

Brendan Whiting's Reply to Ian Wilson's Review of *The Shroud Story*

Ian Wilson's critique of my new book is so focused on what he called my "uncritical lumping-in of the deservedly legendary and the palpably absurd", that he misconstrued its purposeful combination of accumulated apocryphal, historical, and scientific evidence supporting the Shroud of Turin's authenticity as the burial sheet of Jesus Christ, and the surviving witness to His Passion and Resurrection. As opposed to presenting a dry, investigative treatise, I applied a readable, narrative style, which, as the reviewer for the British Shroud of Turin Society's Newsletter wrote: "to walk the reader through almost every aspect of Shroud material available and keep it in concise, easily understood sections".

Generally speaking, people with a similar interest in a particular study share their information gladly. Having respect for Ian's study of the Shroud I invited him to my book launch at State Parliament House, which he attended, and to join me as a co-speaker about the Shroud at a function sponsored by a newspaper. Sadly, on account of his expressed negative attitude, it was necessary to cancel the latter function.

In an email to me he attacked my book for "its fundamental lack of critical, historical sense, and therefore concern for the truth". This clearly referred to my mingling of apocrypha with historical facts, and four brief quotes from the 20th century visionary Maria Valtorta, which he referred to as "ramblings".

My quotes from Valtorta's book, *Poema, The Story of the Man-God*, relate directly to Jesus' Passion and to the Shroud. They total just 24 lines (out of 400 pages), but Wilson discredited them, stating that, "in 1959 Pope John XXIII ordered her book to be included in the Vatican's then Index of forbidden books". The book had not been given the NIHIL OBSTAT (meaning, revelations that are free to believe or not), which was then required in order that a book be approved. But it seems Wilson is unaware that her book subsequently received the NIHIL OBSTAT from Msgr. Luigi Lovazzano, Vicar-General, Albano, Italy, and IMPRIMATURS from Bishop Bonicilli, from the same diocese, and from Bishop Danylak, the Titular Bishop of Nysea, Rome. Moreover, in 1992 Archbishop Dionigi Tettamanzi, in his capacity as Secretary General of the Italian

Bishops' Conference, wrote to the publisher Emilio Pisani to request that "in the event the volumes are reprinted, it be clearly stated at the outset that the 'visions' and 'dictations' related therein may not be considered to possess a supernatural origin", thus giving tacit approval to their publication. In 1993 Cardinal Ratzinger acknowledged in writing to the Bishop of Birmingham, Alabama, that there is nothing against faith or morals in the book, but he cautiously emphasized that Valtorta wrote "in her own way the life of Jesus" and "cannot be considered supernatural in origin".

I am not the only target of Wilson's disdain for the value of visionaries' writings. In his latest book he criticised Mel Gibson for relying on the writings of the visionary nun, Anne Catherine Emmerich, for some scenes in the film 'The Passion of the Christ'. Her inspired, interior locutions Wilson derided as "lurid, hyperimaginative fantasies typical of the type of personality psychologists define as hysteric". Pope John Paul II judged differently when on 3 October 2004 he declared Emmerich as 'Blessed' (the last step before being made a saint).

Neither History nor the Synoptic Gospels mention anything about the Shroud being removed from Christ's tomb. Only in apocrypha and in Church approved writings of visionaries are there such references. Why did the early Church fathers write what we define as apocrypha, if not to be regarded today as evidential? Readers justifiably treat unauthenticated history with caution, and they have the intelligence to distinguish the difference between History, apocrypha and visionary writings.

Making matters personal, Wilson threatened me about the promotion of my book, but my non-reply obviously provoked him to write his egoistic review for www.shroud.com.

As he noted, I am "certainly no scientist". Nevertheless, through my book I was invited to join the esteemed international Shroud Science Group, whose scrupulous work I refer to in my book.

Amongst his criticisms he said that "I believe, in all seriousness, that the Shroud was boiled in oil ..." I merely noted on p. 57: "A French aristocrat by the name of Antoine de

Lalaing wrote, in relation to his attendance of the Shroud on Good Friday 1503, that the cloth had been tried by fire, boiled in oil ...” Curiously, two sources for this quote are Wilson himself (*The Evidence of the Shroud*, 1986, p. 78, and *The Blood and the Shroud*, 1998, p. 341).

Regarding his reference to Dr. Raymond Rogers’ ‘re-weaving’ theory being refuted by Dr. Flury-Lemberg at the 2005 Dallas Conference (which Wilson did not attend), there was strong support from delegates for Rogers’ theory, which I witnessed.

Most books about the Shroud have hovered equivocally around the prime question: is it the burial shroud of Christ? I am sure that any reader of ‘The Shroud Story’ will be challenged to believe that it is, and to appreciate, as I have done, the great importance of the Holy Shroud.

Throughout the centuries controversy has been no stranger to the Shroud. Why should this be so, if it is truly the cloth that covered Jesus, the Son of God who came to teach humankind to love one another? Yet, 2000 years later we are still trying to get it right. My desire for Ian Wilson is that he be able to express this love and to fully appreciate the redeeming power of the Shroud story.

MAY 6, 1992. Archbishop Dionigi Tettamanzi, in his capacity as Secretary General of the Italian Bishops' Conference, wrote to the publisher Emilio Pisani to request that 'in the event the volumes are reprinted, it be clearly stated at the outset that the 'visions' and 'dictations' related therein may not be considered to possess a supernatural origin, but must simply be deemed literary forms of which the author has made use to narrate the life of Jesus in her own way." It may be deduced from Archbishop Tettamanzi's letter that the work does not contain errors, is not censurable, and may thus be reprinted just as it is, and that reading it is not harmful even for the least prepared of the faithful. Catholic readers may not, however, affirm it to be of supernatural origin.

JUNE 30, 1992. The publisher Emilio Pisani, on his first visit to the offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the Vatican, learned that Archbishop Tettamanzi's letter had been requested by the Congregation as a result of the decision to allow all Catholics to read Maria Valtorta's work on the same terms as any other worthwhile publications.