

Did Communion Host Really Bleed at Bolsena?

Modern Sleuths Probe Medieval Miracle

By PATRICK RILEY
Orvieto—(NC)—Did the miracle of Bolsena really happen?

This question, which scholars have been asking until very recently, touches a sensitive nerve of the Church's devotional life and even of its liturgical life. Tradition has it that the miracle of Bolsena prompted Pope Urban IV to extend the feast of the Eucharist, Corpus Christi, to the entire Church.

Pope Paul VI flew here in a helicopter Aug. 11 to commemorate the seventh centenary of Pope Urban's decision to make Corpus Christi a universal feast.

In brief, the answer to the question is yes.

The man who answered the question, is Andrea Lazzarini, a historian of the Vatican City daily, L'Osservatore Romano.

The story of his sleuthing begins in France almost 20 years ago, and traces him from manuscript to a series of secret chambers inside the cathedral of Orvieto, where the relic of the miracle was kept.

The traditional account of the miracle says that in 1263 or 1264 a German priest known as Peter of Prague was assailed by doubts about the Holy Eucharist while offering Mass in the town of Bolsena, about 80 miles northwest of Rome. It states that when he broke the consecrated Host, it began to bleed copiously and that drops of blood spilled onto the corporal beneath.

According to tradition, the Host and the corporal, a piece of linen on which the Host is placed at Mass, were both brought to nearby Orvieto, the temporary residence of Pope Urban IV, who took the occasion to extend the feast of Corpus Christi to the whole Church.

A violent attack on the authenticity of this tradition was launched in a volume of the "Christic studies" by French theologians published in Antwerp, Belgium, in 1948. One study asserted that no narrative of the miracle could be found dating from earlier than the 16th century. It said that the first such stories were spread in the 15th century by Dominicans, notably by St. Antoninus, archbishop of Florence, Italy.

Lazzarini, however, felt sure this was wrong. He had seen 14th-century frescoes in Orvieto cathedral telling the story of the miracle, and he had seen examples on the reliquary of the corporal, which tell the same story. The date of the reliquary is inscribed on it: 1337.

"How could a scholar overlook this evidence, which you can see on picture postcards in any curio shop in Orvieto?" he asked in an interview with the N.C.W.C. News Service.

He listed three documents of the 14th century recounting the story of the miracle—a papal document of the pope when the pope resided in Avignon, France; a history of the miracle written in Orvieto in 1340; and a miracle play, produced in Orvieto no later than 1330, telling the story of the miracle. The script of this play gives the first known written indication that the priest of the miracle was a German. However, he is traditionally known as Peter of the Czech city of Prague.

But what of the three-quarters of a century between the time of Urban IV and the miracle play? Lazzarini determined to find out.

In documents of the 17th and 18th centuries he read of hidden compartments in the marble edifice that houses the relic of the corporal in Or-

vieto cathedral. He began a thorough examination of the edifice, a container used as a shrine.

On the floor of the niche of the edifice he found a trapdoor. Beneath it was a chamber. But the chamber was empty.

Examining the chamber more closely he found another trapdoor in its floor. Opening it, he found another chamber, but that too was empty. On the floor of the second secret chamber he found a third trapdoor and beneath it a third chamber.

THIS CHAMBER was far from empty. It proved to be a treasure house of documentation.

There was a medieval strongbox of wood banded with iron. There was also a 17th-century wooden box, worked in gold and windowed with crystal.

In this box were two pieces of very old linen, which Lazzarini identified as remnants of the corporal from which the relic of the Bolsena miracle had been cut. There was also a piece of blue silk banded and fringed in golden silver thread. This, he said, once held the relic.

Probably the most important contents of the chamber were three small, pointed parchment and one of paper. One was in the shape of a sharply-pointed triangle with a string attached to the smallest angle. On it was written in Latin: "Relics of the blood of Christ."

Lazzarini said this parchment probably served as an envelope which the string secured. The other parchment was rectangular with a centerfold down its length and two folds up its width. On it was written, also in Latin: "The blood of Christ

was sprinkled on this corporal and therefore it should be kept with greatest care."

Lazzarini believes that this inscription, "... should be kept with greatest care," betrays a knowledge of ecclesiastical authority that a canonical investigation of the miracle must have taken place.

At least four experts have dated the handwriting on the parchments in the late 13th century. Among them were the late Giovanni Cardinal Mercati, who at the time he examined the handwriting was custodian of the Vatican archives, and Professor Alfonso Gallo, director of the Institute of Book Pathology of Rome and Brussels.

Lazzarini pointed out that half a century before the miracle of Bolsena the Holy See had set up the most rigid safeguards around relics of miracles to prevent the "manufacture" of miracles. The documents he found, he said, fit in with the rules of the Holy See.

The third document found in the hidden compartment, the one made of paper, is dated in the 14th century. It bears signs of having been sewn into the form of an envelope. This is borne out by its Latin inscription, which says that it held the corporal with its "figures."

These "figures" probably refer to the corporal's bloodstains—20 in all—which have the appearance of the face of Christ. Discussing the question of

whether these bloodstains could have been painted on the corporal by an artist, Lazzarini maintained that a 13th-century artist could not have avoided betraying himself by using some of the artistic style of that time.

"But the likeness shows none of the characteristics of the highly stylized art of the 13th century, and instead are naturalistic."

Last year in the so-called Church of the Miracle in Bolsena, the church of St. Christina, a fresco was discovered showing Christ with a pope in adoration on one side and a female saint—probably St. Christina—on the other side, holding up a chalice and corporal bearing stains. This fresco has been dated in the 13th century and offers further contemporary corroboration of the miracle.

But this miracle of the mystery of the Eucharist still abounds, in mysteries of its own. Chemical analyses of the corporal have been inconclusive and final identifications of them as bloodstains must await a more refined technology than our age has to offer. The role of the miracle played in Pope Urban IV's decision to make Corpus Christi a universal feast still has to be huddled out historically.

For some, the most intriguing question will be: Did St. Thomas Aquinas write the magnificent poetry and theology of the Corpus Christi Office?

Seven On Fisher Faculty Receive Higher Rank

Promotions for seven members of the faculty of St. John Fisher College were approved at the annual meeting of the Board of Regents of the college this week. The advancement was recommended by Rev. Charles J. Lavery, C.S.B., president, and Rev. Joseph E. Dorsey, C.S.B., dean of studies.

Naming to the rank of professor of Chemistry is Dr. Clarence G. Hehlinger Jr., 2098 Five Mile Line Rd., Penfield. He had been an associate professor in the Chemistry Department.

Four former assistant professors were elevated to associate professorships. They are Rev. Daniel V. Burns, C.S.B., Mathematics Department; Rev. Gaston Pappas, C.S.B., History Department; Rev. Joseph A. Trivato, C.S.B., Modern Language Department; and Mr. Robert J. McLaughlin, Philosophy Department. All are 31 or over.

Former instructors advanced to assistant professor status are Mr. J. Lloyd Hill, 18 Cullens Run, Pittsford and Mr. Ljubomir Matulic, 188 High St. Ext., Fairport. Mr. Hill is in the

One Of Ten U.S. Converts Is Negro

Notre Dame—(RNS)—Ten per cent of all converts to Catholicism in the United States are Negroes, a Divine Word Missionaries leader told a convention of Catholic students here.

Father Etold R. Perry, S.V.D., provincial superior of the order's Southern Province of St. Augustine, with headquarters in Bay St. Louis, Miss., spoke before some 4000 members of the Catholic Students' Mission Crusade.

According to Father Perry, a Negro, 775 priests spearhead the work of the Church among the 20 million U.S. Negroes. "They are," he said, "going for more in proportion to their numbers than the rest of our clergy."

"One convert out of 10 is a Negro," he continued. "The number of Catholic Negroes in this country as reported last year, totals 722,600 souls. This represents a 3 per cent increase during 12 months, considerably higher than the percentage increase during 12 months, considerably higher than the percentage increase in the same period in the general Catholic population in the United States."

"Half a million of more of these Negro Catholics are members of the 214 missions and parishes that are maintained for service to them."

"These establishments are staffed by 775 priests and are located in 67 dioceses. Seven out of 10 Negro missions have their own schools."

POLAND

Rent a Catholic Paper

London—(RNS)—The hottest item on Poland's black market is a Roman Catholic newspaper.

You can't buy one in many areas—but you can rent one. This phenomenon in a country predominantly Catholic but ruled by Communists has been reported here by newsmen who recently visited Poland where a continuing tug-of-war exists between the Church and the regime.

Recognition of the black market trading in the Catholic press—spurred by the govern-

ments restrictions on printing by religious bodies—was a major point at a recent meeting of the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party in Warsaw.

The committee not only is intent on curbing the Catholic and press inside the country, it is now planning to screen carefully Western newspapers who enter Poland. It fears their ability "to get the Catholic story" into the Western press and has adopted a policy that will make visas harder and harder to get for Catholic newsmen.

French newspapermen are particularly suspect, quite recently the press of France has broken stories which had been hidden from the outside world. Comments of Josef Cardinal Wyszyński, Primate of Poland, which have protested Red inroads upon the Church, particularly its right to direct the religious education of children, have frequently been carried in France.

Copies of a recent French edition carrying a report of a Polish bishops' stand against the regime reached Warsaw. Newsmen Catholics queued up for the few copies available.

Some were snapped up and translated for what the Polish Reds call the "clandestine market." They were distributed secretly at very high prices.

In many instances a foreign publication containing an analysis of Church-state difficulties or even merely routine news of the Catholic Church—is translated, and reprinted and then reprinted.

Limitation of paper stock to Catholic publications—in particular Tygodnik Powszechny, published in Cracow—has helped to create the demand.

Copies of the publications pass from hand to hand and each reader pays a sum for the privilege. A visitor just returned from Warsaw reported here that he had to wait four days before he could get an opportunity to obtain a particular Catholic publication.

Heavy Guard Put Around Czechoslovak Prelate

Vienna—(RNS)—Interviews given to Western newsmen, including one telephone interview, have caused even lighter restrictions on the activities of Archbishop Josef Beran of Prague.

Czech Communist authorities added to the security guard at the prelate's residence at Badany in Central Bohemia shortly after he told newsmen that he had not received government permission to attend the Ecumenical Council in Rome.

In the interviews, Archbishop Beran reiterated his hope he would be able to attend at least a portion of the third session.

The residence, once the mansion of a wealthy Prague sugar manufacturer, is locked tight. It appears deserted, ac-

ording to reputable people here who sought to visit the archbishop.

The Primate of Czechoslovakia, released last October after 14 years' imprisonment, is seldom seen outside the building.

Many attempts have been made by Catholics to visit the prelate, all to no avail. Some have slipped through a small garden door, lone weak link in the high-walled estate, only to run into a number of "janitors," as the Communists describe the security staff.

Visitors are stopped with the curt warning: "The archbishop is not to be disturbed."

Bombay Prelate Seeks More Mission Visas

New Delhi—(NC)—Cardinal Gracias, archbishop of Bombay, has appealed to the India government to adopt a liberal attitude towards foreign missionaries and to grant them visas to come to the country.

Writing on "Christianity in India" for the Indian and Foreign Review, the Cardinal pointed out that the missionaries wished to come to India to serve Christians at their invitation. The restrictions imposed by the government have impeded the smooth operation of several Christian institutions, he added. Visas are refused on political, social and economic, rather than religious grounds.

The Christian community in India, the Cardinal wrote, "enjoyed complete freedom" in worship and other matters and the Church is recognized and regarded as an important factor in natural life. He praised the policy of the late Prime Minister Nehru in this respect and said that he paid special attention to safeguard the Christian community interests.

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College Honors Roy Wilkins

Purchase, N.Y.—(RNS)—Roy Wilkins, NAACP's executive secretary, receives an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Mother E. M. O'Byrne, president of Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart, Purchase, N.Y. The Negro leader was cited for his "high ability, strong patience and unconquerable hope." It was noted that Dr. Wilkins has "consistently stressed educational opportunity, civic responsibility, civil liberty, and redress of grievances through the law courts of the U.S.A."

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