

## **ARE RELICS TRULY NECESSARY FOR WORSHIP ?**

Due to the influence of Satan the devil, a lot of what is being presented to the world as Christian doctrines are nothing but the traditions of men which have been passed from one generation to another. Thus, millions of people are today following man-made rituals and formalities in the name of Christianity. Such worship will of course not lead anyone to salvation.

One of the doctrines through which the name of God has been grossly misrepresented is the doctrine of relics. The Catholic Encyclopaedia says the word *relics* comes from the Latin *reliquiae* (the counterpart of the Greek *leipsana*) “which already before the propagation of [Christianity](#) was used in its modern sense, viz., of some object, notably part of the body or clothes, remaining as a memorial of a departed saint.” The *Catholic Dictionary* (sixteenth edition) by William E. Addis and Thomas Arnold states at page 704 that “relics are personal memorials of distinguished individuals especially in ecclesiastical history, objects valued for their connexion with our Lord and with the saints; for example fragments of our Lord’s cross or crown of thorns, the dead bodies fragments of their bodies,. or bones of holy persons articles or portions of articles which they have used while alive such as clothes, vestments, rosaries and the like, the instruments of martyrdom, chains etc.” Other items that are valued as relics range from reputed pieces of the true cross, the nails, lance, spear, thorns from the crown of thorns, the seamless robe of Christ, the linen of Mary, her wedding ring, girdle and veil, locks of her hair, vials of her milk, and her house miraculously transplanted from Palestine to Italy, to the more common and more abundant bones, arms, legs, hair, garments and other possessions of the saints and martyrs

Further explanations are given to the effect that relics are usually venerated in public by being exposed in their cases with burning lights upon the altar. They are often placed there at Higher Mass and incensed. They are carried in procession and the people are blessed with them.

In regard to their value in Christian life Catholic theologians believe that “God is sometimes pleased to make relics the instruments of healing and other favors to those who honor him.” The Church asserts that relics are intended “to excite good thoughts and increase devotion.” But is there any Bible support for such belief that is professed by millions of people around the world? Did God Almighty, Jesus Christ or the apostles at any time require Christians to venerate sundry objects including bones and other body parts of dead people in order to get blessing and healing? These are questions to be answered in this sermon first let us see how this practice originated.

### **Origin**

The origin of this religious rite is said to be traceable to the Council of Trent, the 19<sup>th</sup> ecumenical Council of the Roman Catholic Church which opened on December 13, 1545 and ended in 1563. The Council is said to be highly important for its sweeping decrees on self-reform and for its dogmatic definitions that clarified doctrines as purgatory, indulgences, the veneration of saints, images and relics, among others. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica the Council of Trent played “a vital role in revitalizing the Roman Catholic Church in many parts of Europe”. Among its decrees were “that the holy

bodies of holy martyrs and others now living with Christ – which bodies were the living members of Christ and the temples of the Holy Spirit – and which are by Him to be raised to eternal life and to be glorified, are to be venerated by the faithful; for through these bodies many benefits are bestowed by God on men, so that they who affirm that veneration and honor are sacred monuments are uselessly honored by the faithful, and that the places dedicated to the memory of the saints are in vain visited with the view of obtaining their aid, are wholly to be condemned.” (*THE QUESTION BOX* by Rev Bertrand I. Conway, 1962, page 231) In the book *Romans Catholicism* another Roman Catholic Theologian David Quinlan ?.....wrote in a similar vein saying that the Council based the practice of venerating relics on two principles “First the church honours the bodies of the dead who sleep in Christ and secondly that “God is sometimes pleased to honour the relics of the saints by making them instruments of healing and other miracles, and also by bestowing spiritual graces on those who with pure hearts, keep and honour them.”

Rev. Conway adds that “The Catholic Church does not teach that there is any magical virtue or any curative efficacy in the relic itself. The Church merely says, following the Scriptures, that they are often the occasion of God’s miracles.”

### **Abuses**

A system which allows mortal men, many of whom have vested interests or ulterior motives to canonize people as saints and then proceed to make a flourishing business or trade from his body parts, apart from giving room for the most heinous racket to be practiced on the people, is utterly revolting to the human mind, repulsive and devilish. In the words of a notable critic: “The multiplication of nearly every relic of primary interest should, of course, be sufficient to convince even the most credulous that these are nothing but pious frauds.”

Let us take for instance the case of the cross on which our Lord was killed. It is generally believed that the “true cross” was found in the mount Calvary by the mother of Constantine (in the fourth century), and taken to Jerusalem by Constantine himself. But since that time hundreds of pieces of the true cross are being venerated all over the earth. The charade was so apparent that a religious reformer, John Calvin wrote that: ‘If all the pieces...were collected into a single heap, they would form a good ship-load, although the Gospel testifies that a single individual was able to carry it. What effrontery, then to fill the whole earth with fragments which it would take more than 300 men to carry.’ Thus, Paulinus, one of the Roman Catholic apologists for the veneration and defence of relics, was only defending the indefensible when he stated that the “portion of the true cross kept at Jerusalem gave off fragments of itself without diminishing.” - *Roman Catholicism* pages 369-370

### **Fables**

It is an open secret that a lot of the items regarded as relics are based on mere fables. This is certainly true of what is regarded as the “holy robe of Christ” which was displayed in 1959 in the oldest Cathedral in Germany and recorded 1.8 million visitors or pilgrims. In Spain there have been exhibited in different cathedrals two heads of John the Baptist, and in one of the cathedrals there is a magnificent ostrich feather preserved in a gorgeous case, which, it is said, fell from a wing of the angel Gabriel when he came to

make the announcement to Mary! Dilating on this issue Loraine Boetner at pages 369-371 of his book *Roman Catholicism* stated that “Many of the alleged relics have been proved false and have been dropped ...Some of the bones have been exposed as those of animals. In one instance the alleged bones of a famous Neapolitan saint, which it was claimed had worked countless miracles, were found to be those of a goat. !

Perhaps the most incredible of all the accounts of relics is the ‘House of Mary’ or ‘the Holy House of Loreto,’ in Italy. This house is said to have been the house of the Virgin Mary at Nazareth, in Palestine, It is a stone structure about 28 feet long and 12 ft wide. A booklet purporting to give the authentic history of the house as sanctioned by the Roman Church, sold at the site says among other things that when Nazareth was plundered by the Roman soldiers, the house was miraculously preserved, in that the soldiers could not enter it or touch it. In 1291, when Palestine was overrun by the Saracens, the house was detached from its foundation by the angels, and was carried by them across the sea to Dalmatia, in Europe where it was deposited on a hill. The Dalmatians gave it a friendly welcome, devoutly worshipped it, and for three years and seven months it was visited by many pilgrims. Then suddenly it removed and flew over the sea to eastern Italy, first coming to rest near the town of Loreto, about two miles from the coast. A few months later it removed again a short distance to its present home, on a hill in the town of Loretto, where it has been enshrined in a beautiful church. ...In its present location it is visited by many pilgrims, some of whom climb the hill leading to it on their knees, kissing the stones of the walk as they move themselves forward.

The Bible should be the basis for any Christian teaching or practice. Christians are warned against legends or fables such as that of these. St. Paul’s admonished “But refuse profane and old wives fables (and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. – 1 Timothy 4:7; 1:4; 2 Timothy 4:4

To venerate objects is nothing short of idolatry Things should not be done because of tradition. (Matthew 15:3-9; Exodus :3:26) St. Paul exhorted: Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. 1Titus 1:4; 2Ti 4:4

Viewed against the background of the Scriptures, the legend of the finding of the cross by Helena is of no significance at all to true Christians. It has only served as a device through which the devil has lured innocent, spiritually unlearned men into more idolatrous and sinful practices.

To bow down or genuflect to a particle of wood be it cross or some other object, to venerate and worship it, believing it has miraculous powers is contrary to God’s commandment in Exodus 20:4-6 and is nothing short of idolatry. Veneration of relics amounts to worshipping and serving the creature more than the Creator. (Romans 1:25) Neither Jesus Christ nor his apostles gave any instruction to the effect that the cross or any thing of such should be venerated. If the cross or any “relic” possesses any intrinsic virtue, if any importance was to be attached to them, the apostles of Jesus Christ should have set the example for other Christians to follow.

## Purgatory

Now let us look at some of the Bible texts cited by the advocates of the veneration of relics. Writing in the book *ROMAN CATHOLICISM*, a book approved by the Roman Catholic church as reliable authority on “the doctrines and work of the Catholic Church” the writer, David Quinlan, stated that “by prayer the Faithful on earth can gain gifts from God for each other and by good works performed in the state of grace, merit blessings and offer reparations on each other’s behalf, spending themselves for each other”. -2 Corinthians 12:15; and 2 Timothy 4:6

“Because of this union of souls, the faithful on earth and Blessed in heaven can by their intercession assist the souls in Purgatory. Angels bear the prayers of men to God.”- Jeremiah 15:1; Revelation 8:3.

It is evident that the doctrine of purgatory lies at the doctrine of relics. Is there anything like purgatory in the Holy Bible? What is purgatory? According to Quinlan, “Between the eternal states of heaven and hell is a condition of existence for the souls which, dying in God’s grace, are unfitted for immediate entry to heaven because they have the guilt of venial sin or they still owe atonement for past sins.” Explaining further he stated that the “The soul which dies in God’s grace may well be disordered in will and seek a state of life in which it can reach the perfection it desires before it enters into the Beatific Vision without unendurable self-reproach, consciousness of unworthiness, of reparation unpaid, of love to which it cannot yet totally respond, of remorse for unfaithfulness. Such a state is one of suffering. If the suffering is voluntary, it is a state of purgation”. (*Roman Catholicism* Page 75) He also states that “Scripture reveals little about its existence, probably because reason alone guides us to a sure knowledge that such a state must exist” ! (page 73)

Responding to the question “Are heaven, hell and purgatory places or only states of existence?” he wrote: “The ... question is mentioned only because many people ask it, and must be reminded that the **answer has not been revealed to us**. Many writers assume them to be places (above the heavens, in the center of the earth, ...)”

We have always asked the Church why doctrines should be based on opinions of imperfect men and not on the Holy Scriptures. The ways of God are not the ways of men. The Bible says the wisdom of men is foolishness with God. (1 Corinthians 3:18-20; 1:19,20) God declared through the prophet Isaiah: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8,9) To say that to a question on doctrines taught by the Church “has not been revealed” certainly begs the question and is escapist since it should not have been taught in the first place. -John 3:11; Deuteronomy 29:29.

The belief that the souls of the dead are suffering in purgatory and that such suffering could be relieved so that they would be taken to heaven by means of the prayers said by priests on monetary consideration is clear case of pulling wool over the people’s eyes. The dead whether good or bad are in peace. Speaking on the condition of the dead, the prophet Job said: “There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there; and the servant is free from his master.” – Job 3:17-19

When people die, whether good or bad they go to no where else but the grave. They return to the dust. They do not go to heaven or purgatory or to a hell burning with eternal fire. In passing the sentence on Adam, God said: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." (Genesis 3:19) The prophet Solomon echoed this statement when he wrote "I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. **All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.** Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?" (Ecclesiastes 3:19-21)

Those in the grave are silent and unconscious., having returned to the dust. In Ecclesiastes 9:5,6,10.the Bible states "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

Jesus Christ himself made it clear that all the dead are in the grave. It is on the day of resurrection that they will come forth both good and bad, to be rewarded. (John 5:28,29) Since the dead are not in heaven or purgatory, it is evident that the belief that by virtue of their relics, a dead saint can by his intercession offer help to the living is false. "Put not your trust in princes, said King David, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." - Psalm 146:3,4; see also Isaiah 38:18,19

Another point that people must be understood is that everyone of the dead when resurrected will be rewarded according to what he did during his life time. God will not use the blessings meant for A to bless or reduce the punishment for B. In Isaiah 3:10, 11 God says "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him." - see also 2 Corinthians 5:10; Galatians 6:7,8

Indeed "every man shall bear his own burden." He added: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." (Galatians 6:5,9,10) The prophet Ezekiel was used by God to declare that the righteousness of holy men such as Noah, Daniel and Job, will not be of any avail to even their sons and daughters in the day of the Lord's anger.

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Declared St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthian in 2 Corinthians 5:10

The Bible shows that it is belief in the Truth, keeping of the laws of God or the doing of righteousness as taught and practised by Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world that will clean one from sins, superstitions, ignorance including death –

It is the blood of Jesus Christ through the belief in the truth of the Scriptures that has the power to cleanse people of their sins, while they are living and so have the opportunity to hear the word of God and to do righteousness. Jesus told his disciples “Ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you” -John 8: 31,32,36; 15: 3; 17: 17; Ephesians 5: 25-27; 1 John 1: 7; etc. John 15:3.

### **Other Arguments**

Catholics further contend that their veneration of relics “lawfully includes reverence for their relics even as we show honour to the bodily remains of our beloved dead” They cite the case of the Israelites bore the bones of Joseph with them from Egypt. (Exodus 13:19) a dead man was restored to life when his corpse was placed on the bones of Elisha. (2 Kings 13:21)

The texts just cited cannot justify the veneration of relics. What the Israelites did was merely to convey the body of Joseph to its final burial place in keeping with his wish. It is not uncommon for one to ask to be buried in the place of his choice. Abraham was buried in the cave of Machpelah. (Genesis 25:9) Jacob asked to be buried there and so was taken all the way from Egypt to Canaan. (Genesis 49:30;50:13, 24-26) By giving such instruction about where he is to be buried, Joseph showed faith in the promise of God to redeem the Jews from the bondage of Egypt some day. Hence St. Paul stated: “By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.” (Hebrews 11:22)

It should be stressed also that the Jews did not attach any power to the body of Joseph nor did they traffic with his bones or hair etc and the children of Israel never expected Joseph to help them in prayer .or to solve one problem or the other. They would not do so because the law of God says that anyone who touches a dead man that touched a bone, or one dead or a grave” has become contaminated or unclean and will not enter the congregation for seven days. (Numbers 19:11) Those who go about with pieces of dead men bodies are unclean before God. If a man becomes unclean by touching a dead body, then by the same token is the place of worship into which dead persons or parts of them are carried rendered unclean.

First it should be understood that the dead man was not deliberately thrown on the grave of Elisha. The pall bearers saw enemies coming and fled for their lives, abandoning the corpse they were to bury which on falling on the grave of Elishah revived. It was a miracle God did to show that Elisha was His servant. If the bones of a dead saint could raise people from the dead then why have other dead people not being revived by being placed on the grave of any of the thousands of saints that the Catholic Church. The miracle was done by Jesus Christ not the dead Elisha to build faith in God Almighty. The dead are silent and lifeless. If bones of dead prophets and saints have such miraculous healing powers, why is it that other prophets and apostles have revived by being placed by the grave. Christian times the Ephesians used the relics of a living “child of God” Paul, so that demons were exorcised and the sick healed at the touch of his handkerchiefs and aprons, (Acts 19:12)

It is patently misleading to say that God commanded the use of images, to help the Chosen People, when he directed the making of the two golden Cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:18) or the Brazen Serpent (Numbers 21:8) forbidding the making of “graven images” only there was danger of superstitious or idolatrous use of them. The brazen serpent was a picture of greater things to come, it typified Jesus Christ, “the greater and more perfect tabernacle”.— Hebrews 9:11; 10:1; 8:2 All those who look Jesus Christ by faith, doing righteousness till the end will be saved. (John 3:14,15) Writing in *The Secrets of Romanism* Joseph Zacchello posited that “The brazen serpent (Numbers 21:9) is rather a proof against the worship of images. In fact, King Hezekiah later broke the serpent which the people burned incense before it (iv18:4) as Roman Catholics do today before images. (Page 150) There was time the children of Israel started to worship it. This prompted King Hezekiah to destroy it. (2 Kings 18:4)

The images of cherubim on the tabernacle were certainly not worshipped by the people of Israel in those days. The tabernacle was not even seen by the people. It was placed in the holy of holies into the priest enters only once a year. The tabernacle points to Jesus Christ and his redemptive sacrifice presented to God Almighty in heaven “once for all”. (Hebrews 9:24) If handkerchiefs and other personal effects could cure people, then one could ask how many people have been cured with the handkerchiefs been advertised several television stations.

### **Idolatry**

Catholics insist that “a relic is not a magic talisman; a likeness is not a source of spiritual power; we should resist every superstitious tendency which suggests that they are. Not least we should hope for much stricter control of that commercialization of “souvenirs” which disgraces too many genuine centers of spiritual help or physical healing.” (Page 134) And Conway asserts at page 231 of his book that though images are to be kept in churches and due honor and veneration given them “no divinity or virtue is believed to be in them on account of which they are to be worshipped” yet he contends that the faithful adore Christ by kissing, uncovering the head and prostrating before images! But the opposite is the case. In the words of a critic the Church has, by her teaching on relics, created “a full blown system of feishism and sorcery” By venerating the bodies of saints, their images and personal effects and so on the church is practicing idolatry. To “venerate” according to means to the *Longman’s Dictionary of Contemporary English* “treat (a person or thing especially that is old or connected with the past) with great respect and honour, and sometimes with worship) Conway even admits that the Church has “occasionally abridged” the second commandment in her children’s catechisms ! (page 230)

What is the second commandment? “Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.” – Exodus 20:3-6; see also Deuteronomy 5:7-9

But contrary to this clear command of God, Catholics a theologian is saying that it is right for one for kiss, uncover the head and prostrate before images and yet be free of the sin of idolatry. Thus the Church has fallen into the same category spoken by apostle Paul that some people have “turned the truth of God into a lie” It must be stated that all the exertions and self-afflictions in the use of relics in worship are spiritually worthless and unprofitable. The dead saints or martyrs so-called cannot help anyone being dead and silent. In Job 5:1 it is written: “Call now, if there be any that will answer thee; and to which of the saints wilt thou turn?” Certainly none.

Their was a time God showed to the prophet Ezekiel in a vision how the unbelieving Jews were secretly worshipping idols, even in the temple for which God was angry with them and promised to kill them. (Ezekiel 8:7-12; compare Romans 1:18) The veneration of relics is akin to what the unbelieving Jews did in those days.

To teach and believe that one needs relics as helps to faith or as a response to a genuine human need to see or touch something means that the church ins encouraging idolatry. Christians are to exercise implicit faith in God Almighty through Jesus Christ walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7. And Christ told Thomas Didymus “Blessed are those that have not seen, and yet have believed,”. – (John 20:27,29; 1 Peter 1:9) Moreover St. Paul states that faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen” -Hebrews 11:1.