

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

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This concludes the article begun in the December 1982 issue of SPECTRUM.

The third reality to which we arrive by studying the Shroud is the mystery-event of the Resurrection of Christ. It is opportune to insist on the expression 'mystery-event'. While the fact of the Resurrection stands in history as the complement of a succession of totally human events, it is for us essentially a veiled mystery and in a way is indirectly proven by the sum of circumstances which lead us to the threshold of the supernatural.

The translation of St John's famous passage (20:1-10) is scarcely faithful and scarcely felicitous. John enters with Peter into the tomb; *bands are on the ground and the napkin is folded in a place apart*.

This does not help us to understand the two disciples' tremendous discovery, for it does not convey to us the significance of the *linen cloths lying (linteamina posita)* and *the napkin rolled up in its place (Sudarium ... non positum sed involutum in unum locum)*, which is a translation more in harmony with and more adherent to the text of this episode which John, an eye-witness, narrates.

But why: *cloths lying* and *napkin rolled up in its place*? Because from the disposition of the linens—principally of the Shroud lying collapsed but not at all disturbed, and of the sudarium still in its place as when it was tied around the face—John understood that something extraordinary had happened, something supersensible, and that those objects, Shroud, sudarium and other linens, had become the visible signs of an invisible event.

The body of Christ, glorious, had passed through the various linens without disturbing them, while the sheet in which the corpse had been piously wrapped was impressed with those tenuous markings which, in a new fullness of time, would reveal the human figure of our divine Savior.

This exegetical interpretation is not new: it was already sustained by Lavergne (1961) and Balague (1968) and more recently by Feuillet* and Robinson. It seems to correspond most closely to the reality of the facts and to the text of John, who tells us he believed after having seen: *He saw and he believed*. Even some exegetes who are not favorable to the Shroud, such as Willam and Spadafora, support the opinion that

* See Andre Feuillet: "The Identification and the Disposition of the Funerary Linens of Jesus' Burial According to the Fourth Gospel" in SPECTRUM #4, Sept. 1982.

the funeral linens collapsed with the disappearance of the body through them. Landucci, who accepts the above explanation, observes:

There is no doubt that faith is a gift of grace. Therefore it cannot derive from pure critical reflection. However, it does respect human rationality, which requires the proof of credibility. Therefore the *true death* of Jesus as well as the *true Resurrection* of his living body, independently of the new mode of existence, must be seen as proven. ("Victor over Death", in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 15 April 1973) Unfortunately, many people do not interpret John's belief in the sense of true faith, but as a simple verification; but in vain, because between seeing and believing we must interpolate the summation of the things seen as well as the how and the why of many details, some of which emerge from memory.

John does not fail to reason:

- on what lies before his eyes;
- on what he had learned previously from the women who had been admonished not to seek among the dead the One who lives (Lk 24:5)
- on the reanimation of Lazarus, of the young boy of Naim and the daughter of Jairo to their former life;
- on the significance of the expression 'raise from the dead' repeated several times by Jesus in announcing his passion, death and resurrection (cf. Mt 16:21, 17:22, 20:18-19 and parallel passages);
- on the experience as a witness of Jesus' Transfiguration; and finally;
- on what might be the 'new life' of the Master.

The evidence of seeing brought him step by step to that level which was, one might say, the evidence of believing.

To conclude, we turn to the reaction of a friend — a non-believer — of Dr. Barbet, whose book, *The Five Wounds of Christ*, a study of the anatomic experiments made to clarify the details seen on the Shroud, had just been published. Barbet writes:

When I had published the first edition of my "Five Wounds", I went to the *Ecole pratique* to ask my old friend, Prof. Hovelaque, to read it. He was an ardent scholar of anatomy, which he taught at the Faculty of Paris, but he was far from being a believer. He approved, with growing enthusiasm, my experiments and my conclusions. When he finished reading, he put the booklet down and, becoming thoughtful, he remained silent for a moment. Then, suddenly exploding, with that wonderful frankness which our friendship had forged, he cried, "Well then, my friend? ... Jesus Christ rose again!" (Mais alors, mon vieux? ... Jesus-Christ a ressuscité?)

I have rarely had, in my life, an emotion so profound and so sweet as that reaction of a non-believer before a purely scientific work, from which he himself drew the incalculable consequences. I dare to hope that God has

rewarded him, for he died a few months later. (Barbet: *A Doctor at Calvary*, pg. 29)

Christ, then, has risen! If his corpse had remained permanently in the tomb or had it even remained longer than was necessary for the perfect formation of the image, the irreversible process of decomposition would have intervened and we would not have had the result which we see on the Holy Shroud.

One can make all the conjectures which fantasy can invent, but the reality which imposes is one only: that body abandoned the tomb in a manner which we do not know how to explain but which nonetheless we cannot deny.

Remarks to the effect that the Resurrection-event was born of the disciples' faith are worth nothing. The disciples' lives and, above all, their deaths, testify to a new reality, founded on rational bases, which gave a new direction to the history of humanity.

Our Response to the Three Stupendous Realities Proclaimed by the Holy Shroud

The Holy Shroud puts before my eyes the person of Christ in the fullness of his humanity, classifiable in a determined ethnic group. Therefore I must believe *humanly* — that is, according to what the so-called cultural disciplines offer me — what Christ did and said. Gradually this human knowledge can bring one to a superior knowledge of the faith, and here it is fitting to report an extract from the discourse of Paul VI, given during his visit to the North American Pontifical College (22 Feb. 1970), in which the Pontiff described the process which should operate in every person who confronts the fundamental problem of his own existence:

This is a knowledge (of the person of Christ) which appears to be easy and instead it is mysterious; a knowledge which seems to be offered to all and instead it is reserved for some; a knowledge apparently abstruse and instead it becomes, of itself, luminous, majestic and loving; a knowledge which seems to be one like many others and instead it is the requisite for explaining all the others; a knowledge which appears indifferent to our lives and instead it is the source of our true and eternal life.

And it is this knowledge which unfolds in the Gospels; it is the key which unlocks the secret. Jesus is known by the people around him as the son of the carpenter. Others recognize him as the son of David; others as a prophet and still others as the Precursor, John the Baptist revived, or one of the Prophets; others finally see him as the Christ, Son of the Living God. And it is under this title that Jesus is condemned to death . . . and on the power of this title Jesus rose from the dead and lives in eternity. (Teachings of Paul VI, *Poliglotta Vaticana VIII*, 1970)

To believe in Christ *supernaturally* might be more arduous because in this mysterious step one encounters the gratuity of God's gift and the free response of his creature, who can accept or refuse the offer proposed to him.

But to reach God one cannot pass except through Christ. We can imagine him as the central pillar of a bridge with two spans joining the opposite shores of a river. One span is that of reason, which from the worldly shore brings us to the central pillar, Christ, in the mystery of his Incarnation. The second span is that of faith and revelation, which, from the central pillar, Christ, Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, immits us into the infinity of the Father. Reason and faith are therefore the base of all our thinking, acting and believing. No person is without the power of reason. No Christian is without faith. Reason offers me the preliminaries indispensable for belief. Faith goes beyond reason without humiliating our personality. Faith and reason do not exclude each other; they harmoniously integrate. To conclude these reflections on the first response which we owe to Christ for the gift he has given us to know him in the aspects of his perfect humanity, we cite again some words of Paul VI, taken from his address to the National Congress of the Italian Society of Pathology (31 Oct. 1969).

(The Church) is not afraid of scientific progress; on the contrary, it honors and encourages science and favors its better utilization for the welfare of humanity. It is recognized that science, like all the other human values, has an important function, not only with regard to the perfective evolution of man, but also in the ever-increasing discovery of God, of his works, of his mystery; of God, from whom revelations and reason, grace and nature, derive like two channels of truth and of life, having the same source and converging at the same harbor. Every scientific conquest constitutes a better possibility of approach between God and man. (Teachings of Paul IV, *Poliglotta Vaticana VII*, 1969)

The second response is actualized in the acceptance of one's own suffering and the mitigation of the suffering of our brothers in recompense for all that Christ suffered for me and for them.

It can be a rather difficult response to make because one instinctively shrinks from suffering. Only a radical and profound spirit of faith —object of our first response—can help us to give this concrete proof of love for God and for our brothers.

Why does suffering exist? To this most anguishing of all human problems, Calvary alone gives a constructive answer.

And without making useless rhetoric, we must add, to counter those who do not resign themselves to accept suffering or deride those who have the courage to confront it with serenity, that only Christianity offers the means to confront with fortitude these afflictions inevitable

in every human existence.

In every suffering lies concealed the seed of new life provided that, treasuring the appeals and the teachings of Jesus, we know how to make that seed grow. Concerning the sickness and death of Lazarus, Jesus said: *This sickness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it* (Jn 11:4). In the episode of the healing of the man born blind, we read that the disciples asked Jesus: Master, who has sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind? And Jesus answered: *Neither the man sinned nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him* (Jn 9:2-3). And again, Jesus' words to the disciples on the road to Emmaus: *Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and so enter into his glory?* (Lk 24:26).

The motive behind the redemption was love. The motive which brings us to receive redemption is again love, and the point of encounter is sacrifice, suffering in its most varied aspects.

It is not necessary to add other words to affirm our response. We know how to elevate pain and how to elevate ourselves above pain. However dejected or exhausted we may be, we never suffer without a purpose, and we could even reach the threshold of joy, as Leon Bloy wrote in his *Diary* on 27 February 1910:

I suffered voluntarily and by a formal vow for about thirty years ... many more than what was said or written; and for all the riches of this world I would not want not to have had that terrible life which placed me at the threshold of joy.

The man who does not suffer or who does not want to suffer is a disinherited son of the Son of God, who wedded pain; because only he who consents to suffer can glimpse the value of his own soul.

Expressions no less plain and cogently obligating were pronounced by Paul VI at the Lenten Station of St Sabina in 1970:

The Church, too, needs to be saved by someone who suffers, someone who carries within himself the passion of Christ. The passion of Christ must be complemented in our suffering. Our portion may be small, but it will be something to offer for the redemption of the world if we learn this art which is exclusive to the School of the Lord; the art of knowing how to suffer, the art of suffering for the sake of redemption, for goodness, for the restoration of the divine order, to bring back life where there is death. (Teaching of Paul VI, *Poliglotta Vaticana VIII*, 1970)

But in order to arrive at such goals our life must be mingled with the thought of God and our conduct must be an operation interwoven with love. On this argument we can do no less than to quote some thoughts from Pope John Paul II's radio address to the faithful gathered in St Peter's Square on Sunday, 24 May 1981, while he lay

confined at the Gemelli Polyclinic after the attempt on his life eleven days earlier. Not only do these words offer encouragement and comfort to those who suffer, but they also furnish a living instance of how one can and should accept suffering in his own life:

Today I desire to address myself in a special way to all the sick. Infirm like them, I wish to express a word of comfort and of hope.

When, shortly after my election to the Chair of Peter, I came to visit the Gemelli Polyclinic, I said that I wanted to "apply my papal ministry especially to those who suffer".

Providence has disposed that I should return to the Gemelli Polyclinic as a patient. I now reaffirm my conviction of that time; suffering accepted in union with the suffering Christ has its own incomparable efficacy for the actualization of the divine plan of salvation. I will repeat here with St Paul, *I rejoice to suffer for you, and what is lacking in the suffering of Christ I complete in my flesh for the benefit of his body, which is the Church.* (Col 1:24)

I invite all the sick to unite with me in offering their afflictions to Christ for the good of the Church and of humanity. May Mary Most Holy be your support and comfort. (*L'Osservatore Romano*, 25-26 May 1981)

Thus we arrive to the third response which we must give to the corresponding reality: Christ is risen.

The response is to pledge oneself to live in hope, in expectation and in function of that event in which we believe.

We try to conceive what the resurrection might be, musing on the tendencies we feel in ourselves to live fully, totally, forever in joy. The soul will re-unite with the glorious body in a twinkling for a life without end, because at last it will have entered into eternity. This unshakable confidence is founded on the word of God, who does not deceive and does not go back on his promise. Here is what St Paul says about Christ's Resurrection and ours:

I transmitted to you first of all what I myself received: that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; that he was buried and rose from the dead on the third day, according to the Scriptures, and appeared to Cephas and then the Eleven ... Now if we preach that Christ rose from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection from the dead? If there is no resurrection from the dead then not even Christ has risen. But if Christ did not rise again, it follows that our preaching is vain, vain also your faith. And we are also found to be false witnesses to God because we have testified against God, saying that he raised Christ, while he did not raise Christ if the dead do not rise. In fact, if the dead do not rise, neither did Christ

rise. And if Christ did not rise, your faith is vain and you are still in your sins. Therefore also those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If it is only for this life that we put our hope in Christ, then we are the most miserable of men. But Christ did rise from the dead, first-fruit of those who sleep in the grave. For as death came by a man, so also by a man has come resurrection from the dead. As in Adam all men die, so in Christ all will be brought back to life; each one in his own order: first the Christ, who is the first-fruit, then at his coming, those who belong to Christ. (I Cor 15 passim)

St Paul's consoling expressions, which need no comment, should be assimilated and become life-bearing ideas, imparting to our brothers joy, serenity, trust, optimism ... the human virtues of Christian hope, the theological virtues equal to faith and charity.

In the introduction to a book by Hynek, *The Physical Aspect of Jesus*, one reads:

I believe that very few people realize the true significance of this Burial Shroud. It is a very particular grace. In an era in which humanity moves ever farther from Christ, he himself returns among us to convince many of his divinity; to convince and preserve many in the holy faith.

In his Gospel, John presents Jesus as the supreme manifestation of God the Father in history and as the mystery-sacrament to accept for one's own salvation. Similar considerations can be made about the Holy Shroud. As Christ is the manifestation of the Father, so the Shroud is the manifestation of Christ, according to a plan of love which we must return in kind and which is concretely expressed by us in faith, hope, and charity.