

Book Reviews

John S. Carpenter, *Be Not Afraid to Follow the Footprints from Heaven* (2016) and *He is Alive: Science Finds Jesus* (2018)

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Carpenter, John S. (2016). *Be Not Afraid to Follow the Footprints from Heaven*. New York, NY: Page Publishing, Inc., 476 pp., £38.95 paperback/e-book, ISBN: 9781683482017; and, Carpenter, John S. (2018). *He is Alive: Science Finds Jesus*. New York, NY: Page Publishing, Inc., 434 pp., £27.95 paperback/e-book, ISBN: 9781644240335.

John S. Carpenter's contribution investigating mystical beliefs through scientific and biological evidence is exceptional in his two recent books, *Be Not Afraid to Follow the Footprints from Heaven* (2016) and *He is Alive: Science Finds Jesus* (2018). In this regard, no one can devalue the work that science and the biological world have played in exploring mysterious things on earth.

Carpenter, a psychiatric therapist, testifies in these books about how his life changed and how he began observing mystical beliefs in Catholic settings. Despite the fact that Carpenter's father was a Methodist minister, he had not been convinced by Protestant theology. Thus, to delve deeply into the mystery of religious faith Carpenter first located Jesus in the medical and scientific world—which also created a medium to reach out to atheists and people of other faiths (2018, 16). The whole prospect of doing this critical research is based on proving Christ is alive. Second, Carpenter's faith in Mary, the blessed mother of Jesus Christ, is another important shift that took place in his life. This turn to Mary reshaped his theology, and his faith became more alive in an intriguing way through Marian's apparitions (2016, 120). Carpenter's faith in Mother Mary encouraged him to invite more believers and non-believers to believe in her visits.

According to Carpenter, mystical and supernatural experiences can only be recognized as such by receiving Mother Mary's assistance, who prays to Jesus Christ on our behalf. Carpenter further affirms that the reality of Marian visits has extensive historical support, with over 2,500 cases in the last 2,000 years, some even to non-believers. For instance, Carpenter describes an event that occurred in Portugal on October 13, 1917, in which over 70,000 people, including skeptics, investigators, journalists, atheists, and people of other religions, were astonished by her visit that left no explanations (2016, 20). He believes that Mary who paid this real visit is herself real, as well as that the people who experienced her real visit were medically sound, indicating that there was nothing psychologically wrong with them. Indeed, thousands of people have seen her and been touched by her miraculous nature (2018, 359). Furthermore, Carpenter believes that, regardless of whether someone is religious or not, Mary's visionary experience brings everyone to their knees, and many cases support this claim.

Aside from such beliefs, Carpenter's research on the Shroud of Turin, Sudarium Domini, and the Eucharist to support Christ's presence is brilliant. As a Catholic, Carpenter believes that mystical objects are unique witnesses to Christ, while as a scientist he demonstrates that scientific and biological evidence are also important to consider. In addition, the stories and witnesses of other saints among Catholic believers are also of utmost importance (2018). Carpenter's collection of 80 photos of Marian apparitions is quite impressive (2016).

There is no question that Carpenter's pieces of evidence for Marian apparitions are absolutely incredible. He has expended a significant amount of time in gathering all of the related photos and testimonies. Even so, Carpenter's claims would have been strengthened if he had also supported them with the Bible. On the one hand, Carpenter's amazing reasoning about Mary's apparitions understandably seeks to persuade unbelievers and people of other faiths to have such paranormal experiences as well. However, Carpenter could have protected his arguments better if he had included biblical and theological support.

In this regard, Marlene C. Crouch, a strident critic of Roman Catholicism, declares that the testified apparitions are undoubtedly real. Nonetheless, she contends that these are satanic appearances rather than those of Mary, the blessed mother of Jesus Christ. Crouch further argues that the biblical Mary would never contradict God's Word, and the focus of the testified apparitions is on something other than Jesus's glory (Crouch 2009, 40). In other words, Crouch believes that these visitations are taking people away from Christ rather than bringing them to him.

Carpenter has provided scientific and biological evidence to prove the existence of Christ. He has presented numerous pictures of the Eucharist and of allegedly incorrupt bodies, such as those of Padre Pio and St. Veronica, to strengthen his claims. However, Carpenter does not address the objection that the Bible supports no claim over such beliefs. He has left himself open to the criticism that these historical, scientific, and medical methodologies have misshaped his thinking, insofar as he believes that Catholic bodies are preserved under any circumstance (2018, 401). Carpenter's argument ignores the fact that man is a mortal being and, after death, this body turns into dust (Genesis 3:19).

Moreover, though Carpenter's investigations about the Shroud of Turin, for example, seem authentic, the Bible nowhere provides associated claims in its accounts of the Resurrection of Jesus. The Apostles never used the Shroud as proof to claim that Jesus is alive to either the Jews or the Gentiles. Furthermore, while Carpenter uses several passages from the books of Luke and Acts to try and prove that the Shroud was the linen cloth used to bury Jesus, many scholars are unconvinced that the Bible supports such a claim. For example, Christopher J. E. Johnson points out that the Shroud of Turin was discovered in the fourteenth century and was preserved only after the spending of millions of dollars. Johnson, like many others, goes on to conclude that the Shroud of Turin has no connection to the biblical prophecy about Jesus in the Old Testament, since the Shroud's image depicts Jesus with long hair and a beard, which according to Johnson is contrary to scriptural beliefs (Johnson 2012).

Sadly, like Carpenter, many people today disregard the biblical and theological aspects of witnessing about Christ by merely focusing on scientific or biological claims. Unfortunately, some people of the scientific and biological world—Carpenter in this case—use only their own tools to prove Jesus's Resurrection instead of using scientific and biological claims as a tool *if required* to witness about Christ. While appreciative of his brilliance and sincere attempts at using scientific and biological means of witness, this review has emphasized the importance of taking a more biblical and theological approach—not to criticize Carpenter's views per se, but rather respectfully and gently to have him and his readers include biblical input as well.

References

Crouch, Marlene C. (2009). *Whose Voice Are You Listening To? A Comparison of the Catholic Catechism to the Bible*. U.S.A: Tate Publishing & Enterprises.

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