

THE PATIENT

IN THE SHROUD

Lecture to the British Society for the Turin Shroud

by Dr. Michael Clift

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My Dear Companions,

Companions, that is, along life's way. The word means those with whom one eats bread, but bread in this context is, to my mind, symbolic, or metaphorical. I think of you in this way, and sometimes even as My Dear Children because when you have been a GP it comes hard to drop the bedside manner - in this context bedside is again metaphorical. Of course. As this metaphorical parent I take quite some delight in being responsible for one tiny bit of your lives, your Membership of the BSTS. Please don't think me patronising, still less twee. Indulge me only in this and I for my part will struggle to be entertaining. So look upon me as, at worst, a charming oddity, and I'll do the same for you.

Now this evening I am going to tell you a lot of things you know already. It is because you will have forgotten some of them that I feel perfectly justified in reminding you of them. But in addition there will be some bits and pieces of my own, and they will be yours, given to you for disagreeing with if you so desire. I am going to tell you about anatomy and possibly physiology, about the pathology of trauma, about haematology and blood flow, and about water, lots and lots of it, cubic miles of it in fact.... And in all this I have to warn you that I am a believer, and while I am not here even to think of converting you to any viewpoint nevertheless my belief will colour everything I say and you must judge it in that light. Even if you do not care for me to be evangelistic please have patience, because it is just possible you could take some delight, if not in the things I say then in the way I say them.

The Shroud of Turin has much in common with Our Blessed Lord Himself. Firstly it is an almost paradoxical combination of the earthy with the divine. It is linen, born of flax which has sprung from our soil, but it bears a mystery still unsolved, an image of the spiritual looking out at us - as Christ himself, were he now before you, would be seen to be one of us in our human condition but with a compelling *je ne sais* (puns which is distinctly other, and speaks of elsewhere. Secondly it speaks to us individually as He would do. "Michael", it says to me, "you are impatient and bad tempered and a lot of other things beside. I am looking at you...." To others, certainly to the patient and sweet-tempered, it would say other things, like perhaps, "In the face of evil it is wrong to be compliant and good-natured..."

But it is to the humanity of the Man of the Shroud that we now turn. Look, please, at this picture. It should be well-known to you all but there is something curious here. This picture, the image in this form, has satisfied the faithful for generations and yet it appears, to me at least, to be at first sight most unconvincing. Fancy, I thought, on the basis of this going on to say that this could be the last garment of our Saviour on earth! The unlikelihood of this is confirmed by two descriptions of it. "It is", says one, "reminiscent of a badly executed brass rubbing". Says another, "It is what a child might produce with crayons". But just look again and you might appreciate that no child would have produced this since whatever else is wrong with it the anatomical proportions are preserved. Given that we human beings present quite a variety of shapes and sizes certain measurements or ratios are common to the human race. The head, for example, is just about one seventh of the full height. Fashion artists regularly

disobey this and make the head one ninth of the total - the result is an elongated flatteringly svelte figure and probably sells dresses. Another example is here - notice that with my arms straight down and the hands relaxed into their natural palmar concavity they reach roughly to mid-thigh. A child commonly underestimates this and produces short thalidomide-type arms, or little more than hands springing from the trunk. If I exaggerate and try to make my arms look longer notice please that I begin to look like an orang-utan. As with the arms so with all the other proportions. This, therefore is a real man and for me a real patient. All arguments about this being the work of an artist are fully denied by this simple fact for the anatomical perfection is quite unlike any art figures of six hundred years ago still less anything earlier. We can now turn to the negative of the image, or if you like the positive of which the image itself is a negative.

So real is this man that it is quite easy to form an idea of his age. And here you might wonder since this is clearly not someone aged thirty-three years, the traditional age of Our Lord. This deserves a digression. You can be quite sure that Jesus of Nazareth was not that age at his death. The reasoning is as follows. We know precisely the year in which Jesus was baptised in the Jordan. The account in the third Chapter of Luke (who I might remind you was a doctor and therefore a skilled and accurate observer) fixes it for us, just listen to this (read out Luke 3.1 and 2). No mistake there, is there? And history tells us the dates of Tiberias so this evidence is not confined to Holy Writ. There is no question her of "Once upon a time..." Luke then goes on to describe the baptism and as a sort of throw-away line adds, "Jesus was about thirty years old when he began to teach". Notice the 'about'. If such a man as Luke is vague on this then one must not take it as definite. Yet that is what Dionysius Exiguus did in the seventh century. He argued that if Jesus was thirty at his baptism and had a ministry of three years he must have been thirty-three at the Crucifixion. We know for several reason that the Passion was in 33 AD, and two dates are more likely than any others: Friday April 7th AD 30, and Friday April 3rd AD 33. Only these dates come anywhere near fitting the Gospel story and even then neither fits perfectly but the later one is preferred by most authorities. In any case on that day there was a total eclipse of the moon, and there is an interesting point about that. The eclipse was visible from Jerusalem but full moons do not rise until after sunset which therefore would have been the Saturday for the Jews. Hence we have this strange situation that the eclipse would not seem to have any significance for the Jews but for all gentiles it was on the day of the Crucifixion.

Having fixed the date of his death can we find a birthday for him? Well it was not at our Christmas and it cannot have been in the year dot. We know from other sources that Herod died no later than BC 4 and some think it was in the Autumn of BC 5. Remembering that Herod had the Holy Innocents slaughtered up to the age of two years and it could be that Jesus was born in BC 6 - or earlier if you accept that Herod would not necessarily have died immediately after his crime. Add to this the notion that the decree for taxation, known to have been promulgated in BC 8, would surely have taken time to percolate through the Roman Empire and you have BC 7 as a very likely date. In that year the giant planets Jupiter and Saturn were in conjunction three times so here we have not only an explanation for the star of Bethlehem but also for the fact that the star "reappeared". Complex arguments arising from this suggest that the most likely time of the Saviour's birth is teatime on what would have been for us

Tuesday September 15th BC 7. This would make him nearly forty at the time of his death, an age which really is more like that of the Man of the Shroud.

Let us now turn to a post mortem examination of the Holy Patient. You will all know quite a lot about the wounds, the precise placing of the one in the wrist, the way the blood trickles down the forearms according to gravity and regular shifting of position of the trunk, the curving of the blood flow into the natural creases of the brow, the wound in the side matching in shape the Roman lance, the bruises from the flogging, and the punctuate scalp wounds telling us from their distribution the actual plant employed in the cap of thorns. But about some of these there are extra points to be made and here I am indebted to Pierre Barbet, the Paris surgeon of the 1930s and his predecessor and colleague, Paul Vignon.

Take the wrist wound. It is not just that the fixing had to be there because the soft tissues of the hand would not have given enough purchase; the truly wonderful thing is that there is only one channel through the carpus that could have been used. It is in normality only a potential space bounded by the mutually faceted bones Lunate, Hamate, Capitate, and Trapezoid. And in its passage through this channel the chisel-like nail would not simply have touched the Median nerve and triggered it into sending the thumbs into the palms, as we all know. We have to remember that this nerve carries sensory as well as motor fibres, moreover that far from just touching it the nail would have rammed into it and splayed it out so that the picture is one like the bridge of a violin with the fibres taught like the catgut and so finely tuned in this position that the very slightest movement would have resulted in unimaginable pain. Stop here, please, and think about it. This really happened to people in those days. Even if the Man of the Shroud is not, were not, the Son of God, you cannot on that account withhold compassion. Think of those thousands and thousands of poor creatures that their human brothers did this to. And then think of one willingly accepting it for the sake of someone else. I find it extremely painful even to contemplate. Pierre Barbet confessed to tears as he wrote.

Dr Barbet has a great deal to say about how blood flows when it is at the same time congealing. There is so much of it that I simply cannot include it here for lack of time, but it is worth making the point that the flow of a liquid which is ceasing to be a liquid, with more liquid coming on after, is a complicated hydrodynamics problem which is extremely unlikely to have been anticipated, or imagined, or copied by even the most talented artist.

The wound in the side is of exceptional interest. You may have come to think of it as an haphazard coup de grace, dealt in a random manner and just to make sure that Jesus really was dead. But as Barbet points out it was most likely a ritualised procedure, often used, and like all rituals strictly according to rigid rules. And one can see why. It is not certain that plunging a spear vaguely into the chest cavity would ensure death the collapse of a lung could be survivable, even in a debilitated patient. It would be more efficient to pierce the heart, but that is not as easily done as you might think. It would be more damaging to hit the auricles rather than the ventricles, more blood would flow from them especially after death. The aim would be to pierce the right auricle and it is not easy to get at, not from the front anyway. But the insertion of a

spear just exactly where the Shroud shows, followed by an excursion of some three to five inches in a medial and downward direction would ensure success.

We are told that blood and water came out of the wound. For long I have considered three possibilities for the water. Could it, I asked myself, have been a pleural effusion? You can actually sustain a mild form of pleurisy just from knitting, the arms held in an unnatural position for an hour or two being the cause. Our Lord's arms were in an unnatural, stretched, position for six hours so his pleural cavity could have generated a clear fluid like water. Secondly we know that under extreme conditions (notably extensive burns) the stomach can become acutely dilated; thus a wound slanting downwards from where we see it on the Shroud could conceivably have penetrated the diaphragm and come up immediately to the stomach, whence gastric juices might flow. Thirdly there is the possibility of pericardial fluid, from a pericarditis engendered by the grievous assaults already sustained by our patient. Barbet argues convincingly for this choice and having read his observations I no longer entertain the other two. The spear, then, would have encountered first the pericardial sac and clear fluid would have run along the spear from this followed closely by a gush of blood from the subsequent piercing of the right auricle. Of course had the heart been still beating at this moment the blood would have been everywhere drenching everything nearby. But you can see from the rear view of the image that the amount of blood is surprisingly sparse. Barbet suggests that in fact all you see came from the inferior vena cava, which adjoins the right auricle, and would have drained out as the body was laid in the Shroud. It all fits; I cannot fault it - and even if I could I still could not argue with the fact that Barbet put all this to the test with cadavers of his time, and it came about just as his theory suggested.

I would now like to say something about water. It is surely providential that the fire of 1532 was doused with brackish water, perhaps from a nearby stream; only by this can we see where the water flowed, the stained leading edge. Water seems to be important everywhere in the Faith. Think of it in the Old Testament, God dividing the land from the oceans on the Second Day, Noah trusting his all to the Ark, Jonah in the whale in the water, and so on. In the New Testament Our Lord's baptism in the Jordan, water into wine at Cana, the woman at the well, walking on the water, calming the waves, washing the feet, the thirst on the Cross. "Water water everywhere nor any drop to drink". Oh that nasty tale about the vinegar. Some say it was really hyssop to ease his pain. But what I know of hyssop doesn't square with this.

How much water is there in the world? Well quite a lot. The total amount of the world's free water (i.e. excluding that which is and has been locked up in the polar icecaps throughout human history) is 325 times ten million cubic miles, this includes the oceans, rivers, streams, lakes and ponds, clouds, rain, mists, and puddles. In millilitres this is 1.34 times ten million, million, million, million, or ten to the twenty-fourth.

Set that figure aside and consider now the water in the human blood stream. In the body of an average adult male there are between ten and eleven pints of blood. Even ignoring all the tissue fluid and assuming a total change over twice weekly (a most conservative guess) the volume of water which has passed in his lifetime through the vascular system of a of a forty year old man must be at least 1.5 times ten thousand million millilitres. This means that there is a ratio of 1 to ten thousand million, million

between one person's consumption of water and the world supply. This is one to ten thousand billion where the billions are not the titchy American ones but one thousand times as great.

Now in a thimbleful of air there are some ten to the power of twenty-two molecules so, even if water were as thin as air, in every few drops of watery fluid, be it tea coffee or cocoa, blood, sweat, saliva, or urine, milk lemonade or beer or wine, or tears, there must be, after the thorough climatic mixing of nearly two thousand years, a minimum of ten million molecules which were once in the body of Jesus of Nazareth. In fact the figure must be much higher so that we can say with confidence that every sip, not only from the Chalice, contains a significant proportion from the bloodstream of Christ.

By a similar argument we can say for sure that since plants are ever exchanging molecules with the atmosphere most food, and certainly all cereals and breads, must contain in every gram millions of atoms from Our Lord's body. And of course the air is full of them, full of matter from not only his First Century Palestine body but from the body, if body it will be, that will grace his Second Coming.

Arguments for or against transubstantiation are therefore irrelevant. In all our food and drink his body is forever present; all meals and snacks, and even the swallowing of our own saliva, can be, if we are willing, the Eucharist, and every indrawn breath most truly and most wonderfully a wholly Holy inspiration.

Many years ago when I was a young and brash medical student I came across that wonderful quotation from someone called Trudeau. I don't think he was the Prime Minister of Canada, perhaps a medically qualified relative: "The duty of a doctor is to cure sometimes, to relieve often, to comfort always". For our Patient there could have been no cure, and no form of relief would have been allowed.

But in the matter of comfort would that the privilege, the privilege of this patient, of this Divine Patient ... had been mine.