

Stigmata Phenomenon

In the 1999 movie *Stigmata*, a Catholic priest investigates the case of a woman who has the same wounds that Jesus had when he died on the cross. These wounds were caused by the nails driven into his hands and ankles, by the crown of thorns, and by the spear plunged into his side. In the movie, the woman with the wounds seems to be in mental contact with someone who lived in ancient times. The investigation leads to the discovery of a possible lost gospel.

Wounds similar to those suffered by Jesus are called [stigmata](#), and any person who exhibits them is called a stigmatic. Sometimes the phenomenon appears in the form of blotches or sores rather than wounds. They often appear suddenly, then disappear a short time later, but in some cases they have remained present for many years.

Stigmata are often associated with piety. Some people believe that their appearance is a sign of mystical participation in the sufferings of Christ. But many observers think that they are usually created artificially as a way to get attention.

Christianity wasn't the first religion to give a possible supernatural meaning to wounds. In many early primitive societies, wounds were deliberately inflicted as part of a spiritual ritual. The practice was also common in the pagan religions of Roman times, although in many cases tattoos were substituted for wounds.

The phenomenon of Christian stigmata first came to prominence in the Middle Ages. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries some churchmen began to deliberately wound themselves in an attempt to reach an ecstatic state of identification with Christ called participation. The pain of the wounds helped them to go through a similar ordeal to what Jesus had gone through.

An early case of true stigmata, in which the wounds supposedly appeared in a spontaneous way, was that of St. Francis. But his stigmatization is not as well-documented as many of the other events of his life. In fact many contemporaries, including the Bishop of Olmutz, had doubts about the authenticity of his stigmata.

Since the time of St. Francis, several hundred other cases of true stigmata have been reported. Most of these cases occurred in Catholic countries, especially Italy. Perhaps the best-known modern case is that of Padre Pio (1887-1968), who was canonized in 2002. Stigmatization has also been reported in Islamic societies, but in these cases, the wounds correspond to those suffered by Mohammed in his fight to spread Islam.

The Catholic Church doesn't require its members to believe that stigmata can appear spontaneously, or that they are a sign of holiness. And although descriptions of saints sometimes mention stigmata, the Church doesn't maintain any official list of stigmatics.

About the Author

www.gospel-mysteries.net/stigmata.html Stigmata related website information by B. Winkles is the author of several websites, including Tree Trail, Gospel Mysteries, and Other Voices.

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