

## SCIENCE, LOGIC, FAITH, AND THE SHROUD

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Following upon the announcement that new exams would be permitted on the Holy Shroud, particularly that of radiocarbon dating, a number of study centers hasten to propose and discuss various methods of research.

In a previous article,<sup>1</sup> we addressed the question of whether or not carbon-14 testing would be useful; the complexities of the process and the uneliminable margin of error in the measurement were discussed in order to preclude illusions about the results. The eventuality of a negative result concerning the antiquity, and consequently the authenticity, of the relic was also broached, with the observation that even a negative result would not diminish our faith in the resurrection of Christ, and far less the certainty of his historical existence.

Another question now deserves to be treated serenely. Could experimental science ever clearly and unequivocally identify the person who was wrapped in the Holy Shroud? In other words: In the judgment of experimental science, is the Man of the Shroud really Jesus Christ?

The answer given by many scholars is decidedly negative. Experimental science, by definition, could never assert that the Man of the Shroud is Christ; that would be a conclusion outside the premise on which experimental science is founded. Scientists, as one of them explains, are not concerned with demonstrating that the Shroud is authentic; their only concern is to find answers to the many interrogatives the relic poses. Since they see the problem only from the standpoint of experimental research, they do not intend to occupy themselves with the apologetic aspect, that is, to confirm or deny the traditions that consider the Shroud authentic—the ultimate and only conclusion which interests the public.

The word "experimental", of course, is easy to understand: an "experimental" result is that which is obtained from instruments which function in a determined way based on well-known principles.

All the tests made so far and that will be made on the Shroud are comprised solely in the experimental sphere. Chemistry, physics, palynology, photography and every other specialty, provides its own answer, always subject to future controls by more advanced and severe tests. Each discipline gives its answer according to its

specific competence; it does not invade the fields of other disciplines, and indeed it would be too much to ask them to give answers from fields outside their own.

With due respect to philosophy and to logic particularly, it would be embarrassing to request an answer from those who cannot give one. As for answers given by instruments, they would always be incomplete. So one must make a qualitative leap from the sensible to the rational, in order to coordinate the various answers or truths or partial realities.

When one proceeds from principles which do not require demonstration to the corollaries that arise from these principles, no one objects that the conclusions drawn go beyond the premise. All the tests done and that will be done in the study of the Shroud, have great value in their respective spheres. What is lacking is a true global synthesis, and this cannot be required from researchers who are dedicated exclusively to analysis. A logical synthesis goes far beyond that.<sup>2</sup>

Having stated these distinctions, we are thus able to affirm that, thanks to the many elements already acquired in regard to the Shroud, science can reach the conclusion that the Man of the Shroud is none other than Jesus.

Scientists declare that:

- the somatic imprints are a perfect negative;
- the imprints contain, in themselves, a three-dimensional code which, developed with the appropriate instruments, gives us a figure in three dimensions;
- the imprints are those of the corpse of a man who was scourged, crowned with thorns, crucified with nails, wounded in the side;
- pollens of various plants from different localities, including Palestine, have been found on the Cloth;
- there are traces of human blood;
- a clear difference has been shown between the blood that flowed from wounds while the person was still alive and blood that seeped after death, as well as the difference between venous and arterial blood;
- there are no retouchings of any kind which could have enhanced the faint negative imprints, lightly fading away according to the principle of distances, for which the parts of the body in contact with the Cloth are more pronounced while the parts farther from the Cloth are less marked or not at all;
- in nature, one finds or one can produce similar negative effects;
- it is absolutely not a manual work, but a mystery we are trying to solve.

These factors make it possible to continue the discussion with further considerations. So as not to invade the fields of other specific disciplines, scientists abstain from going into these considerations, which lie outside their own fields. There is nothing wrong with this approach. Some conclusions made by specialists cannot be accepted as they have been formulated, and serious revisions are requested. Research has not always been as truly and seriously interdisciplinary as one could wish.

It can be said that when science establishes limits to its research, philosophy steps in and when philosophy has no more to say and its conclusions still remain open to wider horizons, then theology can intervene, introducing clear and precise distinctions between data that are plainly natural and data recognized as surpassing natural laws; distinctions which can and should be made by science.

At the end of the logical process, there should also be a conclusion:

- the Shroud can be explained *naturally* because similar phenomena can be found in nature or can be produced;
- the Shroud cannot be explained naturally, even though it carries traces of human blood.

In the one case as in the other, every discipline has carried out its own research to explain that which is there under our eyes; a realistic representation that can only be the Christ because of the impossibility that all the various circumstances documented on the Shroud could be realized in any other person. In the calculation of probability,<sup>3</sup> we find the maximum expression of an exceptional event which occurred only once in history and only for the Christ. His body, in all things similar to ours, wrapped in that Cloth on which remain the traces of his humanity, in a certain moment of time and of history rose from death as proof of his divinity. And this is the event that has no equivalent, and by the absolute uniqueness of the event raises the percentage of probability of the Shroud's authenticity to one-hundred percent.

In fact, if this body had remained in the Cloth, the corpse would have decomposed and we would not have the indirect proof (even physical proof, as many scholars claim) of that ultimate event of the life of Christ which is the resurrection.

But here we enter into the sphere of faith. The Shroud itself has brought us to this threshold, by offering us logical considerations that can help us to believe with major certainty. Acceptance of the Shroud's authenticity is not, and never will be, an act of faith: the object of faith is the body of revealed truths. Nonetheless, the Shroud has shown itself to be an aid to faith.

At this threshold, whether we will or not, we are called upon to pronounce our *Yes* or our *No* to this event/mystery which is at the core of the Christian faith with the consequences we know so well: Rise again with Him at the end of time, or have no part with Him in the reign of the Father.

## NOTES

1. LUIGI FOSSATI: "Analisi radiocarbonica per la sacra Sindone?" *Studi Cattolici*, #300, Feb. 1986; reviewed in *Spectrum* 19, June 1986, p. 32.

2. It is enough to remember that Neptune, eighth planet of the solar system, was discovered by logic, based on mathematical calculations, before it was found by observatory instruments. In fact, it was discovered in 1846 by J. Galle and H. d'Harrest on the basis of calculations made by Le Verrier. Contemporaneously, but completely independently, J.C. Adams found Neptune through the observations of the planet Uranus, whose movement deviated systematically from the supposed orbit.

3.. The calculation of probabilities was first published by Yves Delage, at the beginning of this century, in a letter to *Revue Scientifique* (31 May 1902, pp. 683-687); then by Paul de Gail, S.J., in *Le visage de Jésus-Christ et son linceul*, Paris (1972) with a paragraph entitled "Les probabilités identifient le Christ", and recently by Prof. Tino Zeuli in *Sindon*, "Gesù Cristo è l'Uomo della Sindone" (Dec. 1983) and in a brilliant and vivacious article in *Il Nostro Tempo* (2 June 1985, p. 4), "Lo scienziato e la Sindone". The *Sindon* article was presented in *Spectrum* #10 (Mar. 1984, pp. 29-33).