

the OMBILICAL

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O Ye Men of Little Faith!

On the third anniversary of the death of President Kennedy, the fate of the republic now hangs on a single holy relic preserved in the National Archives. It is Commission Exhibit #399, the magic bullet bearing the characteristic microscopic markings of the cheap Italian carbine owned by Lee Harvey Oswald; a bullet that passed through the President's neck and Governor Connally's chest and wrist, smashing a rib and wrist bones; a bullet nevertheless unmuttated and undeformed and without a trace of blood in it; a bullet which in the course of its flight lost less metal than the amount it deposited in the Governor's wrist.

There are some cheap rationalists who believe that the holy relic is a fraud, that it was fired from Oswald's carbine into, say, a bale of hay and then deliberately planted in the corridor at Parkland Hospital where, according to the commission, it was found by an orderly. They have the laws of physics on their side, to be sure, but a republic is held together not by laws of physics but by faith in holy mysteries.

Last Saturday night Jim Bishop moderated a television discussion on the Warren Report. He listened solemnly to Mark Lane's attack on our national faith. For three hours he listened and then he said with quiet dignity, "I believe that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, killed President Kennedy." Jim Bishop is planning a book called "The Day Kennedy Died"; he is the author of the book "The Day Christ Died."

Our nation is based upon a Protestant culture which is wary of miracles. Protestant theology seeks to provide rationalist explanations whenever possible, relying on faith only for the core mysteries of the Trinity. Thus it is that the Warren Report has insisted upon only that handful of miracles needed to preserve faith in the doctrine of unitarian regicide.

A rationalist can believe that Governor Connally and all the witnesses who corroborated his testimony were wrong; he can believe that the policemen who discovered the rifle on the sixth floor of the Depository were wrong in calling it a Mauser; he can believe that the witnesses who saw Oswald carrying a package to work on the fateful day were grossly in error as to its size; he can believe that Oswald was extraordinarily lucky in his marksmanship that day; he can believe that the doctors who operated on Kennedy were mistaken as to the wound in his throat; he can believe that all the witnesses who heard shots or saw puffs of smoke coming from the top of the grassy knoll were in error; all these things he can believe without renouncing the laws of physics.

The Warren Report requires faith in only two outright miracles; the magic bullet, undeformed and without a trace of blood after passing through the President's neck and smashing the Governor's rib and wrist bones, the bullet weighing only 2.4 grains less than before it was fired although it deposited 3 grains of metal in the Governor's wrist; and the magical bullet holes in the President's shirt and jacket, holes several inches below the bullet hole the Commission says is in the base of his neck.

Liberal theologians are wont to say that the Commission's central findings remain true but that it did a sloppy job. This is unfair; the Warren Commission did the best job that anyone possibly could do to prove that Oswald, acting alone, killed Kennedy. It reduced the number of major improbabilities from hundreds to a few dozen, and the

number of outright miracles from dozens to a bare two. There is no easy way out; you must either accept those miracles or reject the doctrine of unitarian regicide.

But men will search for an easy way out, and in that search they will destroy the national religion just as modern Protestant theologians have killed God in their attempts to modernize him. There will be a Congressional Commission to investigate the Warren Commission. It will conclude that the holy doctrine remains intact although it came from an impure vessel. This will settle things for a while, but then the fatal quest for certainty will begin again. There will be a third commission, which will squabble and issue several different reports.

Sooner or later, the demand to produce the secret evidence locked in the national archives will be irresistible. When the x-rays are finally shown there will be perhaps the shadow of a bullet lodged in the body, or perhaps a mark where the shadow of a bullet had been painted out. Then the body will have to be exhumed to find that bullet and see whether it could have come from Oswald's Italian carbine.

If the bullet is not sufficiently intact to conduct ballistics tests, or if it is not in the body at all, or if there is no indication of anything untoward in the x-rays or photographs, it will make no difference; we will get to the same point by a different route, a point of crisis greater than any we have faced since the Civil War.

Logically, the Chief Justice of the United States would have to be tried for conspiracy to obstruct justice, but he will be able to plead temporary stupidity. Everyone, in fact, will be claiming to have been deceived by someone else, and for a while we will believe that the engine of deception started up magically by itself. But that will only do for a while, and soon fingers will start pointing all in one direction—most likely (if past experience is any guide) in the wrong direction. The wrong man will be framed for framing the wrong man, and so it will continue. Eventually we will divide into two camps based on two different truths, and the battle between them will shatter the psychological foundations of the republic.

It began the day Lyndon Johnson ordered Earl Warren to prove that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, killed President Kennedy, and now it is too late to stop it from following its course to the end. It's what happens when you try to have your holy wafer and eat it too.