of various miracles to mislead people and deceive them that God had sent this false prophet:

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 170-1. Author’s emphasis. Dr. Veselin Ilic also affirms here what we learned earlier from Eastern Orthodox church historian Eusebius Popovic. Miraculous (emitting oil, etc.) images of saints and relics was unknown in the first centuries of Christianity, and they were only a later development in the Middle Ages. Obviously, the miraculous statues of pagan gods and saints have a substantial connection with what later took place and still occurs in the so-called Christian churches of the East and the West.

¹²¹ Matthew 24:24. Author’s emphasis.

*“The coming of the lawless one is according to the **working of Satan**, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”*¹²²

According to this Bible prophecy, God’s elect (in the words of Christ), that is, those who believe the truth (in the words of the Apostles), will witness the appearance of strange signs and false religious miracles in the Christian world. Quite certainly, this implies that “false teachers and miracle workers” from the Far East (such as Sai Baba and other Hindu gurus and yogis) or occult New Age movements are unable to deceive Christians who attend religious services every week and are firm in their faith in Christ Himself. Therefore, this hazard does not apply to them.

Unfortunately, however, any Christian can see that some evangelical believers, because of their spiritual immaturity and inadequate knowledge of Scripture, may be misled by false miracles. They errantly believe that these phony Christian “saints” may indeed come from God. No wonder, in the words of the Apostle Paul, that the vast majority of the world will be deceived by fake miracles of the “saints” because of their faith in the “tradition of the fathers”, a religious system based on falsehood.

What is more sobering is that such deceived people not only live in a nation that considers itself a part of the “only saving Church”, but also that many “traditional believers” live a daily life full of sin and injustice. It suffices to examine the heart of an average attender of a traditional mainline Christian church, who struggles for its preservation and fulfills what was discussed earlier. Paul’s words show that “they did not love the truth” (e.g. they did not love the truth of the Holy Scriptures). Thus, they easily choose to believe in the inspiration of false miracles¹²³ and false teachers who will pose as saints, which completely fulfills Paul’s prophecy. It also proves that Christ and the apostles did not have in mind pagan missionaries from the Far East as the false teachers about whom the elect must be vigilant. Paul shows another example of this point in the New Testament.

*“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.”*¹²⁴

¹²² 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12. Author’s emphasis.

¹²³ The Lord Jesus Christ and the apostles call them false miracles not because they are fake - as if they never really happened, but rather because they do not come from God but from spiritual forces hostile to Him. The reality of Satan’s power to do great miracles is found in Exodus 7:10-12, 20-22, 8:5-7, where events in ancient Egypt describe how magicians managed to perform miracles like those committed by Moses and Aaron with God’s power. In particular, this applies to the power of the ordinary Egyptian wooden sticks turning into living organisms (snakes). If Satan could do such miracles, then he is fully capable of preserving incorruptible bodies of the dead and producing relics and myrrh-streaming icons.

¹²⁴ 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.

Many will be swayed by the exceedingly strong and blinding power of religious deception. The miracle worker who claims to have “the power of Christ” could perform a wide variety of miracles. The Savior warned us about this:

*“Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”*¹²⁵

It is quite clear that the Lord speaks here of the Last Judgment Day after the resurrection of the dead. Billions of unsaved people will eventually have to bow before the Lord, whose love and suffering they refused for so long. I believe that no one will dare say anything in his defense before the throne of God. One can only admit his guilt and God's justice in sentencing him to eternal fire. Among these people will be countless religious leaders and teachers from all non-Christian religions. However, in these words of the Savior, we see that there still exists a large group of people who will marvel why they await eternal failure. The Lord's words, which will shock them, reveal the humiliation of their current situation and the belief that during their earthly life the false teachers were His ministers. They would have been duped of their orthodoxy by the charismatic gifts of prophecy, working of miracles, and expulsion of demons that they thought He had assigned them to do in His name. However, Jesus will answer them that He never knew them: *“Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”*

The words of the Scriptures are very clear. If anyone on this planet preaches another gospel different from that which the apostles spread in the first century of Christianity, even if it involved performing miracles (which the masterminds of spiritual heresy certainly teach), that person should not be welcomed nor believed. Such people, ministries, and religious organizations undoubtedly lead to apostasy and therefore eternal perdition.

I hope that the message of this chapter and was sufficiently clear to all of my readers. What lies ahead next is the contrast between biblical teachings on the afterlife with the unfounded Orthodox doctrine regarding the afterlife and prayers for the dead.

¹²⁵ Matthew 7:22-3. Author's emphasis.