

LETTERS

Noel Curren-Briggs writes:

I was recently reading *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* by John Boswell, Professor of History at Yale University, published by the University of Chicago Press (Phoenix Books) in 1980. In chapter 10 the author is discussing events which led up to the First Crusade, and note 33, p.279 is worth quoting *in extenso*:

'Nearly all modern scholars are agreed that this letter (from Alexius I Comnenus to Robert Count of Flanders) is a forgery, probably composed in the West shortly before the first crusade. There is much less agreement about who composed it and whether or not there may have been a letter from the emperor to the count which formed the basis of the surviving version, but the arguments are far too complex to be taken up here. I have used the text provided by C. Du Cange in his notes to the Alexiad (*Patrologiae cursus competus, Serie Graeca*), 131: 563-68 ...)

The relevant passage from this letter, which must date from the late 11th or early 12th century, reads as follows:

And since I prefer to be subject to you, the Latins, rather than have Constantinople taken by them [i.e. the Turks and Petschens], you should fight courageously ... It is better that you should have Constantinople than the pagans, since in it are preserved the most precious remains of the Lord: the pillar to which he was bound, the whip with which he was flogged, the scarlet robe with which he was clothed, the crown of thorns with which he was crowned, the reed he held in his hand instead of a scepter, the robe taken from him at the cross, the greater part of the wood of the cross on which he was crucified, the nails used to crucify him, *the linens found in the sepulcher after the resurrection ...*'

Noel Curren-Briggs goes on to comment: 'Of course one doesn't have to believe that all these relics were genuine - almost certainly the great majority were not. But the significance of this letter, be it forged or genuine, is this: it was believed in the West at the end of the 11th or beginning of the 12th century that among these relics in Constantinople there existed the burial cloths of Christ.'

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