

DISCOVERIES BETWEEN THE LINES
OF A NAMELESS MANUSCRIPT

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We are deeply indebted to J. Anthony Gaughan for the publication of *The Crucified* by Alfred O'Rahilly as well as for the interesting and informative Introduction with the biographical data about the author. Alfred O'Rahilly was certainly a most colorful character and an intellectual giant. Fr. Gaughan indicates the breadth of his intellectual interests, and the volume, *The Crucified*, is an excellent example of the thoroughness and detail of O'Rahilly's research, as well as the forcefulness with which he defended his opinions.

Father Edward A. Wuenschel, C.S.S.R., was perhaps less colorful, but no less a scholar. Although he was a perfect gentleman, he was not less forceful in presenting and defending his opinions. His published articles and books are evidence of his scholarship, and his collected library of more than 700 volumes and booklets related to the Shroud of Turin are an indication of his persistent and detailed research.

After years of serious research both men were firmly convinced of the authenticity of the Shroud of Turin. However, there was no unanimity of interpretation of all the evidence for authenticity nor of conclusions drawn from the Shroud imprints with regard to the Via Dolorosa.

When Father Wuenschel died in Rome in January of 1964, Rev. William Gaudreau, Superior General of the Redemptorists, sent Fr. Wuenschel's library and papers to me, since I had worked with Fr. Wuenschel from my seminary days. Fortunately I was able to establish the Wuenschel Collection as a part of the Library at Mount St. Alphonsus, Esopus, New York.

When I catalogued the Collection almost twenty years ago, I found a set of page proofs but there was no title page and no indication of the author. I listed the manuscript in the catalogue as by an unknown author. Whenever I came across it in the files during the intervening years, I was always puzzled how a manuscript got into page proofs and, as far as I knew, had never been published. After reading *The Crucified*, the puzzle was solved. I recognized the manuscript. Fr. Gaughan had found two sets of page proofs of O'Rahilly's book. He did not know that a third set of page proofs had been preserved in the Wuenschel Collection.

I immediately began to search through the 371 page proofs and discovered numerous annotations in the margins in Fr. Wuenschel's

handwriting. Fr. Wuenschel was not a book collector but a research scholar. He marked almost every one of his books with underlined sentences or paragraphs, marginal notes, and handwritten footnotes. Exclamation points and question marks are frequent in the margins. Sometimes the marks indicate disagreement or doubt, but other places, especially underlining, indicate emphatic agreement and the importance of that passage. As I read through the first ten chapters of the manuscript (163 pages), I noticed how few unmarked pages there were. An actual count revealed that only 25 of the pages were unmarked by Fr. Wuenschel, but this indicated primarily the thoroughness of his scrutiny. Although there was, in general, apparent agreement, there were some minor disagreements and questions.

Fr. Wuenschel was a staunch supporter of Paul Vignon, and he continued to support the vaporograph theory as the best hypothesis at that time. But O'Rahilly questioned some of Vignon's ideas and seems to have rejected the vaporograph theory as a possible explanation of the image formation process. It is important to remember that O'Rahilly was writing about 1950! On the other hand Fr. Wuenschel questioned some of Pierre Barbet's observations, while O'Rahilly based many of his observations on Barbet's work.

Chapter Eleven is one of the lengthiest in the book. O'Rahilly discusses crucifixion among the Jews, Greeks and Romans, as well as alternative forms of execution, e.g. impalement, carrying the whole cross or only the crossbeam, and finally the crucifixion of Christ.

On page 183 O'Rahilly states: "Thus, relying on Holzmeister, Vignon (ii. 49) rather dogmatically declares that 'the archaeological [i.e. literary] texts say formally that the condemned man did not carry a complete cross.' I am convinced neither of this interpretation nor—even if it is admitted—of its applicability to Christ." O'Rahilly is hardly less dogmatic than Vignon! After a rather lengthy treatise on impalement and execution by the fork, which do not seem to have much bearing on the crucifixion of Christ, O'Rahilly asks the question: Was only the crossbeam carried?

Fr. Wuenschel's marginal notes became more numerous and finally there was a note: "See Wuenschel Notes on this chapter." That sent me back to the Wuenschel files, where I discovered some correspondence between Wuenschel and O'Rahilly. The first letter was dated July 8, 1948. O'Rahilly had written to Wuenschel: "I just managed to get the loan of the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, April 1946. [...] I must congratulate you on your answer to Père Braun. [...] Had I known that such a reply was to be given I would not have [had] the temerity to tackle him myself."¹

On March 11, 1950 O'Rahilly wrote to Fr. Wuenschel, who was then living in Rome: "I am grateful for your notes. I may be able to take account of it if there is a second edition of 'The Family at Bethany'. In a month or so there will appear a large book,

'The Crucified'—History, Shroud and Art. It has grown so big and thorough that I am not including it in my Gospel Studies which are meant to be simpler. It will have about 300 illustrations." On April 22, 1950 he wrote: "I expect to be in Rome on 29th May for the International Congress on Sociology. I hope to have an opportunity of meeting you there. My book is nearly printed but it will not be out for about two months."

On May 17, 1950 O'Rahilly wrote to Wuenschel: "I am going to Rome on May 26th (by air) [...] I look forward to meeting you[...] I enclose the two first illustrations from my book [...] I am dealing in extenso with the physical cause of Christ's death. I have held up the final printing pending my securing further information. In particular a book or a brochure: Francesco La Cava."²

The files do not contain an account of the meeting in Rome but it is evident that the two men met and apparently had a lengthy discussion. It must have been obvious to both that, while they agreed on essentials, there were points of disagreement. However, the exchange was not only friendly but mutually enjoyable for on June 9, 1950 O'Rahilly wrote to Wuenschel: "I have to talk on the Vatican Radio this evening and so may be unable to see you again. [...] I deeply appreciate your encouragement and your kindness. I hope that you will find time to read my proofs and to send me: 1) any corrections or criticisms of minor items for the text; 2) an appendix of criticisms and alternative views to be printed under your own name (without further comment by me). Of course had I known I was coming to Rome and would meet you, I would not have allowed the text to be paged. But even now, with your help, there is a good chance of making the book watertight and of making a good defense available in English. I retain very pleasant recollections of your kind encouragement during this my first visit to Rome."

A careful comparison of the published text with the page proofs reveals only a few typographical changes and no indication that O'Rahilly changed any of his opinions after receiving Fr. Wuenschel's twelve typed pages of Notes and Comments. The Wuenschel Appendix suggested by O'Rahilly in the letter of June 9 was never published. However, since the page proofs were never re-edited by O'Rahilly, it is impossible to judge whether the Wuenschel Comments led to a change or modification of O'Rahilly's opinions.

After his return to Ireland he wrote on June 19: "I am sorry that I had to leave Rome before seeing you again. But I hope this will not abate your zeal in helping me with my book. I am going to add another chapter with educational notes and observations on the Shroud, on the Crucifixion and on the Death of Our Lord—as a result of my conversations with you. [...] I hope, therefore that you will be so kind as to send me corrections and criticisms."

Wuenschel sent his Comments promptly, for on June 27th O'Rahilly wrote to Wuenschel: "I am tremendously obliged to you for the notes and additions which you sent me." O'Rahilly then continued: "You

have certainly given me a tremendous belting concerning the Carrying of the Cross, etc. But it will help in arriving at the truth by having the side against me so well explained. In fact it will add considerably to the value of the book. I am most grateful for your contribution as well as for your corrections and notes on other points."

Fr. Wuenschel had sent eight double-spaced typed pages of comments on Chapter Eleven. "Your treatise on crucifixion is a good critical study of the available sources. You show that many of the texts commonly cited do not at all refer to crucifixion or to its preliminaries, but rather to impalement or to bearing the fork—an entirely distinct punishment. You also bring out the fact that there was great variety in the manner of crucifixion, and that the texts are rather indefinite and inconclusive about details. However, I am not convinced that: 1) the transverse beam was not carried by the cruciarii; 2) the entire cross was carried; 3) Our Lord carried the entire cross.

"[...] Your interpretation (it is a question of interpretation since the texts are not clear or explicit) hardly warrants the conclusion: Thus the alleged evidence for the carrying of the crossbeam by a cruciarius breaks down on examination' (p.194).

"[...] I think you exaggerate the difficulties involved in hoisting a crossbeam laden with a living man up on the upright stake. [...] You remark (correctly, I think) that the cross of Christ was not as high as is generally supposed. [...] I doubt very much whether you can insist that 'the operation presenting the fewest mechanical difficulties was to affix the victim on the ground and then raise the cross' (p. 215). You add an enumeration of ten incidents in connection with the case of Christ and you conclude: 'In view of such an accumulation of otherwise unrecorded incidents, in addition to our general ignorance of the details and the variations of crucifixion in other cases, the recent unqualified pronouncements concerning Our Lord's case must be regarded as rashly overconfident' (p. 197-98), i.e., that Our Lord carried only the crossbar, and that the vertical post was already erected on Calvary. I do not see the force of this argument. [...] The question of clothes and of the incident of Simon is hardly as decisive as you suppose.

"[...] On the whole, then, the import of certain texts and the balance of practical probabilities are in favor of the carrying of the crossbeam alone, and against the carrying of the entire cross. This seems to be the more probable view in the particular case of Christ. The same conclusion is definitely indicated by the Shroud. Here it is no longer a question of interpreting literary texts or speculating about likely procedure. It is simply a question of correctly evaluating the evidence visible in the imprints of the Body of Christ. In this respect, I am afraid that neither Hynek nor Judica is a good observer or a good interpreter.

"If Christ had carried the whole cross, one would expect some evidence of this on the top of the shoulder. There is none. On the other hand, there are definite stains across both shoulder-blades, the marks

of abrasion and contusions which took place after the scourging. These injuries are across both scapulae, and they are clearly in accord with the carrying of the crossbeam."

Both scholars had very definite opinions about the Via Dolorosa and presented arguments to support their position. It is unfortunate that we do not have any further exchange between them. Each apparently stood firm in his position in spite of friendly persuasive efforts to convince each other.

The first topic in Chapter Thirteen is "Christ's Voluntary Death". O'Rahilly quotes St. John: "My Father loves Me because I shall lay down My life, that I may take it up again. No one will take it from Me, but of Myself I will lay it down. I have the power to lay it down, I also have the power to take it up again. This is the command which I have received from My Father" (Jn 10:18). He quotes many of the Fathers of the Church and summarizes their teaching: "Accordingly we find in the Fathers and early writers strong emphasis on the voluntary nature of Christ's death."

Wuenschel agreed wholeheartedly with O'Rahilly about the voluntary nature of Christ's death but he indicated that here they were dealing with a mystery—the relationship and interaction of the Divine and human will in the God-Man Christ. Wuenschel was a dogma professor and the Incarnation was a favorite subject. He felt that greater emphasis should be given to the voluntary nature of Christ's death, lest researchers into the physical cause of His death forget this important aspect.

On page 268 O'Rahilly states: "In the Gospels His sufferings and His death are constantly described as inflicted by men. The Word having assumed mortal humanity, the injuries done to Him should naturally cause death. Yet by His divine power He could have mastered these death-dealing causes. But He did not choose to do so. Hence His death was both voluntary and natural."

Again Wuenschel agreed but he stressed that the voluntariness was not mere non-action, but a positive act of the divine will of Christ. "No one will take it from Me, but of Myself I will lay it down"(Jn 10:18). O'Rahilly quotes St. Thomas: "St. Thomas seems to imply that Christ's death was deferred until He gave leave to natural agencies to act" (p. 268). O'Rahilly implies that there is some doubt about the opinion of St. Thomas. Wuenschel had no doubt.

When O'Rahilly takes up the question of the physical cause of Christ's death, he concentrates on physical causes and the reader may forget the words of Christ: "I will lay it down." Christ died when He willed it; when He willed to allow physical causes to take their natural effect. This is a unique aspect of the death of Christ, the God-Man, and should not be forgotten in sindonological studies regarding the physical cause of death.

Wuenschel also stresses the effect that the "interior anguish", both in Gethsemane and on the cross, would have on Christ's Body under

the physical conditions of the crucifixion. In spite of the physical and mental sufferings, Christ maintained consciousness to the end when He said: "*It is accomplished*"; and bowing His head, He gave up His spirit"(Jn 19:30).

The two great scholars agreed that Christ died of physical causes and they agreed that he died by an act of His free will. At the moment chosen by Himself, He laid His life down freely for our salvation. They disagreed on the question of whether Christ carried the assembled cross or merely the crossbeam, but such differences of opinion did not hamper but rather occasioned a forceful but friendly exchange between them. It also engendered a mutual respect and mutual support for their primary thesis, the authenticity of the Shroud of Turin.

REFERENCES:

1. E. A. WUENSCHEL, C.S.S.R.: "John's Account of the Burial," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, VIII (1946), 135-78, and "The Shroud of Turin and the Burial of Christ," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, VII (1945), 405-37. Cf. also ALFRED ORAHILLY: *The Burial of Christ*, University Press, Cork 1942; previously published in *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, Oct. & Dec. 1941.
2. FRANCESCO LA CAVA: "II Reperto necroscopico di Longino nel costato di Gesu Cristo," *Medicus*, (1946), April-June.