

Shroud of Turin researcher, educator to speak

Knights of Columbus sponsoring presentations by photographer from 1978 scientific study team

BY JEAN PARIETTI



Barrie Schwartz

It seems improbable — a Jewish man traveling far and wide to tell Christians why he believes the Shroud of Turin is the true burial cloth of Jesus Christ.

But that's just what Barrie Schwartz has found himself doing, nearly 35 years after he traveled to Italy as a documenting photographer for the Shroud of Turin Research Project, a group of scientists who studied the shroud in 1978.

"We went there to answer one question: How is the image formed?" Schwartz said from his home in Colorado. "We didn't go there to prove it was Jesus or prove it was the Resurrection. Our goal was to simply go and figure out how the image was formed."

Although the team couldn't answer that question, 18 years later the team's work convinced Schwartz of the shroud's authenticity. Since then, it has been his mission to disseminate fact-based information and images on his website, www.shroud.com, and through presentations and lectures — including a short course this April at the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum in Rome.

"I feel an obligation as someone privileged to be in that room" with the shroud, Schwartz said of his work. "The man upstairs saw fit for me to be the eyes and ears for the people who couldn't be in the room."

And, he said, "I've got a lot of credibility because everyone knows I'm not Christian."

Science and faith intersect

Next week, Catholics around Western Washington will have a chance to hear Schwartz talk about the shroud in person and see some of the photographs he took in 1978. An eight-city tour begins March 2 in Monroe; most of the talks are sponsored by local Knights of Columbus councils (see box).

The idea took off when John Sickelton, a member of the Church of the Assumption in Bellingham, asked Knights of Columbus Bellingham Council 829 if it would support a Schwartz tour. Sickelton, who said he became friends with Schwartz after contacting him a few years ago, said Schwartz "presents the science behind the Shroud of Turin and pretty much lets you decide."

Joe St. Hilaire, a Knight and fellow Assumption parishioner who is helping organize the tour, said he thinks most people don't know much about the shroud.

"The more you read about it and study it, the more convinced you are of its veracity — the fact that it truly is the burial cloth Jesus was wrapped in," he said. "I'm always interested when science and faith intersect. If science can help to broaden and improve our faith, that's a good thing," he said.

Schwartz also will make presentations to students at Assumption School in Bellingham and St. Luke School in Shoreline. "We're really excited," said Assumption Principal Monica Des Jarlais. The shroud is "a symbol of our faith," she said, and learning more about the shroud will give her K-8 students a chance to deepen their relationship with Jesus as part of their Lenten journey.

Learning more about the shroud, Sickelton said, makes him more certain that the image on the shroud is Jesus. "It's just an amazing thing," Sickelton said. "I think he left this imprint here for all people to understand he was really here."

Honored to be chosen

In his talks, Schwartz will take people behind the scenes of the 1978 shroud study: "what we did, how we examined it, how difficult it was, the work we did in reducing the data and publishing it in peer-reviewed literature," he said.

At the time, the conventional wisdom was that the shroud was a painting, scorch or rubbing, likely from medieval times, Schwartz said. Even with all the tests the team did, "we could tell you what it's not, but we could not tell you what it was," he said.

Many people might remember the carbon dating tests done by three labs in 1988, which determined the shroud originated in medieval times. Years later, however, it was discovered that the sample was taken from an area of the shroud that had been repaired during that era.

Schwartz didn't become convinced of the shroud's authenticity himself until 1995, when he learned there was a scientific reason the blood on the shroud remained a dark red. It contained a high level of bilirubin, which can occur when someone is tortured and deprived of water for hours, and "blood of that ilk tends to remain red for a very long time," Schwartz said.

Now, he says, "I believe that the Shroud of Turin is the cloth that wrapped the body of Jesus after he was brought off the cross and laid in the tomb." All the injuries Jesus suffered, as written in the Gospels, are reflected in the shroud image, Schwartz said.

Although not a Christian, Schwartz said the shroud has had an impact on his life. He rediscovered God at age 50 when he began giving talks on the shroud and people wanted to know what he believed.

"How many Jews can say that their faith in God was renewed by the Shroud of Turin?" Schwartz asked. And spreading the word about the shroud has given "a real purpose to my life," he said. "I'm very honored to have been chosen for this task."

SHROUD OF TURIN TALKS

Barrie Schwartz will speak about the Shroud of Turin in seven Western Washington communities March 2–7. Most presentations are sponsored by local Knights of Columbus councils; admission is free, but donations to help cover expenses may be requested at some locations.

Saturday, March 2

Monroe – 7 p.m., St. Mary of the Valley Church, 601 W. Columbia St.

Sunday, March 3

Bremerton – 9:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., Our Lady Star of the Sea Church, Cammerman Hall, 500 Veneta Ave.

Vancouver – 7 p.m., St. John the Evangelist Church, 8701 N.E. 119th St.

Monday, March 4

Vancouver – 9 a.m., St. Joseph Church, 400 S. Andresen Road.

Everett – 7 p.m., St. Mary Magdalen Church, 8517 Seventh Ave. S.E.

Tuesday, March 5

Seattle – 7 p.m., Knights of Columbus Council 676 Hall, 722 E. Union St.

Call 206-325-3410 to reserve a seat.

Wednesday, March 6

Bellingham – 7 p.m., Church of the Assumption, 2116 Cornwall Ave.

Thursday, March 7

Lynden – 1 p.m. and 7 p.m., Northwest Washington Fairgrounds Rotary Building, 1775 Front St.

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