

Chapter 4: The Seven Holy Sacraments

*“Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great:
He appeared in a body,
was vindicated by the Spirit,
was seen by angels,
was preached among the nations,
was believed on in the world,
was taken up in glory.”¹*

According to the teachings of the Orthodox Church, the Lord has ordained to achieve man’s salvation through giving him a defined number of sacraments, that is, the Holy Sacraments. The people are decreed to adhere to them and have them performed on their behalf by the Church. The only way people can gain salvation and eternal life is through the Sacraments. Here is an excerpt from an Orthodox textbook on religious doctrine:

“‘The whole world lies in the power of the evil one,’ writes the old apostle loved by Christ, St. John (1 Jn. 5:19). In this world dominated by evil, man is found at the bottom of a well crying out for salvation. He himself is unable by his own strength to save himself, but someone at the top of the well can throw him **a rope, a lifeline** which he will eagerly catch... The sacraments of the [Eastern Orthodox] Church of Christ form a ‘rope’ that the Lord Jesus Christ gives from His heavenly heights out of clean and infinite love for man down into our valley of tears so that we, sinful men, might grab them and partake of their powers, by the grace of God, and acquire the Light of God that is without darkness.”²

The main sacraments in Orthodoxy consist of seven “mysteries”³, which include: Baptism, Chrismation, Holy Communion (the Eucharist), Repentance (i.e., Confession), Holy Orders (i.e., Clergy), Marriage, and Anointing of the Sick. Orthodox writer Lazar Milin describes the sacraments:

“Roman Catholics have also listed all the seven Holy Mysteries, or Sacraments. The reformers, Luther and Zwingli, and Calvin, reduced the number of sacraments from seven to two, including only Baptism and Communion. Protestant schismatics, primarily the

¹ 1 Tim. 3:16.

² *Religion in the Home*, 4th Edition, (Religious Charity Foundation: Belgrade, 1991), 25. Author’s emphasis.

³ “Neither the liturgical book called Euchologion (prayer book), which contains the texts of the sacraments, nor the patristic tradition, however, formally limits the number of sacraments; they do not distinguish clearly between the “sacraments” and such acts as the blessing of water on Epiphany day or the burial service or the service for the tonsuring of a monk that in the West are called sacramentalia. In fact, no council recognized by the Orthodox Church ever defined the number of sacraments; it is only through the “Orthodox confessions” of the 17th century directed against the Reformation that the number seven has been generally accepted.” <http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/general/doctrine3.aspx> (Translator’s note: the webmaster indicates that Serbian Orthodox monks at the Decani Monastery in Kosovo compiled this information.)

Anabaptists, but soon others, deleted even these two sacraments by proclaiming them merely sacred rites.”⁴

So, according to the Orthodox, both they themselves and Roman Catholics have the ‘fullness of God’s grace’ because they both adhere to seven Sacraments, Protestants adhere to only two, and the “schismatic” Protestants (those whom Milin calls evangelical Christians in Serbia and the world) deny any sacramental acts as mentioned above.

Before going further into details of explanations from the Holy Scriptures all the terms that the Orthodox call “Holy Sacraments”, our readers ought to know that Orthodox doctrine of Holy Sacraments is not based on the Bible. Rather, Orthodoxy bases its beliefs on the Sacraments from Holy Tradition, e.g., the teaching and interpretation of the Gospel by the Church Fathers over the centuries.

The Origin of Teaching on the Seven Sacraments in the Eastern Orthodox Church

As anyone who studies the doctrines of the Eastern Orthodox Churches knows, different teachers believed other sacraments existed in addition to the seven that are now officially recognized. Such is the example of monastic tonsures (cutting the hair of initiates into life in the monasteries).⁵ However, under the influence of Roman Catholic theology, the Orthodox Church adopted the number of seven Holy Sacraments. Ernst Benz says this:

“Orthodoxy characteristically does not strictly adhere solely to seven as the number of the Sacraments in the Church. **However, the theology of the Orthodox Church later came under the influence of the Roman Catholic Church and adopted the definition of Seven Sacraments identical to those of Rome.** However, Orthodoxy does not recognize the principle of a strict distinction between the Sacraments and sacramentals, in other words, devotional acts of the church that are not sacraments in the true sense.”⁶

This author also confirms the fact presented by evangelical Christians (the so-called “Protestant schismatics”) that the doctrine of the Sacraments developed gradually over many centuries, including various views by church authorities on their number. The dogma of the “Sacraments” found in Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism appeared only 1200 years after Christ's ascension into heaven:

“In a certain way, the Church in its entire sphere of 'mysteries' brought out of its charismatic fullness could always devise a new mystery. While the old church resolved its acceptance of the books of the New Testament canon in the Fourth Century, its establishment of church dogmas in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries, and the simplification of the church liturgy in the Seventh Century, **the number of Sacraments had not yet been defined until the end of the first millennium. This always signified its creative liveliness in this sphere.**

⁴ Lazar Milin, *The Church and Sects*, 299.

⁵ More about tonsure will be discussed in the chapter on Orthodox Monasticism.

⁶ *The Spirit and Life of the Eastern Churches*, 32. Author’s emphasis.

One of the renowned teachers of the Orthodox Church, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (6th Century) listed six sacraments in his work *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*: baptism, Eucharist, confirmation, priesthood, the consecration of monks, and rites for the dead. Another teacher revered by Orthodoxy, John of Damascus, two centuries later mentions only two sacraments: Baptism together with the corresponding chrismation and the Eucharist (Communion). **Only during the Council of Lyons in 1274 did Greek theologians, who discussed the possibility of uniting with Rome, accepted the number of Sacraments to be seven**, which is slightly before the West accepted scholastic theology: Baptism, Confirmation (Confirmation), Eucharist, Penance, Priesthood, Marriage, and Anointing of the Sick. Even today there are many Orthodox theologians who do not hold strictly to the scheme of the seven ‘Sacraments’ established by the Roman Catholic Church. This discord indicates a much more comprehensive range of Orthodox mystery.”⁷

St. John of Damascus was one of the most respected theologians in Orthodox history, particularly for his views on icon veneration. Yet, it is remarkable that even his view of the sacraments bears strong parallels to that of the Protestants. Like the Protestants, St. John only recognized two sacraments: baptism and the Eucharist (the Lord’s Supper). Yet the list of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, two centuries earlier contained some sacraments that are accepted today and others that are omitted, a total of six sacraments. These facts cited in the quote above are sufficient to demonstrate that the number of “Holy Sacraments” is not based on the teachings of Christ and His apostles. Rather, the seven Sacraments are based on the opinions of Church Fathers and the decisions of later ecumenical councils. By the time the Orthodox Churches settled on “Seven Sacraments,” they decided on that number based on the anathematized “brethren” of the Western Roman Catholic Church.

Because of the weight of these historical arguments, we ought to be careful with passively accepting the accuracy of other claims regarding the Orthodox teaching about the sacraments. Earlier in this chapter, we saw the text from *Religion in the Home* assuring us that Christ established the seven sacraments as a “lifeline” from heaven. However, we just saw that the Church Fathers wove this “lifeline” through the centuries, but one faction stayed in the West while the other faction switched to the East. Scripture nowhere mentions a word about “Holy Sacraments”, especially nothing about those religious activities or actions that Roman Catholicism of the West or Orthodoxy of the East practice. However, although the Bible does not use the term "Holy Sacraments,"⁸ some mysteries are still revealed. What do the apostles show us about the mysteries which are mentioned in the Bible?

⁷ *Ibid.*, 33. Author’s emphasis.

⁸ Eusebius Popovic believed the idea that “mysteries” were defined as activities carried out by Christians in the first centuries after Christ’s ascension during great persecution and were called “secrets” because they did not want to disclose them publicly before Gentiles. The Gentiles would wrongly interpret their meaning. Because the Christian baptism, taking the Lord’s Supper, and other activities held in secret Christian meetings (forests, caves, catacombs and similar places), from their fear of persecution, it is possible that they called these activities “mysteries.” See: Popovic, *General Church History*, Vol. 1, 437.

Mysteries Mentioned in the Bible

The Holy Scriptures elevate the word “mystery” to the highest place. The fulfillment and the contexts in which they refer to “mystery” vary. There are human and divine mysteries. For example, when the Old Testament, such as in Judges 3:19 or Proverbs 25:9, the word “mystery” refers only to ordinary human secrets, i.e., confidential information that one would not want to disclose to many other people. However, in the verses to be mentioned, it is easy to see that certain facts or events were secret for some people or for a particular generation. There are also God's mysteries which people have never understood fully, such as the mystery of God and the miracle of His eternal existence, His unlimited power, and many other magnificent properties:

*“Are you the first man ever born? Were you brought forth before the hills? Do you listen in on **God's council [mystery]**? Do you limit wisdom to yourself?”⁹*

*“When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, **‘The secret [mystery] of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables...’**”¹⁰*

*“I do not want you to be ignorant of **this mystery**, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.’”¹¹*

*“Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to **the revelation of the mystery** hidden for long ages past,²⁶ but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him...”¹²*

*“My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know **the mystery of God, namely, Christ**, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”¹³*

*“Listen, I tell you **a mystery**: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed...”¹⁴*

*“In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into **the mystery of Christ**, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.”¹⁵*

⁹ Job 15:7-8. Author's emphasis.

¹⁰ Mk. 4:10-11. Author's emphasis.

¹¹ Rom. 11:25-6. Author's emphasis.

¹² Rom. 16:25-6. Author's emphasis.

¹³ Col. 2:2-3. Author's emphasis.

¹⁴ 1 Cor. 15:51. Author's emphasis.

¹⁵ Eph. 3:4-5. Author's emphasis.

*“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a **profound mystery**—but I am talking about Christ and the church.”*¹⁶

*“The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. This title was written on her forehead: **MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH**. I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.”*¹⁷

As the above verses demonstrate, the Biblical writers use the word “mystery” in reference to the teachings about the Kingdom of Heaven, the Church of Christ, and the resurrection of the dead. “Mystery” also alludes to the future salvation of Israel.

“Mystery” depicts the rise of Babylon, which according to many evangelical interpreters is materially rich yet spiritually bankrupt. Babylon symbolizes religion that is far from God and derives from tradition based not on the Bible but from rules dictated by men. Through the centuries, Babylon in the name of protecting orthodoxy has persecuted true followers of Jesus and brutal murdered them.¹⁸

These verses show that the apostles emphasized that mysteries had been secret or hidden to people in the past, but now they have ceased to be secret once the Gospel of Christ was written down.

To repeat once again, the New Testament does not use the term “mystery” for such things as baptism, communion, marriage and other “spiritual institutions”, even if Orthodoxy calls them “Sacraments” or “Mysteries”. However, we must admit that such ordinances, in spite of the clear definition of the Holy Scriptures, truly remain a “mystery” to some. They remain hidden to some for the simple reason of their own misunderstanding and spiritual apostasy.

Now let us examine baptism, the first of the sacraments listed in Orthodoxy.

THE HOLY SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

“The Savior said, ‘Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.’ (Jn. 3:5) Because the Church is called ‘the Kingdom of God,’ and baptism is being ‘born of water and the Spirit,’ then it follows that baptism is the initial act of man's salvation.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Eph. 5:31-2. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁷ Rev. 17:4-6. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁸ This theme will be covered in the chapter “The Church under Persecution.”

¹⁹ Milin, *Church and Sects*, 300.

Although the previous chapter gave detailed arguments from Scripture to prove that baptism is not “a birth of water and the Spirit” neither is baptism a condition of salvation, let us take note of some facts here. Examining this “sacrament” and the details of Orthodox teaching on baptism, the reader will see more visibility its strangeness and contradiction to Biblical teaching.

In the belief that baptism is a mandatory condition for salvation (because according to the Orthodox, although three Roman officers had great faith in Christ, only one was saved – Cornelius, the only one who was baptized in Acts 10),²⁰ the Eastern Church adheres to doctrines that have no basis in the Bible. In fact, by studying this sacrament and how it is performed in the traditional Christianity of the East, one will recognize the fact that many Serbs and peoples of other Orthodox nations are not properly baptized at all. Thus, their baptism is not valid even by the standards of Orthodoxy. Lazar Milin comments on the proper way to baptize:

“The only proper way to baptize is done with the three-fold immersion into water and the utterance of these words: ‘Servant of God (Name of subject) is baptized in the name of the Father – Amen - and of the Son – Amen - and of the Holy Spirit - Amen...’ This has been the method of baptism since apostolic times, and the Church upholds it today. **Exceptions** were allowed only in two situations. **If someone were sick** and could not enter into the water but had to be baptized in his bed, then that person could be baptized either by sprinkling or pouring. If a sick person were in the hospital, he could be baptized while he was lying in bed. **Another exception is the so-called baptism of blood.** If someone wanted to be baptized but could not because of persecution, yet he were to die for Christ’s sake before having been baptized of water and the Spirit, then his martyrdom would be counted as a substitute for water baptism. His martyrdom would prove that he was ‘worthy to drink the cup that Christ drank.’ (Mt. 20:22)... These are the right and proper methods for baptism: by immersion or in blood. The Church has always practiced baptism by immersion in water, to which among other things is attested by the deep baptismal fonts in the old temples. However, the West gradually slipped into performing baptism by dipping, or even sprinkling. **The [Orthodox] Church does not accept these as valid baptisms...**”²¹

²⁰ See *Catechism for the Home*, 32.

²¹ Milin, *Church and Sects*, 300-1. Author’s emphasis. In this text Milin explains that Orthodoxy still considers Roman Catholic “baptisms” as valid. Regarding Roman Catholic baptisms which are done by pouring or sprinkling (especially for healthy but also sick persons), Milin believes that if such baptisms are done in the name of the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit, it is not necessary to rebaptize Catholics who converted to the Orthodox faith. However, the author clearly states that the Eastern Orthodox Church ought not baptize as the Roman Catholic Church does, but only by the three-fold immersion in water. Yet, Milin’s view contradicts those of other Orthodox teachers surrounding the issue. According to the well-known Orthodox specialists in canon law and theologians from earlier centuries, Theodore Valsamona and Matei Vlaster, even if someone had been baptized by threefold immersion in water under Roman Catholicism, he would have to be baptized yet again under the Orthodox method, which means that his earlier Catholic baptism was not baptism in the true sense. See: *The Kiss of Judas*, The Orthodox Mission of Svetogorsk (Svetogorsk Monastery: Belgrade, 2004), 279.

The book *What Orthodox Christians Believe*, amongst other things, states:

“The Orthodox Church conducts baptism by full immersion in water.”²²

Citing an ancient Church Father, Bishop Nikolai elaborates:

“‘Whoever is not baptized cannot be saved, except for the martyr who sheds his blood to enter the Kingdom of Heaven,’ says St. Cyril of Alexandria.”²³

According to these sources, Orthodoxy teaches that the only proper way for baptizing someone is done through threefold immersion in water (with the exception of sickness, in which case sprinkling of patients in bed is acceptable). Yet how is it possible that so many priests of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Serbia do not observe even their very own canonical rules? The fact of the matter is that we know that most Serbs (especially since the baptisms recorded in the 1990’s, the last decade of the last century) were baptized by pouring water on the person’s head! (This is in spite of the fact that most people were completely healthy and not gravely ill!) This is the very means of baptism that Milin describes as “not deemed valid by the Orthodox Church!”

On the other hand, although Milin and Bishop Nikolai mention a baptism “by blood”, such a concept exists nowhere in Scripture, nor is it taught. The Bible, of course, does record cases of martyrdom for faith in Christ. Examples include the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7), the apostle James, the son of Zebedee (Acts 12), and many other unnamed Christians. However, it is likely that most of them at the time of martyrdom already had been baptized in water on the basis of their faith. If it happened that someone were murdered for their faith before one could be immersed in water (which is certainly possible), such a person would certainly have been saved for eternity. However, it would occur not because of their act of “baptism in blood”, but rather because of his justification through faith in Christ the Savior.

Examples of Salvation of People Who Were Not Baptized

Scripture mentions the example of a man who received salvation yet was neither baptized in water nor suffered martyrdom for Christ (“baptism in blood”). Rather, he suffered and died as a thief and criminal. This man was certainly one of the robbers crucified with Jesus on Mount Calvary. Before we say anything more about this event, let us listen to what Mr. Milin said against this argument of evangelical Christians, who attempt to defend their position that baptism is not necessary for salvation:

“And how did the repentant thief arrive in Paradise, even though he was not previously baptized? Thus, baptism is not a necessary condition of salvation, say the Baptists.

The thief on the cross is a special situation, which Christ never intended for every Christian to hold up as a rule. It is good to repent, but it is not good to wait until the last

²² *What Orthodox Christians Believe*, Svetilo, 7.

²³ *Ibid.*, 33.

moment, as did the thief on the cross. In addition, if the thief did not receive water baptism in a “bath”, neither did anyone preach to him a gospel sermon, quite the opposite of the Baptist complaint that people cannot receive salvation without hearing an evangelistic sermon. If the case of the thief demonstrates that baptism is not a prerequisite for salvation, just as the Baptists allege, then in the same case one can also conclude that neither should the preaching of the gospel be a condition for faith and salvation, because the thief never heard a gospel sermon. Therefore, the case of the thief on the cross should be set aside as an exceptional example of an extremely fruitful and truly amazing action of God's grace.”²⁴

So, by Lazar Milin's assertion, the case of the thief on the cross is extraordinary. According to him, this case contradicts the Baptist logic in that the thief received salvation without hearing the gospel of faith in Christ the Savior preached. The Scriptures clearly say:

*“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”*²⁵

However, was it true that no one really preached to the thief? What then caused him to turn to religion in the last hours of his life? The truth is that this man lived a lawless and unjust life. The Romans were correct to arrest him. Also, in the first hours of his crucifixion, he along with other criminals and the masses of people in the area mocked the crucified Christ:

*“In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. ‘He saved others,’ they said, ‘but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” **In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.**”*²⁶

*“‘Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.’ **Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.**”*²⁷

However, as time went by, something happened in the heart of this man. Although he himself was in a very unenviable position at the time when his life was slowly departing from him, something that the Old Testament prophets had proclaimed appealed to the robber's Israelite memory. Since Jesus' activity was known both among the Israelites of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria and the Gentiles of the Decapolis, Syria, Phoenicia, and others.²⁸ Somehow, the infidel robber just a few hours before his death saw the truth that he was crucified in the midst of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah whom the Israelites awaited for centuries. The Evangelist Luke elaborates on this event:

²⁴ Milin, *Ibid.*, 306.

²⁵ Rom. 10:17.

²⁶ Mt. 27:41-44. Author's emphasis.

²⁷ Mk. 15:32. Author's emphasis.

²⁸ See Mt. 4:23-5, 15:21-8, and Acts 26:26.

“One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: ‘Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!’ But the other criminal rebuked him. ‘Don't you fear God,’ he said, ‘since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ Jesus answered him, ‘I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.’”²⁹

What we see clearly is the fact that the thief believed Jesus to be the Heavenly King and Messiah, when he stated: “Remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Keep in mind his faith came at a time when the apostles doubted their own. While it is true, of course, that the thief heard no preaching while hanging on the cross, yet it is also true that he clearly remembered the earlier preaching about the future Messiah that was heard in the Jewish synagogues, which he apparently once visited. Connecting the preaching he must have heard about the prophecy of Messiah together with the blessed life and now crucifixion of the insulted Galilean on the wooden cross, the thief could come to only one conclusion. Jesus of Nazareth is the prophesied Messiah and King of Israel, the Savior who took upon Himself all the iniquities of sinful humanity.³⁰ The apostle John, in relation to the faith of the individual, specifically stated in his epistle the following:

“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God... I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”³¹

Therefore, the way by which the thief was saved is not a “special situation”. Rather, the situation of the thief corresponds to the law that says that man is saved by God only through faith in Christ the Savior and through spiritual rebirth by God. Man cannot be saved by merits, good works, or religious rituals. We have already demonstrated this principle in the previous two chapters.

However, the aforementioned Orthodox authors are not completely honest to their unsuspecting readers in hiding the faith of the crucified and unbaptized thief as the real basis for his salvation. As we will confirm from the doctrine of the Eastern Orthodox Church, this criminal was saved because at one time our Lord Jesus Christ was under obligation - while still a baby in the arms of Mary! Here is what “Sacred Tradition” says about the “indebted Christ”:

“When the holy family fled before Herod's sword to Egypt, robbers leapt out on the road with the intention of stealing something. The righteous Joseph was leading the donkey, on which were some belongings and on which the Most-holy Theotokos was riding with her Son at her breast. The robbers seized the donkey to lead it away. At that moment, one of the robbers approached the Mother of God to see what she was holding next to her breast. The robber, seeing the Christ-child, was astonished at His unusual beauty and said in his astonishment: **“If God were to take upon Himself the flesh of man, He would**

²⁹ Lk. 23:39-43. Author's emphasis.

³⁰ See the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 53.

³¹ 1 Jn. 5:1,13. Author's emphasis.

not be more beautiful than this Child!" This robber then ordered his companions to take nothing from these travelers. Filled with gratitude toward this generous robber, the Most-holy Virgin said to him: ``**Know that this Child will repay you with a good reward because you protected Him today.**" Thirty-three years later, this same thief hung on the Cross for his crimes, crucified on the right side of Christ's Cross. His name was Dismas, and the name of the thief on the left side was Gestas. Beholding Christ the Lord innocently crucified, Dismas repented for all the evil of his life. While Gestas reviled the Lord, Dismas defended Him, saying: *This man hath done nothing amiss.* (Luke 23:41). Dismas, therefore, was the wise thief to whom our Lord said: *Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise* (Luke 23:43). Thus the Lord granted Paradise to him who spared Him in childhood."³²

As we see from this Orthodox story, the thief named Dismas was rewarded with salvation because he relented from robbing the holy family and also on account of the beauty of the baby Jesus. Christ obviously had to save the thief because at that time, the "Most Holy Mother of God" bonded Him to this obligation even while he was in diapers. Just as the Bible contradicts salvation by works, so we also do not find anywhere in the Bible any teaching whatsoever about "God's earlier obligations" to save anyone based on their merits. Such Orthodox teachings on salvation lie in utter contradiction to the Gospel taught in God's Word.

However, this is not the only example of someone finding salvation yet not being baptized (neither by water nor by blood). There exist examples even within "Sacred Tradition" itself, which, according to the Orthodox Church, are equally authoritative as God's Word. The event described in the following text will occur during Judgment Day, and comes from a vision of the Venerable Saint Gregory of the ninth century:

"After these things, the Lord separated to the left side those who were spiritually blind and **did not live according to His will.** For in them there was no evil, and in fact **they were looked like righteous ones.** And the Lord looked at them and was not angry at them. Rather He was angry at their parents **because they did not sanctify their children in holy Christian baptism.** And the Lord said to them that they would have a **small inheritance of eternal life** in the last place in the West, **but they could not gaze upon the face of God.** And they answered: Master and Lord, you are blessed and gentle, and you have a gracious heart. You are the Lord of life and death. You took us from earthly life prematurely by some of Your wondrous mysteries. But we beg you for one thing, Oh Lord! And the LORD granted them some of His gifts and blessings. **These souls are the children of Christian parents who did not receive holy baptism.** And they were all of equal stature."³³

Thus, children who have been baptized, but do not live by the will of God (meaning they were great kids, not babies), and "looked like righteous ones" – they earned their place in Heaven. However, they inherited the "West End of Heaven" where

³² Justin Popovich, *Lives of the Saints for December 26*, 747-8. Author's emphasis. (See also <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/my.html?day=26&month=December> (Translator's note).

³³ *After Death* (Mileshov Monastery: 1991), 24. Author's emphasis.

they received “a small inheritance of eternal life”. Even though they cannot look at God's face, Heaven is still Heaven.

Of course, one does not need a great deal of wisdom and knowledge from the Holy Scriptures to conclude that it is impossible to be in Heaven only to inherit “a small inheritance of eternal life” (as if the “small inheritance” were not really eternal). Furthermore, one cannot experience true heavenly bliss while being apart from the people of God. It is impossible for someone who does not obey God's will to arrive in Heaven and resemble the righteous, for no evil can exist in a truly righteous person. “Sacred Tradition” creates chaos by giving us contradictory statements as to what will happen on the Day of Judgment.

First of all, both the Lord Jesus and the apostle John show that it is impossible for someone who does not obey God's will to enter Heaven:

*“Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”*³⁴

*“The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”*³⁵

*“Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.”*³⁶

Also, the vision that Gregory claimed to see in the ninth century after Christ is quite different from John's vision in Revelation from the first century on the issue of “gazing at God's face.” John writes specifically that all inhabitants of Heaven will see the face of God, and His name shall be written on their foreheads:

*“No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.”*³⁷

This view is, therefore, not only contrary to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, but it also even contradicts the doctrine of Orthodoxy that addresses the impossibility of reaching paradise by those who are not baptized with water or blood. This ultimately proves that teachings within the Eastern Church contradict themselves.

On the other hand, “Sacred Tradition” and Orthodox dogma inform us of the possibility that seriously ill people, when they do not have an anointed priest with the enlightened power of apostolic succession, can be baptized even by ordinary believers (laity):

³⁴ Mt. 7:21. Author's emphasis.

³⁵ 1 Jn. 2:17. Author's emphasis.

³⁶ Rev. 21:27.

³⁷ Rev. 22:3-5. Author's emphasis.

“The baptism of immersion in water three times, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, can also be performed by a bishop, presbyter, or a deacon. **Even in an exceptional situation, someone besides these people could perform baptism if a person is in danger of dying and is not baptized, anyone of the laity could baptize that person.**”³⁸

Some others, who did not have had the “luck” to be baptized by some faithful layman and were suspected to be near death, baptized themselves in the river or went outside of their home in rainy weather. These served as substitutes for baptism. Others had the privilege to be baptized by angels from Heaven. Let us hear some accounts from Orthodox tradition:

“**St. Drosida:** Daughter of the Emperor Trajan, she was seized with five other women when they were gathering the bodies of the martyrs who had suffered for Christ by night, and was for this cruelly mutilated by the Emperor. These five women were terribly tortured and at last thrown into molten copper, where they surrendered their souls to their Lord. But Drosida remained under strict imperial guard. However, she escaped from the court and **baptized herself in a river.** After eight days she gave her soul into God's hands. (March 22)”

“**St. Lupus:** He was the servant of the Great Martyr Demetrius, and was present at his martyrdom... It is said that, as his death approached, he prayed to be baptized before his death, for, though a believer in Christ, he had never been able to be baptized. **A cloud suddenly poured down a torrent of water upon him, answering his prayer.** After great suffering, he visited and entered the Kingdom of Heaven. (August 23)”

“**St. Philemon:** When Philemon appeared before the idols, the light of the Christian Faith suddenly shone in his heart, and he made the sign of the Cross. After he came out of the temple, he began to shout: “I am a Christian! A servant of Christ the Living God!” Hearing this, the judge laughed, thinking that Philemon was mocking the Christians. Later, Philemon endured horrible tortures. **Rain fell from heaven and baptized him.** (December 14)”

“**St. Conon:** He was brought up in the Faith of Christ and **baptized** in the name of the All-Holy and Life-giving Trinity **by the Archangel Michael**, the Commander of the Angelic Hosts of God. Until his death, the archangel of God invisibly watched over him. (March 5)”³⁹

Beyond any doubt, it is critical at this point to emphasize that the first century Christian praxis never considered that believers could be baptize themselves, nor by stormy weather, nor by an archangel. The Lord never told the apostles about any of these methods nor commanded them to do so. On the other hand, the Orthodox does not stop at the previously cited unbiblical teachings on baptism and its improper application by

³⁸ Eusebius Popovic, *A General Church History*, Vol. 1, 432. Author's emphasis.

³⁹ Excerpts from quotes from St. Nikolai Velimirovic, *The Prologue of Ohrid*. Author's emphasis. (See also <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/my.html?day=5&month=March> .

pouring or sprinkling with water. Orthodoxy also allows for baptism in the absence of water, even though water was considered a material part of how baptism was conducted in first century apostolic Christianity. Here is what we read about possible ways of baptizing in special emergencies, when there is a danger that someone dies without baptism (and goes to eternity without the possibility of salvation):

“Few people realized that if someone might die at the risk of a violent or natural death, any layman can baptize. Baptism can be performed with a little bit of water, or even in the absence of water with a **little bit of sand**. You need to pour (**or sprinkle**) on the person’s head and utter the words: ‘I baptize you (name of subject), servant of God, in the name of the Father, Amen (pour), and of the Son, Amen (pour again), and of the Holy Spirit, Amen (pour again).’⁴⁰

Such examples which are taught in the Eastern Church demonstrate their clear unbiblical contradiction to the plain teachings on baptism that Christ and the apostles spoke and wrote down.

The Orthodox misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the Bible with regard to the “holy sacrament of chrismation” will be examined in the next section.

THE HOLY SACRAMENT OF CHRISMATION

“Through the sacrament of chrismation, the Christian receives special gifts of the Holy Spirit needed for growth in the moral life of holiness. **This sacrament was established by Jesus Christ, and His apostles administered them to believers after their baptism.** Today’s Orthodox Church performs chrismation immediately after baptism, as a special sacrament, not as an integral part of baptism. A priest performs chrismation by anointing holy oil on certain parts of the believer’s body (his head, eyes, nose, mouth, ears, chest, hands and feet) with the utterance of a certain formula: ‘The Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit.’ Only a bishop can bless Holy Oil. This is done at the Holy Liturgy on Great [Maundy] Thursday.⁴¹ Oils, wine and various fragrant substances are prepared. The bishop consecrates the oil stored in chrimaria that will be used for performing the sacraments.”⁴²

This text informs us of the doctrine of the Eastern Orthodox Church regarding chrismation. What is important to remember is the assertion that this sacrament was established by the Lord Jesus Christ and administered by the apostles to believers after baptism.

On the basis of the Bible and other historical sources we can easily determine whether this claim of Orthodoxy is true or not. In fact, as any Biblical scholar would know, nowhere in any of the New Testament writings does the Lord mention the “holy sacrament” of chrismation with all the mentioned elements that are now used in

⁴⁰ *Holy Prince Lazar*, Br. 4 [24] (Prizren 1998), 135. Author’s emphasis.

⁴¹ See http://www.spiritrestoration.org/Church/Holidays/Maundy_Thursday.htm . Translator’s note.

⁴² Milin, *Church and Sects*, 316-7. Author’s emphasis.

Orthodoxy. Neither do the apostles mention a thing about ever using chrismation. Evidence from Scripture for such teaching can only be invented by someone, like the Orthodox teachers, only by ripping verses out of context and customizing them to prove their own extrabiblical doctrine. Before we review some of the Scriptures that the great Serbian Orthodox Church uses to rationalize its dogmas, let us briefly mention a few sentences from the church historian Eusebius Popovic. As we will confirm, this historian argues that the dogma of chrismation gradually evolved over time. In fact, over the centuries, significant differences in its practice arose in the western and eastern parts of the same Ecumenical Church. Also, historical data and evidence that the anointing oil (chrism) was labeled a “Holy Sacrament” only in the third era (according to the chronology represented by Eusebius Popovic). Such dating would place its acceptance as a sacrament only after 622 A.D.

“The means of grace, which the Holy Spirit grants, were given by the apostles Peter and John in Samaria, and Paul in Ephesus, by the laying of hands... **These two instances do not say whether these two cases involved anointing with oil or not.**”⁴³

“The practice of anointing with oil arose only during the Second Period of schism, which occurred earlier between East and West. Specifically, in the Eastern Church, the priest would give the sacrament of chrismation by the anointing of chrism oil after baptism... while he anointed the forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth and ears, the priest would pronounce the formula: ‘Seal the Gift of the Holy Spirit.’ In the Western Church, however, in general it became the custom for chrismation to be given not by priests but by bishops. They traveled through their diocese for the purpose of anointing believers with the sacrament of chrismation on the forehead and laying on of hands... This sacrament is called either the sacrament of ‘Holy Orders’ or ‘Chrismation’ in the Western Church, while the Eastern Church only calls it ‘Chrismation’... **Only in the Third Period did they call chrismation a ‘sacrament’**... Bishop consecrated oil on the altar during the liturgy. **Initially, there was no specific day assigned to this consecration. However, over time, Great [Maundy] Thursday became the day designated by the Eastern Church.** Eventually, the consecration of oil became the exclusive dominion of the high bishop.”⁴⁴

As it is evident, the events surrounding the “Holy Sacrament” of chrismation were determined by “Holy Tradition”, not Scripture. However, it is interesting to look at the attempts by the Orthodox to justify this “Holy Sacrament” on the basis of the Bible. Here is how the “expert” apologist and champion against heresy, Lazar Milin, tries to distort the Bible for such purposes:

“On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.’ (Jn. 7:37-9)

⁴³ Popovic, *General Church History*, 433. Author’s emphasis.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 649-50. Author’s emphasis.

As you can see, John the Evangelist interprets this promise of our Savior to be that for those who are thirsty, they should approach Christ to drink from His founts - that is to be baptized and become members of His Church – and to receive the Holy Spirit when He would descend in His time after the glorification of Christ.

A brief summary: just before and after baptism, there is a holy act that seals the believers with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The apostles understood and obeyed this. Here is the biblical testimony:

‘When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.’ (Acts 8:14-7)

As is clear from the text, the Samaritans were baptized first. The apostles did not consider their baptism as sufficient for growth in their faith. The apostles realized that the Samaritans right before their baptism should have received the ‘laying on of hands’ in order to receive the Holy Spirit. We doubt that this procedure did not originate from the apostles’ own ideas. They had to have learned it from the Savior, even though such a lesson is written nowhere in the Bible. Such a lesson becomes visible by the example of the apostles’ practice. Here is another biblical examples that teaches the same concept:

‘While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ They answered, ‘No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’ So Paul asked, ‘Then what baptism did you receive?’ ‘John's baptism,’ they replied. Paul said, ‘John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.’ On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.’ (Acts 19:1-6)”⁴⁵

The careful reader of the text above will find a number of disagreements between Milin’s interpretations and the actual teachings of the Holy Scriptures.

Namely, the biblical text at the start of this argument, which was issued by the Lord Jesus and recorded by the evangelist John, alludes to the descent of the Holy Spirit upon every single person at the time of his faith in the Savior, after His glorification in heaven and earthly establishment of the Church. In the words of the Lord, the Holy Spirit will become like a stream of fresh (living) water within the life of an individual believer. Thus, he will never be spiritually thirsty.

Milin essentially interprets Christ's instruction to refer to baptism and joining the Church, even though such a meaning from the text is not feasible. The specified text, therefore, refers to the action of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers. It is not at all clear from

⁴⁵ Milin, 317.

where the Orthodox derive any justification for their dogma of “the Holy Sacrament of Chrismation” from this text. There is not even an indirect reference to chrismation in this passage! (The Lord gave a similar lesson on “living water” to the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4, but He certainly could not have meant for this woman to receive the “laying of hands” in order to get the Holy Spirit.)

From another angle, Milin cites the book of Acts in mentioning the descent of the Holy Spirit on believers after their baptism and the laying of hands of the Apostles. Again, these passages also do not support chrismation. Specifically, there is not one word referring to “chrismation” or “anointing by oil” (which is the main reason for Milin’s use of these texts). In fact, we find in Acts an opposite sequence of events with regards to the descent of the Holy Spirit followed by someone receiving baptism. (By Milin’s logic, this would mean that the “anointing” would have been fulfilled before baptism.)

Here are some examples. During the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, it is not written that the Holy Spirit descended on him neither before nor after his immersion in water. Philip laid hands on him, and the eunuch did not display any unusual spiritual gifts, such as prophecy and speaking in tongues. On the other hand, in the home of the officer Cornelius recorded in Acts 10, Peter’s preached to the audience who initially put their faith in Christ. Then right away, the Holy Spirit came down upon them (without Peter’s having laid hands upon them) and displayed miraculous signs. Only afterward did Peter baptize these people:

*“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, ‘**Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.**’ So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.”⁴⁶*

A case which contradicts the Orthodox view occurred during the baptism of the jailer and his house in Philippi (Acts 16). First they believed, and then they were baptized. Nothing is recorded about the descent of the Holy Spirit or anything about them having hands laid upon them.

For these reasons it is very disingenuous to take examples from the New Testament books to justify rituals such as chrismation that were established much later in time. The simple reality is that different texts undermine Orthodox teaching on chrismation (including the order of baptism and chrismation, let alone its existence in the New Testament). Perhaps the best evidence for this is the fact that the Holy Spirit moved the hearts of man before baptism, when they believed in the message by the preaching of the Gospel. The apostle Paul wrote in Galatians:

⁴⁶ Acts 10:44-8. Author’s emphasis.

*“I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?... Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?”*⁴⁷

However, let us reflect briefly on the last portion of Milin’s “proof”. This is the text contained in Acts 19 that describes baptism and the laying on of hands by Paul on the believers in Ephesus. The Orthodox text invokes this text as the crowning proof that the person who does not receive chrismation even if he is baptized cannot receive the Holy Spirit. The example of the baptized Ephesians who had not even heard of the Holy Spirit would seem to favor the doctrine of the sacrament that asserts a baptized person needs to receive the “seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit” via chrismation.

However, is this really the case? Such a conclusion may be derived only from the superficial reading of Luke’s account. However, if one were to read this text along with the final part of the chapter (Acts 18:24-28), one would gain the following insight into the context surrounding these events:

- The disciples whom Paul found in Ephesus (19:1) were baptized “in the name of John’s baptism” by Apollos, a native of Alexandria⁴⁸, who himself was familiar only with the baptism performed by John the Baptist (18:24-25), but not Christian baptism.
- Because of his ignorance of Christian doctrine and baptism, Aquila and Priscilla, more mature Christians, taught Apollos more fully in the faith (18:26).
- It is not true that the disciples at Ephesus never heard of nor received the Holy Spirit because they were “anointed” (“chrismated”), but rather because they were not yet baptized into Christ. John called upon his followers in Palestine, the Israelites, to repent and prepare to enter the kingdom of God.
- After Paul preached and taught to them faith in Christ, these disciples were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (i.e., in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). (19:5-6)
- After Paul laid hands on them did the Holy Spirit descend upon them. They received the gifts of speaking in tongues and prophesying.

After this time, the descent of the Holy Spirit on the newly baptized believer was associated with the laying on of hands by the Apostles (which does not occur in every situation in the Bible, as explained earlier). Eastern Orthodoxy does not find this example useful. Specifically, if one wanted to fully apply all of its implications - as the

⁴⁷ Gal. 3:2, 5. So Paul never posed the question, "Have you received the Spirit after the execution of the sacraments of baptism and unction, or on the basis of the law?" Rather, Paul clearly emphasizes that belief in sermons heard about faith is the condition for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Finally, Paul points out in Romans 10:17 that "faith comes by hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."

⁴⁸ Although the Scripture does not explicitly state so, we can safely deduce that the person who baptized these Ephesians was Apollos. We can make this deduction based on the claim that they were given “the baptism of John” (Apollos himself knew only this baptism based on Acts 18:25), rather than the baptism of Christ “in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”. Neither they nor he were familiar with Christ’s baptism at this point.

Orthodox try to do – then it would follow that all Orthodox believers who are newly baptized and chrismated ought to speak in strange ways, such as prophecy and uttering in foreign languages that they have neither learned nor knew before.⁴⁹ Obviously, such things do not occur after Orthodox baptism and chrismation. Hence other “parts” of the evidence from the Biblical text quoted above, which Milin attributes as support for his position, are not “valid” and applicable in the case of performing the first two sacraments in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

However, since it is obvious that Orthodoxy connects the descent of the Holy Spirit with the anointing of oil, let us examine the history and meaning of the anointing of oil in places where the Bible mentions it.

Anointing of Oil in the Old Testament

Anointing with oil in the books of the Old Testament is mentioned in several places. Anointing God’s servants (priests, kings, and prophets) with oil represented the external visible sign of the invisible presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of that individual. This is probably the origin of the idea of chrismation in the Eastern Orthodox (and Western Catholic) Church as a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the newly baptized believer.

However, the anointing that is described in the Old Testament writings largely differs in meaning from their sacrament of chrismation. First of all, the Old Testament historical period did not have the practice of baptism, and certainly not in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There was no Christ, no Church. Furthermore, the anointing of oil occurred rarely only for the types of people mentioned earlier. Here is how anointing with holy oil was conducted in the Old Testament, as well as restrictions relevant to its application:

*“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Take the following fine spices: 500 shekels of liquid myrrh, half as much (that is, 250 shekels) of fragrant cinnamon, 250 shekels of fragrant cane, 500 shekels of cassia—all according to the sanctuary shekel—and a hin of olive oil. Make these into **a sacred anointing oil**, a fragrant blend, the work of a perfumer. It will be the sacred anointing oil. Then use it to anoint the Tent of Meeting, the ark of the Testimony, the table and all its articles, the lampstand and its accessories, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the basin with its stand. You shall consecrate them so they will be most holy, and whatever touches them will be holy. Anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them so they may serve me as priests. Say to the Israelites, ‘This is to be my sacred anointing oil for the generations to come. **Do not pour it on men's bodies** and do not make any oil with the same formula. It is sacred, and*

⁴⁹ This phenomenon relates to the descent of the Holy Spirit on Christians in the first century. Jesus Christ foretold this working of the Spirit before His ascension into heaven (Mark 16:17). The Holy Spirit enabled Christians from the early church to worship God in other spoken languages. His purpose was a sign to show unbelieving Jews that God ushered in a new covenant in which the gospel of salvation would be preached to all nations in the world. See: Acts 2:4-11, 10:46, 11:15-18, 19:6, and 1 Cor. 12:7-11, 14:21-22.

you are to consider it sacred. Whoever makes perfume like it and whoever puts it on anyone other than a priest must be cut off from his people.’”⁵⁰

The text above shows us the only proper way of making and using holy oil. The Lord’s statement referred to the anointing, and therefore the entire sanctification of the tabernacle of meeting, with all the liturgical items. The place of God’s habitation had to be consecrated, thus demonstrating a symbolic sign of true sanctification of God’s spiritual presence. Aaron, Moses’ brother, and his sons were anointed as priests, whose duties included the performing of sacrifices before a large altar that was in the courtyard in front of the tabernacle and teaching people in faith and how to perform other religious activities. Other ethnic groups were strictly prohibited from preparing this ointment and anointing themselves. The Lord would punish them by death. One of the Psalms refers to anointing oil poured out on the head of Aaron the high priest:

“It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down upon the collar of his robes.”⁵¹

The Old Testament relates several examples when they anointed the kings of Israel:

*“Now the day before Saul came, the LORD had revealed this to Samuel: ‘About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. **Anoint him leader** over my people Israel; he will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked upon my people, for their cry has reached me.’ When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the LORD said to him, ‘This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people’... Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul’s head and kissed him, saying, ‘**Has not the LORD anointed you leader** over his inheritance?’”⁵²*

*“The LORD said to Samuel, ‘How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king’... **So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers**, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power. Samuel then went to Ramah.”⁵³*

“Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the sacred tent and anointed Solomon. Then they sounded the trumpet and all the people shouted, ‘Long live King Solomon!’”⁵⁴

Also, the prophet Elijah anointed Hazael and Jehu as kings of 2 states along with Elisha as prophet:

⁵⁰ Ex. 30:22-33. Author’s emphasis.

⁵¹ Ps. 133:2.

⁵² 1 Sam. 9:15-7, 10:1. Author’s emphasis.

⁵³ 1 Sam. 16:1,3. Author’s emphasis.

⁵⁴ 1 Ki. 1:39.

*“The LORD said to him, ‘Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet.’”*⁵⁵

What we generally can conclude is that anointing with oil represents a type of ordaining for ministry to which the Lord called certain people. David, for example, did not immediately become king, even though the Spirit of the Lord descended on him after his anointing. God’s anointed man had to wait for his coronation many years after the anointing. Of course, the priestly, prophetic and imperial service have very little in common with the “sacraments” of our study, though we can see that they borrowed some features of the Old Testament practice, such as the descent of the Holy Spirit upon a person after his anointing.

Jesus of Nazareth Anointed by the Holy Spirit

The great truth of Holy Scriptures that Jesus of Nazareth Himself fulfilled all the Old Testament typology that pointed to Him. He said about Himself:

*“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”*⁵⁶

The apostle Paul added:

*“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. **These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.**”*⁵⁷

The Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled the requirements of the Old Testament offices of prophet, priest, and king, which were a mere dim shadow of the vibrant New Testament reality. Namely, the word “Christ” in Greek or “Messiah” (“Moshiach” in Hebrew) would be translated into Serbian as “anointed”. In the previous section, we saw that they poured holy anointing oil on Old Testament anointed ones (Messiah, Christ) as a symbol of the spiritual presence of God and His mercy upon them. On the other hand, the one true Messiah Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of His mothers as the eternal Son of God. When He was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him from heaven in the physical form of a dove. This descent affirmed His identity as the Messiah and His ministry to fulfill the will of God.

Many parts of the Old and New Testament affirm Jesus’ ministry as Priest, Prophet, and King.⁵⁸ If one were to read all the relevant verses on this subject, one would be

⁵⁵ 1 Ki. 19:15-6.

⁵⁶ Mt. 5:17.

⁵⁷ Col. 2:16-7. Author’s emphasis.

convinced that the numerous ancient prophecies about the Old Testament Messiah were fulfilled in Jesus the Anointed, and Him Alone. Precisely because the symbolic anointing of the Old Testament Messiah is fulfilled in the New Testament in the person of Jesus the Son of God, it consequently means that there is no longer any need to keep on anointing people for such purposes. In fact, the New Testament writings make no further mention of anyone receiving anointing with oil for such purposes, unless one considers the “anointing” of the Holy Spirit that God gives to every person who believes in His Son as Savior.

Anointing of Believers with the Holy Spirit in the New Testament

In his argument that the apostles definitively chrismated newly baptized believers in order to receive the Holy Spirit, Orthodox theologians cite the word “anointing” in the New Testament. Apologist Lazar Milin alleges the term “anointing” in the New Testament is a confirmation that the first disciples of Christ knew this “holy sacrament” and practiced it from the earliest times. Milin gives his explanation:

“To protect the faithful from those trying to deceive them from the sectarians and heretics of his time, the apostle John writes: ‘*You have the anointing of the Holy Spirit.*’ ‘*As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.*’ (1 Jn. 2:20, 27)

The Apostle Paul also mentions the anointing in regard to the receiving of the Holy Spirit when he writes the Corinthians: ‘*Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*’ (1 Cor. 1:21-2)

It is quite apparent that the apostles used the word ‘anointing’ here in the sense of an invisible internal action of the Holy Spirit on the anointed person’s soul. However, it is natural to ask why they called the effect of ‘anointing’ spiritual? **This term might indicate an external action** that serves as a visible sign of the anointing Spirit, similar to the way baptism is called ‘bathing’ because of the external character of this sacrament, that is immersion in water. **Such a conclusion is very logical and probable**, and from it we can conclude that the apostles not only ‘laid hands’ on the newly baptized people themselves, but they also anointed them, thus performing the sacraments that they transferred to bishops and priests. This is the same reasoning how the bishops and priests read certain prayers that the very apostles also recited. (Acts 8:15) All these elements exist in today’s Orthodox Church since the times of the apostles...”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Jesus as High Priest: Heb. 4:14-5, 5:5-7, 9-10, 7:23-28, 8:1-2, 9:11-12, 24, 10:21. Jesus as King: 2 Sam. 7:13-6, Mic. 5:2, Lk. 1:31-3, Mt. 2:1-2, Jn. 12:12-5, 18:33-7, Rev. 19:11, 16. Jesus as Prophet: Deut. 18:15, Mt. 13:57, Lk. 13:33, 24:19, Jn. 4:19, 7:40.

⁵⁹ Milin, *Church and Sects*, 318. Author’s emphasis.

As an evangelical Christian who asserts that the Orthodox sacrament of chrismation was not practiced in the first century Church, this author expresses his heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Milin for the claims stated above. Namely, although the quote cites the word “anointing” (presumably he uses this as evidence that the Apostles practiced chrismation, the physical anointing with oil), Milin added a sentence which deserves particular emphasis. He said it was “**quite apparent that the apostles used the word ‘anointing’ in the sense of an invisible internal action of the Holy Spirit.**” Thus, he suggests that is not totally safe to assume that this meant that someone was physically “anointed”!

The words of the Lord Jesus lead us to an identical conclusion. In John 16:7-15, He calls the Holy Spirit the “Spirit of Truth” to believers who receive it as a “guide to all truth” (v.13). This passage relates to Milin’s citation of the text in 1 John 2:20 and 27, which speaks of the “anointing” that keeps believers from spiritual apostasy and the acceptance of false teaching. So, the anointing that keeps the faithful away from apostasy is the Holy Spirit, and the anointing in the Old Testament was His visible symbol. Milin still believes that it is quite natural to wonder “why they called the effect of ‘anointing’ spiritual?” The answer to this question is very simple! As it is obvious, the apostles used Old Testament symbols of such things that were able to describe the invisible spiritual reality of the New Testament. After all, they wrote epistles to Christians who read the Scriptures, which at that time consisted only of the books of the Old Testament. So, for example, the Old Testament in many places mentions in addition to anointing things such as circumcision and offering sacrifices. Although things such as circumcision and sacrificial offerings no longer existed in the New Testament Church (unlike the Old Testament), the apostles mention these actions to other as types of the spiritual reality of Christian ministry:

*“In him you were also **circumcised**, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the **circumcision done by Christ**, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”⁶⁰*

*“But even if I am **being poured out like a drink offering** on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.”⁶¹*

⁶⁰ Col. 2:11-12. Author’s emphasis. The covenant between God and his people (the seed of Abraham) in the Old Testament established the circumcision of every male child on the eighth day of his birth. “*This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.*” (Gen. 17:10-11) The Apostle Paul in Romans 4:11 says that Abraham’s circumcision was an external sign of his justification by faith and righteous life (and rejection of sin and wickedness). Comparing the Old Testament to New Testament circumcision as a “spiritual resurrection with Christ”, Paul in Colossians 2:11-12 says that the Church age does not mandate literal circumcision for believers since they already have received “circumcision made without hands,” i.e., removing physical flesh (in lieu of a symbolic rejection of sinful living and commitment to a righteous way of life).

⁶¹ Phil. 2:17. Author’s emphasis. Paul here compares himself with the sacrificial “drink offering” on behalf of the Philippians to God in the form of his ministry. Paul alludes to the verse in Leviticus 2:1: “*When someone brings a grain offering to the LORD, his offering is to be of fine flour. He is to pour oil on*

*“I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.”*⁶²

All of these citations and explanations reveal the answer to Milin’s question regarding the Old Testament term “anointing” with the purpose of the invisible action of the Holy Spirit in the life of the New Testament Christian. Moreover, from the terse text that Milin offers, one realizes that even this Orthodox apologist cannot be certain if the Scriptures actually substantiate the idea that the activities of the Holy Spirit are carried out by physical anointing with oil! Despite the Scriptures cited above that show how New Testament writers used Old Testament concepts in a spiritual, not physical, sense for Christians today, this priest of the Serbian Orthodox Church has the bravado to assert later that **“such a conclusion is very logical and probable”**. Milin boasts that in addition to the apostles laying hands and anointing newly baptized believers, or even that they transferred this practice to others (assuming we allow the possibility that they personally did not do such work), the apostles certainly commanded this practice to their successors - the bishops and priests of the Orthodox Church. At the end of his discussion with the Protestants and “sectarians” who believe that the sacrament of chrismation after baptism is unnecessary and unfounded on the Scriptures, and besides all the uncertainty in presenting their claims to defend this “sacrament”, Milin concluded the following:

“(a) It is not true that the sacrament of chrismation has no basis in Scripture. The citation above clearly shows that it is based on the Holy Scriptures. (b) It is not true that the sacrament of chrismation after baptism is unnecessary. If the apostles performed chrismation, and **the Holy Scriptures clearly show us that they did,**⁶³ then the apostles considered it obligatory. This is a further indication that the sectarian interpretation is contrary to Scripture.”⁶⁴

However, all these verses of Scripture and even data from church history prove the truth that completely contradicts Milin’s conclusions. The “sacrament of chrismation” has no basis in first century apostolic doctrine and practice. Instead, chrismation arose as a later development through many centuries, shaped by “Sacred Tradition”, that is, the teaching of the “Holy Fathers”.

it, put incense on it.” So, symbolically, the oil in the case of Paul is “a sacrifice of oil poured on fine flour” is in response to the faith of the Philippians.

⁶² Phil. 4:18. Author’s emphasis. Paul in this place, by applying the Old Testament symbolism, compares the voluntary gift (money and other supplies) which were sent to him by the Philippians for his own support, to a burnt offering in ancient times among the Israelites. Leviticus 3:5 states: *“Then Aaron’s sons are to burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offering that is on the burning wood, as an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.”*

⁶³ Once again, I must repeat the question already asked several times: which Scriptures clearly demonstrate the practice of this “sacrament of chrismation”? This statement of Milin completely contradicts the information previously presented from the Scriptures.

⁶⁴ Milin, 318-9. Author’s emphasis.

THE HOLY SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION (THE EUCHARIST)

Earlier in this book, the third chapter demonstrates that the Orthodox (and Roman Catholic) doctrines on transubstantiation are not based on the Bible, the sacred texts of Christianity. This section in the present chapter on sacraments will examine the past and reveal its definition. As we will verify, it was necessary for many centuries after Christ and the apostles lived to pass before the doctrine of transubstantiation evolved to its stature today in the Eastern Orthodox Church. This truth completely refutes the claims of its theologians who try to convince us that the present doctrine of transubstantiation was taught in the first century.

Before we review the historical data on this issue, let us analyze the views of orthodox evangelical Christians who believe in Christ's words about the bread and wine at the Last Supper to have symbolic, not literal, meaning. Lazar Milin says this about evangelical believers:

“And what about the schismatics? To which group do they belong on this issue? They will not renounce Christ openly, just as their past outcast ancestors did. Such outright denial was not in their plan, because then they would forfeit the opportunity to destroy the Church from within. To recognize the faith of the twelve, that is the proper Body and Blood of Christ, such schismatics are unable to do so because it would contradict their rationalism! Instead, they found a third alternative: tell us, Jesus, as often as you want that you give us your Body and Blood as heavenly nourishment, when in fact we know that you are not really serious in saying that. You certainly want it to say that the bread and the wine are mere symbols of your body and blood, or simply memories of your last dinner you had with the disciples. So, this is the attitude of many schismatics! Thus it becomes Christianity without Christ!”⁶⁵

Milin accuses evangelical Christians, who accept the entirety of the Holy Scriptures as inspired by God, of selectively dealing only with Biblical texts that support their doctrines. Milin alleges they omit verses that “do not square with their presumptions.” Furthermore, the Orthodox slander evangelical Christians with the label “schismatics” who misunderstand the words of Jesus, and they dub the faith of evangelical Christians as “Christianity without Christ”. On the other hand, evangelical Christians make every effort to understand the Lord's Word exactly how He wanted to be understood. Contrary to those who, like the ancient pagans, believe that drinking wine and eating bread in the rituals themselves allows the blood and body of the deity to enter them and thus grant immortality (eternal life).⁶⁶ Eusebius Popovic gives a detailed explanation of the doctrine of transubstantiation in the Eastern Orthodox and Western Catholic Churches:

⁶⁵ Milin, 327-8. Author's emphasis.

⁶⁶ Veselin Čajkanović makes the following points regarding this subject: “In ancient religion, divinity is identified with the element. Thus, when a Greek participated in the festival of Dionysus by partaking of the wine itself, he believed that he allowed Adonis to enter himself. Union with God is the highest goal in every religion. Hence, customs arose such as drinking wine in some cases, on certain holidays, and the importance of having the so-called sacramental victims, that is, in order to have union with the deity.” Čajkanović, *Other Books*, 388. Also, R. Woodrow cites Will Durant the historian who argues that the

“The controversy over the Eucharist arose around 831 A.D. over the teaching of the Frankish monk **Paschasius Radbert** at the Corbie monastery. His book *De corpore et sanguine Domini (The Body and Blood of Christ)* **taught on the transformation of bread and wine in the Eucharist. He claimed that although the elements remained physically bread and wine, yet simultaneously they also turned into the literal body of Christ to Whom Mary had given birth physically.** People only could receive Communion in the flesh and blood of a physical body. From antiquity, people had considered the bread and wine in the Eucharist to be transformed into the physical body and blood of Christ, but no one ever recorded a formal argument explaining how this transformation from the physical bread and wine to the true body and blood of Christ occurred. In 844 Paschasius Radbert gave a speech that he explained in graphic detail [transubstantiation]. His speech aroused the suspicion of other theologians, who believed that the details of transubstantiation should not be revealed in the open. They justified this belief by **claiming the Eucharist to be a mystery, and that the Eucharistic body of Christ by nature or by essence could be considered as essentially identical with the body of Christ [that is, symbolic, not literal, as Paschasius taught] .**

The views of Paschasius were contradicted as too worldly by various learned men. One man was the abbot of Fulda, Raban Moor (Hrabanus or Rhabanus Maurus). Also called Primus Germaniae praeceptor, the first teacher of Germany, he later became Archbishop of Mainz in 847 and died in 856. Another Frankish monk Ratramno (Ratramnus), also a learned theologian in Corbie, opposed Paschasius and died in 868. Another who opposed this teaching was a famous but eccentric Irishman named John Erigena Scott (Erigena Johannes Scotus). He lived in the Frankish states until 887. He dissented from the then current general church teachings on transubstantiation and taught that the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist had a symbolic presence. He reasoned that the bread and wine are symbols of the body and blood of Christ, ergo His symbols are the spiritual presence in the Eucharist. [Though many still rejected transubstantiation,] But the heterodoxy of Erigena spread throughout the world, and others gradually started to adhere to the view of Paschasius. **Thus, the debate simmered from the second half of the 9th Century until around the middle of the 11th Century.**

By the end of the 11th Century, the dispute reemerged again. **However, the doctrine of Paschasius Radbert became more broadly accepted, and few still held doubts about transubstantiation.** Only the canonist (house scholastic) Berengar (Berengar, Berengarius) of Tours, Archdeacon of Angers, rose up against the doctrine of transubstantiation in 1031 and attacked the doctrine of Erigena. He reasserted the

belief in "transubstantion" is one of the oldest ceremonies of primitive religion. The scientific part of the Hasting's Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics has many pages are dedicated to the idea of "eating God". On these pages is given extensive access to rites of transubstantiation rites among many nations, tribes and religions. Such rites were known in pagan Rome, and in the religious cult of Mithras. In ancient Egypt there was a ritual during which the priest blessed the bread which was considered to be converted into the body of the god Osiris. After the "transforming" the believers ate the bread and then drank the cup of wine. After Catholic missionaries first arrived in Mexico, they were eyewitnesses to a series of religious rites that they were very similar to their Communion. An element was made of mixed flour which after being consecrated was distributed among people who considered themselves to have partaken the body of their god. See: *Babylon Mystery Religion*, 130.

principle that the bread and wine of the Eucharist received merely a spiritual presence of the body and blood of Christ, rather than the literal body and blood born of Mary. Berengar's doctrine aroused great indignation from all sides. Many theologians starting in 1046 wrote letters to condemn his views. In 1050, the prominent abbot and teacher at Bec (Beccum) and Normandy, the Monk of Canterbury, Archbishop Lanfranc (died 1089) denounced Berengar, followed by several synods in France in 1059 and Italy in 1079. Rome finally condemned Berengar and his teachings... **So by the condemnation of Berengar's doctrine, the doctrine of Paschasius is based. Paschasius categorically and explicitly began to teach that the substance of the Eucharist bread and wine transform into the substance of the body and blood of Christ. This process that converts the substances is called "transubstantiation" (from Latin "transsubstantiatio"). This term began to be generally used in the West from the 15th Century and was eventually adopted by the East.**"⁶⁷

Summarizing what we just read, let us make the following conclusions:

- (1) The Church "from antiquity" has believed in "transubstantiation" even though it has never articulated its nature (although Eusebius cites neither Biblical nor historical evidence that would confirm that Christians of early centuries thought this way)!
- (2) No unanimity on "transubstantiation" existed in the Church until Paschasius Radbertus came along in the 9th Century. He was the first to formally defend the idea of the "transubstantiation" of the Lord's Supper of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, even though the bread and wine still retained their previous form, color, smell, and taste.
- (3) The majority of learned theologians at the time opposed the interpretation of Paschasius as "too worldly", which suggests they held a different belief, meaning that in fact there is no such thing as "transubstantiation" or change in essence. Rather, the Eucharistic body of Christ (bread and wine) should only be considered in "nature or substance as identical with the real body of Christ". (In other words, not the literal body and blood.)
- (4) At this time there lived renowned theologians who believed that Christ's words should be understood only symbolically and not literally. Thus they suggest the belief that the bread and wine are symbols of Christ's body and blood.
- (5) The debate over Eucharistic transubstantiation of the bread and wine after the strong rejection of the middle 9th Century continued to the end of the 11th Century.
- (6) The reaction against the doctrine of canonist Berengar of Tours that taught Christ's words of the Last Supper to be symbolic led to the formal establishment of the doctrine of Paschasius regarding transubstantiation. Although this doctrine had been attacked for two centuries, now it had become generally accepted.

⁶⁷ *General Church History*, Vol. 1, 799-800. Author's emphasis.

- (7) The doctrine of transubstantiation in name and substance was adopted officially in the West (Roman Catholicism) in the 11th Century and in the East (Orthodox Church) in the 15th Century.⁶⁸

It would be interesting to briefly observe the events surrounding the conflicting views over transubstantiation that occurred after the teachings of Paschasius were set forth once again 200 years later in the middle of the 11th Century. The Ukrainian author Pavel Rogozin wrote:

“The Council of Rome (1059 A.D.), chaired by Pope Nicholas II, after many stormy protests and debate, accepted the fantasy of the monk Radbert Paschasius as a new dogma of the Western (Catholic) Church. At the same time, this teaching penetrated the Eastern (Orthodox) Church despite the fact that the decisive schism of the Western from the Eastern Church just happened only five years earlier (in 1054 A.D.). Still, despite all the strictness of church law, the “dogma of transubstantiation” remained one of the most contentious issues of the Western Church for a long time. In order to put an end to the debates, Pope Gregory VIII decreed a unique fast for the cardinals, who were mandated to gain unmediated direction from God to resolve this contentious issue. ‘Directions’ were allegedly received, but even these remained insufficient. **In the year 1160, the question of the dogma of transubstantiation was submitted for the Paris Theological Faculty to resolve. To the most severe consternation of the Pope and cardinals, the scholars who gathered rejected the dogma of Paschasius as devoid of any foundation on the teaching of Christ and a contradiction of common sense.** Yet, even these conclusions of the learned scholars led nowhere. Anxiety and arguments did not cease. To put an end to the disputes and prevent dangerous rifts in the church, the Lateran Council (which carries the name of “Fourth” in church history) triumphantly announced the **dogma of transubstantiation as binding upon all Christians.** From that moment onward began a famous repression of dissenters from the Roman dogma. Pope Gregory IX established the Court of Inquisition and placed it under the administration of the Dominican monastic order. Persistent opponents were turned over to the civil powers as dangerous heretics to be burned at the stake. Many volumes of historical research were devoted to this bloody era.”⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Lazar Milin informs us that the teachings on “transubstantiation” in the Eastern and Western churches have some minor variations. He states: “According to the teaching of the ancient Apostolic Church, which is preserved in the traditions of Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, bread and wine consecrated in the Holy Liturgy (Mass) turns into the actual body and actual blood of Christ. However, there is some difference between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic beliefs in the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, but these differences are more liturgical than dogmatic. In fact, Roman Catholics believe that the bread and wine transform into the body and blood of Christ at the moment when in the Mass, the priest quotes Christ's words: ‘Take eat, this is my body.’ The Orthodox, however, believe that the transubstantiation, or conversion, of bread and wine into the flesh and blood happens during the prayer of the holy minister, when he utters the words of Christ: ‘Take, eat...’ (according to the text of the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great and St. John Chrysostom) which is a prayer to God the Father to send the Holy Spirit to perform transubstantiation.” *Church and Sects*, 319.

⁶⁹ Pavel Rogozin, *Where Did It All Come From?* Text is an excerpt from the workbook *Biblical Baptism* by Simo Ralevic. (Published by XBC “House of Prayer”, date of publication unknown.) Author’s emphasis.

Thus, when modern theologians of the Eastern Orthodox churches attempt to cite New Testament texts to defend their view that the Eucharistic bread and wine are literally transformed into the body and blood of the Lord, they actually are not upholding apostolic belief and practice (as we learned in the previous chapter). Instead, they are seeking to rationalize the doctrine of Radbert Paschasius from the ninth century after Christ. We could rightly ask whether today's Orthodox believers believe in the same things that their "Holy Fathers" before Paschasius did. Apart from Paschasius, was it really true that no one else believed in transubstantiation during his days? After all, almost every teacher listed earlier rejected this doctrine that today is promoted as the "traditional" Christianity of the East and West? On the other hand, we have every right to ask whether the Lord truly taught "transubstantiation" as His doctrine, as a true miracle in the Orthodox Liturgy (or Catholic Mass) where the bread and wine transform into flesh and blood, yet remaining with the same appearance and retaining all the characteristics of bread and wine? While Christ walked the earth, it is plainly obvious that He performed miracles that one could call "transubstantiation" ("transformation"). John chapter 2 tells us about the first miracle performed by the Lord Jesus Christ. It was a miracle of true and literal "transformation" of water into very good wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. We also know of the miracles of multiplying bread and fish, not once, but even twice (Matt. 14:13-21, 15:29-39, 16:9-10), when the Lord fed thousands of people with only a few pieces of bread and fish. When the apostles of Christ used miraculous power to heal the lame man in Acts 3, their religious opponents were confused and failed to recognize the following:

*"'What are we going to do with these men?' they asked. 'Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an **outstanding miracle**, and we cannot deny it.'"*⁷⁰

Apparently, it would seem that the Lord could (and actually had to) perform miracles of the actual transformation of bread and wine during the Divine Liturgy in order to teach the truth of the dogma of transubstantiation – if, in fact, this dogma indeed originated with Jesus and His apostles. Indeed, according to Orthodox teaching, the sacrament of the Eucharist is so important that the eternal salvation of an individual (as Orthodox people call it Communion with Christ⁷¹) fully depends on it. Therefore, it seems quite

⁷⁰ Acts 4:16. Author's emphasis.

⁷¹ It would be interesting to recount about the performance of Communion in the Eastern Church. Unlike Roman Catholicism in which the flock receives Holy Communion only under one form (only the Eucharistic bread – the round unleavened host), while only the priests partake of both forms (the bread and wine), the elements of Orthodoxy as "the body of Christ" are mixed together in a bowl that is called the "chalice" (a glass). [Post Vatican II, Rome now teaches that laypeople can partake of both forms six times a year, otherwise, they still partake only one form. Translator's note.] Ordinary water must be added to the bread and wine in the chalice as a symbol of "water" which ran from Jesus' wounds on the chest after His death made by the spear of the Roman soldier (32nd canon of the VI Ecumenical Council, in connection with John 19:34). After his compulsory confession, the Orthodox believer approaches with piety, and receives in his mouth "the body and blood of the Lord" that the priest offers on a special spoon. Church history testifies that this spoon is a "novelty" in relation to the apostolic practice and began to be used only in the IV and V centuries. Eusebius Popovic said that it was introduced into the liturgy by John Chrysostom (died 407 A.D.), but at this time, it was intended only for children. Adults received the Eucharistic bread in their hand and then ate it while drinking wine directly from the glass (similar to the time of the apostles and the first church). This novelty was later introduced that applies to adult believers

incomprehensible why Christ in this situation “denied” the commission of such miracles of “transubstantiation” attributed to him, thus contributing to the confusion, divisions, and debates within the church.

The true reality, which ultimately must be resolved, is that neither the Orthodox nor the Roman Catholic rituals and invocations of the Holy Spirit have absolutely done any “transubstantiation” whatsoever. Simply put, this dogma has no foundation anywhere in the Lord’s teachings in the Bible. It is obvious, therefore, that this dogma, like many other modern Orthodox doctrines which we have studied, developed over the centuries after the death of the apostles. Only in the 15th Century did this dogma of “transubstantiation” of what is called "turning" the Eucharistic bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ come to its fruition in the Orthodox and Catholic Churches.

All the absurdity of belief in the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ during the Orthodox worship is highlighted by the famous Russian writer Leo Tolstoy. In his famous work *Resurrection*, he presents his position on the Orthodox teachings, placing it in the context of the events mentioned in the novel’s progression:

“The service began. It consisted of a priest dressed in special, strange, and very uncomfortable vestments. He who cut up and laid out the pieces of bread on a plate and then dipped them into a chalice of wine as he pronounced upon this various names and prayers... The essence of the service consisted, as it were, of pieces cut up by the priest and put in wine that through set manipulations and prayers turned into the body and blood of God. These manipulations consisted of the priest, in spite of the fact that his adorned baggy vestments hindered him, evenly lifted both his hands up and held them such that later he bent down on his knees and kissed the table and its contents. His most important movement was when he took a napkin in both hands and placed it evenly and flatly upon the plate and the golden chalice. It was assumed that at that very moment the bread and wine would be transformed into the body and blood, and therefore this part of the Liturgy was conducted with special pomp... And it never occurred to any of those in attendance, starting from the priest and the administrator and ending with Maslov, that this very Jesus, Whose name is repeated countless times by the wheezing priest and praised with such strange words, prohibited the very thing they were performing here; He forbid not only **such senseless, glib, occult blasphemy of the priestly teachers over the bread and wine**, but He also in the clearest manner forbade people to call others “teachers”... **None of those in attendance ever considered that everything which was carried out here was the greatest witchcraft and mockery over the very Christ in Whose name all this was done...** Those priests who imagine they are partaking of the literal body and blood of Christ by consuming the bread and wine, in fact, are doing so. They indeed eat His body and blood, but not in wafers and in wine. Rather, they not only

(see: *General Church History*, Vol. 1, 675). However, so that the spoon would not be imbibed too often by the believers, the “Holy Fathers” added a specific spiritual meaning. It is compared to the pliers in which the Seraphim held coal taken from the altar to cleanse the mouth of Isaiah to atone for his sins and to remove his iniquity (Isaiah 6:6-7). (Pavel Rogozin, *Where Did It All Come From?*, 26, from the workbook *Biblical Baptism* by Simo Ralevic).

cause to stumble those ‘little ones’ whom Christ sternly warned not to tempt. They also deprive them of their greatest blessing and condemn them with great suffering, hiding from people the Gospel which he brought to them.”⁷²

Ending this section with Tolstoy’s quote, we can conclude that, based on the teachings of the Bible and church history data, Evangelical Protestant Christians are much closer to the truth than the self-proclaimed “Holy and Apostolic Church.”

Studies of other sacraments will bring even greater conviction of this point of view.

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE (CONFESSION)

Undoubtedly, every person as a sinner needs sincere repentance before God in order to restore close fellowship with Him. This fellowship with God is broken by sin. Evangelical Christians wholeheartedly advocate the need for and the importance of repentance in the life of every Christian. However, those Christians, whose confession is founded on God’s Word, the Bible, dispute the Orthodox doctrine which teaches that repentance actually is a sacrament of repentance based on the authority of Christ performed through ordained priests. After studying this topic, I am fully convinced that our readers will see all the inconsistencies of the Orthodox doctrine of repentance compared with that of the Holy Scriptures, regardless of how many theologians of the Eastern Churches want to convince us otherwise.

Here is how Eastern Orthodoxy explains its teachings on the Sacrament of repentance, as well as their opinion of the view of evangelical Protestants on this issue:

“We priests have witnessed the most common spiritual injury arising as a consequence of sin in man... It takes a major cleansing of the conscience, burdened with the guilt of a big secret, because it is more difficult to conceal it than to be open about it. The time comes when he will find a suitable person in whom to confide. It could be an independent person, assuming that someone appropriate is at hand. He confesses it to him, and his soul is just relieved.

Therefore the Church of God has established the sacrament of confession. It is based on the authority of Christ and the Holy Apostles. “*As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.*’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘*Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*” (John 20:21-3)

In this way, Christ authorized priests with the grace of the Holy Spirit to choose forgive or not to forgive sins.”⁷³

⁷² Lev Tolstoy, *Resurrection*, (Nolit: Belgrade, 1967), 137-40. Author’s emphasis. (Tolstoy, *Resurrection*, Part 1, XXXIX on <http://ilibrary.ru/text/1462/p.39/index.html> and XL on <http://ilibrary.ru/text/1462/p.40/index.html> . Translator’s note.)

“Those who practice confession know that it takes much more mental effort to openly admit their sins before the priest than it does merely in the soul to confess them directly and without mediation to God. And if this recognition is more difficult, it even brings a person more relief than just internal regret. Thus the Savior established the sacrament of repentance with His apostles, including with them their successors, in saying ‘*whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*’ (Mt. 18:18) This promise given to the Apostles by the Redeemer was fulfilled after the resurrection when He appeared to his disciples and told them, ‘*Peace to you. As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.*’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘*Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*’ (Jn. 20:21-3)... Thus the Protestant and sectarian rejection of the sacrament of repentance is in opposition to the Holy Scriptures, of which the sectarians claim is their sole source of faith and in which they based their entire teaching.”⁷⁴

So, according to Orthodox belief, the Church established the holy sacrament of repentance based on the commandments of Christ and the apostolic empowerment to forgive sins of people in the name of God. Of course, this implies that the sinner confessed just before the most holy person without the presence of other witnesses, and the priest is obliged to keep absolute secrecy on the confessions he heard.

Detailed study of this topic in further chapters that is based on the Holy Scriptures will establish the truth about whether the exercise of the sacraments of repentance - as they exist today in Eastern Orthodoxy – were commanded by Lord Jesus Christ, or else, like many other teachings, were formed many years after the death of the apostles.

In attempting to defend the biblical basis of the sacrament, Lazar Milin mentions in his book that the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist preached repentance, which later were continued by Christ and the apostles.⁷⁵ Since the Orthodox begin their claim to legitimacy of the sacrament on the basis of the Old Testament, let us also examine the call of repentance in the time of the Old Testament.

The Call to Repentance in the Old Testament

The Scriptures as a whole testify that God is a Being who cares about the welfare of all mankind, as we noted in the second and third chapters of this book. After the election of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the development of the numbers of their offspring, the people of Israel, and after their deliverance from Egyptian slavery, God gave them His commandments. These commandments to the Jews ought to have led them to peace and prosperity - which they would have enjoyed had they obeyed the Lord. Here are some of the commandments and the promises given to the people:

⁷³ *Catechism for the Home*, 35-36.

⁷⁴ Milin, *Church and Sects*, 329-30.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 330.

*“Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.’”*⁷⁶

*“Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the LORD your God. Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy.”*⁷⁷

*“And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?”*⁷⁸

*“If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, **the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth.** All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God.”*⁷⁹

However, if the Israelites departed from the commandments of God and did evil before the Lord, they would receive various punishments:

*“However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.”*⁸⁰

However, because of His great love and longsuffering, the Lord did not immediately punish His people. Instead, He awaited their repentance and return to the paths of divine righteousness:

*“‘Even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.’ Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.”*⁸¹

*“Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?... For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!”*⁸²

The Old Testament testifies to us that the Almighty was merciful not only with His chosen people but also other people who did not know Him. Some examples of God's patience with the pagans included the Lord relenting punishment on the pre-Flood world

⁷⁶ Lev. 19:2.

⁷⁷ Lev. 20:7-8.

⁷⁸ Deut. 10:12-13.

⁷⁹ Deut. 28:1-2. Author's emphasis.

⁸⁰ Deut. 28:15-18.

⁸¹ Joel 2:12-13.

⁸² Eze. 18:23, 32.

over 120 years (Gen. 6:1-13), the 400 years of the Amorites (Gen.15:16), and the major city of Nineveh (Book of Jonah).

However, although God's call to repentance addressed through the prophets enables some people to repent and stay alive, others refuse His call. This is why they were punished. Nowhere in the Old Testament do we find evidence of the “sacrament” of repentance. Although the Orthodox would respond to this statement by noting that one should not expect to find sacraments in general in the Old Testament, we shall study the issue further in the New Testament. Because they claim this “sacrament” to be in the New Testament, we shall realize that neither does it exist in the New Testament, not even at a distant profile.

The Call to Repentance in the New Testament

In this part of the chapter we will examine the purpose of the call to repentance that John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ made to the Israelites, even though their actions technically occurred in the Old Testament period.⁸³ Mark's Gospel describes the activity of Christ's herald:

*“The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way’— ‘a voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’” And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and **preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins**. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. **Confessing their sins**, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.”⁸⁴*

All Gospel texts that foretell Christ's activities echo the same message. John called for the people who fell away from God to repent. After they have realized their sinfulness and transgression against the will of the Lord, they would repent and then receive baptism, an external symbol of an internal reality signifying forgiveness and cleansing of their sins. However, such texts do not give us even the slightest information that people went to John privately and confessed their sins. Rather, their recognition of sin was made publicly before all the people present. With regard to the Gospel ministry of Jesus, we also encounter the same message as John the Baptist:

*“After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God is near. **Repent and believe the good news!**’”⁸⁵*

⁸³ According to biblical chronology, the period of the Old Testament (i.e., the "Old Covenant" which God made with Abraham and his descendants through Moses) lasted until the establishment of the "New Covenant" between God and believing people of all nationalities in the world through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the period of the "Old Testament" was completed at the time of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross at Calvary and His resurrection from the dead.

⁸⁴ Mk. 1:1-6. Author's emphasis.

⁸⁵ Mk. 1:14-5. Author's emphasis.

Under the influence of Jesus' words, many did repent and became His disciples. The woman sinner, who anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfumes and wept bitterly for her sins, expressed repentance before many eyewitnesses:

*“When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them... Therefore, I tell you, **her many sins have been forgiven**—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.” Then Jesus said to her, **“Your sins are forgiven.”** The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.””⁸⁶*

A similar case took place in the home of the rich tax collector Zacchaeus, who gained his wealth through dishonest means. As proof of his repentance, Zacchaeus promised that any money he stole from them he would repay four times what he stole:

*“All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’” But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, **and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.**” Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.””⁸⁷*

Therefore, all examples of repentance, which are described in the New Testament during the time of Jesus' earthly life were done in public, not in secret. There is no single precedent in the New Testament for the sacrament of “repentance” or “confession” as performed in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Lazar Milin mentions one case of repentance recorded in the New Testament writings. Written in the book of Acts, he alleges that it refers to “confession” of people before the Apostle Paul. The text reads like this:

*“Many of those who believed now **came and openly confessed their evil deeds.** A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.”⁸⁸*

These quotations from Scripture make it obvious that those who believed did not confess privately to apostle Paul alone, as what the Orthodox apologist is attempting to convince us. Rather, they demonstrate that many people came to faith, including, of course, the apostle. As verse 19 tells us, these events took place in front of every person present.

⁸⁶ Lk. 7:37-38, 47-50. Author's emphasis.

⁸⁷ Lk. 19:7-10. Author's emphasis.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Such public confession of sin is affirmed by the apostle James, who said that believers need to confess sins before each other, not just specially ordained confessors (priests) who perform a sacrament.

*“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”*⁸⁹

In order to finally confirm once more that the confession of the priests was not part of the apostolic practice and the fact that this performance of the sacrament of confession was introduced much later, let us examine data from Church history. Here is what the Orthodox scholar Eusebius Popovic reveals:

“It is clear that public repentance gave way to **private penance**, which was connected to **private confession**. **Private confession and penance became required for all chrismations**, and public repentance with its four steps became rare, and finally was limited to great cardinal sins, which caused offense to the public. Confession was introduced first in the East and then in the West. In Constantinople the abolition of public contrition gave rise to a great scandal, which occurred in 391. At the time of Patriarch Nectarius (381 - 397), public penance was done by the penitential priest, also called the presbyter poenitentiarius... The incident that led to this crisis involved a noble woman who was ordered to do public penance. When she came to fulfill her duty, she met with a deacon who seduced her. This crime was reported to the Patriarch, and he removed the deacon from his post. But the Patriarch did not stop there as this erupted into a widely known scandal. On the advice of the presbyter Eudemon (Eudaemon), the Patriarch abolished the institution of regular public penance and the office of penitential priest altogether. **He invited every sinner**, who is addicted to mortal sin that could lead to public excommunication, **to seek advice and forgiveness of clergymen in secret and private penance**. **Such confession became a general practice in the East**. Around the middle of the fifth century, Pope Leo I (the Great) (440 - 461) began in the West an effort to abolish primarily a public confession for venial sins and thus laid the foundation for the eventual abolition of regular public penance in the West as well.”⁹⁰

These historical accounts show that public penance for sins was done in front of other Christians just as in apostolic times. Over time, such practice was gradually abolished and replaced with the use of private secret confession before a priest. For this reason (among other reasons to be mentioned later), it is impossible to believe the claims that Orthodox penance and confession, as presented by their theologians, were found and practiced at the time of the Apostles.

The Use of Rosaries in Orthodox Prayers

Before addressing the issue of what exactly the Lord Jesus Christ meant when He delegated the forgiveness of sins to the church, and to what extent the majority Serbian Orthodox Church properly understands His command, one more issue needs to be

⁸⁹ Ja. 5:16. Author’s emphasis.

⁹⁰ *General Church History*, Vol. 1, 686-7. Author’s emphasis.

examined. Specifically, this issue concerns the use of prayer beads, also known as rosary beads, by the Orthodox (and Roman Catholic) Churches. They claim to use these beads as a tool for “bullets”, i.e. an efficient way to repeat their prayers. The Orthodox historian Eusebius Popovic comments on the rosary:

“This device, which also is used by followers of pagan Eastern religions, consists of one cord, which is threaded with 100 or 200 balls of wood, amber or other substances and shaped like a crown. The beads are so slippery that they can easily pass through the fingers **like ‘bullets’**”⁹¹, hence the name “rosary” has remained with us. In the West, there is a device called the “rosarium” (Rozenkranz), a wreath of roses, not the actual crown, but the spiritual rose (with Germans using the cord for praying).”⁹²

The rosary, which the Orthodox historian recognizes is used in many other Eastern pagan religions, began to be used in Christianity after monasteries from the fourth century onwards started to teach new forms of penance. The monks were trained to do long spells of ascetic penance, including fasting, living on dry food, and chanting many times (sometimes even several hundred times) refrains such as “Lord have mercy”. Others would be compelled to repeat the prayer “Our Father” and falling to their knees in an act of repentance a few hundred times a day. This falling to his knees in the Eastern Greek Orthodox Church is known as “the great prostration” or “great metania” (the great repentance). This name was later assigned to the rosaries, which were supposed to serve as substitutes for hundreds of “great prostrations”, e.g. falling on the knees and reciting prayers.⁹³ Considering themselves to be lifelong penitents, the monks always carried these prayer beads with them. In today’s Serbia, the rosary has become a cool fashion trend. Many Serbs wear rosary beads like a bracelet, yet they do not live repentant lives at all.

However, it is critical to highlight the fact that members of pagan religions used rosaries in their prayers since ancient times, from which we can deduce that they were introduced to Christianity from polytheism. Anyone who knows the Bible can attest that the Scriptures mention nowhere the use of the rosary as an aid to prayer. None of the Lord’s true followers ever used the rosary in Biblical times. Moreover, since the rosaries function for the repetition of prayers by thumbing through each bead, their use opposes the teachings on prayer given by Christ in the New Testament. Most likely, Christ had in mind the prayers that the pagans practiced with rosaries when He forbade His disciples from using repetitive prayer. The Lord Jesus taught His disciples the following words:

*“And when you pray, **do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.** Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”*⁹⁴

⁹¹ This word could also mean “array”, as in “roses lined up in a garden.” See <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/questions/yq2/yq346.htm> for details on the word and also pagan Roman origin. Translator’s note.

⁹² *General Church History*, 686. Author’s emphasis.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Mt. 6:7-8. Author’s emphasis.

Consistent with Christ's teachings, the apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 instructs Christians to "pray to God without ceasing." It certainly does not teach believers to constantly repeat the same prayer over and over again. Rather, it urges believers to always have the spirit of prayer and to be ready to pray for God's will to be fulfilled at any moment. Therefore, prayers with the rosaries are completely foreign to New Testament Christianity.

The Catholic encyclopedia admits that excavations in the ancient city of Nineveh found two statues representing women with wings, which may be the holy tree, holding in their hands a rosary.⁹⁵ Also, Muslims use rosaries with 33, 66 or 99 beads representing the names of Allah. Hindu devotees of the god Krishna (Vishna) repeated the mantras with the rosaries, which have 108 beads. Devotees of the god Shiva used rosaries to invoke all of the 108 names of his god. In the 13th century, Marco Polo was very surprised when he saw the King of Malabar use rosaries with precious stones to count his prayers. In the same way the Catholic saint Francis Xavier and his companions were stunned when they saw that the Buddhists in Japan also widely used prayers with rosaries. Eight centuries before Christ, the Phoenicians used rosaries to honor the goddess Astarte (i.e., the goddess mother known as the Queen of Heaven). In ancient Rome, women wore necklaces with balls that are called "Moni" (reminders) that are used to remind them of prayers.

In any event, therefore, it is clear that Christians in the apostolic age did not know or use the rosary to repeat identical prayers. For this reason, true Christians today should not use them either, especially when the Lord forbade the pagan practice of prayer repetition. However, we have already noticed the fact that the first church did not practice the secret confessions to priests based on the testimony of Scriptures and history. This leads us to the next question: What did Jesus mean when He spoke to the apostles about forgiving sins? Does Eastern Orthodoxy correctly interpret His words?

“If You Forgive Anyone’s Sins, They Will Be Forgiven.”

In the Gospel there are three statements of the Lord Jesus Christ, which are very similar. The Orthodox defend their views on confession and penance based on these 3 verses:

⁹⁵ “Let us begin with certain facts which will not be contested. It is tolerably obvious that whenever any prayer has to be repeated a large number of times recourse is likely to be had to some mechanical apparatus less troublesome than counting upon the fingers. In almost all countries, then, we meet with something in the nature of prayer-counters or rosary beads. Even in ancient Nineveh a sculpture has been found thus described by Lavard in his "Monuments" (I, plate 7): "Two winged females standing before the sacred tree in the attitude of prayer; they lift the extended right hand and hold in the left a garland or rosary." However this may be, it is certain that among the Mohammedans the *Tasbih* or bead-string, consisting of 33, 66, or 99 beads, and used for counting devotionally the names of Allah, has been in use for many centuries. Marco Polo, visiting the King of Malabar in the thirteenth century, found to his surprise that that monarch employed a rosary of 104 (? 108) precious stones to count his prayers. St. Francis Xavier and his companions were equally astonished to see that rosaries were universally familiar to the Buddhists of Japan. Among the monks of the Greek Church we hear of the *kombologion*, or *komboschoinion*, a cord with a hundred knots used to count genuflexions and signs of the cross.”
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13184b.htm> Translator's note.

*“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”*⁹⁶

*“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”*⁹⁷

*“Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.”*⁹⁸

In these verses that specifically pertain to our study, it is important to interpret them in the broader context of the Scriptural passages where they are found. This issue is critical for gaining a proper understanding.

First, then, the Lord Christ told the apostle Peter something that was later communicated as the Word of God to His other disciples. It is interesting, of course, that this passage mentions "the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven" only in the case of Peter. Since we will certainly analyze the popular belief that St. Peter unlocks the door in Heaven for the soul of each deceased person, we will unlock the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures as to the meaning of the "keys" and their significance. Namely, as the Acts of the Apostles reveal, it is the apostle Peter who preached to the Jews on the day of Pentecost (fifty days after the resurrection of Christ) and called them to repent of their sins. Their greatest sin was their consent to the atrocity of the crucifixion of the Son of God. As a result of Peter's preaching, many Jews repented and received forgiveness and salvation. Thus, they became part of the newly established Church of Christ. Ten years after this event, when the doors of the Kingdom of Heaven were opened to the Jews who had transgressed against God, the apostle Peter was one of the first apostles to whom the Lord revealed that uncircumcised Gentiles also should be allowed entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven. Until this time, the first Christians were all Jews by nationality or proselytes, that is Gentiles who were circumcised and fully accepted the Jewish faith. These first Christians preached the gospel only to other Jews and proselytes in Israel and among the diaspora. They did not consider it proper to preach to the uncircumcised:

⁹⁶ Mt. 16:18-9.

⁹⁷ Mt. 18:15-8.

⁹⁸ Jn. 20:21-4.

*“Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, **telling the message only to Jews.**”*⁹⁹

When he entered the house of the Roman officer Cornelius (Acts 10) after much strife with God over this mission, Peter finally understood God’s plan to evangelize believing Gentiles to enter Christ’s kingdom. Even before Peter finished his sermon on salvation, the household of Cornelius trusted in Christ as their Savior and the Holy Spirit descended upon them. Since that time, after a short time of persuasion¹⁰⁰, all the other apostles joined Peter in sharing the faith with Gentiles.

Thus, the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven that the apostle Peter received from Christ functioned to open the entrance of His Church to the Jews and then to all other nations under heaven. Of course, we still need to determine what the rest of the passage of Christ’s speech in Matthew 16:18-19 means.

As mentioned in the first part of this study of the sacraments, it is expected of every Christian who has received the Holy Spirit to have a daily commitment and desire to please God. However, the Bible makes it clear that God’s great people sometimes fall into temptation and commit sin. For this very reason, all such people need sincere repentance before God. However, unfortunately, some Christians go too far in their sinning. Their conscience becomes dulled, and they persist in their sin. They apparently do not realize that they are on a path leading away from the Lord. There are several such examples in the New Testament. The death of the married couple Ananias and Sapphira because they conspired to lie before the apostle Peter and a large number of Christians (Acts 5), "the handing over to Satan" of the immoral man in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 5:5), and Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Philetus (1 Tim. 1:20, 2 Tim. 2:17-19) are but a few examples of what the apostles and other elders of the first Church encountered. It is in these situations that the apostles and others had to be aware of their responsible ministry, which consists of proper spiritual leadership and maintenance of a healthy spiritual fellowship within the church. At times, this could only be achieved through marking and removing people who refused to repent and wished to spread strife and sin from the community. The apostle Paul recorded an interesting statement regarding a church member who committed sin with their own relatives (by having sex with his stepmother):

*“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father’s wife. And you are proud! Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.”*¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Acts 11:19. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁰⁰ See Acts 11:1-18.

¹⁰¹ 1 Cor. 5:1-5.

In this case, the apostle urges the entire community to condemn this sin and to completely separate for a time from the perverse brother by ending any fellowship with him. The words "to save his spirit on the day of the Lord" tell us that a person will not lose his salvation (which he receives only once), but he will have to suffer the consequences of his sinning.¹⁰² Such people are Christians who have entered into the Kingdom of Heaven, but yet they lack even one good deed for which God would commend and reward them. For such believers, Paul stated the following:

“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”¹⁰³

The previous examples show the apostles' of the first Church had the role of being fellow workers with the Lord, Christ's helpers and administrators of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 3:9, 4:1-2) who strived to build up the body of Christ in His Church (2 Cor. 13:10). Thus the early apostles received from the Lord the gift of teaching Christians who were on a much lower level of understanding of spiritual truth than themselves (Eph. 4:11-15). The apostles were the authority of the truth of Christ's teachings and doctrine - how salvation comes through faith - and the issues of practical Christian living.

The Protestant theologian R. T. France explains that Jesus uses the terms “bind” and “loose” in Mt. 16:19 and 18:18 as technical terms similar to the way Jewish Rabbis communicated their teaching in sayings. These terms refer to that which was or was not permissible. (The term “bind” means “to ban” and “loose” means “to permit” the commission of certain actions).¹⁰⁴ According to the author, a similar example can be seen in Acts chapters 10 and 11 and 15:7-11, when the apostle Peter declared that God's decision for the Gentiles as worthy before God for salvation on an equal par with the Jews. Until that time, they had not known this truth. What is particularly interesting is that experts indicate the original Greek language used in Mt. 16:19 and 18:18 was stated in a rather awkward manner. The verbs are stated in the "future perfect" tense. Thus, a literal translation would render these controversial parts as "shall be bound in the heaven

¹⁰² David, King of Israel, suffered the consequence of sinning in adultery with the wife of Uriah the Hittite by the death of the child in birth, which occurred in spite of the repentance, fasting and praying of this steadfast servant of God. See 2 Samuel 11 and 12.

¹⁰³ 1 Cor. 3:11-15.

¹⁰⁴ The renowned scholar of the New Testament Greek text, Baptist theologian and professor. Dr. Alexander Birviš in his "Četvoroevangelju" translated the above verses: “I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven: whatever verdict you render on earth will be rendered in Heaven, and whatever you judge on earth, it will be judge in the same way in Heaven. Truly I tell you, whatever you condemn on the earth, it will be condemned in Heaven, and whatever you allow on earth, it will also be allowed in Heaven.” Aleksandar Birviš, *Four Gospels, The Life and Work of Jesus Christ*, (Bible Society of Belgrade: Belgrade, 1987).

and will have been bound in heaven."¹⁰⁵ It actually should mean that the apostles and other servants of God in the New Testament period are not given the authority to forgive sins as a holy sacrament according to the teachings of Orthodoxy. Rather, their purpose is to reveal to people what the eternal God permits and forbids in preaching. It also shows the foundation of certain teachings, the church's moral norms, the way in which worship is actually performed, and how to erect what God intended since eternity past.

This is precisely the case with the text in John 20:22-23 quoted earlier. This text states:

“And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.’”

By studying the whole context of these verses, we can recognize that Christ on the day of his resurrection, when He spoke these words, found some of his disciples hidden in a sealed room because they feared arrest. They included ten of the Apostles (His betrayer, Judas Iscariot, was already dead since he committed suicide, and even the Apostle Thomas was not present), along with some others who were not counted among them, probably including women such as Mary Magdalene, who had earlier visited the disciples in this secret place.¹⁰⁶ The gospel narrative of Matthew earlier revealed that Jesus did not ascribe the meaning to the words He gave regarding the disciples’ ability to forgive sins that traditional Eastern Orthodoxy interprets. (This clearly demonstrates that early Christians had a completely different practice than today’s Orthodox “penance”.) We still need to understand what exactly Jesus meant when He commanded the disciples in the New Testament examples to “forgive sin” of those who have committed sin.

One direct example of dealing through forgiveness with a sinner, who in this case caused damage to the entire church fellowship, is given in the epistles addressed to the church at Corinth. As mentioned earlier, among the local believers lived one who lived in the sin of sexual immorality. The apostle Paul exhorted the believers to warn and avoid fellowshiping with him so that he might be shamed and come to repentance. A year after he wrote the first epistles, the apostle Paul was able to write that the moral situation regarding this sinner changed significantly for the better. The former sinner grieved for his sin and the rebuke which he received for it and repented from his heart. That is why Paul could write the following:

*“If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent—not to put it too severely. **The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.** I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be*

¹⁰⁵ R.T. France, *Commentary on Matthew*, (Good News: Novi Sad, 1987), 261-2. 281.

¹⁰⁶ The Evangelist Luke says that on the same day and evening, the eleven apostles were also gathered together with their friends. This fact clearly indicates that Jesus intended His words regarding the power of the Holy Spirit to forgive sins not only to the apostles (and, later, the officials appointed by laying of the hands via apostolic succession and their successors the bishops – per Orthodox doctrine), but also to the crowd who was gathered. This crowd included many who never became church elders and several females. See Lk. 24:33.

*obedient in everything. **If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him.** And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.”*¹⁰⁷

As we see from this example, the apostle did not insist that the sinner make a separate confession to himself or anyone who alleges that his "authority of the Lord" grants Paul alone the right to forgive sins by performing the sacraments of penance. Paul simply said that he forgave the man who had been forgiven by the entire fellowship, despite the fact that Paul was physically quite far away from Corinth. This apostolic practice fully concurs with Christ's teaching on mutual forgiveness. Christ the Lord said:

*“So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and **if he repents, forgive him.** If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him.”*¹⁰⁸

The evangelists Matthew and Mark wrote the following:

*“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’”*¹⁰⁹

*“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. [But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your sins.]”*¹¹⁰

The Apostle Paul affirms Jesus' teaching by saying that Christians must live a life of mutual forgiveness:

*“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”*¹¹¹

*“Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and **forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.**”*¹¹²

In other words, the New (and Old) Testament is filled with examples of divine forgiveness, as well as teaching believers to imitate their Heavenly Father who forgives.

¹⁰⁷ 2 Cor. 2:5-11. Author's emphasis.

¹⁰⁸ Lk. 17:3-4. Author's emphasis.

¹⁰⁹ Mt. 18:21-22.

¹¹⁰ Mk. 11:25-26.

¹¹¹ Eph. 4:32.

¹¹² Col. 3:12-13. Author's emphasis.

And so, no matter how much effort they expend to find the writings of the apostles and the smallest example that anybody has ever even hinted at the need for confession of sin before the priests for their "absolution", such examples cannot be found in the Scriptures. All these texts along with sources of later church history, of course, confirm the fact that the sacramental practice of penance and confession before priests, as it exists today in Orthodoxy, was introduced only later in history into the church. In the beginning of the church, the Apostles did not know of its existence and did not practice it.

Now that we have established the biblical truth of repentance, let us move on to examining the next sacrament, which is closely related.

THE HOLY SACRAMENT OF THE PRIESTHOOD

The traditional Eastern Church gives the following explanation of the sacrament of priesthood:

“From the very beginning of church history, spiritual authority in the Church, that is the power of preaching, **performing the sacraments**, and leading the church, was given to the apostles, who received their authority from the Savior, as we have earlier specified (Mt. 18:18, 28:19-20; Jn. 20:21-23). This power Christ has given to all his disciples-apostles in equal measure, not more, not less... When the Church grew so much that the apostles could not be everywhere at once, they ordained with laying on of hands bishops as their deputies, whom are called by the grace of the Holy Spirit and are taught the fullness of their apostolic authority. In addition to bishops, the apostles also ordained presbyters and deacons.”¹¹³

“The clergy is composed of the offices of deacon, presbyter (priest), and bishop (His Grace). The bishop (His Grace) has the right to perform all of the sacraments, to teach the believers, and to manage the Diocese entrusted to him by the Church; the presbyter (priest) has the right to perform all the sacraments except the Holy Sacrament of Ordination. He can manage his own parish, which the bishop can delegate to him by laying hands on him. Deacons cannot independently perform the Holy Sacraments. They help (minister) with the bishop and priest in performing the sacraments. **These are three types of clergy: deacons, priests, and bishops... The ministry of the priest is the direct extension of the ministry of the Apostles.** The Holy Priesthood possesses **direct apostolic succession** in ministry and authority. It has received from the Savior the unique right to ministry, which can be claimed by no other person neither on earth nor in heaven in the Church of Christ.”¹¹⁴

“It is well known that the Roman Church has a direct historical relationship with Christ and His apostles. Without a doubt, it is a fact that the Catholic Church descended from apostolic times... It is also a fact that the clergy of the Roman Church bears apostolic succession, which neither can be denied nor has anyone ever denied.”¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Milin, *Church and Sects*, 29-30. Author's emphasis.

¹¹⁴ *Catechism in the Home*, 42. Author's emphasis.

¹¹⁵ Milin, 34.

So, these excerpts allege that Christ and the apostles founded the church hierarchy, the “clergy”. The clergy consists of a bishop, presbyter and deacon. Also, there is “apostolic succession”, i.e. direct lineage and inheritance from the apostles. This means that the priests of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches have the same powers as Christ gave the apostles (“forgiveness of sins” and others). By this succession, the flow of grace conferred by laying on of hands is purported to have continued uninterrupted for two thousand years, allegedly having dated back to the bishops of the First Century, e.g. the twelve Apostles themselves. The doctrine of “Apostolic Succession”, among other things, supposedly guarantees the veracity of Christian teachings and interpretations of Scripture by the anointed teachers of this “only Holy and Apostolic Church” because the Holy Spirit Himself guides them. This aforementioned clergy, according to Orthodox doctrine, has the authority to perform the holy sacraments, thus allowing people to enter the kingdom of Heaven.

A detailed study from the Bible and historical sources will demonstrate that the Eastern Orthodox Church, to her shame, does not follow truth and is inconsistent with the teachings of Christ and the Apostles on this issue. Before doing that, let us examine the role of Jewish priests in the Old Testament, for this is an important topic to study in order to understand priesthood.

The Role of the Old Testament Priesthood

There is no argument with the fact that the Bible recounts in many places of priests and their religious activities within the framework of God's people. Also the pivotal role of the priest within the Old Testament time period (which ends with Christ's death and resurrection) is undeniable.

However, starting from the book of Acts in the New Testament (which describes the birth of Christ's Church and the development of Christianity in the middle of the First Century after Christ) and beyond, the Bible mentions Jewish priests only in terms of their conversion from Judaism to Christianity (Acts 6:7). The Bible also mentions them in connection to the expiration of their ministry, which found its fulfillment in Jesus' ministry as the exclusive, final, and eternal High Priest (Heb. 8). As this study will clearly demonstrate, New Testament Christianity based on the Apostles' teaching and church practice knows no such thing as a special institution of “clergy”, especially not the hierarchy that exists today in the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches with all their powers. However, let us proceed with the study.

Even before He gave the Ten Commandments to the Israelites through Moses on Mount Sinai, God declared all the descendants of Jacob who were rescued from Egyptian bondage to be a holy nation and a royal priesthood (conditional upon their obedience to His law):

*“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a **kingdom of priests** and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”¹¹⁶*

According to the commandments of God, all the firstborn males from all twelve tribes of Jacob’s descendants belonged to the Lord as dedicated offspring of His holy people. However, as a replacement for dedicating all of the firstborn sons of all the Jewish tribes, God ordained an entire tribe to serve Him in special ministry. This was the Levites:

“The LORD also said to Moses, ‘I have taken the Levites from among the Israelites in place of the first male offspring of every Israelite woman. The Levites are mine, for all the firstborn are mine. When I struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, I set apart for myself every firstborn in Israel, whether man or animal. They are to be mine. I am the LORD.’”¹¹⁷

These Levites had the job as assistants to the priests and fellow ministers in the structure of the ministry of the Tabernacle, such as taking care of the vessels and other objects in the Holy Tabernacle.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, the priests themselves belonged to the tribe of Levi, but unlike the other Levites, they had to be direct descendants from Aaron and his sons.¹¹⁹ During the time of King David, the priests (descendants of Aaron through the sons of Eleazar and Ithamar) were divided into 24 priestly orders. Each order had its schedule of carrying out the service.¹²⁰ With regards to the ministry of priests in the Old Testament, it was clearly defined by the Lord’s will. God required the priests to wear clothing specially made that differed quite a bit from that worn by people who were not priests.¹²¹ The ministry of Aaron and his descendants consisted of offering daily animal sacrifices before the Lord on behalf of the people either in atonement of their sins or out of gratitude to God for His gifts. The Old Testament book of Leviticus gives a detailed description of the Levitical ministry. For our purposes regarding the priest and the details of his ministry and performing sacrifices, we will consider only what is most relevant for our theme – that which is symbolic of the entire Old Testament system of ministry before the Lord.

The Symbolism of the Old Testament System of Ministry To the Lord

The New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews is a comprehensive source of information about the entire Jewish ministerial system of sacrifices in the Tabernacle (and later the Temple) as fulfilled in the sacrifice of the God-man Jesus Christ, after which the Old Testament ceased to be valid.

¹¹⁶ Ex. 19:5-6. Author’s emphasis.

¹¹⁷ Num. 3:11-13.

¹¹⁸ See Num. 3:6-8 and chapter 4.

¹¹⁹ See Ex. 2:1; 6:20; 40:12-16.

¹²⁰ See 1 Chronicles 24. For example, the priest Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, descended from Abijah, who is mentioned in 1 Chr. 24:10. See Luke 1:5.

¹²¹ See Ex. 28; 35:19; 39.

Let us examine the physical place where the ministry took place (the Tabernacle and its yard). The Lord's commandment regarding the Tabernacle and its objects for worship ministry mandated the construction of a tent that was supposed to be divided into two rooms – "the Holy Place" and "the Holy of Holies." In the first room, there were the gold and gold items:

- A table set with 12 loaves of bread (representing the number of the tribes of the descendants of Jacob. Only the priests are permitted to eat this bread. The loaves of bread are replaced every Saturday with new ones. Leviticus 24:5-9);
- A seven-branched lamp stand (Ex. 25:31) on which the priests were supposed to burn incense day and night (Lev. 24:2-4).
- The altar made of acacia wood (Ex. 30:1-8) where holy incense (aromatic substances) was to be burned daily. In the second room of the tent, only the High Priest dares to enter only once a year on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) to offer the blood of animal sacrifices. There was the Ark of the Covenant which contained the two plates with the writings of the Ten Commandments that the Lord had given to Moses. The Ark had a cover with cast golden images of cherubim. The two rooms inside of the Tabernacle were each divided by curtains on which were sewn inscribed representations of heavenly angelic beings – cherubim (Ex. 24:1, 31-33). On the porch in the outer courtyard at the front of the tent were built a sacrificial altar and wash basin (cast out of bronze, that is copper metal, or "brass", per Ex. 30:18; 40:29-33). We will have more to say about these Old Testament symbols in the chapters on the Virgin Mary and veneration of the holy icons. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Jesus Christ served both as High Priest and the sacrificial victim.
- As the perfect Son of God and the High Priest of a new covenant, Jesus as God's presence takes the place of the sanctity of the Holy of Holies located in the earthly Tabernacle. He entered into heaven through His own blood and not that of animal sacrifices. (Hebrews 9:24 to 10:17);
- Unlike the Jewish priests who offered sacrifices every single day, Jesus brought only one sacrifice – Himself, which lasts forever (Heb. 10:11-14);
- The curtain that divided the "holiness" of the "Holy of Holies" and also symbolized Christ's body that was to be killed on the cross (Heb. 10:19-22) was torn to mark the time of His death (Mt. 27:51);
- The lamp stand with burning incense was a symbol of Christ the God-man, who says of Himself, "I am the light of the world," (Jn. 8:12, 1 Jn. 1:5) and represents the symbol of the Holy Spirit (Rev. 1:4, 4:5);
- The loaves of bread put out were also a symbol of Jesus Christ, who said of Himself: "I am the bread of life." (Jn. 6:32-35);
- The golden altar of incense was a symbol of Christ before Whom all the prayers of the saints are brought to God every day (Heb. 7:25, Rev. 8:2-4);
- The bronze basin where the priests perform ceremonial washing (Ex. 30:18-21) symbolized "washing" or the cleansing of sins of all who believe in the vicarious sacrifice of Christ (1 Jn. 1:7, Titus 3:5);
- The bronze altar on which were offered the daily sacrifices in the Old Testament represented the cross, the place of suffering of Jesus Christ – this is the altar of the New Covenant (Heb. 13:10-13).

But perhaps someone might ask why take the time to mention all these details of the Old Testament priesthood when the Orthodox Church denies that its clergy has any connection with the priests of the Old Testament. The reason is simple. In fact, as I previously pointed out, the New Testament does not know the institution of a special Christian clergy (hierarchy) like that which exists in the Orthodox and Catholic churches. This is because after the death of Jesus Christ, there no longer exists any need for the offering of sacrifices for sins. God accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as complete and final, once and for all. Yet, the Eastern Orthodox Church still argues that the existence of the clergy in the Church of Christ is still necessary and was instituted by Christ Himself.¹²² In the next section, we will examine the subject of priests in the Church of Christ as revealed by the apostles in the New Testament Scriptures inspired by God.

The Holy Priesthood in the New Testament

The sacred writings of the New Testament clearly show that after the establishment of the Church, the Lord called all his believers “a holy nation and royal priesthood.” Orthodox teachers derive their doctrine of the priesthood from “Sacred Tradition” which ends up being foreign to the Bible. Consequently, these Orthodox teachers humiliate and mock evangelical Christians for claiming themselves to be the “holy universal priesthood” before God. In light of this, it is worthwhile for us to thoroughly investigate what the Word of God teaches and to contrast this teaching with the arguments of the Orthodox. Lazar Milin gives one example of an attack on the “sinful sectarian teachings on the priesthood”:

“This sectarian interpretation is extremely superficial and contrary to the principles taught by the cited passages from the Holy Scriptures¹²³ which clearly and undoubtedly demonstrate that Christ founded the hierarchy of his Church, contrary to the practice of sectarian religious communities.

¹²² Contrary to the clear biblical teaching on this issue, the Orthodox Church (as shown in the previous chapter) teaches that the Lord's Supper (i.e., the Holy Sacrament of Communion – the Eucharist) is a constant repetition of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ: “The Orthodox Church from the time of the Apostles believed that the Eucharist sacrament is not only a frequent commemoration of the Last Supper of Christ, but also from the framework that the bread and wine transform into the true body and blood of Christ. Thus, the Eucharist not only serves as a remembrance of but actually turns into the true sacrifice brought before God for the people. It is in essence the same Sacrifice as that Who was ordained to die on the cross... There is the sacrifice He offers directly, and also another indirectly through the pastor of the people's church.” Milin, *Church and Sect*, 326.

So looking at things from a layman's perspective, one could conclude from this that modern-day Orthodoxy needs the existence of the clergy similar to that of the Old Testament (since the main job of the priest is to offer sacrifices) by repeating the act of bringing the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to “God as propitiation for the sins of the people who offer it” (Milin, *Ibid.*). Thus, Orthodoxy believes it has made the sacrificial offering of Christ countless times to the present day.

¹²³ We will examine the Bible passages that Milin cites later and demonstrate that they neither support his accusation nor does he cite them accurately and in context.

First of all, these words came from the Apostles Peter and John, and it is not possible to imagine that they did not know the power they had just received from Christ, because we know that they implemented apostolic authority: they preached, baptized¹²⁴, established the holy sacrament of the Eucharist, laid hands on the newly baptized, prayed for the believers, and ruled the church. Thus, all this constitutes their clerical role in the Church, the role that they passed on to their heirs through prayer and laying their hands on them. Therefore, it would have been impossible for them to deny these words that come from the authority and teaching of the Lord.

What do the apostles mean when they mention the “universal priesthood”? It means that Christians are God's people. People regardless of nationality are assembled by the sacrifice of the Savior, the High Priest, which compare with other people exalted before God as kings and priests. **We should especially pay attention to the writer of Revelation about the future age after the resurrection, which says in chapter 20, verse 6: ‘Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.’ It is obvious that they will be priests after the resurrection of Christ and not before the resurrection.**”¹²⁵

Thus, according to Mr. Milin, the teaching by the evangelical church about the “common priesthood of all Christian believers” is wrong. He believes the Bible upholds his position. Milin asserts that the apostles did not contradict themselves. Milin claims they knew there was a clerical hierarchy in the church. While admitting this fact, Milin also alleges the apostles could also declare there to be a universal priesthood among all believers. This Orthodox apologist cites certain Bible verses that he, not the sectarians, correctly interpret. In fact, here is what they say in context:

*“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him- you also, like living stones, **are being built** into a spiritual house **to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices** acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... **But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.**”*¹²⁶

*“...To him who loves us and **has freed us** from our sins by his blood, and **has made us** to be a kingdom and **priests** to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”*¹²⁷

¹²⁴ From an earlier excerpt from *Catechism in the Home*, we learned that deacons in the Orthodox churches do not have the right to perform any sacrament, not even baptism, but in the Bible we learn for example that Philip, one of the seven deacons of the early church, baptized a nobleman from Ethiopia (Acts. 8:26-40).

¹²⁵ Milin, *Church and Sect*, 332-3. Author's emphasis.

¹²⁶ 1 Pet. 2:4-5, 9-10. Author's emphasis.

¹²⁷ Rev. 1:5b-6. Author's emphasis.

*“And they sang a new song:
‘You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased men for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.
You **have made them** to be a **kingdom and priests** to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth.’”*¹²⁸

*“Blessed and holy are those who have part **in the first resurrection**. The second death has no power over them, **but they will be priests** of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.”*¹²⁹

Contrary to the claims of Milin, these Scripture verses of the apostle Peter in his first epistle and of John in Revelation, particularly the last chapter, speak in relation to the past tense when these verses were written. That is, the events Peter and John described had already occurred from their perspective. Thus, one must conclude based on these verses that New Testament Christians had already been made (past tense) royal priests in God's kingdom. Of course, after the "First Resurrection" (i.e. the resurrection of the righteous at the beginning of the future millennial kingdom of Christ) and the return of Christians from the past years of the church age to earthly life in their glorified bodies, they will literally reign with Christ and be God's priests to offer sacrifices acceptable to Him. It is quite obvious that Peter and John in their texts do not mean that Christians are "a royal priesthood" after His resurrection, but that those made at the time of his faith and justification through faith in the Savior. Milin in his book bases his conclusions only on selective interpretation of the Bible and consideration of only those verses that seem to suggest the reader's need to affirm Milin's belief (specifically examining Revelation 20:6). If the reader examines all the verses and makes an intellectually honest effort to analyze their literal and grammatical sense, it becomes clear that the reader must reject the claims the Orthodox theologians have made for the case of the clerical hierarchy. Of course, Milin attempts to read into these verses the meaning that the apostles received from Christ the clerical hierarchy and were fully cognizant of it. Nowhere in Scripture can the Orthodox sacrament of the priesthood be found. The Orthodox apologist can only truly cite the teachings of "the holy fathers" to support his position.

Finally, it is crucial to note something else that will demonstrate even more clearly the errors in the Orthodox interpretation on this issue as well as their misuse of the biblical texts.

Namely, any student of the Orthodox confession knows of its sacred doctrine of the "universal resurrection of the dead" (the believers and unbelievers at once) on the Day of God's Judgment. They do not believe in two future separate resurrections, which Scripture in Revelation 20 describes as "the first (for believers before Christ's millennial reign unto eternal life) and the second resurrection (for unbelievers during the Last

¹²⁸ Rev. 5:9-10. Author's emphasis.

¹²⁹ Rev. 20:6. Author's emphasis.

Judgment unto eternal damnation)".¹³⁰ So, when Milin mentions "the first resurrection" in its literal meaning of actual resurrection from the dead, it sounds very strange, especially because official Orthodoxy does not believe this teaching! Here is how Milin departs from the traditional Orthodox belief in his comments on Revelation 20, where he attempts to justify the Orthodox belief in the "general resurrection" versus evangelical Protestant belief that is based on the Bible that the resurrection of the just and the unjust must be separate:

"We should especially emphasize that the Holy Scriptures considered a sinner to be spiritually dead (Luke 15:32), because '*the wages of sin is death*' (Rom. 6:23). Thus, repentance and **baptism are equivalent to resurrection**. '*You who were baptized in Christ have clothed yourselves in Christ*' (Gal. 3:27) and death no longer rules over that person since he has been resurrected with Christ (Rom. 6:9). Therefore, **the 'first resurrection' is actually baptism**. That is why the passage states: 'Blessed is he who shares in the first resurrection, because over him the second death has no power', and thus he is not condemned by God on Judgment Day during the second coming of Christ.¹³¹ The 'second resurrection' describes the general resurrection when all the dead shall rise from their graves alive and transformed spiritually into their incorruptible bodies."¹³²

So here we see Milin's polemic against what he perceives as the sinful "sectarian" belief in the universal priesthood (under which all Christians became priests after Christ's resurrection). He resorts to arguing that the "first resurrection" is not Christ's resurrection, but rather Christian baptism. Milin now denies the Orthodox teaching of the future double resurrection of both sinners and saints! In fact, Milin contradicts himself in the same book by interpreting the "first resurrection" as baptism on page 294 and then changes his mind by interpreting it completely differently on page 333!

If we still want to follow Milin's logic in combining both interpretations, then one would be forced to conclude that Christian believers become priests immediately after their baptism (which certainly is not what the Orthodox priest wanted to say).

Thus, in the end we must conclude that Orthodox theology has no evidence that the first century Church established a clerical hierarchy. Instead, the clerical hierarchy arose from the teaching of the "Holy Fathers" and today is defended by their successors. Even a blind man can see the visible distortions and manipulations of the holy texts by Orthodox apologists such as Milin.

¹³⁰ This subject will be examined more in depth in the chapter on "The Second Coming of Christ and the Resurrection of the Dead".

¹³¹ The firm claim of Lazar Milin arising from this statement that the person who is baptized with the Orthodox baptism (i.e., he partakes in the "First Resurrection") owns the security of salvation and does not have to worry about damnation on Judgment Day conflicts not only with the teachings of the Bible, but even with Orthodox theology! According to the Orthodox, as we said earlier, baptism is a mandatory condition for the commencement of walking on the road to salvation, but definitely not a guarantee that the baptized person will in fact attain salvation. Rather, his fate depends on his piety later in life that includes a whole range of achievements and works that needs to be performed to earn him salvation.

¹³² Milin, *Ibid.*, 294. Author's emphasis.

Now that we have already seen the failure of Milin to attack evangelical Christian beliefs, let us further examine this topic.

Why Are All Christians Called Priests?

Unlike the Old Testament priest who in the name of the people offered sacrifices and entered the tent of meeting to perform worship, and the high priest who acted as an intermediary between God and the people in the Holy of Holies (e.g., in the presence of God) to offer blood sacrifices for the forgiveness of people's sins, New Testament believers occupy a more exalted position. They approach God with their prayers through the sacrifice that was offered once and for all. Jesus Christ is their only mediator before God:

*“For there is one God and **one mediator** between God and men, the man **Christ Jesus**, who gave himself as a ransom for all men.”*¹³³

On the basis of such mediation, the author of Hebrews encourages believers to approach God with full freedom on the basis of Jesus' shed blood. The following citations will show parallels between the priestly ministry in the Old Testament and access to God by Christians through the Priest of a new covenant (Testament):

*“When Christ came as **high priest of the good things that are already here**, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He **did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves**; but he entered the Most Holy Place **once for all by his own blood**, having obtained eternal redemption.”*¹³⁴

*“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to **enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus**, by a new and living way opened for us **through the curtain, that is, his body**, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”*¹³⁵

*“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*¹³⁶

To anyone who knows Scripture, there is an evident parallel between the sacrificial ministry unto the Lord in the Old Testament and that of Christ in the New Testament. The High Priest entered the most holy place in the Tabernacle (Temple) with the blood of animals in the Old Testament. Christ as High Priest of the New Testament entered the most holy place in heaven before the presence of God by His very own blood. New Testament believers approach God as priests who are washed once and sanctified only by the blood of Jesus. The only sacrifice that New Testament believers as a holy priesthood can offer in this world is a godly life:

¹³³ 1 Tim. 2:5-6a. Author's emphasis.

¹³⁴ Heb. 9:11-12. Author's emphasis.

¹³⁵ Heb. 10:19-22. Author's emphasis.

¹³⁶ Heb. 4:16.

*“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.”*¹³⁷

As we can see, Scripture teaches exactly what evangelical Christians believe – the universal priesthood of all believers under the New Covenant of Christ. Of course, this fact at least does not diminish the importance of the diversity of spiritual gifts and ministries within the Church of Christ (i.e., the diversity of the functions of different limbs of the spiritual body of Christ, Eph. 4:15-16). These Scriptures state that within the Church, there are some people with more prominent ministries and others with less visible ones, in accordance with the abilities that God gave them during physical and spiritual birth. In addition to mutual love and respect that should exhibit all the believers (Phil. 2:3), the fact remains that the Church should particularly respect those elders who preach and teach, or in the words of the apostles "to ascribe a double honor" (1 Tim. 5:17) to those elders. Nevertheless, even having mentioned all this, neither Christ nor the first apostles mention anything in the Bible about the institution of special priestly hierarchies modeled on the Old Testament. Nothing in the Bible supports the false premises of Orthodox apologists attempting to prove their existence.

In the next section of this chapter, we will concentrate on the Orthodox teaching on the establishment of the clerical hierarchy in the Apostolic Church of the first century.

Where in the New Testament Can One Find the Orthodox Priesthood?

“Only to His apostles did He give certain rights and duties which He did not give to other believers. The apostles are sent to preach the Gospel, not all believers. Only the apostles are given the power to loose on earth what will be loosed in heaven and to bind on earth what will be bound in heaven, yes, only the apostles, not every believer... Thus, to be an apostle is not the same as being a regular believer in Christ. The Apostle is the shepherd of Christ's flock, appointed to that position by Christ Himself. Scripture says this very thing.

Furthermore, the Scriptures testify to us that the apostles in prayerful consideration laid hands on their assistants and deputies, priests whom ‘the Holy Spirit has made... bishops and shepherds of the Church of God, which He bought with His own blood (Acts 20:28)’... **From this we can clearly see that the sacrament of the priesthood, which is obtained through prayerful ordination, was established by Christ Himself for the Church of Christ for today**, until He fulfills His promise to return in the Second Coming. Therefore, sectarian rejection of the sacrament of the priesthood stands in sharp and direct conflict with Scripture and leads to the destruction of the Church as a visible society founded by Christ Himself.”¹³⁸

The text above shows us the foundations upon which Orthodox theologians base their belief. We have already answered some of their claims earlier in this chapter in the analysis of other sacraments. Some more research is still to follow. This section will

¹³⁷ Heb. 13:5. Author's emphasis.

¹³⁸ Milin, *Ibid.*, 331. Author's emphasis.

examine the biblical meaning of “prayerful ordination” performed for church elders by the apostles. Does this act actually institute a church hierarchy of bishops, presbyters, and deacons, exactly the way the Eastern Orthodox Church is organized? Also, we will investigate the doctrine of apostolic inheritance (succession) - the teaching that represents the idea of the sacred ties of today's Orthodox and Roman Catholic clergy with apostles via an unbreakable chain of direct “prayerful ordinations”.

As repeatedly pointed out earlier, terms such as “hierarchy” and “apostolic succession” were unknown to the Spirit and the letter of the New Testament. It is true, of course, that the Bible says that the apostles appointed elders to the newly founded churches throughout the Roman Empire (mostly in Asia Minor and Greece) by laying hands on them, but this still does not prove that they were some form of special priesthood! Earlier, we strongly demonstrated the fact that the apostles did not “absolve sins” as Orthodox priests do today, neither did they turn the bread and wine into the literal body and blood of Christ, nor did they “baptize with water and the Spirit.” Indeed, such Orthodox practice is based on traditional misinterpretation of the teachings of the Lord. The chapter later in this book on “Orthodox Monasticism” will demonstrate that the Bible shows no evidence whatsoever for the existence of bishops or monks in the first century of Christianity. Furthermore, according to the description in the apostolic epistles, the ministries of the presbyter (elder) and bishop (overseer) were identical because each head was placed as an overseer of his spiritual flock. In contrast, Orthodoxy splits these ministerial functions into different roles. Here is how Paul identifies the roles of elder and overseer in his epistle to Titus:

*“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and **appoint elders in every town**, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. **Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work**, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”*¹³⁹

The above text shows that presbyters (elders) are the same as bishops (overseers). The Apostle speaks about these roles in other places in Scripture. A similar reference is found in Acts. Here is what Luke records:

*“From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church. When they arrived, he said to them... Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood.”*¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Tit. 1:5-9. Author's emphasis.

¹⁴⁰ Acts 20:17-18, 28. Author's emphasis.

In verse 17, the original Greek language uses the word “presbuteroi”, which means “elders”. The Serbian language made a small adjustment to this Greek word and created its own word for “presbyters” or from the singular Greek word “presbuteros” comes the Serbian word for “presbyter”, which means “leader”. In verse 28, Paul uses another word to address church leaders: “episkopoi” in the Greek, that is, bishops, which can also be translated in Greek as “overseers”. (The Greek singular would be “episkopos” meaning “bishop” or “overseer”.) So once again, Paul equates the role of the bishop with that of the presbyter. Paul actually says that the leading elders (presbuteroi) had the identical ministry as overseers or bishops (episkopoi). It is interesting in this regard to read the first part of the Epistle to the Philippians:

*“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with **the bishops and deacons**: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*¹⁴¹

An alternate translation by Bonaventura Duda and Jerko Fućak comes from the Roman Catholic publishing house “Christian Presence”:

*“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, along with **the overseers and ministrants**. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.”*¹⁴²

From just these verses we can recognize the greeting by Paul and Timothy sent to all the believers (“all the saints”) in Philippi, among whom were bishops and deacons (i.e. overseers and ministrants¹⁴³). Surprisingly, this greeting does not mention the word “presbyter”! The structure of the modern Orthodox Church dictates that every major church must have a presbyter. Thus, Orthodoxy would expect to see a presbyter also serving at the church in Philippi. However, the omission of the word “presbyter” is obvious because it is interchangeable with the name “bishop” or “overseer”, as is the case in other parts of the New Testament which use these two terms for ministry interchangeably.

It is also interesting to note that first century Christianity, several “elders” or “overseers” served in each local Christian community, as we clearly see from the examples of these two churches in the New Testament. The Eastern Church, which calls itself “apostolic”, deviates from the laws of the early Christian church. Eastern Orthodoxy adheres to the teachings of later church councils which strictly commanded that no more than one

¹⁴¹ Phil. 1:1-2 (King James Version on www.biblegateway.com). Author’s emphasis.

¹⁴² *Holy Bible* (Christian Presence: Zagreb, 1993).

¹⁴³ The ministry of the deacons in the first century church was very different from that performed today by deacons in the Orthodox Church. Namely, deacon ministry consisted of “serving”, i.e. concerns for the “sharing of humanitarian aid,” or, better said, about various practical things not having direct connection with preaching and worship. Of course, the first deacons also used the opportunity to testify about his Lord, and even baptized new believers, but this was not the primary task for which were initially selected. (See Acts 6-8.)

bishop could lead in one city.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, the overseers appointed by the apostles never gained the worldly prestige that modern Orthodox bishops enjoy. The apostle Peter bears witness in his first epistle to the church:

*“To the **elders** among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: **Be shepherds of God's flock** that is under your care, **servicing as overseers**—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve.”*¹⁴⁵

According to the Greek text, the apostle in the first place speaks about elders in the Christian churches whom he wrote. He uses the word “presbuteroi”. Then, in comparing their ministry with his own, he uses the term “sumpresbuteros”, which has the meaning of “fellow elder just like you”.¹⁴⁶ He even uses the expression “poimainein” which means “to shepherd” and “episkopein” which means “to oversee” God's flock. Thus, the apostle Peter in this specific text does not suggest the existence of other leaders other than the “elders”. He definitely does not suggest himself to hold a superior rank of “archbishop”. Peter nowhere alleges to have Christ's authority to lay hands on other elders and confer upon them apostolic succession, commit to them the authority of the Holy Spirit to perform the sacraments, or commend the ministry related to them. (According to Orthodox teaching, only the Archbishop can lay hands on, or anoint, an “elder”. The “elders” themselves do not have this right.) In contrast, the New Testament teaches that existing elders (presbuteroi) have the duty of appointing other elders, such as the case of Timothy. What is interesting is that the apostle Paul himself assumes the body of elders (presbyters) had laid hands on this young man. The apostle states:

*“Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the **body of elders laid their hands on you.**”*¹⁴⁷

*“For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through **the laying on of my hands.**”*¹⁴⁸

In addition to highlighting the facts just mentioned, the apostle in these verses suggests that Timothy received the gift at the very moment when Paul laid hands on him. Also, Paul encourages him “not to neglect” the gift, but to “fan it into flame”. Based on these verses, the Orthodox Church adheres to the belief that its priests¹⁴⁹ receive the special

¹⁴⁴ The eighth rule of the First Ecumenical Council held in Nicaea in 325 states among other things: “There shall be but one bishop of one city.” See *The Book of Laws: Proceedings of the Canons of the Orthodox Church*, (Sibenik, 2003), 17. [Cited from <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/nicea1.txt> - translator's note.]

¹⁴⁵ 1 Pet. 5:1-2. Author's emphasis.

¹⁴⁶ The apostle John in his writings to the congregations (2 Jn. 1:1 and 3 Jn. 1:1) also uses the term “presbyter”, that is “elder”.

¹⁴⁷ 1 Tim. 4:14. Author's emphasis.

¹⁴⁸ 2 Tim. 1:6. Author's emphasis.

¹⁴⁹ The term “priest” (ierus, from Greek “priest”) in the New Testament never refers to the ministry of Christian bishops (overseers), presbyters (elders), or deacons (associate ministers). This term is used in the Gospels, Acts, and Hebrews to designate the members of the Old Testament Jewish clergy whose ministries included the offering of sacrifices in blood.

grace of the Holy Spirit, which Milin dubs “the fullness of apostolic authority.” However, what actually is this “gift”, which Timothy received at the time when they laid hands on him? Does this work reveal itself in external visible manifestation of spiritual gifts? What happened during the repentance and baptism of many people who received the gifts of prophesy and speaking in other tongues? This holy text does not tell us. In order to understand these issues, one must first answer this question: What was the purpose and importance of the laying on of hands in the Church of the first century?

First, we have to recall the fact that the hands of the Apostles, in certain cases, were laid upon “ordinary” believers (such as the case of believers in Ephesus, Acts 19:6). The Holy Spirit came down upon them and granted them the ability of prophesying and speaking in strange tongues. However, for our purposes, we are more interested in cases of laying hands on future church leaders and will focus more on this area. We can see the significance of laying hands with prayer on those who perform certain ministries in the Church in Paul’s epistle to the Galatians:

“As for those who seemed to be important—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not judge by external appearance—those men added nothing to my message. On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Peter, and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews.”¹⁵⁰

Anyone familiar with the Holy Scriptures knows that during the time of Christ’s earthly ministry and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles, the apostle Paul, known as Saul, had belonged to the conservative Jewish religious party called the Pharisees. He had been a main opponent of Christian teaching. Paul had wanted to destroy the newly founded Church as he had considered Christianity as a dangerous heresy to be rooted out. He had persecuted his fellow Jews who became disciples of Jesus of Nazareth.

Paul’s conversion was dramatic. The Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him from heaven during Paul’s journey to Damascus. Paul had set out to arrest those Jews who believed in Jesus as the Messiah and Savior. He was authorized by the high priest to lead them back to Jerusalem.

After he himself believed in Jesus, Saul began to share his testimony about his conversion. Having returned to Jerusalem, Paul tried to join his brothers and sisters in faith - that is, those upon whom he had very recently carried out bloody persecution. Quite understandably, the Christians did not immediately believe that Saul became one of them. Instead, they feared Saul was lying and still intended to destroy the church from the inside. The first man who accepted Paul and announced to the apostles and other disciples about the veracity of his faith in Christ was Barnabas. Paul the former persecutor of the Church demonstrated his zeal in preaching and consistently bore

¹⁵⁰ Gal. 2:6-9. Author’s emphasis.

testimony to his faith in Jesus the Savior. The elders of the church of Jerusalem, the apostles Peter, James and John, recognized Saul (Paul) and Barnabas as reliable Christians and firm preachers of the gospel. They recognized their desire and gifts to spread the good news of salvation outside the country of Judah to the Gentiles. After their preaching of the gospel to the pagans, it resulted in the establishment of new churches. They carried out over Paul and Barnabas what we could call the “laying on of hands”.

As we observed in the previous text, Paul writes that the three apostles¹⁵¹ laid hands them as “a right hand of fellowship”, something of which he and Barnabas earned after the apostles had observed the gift of grace which the Lord had already gave them. This gesture of the elders of the church in Jerusalem occurred at a time when the Christians (formerly Jews) had a conflict of opinion as to whether Gentiles who had already been saved by Christ should then undergo ritual circumcision and observe the Old Testament laws. By giving Paul the “right hand of fellowship”, the apostles gave a sign of open support for Paul’s preaching. This apostle, namely, emphasized that salvation is gained only through faith in Christ without the works of circumcision and the laws of Moses. Although the apostles in Jerusalem in the first years of the existence of the Church did not understand this, God revealed this truth to Peter the Apostle. The Lord has established His followers in the spiritual truth of salvation by grace for all people - both Jews and Gentiles.

The act of “laying hands”¹⁵² as a sign of fellowship with Paul and Barnabas represented the clear ratification of their ministries by the first apostles, as well as those who entered apostolic ministry later on. If the apostles, regarded by the first Christian Church as “pillars”, had not extended “the right hand of fellowship” to Paul and Barnabas, the Christians could interpret that refusal as disagreement with the message preached by them. In other words, Christians would have interpreted such refusal as indicating Paul and Barnabas to be false teachers. Therefore, the very fact that this act was performed before many witnesses made all believers aware that these two teachers had the same apostolic authority as those in the existing fellowship of apostles. Thus, the “laying of hands” represents “a sign of fellowship” and identification with the elders who committed this act. So, Paul and Barnabas received the same authority to carry out a set of spiritual tasks as the original apostles.

Now that we have explained the instance of “laying on of hands” on Paul and Barnabas by the other Apostles, let us examine the issue of the gift of grace conveyed to Timothy

¹⁵¹ The James mentioned above is not the brother of the Apostle John, son of Zebedee, but rather James, the brother of the Lord (son of Joseph and Mary, who was born several years after the Lord Jesus Christ). We know this because the Apostle James, brother of John, was executed by King Herod some time in 43 or 44 A.D. The event of “giving the right hand of fellowship” to Paul and Barnabas occurred at the time of the first church council about 51 A.D. (See Acts 12 and 15.)

¹⁵² The apostle John in Rev 1:17 says that after Christ was resurrected, He put his right hand on John to stand and encourage him to record what would be revealed in the heavenly vision. Otherwise, terms such as “right” or “right side” in the Bible are often used in the sense of kindness towards him to whom the “right” position, or the ordination of someone who was seated “at the right hand” of the ruler. See: 1 Ki. 2:19, Ps. 45:9, Mt. 20:21, 23; 22:44, 25:34-40; Acts 2:33-34, Rom. 8:34, Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:13, 1 Pet. 3:22.

by Paul. This is the gift about which Paul says it should not be “neglected”, but rather “fanned into flame.” (We saw earlier what Paul said that the apostles – the “pillars” of the Church in Jerusalem – considered the “gift” given to him and Barnabas as a “blessing” for their ministry to the Gentiles.)

First, in 1 Timothy 4:14, we note that the Apostle says that his disciple Timothy has received the “gift” of “prophesying”. The New Testament Scripture strongly emphasizes that the office of prophesying, amongst other things, were of first importance in the first Church. (See Acts 13:1, 21:9-10; 1 Cor. 12:28.) New Testament prophets saw that Timothy, after his conversion, was someone given a special calling by God in the future to become His special servant. From their perspective, this young man was given a “gift” from God in order to be able to serve Him. However, to which “gift” is Paul referring?

If we look at the incomplete list of “gifts of grace” which Paul lists in 1 Corinthians 12, we can see that they consist of: words of wisdom, words of knowledge, faith, healing, performing miracles, prophecy, discerning spirits, different tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. The Apostle in this chapter emphasizes the following:

*“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”*¹⁵³

The Scriptures reveal that many of these gifts were received by “ordinary” believers, that is, those who have not been administered the “laying on of hands” to become officers in the church. It is clear that the Holy Spirit gave Timothy a special “gift” at the time of his ordination. The apostle Paul writes:

*“And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third **teachers**... also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of **administration**...”*¹⁵⁴

Recall what Paul spoke to the elders (bishops) of Ephesus in Acts 20. He specifically cited the Holy Spirit in verse 28 as Himself having acted through the apostles to appoint the elders and to introduce them to the ministries for which they were responsible. Knowing this, we can quite safely deduce that the “gift” given to Timothy, which fulfilled previous prophecies about him and commenced when Paul and perhaps other elders laid hands on him, simply consisted of the “gift of teaching” (i.e., authority for teaching other believers) and “administration” (managing interpersonal relationships and establishing doctrine in the churches). It is these gifts, among others, that the apostle mentions in 1 Cor. 12:28. The apostle instructs his young colleague to teach and rebuke people who lived in sin (1 Tim. 1:3,18, 2:11-12, 3:6-7, 10; 4:6, 13; 5:1-2, 9, 19-20, 22; 2 Tim. 2:2, 14-15, 4:2, 5). People who fell into sin were to be rebuked before all those who were present in the church, even including presbyters, i.e. elders (1 Tim. 5:20). From this we

¹⁵³ 1 Cor. 12:4-7.

¹⁵⁴ 1 Cor. 12:28. Author’s emphasis.

see clearly that the “gift” and powers given to Timothy were just as important as those even of the apostles.

With regard to laying hands on other church elders, specifically that it pertains to experienced and proven servants of God, this has the identical meaning as that in the case of Paul and Barnabas which we have just studied. Church elders were officially ordained into ministry when the apostles recognized that such men were established in their devotion to God and had spiritual possession of the necessary gifts and skills for its performance. Additionally, it was obligatory for elders to demonstrate a proper belief and practice of Christian doctrine. It was critical for such an important ministry in the church not to rashly appoint someone who does not possess the spiritual and moral qualifications, particularly one who is a new believer (i.e., a man who had just become a Christian).¹⁵⁵ Of course, this is because the ministry of the overseer requires having significant Christian experience and good knowledge of the Bible. Such qualities are certainly not attainable right away for a person who has just begun to attend church service and through water baptism just became a member of a local fellowship.

However, at this point, I must mention the fact that in the history of the Orthodox Church there are many examples of violations of the Lord’s ordinance. There are several examples of people who received the rank of Bishop and even Patriarch only a few days after becoming Christians through baptism (according to Orthodox theology). In a second example, someone ran away from his elevation to the office of Bishop. From a biblical perspective, he subjected this profound ministry to mockery by considering the role as a water carrier in a monastery to have greater spiritual value than as an overseer in the church. A third example is, again, one who pretended to be insane and hid in the woods, thus confirming the words that the holy apostolic ministry of overseer really is not for everyone.

The greatest miracle of all is of course the fact that all these people are included among the canonized saints, whose lives should be taught to us as an example for our faith. Here are some examples from the Prologue from the Orchard by Bishop Nikolai:

“Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Mediolanum (Milan)

This great holy father of the Orthodox Church was of eminent birth. His father was the imperial deputy of Gaul and Spain and was a pagan by faith, but his mother was a Christian. **While he was still in the cradle, a swarm of bees settled on him, poured honey onto his lips, and flew away. And while still a child, he extended his hand and spoke prophetically: “Kiss it, for I will be a bishop.”** After his father’s death, the emperor appointed him as his representative in the province of Liguria, of which Milan was the chief city. When the bishop of Milan died, a great dispute arose between the Orthodox Christians and the Arian heretics concerning the election of a new bishop. Ambrose entered the church to maintain order, this being his duty. At that moment, a

¹⁵⁵ The Apostle Paul says this in his teaching to Timothy: *“Now the overseer must be beyond reproach, the husband of one wife... **not a recent convert**, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.”* (1 Tim. 3:2, 6). Author’s emphasis.

child at its mother's bosom exclaimed: ``Ambrose for bishop!" All the people took this as the voice of God, and unanimously elected Ambrose as their bishop, contrary to his will. **Ambrose was baptized, passed through all the necessary ranks and was consecrated to the episcopacy, all within a week...** Ambrose died peacefully on the morning of Pascha in the year 397.”¹⁵⁶ [December 7]

“Saint Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople

Photius was a great beacon of the Church. He was the emperor's relative and a grandson of the glorious Patriarch Tarasius. He was a vigorous protector of the Church from the authority-loving pope and other Roman distortions of the Faith. **In six days he went through all the ranks from a layman to patriarch.** He was consecrated patriarch on Christmas day, 857 A.D. and died in the Lord in the year 891 A.D.”¹⁵⁷ [February 6]

“The Venerable Barsanuphius

Barsanuphius was born a pagan in Palestine and was baptized in his eighteenth year and immediately was tonsured a monk taking the name of John. When he became known for of his virtuous life, Barsanuphius was elected **archbishop** of Damascus. He did not remain long at this position. Yearning for the reclusive, ascetically spiritual life, he **secretly left Damascus** and went to the wilderness of Nitria. Here, he presented himself as the monk Barsanuphius and immediately, was assigned, as an obedience, to be a **water-carrier for the monastery.** The former archbishop accepts this obedience with joy...”¹⁵⁸ [February 29]

“Venerable Ephrem the Syrian

Ephrem was born in Syria of poor parents during the reign of Emperor Constantine the Great... Numerous are his books and beautiful are his prayers... **When they wanted to appoint him a bishop by force, he pretended to be insane and began to race through the city of Edessa dragging his garment behind him.** Seeing this, the people left him in peace.”¹⁵⁹ [January 28]

“Venerable Isaac the Syrian

... When Isaac became known because of the sanctity of his life and of his many miracles, he **was elected bishop of Nineveh** and **was forced to accept** that rank. But, after only five months, he **left the bishopric** and secretly withdrew into the wilderness to

¹⁵⁶ <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/my.html?day=7&month=December> (English translation). Author's emphasis.

¹⁵⁷ <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/my.html?month=February&day=6&Go.x=12&Go.y=15> (English translation). Author's emphasis.

¹⁵⁸ <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/my.html?month=February&day=29&Go.x=15&Go.y=6> (English translation). Author's emphasis.

¹⁵⁹ <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/my.html?month=January&day=28&Go.x=12&Go.y=14> (English translation). Author's emphasis.

the Monastery of Rabban Shabur... Isaac died in extreme old age toward the end of the seventh century.”¹⁶⁰ [January 28]

“Saint Gregory Dialogues, the Pope of Rome

... After the death of Pope Pelagius II, Gregory was chosen Pope. **He fled from this honor and authority hiding himself in the mountains and ravines**, but the Lord revealed him to those who were seeking him in the following manner: a fiery column appeared from the ground to heaven over the place where Gregory hid himself... His Arch-deacon Peter saw a dove flying above Gregory's head as he was seated and writing. He presented himself before the Lord in the year 604 A.D.”¹⁶¹ [March 12]

Despite the strong impression left by the aforementioned examples of the lives of the saints, in which the Orthodox take great pride and promote as positive examples, they display completely spiritually immature behavior. Some of them had the function of church oversight imposed upon them (and considered themselves to be unworthy of the role). It is important to emphasize that even the First Council of Nicea protested loudly against the appointment of new believers into positions of church authority. Here is one canon that the Council stated:

“As **many incidents**, due to need or driven by people’s efforts, **violated church rules**, so that some people who just entered into faith from a godless life, and who only for a short time have become familiar with the basics of the Christian faith, **such people almost just exited from the baptistery, yet they already are appointed as bishops or priests, [a rule] has become necessary** that it requires time for training (progress) in the faith, and also after baptism, [the church] needs to verify that these people are worthy of consideration for those ranks of the clergy. **The apostolic saying on this issue is very clear**: ‘He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.’ (1 Tim. 3:6).”¹⁶²

The bishops present at the Council enacted the 80th rule of the so-called, “Rules of the Holy Apostles”, which reads as follows:

“**It is inappropriate for someone who just came out of the godless life and received baptism**, or from a life unworthy of the calling of the faith, to be given **the right of appointment as a bishop**. Because, it is not appropriate that someone who is untested could become a teacher of others, lest it occurred by God grace.”¹⁶³

Since this church council was held in the first half of the fourth century, we should expect that the issue arose in earlier times - despite the clear apostolic teaching that new converts

¹⁶⁰ <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/my.html?month=January&day=28&Go.x=12&Go.y=14> (English translation). Author’s emphasis.

¹⁶¹ <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/my.html?month=March&day=12&Go.x=15&Go.y=15> (English translation). Author’s emphasis.

¹⁶² *The Book of Laws, Collection of Canons of the Orthodox Church*, 15. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 13.

and newly baptized believers could not become overseers. However, the examples of two bishops (bishops and patriarchs Ambrose and Photius) just mentioned confirm that this ruling by the Council was not obeyed. Such ordinations continued into the 9th century (Patriarch Photius died in 891 A.D.) and probably beyond. But although the two previously mentioned laws represent many things from a biblical point of view, the end of the last quote gives permission in special situations for one to be appointed as a bishop even though “he has been untested in the faith.” In general, the rule says such appointments are only possible in the case of “God's grace”, presumably with the idea of putting limits on such instances.

However, the question is why the apostles in the New Testament never wrote anything about this exception and deviation from the commandments which already existed? Already we have previously pointed out the fact that the appointment of any church elder happens by grace, not only in special cases. On the other hand, it is certain that the need for excellent elders was much greater at the beginning of the Christian era than later when Christianity received the freedom of worship, and later became the only religion officially recognized by the state. However, if God by “His grace” in the first century during the time of the Apostles had already established the correct procedure for appointing church leaders, there exists no precedent for appointing someone to church leadership only a week after their baptism.

Based on the above examples, anyone who knows the teachings of Christ and the Apostles will realize that the qualifications for ordination of church leaders in later centuries differed greatly from those of the early church era. It is simply inconceivable that the apostles would have chased down anyone who is running away from ministry in the Church. They never would have forced him to undergo ordination, and especially not to chase him into mountainous cliffs. They never would have put a person in a ministry where he did not belong. The words that God inspired Paul to write exhort Timothy to be the true servant of God, the supreme authority. Let us repeat Paul’s words and listen to them:

*“I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality... **Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands**, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.”*¹⁶⁴

Now that we have determined the differences between Orthodox and Biblical teachings in these areas, let us address the origin of the idea of “apostolic succession”.

Apostolic Succession

According to Ernst Benz, a world famous author and scholar of the history of Christianity, the idea of apostolic succession was conceived during the first centuries of Christianity, a time when many religious movements began to flourish. Such movements taught beliefs very different from those represented by the official Church. Specifically, even in the first century and later, various Gnostic sects appeared. There were

¹⁶⁴ 1 Tim. 5:21-2. Author’s emphasis.

Charismatic movements whose members claimed to have the gift of prophecies and published new revelations, thus attracting many followers to false teaching. In his book *Rome and the First Christians*, A. G. Hamman describes a great spiritual time of trouble during which false prophets appeared and, of course, claimed to represent the true teachings of God:

“The facts stated by Tertullian – which he gives us no reason to doubt - give us an idea about these ecstatic visions, which are closer to Spiritism than the Holy Spirit. Some pious woman during a weekly meeting in Carthage speaks – possessed by a spirit - with angels, hears hidden things, and reads hearts. She counsels solutions to those seeking advice. Another woman - because of her flirting – is beaten at night by an angel. Her revelation commands the exact length that a woman ought to wear her veil. The number of spiritual revelations is impressive and - suspicious. **Some woman has taken charge of the church service. As she was making the sign of the cross, during the liturgy she falls down in ecstasy, prophecies, preaches, and woos the astonished listeners.**

Prophets of all kinds trolled the streets, and despite the simplicity of their tricks, they used deceiving spirits, and the world believed them to be good – people were eager for wonders and holy arousal... Some prophet in Syria ‘convinced many brothers to take their wives and children into the desert to meet Christ.’ He convinced a whole bunch. Finally, they got lost in the mountains. They nearly murdered the leader as they thought he was a thief. Fortunately, his wife, a Christian, arranged things.

Some bishops from the Black Sea had more visions. They began to prophesy and came to the mad idea that says: ‘Judgment Day will come this year.’ Fainthearted listeners were so frightened that they stopped working on the earth, sold their goods and left the area... **The Great Church excommunicated these sects.** When the martyrs accidentally were found together with these heretics, they ignored them and had no desire to share anything in common... Sectarians even replaced the wine with water in the Eucharist. They became known as ‘water drinkers’ (**Aquarians**).”¹⁶⁵

Christianity faced some major problems, of which only a fraction are mentioned here. The Apocryphal texts which were later canonized into the New Testament and various streams of teaching confused believers. The church elders, according to Benz, decided to put three walls to protect the Church from heresy.¹⁶⁶ These walls included: the canonization of the New Testament books (and rejection of other writings that did not come from the apostles nor represented the original teachings of Christ¹⁶⁷),

¹⁶⁵ A.G. Hamman, *Rome and the First Christians*, 101-4. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁶⁶ “In order to combat the uncontrolled flood of prophetic and visionary spiritual activities, as well as against the current pagan syncretism, the Church built three walls: the New Testament canon, ‘the rule of faith’, and apostolic succession of bishops. The common thread of the three walls is the idea of ‘**apostolicity**.’” Benz, *The Spirit and Life of the Eastern Church*, 62. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁶⁷ The New Testament canon in the contemporary church was devised not by choosing books to include, but rather by discarding books that did not belong. In the early centuries a huge production of alleged holy writings abounded, including gospels, apocalypses and other prophetic writings, and epistles. Many of these writings stemmed from sources of Gnosticism and pagan-Christian syncretism. The Church set aside

the writing of the “symbol of faith” (a definition of orthodox Christian doctrine as opposed to heretical teachings¹⁶⁸), and the idea of the apostolic heritage (i.e., the doctrine that only bishops ordained as direct successors of the Apostles by the Holy Spirit have the right to interpret and convey true Christian teachings, which essentially condemned the Gnostics and other heterodox teachers, i.e., those who do not follow the beliefs and practice of the first century disciples of Christ¹⁶⁹).

The following passage expresses official teaching of the Orthodox Church regarding apostolic succession:

“The apostolic succession of the bishopric guarantees the complete purity of apostolic teaching, not only, therefore, in its particular form in New Testament, but also in its explicit form, called Holy Tradition. It preserves the apostolic succession as applied in spoken form.”¹⁷⁰

However, the priest Bozidar Mijac admits that the understanding of “apostolic succession” of the modern Church differs from that of church authorities in the past. Here is how this Orthodox author defines “Succession”:

“In Orthodoxy... the bishop acts as the successor of the Apostles by the famous **theory** of succession of grace, but the very notion of succession (‘I succeed’ in Latin) is subject to **different interpretations**. (For example, Cyprian says, ‘The Church belongs to the bishop, while other attempts, for example, by Aquilion and Nisiotis, show a deeper and more visible division. In practice, succession has been vulgarized and expressed in familiar forms of despotism, etc.)...”¹⁷¹

literary creations from that which was not in full accordance with the apostolic tradition. The basic principle in the screening was 'apostolic' writings.” *Ibid.*, 62. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁶⁸ “Only the Imperial Byzantine Church abided by the provision of the unique formula of confession of the Nicean Council of 325. The Synod of Constantinople in 381 slightly amended it at the end of debate on its current interpretation of the church. This is the creed recited today at every Eucharistic service...” *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ “The Church built the third wall against the free and uncontrolled charismatic activity in the Church, as well as against the Gnostic-syncretistic current in the Church. Thus, the ministry of the Episcopate found its legal confirmation in **the idea of apostolic succession**. Missionary effort, the persecution of the Church, defense against free prophecies, and the fight against Gnosticism and other heresies of **the first centuries led to the rise of the historic reputation and ministry of the monarchist Bishop**. In his role as leader of the Eucharistic liturgy, teachers, and clergy, the Bishop became **the chief shepherd of the community** and was respected as her representative. The Bishop was placed in a direct relationship with the ministry of the Apostles, themselves chosen by Christ. Thus the Bishop became recognized as a symbol of sponsorship and uninterrupted succession from Christ’s Church: Christ and the apostles appointed the first steward under their spiritual authority; the Head of the apostles appointed elders in fellowships with the responsibility to teach by laying his sacramental hands as an incumbent authority of grace and ministry. In the same way, for their part, these elders for generations have conferred on their successors this same apostolic ministry. In this way, **the apostolic succession guarantees not only diocesan church governance, but also the episcopal legitimacy of church teaching.**” *Ibid.*, 63. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁷⁰ Dimitrije Staniloje, *Orthodox Dogmatic III*, (Sremsky Karlovtsi: 1997) 105. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁷¹ Bozidar Mijac, *Questions and Answers* (Belgrade: 1974), 230. Author’s emphasis.

Since the fourth century onwards, the office of the Bishops¹⁷² and institutions grew in considerable power and rendered judgments on what is right and what is not in religious matters. However, no matter how sincere the motive might have been which had led the Church during its struggles with heresies (false doctrines) and heretics, both the Holy Scriptures and later church history demonstrate that the idea of apostolic succession was not the intended outcome. The Church and its bishops at the time were not nearly so unified in opinions as it might appear at first sight. Various religious authorities in the churches of the second to fourth century believed some books to be inspired by God that were later declared apocryphal, and rejected those that were later canonized in the collection called the New Testament. There also existed a variety of theological views about church dogma and practice. (One example is the previously mentioned conflict of positions between Tertullian and Origen on the validity of baptizing young children).

The same was the case with regard to the so-called “apostolic succession”, simply because the apostle Paul himself testified that laying hands by the apostles is not a sure guarantee that the appointed bishop will persevere in Christ’s true teaching by the end of his life. The apostle testifies that some of the elders whom he himself ordained and placed in ministry (even when they confessed the right doctrine) would later distort the faith which Paul introduced and bring heretical teachings to draw converts after themselves:

*“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. **Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.**”*¹⁷³

If even Paul, the very apostle to the Gentiles, admits that his authority to lay hands in ordination has no “miraculous” effect and does not guarantee the accuracy of further transmission of Christian truth from generation to generation by the elders he ordained, then we can conclude that the theory of “apostolic succession”, as advocated by the Eastern Orthodox Church, has no validity. Specifically, verse 31 of the above passage shows that what is needed to pass on true Christian faith is to pay attention to the preservation of the Apostolic teaching and the Spirit against various novel heresies that

¹⁷² “Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, Pothinus in Lyon, Quadrat of Athens, and Dionysius of Corinth, standing as heads of their communities, are called bishops (overseers), which means elders or overseers. The name comes from the civil administration. The word **“bishop”, for a time synonymous with presbyter**, finally assumed the meaning of **monarchial authority**... The author of the Didaskalea, who himself might have been a bishop, wrote a complete portrait about the various activities of bishop... probably written in the late second century. Even if the portrait is somewhat idealized, the work describes quite specific duties. He is the head of the fellowship and liturgy. He makes righteous judgments, settles disputes, demonstrates his prudence and good nature. He must defend the faith - and the poor. In short, he stands in the place of God in the church. ‘So, **bishops**, be pure in action, for this is the price of his duty, because he **stands in the place of the Almighty God.**’” A. G. Hamman, *Rome and the First Christians*, 94, 98-99. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁷³ Acts 20:28-31. Author’s emphasis.

unstable people are vulnerable to accepting. Indeed, Paul's prediction that some of the elders of the Ephesian church would depart from the true faith and mislead others came true. In 1 Timothy, Paul tells his fellow worker:

*“As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, **stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work—which is by faith. The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.**”*¹⁷⁴

The text above makes it clear that some of the elders, previously mentioned in Paul's prophecy, “wandered” from the faith and were “teaching false doctrines” different from those of the men who had laid hands on them. The same picture of corruption of the elder also applies to an entire church as revealed in the first chapter of John's Revelation. Namely, Christ Himself “dictates” a letter to the Apostle John, so he would send it to the elders of various churches, which among other things states:

*“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write... Yet I hold this **against you**: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! **Repent and do the things you did at first.** If you do not repent, I will come to you **and remove your lampstand from its place.**”*¹⁷⁵

*“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write... Nevertheless, I have a few things **against you**: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. **Repent therefore!** Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”*¹⁷⁶

*“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write... Nevertheless, I have this **against you**: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. **I have given her time to repent** of her immorality, but she is unwilling.”*¹⁷⁷

*“To the angel of the church in Sardis write... I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but **you are dead.** Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for **I have not found your deeds complete** in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore,*

¹⁷⁴ 1 Tim. 1:3-7. Author's emphasis.

¹⁷⁵ Rev. 2:1,4-5. Author's emphasis.

¹⁷⁶ Rev. 2:12, 14-16. Author's emphasis.

¹⁷⁷ Rev. 2:18, 20-1. Author's emphasis.

*what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.”*¹⁷⁸

*“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write... I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, **because you are lukewarm**—neither hot nor cold—I **am about to spit you out of my mouth**. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked... Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and **repent**.”*¹⁷⁹

“The angels of the churches” in this case are the church elders, not the angels of heaven. If the question had been about actual angels (spiritual beings), then Christ would not have had to send them a message written on papyrus (or skin) with the pen of the apostle John. Rather, He would have had to communicate with them in a completely different way. Identifying the whole church with its head (the Bishop) stems from the simple reason that he is responsible for the proper management of its spiritual life. , Christ sends a message of encouragement coupled with rebuking due to spiritual failures and sins committed. In each passage of Scripture, there is a call to repentance, with the threat that if it does not happen, Christ might reject the entire religious community (along with its Bishop).

Given the fact that these bishops of the “Revelation” churches were ordained by the apostles themselves (or by other elders ordained by the apostles) were capable of wrongly leading their spiritual flocks, is it not more possible for this to be the case with many church leaders of later times? Even some of the Orthodox authors agree with this position. Namely, the holy monks, the “Old Calendarists”, who claim that most of the modern Orthodox churches fell from the grace of God because they accepted the new calendar and ecumenism led by the Church of Rome, considered “apostolic succession” to be transmitted not by the mechanical laying on of hands, but rather through the legitimacy of one’s uncompromised confession of faith:

“When speaking about the apostolic succession, it is insufficient to prove that there is an uninterrupted chain of ordination, which reaches the apostles. Christ’s Church does not depend on the letter of the law, nor the mechanical act of laying a hand. Even if someone is ordained, yet lacks true faith, his ordination is invalid. He is considered neither a member of the clergy nor of the apostolic succession. The ordination of those who become priests only is valid when performed by a righteous bishop who bears the grace of the Holy Spirit. **Can the Holy Spirit dwell where there is a lie? Or where there is heresy? ... What value has mere ritual apostolic succession for those from whom the Holy Spirit has departed? ...** Because, although the first priests who were ordained by the Fathers by laying their hands with the two-fold gift of the Spirit, however, these priests fell away. This next generation of priests became merely laymen

¹⁷⁸ Rev. 3:1-3. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁷⁹ Rev. 3:14-7, 19. Author’s emphasis.

who lacked the power to baptize nor to lay hands, else they were unable to transfer grace of the Holy Spirit on the other because it was they themselves lost.”¹⁸⁰

All these examples, therefore, clearly demonstrate that the idea of "apostolic succession", which was conceived during the struggle with heretics (an attempt to prove that a majority of the Church elders have a connection to the apostles through a series of ordained bishops, thus representing the true Christian doctrine), does not guarantee that ordination of bishops will prevent them from introducing false doctrines. The heresy differed in one (but significant) way between the early Christian movement cited earlier from Revelation and larger churches of later times. The early church could recognize heresies that appeared abruptly and stood in obvious contrast to the true confession which it possessed. In contrast, today's larger modern churches suffer a different threat. Great changes in church dogma occurred very slowly (often over centuries) and almost unnoticed by most. The disclosure of these heresies within the dogma of the Church is actually a major purpose for writing this work. As was the case in previous chapters, future chapters of this book will demonstrate this truth.

Places and Means of Worship Services

Because Orthodoxy preaches that it is the only true Church of Christ on earth, it is easy for our uninformed Serbian religious people to assume that the early Christian churches (the church) resembled today's church: an inner sanctuary full of icons and frescoes, two main rooms, a place for the faithful to stand near the altar, and an entrance only for priests. Also, it would appear so easy to depict the images of the apostles and their successors wearing special clothing, such as do today's priests.

One could imagine, for example, the icons of the Holy Archdeacon and First Martyr Stephen who holds a censer in his hand, just as the deacons and elders of the first century churches ministered in their church premises - such as the present clergy of the Eastern Orthodox Church does today. However, the conclusion at the end of this study is that the worship observed in the churches of the first century (at the time of the Apostles and after them) actually more closely resemble services held in today's evangelical-Protestant churches, not those conducted in Orthodox temples.

Therefore, regarding the place where the apostles with other disciples gathered to worship, these were ordinary homes where some of the believers lived. They opened their home to host church services. This situation was similar whether the homes were located in an urban or rural environment. Let the Scriptures testify:

*“Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to **the house** of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God.”*¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ *The Kiss of Judas: The Orthodox Mission of Svetogorsk* (The Monastery of Holy Ascension of Esphigmen: Belgrade, 2004), 276-7. Author's emphasis.

¹⁸¹ Acts 18:7. Author's emphasis.

*“But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily **in the lecture hall** of Tyrannus.”*¹⁸²

*“Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings.”*¹⁸³

*“The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets **at their house**.”*¹⁸⁴

*“Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and **the church in her house**.”*¹⁸⁵

Church historian Eusebius Popovic confirms the fact that the first Christians gathered to worship the Lord in places that did not resemble at all resembled today's Orthodox temples:

“The first liturgies were observed by Christians **gathered in private homes**. During the persecution, they held common worship services in caves, caverns, underground vaults, and in forests... They conducted worship in special areas... The internal layout of church buildings was easy to understand. The interior of the church buildings at the end of this period (3rd and 4th century A.D.) usually consisted of three parts: the porch for baptismal candidates and penitent, the middle part for believers, and the final part for classes of clergy of the church, but without a barrier.”¹⁸⁶

What today in Serbia appears quite “scandalous” for members who belong to the traditional Eastern Orthodox Church is that evangelical Christians (derogatorily called “sectarians”), model their church architecture on that of churches in early church history. Places of worship include places of worship in private homes (that is, no separate church building) or in buildings that exude simplicity - like those in the apostolic time.

Only later (from the 3rd and 4th centuries) did they begin to erect ornate temples that required substantial amounts of financial resources. Some beautiful pagan temples were transformed into Christian churches. Christian emperors competed with each other to build better, brighter, and more expensive temples for the Liturgy. According to Eusebius Popovic, the builders attempted to recreate the look of the reception hall for audiences at the imperial courts when they built the church buildings. Thus churches were built first before they were officially christened for usage. Then they were “consecrated” by one or more local bishops. Thus every year, the day of their consecration is celebrated. Out of respect for the church, some people entered the worship barefoot, and others kissed the entry threshold before the door. Also, apparently modeled after the Jerusalem temple, the church consisted of two rooms, in which no one except the priests (and emperors - who

¹⁸² Acts 19:9. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁸³ Rom. 16:23.

¹⁸⁴ 1 Cor. 16:19. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁸⁵ Col. 4:15. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁸⁶ Eusebius Popovic, *General Church History*, v. 1, 422. Author’s emphasis.

were considered a kind of high priest) could enter. They were called “the Holy of Holies”, or “the altar”. Popovic mentions the custom that anyone who forced his way inside and fell upon “the altar” and grabbed the table would enjoy church asylum (i.e., church protection). This situation strongly reminds us of many Old Testament examples where some who deserved death clutched onto “the horns of the altar,” which was placed in front of the tent of meeting, and sought pardon.¹⁸⁷

The simplicity of external appearance of the place of worship for the first century Church as well as its interior did not resemble in the least anything like that of today’s Orthodox churches. Here is what Mijac says about the requirements for the interior of an Orthodox church:

“The temple is a place for the exact iconic operation. Therefore, as a rule, a church **cannot be an Orthodox church in the absence of icons**. A temple may have more or fewer icons, but it **can not exist without icons**. The icon is a critical component of the concept of the church, because the icon occupies a central role in worship, primarily in the Holy Liturgy, that requires other components to complement the icon.”¹⁸⁸

In contrast, the church history teaches us that in the beginning of the Christian era there existed no iconography or frescography. In fact, according to well-known Orthodox theologian Sergey Bulgakov, the early church adhered to “an iconoclastic spirit.”¹⁸⁹ And yet, according to the conclusion just proposed by Mijac, the places where the early Christians gathered cannot be called “Orthodox temples” because they have no icons in them! Following the example of the early Church, even today’s serious evangelical-Protestant Christians do not store icons within their houses of worship. Therefore, on this issue, they are much more faithful to the practice of the early Apostolic Church than is the case with the Orthodox.

As regards the use of hand censers by Orthodox priests in worship and their relation to burning candles, Vladeta Jerotić, citing information which came from Sima Trojanović, says that this practice originates from paganism:

“According to S. Trojanović, incense is a pagan custom (the burning of incense to the icon by the deacon!), for it is offered up to idols. This also includes the burning of candles! This pagan custom began to spread from the second century after Christ.”¹⁹⁰

Eusebius Popovic also confirms that many modern-day Orthodox religious practices originated centuries after the death of the apostles. Some of the customs were adopted from paganism. Baptized but new converts from pagan religions added innovations to the liturgical practice, while other actions (such as patron sign of consecration or blessing by the priest) were invented and developed, so to speak, “by themselves”:

¹⁸⁷ See 1 Ki. 1:50, 51, 2:28. About the setting of the altar and the “horns”, see Ex. 27:2, 29:12, 30:23, 37:25-6, 38:2-3 and Lev. 4:7, 8:15, 9:9, and 16:18.

¹⁸⁸ Mijac, *Questions and Answers*, 144. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁸⁹ About this topic, there will be much detail in the chapter “Devotion to the Holy Icons.”

¹⁹⁰ Vladeta Jerotić, *The Old and the New in Christianity* (Belgrade: 2000), 23.

“The development of the form of the worship service in the second period (i.e., 312-622 A.D. – author’s note) is related to the development of the church and its structure or hierarchy as it was instituted. Since the church of the Roman Empire became driven by the state, which supported it with material and moral aid, the church became a wealthier and more advanced church in terms of its external forms. It was a natural progression that the form and structure of its worship also became more complicated, especially **as many Gentiles, who converted to Christianity, demanded syncretism with their pompous forms of worship full of pagan cult symbols. Some symbols became common in Christian rites**, or at least arose in general forms, such as **the use of incense and lighting in worship, including lamps and candles**. Some other forms of worship, however, that existed in the first period became more sophisticated, such as the **devoted sign of the cross**, which, so far as we know, only the African church had performed. Whereas before, believers only drew the sign of the cross on the forehead with one finger, so in the new age of the second period, it reached its most complete form. In the West, believers went from left to right using the whole hand with the forehead on his chest and shoulders with one another, as opposed to the East which required using the first three fingers to symbolize the Holy Trinity and going right to left. So **symbolic blessing**, which is performed by laying the sign of the cross over another person or many persons or even things, headed in the same direction.”¹⁹¹

Regarding the custom of the sign of the cross invented by the churches on the African continent, in other areas it still was not known in the second and third century A.D. (and certainly not at the time of the Apostles). Popovic makes the following statement:

“In the beginning, every major action performed by Christians was followed with a **habit** of making the sign of the saving cross as a sign of redemption, the adoption of salvation. According to the testimony of Tertullian, believers in Africa traced the sign of the cross on their foreheads. However, also during that time, the church in the East knew nothing about the sign of the cross.”¹⁹²

As regards the hand-made clothes used by Orthodox priests, the Bible and historical sources inform us that the apostles and elders of the first century churches (as well as Christ) dressed simply, unlike the Old Testament priests who wore special clothes. Contrast this with Serbian people, who are used to bearded priests always seen dressed in black robes. By comparison, preachers at evangelical churches who dress in ordinary civilian suits look quite strange.

However, this very sort of outward appearance by worship ministers in evangelical communities approximates that very way of appearance as practiced and taught by Christ and the apostles! The simple reason is that, as we found earlier, the clergy of the Old Testament with its special clothing and ministries in the period of the New Testament (the Church of Christ) is rendered completely unnecessary. This is how ministers in the first century (apostles and other elders-overseers) dressed, according to an Orthodox presbyter:

¹⁹¹ Eusebius Popovic, *General Church History*, Vol. 1, 638-9. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 436. Author’s emphasis.

“At first glance, the fact that the New Testament makes it impossible for us to find a doctrine of how ministers should dress, similar to other cases, should not confuse us. **It really has no such regulations.** There may be found only some notes about modesty in dress (Mt. 6:28-30; Lk.12:27-28; Phil. 4:5), while **Christ and the apostles wore attire commonly worn by other people.** Moreover, Christ attacked [the Pharisees] for wearing special clothing as part of their hypocrisy (Mt. 23:5)... So, **after the apostolic era, in which one does not find a particular dress code for a pastor** (one should know that Christ and His apostles wore attire typical of their fellow countrymen during their time - a simple garment that covered the entire body, which was well suited for their pastoral roles), but at the end of the first century there are traces of its existence, which testifies to the apostolic tradition and church canons. **Only in the second half of the fourth century do we discover precise rules on a special clerical dress code.**”¹⁹³

Eusebius Popović, in contrast to Bozidar Mijac, neglects to mention information that a special dress code for “priests” began to be introduced at the end of the first century. Rather, he dates the first mention of a dress code “at the end of the first period”, i.e., sometime before the end of the third and fourth centuries, with emphasis that no facts point to one beforehand. The author points out that the clothing religious servants wore was probably white (or some other bright colors), and not usually navy or black as is the case today. The second “period” (from 312-622 A.D.) witnessed nearly all of the clothes that are still used today by the clergy in the Eastern and Western Churches, with the indication that some vestments were introduced much later in time.¹⁹⁴

Thus, for example, Popovic states that the lowest level cleric initially wore a sleeveless shoulder cape, which is called a “short phelonion”.¹⁹⁵ A little later, it became common that these clerics, just like those at the next highest level, wore basic clothes, including a lower garment, a white tunic called a “sticharion.” All the archdeacons and senior clerics wore tunics. The part of the clerical clothing called the “orarion” includes long strips worn by deacons over the left shoulder and reaching over the ankle in both front and back. It is believed that the tape might have initially had the clear purpose to wipe the mouth of those who participated in Communion, similar to the Roman custom of using a handkerchief called an “orarium” to wipe the mouth. On the other hand, the orarion serves to give a signal to begin certain activities in the Liturgy. The Deacon raises the front end of the strip in the air so that everyone can see it. This commences the exercise of worship services carried out by the presbyter, with the difference that on the priest, rather than having the strips fall on his back and chest, instead they both hang over his chest. In this form, the “orarion” bears a special name called an “epitrachelion”, a stole (collar), which serves a dual function for the priest during worship. These church officials adorned over the sticharion and stole a long “phelonion”, a sleeveless garment that covers the chest and back and is held together by a belt.

¹⁹³ Bozidar Milac, *Questions and Answers*, 194. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁹⁴ “Only in the second period did this reverence grow, and renown from the other main period had in the first period laid the foundation of a separate clerical dress. Then in the second period did the main vestments used in the church today become clear, although it was only formally instituted somewhat later on. And so, not at once, but little by little did this system of liturgical vesture or garments arrive.” Popovic, *General Church History*, Vol. 1, 677. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁹⁵ See <http://www.istok.net/church-supplies/clergy-vestments/>. Translator’s note.

On the other hand, bishops in the beginning had the right to wear all these items of attire, with the difference that they could wear a cross over their phelonion, while the priests did not have this privilege. This vestment of the bishop was decorated with many crosses and was called the “polistavria” (phelonion with many crosses). Another component of the bishop’s vestment consisted of the “Omophorion”, i.e., a garment for the shoulders, which, according to the words of Popovic, represented an imitation of the ephod, the vestment of the Old Testament high priest. This part of the clothing became the distinctive emblem of a distinguished bishop or priest, and his clothing signaled the beginning of the exercise of the high priestly activity. The “Nadbedrenik” is also part of the bishop’s outfit.¹⁹⁶ It consists of a four-fold linen cloth that extends from the shoulder to the knee or thigh. It is believed that the nadbedrennik initially served as a towel used after the bishop washes the feet of other believers, especially on Maundy Thursday, following the example of Christ. A later mystic interpretation endowed the nadbedrennik with episcopal authority, i.e., a spiritual sword.

“Sakkos”, are liturgical garments which were initially worn only by patriarchs. (Eusebius says that it is not known whether they wore them before the third period, e.g., before the 7th century). The sakkos represent vestments like a bag with large sleeves made of rich material. Modeled on that of the Old Testament high priest and the Greco-Roman emperor, it later became a vestment for all bishops. Up to the 12th century, only patriarchs wore the sakkos. By the 13th century, some metropolitans also adorned them, and all other bishops were wearing them by the 14th century. From the time when the patriarchs along with a privileged few metropolitans and archbishops wore them, the sakkos was adorned with many crosses (called “sakkos polistavros”) to distinguish these men from other bishops. On special festive occasions, bishops wore a cape (a mantle, similar to that like a monk - but expensive). Part of their uniform included a decoration on the chest called an “engolpion”, which is a partial imitation of the breastplate of the Old Testament high priest. The decoration on the chest is also called “panagion” (the All-holy thing). This engolpion is a medallion upon which are drawn small icons of Jesus Christ, the Virgin with a small icon of Jesus or the Holy Trinity and the cross. In recent times, the engolpion took the form of a medal with the image of the Mother of God, which also became known as the “panagia” (the All-Holy Theotokos).

Bishops still carry a pastoral staff, which is bent at the top or T-shaped. The top often consists of two snake heads intertwined with one another (representing the two-fold wisdom of the archbishops).

Bishops wear on their heads a special hat called a “mitre”. The mitre was based partially on the crowns of Greco-Roman emperors and partly on hats worn by Old Testament high priests. The use of the mitre dates only from the 10th century. The name “mitre” originally referred to a headband or turban that people wore in the secular world to cover their head. In the Eastern Church, the Patriarch of Alexandria was the first to wear a turban, or mitre, and later other patriarchs followed. Only in the eighteenth century were bishops required to wear them, and even then as a special prerogative for archimandrites and protopresbyters.

¹⁹⁶ It can also be awarded to certain priests. See <http://orthodoxwiki.org/Vestments> . (Translator’s note.)

On the other hand, the use of mitres by Western Catholic bishops developed such that they eventually covered the whole head in a way similar to that of the ancient pagan Roman priests. In fact, the mitre was also called by the same name “infula” in the Roman church as it had been used for the pagan sacrifices. These infulas were a head covering composed of two triangular areas, with the tops facing up. On the back of the mitre, two more strips hang down in back, just like the pagan priests wore them.¹⁹⁷ The mitres of Western bishops and the Pope resembled the head of a fish with an open mouth.

It begs the question as to what meaning they had discovered from the old Roman polytheistic cult. (Remember that we have already established the pagan origins of the mitre from polytheism both for the Eastern and Western bishops; the mitre in the East derived from the model of the crown worn by Greco-Roman emperors and the mitre in the West mimicked the hats worn by pagan Roman priests.)

According to Alexander Hislop¹⁹⁸, the mitre adorned by the Roman Pope, despite being decorated in various ways through the centuries, shares an identical form to the crown worn by various gods and angelic in the pagan world. One example is the drawing of the fish god Dagon which was worshiped by the Philistines and the Babylonians.¹⁹⁹ The cap is shaped like the open mouth of a fish head, while the rest of the fish body hung in the back. (This is similar to Roman Catholic bishops, with the only difference that they wear several ribbons called “infulae”.) Moreover, all the Popes bore the pagan title of “Pontifex Maximus”, which was also borne by the Emperor Constantine the Great as well as many of his pagan predecessors.

It is possible that the priestly garments, which were instituted centuries after the apostles in the traditional Christianity of both East and West, originates from the pagan Roman Empire and even their customs were adapted from an older pagan system. The Old Testament prophet Zephaniah, citing the warning words of the Lord (Zephaniah 1:4), writes the Hebrew word *kemarim* (*kamar*), which refers to the priests of the idol Baal. According to data from Fausset’s Bible Encyclopedia, these priests were dressed in clothes of black color.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ All previous information has been taken from Popovic, *General Church History*, Vol. 1, 676-684.

¹⁹⁸ The author made original reference to Ralph Woodrow, who has since altered his views, not entirely convincing to some. Alexander Hislop, the main reference for Woodrow’s earlier work, is used instead. (See http://philologos.org/_eb-ttb/sect61.htm . Translator’s note.)

¹⁹⁹ See the picture under http://philologos.org/_eb-ttb/images/fig48.htm for a direct comparison to Dagon. Other pictures of a mitre with a similar design to that of the Roman Pope include that of the Maltese mediating deity (http://philologos.org/_eb-ttb/images/fig49.htm) and even the Chinese emperor interceding for his people (http://philologos.org/_eb-ttb/images/fig50.htm). The resemblances of these mitres are very obvious. Regardless of how much or little credibility one places in the direct conspiracy of the Roman Pope to legitimize power directly from pagan gods, nevertheless the conclusion that the mitre in the Western (or Eastern) churches indeed originates from pagan sources stands. (Translator’s note.)

²⁰⁰ *Fausset’s Bible Encyclopedia*, 291, cited in www.gospelcenterchurch.org/babylonmysteryreligion.html+Baal+priests+black+robes+Fausset's&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us . See also Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, 222, cited on same website (and more specific reference to priests of Baal). (Translator’s note.)

Eusebius Popovic cites the fact that Acacius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, in 476 ordered the bishops to wear red vestments on days of mourning in memory of martyrs (allegedly because of the identity of the color with the scarlet red robe that the Roman soldiers forced Jesus to wear on the day of His crucifixion).²⁰¹ On the other hand, Woodrow believes that it is probable that today's Roman Catholic cardinals wore red clothes as another inheritance from the ancient Babylonian religion, just like the mitre. (See Ezekiel 23:14-15.) According to historical data, some priests among pagan religions wore red clothing (the color of fire) to symbolize their actual role of maintaining the holy fire which burned during the activities of the ritual.²⁰²

What is certain is that the first century Apostolic Church had nothing in common with the numerous, later innovations of ecclesiastical customs and practices, many of which undoubtedly originated from pagan sources. Of course, the fact remains true that church authorities, even in adopting pagan customs, attempted to replace them with Christian meanings, as we shall see later. Nonetheless, these measures could not change the undeniable fact that they came from polytheism:

“Love for the allegorical interpretation of the Bible captivated particular mystic theologians, which also extended to their acts of worship and institutions of the worship service. So, symbolic and allegorical interpretation of liturgical activities and relics also gradually emerged. Even in those cases that do not have symbolism in and of themselves, there arose a so-called mystical interpretation and understanding of everything that concerns worship.”²⁰³

And at the end of this chapter, I would like to cite two large passages from Serbian educators, who explained the difference between actual spiritual Christian values versus many novelties introduced over the centuries, which are a blurred view of the original apostolic confession and religious practice:

“Steeple, bells, oil, and shiny silver lamps - it is all secular pomp and decoration, not the redeemed church of Christ the Savior, for which the Most Holy shed His blood. The souls of the people purified and doing good works, innocent and pure nature: this is my brother, the true bride of Christ and the Heavenly Zion by the witness of the Apostles: ‘This is the church for the living God!’ which is painted and adorned by God, and not walls, bells, and golden threaded vestments (female adornments) and silverware.”²⁰⁴

“Greek people and other people can fool themselves as easily as others, and we have received from them, however we found ourselves stuck in the same mess, just as the others are stuck. Yet how is it we come out shining like the sun! When we have acted in such a way that we judge others as abusers, is it just and timely to examine and judge ourselves? It seems to me that this is the smartest option. **When the Greeks and Latins accepted Christian doctrine from Christ’s apostles, there was no Holy Wood, no**

²⁰¹ Popovic, *General Church History*, Vol. 1.

²⁰² Ralph Woodrow, *Babylon Mystery Religion*, 114.

²⁰³ Popovic, *General Church History*, Vol. 1, 639.

²⁰⁴ Dositej Obradovic, *Collected Works*, 668.

icons, no bodies of the saints or relics, no bones, no canons, nor irmos²⁰⁵, no troparion²⁰⁶, not the slightest kontakion.²⁰⁷ For not one of the blessed and holy apostles neither knew or thought of a single word or letter of such things. Yet our Slavic peoples received Christianity not from the Greeks nor from the Latins. But when? Nine hundred years after the apostles. So let me say: who knows what they could have conjured up and invented over nine hundred years?”²⁰⁸

The studies to follow relate to the holy sacraments of marriage and anointing, which will be shorter than the previous sections. The reason is simple. In our studies, we see that the sacraments are the foundation on which stands the whole Orthodox structure. Therefore, we need just a little more consideration to make the correct conclusion about their (contra) Biblical foundation.

THE HOLY SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

From the beginning, I have to admit that this sacrament of the Eastern Church is its closest effort to teaching the truth. Although, as we have already found out, Orthodoxy has a very poor understanding of other biblical truths, the Eastern Church “only” teaches several inconsistencies on the issue of marriage relative to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. Namely, the Orthodox Church represents the sanctity of marriage community between men and women (albeit only theoretically) and allows divorce only for adultery made by one spouse. Also, Orthodoxy believes that the relationship of husband and wife parallels the image of Christ and His Church.

“In The New Testament Church, marriage becomes the sacrament of the Kingdom of God, which leads man to eternal joy and spiritual love and makes it not only for this temporal life, but for all eternity. In marriage, the grace of God is poured on them as infinite love, will make them grow into a wonderful and holy spiritual building as a unified mind consisting of one will, one in feeling, and inextricable conjugal unity, which is the goal of the extension of human family and the celebration of God. Thus, in the sanctity of marriage, the husband and wife are one and the above relationship, while the sons and daughters of the parents are first degree relatives, grandchildren in the second degree, and so on.

The truth is, therefore, living: marriage is the most sacred and oldest institution of mankind. It points to the heavenly love between Christ and the Church. It is the cornerstone of humanity. Hence: as goes marriage, so goes family, as goes family, so goes the states, as goes the state, so goes humanity.

²⁰⁵ “The **irmos** is the initial **troparion** of each individual **ode** in a **canon** as chanted in the **Eastern Orthodox Church**.” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irmos>) Translator’s note.

²⁰⁶ “A **troparion** (**Greek**: τροπάριον, plural: **troparia**, τροπάρια; **Church Slavonic**: тропарь, *tropar*) in **Byzantine music** and in the **religious music** of **Eastern Orthodox Christianity** is a short **hymn** of one **stanza**, or one of a series of stanzas.” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Troparion>) Translator’s note.

²⁰⁷ “A **Kontakion** (also *kondakion*, *kondak*, and *kontak*; plural *kontakia*, *kondakia*) is a type of thematic **hymn** in the Orthodox **Church** and other Eastern **Christian** churches.” (<http://orthodoxwiki.org/Kontakion>) Translator’s note.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 687-8. Author’s emphasis.

Therefore, our Holy Church does not cease to call her children to a consecrated wedding of marriage in the church where the spouses become one in spiritual unity and teaches them to keep marriage sacred as the apple of his eye. Divorce is allowed only in the case of proven betrayal - because of adultery.”²⁰⁹

However, there are several things to notice on the basis of what we just read from Orthodoxy. Namely, the same source just quoted also claims that Christ established and consecrated the holy sacrament of marriage during his attendance at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. Of course, although marriage is truly a divine institution, nowhere in the Bible is it called a sacrament. In the apologetic work of Lazar Milin, he attempts to justify marriage as a sacrament by quoting verses from the Epistle to the Ephesians, the fifth chapter, which is considered to support the Orthodox position:

“But when we read ahead those places mentioned in the Bible, when we remember how God created the first man and woman and blessed them, saying they were to multiply and replenish the earth, when he read the words of the Savior on marriage where he is actually repeating the words of God from the book of Genesis that man and woman become one body, and when Paul teaches that a marriage relationship between husband and wife is called by the great and blessed mystery such as the relationship between Christ and the Church, and when, with all that take into account the presence of Christ at the wedding in Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11), then we can clearly see that the marriage sacrament which God blesses and through which they receive the grace of God is to help one’s marriage relationship. We realize what God requires of every Christian. **However, the church has always, from the apostolic age, marriage regarded as a holy sacrament. We can see from these words by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians**, where he compares the relationship between husband and wife as a mystery of the spiritual connection to Christ and the Church.”²¹⁰

However, this time Milin errs in understanding the New Testament text. Here is how to correctly read the text cited by Milin:

*“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church- for we are members of his body. ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ **This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ***

²⁰⁹ *Catechism for the Home*, 41.

²¹⁰ Milin, *Church and Sects*, 339-40. Author’s emphasis.

*and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”*²¹¹

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, for us earthly men hampered by many limitations, many decisions are God’s mystery. One great mystery is the complete depth of the relationship of husband and wife before God. From the moment of marriage, the relationship is not viewed anymore as two separate personalities - but as one. In this is reflected all the glory of marriage – the spouses are in complete spiritual, mental and physical unity. The Apostle Paul’s text just makes it clear that the faithful with Christ and his Church (all people who are born again) are connected in the same way. Before God the Father, Jesus Christ and his Church are in complete unity - which is another guarantee of eternal salvation of every believing person. What also appears clear from the above text, in verses 30-32, is that Paul is describing his thoughts on the “great mystery” on Christ and the Church, not the spouse. Here are the New Testament verses translated by Dr. Dimitrije Stefanović and the archbishop’s synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church:

*“Because we are the members of his body. Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and shall be one flesh. This is a great secret: **I speak for Christ and the church.**”*

*“Because we are members of his body, of his flesh and his bones. Then a man will leave his father and mother and cling unto his wife, and the two will be one body. The secret is great, **but I am talking about Christ and His Church.**” (Author’s emphasis)*

I think the translation from the committee of the Synod of Bishops in this case is clearest. Christ’s faithful, who are limbs of His body (1 Cor. 12:12, 18, 27), are, spiritually speaking, of his flesh and his bones. The communion and unity of husband and wife, of which Paul speaks in this chapter, is visible and noticeable to everyone. Husband and wife live together in the same house, sleep in the same bed, and have a kind of intimacy not shared with anyone else. However, the truly “great mystery” is the proper and integral connection of the risen Savior Jesus who is in heaven - with believers who are on the earth. The Lord, while he was still on the earth, thus prayed:

*“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that **all of them may be one**, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: **I in them** and you in me. **May they be brought to complete unity** to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to*

²¹¹ Eph. 5:22-33. Author’s emphasis.

*them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that **I myself may be in them.**"*²¹²

In accordance with the Lord's prayer just cited, in which he expressed his desire for the perfect spiritual unity among believers, as well as their absolute unity with the Father and the Son, the members of the New Testament Church of Christ are the limbs of the body, with which he is associated in the same way as the head with the rest of human organism. Comparing the relationship between believers and Christ, that once were "two" (i.e., separated from one another - before the conversion of every sinner through repentance and faith in the Savior that unites him to the Church) have now become "one flesh" (like the marriage of two compound person of the opposite sex), the apostle Paul says: "This is a big secret," in thinking about the connection and unity of Christ and the Church.

So, Milin's claim that Paul in Ephesians 5:22-33 calls marriage a "holy sacrament" does not stand. In fact, as we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, not even the famous theologian of the Eastern Church in the eighth century, St. John of Damascus, in his time called marriage a holy sacrament. The secret relationship of husband and wife is great, but the Bible never calls it a "sacrament" which Christ established and "consecrated".

I would also like to clarify his claim from the beginning of this chapter, which states that the Orthodox Church only "theoretically" represents the inability to sever marriage, as ordained by the Word of God: "*So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.*" (Mt. 19:6)

In the chapters titled "Orthodox Monasticism" and "Holy Lives" later in the book, I cite a number of examples of many married men in the Eastern Orthodox Church are revered as saints, yet they abandoned their wives and children forever and went to monasteries, forests, and wastelands. Of course, many of these saints never returned to their families. Such examples are obviously worthy of praise by the Orthodox Church - as well as our examination - since the "Lives" consider such saints to be "blessed" and "venerable".

On the other hand, the chapter on monasticism will show what commands the holy fathers and canons taught "the Church" regarding a former monk who left the monastery and married. The "Church", with the help of state coercion, could force them to divorce their wives at any cost, return to the monastery, and threaten the penalty, under anathema, of imprisoning him in a cell for life.

All these numerous examples will give us the opportunity to learn about the Orthodox Church's commitment to the "sanctity" of marriage. The Orthodox Church follows God's Word, in this case, until the moment it does not contradict the teachings of the holy fathers (i.e., Holy Tradition).

To support the claim just presented is more than true, let the following excerpts from Patristic tradition make the case.

²¹² Jn. 17:20-6. Author's emphasis.

Namely, Scripture and church history make it well known that the first church officers (i.e., presbyters and bishops) were married men. Only with the rise of monastic life in later centuries were bishops selected from among the monks rather than those who were married.²¹³ This occurred completely contrary to the teaching of Christ's apostles in Scripture, which commands that bishops must be married (1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:6-7). Only in later centuries, they believed that the bishop after his appointment to the ministry could no longer continue to live with his lawful wife, and thus, he had to divorce her. Here is the 12th Canon of the Synod of Trullo:

“Moreover this also has come to our knowledge, that in Africa and Libya and in other places the most God-beloved bishops in those parts **do not refuse to live with their wives, even after consecration, thereby giving scandal and offense to the people.** Since, therefore, it is our particular care that all things tend to the good of the flock placed in our hands and committed to us—**it has seemed good that henceforth nothing of the kind shall in any way occur.**”²¹⁴

Of course, the "holy fathers" present at this Council knew full well that the Word of the Lord taught that marriage is not a transgression by a bishop, but rather ministry that pleases God. They tried to concoct support for their “law” by justifying it with other biblical verses, thus trying to make the Word contradict itself and expressing their utter misunderstanding of the sacred texts. Here is a continuation of the previously mentioned section:

“And we say this, not to abolish and overthrow **what things were established of old by Apostolic authority,** but as caring for the health of the people and their advance to better things, and lest the ecclesiastical state should suffer any reproach. For the divine Apostle says: Do all to the glory of God, give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Greeks, nor to the Church of God, even as I please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ. (1 Cor. 10:31-2; 11:1) **But if any shall have been observed to do such a thing, let him be deposed.**”²¹⁵

Judging by the previous statements, if an individual or group of people are still unstable in their faith and knowledge of God's will and “dislike” the wife of the bishop, thus this command was issued for the bishop after his ordination to divorce his wife, because she was a “stumbling block” to the “faithful”?!? The Apostle Paul in these texts certainly never intended to say that the Lord through His healthy, Inspiring Spirit should adapt immature doctrine to the reasoning of a spiritual ignoramus! In contrast, the apostle is teaching on not showing offense to anyone in terms of enforcing some minor actions prescribed in the Law of Moses, such as circumcision, separating clean and unclean foods, observing certain holidays, and the like. We learn from the book of Acts, as well as the teaching of some New Testament epistles, that Paul lived “as required by the Law”

²¹³ Details later in the chapter on “Orthodox Monasticism”.

²¹⁴ *The Book of Laws*, (Shibenik, 2003), 36. (See also <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3814.htm>) Author's emphasis.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.* (See also <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3814.htm>) Author's emphasis.

while he lived in a purely Jewish society (1 Cor. 9:19-20), but he lived “as without the Law” among the Christians who were originally Gentiles (21). His adaptation to the environment is by no means related to abolition and changing the meaning of God's eternal commandments, such as the inability to sever marriage, amongst other things. After all, the Apostle invited us to emulate him, and Christ, who issued a serious warning: “What therefore God has prepared, let not man put asunder.”

Here is how Dositej Obradovic, who knew church history very well, commented on the refusal of a wise man named Sinesius to leave his wife for accepting ordination as a bishop in the 5th century:

“At the same time lived in Egypt, in the city of Cyrene, a learned man with a life full of good deeds named Sinesius, known to all our church teachers... Sinesius was wise. He prayed for a long time whether to accept the bishopric of Cyrene, but since he was married (at that time, the custom of celibacy for bishops was introduced), he stated very clearly to everyone that he would refuse the episcopate for two reasons: first, that he would not abandon his wife for the diocese and for all the mitres and patriarchies in the world, and second, being a learned man, he could not believe or simply trust everything, nor could he lie by saying what he did not recognize as true he would believe. This man did not lose a single hair. He would be allowed to keep his beliefs as he sees fit along with his wife. But if God were to grant him children, then he could no longer be a bishop. In that way, they accepted his ministry.”²¹⁶

However, although Sinesius succeeded to become a bishop and at the same time remain married, more than two centuries later in 680 A.D., the Council amended that “law” and banned the option of marriage and threatened to depose the one who remains disobedient. At the same time, the Council passed another “law” that further regulated the life of the ex-wife of the bishop. Here is how it read:

“The wife of him who is advanced to the Episcopal dignity, shall be separated from her husband by their mutual consent, and after his ordination and consecration to the episcopate **she shall enter a monastery** situated at a distance from the abode of the bishop, and there let her enjoy **the bishop's provision**. And if she is deemed worthy she may be advanced to the dignity of a deaconess.”²¹⁷

It is obvious that such Patristic commandments concerning the life of the church elders and their legal spouses are neither inspired by God nor in accordance with God's Word. And since the Orthodox Church believes that sacred tradition (which includes the first Ecumenical Council decisions) is as equally inspired by the Holy Spirit as the Holy Scriptures, believing that this doctrine is a supplement to the Bible, it is clear that there is truth in my earlier statement that the Eastern Church only “theoretically” supports the inability to dissolve marriage. We have seen from history that the Eastern Church permits divorce in marriage, and a logical confrontation of human traditions with God's

²¹⁶ Obradovic, *Collected Works*, 656.

²¹⁷ *The Book of Laws*, 45. (Canon 48 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council) Author's emphasis. (See also <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3814.htm>)

eternal decree and commands. Recall the words of the Lord Jesus Christ that He spoken to his contemporaries – traditionalists. Then we will also realize whose “laws” go against the teachings of Christ and the apostles:

“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.’ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men... You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!”²¹⁸

In addition to all this, it is necessary to mention the fact that the implications of the holy fathers’ teaching means that God can bless and validate only marriages approved by the bishop or presbyter with the apostolic succession. All other marriages (contracted between atheists, non-Orthodox, etc.) actually represent sinful, extramarital, and invalid relationships.²¹⁹ It is clear what the opinion is of many decent and honorable Serbian gentlemen and their wives, who during the fifty years of Communist rule were wed not in a church but only by the state authorities (the Municipality), though the fathers of the Orthodox Church would not recognize their validity.²²⁰

Contrary to the traditional views of the Eastern Church and the practice carried out through history, the fellowship of evangelical Protestants command maximum respect for marriage vows amongst its members. Because their teachings are based solely on the Bible, evangelical believers preach and practice what God commands concerning marriage. They respect every marriage conducted by the state, social, or religious rules between persons of the opposite sex of which are not close of kin. Such a marriage is considered to be an inextricable bond before God, regardless of whether the spouses are Christians, members of other religions, or atheists. Also, evangelical Christians subscribe

²¹⁸ Mk. 7:6-9.

²¹⁹ Such a claim I have personally heard from the Bishop of Timochko, Mr. Justin Stefanovic, during a speech held in the mid 1990’s in Zajecar, the building of the diocese of Timochko before 50+ believers.

²²⁰ Attitudes of the Orthodox Church in relation to such marriages (Orthodox people to non-Orthodox) that are assembled in accordance with civil and not ecclesiastical regulations are very strict. According to the canons of the holy fathers such marriages are valid before God and should be a cause of divorce as soon as possible:

“It is forbidden for an Orthodox man to marry a woman who is a heretic, neither for an Orthodox woman to be married to a heretic. **If you discover that someone has acted in violation of this rule, such a marriage shall be considered void, and the illegal connection is lost.** Those whom should not be put together cannot be kept together, nor can one unite the lamb and the wolf, nor Christ’s part of the inheritance with sinners. **Whoever has broken this rule, we will find them out.**”

The Book of Laws: Proceedings of the Canons of the Orthodox Church, 50. Author’s emphasis. Quotation is the first part of Canon 72 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council.

Contrary to the position of Orthodoxy that allows complete freedom to divorce from such a marriage, biblical teachings involve the necessity of proper choice of spouses (which stipulates that one born-again person should marry only another born-again person). But if God’s faithful people still marry an unbeliever, no text of the Bible allows for such a marriage to be ended in divorce on the pretense of “correcting” an error so committed.

to the belief that every person born of God (male or female) should choose a spouse of faith, not one who does not share the same religious beliefs. They believe that conjugal union includes same spiritual interests (unity of spirit) and not only the physical love based on sensuality. The Apostle Paul teaches the first century Christians who are planning to get married to take as spouses believers (Christians) and not those from Paganism:

*“A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, **she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.**”*²²¹

In the same way that the Lord in the Old Testament forbade the Israelites to intermarry with members of the surrounding pagan peoples, because of the great possibility that such marriages would lead to apostasy for the Jewish nation²²², he makes the same prohibition for the New Testament Church. Citing Old Testament texts, Paul says this:

*“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? **What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?** What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.’ ‘Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.’ ‘I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.’”*²²³

Of course, the teaching of the apostles implied that if a wife who entered marriage while she was in a state of unbelief later accepted Christ as Savior, she ought to continue to live with her husband, even though he has not yet become a Christian. (1 Cor. 7:12-15; 1st Pet. 3:1-6)

Unlike many divorce cases that occur in Serbia, for various reasons, where the parties are mostly members of the Serbian Orthodox Church, divorce among born-again evangelical believers is very rare and occurs mainly in cases where one spouse is not a Christian, is full of prejudice, and wishes to leave married life with a person who, during the marriage, became an evangelical believer (see 1 Cor. 7:15).

Evangelical Protestant marriages are, therefore, unions of men and women who live in harmony, forming healthy and strong families. This fact is recognized even by Lazar Milin in his book:

*“Sectarians do not have a holy sacrament of marriage, but they have certain rituals during the wedding. **What is more important and praiseworthy, they consider marriage to be an extremely serious institution.** So much so, that some of them do not allow for*

²²¹ 1 Cor. 7:39. Author’s emphasis.

²²² See Dt. 7:1-5.

²²³ 2 Cor. 6:14-18. Author’s emphasis.

divorce. **Thus, they consider marriage as a sacred area**, even if it is not formally called a sacrament, since the first reformers deleted marriage from the list of sacraments.”²²⁴

Since evangelical believers have already received praise from Orthodox writers, in terms of their understanding of serious marital vows, it is time to draw the final conclusion. I am completely convinced that it is much better to belong to a religious community that appreciates and respects marriage above all, even if you do not call them sacraments, rather than to belong to a church that considers marriage a sacrament, yet whose baptized, anointed and faithful adherents destroy their lives with divorce as a result of adultery and many other forms of mutual contempt between spouses.

THE HOLY SACRAMENT OF ANOINTING

As the name says, this sacrament refers to consecration by oil. A careful reader of Scripture will, of course, immediately realize that the New Testament writings never mention anything about oil for consecration, and he will conclude that the sacrament comes neither from Christ’s teaching nor from apostolic church practice. But before I say anything more about this subject from a biblical and historical perspective, I want to give a few texts from the Orthodox literature that explain to us how the Eastern Church understands this world of sacraments:

“When medical problems arise, patients who believe pray to God for their health, because God can do what to a human doctor is often impossible. Patients often need a member of the clergy, a ‘church elder’ who will pray with perseverance and for a long time. According to rank in the breviary, he **can invoke the grace of God upon patients and pray for his healing by anointing him with holy oil**. This is why this act is called ‘consecration with holy oil’. Limited human power can conjure the omnipotence of God that emerges through the sacrament of anointing with holy oil. When you face illness and troubles, **the Holy Church, as a compassionate mother has established for patients in critical need the sacrament of anointing with holy oil**. For this sacrament, the holy apostle of Christ says: ‘If any man sick among you, let him call the elders of church and read a prayer over him, and let him help in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will help patients, and the LORD will heal him, and if he did sin, forgive him ... Pray, therefore, God, for one another to be healed, because the constant prayer of the righteous can help much.’(Ja. 5:14-16)”²²⁵

“**The Holy Sacrament of Anointing with Holy Oil**. And it is proof of God’s wisdom to think about people. Being omniscient, He provides all, including a gracious exit from the preparation of each situation. He knows that people, after separation from Him, the Source of life and health, will be subject to diseases, and **He prepared the cure in the form of a holy sacrament**, and recommended his Apostles to heal patients. So the apostles anointed with oil (**consecrated, of course**) many patients, and healed them (Mk. 6:13). Therefore the apostle St. James **recommends this sacrament to Christians in times of disease**: ‘If any man sick is among you, let him call the elders of the church to

²²⁴ Milin, *Church and Sects*, 339. Author’s emphasis.

²²⁵ *Catechism in the Home*, 41-2. Author’s emphasis.

pray over him, and let him be anointed with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will help a patient, and the LORD will heal him, and, if he committed any sins, forgive him. (Ja. 5:14-15).”²²⁶

These texts reveal several facts:

- (1) The holy sacrament of anointing with oil was established by the “Holy Church”, and she performed it by anointing with oil and consecrating patients who were gravely ill.
- (2) This sacrament is alleged to have come from the apostles who “understood” the need to anoint the sick with consecrated oil.
- (3) Orthodox priests perform this sacrament by praying (i.e., reading a prayer) over patients in order to heal them.
- (4) The apostles commanded us to perform this sacrament over people who are sick.

It is my deep conviction that the Orthodox texts just cited above are contrary to the teaching of the New Testament apostles of Christianity, as well as to the documents from Church history. What is certain is that Orthodox theologians distort biblical texts and historical facts in order to rationalize their teaching on this teaching based not on the Bible but on “holy tradition”.

To prove that the doctrine of “the holy sacrament of consecration with oil” comes from the Holy Scripture, we will examine information from the works of Eusebius Popovic. Before doing that, I want to stress one important fact. This sacrament of “holy oil” has no reference in the New Testament whatsoever. Specifically, if the holy sacrament were truly grounded in apostolic teaching, it seems unlikely that any disciple of Christ would have remained silent about consecration with oil to help people. Namely, although the apostles and other church elders in the first century did anoint sick people with oil and prayed for their healing, the mere mention of these events in and of itself does not validate the existence of “the holy sacrament of anointing with oil”. It merely shows the existence of the practice of rubbing someone with oil in the name of the Lord. These are two completely different things.

Secondly, the archpriest Marinkovic, citing the fact that the apostles had to practice the anointing of the sick in order to treat them, says they certainly “understood” that this oil was initially consecrated (though the Bible says nothing about it). No, that would immediately solve the concerns about whether the apostles really consecrated oil or not. We will examine the historical data.

“It is not about anointing patients with holy oil... i.e., anointing with holy oil connected with prayer, in Latin “oleum infirmorum” or “oil for the sick ones”, rubbing patients with oil, unction. Only in the 12th century did the Roman Catholic Church coin the term “extrema unction”, that is, final anointing. **We do not find any extended documentation on this apart from the epistle of James**, when the ‘elders’ rubbed

²²⁶ G. Marinkovic, *The Greatest Teacher*, 263. Author’s emphasis.

patients with oil in the name of the Lord, and they prayed over them for relief and when needed the forgiveness of sins.”²²⁷

“The consecration of water... Water was intended for daily use in prayer, especially to sprinkle people and things – holy water, which indicates the symbolic cleansing proclaimed and expected from God, and upon God hearing the prayer, ritual cleaning is done. The holy action comes more from the Old Testament, **and water baptism, which came later, is the first consecration.**²²⁸ **A similar reason was offered for chrismation of patients by anointing with oil,** as after baptism, it would **consecrate the person.**”²²⁹

Obviously, the citations above show that the consecrated oil used for anointing sick people was introduced only many years after the Apostles. Water was used as consecration in baptism and in sprinkling people and objects. Eusebius says this "Sacrament" is unknown beyond what is written in the epistle of James, and that no information on the "consecration of oil" precedes James. As previously mentioned, it is important to carefully study all the New Testament verses that speak about the treatment of disease using anointing oil. In this way it will become more persuasive that Orthodox teaching on this issue does not square with the Bible.

Anointing and Healing in the New Testament

Along with verses from Mark 6:13 and James 5:14 that address the relationship of healing and anointing with oil to cure disease, relevant verses in the New Testament also include Luke 10:3 (in connection with Isaiah 1:6) and Revelation 3:18. First of all, I want to look at the meaning of anointing and healing specific to these verses, and then we will examine James later.

What I would first like to emphasize is that olive oil in ancient Eastern nations, including Israel, was used in treatment as a medical tool. It is certainly true that the oil could not help cure many diseases, but it certainly could treat some ailments, e.g. wounds and boils. The prophet Isaiah vividly describes Israel's apostasy like a sick condition of the entire body, and notes:

*“Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness - only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or **soothed with oil.**”²³⁰*

²²⁷ E. Popovic, *General Church History*, Vol. 1, 435. Author's emphasis.

²²⁸ “Water baptism **was first used – as we know – not at all as a sign of consecration,** but as a sign of repentance. We only see water used for consecration as well in the 3rd century.” *Ibid.*, 432. Author's emphasis.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 436. Author's emphasis.

²³⁰ Is. 1:4-6. Author's emphasis.

In the New Testament parable of the Good, Christ the Lord mentioned that the injured man's wounds were dressed with oil and wine, for clean and efficient healing:

*“But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and **bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine.** Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him.”*²³¹

In Revelation, Christ the Lord vividly counsels people to buy oil from Him for anointing the eyes and gaining a healthy (spiritual) vision for seeing one’s own true spiritual condition:

*“I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and **salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.**”*²³²

As we see, rubbing oil to treat certain diseases mentioned in the Bible had a literal and therapeutic meaning, as well as a metaphoric, symbolic meaning of healing from spiritual illness. Mark in his Gospel mentions one example of the apostles anointing the sick with oil, which is not mentioned in any of the other Gospels:

*“And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them. They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and **anointed many sick people with oil and healed [treated] them.**”*²³³

It is a known fact that the Lord Jesus Christ healed people from disease mostly in a direct way, by the force of His divine words, without any physical contact with them, and thus also did the apostles in the same way. However, once the Lord and his disciples healed the sick by bending down and allowing for direct physical contact, either by their laying hands on the sick person, or else the sick person touched parts of their clothing. Mark 6:13 describes a case when the apostles treated sick people by rubbing them with oil. This cure by using oil certainly could have been the result of the inherent healing properties in oils, which can have a direct physical impact upon patients’ health. (Note the expression “treated them”, which involves the use of medicinal substances and natural treatment, not the term “healed them”, which involves miraculous healing.) Neither can one exclude the possibility that this is an “anointing in the name of the Lord” as mentioned in the epistle of James.

However, careful scholars of the New Testament writings must be quick to observe the circumstances related to the various events of healing and miracles in the first century, in particular the changes during the apostles’ ministry as time passed. Namely, the apostles were themselves suffering from certain diseases of which they themselves could not cure, despite their desires and prayers.

²³¹ Lk. 10:33-4. Author’s emphasis.

²³² Rev. 3:18. Author’s emphasis.

²³³ Mk. 6:11-13. Author’s emphasis.

Such is the example of Paul the “chief healer”, who had a physical illness or some other obstacle that the Lord would not remove from him (2 Cor. 12:7, 10).²³⁴ Also, Paul’s associate Epaphroditus was miraculously healed after falling ill and nearly dying (Phil. 2:27). However, he recovered naturally from his illness. Trophimus had a similar example, where he had to leave Paul for Miletus to receive natural treatment (2 Tim. 4:20). Moreover, for our Lord Christ, the prophet Isaiah predicted that He would be “a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering” (Isaiah 53:3), regardless of the fact that He could have exerted His divine power to never fall ill or be susceptible to weaknesses.

As is evident from the New Testament, miraculous healings were increasing at a time when Christ revealed His messianic mission to the Israelites, as well as in the first years after the establishment of the Church. Yet miracles are clearly “reserved” only for the apostles and a few Christians in the first century who possessed the gift of healing the sick (1 Cor. 12:9, 28). Memorable miracles were predicted by Christ (see Mk. 16:17-18), and referred to the remaining consequences for the believer when bitten by a viper (Acts. 28:1-6), speaking in strange new tongues (Acts. 2:1-13, 1 Cor. 12:10), and drinking poison - without its harmful consequences, etc. But, as I mentioned earlier, as time went by, and the teachings of Christianity became established, the Lord no longer had any “reasons” to work miracles through the apostles as was the case in the beginning.²³⁵ Thus, the epistle of James teaches people in case of illness to invite their church elders who would be with them and pray over them for recovery:

*“Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. **And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and **pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.**”***²³⁶

In the above text we see a few things related to one and the same event. Elders visit the ill. The text mentions prayer for healing, anointing with oil (probably as a visible sign of the invisible presence of the Holy Spirit), and recognition for their forgiveness of sins. Apostle James does not mention here only the prayer of the church elders, but prayer to God as powerful and effective, and also that other believers should pray “for each other.” Also mentioned is the confession of sins “to each other”, and not before priests (despite how the Orthodox would like to interpret this verse). What is particularly important for the healing of the ill is that the sick person must have the firm belief that the Lord can heal him. Namely, James says:

²³⁴ John MacArthur in his commentary suggests that the “thorn in the flesh” that God would not remove might actually have been demonically influenced false teachers in the Corinthian church, not a physical ailment. (Commentary by John MacArthur, *MacArthur Study Bible NKJV*,) Translator’s note.

²³⁵ In the post-apostolic period, the existence of these signs were touted mostly by heretics, i.e. those who were members of the various charismatic movements against which the official (still Apostolic) Church fought. Various miracles still abound in unbiblical cults and religions, with the indication that it certainly does not come from God. (See detail in the chapter on “Veneration of the Saints”.)

²³⁶ Jam. 5:13-16. Author’s emphasis.

*“But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.”*²³⁷

The same condition is true in most cases when the Lord Jesus Christ healed sick people while He still walked this earth. One evangelist noted the following circumstances that preceded the healing of some ailing people:

*“Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, ‘If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.’ Jesus turned and saw her. ‘Take heart, daughter,’ He said, ‘**Your faith has healed you.**’ And the woman was healed from that moment.”*²³⁸

*“Then Jesus answered, ‘Woman, **you have great faith!** Your request is granted.’ And her daughter was healed from that very hour.”*²³⁹

*“Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. **If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.**’”*²⁴⁰

However, what is also very important is that the anointing is done “in the name of the Lord.” Namely, despite the strong belief in the omnipotence of the Lord and no question of God's ability to fully heal every disease, every Christian has the heart that longs for the fulfillment of God's will in his life. Therefore, because of his looking to Christ, the Christian will act when he understands the Lord's will (which might even include not sending healing). Specifically, the Lord says:

*“For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.”*²⁴¹

During his prayer addressed to the Father, and despite a very strong desire to remove Himself from all the suffering to come from crucifixion, Jesus accepted His will - that this prayer would not be answered:

“He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.’ Going a little farther, he fell with

²³⁷ Jam. 1:6-8.

²³⁸ Mt. 9:20-2. Author's emphasis.

²³⁹ Mt. 15:28. Author's emphasis.

²⁴⁰ Mt. 21:21-2. Author's emphasis.

²⁴¹ Jn. 6:38.

his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.'"²⁴²

Jesus is God and is quite aware that He can avoid death on the cross and the time to destroy all His enemies (Matt. 26:52-54). Instead, He voluntarily subjects Himself to the will of his heavenly Father, who sent Him for the salvation of mankind. Christ the Lord showed this attitude as an example for every reborn Christian (even those who are very sick and desire healing), which is: "Not my will, but Thine."

Anointing of patients, therefore, is no guarantee for healing anyone, because the sovereign will of God determines whom He will heal and whom He will not. Also, we need to understand that this "sacrament" is not established for the treatment of severely ill patients (contrary to the Orthodox claim), because those such as Trophimus and Epaphroditus were very ill, yet the apostle Paul did not exercise his gift of healing on their behalf, and certainly not "the sacrament of anointing with ill". Instead, after much prayer and the grace of God, they used natural means to fight against their illnesses.

It is certain that miraculous healings of sick patients occurred in the first century. Such healings occur even today. However, even during that long period of time, as in our modern era, not everyone is healed, and especially not by using the so-called "sacrament of anointing by oil".

Based on studying the above material on this sacrament, we can conclude that there is no biblical justification of its existence in the form as promoted and practiced by the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Conclusion

All the knowledge we gained during the study of the sacraments in Orthodoxy, which are based on the inerrant Word of God, the Bible, and supplemental facts from church history, clearly indicate that these Eastern teachings do not originate from Scripture. Rather, they derive entirely from their "sacred tradition". As we proved in our previous study, which will become more evident later in the book, study of the Holy Scriptures has completely irreconcilable differences with the teachings coming from the minds of later religious teachers, who have their own understanding of Christian truth is shaped under the influence of pagan religions and philosophies.

Another of these later teachings introduced is the belief that Jesus' mother Mary is the Queen of Heaven. In the next chapter we will acquaint ourselves more with this teaching of Eastern Orthodoxy.

²⁴² Mt. 26:37-9. Author's emphasis. See Mk. 14:36, Lk. 22:42-44, Jn. 18:11.