

Forum

The Shroud Deserves Better

By William Willoughby
Religion Today

Mention the Shroud of Turin in some circles and people will begin to tear you to shreds for even entertaining the thought that that piece of cloth might be anything but a hoax.

I personally believe there is overwhelming evidence which points to the earthly Jesus woven into that cloth once again safely tucked away in the cathedral of the Italian city of Torino.

Besides being a journalist, I do a tremendous lot of public speaking, something I enjoy almost as much as writing itself. One of the things, of late, that I have spoken on is the Shroud of Turin, putting forth, as I see it, those evidences which support the notion that this is a genuine relic of Jesus.

In fact, if it is the cloth Jesus was wrapped in, it would have been the last thing touching Him in death and the first thing He touched in His new resurrection life. You will recall that in the Scriptures it was the shroud and its appurtenances which Peter and John found neatly folded and placed in a corner of the tomb by the resurrected Jesus. Jesus' mom must have taught Him how to be neat.

Of course, I also discuss quite freely the objections the science community sometimes raises about the shroud being authentic, although you might be surprised to find that there are fewer and fewer objections being raised.

True faith, of course, does not hinge on whether, when all is said and done, the shroud is a cunningly devised hoax or the real goods. That does not change a necessary ingredient in the message of God's salvation, because God's truth does not need any outside help. Truth is there when everything else melts away.

I was more than pleased to see the current issue of The National Geographic magazine has its lead article on the Shroud of Turin. I almost was ready to go into ecstasy as I read the early portion of the story by science editor Kenneth F. Weaver, for I thought I was going to find something new about the shroud.

At first I could sense the misgivings when I announced that I was better than 90 percent convinced of the authenticity of the piece of cloth, that it was not a forgery by some more than crafty painter.

Of course, there is a strong aversion among Protestants about anything that even is purported to be a relic connected with the life of Jesus.

After all, I suppose that if all the wood which is claimed to be a part of the true cross of Jesus were put together it would be enough to build an armada. An armada, in fact, big enough to hold all the persons who claim to be directly descended from the people who came over on the Mayflower.

But there is another extreme that is equally dangerous. Last winter I was chatting with a number of secular and religious journalist friends of mine and someone asked what I thought of all the new interest in the shroud.

A top editor of the journal which I consider to be the leading thought journal in either Catholicism or Protestantism immediately sought to shoot me down.

"Oh, the shroud. Ever since our magazine has been in operation we've had that filed away under the title 'Religious Hoaxes'."

There is a mini-war of ideology going on currently in another well-thought-of journal, The Christian Century, over this question of the shroud. It seems that theologian Martin Marty has triggered it off by casting aspersions at those who have a keen interest in the shroud.

It is Marty who, for some reason unknown to me, is quoted so frequently by religion news writers too lazy to look for another source, on every subject under the sun and beyond it. Quite often his answers run a little thin. I often consult the Gospel of Mark but seldom the gospel of Marty.

S. Mark Heim of Franklin, N.H., in retort to an apparently strong put-down article in the Christian Century, rightly challenged Marty, who seemed to get a bit hung up on the possibility of the shroud becoming an idol. Well it could become that, and for some misguided folks, it already is.

But is it of no account because some abuse it?

Heim wrote, "I fail to see why an artifact of Christ is necessarily an idol, or why as Christians we must have a positive desire that the shroud must be false."

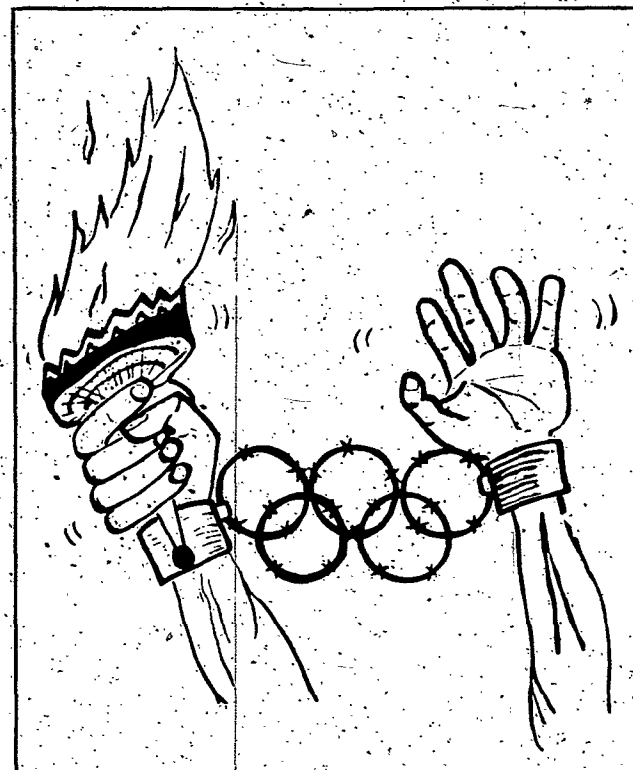
Later in the letter Heim wrote: "I do not see any 'a priori' reason why the Resurrection, as an actual event, should not have left a trace — or, as it may be, a thread — any more than Jesus' life should be void of earthly reminder."

"Jesus being truly human, such traces did exist and, for all I know, might still exist, unless a First Century Marty followed Him about, tidying up."

People do not have a prejudice against scientists excavating and examining the synagogue at Capernaum, the place Jesus might have done His first teaching.

But some of those same people, like Martin Marty, give the brush-off to those who are interested in the kind of scientific research being done with the shroud — the one thing, if authentic, closest to both Jesus' death and His resurrection.

As for me, it looks as if the only thing that is hoaxy about the Shroud of Turin is the half-baked thinking that some of the unthinking think about it.



Anti-Olympics Poster

The Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry has produced this new poster entitled, "Berlin-1936 and Moscow-1980," for what they describe as the upcoming "Olympics of Oppression" in Moscow. According to published reports, the Russians are expected to arrest many Jewish activists and other dissidents during the period of the games to prevent them from contacting Westerners.

Looking Back . . .

75 years ago this week — And on Page 1 a longish article on why Latin in the Church. Unfortunately it poses a self-defeating purpose: Why do we not have it so that we can understand it? Why, indeed?

Inside, a half-column story told of the graduation at Nazareth Academy grammar school. The graduating class consisted of Edna Bayer, Henrietta Free, Marie Gallagher, Olive Hogan, Irene Murray, Grace Ryan, Mable Smyth, Sadie Brodier, Lillian Free, Amelia Gralling, Alice Loewenguth, Marie Rhines, Ethel Sharkey, Marguerite Uebel.

50 years ago this week — "Camp Stella Maris Title. Transferred to Rochester Diocese," read the Page 1 headline. Mrs. Max Russer, widow of founder of the camp, presents Bishop O'Hern check for \$10,000 to aid in permanent establishment and maintenance of summer camp for Catholic boys. So, that's when it all began!

In the Vatican, two new saints were proclaimed — "Caterina and Lulucia Filippini," the latter the foundress of the order of teaching nuns which today serves in this diocese.

Move over, John-Paul II. "The Rev. Charles E. McAllister, rector of the Episcopal Church of St. Michael and All Angels, voiced severe criticism of political ministers and ecclesiastics . . . Unless we wish the church to be further misunderstood in the minds of the great mass of uninformed on the subject of religion . . . we must set our faces squarely against the leaders of Christianity becoming involved in . . . political activity."

And would you believe that a story on Christianizing the cannibals would begin with, "No more luscious lady fingers?"

25 years ago this week — The preoccupation of the era with the Communist threat was evident with seven stories on Pages 1, 2 and 3, with "Reds" in the headlines . . .

10 years ago this week — "Parish offers land to state for elderly," said the Page 1 lead story. So began Dunn Towers . . . "Thumb Fun" was the eye-catcher on the Finger Lakes Race Track ad

Another Problem for the Pope

The bishops of Indonesia have dropped a very difficult problem into the decision-making machinery of the Vatican — ultimately into the judgment of Pope John Paul.

According to a report submitted by a group of these bishops, a shortage of priests prevents 60% to 80% of their Catholic people from having access to the Eucharist more than two or three times a year.

Even this priestly ministry depends heavily on foreign missionaries, and the government seems to be considering a prohibition of missionary work by foreigners.

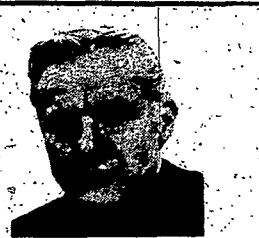
The bishops state their request clearly: "We ask that permission be granted to ordain dedicated married men to the priesthood."

The issue should be kept clear. They are not asking that priests ordained with a commitment to celibacy be allowed to marry; they are not asking that the universal church change its basic policy on clerical celibacy.

Instead, because of an urgent pastoral need, they are asking that an exception be granted so that mature, married men, who have already been assigned other pastoral roles, might be ordained to the priesthood.

Fr. John Reedy

Looking for the Lord



This issue was seriously considered by the Roman Synod of 1971, which voted overwhelmingly to recommend that the law on priestly celibacy be maintained in its entirety.

At that time there was a lot of agitation calling for a change which would allow priests to marry.

I was in Rome covering the Synod. One of the bishops, who was in a position to know, told me that at the beginning of the session, he felt sure that the majority of the Synod Fathers (the bishops and cardinals) would have supported an exception to the law such as that requested by the bishops of Indonesia.

This would allow the general policy to remain in force, while recognizing that circumstances could justify exceptions.

This bishop told me: There was little, if any, support for allowing priests

already committed to celibacy to marry, but the members seemed quite open to the ordination of married men in exceptional circumstances.

The change in attitude came, he said, when in conversation outside the formal meetings, a few of the bishops started talking about the latter option as a first step toward a basic change in the law which would make priestly celibacy optional.

Once that attitude was expressed, he said, opposition developed toward any change in the present law.

John Paul was a member of that Synod; my guess is that he voted with the overwhelming majority to support the present discipline.

But the pastoral situation still leaves him with an agonizing problem. In one of the press briefings at the time, the moral theologian,

Bernard Haring, posed the problem: "If there is any fundamental right which a Christian has, as a member of the church, it would seem to be the right to have access to the celebration of the Eucharist."

Clearly, he added, the discipline of celibacy is a law of the church which can be changed, which admits of exceptions. No matter what great values might be attached to this discipline, can these values offset that fundamental right of access to the Eucharist?

If the request of the bishops of Indonesia is granted, I am quite sure that some groups will use it as a wedge to lobby for greater change in the law of celibacy. My guess is that this pope is strong enough to grant an exception while maintaining the basic law. But such a move would surely generate more turmoil within the church.

But if he says no to the bishops of Indonesia, what is he saying to their people about the relative value of the Eucharist and ecclesiastical discipline?

Once again, it's a dilemma which makes me glad that I don't have to make the decisions which come to the Holy Father.

Guidelines

Letters intended for publication must be addressed to Opinion, Courier-Journal, 67 Chestnut St., Rochester, N.Y. 14604.

Expressions of opinions should be brief, no longer than 1 1/2 pages, typed, double-spaced, with names and addresses.

We reserve the right to edit as to length, offensive words, libelous statements, or to reject altogether. Generally speaking, however, only limited grammatical corrections will be made and letters will reflect the writer's own style.

We encourage readers to submit opinions but since we try to print letters from as many different contributors as possible we will publish no more than one letter a month from the same individual.