

Iconography and Photography, Windows to Divine Mercy

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The science and exactness of photographic imagery of the Shroud, coupled with the spiritual, symbolic and faith filled fluidness of iconography, symbolize the marriage of science and theology, faith and reason (*fides et ratio*) (1). The photographic image of the Crucified Savior on the Shroud, which is of very recent origin as far as imagery of Jesus goes (2), is backed up by the historical and theological aspect and knowledge of the Passion of Christ and the Shroud in and of itself. The photographic science of recent origin has a masculine quality and traditional iconography which comes from the Bride of Christ, which is the Church (3), and is of ancient origin, has a feminine quality. Another correlation is that both use light as their source: photography uses created light to form an image while iconography uses the Light of Christ as the basis of the holy image. Photography using created light has allowed us to glimpse the result of the Light of Christ and the true template of all icons, the Shroud. The complementarities between the two give us a model to follow in our lives and it also creates a doorway for us to enter into the fullness of the mystery of the Incarnation (4). In His mercy the Lord has allowed us to experience these things in order to draw us to Himself, if we are open.

The correlation between the Shroud of Turin and the liturgical use of the Epitaphios Icon in the Eastern Church is strikingly obvious. (5) One only needs to look to the historical path of the cloth (6) and the various feasts in the Church, both in the East and in the West, not to mention the actual prayers used in the liturgies and the scriptural readings and references that are used. The custom of sprinkling rose water to symbolize the anointing of the Body with spice and children placing flowers on the icon in the *kouvouklion* (canopied table representing the Holy Sepulcher) are traditional reminders of what took place when Christ's Body was removed from the Cross and placed in the tomb (7).

I desired to create an image likened to the traditional Epitaphios Icon. I drew an original appropriate template which is anatomically in correlation to the photographic image of the actual suffering of Christ imprinted on the Shroud by the Light of Christ during the Resurrection. I reflected that in having done it in this way I had unintentionally and surprisingly brought the two spiritual focuses of the East and the West into one on the panel, and thus brought about in a symbolic way the unity of the entire Body of Christ (the Church) for which He prayed for from His depths (9,10). For the East meditates on the Transfigured Light of Christ our God, which caused the Image(11), and the West meditates on His saving Passion and Sacred Humanity, of which the Shroud Image reflects.

Thus, it is my prayerful hope that in some small way it may give those Christians who view it the courage to follow Jesus more fully and forgive one another from our hearts for the times we have hurt one another in the past (12), and so to lovingly embrace one another united under His banner of Divine Mercy, which is the Shroud of Turin. We will then be more effective witnesses to the truth He has revealed and draw the world to His side, which is the font of Divine Mercy (13).

I wish to leave you with this quote of the Servant of God, Pope John Paul II:

“The Shroud! What an eloquent message of suffering and love, of death and immortal life! It enables us to understand the conditions Jesus wished to endure before ascending into heaven. In its dramatic eloquence, this most precious Linen offers us a most significant message for our life: the source of all Christian life is the redemption won for us by the Savior, who for our sake took on our human condition, suffered, died and rose again. The Holy Shroud speaks to us of all these things. It is a unique witness.” (14)

1. *Encyclical Letter Pope John Paul II Fides et Ratio #5 from the Introduction: “Anthropology, logic, the natural sciences, history, linguistics and so forth—the whole universe of knowledge has been involved in one way or another. Yet the positive results achieved must not obscure the fact that reason, in its one-sided concern to investigate human subjectivity, seems to have forgotten that men and women are always called to direct their steps towards a truth which transcends them. Sundered from that truth, individuals are at the mercy of caprice, and their state as person ends up being judged by pragmatic criteria based essentially upon experimental data, in the mistaken belief that technology must dominate all.”*
2. *Date of the first photograph of the Shroud of Turin by Secundo Pia, 1898*
3. *Catechism of the Catholic Church, ARTICLE 9, Paragraph 2. The Church—People of God, Body of Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit*
4. *Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II-REDEMPTOR HOMINIS, III-13*
5. *The Veneration of the Holy Shroud according to The Byzantine Rite Tradition. Byzantine Leaflet Series, No. 7, Byzantine Seminary Press, 1977*
6. *The Blood and the Shroud: New Evidence That the World's Most Sacred Relic Is Real, Ian Wilson*
7. *The Veneration of the Holy Shroud according to The Byzantine Rite Tradition. Byzantine Leaflet Series, No. 7, Byzantine Seminary Press, 1977*
8. *God's Human Face, Christoph Cardinal Schonborn, Ignatius Press 1994*
9. *John 17:17-23 Jesus speaking to His Father: “Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world. And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth. I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me.” NAB,*
10. *Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint*
11. *The Mystical Shroud: An Ecumenical Perspective, James E. Damon, Eastern Christian Publications, 2006*
12. *International Theological Commission MEMORY AND RECONCILIATION: THE CHURCH AND THE FAULTS OF THE PAST December 1999, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_2000_0307_memory-reconc-itc_en.html*
13. *Diary of St. Faustina Kowalska, notebook One-I(St. Faustina speaks here of the Divine Mercy Image being the ‘font of mercy’ and the ‘throne of mercy’. Interestingly, August 16, 944 A.D. when Shroud is brought to Hagia Sophia at Constantinople it is placed on the altar (the Throne of Mercy). Eucharistic symbolism or coincidence? Perhaps another liturgical clue.*
14. *From Pope John Paul II's homily for the Pastoral Visit to Vercelli and Turin, May 1998*

AFTERWORD

I would like to mention a word of gratitude to Vladislav Andrev, founder of the Prosopon School of Iconology. Though I am a student of this school and method of iconography, I want to state out of complete respect for these people who have taught me their Russian method of using traditional materials and the theology behind it, my work presented here is not representative of their style. Though it is painted using the egg tempera method on a birch panel prepared with gesso and has been gilded in the traditional method, I take full and complete responsibility for this piece since it is from my own soul and does not represent the Prosopon School of Iconology. It is from my own original drawing based on the anatomical features present in a photograph of the Shroud of Turin which I then used as a template for my panel.

However, I also wish to state that I am in no way ashamed of Him in His extreme humility as I have depicted it, based on photographs of the Shroud of Turin, just moments before the Shroud was pulled over His Sacred Face and Broken Heart and the stone rolled into place at the Holy Sepulcher. I associate myself with Him in that I have painted my heart. This is what Christ must have looked somewhat like to the Theotokos on that Great Friday when He emptied Himself. The Apostles were prepared for this moment by the Transfiguration in order to give them HOPE that what you are viewing is NOT the last word for humanity! Because of Christ, we also have the hope of seeing the Father. Jesus is the Lamb of God.

I took this picture with my mind in 2000 when I saw the actual Shroud in Turin on exposition for the Great Jubilee. It remained latent for seven years in my heart and then took me two months to paint.