

Chapter 7: The Resurrection of Christ and Easter

“Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.’”¹

At the beginning of the previous chapter, we pointed out the glorious truth that the birth of Jesus Christ represented (and still is) one of the most profound events in the entire history of the world. It is impossible to overemphasize the uniqueness of Christ’s saving character and His work.

However, the fact remains undeniable that without Jesus' resurrection from the dead, sinful humanity would not have had any hope for gaining eternal life. Foreseen by the Savior's teaching and exceptional examples of His perfect fulfillment of God's will, the sinner’s own works on their own could not help even one iota toward earning his final salvation. As we studied earlier in the second, third, and fourth chapters of this book, the Bible clearly indicates that for the sinner to receive salvation, he must trust in the risen Savior who on His shoulders bears the burden of our sins, for which Christ was eventually crucified and died a terrible death. The truth about the lives of the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth would have been in vain, if indeed their Teacher would have remained in the grave, as the apostle Paul explained in one of his epistles. In fact, he said that if Jesus has not risen from the dead, then not only is there no hope for the salvation of sinners, but these Christians themselves, including him, would be worthy of pity because of their foolishness and superstition in hoping for their future resurrection:

*“Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. **And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.** Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! **Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.**”²*

¹ Lk. 24:1-7.

² 1 Cor. 15:12-19. Author’s emphasis.

The most fundamental task that the Lord Jesus Christ took upon Himself from eternity, in accordance with His divine omniscience and infinite wisdom, is His incarnation, i.e. taking upon Himself a mortal human body. His birth made it possible for him to sympathize with fallen and sinful human beings, who would eventually die and be punished by God for their sins apart from Him. Both the Apostle Peter and the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews confirm the words that “before the foundation of the world”,³ Jesus was destined to suffer for the salvation of sinners and “came to fulfill God’s will.”⁴ The Lord Christ, in one of His extraordinary sermons, compares Himself to “the Good Shepherd.” He says that the purpose for His coming to earth was in “laying down His life for the sheep.” However, in addition to offering His life as atonement for sin, the Lord also promised in His sermon that after his suffering, He would be resurrected from the dead:

*“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep... I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep... Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life **that I may take it again**. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, **and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.**”⁵*

Thus, the Lord’s eternal purpose was the bloody death and resurrection from the dead of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Peter on the day of the descent of the Holy Spirit declared before many thousands of Israelites: *“This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.”*⁶ Death could not hold back the Giver of life, who is called *“the resurrection and the life”* (John 11:25), and *“I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.”* (Rev. 1:18)

Although people today in the 21st century, just as they did many centuries earlier, view the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead as belonging solely to the sphere of religion, i.e. personal religious convictions, this was not the case for the apostles in the beginning of the church. In fact, as he defined the concept of faith, the author of Hebrews described faith as *“...the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”* (Heb. 11:1) So, among other things, religion can be defined as a strong hope. However, Paul writes in his epistle to the Romans that *“hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?”* (Rom. 8:24) We can confidently declare that apostolic belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was not just a “strong hope” in what they never saw. In fact, according to the testimony of the apostles themselves, they were eyewitnesses of His resurrection and subsequent appearance. The Apostle Paul, who at first was not among the twelve Apostles, wrote to the Corinthians, some of whom doubted the possibility of resurrection of the dead, that he himself, along with hundreds of others, saw the risen Christ:

³ 1 Pet. 1:18-21.

⁴ Heb. 10:5-10.

⁵ Jn. 10:10-18. Author’s emphasis.

⁶ See: Acts 2:32-6.

*“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and **that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures**, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that **He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once**, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that **He was seen by James**, then by all the apostles. Then last of all **He was seen by me also**, as by one born out of due time. ”*⁷

The Apostle Peter, who had earlier denied the Lord Jesus out of fear and then witnessed Christ’s resurrection, later on the day of Pentecost testified in front of thousands of people (among whom were many who shouted for the Prophet of Nazareth to be executed) and spoke in a very loud voice:

*“This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.”*⁸

Therefore, according to the testimony of the apostles and many other followers of Jesus from the first century AD, they saw the resurrected alive. And that is not all! The apostles were with him, ate, drank, and talked with Him after His resurrection during the entire forty days.⁹ During the period of Christ's appearance to His closest disciples, as well as after the descent of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Church, Jesus’ opponents – Jewish religious leaders such as the Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes – had no evidence to disprove the apostolic testimony to the resurrection of their Master. The new tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, in which they laid the corpse of Jesus that was guarded by Roman soldiers, was empty. Moreover, these soldiers, fearless soldiers tested in battle, testified about the appearance of angels and the removal of the stone from the entrance to the now empty grave. The resurrection of Christ posed such a threat to the Pharisees and Sadducees that they had to cough up a large bribe. Specifically, they paid a large sum of money to the guards in order to hush their testimony to the resurrection. Matthew tells us that the Jewish elders spread a lie among the Jews as an excuse for their unbelief.¹⁰ This lie alleged that Jesus’ disciples stole His body from the tomb while the guards slept.

Today there are people who do not believe that Jesus raised from the dead, but rather that His body was stolen from the grave. However, even something like this is unlikely. Josh McDowell presents compelling evidence in favor of the belief in the truth of Jesus’ resurrection:

“Another theory says that the disciples stole the body while the guards slept. The despondency and cowardice of the disciples gives us devastating evidence against these speculations that they could have suddenly become so brave and fearless to resist the garrison of soldiers guarding the tomb where Jesus’ body was alleged to have been stolen. They were in no condition to try something so daring.

⁷ 1 Cor. 15:3-8. Author’s emphasis.

⁸ Acts 2:32.

⁹ See Jn. 20:11-29; Acts 1:3.

¹⁰ See Mt. 27:62-28:15.

J. N. D. Anderson was the Dean of the Faculty of Law, University of London, President of Oriental Law at the School of Oriental and African Studies, and Director of the Institute of Law at the University of London. Commenting on the theory according to which the disciples stole Jesus' body, he says: 'It would be in total contradiction with what we know of them, their moral teachings, the manner in which they lived, their perseverance in suffering and persecution. This would not even explain their dramatic change - from cowardly fugitives in hiding that became fearless witnesses to Jesus that no opponent could prevent.'

The theory that the Jewish or Roman authorities transferred the body of Christ sounds like a more reasonable explanation for the empty tomb than the theory that the disciples stole the body. If the authorities knew where the body was, then why did they not show evidence they had stolen it, when the disciples were preaching the resurrection in Jerusalem?

If they had moved the body, why did they not reveal where the body really was? Why did they not uncover the corpse, put it in a cart, and wheel it through the streets of Jerusalem? Such a procedure would certainly have destroyed Christianity.

Dr. John Warwick Montgomery notes, 'It would have been amazing to have had early Christians invent such a tale and preached it among those who would have been easily able to disprove it by simply having presented Jesus' body.'

Professor Thomas Arnold, who for 14 years was headmaster of the Rugby School, author of the renowned *History of Rome* in three volumes, and appointed chairman of modern history at Oxford, was well familiar with the value of evidence in determining historical facts. He said:

'I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and **I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead.**'

English scholar B. F. Westcott said:

"Raking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that there is no historic incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ. Nothing but the antecedent assumption that it must be false could have suggested the idea of deficiency in the proof of it."

Dr Simon Greenleaf was one of the greatest experts in law in the United States. He was a famous professor of law at Harvard University, and succeeded Judge Joseph Story as Dean of the Faculty of Law at the university... While a law professor at Harvard, Greenleaf wrote a study on the value of the testimony of the Apostles to Christ's resurrection. Greenleaf considered it to be impossible that the apostles 'could continue to attest to the truth about which they spoke, that Jesus was raised from the dead, yet without knowing the truth of this fact as certainly as they knew any other.' **Greenleaf concludes that the resurrection of Christ is one of the best established facts in human history. He arrived at this conclusion based on** the abundance of legal evidence applicable to judicial proceedings.

Another lawyer, Frank Morrison, set out to disprove the evidence of the resurrection. He believed that Jesus' life was one of the most beautiful of human life. However, when it came to the resurrection, Morrison thought it was a myth added to the story of Jesus. He intended to write an accurate description of the last few days of Jesus' life. He thought that a smart, rational approach to the subject of Jesus would utterly discredit the resurrection. However, after Morrison studied the facts, his legal education prompted him to change his opinion. Morrison wrote the best selling book *Who Moved the Stone?* The first chapter was given the name 'The Book That Refused To Be Written,' and other sections speak decisively in favor of the evidence of Christ's resurrection.

George Eldon Ladd thus concludes: “The only reasonable explanation for these events is that God raised Jesus in the flesh.”

He who believes in Jesus Christ today can have complete confidence, just like the first Christians did, that his faith is not based on myth and legend, but on solid historical evidence that Christ is risen and the tomb is empty.”¹¹

Of course, despite the fact that world-renowned experts give great credibility to this evidence on the historicity of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, we must not think that the proof ends there. We desire no one to have any doubt or ignorance on the issue.

However, in addition to those who are unfamiliar with the evidence and have no desire to believe in the risen Savior, there are those who believe that He rose from the dead, but who have invented stories that have been proven wrong by history and have no basis from the Bible. Such is the case with the Orthodox faithful, who believe the traditions of their church instead of the Scriptures.

The next section will examine Eastern Orthodox beliefs about the Resurrection that are inaccurate when compared with the revelation of Holy Scripture.

ORTHODOX TRADITION ABOUT THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

Although they believe in the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave on the third day after the crucifixion, the leaders of the Orthodox Church have added unbiblical teachings to the event. The most important Orthodox teaching relates to the custom of painting eggs for Easter, which is said to originate from the sacred tradition of the Church. The Orthodox Church attributes strong spiritual symbolism to this custom.

The Custom of Painting Eggs on Easter

Here is how one Orthodox religious book explains the custom of Easter eggs:

“According to tradition, this custom originated from the following facts:

- (A) When the Christians on Good Friday claimed that Christ would resurrect, the Jews mocked them by saying it would occur only if chickens could lay red eggs. And they beheld miracles: on Easter Sunday, chickens laid red eggs! On that day, Christ was resurrected. So eggs in red color are commemorated to the present day.
- (B) The custom of painting Easter eggs dates back to the time of Christ's Resurrection and Ascension. Mary Magdalene, a follower of Jesus Christ, after Christ's Ascension came to Rome in order to preach the Gospel. When she came before the Emperor Tiberius, she greeted him by saying: ‘Christ is risen’ and presented him with a gift of a painted egg. This gift of St. Mary Magdalene derives from the custom in Rome and other Gentile nations of

¹¹ Josh McDowell, *More than a Carpenter*, (Synod: Belgrade, 1992) 91-5. Author's emphasis.

giving eggs at the occurrence of the New Year, which usually began in the spring.”¹²

As for the first story from sacred tradition, we can easily determine that it has no foundation in the Gospels and stands in direct opposition to the apostolic records. Although Orthodox tradition claims that Christ's disciples preached on Good Friday about the future resurrection of Jesus, Scripture teaches that the opposite happened. After Christ's arrest, all the apostles and Peter ran away. In fact, Peter denied He knew Christ three times:

*“And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.” Peter answered and said to Him, ‘Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ **Peter said to Him, ‘Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!’ And so said all the disciples ...** And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people... But Jesus said to him, ‘Friend, why have you come?’ Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him... **Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled.**”¹³*

Although the Lord reminded them many times that He would be killed in Jerusalem and then be resurrected from the dead on the third day, the apostles did not understand the meaning of his words:

*“Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know it. For He taught His disciples and said to them, ‘**The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.**’ But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him.”¹⁴*

His apostles and disciples expressed the same level of unbelief in the possibility and reality of Jesus' resurrection on the day of His resurrection. Some of them still did not believe even after He appeared to some of them! For example, the Apostle Thomas persisted in his unbelief for eight days.¹⁵

*“Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. And she went and told them that had been with him, **as they mourned and wept.** And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, **believed not.** After that he appeared in another form*

¹² *Catechism for the Home*, 82. Author's emphasis.

¹³ Mt. 26:30-5, 47, 50, 56. Author's emphasis.

¹⁴ Mk. 9:30-2. Author's emphasis. See also Luke 9:43-5, 18:31-34.

¹⁵ See John 20:24-9.

*unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told it unto the residue: **neither believed they them.***"¹⁶

*"It was Mary Magdalene and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles. And their words **seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.**"*¹⁷

Based on the clear account in the Biblical Gospels that the disciples were mourning over Jesus' death and never considered His resurrection possible, we can safely dismiss the Orthodox version of Good Friday. Instead of boldly preaching the upcoming resurrection of Christ, the disciples ran away and hid. Consequently, the Jews had no one to mock, and the chickens had no way of laying red eggs.

So what about the other story about Mary Magdalene and her visit in Rome with the Emperor Tiberias? Her alleged "gift" of painted eggs to the Roman emperor and its association with pagan customs during the spring holidays poses an interesting question.

Without a doubt, this event never occurred, and we have evidence to assert this fact. Firstly, the books of the New Testament, especially Acts, say nothing about such customs. If such a custom of painting eggs during Easter had actually come from the Lord (not like the first fable of chickens laying red eggs on the first Easter), we should expect to find some detail on this very important event. If dying eggs were customary of the first century Christian church, it would be simply incredible that the apostles make no mention of this custom.

Just as the case with Christmas, Scripture gives us no information about the Church having celebrated the first anniversary of Jesus' resurrection. Specifically, the Scriptures say nothing about the practices that now exist within Orthodoxy. No historical evidence exists that Mary Magdalene ever visited Rome (neither does it exist for the apostle Peter, whom the Roman Catholic Church claims to have been the first Roman Pope). Further examination of the pagan tradition of egg coloring and its meaning will reveal even more clearly why such an event could never have taken place.

Consequently, since this custom did not come neither from Christ nor the apostles, we must conclude that the custom derived, just like many others related to the Christmas holidays, from paganism. This assumption is completely justified. Veselin Čajkanović explains:

"We should add that these Christians - members of the Oriental [Eastern] Churches - adopted the celebration of Easter and several heathen customs from the cult of Adonis. Adonis, or in Babylonian culture, Tammuz, was a deity of vegetation, and a suitor of Aphrodite. Customs... with the festivals of Adonis entered into the Eastern churches, and in the Easter ceremonies... The central place is, of course, the custom of dyeing, giving, and eating eggs. The custom of

¹⁶ Mk. 16:9-13. Author's emphasis.

¹⁷ Lk. 24:10-11. Author's emphasis.

dyeing eggs is known in other Christian nations in Europe - obviously, therefore, **it is an ancient tradition.** What is the purpose of these Easter eggs, and what are their origins?"¹⁸

So after he explains that the Eastern Church adopted pagan customs and merged them into the commemoration of Christ's resurrection, Chaykanovic claims that the custom of coloring eggs is an ancient tradition. Here is the background.

First, the egg is the source of life. Indeed, many Eastern religions link the egg to the original creation of the world. In Greek mythology, the primal chaos formed a genuine egg from which "hatched" the primal god of the universe (god of love), Eros. From another part of the world, similar to the ancient belief of the Greeks, the ancient Hindu epic Mahabharata describes the creation of the cosmic egg that fell out. From this egg emerged the god Brahma, who later created the world. Because ancient cultures venerated the egg as the origin of life, pagan religions incorporated the egg as a very important part of the ancient cult of the dead.

Such beliefs in the cult of the dead claim that dead souls on the other side of the grave prolong their existence by satisfying their appetites similar to those they had when they were alive. These dead souls primarily subsist off of food and drink, which their relatives are obliged to leave them at the cemetery. Their relatives leave them food and drink offerings which the dead souls symbolically partake "for their soul."

Chaykanovic considers the sacrifice of the egg was the most precious because the egg offers the source of life most demanded by the dead souls. The famous Swedish scientist Martin Nilsson discovered that throughout ancient Greek culture, eggs were offered as sacrifices to dead souls. Since we also know that Serbian people also leave eggs in cemeteries as offerings to dead souls, as well as to "share" their own souls, the renowned scientist tells us the following:

"Finally, it should be mentioned that eggs in Serbia and other nations play an important role during the spring planting with regard to **animal magic**: in the first case, they bury eggs in the furrow during plowing, and in the second case, they break the horn of the oldest ram. It is possible that in both cases people expect to impart to the field and transfer to livestock magical powers. Later, this custom evolved into the area of so-called analogous **magic**, also known as **demon sacrifice**, and eventually ancestor worship, some of which also alleged to impart fertility to fields and animals."¹⁹

This author answers the question of the origin and function of Easter eggs by connecting them with dark magical arts. Specifically, sowing seed and communion with the dead occurred in the spring, just at the time of commemoration of Christ's resurrection. This custom derives from the cult of the dead and prescribes that two eggs must be prepared in the evening before sunrise, which is a rule that applies to cooking eggs on the Sabbath

¹⁸ Veselin Chaykanovic, volume 2, 142. Author's emphasis.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 145. Author's emphasis.

All Soul's Day. The painting of Easter eggs during the evening (on Good Friday) is quite logical because the demons and deities of the spiritual world only accept sacrifices at night.²⁰

Yet, why is it that eggs are painted mostly in red (although no other colors in theory are excluded)? According to the explanation of the Orthodox, the egg (which is a symbol of Christ who resurrected from the grave without anyone's help) is colored red because it symbolizes His blood which was shed on the cross. However, this explanation is only a "Christianized" rationalization. The custom of dyeing eggs in Orthodoxy derives from the pagan cult of the dead - which of course has nothing in common with Christ and His gospel. In fact, Chaykanovic states that the cult of the dead uses the color red to symbolize blood that restores life. (However, this symbolism should not be confused with Christ, for there is nothing in common between Christianity and the cult of the dead.) Rather, the shedding of blood on the graves of the dead (as practiced in ancient times) today has been replaced by red wine in springtime. Red wine can replace red blood. This shows the connection to the ancient custom practiced in prehistoric Europe. If one were to exhume the bones of dead people, one would see that the bones are coated in a red color.

"The red color on the eggs, then, is the symbol of blood. Eggs for our people, certainly, were painted in red in the **ancient** cults of ancestor worship. Later, this custom was **imported** into Easter."²¹

Since we are in the process of examining how red eggs functioned in the ancient Serbian cult of idol worship, it would be interesting to examine the usage of colored eggs in other ancient traditions. Namely, the American researcher Ralph Woodrow came to know that the eggs were important symbols in many polytheistic religions. Ancient Druids bore eggs as a sacred symbol of his rank in idol worship. The worship processions in honor of the Roman goddess Ceres were led by people carrying eggs. Eggs were also used in the mysteries of the god Bacchus, and painted eggs were used in Chinese pagan celebrations. In Japan, they used to dye eggs a bronze color. The Egyptians associated the egg as a symbol for the Sun and used it to celebrate spring. In northern Europe, colored eggs were used to honor the goddess of spring (a fact which *Catechism in the Home* recognizes, which we cited earlier). Encyclopedia Britannica also cites the egg as a symbol of fertility and renewed life in the ancient cultures of Egypt and Persia, which **used to color and eat their eggs** during the spring holidays.²²

Just because the custom of giving eggs and paint at the spring feast goes deep into paganism, it is simply impossible to conceive of the first century Christians and apostles, who firmly held the truth, to incorporate such practices into the worship of the only true God. Whenever they come into contact with polytheistic idolatrous religions, the apostles strongly opposed them. They did not embrace paganism and adorn them with

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 145-6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 147. Author's emphasis.

²² Ralph Woodrow, *The Religion of Mystery Babylon*, 146-8. Author's emphasis.

Christian meaning, unlike the Orthodox who thought they could entice pagans and make them Christians. Here is what the Evangelist Luke writes:

*“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.”*²³

*“Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that **ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God...**”*²⁴

*“And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, **and burned them before all men:** and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.”*²⁵

God's Word is quite clear. When a person becomes a Christian, that person quickly rejects all of his or her previous spiritual practices that stand in contradiction with the Lord's will as described in the Scriptures. On the other hand, only people who accept Christianity as an externality as well as an ancestral tradition (unfortunately, this includes a vast number of Serbs) do not care about what one believes, let alone whether such beliefs come from the Gospel or take their origin from ancient pagan religion.

Here is how the wise Dositheus described people who were "Christians" in name only, yet who did not care about whether their beliefs and practices truly worshiped God:

*“They have eyes, yet they do not see. They have ears, but they do not hear. Thus, such a ‘Christian’, **in the event that he really were a Christian, does and believes whatever he wants based on tradition. Yet, he does not care about what our crucified Savior, full of love for people, taught and commanded.** Rather, over several hundred years, **he invents and embellishes many other things** to what our Lord actually commanded. This in a few words is carnal man, who can say nothing else of Christ except that **He was born, lived and died**, and that you can turn to Christ in the storm.”*²⁶

It is clear why the first century Christians in the early Church could never have introduced the practice of coloring eggs before Easter. Those who opposed the practice and teaching of polytheism fought against paganism with all their might, in accordance with the doctrine of the Lord. Surely, the early Christians could never adopt practices which were completely contrary to their beliefs. Thus, the only way Orthodoxy can

²³ Acts 17:16.

²⁴ Acts 14:14-15. Author's emphasis.

²⁵ Acts 19:18-20. Author's emphasis.

²⁶ Dositheus Obradovic, *Selected Works*, 259. Author's emphasis.

justify its false teachings is to rely on myths and fables from sacred tradition, just like so many other examples discussed in earlier chapters.

Origin of Lent (Forty Days of Fasting)

The Orthodox religious calendar is marked by several major fasts, including that of the Easter holidays. This fast called Lent lasts 7 weeks, i.e., a total of exactly 48 days. So what about the subtitle that says Lent lasts only forty days? Let us read further.

In fact, as well as with other religious practices that our people began to observe after the fall of communism, so it occurred with regard to the observance of and devotion to the great fast Lent. This confusion is in line with the statement just cited from the great Serbian educator Dositheus. He explained that most of our people, who lack true repentance and obedience to God, began to follow religious customs dating back many centuries. Yet, they do not exert the slightest effort to obey what our Savior who loved people taught and commanded. Rather, he “invents and embellishes many other things to what our Savior taught.”

Anyone who has read even a fragment of Scripture with a cursory glance could know that nowhere in the Bible does God command Christians to observe a fast in honor of Christ's resurrection. Furthermore, the reader would note that the first century Christians, including the apostles in general, had no interest in highlighting an annual holiday to remember the resurrection of their Lord. Faithful Christians in the early church who were truly born again lived by faith in the risen Lord every single day. The true Christians experienced the Lord's presence in their spirits and guidance of His Spirit that instructed them to grow in their commitment to and knowledge of God. On the other hand, a reminder of Christ's resurrection once a year is needed by people who have forgotten the Lord, and that in most cases do not try to live according to His holy will. In fact, most Serbs have never even visited their local traditional church. Even during the feast of Easter, that includes those who exchange the greeting: “Christ is Risen – He is risen indeed.”

One of the reformers in medieval England, Hugh Latimer (1485 - 1555), noticed the great spiritual vacuum among people. He ascribed this problem in part to the use of the Latin language in church services (i.e., Latin was a foreign language to most English speakers). The other reason was the practice of religious customs and rituals not based on Scripture. He made a correct spiritual conclusion.

I believe that Latimer's conclusion is fully applicable to the dubious religiosity of our Serbian nation today. Specifically, the text which I will cite bears a frightening title, title, which describes Satan as working great harm and deceit to many human souls: “The Devil as Preacher”:

“And his office is to hinder religion, to maintain superstition, to set up idolatry, to teach all kind of popery. **He is ready as he can be wished for to set forth his plough; to devise as many ways as can be to deface and obscure God's glory.**”

Where the devil is resident, and hath his plough going, there away with books, and up with candles; away with bibles, and up with beads; away with the light of the gospel, and up with the light of candles, yea, at noon-days. Where the devil is resident, that he may prevail, up with all superstition and idolatry; tensing, painting of images, candles, palms, ashes, holy water, and **new service of men's inventing; as though man could invent a better way to honour God with than God himself hath appointed.**"²⁷

Thought it might appear harsh to condemn fasting as evil, this practice as performed by Serbs in the Orthodox Church is completely foreign to the Bible. In fact, the truth is that Christ and the apostles fasted. It is also true that many figures in the Old Testament also fasted, as explained in the third chapter of this book. However, neither Christ nor the apostles ever establish any special seasons for fasting to be practiced in future centuries within the Church.

Thus, we need to pose the question: what is the origin of Lent, a period of fasting for forty days? Orthodox historian Eusebius Popovic answers this question in his *General Church History*. Popovic thoroughly examines the process that unfolded over centuries to govern the Lenten fast. His analysis will illuminate the unbiblical origin of the Lenten fast and how, in fact, Lent did become a tradition in the Eastern (and Western) Churches over many centuries:

“Lent, i.e., the fast before Easter for an extended period of time (Eusebius writes of this in the year 312 [e.g. 622 A.D.]). Although it is a very dubious witness, namely the unreliable translation by Rufinus of the 10th homily of Origen on the fourth book of Moses called Leviticus... fails to indicate whether the 40 days of Lent coincide with Christ’s fasting for 40 days, or else with the time of 40 hours that Christ lied in the grave. However, before the establishment of the 40 day fast, it was not spread out over all 40 days. Rather, in the second century, people could fast for 1, 2, or 3 days. In the third century, they fasted for most of the week. While fasting in the second era was considered short, by the fifth century, the Church extended its length to 3-6 weeks. Only by the sixth century did the Church mandate a Lenten fast of 6 weeks or 40 days. But even in the beginning of the fifth century, the church historian Socrates wrote that the duration of fasting varied. **The forty day fast had developed more recently, but to extend it beyond 6 weeks but there were differences between the East and West. 6 weeks equaled 42 days.** However, the West did not count Sunday’s as days of fasting, hence the West only fasted 6 days a week, or 36 days. The Western Church arrived at 40 days during the time of Pope Gregory (590 - 604). He added 4 more days to the 6 previous weeks and consecrated Wednesday, which was named Ash Wednesday (dies cinerum), as a sign of remorse by sprinkling heads with ashes. Some historians claim Gregory II (715-721) added the four days in the eighth century. Fasting in the East had always been stricter in observing the

²⁷ Hugh Latimer, *Sermon of the Plough*. See <http://anglicanhistory.org/reformation/latimer/sermons/plough.html> . (Author’s emphasis. Translator’s note.)

fast. At first, they fasted for 6 full weeks, but then they added a seventh week with secondhand fasting, the so-called Cheese (white) weeks, when they could eat cheese, oil, and eggs, but not meat. Some therefore calculated that the cheese week added an eighth week, but Saturday and Sunday are not counted as days of fasting. Hence, in every week there are only 5 Lenten days, or 40 days in total (8 weeks times 5 days). On the contrary, whether it is a cheese week, a great week, or a terrible week, it does not count in the real Easter Lent. Rather, they consider the first part as only preparation, and the last as part of the Easter holidays... so that the law remains 40 days over 6 weeks, but it is 42 days, so take away a flower and Lazarus Saturday as a holiday and transitional days to get just 40 days. In contrast to the so-called second and third forty-day periods, e.g. apostolic Christmas, Easter, or more accurately the first forty days or a large forty day Lent.”²⁸

After reading this fairly accurate report from church history, we learned that believers in the second and third centuries (that is, after the apostolic period) fasted between one and seven days before the celebration of Easter holidays. It is not so obvious if and for how long they fasted in the first century, since the Bible tells us nothing. Surely we can uphold the validity of the claims of today's biblical Christians that obligate no one to keep a fast for forty days. As we have already seen, the number of days of fasting varied over time and after many centuries from Christ's ascension and death of the apostles, who knew nothing about the establishment of Lent.

This chapter will conclude with a word from Dositheus Obradovic, who correctly noted that the scope of teachings embellished over the centuries have clouded the true Gospel of Christ and the apostolic teachings over the centuries. He also saw that these embellishments introduced a whole lot of customs which true Christians today should not practice, simply because they are not in accordance with God's will as published in His Word - the Bible. Dositheus reveals that the Slavic peoples, including the Serbs, adopted a form of Christianity from the Greeks in the ninth century AD, which by that time had morphed into a perversion and distortion of the true original message of the Gospel:

“Greeks and other people could be deceived, **and we in turn have received from them the same deception.** We ourselves are stuck in the same mud, however we see everyone else as bogged down yet we ourselves are clean and shine like the sun! While we have prepared so many judgments and critiques, is it not just the moment for us ourselves to be judged and criticized? It seems to me that this is the smartest way. When the Greeks and Latins received the Christian law from His apostles, they did not receive a sacred tree, nor icons, nor sacred bodies or relics, no bones, no canons, no irmosa or troparions, not the slightest Kontakion. Of these things, the blessed and holy apostles never wrote or knew a word, letter, or thought. And our Slavic peoples received a form of Christianity from the Greeks and Latins! But when? Nine hundred years after the Apostles! It is not

²⁸ Eusebius Popovic, *General Church History*, Vol. 2, 662-3. Author's emphasis.

difficult to realize this: **over 900 years, how many things could be invented during that time?**”²⁹

Subsequent chapters will examine other teachings of Orthodoxy that belong neither to the first century Church nor to the blessed teachings of Christ.

²⁹ Obradovic, *Selected Works*, 687-8. Author’s emphasis.