

# International Crusade for Holy Relics USA



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## THE GUARDIAN

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### New Editor

Dear fellow members of ICHR:



Let me introduce myself. My name is Samuel Mitchel and have been a member of the ICHR

since 1999.

I earned my B.A. degree in philosophy from the Pontifical College Josephinum and Master of Library Science from Indiana University. I am currently employed as the development manager for the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest (approved traditional order of priests) and a librarian at a local library.

I have a small farm where I raise registered purebred Scottish highland cattle.

It is my pleasure to assist Chev. Tom Serafin and the ICHR organization in compiling this newsletter. If you would like to contact me in order to submit future articles or suggestions, please contact me via email (smitchel@qserve.net). God bless you through the intercession of His Saints.

### When the Saints Go Up for Auction

A one-man crusade against

online relic sales is met with unholy indifference. By Jeff Sypeck

Feb. 20, 2001 | There's a story Thomas Serafin enjoys: During the Middle Ages, a traveling monk hoping to purchase a saint's relic for his monastery found little success and returned home disappointed. Luckily, he soon encountered a merchant who offered to sell him the skull of John the Baptist. The monk as dumbfounded. Hadn't he just seen the skull of St. John in a church during a recent visit to France? "That was the skull of St. John when he was a child," explained the merchant. "This is his skull when he was an adult."

To Serafin, a professional photographer and founder of the International Crusade for Holy Relics in Los Angeles, this little parable is a reminder that some things never change. Aided by some 200 members -- primarily Roman Catholics but also members of the Russian Orthodox, Byzantine and Anglican churches -- Serafin is on a mission to identify sellers of saints' relics and convince them of the error of their ways, or shut them down. But he's not roaming the lonely cloisters or muddy market squares of Europe; instead Serafin keeps a suspicious eye on the Internet's highly successful auction houses, which have revived the market for the earthly re-

lics of saints -- and sparked a conflict between an ancient religious tradition and the free-market ideals of the Internet.

Relics challenge our sensibilities in a skeptical age, but the modern world hardly lacks grotesque secular equivalents: Think of screaming fans flailing to catch Elvis Presley's sweat-drenched hankie or Michael Jackson coveting the bones of the Elephant Man.

Saints' relics occupy a decidedly more solemn tradition: They're venerated as reminders of Christian virtue, and miracles are believed to occur in their presence.

First-class relics -- pieces of a saint's bone or flesh -- are the most sacred. Second-class relics -- objects a holy person wore or owned -- are also highly valued. (Items that have touched other relics are known as third-class relics and can be found in many church gift shops).

Although relic veneration is as old as Christianity, abuse and fraud connected with relics peaked during the Middle Ages, prompting Chaucer to make his most memorably despicable "Canterbury Tales" character a corrupt preacher who hawks pigs' bones to gullible peasants. Later, an abiding interest in relics starkly separated Catholics from

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### Special points of interest:

- Official ICHRusa membership ring is now available. (see page 4 for image)
- Please visit the members forum at: [www.ICHRusa.com](http://www.ICHRusa.com) and register for sign in privileges.

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Protestants, and John Calvin railed venomously against them as evidence of corruption. In the 16th century, dozens of nails were said to be relics of Christ's crucifixion, more bones of Peter and Paul existed than either saint ever could have packed into his body and John the Baptist kept rearing his many problematic heads.

The modern canon law of the Roman Catholic Church strictly forbids the sale of first-class relics. But even though the law was reaffirmed as recently as 1983, relics still aren't the most popular subject among modern Catholics; to some clergy, they're unpleasant reminders of medieval superstitions and stereotypes. "I don't know anything at all about relics," sniffed one priest and canon lawyer in Washington. "I don't know anyone around here who would, either." In a modern church grappling with pressing social issues, it's even more rare to find anyone willing to blow the cobwebs of archaism off the concept of simony -- the sin of selling spiritual items and religious offices, named for New Testament heretic Simon Magus.

But electronic simony is on the rise; just ask Serafin, who sells his luridly titled report on the subject, "nEW JUDAS: Electronic Simony Exposed," on the ICHR Web site. The report documents the organization's clashes with some of the online auction community's inveterate relic dealers. Like most Internet-based correspondence, the e-mail ranges from righteous and determined to petulant and crude. One grumpy relic seller mocks Serafin's knightly title "Chevalier," bestowed by the relic-friendly royalty of Portugal, as French for the posterior of a horse." Others accuse the ICHR of

entirely unwholesome motives. "Since you're so busy exploring the 'bad sins' of others," writes a relic dealer in response to an ICHR scolding, "just between you and me, buddy, what's YOUR 'bad sin'??? With most right-wing nut cases like you I've met, it's usually something NASTY that has to do with the 6th or 9th commandments. See you at Confession. You poor, sick thing."

When the saints go up for auction | 1, 2: But Serafin has a little fun with his adversaries, too. In the documents he releases, he mischievously replaces his foes' names with "SIMON," a cheeky jab with damning connotations. Some of the e-mails reproduced in "nEW JUDAS" even bear witness to the justifications of relic-selling clergy: One nun -- Serafin dubs her SIMONITA" -- accurately points out that the Roman Catholic Church allows the sale of relics as long as it's clear that the container is for sale and the relic is a "gift." "It's a fine and Jesuitical quibble," she writes, "but if it's good enough for the Church, it's good enough for me!"

The ICHR has clearly dealt with a few sleazy hucksters. Last September, one of its most unrepentant opponents tried to sell "the air breathed by Jesus" on eBay. Serafin and his members were aghast, but the audacious auction was an obvious attempt to get a few cheap yuks and horrify ICHR's serious-minded crusaders. But not all online relic sellers resemble some slick Chaucerian caricature. Many are like the devout Catholic woman from China who simply wanted to get rid of a relic, unaware that her religion forbade its sale. "She thought owning it was 'spooky,'" Serafin explains.

Others consider themselves religious and confidently assert their own inter-

pretations of right and wrong. "I am a Catholic, but I do not blindly follow their dogmas," says Daniel Lopez Gonzalez of Puerto Rico, who recently sold "an old relic of the True Cross" on eBay for \$1,100. Gonzalez says that he buys far more relics for his own personal veneration than he ever sells, arguing that there's little difference between buying a relic from him and obtaining one legitimately from a religious order in exchange for a donation. "Whichever way you want to say it," he says, "a donation or contribution to the church -- any amount of money given in exchange for a relic -- is a sale."

"I have never sold a relic, just the reliquary," explains another dealer carefully. "The relic is always a gift." He points out that organizations like the ICHR are not officially sanctioned by the Catholic Church, and calls them "a bunch of renegades that just want to acquire relics for free."

Serafin and the ICHR "rescue" many relics by buying them, which isn't prohibited under church law. But their other options are severely limited. Whether laws pertaining to the sale of human remains apply to tiny chips of bone and flesh is still an open question, and legal remedies for relic theft are nearly nonexistent. In 1998, a Romanian thief who swiped a relic and other religious items from a French church was nabbed in Newark, N.J., and charged with a decidedly mundane crime: filing a false customs report. Fraud laws may cover the problem of fake relics -- but with deep and abiding faith riding on the answer, what prosecutor or judge would dare confirm or deny the authenticity of saints' bones, or of a chip of wood supposedly from the manger of the infant Jesus?

At times, Serafin and the

ICHR have persuaded online auction houses to close down some sales of first-class relics. Serafin has kind words for the staff of Amazon Auctions, where, he says, some staffers have even learned to recognize Latin phrases like *ex ossibus*, "from the bones of." "We don't have a policy that specifically prohibits the sale of first-class relics," explains Amazon Auctions spokeswoman Lizzie Allen, "but in the past we have removed relics that were reported to us. Also, human body parts are prohibited, therefore first-class relics will be prohibited in most cases."

Members of ICHR have also discussed the matter with lawyers for eBay. Although there's never a guarantee that a relic will be removed, "we do take it on a case-by-case basis," says eBay spokesman Kevin Pursglove. "If a user brings a complaint to our attention and we can determine that a relic includes human remains, it may be removed." But as of early February, eBay was still a veritable online charnel house of holy bones -- from well-known figures like St. Valentine to the more obscure St. Alphonsus Liguori. "Getting eBay to do anything is impossible," complains a frustrated Serafin.

Ronald Green, director of the Institute for the Study of Applied and Professional Ethics at Dartmouth College, suggests that a viable business can only do so much to assuage the concerns of its religious customers: "At issue here, of course, is basic freedom of commerce and the rights of individuals to sell items whose sale others religiously object to. Surely we don't want to cater to every religious objection to the sale of things. Should we forbid the sale of meat because Jains object to the killing of animals? Alcohol because some groups oppose its use?" But Green concedes that online auction houses don't want to become the object of a

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Catholic boycott, and should be willing to work with offended religious customers if enough complaints suggest a serious problem.

It's unlikely that Catholics will unite in their outrage over relic selling anytime soon. The archdioceses of Washington and Los Angeles did not respond to calls about online relic sales, and it took a call to the Vatican to find a church official who would discuss the subject. Monsignor Robert Sarno of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, the Vatican office that gathers evidence for canonizations and works to preserve relics, was appalled to learn that simple containers with small relics were selling on eBay for hundreds of dollars. "I'm disappointed that businesses would have such high disregard for people's religion by selling relics of deceased individuals proclaimed to be in heaven," he said from his office in Rome. "These are sacred objects." Sarno suggests that the Catholic Church's official involvement might only make the problem worse, and he commends the laypeople who are waging an unpopular crusade. But he concludes with a sigh: "I guess most people don't care."

Anecdotal evidence suggests that an indifferent clergy may be pumping both supply and demand for relics. Michael, an art dealer from Germany who sells relics online, says he knows of a cardinal who regularly browses antiques shops to stock his personal collection. Other relic sellers on both sides of the Atlantic report tales of cash-strapped monks and nuns whose vows of poverty don't prevent them from dropping by pawnshops to make a few quick bucks. Serafin himself says he was even heckled by a nun during a recent speaking engagement. "When a nun

calls you a cyber-Nazi, you know you're doing some good," he says, suggesting that his critics aren't seeing the larger picture.

"Listen," he says earnestly, "if we put the relics back in the box, we still have the lives of the saints -- reminders of how these people preserved their virtue, how they persevered." A relic, he explains, isn't just a dead piece of bone or flesh, but a reminder of the link between heaven and earth. "I think that's something most people can understand."

Interest in the saints themselves doesn't appear to be waning. In 1999, the relics of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, a French nun who died in 1897, attracted crowds in the tens of thousands when they were displayed in American churches and shrines. And Pope John Paul II may soon make St. Isidore of Seville, a seventh century archbishop who compiled an early encyclopedia, the patron saint of the Internet.

Although the actual remains of saints are an unpopular subject, Serafin allows himself an optimistic laugh, remembering what a sympathetic priest recently told him. "If I can hang on around 300 years," he says, with no doubt in his voice, "they'll be back in fashion." salon.com

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(About the writer Jeff Sypeck, a Washington writer, teaches medieval literature at the University of Maryland University College.)

### **Pope Gives Relic to Armenian Catholic Church Patriarch**

(Nov. 23, 2000 The Church World (Maine))

"Armenian Orthodox leader praises Pope's return of relic"



Vatican City (CNS) - Receiving a relic of his Church's patron saint, Gregory the Illuminator, from Pope John Paul II, the patriarch of the Armenian Oriental Orthodox Church said the return of the relic is a symbol of ecumenical progress. "In restoring this relic to the Armenians, the Catholic Church bears witness to the brotherhood between our two ancient Churches," said Catholicos Karekin II of Etchmiadzin, head of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Pope John Paul told Karekin II during a Nov. 9 evening meeting, "Let our prayer together be that the communion which we are experiencing today will open new ways to peace and reconciliation between us."







nastic/Pictish decorative work found in 8th century jewelry, ritual ornament and religious scrollwork. The original silver coating of the tiny wooden casket was gilded and its raised bronze mounts set with enamel and lapis lazuli. It is smaller than a man's hand, carved out of a single piece of wood:

4-1/4 inches long by 2-1/8 inches in height to the opening of the lid, by 2 inches deep. The ark-shaped lid is trapezoid, 1-3/4 inches high by 2-1/2 inches along the ridge, its gable ends forming equilateral triangles of 1-3/4 inches per side.

Its miniature scale (above illustration is approximately life-size) made it a portable shrine worn round the neck, usually by a guardian monk. Its association with Columba, the warrior saint, was believed to transmit the same potency in battle and the shrine was paraded before the Scots army prior to the Battle of Bannockburn, 1314. It is not unique in its use as a battle standard: both the relics (bone) and the crosier - baculum - of a saint were considered potent in vanquishing the enemy. It may be for this very reason that the Scots Chronicles record first king of both Picts and Scots, Cinaed (Kenneth) mac Alpin, sometime before AD849 transporting relics of Columba from Iona to a religious foundation in Dunkeld near his recently-conquered palace at Forteviot, former capital of the Pictish Kingdom. This may have been an effort on his part to display power through the saint and he may have taken over the foundation at Dunkeld because it was previously a powerful ecclesiastical centre founded by the

long-reigning and well-loved Pictish king, Constantine [Custantin], who died AD820, 20 years before the macAlpin takeover.

The house-shape of such reliquaries seems to have influenced later medieval sacrament houses' built into pre-Reformation churches in Scotland to keep holy vessels used in the sacrament.

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## Breacbannoch of St. Columba

Monymusk Reliquary, now in the Museum of Scotland, probably dating from the 8th century, was brought from Iona to Pictland and housed a relic of the island's founder Saint Columba.

It is mentioned in 12th century charters at Forglen near Turriff, where it was kept on behalf of the Monastery of Abirbrothock (Arbroath) with permission from William the Lion, King of Scotland granted in a Deed dated between 1178-1214 held in Arbroath Charter hest.

It remained in the custodianship of Forglen until the early 16th century when Forglen and the House of Monymusk were in Forbes hands; with transfer of ownership from Sir William Forbes, Bart. to Lord Cullen (Senator of the College of Justice, Sir Francis Grant of Cullen) in 1712, the shrine became part of the Grant collection. It was bought for the Nation in 1933.

Breacbannoch in Gaelic means the 'speckled peaked one' describing the Reliquary's Pictish decoration punched into silver panels which form a background of zoomorphic figures into which have been set bronze round, square and bird-beak shaped clasps. This 'speckling' is typical of mo-

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**YOUR SEALED PETITION WILL BE TOUCHED TO THE RELICS OF OUR LORD**

Please provide self addressed stamped envelope for return mailing



# Metropolitan Theodosius presents relics of St. Raphael to Antiochian Archdiocesan Cathedral

**BROOKLYN, NY** – On November 3, 2000, His Beatitude, Metropolitan Theodosius, Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, presented relics of Saint Raphael Hawaweeny of Brooklyn to the faithful of Saint Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral here.

The presentation took place during a Vesper Service attended by His Grace, Bishop Demetri, Auxiliary to the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America; a dozen priests from the OCA and AOCA; and hundreds of faithful who filled the historic cathedral.

On behalf of His Eminence, Metropolitan Philip of the AOCA, Bishop Demetri thanked Metropolitan Theodosius for the relics, which will be enshrined in the cathedral for veneration.

Saint Raphael, who was the first Orthodox Christian to be consecrated to the episcopacy in North America and was responsible for missionary work primarily among Middle Eastern immigrants during the early years of the 20th century, was canonized in special services at Saint Tikhon's Monastery, South Canaan, PA in May 2000. Saint Raphael was the founder of Saint Nicholas Cathedral during his early years in America. The present building is the second in the community's nearly 100-year history. The canonization followed a lengthy study of the saint's life and work by a joint Canonization Commission composed of representatives of the Orthodox Church in America and the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America.

During the presentation, Metropolitan Theodosius spoke on the legacy of Saint Raphael. The text of his sermon follows.

"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more.... I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the Gospel,

that I might share in its blessings" [1 Corinthians 9:19, 22-23].

"These words from Saint Paul's first letter to the Corinthians help to characterize his role as an apostle – as one sent out by the Lord to proclaim the Gospel of new and eternal life. These words of Saint Paul also help to describe the life and person of Saint Raphael of Brooklyn. Like the holy apostle, Saint Raphael was sent by the Lord into the world to offer the Word of Life to all people. As a missionary in North America the venerable Bishop of Brooklyn became "all things to all men" so that no one would be deprived of the Savior's generous offering to enter into the fullness of the Kingdom of God. And as the Son of God emptied Himself to be incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, Saint Raphael emptied himself – humbled himself – so that he could be unhindered by national and social boundaries.

"The life and work of Saint Raphael teach us that if the Orthodox Church, particularly the Church in America, is to undergo an evangelical renaissance nurtured by the creative energy of the Holy Spirit, there must be a desire to be free of all which hides and distorts the Gospel. National and social boundaries cannot – must not – be allowed to be drawn in our Churches. Much of the last century witnessed the weakening of our Church in America specifically because of the ethnic divisions which fostered the multiplication of national jurisdictions.

"Born in Syria, educated in Kiev and Halki, Saint Raphael utilized his God-given talents to build up the Church in America. Born in the East, the Lord guided Bishop Raphael to the West where he spent his life planting and watering the seeds of the Apostolic Faith. A son of the venerable Church of Antioch, he was the first Orthodox bishop to be consecrated in America. Called back to serve the Church in his native home-

land, Saint Raphael chose to remain here and serve the flock of Christ scattered across North America. He chose to bring the light from the East to the land where the Church had and continues to have the opportunity to act without political or religious oppression. Creating parishes for the Arab Orthodox in North America, Saint Raphael personified the inexhaustible breath and depth of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

"Indeed, Saint Raphael was a servant to all. He did not spare his life or energies, but poured out his life for the building up of the Body of Christ in America. He lived and died in America working to expand the growing Orthodox mission that had originated in Russian Alaska.

"The glorification or canonization of Saint Raphael affirms the sanctity of his life and labors. His glorification also affirms the commitment of our Church to spare nothing for the promotion of the Gospel.

"This evening we gather around the relics of Saint Raphael. We prepare to draw near and to venerate them.

They are now permanently placed in the Mother Church of the Antiochian Archdiocese where they are the sanctifying presence of one who labored for Orthodox unity in America. The relics of Saint Raphael now rest with the community that he founded and nurtured. They are the physical presence of our holy Archpastor who ceaselessly intercede for the unity of the Church in America which must show itself as a slave to all so more may possess the Gospel of new, transfigured and eternal life.

"Holy Hierarch Raphael, continue to sojourn with your missionary Church. By your prayers may we soon come to enjoy the sweetness of indissoluble unity founded on the incarnate Word of Truth, sustained by the Holy Spirit and bound eternally to the bosom of the Father. Amen." ■