

## **HONOURING FATHER OTTERBEIN**

The 'Quiet Man' of Shroud Politics Celebrates Sixty Years As A Redemptorist

By Ian Wilson

Despite his forty-five years as Founder and President of the U.S. Holy Shroud Guild, Fr. Adam Otterbein has never sought the limelight on Shroud matters. Yet almost anyone in the U.S. or U.K. who has been involved with the Shroud for more than the last few years will have had some dealings with Fr. Otterbein.

Not least your Editor. When, thirty years ago, I became minded seriously to research the Shroud and (knowing of no British Shroud organization), wrote to the address of the U.S. Holy Shroud Guild as given in John Walsh's book *The Shroud*, it was Fr. Otterbein who sent the swift, courteous and supremely helpful reply that came winging back across the Atlantic. That response introduced me not only to the inimitable Fr. Peter Rinaldi, but also to the U.K.'s then Shroud triumvirate of Vera Barclay, Fr. Maurus Green and Dr. David Willis, with more fruitful and extraordinary consequences than I could ever have dreamed. In a very real sense my Shroud research all began with Adam...

Accordingly when, in mid July, I received a letter from Fr. Fred Brinkmann asking if I might attend a special Holy Shroud Seminar Retreat being held the weekend of 24/25 August at Mount Saint Alphonsus, Esopus, New York State, in honour of Fr. Otterbein's sixtieth anniversary as a Redemptorist, there could be little real hesitation.

I therefore make no apologies for a generous proportion of this Newsletter being devoted to what proved one of the most congenial Shroud gatherings of recent years.

### **About Fr. Adam Otterbein, S.T.D., C.Ss.R**

Adam Otterbein took his religious vows on August 2, 1936, the same month that Adolf Hitler was presiding over the Olympic Games in Berlin. As a seminarian, he studied at the huge Redemptorist Mount Saint Alphonsus seminary at Esopus, where Fr. Edward Wuenschel, already a leading Shroud enthusiast who had assembled a very definitive library on the subject, was one of his teachers.

Because of the young Adam's interest in amateur photography, in 1938 he was asked to make copies of the Enrie photographs of the Shroud that had been taken seven years before, and it was this chance assignment which sparked off what would become a life-long fascination for the Shroud's negative image.

Ordained at Esopus in 1941, he went to the Catholic University, where he took a degree in 1945, thereupon returning to Esopus as a member of its teaching staff. When in 1949 Fr. Wuenschel was called to Rome, it was to Fr. Otterbein that fell Wuenschel's mantle for the furtherance of Shroud interest in the U.S. In order for letters on the subject to be distinguished from all other mail arriving at the Mount Saint Alphonsus Seminary, Fr. Otterbein coined the name 'Holy Shroud Guild' as a mailing address, thus beginning this still extant Shroud organization.

In October 1951 the Guild was given formal recognition as America's principal Shroud-promoting body, with Fr. Otterbein as its founder and first president, Fr. Wuenschel, still in Rome, as its Honorary President; and Frs. Francis Filas and Peter Rinaldi as members of its Council. In 1973 Fr. Otterbein travelled to Turin with Fr. Rinaldi for the special TV exposition of the Shroud.

In the mid-1970s Fr. Otterbein played a key role in facilitating the making, with U.S. funding, of British film producer David Rolfe's award-winning Shroud documentary *The Silent Witness*. As remarked by David Rolfe, the success of this was 'in no small way due to the assiduous way Adam warmed to the latent 'movie mogul' element in his personality. The good order of the Wuenschel Holy Shroud library at Esopus, with every item catalogued and put on microfilm, is likewise a tribute to Fr. Adam's assiduousness and good housekeeping.

### The Seminar Retreat in Fr. Otterbein's Honour At Esopus

The Mount Saint Alphonsus Retreat Center, where the retreat in honour of Fr. Adam Otterbein was held the weekend of 23-25 August, was formerly a vast seminary for the training of Redemptorist priests, among these, of course, Father Otterbein himself. The huge old seminary building is set in superb grounds and surrounding countryside in New York State some two to three hours drive from New York City, and its library as formerly used by the thousands of novitiate priests who studied there, is still intact.

Organiser/host of the weekend was Redemptorist Fr. Frederick Brinkmann, who has taken over Fr. Otterbein's responsibilities for the U.S. Holy Shroud Guild. The occasion was your Editor's first opportunity to meet Fr. Brinkmann, and it was most gratifying to find in him the qualities of energy, enthusiasm, hospitality, and a rich musical talent, all in super-abundance. Among those also present were Dr. John Jackson and his wife Rebecca; Dr. Eric Jumper and his wife Marjorie; Tom D'Muhala, Mike Minor; Isabel Piczek; Professor Dan Scavone; Dr. Alan Adler; Dr. Alan Whanger and his wife Mary; Barbara Sullivan; Dorothy Crispino; Rex Morgan of Australia; Fr. Kim Dreisbach; Dr. Bob Dinegar; Fr. Joe Marino; Richard Orareo, Dr. Ed Brucker and his wife Pat, and not least Fr. Otterbein himself - frail but full of gratitude for the honours being bestowed on him.

### The Mount Saint Alphonsus Seminary at Esopus, New York, home of the Wuenschel collection of Shroud books and photographs

My wife and I travelled from Colorado with John and Rebecca Jackson, and on our leaving Newark airport for Esopus the New Jersey turnpike proved so congested that we missed the Friday evening programme. This comprised Dr. Alan Adler speaking on 'Updating Recent Studies on the Shroud of Turin' [see review of his paper of the same title, p.35-6] and Dr. Alan Whanger's 'An Adventure with the Images on the Shroud: An Examination of the Face and Many Non-Body Images', a slide-illustrated discussion of many of the off-body image features, including images of plants, that Dr. Whanger still somewhat controversially identifies as visible on the Shroud.

After Barbara Sullivan's 'The Shroud of Turin: Critical Analysis of Alternative and Disjunctive Propositions', the major presentation of the Saturday morning was Rex Morgan's 'Discoveries in the Roman Catacombs relating to the Holy Shroud.' This concerned Rex's passionate interest in the early profile portrait of Christ in the Orpheus Cubiculum in Rome's Catacomb of Domitilla, as copied by the Victorian artist Thomas Heaphy the Younger. In the May of this year, and with Isabel Piczek of Los Angeles acting as artistic adviser, Rex's archaeologist son Christopher, in the company of his father, made a very thorough survey of the Orpheus Cubiculum and its frescoes, a work on which Rex was able to report with very justifiable pride.

On the Saturday afternoon Dr. John Jackson spoke with no little emotion of his remarkable experience on the afternoon of Wednesday 13 May, 1981 when he was with Fr. Adam Otterbein and other STURP representatives in the Piazza of St. Peter's, Rome, awaiting a specially prepared audience with Pope John Paul II to report on the 1978 testing of the Shroud. Of all occasions to be in St. Peter's Piazza this happened to be the very one on which the Turkish gunman Mehmet Ali Agca made his assassination attempt on the Pope, resulting in John Paul II being rushed to hospital, and Jackson and his delegation's audience being abandoned.

John and his wife Rebecca's presentations were followed by Isabel Piczek, who gave a most carefully-prepared paper 'Alice in Wonderland and the Shroud of Turin?', supported with numerous slides, reiterating her arguments for why the Shroud cannot be the work of an artist. The full text of this presentation, and reproductions of many of the slides, can now be accessed via Barrie Schwartz's Shroud site on the Internet.

Isabel Piczek's talk was followed by Professor Dan Scavone with arguably the most momentous paper of the weekend 'Joseph of Arimathea, the Holy Grail and the Edessa Icon.' Some connection between the Shroud and the legend of the Holy Grail has long been suspected, because of the Grail stories having at their core Joseph of Arimathea, the man described in the gospels as having taken charge of Jesus's burial and theoretically purchasing the Shroud currently in Turin. Grail stories also often enigmatically feature a very Shroud-like vision of Christ crucified, covered with wounds.

Hitherto, however, one of their many baffling elements has been the stories' inclusion of Joseph of Arimathea bringing the Grail to Britain, also tales of the semi-fictional British king Arthur and his knights. Here the remarkable breakthrough made by Dan Scavone has been his finding that the whole involvement of Britain in the story may have been due to a misunderstanding made at a very early period indeed. This seems to have stemmed from very early references to a king Lucius of Britio who asked for Christian missionaries, around the time of Pope Eleutherius (AD175-189). Even as long ago as the Dark Ages writers assumed that Britio must mean Britain, the Venerable Bede, for instance, duly assuming such in his History of the English Church and People, even though otherwise there is not a shred of evidence that any British king called Lucius ever existed.

As discovered by Dan Scavone, however, a little-known reference in the Outlines of the 2nd century writer Clement of Alexandria indicates that the original 'Britio' reference pertained not to Britain, but to the 'Britio Edessenorum' - the Britio or Birtha (Birtha

means castle in Syriac) of the citizens of Edessa . Back in the 2nd century, as today, Edessa/Urfa was dominated by a citadel or castle, as seen at right.

Dan Scavone also discovered that the name Lucius pertained, not to any king of Britain, but to king Abgar VIII (the Great) of Edessa, who reigned between AD 177 and 212, and who took the name Lucius to honour his Roman master the emperor Lucius Aelius Commodus. Abgar's actual titles, as proven not least by his coinage, were Lucius Aelius Septimius Megas Abgar, honouring both Commodus and Septimius Severus. He was also the first monarch in all history to feature the Christian cross on his tiara (see right). Dan Scavone's discoveries raise afresh the question of whether Edessa's evangelisation occurred in the reign of Abgar VIII or Abgar V (AD 13-50), and still leave many issues unresolved. The bad news for Britain's Glastonbury-lovers, however, is that they now seriously undermine the idea that Joseph of Arimathea may ever have visited Britain to plant Glastonbury's famous Levantine hawthorn.

On the Saturday evening a moving Testimonial Dinner in honour of Father Otterbein was held in the Mount Saint Alphonsus Dining Room, presided over by Michael Minor. This included tributes to Father Adam from U.S. President Bill Clinton, and from Cardinal Saldarini in Turin, together with addresses by Kevin Moran, by Dorothy Crispino (who gave a history of the Holy Shroud Guild), and, as a surprise contributor, by Dr. Eric Jumper, who despite having become disaffected from the STURP group because of his acceptance of the radiocarbon dating, was present with his wife Marjorie. The dinner was followed by a prayer service led by Fr. Kim Dreisbach.

The Sunday morning was remarkable for a series of inspiring addresses: first by Tom D'Muhala, President of STURP, who spoke very movingly of the spirit which had motivated the STURP team, despite enormous logistical problems; second by Fr. Joseph Marino, who most pertinently likened the events of the radiocarbon dating and its aftermath to those of Jesus' crucifixion and its aftermath; and third, by Fr. Fred Brinkmann, whose homily at the concluding Mass set the whole occasion in its spiritual context.

Because the visit to Mount Saint Alphonsus was my personal first, I took the opportunity to visit Fr. Wuenschel's Holy Shroud Library, one of the world's finest collections of books, photographs and other materials relating to the Shroud, all meticulously catalogued and microfilmed.

#### New Address for the Holy Shroud Guild

At the Retreat it was learned that Fr. Fred Brinkmann, (seen right), has been appointed Rector of Notre Dame Retreat House, the Redemptorist Community in Canandaigua, New York - a most worthy 'promotion'.

Accordingly, although the Wuenschel Library will remain at Mount Saint Alphonsus, Fr. Fred will deal with all Holy Shroud Guild correspondence from his new location. The address of this is:

The Holy Shroud Guild  
P.O.Box 342  
Canandaigua, New York 14424  
tel (716) 394 2606  
fax (716) 394 9215  
Internet Home Page: <http://users.aol.com/fcbrink/hsg/hsg.htm>

Otherwise the Guild's distribution point for pictures, articles and cards will remain as before:

Perpetual Help Center  
294 East 150th Street  
Bronx, NY 10451-5195  
tel. (718) 585 3678  
fax (718) 993 5870

### A Memorable Visit to the Turin Shroud Center of Colorado

Our journeying to the United States provided a useful opportunity to make an overnight stop-over in Colorado Springs, at John and Rebecca Jackson's invitation, to visit their Turin Shroud Center of Colorado. As mentioned in the last Newsletter, this is located in Colorado Springs, and as Rebecca Jackson insists, the very economical new U.S. airline Westpac, which uses Colorado Springs as its hub, makes visiting the Center both easy and relatively inexpensive while in the U.S.A.

In the event, the interest-value of this Center, its facilities, and its quite exceptional standards of this as a Turin Shroud research location exceeded all expectations. Visitors are received by appointment, and the small auditorium can easily seat groups of twenty-or so attending mini-courses on the Shroud. The Center has every latest computer-type facility, and is also somewhat of a Shroud science museum, housing, for instance, the original VP8 Image Analyser which revealed the Shroud's 3D image for the first time.

However the most exceptional feature of the Center, which the Jacksons and Rebecca's son Remington (see right) tend to live in more than their home, is its facility for researches into every facet of the Shroud's image. The walls are lined with life-size colour and black and white transparencies enabling instant reference to the tiniest detail. There are two life-size crucifixes fitted with straps so that research with volunteers can be conducted concerning exactly how the man of the Shroud's body hung on the cross. There are cloth mock-ups of the Shroud, marked up with reproductions of every blood-stain, enabling reconstruction of the cloth-drape over polystyrene models of the Shroud body in its burial attitude.

Using a cloth mock-up and polystyrene 'body' John Jackson very convincingly demonstrates how when the cloth is draped in the correct manner, not only does every detail match up, but a hitherto obscure bloodstain at the foot of the frontal image becomes in perfect register with the bloodstains from the foot on the dorsal image. It can also be seen how blood dripped at the elbow, and how the splash of blood across the back of the body occurs at the very point where the back would have been most arched.

From details such as these, the Shroud becomes even more harrowingly 'real' as a cloth which wrapped a genuine crucifixion victim, whatever anyone may make of his identity, or when he died as he did.

#### A Visit to Dr. Leoncio Garza-Valdes in San Antonio

Another very pleasant and worthwhile call during the visit to the States was to Dr. Leoncio Garza-Valdes and his wife Maria in San Antonio, to hear at first hand Dr. Garza-Valdes's arguments for the Shroud radiocarbon dating having been falsified by substantial accretions of microbiological organisms, in the form of a bioplastic coating.

Dr. Garza-Valdes is a Mexican-born paediatrician who has made microbiology his very professional hobby, and it was highly illuminating - not to mention convincing - to listen to his explanation of how portions of the Shroud may indeed be covered with a very substantial bioplastic coating in a manner rather similar to the plastic coverings of electrical wiring. As Dr. Garza-Valdes points out, a coating of this kind would resist all the pre-treatments applied to the Shroud samples in 1988, and is not peculiar to the Shroud, but is to be found on most ancient linens, in varying proportions according to factors such as the amount of exposure and handling the item has received during the course of its history.

One way of rationalising the coating seems to be to liken it to the patina acquired by old coins, which becomes part of the coin's surface, and is irremovable by ordinary washing. A clear plastic coating may also explain one oddity noted from my own personal viewing of the Shroud in 1973 - that the cloth seemed to have a surprising surface 'sheen' [see *The Turin Shroud*, p.8]

Whatever, Dr. Garza-Valdes's findings have attracted serious interest from the well-known British Egyptologist Dr. Rosalie David of the Manchester Museum, since they could explain the discrepancies that she has found of up to a thousand years between the datings of ancient Egyptian mummy-wrappings and the body they wrapped, as particularly in the case of one example in her collection, no.1770.

Indeed, such is Dr. David's interest that she visited Dr. Garza-Valdes in San Antonio, and subsequently, in collaboration with Professor Harry Gove, arguably the leading pioneer of the AMS method of radiocarbon dating, she has arranged for the wrappings and bone collagen from an ibis mummy in her collection to be subjected to comparative dating.

The ibis mummy was chosen specifically because there was less likelihood that it might have been rewrapped than in the case of a human mummy. Intriguingly, although the results have yet to be published, it seems that again substantial discrepancies have been shown up between the datings of the ibis mummy's wrappings and those of its body.

However, for those already leaping to accept Dr. Garza-Valdes's claims as the explanation for the Shroud radiocarbon dating, it should be pointed out that the radiocarbon dating laboratories are now saying that the ibis mummy may have been an unsuitable choice, because as a bird whose diet derives from life living in water, i.e. fish, its radiocarbon intake can be different from that of creatures whose prime diet is directly or indirectly land-based, as in the case of man. It is beginning to seem that the

radiocarbon laboratories can always find an excuse for a dating anomaly - except when the object in question is the Shroud...

#### A Reappraisal of the purported 'Camel Hair Textile'

A new interpretation has been made of what had previously seemed to be a fragment of textile - thought possibly to be from a headband made of camel hair (see Newsletter no.39) - as found by Dr. Garza-Valdes embedded among blood sample taken from the occipital or 'back-of-the-head' region of the Shroud.

The latest and what may well be final thinking is that the fabric-like fragment is in reality a fungus structure called Cleistothecium from the sexual mode of reproduction of the fungus. According to Dr. Garza-Valdes, Aspergillus is the name of the anamorph and Eurotium is the teleomorph name.