
Relics and Icons: Their Role in Healing, Conversions, and Miracles

Darrell Pinckney

This paper explores recent claims and experiences of healings, miracles, and religious conversions as expressed by members, parishioners, laity and clergy from the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches located in northeastern Pennsylvania. I choose the term *more recent* to describe the experiences of consultants which have occurred within the past ten years or less as opposed to those experiences described from previous years or centuries ago. The claims and experiences described by these consultants have had profound effects on them, leading to life changing beliefs. The claims are very real to the aforementioned interlocutors and many border on the realm of the supernatural. In the past, such beliefs in divine intervention have been dismissed by social scientist and cultural anthropologist camps as well as others who strongly adhere to objective, traditional science. In this paper, I will seek to demonstrate how prayer, relics and icons have had life changing effects on people who came into contact with them or had sought out help through prayer. The relics, icons, and prayer, therefore, are all authentic and instrumental to the faithful.

Introduction

Through the centuries people have recognized the physical and spiritual healings, mystical power, miracles, and religious conversions that have taken place through the intercession of saints, martyrs and other holy persons—especially through prayer, or by coming into contact with artifacts associated with saints and martyrs such as relics and icons. The same people seek the intercession of the saints and martyrs through God only, and therefore, are not seeking the help of saints and martyrs alone. Interestingly, not all those interviewed who have experienced a positive change were active members of either the Roman Catholic or Orthodox churches when they came into direct contact with a relic or icon. These people have expressed that it was through contact with the relics and icons, prayer, or a combination of activities that resulted in a positive outcome, change, cure, miracle or religious conversion.

Some Historic Background

Christian relics are associated with specific people such as a saint, martyr, or confessor to a specific historic event associated with the history of

Christianity. But Christianity is not alone in the veneration of saints and relics. Other religions have also venerated relics and religious artifacts associated with their beliefs through their own history. For this I point to an Islamic relic which includes hair fragments from the prophet, Mohammed, that is currently secured in a dome-like reliquary in Mecca, close to the Dome of the Rock. “Relics of Mohammed, who died in A.D. 632, are like-wise revered, these being two hairs of the prophet which are kept in a reliquary resembling a domed temple that stands several feet high beside the huge rock in a building in Jerusalem called the Dome of the Rock” (Cruz 2015, 2).

The veneration of relics is not a new story. Throughout history, there have been many attempts—some successful, others unfruitful—to find the relics or remains of saints and apostles of Christ that early Christians had stowed away during times of Roman persecution. Helena, the mother of Constantine, for example, traveled to Palestine and Jerusalem between 326 and 328 A.D. to search for relics associated with the crucifixion of Christ. It is uncertain where Helena began her search for these relics following her arrival in the Holy Land.

It had been rumored that the True Cross was hidden in the Holy Sepulcher, which had been

covered with a mound of dirt and further concealed by the Jews by the placement of various pagan buildings in an effort to discourage Christian worship. Slightly different versions of the findings have come down to us. One maintains that only a few chosen Jews knew the exact location, and that one of these, named Judas, having been touched by divine inspiration, revealed the site to St. Helena (Cruz 2015, 61).

While some historians and scholars argued that there is enough of the “True Cross” to have been available to build a fortress, it is also interesting to note that the original True Cross—the cross used to crucify Christ—was reported not to have been affected by the taking of samples. “St Paulinus of Nola (ca 353-431 AD) in one of his letters refers to the fact that no matter how many pieces were removed from the cross, it grew no smaller in size. This has been likened to the miraculous multiplication of the loaves and fishes at the feeding of the five thousand” (Cruz 2015, 63).

However, relics were not always genuine, nor original, and because some unscrupulous characters with opportunist motives found prospects for financial gain, some relics were manufactured locally and artificially. They were then sold to naive pilgrims during their journeys to the pilgrimage sites and passed on to later generations as authentic. Furthermore, some clergy disapproved of the veneration of relics. “Gregory the Great for a time expressed displeasure with the interference, dismemberment or the removal of the remains of the honored dead from one place to another, although he offered to send the Empress Constantina some filings from Saint Peter’s chains, a type of gift often mentioned in his writings” (Cruz 2015, 5).

When the Second Council of Nicaea met in 787 A.D. at the Church of Hagia Sophia, the purpose was to restore the veneration and purpose of holy icons which had been suppressed in earlier times by Leo III.

The council declared that icons deserve reverence and veneration but not adoration, which is reserved for God. It was also decreed that every altar should contain a relic, a tradition that has been retained in both modern Catholic and Orthodox churches. (Encyclopaedia Britannica)

The Second Council of Nicaea made it clear that relics were welcomed back into the mystique of Christianity—that they could be fully venerated by the faithful, and furthermore, made to become a permanent fixture of any new churches erected, as

directed under Canon vii which reads, *Relics are to be placed in all churches: no church is to be consecrated without relics* (Catholic Encyclopedia 2021, n.p.).

The Council of Trent, which met in 1653, further sanctioned the veneration of holy bodies by the faithful. However, the Council also called for the abolishment of superstition surrounding them. For example, the twenty-fifth session reaffirmed it is not the relic of the saint that is powerful itself, nor is it the saint alone of whom the faithful request their intercession who affects a change for any positive outcome. It is through God alone that the saints intercede for the faithful. The faithful seek for help by asking the saint to pray for us. Hence, the Novena—where prayers are prayed by the faithful for nine consecutive days in the hopes that God will provide the help or grace one is requesting. So, as it is with Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, parishioners do not worship the relics. They venerate the relics of the saints because of the way the saints demonstrated their love for others and their love for Christ. How the saints lived their lives became an inspiration to both religions.

To the Protestants, the veneration of relics was in direct violation of God’s first commandment, as well as a prolonged vestige of paganism. But as much as Protestants ransacked and destroyed the reliquaries, leaving remains of the relics and bodies of saints recklessly scattered in open view, Catholics were only too quick to salvage the artifacts, and many of the personal items and body parts of the saints were quickly retrieved and collected for safe keeping until such a time when Catholicism was restored to a more benign standing.

In the Introduction to *Relics and Remains (Past and Present Supplement 5)*, Alexandra Walsham provides a brief description of holy relics as a remnant of the complete holy being. The author also defines the power of the icon which she describes having equal holy power (2010, 12).

A relic is ontologically different from a representation or image; it is not a mere symbol or indicator of divine presence, it is an actual physical embodiment of it, each particle encapsulating the essence of the departed person, *pars pro toto*, in its entirety. In practice, however, the lines dividing these two have often been permeable. In ancient Byzantium and modern Eastern Orthodox cultures, icons function in much the same way as relics, while within the western Christian tradition pictures and statues that bleed, sweat, or shed tears exemplify the ease with which

images can make the transition from signifier to sacred object in their own right (Walsham 2010, 12).

Walsham views relics as living connections to history—as left-over traditions handed down from history, serving as a type of memorial that is in danger of departure. Walsham goes on to describe relics as spiritual electrodes that send sacred energy to a temporal sphere. What Walsham does not discuss in her chapter is how the holy relics associated with saints and martyrs were instrumental in helping the faithful to find spiritual and physical healing, nor does her chapter describe how the lives of the faithful were changed as a result of that healing process through relics.

Victor and Edith Turner, on the other hand, viewed relics and icons differently—describing them more like artifacts with sympathetic magic power that is symbolically associated with the person in order to gain influence over a particular situation. “This over-emphasis on signifiers at the expense of meaning led to the attribution of magic power to relics, paintings, and images; they became fetishes operating by principles of sympathetic and contagious magic, rather than serving as vehicles of religious and ethical ideas (Turner 1978, 197).

Having been one faith in the early church up until the Schism of 1054, the two separate faiths do share beliefs in, and veneration of, some of the same saints. For instance, both churches refer to the prophet Elisha’s remains, based on the following scripture passage:

Once some people were burying a man, when suddenly they saw such a raiding band. So they cast the man into the grave of Elisha, and everyone went off. But when the man came in contact with the bones of Elisha, he came back to life and got to his feet. (2 Kings 13:21)

Furthermore, some Christians who were either glorified by the Eastern Orthodox or canonized by the Roman Catholics are recognized by both churches, such as St Anthony the Great, St Augustine of Hippo, Basil the Great, Pope Benedict II, St Leo the Great and more. (The saints listed here were recognized by both churches prior to the Great Schism of 1054.)

Establishment of Canon

The remains of saints and martyrs were viewed as holy and life-saving and were therefore held in high

esteem by Christians. So, veneration of saints by Christians began very early during the spread of the early Church. We can see in Acts 19:12 that items dropped by Paul were quickly retrieved and treasured by the faithful. Furthermore, the saints were often viewed as having direct consultation with God. Christians yearned to be closer to the saints and those martyrs who died for their beliefs even if it meant to share space with them in death in the cemeteries or catacombs. As the Christian population grew, especially in urban areas, organizations with devotion to Christianity began forming.

In some cities, Christians organized themselves into such funeral societies, and therefore it made sense for them to gather at their cemeteries. But even more importantly, many heroes of the faith were buried there, and Christians believed that communion joined them not only among themselves and with Jesus Christ, but also with their ancestors in faith. (Gonzales 2010, 110)

By joining a group such as a funeral society, the dearly departed were afforded a greater opportunity to share space with a holy person or saint—often where saints were concealed, such as in a catacomb. “To these Christians, the saints were very much alive to them. The saints were more present to the Church on earth, because the saints lived in the presence of God. The saints were not dead; indeed, they were more alive than the Church on earth” (Hahn 2018, 127).

Canon Law helped to prove the authenticity of the relics for public veneration. Authentication is required by the Roman Catholic Congregation for the Causes of Saints and must be sealed in a reliquary. Additionally, it must also be accompanied with a certificate of authentication signed by a member of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Through the course of time, canons would be approved by Christian Church officials which would provide the proper parameters on the recognition of authentic relics. Canon Law, it was thought, would help to prove the authenticity of the relics so they could be publicly venerated by the faithful. Since then, the canons have been updated over the centuries by the Roman Catholic Congregation for the Causes of Saints, but not by the Eastern Orthodox Church. So authentication is required for relics in order to be publicly venerated and sealed in a reliquary within the Roman Catholic church. In addition, certificates of

authentication are then prepared for the relic that was authenticated.

While deceased members of the Eastern Orthodox faith are *glorified*, deceased members of the Roman Catholic faith are *canonized*. The veneration of saints in the Roman Catholic Church requires the deceased person to satisfactorily meet several stages in the canonization process. During the first stage, the member is referred to as Servant of God. If conditions are met at this stage, the process is then raised to the second stage of Venerable. After having met the parameters for this stage, the member is then raised to the third stage of Blessed. The fourth and final stage is canonization and the member is now referred to as a Saint if the Blessed has been proven to have performed two miracles after their earthly passing, although only one miracle is required for a confessor.

The relics themselves are remains of holy saints, martyrs and other holy people. “The word ‘relic’ comes from the Latin word, *reliquiae* which means ‘remains’ and therefore, may contain components of holy people that were venerated by the Church. ‘Veneration’ itself by definition means to have great respect or reverence for a person or object associated with said person. Reasons for extending such care and respect to the saint and associated relics are mainly due to the belief in the holiness of the soul of the saint which awaits the reunion with its mortal remains during the resurrection” (Pinckney 2021, 18-19).

First-class relics consist of artifacts associated with the passion of Jesus Christ. First-class relics may also consist of the remains of the holy saints, such as fragments of bone, hair, and skin.

Second-class relics consist of objects that have come into close contact with a saint such as clothing and artifacts associated with the saint that were used in their lifetime

Third-class relics consist of artifacts that have in the past, come into contact with first or second-class relics and may consist of remnants of clothing that have touched a first- or second-class relic.

Saints chosen by the Eastern Orthodox religion do not require the manifestation of miracles during the lifetime of the church member. However, they must demonstrate that they have lived a virtuous life, are endowed with recognizable holiness, and their writings or manuscripts are found to be completely within the Orthodox Christian tradition. Unlike the Roman Catholic nomenclature process, there are no assigned classes of relics for Eastern Orthodoxy as all Christians can become saints if they were baptized, chrismated

(E. O. form of confirmation) and received the Eucharist sacrament.

Through the work of the Holy Trinity all Christians could be called saints; especially in the early Church as long as they were baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity, they received the Seal of the Spirit in chrismation and frequently participated in the Eucharist. (Greek Orthodox Dioceses of America, 2021)

So, in the Eastern Orthodox faith all Christians must work to become saints. There are items that are considered to be miraculous—that is, having been bestowed with divine power such as the icons of Eastern Orthodox saints. The actual images which are prepared from paints from vegetable and mineral pigments, an egg yolk binder, water, and applied to canvas and finished with gold leafing are not alone worshipped. Rather, the inactive object of the content or subject matter is venerated. To the Eastern Orthodox, the images become the gathering place between the saints that are with God and the living parishioners. Likewise, the icons follow a sacred tradition. Like Saint Paul, Orthodox Christians do not merely imitate the way of Christ—in his words and gestures. Instead, they integrate the Lord’s way of life into their inner being. The same rhetoric is applied to the icons. Finally, many of the icons can appear dim or somber in shades or perhaps dimly lit because the iconographer (the artist who creates the icon) is avoiding shadows. That is, he is not illuminating the saint with any light source as light sources can cast off natural shadows. There is a logical reason for this and it originates with the saint—that is, the state of grace that the saint is in. This state is also found in God’s Kingdom where no shadows exist and all is surrounded with light.

In some cases, icons have been reported to stream holy substances, referred to as “myrrh” in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, and the images are therefore referred to as miraculous images. The myrrh that streams from the images is an oily substance, amber in color, and streaming down the icon where it can be collected on cotton wadding. Oddly, the oil streaming does not appear to cause any damage to the original artwork or framing surrounding it. In some cases, the framed icon may actually be a printed copy or lithograph copy of the original icon. The copy therefore, would begin streaming after it was touched by an icon that was already previously streaming myrrh

oil. In the past, attempts were made to explain the myrrh streaming phenomena. For example, members of scientific communities examined the icons, their encasements, and searched for hidden reservoirs, or other conduit-like devices that could have been found responsible for the steady streaming of myrrh. But the studies have not provided any objective facts (nor any conduits) that could explain the myrrh streaming phenomena and the effects it has had on believers—and not just believers from within the Eastern Orthodox church. Others outside of their membership have also come to venerate the myrrh streaming icons. But, it is not just the myrrh streaming icons themselves that cannot be explained. There is even more difficulty in explaining the healings, miracles, and conversions that have occurred to people after they have come into contact with the myrrh streaming icons.

What do the relics and icons represent to both Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians today? Where Edith and Victor Turner (1978) viewed them as clothed in images or symbols (my wording—not a quote), and others saw them as representations of bygone eras and medieval facsimiles, I was curious if parishioners and those whose lives were permanently impacted by them viewed them as the meeting place between God and humanity. Additionally, it was important for me to understand how their lives changed by these artifacts and what the change meant to the believers.

Interviews with Participants

The methodology I chose to discuss the experiences of consultants consisted of informal interviews from both Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic faiths. Volunteers were sought by the clergy from the parishioner bodies to include members from two Roman Catholic churches. While only parishioners of Roman Catholic faith volunteered (rather than clergy), the opposite phenomenon occurred among the Eastern Orthodox churches I visited. That is, only members of Eastern Orthodox clergy volunteered to be interviewed, rather than any of the members of the parishioner body. Here, clergy were interviewed from four churches and one monastery. Each of the consultants interviewed from both faiths were asked the same questions. However, due to the length of the responses during the study, not all of the responses can be discussed here. I had also consented to the consultant's desire to expand on their responses to questions and to freely allow themselves

to take the conversation where they felt most comfortable. Therefore, the interview questions I listed served more as a guide to seeking information than a rigid formula to follow (see the appendix). Hence, responses I included here may seem out of place or awkward. Nevertheless, I do believe these responses best summarize the faith and experiences of the consultants whose lives were impacted through prayer, intercession, or coming into contact with relics and icons from the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox faiths.

Louise

Louise is 79 years of age and has been a devout Catholic for her whole life. She has a keen interest in relics, and prayer is an essential element of her spirituality. Through prayer, Louise has overcome many obstacles in life.

Louise: As time goes by, I'm going to reflect on my life. And yes, she [Mary, the mother of Jesus] not only brings you closer to Jesus, she also shares things about him that you would never realize, through what you read, what you've come across, she shares her son with you more and more. And then Saint Anne, two other times, she came to my rescue. And like you're saying about relics, I had the holy water from Saint Anne in Quebec. And with my last baby who died, they had trouble with me, my blood wouldn't reproduce, I had water in my lungs, they couldn't stop me from coughing, and they were really worried and I drank it and I asked her to help me. And she stopped it. They brought up machines after that and after all the coughing I did for hours, they thought it [the holy water] would damage my lungs. They took a picture and my lungs were fine. So that was two big times with Saint Anne.

Loretta

Loretta is 66 years of age and came back to the church following a hiatus in church attendance. Having been willed a glove from Padre Pio, she has found helping people spiritually to be a calling for her since her return.

Loretta: The help that I turn to is Padre Pio. The first time was for my sister. My sister was 50 years old and she was diagnosed with emphysema. She was diagnosed at 41 with emphysema. And that's when I

prayed to Padre Pio on a daily basis to please let my sister live until her son understands and will remember her with good thoughts and memories. And she lived six more years—five years after she was supposed to. And she didn't die from the emphysema.

Loretta also spoke of a friend of hers whom she refers to as Pauley and who had a glove that was gifted by Padre Pio to Loretta's family [see Figure 1]. When Pauley had come into contact with the glove, he believed he heard a voice say, "Get on your knees and pray!" Loretta went on to describe the event.

Loretta: And he got on his knees and started praying. And then he said he felt this urge to go to church. So, when he walked into the church, all these people were praying to Padre Pio. So, he said to one of the people, "I have a friend—he has a glove. He has a Padre Pio glove." "He does?," they asked. "Could you bring it to us?" He said, "I'll ask him for it." And there his journey started. The night when he went down there with the glove, Padre Pio came to him in a bubble—in the image of a bubble. And the bubble broke and he woke up. He was saturated [with water]. So now he starts this journey of going to all these churches down in Jersey. He said, "Loretta, I wanted to go down to the shore and open a pizzeria. That's all I wanted!" This happened to him in 2003. He said, "That's all I wanted to do is go down and open a pizzeria down there. I didn't want to get involved in this. This wasn't where I was at."



Figure 1
Padre Pio Glove, 2nd Class Relic

He told me he at one time was driving and he didn't know where he was going or what he was doing. But he had the glove with him but he didn't know where he was supposed to go and he got a phone call [on his cell phone]. He was just driving down—he didn't know where he was going. He was on the Garden State Parkway. He had no rhyme or reason why he even wound up on the Garden State Parkway. And he got a phone call from one of the women that he became close with, with the glove, and she said, "There's a friend of mine who's at a hospital with a friend of hers that does not believe. But she's dying. And she'd like you to go there and bring the glove." So, he went. He went into the hospital room. The woman was lying in the bed—she was still alive. And her friend was there. And he started praying and he took the glove out and touched her with the glove. When he touched her with the glove, he also had holy oil. And when he touched her with the holy oil and glove, purple lights starting shooting all over the room. And the woman [the friend in the room] said, "What are you doing, what are you doing with that?!" The woman that was sick smiled and she passed away. So now he got so upset, but it was a good thing because he felt she was at peace. He put her at peace. So now he gets upset because he saw these purple lights. He never experienced that before. And he was really upset about it. He leaves the hospital alone. He gets down to the parking lot but he forgot he left the glove in the hospital room. So now he said, "I had to go back! When I go back, the woman is still in the room in bed. Her friend is still there. When I walked into the room, I felt the energy of madness. They were angry. It was like the Devil—I know it was the Devil because I blessed her. And he [the Devil] wanted her to die and go to Hell. And she's not going." He said it was because she was blessed—so Padre Pio saved her. And the Devil was angry. He said there was such a bad energy in the room. He said he felt anger in the room. The woman—the friend in the room, did touch the glove. They prayed together also. She said to him, "What did you do? How did those purple lights appear?" Pauley said, "I can't answer you." And he took the glove and left because he didn't know what to say to her. He never experienced anything like that before.

This here is Alan. And Alan is now an almost six foot tall, thirteen-year-old boy. I was introduced to his mother. And this is just a cross and picture of him. Alan was this young [pointing to the picture] when his mother met me and the glove. Alan had heart disease. He had a very rare heart disease. He was going to

Columbian Presbyterian Hospital [Presbyterian Columbia University, Irving Medical Center, in New York City] and he had to wear a backpack for the medication for him to live. And when she [Alan's mother] came to my house—she lives like five minutes from me—she came to my house and we prayed and we rubbed it [the glove] on his chest and we said some prayers. She took him back to Columbia from within a month from that. “The doctors at Columbia were astonished!” Those are the words she told me—that the doctor was astonished that he was healing. Today, he doesn't carry anything. He takes oral medication and he's doing wonderful.

So, if you ever come across a dollar bill and it's stamped, and it says “Pray, Hope, Don't Worry,” that's Pauley! He stamps all his money. He bought a stamp saying Pray, Hope, Don't Worry. That's Padre Pio's saying. He [Pauly] had a company that flew banners. They flew Pray, Hope, Don't Worry. So, he's sitting in Jersey, down on the shore on the beach and waiting for the plane to come by. The next thing, here comes the plane. So, here's a kid saying, “Mommy, Mommy, what does that mean—pray, hope, don't worry?” She told him, “If you pray to God, you have to have hope, and wherever you're going, don't worry, God will take care of it.” Pauly turned around and it's this twelve-year-old boy and his mother is in a wheelchair. He's pushing his mother in the wheelchair! The company started flying it for free and people would call up and ask, “Who's flying that?” This woman was very persistent and wanted to know who it was. And the company called Pauly. They said, “Listen, this woman wants to speak to you.” He said, “Okay, give her my number.” She called Pauly and thanked him because she was going to commit suicide that day and she said, “I knew that was meant for me and I want to thank you for doing that.” He's touched many, many lives—with the glove, the banner—he's really done so many things. All he wanted to do was open a pizzeria on the Jersey shore, but God has him on this journey—but he loves it. He's probably 64 or 65 years old.

Phil

My quest to find truths about relics and icons led me to an Orthodox church. Here, I had the pleasure to meet and speak with Phil—a member of the laity and a chemist whose family originates from the Carpathia area in eastern Europe. Phil had the unique ability to blend his views on religion and science together and

personally witnessed an apparition while visiting Russia.

Phil: Don't limit. Because what you do when you do that, you're kind of limiting God to speaking in those terms. Because God can reach people in all cultures. [Here, Phil is describing his worldview on people who compartmentalize science and religion when discussing God. He goes on to describe his own view of relics.] So, is that what we need to learn from that bizarre philosophy today, just like Saint Basil learned the Aristotelian philosophy in order to express himself? And that's what I learned from my scientific perspective. It's interesting to learn science, but it's not the end for me. And I think for a lot of people, what happens is, where you get the conflict, is science is an end. And so, when the science is an end, there's a conflict. When the science is seen as a progression, to help with the faith, there's no conflict. I'm fascinated with all the chemistry—the analysis of the shroud [of Turin], of the cross, etc. But in the end, does it matter? I had some interesting experiences. I was over in Russia when it was breaking up. It was less than a month before the change occurred in Moscow. You could see that it was all crumbling. It was just in Moscow itself that it was still intact. I was in St Petersburg at the Saint Xenia church and they have like a tomb there. It's a mausoleum, you could call it. We were on a small tour group—eight of us total. It was mid-July. We went to the earliest liturgy there was. It was probably 7 in the morning. We couldn't go on any of the tour groups because it was so early yet. I had gotten to the church. And there's this gigantic cemetery around the church. You could actually go inside. She was there—she was actually there! She was dressed in gray. It was this old woman. How she got in? She just showed up. It was very peaceful. When it was taking place, we kind of just looked at each other. Afterwards, when we were walking around the cemetery later on, we said, “That was Saint Xenia!” Because, from icons of her, we recognized her. She kind of like just nodded. She made some motions. She nodded her head. It was totally out of the blue.

It's interesting. We live in a very materialistic society. Communism was total materialism in a sense. When people had nothing from that, with what the communists were offering, this could be why they were turning to that as a thing. And they actually found something spiritual in the material. That's what hit me when I was over there. And it really deepened my faith. There's actually a presence. I think that best way I

could actually explain it, with relics, is there's like this presence of something beyond here. From our perspective, we see ordinary life. But there are two ways to explain it. These people living here were touched by holiness. Like in the Acts of the Apostles, people wanted to touch the garments of Peter, even the shadow, because it was something tangible. The same thing with iconography. There's something to it—it's visual but there's something beyond the icon. And that's what I think what it is with the relics. That somehow, something—if you want to use the word 'dimension', has touched, and they defy our understanding of materialism. The heart regarding faith. There's something there that has to draw you. If you try to put this all into a much bigger scheme of things, all of these things are just done as a means for God to draw us to him. So, if you have a friend that has cancer, and relics and prayer bring what you desire is the result, is the whole thing because God is interacting with you to draw you to him? Relics aren't magic. In a reasoning sense, if you have a relic of Saint Basil, and somebody received a cure from that, then that's what they do, then everybody would believe. Those relics would be the same thing every time. Science would say you receive a cure every time. There we are just seeing them in the material sense. Is the relic the meeting place? In other words, is there like this holiness or sanctity or something in that relic? Then some people would say, then why do I need a relic if God is everywhere? I could be in the middle of a desert with no relics or no anything. That is sanctified and God could help. If so, then why does he use these other instruments [relics]? It's to bring people to himself. Sometimes I think because we are at this age, so we are so much more advanced, but there is no way to take care of this thing now [an ailment], the same means that worked 2000 years ago will work today if you have faith. And that faith was the same back then as it is now. When does a relic come into being? When you go back to the Acts of the Apostles, Peter was still alive. He was still present. Even his shadow. When you go back to Moses—the darkness—the unknowingness' of God in a sense. Again, I ask myself the purpose. For example, Saint Basil—he lived for a century. With Saint Basil's church, in which I was raised in, I find myself so much in tune with him when I read about him. A person who lived back so long ago. Is that what brings the connection? Or is that why I renovate the relics? It's something I first did without thought—I just did it. And I, not knowing who Saint Basil really was.

Father Cassidy

At an Orthodox seminary, I met up with Father Cassidy—a member of the clergy from the seminary. To start off our conversation, we began talking about the holiness of objects and substances which led to a discussion on holy water. He has a personal interest in relics and icons and shares how a myrrh streaming icon impacted the lives of people he knows. He begins here with a discussion of the effectiveness of baptism.

Fr. Cassidy: And so, the blessing of water takes the water from the fallen world, and asks God to make it water that is essential in communion with him—sacred water. That happens in part on that day because when you and I are baptized, in part, the baptism is washing of the outside of the person. What you would call a holy bath. However, what's really happening is the cleansing of the soul. So, there's an external part to the baptism and an internal, unseen part. When Jesus was baptized, he didn't have any need for that cleansing, especially on the soul, because he was perfect as God. So, what happened was when he touched the water, the water didn't cleanse him, he cleansed the water. So that's our perspective on holy water, what holy water does, and where it comes from.

We have in the monastery church, the relics of fifteen to twenty saints. The chapel there, where there is a reliquary, has all of the Apostles. The whole place is a reliquary. There are lots of relics here at [the seminary].

One saint that has become particularly dear to our family is Saint Xenia of St Petersburg [c. 1719–1730–c. 1803, who is a patron saint of St. Petersburg. After the passing of her husband, she gave all her possessions to the poor], who is known to help people to find jobs and we thank Saint Xenia for helping our daughter-in-law to find a job recently. I often ask the intercession of Saint John Chrysostom. He's universally considered the greatest preacher that ever lived by everyone including the Baptists that knew he exists. So, it would be routine for me to ask his intercession for my teaching or my preaching.

Interviewer: Had any phenomenon occurred while praying for the intercession of the saint associated with the relic during the time of need?

Fr. Cassidy: I could tell you one personal story and I could tell you a few anecdotes that are not my personal stories. My personal story is there is a miracle working and myrrh streaming icon called *Kardiotissa*, "The Tender Heart" [See Figure 2] which means

related to the Mother of God, that is down in Taylor, PA. This icon has been streaming myrrh for a long time—like years. When I say streaming, I will share with you that I am not a skeptic of these things. But I am a Thomist—I have to see it to believe it. And until this experience, I never saw it before. November, a year ago, we had a meeting here of the missionary board I serve on. The board members came from around the nation. And one of them is a friend who was the pastor of this church in Taylor. And they asked—could he bring his cion? The abbot said that would be fine. It had visited here before.



Figure 2
Kardiotissa Icon Reproduction

Fr. Cassidy: Often times, by the way, we will refer to those icons as if they were people. So, they might say, “she’s” visited here before, not “it.” It’s a very personal kind of thing. So, this wonderful, miracle-working icon was brought out here and came into the church of the monastery church and was in a glass case about that size [points to an 11” x 12” frame much like a shadow box]. And it had a big glass on a hinge. So, the glass is kind of to protect the icon from too much lip prints or something [indicating how pilgrims kiss the icon], stuff like that. The glass—it was like its own ecosystem. There was so much myrrh in there that it was raining on itself. The glass was completely dripping on the inside and at the bottom, about right here [indicating where a cloth was located] was a big wad of cotton swabbing—wadding they might call it or batting. Anyway, it was a big stack of it down there. Completely, dripping, soaking wet like you could wring

it out like a washcloth. And all of the myrrh is coming from that icon for years and years and years. The priest went through the church and he put the cion like this [indicating a tipping motion] and it would just pour into your hands. And he went around and like poured it into the hands of many people that were there. Then after we served the service, he put the icon on the stand in the middle of the church where it’s on an easel like a podium. And we served a beautiful service of Thanksgiving or intercession to the Mother of God or something like that. And then he tore a big piece of that cotton and gave it to me for me to stand there and to anoint people when they would come up and kiss the icon. And then they would turn to me and I would anoint them on the forehead with the myrrh or their hands if they wanted. And I probably anointed a hundred or hundred and fifty people. And I’m telling you there was more myrrh in my hands when I finished than when I started. It’s just myrrh, myrrh, myrrh, everywhere—myrrh. I did not experience a healing, although I wish I would have. I did not experience any particular sense of comfort or peace but more bewilderment like “whoa!” But what I did experience is this: The question came to me, what am I supposed to do with my hands now, because when you come in contact with something that miraculous, if you wash them, you would be dirtying your hands. If you’re hands are just completely drenched in this holy oil, if you washed your hands with soap and water you’re dirtying them, as nothing else would be more pure or holy [than the myrrh oil].

Father Lawrence

From my trip and visit to an Orthodox church, I had the pleasure of listening to the church celebrant, Father Lawrence, talk about the Eastern Orthodox icon, the Kardiotissa. Fr Lawrence shared stories with me about the Kardiotisa and how the myrrh streaming icon changed the lives of many.

Fr. Lawrence: There are some amazing things that happened over the course of time—just mind boggling. We even had a man die here in the church. He had a massive heart attack during one of our Wednesday services. And I took the icon [Figure 2] back and it dripped on him. The nurses were doing compression on him—CPR. There was no respiration, no heartbeat—nothing! When the myrrh hit his chest, he made a whoosh sound. He took a deep breath, opened his eyes and started singing, “Oh Mary, Mother of

God, pray for us! Mary Mother of God, pray for us!” It was wild! He’s since passed—not from a heart attack—he lived for another five years. When they got him to the hospital [during the heart attack at the church], they could not find anything wrong with him or what caused the heart attack.

I always liked this one: This was a woman who had an inoperable brain tumor. There was nothing they could do because of the location, the size, all of that. She was just waiting to go. And a friend of her’s had come here. And I gave out some myrrh. She grabbed an icon card, took it back to her. And she was a woman of some faith, but not some extreme religious person. For lack of options, she decided to sleep (she anointed herself every night with the myrrh), went to bed, and slept with the myrrh and icon card under her pillow. And one morning she woke up and just to find a mass of this stuff on her pillow. So, it scared her to death. So, she jumped up, grabbed her pillow, got herself together and she said she felt fantastic! She went to the hospital and the first thing they did was analyze the stuff on the pillow. That was the tumor! It had come out her nose during the night.

There was another one and this one I like a lot because we have a lot of experiences with couples who are unable to have children, coming a lot to see the icon. And with this particular one—they were from Ohio and they’ve been trying to have a baby for ten, twelve years. “Nothing,” the doctors said, for various reasons and they [the couple] never gave up hope. Also, they came out, made the trip from Ohio to here for one of our Wednesday night services. We didn’t have a lot of myrrh because we came off of a big trip from a big church and gave everything away. And so, it takes time for it to accumulate so we didn’t have a lot. So, the sub-deacon’s brother, gave her a little tiny piece [the myrrh-soaked cotton] and she took it and ate it! I never saw that before. So anyway, a couple of weeks later, I get an email—she’s pregnant! She carries the baby to term without issue—goes through delivery smooth—everything’s good! The baby is born—a little boy—and the doctor’s watching, the nurses are watching after the baby to make sure the hands are moving, the feet are moving and functioning as it should. And, they notice that the little guy’s fists were clenched and he wasn’t moving his fingers. And being a little concerned, they watched. Finally, the left hand opened up, the fingers move, but not the right one. So, they gently pried his fingers open and sure enough, there’s a piece of cotton in the little guy’s hand!

We get people coming from all over the world to visit the site and ask for her intercession. We had a nun from the Holy Land—she was diagnosed with terminal cancer. She stayed in the church for three days—stayed here and prayed with the icon constantly. Went back to the Holy Land and I found out about a year and six months later—no cancer. It was gone.

I even had a couple of scientists come once to debunk the thing. They couldn’t—and they were so arrogant, I mean rude! I was cooking in the kitchen, and I didn’t expect them. I was in the kitchen making something for a festival. And I just let them in the church and left the icon out for them. They were very arrogant and I left them to do whatever they needed to do. I left them for about a half hour or 40 minutes. I came back in and here’s both of them—and they’re research doctors with PhD’s—and both of them on their knees in front of the icon crying. And they apologized. They said, “we didn’t realize what we were going to find.” So that was pretty amazing. They came with one purpose and left with a change of mindset.

Father Stephen

At another Orthodox church, I interviewed the church celebrant, Father Stephen who began talking about his daughter who had injured her arm during play. He responded by helping the child with applying healing oil from Saint Nektarios.

Fr. Stephen: I got this oil of Saint Nektarios and rubbed it on her arm and probably 10 minutes later she’s happy and bouncing around with no problem. Another man I knew—he converted. He married a woman from Macedonia. He had a tumor the size of a grapefruit on his colon. And so, she [his wife] was anointing him with this oil every day. They were gonna take his colon out because they couldn’t separate one from the other. So, they went in and it came out sooner than it was supposed to and they came out to her and said, “What’s happened?” The doctors said, “Well, we went in there and instead of being this thing the size of a grapefruit, it detached itself from the colon and it was flat like a pancake that was full of some weird oily substance we couldn’t quite explain.”

There’s a story about him [St. Nektarios] where they couldn’t get a bishop or couldn’t get a priest for a long time because it’s a remote area. They finally wrote the bishop and said thanks for sending us a priest. They were like what are you talking about? He came, he married people, he buried people, he baptized,

chrismated, preached, he was fantastic! “Well, who’s this priest, we don’t know anything about it!” So, they went up there. They looked at the records and it said Archbishop Nektarios. And they took it to a handwriting expert and he said, this is his handwriting. So, things like that happen around him all the time.

Lizzie

Through a Roman Catholic church, I interviewed a family that was contacted by the church for my research and met Lizzie. Lizzie is the spouse of Jeffrey and they have three children (three girls). I had the pleasure of meeting with this family at their home. The family are active parishioners in a local Roman Catholic church. They have access to relics which they include into prayer daily. Lizzie was personally affected by prayer and relics.

Lizzie: That’s the thing about relics—they’re filled with Jesus. My friend had a profound conversion experience with the tibia of Mary Magdalen. It was on tour [See Figure 3]. And she was interested in the Catholic church at the time. She was agnostic. As she was asking questions, and seeking answers, she went to some people she was getting to know through the church and was interested in the relic, which is unusual, because if you’re not Catholic, or even are Catholic, you’re going to see someone’s body parts [laughs]. It was a little strange. And she went and she describes going, not like with an understanding of what she was doing, and she started weeping. Mary Magdalen was in front of her and she just started weeping. It was a big moment. Later she was baptized, confirmed, etc. Now in September, she’ll be making solemn vows with the Hawthorne Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne, NY!

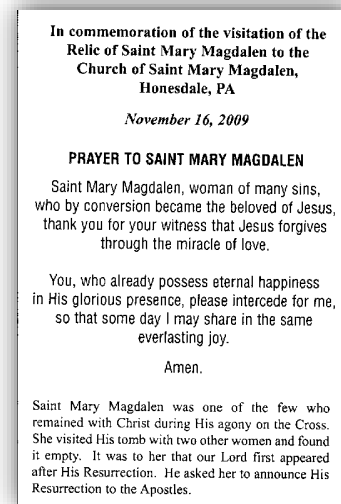
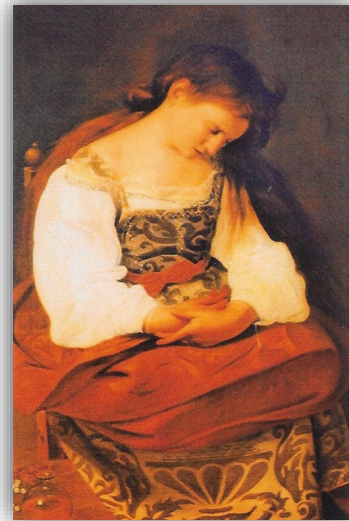


Figure 3
St. Mary Magdalen Commemoration Card

Lizzie: Why do we venerate the saints? Because there’s a God in Heaven and we see examples of people like us and that gives us hope. All of this should be geared toward a relationship with the Lord. So, if you’re venerating relics, it’s to increase our devotion. A friendship with the saints is ultimately ordered to love Jesus and worship God. Like the church, you should go to mass every Sunday to stay in a relationship with God.

As Jeffrey pointed out, by vehemently rejecting the concept that one can just get what they want by doing some things and obtaining some powerful artifacts, we are instead turning to Christ. Like Jeffrey, I concur

that this is where the confusion enters occasionally into one's Christian faith. The holy artifacts, or relics—once part of the saint or once part of a saint's life in some way—are not magical objects that can be rubbed like a magic lamp to have one's wishes granted. They are holy and they are there to remind the faithful that the saint, during their lifetime, did all they could to live the life that Jesus requested of them, or to accept similar pain and sufferings as Christ had. Some have died in his name and they are the martyrs. So it is really through Jesus Christ that we seek help, aid, and assistance for our troubles and concerns, and not the relics of the saints alone.

Interviewer: Which saint do you pray to most frequently?

Lizzie: You know the reason I have such devotion to Saint Anne is ten years ago—I was raised Catholic, baptized, and went through all the sacraments of the time. And I fell away from the church. In high school and college. And I happened to be very anti-religion and very sad. Starting in 2011 it changed. I used artificial contraception. I was no longer doing anything that made that necessary. And I was becoming less and less comfortable with that. But I was so ready to give it up but afraid to go off of it. Maybe I wouldn't be able to have children when the time came. And I remember it was this time of year, and I ran into the church but was supposed to fill it [the prescription] and I forgot to. So that night I went to bed and I had a dream that I had a child—I had a daughter. And the only thing given to me was this baby and I had to name her. It was up to me to know the name—what it was. So, I'm looking at this baby and it came into my heart that this is Anna.

I woke up that morning and I met this woman with a devotion to Mary Magdalen. She was a new, zealous Catholic, so I wake up in the morning and I see it is the Feast of Saint Anna. That's interesting. And I read about her. I found out that she was against birth control. So I just stopped. I never filled it again. It felt like it was the first time I really had a relationship with a saint. I was finally at a place where I wanted to be a mother. For all those years, I was very anti-motherhood. It felt like it was an invitation from her to trust her: "Just trust me on this. You don't need this. I'm going to take care of this." Fast forward a couple of years, I'm being married and had our first daughter. And we did encounter her relic on our honeymoon. We saw her relic in Quebec City, Canada. That was the first time I think where, like through the intercession of saints, I was asked to do something very definite. That was a very spiritual sense.

Gretta

Through a Roman Catholic church, I met with Gretta who has years of teaching experience in the elementary schools. She too held a similar view of relics as Lizzie. That is, the faithful ask the saints to pray for us on our behalf in Heaven, and the faithful do not ask the saints directly for assistance.

Interviewer: Have you prayed to ask the saints or martyrs to pray for you (for assistance)?

Gretta: Yes. Not actually praying to them. When I teach, I always teach to be careful in how you use the word "pray." The definition of prayer is opening our hearts and communicating with God. So, when you talk to people who are not Catholic, or children who wouldn't understand, they may think that they're God or a substitute for God. I say, "No, we ask their prayers for us." That's why we say, "Saint Anthony, pray for us," "St John the Evangelist, pray for us," because we're asking them to intercede for us.

The interview came to a close when Ida [a lady I interviewed for the research] stopped by and mentioned how in history they would only bring the relics out during communion because the people were taking them home. Some would do dark stuff—even with the Eucharist. I do recall through prior research how those involved with Black Magic, Voodoo, and other dark arts, would include holy artifacts, crosses, and such in ritual, which to the Christian is blasphemy and against God. One just never knows what some other person's intentions are. Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox parishioners are protective of their faith and protective of those they love. So, it is no wonder that both churches and their parish members are protective of the relics, the Eucharist, and other religious artifacts that are blessed with God's authority. Perhaps those lost in those dark practices should be prayed for as the saints would have done the same. The light of God's love is there for all, and for those who became lost along the way.

Carla

Through a Roman Catholic church, I met and interviewed Carla, a 53-year-old woman and artist. Carla's belief in the power of relics was very strong.

Carla: I think that's what attract me so much to relics. Saints don't care who you are, they don't care

what you believe or don't believe. It will heal people no matter what religion you are. If you think about it, from the beginning of time, people honored their dead. We still honor our dead. They put them in cemeteries or in crematoriums and on a shelf. But we still honor the dead. So why would we not honor the dead saints? They were given a grace by God and accepted it. So, God lives within them as he lives in each of us and that's how I look at it. And I think that's why the dead should always be honored because he is in them. They are part of God. So, for me to have a relic of a saint, it doesn't change the fact that it was part of God and is still there.

Christy

Christy is 60 years of age and a Roman Catholic who prayed to Mary for assistance to help her with her physical ailments. She can now do many physical activities she was unable to perform before choosing to pray for assistance.

Christy: They had this one particular icon. It was an icon of Our Lady. It's from Hawaii, "thy holy icon, O Lady Theotokos, blessed myrrh has flowed abundantly." And it's a myrrh streaming icon. I was singing with St Tikhon's from September of 2011 and this was in 2012, Memorial Day weekend, because they had the icon there. I was having problems going up and down the stairs. I was getting real bad heart palpitations and getting winded. I couldn't breathe. And so, I'm standing in line for Bishop Michael to anoint us with the myrrh from the icon. And it was funny because he was saying everybody's name as they came up. And all of a sudden, I get up because I'm not well and I say, "Momma, you are the divine nurse, you have to do something. There's something going on with my heart, I can't do anything about this. I have no insurance right now. I have no doctor, you have to handle this." And I get up and Bishop Michael literally looks at me and goes, "Oh hand maid of the Lord" and anoints me and I feel this warm rush go right through me. And I had it happen a couple of months earlier, the same thing happened when he anointed me on the Feast of Saint Nicholas. But so, I had this sensation of this warm rush going through my body and said to one of my friends, "I'll be right back. Stay here." And I went inside St Tikhon's. I walk in, and to test it, I ran up and down the stairs three times and I was like, "Thanks Mom!" And I literally, from that

point on, have had no issues going up and down stairs, losing my breath or any. That was one episode.

Father Mark

During the course of my research, I was put into contact with Father Mark who serves an Eastern Orthodox church, a sixty-nine-year-old of Russian-Ukrainian descent. He too expanded on the significance of the myrrh streaming icons and how the myrrh streaming oil was analyzed in laboratories.

Fr. Mark: With the original icon, which is the Hawaiian icon, was brought to St Mark's and the priest found out that his icon was streaming. But the original Hawaiian icon they asked [name unclear] of Russia if they could have it analyzed. He agreed and the caretaker of the icon was going to be in Pennsylvania, agreed to it. They went to three different laboratories. And each laboratory did not know that they were analyzing it. And the result was, they found a rose fragrance that's indicative of the Garden of Gethsemane where the Mother of God reposed. The oil was from the olive tree in Libya, an Orthodox monastery, but that olive tree has been extinct for one hundred and fifty years. And the third thing [ingredient] they found was that water and oil used—usually, oil rises to the top—but this gels together with no problem. And each laboratory discovered that. So how did the rose from the Garden of Gethsemane get to the icon? How did the olive oil that's indicative to a monastery in Libya that's been extinct for 150 years get to this icon? And the fragrance is very important.

A woman had stage four pancreatic cancer. I went to her home, anointed her with the holy myrrh, prayed to the Blessed Mother for her holy intercession and the intercession of Saint Genevieve and other saints. I forgot I was visiting her and I remember I didn't do a follow up on her. So, I decided to call her. When I [originally] visited her, she was in a hospital bed, fourth stage, receiving palliative care. And I said to her daughter, "How's Jean? I haven't talked to her." Her response: "She's doing the dishes, Father, want to talk to her?" I am not surprised, not impressed by miracles, because miracles are normal in the church. See it every day.

Edward

From a Catholic church, I had the pleasure to interview Edward, a parishioner who has been a

Roman Catholic for his entire life. Edward believes strongly in repetitious prayer, what he calls discipline, in order to receive divine blessings and assistance which he believes helped to save his life.

Interviewer: Was there any cause or concern attributed to illness, misfortune, and you made a request for guidance?

Edward: I bought a new truck seven years back. I was living down in Long Island at the time. And I'm driving along Sunrise Highway and it's like a seventy-mph highway. And all of a sudden, this new truck, decides to stop. I didn't know what was wrong with it. I couldn't move and it was in the worst place. It was a bend and with concrete embankments on all sides. There's no shoulder. And people are zipping by me blowing their horns because I'm stopped. You can't see me because you're coming around this curve and there I am. I'm just going, "Mercy, God, mercy, God." And I opened the [passenger] window—I was going to go out the passenger window because the cars were just missing my truck. All of a sudden, I hear a beep and there's a tow truck next to me with his lights on in the next lane so people can see him. He goes, "you need help?" So, I said, "yeah!" He got out and put cones out and he towed me off the road. That's immediate answer to prayer. I'll never forget that. I just felt the presence of God right there. There's been other times too. Simple, nothing exaggerated. But these things happen to everybody in their lives and they don't understand it. The response that I got is because I'm a Catholic, it's because I say Hail Mary's, it's because I do things over and over again. The first response I had was to pray to God right away for mercy! That's the discipline. It's like the soldier who's doing 500 pushups. It's like the marathon guy running 25 miles. It's over and over again because it strengthens us. It forms us—it becomes part of our being.

Ted

At a Roman Catholic church, I interviewed Ted, a parishioner who has also been a lifelong Catholic. Ted briefly described some of the history surrounding the apparitions of the Virgin Mary that occurred in Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the Risen Christ statue, also located in Medjugorje.

Ted: Are you familiar with the Divine Mercy? In the book, she's recommending that everyone do the Divine Mercy every day at 3:00 pm [the hour of Jesus'

death]. When I came back from the cabin, my wife had all these papers spread all over the floor. She said "we're going to Medjugorje." I truly believe that was divine intervention—to get her to go there. As soon as we got close to where the apparitions were happening, there was a peace that came over us, and I can't explain it to this day. We were there five days and the whole time we were there, that peace was there. Once we left, it was back to the regular real world. The site is located in Kosovo. Phenomenon has been occurring since in 1981.

The knee of the Risen Christ is in Medjugorje, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Water droplets—all over. You wipe them off, and they reappear. And they have been tested and they are human tears. I believe the statue was put there 1991. But it didn't start leaking tears until around 2004. Some of what I read is because [the knees] that's as high as the Blessed Mother could reach while Christ was on the cross. A little background . . . there are 6 kids that know 10 secrets. When the secrets are going to be made available to the world, 7 days prior to the secrets being announced, the visionaries will tell the priest which has already been contacted. That priest will pray for 7 days and fast. Three days prior to the event happening, that priest will notify the world. There will be a permanent sign given (the third secret) that no one will be able to explain. The theory is that the twenty fifth of June, 2021, is 40 years, which represents 40 years in the desert, 40 days here. They think it's very symbolic but nobody knows because the visionaries will not say the secrets until such time they are allowed to.

The interesting thing about that is that they've taken one of these visionaries and placed them under hypnosis and asked them about the secrets and they don't reveal them. They're protected in that manner. There's also a parchment paper—although they really don't know what it is—with the secrets written on it. But nobody can read it. But when the secrets will become available, they will be able to read it from the paper. They can't decipher it. [The Vatican has examined this object. Ted then showed me a book that one of the visionaries wrote.] We met her when she was there. She was at that time getting the apparitions daily in her house. And that's where a small group of people could go and she was there. I was in the same room with her. She's in a tremendous amount of back pain right now, as all the visionaries ever had in the past, will all suffer. And she has suffered. That's my speculation. Pope John Paul II has read some of the secrets. After one of the visionaries died, she had a vision of him [Pope

John Paul II] with the Blessed Mother, all in white, very happy and younger in age.

Anthropological Analysis

The best way for me to describe the sense of place, depth of feeling, and empathy for those interviewed in this study, is to turn to Glen Hinson's *Fire in my Bones, Transcendence and the Holy Spirit in African American Gospel*. Hinson probably described it best as an ethnographer when he recorded one of his consultants exclaiming, ". . . you got to be *in it to feel it* . . ." (Hinson 2000, 1). As Hinson goes on to describe Elder Richardson's belief as a Baptist singer—that God is really with one when one is really in it—a feeling of spirit enables a connection as a channel to God, a feeling of immanent joy that touches one's soul. So an immense, transformative feeling and connection is shared by both the Baptist singers (Hinson refers to them as saints) and members from the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches.

"There is a transformative feeling that moves the soul of the parishioners of both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches which is very similar to the way it moves through the gospel church described by Hinson. In many ways, people that turn to relics and icons of these churches are filled with spirit—even those who keep a distance from them, as we have seen with the scientists who investigated the Theotokos Orthodox icon. And to these believers of the icon, it is truth" (Pinckney 2021, 210).

"The saints of the African American sanctified community say that soul is the domain not of the body or mind, but of *spirit*. And when the Spirit touches spirit, the soul rejoices in an epiphany of truth and knowledge. To the parishioners I interviewed from both faiths, the healings, miracles and conversions were definitely a lived reality. And like Hinson, I also had a limited view of what that reality was until I began the interviews. It was not the Catholic mass and its congregational responsorial or bells that pulled me into the shared feelings and emotions of those I interviewed. Nor was it the choir singing or incense of the Divine Liturgy that captured my awareness of a true lived experience. It was the oral descriptions of parishioners and how their faith grew stronger and how their lives were impacted that over-saturated my senses, much like the emotional pull described by Hinson in his second chapter of *Fire in my Bones*." (Pinckney 2021, 210-211)

"To fully realize and understand the expressions of the parishioners and clergy whose lives were impacted, changed, or healed, we as the reader have an obligation to have to shake off all our invisible robes of judgment" if we choose this road. Therefore, we allow their subjectivity to override our objectivity. That is how one captures a better or complete understanding of their words, their meanings, and their experiences. To help us to better identify with our interlocutors or consultants, I use the analogy of a house to make my point. Here, as anthropologists, we attempt to climb through the window of someone's life. "We may not necessarily have the same vision, smell the same smells, see what the other sees, hear what the other hears, and feel what the other feels. But, we take up temporary residency in their home to pull back the veil of privacy as an attempt to connect with them, while leaving our presuppositions, judgements and bias outside the window. We will not need that baggage we left behind under the window if we want to wear what they wear, walk where they walk, and feel what they feel—as long as we are invited to do so" (Pinckney 2021, 212).

I had agreed with Hinson that to weigh any supernatural encounter with disbelief is not only troublesome, but detrimental to the consultants and their testimonies because it negates the significance of their experiences and beliefs, which leads to abandonment of objectivity itself. Supernatural and paranormal investigator Paul Roland made a similar point in his text.

We operate at the lowest frequency of existence on the densest level, the physical plane. Naturally, we tend to believe that what we perceive is real and that anything we cannot touch, taste, see, smell, or hear does not exist. Our world appears solid, but as science has recently discovered, this is an illusion created by comparatively low processing power of the human brain which cannot see the spaces that exist between matter at the subatomic level. It is comparable to looking at a photograph in a newspaper. We do not see the millions of dots that makeup the image and the white spaces in between unless we look at it through a magnifying glass. Nevertheless, the dots are there. (Roland 2010, 96)

So if human intellect is only functioning on its five senses, then it may be that we are missing much more that is occurring around us all of the time and possibly without our knowing.

Theological Analysis

In the end, one may ask what is faith in the intercession of saints? Is it an all-embracing confidence in what we learn from our Sunday school lessons, catechisms, the liturgy, the sacraments, the relics, and icons? Or, is faith much more than all this? Is it a logos—a deep knowing in our internal being that is always present—something we rely on to guide us in life or spiritual development? One may ask if it is based on what we learn from others—the personal stories of healing, both spiritually and physically, and perhaps conversions as well. For many, faith may be based on the events that influence us, the paths we choose, and immediate options available to us when we are confronted with difficult times.

We can find evidence of faith in the saints who in turn had faith in Christ through the testimonials of the faithful that were helped, saved, cured, and healed through belief in the relics, or in the saints themselves that intercede for us on our behalf in Heaven. Many have witnessed the miracles in the churches, the hospitals, and in the home that have demonstrated time and again, that faith is very real and intercession brings about real change in the lives of the faithful.

So, while faith may be just a belief to some, and nothing more, perhaps because they have not lived the experience nor witnessed the intercession of the saints, faith to many others is like a fountain that runs in our veins and nourishes our relationship with the divine. Often times, we need to recharge that fountain, and for many, the Church is there for them. But we must bring God into our own homes, and into our personal fountains to really feel that connection to the saints. We must internalize that life giving force and allow it to flow and recharge our faith—the fountain of our relationship with God. The relics and miraculous icons can be the vehicles we need to recharge the faith that is in all of us. They can be vital to us to strengthen and nourish the fountain of faith. The saints are very real and so is their ability to intercede for us on our behalf. All we have to do is ask for their assistance—to pray for us in order to restore peace in our minds and health in our bodies and to give us renewed faith that can once again flow within our fountains (Pinckney 2021, 219-220).

Miracles, as expressed, do occur, and to many of the faithful, they occurs every single day. For the faithful I have talked with in this study, their strong faith in the saints and relics they venerate for assistance have produced physical and spiritual healing, conversions

and miracles. As one consultant expressed, the theology of relics must be experienced and is very unique to the faithful—they are the meeting place with God.

Physical Healing

In considering the Padre Pio glove, a knitted glove that was reported by Loretta, it is commonly known that Padre Pio had worn gloves on both hands to cover the marks of the stigmata, which is a divine favor bestowed on one; the marks of the crucifixion that develop on their body correspond to the same marks found on the body of Jesus. In 1918, all five marks of the stigmata began appearing on the Padre's body and he suffered the unending pain every day for the next fifty years. "Doctors said he lost up to one cup of blood a day through the bleeding wounds and the holes in his hands were so large at times they claimed it would have been possible to stick their entire finger completely through the wound to the other side" (Sniadach 2010, 144). Reportedly, the blood from his wounds emitted sweet-smelling perfumes. The glove I examined from Loretta also emitted a sweet smelling perfume—that of roses. Such an aroma typifies the sufferer to be in a state of holiness. The presence of this aroma is the first test in determining a true stigmatic. The aroma is known as the Odor of Sanctity and is said to be given by God to represent one's holiness and love for Him. The second test is a blood test. Although physically, medically, and physiologically impossible, the blood which flows from the wounds of a true stigmatic, more often than not, is a different blood type and does not match the stigmatic's own blood" (Sniadach 2010, 140).

While Padre Pio's glove may not have healed the dying woman in the hospital that Pauley brought to her, the same glove has surely been accredited with many miraculous healings. Furthermore, one cannot provide a reasonable explanation for the purple lights that flashed and darted across the hospital room when Pauley placed the glove on the chest of the dying woman in the hospital bed.

Father Stephan's discussion of the tumor that had miraculously been healed through the intercession of Saint Nektarios is another example of the healing power of the relics and icons. Additionally, the healing oil from the myrrh streaming icon, the Kardiotissa, has healed an unknown number of people from tumors, cancer, and other physical maladies. Additionally, it is associated with the ability to cure infertility, as claimed

by Father Lawrence. The most extraordinary testimonial was the ability of the myrrh streaming oil of the Kardiotissa to restore life back to a parishioner who suffered a heart attack and passed while attending the Divine Liturgy.

“Not only did the parishioner revive, he sprang to his feet and began singing. Other than the application and usage of a defibrillator, a device that sends an electric shock directly to the heart to someone in cardiac arrest, it would be difficult to find a scientific method or instrumentation to revive a person who has “flatlined” on a church floor. In fact, a defibrillator was not used in this case. The oil from the icon therefore, had to have some positive impact or effect on the heart attack victim. And the victim just did not slowly awaken and sit up in a pew with a dazed expression—the victim immediately recovered, stood and sang a church hymn, completely without the application of science” (Pinckney 2021, 224).

The case of infertility experienced by women and evidence of this condition being miraculously reversed after coming into contact with myrrh streaming icons cannot be explained easily. There appears to be no scientific evidence pointing to the curative properties found in the myrrh streaming oils or the icons themselves—that is, no curative properties that many women seek to allow them to conceive healthy fetuses. Likewise, the myrrh oil and rose water alone have not been found to physically contain any curative properties that can be used to eradicate cancerous tumors and other physical ailments from the human organism. The changes that occur biologically to the cancerous growth as the myrrh oil comes into contact with the body is unknown scientifically. Spiritually, much more must be occurring and on a miraculous scale. As Father Lawrence indicated in the interview, not all are cured by coming into contact with the myrrh streaming icon and its streaming oils. The same oil that was used by Father Mark underwent three separate laboratory testings, with each laboratory unaware of the oil’s origin. How interesting that results indicate the rose fragrance originates from the Garden of Gethsemane where the Mother of God reposed. The oil too originates from Libyan olive trees which have been extinct for one hundred and fifty years. And finally, the oil is known to unnaturally mix with water evenly, and not separate when left undisturbed.

To the faithful, the belief in the curative power of these artifacts is not a faith in the objectivity of science, but a faith in their personal beliefs either by witnessing or by personal encounters with the relics and icons. To

those who experienced conversions from a secular and atheistic perspective to the belief in a higher holy power, a birth of faith has entered into their consciousness in the healing power of the relics and icons. Therefore, belief in the intercession of the saints is very real to them, as much as those who hold a strong belief in modern medicine’s ability to cure people of biological maladies. A main difference one could point to is that there is no guaranteed methodology to scientifically falsify the healing power of icons and relics, or to even determine the curative properties of either. There simply is no litmus test or simple qualitative or quantitative test that one can conduct on the relics and icons to determine a sense of the divine. Perhaps this is because no litmus test has been developed for faith. One is forced to ask, what do we have here?

“We have faith and miracles that occur and science struggles to provide a valid explanation for the cures that manifest when people put their trust and faith in the relics and icons of the saints. One can decant or bottle wine and one can bottle tea, but one cannot decant or bottle faith. Faith is real when it occurs—when it happens to one who has it or desires it—and that faith is manifested through God. When one has faith or receives it through prayer, or devotionals, or through contact with the divine, then one knows they have the faith as expressed by the parishioners, laity, and clergy from both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. They have experienced this faith first hand because they experienced the positive changes that occurred to them without the benefits of modern medical science, or in conjunction with medicine” (Pinckney 2021, 226).

As many parishioners and clergy of both Christian faiths believe, miraculous healing is not a guarantee when spiritual people or parishioners pray, or seek the intercession of the saints. Not everyone will be healed and there does not appear to be any predictable pattern. Color, ethnicity, sex, gender, or choice of spirituality does not appear to be a prerequisite or caveat. No pattern has revealed itself.

This is also evident in the case of a woman whose physiology was not allowing her reproductive organs to bring a baby to term. After coming into contact with the myrrh streaming icon, she, a member of the Eastern Orthodox church, was able to conceive. A Texas A&M professor was astounded by this and viewed it as God revealing himself in the language of science. Ergo, if medical science cannot interpret this phenomenon and provide a logical explanation for this

event, what other reason do we have to believe that the unborn child was not miraculously healed through healing power of the myrrh streaming icon? Perhaps the question should be, how is it not divine intervention?

But the faithful must also keep in mind that the miraculous healing which occurs is only temporary. As Father Mark mentioned to me, any healing or cure received in the church is temporary because we are all living beings. Healing through the saints, the relics, and ultimately through Jesus Christ is temporary for our life, and death becomes a bridge to heaven. The purpose of a cure is that we repent, intensify and prepare ourselves for eternal life with Christ.

Spiritual Healing

The spiritual healing that I have documented from the interviews may be more subtle to the reader, but much more profound to the person who experienced the change. Restored faith and a change of heart has led people to reconsider their outlook on life—from that of a negative, self-destructive behavior to one more positive and with a stronger belief in their faith. And they have attributed that change to a faith in the relics and icons of the saints that intercede for them. From my discussions with members such as Loretta, I learned of the stories of a healed conscience and how a contemplation of suicide was prevented simply by coming into contact with the message of Pray, Hope, Don't Worry—a message attributed to Padre Pio.

I learned of how Louise's lifetime of nervousness and chronic uncontrollable urge to cry was alleviated through prayer. Through prayer again, a laity from the Eastern Orthodox church reaches a rare, and balanced acceptance of science and faith together. And through Lizzie, her lifelong outlook or view of not wanting children had changed to a desire to have children—four infants no less—by praying for the intercession of Saint Anna.

One may question how prayer works. Is it a matter of faith building through repetitive prayer and confidence in an all-knowing and universal theistic deity, or just the outlier of chance that prayer appears to be answered? To some, faith is essential to have for prayer to be instrumental in helping one connect with God, to talk with God and explain one's situation with God. Thomson Jay Hudson, the author of *The Law of Psychic Phenomena, A Working Hypothesis for the Systematic Study of Hypnotism, Spiritism, Mental Therapeutics, etc.*, would confirm those beliefs held by

the faithful today, that continuous prayer is naught without faith. "It is the Divine essence within us which produces the effect, and operates in strict accordance with Divine law. It confirms and explains that which Christ taught so earnestly and so persistently, namely, that we must have faith, or our prayers will avail nothing" (Hudson 1893, 263). Some without faith have been unable to express it or feel it and prefer to utilize more finite or fixed processes of reasoning. People with faith, however, rely more on prayer and a 'knowing' that their prayers are heard. Some are fortunate enough to see their prayers answered and, in many cases, it validates the healing processes to them that they have either witnessed or experienced for themselves. To some, there is an ultimate connection to the divine and they view the relics as connections—connections all leading to Christ. As Father Mark had said, "the longest journey has the shortest distance—from the mind to the heart. Close our minds, open our hearts."

Spiritual Conversion

Spiritual conversions have also occurred, and with conversion, I am referring to the acceptance of a new spiritual belief. This is where the individual abandons or excludes all other religious beliefs or denominations and then accepts and adopts one particular religious belief or set of beliefs from one particular denomination. Through Father Lawrence we learn of the two scientists who arrived at an Orthodox church to scientifically study, measure, test and collect samples from the myrrh streaming Kardiotissa icon of the Theotokos. Here, what was a denial of divine intervention and an admission of atheism, became a transformation of paradigms—a total conversion experience. But this was not the only religious or spiritual conversion expressed by Father Lawrence. There was also the spiritual conversion of a Muslim to Eastern Orthodoxy during a religious service. On the Roman Catholic side, we hear of the conversion of a female atheist to that of a Roman Catholic nun simply by coming into contact with a relic from Mary Magdalen. Another conversion was attributed to the Roman Catholic green scapular, an article of devotion worn around the neck.

But does a religious conversion mean we have to give up a life we are familiar with and start a new regime of thinking, acting and treating others? Does it happen when our current paradigms are challenged by coming face to face with a stronger reality? While that may be

the case for some, spiritual conversion for others does not have to be traumatic as it was for the Apostle Paul. It can be a renewed partnership with Christ and the realization that Christ is the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world. Conversion may mean forgiving others of sins committed against another. It may be a self-cleansing for others and spiritual renewal. Yet to others, it is all of these. “A Christian is not simply somebody who stands a better chance of being ‘saved,’ but a person who accepts responsibility to serve God in this life and promote God’s reign in all its forms” (Bosch 2012, 500). A conversion process had occurred to Victor and Edith Turner when they were looking for deeper ontological values of ritual—something beyond the symbolic. Their studies of the Ndembu of Africa had a major impact on them, and Marxism, they found, could not account for the rituals they witnessed and participated in. In *The Slain God*, Timothy Larsen hones in on the transformative process that the Turners went through:

Therefore, while ‘primitive’ beliefs and practices made it impossible for E. B. Tylor to accept Christian claims, in a complete reversal, traditional African religion made it possible for the Turners to take Christianity seriously once again. Vic testified that when he witnessed a Catholic priest presiding at Mass: I felt in the texture of his performance something of the same deep contact with the human condition tinged with transcendence that I had experienced in central Africa when I attended rituals presided over by dedicated ritual specialists. (Larsen 2014, 183)

So, in their quest to search for deeper values, they turned to western religion. By 1957, the Turners had found that value during the consecration of the bread and wine in the Roman Catholic Mass. I have met some in life who have experienced a much subtler conversion process. For them, it was acceptance of a new religious canon and a new identity for themselves that they came to accept and embrace. These people appeared more grounded, more focused, and more open to others whom they previously had turned away. Robert Hefner describes the conversion process in *Conversion to Christianity*.

The most necessary feature of religious conversion, it turns out, is not a deeply systematic reorganization of personal meanings but an adjustment in self-identification through the at least nominal

acceptance of religious actions or beliefs deemed more fitting, useful, or true. In other words, at the very least—an analytic minimum—conversion implies the acceptance of a new locus of self-identification, a new, though not necessarily exclusive, reference point for one’s identity. (Hefner 1993, 17)

Miracles

When it comes to “miracles,” or what people describe as such from their own personal experience, we discover how these events or occurrences impacted their worldview and spiritual beliefs. Through the Padre Pio glove relic, Loretta described how the life of her own biological sister was extended for an additional five years despite a life-threatening condition. At Medjugorje, parishioners from St. Mary Magdalen church described the miraculous manifestation of water from the Risen Christ statue near the knee on the cross. The water was tested and is allegedly of the same substance found in human tears. Interestingly, the height of the knee on the statue was reportedly the height that the Blessed Mother could reach while her son was on the cross, and there she wept for her son.

From Edward, we hear how he was saved from a vehicle accident, possible injury and death by praying to God on a busy highway on Long Island, NY. A mysterious spirit manifested in front of Phil and several other witnesses in Russia during a pilgrimage which we learn the group had attributed to Saint Xenia. The spirit allegedly interacted with Phil and his fellow pilgrims.

While it would be very difficult to recreate the same experience at the same mausoleum, and under the same environmental conditions that Phil experienced with his co-pilgrims, a secularist would argue that the group had a momentary total suspension of objective consciousness, and their witnessing of the phantasm could have been induced by some unknown environmental condition—a subjective condition. However, each member of the group had witnessed the same phantasm or spirit and were able to deduce that the spirit was of intelligent design and acknowledged their presence. According to Phil, each member of the group positively identified the spirit as Saint Xenia (Pinckney 2021, 232).

According to Father Stephan, the oil of Nektarios is a miracle because we learn it healed a man with a tumor the size of a grapefruit. Yet, there is also the

body of the saint himself to consider who some believe can walk from place to place posthumously. Additionally, the same saint is said to have married, buried, baptized, chrismated, and preached to people posthumously. A handwriting sample that was analyzed by a graphologist suggests the sample is the handwriting from the same saint.

Regarding the flashing purple lights observed in a hospital room as reported by Pauley, the same lights were witnessed by several people when the glove of Padre Pio was brought out and placed on the chest of a dying patient. From Father Cassidy, we learn of the myrrh streaming Kardiotissa icon, and how the sacred oil had multiplied in volume before his very eyes. Many more experiences were described than I can discuss here.

Conclusions

Based on the testimonies of the consultants interviewed, spiritual and physical healings, conversions, and miracles have occurred over time. The experiences of those witnessing the events are very real to those whose lives have changed possibly for the better, have been healed, or experienced such changes through prayer, intercession of the saints and martyrs, or by coming into contact with relics and icons associated with such holy people. As such, these lived experiences become the reality of people who go through positive changes and improvements in their lives, and many of them border on the supernatural. For them, no true litmus test or scientific measurement can prove or disprove the authority of their lived experiences. The healing, miracles, and conversion are not necessarily restricted to just believers, parishioners, laity and clergy of the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. Therefore, the relics and icons and supernatural activity believed associated with them, are not just artifacts that became fetishes operating by principles of sympathetic and contagious magic, rather than serving as vehicles of religious and ethical ideas as Victor and Edith Turner suggested (Turner 1978, 197). Nor are they just representatives of bygone eras. To the faithful, they are living and active—not left-over traditions handed down from history as suggested by Walsham (2010, 13). The testimonies of the consultants are authentic descriptions and beliefs in the holy power of prayer, relics and icons.

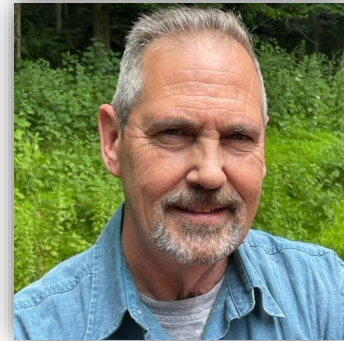
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Darrell Pinckney is a cultural anthropologist and archaeologist who has worked for several cultural resources management firms in the northeast. He is also an artifact conservator and a retired member of the Air National Guard. He is currently teaching for the Community Archaeology Program at Schenectady County Community College as an adjunct professor. Darrell lives with his wife, Linda, in Honesdale, PA.

Author email: darrell.pinckney@eastern.edu

Appendix

Age_____

Ethnicity_____

Area raised_____

Current location_____

Age at when regularly attending church_____

Current declaration of religion_____

Do you have access to any relics? (For example, I have a small relic from the Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha that I include in prayer.)

Name of saint or martyr associated with relic(s)?

Have you prayed to ask the saints or martyrs to pray for you (for assistance)?

How often do you pray (to include a saint or martyr in your prayers)?

Was the cause or concern attributed to illness, misfortune, request for guidance, other?

Have your concerns been answered through prayer?

Had any phenomenon occurred while using relics in prayer or during the time of need?

Do you pray regularly, daily, at home, other location?

Which saint do you include in your prayers most frequently?

Other religious identity held in past?