

**NATIONAL CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE November 1988**

**ROME: The Shroud of Turin continues to stir passions in Italy almost a month after test results announced the cloth is medieval in origin.**

The Archdiocese of Turin and the Italian Catholic newspaper *Avvenire* have been inundated by letters since the carbon-14 test results were announced by Turin Cardinal Anastasio Ballestrero.

In letters, columns and talk shows, Italians speculate on the possible flaws of the carbon-14 tests used to date the cloth and the questions science still has not answered about what some believe is the burial cloth of Christ.

The highly respected Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica* published a commentary by Jesuit Father Giovanni Marchesi titled "The Mystery of the Shroud Continues."

Father Marchesi recounted the story of the three laboratories that tested pieces of the Shroud and determined it to be from the 13th or 14th century.

He then raised a series of puzzles that he said science had still not been able to solve, including:

The three dimensional form of the Shroud figure.

Its similarity to a photograph negative

The traces of blood on the cloth

The "anatomical perfection" of the figure, a rendering not possible in the Middle Ages, according to Father Marchesi.

The traces of Middle Eastern plant pollens found in the cloth.

The traces of what appear to be ancient coins on the eyes of the figure, a Middle Eastern burial technique.

"Could a medieval artist have such a vast store" of "historical, chemical, anatomical and scientific knowledge which the most advanced modern science only recently discovered or has not yet deciphered?" Father Marchesi asked.

The newspaper published a full page of excerpts from the more than 100 letters it had received.

Some readers speculated that the Miracle of the Resurrection altered the chemistry of the Shroud, thus negating the carbon-14 tests.

Others questioned the accuracy of carbon-14 dating, citing a variety of reports that cast doubt on the process.

In light of previous studies done on the Shroud, wrote one Milan reader, the carbon-14 tests "should call into question not the authenticity of the relic, but the validity" of the tests.

One priest addressed his letter to Cardinal Ballestrero.

## NATIONAL CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE (cont'd)

"Do you know what I advise you, Eminence?" wrote Father Pietro Sganzetta. "Put aside carbon-14, uranium and all the other modern pestilences.

"Keep the faith like a simple believer, tend to the substance, and on relics turn a blind eye.

"The supernatural eludes scientific investigation."

For some, the report on the Shroud has been a subject of pain.

On an Italian television talk show dedicated solely to the Shroud, Italian writer Italo Chiusano spoke of his hurt.

"I suffered like a child who had never known the father and of this father had only one photograph," he said, "only to discover unexpectedly that it is false."

Chiusano concluded that God gave the proof of the false Shroud to a humanity that is still in its infancy and needs to become adult.

In an interview, Cardinal Ballestrero said it was up to science, not him, to evaluate the results of the carbon tests.

"We have said and repeated that the veneration of this sacred cloth continues and remains one of the treasures of our Church," he said.

