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**COVER:** When Seth Chandler, an amateur astronomer, discovered a free wobble in the earth's orientation on its axis of rotation, he set in motion a scientific controversy that like the wobble shows little sign of abating. Modern measurement techniques are stimulating the search for the wobble's effects and causes. See page 268. (Credit: National Geodetic Survey)

<b>Publisher</b>	E. G. Sherburne Jr.
<b>Editor</b>	Joel Greenberg
<b>Senior Editor and</b>	
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<b>Business Manager</b>	Donald Harless
<b>Advertising</b>	Scherago Associates 1515 Broadway New York, N.Y. 10036 Fred W. Dieffenbach, Sales Director

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**Editorial and Business Offices**  
1719 N Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20036

**Subscription Department**  
231 West Center Street, Marion, Ohio 43302

Subscription rate: 1 yr., \$22.50; 2 yrs., \$39.00; 3 yrs., \$55.00 (Add \$3 a year for Canada and Mexico, \$4 for all other countries.) Change of address: Four to six weeks' notice is required. Please state exactly how magazine is to be addressed. Include zip code. For new subscriptions only call: (1) 800-247-2160.

Printed in U.S.A. Second class postage paid at Washington, D.C. Title registered as trademark U.S. and Canadian Patent Offices.

Published every Saturday by SCIENCE SERVICE, Inc. 1719 N St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. (202-785-2255)  
ISSN 0036-8423

# LETTERS

## Comments on a commentary

I have a background in physical sciences as well as Christian Theology and want to say that I found Mr. Thomsen's "Commentary" on the Turin Shroud (SN: 10/3/81, p. 211) to be the most delightful and cogent piece that I have seen on the subject. I was particularly grateful for the way in which he articulated an appreciation for the proper humility of both natural philosophy and theology.

*The Rev. Charles Grover  
Syracuse, N.Y.*

Your editorial commentary on the Turin Shroud was appreciated. I agree with you that "scientific conclusions about the Shroud are thus likely to be fed into religious debate."

Jesus himself probably had the best commentary on this, as recorded in Luke 16. This is the story of the poor beggar Lazarus and the rich man. Both eventually died and wound up in their appropriate places. The rich man begs Abraham to send someone to warn his brothers of the terrible torment that awaits them. He says, "If someone goes to them from the dead they will repent." Jesus quotes Abraham as replying, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead."

So it is with us today. If we really don't believe what Moses and the Prophets said about Jesus and his resurrection, then all the scientific proof we can muster to prove the resurrection will still not persuade people.

*David E. Hartman, Ph.D., P.E.  
Longview, Tex.*

I fully concur with Mr. Dietrick E. Thomsen. Please to pass to him my congratulations. One of the smartest commentary I ever read in SN.

It is more than foolish to try to prove transcendental through material. It is idiotic. The Church too has to bear its responsibility for allowing the tests.

*Valentin D. Fikowsky  
Berkeley, Calif.*

Can that really be Dietrick Thomsen's writing!? "Let [the Shroud of Turin] rest in peace in its reliquary..." he asks. No doubt his admonition is but a veiled challenge. One might as well command thinking, curious people everywhere to stop asking questions, to stop wondering how things work, to turn aside from inquiry and discovery. These activities are the very stuff of science, indeed, of human nature itself. Mysteries cry out for solution; their pursuit is in great measure what human existence is all about.

Sometimes we don't ask questions because we fear the answers. Surely science and religion both have nothing to fear from a study of the Shroud. Its significance to Christians bestows upon it no absolute immunity from investigation. To be sure, we must exercise an extra measure or two of caution in dealing with so revered an artifact, but that is no excuse for denying the collection of knowledge about its properties and antiquity.

Throughout history when people didn't know, they relied on faith—in most cases, there were few alternatives. Today we do indeed have more choices. Not to exercise them is an intellectual and spiritual cop out of the highest magnitude.

*Harvey Fleet  
Golden, Colo.*

I applaud Dietrick E. Thomsen's commentary on the demonstration attempted in *Verdict on the Shroud*, but more needs to be said about such attempts.

I have not seen *Verdict*. But it probably follows the same general line of argument used in every attempted demonstration of supernatural influence in the natural world: Science alone, the argument runs, fails to tell us why things are the way they are. Unless we believe that the Shroud of Turin was the burial shroud of Jesus, we cannot explain the image it bears. Unless we believe that God created the earth, say the creationists, we cannot explain the fossil record.

This is not a scientific argument! No one, not even a scientist, can take it upon himself to proclaim that any puzzle—the Shroud, for example—has only just now exhausted the capacity of the human intellect and left us no alternative but to accept an "explanation" which demands that we surrender the hard-won and potent strategies of science.

*Peter Sobol  
Bloomington, Ind.*

I read your Shroud article with interest.

The fact that the Shroud contains three-dimensional information may be explained by the use of the garment on more than one body. The displaced impression would easily produce the stereo effect.

The scorching process need not have taken place while the bodies were in contact with the fabric. A body in contact with cloth invariably leaves an imprint of organic and mineral residue, which at any time later may be converted by solar radiation or other actinic reactions to a carbonaceous material resembling that formed by scorching.

It should also be kept in mind that all science can possibly prove is that the imprint is that of a crucified body. Whether the body was that of Jesus is simply a matter of personal judgment or religious inclination.

*J. E. Schmidt  
Charlestown, Ind.*

Regarding the Shroud of Turin, I think Albert Einstein indirectly but perfectly explained how the Shroud was made.  $E=mc^2$  succinctly states that matter and energy are interconvertible. Perhaps Christ did demonstrate the cosmic circus trick—He dematerialized and became energy. Perhaps in the process, an image was formed from the release of such energy before it was dispersed into the atmosphere.

While Christians base many of their beliefs on faith, most scientists must have "living proof" that a phenomenon is real. Thus I think it is very important and exciting to study the Shroud as a scientist because some of the mysteries of the universe may be locked within the force that created the markings on a piece of linen nearly 2,000 years ago. I would not advocate ripping the Shroud to pieces in order to understand it. Hopefully religious leaders would prevent this abuse. I would suggest that physicists and religious leaders talk to one another about the possibility and implications of two points which may be proven: the Resurrection of Christ and the proof of Einstein's equation.

I find it absolutely delightful to think that Einstein's contributions to this planet may have transcended his contribution to the development of the atomic bomb. After all, God does not play dice with men.

*Cynthia L. Theall  
Cambridge, Mass.*