

Jakob Marx on the Exhibition of the Holy Robe in Trier (1844)

Abstract

In this passage from *The History of the Holy Robe in the Cathedral Church in Trier* (1844), Professor Jakob Marx (1803–1876) of the Trier Theological Seminary vividly describes one example of the broad revival of Catholic piety in response to secularization: in fall of 1844, close to half a million pilgrims went to Trier to see the [tunic worn by Christ](#) before his crucifixion. Other manifestations of religious revival included the growing veneration of the Virgin Mary and the belief in miracles.

Source

The first healing, which happened during the festivities, was of the Countess Johanna v. Droste-Vischering and took place on August 30, a Friday. Because this healing increased faith in prayers being answered, challenging those who did not believe in the festivities, a short account of this situation is warranted. This Countess from Westphalia, the great niece of the archbishop Clemens August of Cologne and the Bishop of Münster, and who was a girl of nineteen, was lame and in suffering for three years and could barely get around on crutches. According to the doctor, she suffered from a kind of knee tumor which caused a shortening of the tendon in the back of the knee. As a result, the upper and lower parts of her leg formed a rigid right angle, prohibiting her foot from touching the ground.

In this condition, she went to Kreuznach for a third time to use the spa there in order to rid herself of this ailment. When she learned that the Holy Robe of Trier was being exhibited, she had hope that when she touched the seam of this relic God would grant her healing from the most difficult of her afflictions, her lameness. She went to Kreuznach with her grandmother, the widow Charlotte Erbdroste zu Vischering, another lady, and servants. Right after her arrival on August 29, her grandmother wrote a letter from her guesthouse (the red house) to the General-Vicar Dr. Müller in which she informed him of her granddaughter's condition, wishes, and hope. She then asked for permission to touch the Holy Robe. "My above-mentioned granddaughter, who is only nineteen, has so suffered under lameness for the last three years that she can barely move around on her crutches. She has faith and hope that when she touches the seam of the Holy Robe, she will be healed from the worst part of her infirmity." This permission was given and the next day the Countess, in between her grandmother and the other lady, went up the marble steps to the Holy Robe, supported by her crutches. Once they arrived, the grandmother and other lady kneeled in prayer while the Countess remained standing with her crutches, deep in prayer. All at once, she felt her leg being released from its tension and let her crutches fall! She then told her companions, in joyous excitement, that she could stand again! She then kneeled and cried into her hands with such happiness and thankfulness that everyone around her was deeply moved and could not fight back their own tears. After regaining her composure, she stood up and was led to the tunic where she kneeled again and touched it with the help of the Vicar-General Müller. After a few minutes of prayer, she stood up, left the assistance of her grandmother's arms and, with both feet firmly on the ground, walked the marble steps back down. The servant lady, in tears, carried her crutches behind her. The Countess then went through the cathedral and outside to her coach.

That is the series of events that took place, according to statements from the Countess herself, her grandmother, the other lady, and many eyewitnesses. The result of these events, expressed in short and simple terms, was that the Countess suddenly regained full use of her leg after visiting the Holy Robe and the healing of her worst affliction, which is what she had prayed for. The indisputable facts were that the

Countess came to Trier with a lame leg and that at the Holy Robe it became fully normal. Joy abounded among people of faith because of this occurrence. There are people, however, who thought the healing of the Countess was very disturbing. These people do not like to consider the existence of what they would call an eerie spirit world or to think about a higher power and therefore do not want to believe or hear about miracles. This healing was a thorn in their eye, even more so due to the jubilation of the faithful. It had to be fought against at any price.

[...]

If we have observed in the preceding the multitude of flocking pilgrims and admired them, we should not ignore their wonderful unity. If we compare the millions of pilgrims to each other in terms of their normal stations in life, we find differences everywhere which divide them into different classes and tendencies. They differ in occupation, which determines everyone's circle of influence. They also differ from each other in education, in their views of everyday human life, in ethnicity, language and dialect, in their level of luxury, in their customs and habits. All of these differences lead to the separation of people in civil society and often to bitter conflicts. These contrasts only let people associate with each other in the most limited of circumstances, such as family relations, friendships, living in the same community, and the short-term common interests of a certain class of people or an entire population. In everyday circumstances, people do not cross paths with a variety of other humans, not enough to form very many unions and associations. At the most, people rotate within the circles of their families and communities, their art, academic, trade associations, or their countries.

There is, however, *one* tie that goes beyond all human differences, that dissolves all separation and individual groups, and that transcends all distances and borders, all classes of age, status, gender, wealth, education, and occupation. It *unifies* all into a huge, wonderful entity and a multi-faceted, mystical corpus, beyond the grasp of death and human time. This bond is the Catholic faith, the Catholic church, and we have seen a picture of this union in that great feast. The thousands and thousands of people who would have otherwise moved in their own circles, gone their own way, and followed their own tendencies, have joined as one, as brothers and in faith, loyalty, and fellowship in the church. Here there were no Frenchmen, nor Germans, Belgians, Swiss, Bavarians or people from Baden. There were only Catholics who recognized their own religious feelings in every other pilgrim, whatever their country or race, whatever language they spoke, whatever class they may have belonged to. They saw in each other their own faith, their agreement on the most important and most holy matters, and the most comforting harmony. They all felt at one with each other through a divine association with Christ and his Church. At this festival, it was not the scholar or the wealthy man or the man of affairs, artist, or farmer who arrived as a representative of his individual class or career. No, at the festival were only the religious faithful, the loyal sons of the church which extends across the whole earth, through all social classes, carrying the banner of the Redeemer. Under this banner we are all brothers and sisters, children of *the same* father who are called to the same inheritance as St. Paul said, "You are all children of God through your faith in Jesus Christ. All of you who have been baptized in Christ are clothed in Christianity. Here, there is neither slave nor free person, man nor woman, because you are all one in Christ."

After this, everyone knew every other stranger automatically, however far away their homeland was, whatever language they spoke, and whatever position they had in society. They loved and treated each other as old friends and enjoyed personal discussions with each other about their thoughts and feelings, without holding back. Wherever pilgrims met each other they recognized each other as friends and partners in the same cause, regardless of the country, state or city they were from. One example of this was shown in a loving way when the Bishop of Amsterdam traveled from Trier to Koblenz on a steamship on which there also happened to be many pilgrims from various churches, provinces, and cities on board. During the trip, there were common prayers and songs sung together and when the ship arrived in Koblenz, all the pilgrims kneeled and bade the Bishop farewell, receiving his blessing on their pilgrimage.

This unusual event, with its roots in the spiritual world, appeared so lovely and grand that it must have made a deep impression upon all thinking people and upon all open hearts. Even men who were suspicious of the religious movement in the beginning were convinced by its purity, authenticity, and motivating force. *The Independent*, a ministerial newsletter in France, discusses this religious manifestation, “in which France and Germany greet each other” in the following way: “Since the exhibition of the Holy Robe in the Trier Cathedral, we quietly observed the movement of a part of Catholic Europe. The excitement which accompanied the first news of this did not convince us, because superstition and gullibility have their excitement, too. These are different from the excitement which flows from true religion and faith. Now there is no doubt that these millions (!) of Christians who flock together to the noble metropolis of Trier are filled with the purest of faith; this impression is made even on people who are accustomed to having concrete evidence before giving their approval, because of these numerous processions in which all classes of society come together, where the educated walk next to country boys, where professors from elite universities sing songs of praise together with manual laborers. Whole cities are led by their city councils in processions to Trier in wonderful order and harmony. The moment they step aboard the holy ship, the pilgrims begin to devoutly sing songs which have been consecrated by the piety of religion and which in Germany have a special characteristic of the deepest majesty.”

This union of various people from varying intellectual backgrounds, from every age group, rank, status, and gender is only possible within the Catholic Church. This faith is the same in all regions and among all populations on earth. This faith promotes the same humility, obedience, and duty for all of its followers, the skilled and unskilled, the noble and the peasant, the rich and the poor – all of them receive the same blessed gifts from on high. Yes, such a wonderful unity rejoices in this faith, which in its essence is removed from interpretations based on the arbitrariness of humans. This faith is not shaped by, nor is it bendable to, everyday wisdom and fashion, not influenced by the wishes and special interests of one class or group, not subservient to a nation or state, but untouchable and above any earthly power. God has given this and Heaven, from where He comes, protects His creation with a gentle power until our salvation opens our hearts, without our own will interfering. This connects us all to a new kingdom, without chains and only in freedom. In this unity, our celebration was a picture of the Catholic Church in which the same faith, understanding, and worship come together as one. Unity in faith is a requirement of godliness and a feature of its truth. These criteria supported the faith which brought forth our celebration and so made it shine upon His face, but faith also carried the feature of holiness within itself, namely love, without which faith is dead. At the celebrations, all pilgrims were joyous in their faith and spirited in their belief. Who heard or saw any acts of hatred against those of other beliefs, who took part in any attacks on the faith of other groups? Not a trace of any of this was to be found. The nature of truth and right possession is such that those who stand by its side can be joyous without disparaging or disturbing others, and that they surround and uphold their possessions with love and without offending the rights of others and without fighting over things with other people. This is the sad inheritance of those who have chosen rejection and who are divided among themselves and only come together in one thing, not in God, but in Satan, from whom all deniers are descended since the beginning of time.

Source: Jakob Marx, *Geschichte des heil. Rockes in der Domkirche zu Trier*. Trier: Lintz, 1844; reprinted in Wolfgang Schieder, *Religion und Revolution: Die Trierer Wallfahrt von 1844*. Vierow bei Greifswald: SH-Verlag, 1996, pp. 80–86.

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