

The Shroud a 'Gift From God?' Cardinal Saldarini's Message to the Nice Symposium:

*The following remarks by **Cardinal Giovanni Saldarini**, Archbishop of Turin, were read on his behalf at the commencement of Nice Symposium, and are reproduced from the translation which appeared in CIELT's Revue Internationale du Linceul de Turin, No. 5, 1997.*

I take great pleasure in sending my sincere greetings at the start of the 3rd International Scientific Symposium of the CIELT, being held in Nice on the 12th and 13th May 1997. May I first address my greetings to his Excellency **Monsignor François Saint-Macary**, my brother in the episcopacy and pastor of the Church welcoming the Symposium, and with him to all the authorities and participants, with particular regards to the organisers, who, through you, chose to inform me of their worthy initiative.

I see from the programme sent to me that the original project, which was for a large part devoted to the problems [of the] image on the Shroud, has been extended to include a wide variety of subjects, in anticipation of the major themes due to be considered at the International Congress, which--God willing--will be held in Turin next year during the solemn exposition of the Holy Shroud. I look with great satisfaction on all the work that has been done, as must the researchers themselves, who are at this very moment reaping the fruits of their labours around such a mysterious object, and I hope that the progress made will lead us all gradually closer to God's shining Truth and infinite Wisdom.

Here ends my role as bishop, faced as I am with scientific specialists, for I have no specific competence as far as science is concerned. I hope the participants will accept a few words from me concerning the relationship I see between the scientific results and the pastoral programme followed by the Church, in accordance with the responsibility it feels for the Shroud, this gift from God.

The Church, being composed of men with hearts of flesh, is interested to know whether the Shroud dates back to the 1st century and if it really did wrap Jesus' dead body. A positive answer to these questions would mean that the Shroud could be referred to as a true relic, no longer would this term be used, as it sometimes is, with caution. However, by its very nature, the Church does not have at its disposal the tools necessary to look for an answer, and indeed the Church's role is not to find an answer, let alone define it. The Church hopes that science will arrive at a definitive solution to these problems. Many people in the Church, myself to begin with, hope that the answer to these questions will be positive. But nobody knows if the day will ever come, here on earth, when we will be able to declare that all the uncertainty has been overcome.

The uncertainty surrounding the Shroud does not however lessen the value of this gift from God, nor is it detrimental to the duty with which the Church feels invested to consider the Shroud as an opportunity for an intense pastoral commitment. The Shroud's age does not determine its value, even if my intellectual curiosity and my heart, that of a disciple who loves his Lord, show a passionate interest for it. Let me reiterate a truth that

has already been stated in some quarters: even if the Shroud is shown without doubt to have been used to wrap Christ's body, it would not be Jesus; and even if doubt did remain as to whether or not it was used as Christ's burial cloth, it would not suddenly stop being a moving and very faithful representation of His sufferings on the cross, such as they are recounted in the Gospels.

For the Church then, the Shroud is an echo and a testimony to the Gospel. The inimitably touching image of the Crucified Christ's sufferings make it particularly powerful. I must humbly recognize for the moment I do not know how the image was formed. But this does not make the image any less forceful in its ability to make me realize how great the Father's love was, that He should give His only Son to save the world.

These considerations seem to me to be a source of serenity and confidence for all men of good will who undertake to study an ancient article as mysterious as the Shroud. Countless people throughout the Church's history did not know of the Shroud's existence but this did not prevent them from receiving the graces necessary to follow Christ. So today, it is possible to follow Him regardless of the verdict on the Holy Shroud's age. Research therefore has no need to worry. Obviously, the studies must be conducted according to stringent guidelines, because research statutes demand it and because the object under study is so worthy of respect. The researcher must be aware that the Church takes an unbiased view of his work and results, being as they are attempts to get closer to the truth.

At the same time, scientists must bear in mind that their research may come to back up the Shroud's role as witness. By getting to know the Shroud better, more appropriate ways of interpreting it become possible and credibility can be enhanced. Science can also play a pastoral role and this explains why many researchers even become engrossed with the Shroud and undertake to spread its message. Similarly, many priests who use the Shroud as a preaching aid show an ardent interest in the scientific problems surrounding it.

I leave you with those thoughts, and wish you every success for the symposium.

Giovanni, Card. Saldarini,
Archbishop of Turin, Pontifical Custodian of the Shroud