

Slouching Towards Emmaus

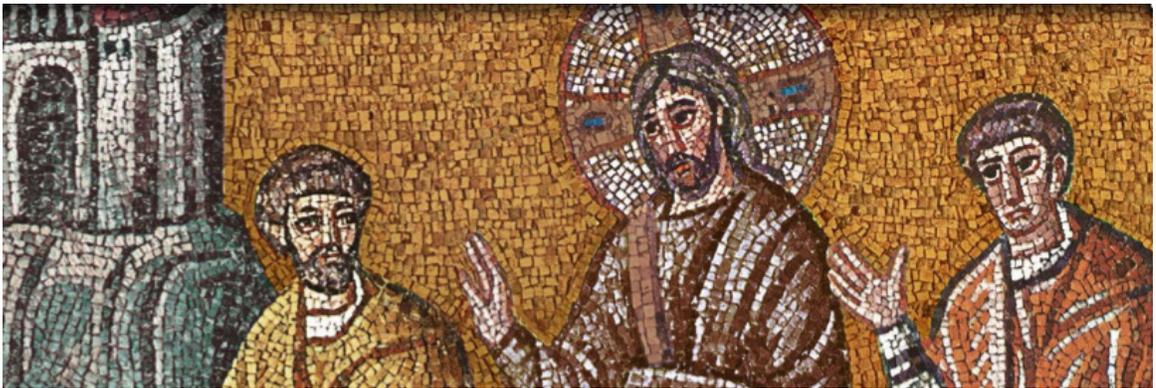
And Some Nonsense Along the Way

An Essay by Dan Porter

Easter 2022

*If the story of the prodigal son has a claim to be the finest story Jesus ever told,
the tale of the two on the road to Emmaus must have an equal claim
to be the finest scene Luke ever sketched.*

– N. T. Wright *In Luke for Everyone*



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Slouching Towards Emmaus

For reasons I did not understand, I have long been fascinated and intrigued by the Resurrection of Christ. Then recently, a glimpse at a photograph of an American soldier in Vietnam wearing a big white cowboy hat brought forth a rush of memories and I understood why. My interest in the Resurrection had begun on a Sunday afternoon at a small, out-of-the-way restaurant in Saigon. I remember, we would enter through a beaded curtain doorway from a narrow labyrinthian alley between two buildings on Saigon's famous Tu Do Street. The year was 1965. That was the year that whatever it was that the Americans had been doing in Vietnam, it was suddenly something we called war.

That afternoon, I found myself, quite unintentionally, beginning what I think of as a spiritual journey, one that had me gravitating to books, articles, and even sermons about the Resurrection. There was no internet in 1965. There were no search engines. Finding answers meant visiting libraries, searching through card catalogs, and reading your way through the "stacks." Chat rooms in 1965 were bars and restaurants and just about anyplace you could sit and talk.

That's what I was doing on Tu Do Street in 1965: chatting, getting answers to questions I had never thought of asking, and becoming absolutely hooked on the subject of the Resurrection.

Years went by, and I continued reading, thinking, and talking with others about the Resurrection. What really happened? What did it mean then? What does it mean now? What did others believe and what might I believe? Then, for no reason I can think of, I lost interest. I stopped reading about it. I stopped thinking about it. Years went by. Then suddenly, while reading a book on a flight from New York to Miami, I became intrigued again.

My spiritual journey restarted, this time with a side trip. Side trips can

reinvigorate us and offer up new ways of seeing things. It is like when visiting a distant city, not just looking at it from within, but from a mountaintop or a church belfry. For me, for my spiritual journey, the side trip was a wacky, intellectual stroll into an overgrown and overblown tangle of some often dubious science and controversial history of a Christian relic. I call it a relic though I don't know if it is that. It could be an unconventional work of art, a brilliant hoax, or something no one has yet defined. Known as the Shroud of Turin, it is a 14-foot length of ancient linen cloth that many Christians believe was the burial shroud of Jesus. The cloth is stored flat behind bulletproof glass in an airtight box filled with non-reactive gas in a chapel of a 15th-century cathedral in Turin, Italy. What is fascinating about this cloth is not merely the thought that it might be a relic of Jesus but that it has baffling frontside and backside images on it of an apparently crucified man.

Some say, and some sincerely believe, those images were formed by the Resurrection of Christ. I don't. Nonetheless, I was on a side trip. I was looking at icons, reading snippets of liturgies, and examining facts. Sometimes I found myself believing fiction that was posing as fact.

I felt like I was in Alice's Wonderland. "If you don't know where you are going any road can take you there," wrote J.R.R Tolkien to C.S. Lewis while summarizing the Cheshire Cat's advice to Alice. I was on that road.

Once a skeptic of the Shroud, my thinking then, having been that no one in their right mind could think the Shroud of Turin was real, I eventually began thinking it could be real. Now I was possibly on my way to becoming a skeptic again. At least, now, I realize how to better understand it.

To pause before it, metaphorically, as you might a curiosity in a museum, and to contemplate the facts and mysteries that swarm about it like bees to a hive, is to be pulled into a world where imagination and rational thinking intermingle.

It was 2001 when I began this detour in my overarching journey. Real or not, I thought, it might help me think about the Resurrection in new and different ways.

By 2005, I was deep in the overgrowth. I was thinking and saying that the Shroud seemed real. The arguments were impressive; at least most of them were. Now, as I sit down to write this, fewer of them seem so. Am I disappointed? I don't know.

The place to begin telling this story is Dallas in the year 2005. From there, I'll jump around, going forward and backward in time, even back to 1965. This story is best told topically, not sequentially.

In 2005, I found myself sitting in the bar of the Adolphus Hotel in Dallas. The Adolphus is a stately, old, eighteen-story hotel with a brick and granite façade. It was built in 1912 by Adolphus Busch, the co-founder of the Anheuser-Busch Brewing Company. In true Texas fashion, the Adolphus brags openly about being the grandest hotel in the Lone Star State. Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, George H. Bush, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan have stayed there. Amelia Earhart and Babe Ruth stayed there. Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip stayed at the Adolphus during a trip to Dallas in 1991.

It was the perfect venue for the 3rd International Dallas Conference on the Shroud of Turin, where a hundred or so of us were coming together to listen, discuss, and argue. Some of us came because we were curious. Others came hoping to hear about breakthrough discoveries. Some came, though they would probably deny it, hoping to bolster their faith in the Resurrection with a dose of scientific theorizing. I had a vague idea of why I came. Someone once said to me, "How can you believe that crazy stuff?" Maybe I was here to try to find out the answer.

Words from *Alice in Wonderland* came to mind after the Mad Hatter had asked Alice why is a raven like a writing desk:

“Have you guessed the riddle yet?” the Hatter said, turning to Alice.

“No, I give up,” Alice replied: “what's the answer?”

“I haven't the slightest idea,” said the Hatter.

I couldn't check into the hotel because my room wasn't ready. I had arrived early in hopes of meeting up with a couple of people. The first was Father Kim Dreisbach, a scholarly Episcopal priest from Atlanta. The second was Barrie Schwartz, a Jew – a fact he reminded us of frequently – whose personal mission was to know more and understand more about the Shroud than anyone in the world. He did. He still does. His mind on the subject is comprehensive, encyclopedic, and well organized. He has the patience of a Job in dealing with all sorts of believers and skeptics and he is frustratingly but admirably free of judgment.

I had caught the shroud bug as one might catch the bug to take up mountain climbing, collect postage stamps, or rebuild classic cars. It was something you had to get into all the way or not at all. I was now what Kim and Barrie called a sindonologist. Almost everyone else called us shroudies. Sometimes, they even did so non-pejoratively.

From somewhere to my right came a deep, disembodied voice: “You a shroudie?”

I thought I was alone. I hadn't sensed anyone approaching, much less, sitting down on a barstool beside me. I nodded with a half-yes and a half-gulp of beer and turned to see who it was. I had never seen him. He was a tall, thin guy wearing one of those Bolo string ties that cowboys in the movies used to wear,

this one with a plastic slider the shape and size of Texas. It was the sort of touristy thing you might find only in an airport gift shop.

We shook hands, introduced ourselves, obligatorily mentioned the weather, and agreed with each other that the hotel seemed nice. He asked me if I had been here before. Dallas? Yes. This hotel? No!

As I write this now, I can't remember the name of my newfound sidling-up drinking buddy. I think maybe it was Greg. Deep down, that sounds right. I'll call him that here.

"Where are you from?" I asked.

"Up north."

Up north in Dallas means any place between North Dallas and the Arctic Circle, anywhere between Alaska and Newfoundland. "Me, too," I said. I was tempted to say New York and thus solicit more from him. But I let it go. Instead, I took a long slow sip of beer.

Finally, after a long silence, Greg piped up with, "Where you at on the Shroud?"

This I took to mean he wanted my views on the Shroud's authenticity. I was wrong. I should have realized that. A skeptic at a Shroud conference was like a vegetarian at a cattle ranchers' convention. I should have known better.

I think I said something like, "It's a mystery, could be real, maybe so, probably so." I was hedging my bets, dribbling out words senselessly. Greg was looking at me quizzically.

He leaned forward and shifted his weight to his elbow, so he could look at me more directly, "Probably, or just probably?"

"Well, yes, probably just probably maybe," I said nonsensically.

Greg leaned forward more and knocked over a neat little stack of cocktail

napkins. His eyes looked right into mine, and he said, “Depends on what you’re banking on. The history of the Shroud is really the history of art, icons, and medieval Christianity. It’s interesting stuff, and it makes a slight case for the Shroud’s authenticity. On the other hand, much of the science about the Shroud is pretty weird, focused on trying to prove the Resurrection and all that.”

“But if you could . . .” I started to say.

“You can’t. You can’t prove authenticity. You can’t prove the Resurrection.

“But . . .” I said and stopped mid-sentence as I realized I wasn’t going to be allowed to finish my sentence.

“The history looks good, but like all history, it’s provisional. The folks way-back-when who wrote most of what passes for history, weren’t exactly journalists or trained historians.”

Greg paused, waved for another beer, then continued.

“I don’t know about you or what you believe, but when it comes to Shroud science, it’s a whole lot of weird. You’ve got people, smart people no less, claiming they see coins, complete with lettering and artwork. They see smudges that look like flowers that they say grow only in Palestine. They see teeth and hand bones and a ponytail. The only thing they don’t see is the rubber band for the ponytail. Give me a break. I don’t see these things, at least not clearly enough that I can honestly say that some vague pattern is really this or that. Most people don’t see these things distinctly, so why are folks calling them facts?

“At the same time, you’ve got scientists dreaming about dematerializing and rematerializing. It’s like the “Beam me up, Scotty” transporters used in Star Trek. Give me a break.

“And now, many of the *STURP* conclusions are unraveling. It’s not unexpected.

With Ray Rogers – may he rest in peace – it was bound to happen. We should be paying attention to him. He was one of the few scientist types not trying to prove the Resurrection. He wasn't even on an authenticity kick. He was critical of all the “I think I see” claims and imaginary dematerializing. He called it nonsense.”

Nonsense? As I sit down to write this so many years later, I wonder: did Rogers say that? It turns out he did.

The late Ray Rogers, of whom my new friend, Greg, was speaking, was a chemist and Fellow of the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. He was part of STURP, a team of about two dozen scientists and other researchers who went to Turin to examine the Shroud in 1978. Known as the [Shroud of Turin Research Project](#), or STURP, its authorized mission was to perform a close-up, in-depth scientific examination of the linen cloth and its images.

Rogers used the word nonsense in a [written review](#) of *The Resurrection of the Shroud*, a book written by Mark Antonacci. Rogers was referring to a proposal in the book suggesting, as Rogers in his review summarizes it:

complete dematerialization (or passage through a wormhole) of the body with production of protons and other radiation. This process is assumed not to damage the cloth's structure. The protons are assumed to have caused the image.

And Rogers opined, quite clearly:

I find the "science" to be totally goal-oriented, to lack rigorous application of Scientific Method, and to be so improbable as to be nonsense.

And as I read that, I thought about what the Mad Hatter had been saying to Alice:

If I had a world of my own, everything would be nonsense. Nothing would be what it is, because everything would be what it isn't. And contrary wise, what is, it wouldn't be. And what it wouldn't be, it would. You see?

Greg was still leaning forward on his elbow, which was now almost off the back

of the bar, the strings of his Bolo tie now trailing through a bartop tray of lemon wedges, olives and cocktail onions. “I’m reckoning,” he said, “even if you can’t prove it, the Shroud is definitely real. You know what I mean?”

That’s nonsense, I thought. But that’s not what I said.

“I know what you mean,” I said without knowing at all what he meant.

What I just said was complete nonsense.

“Gotta go,” he suddenly said. “Meeting someone.” And he was gone.

I saw Greg a couple of times during the conference, mostly at a distance or tied up in coffee break conversation. We never spoke again other than to say hello in passing.

What I had realized, as he walked away from the bar, was that phrases like “Where you at on the Shroud?” and “I’m reckoning?” sound more Down South than Up North.

I’m all too easily taken in.

Then I thought, if I hang out for a few more minutes, maybe Barrie will show up.

If you’ve ever watched a TV special about the Shroud, if you’ve ever read a book about the Shroud or read an article about it, if you’ve ever listened to a relevant podcast, or even talked about the Shroud over a beer, you have undoubtedly come across the name Barrie Schwartz. For more than four decades, Barrie has worked tirelessly as a leader and organizer of conferences and meetings. Barrie has served as an unbiased archivist of documents and photographs.

Mostly Barrie has been an all-around inspiration for the world of Shroud researchers and dabblers. If you were looking for pictures of the Shroud,



Barrie Schwartz

scholarly citations, or academic papers, you have probably clicked on the shroud.com website that Barrie created more than 25 years ago. Barrie edits and writes comprehensive, must-read summaries with each update. The website has a name but everyone simply calls it shroud-dot-com.

When Barrie created the site, there were less than 10,000 websites; today, there are more than 1.9 billion. Without a doubt, within this cyber vastness, Barrie's website is the most extensive, visible, and heavily used website on the Shroud. He's counted more than ten million visits. That's a lot.

Barrie was part of the STURP team that went to Turin in 1978. He was the Official Documenting Photographer for the group. Since then, he has traveled all over this planet, lecturing about the Shroud. He has appeared on almost every major cable and broadcast network, including CNN, PBS, BBC, and Vatican Radio.

Not too long before the 2005 Dallas conference, while giving a lecture on the other side of the world, Barrie had told a reporter for the [New Zealand Herald](#), "The irony of my life is how much time I spend, as a Jew, trying to educate Christians that this could well be a relic of Jesus."

The last time I heard Barrie give one of his educational talks was in 2013 in Savannah, Georgia, at the beautiful Catholic Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist. His lecture that evening seemed to be an expanded version of a TED talk he had given earlier that year at the Pontifical University inside Vatican City. I imagine it also included material from the annual course he gives at the Pontifical Seminary, though I have never seen that material.

Barrie probably wouldn't show up. He was always very busy just before a conference. Unlike Barrie, I wasn't. I was just hanging out, killing time.

Maybe Kim would show up.

Kim and I, along with Dan Scavone, a professor of history at the University of Southern Indiana, spent many thoughtful hours exchanging emails about the

Shroud and its history. Kim would mark up essay-length emails with magenta, the color bishops like to call purple. Dr. Scavone would use yellow. I was left with cyan, the only other mark-up color in those early internet days.

I visited with Kim, as well. I remember sitting in Kim's Atlanta backyard with one or two of his many rescued dogs and a six-pack of beer. We were discussing N. T. Wright, an Anglican bishop, theologian, and expert on anything and everything having to do with the Resurrection. And as the afternoon dragged on, we talked about Kim's favorite Catholic biblical scholar, Raymond E. Brown. Eventually, as the afternoon turned to evening, we talked about the very much right scholarly, Most Reverend and Most Honorable Doctor of Philosophy, Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. He had also written an important book on the Resurrection.

Kim was a historian and a biblical scholar. The scientific study of the Shroud was interesting to him, and he understood it. But for him – what excited him most – were the little-noticed tidbits and outliers of the past that seldom made it into popular histories. He called them spy clues.



Kim Dreisbach

Back in the 1960s, Kim, a former U.S. Marine Corps artillery officer and by then an ordained Episcopal priest, was active in the Civil Rights Movement. He participated in the March on Washington in 1963. In 1965, following the news of *Bloody Sunday* on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Kim rushed to Alabama to be there for the next march. His own words say a lot about the situation and him:

Finally. . . the big day arrived. . . I arrived early at the assembly area and noticed a boy of about twelve – a bandage still on his head from "Bloody Sunday" – walking across the lot and headed directly for me. He had a moth-eaten blanket with a belt around it and a paper bag with his lunch. He approached and said: "Father, is anyone walking

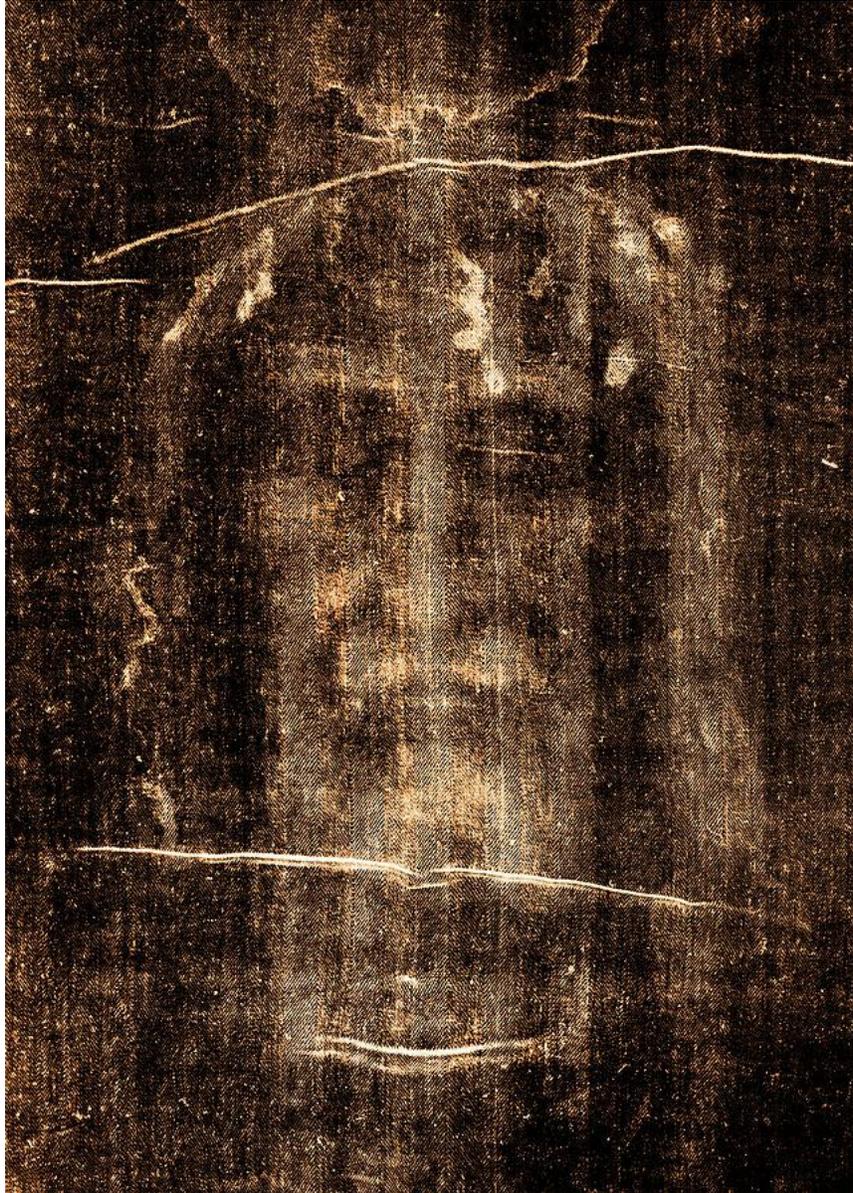
with you? My daddy's dead, my brother is a cripple and momma has to stay home with him. I am the 'onliest' one who can go, and I'm scared." I took his hand, put him on the inside, and together we marched across Pettus Bridge.

One evening, about a year before the 2005 Dallas conference, I remember sitting in an Atlanta restaurant with Kim and several other shroudies. Barrie was in from the West Coast. John Brown, a scientist that the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* had called Georgia Tech's 'super sleuth' of the sciences, was there. So was Russ Breault, from somewhere in the Atlanta area. I think, altogether, there were six or eight of us shroudies at one big table. It wasn't long before Kim was talking to absolute strangers at nearby tables, telling them about the Shroud. They were fascinated by him and what he had to say. Kim was outgoing, entertaining, and informative.

Unfortunately, the Adolphus Hotel was the last place where I ever saw Kim. The following year, he was on his way to a Shroud conference in Rome when he collapsed and died at the Atlanta airport.

When I heard the news, I noted that the New York Yankees had just clobbered the Toronto Blue Jays, 17 to 6. That one was for Kim, I thought. But what a strange thing to think about, when someone you knew and liked had just died. Then again, it was not strange if you knew Kim. He would have known the news about his beloved Yankees. He probably told every flight attendant, ticket agent, and skycap all about the game. Later he would be telling everyone in Rome. Kim was like that. He loved talking. He talked to anyone and everyone about anything and everything, as long as it was good news: the Yankees, the Church, the theology of the post-Resurrection appearances, and of course, the Shroud. At Kim's funeral, overflowing with civil rights workers from the 60s and shroudies from far and wide, the Episcopal bishop of Atlanta joked about Kim's wonderful obsession with the Yankees and the Shroud of Turin. I think it was in that order.

From the funeral, we drove to another church near the airport, where Kim's ashes were placed in a small garden. "In the hope of the Resurrection . . ." the officiating priest was saying as he tried to be heard above the sounds of Deltas roaring forth to somewhere else.



On Being Less Certain Now

Easter, 2022.

I was more certain about authenticity seventeen years ago in Dallas. The Shroud seemed more real then, more important, more interesting. Now, I have more doubts. Then I could say, as I did in the bar of the Adolphus, it was probably real. Now, I find myself only saying it is possibly so.

What's changed? Am I getting older and wiser? Are facts about the Shroud getting corrected? Is it something else?

One thing I do know, my diminished belief in the Shroud's authenticity is a godsend. For alongside that observation, I've noticed, my belief in the Resurrection remains undiminished. The Shroud had not strengthened my faith, but the study of it had. Studying had focused my thinking and solidified my belief in the Resurrection.

As I learned more about the Shroud, I felt at times that I had been duped. But, no, that's not fair. It takes a duper and a dupee for that to happen. And there were no dupers. I simply believed too many wrong things too easily.

There was plenty of faulty evidence about the Shroud. There was quite a bit of what Rogers referred to as "I think I see" science. Greg was right about that.

Rogers was raising other questions, questions about how the images were formed, questions about the chemical nature of the bloodstains on the cloth, and questions about the cloth itself. I realize now that I had not been paying enough attention to Rogers.

There was a lot of discussion about seeing vague things like teeth in the mouth of the man of the Shroud. Large numbers of people believe they see the teeth and thus they believe those teeth are really images of Jesus' teeth. Others are

convinced because of what is reported in the media. I, too, see what looks like teeth. But I no longer believe those are images of real teeth.

Here is one example of how this happens. The *Christian Post*, with a current circulation of about 20,000 and a web presence of about 2.3 million visits per month reported on a lecture by a prominent Evangelical theologian and historian, Gary Habermas. The front-page headline read: [Radiation From the Shroud of Turin a Clue to Jesus' Resurrection?](#) At least there is a question mark there. Here is a bit of the story:

Gary Habermas, distinguished research professor and chair of the Department of Philosophy and Theology at Liberty University . . . who has been lecturing on the topic since the 1970s, reminded the audience of a number of interesting discoveries that scientists have been able to make about the Shroud, but refused to make any definitive statements on whether this is indeed the authentic burial robe of Jesus Christ.

One of the discoveries based on enhanced images of the Shroud presented is that the person's teeth were showing through the skin – possible signs of the resurrection for those who believe that the man is indeed Jesus Christ.

"His skin is intact, his beard is intact, but you are able to see what's inside coming out, just like if you are able to see what's on the back of a hand," Habermas said during the presentation, while showing a photo of an exposed human skull juxtapositioned next to the head of the man in the Shroud, with the teeth from the two images aligned.

The original and responsible question had at one time been “Are those teeth, I see?” The *Christian Post* and Habermas hokumed it in the direction of conspiracy theory: that I see through a closed mouth like with X-ray, right? That's radiation, right? Is radiation evidence of the Resurrection?

If I had heeded Rogers more, not just in what he published in formal papers but in emails he wrote to me as well, I would have seen that there were a lot of reasons to doubt all this.

The Shroud does not get washed or cleaned. Therefore it's dirty. It's creased and

wrinkled. It has been exposed to dust, insects, smoke from fires, and almost certainly candles and cinders of incense and people with dirty hands. It has been exposed to moisture, so much so that there are distinctive water stains in places. It has been folded in different ways and rolled up for storage. Folding and rolling cause creases. It has been held aloft and probably hung in ways that, over time, caused stretching. The cloth was woven on a handloom with handspun thread that was anything but uniform in color and thickness. All of this contributes to visual information and visual misinformation.

Something else contributed to what we saw and thought we saw on the Shroud. Rogers called it banding. It is a variegated appearance of the cloth that is very significant. Rogers thought it was caused by the method used to bleach linen thread in batches or “hanks” before weaving. Vertical banding lines in the area of the mouth give the appearance of teeth. Look carefully. Those banding lines go well beyond the mouth, beyond the face, and in some cases, for the length of the cloth.

The question, “Are those teeth we see?” evolves into an assertion, “Those are teeth we see.” Such assertions ultimately get trotted out like facts. “The teeth.”

It is not just the dubious assertions that are part of the problem. There is also the persuasive power of an unsolved mystery. In this case, the mystery is how and why; how and why are there definite images of a naked, apparently crucified man on the cloth. It makes one think, even imagine, that maybe even beyond the boundaries of scientific skepticism, the images are praeternatural. Shroudies have adopted a medieval Greek word for such. It’s *acheiropoieta* (the singular being *acheiropoieton*) meaning not made by human hands. Think of the legendary Veronica’s Veil. Think of the seemingly impossible picture of Jesus’ face on a piece of delicate cloth kept in the Capuchin monastery in Manoppello, Italy. Think of the much-venerated picture of the Virgin Mary that miraculously appeared on the cloak of a Mexican peasant, Juan Diego, around 1531, which is

now preserved at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. You don't have to believe these images are real *acheiropoieta*. And you don't have to believe the legends attached to them to be bowled over by the mysteries of how the images are formed on the cloth.

That is true of the Shroud of Turin, as well. And as Rogers makes it clear, the Shroud could be an authentic relic, and the image upon it could have been produced quite naturally. That could mean that the image has nothing to do with the Resurrection.

Does *acheiropoieta* also mean images that are naturally formed, such as a leaf stain on a concrete sidewalk or a Precambrian fish skeleton impression high up on a Wyoming rock formation? Or does it mean only divine images miraculously formed when, as apocryphally told centuries later, Veronica used her veil to wipe the sweat from Jesus' face as he struggled to carry his cross to Calvary?

Could the Shroud image be some sort of inexplicable quasi-natural or unnatural radiation byproduct of a miracle?

When I say inexplicable, I mean not yet so. To be honest, I don't really believe it. I can't believe it yet. I think I will never believe it. There is just something – perhaps only to my way of thinking – that seems philosophically and theologically nutty about this.

Dr. Colin Berry, a British chemist, a super-skeptic and something of a quick-witted polymath, wants to pour water from the font of common sense onto any unnatural wondering about the Shroud of Turin.

Had there been that iconic double image – both sides of the same man, aligned head-to-head – in someone or other's possession for 1300 years prior to Lirey, it would have leaked out into the public domain.

Lirey is a small town in France where the Shroud made its first appearance in medieval Europe. Dr. Berry makes sense! The “no news is good news” aphorism

he uses resonates deep within our left-brain inclinations if we are inclined to be skeptics.

But then again, if we want to believe – and believe me, many of us do – Dr. Berry's observation becomes just one more unproven mystery for the historian. Why, oh why, didn't it leak out?

"Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence," as Carl Sagan and probably a billion other scientists and lawyers are known to have said; I have a better chance of proving that assertion than anyone has of disproving it. That is common sense but beyond serious consideration. Having said that, however, we should consider Colin Berry's common sense reasoning seriously.

However we choose to consider an unsolved mystery, even if it seems so obvious, we must be careful that the allure of unsolved mysteries is not allowed to prevail unqualified.

What was it, I thought, that the Queen of Hearts said to Alice in Wonderland, that seems so apropos? Google knew when I checked:

*Why, sometimes I've believed as many as
six impossible things before breakfast.*

Many of us, particularly those of us who see teeth, would do well to eat breakfast earlier.

I'll do better than my friend Colin Berry since we are being philosophical: Why in tarnation is there any image at all on any of Jesus's burial or passion wrappings?

Hold that thought. I'm running away from the line of thinking I've set for myself. I need to go all the way back to 1965, to Saigon, to the start of this journey of the mind. It's the right place to venture back to the beginning.

First, please note: *Barrie and Kim had been particularly important in helping me better explore my thoughts; Barrie, with the Shroud and Kim with an understanding*

of the meaning of the Resurrection. There were many others. It's a dangerous thing to list others for fear of omitting someone. It's worse not to try. There was the ultra-liberal once-upon-a-time super-crusading New York lawyer, John Klotz, the only lawyer to ever successfully depose Roy Cohn, who would now and then buy me lunch at the Princeton Club and fill me with his upper-West Side of Manhattan Catholicism. There was Joe Marino and his wife the late Sue Benford, a couple from Ohio State who had been putting together a very strong case challenging the results of the 1988 carbon dating debacle. There was Bill Meachum, an archeologist from the University of Hong Kong. There was Russ Breault, a friend and a Shroud explainer extraordinaire. Professor Dan Scavone from Southern Indiana University was always helpful. So was historian Jack Markwardt with his refreshing perspectives. There was the much admired Dr. Thibault Heimbürger, a medical doctor from France, and Dr. Kelly Kearse, a highly analytical immunologist from the University of Kentucky. I've mentioned the late-Ray Rogers, who was a forceful skeptic of his fellow scientists when they veered from the path of established science. I also must mention Dr. Colin Berry, a chemist from the UK, a much-needed skeptic of the Shroud's authenticity. There was Hugh Farey, also a skeptic of authenticity, who served for a while as editor of the [British Society for the Turin Shroud Newsletter](#). Giulio Fanti, a charming old-world professor from the University of Padua, was always helpful. There was Professor Ray Schneider. Yannick Clement. Who else? There were hundreds who commented extensively and thoughtfully on my blog when I was blogging online. OK is one who comes to mind. [Their valued comments have been preserved in the blog](#). If I have failed to mention someone, the fault is mine. I'm growing old, not thoughtless.¹

¹ Throughout this essay, I refer to Barrie and Kim, almost exclusively by their first names. I refer to almost everyone else by their last name only after I use their full name once. If they have a title, and I know it, I include the title. But sometimes I change things up if it seems better to do so.

Saigon, 1965 - The Beginning of the Journey

Tu Do Street

"Padre, I have a question about the Resurrection," Alamo said while wildly waving a timeworn, hand-stained little book in front of Chaplain Pete's face.

Eight of us were gathered in Chaplain Pete's "other office" for one of his frequent "*Anything Goes*" sessions. It wasn't an office at all. He just called it that in his daily activity reports that the Army demanded and that no one in the Army ever read. The "other office" was a small, quiet restaurant just off Saigon's famed Tu Do Street. The place was considered safe, in those days, because of the visible presence of American MPs and Vietnamese police. It was one of the safer spots in town. This year, there had been two bombings already: a floating restaurant on the river and a popular cafe in the heart of the city.

It was a French restaurant. It was probably unchanged from its recent past when Vietnam was a colony of France. French food meant wine, of course, but we were beer-drinking Americans. At first, we brought in our own from the Army-run commissary. But then, the restaurant began to stock American beer, probably from a black market source.

Someone must have run out of real beer and red printer's ink at the same time on this particular Sunday afternoon. The Budweiser label was yellow, white, and blue instead of red, white, and blue, and the beer didn't taste much like Bud. You can't fool me, I thought. But then again, earlier that day. I had bought a package of fake flints for my Zippo lighter from a sidewalk vendor. Who would imagine that someone would paint tiny slivers of bamboo, each the size of a grain of rice, with silver-colored paint so as to sell them to unsuspecting GIs for a nickel apiece? Was that just an exception? Maybe not.

In the military, the preferred way to address a chaplain is not by his rank, as you would any other officer, but as Chaplain, or as Chaplain so and so if you knew his name. But in our group, our commanding general addressed the chaplain as Major. So, when not out and about, we also called him Major. In the restaurant, where military courtesy was relaxed, the Catholics called him Father – he was a priest – and the rest of us called him Pete. The one exception was Alamo, who always called him Padre.

Pete extended an open hand towards Alamo, palm up, wiggling fingers in a way that signaled 'go on, go on.' "You said you had a question, Alamo," he added.

Alamo was still waving his book around. "Okay. My Catechism," he said. He paused for effect. "This book here." He paused again. Then opening the book, he slowly looked around the table and made eye contact with each of us. He wanted to make sure we were listening. With a thespian's arrogant jerk of the head and a dramatic jutting out of his chin, and with his forefinger on the page before him, he started to read. Or so we thought. "It's a Bird. It's a Plane. It's Super Jesus." He stopped and looked around and made eye contact again. Then he continued: "Able to leap through locked doors in a single bound. Faster than a speeding angel."

As the expression goes, you could hear a pin drop. There was near-total silence. There was a soft rush of air from a nearby electric fan. There was the clacking of billiard balls, maybe upstairs. A Jeep outside screeched to a halt. As in the movies, all Jeeps always screech when halting. We all stared down at our plates. It was one of those moments when you wanted to laugh; it really was funny. Simultaneously, you felt embarrassed for someone who had just said something really stupid and rude to a priest. But then we saw that Pete was laughing. So we all laughed. We laughed so hard we couldn't stop for a long time.

"So what's your question?" Pete finally said to Alamo.

With that perfect sense of timing possessed by comedians and gifted debaters, Alamo solemnly and slowly asked, "Padre, how fast does an angel travel?"

We howled. Pete laughed so hard that he almost fell off of his chair.

Yes, as they say, you had to be there. But it really was funny.

It really wasn't a question. Alamo was making a statement.

Alamo was from one of Chicago's north side Italian communities. If you didn't know him, you would think he was a wannabe cowboy by the way he dressed when not in uniform. People who didn't know him thought he was a phony. He wasn't. He just liked playing the part. Someone, we were told, had given him the nickname Alamo because of the big white cowboy hat he wore whenever he could get away with it, which was most of the time. And there was his ceaseless Gene Autry smile. Others said the big white hat made him look like some sort of dessert *à la mode*. Alamo, however, was a play on his name. Al, the first syllable, was for Albert and the other two syllables were a shortening of some Italian family name like Amorosini. Whatever the real reason for his nickname, he liked playing the part of a spaghetti-western cowboy lost in Saigon. He called Pete Padre because it was part of his image to do so. When he encountered one of the "mama-sans" who cleaned our quarters and did our laundry, he'd doff his big hat and address her as *Seniorita*. And *Sí* was how he always said yes to everyone, even the General. "Sí, sir," he'd say.

It helps to remember that it was 1965, long before the internet and smartphones. Spaghetti Westerns, filmed in Italy's countryside, because it looked like the American West, were something of a fad in stateside movie theaters.

It was a time, too, when in America's South, civil rights marchers were being beaten by cops with nightsticks as they tried to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. Many of the marchers were priests and pastors. An Episcopal seminarian named Jonathan Daniels was shot to death by a cop while protecting

a young, black civil rights activist named Ruby Sales. One of the marchers in 1965 was Father Kim Dreisbach, my friend, who I did not know then but would meet many years later.

That year, 1965, saw combat forces arriving in Vietnam in much larger numbers than before. Helicopters were now the cavalry's new mount. The "Cav" had given up horses long ago and moved on to tanks. Now, in the Vietnamese "up-country" the Cav rode into battle on attack choppers.

In Saigon, each morning, at exactly six o'clock, Air Force Sergeant Adrian Cronauer kicked off his Armed Forces Radio show by yelling out a long, drawn-out, "Gooooood morning Vietnam!" Soldiers everywhere listened on portable radios. Robyn Williams, who immortalized Cronauer in the movie named for the greeting, was a bit of an exaggerated figure. The movie, nonetheless, painted a reasonably accurate picture of the city of Saigon as I knew it in 1965.

Now, some fifty-five years later, I can't recall why I was sitting in one of Father Pete's bull sessions. I wasn't Catholic. I was Episcopalian, or at least that's what was stamped on my dog tags. I had been confirmed in the Episcopal Church when I was twelve years old for no other reason than it was the expected thing to do if you grew up in an Episcopalian family. Catechism class to prepare me for the event consisted of memorizing the Apostles' Creed and learning at least five of the Ten Commandments. Being twelve, I don't think I had any idea about the Resurrection. Yes, we all said the line, "On the third day he rose again." It was part of the creed we said in church each Sunday. No one asked and no one wondered if I knew what it meant. No one asked if I believed it. A few years later, by the time I arrived in Saigon, a mixture of public school and university classes had taught me a lot about science. I had a pretty good idea about how the universe and the earth had been created billions of years ago. I understood and believed in the theory of evolution. I had a pretty good idea about what worked

and didn't work in the world. In other words, I had a sense of the laws of nature. The Bible, from Genesis to Revelations, made little sense. I was a Christian in name only. In 1965, I had no better understanding of the Resurrection than I did when I was twelve.

In Rome, in 1965, the Second Vatican Council finally concluded with a series of commitments to change. Times were changing. Although Bob Dylan and most other “hippie” singers were routinely banned by Armed Forces Radio, Cronauer gave Alamo a bootleg copy of "The Times They Are a-Changin'." It was on a reel of tape with about a dozen other “subversive” songs. Alamo thought the song fitting, not only for society but for the Catholic Church. He played it over and over on his portable suitcase-sized reel-to-reel tape recorder. He played it until the high-fidelity magnetic tape wore out.

Times, indeed, were changing. Father Pete could now say the Mass in English. In response to one of the goals of Vatican II, preliminary work began on a new catechism for the Catholic Church that Pope John Paul II would finally promulgate in 1992. It would be very different from the catechism Alamo was now holding in his hands.

"Alamo," said Pete, "Humor me. Read what your catechism really says."

Alamo, who had his finger stuck in the book at the exact page, began. "Keep in mind," he said, "this catechism is talking about the body of Jesus after the Resurrection. It reads:"

Question 409: What are the qualities of a glorified body? Answer: The qualities of a glorified body are: (1) Brilliancy, by which it gives forth light; (2) Agility, by which it moves from place to place as rapidly as an angel; (3) Subtility, by which material things cannot shut it out; (4) Impassibility, by which it is made incapable of suffering.

"What's wrong with that?" said Pete.

“It's yarn spinning, Padre. It's okay if you're explaining Mark Twain and the ‘Jumping Frog of Calaveras County,’ but not Mark, the saint, and Matthew, Luke, and John. At school, we had this nun, Sister Penelope. Best teacher I ever had. Sister P told us to ignore the embellishments in the catechism and not to make up stuff.”

Again, Alamo paused and looked around. He went on. “Talk about not making stuff up. Just for fun, Sister P would pick on a student and ask him where Jesus got the clean clothes and sandals he wore on Easter morning. Where did he wash up after his ordeal? Remember, his followers didn’t recognize him. Kind of like me on Sunday mornings, all spiffed up.”

I chuckled. But no one joined in.

“What’s your point?” asked Pete.

“Not my point, Padre. It’s Sister P’s point.” And with that, Alamo got up to visit the restroom. Others started to speak up.

"I thought we were going to talk about miracles today," one of the guys said.

"We are," said Pete. "The Resurrection is a miracle."

"Yeah. But Alamo is just griping about his little catechism book, again. He’s doing it all the time."

Someone else said, "I thought we were going to talk about miracles like cures in Lourdes or our Lady of Fatima," said one of the other guys.

“And what about fake miracles like weeping statues?”

"What about the Cards beating the Yankees in Game Seven last year? That's a miracle, right?"

“Wasn’t there this dude in Spain whose leg grew back after it was amputated?”

And so it went for a while until Alamo returned and Pete spoke up. "I want to hear what Alamo has to say. Let's give him ten minutes. Then we'll talk about non-Biblical miracles. If we don't finish today, we'll continue next week. Does everybody agree with that?"

After some grumbling, everybody did agree.

Alamo stood up and turned his chair around so the back was to the table. He sat down again, now straddling the chair like it was a horse. He rested one hand on the back of the chair like it was the horn of his saddle. With the index finger of his other hand, he tapped the brim of his ten-gallon hat and said, "Giddyup." He actually said, "giddyup." He was play-acting, which was his way of dramatically controlling this small group. He began by telling us about his dad.

While Alamo was in high school, his father had worked for a company that "pressed" phonograph records. Then one day he stumbled on the sidewalk in front of his own house. There was nothing wrong with the sidewalk and he had been walking alone. There was no one to blame for his fall and no one to help pay the bills. The year 1965 was the first year for Medicare but the accident was before then. Alamo's father was too young to receive any benefits, anyway. Unable to walk without crutches and confined to a wheelchair most of the time, he was forced to quit his job. Alamo's mother went to work to support the family.

With a lot of time on his hands, Alamo's father started reading and thinking about his religious beliefs. One of the first books he read was Alamo's textbook, "The Baltimore Catechism No. 3: With Explanations," the same book Alamo had with him in Saigon. He also read books that Alamo's mother brought home from the public library, where she worked.

"He was in a lot of pain," said Alamo. "I wanted him to go to Montreal or even Lourdes in France, but he wouldn't go. I often prayed to Brother André Bessette, a monk in Montreal, who was credited with curing thousands of people who

couldn't walk. I don't know if we are supposed to pray to people who are not saints, but this was my dad."

He looked over at Pete. "Padre. Was it okay?"

Pete was smiling and gesturing with two upturned hands as though weighing one thing against another. "Sure," he said, "God always listens. You did the right thing. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise."

For me, a non-Catholic, this was heavy-duty stuff. I found it fascinating.

Alamo continued. "I remember the day my father told me flat out to stop trying to get him to go anywhere. He didn't believe in miracles anymore. The healing of the blind man was a psychosomatic cure, he said. The wine at the wedding was a big misunderstanding. He figured someone found some wine they didn't know they had. As the story was told and retold, it got better until it was a miracle. The Resurrection of Christ was a spiritual thing; it wasn't an event. He figured that nothing physical happened. Even so, he sometimes let my mother take him to Mass."

"But he didn't believe," someone said. "Isn't it a problem?"

"We should pray for a miracle," said Pete. Go on, Alamo. Any more wisdom from Sister P?"

Alamo continued. "Yes. As she explained to us, many people in these scientific times believe that nothing happens if it violates the laws of nature. Does that mean they don't believe in miracles? Mostly, that's true, she told us. And mostly, they don't believe in God and that's not good.

"Others believe in God and miracles, but for some strange reason, they believe God only works miracles with the laws of nature. They want everything to have a

scientific explanation. In England, there's a biologist² who argues that virgin births are scientifically possible. So Jesus could have been born of a virgin. It happens with guppies, so why not humans. But then she ran into a problem. She realized that with a virgin birth, Jesus would lack the essential Y chromosome needed to be a man. She figured there must be a way for God to manipulate things. I remember telling this to my father. He laughed. 'The virgin birth didn't happen. It's a metaphor,' he said.

"Sister P made changing water into wine very interesting. Wine is about 85 percent water anyway. This simplifies the miracle quite a bit. For every one-gallon jug of wine, only about two cups of water need to be converted to other stuff like sugars, yeast, and those all-important chemicals that give the wine its good taste. Of course, this would mean taking molecules of water apart, stripping them down to atoms, and then breaking them down further into sub-particles and building new atoms from all those little parts. Some carbon would be needed. It is an essential atom that is not in water but you have to have it for wine. According to Sister P, who taught both science and catechism, the heat required would be that of a white-hot star. That would end the wedding feast and our entire solar system instantly. You've got to admit that the eighteenth century philosopher David Hume understated things when he said that miracles are violations of natural laws.

"There is another way that is infinitely better. C. S. Lewis, a British guy, argued that miracles can exist within the natural world without violating natural law. Sister P puts it more simply. Nature knows nothing of miracles and miracles have no need of nature. She called miracles God's ultimate sleight of hand. Nothing happens scientifically. Nothing is assembled or disassembled. Think of it this way. God simply says what he wants. And it is. It doesn't happen. It is.

² Dr. Helen Spurway, a geneticist specializing in the reproductive biology of the guppy at University College, London, claimed in 1955, that parthenogenesis could occur in human mothers.

That's all. The ancient Hebrews understood this better than we do. A literal translation from Genesis reads, 'And God said let there be light and light is.'

“Sister P argues that we have three choices when it comes to miracles. We can reject them all together and put all our trust in nature. We can imagine a complex deconstruction and reconstruction of matter, the swapping in and out of molecules or atoms but from where and to where and how so. Or, we can assume that nothing happens through nature. Rather, by the word or will of God, history ends up with a miraculous result. Nothing happens for that to be so.

“The measure of a miracle is the result, not the way it happens. If you and I want cookies, we mix the ingredients and bake the mixture in an oven. Well not really; we write home and someone bakes them and mails them to us.”

Home baked cookies were treasured in Vietnam.

“If God wants a cookie, a cookie exists. He doesn't make it. He doesn't bake it. It just is.

“Jesus didn't change water into wine. I know we need to be cautious about taking scripture too literally but read about the wedding at Cana. Jesus asked the servants to fill some jars with water and then draw some out and take it to a wedding official. There is nothing to suggest incantations or magic wands or laying on of hands or any of the literary devices used for magical transformations. It's not like a fairy godmother waving a magic wand and changing a pumpkin into a coach to transport Cinderella to the ball.”

I heard it: the measure of a miracle is the result. But, I wanted to say but how? But I knew there was no how.

“Angels don't travel fast,” Alamo went on. “They don't travel at all. When they go from one place to another place they don't move: not through the land or sea or space between. And they don't take any time getting there. Thomas Aquinas figured this out 700 years ago. As it is for angels, so it was for Jesus. Didn't the

authors of this silly catechism ever read Summa Theologica? John's Jesus didn't rise up. He didn't shed his burial wrappings. He didn't roll back the stone and walk out of the tomb. And time has nothing to do with it either. He is risen. He is where he needs to be, dressed as he needs to be. He didn't pass through locked doors. He was simply in the room. He didn't travel to Emmaus, he was simply there, along the road when he needed to be. None of what Sister P told us is contrary to scripture. It is what scripture says."

Note: Many years later I would visit St. Joseph's Oratory in Montreal, where I saw racks and racks of abandoned crutches, walking canes, and wheelchairs. I was just a tourist then and I did not even think about Alamo at the time. A few years later, in 2010, Brother André was canonized as Saint André of Montreal. And now, thinking back and remembering, I wonder what happened to Alamo and his father.

The Resurrection of the 8-Ball

Nguyen Hue Street of Flowers, Saigon, 1965

A couple of days later, Alamo and I were sitting on the hood of our Jeep in front of the USO on the Street of Flowers in downtown Saigon. Because we were attached to an intelligence unit someone, oxymoronically, thought it would be prudent if when in Saigon, we wore civilian clothes so as not to look like Americans. So, with a GI haircut, a button-down plaid shirt, starched khakis, and a pair of highly-polished Bass Weejun penny loafers, I was trying to not look like an American sitting on an Army jeep with big white letters that read US ARMY.

The USO was a club for American servicemen run by volunteers from the Salvation Army as well as Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish agencies. It was a place where you could get good sandwiches, borrow books, copy music to audiotape, and make a ten-minute phone call to your family in the states. Calls were actually amateur radio transmissions to a 'ham' near your home who would splice his shortwave radio to the telephone company's wires and 'patch you in.' After saying something you had to say the word "over" to let loved ones on the "other end of the line" know it was their turn to talk.

Amidst the racket of car horns, bicycle bells, and the angry shouts of nearly-runover pedestrians, we were eating street vendor lemongrass chicken while waiting for Alamo's scheduled call to his father.

I'm thinking as I write this that Alamo may have mentioned the Shroud of Turin. I just can't remember. It seems he should have. Alamo was always bringing up what were to me esoteric tidbits about his religion. Had I heard about this place or that, this relic or that, this saint or that? I don't think I cared much and I certainly don't remember much. He would have thought of the Shroud as one of

the great mysteries of the world. He would have mentioned that it contained a picture of Jesus. I would have remembered that.

“Yeah, right,” I would have said. “Another one of your miracles?”

“Let’s go inside and shoot some pool,” I had said. It was very hot outside. The USO was one of the very few buildings in Saigon that had air conditioning. Even the top brass would come there to cool off. It was crowded.

What followed next, I remember very well.

“Imagine,” said Alamo as he selected a cue stick from a rack on the wall. “You’ve sunk balls 1 through 7, and all you have to do is pocket the 8-ball. It’s an easy shot. If you do it right, the cue ball will strike the 8-ball in the right spot, and the 8-ball will go into the corner pocket to your left. The cue ball will ricochet away to a safe resting spot. Of course, you lose, if you sink the cue ball by mistake. Do you get the picture?”

I nodded yes. But then I asked, “What’s this all about? Why don’t we just play instead of imagining a game?”

“Hang on,” said Alamo. “It will be clear in a minute. Okay?”

“Okay,” I answered.

“Okay, back to the game we are imagining,” said Alamo. “I should mention that everyone is watching. You point to the left pocket and say, ‘8-Ball in the corner pocket.’ You chalk up your stick, blow off the extra dust, and line up on the cue ball. You pull back and then with just the right amount of speed, you thrust forward. It’s a perfect shot. The cue ball rolls forward and strikes the 8-ball straight-on, at just the right spot. The 8-ball rolls slowly towards the pocket and drops in. The cue ball comes to rest in the middle of the table. A perfect win: 8-ball in the pocket, cue ball on the table.

“So,” I said. What was he getting at, I wondered.

“Wait. It gets better. A stranger walks up with the triangle rack ready to rack up the balls for another game and so you go around the table pulling out all the balls from each pocket.

“Wait a minute,” you say. “Where is the 8-ball?”

“The stranger ignores you and puts the other 14 balls into the triangle. There’s a gap in the middle where the 8-ball should be. Everybody is watching with curiosity as he removes the triangle. ‘Go ahead and break,’ he said. And you do. And when all the balls come to rest, there is the 8-ball right in the middle of the table. No one saw it appear. No one saw it moving. But everyone sees it now. And then an instant later, it is gone.”

Alamo stopped. Then he said solemnly:

*Then their eyes were opened,
and they recognized him;
and he vanished from their sight.³*

“That is how I think miracles work. That is what I think C.S. Lewis is trying to tell us.⁴ After you buried it, the 8-ball never moved, not so much as a molecule or an atom of it changed. Nothing moved in and nothing moved out. But it was gone from the pocket. Then it was where it needed to be. Then it vanished from your sight.

“It just appeared and disappeared at will without any motion. Don’t think of anything happening. This is maybe what Thomas Aquinas is trying to tell us with

³ Perhaps Alamo used the Douay-Rheims Bible. I have chosen the words from a translation of Luke by N. T. Wright.

⁴ I’m not sure this is what Lewis is trying to tell us. Regardless, I agree with what I think Alamo was trying to tell me.

his angel allegory. A miracle is a result, not an action. A miracle is a God-chosen result that is different from the one we expect from nature.

“That’s nonsense,” I said.

“Maybe. But it’s the nonsense I believe in.”

Long after I had internalized this idea and subconsciously fooled myself into thinking I had come up with this idea on my own, I called it *results without process*. I also continued to call it nonsense. And I came to believe in that nonsense.

I later realized that Alamo had combined or mixed up a couple of different parts of the Resurrection narrative: the empty tomb and the Emmaus encounter. I thought, at first, that he made a mistake. Then I thought he didn’t. It doesn’t matter.

Note: Botanists tell us that some plants have seeds that seemingly intentionally delay germination for as much as a half-century until conditions are right. Some seeds germinate as soon as they touch the soil. It was that way with the seeds Alamo scattered. I came away with enough faith (a mustard seed comes to mind) to keep me in the church. It would be many years before I realized how much I was fascinated with the Resurrection. It took more than fifty years to remember that day in Saigon in 1965. It did happen quite suddenly when I saw the photograph of an American soldier in Vietnam wearing a big, white cowboy hat.

How much do I actually remember? How accurately? Alamo was real and so was his cowboy hat. So, too, were his extraordinary well-formed opinions on theology. Father Pete and his “Anything Goes” sessions in the Tu Do Street restaurant were real, though I attended very few of them. The actual words used by Alamo and others are at best a fictionalized reconstruction in an attempt to capture the gist of what was said more than fifty years ago. I think I did well.

I internalized his theology and made it my own. I thought I had figured it out by myself. I never wondered why I was so interested in the Resurrection, and thus the Turin Shroud, until I saw that picture.

An Overgrown, Overblown Forest

New York to Miami, 2001.

While waiting for several hours in New York's LaGuardia Airport for a weather-delayed flight to Miami, I ate chili dogs and browsed the shelves of an airport bookstore. That's when I noticed a new book by the historian Thomas Cahill, *Desire of the Everlasting Hills*.

It's not the sort of book you would expect to find in an airport bookstore. But there it was among self-help books and the top ten novels. It was a hardback book with a paper jacket selling for an absurdly high price. But the subtitle, *The World Before and After Jesus*, caught my attention and I bought it.

By the time we finally took off and had climbed to 30,000 feet it had grown dark. My airport-frazzled impatience had been soothed away by the soft white noise mixture of engine whine and whooshing air. I was reading by that little overhead light they call a reading light.

The subtitle is wrong. That's what I thought. It should be *The World Before and After the Resurrection*.

The life and times of Jesus were not what changed the arc of history. It was, for the whole world – for Christians and non-Christians – for however one might define it or characterize it, the belief in the Resurrection by a small group of followers. As I saw it then and still do, it was the claim, the assurance, the demonstration that Jesus overcame death.

There I was flying almost as fast as angels, I thought – defying death, for I never get on an airplane that I don't for at least two seconds think about crashing. And I was enjoying the book when I came across this:

It may be that all during the centuries that Christians could not bring themselves to portray the crucified Christ they had a picture of Jesus's sufferings, a picture that they claimed was "not made by human hands." There is, at least, an ancient tradition that such an image existed as a treasure of the Eastern church and that, after many adventures, it came to rest at Constantinople. There are some indications that this picture may be what we now call the Shroud of Turin, which in the fourteenth century was brought back from the crusades by a plundering French nobleman and finally found its way to the cathedral of Turin in Italy.

Ludicrous, I thought, but fascinating. How can anyone think the Shroud of Turin is really the actual burial shroud of Jesus? The fact that the Shroud of Turin has an image on it believed to be a picture of Christ made it seem beyond preposterous. Yet, Cahill, historian that he was, thought it was worth mentioning with a note of credence.

Then in my mid-fifties, I had always been an avid reader of history, particularly early church history. I could not ever recall reading any serious article or hearing anyone talk about the Shroud of Turin. Even with my ongoing interest in the Resurrection, the Shroud was so far from being something I cared about that I never paid it any attention. Thus, when in 1979, Walter McCrone, a world-renowned forensic microscopist, who I'm sure I had never heard of, claimed that he found paint on a few Shroud fibers, I didn't notice the story. McCrone tells us that the Shroud had suddenly appeared in 1356 in the hands of a French knight who would not say where it came from. And also, he tells us that a local bishop claimed that an artist "cunningly painted" it. Had I noticed the story in 1979, I would have certainly accepted his conclusion. It would have made sense to me.

A decade later, I hadn't noticed when three radiocarbon dating laboratories, using carbon 14 dating, supposedly proved the Shroud of Turin was medieval.

Had I noticed, I would have certainly accepted the conclusion. I trust science. I did then, and I do now, more than ever.

Moreover, I am naturally skeptical about any relic with a historical footprint in medieval Europe. The year 1356 was a time of unbridled superstition in demons, witches, magic, and miracle-working relics. It was a time of frequent famine and the Black Death plague. It was a time of extreme economic and political turbulence and of war. The same year that the Shroud was first displayed publicly in the small French village of Lirey, nearby, at the battle of Poitiers, England's Black Prince defeated the French and captured King John II. Adding to the political turmoil, the Pope was in Avignon, not Rome. Indicative of the thinking in this age, some believed that the plague was God's retribution on the whole world because the Pope was not in the eternal city. In this climate of superstition, naiveté, and disorder, a lucrative market in false relics flourished. And though the Fourth Lateran Council, in 1215, acknowledged the problem, church authorities did little to curb the market in them. Our knowledge of this time in history rightly conditions us to be suspicious of any relic that might appear in Europe at this time. But I had not noticed its history, either. In metaphoric parlance, the Shroud of Turin was never a blip on my radar. And it would have likely remained that way were it not for a single enigmatic fact that Cahill mentioned: the picture on the Shroud of Turin was a photographic-like negative.

I knew something about the subject of negatives. But rather than marveling at this fact, I doubted it. I was so convinced that the Shroud of Turin was a fake that I doubted the images were negatives.

It surprises me now. I was certain that no artist, no craftsman, no faker of relics, could possibly paint a negative of a human face. To do so would be like trying to write your signature upside down and backward. Our minds are programmed for the way we see things in the world, a world where black is black and white is

white. It is relatively easy, with talent and training, to paint a picture of what we see in the world. And an artist, if he is imaginative, like Picasso, can alter that perception in stylistic ways. But the one thing he cannot easily do is to perfectly reverse black and white and all the darker and lighter shades of gray while painting a face. I say that, but at the same time, I do wonder. Could some sort of highly-gifted, prodigious savant do so?

So let's imagine, for just a moment, that he could. How would he know, without technology to test his results, that he had done it correctly? A more profound question is why? In an age so undemanding as the medieval, when any sliver of wood could pass as a piece of the "true cross" and any bramble as a piece of the "crown of thorns," why bother?

Of Poems and Liturgies and Icons and More

Online, 2001.

As I said, I doubted the images were negatives. I had to see for myself. And so, from a hotel room in Miami, I logged onto a website I found. It was shroud.com, run by Barrie Schwortz. He had his phone number on his website, and so I called him. We talked for three hours. Barrie was a photographer, and he confirmed my thinking about the negatives. In fact, Barrie, as I learned that night, had photographed the Shroud close up.

Barrie's website, at first blush, seemed to be mostly an archive of scientific and some seemingly quasi-scientific papers presented at conferences of Shroud enthusiasts. My gosh, I thought, this must be what conspiracy theory websites are like: UFOers, flat-earthers, and now, shroudies. It almost stopped me cold. It should have. Something kept me reading. Maybe it was the hotel room. I didn't feel like reading my book right now. I didn't feel like watching TV. I didn't feel like sleeping. I kept browsing and encountered a couple of papers written by an Episcopal priest, Father Kim Dreisbach, who I would soon meet by telephone and then in person, someone who would help me better understand the Resurrection in new and interesting ways.

The first paper by Kim that I noticed was, "The Shroud of Turin: Its Ecumenical Implications." Therein, Kim quoted Duke University's Reynolds Price⁵:

At once it surpassed the variously moving guesses of artists in the Roman catacombs, the Byzantine mosaicists, Mantegna, Leonardo, Rembrandt and Rubens...Carbon dating now concludes that the linen is medieval in origin, with the corollary that the image was somehow made by an artist. But no one has shown how a fourteenth-century artist produced an object so complex in historical accuracy and still so mysterious in its physical properties. Meanwhile the battered

⁵ For those wanting to pursue this more, the citation on Kim's paper refers to Reynold Pierce. It should read Reynolds Price. Search Reynolds Price in Amazon Books for more details.

calm face on the Shroud goes on seeming a worthy cause of the cataract of music, art, architecture and mystic rapture that artists and saints of the past two millennia have poured in honor of Christ and directed toward him. And all the Christs I imagined thereafter began in the unanswerable eloquence of the Shroud [Italic added.] (Reynolds Pierce. 1990. Clear Pictures. New York: Ballantine, pp. 243-44).

Then Kim wrote:

[those who] participated in the Evening Office of the Holy Shroud. The Greek Archbishop, the Roman Catholic Archbishop, the Episcopal Bishop and the Presiding Bishop of the AME Church gathered before the world's first full size, backlit transparency of the Shroud and joined clergy representing the Assemblies of God, Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists and Presbyterians in an amazing witness to ecumenical unity. At the conclusion of the service, His Grace Bishop John of the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Atlanta, turned to me and said: "Thank you very much for picking our day." I didn't fully understand the significance of his remark until he explained to me that August 16th is the Feast of the Holy Mandylion commemorating the occasion in 944 A.D. when the Shroud was first shown to the public in Byzantium following its arrival the previous day from Edessa in southeastern Turkey.

Although the linen is now legally the possession of the Pontiff and all his successors, its message is for all the world. One day at the nearby Trappist Monastery of the Holy Spirit, I was to learn this truth phrased in a way that has stayed with me through the years. Fr. Anthony Delesi said: "You know, Kim, we Roman Catholics have taken care of the Shroud for the last 800 years after we stole it from the Greeks who had been its custodians for the first 1200 years. However, in truth it belongs to no denomination - possibly not even to Christianity..."

The second paper by Kim was a short paper called "Liturgical Clues to the Shroud's history." Two items, in particular, caught my attention. The first was the "Hymn of the Pearl," an epic poem found within the *Acts of Thomas* (not to be confused with the non-canonical *Gospel of Thomas*). Some scholars think the poem is older than the *Acts of Thomas*. It is often attributed to Bardesane of

Edessa, a Gnostic poet writing as early as 216 CE. A few puzzling words, a mere four lines of poetry that seem curiously out of place, that are found in different places in different Greek and Syriac versions of the Acts, are spoken, as though, in the first person by the risen Christ:

*Suddenly, I saw my image on my garment like in a mirror
Myself and myself through myself [or myself facing outward and inward]
As though divided, yet one likeness
Two images: but one likeness of the King [or King of kings]*

Keith Witherup, a blogger over at ReligionForum.org, would later explain:

If you look at a photograph of the Shroud you see two full-size images of a man, one in which the image is facing outward and one inward. In more modern terms we describe these as front-side and back-side images, or ventral and dorsal images. They are, indeed, as in a mirror as they are full size and seemingly perpendicular to the surface. Those words, “as though divided, yet one likeness,” resonate with the two separate images that meet at the top of the head.

It is hard to imagine what else these lines of poetry could refer to. Saying that, however, doesn't make for logically sound, objective history, no more so than, say, Dr. Berry stating that had the Shroud been in “someone or other's possession for 1300 years prior to Lirey, it would have leaked out.”

Even so, while looking at a picture of the Shroud and reading these words, I was intrigued. I was even more intrigued when reading about an ancient 6th-Century Spanish rite, the Mozarabic Rite. In the illatio (preface) for Saturday in Holy Week, we find the intriguing wording:

Peter ran with John to the tomb and saw the recent imprints (vestigia) of the dead and risen man on the linens. (M. Green. "Enshrouded in Silence" (The Ampleforth Journal, Vol. 74, Part 3 (p. 329).)

These spy clues seem quite confirming. But are they? As with scientific evidence, historical records must also be questioned, examined, and reexamined for accuracy and relevance. For example, consider the “Hymn of the Pearl.” There are a number of versions in Syriac and Greek. How similar or dissimilar are they? There are a number of translations, as well. How accurate are they? More precisely, how well do these translations and versions represent the original author’s intended meaning?

Robin Waterfield, a classical scholar, and translator of ancient texts, writes in the Oxford University Press's blog, Academic Insights for the Thinking World:

How exactly should one echo the phraseology, word order, sentence structure, metaphors, and so on of the original? Though one can think of a number of supposed translations of ancient texts where the translators have imagined that they knew better than the original author what he was trying to say, it is the other extreme which is all too common in this field: over-literal translation – translation that reads like the first draft of a schoolchild’s exercise, or a 1950s’ phrasebook for Eastern European tourists.

It is a potential problem, not only with the Hymn of the Pearl but with every letter, speech, and quotation that becomes part of the popular lines of reasoning arguing for and against authenticity.

Then, too, there is the problem of how ancient texts get corrupted by scribes and copyists. Pope Stephen III, in 769 CE supposedly had said of the Image of Edessa,

[Christ] spread out his entire body on a linen cloth that was white as snow. On this cloth, marvelous as it is to see . . . the glorious image of the Lord’s face, and the length of his entire and most noble body has been divinely transferred.

Some scholars now think the reference to his entire body was added by a copyist in the twelfth century. Even so, that is telling. It is telling in the original and telling as a twelfth-century nugget of knowledge about a full-body image.

Kim had introduced me to many other aspects of Shroud history. I would never have thought I would be saying that non-scientific observations and historical interpretations might trump scientific findings. But these bits of knowledge, which Dreisbach called spy clues, are indeed significant. They challenge the carbon-14 dating, perhaps even more than the hypothesis of contamination from a medieval mending. So too, these clues cast doubt on the idea that the Shroud is a medieval forgery.

Beneath the fog of sensational legendary tales of a king named Abgar and his written correspondence with Jesus of Nazareth, there are reasonable historical indications of a cloth believed to have been an *acheiropoieta* (a picture not made with human hands) of Jesus. It is known as the Image of Edessa. Provenance and why it was believed *acheiropoieta* is what the legends are all about. That these stories come to us from the highly regarded 4th-century church historian Eusebius only means that the stories existed. It does not mean they should be taken seriously. There are other documented utterances indicating that the Image of Edessa may have existed.

According to one story, many centuries later, on August 15, 944, forces of Emperor Romanus, after laying siege to Edessa, took a cloth bearing the image of Jesus to the Church of St. Mary of Blachernae in Constantinople where it seems to have remained until French and Venetian Crusaders looted Constantinople in April of 1204. Historian Mark Guscini explains that Gregory Referendarius, the archdeacon of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, preached a sermon about the relic upon its arrival in the city in which he described it as a full-length image of Jesus with a facial image and bloodstains from a wound in the side.

Mark Guscini, in his doctoral thesis at the University of London, suggests a cautionary note is warranted. Guscini's thesis is not about the Shroud of Turin. The idea that the Image of Edessa may, in fact, be the Turin relic is controversial. He writes (page 193):

However, this controversy only arises if it is assumed that the burial shroud of Christ (and there definitely seems to have been a burial shroud) is indeed one and the same as the cloth now known as the Shroud of Turin: this argument lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

In 1201, the sacristan of the Pharos Chapel in Constantinople, Nicholas Mesarites, described an interesting ceremony.

Here He rises again and the sindon [=shroud] is the clear proof still smelling fragrant of perfumes, defying corruption because they wrapped the mysterious naked dead body from head to feet.

There is evidence that suggests that the Edessa Cloth, or if not that, a purported burial cloth of Christ, was taken to Athens after the plundering of Constantinople. Theodore Ducas Anglelos wrote in a letter to Pope Innocent III:

The Venetians partitioned the treasure of gold, silver and ivory, while the French did the same with the relics of saints and the most sacred of all, the linen in which our Lord Jesus Christ was wrapped after His death and before the resurrection. We know that the sacred objects are preserved by their predators in Venice and France and in other places.

Nicholas d'Orrante, the Papal Legate in Athens, in 1207, wrote about relics taken from Constantinople by French knights. Referring specifically to burial cloths, he mentions seeing them "with our own eyes" in Athens.

From somewhere, an image-bearing cloth, presumably or possibly the same cloth that had been in Athens, made its way to a small church in Lirey, France, and then, ultimately, to Turin. The problem is that there is a significant gap of about 150 years between Athens and Lirey.

And there are competing theories and competing cloths to contend with as well. For instance, we must consider a full-body image of Jesus on a cloth discovered in Camuliania in 544 CE and carried about and displayed throughout much of Asia Minor. In 574, Justin II brought this cloth with an image claimed to have been acheiropoietia to Constantinople, where it became known as the Image of God Incarnate. Historian Jack Markwardt contends that this is what eventually made it to Lirey and ultimately Turin.

While I was speaking about the Shroud at a large Catholic church and school in New York, a young Catholic priest raised his hand and said, “I don’t see anything here but some observations separated by centuries that are only held together by fragmentary descriptions of bloodstains and an image of a man.”

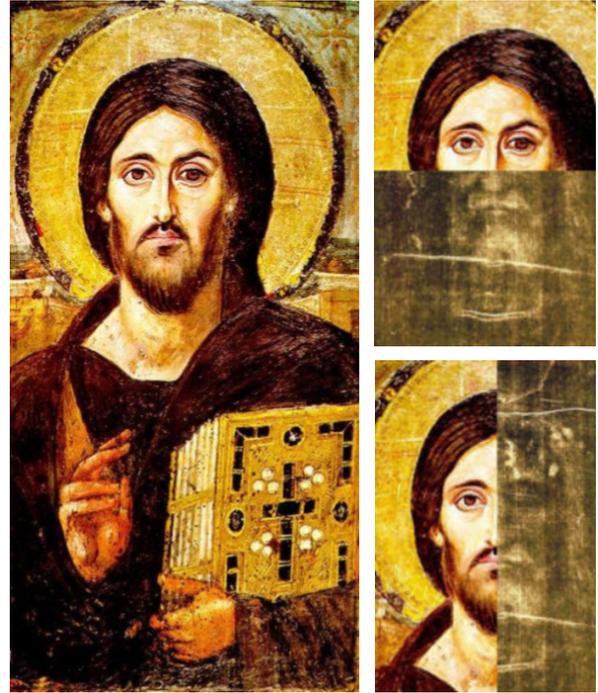
“You’re right, Father,” I said. “From the information we have, we cannot conclude that the Image of Edessa is indeed the shroud that ended up in Athens. Nor can we know for certain that the shroud looted from Constantinople is the shroud that ended up in Turin.”

I wish now that I had been able then to have read Mark Guscini’s, [The Tradition of the Image of Edessa](#) written in 2014 for a Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of London. (stored on the university’s Royal Holloway and Bedford New College portal website). Mark writes therein:

However, as pointed out in the thesis (pp. 200–201), even if, as a few texts claim, the Image of Edessa is a large bloodstained cloth depicting a crucified man, this does not in itself equate it with the Shroud of Turin

The Pantocrator Icon at St. Catherine's

There are no descriptions of Jesus' physical appearance in the New Testament. Nor are there any meaningful descriptions in any known early Church sources. St. Augustine of Hippo made a point of this in the fifth century. Then, starting most likely in the sixth century, a new common appearance for Jesus started to emerge. Today, we see it in many pictures of Jesus, particularly in icons produced within the Eastern Orthodox traditions. This common picture quality may have started in the



Middle East about the same time that the Image of Edessa was reportedly found hidden in the walls of Edessa in 544 CE. The Pantocrator Icon at St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai may well be the earliest known example.

Up until this movement began, pictures of Jesus were mostly of a young, beardless man, often with short hair, often in story-like settings in which he is depicted as a shepherd.

Rapidly, throughout the Middle East and eventually, throughout Mediterranean Europe, pictures of Jesus became frontal portraits with distinctive facial characteristics. Jesus most often had shoulder-length hair, an elongated thin nose, and a forked beard. Numerous other characteristics appeared in these pictures, and some of them were seemingly strange and of no particular artistic

merit. Many portraits had two wisps of hair that dropped at an angle from a central parting of the hair. Many pictures showed Jesus with large "owlish" eyes. Numerous other characteristics appeared in these pictures, and some of them were seemingly strange and of no particular artistic merit.

Paul Vignon, a French art scholar, who first categorized these facial attributes in 1930, also described a square-cornered U shape between the eyebrows, a downward-pointing triangle on the bridge of the nose, a raised right eyebrow, accents on both cheeks with the accent on the right cheek being somewhat lower, an enlarged left nostril, an accent line below the nose, a gap in the beard below the lower lip, and hair on one side of the head that was shorter than on the other side.

The Pantocrator at St. Catherine's in the Sinai certainly was one of the early depictions of Christ in the new style. It doesn't have all of the Vignon characteristics, but it does have most. What it does have that makes it unique is an uncanny resemblance to the face of the Turin Shroud. One can easily imagine that the face for the icon was copied from the Shroud. Perhaps, as some do say, it could have been the other way around. Either way, if we can trust the similarities, this visual spy clue is perhaps but a drop in the bucket. Enough drops and perhaps we can firmly establish the Shroud's pre-European history.

The side-by-sides are only for illustration. One should not assume a one-for-one match. There can be no assumed congruence because we don't have precise measurements and knowledge about any angles or skew in the photographs. Nor do we know if the Shroud, old as it may be, may have been stretched or shrunk in places.

The Sudarium of Oviedo

In the Cathedral of Oviedo, Spain, there is a bloodstained piece of ordinary linen cloth measuring about 34 by 21 inches. Tradition has it that the Sudarium of Oviedo, as it is known, is the face cloth mentioned in John's Gospel: "and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself." – John 20:7 (NRSV)

The Sudarium's provenance seems impressive. In 614 CE, a cloth believed to be Jesus' face cloth, which had been kept in a cave near Jerusalem, was moved in an ark or chest to Alexandria when the armies of the Sasanian King of Persia, Khusru II, conquered Jerusalem. Then, taken along the coast of North Africa it eventually arrived in Spain. Travels of the ark with the cloth throughout Spain are well documented. It was in Toledo in 674 and in Oviedo in 840. Unfortunately, we don't know if the chest was opened and if the cloth was identified before 1075.

Mark Guscini, who has also studied the Sudarium, wrote in a 1998 paper, "The Oviedo Cloth:"

The most striking thing about all the stains [on the Sudarium of Oviedo] is that they coincide exactly with the face of the image on the Turin Shroud." – Lutterworth Press: Cambridge

The Pray Codex

It is part of the ritual of a major team sporting event, to name a most valuable player for the game. This practice is so well known that everyone over the age of two knows what MVP stands for. The idea applies to movies for which there is a star performer. A chef has his signature dish. And so forth and so forth.

Among what Father Kim Dreisbach calls spy clues, the many tidbits of history that suggest and maybe convince us, that the Shroud of Turin is older than the earliest estimates from carbon 14 dating, there is a most valuable picture. Actually, it's two pictures on one page from a 12th-century comic book version of the Resurrection story. Shroudies simply call it the Pray Codex or The Hungarian Pray Manuscript. It is the MVP.

Hugh Farey tells us that is not entirely correct. It's actually five illustrations on four pages of a larger collection of documents collectively known by those names. The first picture shows the crucifixion. The second is a full-page picture of Jesus being taken down from the cross. The next two pictures, on one page, show Jesus being anointed for burial and then the discovery of the empty tomb. The final picture is Jesus enthroned.

If you are inclined towards authenticity, it is hard not to notice that the Shroud seems to be depicted amazingly well. And it's frustrating if you are a skeptic to try and explain away what the believers see.

Farey has written an excellent article based on extensive research and logic that tries to do just that. He tries to convince me that what I see and have always believed were direct and indirect depictions of the Shroud are not that. On my

first reading of "[The Pray Codex](#)" in the *British Society for the Turin Shroud Newsletter Number 83* (December 2016) he almost convinced me.

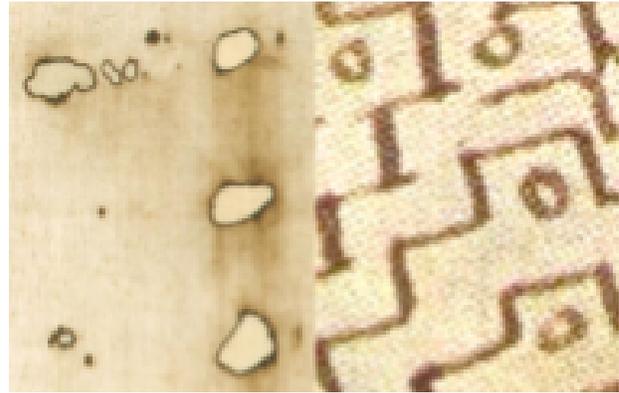
Alas, not. Farey's article only made me focus my thinking more. I recommend it to everyone, authenticists, skeptics, and topically-agnostic, alike. At least, look at the pictures.

The illustrator, it seems, has tried to draw the highly unusual herringbone weave of the Shroud's cloth. Or, he hasn't. It is not a very good representation of a herringbone weave pattern. But it is primitive, non-realistic art, as is everything else in the pictures. Actually, I think it is a pretty good impressionist work of art for its time. There is something of a sense of Claude Monet's *Water Lilies* in this.



I'm also more convinced than ever that the upside-down L- shaped pattern of four little circles drawn onto what I think is a drawing of the cloth corresponds to four prominent burn holes on the Shroud that is also in an L-shaped pattern.

If you are an authenticist, it's easy to see that the illustrator of the codex, working at a time before the sacking of Constantinople, knew about the Shroud. That was much earlier than the carbon 14 dating calculation. End of story. Right?



No! If you are a skeptic you will likely pooh-pooh the drawing. It is pretty unrealistic. And you might note, too, that there is no image on the shroud.

But, wouldn't the picture be on the inside?

If you wish to read what some of the shroudies from around the world had to say about the codex, you should probably click on [A Masterly Demolition of the Hungarian Pray Manuscript?](#) There is a lot of good opinionating there.

I see the obvious more clearly. I didn't expect that. I'm surprised. I think the art probably represents the Shroud. But I'm not completely certain. I can't be certain even if I want to be. Farey has made me less certain and more certain at the same time. Possibly just possibly (unpunctuated), the Pray Codex has nothing to do with the Shroud.

As the Mad Hatter from Alice's world might have said to me: "You used to be much more... 'muchier.' You've lost your muchness."

Maybe so. I've thought about it a lot, though. I do think the codex illustrations belong in the pile of evidence that challenges the carbon 14 dating.

These many spy clues – poems, rites, artifacts, pictorial depictions – seem quite convincing. However, as with scientific evidence, historical records must also be questioned, examined, and reexamined for accuracy and relevance. Greg was right when he called the history provisional. For example, consider the *Hymn of the Pearl*. There are a number of versions in Syriac and Greek. And of those, there are multiple translations into contemporary languages. How do they compare?

On balance, there is probably just probably (unpunctuated) enough first-millennium evidence to suggest that there was something out there that seems like the Turin Shroud. If not that, then at least, we might say there is enough historical evidence to at least quixotically challenge the carbon 14 dating.

Is this one of those instances when common sense rightly challenges our thinking?

We need more intensive, well-researched, skeptical and/or objective articles about the provisional history of the Shroud.

Two Kodak Moments

In 1888, the George Eastman Dry Plate and Film Company of Rochester, New York, started selling a new and innovative “Kodak” box camera that came preloaded with roll film enough for 100 pictures. You sent the camera back to Eastman when you were ready to have the negatives developed and pictures printed. The company’s original slogan was, “You press the button, we do the rest.”

Almost a hundred years later, Kodak, by then the name of the company, came up with a new phrase, “Kodak moment.” Almost immediately, those two words took on a ubiquitous meaning. According to the Farlex Dictionary, those two words mean a “ particularly poignant, memorable, or emotionally touching moment or event.”

And there were two such momentous moments in the modern era of the Shroud before Barrie and his colleagues went off to Turin and snapped dozens of photos.

The first of these Kodak moments was no doubt in 1898, ten years after Kodak’s box camera rolled out. Secondo Pia, an Italian amateur photographer using a gigantic glass plate camera, took the first-ever photograph of the Shroud. The second such moment was when researchers in 1976 aimed a television-like camera connected to a device called the VP-8 Image Analyzer. Both Kodak moments helped launch unending periods of scientific research.

When Secondo Pia took his famous photograph of the Shroud in 1898, he discovered that the images on the cloth were like photographic negatives and that his glass plate negatives were, therefore, positive images. The story goes, at least in Wikipedia, which has a [very good article](#) about Pia. Pia . . .

...almost dropped and broke the photographic plate in the darkroom from the shock of what appeared on it: the reverse plate showed the positive image of a man and a face in a detail that could not be seen with the naked eye.

For the first time, people who were naturally unaccustomed to viewing negative images could discern hauntingly, detailed, almost photorealistic human forms on the cloth. Pia's negative on a large glass negative plate was a positive image. It wasn't just "wow" that everyone was saying as the photograph was published in some of the world's newspapers. They were saying "how?"

In May 1931, Giuseppe Enrie, a Turin photographer who had gained recent fame from some exhibited works of his at the Esposizione di fotografia futurista held in Turin three years earlier was commissioned to photograph the Shroud. Under the watchful eye of Secondo Pia, a priest and a scientist, Enrie made twelve negatives of the Shroud. He carefully recorded his methodology in painstaking detail, noting precise camera and lens settings, film type, and lighting. A copy of a print of one of those photographs would play a very important role in the future of Shroud research when subjected to analysis with the VP-8 Image Analyzer.

After my success looking up Secondo Pia in Wikipedia, I decided to look up the VP-8 Image Analyzer in that same encyclopedia. What is there is so sparse as to be meaningless. What little there is is peppered with disclaimers and warnings. The editor's talk page seems to be leaning towards removing the article because it is of low importance, is part of shroud mythology and contains erroneous information.

What is there reads only:

The VP8 Image Analyzer is an analog computer produced by Pete Schumacher of Interpretations Systems Incorporated (ISI) in 1972. It has been used by believers to image the Shroud of Turin.

Used by believers? Does that not reek of the very type of bias the disclaimers and warnings warn against? That might be a reason to remove the article.

But, are there no VP-8 fans who might not want to jump onto Wikipedia and edit and save the article?

Barrie explains it much better on his website in an excellent, photo-rich presentation on [1978 Scientific Examination of the Shroud](#):

On February 19, 1976, physicist John Jackson met with William Mottern, a radiographic expert and researcher working at Sandia Laboratories in New Mexico. Bill was using a device known as a VP-8 Image Analyzer for analyzing x-rays in his own research. However, the VP-8 was an image processing tool that allowed any image to be input via video camera.

So the researchers input a 1931 Enrie photograph of the Shroud and, by using the instrument's ability to convert image density to vertical relief, were able to visualize on the VP-8's green screen display the rather amazing natural relief of a human form, demonstrating that certain spatial or topographic data was encoded into the Shroud's image.

Encoded is an interesting word. The word is a verb and it means to convert to another form. It means nothing other than that. We encode messages into secret coded content. We encode analog to digital and back again. We encode data into particular formats. No one – and no deity or process – encoded any data on the Shroud.

We speak of the image being “created” and of the 3D information being “encoded” as though they are two different things. If we understand it, we know that it is one process. The image and the 3D information are the same single thing. The image is completely made up of darker and lighter shades of a yellowish-brown color (or black and white in black and white photographs). .

Those shades of color that your eye sees as a picture are the same shades of color that the VP-8 plots into three-dimensional representations.

In 1999, Peter M. Schumacher, who was instrumental in the design and documentation of the production units of the VP-8, published a paper entitled "[Photogrammetric Responses From The Shroud of Turin](#)." He says, quite correctly in the first paragraph below:

The Shroud image induces a response in the isometric display of a VP-8 Image Analyzer that is unique. Each point of the Shroud body image appears at a proper "elevation". Is this due to the distance the cloth was from a body inside it? Is this due to the density of the human body at various points in the anatomy? Is it a result of radiant energy? These questions cannot be answered by the VP-8 Image Analyzer. However, the related theories can be rightfully posed. The isometric results are, somehow, three-dimensional in nature. The displayed result is only possible by the information ("data") contained in the image of the Shroud of Turin. No other known image produces these same results.

But this next paragraph is unfortunate:

If one considers the Shroud image to be "a work of art" of some type, then one must consider how and why an artist would embed three-dimensional information in the gray shading of an image. In fact, no means of viewing this property of the image would be available for at least 650 years after it was done.

Thus, collectively, most of us stumbled forth in a dense cloud of our own misunderstanding. For once upon a time, and still today, it is wrongly said, "When input to a VP-8, a normal photograph does not result in a properly formed dimensional image but in a rather distorted jumble of light and dark 'shapes'."

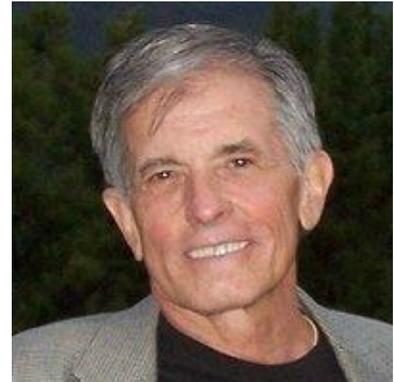
That is what it says in very many doc files, PowerPoints, and books – for example, a page in a series of web pages entitled [The 1978 Scientific Examination](#). The word *normal* is the disclaimer. But the word *normal* means whatever the reader wants it to mean. Erroneous thinking is repeated in many ways. You will find it in Jackson et al.'s [Critical Summary](#), a defense of something called the “Fall Through hypothesis.” You will find it in countless presentations, websites and books. Unfortunately, the phrasing is inadequate. As such it just doesn't hold up.

The Black Swan

St. Louis, 2014.

Once upon a time, it was said, all swans are white. This was so because no one, at least no one in the defining swirl of Renaissance Europe, had ever seen swans of another color. It was as good as a fact. It was so until 1697. That's when Dutch explorers discovered black swans in Australia. And thus, obviousness, the simplest of all logical fallacies, got a name.

A black swan moment in Sindonology happened in 2014 at an international Shroud of Turin conference in St. Louis. Dr. Joseph Accetta, while Principal Scientist and Instructor at Georgia Tech's Research Institute, wrote a significant paper, simply entitled [Origins of a 14th Century Turin Shroud Image](#).



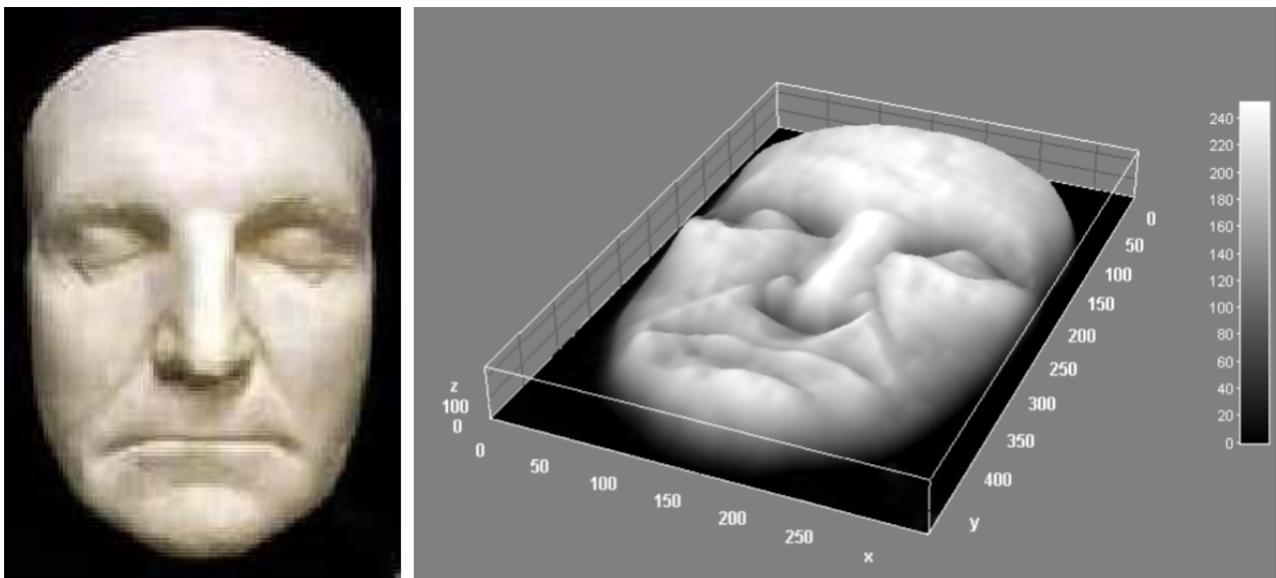
Dr. Accetta, who had been one of the original STURP team members, wrote:

In summary, we have presented a reasonable plausibility argument that the Shroud image must result from a contact process. Woodblock or intaglio techniques known to be in use in the 14th century in Europe and in France account for all of the visible attributes of the Shroud image including the 3-d effect, reversed contrast, the resolution, uniformity between the frontal and dorsal images and the extensive detail observed.

His paper explained, among other things, how a normal photograph could contain all the same type of three-dimensional information found on the Shroud, Accetta proposed that a certain death mask photograph might contain the same kind of 3D information found in the Shroud's image.

Dr. Berry, who had not come to St. Louis, nonetheless heard about and read Accetta's paper. Dr. Berry was working with a software package, ImageJ, which was to the VP-8 Image Analyser what a modern digital camera today is to an old Kodak box camera from the last century. Dr. Berry, with a few clicks of a mouse, showed us that Accetta was right.

Spectacularly right.



And that wasn't all. Two decades before St. Louis, in 1994, Dr. Emily A. Craig and Dr. Randall R. Bresee, a couple of University of Tennessee forensic researchers, published a paper, "Image Formation and the Shroud of Turin" in the prestigious *Journal of Imaging Science and Technology* (Volume 34, Number 1, 1994). Quoting from the abstract:

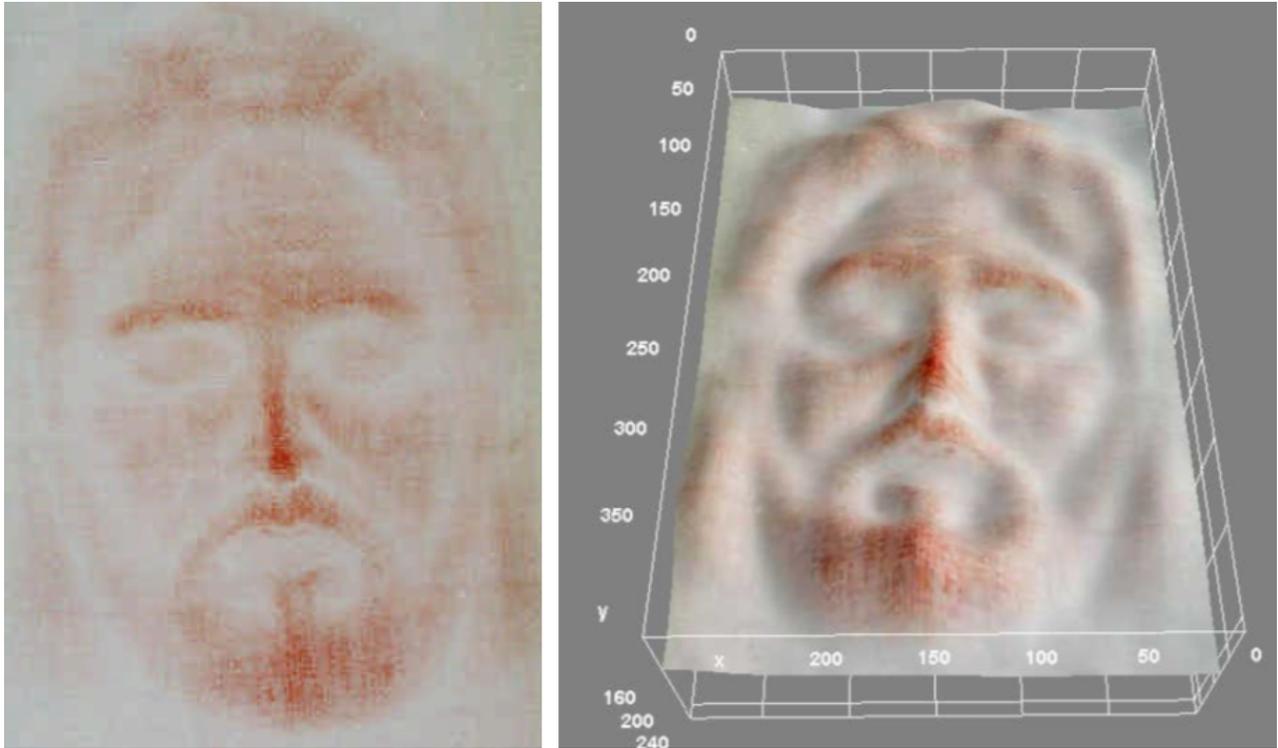
Both the first written historical record and modern radiocarbon analysis date the cloth known as the shroud of Turin to the 13th or 14th century. Interestingly, many people have remained convinced that the cloth was used as the burial

shroud of Jesus and thus must be approximately 2000 years old. The primary reason usually cited for this belief is the inability of scientists to explain how a 13th or 14th century artist could have created the image on the cloth that is continuous tone, exhibits fine detail without brush strokes, is a negative image, and accurately represents an abundance of three-dimensional information. In this paper, we will show how the carbon dust drawing technique used by medical illustrators can be modified to produce images exhibiting numerous features of the Turin cloth.

And they did. As Dr. Al Adler, a chemist and member of STURP stated:

Craig and Bresee have described a dry powder transfer technique that appears to give acceptable VP-8 characteristics. This sounds satisfactory until one discovers they are actually making the copy from an image of the Shroud face itself. The question then becomes where did the artist get the original from which to make the copy.

Chemically, and in many other ways, Craig and Bresee did not succeed in replicating the Shroud's image. But the point that must be made here is that once again, the notion that the Shroud's 3D characteristics are unique is demonstrably false. It doesn't matter if they were copying the Shroud's image. They weren't trying to make an exact copy. They were doing what forensic scientists do, looking for a way that might work. With dust and daubing brushes and quite a bit of stylistic freedom, they created a picture with 3D characteristics.



Lee Jones, who was paying attention to social media commentaries on the Shroud, decided to confirm this by plotting Craig and Bresse's image. Craig and Bresse called their proposed method a *carbon dust drawing*. Adler had referred to it as *dry powder transfer*. Artists sometimes call the process daubing. Take a daubing brush and apply some dry pigment. It is the primary method for applying cosmetic powder to one's face. I can fully imagine creating an image like Craig and Bresse's by copying a real person's face. Lee Jones, with a few clicks of a mouse, showed us that Craig and Bresse – and Accetta – were right.

Again, spectacularly right.

Ray Rogers, also a member of the STURP team who went to Turin, used to speak about the diffusion of ink on an absorbent surface. He would tell us to put a single drop of black ink on filter paper and let it diffuse. The result from VP-8-like plotting is a three-dimensional picture of a mountain.

Dr. Berry also demonstrated the encoding of three-dimensional information in an image with thermal imprinting. It seems that different amounts of pressure between a piece of linen and a hot statue can create a 3D effect. Hugh Farey, the then editor of the [British Society for the Turin Shroud Newsletter](#) writing in June of 2015 said of Dr. Colin Berry and his experiments:

He demonstrated that almost any scorch will produce both an effective 'negative' image, and can be converted into a '3D image' using similar software to that of the famous VP-8 Image Analyser, demolishing any miraculist claim that only the Shroud was capable of such effects.

Nassim Nicholas Taleb, in his book, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, described by *The Sunday Times* as one of the twelve most influential books since World War II, explains that a black swan is “an illusion of understanding in which we think we understand a complicated world.” For us, that complicated world was summed up in the [National Catholic Register](#) with a slightly out-of-date quote:

This spatial data encoded into the image actually eliminates photography and painting as the possible mechanism for its creation and allows us to conclude that the image was formed while the cloth was draped over an actual human body.

This claim, in recent years, had become a catechistic shibboleth of Sindonology. It seems so special, so mysterious, even so seemingly miraculous. How can it not be genuine, we wonder?

The *National Catholic Register* article was in July of 2015. The *British Society for the Turin Shroud Newsletter* was dated June of 2015. We can call this a tie. We can also surmise that no one was paying attention. Some still aren't.

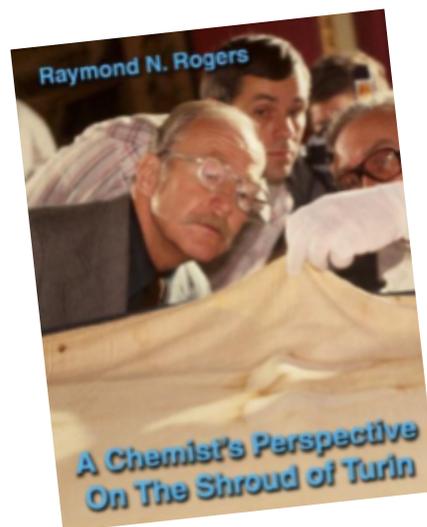
We cannot say with any certainty that the data is spatial data. While the blood evidence suggests that the cloth was in contact with a much-wounded body, we don't know how the cloth was deployed over that body – perhaps differently at different times. [Rogers tells us that gaseous diffusions](#) (assuming that the image was caused by amine vapors reacting to something on the cloth) are complex flow processes:

The chemistry of the colour does not answer all questions about how the "photographic" image formed. The image seems to show the body of a man, and it is darkest in areas that should have been closest to the body's surface.

Vapour diffusion parallel to the cloth's inner surface would follow Graham's Law, and high Maillard reaction rates would limit the spread of reactive amine vapours. Gaseous reactive amines can be lost by diffusion through the porous cloth, reducing concentrations and reaction rates inside the cloth.

The first paragraph above, on first reading, seems to support spatiality. But phrases like “seems to show” and “should have been” seem to stare back at us from the page.

Rogers wrote a book: *A Chemist's Perspective On The Shroud of Turin*. Barrie Schwartz was the editor. As I reread it now, particularly the chapter on the “Kinetic Theory of Gases and Image Resolution,” I see nothing to suggest that the image contains spatial information even if a 3D representation of the image may be plotted.



If we wish to consider Rogers' hypothesis, we should not assume that the resulting image represents spatial data. Diffusion, when plotted, may – I emphasize may – create synthetic three-dimensionality.

Dr. Berry has also demonstrated that the 3D characteristics might be caused by applied pressure during image formation. He hasn't just speculated about this. He has demonstrated this.



So how can we call the data spatial? We can't! It may be something you can take on faith but you can't say so scientifically unless you can prove it. That it plots out and looks three dimensional is not proof.

And how can we say that data is encoded into the image. We can't. The image is the data. The data is the image. At every tiny place on the Shroud or on a photograph of the Shroud, there is a tiny place that is bright or dark or in between. That tiny place, which we often now call a picture element or pixel, is part of the picture and, at the same time, a numerical darkness value that can be plotted in a 3D way. That the combination of picture pixels forms a highly discernable image and also yields a reasonably realistic 3D plot is a happy coincidence. That's true of the Shroud. It is true of Joseph Accetta's mask. It's true of the dust daubing by Dr. Craig and Dr. Bresee. It's also true for flour imprinting images made by Dr. Berry.

The assertion that spatial data “actually eliminates photography and painting as the possible mechanism” is not only a moot point; it’s a misleading statement.

However, that doesn’t mean that the cloth was not draped over the body of a crucified man at some time. That is highly possible. It was possible enough for John Dominic Crossan, a very controversial Biblical scholar most noted for his assertion that Jesus was not buried, to proclaim on [Belief Net](#).

My best understanding is that the Shroud of Turin is a medieval relic forgery. I wonder whether it was done from a crucified dead body or from a crucified living body. That is the rather horrible question once you accept it as a forgery.

Dr. Michael Tite, who in 1988 led the British Museum’s oversight role in the carbon dating process and later was Emeritus Professor of Archaeology at the University of Oxford, implied something similar in a [BBC Radio interview](#) in 2016:

I don’t believe it’s the [authentic] Shroud but I think it is highly probable there was a body in there. It was the time of the Crusades. A very appropriate way of humiliating a Christian would be to crucify him, like Christ. I think that is a very real possibility. And then the cloth is put over the body and sort of bodily fluids resulting from the stress of a crucifixion react and cause this discolouration and ultimately a certain degree of decay in the Shroud.

Really? Bodily fluids reacting? We have been down this road before, back in the 1930s and again in the 1970s, before STURP.

Nonetheless, I’m thinking as I write this. There is, even among some skeptics, a recognition that we don’t have all the answers.

It’s not that it isn’t easy to make something that looks like the Shroud on a piece of linen. It is relatively easy. But there are other image characteristics that must be met. We thought we had a good handle on these when STURP issued its Final Report in 1981, as well as an [official summary distributed to the press](#). Having

learned new things since then, some assertions need to be reexamined and maybe changed.

For instance, we may have gotten the physical and chemical nature of the image chromophore all wrong. The summary reads:

The scientific consensus (sic) is that the image was produced by something which resulted in oxidation, dehydration and conjugation of the polysaccharide structure of the microfibrils of the linen itself.

That statement in slightly different grammatical constructs may be the most stated assertion about the Shroud's image, ever. It may be repeated even more than the line about paintings and photographs not producing 3D. The most significant change you ever see is to correct the spelling of consensus.

Consensus is an important word here. It strongly suggests something other than unanimity. And indeed, STURP chemist Ray Rogers had other ideas. With Dr. Anna Arnoldi from the University of Milan, he published a significant paper in 2002. They proposed something else. Ray Rogers and Dr. Arnoldi are clearly not part of the *consensus*. They wrote:

I [= Rogers] believe that impurities in ancient linen could have been suspended by the surfactant property of a Saponaria officinalis washing solution. They would be concentrated at the drying surface by evaporation. Reducing saccharides would react rapidly with the amine decomposition products of a dead body. This process could explain the observations on the chemistry and appearance of the image on the Shroud of Turin. Such a natural image-production process would not require any miraculous events; however, it would support the hypothesis that the Shroud of Turin had been a real shroud.

The observations do not prove how the image was formed or the "authenticity" of the Shroud. There could be a nearly infinite number of alternate hypotheses, and the search for new hypotheses should continue.

If shroudie's gave a prize for objectivity, it should go to Ray Rogers – regrettably posthumously – for that short second paragraph. I suspect there are, indeed, many hypotheses. And we haven't even thought of many of them.

And if they gave a prize for admirable chutzpah, it should go to the Shroud's most qualified skeptical chemist, Dr. Berry. He has identified a technology that:

appears to provide a potential means for exploring the chemical make-up of the image chromophore (something that has evaded science for the best part of 40 years – and more!).

More to the point, it provides a means (hopefully) for distinguishing between rival models – notably the ones supplied by STURP (2 contrasting models – modified cellulose v Maillard!) and now my own Final Model 10 (“FILM-SET”).

No, we don't need – as yet – to go the whole hog, i.e. to determine the detailed chemical structure of the image chromophore. No, far from it. Let's be content (for starters) with determining whether or not the fragmentation pattern seen on mass spectrometry is that from a chemically-modified cellulose – as declared by STURP's 1981 Summary – formed with no extraneous add-ons- OR whether it shows a better match with Maillard browning products, involving amino-carbonyl reactions in the first instance (the nitrogeneous amino groups supplied by additional non-cellulosic participants!).

The short, so often repeated or quoted page of text, [STURP's 1981 Summary](#) for skeptics and authenticists alike, is a problem. It needs a warning label.

“I am not crazy; my reality is just different from yours,” said the Cheshire Cat to Alice.

And the Mad Hatter said, ““I have an excellent idea! Let's change the subject.””

The Holy Grail and So Much More

They were once Christendom's most noble and simultaneously hopeless pursuits: the quests for the Holy Grail, the True Cross, and the Crown of Thorns. They are now mostly forgotten, or when remembered, thought of as romantic but peculiar undertakings. Today, some might also think that attempts to understand the mysteries of the Shroud are outdated and peculiar. It would be so was it not for the fact that front and back images of an apparently crucified man are there and we don't know how they got there.

The names of people who have tried various methods of creating the image runs on and on and on: Vignon, Pellicore, German, Rodante, Nitoski, Volkringer, Rogers, Berry, Jackson, Spicer, Allen, Craig and Bresee, Kersten and Gruber, Picknett and Prince, Nickell, Fanti, Delfino, Garlaschelli, and Wilson among others. The methods include vapors, contact, bas-relief rubbing, a medieval room-sized camera, controlled sunshine bleaching under glass, a Twilight Zone-ish dematerializing body, corona discharge, wheat flour imprinting, electric charge separation, etc.

There is nothing so far for which there is a consensus. Every now and then, a paper is written. Maybe, it gets presented at a conference or published in a journal. Now and then, there is a press release. And now and then, the *Daily Mail* or some other tabloid with headlines big enough to see from outer space reports another great discovery that takes hold and lasts until tomorrow's edition.

If it was just because it's human nature to try to solve scientific and historical puzzles, this constant puzzle solving would not be as controversial as it is. Regrettably, but quite naturally and expectedly, most Shroud researchers approach the task with some visceral sense about the Shroud. It is real, some think. Others think not. The image, some imagine is the product of a natural

chemical phenomenon needing only to be figured out. Others feel it must be the work of an artist or craftsman. And then there are those who think the image was miraculously formed, maybe as a direct result of the Resurrection.

“Where are you at on the Shroud?” What is it that compels people to ask questions like that?

Proof of a Resurrection? Really?

Dallas 2005, part 2, the Adolphus ballroom.

“Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast,” said the Queen of Hearts to Alice.

I remember going to basketball games in high school. Some teacher was always standing by the door, usually the wrestling coach with a big whistle hanging from a lanyard around his neck. He was there, ready to boot us out should any of us commit some infraction of the school’s rules.

The first thing I noticed when I walked into the Adolphus grand ballroom was the guard. Apparently, someone thought we needed to have a guard. He was not just a guard. He was a pistol-packing Texas Ranger in uniform, complete with boots, a cowboy hat, badge, and all. I presumed he was there to guard us. No, someone said. The armed guard standing there by the door was ready to boot any of us out – any one or several of about 100 of us professors, industry and government scientists, scholars, and the like. He was there to boot us out should any of us commit some infraction of the conference rules.

Infraction? When University of Hong Kong archeologist William Meacham openly asked why an armed guard was needed, conference organizer Michael Minor explained he was there to prevent ‘insulting’ controversy and criticism.

Nonetheless, controversy and criticism happened. This was a Shroud of Turin conference. There was much to argue about, much to criticize. We were here for insulting controversy and criticism..

Earlier, before we convened, an official representative of the Archdiocese of Turin, perhaps hoping to stir up some controversy, told the *Associated Press* and

NBC News that the question before the conference was, “Is the Shroud proof of a resurrection or is it a medieval fake?”

The stark, either/or choice in that statement was mind-boggling since it came from supposedly responsible Church authorities. It would have been so much better if the Turin contingent had quoted Vatican Secretariat of State, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, who wrote: “His Holiness [Pope Benedict XVI] trusts that the Dallas Conference will advance cooperation and dialogue among various groups engaged in scientific research on the Shroud.” Perhaps he could have quoted Cardinal Severino Poletto, the Archbishop of Turin who was also the Papal Custodian of the Shroud who, himself, had quoted Pope John Paul II saying, "

As it is not a matter of faith the Church does not have specific competence to pronounce on these questions. It entrusts to scientists the task of continuing to investigate to find suitable answers to the questions regarding the Shroud.

Most scientists and other scholars at the conference, representing a broad spectrum of Catholic, Anglican, Protestant, and Evangelical Christians, agreed that the Shroud might well be genuine, though not proven as such. And if it were somehow proven, these scientists understood that it might not be proof of the Resurrection of Jesus. They were here to share and learn.

They were also here to express their views on a growing feud between the Papal Custodians of the Shroud and several scientists around the world. It would be like an old-fashioned wild west shoot-out. Turin officials – not to be confused with the Vatican or the larger Catholic Church – were metaphorically the Texas farmers controlling the flow of water and stringing barbwire to keep cattle from grazing in their fields. The scientists, archeologists and a fair number of historians were like cowboys singing, “Don’t Fence Me In.” A shootout was inevitable.

There were two hot questions at the root of the feud. The first was why Turin ignored reasonable scientific hypotheses that challenged the 1988 carbon 14

dating? The second such question was about a 2002 restoration of the cloth that many felt was archeologically, scientifically, and preservation-wise reckless?

Scientists wanted to ask questions. But questions from the floor were not being allowed. That was extraordinary. You don't invite academic researchers from around the world to a conference and treat them this way. Many were university professors and scholars who had published many papers in highly regarded peer-reviewed journals.

Scientific competence was the issue.

Researchers, in large numbers, now believe that in the 16th century, a corner of the Shroud had been expertly repaired using a mending technique known as "invisible reweaving." It was from this repaired corner that the carbon 14 samples were taken. This resulted in a mixed sample of both new and old fibers leading to erroneous carbon 14 dating in 1988.

Turin wasn't buying it even though they agreed that the carbon 14 dating was certainly wrong. They had not seen the repairs when they examined the Shroud. Invisible reweaving, they argued, would have been noticeable. Scientists disagreed. It takes microscopic, spectral, and chemical analysis to properly identify invisible reweaving. And the scientists had photomicrographs and plenty of test results to show that.

In 2002, Turin undertook a secret restoration of the Shroud. Archeologists, scientists, and scholars of all sorts were horrified when they learned of it after the fact. It was reckless. Bill Meacham called it disastrous. It cannot be undone. Some scientists suggest that the restoration may have created problems that could potentially damage the cloth sometime in the future.

But the Archdiocese of Turin was not willing to embrace what scientists had to say. It seemed reminiscent of a time in history when a certain Cardinal Bellarmine forbade Galileo to hold Copernican views.

The modern Galileo, so to speak, was the late Ray Rogers as a highly respected scientist for his unwavering dedication to scientific methods. Turin authorities were trying to ignore his microscope and micro-chemical studies; studies published in a secular, peer-reviewed, scientific journal; studies that had been independently confirmed by John L. Brown, retired Principal Research Scientist at the Georgia Tech Research Institute's Energy and Materials Sciences Laboratory. Brown examined samples from the Shroud with a Scanning Electron Microscope.

What was the reason that Turin refused to consider the scientific data?

In the past few years, the custodians of the Shroud have faced significant public criticism for the way the carbon 14 samples were selected. And now they were also being criticized for a cavalier rejection of Rogers' findings — findings that actually support the Shroud's authenticity. Rogers had shown that what had been carbon 14 dated in 1988 was chemically unlike the rest of the cloth. Moreover, Rogers showed that the Shroud had certainly been artfully and discretely repaired.

The first shootout occurred during the evening of the first day. It was during an after-hours presentation that had been billed as a tribute to the late Ray Rogers. Nearly everyone showed up. The guard did not.

It wasn't a tribute at all. It was a DVD of Rogers being interviewed by Barrie Schwartz shortly before Rogers' death. Schwartz never claimed it was a tribute. It was titled "Ray Rogers in His Own Words."

Rogers had previously criticized Turin authorities for treating the Shroud's reliquary with thymol. Thymol (3-Hydroxy-1-methyl-4-isopropyl benzene), the active stuff of Listerine antiseptic mouthwash, is a phenolic compound that will react with many functional chemical groups on the Shroud. According to

Rogers, it permeated the cloth. “This will confuse image analysis, and it may result in damage to the cloth,” he had written earlier in the year.

On the DVD, Rogers expanded his criticism of the Thymol treatment of the Shroud’s reliquary, stating that because Thymol was absorbed into the cloth it might make future dating problematic. And, if that was not enough, Rogers offered a blistering criticism on the secretive, poorly documented, unnecessary, potentially damaging restoration of the Shroud.

Rogers explained the invisible reweaving in chemical terms and why the reweaving had fooled the carbon 14 dating. Everyone knew that Rogers’ findings were independently confirmed by Brown, confirmed by textile experts, confirmed with ultraviolet photography, and confirmed with x-rays.

Statistical studies of carbon 14 measurements suggested anomalous age patterns in the sample and everyone knew that.

Most everyone knew that in 1988, Teddy Hall, then the director of Oxford University’s Radiocarbon Laboratory, had seen cotton fibers that might be from mending. And almost everyone knew that a 1988 article in *Textile Horizons* by Peter South entitled “Rogue Fibers Found in Shroud” suggested that those cotton fibers were suspicious and might have been part of repairs.

Some also knew that in 1998, Turin’s own scientific advisor, Piero Savarino, wrote, “extraneous substances found on the samples and the presence of extraneous thread (leftover from ‘invisible mending’ routinely carried on in the past on parts of the cloth in poor repair).” Many knew, too, that longtime researchers Sue Benford and Joe Marino had made a strong photographic case for invisible reweaving. And many knew of an earlier paper by Rogers and Anna Arnoldi of the University of Milan, published in 2002, that confirmed Benford and Marino.

Many knew that in 2004, the *Journal of Research of the U. S. National Institute of Standards and Technology* published an important paper by Lloyd A. Currie, a highly regarded specialist in the field of carbon 14 dating and a NIST Fellow Emeritus, cited the Rogers and Arnoldi paper giving it additional scientific standing and credence.

Currie's NIST paper was significant in other ways. It set aside any argument that the labs had done anything wrong or that there was anything uncertain about carbon 14 dating. It debunked other hypotheses circulating in the polemic rumor mill, such as the notion that a biological polymer on the fibers was the cause of a measurement failure. And it brought into focus the issue of sampling. A serious violation of the original scientific sampling protocol occurred in Turin. Had the proper protocol calling for multiple sample locations been followed by Turin, the single bad sample would not have caused the problems it did. The three labs that conducted the test used parts of one sample.

By the time Currie's paper was published, Rogers was well on his way to demonstrating that the carbon 14 tests were wrong. In December of 2003, he received material that had been reserved from the center of the carbon 14 sample. It would take a year for testing, independent confirmation, and peer review. In January 2005, *Thermochimica Acta* (an Elsevier BV peer-reviewed scientific journal) published Rogers' work.

Over a hundred researchers and thousands of people who follow shroud research were aghast when, within days of Rogers' paper, Turin's Monsignor Giuseppe Ghiberti pronounced a summary judgment on Rogers' findings. He said, "I am astonished that an expert like Rogers could fall into so many inaccuracies in his article. I can only hope, indeed, also think that the C14 dating is rectifiable (the method, in fact, has its own uncertainties), but not on the basis of the 'darn' [sic, darning is altogether a different method of repair] theory."

How could Ghiberti, then, there among us in Dallas, have possibly known this? He offered no evidence or explanation. People at the conference wanted to ask him about it. It wasn't that questions were not allowed at the conclusion of the interview with Rogers. The sheriff wasn't there. Ghiberti, representing Turin's Cardinal Poletto, could have invited questions, and no one would have objected.

But Ghiberti walked out. The ranking representative for the Papal Custodian of the Shroud of Turin got up and walked out of the room. It was the wrong thing to do. Some felt he should have stayed to defend his archbishop, the diocesan staff, its advisors, and ultimately the decision that he later defensively characterized as a decision by the Holy See. Poletto had asked for harmony and dialogue at this conference. But Ghiberti, as they say in Texas, skedaddled.

Defense of the Turin position, on the next morning, fell to Dr. Mechthild Flury-Lemberg, a renowned textile conservator. She stated that she did not see invisible reweaving.

But that was just the point. She should not have noticed invisible reweaving without the tools of science. Without the freedom to ask questions and get answers, the whole substance of her argument was reduced to a single "didn't see it" polemic.

We don't know how the images of a crucified man were formed on the fabric. So far, scientists can do little but offer hypotheses.

I think most people would agree that whatever it is that we know about it, it is not a substitute for faith. We may never be able to prove, by the Shroud, that Jesus is the Christ or that he rose to new life. But it is nice to learn what we can.

Cardinal Poletto wrote:

The fascination of the mysterious image that regards us from the Holy Shroud strikes people of every religious faith and culture, in particular those who experience the

presence of Jesus of Nazareth in their personal lives and who believe that His life on earth represented the culminating moment of human history.

An Overdose of Neutron Radiation

St. Louis, 2014, part 2.

The 2014 “Shroud of Turin: The Controversial Intersection of Faith and Science” conference in St. Louis was, for me, the best, the biggest, and the last Shroud conference I attended. Barrie reported at shroud.com that 162 people attended from at least eight different parts of the world.

In retrospect, the most important paper presented was Dr. Joseph Accetta’s [Origins of a 14th Century Turin Shroud Image](#). It wasn’t so for most people and it wasn’t so for me at the time. It became important as a Black Swan, when later, Dr. Colin Berry had plotted that 3D rendering of the burial face mask that Dr. Accetta had included in his paper.

The longest and latest session was hosted by physicist John Jackson. It started about 9:00 PM on a Saturday evening and stretched beyond midnight into Sunday. Barrie described it as “certainly a highlight of the event for many of the attendees.”

I thought it was surreal – maybe that was because I had already had, with dinner, a couple of glasses of the hotel’s two-free-pours of red wine rations for each night that you stayed.

The session was moderated by John Jackson, who spent much of what I thought was to be an open discussion forum focused on his own research. Rather than characterize it, let me simply provide a link to a 2014 paper written by John: [Is the image on the Shroud due to a process heretofore unknown to modern science?](#)

John knows how I feel about it so I need not pull any punches here. When I read, “. . . the hypothesis of a collapsing cloth into a radiating body appears to explain all known characteristics of the Shroud image ...” all I can think of is Alamo’s little book, "The Baltimore Catechism No. 3: With Explanations.”

I found these three sentences in the concluding remarks section of a supporting document edited by John’s colleague, Daniel Siefker. The document is a massive, well-organized piece of research. It is called *The Shroud of Turin: A Critical Summary of Observations, Data and Hypotheses*:

The “Fall-Through” hypothesis is strictly data driven and is not intended to offer a scientific “proof” of the Resurrection. To the contrary, the Resurrection can never be scientifically “proven.” This is because the philosophy of science includes the stipulation to work to “disprove” rather than to prove”.

While, what John et. al. writes may be philosophically true, we must be careful with how things are defined for people, like me, who are not scientists. The “Fall-Through” hypothesis is about the cloth, the Shroud, falling through a “mechanically transparent” body.

“You mean like ice turned to steam?” someone once asked me. “A cloth would fall through that.”

But I don’t think that is exactly what John is thinking about. He is thinking about the body of Jesus becoming mechanically transparent during the Resurrection – or because of the Resurrection – or because of something like that.

Mechanically transparent?

“Is the image on the Shroud due to a process heretofore unknown to modern science?” The very wording reminds me of that old black and white television show of the 50s and early 60s that began?

You're traveling through another dimension, a dimension not only of sight and sound but of mind. A journey into a wondrous land whose boundaries are that of imagination. That's the signpost up ahead – your next stop, the Twilight Zone!

Here is the problem I have philosophically. You cannot even think about the very notion of resurrection having any connection with science unless you can define the word in a way that strips it of all biblical, theological, catechistic and religious premises. To assume any part of the process is miraculous or supernatural or supranatural or even spiritual is to trespass wildly beyond the realm of science.

You can, of course, revise the philosophy of science, which, by the way, happens everytime a philosopher of science says, “Hmm.”

Doesn't the philosophy of science sometimes collide with common sense? Pragmatism seems to demand it sometimes. If you see me throw a brick through your window, you have all the proof you need to know the cause and the nature of your smashed window. You don't try to disprove it. Thus, I think, if you can construct a mathematical model with the cloth's image data that shows the image on the cloth was the consequence of the cloth falling through a dematerializing human body, a body that has become or is becoming mechanically transparent as the cloth falls through it, then you've pretty much proved the Resurrection for a lot of people.

And for a lot of people you have defined the hypothesis with the proof.

No need to try to disprove, then. Newton skipped this step with his apple.

Philosophy may not be so much the search for truth as it is the search for a way to define truth.

After all is hypothesized and tried, said and done, then data, conceptually, may be all that is left. Data may be the salvation of the “Fall-Through” hypothesis.

All we need to worry about, now, is Stephen Hawking's data-driven assertion that data, after falling into a black hole, will eventually reemerge despite gravity. Can you test this?

And I would still be unconvinced even if everyone else was part of a great consensus. I still think we must come up with a workable non-religious definition of resurrection or it's *nonsense*.

Right now I'm *liking* Alamo's 8-ball definition of a miracle. But that won't qualify. It's religious. And it doesn't allow any time for an image to form.

As Saturday evening crept into Sunday in St Louis, I was ranking hypotheses in my head in an attempt to stay awake. Here are my preferences as they were then and as they still are in order of most liked to least.

1. a naturally formed set of images, the result of chemical reactions, such as Ray Rogers tentatively supposed
2. a manmade set of images created using some yet undiscovered arts and crafts technique
3. a divinely wrought image that is totally unrelated to the Resurrection such as some believe the *Our Lady of Guadalupe* image was created.
4. images formed by radiation, particles, waves, forces or magical energetics that are a consequence of the Resurrection

Then I thought, if the images are the consequence of the Resurrection, are they accidental or intentional? Part of the plan? Unexpected? Were the images divinely intended? I needed sleep.

I was talking with someone about this later and he said, "You mean, as some think by dematerialization and rematerialization?"

"Exactly, I said."

"Then why did God part the Red Sea for Moses? Why didn't he simply

dematerialize the Israelites and rematerialize them on the other side of the Red Sea?”

“Good point,” I said.

But he had to get in the last word. He emailed me later.

A couple of researchers with the U. S. National Center for Atmospheric Research⁶ have published a paper in a highly respected peer-reviewed journal, PLOS One. With a computer model running on a government supercomputer, the two scientists were able to show how a 63 mile per hour easterly wind could have cleared a suitable land bridge. No need for a miracle.”

“So, God does work in mysterious ways,” I wrote back.

Barrie, in his later write-up on the St. Louis 2014 conference, pointed out:

I was trying to wake up during breakfast on Sunday morning after only five hours of sleep, when I overheard the following remark from a nearby table: “I am suffering from an overdose of neutron radiation!” I actually laughed out loud and immediately wrote it down so I could remember it and share it here with you! This was obviously a tongue-in-cheek commentary on the large number of radiation related papers that had been presented at the conference over the previous two days. I thought it was a brilliant remark (or at least it seemed brilliant at 7:30 a.m.)!

By my count eight presentations promoted or supported the notion of some type of resurrection energetics or made up physics.

That’s too many to consider in this essay. Let’s look at just one more paper from 2014 and then deal with the problem of defining the Resurrection. I particularly like [Image Formation on the Shroud of Turin](#) by “Robert A. Rucker, MS (nuclear), reviewed by Arthur Lind, PhD (physics) and Kevin Schwinkendorf, PhD (nuclear)” as it has now been revised five years after St. Louis.

⁶ Carl Drews ,Weiqing Han in [Dynamics of Wind Setdown at Suez and the Eastern Nile Delta](#), PLOS ONE, August 30, 2010. The journal notes that the “ present study treats the Exodus 14 narrative as an interesting and ancient story of uncertain origin.”

Rucker seems to show restraint by not mentioning the word resurrection and writing this:

None of this assumes God's existence or that he has done anything in history, it only assumes there may be more to reality than our current understanding of physics has discovered.

But there is one tap to the chin. After advising us to be open-minded by not being bound to “a philosophical assumption of naturalism,” Rucker writes:

The radiation not only had to be emitted from the surface of the body, but it had to be emitted from within the body because we can see bones on the Shroud, including teeth, bones in the hand, etc. The radiation had to be emitted within the body to carry to the linen cloth the information regarding the presence of these bones in the body. Since there was no lens between the body and the cloth to focus this radiation, the radiation had to be emitted in vertically collimated directions up and down, like a billion vertically oriented lasers going off simultaneously within the body. In this way, each point on the cloth could be affected by only one point on the body (the point directly above or below it) so that a good resolution image could be formed without a lens.

The imaging of the teeth and bones he refers to is an unfortunate problem. This, I believe, falls in the category of “I think I see” pseudoscience or pareidolia. A paper published in 2013 by ENEA, an Italian research and development agency, “[Perception of Patterns After Digital Processing of Low-Contrast Images, The Case of the Shroud of Turin](#)” by Paola Di Lazzaro, Daniele Murra, and Barrie Schwartz provides long-needed scientific clarity on the subject. That doesn't mean the teeth and bones aren't there. They may be there. Then again, they may not be. The problem for Rucker is that he treats them as a weighty assertion in his hypothesis.

Okay, Rucker did a reasonably good job of not stepping too far beyond the bounds of science. But, how did this “extremely rapid powerful burst of charged

particle radiation from the body,” come about? How might we test this? How might we endeavor to disprove this? That is unfortunately missing and we are forced to wonder if he is imagining the Resurrection, and imagining it as an energetic process? Or what?

As I read Rucker’s paper over again, I find myself thinking about the Cheshire Cat saying to Alice, “I am not crazy; my reality is just different from yours.”

I must say I like Rucker’s restraint almost as much as I don’t. It would seem to me that a God who could raise Jesus to new life, could also control the direction of all of the radiation so that is “like a billion vertically oriented lasers going off simultaneously within the body.” At the same time, He might even attenuate the radiation for the desired effect. I mean, why not do a miracle within a miracle. Or two miracles simultaneously.

Perhaps we scientifically-minded mortals are more bound than we think to “a philosophical assumption of naturalism” even as we warn readers not to be. We seem to think we have to have something natural like radiation to do God’s work.

Can God’s work not be like Alamo’s vision of miracles by which God in zero-time and by no process at all creates results.

Of course, if we are truly not bound to “a philosophical assumption of naturalism,” then we could skip the radiation altogether and allow God to discolor the fibers without it. Can God do that?

It’s quite possible that miracles — if you believe in them as I do — don’t produce radiation or anything other than the end result. I like Alamo’s 8-ball analogy.

Where You At on the Resurrection?

If Greg, at the Adolphus' bar, had asked me, "Where you at on the Resurrection?" I don't think I would have thought he was asking if I thought the Resurrection was real. I don't think I would have come off sounding so naive.

Why was Greg there in Dallas? Why was I there? Why so much fascination with the Shroud's authenticity? Why did it matter? Were some of us there to bolster our faith in the Resurrection? Was I? I didn't think so but I wasn't sure.

Greg had said you can't prove the Shroud is real and you can't prove the Resurrection really happened, certainly not one with the other. It wasn't about how the images came to be on the Shroud. Nor was it about the nature of the images. Nor was it about picking at the scraps left over from history in an attempt to prove that the carbon dating was wrong, or that the Turin cloth is the cloth that allegedly, supposedly, possibly existed here or there, sometime in the past.

I do like the *Hymn of the Pearl*, however, and the *Hungarian Pray Codex*, and some of those tidbits that Kim uncovered. They seem convincing.

When the official representative of the Archdiocese of Turin, told the *Associated Press* and *NBC News* that the question before the Dallas 2005 conference was, "Is the Shroud proof of a resurrection or is it a medieval fake?" what if the reporters had pressed on.

What if a reporter had asked, "What do you mean by resurrection?"

Would he have fallen back on the sort of answer Alamo found so objectionable that Sunday afternoon in his *Baltimore Catechism No. 3, With Explanations*. Or would he have used the contemporary catechism found on the Vatican website

that admits that belief in a physical, bodily resurrection can be difficult?

Which also says, with a body that is “not limited by space and time but able to be present how and when he wills.” That sounds a lot like Alamo’s 8-ball definition. I guess you could dematerialize along the way, or at least radiate a bit so as to leave an image. That sounds awfully anti-Occam’s-razor-ish. It makes no sense to me.

Nonsense!

Proof of what, really? What do we mean when we say *resurrection*?

I went online and looked up the word resurrection. Google, which relies on the lexicographers who write the *Oxford Dictionary*, tells me it is a noun. Resurrection is “the action or fact of resurrecting or being resurrected.”

For all practical purposes, that is a worthless definition, so far. Google then goes on to tell me that “In Christian belief, it refers to Christ's rising from the dead.”

Not good enough! Not good enough, at all! I decided to look at materials from my own church, the Episcopal Church, and then look at various catechisms, particularly those used in the Catholic Church. Starting with [An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church](#), I found this for the Resurrection of Jesus:

The belief that Jesus was raised bodily from the dead by God on the third day after Jesus' crucifixion and burial, exalting him to the near presence of God in eternal glory. The resurrection of Jesus is at the heart of Christianity (Acts 2:22-36). Christian faith would be meaningless without the resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor 15:14). The reality of Jesus' resurrection was experienced by chosen witnesses and proclaimed by the early Christian community. Easter is the day of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus is understood to have been raised on the Sunday following the Friday of his crucifixion. The resurrection is to be distinguished both from resuscitation (restoration to the prior mode of human existence) and the immortality of the soul. Jesus' resurrection began the transformation and glorification of the whole cosmos, including the redeemed Christian community. Christ was raised as the “first fruits of those who have fallen

asleep” (1 Cor 15:20). By Christ's resurrection, this same new mode of existence is made available to all. The Catechism notes that “By his resurrection, Jesus overcame death and opened for us the way of eternal life” (BCP, p. 850). Jesus' resurrection is celebrated by Christians at all times, especially at Easter and throughout the Great Fifty Days of the Easter season, and on Sunday, which is the Lord's Day and the day of resurrection.

There is little to be gained by looking at the catechism of my church which is printed in the back of our *Book of Common Prayer*. That one sentence, quoted above, “By his resurrection, Jesus overcame death and opened for us the way of eternal life” (BCP, p. 850),” is all it says on the subject.

It's simply not that simple, not in my church. Amid the cloistered mindways of Anglicanism, some say that if you put two Anglicans together and ask them to define the Resurrection, you will get three different definitions. That's not only true for the Resurrection but true for just about anything Anglicans⁷ think about. Put three together and you get six answers, and so forth.

Ellen Painter Dollar, who writes frequently for *Sojourners*, *Patheos*, and *Episcopal Cafe*, has written a revealing article called [Why We Need the Resurrection](#). It appears in the blog of St. James's Episcopal Church of West Hartford, Connecticut. It reads, in part:

... But the resurrection is a hard sell. It looks an awful lot like wishful thinking. Dead bodies don't just up and walk around, asking for breakfast and appearing in locked rooms. What really happened that Sunday morning?

Some say that the disciples experienced some kind of prolonged shared vision—not a hallucination that existed only in their minds, but a vision tangible enough, real enough, for disparate people to agree on what they were seeing and hearing. They saw and interacted with something real that looked and walked and talked like Jesus, that was Jesus, but was something other than Jesus's cells and organs and protoplasm resuscitated from the grave. The resurrected Jesus's body didn't behave the way bodies

⁷ A common idiom for jokes among Anglicans including Episcopalians.

usually do—take the locked room appearance, for example, or that he appeared to different people in different places around the same time. Scholars point out that when Paul defends the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, he links his own experience of seeing a powerful vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus with the first disciples' post-resurrection sightings, implying that he thinks they had the same sort of vision that he had, rather than an interaction with an actual dead body that was no longer dead.

Other theologians have said, no, it's not that complicated. The resurrected Jesus was not some kind of vision. Jesus's body was dead and lying in a grave, and then it was alive. Thomas put his hands into the wounds, after all. The resurrected Jesus ate, walked, and talked. Why would a vision need to eat? . . .

And I think, this last paragraph fits well with the way Alamo imagined the Resurrection with his 8-ball. Or maybe it was as it was described in Alamo's Baltimore Catechism, the little book he brought with him to Vietnam. That book had been written in 1885 and was still being used in U.S. schools and churches well into the 1970s.

Or maybe it's as in the English translation of the “official” [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) published on the Vatican's website. Of all the catechisms that I looked at – including those of many traditions that didn't always call catechisms catechisms – I came to realize that the modern Catholic version is the most thoroughly, helpfully apologetic. It clearly defines resurrection as physical and argues the point with both logic and scriptural references. Therein we read:

. . . Given all these testimonies, Christ's Resurrection cannot be interpreted as something outside the physical order, and it is impossible not to acknowledge it as an historical fact. It is clear from the facts that the disciples' faith was drastically put to the test ... some of the disciples did not at once believe in the news of the Resurrection....

... the hypothesis that the Resurrection was produced by the apostles' faith (or credulity) will not hold up. On the contrary their faith in the Resurrection was born,

under the action of divine grace, from their direct experience of the reality of the risen Jesus.

By means of touch and the sharing of a meal, the risen Jesus establishes direct contact with his disciples. He invites them in this way to recognize that he is not a ghost and above all to verify that the risen body in which he appears to them is the same body that had been tortured and crucified, for it still bears the traces of his Passion. Yet at the same time this authentic, real body possesses the new properties of a glorious body: not limited by space and time but able to be present how and when he wills...

Such a comprehensive explanation and defense of a physical resurrection is clear. But it also admits that belief in a physical, bodily resurrection can be difficult. Accepting it in our current scientific era is hard. Was it not just as hard to believe nearly 2000 years ago? I imagine so. In those days, common sense prevailed in the absence of modern science. New Testament scripture certainly says so.

There are different opinions in the Catholic Church. Hans Kung was an embattled but prominent and popular Catholic theologian and priest, much respected by scholars and laymen of all Christian traditions. He had been Professor of Dogmatic and Ecumenical Studies at the University of Tübingen and a Visiting Professor at Chicago University. He held honorary degrees from several American universities and had lectured on numerous campuses worldwide.

But he had gotten into trouble with the Vatican, primarily because he disagreed with *Papal Infallibility* and favored having women priests and married priests in the Church. For that and some other particularities, he was found guilty of heresy. But contrary to what is often alleged on Facebook and other social media sites, he was not defrocked as a priest. Nor was he excommunicated. He

continued to write. He continued to preach. And he continued to teach. He was only prohibited from teaching theology in Catholic institutions.

Here is what he wrote in his 1976 bestseller, *On Being A Christian*, now still in print, now still popular:

Since according to New Testament faith the raising is an act of God within God's dimensions, it can not be a historical event in the strict sense: it is not an event which can be verified by historical science with the aid of historical methods. For the raising of Jesus is not a miracle violating the laws of nature, verifiable within the present world, not a supernatural intervention which can be located and dated in space and time. There was nothing to photograph or record.... But neither the raising itself nor the person raised can be apprehended, objectified, by historical methods. In this respect the question would demand too much of historical science – which, like the sciences of chemistry, biology, psychology, sociology or theology, never sees more than one aspect of the complex reality – since, on the basis of its own premises, it deliberately excludes the very reality which alone comes into question for a resurrection as also for creation and consummation: the reality of God.

Is Father Kung a rare exception? He seems not to be.

In a survey, just a few years ago, about a third of American Catholics made it clear that belief in a physical resurrection was hard for them. Asked to respond to the statement, “Jesus Christ physically rose from the dead” only 68% said they strongly agreed. The percentage of Mainline Protestants was statistically the same at 67%. Evangelical Christians scored higher in this regard with 84%. The survey, [Portraits of American Life Study \(PALS\)](#) was conducted in 2006 by Michael O. Emerson of Rice University and David H. Sikkink of the University of Notre Dame with funding from their respective schools and the Lilly Endowment Fund.

Three observations drive the Catholic catechism's conclusion about a physical body. First, and perhaps most dramatically, is the witnessing of the empty tomb. Mary Magdalene is a witness to this. So, too, is Peter and the Beloved Disciple. Second of all, are the appearances of Jesus to his apostles, and later to other disciples. And third, Jesus seems to have a real body, thus allowing Thomas to touch him and allowing Him to eat food at Emmaus.

But there is a lot of wiggle room in all of this for skeptics as well as for believers who maybe still have some doubts about the physical or bodily nature of the Resurrection.

Recall, again, the folks from Turin suggesting that the question before the conference in Dallas was if the Shroud of Turin was proof of the Resurrection. By whose definition of resurrection is anyone wanting to prove it? In other words, what are you trying to prove?

In quoting above from the Catholic Church catechism, I had started in a bit with the statement "Given all these testimonies." Leading up to those words, the Vatican document speaks of the witnessing of the Resurrection by Mary Magdalen, the Apostles and the 500.

It is important to note that, in the catechism and elsewhere, we are speaking about witnessing the result, not the process. These are "witnesses of the Risen One." At the risk of being punctilious, not the rising one. All too often, whether it's in wanting to understand how the images were formed or in wanting to prove the Resurrection, we are trying, by science and forensics means, to be witnesses to what happened in the tomb.

We are, in the words of Alamo, yarn spinning.

Apparitions of the Risen Christ

During a Lenten lecture in 2008, Rowan Williams, then the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury (pictured here with Pope Benedict XVI at Lambeth Palace in London in 2010), added his own perspective. Significantly, he refers to the post-resurrection encounters as apparitions. The Oxford Dictionary gives two meanings for the word:



1. A ghost or ghostlike image of a person.
2. A remarkable or unexpected appearance of someone or something.

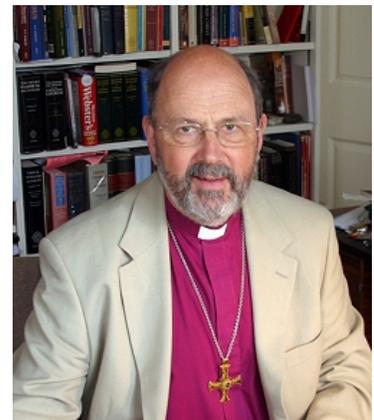
Dr. Williams doesn't make it clear what he means. We can guess and I'm guessing he is referring to an unexpected appearance:

There is, I have sometimes said, a quality of rawness about these stories of the resurrection, a quality of mysteriousness: the strange but very persistent theme that people do not at first recognize the risen Jesus – the story of the encounter with Mary Magdalene, the story of Emmaus. That is a significant factor once again that no one has ever fully made sense of, and again doesn't fit easily into literary stereotypes. There are cases in the Old Testament when people realize belatedly that they have been talking to an angel, when the angel suddenly reveals his glory; but that's not quite how it works in the encounter with Mary Magdalene or the Emmaus story. And so, in thinking about the historical basis of the resurrection stories, about the empty tomb and the 'apparitions', I would say, look for the way the story is told and begin to see how much of a shock it actually was – and, of course, still is. The story is told in a new way because nothing like this has ever happened before, and we are still finding it difficult because nothing like that has ever happened again. But (to go right back to

where I began) that is what you might expect in retrospect, what you might expect if what you're dealing with is an event that inaugurates a new phase in human history, not just another episode in the ongoing story, but something that reshapes the whole way in which we talk about God, and about God's world. Now there are many points of detail about the resurrection stories—about the way in which the empty tomb is spoken of, about the content and the direction of some of the apparition stories (not least the apparition to Thomas or the apparition to Peter and the Beloved Disciple by the Sea of Galilee at the end of John's Gospel)—on which it would be fascinating to spend more time. But I hope that the main point is clear. There is something about the way in which these stories are told that continues to stand out: a change of gear between the passion and the resurrection story – a sense of the new.

I like William's use of the word apparition in this context. It's non-specific and useful. I think we can infer from the polls and from contemporary books and literature that a significant number of Christians of all traditions think of the post-resurrection "appearances" as spiritual encounters or symbolic stories. Apparitions works for this.

N. T. Wright, a renowned biblical scholar, historian, and formerly the Church of England Bishop of Durham speaks of a strange transformation into a new mode of physicality. Apparitions works for this, too.

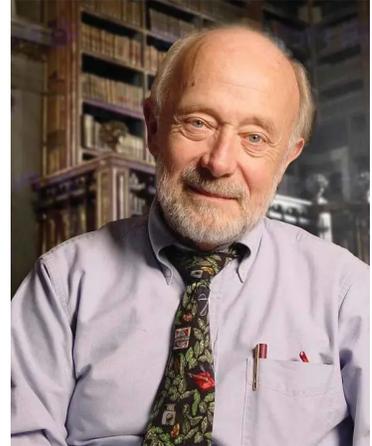


Apparitions also works for Alamo's 8-ball analogy. Nicely, I might add.

Wright, has written an extraordinary 850+ page comprehensive survey, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*.

It carefully and thoroughly explores what people believe and have believed about the Resurrection throughout history. It took me seven weeks recovering from a broken ankle to sit still enough to get through it. I can now say I'm glad for the fractured ankle. It is that good of a book.

Five years after first publishing that book, Wright hooked up with his good friend, the late Marcus Borg, then the Hundere Distinguished Professor of Religion and Culture at Oregon State University. Together, they wrote a smaller book targeted more at a popular audience. The book, *The Meaning of Jesus*, was really more of a polite debate between the two good friends. Discussion of the Resurrection was pretty much reduced to two chapters, one by each of these scholars.



With a book to sell, the two embarked on a tour and series of debates at universities, churches, and television studios across the United States. One stop included an interview on Public Television (PBS) in March of 1999. At the beginning of the television broadcast, the show's moderator, Chris Roberts, introduced the discussion:

Englishman N. T. Wright and American Marcus Borg disagree about Jesus and the resurrection. They are historians — both Christians, both Oxford graduates — and friends for many years. Together they've written a new book, The Meaning of Jesus.

Wright then neatly summarized for the viewers the discussion that would follow:

Was Jesus bodily raised from the dead or not? And I say yes, and Marcus says no. Those are the big things.

Shortly, after that, Borg stated:

I do believe in the resurrection of Jesus. I'm just skeptical that it involved anything happening to his corpse...

... I wouldn't see these stories as fictions in a modern sense of the word. I would see them as characteristic of the ancient mind, and of ancient storytelling techniques where you do use a story to express a truth of something that has happened. I think the Easter stories are true in the sense that the followers of Jesus really did have

experiences of Jesus as a living reality after his death. I don't think those stories are simply saying his memory lives on. I think they had visionary experiences. I think they had experiences of him as a presence within the life of the community.

Wright on the other hand said:

All the early sources from quite different angles, they all describe as best they can something very strange involving the transformation into a new mode of physicality—I actually can't understand what the historian—why the early Church got going and took the shape it did, unless I say that sometime reasonably soon after his death, Jesus of Nazareth was alive again in a new mode of physicality, which transforms, not just resuscitating or abandoning his physical body.

Roberts tried to clarify. Maybe it was for television that he said:

According to Dr. Wright, the first Christians believed God acts in the real world of flesh and blood, in real-time. So that if a TV camera had been in the tomb, it would have recorded the transformation of Jesus' body.

Borg would have none of it.

I think of the great Easter hymn, "Christ the Lord is Risen Today," with all its soaring hallelujahs. And I see that hymn as profoundly true even though I don't think its truth depends upon the tomb having been empty or something happening to the corpse of Jesus.

Christ indeed has risen, but to confuse that with an event that you could have photographed, I think is to trivialize the story.

The notion of a camera in the tomb intrigued me. Roberts didn't come up with the idea, however. It is in their book. Nonetheless, it shaped my thinking from that point forward.

Wright, I thought, came up short in the PBS session. I agreed more with Wright at this stage in my life but in hoping for more of an explanation, perhaps to help me better justify my belief, I was disappointed. I turned back to my bookcase and

went back to *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Wright adds an important point about the burial cloths and the body – I can almost imagine John Jackson singing hallelujah:

Their positioning, carefully described in [John 20] verse 7, suggest that they had not been unwrapped, but that the body had somehow passed through them, much as, later on, it would appear and disappear through locked doors (verse 19).

The phrase, “somehow passed through them” bothered me. I would have said “as though” the body passed through them. But then again, I’m speaking from personal bias. I am not a Biblical scholar, nor will I ever be.⁸

As for appearing and disappearing through locked doors, could Wright not have said, instead, “despite” locked doors? The distinctions are important even if not justified. Passing through resonates with so much belief and pseudoscience about the Shroud from which emanate such notions as the body dematerializing or the body becoming mechanically transparent.

“Simple,” wrote Hugh Farey, when he was editor of the British Society for the Turin Shroud. Farey was commenting on a paper, [Charge Separation as the Mechanism for Image Formation on the Shroud of Turin](#) by Dr. Daniel Spicer, a former physics professor at Drexel and now Emeritus Scientist at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center and Dr. Edward Toton, the president of a physics consulting firm. [Farey wrote in my blog](#):

All we need is for a “body wrapped in the Shroud to become volumetrically radiant [...] and simultaneously mechanically transparent, thus offering time-decreasing resistance to the cloth as it collapsed through the body space.” Simple. Made-up physics can explain anything.

⁸ I don’t read it that way: John 20 Verse 7 says only, “and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.” and Verse 19 says, “When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”

Yes, simples is a word. I didn't know.

Kim Dreisbach had helped me to understand the Resurrection in many different ways. A paper he wrote in 2001, "[Thomas: The Cenacle and the Shroud Reconsidered](#)" nicely summarizes some of the things we had discussed. In it, Kim quotes Claremont School of Theology's Gregory J. Riley from his book, *Resurrection Reconsidered, Thomas and John in Controversy*.

It has been less often noted how late a development in early Christian history was the doctrine of the physical resurrection of Christ, and how common the "heresy" of its rejection in the Church. The original Christian idea was, if not identical with, then far more in accord with "spiritual resurrection" and "Greek" ideas than with mundane restoration of corpses... Paul declared that Jesus had appeared to many irrefutable witnesses (1 Cor 15:3ff), but in a transformed "spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:44). This body was a "dwelling, from heaven" made by God and given in exchange for the earthly body (2 Cor 5:1-4), for "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 15:50).

Mark, the earliest canonical Gospel, contains no physical demonstration of Jesus' postmortem body. All three Synoptic Gospels preserve the saying that the resurrected believers would become like the angels (Mark 12:25 and parallels)....

Kim went further. He asks us to imagine an intriguing idea. To me, it's a stretch to think Kim could be right. But what fun to consider Kim's take, which he brilliantly illustrates by photoshopping Caravaggio's *The Incredulity Of Saint Thomas*.



In its most basic form, what we have here is Thomas' attempt to confirm the Image(s) on the Shroud as that [those] of the historical, crucified and risen Jesus of Nazareth. The method of confirmation is via the identifying marks of the wounds in the hands (i.e. wrists) and side to prove that the body imaged on the burial linen was simultaneously that of the crucified Jesus and a

depiction of his new status as the Risen and glorified Messiah. What we may well be encountering in John 20 is a transitional stage in the description of the Resurrection where appearance/vision is giving way to the need for stressing the physical dimensions of the risen "body." As time went by, possibly this verse was used by later Christian apologists to counter Docetists who denied an actual physical incarnation. Could it be that the Shroud - "The" only surviving link between these two events - not only is the "outward and visible sign" which moves Thomas beyond doubt to unswerving rededication; but is also the hidden "spy clue" upon which the Thomas story is based? And should it come as any surprise that subsequent legend assigns Thomas the role of dispatching Jude with the sacred linen to King Abgar of Edessa?

Is it as simple as a choice between a spiritual resurrection and a physical one, as argued by Borg or Wright?

Some of the many people in the world of Shroud research who religiously believe in a physical resurrection, simultaneously think that the image must be a miraculous acheiropoieton created during and by actions of the Resurrection. Some, even in a chicken-or-the-egg-first fashion, will argue that scriptural descriptions of the scourging and crucifixion seen in image and blood argue for the authenticity of the Shroud. And ergo, the Shroud's authenticity argues that the Resurrection happened physically. The image of a crucified Jesus, they will tell us, was created from an energetic byproduct of what transpired in the tomb after the stone was rolled into place and before it was apparently rolled away. It need not be that way, of course. There are many images believed to be acheiropoietia, among them: the Veil of Veronica, the Manoppello Image, and the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. But they lack the bloodstains. They lack uncanny photorealism.

Physically, was the operative word in the PALS study that showed that only 3 in 4 American Christians strongly agreed with the statement, "Jesus Christ physically rose from the dead."

Do we mean by that what happened inside the closed tomb was physical? How so? Do we mean the empty tomb was a physical reality? Do we suggest that the post-resurrection appearances were in-the-flesh, so to speak: Jesus's physical body transformed, somehow, but still able to eat food? Transformed but still showing wounds? Transformed but seemingly able to defy basic laws of nature?

What if, as I wrote in a blog posting I called [The Process of Resurrection](#), the Resurrection was simply a change of state without any process, occurring in zero time, without so much of a disturbance as that caused by the seed of a dandelion landing on the ground?

We are all familiar, at least in principle, how a caterpillar transforms into a butterfly. That is a process. We can make a time-lapse movie of it and see each and every step. Some will say they see a miracle unfolding. Others will say it is nothing of a kind; it is a perfectly explainable biological process.

Suppose you were to take the first and last frames from the movie of the process, splice them together, and pretend that nothing happened in between them. In doing so, you could demonstrate, with a very short, two-frame movie, a miraculous transformation without a process.

The Resurrection, if we are to believe it was in some way physical, was by definition, a miracle. If we are to take our knowledge from scripture alone, there was a before and after, a first frame, so to speak, and a last frame. There was nothing in between that we know about. So, why do we think there was a process? Why do we think, for instance, the body dematerialized such that a cloth might fall through it or that the body might release some form of energetic byproduct during the Resurrection? Why do we think, as Mark Antonacci, a well-known Shroud researcher, suggests that Jesus might have passed through a traversable Lorentzian wormhole in space-time or as Tulane professor Frank Tipler suggests that the process of resurrection might have been a form of

electroweak quantum tunneling and the images on the Shroud the consequence of a Sphaleron field?

Nonsense! Let's not forget how Ray Rogers described such thinking. But, couldn't someone say the same about Alamo's explanation for a miracle or indeed the Resurrection. Of course.

Thomas Aquinas in Summa Theologica tried to explain that angels in going from one place to another did not pass through the place in between. Nor did they consume time doing so.

For angels, at least for Thomas Aquinas' concept of angels and how they traveled, there is only a first frame and the last frame, so to speak. Thomas Aquinas was much into angels and was brilliant at logical speculation. We can leave it at that. Or we can call it what it is: nonsense. But it is metaphorical nonsense. It provides a useful metaphor for pondering any and all supernatural action. There is in his imaginings a change of state and no measure of time. There is nothing like that in a modern-day's take on classical physics and perhaps nothing like that in quantum mechanics, as well.

And to be clear, we are talking about miracles in a classic sense of the word. We are not talking about the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly. We are talking, here, about:

- "The highest degree in miracles comprises those works wherein something is done by God, that nature can never do." -- The Summa Contra Gentiles by St. Thomas Aquinas.
- "A miracle is a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent." -- "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding" by David Hume.

Might miracles be like Thomas Aquinas' angels, who avoid the in-between and use no time?" Not concerning ourselves, here, with questions about Biblical literalism, when Jesus healed the blind man was there a moment in time when the man's eyesight was partially restored? When Jesus turned water into wine were there moments in time, no matter how brief, when the wine was almost completely water and when, perhaps picoseconds later, there was some awfully watery, weak wine? Or was it that the man's eyesight was suddenly, instantly, faster than a speeding angel, fully restored? Was it that the water was water and then was wine and never along the way something in between?

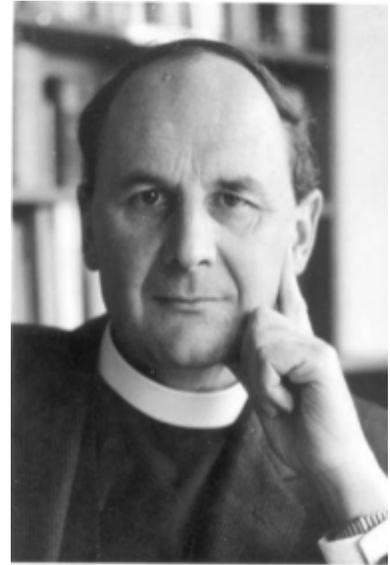
There was, when I was growing up, a book that could be found gathering dust here and there about our house. It was sometimes in its place on the bookshelf but more often it was on the corner of a desk, a coffee table in the living room or on top of the television set where it was used to prop up the rabbit ears antenna at just the right angle for getting the best television reception from a nearby broadcasting tower. The theory was that my grandmother would, on purpose but seemingly accidentally, leave the book around the house in hopes that someone would actually read it. The book was *Who Moved the Stone?* by Frank Morrison. Promoted by such luminaries as T. S. Elliot and G. K. Chesterton, the book was a big success when it was first published in 1930. It is now a classic.

While scrolling through the Kindle version I came across this thought:

In each case the women arrive to find the stone already rolled away, yet with no hint from the writers as to how this came about. It is only when we turn to St. Matthew's Gospel that we read of a great angel descending and removing the stone. Now the peculiar and significant thing is this. We can search the apocryphal writings through and through, and we shall nowhere find even the remotest suggestion that the Lord Himself broke the barriers of His own prison. We are told that the stone 'rolled away of itself', or that supernatural beings descended and moved it. But nowhere is the obvious miracle recorded that Jesus Himself threw down the physical defences of the grave.

Honest to God, John A. T. Robinson, Notorious Bishop

In Dallas, Kim and I sat together at one of those long and narrow conference room tables that come with a yellowish table cloth, a bowl of hard candy and two cardboard tent signs on which to write our names. Kim frequently passed pieces of paper to me to read. They included quotations from the former Anglican Bishop of Woolwich, who like me had attended multiple Shroud conferences. After serving as bishop for ten years, he served as the Dean of Trinity College, Cambridge until his death in 1983.



John A. T. Robinson

Kim passed me a copy of a letter that Bishop Robinson wrote to a Catholic priest, Father Peter Rinaldi.

*You won't know me, though you may know me by name as the notorious bishop who wrote **Honest to God** and therefore about the last person to be a believer in the Shroud, if that is the right word! But for a long time I have been very much impressed by the evidence ... that there is here something that cannot easily be explained away."*

There was this, too, that Robinson had written:

If in the recognition of the face and hands and feet and all the other wounds (on the Holy Shroud), we, like those who knew Him best, are led to say, "It is the Lord!", then perhaps we may have to learn to count ourselves also among those who have "seen and believed." But that, as St. John makes clear, brings with it no special blessing (20:29) -- rather special responsibility (17:18-21).⁴

Kim had added:

That "special responsibility" is to get beyond the linen to the Lord – to see Him in the faces of the dispossessed, the victims of injustice, the poor, the neglected and all the others for whom He died. "Facts" learned about the Man of the Shroud do not guarantee dedicated service in His Name, Alas, these "facts" can become nothing more than religious erudition in pious garb unless they lead to the deepening of the student's own faith reflected in concern for and service to those for whom the Man of the Shroud came to minister.

Those few sentences by Bishop Robinson and the addition by Fr. Dreisbach may be the most important words I have absorbed since this journey began in 1965.

Why slouching?

W. B. Yeats used the line, “Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?” in his famous poem, “The Second Coming.” Slouches, slouch and slouching have been adaptively borrowed a lot from this poem. I am not the first, nor will I be the last.

In thinking about the death of my daughter Amy, I had read two books by Joan Didion: *Blue Nights*, about the death of the author’s daughter and how she coped, and *The Year of Magical Thinking* about Didion’s struggle with the the death of her husband. Joan Didion also wrote a piece called *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*. I noticed the word and liked it. It is no more complicated than that. It describes my lazy, drawn out, slow moving spiritual journey very well.

Why Emmaus?

In his book, *Luke for Everyone*, N. T. Wright writes:

If the story of the prodigal son has a claim to be the finest story Jesus ever told, the tale of the two on the road to Emmaus must have an equal claim to be the finest scene Luke ever sketched.

The words Alamo quoted that day in Saigon were from that finest scene.

Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

Why nonsense?

I believe in God. I don't really know why, I just do. The God I believe in is limitless. Why do I think so? It goes to definition. That's what God means. If that is good theology it is a happy coincidence. I also believe God is a loving God. That, too, as I see it, is a matter of definition. If God is limitless and loving, then miracles are to be expected.

Alamo, back in Saigon, had told me that he thought C. S. Lewis was trying to tell us what he, Alamo, was explaining with his 8-ball analogy. Let me change that a bit. I think that it was Alamo trying to explain to us what Lewis had said initially when he wrote, "Miracles do not, in fact, break the laws of nature."

Maybe Jackson and Rucker and all the others in the energetics camp are right. I don't know but I don't think so. Maybe Rogers is right, instead. I just don't know. At the bar in Dallas, when asked where I was at on the Shroud, I had dribbled out these words: "It's a mystery, could be real, maybe so, probably so." Now I pretty much say the same thing except that I've changed the word *probably* to *possibly*. That's nonsense, perhaps.

One thing that is not nonsense, is my belief in the Resurrection. Kim and I pretty much saw it the same way when it came to the moment of the Resurrection. Jesus was gone from the tomb instantly. Kim was more in Marcus

Borg's camp with the post-resurrection appearances. A quote from Borg's PBS appearance defines it as "characteristic of the ancient mind, and of ancient storytelling techniques where you do use a story to express a truth of something that has happened." I, on the other hand, see the post-resurrection appearances much as they are described in the current Catholic catechism, as "a glorious



body: not limited by space and time but able to be present how and when he wills” à la Alamo.

It has been the study of the Shroud, not what is seen on the Shroud or believed about the Shroud, that has helped me to see that I believe in a physical resurrection and a series of physical post-resurrection appearances.

Kim spent most of his life in service to Christ: “That ‘special responsibility’ is to get beyond the linen to the Lord – to see Him in the faces of the dispossessed, the victims of injustice, the poor, the neglected and all the others for whom He died.” That matters more than how we understand this or that detail.

Where does that leave us when it comes to the unresolved mystery of the images on the Shroud? As the “notorious bishop” put it: “that there is here something that cannot easily be explained away.”

Possibly just possibly, the Shroud is real. Possibly just possibly the images are also real, as in the *Hymn of the Pearl*. Possibly just possibly they are related to the Resurrection miracle.

The truer image, the more important image, the Risen image is from Luke’s great story from Emmaus:

*Then they told what had happened on the road,
and how he had been made known to them
in the breaking of the bread.*