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Mark Oxley is a businessman and consultant living in Harare, Zimbabwe. He has a business importing wine from South Africa for distribution in Zimbabwe and also provides consultancy services in corporate governance, business planning and private sector development. His interest in the Shroud began when he was a schoolboy at a Jesuit college in Harare, where he saw a film about the Shroud made by Leonard Cheshire. Some years later he was further influenced by Ian Wilson's book The Turin Shroud. In the early 2000s he wrote a book, still unpublished, about St Luke, and having completed that he decided to pursue his interest in the Shroud by writing a book on the subject. His book, The Challenge of the Shroud, was published in 2010. More recently he has developed a particular interest in the spiritual aspects and significance of the Shroud. He is currently working on a book on the history of gold mining in Zimbabwe.

ABSTRACT

Walking a Fine Line Between Science and Faith

It should not matter to a Christian whether the Shroud of Turin is the genuine burial cloth of Jesus or a mediaeval forgery. For a Christian it bears the image of the crucified Christ, the salvation of humankind. It should not be critically important whether it is a genuine relic of the Crucifixion or not. We are past the age of relics. Of greater importance is what the image on the Shroud represents. The Shroud is an object of both scientific and religious interest. Religious interest is based on the image itself. It is the nature and detail of the image and how it was formed that is of interest to scientists, but there is a danger in combining scientific research with religious belief. When scientific investigation of the Shroud is seen to have religious objectives it loses credibility among secular researchers. Scientific investigation of the Shroud must therefore be seen to be purely scientific in nature – a search for the truth, however uncomfortable that truth might be. This means accepting the hypotheses of Shroud sceptics as being valid contributions towards finding the truth about the image. Those who believe the image to be that of the resurrected Christ and those who see the Shroud as a fake or forgery, as well as those in between who merely find it an object of mystery, should see each other as colleagues and collaborators rather than antagonists in that search for the truth. In May 1998 Pope John Paul II emphasised that the Shroud should be studied without pre-established positions. He urged scientists to act with interior freedom and attentive respect for both scientific methodology and the sensitivities of believers. It is a fine line to walk.