

The Holy Shroud and the Classroom - Tony Luby Ph.D

Easter. 1979. A crowded congregation exits. Our Lady of Lourdes RC church, East Kilbride, south of Glasgow. A new town full of possibilities for a practical, hard-headed people. People of faith.

I was, and still am, forty years later, one of these people of faith; and, yes, a practical, hard-headed faith. The hard-headedness is a fruit of pounding the beats of the *No Mean City* streets of Glasgow; the city of my birth and early years. To deprive of liberty, to convict of a crime, requires evidence. And faith? Yes, faith is a gift, undeserved – but this gift complements reason.



Dr. Tony Luby

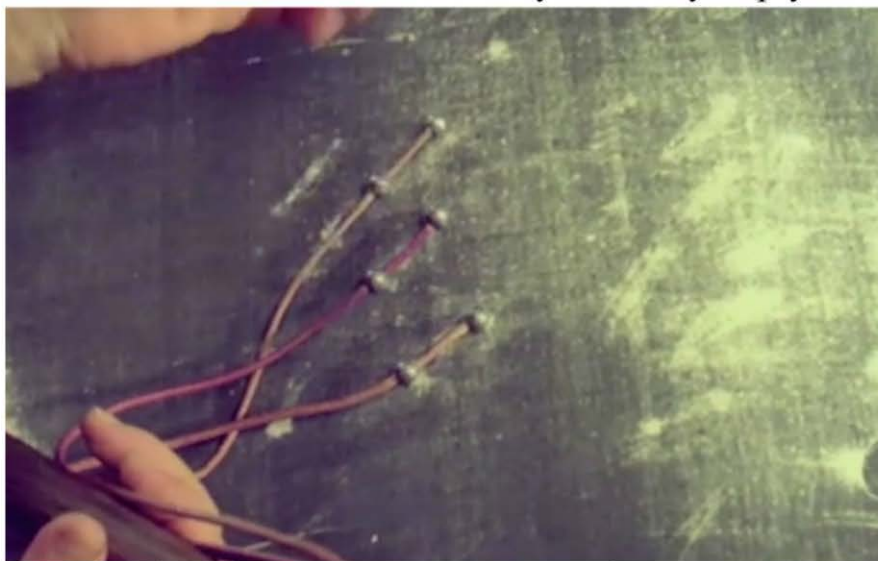
Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth...” (Pope St. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 1).

And the truth to be contemplated? Nothing less than the Holy Shroud of Turin.

Back to 1979. A crowd, happy, milling, content. And a face, a voice, that I can't recall but for which I am profoundly grateful says “*Tony, watch it, Thursday, it's for you*”. *Watch what?* David Rolfe's mesmerising *Silent Witness* and its first airing on television.

And, most certainly, it was for me... and for millions of others too. And like those other millions I watched – fascinated, absorbed, entertained and, then, in one gripping moment, belief transformed to conviction.

Faith grounded in reason. And that moment? Mgr. Giulio Ricci places a replica Roman flagrum based on archeological specimens against the wounds of the man on the Shroud...and they match. My neophyte faith



Close-up from The Silent Witness

is excited. Baptized, but not raised Catholic, I had been confirmed only a year earlier. But it was the hard-headedness, the search for evidence, the police training that “kicked in.” Mirrored so well by the STURP team. How can this be so? If the Shroud is a mediaeval fake, then how can a forger be certain that their flagrum is Roman? And from the 1st century? And so - a journey begins...

This journey takes me into the classroom. A place for learning, for faith and for reason; but a place also for joy and for mystery. As I swapped pounding pavements for treading classroom floors, I left behind my uniform but not my training, not my life experiences. I first entered a classroom as a student teacher, that same year, 1979. And it was in the next two decades, the 1980s and the 1990s that I was formed as a teacher; and both the police and the Shroud performed crucial roles in this formation.

In the bleak Burnbank housing scheme I noted, as a student teacher, that the primary school children were attentive, obedient when we learned of the story of the British police services. But this was at a distance – historical, somewhat remote – and their interest was reserved. But secondary school students from the rugby heartlands of the Scottish Borders? They needed “meat”. And this meat was the Year 11 Making Moral Decisions course in which I introduced real-life case studies. The Alexandria Axe-Man, Bonhill Bungle, Cathkin Capers and Dalmarnock Dilemma. True stories of a revenge-seeking brother-in-law; a police slip-up enabling a cheeky burglary; a snake-like but rapid police car chase from the centre of Scotland’s biggest city to the edge of Europe’s largest housing estate; and a cowering of policemen as the barrel of a rifle emerges from a window shutter.

All of these grabbed attention, excited interest and discussion and promoted sound learning. But what excited my interest? The Shroud of Turin. And this too became a regular feature of teaching. Initially, the students watched Silent Witness video in two parts. There would be an initial viewing focus – points to pause, to think about. Follow-up questions. Discussion. As far as possible, focusing on evidence.

And looking back, I was fair. I made it clear, “warned” even that the bulk of the evidence points to the Shroud being genuine. But, like a court case, it only needs one piece of evidence to bring a whole case crashing down. That’s all they had to find – one piece of evidence. And the students liked this evidence-based approach. Not only in the heart of the Borders in the 1980s but also in Royal Deeside in the 1990s. And not just countryside folk but city dwellers too. Teaching later in the heart of the Granite City of Aberdeen, study of the Shroud of Turin became a mainstay of the religious education (RE) course at Robert Gordon’s College (RGC). And this turn of the millennium witnessed the advent of internet-based approaches to RE. Indeed, the RGC students were enabled to email the courteous and scholarly Barrie Schwartz host of www.shroud.com the first and exemplary calling point for Shroud devotees. And the quality of their work was affirmed by the Learning Schools Program established by RM and the Open University in conjunction with the Scottish Council for Education Technology.

By the mid to late noughties students were able to access other top class websites such as www.shroudstory.com and www.shroud2000.com and I incorporated the Shroud within a schoolbook Trial of the Resurrection. This book set out the argumentation and evidences for the Resurrection of Christ within an imaginary story that focuses on the World Court in the Hague, Netherlands. I continued this theme with a subsequent schoolbook, *Introducing Philosophy of Religion: A Critical Reader*. It strikes me now that it would be good to have such a book about the Shroud of Turin set against the background of an international trial. Forgive me for wearing my police hat again, but many young people are uninformed about their duty as a citizen to attend a court if they are summonsed as a witness or as a juror or as an accused. A by-product of using these books with my students is that it acquainted them, to some degree, with rules of evidence and court procedures.

It is easy to imagine a Shroud of Turin workbook that addresses current GCSE courses e.g. OCR GCSE Religious Studies component group 2: Religion, philosophy and ethics in the modern world from a religious perspective in which the four themes of study include dialogue within and between religions and non-religious beliefs. The theme of dialogue sits well with religion and science and, arguably, there is no topic more suitable than a study of the Shroud of Turin. Indeed, I have just completed a PhD at the University of Glasgow with a focus on dialogic skills in RE – and the quality of the students’ paired conversations was eye-opening. Coupled with Brenda Benton’s heart-warming response from a teenager in the Winter issue (no.88) of the Shroud Newsletter that study of the Shroud “...is better than Netflix!” (p43) - then the Shroud of Turin offers an educational approach in which “Wisdom begins in wonder.”

Borrowing from the format of the “greatest radio program of all time” (BBC News Online, 12 February 2019) if like my fellow Scotsman, Alexander Selkirk, I were ever to be stranded on a desert island; I would wish for companions the Holy Bible, Zeffirelli’s Jesus of Nazareth and David Rolfe’s Silent Witness. They have served me well in life and work.

But where would I find a power supply?