

**THE SHROUD, SCIENCE AND FAITH****by Br Justin Lodge\*, (pseudonym), USA**

An article entitled "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ" was published in the March 1986 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and suggested that, based on analyses of the Shroud of Turin as well as both Christian and non-Christian historical documents, Jesus was dead before he was taken down from the cross. The article produced the greatest correspondence the journal ever received on any topic. Most of it was negative and criticized the journal for delving into a "religious" subject. Australia's Rex Morgan, editor of *Shroud News* commented, "It is interesting to speculate again on why science seems to run scared when Christ is mentioned in the hallowed columns of scientific literature". [1]

It is not surprising that the Shroud enters into this question. The unmistakable link between the death of Jesus and the Shroud has often led to controversy. Since the beginning of its recorded history in 1357, it has caused much debate among religious, scientists, historians, and scholars. When the Shroud was exhibited publicly in 1389, it was alleged to be a painting by the bishop of the diocese, Pierre d'Arcis. Ironically, the Shroud was pronounced authentic by an agnostic scientist, Yves Delage, in a report to the famed French Academy of Science more than 500 years later, in 1902. The Academy, populated by many "free thinkers", derided Delage for having belied his position as an agnostic and accused him of having betrayed the spirit of science. Delage replied that he recognized Jesus as an historical person and saw no reason why anyone should be upset by the fact that material traces of his life still existed. He also added that problems were caused because a religious question had needlessly been injected into a scientific question.

While one must admire Delage for taking the stand that he did, one must question whether he was being realistic in trying to eliminate the religious question from the scientific question of the Shroud, which is similar to trying to separate the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith. This writer believes that neither can be done. Is there not an obvious correlation between the image of the man in the Shroud and the unique person of Jesus? Delage believed that the image was caused by a natural formation process (the "vaporgraph" theory), which has proven to be untenable. Shroud of Turin Research Project (STURP) scientists and European scientists who have studied the cloth have not been able to find a natural explanation that fits all the data. Even if they eventually discover a natural-formation process, it would not destroy the unmistakable correlation between the Shroud and Jesus. Perhaps Delage, like some scientists of today have done, would reconsider the religious question if he saw the current advanced stage of Shroud research, which still has not been able to totally solve

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the mystery.

It is usually stated, and with good reason, that the Shroud is not necessary in Christian faith. Then why has it been so important to so many people for so long? What is it about the Shroud that makes so many people passionately involved, either in support of it or opposition to it?

Advocates who are believers seem to find an added dimension to their faith because of the Shroud. Even more powerfully, a look at the face on the Shroud has been for many people the decisive moment when they decided to commit their lives to Jesus. I say "advocates who are believers" because there are some advocates who are not believers, just as there are Christians who are not advocates. Delage is a good example of the fact that one can be an advocate of the Shroud but not be a Christian. D'Arcis is a good example of the fact that one can be a Christian and not be an advocate of the Shroud.

Skeptics who deny the authenticity of the Shroud are often atheists, and many of these atheists are in the forefront of Shroud opposition. They are not willing to acknowledge the possibility of the supernatural and find it safer to dismiss the Shroud as a forgery, even when it flies in the face of all the evidence. Quite simply, the reality of the Shroud and its possible ramifications scares them. They know that an authentic Shroud of Turin puts their atheism on shaky ground.

A comment by a bishop to one such skeptic really puts the whole significance of the Shroud in perspective. The bishop told him, "If the Shroud turned out to be 2,000 years old, it wouldn't really affect my faith, but it might affect yours". Thus in a real sense, the Shroud is more important for skeptics than it is for Christians. It penetrates to their deepest philosophical levels.

Christians and atheists both claim to be searching for the truth. Christians believe that the ultimate truth is a person, Jesus. The closest an atheist comes to having an ultimate truth is his almost unwavering belief that science can or will eventually be able to explain everything. Most reputable scientists realize that science is only a tool that can help us to explain some truths. The atheists would have everyone believe that a truly objective scientist must be an atheist or at least agnostic. They do not seem to realize that their atheism requires as much faith as the religious believer. It is foolish to restrict reality to the knowledge, especially that gained through experience that we physically perceive. Every person, whether atheistic or religious, works under certain pre-conceptions and assumptions. However, this does not mean that we cannot arrive at certain truths. Persons must acknowledge their own prejudices, be willing to change their opinions if the evidence warrants it, and let the search for truth be the main concern.

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Shroud skeptics usually have at least two things in common: they accuse STURP scientists of being religious zealots out to prove that the Shroud wrapped Jesus, and they often are arrogantly confident in their conclusions, despite the fact that they haven't examined the cloth first-hand (as the STURP scientists did) and despite the fact that they usually disagree among themselves on how the image was allegedly forged. Even though their charge that the STURP scientists are religious zealots is patently untrue, and the skeptics' conflicting solutions, like the 19th century Rationalists' attempts to explain the Resurrection, help to point out the weaknesses of their own positions, they may be helping to stimulate the thinking of STURP scientists and all Shroud advocates.

The skeptics' usual procedure is to push seemingly negative facts (all of which can be readily explained) while ignoring all other evidence that contradicts their positions. An example is their treatment of the famous d'Arcis memorandum, which they use to back their contention that the Shroud is a forgery. D'Arcis wrote a memo to the Anti-Pope Clement VII in Avignon, denouncing the exhibition in 1389, stating that an artist had admitted producing the Shroud image in the time of his predecessor. However, no name of the artist or any other information was given. It simply was an unsubstantiated allegation (and we only have a draft of the letter, not the actual letter itself). The skeptics never point out the fact that Clement imposed perpetual silence on d'Arcis about the matter, which suggests that his case was not strong, or that d'Arcis successor, Bishop Louis Raguier, maintained the Shroud's authenticity in three official documents.[2] Raguier is not to be believed at face value any more quickly than d'Arcis is, but if one is aiming for the truth, all important facts should be divulged, not just the ones favourable to one's position.

Skeptics continue to claim that the Shroud is a painting because of traces of artists' pigments found on the cloth. The maxim from mathematics, "necessary but not sufficient"[3], applies here. For the Shroud to be a painting, it is necessary to find paint on the Shroud, but it is not sufficient to prove that it is a painting. One must look for other reasons why paint may be on the Shroud. It is well known that many artists who made copies of the Shroud touched their copy to the Shroud to "sanctify" it. This is a more plausible explanation why there is paint on the Shroud than saying a medieval artist painted a negative, 3-dimensional, superficial image showing knowledge hundreds of years ahead of his time.

One must also consider the possibility that some skeptics crusade against the Shroud as a way of getting publicity for themselves; some have made quite a

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name for themselves by maintaining that the Shroud is a forgery. Indifference and hostility regarding the Shroud even from some Christians is not uncommon. One Christian evangelical magazine went so far as to solicit one of the foremost skeptics of the Shroud to write a negative article for them. Despite all this, one is almost surprised that there is not more opposition to the Shroud than there is. But perhaps there is more sinister opposition occurring; the Archbishop of Turin recently named eight new exorcists for the city.

Advocates and skeptics alike often focus on the often-stated implication that the Shroud image points to the Resurrection of Jesus, which is admittedly an article of faith and beyond scientific proof. All Christians know that they must take some aspects of their beliefs on faith, which co-exists with their reason. Atheists rely on reason, and their faith is in their own conviction of their stance. Christianity could not stand without belief in the Resurrection. The Shroud possibly brings us face to face with the Resurrection and/or divinity of Jesus. When one realizes that on the Shroud, one may be looking at the man who said that our eternal destiny depends on our response to him, one can understand the emotionalism of the Shroud issue. Science can and should co-exist with religious faith. However, if science attempts to set itself up as the ultimate truth, it will continue to "run scared when Christ is mentioned".

## NOTES

[1] Rex Morgan, "Editorial", *Shroud News*, Issue 35 (June 1986) : p.2.

[2] Clement J. McNaspy, "The Shroud of Turin", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 7 (1945) : 149.

[3] John Heller, *Report on the Shroud of Turin*, (Boston : Houghton Mifflin, 1983) p. 193.

