

Kurt Berna's Extended Explanation of Survival from the Cross Based on the Shroud of Turin

Berna stated that all the reports about the death of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels, were true, considering the definition of death at that time. Berna included a very lengthy quote from one Dr. Theodor Hirt, a professor of a German university, and we will reproduce portions of it here. These quotes appear in Berna's now out-of-print book between pages 46-69, and any emphasis is mine:

“Now, not only medical men but every layman knows that blood in the hair dries quickly, blood and hair together forming a hard crust. As no fabric absorbs dried blood, the traces visible on the Shroud can have originated only from the blood that was flowing from open wounds...

“We can take it for granted that the crown of thorns was not moved at all from the time he gave up the ghost and his head fell forward until he was removed from the cross. It is absolutely certain that in the hour or so that passed before the removal from the cross, any blood which remained on the head, the back and the forehead, dried up and was congealed, because this is the natural behavior of blood which leaves the body and is exposed to air...

“What happens to a corpse if a crown of thorns is removed, leaving small wounds on the skin at the back of the head? Nothing, absolutely nothing. There is no blood pressure in a dead body, and, as everybody who understands anything about human blood circulation knows, without pressure blood does not flow from a wound...

“Once death has ensued, blood circulation in the human body follows the same law. At one moment a person's skin may still be a reddish flesh-color because the blood penetrates to the capillaries, the hair-thin vessels just below the surface of the skin. But when the heart stops pumping, by the same law of nature that applies to the test with the glass tube, the veins draw the blood back. As a result, the capillaries are the first vessels to be emptied of blood because they are at the extreme end of the circulatory system. As the blood retracts, the skin of the deceased turns white.

“This is what happens to a corpse some eight to ten hours after the heart has ceased to beat—not only does no blood flow from open wounds because there is no pressure, but the blood retracts a little in the veins.

“But what happens [at the removal of the crown of thorns] if here is blood pressure--that is, if the heart is still beating? The little wounds fill with blood; the blood flows from the head into the hair; and because it keeps flowing, it trickles through the hair onto the Shroud—as we can see on the Shroud of Jesus. That is why it cannot have been a corpse that was in the Shroud—the body was not dead. We can all see the evidence on the Shroud, as revealed by a camera nineteen hundred years later—and the camera does not lie...It is so obvious and easy to understand that I am certain you have followed my reasoning...”

“As we look at it we immediately notice the wounds which would seem to have been caused by scourging. When the body was taken off the cross and carried away, it was inevitably pulled, stretched and bent in the process, with the result that the wounds were ripped open and bleeding started again. Other significant points in the picture are marked with arrows and capital letters. Starting at the top, the letter A denotes the patches of blood from the wounds made by the crown of thorns. Furrows on the forehead are the explanation for the curious shape of the particular patch which looks like figure 3. The fresh blood that flowed from these wounds is further proof that the heart was still active. Every single drop of blood that had earlier been on the forehead must have dried by the time the body was removed. The mark is

important because it could have been made only when the crown of thorns was removed and the wounds on the forehead reopened...

“Letter C refers to the wound in the side of the body. It is on the right breast in line with the armpits between the fifth and sixth rib, a little below and somewhat to the side of the right nipple. The size of the wound is about two inches by half an inch. Letter D refers to a small wound which, in 1948, was diagnosed as having been caused almost certainly by the point of a lance extruding after it had transfixed the body. We shall return to these two lance wounds later.

“Letter E indicates bleeding from the nail wound from which blood flowed in three directions; to this I shall also return later...Letter G refers to the instep of the right foot which also shows traces of blood. All these points emerge because of the novel form of photographic presentation; this also applies to photographs which you will see in due course...”

“Let us now turn to the enlargement of the photograph of the crossed hands (Picture 13). I do not want to take credit that is not due to me and must explain that we owe the next few photographs to the research of a man who reached the same conclusion as I—that it was not a corpse which was placed in the Shroud—but by an entirely different approach...

“Let us move on to Pictures 16 and 17, which are enlargements of the nail wound, each showing the three streaks of blood. Let us concentrate first on blood streaks Numbers 1 and 2 (leaving aside for the time being streak Number 3, which the experts, owing to the confusion caused by Barbet’s mistake, were unable to diagnose). Picture 17 shows the spaces between the blood streaks in the correct measurements, and I invite you to read the big caption which will make it easier for you to understand what I have to say. In the meantime I shall get a protractor with which you can check these measurements...”

“You will have noticed that Dr. Barbet estimated the angle between the two streaks of blood at five degrees. Knowing that the arms of a crucified person were so far extended, and that it was virtually impossible for the body to be lowered and raised, Dr. Barbet judged the flow of blood (as in streaks 1 and 2) on the assumption that the person on the cross was in the position typical for a man in his predicament. As far as he was concerned, the case was quite clear, particularly since an injury to the heart caused by the lance was accepted as fact.

“Had Dr. Barbet determined the direction of the two blood streaks with a protractor, he would have realized at once that they could not have occurred at such an angle while the body was nailed to the cross. One of the streaks must have originated when blood later came from the nail wound, which is the only feasible scientific explanation. Had research concentrated on the reconstructions which were made twenty years after, it would have been found, either in 1935 or later, that it was not a corpse that had reposed in the Turin Shroud of Jesus. Because of Barbet’s lapse, it took thirty years longer to draw the correct conclusions from the evidence on the Shroud.

“Looking at Picture 18 and the following photographs, need I remind you that water does not get to the top of a mountain unless it is pumped. The same principle applies to blood circulation in the human body. Whether the body is in an upright or a horizontal position the flow of blood above the heart depends on pressure. Whilst we must not forget that a corpse does not bleed, we need to be reminded that ‘active bleeding’ is caused by heart pressure, which means that the heart must pump the blood to the point where pressure causes it to exude from the wound.

“As you observe the many blood streaks in the following pictures, you should remember this principle; such streaks could only be the result of pressure from the heart. Had the heart stood still for thirty minutes or an hour, blood on the skin would have dried up and could not have

left stains on the Shroud. But, as there are bloodstains on the Shroud which indicate that the blood on the skin was still fresh and liquid, the heart must have been active.

“The other reconstructions show the position of the body and of the arm at the time of active bleeding. They enable us to observe the activity of the heart at every stage--while the position of the body changed shortly before and during the removal from the cross, and when it was placed in the Shroud.

“Pictures 19 and 20 are reconstructions in the same category...”

“In support of my criticism I can point to page 156 of his book where it says: ‘Looking closely at the left wrist on the Shroud one sees two rivulets of blood originating in the same central zone, the nail wound. They diverge slightly at an angle of approximately five degrees.’ You will note...that he speaks of an estimated five degrees. If he had measured the exact proportions he would have referred to thirty-four and twenty degrees, respectively...”

“Let us now turn from Barbet...to the most interesting scientific implication of the third streak of blood. Evidence on the Shroud proving activity of the heart during the body’s removal from the cross was bound to lead scientists to look for traces of even later bleeding. One instance is the blood from the back of the head with which we dealt this morning. The next photograph (Picture 21) provides further proof of heart activity while the body was in the Shroud. It shows the hands crossed; it also shows the direction of blood streak 3, which comes from the nail wound. Bearing in mind the position of the body in the Shroud, it becomes obvious that only pressure from the heart could force blood to come from the wound. The left hand was at the highest point of the prone body and blood does not flow upward in the body without pressure (see also the following photographs). There can be no possible doubt that blood streak 3 came into being when the body was laying flat, because careful and extensive reconstructions of the angles and the respective distances of the blood streaks from each other prove that this bleeding could not have occurred earlier.

“Reconstruction of blood streak 3, though comparatively simple, became possible only when the body, correctly positioned, could be depicted in natural color. A sketch was made of the approximate position of the body in the Shroud (picture 22) with an arrow pointing to the wound made by the nail and showing where the blood emerged from this wound when the body was in this position.

“As we have already said, blood cannot flow upward in the human body, anymore than water can flow uphill, without a pump. Moreover, blood does not circulate in a corpse. Without the pumping of the heart, blood could not have flowed from the nail wound.

“Another arrow in the photograph points to the forehead and to the curious shape, almost like a figure 3 drawn in the blood (Picture 23). Is it possible that this bleeding occurred on the cross? How could blood, which had been on the surface of the body, (i.e., on the skin) for sixty minutes or more, remain so fresh and liquid that it was soaked up by the Shroud? Depending on the temperature outside, blood on the human skin congeals within fifteen or twenty minutes and forms a hard crust which cannot be absorbed by cloth, as you can easily test for yourself...Since only the heart’s activity forces blood to the surface, this means blood flows from the wound only if there is no interference. In the case of the Shroud, which is what we are concerned with, the continued flow of blood indicates that there was activity of the heart...

“We can therefore assume with certainty that the blood forming the figure 3 on the forehead emerged from the wound when a thorn of the crown of thorns was removed--that is, after the execution. As with the blood from the back of the head, the figure 3 on the forehead proves that the heart in the body of Jesus was still active at this stage.

“Let us look more closely at the curious shape of this blood crust. Tests have shown that it could not have formed in this way while the head was upright, but only when the body was lying flat. Flowing slowly, the blood was held up by the first furrow on the brow, where it widened a little. As more blood came, it flowed on to the next furrow; this is how the figure 3 came about. This was only possible while the body was in the lap of the mother—if the crown of thorns had been removed by that time; or, more likely, when the mother helped to remove the crown of thorns and put the body in the Shroud. At this point a cushion may have been placed under the Shroud raising the head obliquely—the measurements taken by Professor L. Ferri, the Italian scientist, would seem to bear this out.

“Whatever happened, it is clear that the body did not lie flat in the Shroud. The interval between the removal of the loincloth and the placing of the Shroud over the body, thus soaking up all the blood, was sufficient for the figure 3 on the forehead and streak 3 coming from the nail wound to be formed. To recapitulate: the warmth of the body in conjunction with other chemico-physical reactions due to the aloe impregnation produced a negative imprint of the body—the ‘snapshot’ which has preserved the details of Jesus’ crucifixion for posterity.”

Reading Dr. Hirt’s excerpt causes us to ask a question: Could the reason that scientists remain baffled (except for Vignon, Dr. Hirt, Dr. Garza Valdes [more later], and writer Holger Kersten) over how the image was made be because they are beginning their research with the assumption that the Man of the Shroud was dead? Let us continue with Dr. Hirt’s narrative:

“I should like to sum up by emphasizing that we have so much evidence and so many testimonials about the activity of the heart in Jesus’ body during and after his removal from the cross that it can never be disproved...”

“But the whole Bible contains not a single word about a lance [actually] piercing the heart. It speaks only of ‘a stab in the side,’ as the clergymen among you will confirm...”

[Dr. Hirt’s assistant, Dr. Ernst, took over]:

“For the same reason we must take serious account of Picture 27, which shows the organs in the human chest. The position of the wound in the side, which is generally accepted to have been between the fifth and sixth rib, makes an injury to the heart unlikely...”

“But you must not think that we relied on these illustrations. On the contrary, control X-ray pictures were made; and, in some cases, in order to guard against prejudice, the people concerned were not told the purpose for which the photographs were taken. The results showed that only an approximately horizontal incision or stab could have injured the heart. Pictures 28 and 29 are X-ray photographs of a human chest, upon which a lance of equivalent size has been superimposed so as to give a clear idea of the direction of the stab, and to the nature of the wound caused by the extrusion of the lance. But, irrespective of the small extrusion wound, the supposition that the stab was vertical is scientifically invalid and no more than an unproved assumption. It is time the assertion that the body in the Shroud of Turin had suffered an injury to the heart was officially retracted because it is based not on scientific research but on an artificially constructed hypothesis based on faith.

“However much one may sympathize with the pro-church sentiments which inspired it, the clear and incontrovertible evidence produced by Professor Hirt by means of the Shroud shows that the highly publicized accounts of this injury do not accord with the facts.

“Of the last two illustrations appertaining to the lance wound, Picture 30 is another control picture of the chest with the front ribs painted in or made clearer. The stab is shown between the fifth and sixth ribs, which is what the investigation leads one to assume. As we can see, the stab with the lance does not injure the heart.

“Picture 31 has been withheld until now because it refers to an aspect which has so far not attracted any attention. In our view it was not an important piece of evidence, because the

activity of the heart is sufficiently proved by the bleeding which occurred after the removal from the cross. And this, in turn, rules out any injury to the heart”

[Dr. Ernst went on to explain that further study showed that the lance entered the heart not between the fifth and sixth ribs, but between the fourth and fifth. But in this case also, the lance would have missed the heart, according to Dr. Ernst]:

“Not one of these persons mentioned have done their own research in this special blood case; they are all repeaters of a more than seventy-year-old meaning. In scientific fact, no post-mortem bleedings are on the Holy Shroud, because the position of the marks and the blood serum borders around the ‘identified human blood’ prove active bleeding as a result of heart activity. The existence of serum borders requires the existence of activity of fibrin in blood outflow. Post-mortem blood does not have this active fibrin. An excellent view of these serum borders appears in Picture 24, the photograph of the original footsteps of Jesus in the Holy Shroud. On the heel, notice the big blood pool with the serum borders. It can be seen very clearly how the blood flowed from the nail wound down to the heel and collected there, and was forced to flow in the body which lay in the Holy Shroud of Turin. The fact that ‘no refutation is scientifically possible’ is noted by the Vatican and recorded by the Apostolic Nunciature in Germany.

“Back to the false meaning of ‘dried clots of blood changed again to liquidity.’ Marks of such blood cannot have serum borders because fibrin does not exist in dry blood; it is chemically destroyed. Fact one: no serum borders without the existence of fibrin. Fact two: serum borders around blood marks prove with absolute certainty that the marks are due to fresh blood flowing from open wounds. Fact three: if a heart stands still, open wounds do not bleed, for there is no blood pressure. Scientific conclusion: the heart was pumping!”