



Pope John Paul II and Humbert II of Savoy embrace on the occasion of the Pope's Pilgrimage to Fatima, 14 May 1982.

HUMBERT II OF SAVOY  
1904-1983

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Shroud devotees and admirers throughout the world were saddened by the death, on March 18 last, of Humbert II, former King of Italy, and, as head of the House of Savoy, owner of the Shroud. The Relic has been in the keeping of the Savoy family for more than five centuries, jealously preserved by its members through some of the most turbulent periods of Europe's history.

When on March 24, Humbert II was laid to rest in the Abbey of Hautecombe, near Chambéry in Savoy, he joined a number of his forbears buried in the same Abbey. Among them is Ludovico, Duke of Savoy and Piedmont, who, in 1452, gratefully received the Shroud from the last surviving member of the de Charny family, first recorded owner of the Shroud in the West.

Not far from Humbert's grave lies buried another Duke of Savoy, Emanuele Filiberto. Having decided that Turin in Piedmont should replace Chambéry in Savoy as the capital of his duchy (comprised of both Savoy and Piedmont), Emanuele Filiberto moved his court to Turin, and, shortly thereafter in 1578, to the bitter chagrin of Chambéry's inhabitants, he ordered the Shroud to the new capital.

From Turin, their new capital, the Dukes of Savoy were to extend their dominions to include eventually all of Italy of which they became kings in 1861. While Turin lost to Rome its title as the capital of the new kingdom, it remained through the years the city dearest to the Savoy family, the city of their Shroud, preserved in the magnificent Royal Chapel which they built for their most precious heirloom.

Italy became a republic in the turmoil that followed the Second World War, and Humbert II, then the reigning king, was driven into exile. The country over which he and his forbears had reigned became out-of-bounds for him and his family. He was never again to set foot on its soil. From 1946 until his death he resided at Villa Italia in Cascais, Portugal.

#### **A Deeply Religious Man**

Humbert held "his Shroud" in great regard. A deeply religious man, he fully realized the unique importance of the Relic, particularly after the scientists made it an object of study and research. Giuseppe Enrie told me how deeply moved young Humbert was (he was then crown-prince of Italy), when, in 1931, he first viewed the magnificent photographs Enrie made, the first ones since Secondo Pia had made his in

1898. Enrie's photographs revealed far better than Pia's the incredible characteristics of the Shroud's famed image. "The young Prince," Enrie told me, "was almost beside himself with excitement and emotion."

I first met the exiled King in Cascais in 1955. I was anxious to tell him of the growing interest in the Shroud in the United States; anxious, too, to obtain his approval and blessing on initiatives that might open new avenues of research on the Relic. It was the first of some twenty visits that followed through the years until 1982. Always warm and cordial, Humbert often struck me as somewhat sad, especially when conversing about Italy and his beloved Turin which he was never again to see. Indeed, exile is a sad word, one he was never allowed to forget.

I became a sort of unofficial messenger between him and the Church officials who, for years and for reasons best known to themselves, appeared more than a little reluctant to move on the Shroud. Humbert would say: "Tell them I am agreeable to anything that might be done. All I want is to be kept informed."

### **Concerned With The Shroud**

I could see on subsequent visits how carefully he followed whatever was done with regard to the Shroud. He would read painstakingly all that was suggested by the experts, proposals and reports often couched in difficult scientific language. "The results of the 1978 tests have brightened my days," he told me when I visited him shortly after I had mailed him a first draft of the report on the results of the tests by the United States Shroud of Turin Research Project.

In the spring of 1981, Dr. John P. Jackson and Dr. Larry Schwalbe, members of the USA Project, Prof. Luigi Gonella of Turin, Father Adam J. Otterbein, C.S.S.R., president of the Holy Shroud Guild, and the writer visited with Humbert at Cascais, and gave him a detailed report on the results of the 1978 tests. Humbert, though far from well, never appeared more pleased and happy.

He was concerned with the Shroud's future. It was clear he felt that, because of the changing fortunes of his dynasty, the Relic might be better provided for. He spoke of this to me shortly after the 1978 exposition. "The situation," he told me, "will find a solution at my death. Keep it confidential. I am bequeathing the Shroud to the Holy See with the condition it remains in Turin." It is no longer a secret now, since it is exactly what he did. It is possibly the wisest decision with regard to the Shroud ever made during its entire history.

### **When I First Saw Him**

On March 24, during the solemn and moving service with which Humbert was laid to rest in the Abbey Church of Hautecombe in Savoy (the region of Savoy was ceded to France by Italy in 1860, but the Savoy family kept dynastic property rights over the Abbey), I suddenly remembered the day when I saw him for the first time in my

life. It was in the Cathedral of Turin in 1933 at the exposition of the Shroud. A tall, strikingly handsome young Prince, he was walking devoutly in the procession which escorted the Relic from the Royal Chapel to the sanctuary of the Cathedral. It was the last time Humbert saw the Shroud.

Yet, all through his life, the Shroud was for this quiet, scholarly, deeply religious man, an object of inspiring and consuming interest. In his library at Villa Italia at Cascais, the life-size portrait of the Face of the Man of the Shroud held a place of honor. I was thinking of that portrait, too, as at Humbert's funeral the monks offered a prayer that never seemed more appropriate: *"He believed and hoped in Thee, O Lord. Do Thou now grant him abundance of joy in the sight of Thy Face."*