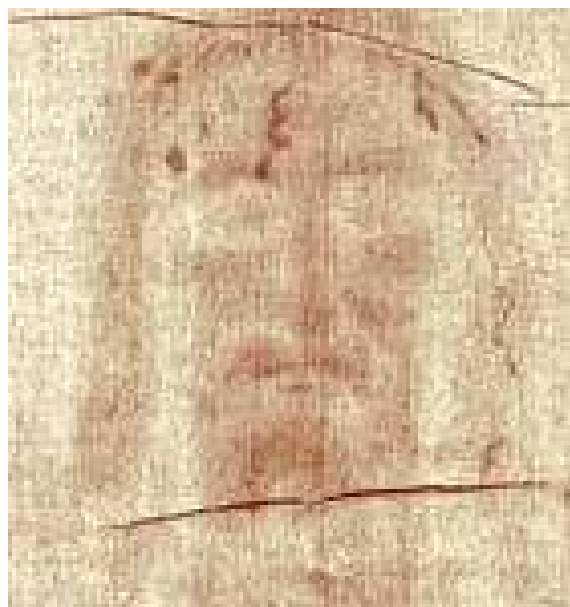


Helmut Felzmann



Excerpt from the book

New Light on Jesus

**Research on the Turin Shroud
Yields Surprising Knowledge**

Ebook edition 2010

Felzmann Verlag

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The connection between the Gerocross and the Turin Shroud is explained in the
chapter: The history of the Shroud

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Preface

The existence of the Shroud of Turin is a great fortune for the crisis-ridden Christendom of the twenty-first century. Although the 1988 carbon 14 testing seemed to deliver scientific proof that the Shroud was produced in the Middle Ages and was therefore a fake, in recent years the issue of authenticity has changed dramatically.

This book contains an overview of the present state of research on the Shroud of Turin. All readers will have the opportunity to form their own ideas and to come to their own judgments. It will be shown here that various scientific disciplines solve the mystery only when we make the assumption that Jesus of Nazareth in fact once lay under the Shroud.

The Shroud testifies in a moving way to the brutal event of his crucifixion in all its horrible detail. The Shroud is thereby, along with the Gospels, an objective witness of the central event of Christianity. Yet what occurred later in the tomb? Does the Shroud tell the story of death and bodily decay? Or does it signify life and resurrection?

The evidence of the Shroud on this point is, I believe, unmistakable. It will be detailed and presented here in an easily comprehensible manner. The Shroud confirms the reports in the New Testament about the many eyewitnesses who saw Jesus alive after his crucifixion. The Shroud testifies to one of the most unbelievable dramas that has ever happened in the history of humanity. Admittedly, it must have played itself out somewhat differently than traditional belief affirms.

The consequences for Christianity are far reaching and force one to rethink matters. Yet this is only because of the dogmatic religion that was made of the life of Jesus in the first few centuries after his crucifixion. The crisis of traditional Christianity does not mean the impossibility of a revitalized new beginning. That is the theme of this book. The core of the reformation looming over Christianity today is a return to an ideology-free belief, as Jesus himself taught and lived.

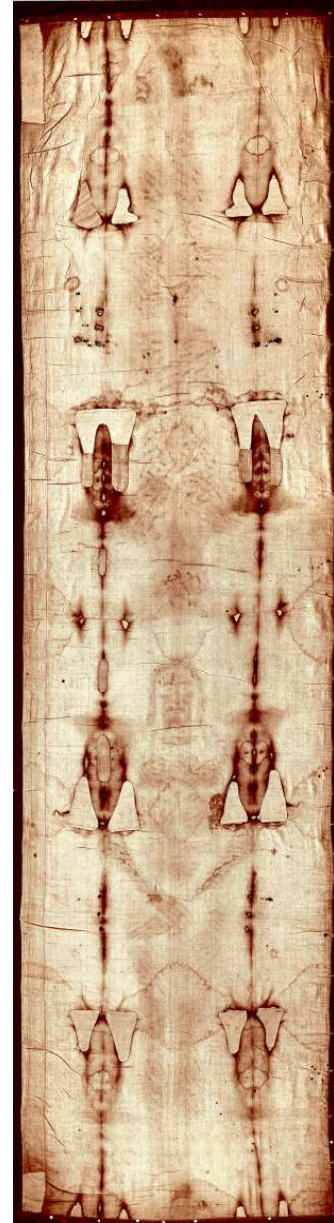
1. The Turin Shroud – A Controversial Object

Scarcely any historical object has been so intensively examined in so many disciplines as the Shroud of Turin. And scarcely any historical object has been so passionately debated.

The Shroud of Turin is a linen cloth measuring 436 centimeters in length by 110 centimeters in width on which the clear image of a crucified man can be seen, a man who was approximately thirty to forty years old and who stood approximately five feet ten inches tall (1.8 meters). The Shroud also bears various burn spots, as well as a series of bloodstains.

For some, the Shroud is an ingenious medieval forgery, while for others it is the genuine burial shroud of Jesus Christ. Only now in our time are scientific methods available to objectively search for the truth of the Shroud.

This book considers only the most important results of such examinations because the spiritual consequences are considered first and foremost here. A number of excellent books present more detailed information, including a more complete history of the Shroud.¹



Ill. 1 The Shroud of Turin © Enrie

¹ For example, consult the works of Ian Wilson, Rodney Hoare, Mary and Alan Whanger, John Iannone, Frederick Zugibe, Wolfgang Waldstein, and Maria G. Siliato, to mention only a few.

The History of the Shroud

The indisputable history of the Shroud of Turin began in the year 1357.² In that year the widow of a French knight, Geoffroy de Charny, then in possession of the Shroud, decided out of financial desperation to display the Shroud publicly in the church of Lirey. The Shroud immediately attracted large groups of pilgrims and became so popular that the further history of the Shroud is recognized as being without gaps or doubts. How it had come into the possession of the de Charny family is, however, not known. Geoffrey's son later declared that his father had received the Shroud as a heartfelt gift. One hundred years later in 1452, a descendant of the de Charny family, for lack of an heir, bestowed the Shroud upon Louis of Savoy, head of the dynasty from which the kings of Italy later arose. In 1532 fire nearly destroyed the Shroud. The palace chapel of Chambery, in which the Shroud was kept at that time, burned to the ground. The Shroud itself lay folded together in a silver box, which melted from the heat on one corner so that the Shroud suffered serious damage. Very luckily, no portion of the Shroud was burned that had any significant part of the human image on it.

The Shroud remained in the possession of the House of Savoy until the year 1983, when the former king of Italy, Umberto, bequeathed it to the Vatican shortly before his death. Since 1578, however, it has remained in Turin.

Many documents and other historical traces fill out in detail the history of the Shroud from the first to the fourteenth century. The early history of the Shroud is related, in somewhat embellished fashion, in a completely preserved sermon that was held on August 16, 944, in Constantinople. On that day, the Shroud was transferred to the city in a celebratory procession after having been delivered from the hands of the Muslim Arabs then in possession of the city of Edessa (now Urfa in southeast Anatolia).³ In that sermon it is reported that after the death of Jesus, a disciple brought the Shroud, with its "image not made by human hands," to the city of Edessa and its king, Abgar. The sermon contained references to older, partly Syrian sources, according to which Abgar and his son were also followers of Jesus. The Shroud was folded so that only the face of the image was visible. It was then placed above the city gate of Edessa, visible to everyone. At the time, it was common to place representations of a city's protective gods above the city gates.

According to the sermon of 944, a short time later the cloth with its image disappeared, and it remained only a dim memory among the people of Edessa. Abgar's grandson reportedly converted back to his old pagan beliefs. Out of fear the pagan ruler would destroy the cloth and its image, someone concealed it within the city walls. There it remained forgotten until the sixth century.

² The entire history of the Shroud is presented in great detail by Ian Wilson (1998) in his book, *The Blood and the Shroud*.

³ Every August 16, the Orthodox Church commemorates the bringing of the Shroud to Constantinople. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/August_16 and find "Constantinople"

During a flood, the sermon continues, parts of the city of Edessa were destroyed. A siege by the Turks damaged the city further so that the city walls had to be repaired. In the process, the cloth was rediscovered in 525⁴, and the image thereon was instantly worshipped as the long lost “image of the redeemer not made by human hands” (*acheiropoieton* in Greek). It was folded so that only the face could be seen upon it, so the fact that it was actually a burial shroud for a corpse was virtually unknown.

The discovery and veneration of the “Mandylion” (*handkerchief* in Arabic), as it was soon named, stands in direct relation to an abrupt change in the representation of the face of Jesus in the paintings of the Eastern Church. Until the beginning of the sixth century, the representations of Jesus had been quite varied. A common type of representation was, for example, that of the beardless “good shepherd.” With the rediscovery of the cloth, its image quickly became the standard for representations of Jesus because it was venerated as “the true face of Jesus.” There are countless icons bearing a copy of the Mandylion in various eastern churches.

Especially interesting is the transformation of mosaics of Christ in Ravenna. This city experienced its most fruitful period in the fifth and sixth centuries, and it has mosaics that were produced in the decades just before and after the rediscovery of the cloth. Here are two typical examples.

Professor Whanger has also discovered in the Jesus Pantocrator icon representations of flowers in the same places as on the Shroud of Turin.⁵



Ill. 2 Typical representation of the Mandylion (12th century)



Ill. 3 Russian troops in WWI with the Mandylion as their battle standard (Imperial War Museum, London)

⁴ Report of the Byzantine historian Prokop of Caesarea

⁵ Whanger, 1998, p. 35.



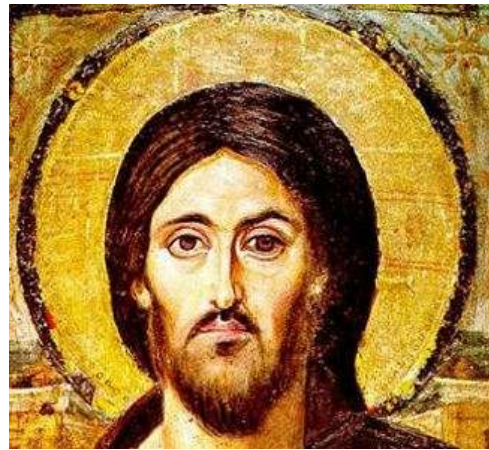
Mosaics in Ravenna
(San Vitale)

Ill. 4 left about 525

Ill. 5 right after 544



Ill. 6 Face of the Shroud (comparison)



Ill. 7 Jesus Pantocrator, St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, ca. 550

In Edessa the cloth was folded together so that only the face was visible. During the first examination in Constantinople in 944, it was discovered that the cloth was a burial shroud on which the entire body is visible...

A Living Man among the Dead

Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here; he is risen.

Angels at the empty tomb to the women visitors (Luke 24:5–6).

Signs of life are surely the last thing that one would expect to find on a burial shroud. Who would suspect a living person among the dead? Moreover, the circumstances would all indicate that the man under the Shroud of Turin must have been dead: the brutal mistreatment, the crucifixion, and the fact that a burial was indeed carried out. No one could survive these serious wounds. Even if the whipping and the crucifixion had not led to death, the lance thrust - directly into the heart, as some believe - must at last have led to death. And, indeed, a Roman execution squad cannot be deceived. It is simply absurd to assume that this man made fools of almost all witnesses to his crucifixion and his burial - a Houdini escape in the history of crucifixions, so to speak.

Around 1950 a certain Hans Naber in post-war Germany expressed the belief that Jesus did not die on the cross. Naber based this belief on a direct message from Jesus Christ to himself, as well as on observations of the Turin Shroud. He claimed too much blood was present on the Shroud, whereas corpses no longer bleed—or at least the large quantity of blood on the shroud does not correspond to the blood emissions from a typical corpse. Naber was very active and published a series of books. He was, however, strongly attacked and even sentenced to two years in prison for fraud. Both the German media, as well as the church authorities, simply ignored him. Nevertheless, in 1969 the Turinese Cardinal Pellegrino convened a commission of experts, unnoticed by the public, to test Naber's hypothesis with the Shroud at hand. The result was as expected: "The Man under the Shroud had really been dead, and Naber is wrong with his claim."⁶ But the idea had been launched into the modern world, and later authors came to the same conclusion.⁷

What is it about this idea that the man on the Shroud was still alive in his tomb and that evidence from the Shroud confirms this?

Basically, this question of life or death can be answered only by developing two scenarios. First, what would be expected if the man were dead, and second, what if the man were still alive? Especially important here are the bloodstains, traces of rigor mortis, as well as the question of whether this basic assumption can explain the forming of the image on the shroud. Naturally, one must take into consideration the "entire picture" when conclusively deciding the validity of any hypothesis, as details leave some room open for interpretation, and one can always speculate about circumstances that would explain individual aspects of the Shroud, by which more than one scenario becomes possible.

⁶ The whole story is told at <http://www.kroi.de/naber3.htm>

⁷ Holger Kersten: *Jesus Lived in India*, 1983; *The Jesus Conspiracy*, 1992; Rodney Hoare, *The Turin Shroud Is genuine*, 1984/94; Helmut Felzmann, *Revolution im Christentum*, 2002; und Gerhard Kuhnke, *Rom und das Grabtuch*, 2004.

Bloodstains

It was found that blood flowed out of at least twenty-eight wounds while the man was in the tomb. Most of the blood came out of the side wound, yet a considerable amount of blood also flowed out of the nail wounds in the hands and feet, as well as the thorn wounds on the back of the head. Precisely this picture is to be expected if the body were still alive. If this blood flow had not occurred, it would be a certain indication that a corpse must have lain upon the Shroud. But could it also be possible that so much blood flowed out of a corpse?

Of course, corpses can also “bleed” out of large wounds on the lower part of the body due to gravity. Also during transport of a corpse, the emission of blood is possible if pressure occurs in areas containing blood.

Looking very carefully at the individual bloodstains on the Shroud, one must differentiate the possible from the impossible. The late Prof. Wolfgang Bonte, former head of the Forensic Medicine Institute at the University of Dusseldorf and president of the International Organization of Forensic Scientists (IAFS) attempted to answer this question in the 1990s.⁸

First consider the bleeding from the wound on the side (the lance thrust wound). The lower back must have lain in a puddle of blood because bloodstains spread right and left six to eight inches beyond the area covered by the image of the body.

Karl Herbst, a retired Catholic priest, wrote Professor Bonte with this information without revealing to him that the Turin Shroud was involved, in order that Bonte’s judgment would not be prejudiced. Bonte wrote back to Herbst that, according to this description, the opening of the wound on the right front chest wall was placed rather precisely on the highest point on the body, and he, Bonte, considered a spontaneous post-mortem blood flow unthinkable because the blood level in the wound would have to have been lower than the opening of the wound. In such a case, no blood can flow out of a corpse.

On the contrary, a blood flow in the proportions described by you, including the direction of the flow, would agree with the idea that the individual involved was still alive at this time . . . this applies especially then, when larger arterial vessels are opened and when the blood pressure produces the necessary pressure against gravity for the blood to leave the body.⁹

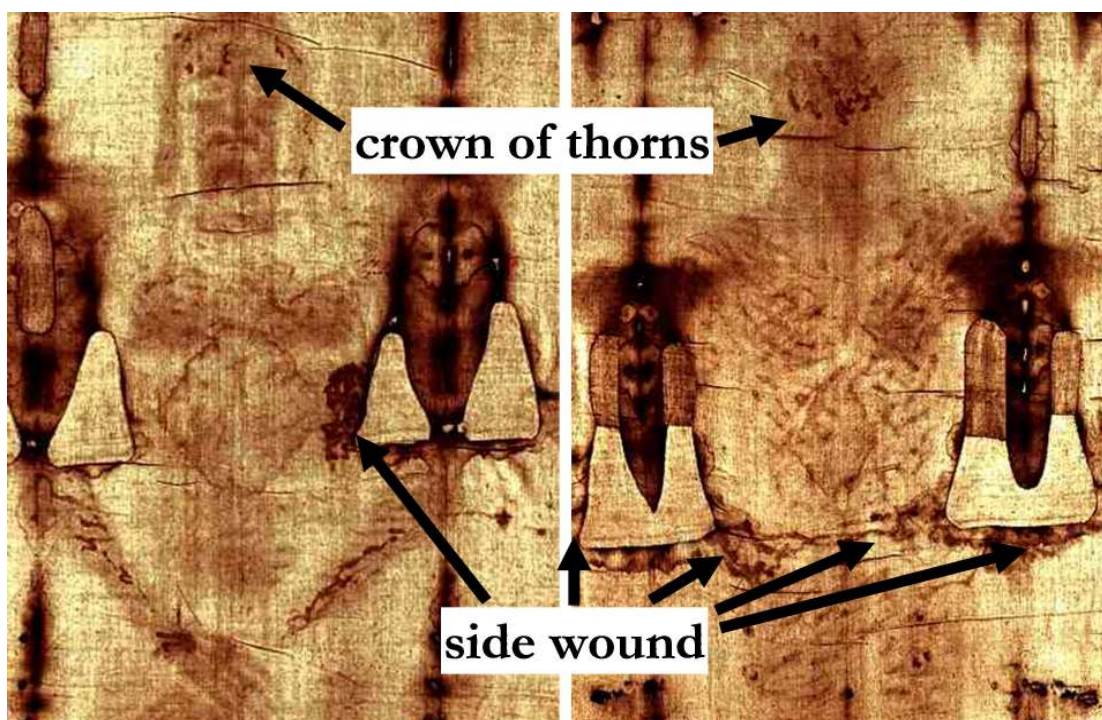
Herbst then revealed to Bonte that the matter involved was the Shroud of Turin and provided photographs and specialist literature for him in which the blood flows on the Shroud had been described in connection with a corpse. Above all, Herbst made Bonte aware of the argumentation of the Italian medical examiner Prof. Ballone, who had declared that “*the cause [of the exit of blood on the shroud] is to be sought in the manipulation of*

⁸ Described in detail including the expert opinion of Prof. Bonte in Karl Herbst, *Kriminalfall Golgatha*, p. 97ff. and also Kuhnke, p. 75ff.

⁹ Herbst, p. 98.

the corpse during the burial procedures.” Professor Bonte, however, maintained his opinion and wrote back to Herbst: I will not repeat my earlier arguments. In my opinion, everything speaks to the fact that the blood circulation activity had not yet ended. Obviously I agree with Prof. Ballone that in the course of the transport of a corpse blood can flow almost passively out of such a stab wound to the chest. Yet one has to pose the question of whether the burial shroud was wrapped around the corpse already at the beginning of the transport. I believe that in this case no so-called statically stain-pattern would have been formed, which without exception permitted a direct, topographical assignment to a lying body. I would then far more have expected numerous traces of smears, whose locations would have been strewn more coincidental and irregularly. The pattern that is in fact recognizable indicates, in my opinion, that the person involved was only wrapped in the shroud during the placement in his grave, and indeed very probably in the form that at first the body was bedded on the shroud and the shroud’s other half was then drawn over the body. I cannot imagine that during this placement a considerable quantity of blood could have flowed out passively.¹⁰

As further evidence for a dead body, it is often said that serum areas would indicate post-mortem blood. To this claim, Professor Bonte wrote: *In my opinion, a great deal of unqualified comments has been said about another phenomenon. I mean the differentiation between the actual bloodstains and the serum areas that surround them, and which are seen as proof of corpse blood. In general one can say that corpse blood does not differ from the blood of a living person at least in the first phase after death. In earlier times corpse blood was used for purposes of transfusion in great quantities. But if one cannot be differentiated from the other, it can not be concluded from any results that the one or the other type of blood is involved....¹¹*



¹⁰ Herbst, p. 99. own translation

¹¹ Herbst, p. 100.

The Formation of the Image

...

The image on the Shroud is not a contact print, for the image bears details of places on the body that must have been up to two inches away from the Shroud. Pure diffusion processes alone are thus eliminated because an image of such photographic clarity could never have formed that way.

There is, therefore, a broad consensus among Shroud researchers that the formation of the image must have something to do with energy. If a dead and thus relatively cold body is assumed, there is no known process that would explain the formation of such an image. How can the appearance of an appropriate form of energy in this scenario be explained? Many Christian believers, therefore, assume a kind of energy flash—perhaps resulting from high voltage—which was generated at the resurrection and which somehow branded or singed the image of the body onto the Shroud. But Rogers has found that “*any photon or particle with an energy above about 3 eV (e.g., light with a shorter wavelength than green)*” cause traces (defects) on the fibers, which can be seen under a microscope. As image fibers do not have more defects than non-image fibers, he concluded that “*the image could not have involved energetic radiation of any kind; photons, electrons, protons, alpha particles, and/or neutrons.*”¹² This is one of the reasons why theories like the “corona-discharge hypothesis” are very controversial among Shroud researchers.¹³ Science is no longer competent if a miracle is included as part of the explanation.

If a solution is to be found based on scientific reasoning, doesn't **everything** research found out about the properties of the image have to be looked at very closely? Precise examination of linen fibers that are found in the area of the image has yielded the following information:¹⁴

- The yellowish chemical substance made up of doubly bound saccharides is present only on the **surface** of the fibers, which seen from a certain distance gives the impression of a body image.¹⁵ The fibers themselves are unchanged. Inside the fibers, neither discoloration nor any other change can be discovered.
- Not all threads in the image area are affected by this yellowish substance. Lying directly next to the threads affected by the image substance are also threads whose surfaces are unchanged and having no image-creating substance.
- The formation of the image must have occurred at a relatively low temperature (air or body temperature). The image cannot have been formed by heat scorch-

¹² Raymond N. Rogers, *The shroud of Turin: radiation effects, aging and image formation* at <http://www.shroud.com/pdfs/rogers8.pdf>

¹³ See <http://www.dim.unipd.it/misure/fanti/corona.pdf>

¹⁴ Raymond N. Rogers und Anna Arnoldi, *Scientific method applied to the Shroud of Turin—A Review*, at <http://www.shroud.com/pdfs/rogers2.pdf>

¹⁵ There is an excellent photo by Raimond Rogers where this yellow coating can clearly be seen. See www.shroudstory.com or Wikipedia's entry for the Shroud of Turin.

ing, because in that case the colors reflected under ultraviolet radiation would have a different spectrum than that found during the examination process. The image areas differentiate themselves here significantly from the areas that were scorched in the sixteenth-century fire at Chambery. We can therefore also assume that the process of image formation required a certain amount of time.

- The yellowish substance is found all around the affected fibers/fibrils, including areas on the sides opposite to the body. If the image had resulted from a direct energy effect, the energy would have had to be so strong that it would have discolored the interior of the fibers before it had caused a discoloration of the opposite side of the fibers, which is not the case.
- In the case of the top half of the Shroud, that is, the half that lay over the front of the body, a very faint image is also recognizable on some areas of the opposite side, especially in the face area. The body image was thus formed on both sides of the cloth in some places.¹⁶

...

Was the Man under the Shroud the Historical Jesus?

Can we really know such a thing for sure? Is such a statement even acceptable in a strictly scientific sense? Of course not! No statement about the past can be proven one hundred percent because we cannot experimentally repeat the past.

Were human beings really on the moon forty years ago, and did they walk around on its surface? Was the whole thing perhaps a masterly Hollywood production, an ingenious fake that everyone has believed, a gigantic conspiracy with the goal of gaining special credit for the USA during the Cold War? Can we exclude that notion completely? One needs only to search on the Internet to find abundant “proofs” of a “conspiracy,” proof that includes photographs and films.¹⁷

Nevertheless, it is claimed—and rightly, I believe—that the Apollo space mission landed on the moon, even though no one can be absolutely certain without being directly involved in the project. The French philosopher Rene Descartes remarked: “The only thing that we really know for certain is that we exist.” Apparently, there remains for us nothing but to acknowledge everything as reality, even if we are not one hundred percent certain and cannot prove it.¹⁸

¹⁶ Giulio Fanti and Roberto Maggiolo, *The double superficiality of the frontal image of the Turin shroud*, Journal of Optics A: Pure and Applied Optics, 6, 2004.

¹⁷ Search terms like “moon landing fake” lead to sites like <http://www.ufos-aliens.co.uk/cosmicapollo.html>, “The faked Apollo landings.”

¹⁸ In the movie *The Matrix*, this truth is carried to extremes. Humans, whose bodies have been connected to machines, experience internally a regular, modern life, which is fed in directly into their brains electronically, and everybody believes that this is the only reality.

Can you, in this modest sense, believe that an actual crucified man once lay under the Shroud of Turin? If so, good. Then it is only a matter of asking whether that man was the authentic Jesus (the historical Jesus of Nazareth). We will never be able to know that with one hundred percent certainty, but perhaps the collective evidence is enough for us to believe. Let's, therefore, look into the matter more deeply. The evidence can be categorized in three ways: the first type, possible evidence; the second type, probable evidence; and the third type, certain evidence. A "false Jesus" would have to fit all three types.

There is, moreover, no evidence at all to say that the man of the Shroud image is someone other than Jesus—with one exception, the evidence of the 1988 carbon 14 dating results, which dated the Shroud fabric to the Middle Ages, but that issue will be treated in detail in the next chapter.

If anything on the Shroud did not fit with our knowledge of the historical Jesus of Nazareth—for example, if the man depicted had broken legs—the matter would be settled instantly. He could not be Jesus. Any further discussion would be moot, even if everything else seemed to fit.

All four Gospels reported that the body of Jesus was wrapped in a shroud (or in grave cloths): "*Joseph of Arimathea bought a large sheet, took Jesus from the cross, wrapped him in the sheet and laid him in a grave*" (Mark 15:46). On Easter morning Peter and John found the shroud in the tomb "*folded together on the side*" (John 20:6–7).

Thus, there was indeed a shroud for Jesus. The question is, could this shroud really have been preserved over a period of 2000 years, and could it be identical to the Shroud of Turin?

...

The Mistreatment of the Shroud of Turin

There will be hell to pay when the truth comes out.

Raymond N. Rogers, one of the most prominent shroud scientists, about the C14-dating¹⁹

Seeing the Shroud of Turin is like seeing Jesus, standing before a skeptical world that is interested only in facts, saying as he once said to Thomas: "*Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe*" (John 20:27).

In 1988 the Catholic Church gave permission for a piece of the Shroud of Turin to be cut out and tested to determine its age by means of radio carbon dating. This

¹⁹ Quoted from the back cover of William Meacham's book, *The Rape of the Turin Shroud – How Christianity's most precious relic was wrongly condemned, and violated*, 2005

method is based on the fact that a certain portion of the carbon in the air consists of radioactive carbon 14 isotopes. The isotopes decay with a regular half-life, but new isotopes are permanently formed in the highest layers of the atmosphere due to the sun's radiation, so that equilibrium is formed in the air. In a living organism, the ratio of these atoms exactly matches this ratio in the air. However, when the organism dies, the number of carbon 14 isotopes is reduced by half every 5730 years. Thus, the smaller the carbon 14 ratio, the older the organic material must be.

The piece from the Shroud of Turin was further divided into five pieces, four of them were sent to three renowned institutes; one larger piece was kept as a reserve. On October 13, 1988, Prof. E. Hall, Dr. M. Tite, and Dr. R. Hedges from the British Museum organized a press conference and announced the result: the Shroud dates with certainty from the thirteenth to the fourteenth centuries. Hall said later in an interview, "*We have shown the Shroud to be a fake. Anyone who disagrees with us ought to belong to the Flat Earth Society.*" The Cardinal of Turin, Ballestrero, announced shortly thereafter that the Shroud had been proved to be a medieval forgery.

What would happen if "Otzi," the five thousand-year-old "Ice Man" whose corpse was found in a Tyrolean glacier in the 1990s, had been dated only to the Middle Ages by means of the carbon 14 method? The result of such a miserable dating would probably never have been published, for a thousand other findings were against it. But in the case of the Turin Shroud, this medieval age established by the carbon 14 dating was announced like dogma. The information was skillfully presented to the people as irrefutable, scientific truth. Thus it has taken some two decades for that measurement itself to be believed false by a large portion of the public.

Because the carbon 14 result contradicts not one or two but every other research result on the Shroud, something must have gone wrong in the carbon 14 testing process. In fact, something worse took place than simply something "going wrong." The whole matter reads like a criminal story. Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* is harmless by comparison. In the end there are only two possibilities. Either the false medieval dating was the consequence of terribly shoddy dilettantism with which the testing process was carried out, or the test samples were deviously swapped for false ones in Turin before they were sent to the institutes. The only thing that is certain is that the institutes worked carefully and measured correctly but had unfortunately received a piece from a medieval cloth or patch rather than a piece of the original Shroud cloth.

What happened, then?

...

2. Farewell to the Traditional Image of God

For we know in part and we prophesy in part. . . . When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

St. Paul, 1 Corinthians 13:9–11

How do you feel now, having read the first section of my book? Maybe you somehow knew it all before, having perhaps read the book *Jesus Lived in India*, and your reading of this present book has only strengthened your view. Or maybe this information about the Shroud of Turin was simply interesting for you because you have never believed in the supernatural side of Christianity.

Possibly, however, some hitherto “holy truths” for you have been placed in question by what you have just read here. Perhaps you are struggling within, marshalling opposing arguments, thinking, *How can this author dare to put in question the credibility of the Bible, the authority of the word of God and of his Church, which has existed for 2000 years? Should the Pope now declare invalid the central dogmas of the faith, on which so many generations of people have believed for so many centuries? What arrogance! I, in any case, will still hold fast to traditional beliefs, regardless of what ‘evidence’ an old shroud may contain.*

I can reassure you here. Pope Benedict XVI knows this information about the Shroud of Turin very well, including the evidence for a living body. Much of it has been public knowledge for a long time for those who study the shroud intensively. And I assume that at least Pope Benedict will not change anything in the dogmas. It may well require another two to three generations before it is possible to discuss—on the level of an official council—the Christian confession of faith as it was decided upon at the Council of Nicea in the year 325.

But maybe you felt as I did and cannot escape these arguments. For me for a long time the Shroud of Turin was a sign of the supernatural resurrection of Jesus. It was clear to me that the formation of the image must have had something to do with energy. But where is such energy to arise in a corpse? Therefore, I thought, only a supernatural event could have caused such a nearly photographic effect.

I had just begun to write a new book, which would also deal with the Shroud, when I chanced upon a book with the title *Jesus Did Not Die on the Cross—the Message of the Shroud of Turin*.²⁰ No, I first thought, I will not get involved with such heresy! But then it became clear to me that if I wanted to write a book about the Shroud of Turin, I had to study opinions that did not please me, so I finally read the book. It gave me a sleepless night because blind faith that obviously contradicts scientific knowledge was and is not possible for me.

²⁰ Only available in German: “Jesus starb nicht am Kreuz – Die Botschaft des Turiner Grabtuchs” by Holger Kersten.

I found myself at the time already in a period of spiritual reorientation. Just two decades before, in my “storm and stress” years, I regularly stood with other Christians on the streets of Munich in order to preach the resurrected Christ. And now it was becoming increasingly clear to me that historically the resurrection just could not have been so. I therefore had to bid farewell to other orthodox ideas of faith. New things, especially Christian mysticism, entered my life. The next two sections of this book will deal with this “reconstruction” process. It is very important for me not to leave the believing reader “out in the rain” but to show that only now does the story begin to get interesting.

It is not a matter of preaching a new heretical teaching in this book. It is not at all a matter of dogmatism. Scientific instruments and ways of observing have led to knowledge that requires a reevaluation of the traditional faith. The whole matter is comparable to the story of Galileo Galilei.

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From Jesus to Christ—The Formation of the Christian Religion

The Church survives by not making public the results of scholarly research into the historical Jesus.

Prof. Conzelmann, German theologian²¹

How has it come to be that the son of a village craftsman, a man who wandered the land preaching unconditional love, truth, and the way to true happiness, was transformed into Christ, the second person in a divine trinity? How did Yeshua, who simply wanted to be a brother, become this supernatural figure: announced by angels, born to a virgin, equipped with magical abilities, a being who could walk on water, who rose from the dead after his crucifixion, who then had a supernatural body and finally arose to heaven in that body, there to sit on the right hand of God, and who will come a second time to earth to judge all humanity?

Before we turn to the development of the Christian religion, it makes sense to ask which religious and philosophical ideas of that time possibly influenced Jesus himself. How did Jesus of Nazareth “grow up” spiritually?

The Spiritual Background of Jesus

In the view of traditional Christianity this is a taboo theme. If Jesus came into the world as the Son of God directly from heaven, it is logical that he brought all wisdom and knowledge with him. No wonder, then, that the Bible scarcely reports what happened between his earliest childhood and the beginning of his preaching as an adult—with the single exception of the episode of him as a twelve-year-old in the temple. In the Gospel of Luke it is merely said: “*And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature,*

²¹ Conzelmann, *zur Methodik der Leben-Jesus-Forschung*, p. 8.

and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52). Apparently, Luke assumes that Jesus went through his own process of spiritual development.

What did Jesus do in the period between the ages of twelve and thirty? Did he help his father in the business of his crafts? Was he in a religious community? Did he undertake travels in order to learn from others? The Bible is silent here, while speculations bloom. Some even state that Jesus had been in India during this time and also after his crucifixion.²²

This assumption is supported by the fact that many essential sayings of Jesus resemble those of Buddhist texts with a precision that cannot be coincidence on the whole. Buddha is known to have lived some five hundred years before Jesus. Parts of Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount and his parables are found in Buddhist texts from a time before Jesus, texts which agree even in the choice of symbols and pictures. These facts have been known for a long time. Elmar R. Gruber and Holger Kersten, two German researchers, presented this material in detail. Here are a few examples:²³

Buddha: “Hate in this world is never overcome by hate; hate is only overcome by love.” “I will live happily without hostility; among hostile people I live without hostility.”

Jesus: “I say to you, love your enemies, bless them who curse you, pray for them who mistreat you.”

Buddha: “One does not become clean by washing, as most people on earth do; whoever rejects every sin, big or small, is a holy man, because he conquers sins.”

Jesus: “For from the heart come angry thoughts, murder, strife in marriage, thievery, false witness. . . . Those are the things that make people impure. But eating without washing the hands does not make a person impure.”

Buddha: “Judge not the mistakes of others, nor what others do or do not do; but judge your own right and unright acts.” “The mistakes of others are easy to see, but to see one’s own [mistakes] is difficult. One sees the mistakes of others like chaff, but hides one’s own like a clever game player.”

Jesus: “Judge not, and you will not be judged. For the measure by which you measure will be the measure by which you are measured.” “You see the splinter in the eye of your brother, but do not see the beam in your own eye.”

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²² see for instance www.tombofjesus.com

²³ Quoted by Elmar R. Gruber und Holger Kersten, *Der Ur-Jesus, die buddhistischen Quellen des Christentums*, 1996, p. 113 ff.

Does God Need a Sacrifice for the Salvation of Humanity?

I have come to abandon sacrifices and if you do not cease from sacrificing, the wrath will not go away from you.

Jesus in the Gospel of the Early Church (Ebionites)

The belief that a sacrifice is necessary for salvation is only possible with a specific understanding of God, a specific notion of human nature, and with certain convictions about what salvation actually is: “*God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him*” (1 John 4:16).

The God of the Bible, however, does not always love unconditionally. He has very human features. He is also an angry God, a God of terrible judgment. He sees sin and punishes it. In eternity at the latest, God restores justice—also by means of punishment.

The love of God is meant above all for the believers: “*Herein is our love made perfect, that **we** may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world*” (1 John 4:17, King James).

In other words, “The unbelievers will see; for us at least Jesus paid the price.”

For many believers, however, life is comparable to a tightrope walk: on the one hand they feel themselves loved by God; on the other hand they recognize that they cannot live that high ideal of love, so they feel guilty. Will God consider me among the unbelievers and damn me in the end?

This God has a very threatening side, too. The world and one’s own body offer only a very limited security against him. At any time death can come, and the hour of truth arrives, the divine judgment, before which no human being can prevail alone.

In this view, the following question seems justified: how can anyone find mercy in the eyes of a God like this? According to Catholic conviction, a sinner who has committed serious or deadly sins is saved from purgatorial fire or eternal damnation through his or her confession and a valid absolution by a priest. This sole authority to forgive sins formed the basis of the Church’s power for many centuries. The building of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome was mainly financed through money that had been paid for the remission of sins. One could regard the whole affair as a successful marketing strategy: first one creates a vengeful God who sends his creatures into eternal damnation on the grounds of his justice, and then one has a monopoly on the solution. The power of many sects even today is based on this principle.

This belief system would not work, however, if there was no correlation deep in our souls. The message falls indeed upon fruitful soil; otherwise, it would not have such an effect. In the depths of the humans psyche is the belief that we have separated ourselves from God and that he is angry with us. The concept that higher powers have to be appeased is part of the very essence of human thought patterns...

3. Approaching the “True God”

*God inhabits the inaccessible light, which no man has seen, nor even
is able to see.*

1 Tim. 6:16

Is it possible to meet the “True God?” How can that happen? What is that anyway, the “True God?” Can a God even exist out there, in heaven, in the fifth dimension, or wherever?

Nothing can prevent asking questions about God. Communism taught that religion is superstition and opium for the masses. Materialism was supposed to represent the first and final reality. The East-German communist party leader Honecker once said, “Socialism will prevail, for it is the truth.” Hogwash!

In Western Europe, it was by and large taboo to take the topic of God seriously until the 1990s. Today, many have a renewed interest in God and religion, but much of the shift is taking place outside of traditional churches. Religious music is taking the hit parade by storm. Most people of the twenty-first century refuse to let the pope, bishops, and churches tell them what to believe about God.

New ideas develop. Thousand-year-old “truths” and taboos are being questioned. As a consequence, we automatically become more responsible for our truth. We can and should decide what is “true.” But in the religious jungle of our days, how can we find the right way? In whom or what can we ultimately trust? What is really “real?”

This chapter must be, unavoidably, personal. However, here I have not written a theological essay about God. That kind of writing will probably not be of interest to most readers. I view with suspicion people who proclaim to know too precisely who God is, what He thinks, what He wants, and how He acts, and I will try not to make the same mistake.

Still, I want to share the thoughts and experiences that have become important to me, especially after my work on the Shroud of Turin, which made it impossible for me to maintain essential parts of the orthodox system of faith.²⁴ I will try to approach the question of “God” from theological and scientific perspectives, as well as from the point of view of Christian mysticism, for I believe God is found inside of all of us, and the question of God has ultimately to do with who and what we are as human beings.

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²⁴ In this chapter, “orthodox” is intended to mean Christian orthodoxy as it developed in its first centuries and was organized by council resolutions and creeds of faith.

4. The Spirituality of Jesus

Jesus of Nazareth had an impact on the history of humanity unlike anyone else. Even if he was often misunderstood, and terrible acts in history were committed in his name, he has helped many people to find the way to God. This is not only true for the people who met him in person and who followed him but for many in later times who met him in a spiritual way and had the same or similar experiences as the first generation of his disciples.

Truth and Freedom

Jesus said to those Jews who believed in him: "If you will abide in my word, you will truly be my disciples. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." (John 8:31-32)

Freedom and redemption come out of a recognition of truth. Truth is experienced by everyone who walks an inner path like Jesus walked. This knowledge is not an intellectual process of the mind. The truth is actually very **simple**. In order for it to be effective, however, one has to internalize it. It has to be inscribed in every cell of the body. Whoever has experienced it will himself be a carrier of a deep secret. Jesus describes this procedure as follows: *"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a man finds it, he hides it, and, because of his joy, he goes and sells everything that he has, and he buys that field."* (John 8:31-32)

For whoever does not know this truth yet, a great surprise is waiting. But how do we get to it? How do we find this truth? The answer of Jesus is quite simple: *"Seek and you shall find"* (Matt. 7:7).

Whoever seeks God (the truth, the life) unconditionally and with a whole heart, whoever feels the importance of finding the truth, will make a surprising discovery. According to our willingness to question the small egotistical world, new vistas will open behind the ordinary things in life, as if we had just received eyes enabling us to see into new dimensions. Life then seems to have been waiting for this readiness in order to offer a vision of this liberating truth. To find the truth, however, one has to be willing to question all values and "truths," regardless of how dear and important they may be to him: *"Amen, I say to you, whoever will not accept the kingdom of God like a child, will not enter into it."* (Luke 18:17)

Liberation is knowing the core of your own identity as a child of God. Only those who are clear about **who** they really are and what this really means can recognize their own worth and power as a creation of God, a creation that goes far beyond the material world.

Jesus said, "If your leaders say to you, Look, the (Father's) kingdom is in the sky, then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, It is in the sea, then the fish will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is within you and it is outside you. When you know yourselves, then you will be

known, and you will understand that you are children of the living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you live in poverty, and you are the poverty." (Gospel of Thomas 3)

Epilogue

The religious convictions I had in the seventies and eighties I would describe today as orthodox and fundamentalist. On the streets of Munich, together with other charismatic believers, I regularly preached the word of the resurrected Christ. The Shroud of Turin was my proof of a supernatural resurrection. I never would have dreamed during this time that I once would write such a book. Rather, I would have wanted such a writer to be thrown into the hottest spot of hell. But you never know how life changes and how you will develop...

During this process I had to rethink a lot and leave many beloved convictions behind. Yet I was in struggle with myself as to whether I really should publish this book. Is it a good thing, if perhaps the faith of readers will be shaken strongly or even destroyed? Is it not tremendous arrogance to state that some fundamental declarations of Christianity, which have been preached as irrevocable truth for almost 2000 years, are just misrepresentations?

I have tried to present what we know today about the Turin Shroud as truthfully as possible. The conclusions inevitably are subjective and personal. Of course I do not claim absolute truth; I can only give thought-provoking statements. I think that every human is called to reach his own convictions and "truths." The decisions that are connected with this process reflect the innermost core of our freedom. But they also reflect the responsibility we have towards ourselves and life itself or, if you like, "God." No one should hand over this freedom carelessly, neither to a book, nor to a pastor or church, even if the "truth" offered appears logical or tempting – or the threats from rejection are frightening.

I am convinced that the Turin Shroud can contribute to the process of reconciliation of religion and science and help us come to an integral world view that includes the spiritual dimension.

Only a changed and humble Christianity that has honestly returned to unconditional love and has completely left orthodoxy behind can become a spiritual base for all humanity. Only then can it show that the message of Jesus is far more significant than most people know.