



Frontispiece of the work, *Iesu Christi Stigmata* by Card. Paleotti, commented by Fr. Daniele Malloni. Edition of Venice, MDCVI.

THE SPLENDOR OF THE HOLY SHROUD*

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At the beginning of his commentary on *Spiegazione della Santa Sindone*¹ by Card. Alfonso Paleotti, archbishop of Bologna, Father Daniele Malloni, hierosolymite², appropriately remarks on the mystery of the precious Relic.

Wisdom hidden in mystery³ is Christ Jesus crucified for us, wrapped and hidden in the novel and sublime mystery of the Holy Shroud; for the Shroud, Bearer of Christ, is verily mystery, and of the highest order. For if mystery is profound and divine secret, why shall we not recognize in the Holy Shroud the highest of mysteries, inasmuch as it contains abstruse and most deeply hidden secrets of the most holy Passion of Christ, enclosed, as it were, in a sacred imprint?⁴

Mystery because of the Object it represents and to which it renders testimony, the Holy Shroud is also mystery for the manner in which the imprints upon it were made, since, to produce them, providential circumstances certainly had to come together; first of all, the Resurrection of Christ.

But as in the hymn *Vexilla Regis prodeunt*—composed at Poitiers around 569 on occasion of the arrival of a relic of the Holy Cross, given to St. Radegonde by Justin II, emperor of the Orient (and adopted, as we know, into the Roman Breviary)—St. Venanzio Fortunato gave prominence to the splendor of the mystery of the Cross:

*Vexilla Regis prodeunt
Fulget Crucis mysterium ...*

so also Fr. Malloni calls attention to the splendor which radiates from the mystery of the Holy Shroud.

The celestial splendor which flashes from the most holy effigy of Christ imprinted on the Shroud savors not of human but divine artifice. Some kind of hidden energy shines out of the Sheet and fills those who look upon it

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with heartfelt stupefaction; and like the sword wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod (cfr. I Sm. 21:9) with which David killed Goliath, this force pierces through and through to the point that mind and spirit divide, as do the joints and marrow (cfr. Heb. 4:12) and wounding the heart of the beholder with the dagger of remorse, dissolves him in tears.

Other images were drawn from this Original.

However, the painter could not conceive in his mind nor express with his brush that splendor which by divine agency breathes forth from the Linen, but was compelled to acknowledge and confess that a certain radiance in the Shroud is a thing divine.⁵

To say that the mystery of the Holy Shroud resplends is to say that the spiritual light irradiating from the sacred Sheet emanates from the profundity of the Reality which it represents and to which it bears witness; *in itself* supremely intelligible, therefore luminous; for us beyond comprehension, therefore mysterious and inscrutable.

This Reality is Jesus Christ dead and risen for us; and, according to Fr. Malloni's acute and theologically precise observation, the light or the splendor which shines forth is the divine force by which the death and resurrection of the Saviour effectively bring about our salvation.

But as the splendor which radiates from beautiful things does not touch or stir us unless it comes into contact with our esthetic faculties (*pulchra sunt quae visa placent*⁶, as the ancients used to say), so in order that the divine force released from the mystery of Christ can really produce its salutary effect in each one of us, we must place ourselves in contact with Him through faith and through the Sacraments of the faith: "The effusion in man of the salvation by Christ is ... through the cultivation of good will, with which man clings to Christ and thus all which each one obtains from Christ is a personal gain"⁷.

Now it is not difficult to understand how much our faith is nourished by pious and devout contemplation of the Holy Shroud and of the mysteries it represents; in adoration before the sacred Sheet, our whole spirit submits itself to Christ and expands to receive the grace which flows from Him. Thus is it given us to receive the splendor of the Holy Shroud and, through it, to touch the mystery.

The hidden force shining from the sacred Sheet is similar, Fr. Malloni observes, to the force of the divine Word which, according to St. Paul, "penetrates to the division of mind and spirit, of the joints and marrow, and discerns the thoughts and the intentions of the heart"⁸.

When, in silent absorption, we meditate the Word of God and the "Light" kindles in the depths of our spirit⁹, each one of us feels the obligation to declare himself disposed to accept it or to reject it; to choose between the works of the spirit and the works of carnality. It is

thus that the Word of God requires the secret intentions of our heart to reveal themselves¹⁰ and from that moment, in secret, each one of us is "judged".

Now this is the judgment:
 the Light came into the world
 and men loved the Darkness
 better than the Light
 because their works were evil.
 For everyone who does evil
 hates the Light and does not come to the Light
 lest his deeds should be exposed for what they are.
 But he who practices the truth
 comes to the Light
 so as to show that his works are done in God¹¹.

In this "judgment" appears all the "efficacy"⁸ of the divine Word.

Likewise, face to face with the Holy Shroud, the secret intentions of our heart are obliged to manifest themselves. When with deep faith and sincere devotion one contemplates the mysteries which the Holy Shroud represents, serious resolutions and holy proposals unfailingly arise in our innermost being. Because the "dagger of compunction" —*compunctio timoris et poenitentiae*, but also *compunctio dilectionis et contemplationis*—wound the heart of the contemplant, melting him to tears; tears not of melancholy sadness, but of intimate, tranquil joy, generated by the sentiment of God's presence and by the yearning for heaven.

Here the force, the splendor, the supreme spiritual beauty of the Holy Shroud is unveiled.

Which, like every beautiful and sublime reality, makes the beholder beautiful. Wrapped in that warm, luminous radiance, he is transformed and really becomes, as Jesus wants, a "child of the light"¹², ready to bear the fruits of the light.

NOTES:

1. *Explanation of the Holy Shroud*
2. Card. Alfonso Paleotti, archbishop of Bologna, accompanied St. Charles Borromeo when, in 1582, he made his second pilgrimage to the Holy Shroud in Turin. Cfr. Mons. P. SAVIO, *Ricerche storiche sulla S. Sindone*, Turin, 1957, pg. 304. In 1606 Fr. Daniele Malloni, Italian of Jerusalem, interposed his commentaries between the chapters of Card. Paleotti's book.
3. I Cor. 2:7
4. "Sapientia in mysterio abscondita est Christus lesus pro nobis crucifixus, novo quodam atque sublimi sacrosanctae Sindonis mysterio obvolutus et absconditus: mysterium enim, et illud quidem maximum, Christifera Sindon fuit. Si enim mysterium altum quoddam divinumque arcanum est, cur in sacrosancta Sindone mysterium non agnosceremus amplissimum, quippe quae occulta quaedam maximeque recondita sacratissimae passionis Christi arcana veluti sacro signaculo clausa contineat?" *Iesu Christi Stigmata Sacrae Sindoni impressa ab ALPHONSO PALAEOTO Archiepiscopo II Bononiensi explicata, mellifluis elucidationibus. . ad uberrimos contemplationis fructus hauriendos ... accommodata, quamplurimis quaestionibus ... necron aeneis iconibus ... exornata ... auctore Fr. DANIELE MALLONIO s. Congr. Hieroy. divin. Litt, publico interprete. Venetiis MDCVI. Mallonii Elucidationes, In caput primum.*
5. "Fulgor qui e sacratissima Christi effigie Sindoni impressa coelitus emicat, non humanum sed divinum redolet artificium; ac nescio quid latentis energiae fulget e linteo, quod aspicientes intimo quodam stupore replet, ac veluti gladius, quo David Goliath occiderat, involutus ephod (I Sam. 21:19) pertingit usque ad divisionem animae et spiritus, compagum quoque ac medullarum (Heb. 4:12), et aspicientium pectora compunctionis iaculo pungens solvit in lacrimas. Licet autem ex eodem prototypo alia extracta sint simulacra, pictor tamen fulgorem illum, qui divinitus spirat e linteo, neque mente assequi neque penicillo exprimere valuit, sed rem divinam, quendam radium in Sindone, agnoscere et fateri coactus est.- Op.cit. *Mallonii Elucidationes, In caput secundum.*
6. Beautiful are those things which please the eye.
7. ST. THOMAS: *Summa Contra Gent.*, lib. IV cap.55 #27.
8. Heb. 4:12. Vivus est enim sermo Dei et efficax et penetrabilior omni gladio ancipiti, et pertingens usque ad divisionem animae ac spiritus, compagum quoque ac medullarum, et discretor cogitationum et intentionum cordis.
9. John 8:12; 'Then, other times, Jesus spoke to them saying, 'I am the Light of the World ...' And again, Apoc. 22:16; 'I am ... the radiant Daystar.' That is why St. Peter says (II Pet. 1:19), 'And we hold for more certain the word of the prophets, to which you do well to pay attention; like a lamp which shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Daystar rises in your hearts.'
10. Luke 2:34-35: 'He will be a sign of contradiction ... so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.'
11. John 3:19-21
12. Eph. 5:9; 'Now walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good ...'