

THE TANGIBLE EMMANUEL
HOW THE SCRIPTURES SHED LIGHT ON THE
MEANING AND PRESENCE OF THE SHROUD
OF TURIN

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ABSTRACT

This paper will detail the Biblical principle of the Tangible Emmanuel (coined by author) in how God, who is with us, uses his creation to show forth His glory. Tracing several Biblical passages where God uses matter as a means to reveal His message, presence, or glory. The listener will be drawn into a deeper understanding of the connection between the spiritual and material realms. Once this is established, a brief understanding of the sacramental system (matter and spirit in our own time) will be outlined, and finally the Shroud of Turin will be discussed in great detail on how it fits into the Tangible Emmanuel. By understanding the Biblical actions of God, we can understand with greater clarity the presence of the Shroud of Turin and how this “Biblically unmentioned” cloth follows the logic and pattern of the actions of God as recorded in Sacred Scripture.

The conclusion of this paper will reveal that the Shroud’s presence should not necessarily be something that we should be astonished at, but rather, through tracing the Scriptural account of how God works in this world, we should almost expect something like the Shroud to come as a result of the crucifixion and the resurrection. It is the mysteries that lie within the cloth, more than its presence, which is rightfully the focus of our astonishment.

PAPER

Throughout time, mankind has employed theology as a means to grasp the various questions that plague our minds: What is the meaning of our lives? Why is there evil? Where do we come from? Where are we going?¹ These are just some of the questions that theology has engaged throughout the ages and continues to engage today.

In the Judeo-Christian religion, we have come to see our Creator, God, as a Trinity of Persons: Father, Son, and Spirit...our understanding of this God has come about through Revelation. In the Catholic Tradition, this Revelation is seen as coming in two forms: Tradition and Scripture. It is these two forms that prompted St. Paul in his Second Letter to the Thessalonians to say, “So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.”²

In examining the Scriptures in particular, we can come to a better understanding of how God, throughout the ages, has shown His glory to mankind, and how the Shroud of Turin is not just a mysterious paradox, but a piece that fits neatly into the understanding of what I call the Tangible Emmanuel, namely, that God, who is with us, uses the created world to show forth His glory.

It should be noted that this understanding of the Revelation of God, coming also in a tangible or empirical form is a subject that can be somewhat uncomfortable to those of religious beliefs that do not have a sacramental system. But, as human beings, we experience the world through our senses, through our experience. If we hold that God is our Creator, then He has created us with this capacity and has given us the gift to take the created world, these physical things in our lives, and impose meaning upon them. This ability for us to give meaning to the everyday object is a trait so coming in our human lives even outside of the religious context. As human beings, who drive in the United States, when we come across a hexagonal red metal sign, that physical sign isn’t just a piece of metal, it has been given meaning. We know that when we come across this sign we must STOP, lest we break the law, get a ticket, or run into another car. So, too, when a certain song comes on a radio, it might be pointless or a waste of airspace for someone, but to another, it might be the song of him and his girl. Immediately he is transported

back into the realization of his relationship with his girlfriend or spouse no matter where he might be or what he might be doing. Or to one person, a simple coffee mug might be just that, but to another, it could be the only remaining thing he has from his grandfather and to him, it is a priceless possession. As human beings we are meaning-makers, we have the gift to give meaning to the everyday physical objects of this physical world that we live in.³ If we hold that God created us as such, imagine how much more meaningful the physical world becomes if God uses the physical to show forth His glory. By looking at the Scriptures and the Shroud of Turin, we see that He does exactly this.

COVENANTS

The Scriptures are filled with countless accounts of how God uses the physical to show the spiritual, so many that it would not be feasible to list them all in this particular talk. For now, I would like to focus on the physical aspects of the major covenants of the Hebrew Scriptures or the Christian Old Testament. The following chart shows that in each of the covenants there are certain physical manifestations of God showing His glory, presence, and promise of the covenant to His people.

COVENANT/ROLE/FORM	SCRIPTURE REFERENCES	PHYSICAL MANIFESTATION(S)
<i>Adam & Eve</i> (Covenant of Works) Role: Husband Form: Marriage	Genesis 2-3	Garden of Eden given to them/taken away...love of God shown even after covenant is broken by God making them clothes of skins (Genesis 3:21, Elohist Source). Main Physical Sign: Sabbath/Day of Rest (not doing the physical)
<i>Noah</i> Role: Father Form: Household	Genesis 6-9	Main Physical Sign: Rainbow
<i>Abrahamic Covenant</i> Role: Tribal Chief Form: Tribe	Initially stated in Genesis 12:1-3, and confirmed in Genesis 12:6-7, 13:14-17, 15:1-21, 17:1-14, and 22:15-18	National land, numerous descendants, and Israel will be a blessing to all the nations of the earth. Main Physical Sign: Circumcision
<i>The Mosaic Covenant</i> Role: Judge Form: Nation	Exodus through Deuteronomy	Plagues of Egypt, Israel becomes a nation leading to the Promised land. Main Physical Sign: Passover/Passover Meal
<i>Davidic Covenant</i> Role: King Form: National Kingdom	2 Samuel 7:12-16 Confirmed in: Psalm 89: 3-4, 27-29, 33-37; Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 30:8-9; 33:14-17, 20-21; Ezekiel 37:24-25; Daniel 7:13-14; Hosea 3:4-5; Amos 9:11; and Zechariah 14:4, 9	Enlarged and confirmed the "seed/descendant" promises from the Abrahamic Covenant because of David building the temple. Main Physical Sign: Throne
<i>Jesus</i> Role: Royal High Priest Form: Church	Gospels, particularly Matthew 16:17-19; Matthew 26:26-29 (and other institution narratives); as well as Acts 2:1-4.	Church is established to guide people until Christ comes again. Main Physical Sign: New Passover/Eucharist

NEW TESTAMENT/GOSPEL OF JOHN—RECONQUERING OF EDEN

As we see, the Old Testament is filled with the physical means by which God shows His presence and His glory to mankind. In the New Testament, there are countless miracles that are documented of Jesus, of course, it is the Resurrection that is the central miracle of the Gospels

and the Christian faith. It is also the miracle of the resurrection that the Shroud, supposing it is authentic, is a witness of, and is particularly mentioned post-Resurrection in the Gospel of John, where John records: “Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.”⁴

The linen cloths are explicitly mentioned in the Gospel of John, and while no image is mentioned (the proposed reasoning has been explained by several authors so I will not go into that), the linen cloths actually fit with a central theme of the Gospel of John. In each Gospel, there are several themes that Biblical scholars and commentators have acknowledged, and, by locating where Jesus is *first called the “Son of God” publicly for all to hear*, we can see these particular themes. This chart shows us those Son of God passages and how they correspond to the theme of the particular Gospel:

GOSPEL	MAIN THEME(S)	SON OF GOD	CONTEXT
Matthew	Church/Faith/ perseverance to the End Times	Matthew 14:33 Matthew 16:16	-Peter's faith in Jesus while walking on water -Peter acknowledges who Jesus is/Jesus changes his name to Peter (rock)/promises to build His Church on Peter/will give him the keys to the kingdom
Mark	The Cross/Humanity of Jesus	Mark 15:39	Centurion's belief at the cross
Luke	Universal Covenant/Importance of Social Outcasts/Jerusalem	Luke 3:22	baptism of Jesus-heard by all vs. Mark 1:10 which is not publicly heard
John	Divinity of Jesus	John 1:34 John 1:49	-John the Baptist's account of who Jesus is -Nathaneal's belief from Jesus' prediction of him under the fig tree when no one was there

Notice that the Gospel of John is particularly concerned with the Divinity of Christ. He takes the humanity of Jesus as assumed and builds his gospel by immediately establishing Jesus' divinity and authority on earth by beginning His Gospel with the incredible prologue echoing the First Account of Creation of Genesis through the words “in the beginning”. Following this, John the Baptist acknowledges Jesus as the Son of God, and then Jesus follows with the prediction of Nathaneal, and John the evangelist chooses, in a unique way that strays from the Synoptics, to order His Gospel with the climatic and dooming cleansing of the temple right in the beginning of the Gospel to show Jesus' authority on earth, even over the Sadducees. The rest of the Gospel

continues this trend, constantly showing Jesus' divinity and earthly authority; even the crucifixion account in John's Gospel shows Jesus in control of His own death, with no sense of being troubled or being forced into it—He lays His life down, it is not taken from Him. This is a reading of the passion and death that is so different than the Synoptics⁵, one cannot help but see a difference and wonder the meaning. So, too, does the record of the tomb give us a glimpse to the divinity of Jesus, not by the tomb being empty, but precisely because the Shroud shows the disciples that something supernatural has happened, even though they do not understand the resurrection. It was the linen cloths, not the empty tomb that reveals to the apostles a divine event. The fact that two apostles were present at this event also confirms the truth of this event as Biblical Numerology affirms that the number "two" is a biblical number of truth, or a witness to the truth.⁶

Another trait of John's Gospel is the use of "dualism" or using two opposing words: day and night, going and abiding, etc. One of his most popular dualistic themes is that of seeing and not seeing and its connection with faith. Many can probably remember John 20:29 in which Jesus tells Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen me but still believe."⁷ In recalling this, one might assume that John is all about not seeing, but believing. However, in the numerous times that John uses the word or a variant of the word "see" in his gospel, the majority of those times he is referring to believing from seeing, and that it is something that is accepted! Consider just this small sampling:

REFERENCE	PASSAGE
John 1:14	And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
John 1:33-34	I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."
John 1:50	Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these."
John 3:11	Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.
John 3:32	He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony.
John 4:29	"Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"
John 4:45	So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast.
John 6:36	But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.

These passages, taken just from the beginning chapters of John's Gospel shows us that there is a connection between seeing and believing...God understands that it is part of our human nature to have that need of sight for belief. That does not mean, however, that there is no value in believing without seeing, in fact, the Thomistic reference above shows us that. What is clear though, is that John shows that Jesus understands the human need for seeing, and even appeals to it.

The Shroud, then, fits well with much of the message of John's Gospel, of the acceptance,

not necessarily the preference, of seeing and believing, and that of the Tangible Emmanuel, that God, who is with us, does use the material world to show forth His glory. By following the trend in the Gospel of Jesus allowing people to “see” before they “believe”, and given the fact that at every major covenant and throughout the Scriptures, God uses the physical world to show His glory and His presence, it would almost be expected that there be some type of physical sign to accompany the resurrection, and because of the type of event, a sign that would be lasting (more than just the earthquakes/etc. that we read in Matthew’s Gospel). We could almost expect something like the Shroud as a lasting signature of the Hebrew God’s action in the world and presence to His creation. In the tomb, *two* Apostles (witnesses) saw the cloths and believed.

RELICS/CALVIN/RATZINGER

Taking from these Biblical accounts of God using the created world to show forth His presence and glory, can we infer that this same mode is still done by God today, encountered largely in the human experience with the use and veneration of sacramentals and relics, not as magical objects that have a power within themselves, but rather, as physical signs that lead us to God incarnate, in particular, is the Shroud a sign of the Tangible Emmanuel even for today?

The Catholic Church recognizes three types of relics: First class which is actual bone or piece of the saint or holy object; Second class which is something owned by the saint; and Third class which is something that has touched a first or a second class relic. It is reasonable to understand why some are hesitant to accept a notion of value to these relics, it was certain abuses of relics during the Middle Ages, to which the Catholic Church has acknowledged and condemned, that prompted many, including Protestant Reformer John Calvin to speak out against relics. In his *Treatise on Relics* John Calvin holds that relics are invented by man and are nothing better than vanity and foolishness. He states that “to have relics is a useless and frivolous thing, which will most probably gradually lead towards idolatry, because they cannot be handled and looked upon without being honored, and in doing this men will very soon render them the honor which is due to Jesus Christ. In short, the desire for relics is never without superstition, and what is worse, it is usually the parent of idolatry.”⁸

These beliefs of Calvin are certainly understandable, but the fear of what can happen when people abuse what a relic is should not be cause to discredit what God might choose to use to show His glory and continued presence on earth. In fact, the Scriptures show God using all three of these “classes” of relics to display His glory and presence to mankind. In 2 Kings 13:21 we read: “And as a man was being buried, behold, a marauding band was seen and the man was thrown into the grave of Elisha, and as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet.”⁹ The bones of Elisha which God used to raise the dead man are an example of a first class relic. In Luke 8:43 we read “And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased. And Jesus said, “Who was it that touched me?” When all denied it, Peter said, “Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!” But Jesus said, “Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me.” And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.”¹⁰ In the other Synoptic Gospels they even mention the woman saying “If I only touch his garment, I will be made well.”¹¹ The garment of Jesus is a second class relic. Finally, in Acts 19:11 we read, “And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that

even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.”¹² These handkerchiefs and aprons are examples of third class relics. It is clear that the Scriptures do provide us with the acknowledgement that God can and does at times use these sacred physical objects to show His glory and relics are not “inventions of men”. Again, I am not saying that these physical objects have any supernatural powers in themselves, but Scripturally, they are shown to be used by God to show His glory. Therefore, it is completely in line with the Revelation of Scripture to venerate and hold to a sacred sense of value for these holy objects even today, the Shroud of Turin not being an exception.

PAULINE TYPOLOGY-SHROUD SHOWS PHYSICAL ARK OF COVENANT/PASSOVER

A relic of any kind, points to the reality that it represents; the Shroud points to Christ, His suffering, death, and resurrection. It is a reminder to us that in this life we must go through the crucifixion to reach the resurrection, and, while we can't escape suffering, suffering can be redemptive.

Biblically, when we talk of a passage that points to another passage in a symbolic, yet spiritually real sense, we call this typology. St. Paul uses this sense when he talks of Adam and Jesus: Romans 5:14 “Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.”¹³ I Corinthians 15:22 “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”¹⁴

In Pauline Theology, Adam is the “type” that precedes or foreshadows the “anti-type”, Jesus. In a similar way, we could say that the Shroud is the anti-type of the Ark of the Covenant. Just as it held the word of the Lord (the Ten Commandments), the Manna, and the priestly staff,¹⁵ so, too, did the Shroud hold the Word made Flesh¹⁶, the Bread of Life¹⁷, and the One High Priest¹⁸. In a similar way, we could see the Shroud as the anti-type of the Passover. The Passover was a physical memorial that was a perpetual sacrifice. While Christ's Passover, the sacrifice of the cross, and the Mass, are all rightly the anti-type of Passover, I would also dare to include the shroud in this litany, for as the Passover was the physical memorial of the Hebrews' salvation from the Egyptians by God, so, too, is the Shroud a physical memorial of the salvation by God in Christ Jesus. It is a lasting sign of this salvation.

SACRAMENTAL CHARACTER

I would be remiss if in discussing the understanding of how the Shroud of Turin fits into the concept of the Tangible Emmanuel, if I didn't mention the sacramental characteristics of the Shroud of Turin, particularly to the Churches with a sacramental system, in particular, the Catholic Church. A common definition of a sacrament is a visible sign instituted by God to bring forth His grace. While this isn't a complete nor is it necessarily the best definition of a sacrament, it will suffice for our current discussion.

If the Shroud is given to us by God, the truth that it is an instrument that God has used in the lives of countless people to bring them closer to God through meditating on its visible image, is testament to the fact that this visible sign given by God brings forth the invisible grace of conversion, and the grace of a deepening of faith. The “hidden image” in the Shroud is a sign pointing how the invisible is contained in the visible—always present but not always seen.

Sacramentally, the Shroud has a unique connection to Baptism and Eucharist, the two sacraments that also happen to be the obsessive focus of the Gospel of John, as discussed by Biblical scholar Oscar Cullman.¹⁹ The Eucharist is somewhat obvious, the image of the very Body of Christ, and the actual Blood of Christ is present on the cloth, not in a sacramental sign,

under the appearance of food and drink, but in its natural form and through a historical “touching” of the physical Jesus. Baptism (as well as a further Eucharistic sign) is seen in the wound in the side. On the Shroud, not only was blood found, but a watery serum from the pleural effusion that caused blood and water to flow from the side of Jesus when the lance pierced Him²⁰. The blood and water were commonly seen, and still are seen, as signs of Baptism and the Eucharist by many Churches. As the First letter of John states, “this is He who came by water and the blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.”²¹ Jesus came by water and the blood, He gives us the water and the blood, and it is with the water and the blood that we are cleansed and nourished. Furthermore, the Spirit, the water, and the blood testify to the Christ: “For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.”²² All of them witness to the Christ, all of them are instruments of Christ’s grace, and all of them are present on the Shroud! The water and blood physically, and the Spirit through its action upon the cloth.

ICON OF THE HYMN OF THE PHILIPPIANS

When all said and done, the Shroud of Turin is perhaps best the icon of the Great Hymn of Philipians in which St. Paul states that, “Though He was in the form of God, Jesus did not accept equality with God, something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied Himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of man. It was thus that He humbled Himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted Him, and bestowed upon Him the name above every other name. So, at the name of Jesus, every knee must bend in the heavens, upon earth, and under the earth, and every tongue proclaim to the glory of God the Father that Jesus Christ is Lord!”²³ The Shroud shows us these aspects of Jesus’ life...the emptying of Himself in the suffering of the cross; the divine equality and exaltation of Him in the mysterious image. “The movement toward the image does not terminate in it as an image, but tends toward that whose image it is.”²⁴

I would like to leave you today with a quote from our late friend, Fr. Kim Driesbach, whosaid the following in the 2001 Dallas Conference: “Science can never say that the Shroud of Turin is authentic, at best it can do is say that this probably wrapped the historical Jesus. But the question that faith asks of you, the question that theology asks of us, is „Who do you say that I am? ”²⁵ The Shroud should never be used to base one’s faith upon, but when used correctly, it can be a powerful tool to meditate and reflect upon the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the reality of the Tangible Emmanuel.

NOTES

¹ Pope John Paul II. Fides et Ratio. Boston. Pauline Books & Media, 1998. (1)

² 2 Thessalonians 2:15

³ These examples and the idea of human beings as “meaning-makers” were presented to me in a Christian Anthropology class taught by Fr. Patrick Manning at the Pontifical College Josephinum in Columbus, Ohio 2005-2006.

⁴ John 20:1-9

⁵ Compare John 10:14-18; 5:13-14; 18:3-19:30 with Mark 14:18-15:37, focusing on how Jesus dies and how He is arrested. John’s Gospel clearly portrays Jesus as more “in control”, striking fear in the soldiers, giving over His life; while Mark portrays Him as sorrowful, afraid, and releasing a loud cry at His death.

⁶ This particularly has basis from Deuteronomy 17:16; 19:15; and Matthew 18:16 where the testimony of truth is established on two or three witnesses. For further information, see any book on Biblical Numerology such as: Bullinger, E.W. Number in Scripture. New York, Cosmo Classics 2005.

⁷ John 20:29

⁸ Calvin, John. Treatise on Relics. BibleExplore.com. 15 June 2008.

- <<http://www.godrules.net/library/calvin/176calvin4.htm>>.
- 9 2 Kings 13:21
 - 10 Luke 8:43-48
 - 11 cf. Matthew 9:21; Mark 5:25
 - 12 Acts 19:11-12
 - 13 Romans 5:14
 - 14 1 Corinthians 15:20
 - 15 Contents of Ark as seen in: Exodus 16:33-34; 25:10-16; Numbers 17:10; and Hebrews 9:1-5
 - 16 In the incarnation the Word of God, becomes the Son of God in Jesus Christ.
 - 17 John 6:48
 - 18 The Letter of Hebrews has as its central theme Jesus the High Priest (cf. 3:1, 4:14, 6:20).
 - 19 Cullman, Oscar. Early Christian Worship. Lima, Ohio. Wyndham Hall Press, 1987.
 - 20 John 19:34
 - 21 1 John 5:6
 - 22 1 John 5:7-8
 - 23 Philippians 2:6-11
 - 24 St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica II-II, 81, 3 ad 3.
 - 25 Fr. Kim Driesbach, Dallas International Conference of the Shroud of Turin, 2001.