

## Children and the Shroud of Turin

‘Out of the mouth of babes and infants God has called forth praise’.

*Matthew 21:16; Psalm 8:2 [1]*

‘For me, seeing the Holy Shroud is like seeing in person the true face of Jesus’ [2]

### **Collated by Pam Moon, Brenda Benton and Emanuela Marinelli with comments and drawings from children**

Children are special to Jesus Christ. He said: *"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 18:3). On another occasion, when the disciples tried to keep children away from Jesus he said, *"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."* (Matthew 19:14.) Using the Shroud of Turin as a visual tool to tell the story of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ is hugely important today. Presenting the Shroud at talks, cathedrals, churches and schools, we have encountered a lot of children. We would like to tell some of their stories and reactions to the Shroud.

The love Jesus has for children can be seen in this encounter at St John the Baptist RC cathedral in Norwich, UK. Brenda wrote in her diary: ‘Later in the day we had a group of schoolchildren to visit and I overheard one beautiful little boy of about 6 or 7 tell his friends he had seen a vision of Jesus. He said Jesus looked just like the Shroud. As they mocked him and accused him of making it up my heart ached for him. His friends moved on, but he remained before the holographic picture of the face of the Shroud, which includes an artist’s impression of our Lord. I went up to him and said, “I believe you saw a vision of Jesus and very few people do so you must be really special, never forget that.”’



Having a replica Shroud created by Barrie Schwartz ([www.shroud.com](http://www.shroud.com)) adds immeasurably to the experience. Here is the Shroud replica at St John the Baptist RC cathedral in Norwich (photograph Stuart Benton)..

## The Face of Jesus

The Psalmist teaches *'My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, LORD, I will seek'* (Psalm 27:8). St Paul wrote: *'For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ'* (2 Corinthians 4:6). One of the first things that confuses children when they see the full 4.5 metre Shroud is its length and the fact that the image is horizontal, rather than vertical. They take a while to understand that the image wrapped the body. After Emanuela explained it: 'a child, very happy, said: "Finally you made me understand how Jesus was placed in the Shroud: with the sheet up and under, as if he were inside a sandwich!"'

The faint sepia of the Shroud image is more difficult to see than the black and white negative image. For years Pam assumed children knew how to read the life-sized replica: 'Then I took the exhibition to the Knock Shrine in West Ireland and the curator of the museum, Grace Mulqueen taught me where to start! She asked a group of children if they could see the face. Several came forward and pointed to different burnt areas of the Shroud, where they thought they could see a face. Eventually someone pointed to the real face. There was a gasp and a look of delighted astonishment as one by one the children saw the face. Almost universally they turned their heads on one side to see the horizontal image and pointed at it. Since that moment I have always started to explain the life-sized replica by asking "can you see the face?"'



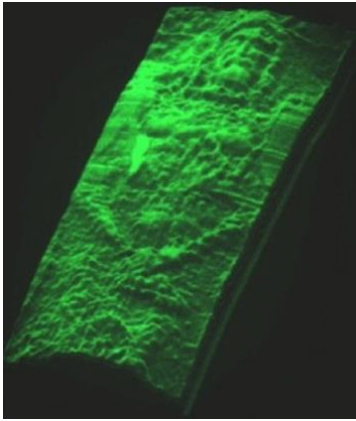
Shroud Face  
©1978 Barrie M. Schwartz,  
Collection, STERA, Inc.

### Observations about the body of Jesus.

Emanuela showed the photo of the three-dimensional relief of the body and a child noticed the developed pectoral muscles. "Teacher, but did Jesus go to the gym?"

Emanuela answered: "A carpenter does not need to go to the gym to build his muscles!"

The black and white negative is the most vivid of Shroud images. But as Brenda writes, 'Children who have grown up in a digital age do not have a clue what a negative image is.' It can have a dramatic effect however. Pam did an exhibition and one child stunned us with an insight. She was one of the younger children, aged no more than six or seven. Looking at the black and white negative image of the Shroud she said, "Does Jesus have a number three on his forehead to remind us of the Trinity?"



Three-dimensional image



Black and white negative image

### **Profound observations.**

*'But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, "'From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise'?" (Matthew 21:15-16.)*

In the context of that scripture it can be expected that children will say profound things about the Shroud of Jesus. Here is one example: "The Holy Shroud made a great impression on me because Jesus who is the Son of God was wrapped in that Holy sheet. .... Jesus was wounded and killed with so many wounds, I tried to imagine his sufferings" [3]. Another wrote: "For me it is the most important thing I have ever seen in my life and I think it is the truest testimony that Jesus sent" [4].

Hearing that the blood on the Shroud remained red, one child told Brenda: "Of course the blood is still red - it's Jesus's blood." Another child asked Emanuela: "But when Jesus rose, and the Shroud was emptied, didn't the blood of the upper part stain the lower part and vice versa?" "A difficult question ... I was thinking how to answer, but another child quicker than I was, said "But with the light and warmth of the resurrection, the blood had dried up and no longer stained!" Could St Peter have explained it better?

Brenda told a group of children that even with the wonders of modern technology no one knows how the Shroud was made. A little girl gave her a knowing look and said, "Just google it." If only it were so simple! In a similar context Emanuela explained that scientists are having difficulty explaining the image on the Shroud. A little boy said, "But it's not that hard to understand what happened! One day Jesus took a trip to the mountains with his friends and at the top of the mountain he became shining! Well, when he resurrected he did the same thing, a burst of light and he took a selfie of himself with the Shroud!" What a simple and profound way of explaining the complex science

of physicists' understanding of the creation of the Shroud by light! Pam has found repeatedly that 'the first selfie,' is a term which resonates with children. Selfie was word of the year in 2013 and taking selfies is central to the way teenagers engage with friends on social media. Some adults feel that this is narcissistic, but children do not see it that way. It is child-like in its simplicity to believe that Jesus would leave his image so that children can see his face. Jesus loves this generation of children and relates to them in a visual language they can understand.

### **Defending the Shroud of Turin**

Emanuela describes an encounter with the profound reason of a child. She writes: 'It happened at the end of a lecture, in the question time. A man said: "The Romans crucified thousands and thousands of men, how can you say that the Man of the Shroud is Jesus? Maybe he is another crucified person, maybe even one of the thieves crucified with Jesus!'. I was ready to answer that the thieves were buried without a shroud in a common grave, but a boy, not more that 10 years old, put up his hand and said, "Can I answer that?" I was a little nervous about what he might say but allowed him to continue. He said: "So, do you think that St John and St Peter were stupid? They threw away Jesus' shroud and preserved the shroud of a thief. For what reason?" The poor man remained silent...'

This child's insight has deeper implications today: do you think followers of Jesus threw away his real Shroud, and now Christians have spent centuries venerating a fake? Popes, emperors, princes and rulers, great scientists and theologians, together with billions of faithful believers, have all paid homage to the Shroud of Turin. Are they all stupid too?

### **In an age of doubt**

However, there is much work to do to bring the extraordinary truths of the Shroud to children. The small boy at Norwich cathedral, was being persecuted for his faith. As Christians, we have to face the fact that, within society, the worth-ship given to science, particularly theories of evolution, and the radiocarbon dating of the Shroud of Turin, makes it very difficult for children to appreciate the wonder of God and his action in creation and the sheer beauty and majesty of the Shroud. Coupled with religious relativism and the prominence of social media, Christian truths are being lost. Peer pressure re-enforces the difficulties children struggle with in our increasingly atheistic age. Work in promoting the Shroud of Turin is not aimed at indoctrinating children. Its purpose is to present them with the full range of evidence discovered by scientists, theologians, historians, archaeologists and iconographers. By failing to teach the Shroud, we leave children with the belief that the hugely flawed and now discredited radiocarbon date is definitive.

Pam spoke at a secular secondary school in the UK, to year 10 pupils, who were divided into twelve small groups, so that they could all be involved in some interactive work.

The children had never encountered the Shroud or the radiocarbon date, but they were entrenched in atheism. 'Before I went I had had a conversation with a Christian teenager from the school, who said she was asked to explain her faith in a Religious Education (RE) lesson. She was deeply troubled by the experience, because the RE teacher told her she was the only person in the room with any faith. On the back of this, when I arrived I said, "I assume the children are atheists" and the RE teacher replied, "Yes, of course." As the sessions went on, I became concerned by the lack of basic Christian knowledge. I asked the children to tell me the season of the year when Jesus was crucified. Two groups confidently told me that Jesus died at Christmas! I asked another group if they knew on which day of the week Jesus died. "Tuesday" came one reply.

### **The Holy Spirit as advocate**

The need to persevere with the message of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and the Shroud of Turin is really important. But there is hope, and there are wonderful occasions when the work is blessed by the Holy Spirit: At Worcester Cathedral Brenda noted in her diary: 'I noticed a young man of fifteen, who was obviously very interested in the exhibition and spent a long time reading every board. His mother stood waiting for him, so I began to chat to her. She told me the fascinating story of how they came to be in the Cathedral. On the previous weekend, the lady's daughter went camping as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. Her particular task that weekend was to take photographs and, on the way back, she left her camera at a service station. The lady's son has several Christian friends, and although the family were not Christians, they told her son that they would pray, and the camera would be returned. The lady had travelled to the service station to enquire about the camera and to her amazement they gave it to her. She told me that her son wants to be a scientist and has been fascinated by the Shroud for many years. They did not know the exhibition was on and had decided to break their journey in Worcester and then felt led to visit the Cathedral. Coincidence? Definitely not! A God-incidence!'

We must try and make it easy for these children, many of whom are unchurched. Brenda describes 'one young girl who was about 12 years old came with her grandmother. It was obvious that she was not there by choice and looked extremely bored. I watched as she walked around the information boards and began to read them. The following day she came back into the church and came to speak to me. She said, "If I want to pray, do I have to do it at a special time?" She added, "Is it okay if I come to church on a Sunday and if so, where can I sit?" I assured her that she can pray at any time, she would be made most welcome in church and she could sit in whichever pew she feels comfortable in.'

### **Children as evangelists.**

Jesus continues to draw children to himself. At the exhibition a young woman came with two small children. She told Brenda that 'she and her partner are not Churchgoers but her daughter, aged about four, had been asking to go to Church. When she saw the

sign to the exhibition, she knew this would be the ideal opportunity to come in and see what it was like. The minister had a chat to her and as a result she said she would join the playgroup run by the Church.’ We have also discovered that if you teach children, they pass on the information. Brenda wrote in her diary, ‘At an exhibition, a young boy, who came with his school, brought his father later and I was fascinated to hear him pass on all the things he had learned with such accuracy and enthusiasm. A young girl from the same school brought her parents, grandparents, and sister too.’ One child wrote: “Seeing the Holy Shroud I loved Jesus more. I was very happy, so much so that I wanted my parents to visit it too” [5].

### **The Harvest is plentiful**

*‘When he [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field”’* (Matthew 9: 36-38.)

The work of sharing the good news of the cross, the resurrection and the Shroud of Turin with children is really important, but there are very few people involved worldwide. Someone who has caught the vision is Jim Bertrand. He has given over 200 talks, using a format based around the book *The Shroud of Turin: A Critical Summary of Observations, Data, and Hypotheses* by John Jackson. Many of his talks are to school groups and he makes sure he prays extensively before every talk. There is huge value in this work. Pam writes ‘at an exhibition, one boy asked me, “Who owns the Shroud replica?” I replied, “I do.” He asked, “are you a millionaire?!” After a moment’s reflection, I replied, “Yes, I am a millionaire to own this, but not in money.”’ The value of the image of the Shroud, even in a replica, far exceeds any worldly wealth. And we need to share that image with those who do not know Jesus yet.

Its value was beautifully captured by this child: “The Holy Shroud is a very ancient sheet and, in my opinion, it has an inestimable value, because it wrapped the body of Christ, and it is thanks to this sheet that we know what the face of Jesus is like. Some scientists do not believe that the face on the Shroud is that of Jesus Son of the Almighty, and I think they should start believing even in things that cannot be explained and try not to always find a logical solution, even if this is their job. In my opinion, God with the Shroud wanted to direct us to good. So, I believe that we should all be better, after realising the truth, which is that Jesus existed and still exists. In addition, looking at this Shroud, this symbol of peace and love, I felt feelings of goodness for my neighbour, because I thought that Jesus forgave his crucifiers all the evil they had done to him, so I too, now, have become less selfish and more tolerant of others” [6].

### **The Faith of Children**

We cannot write of the Faith of Children without including the story of Josephine Woollam, who was critically ill, but who had enormous faith in the Shroud. In 1955,

her mother wrote the following to Group Captain Leonard Cheshire:

*'I am writing to ask you if my daughter Josephine could be blessed with a relic of the Holy Shroud. She is ten years old and is in hospital with osteomyelitis in hip and leg. Also, a lung abscess. Her doctor has told me that there is no hope of her getting better. She has been in and out of hospitals for the last five years. On Friday she received the Last Rites of the Church. Josephine has asked me to write to you, and she said that if only she could see the Relic she will get better and walk again. Everyone at the hospital has been very good to her. She is always in great pain, but she has always got a smile.'* [7]

Leonard Cheshire organised for Josephine to see a replica, but he also organised a trip to Turin, where she was allowed to hold the Holy Shroud in her lap. She was not miraculously healed, but her doctor wrote: "Looking at her history as a whole, I must confess that one is struck by the fact that the end of 1955 did coincide with a long period of quiescent osteomyelitis. Was this just coincidence or was it something more?" [8]. Josephine did walk, as she had hoped, but eventually her disability led to an amputation of her leg and she continued life with a prosthetic leg. Given the Last Rites as a child, she lived to be an adult and to have two children of her own. No doubt she taught them about her faith in the Holy Shroud.

***'And a little child shall lead them.'* Isaiah 11 vs 6b**

One child whose short life has touched many people for Jesus and his Holy Shroud is Zoe Benton. Zoe became ill at the age of nine months and died at the age of three from an inherited brain disease. Brenda and Stuart Benton had been married seven years when Brenda became pregnant with the daughter of her dreams, whom she intended to call Claire. She writes, 'Nine months before our Zoe was born, my sister had a daughter whom she at first called Zoe, a name completely new to me. However a few days later, she changed her mind and called her daughter, Nina, instead. Yet through-out my own pregnancy, the name Zoe was constantly in my thoughts, aided by Stuart's leaving the choice of the baby's sole Christian name to me. It was at the funeral that I learnt Zoe meant Life in Greek from the vicar's sermon. He said that in Zoe's case it meant eternal life, since she went to Heaven as pure as anyone could be. This greatly comforted us both.



Zoe

I did not think of Zoe's name again until a ladies' meeting I attended twenty years later. The speaker's subject was Zoe Life; Life as God gave it, Life as God has it, Life as God intended it [9]. Then, over several months, sermons I heard addressed the same subject. A few years later I was working in an international women's ministry when its president lent me a book, entitled *The Zoe, Life* [10]. It explained that this was the Life Jesus

lived. Gradually it dawned that it was the Lord who had led me to change the name from Claire to Zoe.’

Brenda continued, ‘We were given a one in four chance of the inherited disease happening again and knew we could not inflict that suffering onto another child. For many years, my life was very empty and my longing for children as intense as ever. One of the things that troubled me greatly was the fact that when we die there would be nothing of us to be left behind. How wrong could I be! Someone once told me that Zoe left us a beautiful inheritance and I could never have imagined how powerfully her short life would be used by our Lord. I first heard about the Turin Shroud just weeks before Zoe died when we saw David Rolfe’s film, *The Silent Witness*. This film turned our lives around and opened a whole new life for Stuart and me and we have been on the most amazing journey ever since that day.’

### **Thanks and Conclusions**

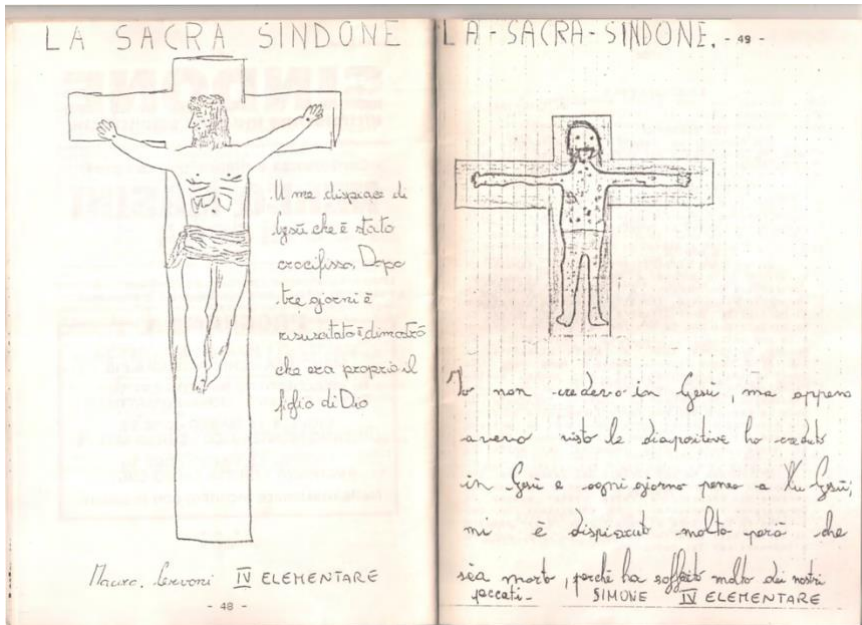
We would like to thank so many people we have worked with: Barrie Schwartz, The Review of Religions team, David Rolfe, Michela Marinelli, Rev. Phil Moon, Luigi Antoniazzi, Stuart Benton and Steve and Jennie Upton, Canon Andrew Willie and, of course, special thanks go to Zoe Benton. We should never forget the joy that the Shroud brings to children. Smiles at the “first selfie,” appreciation when they work out how the body is arranged, and astonishment when see the face of the Man of the Shroud for the first time. One child confidently told Brenda “It’s better than Netflix!” And it leads them to other truths in the faith: Emanuela describes another time, speaking of the resurrection, when a child said, "But Jesus was bad with the disciples of Emmaus! He disappeared just when they recognized him! He was spiteful!" Another child intervened, "But then you didn't understand anything! When did they no longer see Jesus? When he broke the bread! Then, Jesus did not just disappear, they did not see him again because he slipped into the bread to make it clear why they had to receive communion!" Never underestimate a child!

*Jesus said: “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.” (Matthew 18:10)*



## Children's Images of the Crucifixion.

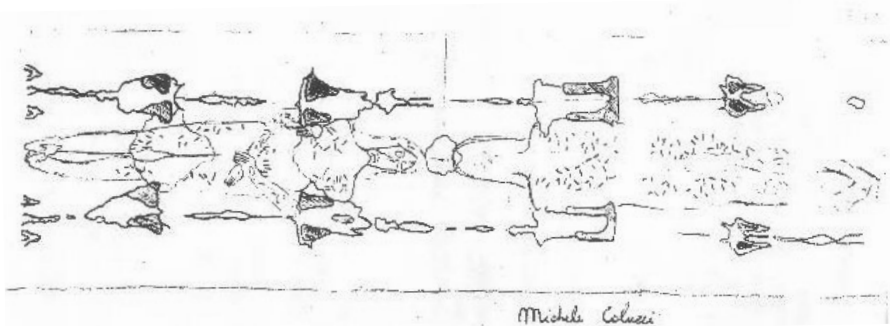
The position of the nails in the first image and the whip-marks in the second are influenced by the Shroud of Turin [11]



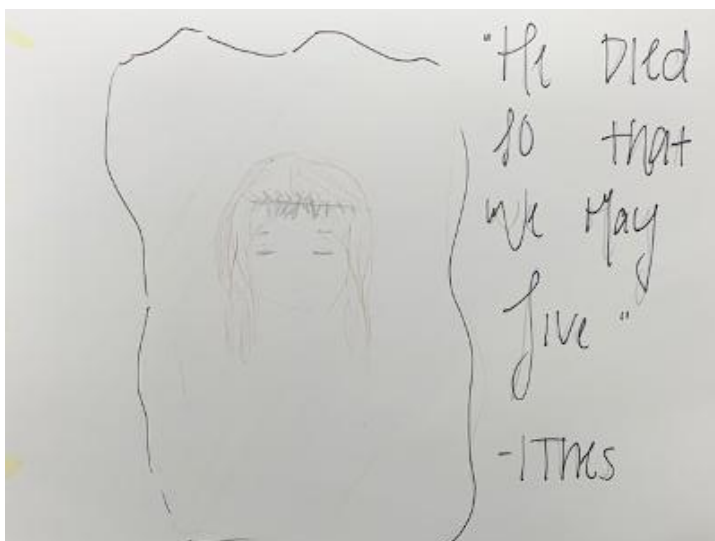
"I am sorry for Jesus who was crucified. After three days he resurrected and proved that he was indeed the son of God".

"I did not believe in Jesus but as soon as I had seen the slides I believed in Jesus and every day I think of Jesus; but I was very sorry that he died, because he suffered a lot because of our sins".

Beautiful image of the full Shroud created by a 11-12 years old child



A child's drawing after one of Jim Bertram's talks



The need to tell children about Jesus' death and resurrection and the witness of the Holy Shroud: this child did not know about the Shroud until it was presented.

Dear Mr. Bertan  
Thank you for  
bringing the Shroud of  
Turin to St. Joseph  
School. I didn't  
know anything about  
the Shroud until you  
came. From,

In their own words at an exhibition at Our Lady of Lourdes, Hednesford:

OUR LADY OF LOURDES 2013

HEDNESFORD 3rd - 14th JULY

It is really good for  
confession

Cool

It is really good ~~to be~~

It is making me believe. NA

It inspired me and was spectacular &

It helps me believe. Seb's

LOL and cool

It's unbelievable

It reminds me of the Crucifixion

"I hope that the memory of the figure of Jesus can bring peace to the world" [12]

## References

1. All Bible quotes NIV
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6. Ibid
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11. *Collegamento pro Sindone Marzo-Aprile*; Translated from Italian by Michela Marinelli
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*The Newsletter Editorial Team would like to wish all our Readers and especially any children connected with their families, A very Happy Christmas.*

