

# FIVE REASONS WHY SOME CHRISTIANS ARE SHROUD SKEPTICS

*Barrie M. Schwartz*

**A**t first glance, I might seem to be the least likely candidate to be writing an article addressing Christians' beliefs about the Shroud of Turin, because I am Jewish. (Of course, so is the man on the Shroud)! On the other hand, I was a member of the only research team ever permitted to perform an in-depth scientific examination of the cloth. In 1978, I was one of 24 researchers who spent 120 non-stop hours over five days and nights examining it directly and performing a battery of non-destructive tests on the cloth. We spent the next three years evaluating all of our data and writing the results into formal scientific papers, which were submitted and published in highly regarded peer reviewed scientific journals. Our research ultimately concluded that the Shroud was not an artwork. In spite of that, I remained a die-hard skeptic and it took me another 17 years before the scientific evidence finally convinced me of its authenticity.

In my role as the official "Documenting Photographer" for the research team, I was obligated to document the event and the team's work in detail. When that work was finished and most of the others moved on, I felt that my work was somehow incomplete. As an "insider" with access to all of the scientific research and a media professional myself, I was very frustrated by the inaccurate (and sometimes patently false) reports in the media about the Shroud and realized that my Christian brothers and sisters were not really getting a very accurate accounting of what we knew about it. Let us

be honest. The average person does not read peer reviewed scientific journals! So I created and published the first Shroud of Turin website on the internet in 1996 ([www.shroud.com](http://www.shroud.com)) to provide a platform for more accurate and readily accessible information about the Shroud and began lecturing about it at conferences, universities and churches around the world.

Over the years I have spoken to hundreds of Christian groups of nearly every denomination and have probably heard every reason why people either love or hate the Shroud. Everything came to a head in 2013, when I was asked to speak at an Evangelical Conference in Colorado Springs, Colorado. I attended the entire three day event and spent the first two days just sitting at a table with a modest Shroud display and talking with many of the attendees, some of whom were quick to tell me they were not really interested in the Shroud. They were also very happy to tell me why, and their reasons were rather stunning, since in most cases they were completely inaccurate or totally incorrect.

I knew this evangelical audience probably would not be thrilled with a Jewish guy getting up and telling them they are misinterpreting their own Gospels when it comes to the Shroud, but I knew I had to do something. I was giving my only lecture in the main auditorium on the third day of the event, so I jotted down the top five reasons folks had given me on the back of an envelope so I could address each of them directly when I got up to speak. I called it (with apologies to David Letterman), the “Top 5 Reasons Why Some Christians Are Shroud Skeptics” and opened my talk with it. To my surprise, the audience response was overwhelmingly positive and I realized that this information should be made more readily available. Consequently, I created a PowerPoint to better illustrate the information and now present it as part of my regular presentations to Protestant and evangelical groups. When I was asked to write this article for *The City* I realized this was a perfect opportunity to expand on the information I had been presenting at my lectures and dispel in detail some of the misconceptions about the Shroud that many Christians seem to have. Before you make up your mind, I believe you should know the facts. So here are the top Five Reasons Why Some Christians are Shroud Skeptics:

## 1. THE SHROUD IS A GRAVEN IMAGE

This is usually the first reason I am given as to why the Shroud is not credible in some people's eyes. In my lectures, I always remind folks that being Jewish, I know a little bit about graven images. We had a Golden Calf that cost us 40 years in the desert! But what exactly is a graven image? By definition, it is a *manmade* object or artwork (such as a statue) that is worshipped as a god or in place of a god.

But science itself has PROVEN (and I don't use that word lightly), that the Shroud is not an artwork of any kind. Our team went to Turin to answer a single question: How is the image on the Shroud formed? The conventional wisdom in 1978 was that it was either some form of painting, scorch or photograph, so our tests included experiments to explore all of those possibilities. Using very sensitive spectral and chemical analyses, along with microscopic and photographic examination, we searched for any traces of paints or pigments on the cloth. In fact, we had with us a complete catalog of the spectral characteristics of every paint and pigment used by man from medieval to modern times. In the end we determined that no paints or pigments were responsible for the image. Thus, we *proved* scientifically that the Shroud image is *not* a painting.

Another theory was that someone heated a metal statue, laid the Shroud over it and the hot metal scorched the image onto the cloth. This was an understandable possibility since the color of the Shroud image is very similar to the color of the lightly scorched areas on the cloth. The Shroud was heavily damaged by a fire in 1532, leaving it covered with burns and scorches, so there were plenty of documented reference scorches on the cloth for us to compare to. Scorched linen will fluoresce red under ultraviolet excitation, so we photographed the entire Shroud using ultraviolet fluorescence photography and sure enough, every known scorch fluoresced in the red, just as we expected. But the image itself did *not* fluoresce. In fact, it even quenched the pale yellow-green background fluorescence of the cloth itself, thus proving that the Shroud image is not the product of a high temperature event. In other words, we *proved* that the image is *not* a scorch.

The third theory was that the Shroud image was created in medieval times using a photographic process, even though the first

documented photographic negative still exists and was created in 1826 by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in France! There is not one shred of evidence in the historical record that any photographic images were created before then. Since the primary light sensitive material used in the photographic process is silver, the STURP team looked for it using spectral and chemical analyses and not one trace was found. According to proponents of that theory, all the silver was removed during the fixing process. However, the chemicals used to fix the image and make it permanent only remove the UNUSED silver and there would be plenty of it remaining in all of the image areas. Also, such a light sensitive emulsion would have to be coated onto the entire Shroud in a semi-viscous liquid or gelatin form which would have penetrated deep into the fibers of the cloth and some silver would have remained there until this day. Yet not one trace was found. Again, we *proved* the Shroud image was *not* created by a photographic process. Of course, if one takes the time to thoroughly analyze the Shroud's global image properties (and I am a professional photographer that has had 38 years to do so), one can easily see that, other than the negative-like light to dark reversal, the Shroud image is absolutely nothing like a photographic image. One cannot encode spatial or topographic 3-D information into an image using normal photography.

Here is an excerpt taken directly from the official summary of STURP's 1981 final report:

“No pigments, paints, dyes or stains have been found on the fibrils. X-ray, fluorescence and microchemistry on the fibrils preclude the possibility of paint being used as a method for creating the image. Ultra Violet and infrared evaluation confirm these studies. Computer image enhancement and analysis by a device known as a VP-8 image analyzer show that the image has unique, three-dimensional information encoded in it. Microchemical evaluation has indicated no evidence of any spices, oils, or any biochemicals known to be produced by the body in life or in death. It is clear that there has been a direct contact of the Shroud with a body, which explains certain features such as scourge marks, as well as the blood. However, while this type of contact might explain

some of the features of the torso, it is totally incapable of explaining the image of the face with the high resolution that has been amply demonstrated by photography...”

“Thus, the answer to the question of how the image was produced or what produced the image remains, now, as it has in the past, a mystery. We can conclude for now that the Shroud image is that of a real human form of a scourged, crucified man. It is not the product of an artist. The blood stains are composed of hemoglobin and also give a positive test for serum albumin. The image is an ongoing mystery and until further chemical studies are made, perhaps by this group of scientists, or perhaps by some scientists in the future, the problem remains unsolved.”<sup>1</sup>

Science has proven the Shroud is *not* a manmade artwork, so there is no way it can be considered a graven image. Finally, in my 39 year involvement with the Shroud, I have never seen one person pray to the Shroud. People may kneel before it in prayer, but the Shroud simply serves as a focal point for their prayers and not the final destination. The Shroud of Turin is NOT a graven image.

## 2. THE SHROUD IS JUST ANOTHER CATHOLIC RELIC

I have heard this argument on countless occasions and it always brings a smile to my face. My first response when this comes up in my lectures is to ask the audience when they believe the Shroud came under the control of the Catholic Church. The answers run the gamut from the 1<sup>st</sup> century to medieval times, but none of those are correct. For more than six centuries, the Shroud was in private hands and owned by the Savoy family, the ruling monarchy of Italy. Although they did place it in the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Turin in 1578 for safe keeping, they retained ownership of it until the death of King Umberto II, last Duke of Savoy, in 1983. So the church was only the custodian of the Shroud, had no direct control of it and could do nothing with it without first getting the permission of the king. In fact, the scientific examination performed by STURP in

1978 was authorized by the king and not by the church. Frankly, had it been the direct property of the church, I am doubtful we would ever have received permission to examine it.

In 1985, after two years in the Italian courts, the king's will was probated and it was determined that the will was valid. It is most interesting to note that the king did not leave the Shroud to the institution of the church, but rather to one man, the living Pope. I imagine the king realized that if 130 cardinals had to vote on what should be done with the Shroud, nothing might ever be accomplished. So technically, the Shroud did not come under control of the Catholic Church until 1985! Consequently, it is not really correct to label it a Catholic relic.



### 3. THE GOSPELS STATE THAT JESUS WAS TIED WITH LINEN STRIPS

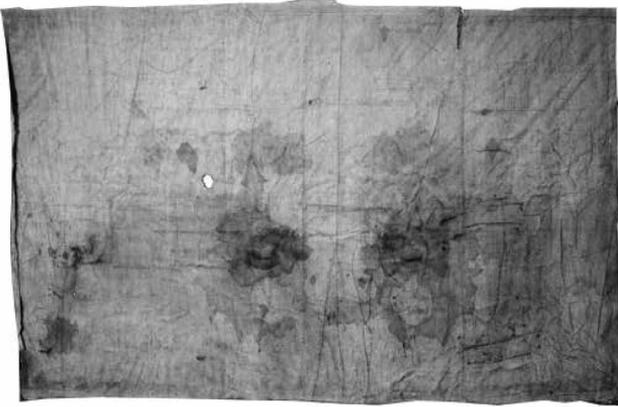
“The Gospels state that Jesus was tied with linen strips, yet the Shroud is a single large cloth, so it can’t be real.” That is another statement I hear frequently. I guess most people do not realize that by the first century, even the Egyptians had stopped wrapping mummies with strips. So why are “linen strips” even mentioned in the Gospels?

One has to remember that Jesus and his disciples were Jews and his burial would be conducted according to Jewish law and tradition. The Old Testament requires Jewish men of high stature to be buried in “pure linen raiments.” The Gospels tell us that the shroud of Jesus was provided by Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy man. That makes good sense, since such a cloth would have been expensive by first century standards and would most likely have been imported, quite possibly from Syria. Jewish custom requires burial in a large

single sheet, as demonstrated in the accompanying De la Rovere painting. Once the body is wrapped in the cloth, it must be bound by linen strips to insure the cloth does not fall off when the body is transported. That is not only consistent with a first century Jewish burial, but also with contemporary burials, and not just by Jews but by Muslims as well. When my father died in 2003, he was given an Orthodox Jewish burial and was wrapped in a white linen shroud very similar to the Shroud of Turin. When the disciples entered the tomb on Sunday morning, only the cloth and strips remained, so they are mentioned in the Gospels.

Of course, the Gospels also tell us there was a second cloth, folded and separate from the other. I often am told that, since the Shroud is only one cloth and two were mentioned in scripture, that the Shroud must consequently be a fake. Never mind the fact that over two millennia, it is quite possible the two cloths could get separated!

So what is this second cloth and why was it there? Once again, Jewish law requires that anything containing the victim's blood or bodily fluids be buried with the body. Once Jesus was taken down



THE SUDARIUM OF OVIEDO -  
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from the cross, his face and head were wrapped in a smaller cloth or napkin which absorbed the blood and pleural fluids from his nose and mouth. We still follow a similar procedure today and typically cover the face of the dead immediately upon their passing. Frankly, it is the preservation of this second cloth and its presence in the tomb that convinces me this was an authentic Jewish burial. Even more amazing is that this second cloth, known as the Sudarium, has survived to the present day and is now kept in the cathedral in Oviedo, Spain, where it has resided since the 7<sup>th</sup> century!

#### 4. THE MAN OF THE SHROUD HAS LONG HAIR, WHICH IS FORBIDDEN IN THE GOSPELS

Skeptics will often quote to me from 1 Corinthians 11:14 – “Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?” (this and other verses in this article are from the KJV translation). Well, yes, that is what it says. But when exactly was that written? I am not a New Testament scholar, but I know that Paul wrote that about twenty years after the death of Jesus! So this rule would NOT have applied to him or his disciples, since it had not been written yet! What laws did they follow? The best way to address that is to look to the Old Testament, which was the law in Jesus’s time. Here is what it says about long hair and beards:

Numbers 6:5 (Re the Nazarite’s vow) - “All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.”

And in Leviticus 19:27 – “Ye shall not round [*i.e.*, cut] the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar [*i.e.*, cut] the corners of thy beard.”

Jews were literally forbidden to cut their hair and beards and you can still see that today in any Orthodox or Hassidic Jewish communities where all adult males have long hair and beards. Jesus followed the Law of Moses!

#### 5. THE PROPHECIES SAY THE MAN’S BEARD WAS PLUCKED

“The Prophecies say the Man’s beard was plucked, yet the Man of the Shroud has a full beard, so it can’t be Jesus.” This is another popular reason I am given by many Christians as to why the Shroud cannot be authentic. Is there anything on the Shroud that might address this issue? Actually, there is.

If you look closely at the center of the beard below the chin you

will notice an inverted “V” notch that indicates some missing hair. Having worn a beard myself for nearly four decades, I can assure you that plucking even one hair would bring tears to your eyes. Pulling out a clump of hair, as it appears on the Shroud, would have been extremely painful and only added to his torture. Once again, we must consult the Old Testament to see what the Prophecies say:

Isaiah 50:6 - “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.”

It never said they shaved his face or plucked off ALL his hair.

Among people of the Middle East, the beard was held in great veneration, so to pluck a man’s beard was a gross indignity and still would be today. As a Jew following the Law of Moses, Jesus was NOT clean shaven. How could people pluck hair from his cheeks if he had no beard?



As you can see, there is a very plausible explanation for each of these objections. It might seem a bit strange that they are being presented to you by a Jewish guy (especially one who said “no” when I was first asked to be on the STURP team in 1977), but I feel obligated to share with you the knowledge I have been privileged to gain over the past 39 years. It is my sincere hope that this information will simply provide you with a new perspective on the Shroud of Turin. It turns out that I was not in that room with the Shroud for myself. I was there for you!



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BARRIE M. SCHWORTZ, was the Official Documenting Photographer for the Shroud of Turin Research Project (STURP), the team that conducted the first in-depth scientific examination of the Shroud in 1978. Today, he plays an influential role in Shroud research and education as the editor and founder of the internationally recognized Shroud of Turin Website ([www.shroud.com](http://www.shroud.com)), the oldest, largest and most extensive Shroud resource on the Internet, with more than fifteen million visitors from over 160 countries. In 2009 he founded the Shroud of Turin Education and Research Association, Inc. (STERA, Inc.), a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation in order to preserve and maintain his Shroud photographic collection and other important resources and make them available for future research and study. He currently serves as the President of STERA, Inc.