

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

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## The Shroud of Turin

By John W. Robbins

*Editor's Note: The Trinity Foundation is republishing this article by John W. Robbins as the shroud of Turin is making the rounds again with many of the same players, including Gary Habermas of Liberty University. The April 2023 issue of Newsmax Magazine has a cover story on the shroud with artists' renderings of "The Real Face of Jesus" and a 3-D sculpture. The following paragraphs demonstrate where such faith is placed:*

Powerful – and some say overwhelming – new evidence indicates that Jesus of Nazareth's burial cloth, believed to be the Shroud of Turin (*sic*), is not only real but points to the occurrence of a supernatural event after his death.

Recent analyses of the Shroud using equipment only modern science can provide, from machines that study [*machines don't study; persons do*] deep space to nanoscopic parts of the human cell, are revealing surprising information.

The ancient 14-foot cloth has long been revered by [Roman] Catholics as an iconic relic, but a growing number of believing (*sic*) Christians and others see in the Shroud physical proof of not only Jesus' life and death, but evidence of his claimed [*notice the unbelief*] resurrection....

In 1998, Pope John Paul II visited Turin Cathedral to speak about the Shroud and its meaning for humankind.

"The Shroud shows us Jesus at the moment of his greatest helplessness and reminds us that in the abasement of that death lies the salvation of the whole world," John Paul said.

"The Shroud thus becomes an invitation to face every experience, including that of suffering and

extreme helplessness, with the attitude of those who believe that God's merciful love overcomes every poverty, every limitation, every temptation to despair."

For Christians and non-believers there remains real value in the Shroud, the best evidence that there is a better way for all of us.<sup>1</sup>

*After reading the articles, the reader gets the impression that faith in Christ is not increased, but rather, misplaced faith in relics, specifically this relic is increased. Many ersatz evangelicals have gone along with this instead of relying on the sufficiency of Scripture.*

*Editor's Note: This essay is the Introduction to Gordon Clark's book, Three Types of Religious Philosophy.*

*Three Types of Religious Philosophy* may be a forbidding title to most Americans, including many American Christians, who are not interested in philosophy. Perhaps they think that philosophy is for scholars, those sheltered residents of ivory towers who do not have to deal with the "real world." Perhaps they simply feel overwhelmed by the difficulty of the arguments.

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<sup>1</sup> Luca Cacciatore and Kimberly Carberry, "Holy Evidence: New scientific findings point to the authenticity of Jesus' burial shroud – giving new meaning to his life, death and claimed resurrection," *Newsmax Magazine*, April 2023, 46, 54.

Still worse, they may ask, What has Christianity to do with philosophy? Does not the Apostle Paul warn us not to be deceived by philosophy? Surely, we have better things to do than read about philosophy, let alone three different types. Why, then, a book by this title?

To reply: Just as all men speak prose whether they know it or not, so all men, not simply philosophers, have a philosophy. There is no possibility of a rational being not having a philosophy. And if all men speak prose, the question is not prose or no prose; the only question is whether they shall speak it correctly or not. Similarly, the question is not philosophy or no philosophy; the only question is whether a man's philosophy shall be correct or not.

Second, Paul warns us very strongly, not against all philosophy – that would be even more absurd than urging men not to speak prose – but against unbiblical philosophy: “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.” Paul is warning us, not about all philosophy, but about non-Christian philosophy. Philosophy means the love of wisdom. Christ is the Wisdom of God, according to *John* and *Proverbs*, and true philosophy consists in the love of God.

There is, however, much confusion among both ordinary Christians and their leaders about philosophy. Many Christian leaders, in fact, teach philosophies according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

Examples abound. Let me suggest just one: the belief that the shroud of Turin is the burial cloth of Christ. Many Protestants share Roman Catholicism's religious philosophy, empiricism, the notion that truth comes through the senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and perhaps a few more. (The empiricists have not yet furnished us with a complete list of the senses.) This empiricism, with its emphasis on the importance of experience, has led to a growing acceptance of relics and rituals, which appeal primarily to the senses. There is a great and growing abandonment of the intellectual Word in worship in favor of the empirical smells and bells of Roman, Episcopal, and Orthodox liturgy. Ritual and rote are fast replacing sermons and study in church.

One indication of the growing Protestant affinity for Rome's religious philosophy is the sympathetic

reception the Roman Catholic Church's claims about the shroud of Turin have received from certain Protestants. The Chairman of the Department of Philosophy at the Baptist, fundamentalist Liberty University, Gary Habermas, published a book in 1981 (actually a Roman Catholic publisher, Servant Books, published it) arguing that the shroud was, in fact, the burial cloth of Christ. He solemnly declared that “there is no practical possibility that someone other than Jesus was buried in the shroud.”

Nor is Mr. Habermas' statement the only example of philosophical incompetence supporting religious superstition. A leader of the scientific team that investigated the shroud in October 1979, Thomas D'Muhala, a “born-again” Christian, also asserted, “Every one of the scientists I have talked to believes the cloth is authentic. Some say, maybe this is a love letter, a tool he left behind for the analytical mind.”

In 1979, after a team of scientists had examined the shroud, a leading conservative lawyer in the “pro-family” movement had this to say about the shroud of Turin:

At long last, we have the proof demanded by the doubting Thomases. The proof is the Shroud in which the body of Jesus was wrapped, and is now preserved at Turin, Italy, in the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist.

A recent movie called *In Search of Historic Jesus* shows the Shroud and details its proof. The Shroud bears many scourge marks from the back of the body it wrapped. It shows marks of thick, tightly compressed long hair, gathered at the back of the neck, in the unique fashion of young Jewish men of the first century.

Even while he was announcing the results in the latest scientific tests showing that the shroud could be dated only to the fourteenth century, Cardinal Ballestro of Turin assured his audience that “the holy Shroud has produced miracles and continues to.”

The front of the Shroud shows the wound in the side and the prints of the nails on both wrists – not through the hands, as portrayed on most crucifixes....

The thumbs are pulled tightly into the palms of the hands, in accordance with the reflex which medical science tells us would result from the nail

wounds in the wrists. The knees appeared severely damaged as if from repeated falls.

Close examination reveals abrasions on the shoulder which could come from carrying the cross. The nose is broken, and the beautiful face is disfigured by violence.

The body shown by the Shroud is muscular, and devoid of any excess weight. The body is estimated to have weighed 170 pounds and to have a height of 5 feet 11 inches. The man's age appears to be between 30 and 36 years, and the appearance is majestic.

There are eight independent puncture wounds of the scalp which could have been caused by the crowning of thorns....

The evidence of the murder of Jesus Christ is far greater than of Julius Caesar's murder by Brutus and others. We have no modern proof of the wounds which killed Caesar. We don't have the Shroud in which Caesar was buried.

We cannot match the accounts of Caesar's murder with his Shroud, as the accounts of the four Gospels perfectly match the body marks on the Holy Shroud....

The Shroud provides overwhelming proof of the accuracy of the Gospel's history of the crucifixion of Jesus.

Likewise, the Shroud gives proof of the Resurrection. The numerous experts who examined the Shroud within the last year, including all varieties of Christians, Jews, agnostics, and atheists, have concluded that the body suddenly left it with a great burst of radiation-like energy....

The Shroud proves the most remarkable miracle in history.

Now the writer of those words, Phyllis Schlafly, is a well-educated lawyer and quite famous. She is a Roman Catholic who has preached at Thomas Road Baptist Church – Jerry Falwell's church – in Lynchburg, Virginia. She knows – or rather, she ought to know – that the shroud does not and cannot provide “overwhelming proof of the accuracy of the Gospels,” and that it certainly does not “give proof of the Resurrection.” But she is an empiricist, and thus is blind to the logical gaps in her argument. It is precisely such logical voids between premises and conclusions that characterize superstition.

But we need not restrict our charges of incompetence and superstition to lawyers and philosophy teachers. The infallible popes themselves have expressed their belief in the authenticity of the shroud. Nineteen popes have expressed their confidence in the authenticity of the shroud. Pope Paul VI called the shroud “The most important relic in the history of Christianity.” Between 1472 and 1480, Pope Sixtus IV issued four bulls indicating that he believed the shroud to be worthy of the highest veneration. In 1506 Pope Julius II proclaimed the Feast of the Holy Shroud. In 1950, Pius XII addressed the First International Shroud Congress and expressed his wish that the participants at the Congress contribute even more zealously to spreading the knowledge and veneration of so “great and sacred a relic.”

What has all this to do with religious philosophy? The case of the shroud of Turin graphically illustrates some of the matters at issue between empiricism, which is the dominant religious philosophy of the twentieth century, and Scripturalism, which is the Christian view.

A Scripturalist, that is, one who assumes what the Bible says is true as an axiom, a first principle, would have known from the start that the shroud of Turin was a fake. The Bible says quite clearly,

After this Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds.

Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury....

Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself.

A Scripturalist should not have been fooled by the shroud, and many were not. Christ's body was not covered by one strip of cloth but wound with several (note the plural *cloths*), together with 100 pounds of

spices. Furthermore, his head was wrapped separately from his body.

But an empiricist, one who believes that the evidence of the senses is more certain than the statements in the Bible, one who chooses the authority of the senses rather than the authority of God, might have been fooled, and many were. Some felt the shroud offered “overwhelming proof” of the death and resurrection of Christ. They have been embarrassed by the latest scientific tests – empirical tests – which seem to show that the shroud dates only to the fourteenth century, not the first. Liberty University’s Department chairman, even after the latest scientific findings were made known, asserted that “if the shroud is authentic, it offers incredible[!] further proof of the Crucifixion, and possibly the Resurrection.” This statement offers credible further proof that Mr. Habermas simply does not know what proof is.

The case of the shroud of Turin brings into focus the central issue in philosophy: the source of our knowledge. How do we know? Do we trust the authority of our senses (and of science)? Do we trust the authority of the unaided human mind? Or do we trust God? Many professing Christians would agree with Aristotle that knowledge comes through the senses. That is the official position of the Roman church, and the unofficial position of most Protestant churches. Some of those Christians have been avidly promoting the shroud of Turin as empirical evidence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the evidence that “proves” the Gospels. But the Scripturalist must ask: What is proof? Are the *Gospels* documents the truth of which needs to be proved? Can science and religious relics prove the truth of the Bible? Even more fundamentally, can science or sense experience prove anything at all? *Three Types of Religious Philosophy* answers these questions, and the answers turn the secular philosophical world upside down.

In 1982 *National Review*, the conservative magazine of opinion edited by William F. Buckley, Jr., commented:

The fact now appears to be that the famous Shroud of Turin has been accurately dated. High-contrast photography reveals a coin placed on the right eye of the figure. The coin can be identified. It depicts a *lituus*, or astrologer’s staff, and the letters UCAJ can be discerned, part of an inscription referring to Tiberius Caesar. This coin was minted during the procuratorship of Pontius

Pilate. Pilate went out of office in 36 AD, but coin specialists assert that he had coins minted only between 30 and 32 AD.

Well, that pretty much does it. The Shroud is in fact a kind of photograph of Jesus Christ. The coin pins down the dating.

One intelligent *National Review* reader replied to this asinine argument with these words:

I have, hermetically preserved between the pages of an old *National Review*, a picture of my Labrador Retriever, revealing a coin placed on the right eye of the dog. The coin can be identified as a zinc penny, minted during the Presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Roosevelt went out of office such coins were minted only in 1943.

Well, that pretty much does it. My Labrador was in fact Sergei Rachmaninoff, who died March 28, 1943.

Absurd, you say? But this argument is no more absurd than the arguments purporting to prove that the shroud of Turin is the burial cloth of Christ. In two clever paragraphs the writer exposed a few of the many logical fallacies that the empiricists commit every time they argue. Gordon H. Clark does far more. He demonstrates that empiricism, and rationalism as well, though hardly anyone is a disciple of Anselm these days, is a tissue of logical fallacies.

The result is a classic introduction to religious philosophy that avoids the errors of empiricism and rationalism and presents the Biblical view, which Clark calls dogmatism. One ought to believe the Bible simply because it is the Word of God; there is no greater authority. Empiricism, the belief in the authority of the senses, is a form of philosophy “according to the principles of the world.” To try to prove the Bible by relics and science is more absurd than trying to find the sun with a flashlight, and those who do so open themselves not merely to refutation, but to ridicule as well. Those who think themselves wise, as well as humble laymen, would do well to read this book, for until Christians, especially university professors, get their philosophy straight, the superstitions of the twentieth century will continue to grow, and we shall continue our rapid retreat into the Dark Ages.