

FAITH, HOPE, AND CHARITY
IN THE LIGHT OF THE SHROUD

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The Historical, Archeological and Apologetic Properties of the Holy Shroud

The considerations which we want to set forth presuppose that, through personal study, the reader has gained the knowledge and the recognition of what can be defined as the intrinsic reality of the Holy Shroud, that is:

—that the Turin Sheet is the "clean shroud" acquired by Joseph of Arimathea (Mt 27:57-60)

—that the negative imprint of That Corpse is the imprint of the body of Christ, and consequently

—that the physiognomy which appears in positive on the photographic plate is the natural portrait of Christ, produced while his body was deposited provisionally in the tomb awaiting a decorous burial.

The conviction of the authenticity of the Holy Shroud results from and is reinforced by visual contact with the Object, an experience shared by millions of visitors on the occasion of the Exposition of 1978. Visual confirmation entirely surpasses every study. All those who had the good fortune and the privilege to see the Shroud at close range and to scrutinize the tenuous, almost evanescent imprints which depict—without outlining—the body of Christ, can attest to this. Many times, skeptics and doubters have become supporters convinced of a reality which, while partly inexplicable, nonetheless seizes the viewer and draws him to acceptance.

We would like to add that the considerations which will be set forth do not pretend in any way to formalize a reality which can only be attained through faith.

Just as Jesus borrowed so many examples from daily life and in them and through them assured his listeners that the Trinitarian life is bestowed and developed in every creature; so can we find assistance in our search for the Hidden God by means of this perceptible reality which supersedes all others, not only as an archeological object of inestimable documentary value, but also, and above all, as a theological reference point because of the implications it poses and calls forth.

The need to know and to see the face of the divinity has been felt in every epoch. It is in man's nature to seek divinity not only in words and deeds, but also, if possible, in images which represent it. This was true in pagan antiquity and from the very first centuries of

Christianity. In fact, there are still extant many famous Holy Faces, created and inspired by the deep longing to represent the natural face of Christ.

The Holy Shroud unexpectedly satisfied this desire because, especially from the photographic negative which reproduces the countenance of Christ in its full humanity, giving us the Holy Face par excellence, we realize that we have before us not only a portrait, but the living, speaking likeness of the person of Christ. The great tragedy of Calvary is represented and presented anew before our very eyes, a reminder of the immensity of the Redeemer's sufferings.

Writing of the passion and death on the cross, the evangelists left very sober accounts, almost laconic; and without comment, although they knew very well, under certain aspects, what it meant to die on the cross. In compensation, the Holy Shroud offers a complete synthesis and the most minute analysis of circumstances we could never have imagined. The somatic imprints and the marks of the many sufferings (scourging, crown of thorns, piercing of hands and feet, wound in the side) are infinitely more expressive than any words.

For that reason, the Shroud has been called "The Fifth Gospel" and "The Passion according to the Shroud"; though the expressions do not seem completely appropriate. Our day has been called the "Age of the Image". Certainly the image has considerable impact, one might say a magic. Great masses of people, not bothering to read, gather their notions from the images in newspapers and magazines, from advertisements and the television; and this they esteem to be culture. One might then consider the Shroud a sign of the times, emblematic of our era, since by means of images we have discovered the physiognomy of Christ and the description of his Passion.

The Reality with Which the Holy Shroud Confronts Us

The first great reality which the sacred Sheet puts before us is that of the existence of Christ.

Jesus existed in flesh and bone, made like us; *factum ex muliere, factum sub lege*, as St Paul reminds us (Gal 4:4).

To ratify this reality, we report the declarations of two eminent scholars, Yves Delage and Henri Terquem, both non-believers who attentively followed, from the beginning, the developments of the polemics concerning authenticity of the Shroud after the first photograph was taken in 1898 by Secondo Pia—photo which revealed the negative character of the imprint.

Here are a few affirmations excerpted from the letter which Yves Delage sent to the director of the *Revue Scientifique*:

"I consider the Christ as an historical personage and I cannot see why one should be scandalised that a material trace of his existence should subsist.

"Shall I speak of the identification of the personage who left his image on the Shroud? ... On the one hand, we have the Shroud

probably impregnated with aloes, which places us in the Orient to the exclusion, it would seem, of Egypt; and a crucified man who has been scourged, crowned with thorns and pierced in the right side. On the other hand, a connection with history, legend and tradition which tell of the Christ having undergone in Judea the various treatments legible on the corpse whose image lies upon the Shroud ...

"Is it not natural to compare these two parallel series and ascribe them to the same subject? ...

"And if it is not the Christ, it is then some criminal of common law. How can we reconcile that with the admirable expression of nobility which one reads in this face?

"So then, everything well considered, I remain convinced that the image on the linen is a natural reproduction of a buried corpse ... As for identifying the personage with Christ, I believe, again all things well considered, that there are stronger reasons for admitting it than for rejecting it, and until proof to the contrary I acknowledge it as established."¹

After these considerations, Delage supports his reasonings with the exposition of a "calculation of probabilities" in reference to five exceptional circumstances which occurred in the passion and death of Christ and which are found equally clearly on the Holy Shroud. With a slight modification, we list them thus: scourging, crowning of thorns, perforation with nails of the wrists and feet, wound in the side, use of a shroud in that particular manner.

"Suppose that for each circumstance," Delage continues, "there was one chance in a hundred that it would be encountered in the case of another person; there is therefore only one chance in 100⁵, one chance in ten billions, that they would be found all together. I do not give those numbers, you understand, as having any pretension to exactitude, but as a figure meant to show the unlikelihood of a concurrence of all the conditions in the case of another person.

"The proof is evident; from the mathematical impossibility that it could have happened to a counterpart of Christ, one concludes that the Person of whom we speak could be no one but Him."

From Henri Terquem, a scholar of vast culture, author of two essays on the Shroud², we quote the concluding page of his second study (*Could the Shroud of Turin be the True Shroud of Christ?*). Written thirty years after the results of the 1931 photograph, it is a meditative and reasoned re-confirmation of the positions previously assumed on the question of authenticity:

"We have set forth all the material ascertainments made on the Shroud. The detailed study of all the stains in Paul Vignon's remarkable works, and the special studies of Dr Barbet concerning the wounds; exclude every hypothesis of the intervention of the hand of man. One can therefore say that "scientifically" the Shroud of Turin is a genuine photograph.

"Next, we have ascertained that all that we know about the torture of Christ, absolutely all, coincides with what the examination of the Shroud reveals, and that consequently the identity of the Man of the

Shroud appears established.

"We have set before the eyes of those who are inclined to read this study attentively, without any preconceived idea, favorable or unfavorable, and who are, above all, inclined to refer to the admirable work of Paul Vignon—we have set, we repeat, before their eyes the confirmations that they themselves could make. It suffices to look.

"It seems therefore that after this control, the scientific thesis of 1902 has received a definitive sanction and that the Shroud of Turin has henceforth acquired the indisputable right to be called 'THE SHROUD OF CHRIST'."

The second reality with which the Holy Shroud confronts us is the manifestation of suffering as proof and expression of love for the person for whom one accepts that suffering.

Jesus paid in person, suffered the inexpressible, as we can learn from doctors' descriptions of the various wounds that we see traced on the Shroud.

The innumerable lashes of the whip, the suffering caused by the crown of thorns, the truly lacerating pains produced by the piercing of the wrists with the consequent lesion of the median nerve; the wounds in the feet, the suspension from the patibulum, the efforts to breathe: give but a pallid idea of what death by crucifixion entails—and that following upon all the previous maltreatments.

But that is not all. A profound scholar of the Shroud, Rev. Edward Wuenschel, C.S.S.R., wrote these observations in an article of great interest:

"The crucifixion of Christ was infinitely more than a judicial execution; it was the voluntary immolation of the Man-God in expiation for the sins of the world. Yet above all it was the suffering of the human soul of Christ. He endured all the physical torments of the passion to the lees, suffering all the corporal effects; but the agony of his soul greatly surpassed even the worst pains inflicted upon his body³".

Matthew (26:36ff), Mark (14:32ff) and Luke (22:39ff), with brief remarks, allow us a glimpse of this torment of Jesus' soul: he began to feel sorrowful, overcome with anguish; *My soul is sorrowful unto death*. In agony, he prayed ever more intensely. In his human heart, Jesus went through all the horrors of the passion, which he foresaw in their minute details. Finally he fell prostrate upon the ground in total submission and supplication.

The physician Luke (22:44) records a detail not mentioned by Matthew or Mark. *Et factus est sudor eius sicut guttae sanguinis decurrentis in terram*. Only an intense psychical stress could have caused this rare phenomenon which evinces Jesus' state of mind in those moments of maximum moral suffering. We too, know by experience what it means to think about or anticipate imminent sufferings. One suffers more before the event than while it is actually taking place, for then one exerts all his strength to overcome the pain.

The Rev. Faber, in one of his works asks why in the world did Jesus want to suffer so many torments and die such a bitter death! He answers his question in these words:

"If we examine the human heart, we find that sympathy is aroused more by misfortune than by prosperity. God is love. If it could be said that He needs anything, we would say that He needs to be loved. Jesus' dominant thought was love—to love and to be loved. Since God created man inclined to sympathize with the unfortunate, He shouldered affliction in order to make himself loved by man, and, longing to be loved to the utmost, he submitted himself to the extreme calamity."

to be concluded in March, 1983

NOTES:

- 1) Yves Delage, *Le Linceul de Turin*, Revue Scientifique #22, 1902, pp 683-87
- 2) Henri Terquem, *L'authenticite du Linceul de Turin*, Paris 1902; and *Le Linceul de Turin serait-il le veritable Linceul du Christ?* Paris, 1936
- 3) Edward Wuenschel, C.S.S.R., *The Physical Cause of the Death of Christ*, Doctor Communis, 1962, pp 93-128
- 4) Rev. Faber, *Ai piedi della Croce*, Turin, 1880