

Combined Review of: “The Sign” by Thomas de Wesselow
and “Resurrected or Revived?” by Helmut Felzmann

Historical and Religious Aspects

Now that the Easter season has come and gone, the inevitable Resurrection naysayer publications have hit the bookstore shelves and online websites.

Most notably, this year we have *The Sign: The Shroud of Turin and the Secret of the Resurrection* by Thomas de Wesselow and *Resurrected or Revived?* by Helmut Felzmann.

De Wesselow, an art historian, researched the Shroud for seven years to tell the reader that the image was caused by some natural process that he or no one else can adequately explain. This image then became the origin for the greatest misunderstanding in the history of mankind. The monumental confusion stems from the theory postulated by de Wesselow that the image on the Shroud is what the first disciples saw, not a physically resurrected Jesus.

According to de Wesselow, the Shroud was retrieved from the body of a dead Christ. Later, Jesus was re-wrapped in new burial garments and his body left to decompose in keeping with traditional Jewish burial customs. The bones then would have been placed in an ossuary and lost to history with the passage of time.

To the first Christians, the Shroud became the “risen Christ” according to de Wesselow. De Wesselow explains this by introducing “animism” (the attribution of life to inanimate things) and “anthropomorphism” (to credit with human-like thoughts and emotions) to his conjecture. These two concepts, coupled with the superstitions of an unsophisticated people, leave “no reason to doubt” that the Shroud figure would have been viewed “as a living presence” in the first century.

So the reader must now accept that Paul’s dramatic conversion was due to viewing the Shroud; and the 500 in Corinthians described by Paul as having seen the risen Christ was nothing but the display of a cloth. Further straining credulity, is de Wesselow’s notion that the apostles, by viewing a cloth, could have launched the teachings of Christianity in the face of extreme hardship and the most horrific deaths.

However, most implausible may be de Wesselow’s belief that thousands of Jews steeped in centuries of Jewish tradition, who took no notice of Christ’s teachings during his lifetime, now cast all that aside post Crucifixion merely by viewing an image on a cloth.

De Wesselow explains the Shroud’s disappearance in Edessa in modern day Turkey as the final step in creating the great misunderstanding. With the cloth gone from sight and the passage of time, the Shroud displays following the Crucifixion morph into a body and blood resurrection. According to de Wesselow, this myth becomes the prevailing basis for today’s Christianity.

Felzmann takes another approach and proposes that Christ survived His Crucifixion; then almost immediately set out visiting the apostles and wanting to preach again in public. All of this supposedly occurs with the aid and protection of the Essenes, a controversial group of holy men and women of which little is reliably known.

First, however it is necessary for Felzmann to prove that Christ survived the Crucifixion. He supports this theory by referring to the work of the late Prof. Wolfgang Bonte, a credentialed forensic scientist. Bonte proposed that the blood stain patterns on the Shroud and other indicators show that Christ was alive when wrapped in his burial garments. It should be noted that this conclusion is shared by only a few in the field and is contrary to all mainstream research conducted by numerous eminently qualified forensic scientists.

Felzmann asserts that Christ was alive when taken from the cross, which enhanced the possibility for natural body encoding to occur (similar to de Wesselow's natural process causing the image) and create the unique image on the Shroud. Here Felzmann introduces an unproven methodology described as the reaction of a warm body (necessarily alive) and body enzymes acting on cloth to produce an image.

Felzmann speculates that a living Christ is rescued from the tomb by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea because both men are Essenes and essential to this grand hoax. The Essene writings on which Felzmann relies describe a post Crucifixion Christ in a weakened state, desperately wanting to be with his disciples while being hotly pursued by Caiaphas (a Jewish high priest) and his underlings.

After several meetings with his followers, including the well-known "doubting Thomas" encounter, Christ retreats to safety at an Essene community near the Dead Sea and dies only days later. These accounts by Felzmann's admission are in "reasonable doubt." Most scholars disregard these texts finding it totally implausible that Jesus, ravaged by crucifixion and succumbing to death from those wounds, could have possibly inspired the apostles to go forth and spread the message of Christianity.

Felzmann also takes us through the flawed process of the Shroud carbon 14 dating. His work is thorough and uncovers many of the shortcomings surrounding the 1988 attempt by three prestigious labs to accurately date the age of the Shroud.

Unfortunately, much of this fine work is overshadowed by rather blatantly accusing the Church of perpetrating a fraud. This fraud or conspiracy surrounds the 1988 Shroud test samples being "replaced by bogus ones." Felzmann further asserts, "the motives of the Church are to devalue the Shroud and to make it seem unauthentic," presumably to discourage further research that would verify his theory that Christ was alive post Crucifixion. Consequently, "the magical salvation and resurrection story is thrown into the theological trash heap of history."

After mind numbing research, both authors apparently arrive at Christ's tomb with no clear explanations for the Easter mystery. At this point, as all confirmed nonbelievers must do, they develop a theory - no matter how dubious - that allows them to continue with their preconceived notions. They each took a different approach using the Shroud as their path to a "reasoned" answer to the Resurrection miracle. Both authors should take note of a comment from the common sense mind of G. K. Chesterton, "reason is fine until it becomes unreasonable."

Since most of the evidence derived from the Shroud is scientific, a focus on the authors' scientific bases is essential in understanding their overall positions.

Scientific and Contemporary Aspects

Both Felzmann and de Wesselow rely prominently on the scientific research of Raymond Rogers in formulating their respective views that either the live or decomposing body of Jesus naturally caused his images on the Shroud. Both also rely on Rogers' scientific research to suggest that either a foreign repair piece was unwittingly carbon dated in 1988 or that foreign samples were intentionally switched with the Shroud samples by the Church and their supporters. For this reason, it is important to review some of the underlying scientific methods and findings relied upon by the authors.

According to Felzmann, Rogers claims that during the Shroud's production its spun fibers were individually moistened with a paste of crude starch as other ancient linen supposedly received. The complete or woven Shroud was then washed in *saponaria officinalis* or soapwort, a soap-like solution, and then laid out to dry. De Wesselow explains that when the water thus evaporated a thin layer of carbohydrates containing starch or sugar then resulted throughout the surface of the entire Shroud. Rogers claims as Jesus' corpse decomposed and putrefied that it gave off amines or amino acids in a gas diffusion that would have reacted with a reducing sugar as a form of non-enzymatic browning or carmelization that resulted in the unique body images on the Shroud of Turin. While such a series of events has never occurred in history, there are a number of reasons why they could not have occurred with the Shroud.

There is no evidence on the Shroud's body images of a decomposing body, yet by definition the body in this image forming hypothesis would have been decomposing. Furthermore, there is no evidence or any decomposition stains at any location on the Shroud, nor is there any evidence of sugar on the Shroud or the distribution of starch as hypothesized by Rogers. At orifices like the mouth, the stains would be the most visible by this method; but some of the best resolution is actually found at this location on the Shroud image. The corpse's temperatures would also vary from its dorsal to its frontal side and its extremities, yet no such correlations are found on the Shroud's body images. The chemical reaction within the Maillard reaction will not even occur unless the corpse's temperature is 104^o F (40^o C) or more. Since the dead body in the Shroud first went into rigor mortis while it was in the vertical crucifixion position, it is extremely unlikely any part of this coldblooded corpse would have been at such a high temperature when it was subsequently buried in a cool tomb, as in the case of Jesus.

Even assuming every undocumented reaction of this hypothesis, it would not produce uniform coloring on all the individually colored image fibers found throughout the length and width of the full-length frontal and dorsal body images. This necessarily means it could not encode the three-dimensional and vertically directional information also found throughout the full-length Shroud body image. Nor would this method produce negative images that contain highly-resolved, detailed images of a man when they are photographed. The Shroud's body image fibers are also uniformly encoded 360^o around each individual fiber. This method cannot encode individual fibers in such a manner. The same shortcomings in this paragraph, as well as others, apply to Felzmann's live body method.

The lack of scientific understanding and rigor on the part of both authors is very apparent. They only focus on a few of the Shroud's many features when discussing their naturalistic methods,

while failing to notice the multitude of body image and blood mark features their methods fail to encode. The authors also ignore many other image forming methods that account for or duplicate far more of the Shroud's features than their methods. They fail to recognize that all sorts of diffusion, vapograph, direct contact and various combinations of these and other naturalistic methods have been tested over the course of a hundred years, but all have noticeably failed. Millions of people have also died and been covered with burial shrouds, sheets, blankets, jackets etc. over their bodies. None have left images that approach the unique and unfakable human body images and blood marks found on the Shroud. Many millions more have been similarly covered under many circumstances while alive without leaving body images or blood stains approaching those of the Shroud. Yet, despite the repeated failures of all naturalistic methods by experiments and by natural design, both authors confidentially assert that their naturalistic methods would work.

Both authors also emphasize Rogers' claim that the Shroud samples he studied had a different chemical composition than other Shroud samples; however, the "other" Shroud samples referenced by Rogers came from the edges of water stains, where chemicals are typically deposited by the flow of water. Moreover, when 13 threads taken from the same area as Rogers' samples were examined by STURP using X-ray fluorescence analysis they showed the same relative concentrations of calcium, strontium and iron that were measured throughout the entire Shroud cloth. Due to physical limitations these were the only chemical elements that could be measured in 1978; however, these three elements are distributed throughout the entire Shroud linen. This chemical comparison not only makes a medieval or 16th century repair hypotheses extremely remote, but it completely outweighs the non-elemental findings in Rogers' 2005 *Thermochimica Acta* publication that was clearly relied upon by the authors.

Significantly, when scientists at the University of Arizona's radiocarbon laboratory examined samples remaining from their 1988 dating of the Shroud by UV fluorescence and photomicrographic analysis they found no evidence of any coatings or dyes as indicated by Rogers. They also found no evidence to support Rogers' or the author's position that their radiocarbon sample did not derive from the main part of the Shroud. When Italian scientists examined Shroud samples removed from the same area as Rogers' samples, they too found the samples resembled those taken from the rest of the Shroud. Similarly, the detailed, close-up inspections of the front and back sides of the Shroud by textile and other experts also refute the views of Rogers, the authors and others who suggest the Shroud samples tested in 1988 came from an invisibly repaired region or were not taken from the main part of the cloth.

The authors also overlook the scientific evidence indicating that the body images on the Shroud resulted from a dehydration and oxidation process that develops over time. The Shroud's body images were probably not visible for centuries. This simple fact, as opposed to the authors' outrageous 1st century conspiracies, best explains why no Shroud-like image is mentioned in the first several centuries after Jesus burial. No description of an image like the one on the Shroud is found anywhere in history until the sixth century, when the image either developed or was found after having been hidden away for centuries. If Christ left his image on his burial cloth, it would have clearly been mentioned. Yet no biblical, apostolic or other writings mention such a unique image until the sixth century. The scientific, biblical and historical evidence all refute the authors' assumption of an immediate image (as well as many of De Wesselow's and Felzmann's other positions).

In summary, what distinguishes the above books from most other Shroud books are the authors' conclusions regarding

- 1) How the Shroud's images were formed,
- 2) The conspiratorial actions of the Church and their colleagues regarding the Shroud's radiocarbon samples and Jesus' resurrection,
- 3) The physical condition and actions of Jesus following his crucifixion,
- 4) The actions of the apostles and Jesus' followers following the events of Easter.

Unfortunately, all of the authors' above contentions are based on little, if any, scientific or other credible evidence. Instead they are largely, if not completely, based on conjecture and illogical interpretations.

Felzmann and de Wesselow also erroneously claim or imply that their unsupported contentions will or should have enormous effects on the public's religious beliefs. These conclusions are not only based on speculative and undocumented evidence, but they understate or ignore the nature and extent of the objective and independent evidence that has been documented from decades of scientific and medical examination of the Shroud. As their own failed methods confirm, most of this extensive evidence is not only unfakable, but is consistent with the Shroud's authenticity as the burial garment of the historical Jesus Christ. Moreover, the documented evidence is actually consistent with every element of the passion, crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ as these events are described in the Gospels.

The realization that Christianity has hundreds of unfakable items of scientific and medical evidence to confirm the central tenets of Christianity and the most critical events in all of history, which are contained in the most reliable and textually attested sources of antiquity, could have unprecedented consequences throughout the world. No other religion has any objective evidence to confirm the central tenets or critical events of their religion, let alone an exhaustive amount of such evidence. Overwhelming, objective evidence — along the lines of a 150 – 0 shutout when compared to any contrary religious or other view — would impress the listener whether agnostic, atheist or a member of any other religion.

Unfortunately, religion causes, contributes to or is an underlying element in numerous wars and conflicts that are occurring throughout the world. While such wars and conflicts have always occurred throughout history, their numbers are increasing. Furthermore, the means of destruction by the combatants have become alarming. These underlying religious differences and conflicts go back centuries. Wars and conflicts have not and cannot eliminate these differences. Worse yet, they have perpetuated and deepened the differences and hostilities among the combating religions. Overwhelming, objective, and independent evidence for one religion, with the lack of any such evidence for other religions, would allow sectarian combatants throughout the world to end these unnecessary wars and conflicts.

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