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I was the official Documenting Photographer for the Shroud of Turin Research Project, the team that in 1978 performed the first and only, in-depth scientific examination of the Shroud of Turin in its history.

For the past 20 years I have lectured around the world on the Shroud and have no problem speaking extemporaneously for two hours or more without any script or written preparation. I have even done full day seminars without any notes. However, I have only 16 minutes today and that's hard, so forgive me, but I have brought some notes with me that I will use to make sure I get it right.

As a professional photographer who specialized in scientific, technical and medical photography, I had the skills and qualifications necessary to be a member of the Shroud research team, but when I was first asked to join, I immediately said, "no!"

Why did I refuse? The answer is simple: I was very uncomfortable with the subject matter, because I was born and raised in an Orthodox Jewish home. Both my parents immigrated to America from Poland when they were children, just before World War II. Why would a Jewish man want to get involved with an object that is probably the most important relic of Christianity? At that moment, I couldn't see any benefit in doing so.

Not only that, but I was a total skeptic and believed the Shroud was probably some kind of artwork or fake. I fully expected to take a quick look, see the paint and brushstrokes and go home! I had no emotional attachment to the subject matter as anyone raised as a Christian might have and didn't care one bit whether it was authentic or not. In fact, I saw this basically as nothing more than a free trip to Italy! I must admit my attitude was rather shallow and immature (but I was only 32 years old at the time).

In the end of course, I did join the team because the image on the Shroud has some fascinating properties that piqued my scientific curiosity, but I still tried to quit several more times in the year leading up to our actual examination of the cloth. Several months into the project I was speaking with Don Lynn, an imaging expert from NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory and one of my heroes on the STURP team. (Don had been the imaging project manager on the Voyager, Viking, Mariner and Galileo missions). I am sure that any professional photographer given the opportunity would have been honored to be working along side such an important NASA imaging scientist.

I remember asking him at one of our frequent meetings, “Don, what’s a nice Jewish man like me doing on this team?”

Don, who was a good Catholic, immediately asked me, “Have you forgotten that the man in question was a Jew?”

“Of course not,” I replied. That was probably the only thing I knew about Jesus at that moment in my life.

Then Don asked, “So you don’t think God would want one of His Chosen People on our team?”

I laughed out loud and said, “No, I never thought that!”

Then Don gave me some advice that not only kept me on the team, but may have been the best advice I have ever been given.

He said, “Barrie, go to Turin and do the best job you can do. God doesn’t tell us in advance what the plan is, but one day you will know.”

Truer and more profound words have never been spoken! Don was right and I have never regretted taking his advice and staying on that team. The tests we performed went on to prove the Shroud was not a painting, not a scorch, not a rubbing and not a photograph and we published our work in highly regarded peer reviewed scientific journals. In the end however, we could not determine any known mechanism that could make an image with the same chemical and physical properties as the Shroud. We could tell you what it’s not, but not tell you what it was. Our collective work still forms the primary database of empirical evidence about the Shroud of Turin that exists in the scientific literature today.

However, even with all that, it still took another eighteen years before the scientific evidence finally convinced me the Shroud was indeed authentic. In 1995, after years of resistance on my part, world renowned blood expert Dr. Alan Adler, another Jewish member of our team and the blood chemist who proved the blood on the Shroud was real, answered the final question that had kept me from accepting its authenticity. I was not convinced the Shroud was real because old blood is supposed to turn black or brown, but the blood on the Shroud was still reddish in color. In fact, right from the beginning, several of our team members were troubled by this.

So Al explained that he had found high levels of bilirubin in the blood on the Shroud, most likely due to the extended torture suffered by Jesus starting the night before in the Garden of Gethsemane, then the scourging and the crucifixion. Once he went into shock, his liver flooded

his bloodstream with bilirubin and blood of that nature tends to stay red forever. Suddenly and unexpectedly, that last remaining question had been answered! And by a Jewish blood chemist no less! I immediately remembered the words of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle through the lips of Sherlock Holmes, who said, “If you eliminate all the possibilities, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, is most likely the truth.”

I then remembered the rule of Occam’s Razor, which states that the simplest answer is usually the correct one. I was left with only one conclusion: the cloth could *only* be the authentic burial Shroud of the historic Jesus. It was even a surprise to me!

Over all those years I had noticed that the media reports on the Shroud were often misleading or even completely false. I had been privileged to study it first hand and had access to all the “inside” information, so I knew the truth about the Shroud. And because of my media experience, I knew better than to believe the erroneous press reports. But what about everyone else in the world?

There were probably a billion people on this planet that had more right to be in that room with the Shroud in 1978 than I did. But I was the one that was given that privilege. And that brought with it a great responsibility. It was something of an epiphany because I finally came to realize that I wasn’t in that room for myself. I was there for everyone else. I was there for you.

I knew the truth about the Shroud and was frustrated that my Christian brothers and sisters were not getting that truth in the popular press. To me, and all of our team members, this had always been about the truth. So I decided to take the photographs and materials that I had collected over those past eighteen years and in 1996, I built the first website on the Shroud of Turin, www.shroud.com, which has grown to become the oldest, largest and most extensive Shroud resource on the internet. In fact, we celebrated our 17th anniversary on January 21st of this year.

People often comment that we are number one on Google, and I have to remind them that we are five years older than Google! More importantly, I now realize this work is the fulfillment of the obligation that came with the great privilege I was given in 1978, and, in the end, it has also become my legacy. That is truly a gift from God!

In 2009 I formed the Shroud of Turin Education and Research Association, or STERA, Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to educating people about the Shroud using our website and other media and to archiving and preserving the existing scientific data to encourage and support future research. STERA, Inc. now owns the website and all the materials I collected over the past 35 years, along with the collections of a number of our deceased team members. STERA, Inc. will insure they remain freely available to everyone into the future.

In case you missed it, my topic today is “Religious Freedom in Scientific Research.” As a non-scientist myself, I can’t speak for the world of science in general, although I personally believe that science is simply man’s attempt to understand God’s creation. Because of that, I can only share my personal perspective with you about this specific project.

I could start by telling you that the Church was gracious from the first day to the last and in no way interfered in the scientific work our team performed. They even allowed us to own and keep the data we collected, rather than return it to Turin. But STURP team member Dr. John Heller put it far more eloquently in his 1983 book about our work,¹ in which he states so succinctly (and I quote): "Though it was believed that there would be a confrontation between science and religion, none occurred. Rather, the relationship was harmonious and synergistic."

I am sure that this was an important part of why our team was so successful.

In the end, I consider myself a living example of religious freedom in scientific research. In my 35 year involvement with the Shroud of Turin, I have always been treated with great respect by Christians, Jews and Muslims alike. All have shown understanding and consideration of my somewhat unique position. Even the atheists and skeptics I occasionally debate show a grudging respect for me. Perhaps even they have finally realized that I am only telling the truth. Ironically, I now teach a course on the Shroud every year at the Pontifical Seminary here in Rome! Imagine that! A Jewish man teaching future priests about the Shroud. No one is more amazed than I am.

But the story doesn’t end there. Shortly after building the website and stating publicly that I believed the Shroud was authentic based on the scientific evidence, people started asking me a new question: What do *you* believe? They were no longer asking me about the Shroud. They were asking me about my faith!

So at age 50, I had to confront my own beliefs for the first time as an adult. I had walked away from Judaism when I was 13 and never looked back. God was not a part of my life and I never even thought about religion. Now I was being forced to confront that which I had neglected or avoided for most of my life. I was raised in a very traditional Jewish home where God was part of everything every day, but I had rejected it all. So no one was more shocked than I was when I looked inside my heart! I discovered that God had been there all along, just waiting for me to acknowledge Him. With that knowledge, I had also rediscovered my own faith!

¹ "Report on the Shroud of Turin," John Heller, Macmillan, New York 1983

It is still hard for me to believe that 35 years have passed and today I am called an “expert” on the Shroud of Turin! How did that *happen*? This was never *my* idea. *I* didn’t decide to do this. I was dragged along, kicking and screaming and resisting. And yet, here I am! Standing in the Vatican addressing this esteemed audience!

Of course, over the years the Shroud has brought me to *many* places I never dreamed I would be. Last year I lectured on the Shroud in the little village in Poland where my mother was born, in the little white Catholic Church by the river that is still one of my 90 year old Jewish mother’s most vivid memories from her childhood. I have also traveled to most of the major cities in Poland, lecturing about the Shroud at schools and universities and a book came out recently (in Polish) based on 10 hours of interviews with me!² None of this could have happened were it not for the Shroud of Turin.

Later this year I will make my first visit to Jerusalem. For years my friends and colleagues have asked me if I had ever been to Israel and my response was always the same: “No, but if God wants me to go there, He’ll arrange it.” Ironically, my upcoming trip to Jerusalem is being sponsored by my dear friend Fr. Hector Guerra, a Catholic priest! God works in mysterious ways!

I truly believe that only God would think to choose a Jewish man who had no emotional attachment to Jesus, who was a total skeptic (and with a negative attitude I might add) and put him on that team! Ironically, I had learned as a child that the Jews were the Chosen People, but that never really meant anything to me and I never felt very “chosen.” Yet because of the Shroud, for the first time in my life, I truly *did* feel “chosen.” And all God asked me to do was tell the truth! If I had been asked to make up stories to convince people the Shroud was authentic, I would have failed miserably! But telling the truth, that’s easy!

I usually end my lectures by answering the question I posed at the beginning of this presentation. Remember? WHY would a Jewish man want to get involved with the most important relic of Christianity? It took me a long time to figure it out, but now the answer is obvious to me. God wanted me to do it! Isn’t it interesting that God always seems to pick a Jew to be the messenger! I am simply a messenger. And how many other Jews can claim that the Shroud of Turin brought them back to their own faith in God! Now if that isn’t religious freedom in scientific research, I don’t know *what* is!

Thank you very much!

² **Essence of Truth - A Jewish Man Investigates the Turin Shroud, Rosikon Press, Warsaw, Poland March 2012**