

A SAMPLING OF REACTIONS TO THE MEDIEVAL DATE

A double filtration: the items below are selections from a heavy shower of publications deemed significant—in one way or another—by *Spectrum* readers, and sent to be shared with others.

Italy. *La Stampa*, Oct. 14, surrounded the official announcement with a pageful of questioning articles. In "The Mystery Continues", a good historical survey of other shrouds, we learn that in the 1800s the shroud of Compiègne was washed by a priest's housekeeper, perhaps a bit too energetically, and its imprint disappeared. Also on Oct. 14, *Avvenire* ran a 3-column photo of the Holy Face on the front page and three full pages inside with pictures and articles by qualified writers.

Franco Cardini, in it *Giornale*, Oct. 16, provokes reflection through banter. With kindly condescension, he gently reproves our affection for relics and miracles: "So now, good Christians, think twice; even feel a little bit ashamed.... And yet John Calvin and then Voltaire had said over and over again, get rid of those stupid medieval relics...": winding up to the ponderous question of the ultimate miracle, the Resurrection: "And when, up to now, was it ever asked of a miracle to submit itself to a scientific examination, or of science to legitimize a miracle? ... What that Object is a sign and pledge of, the Resurrection, remains beyond every proof. For those who do not believe, it is an absurdity; for those who believe it is dogma".

It would seem that after the first joyous shout of relief, the media in the **United States** went on with business as usual. *National Geographic*, which had given the Shroud such a grand coverage in 1980 (June; 24 pages, color photos, two foldouts), on the last page of the February 1989 issue, disposed of the subject in one short column. In defense of the Shroud, "press releases" that never got beyond the Xerox machine, fluttered across the nation. The Rev. Albert Dreisbach, in an exhaustive outlay of arguments for authenticity, remarked that "It is the accuracy of the carbon 14 dating method, rather than the authenticity of the Shroud, that is called into question". A news release dated Oct. 14 from William Meacham, archeologist at the University of Hong Kong, revealed the alarming results of a "secret" C14 test at Berkeley in 1982. In another article, unpublished so far as I know, Meacham raised criticisms and hard questions about the sampling and testing procedure. Urging another round of C14 testing, under strict controls, he advised: "We should have at least 5 or 6 dates on various points on the cloth before we can say anything definitive about its radiocarbon age."

We congratulate *The Wanderer* for publishing, Nov. 24, the response of Sr. Damian of the Cross. In two incisive columns, the Carmelite nun comes forward in her vest of archeologist, itemizing the data for authenticity without wasting one word.

A television program in **Sweden** reassured the few Shroud devotees in that climate by stating that perhaps the carbon date was not correct, and that a new investigation is being planned.

In **Switzerland**, the *Ostschweiz*, on Oct. 14, under the headline "Turin Shroud dates from the Middle Ages", gave a totally objective report of the Cardinal's announcement, the laboratories involved, a brief description of the Shroud, a sidebar explaining the radiocarbon method, all without comment or slant.

Mérleg, a Hungarian-language journal published in **Munich**, went to press just before the test results were announced. In a short note, the editor writes: "However, more and more articles appear in the world press from unconfirmed sources, claiming that the samples—according to the results of the tests—originated in the middle of the fourteenth century, not in Jesus' time.... If the rumors prove to be right, we are witnessing yet another case where archeological age determination is in conflict with that of radiocarbon dating". (Many thanks to Dr. Marta Szabados, of Indiana University, for translating this item.)

The January 1987 issue of *Mérleg* published a 50-page article by Werner Bulst, S.J.: "A Torinói Lepel és a Mai Tudomány" (The Turin Shroud and Contemporary Science). A few reprints are still available. Also appearing in that issue were articles by Rainer Riesner and Gerald O'Collins, S.J., familiar names in sindonology.

England. In *The Tablet*, Oct. 15, John Cornwell sets his pen to "Facing the facts about the Shroud". With hardly appropriate levity he manages to make the remarks of "believers" sound foolish and the "safe" option of "fence-sitters" to be a balancing act by real humpty-dumpties. "But now that the carbon test points to a medieval date, we can no longer postpone reflecting on the likelihood that the image is an unspeakable product of barbarism manufactured in the interest of ecclesiastical commerce. As we ponder the new scientific evidence, it is crucial that we consider the future implications for the Shroud's religious and moral significance in the light of this appalling possibility."

An answer to this came, in *The Tablet*, in December. Martin Haigh, O.S.B., a monk of Ampleforth Abbey who has lectured on the Shroud for 40 years, under "The Shroud defended" recalled the objections outlined by William Meacham in a paper presented to the Hong Kong Symposium (1986). Fr. Haigh sets forth his arguments for authenticity along the usual lines, with that calmness which is a reward of contemplation.

Textile Horizons, in December, reports on the mystery surrounding "rogue fibers" discovered by Prof. Hall on his Shroud sample. Prof. Hall requested Precision Processes, Ltd. to identify these "foreign bodies". "The strange fibers ... were immediately identified as cotton".

On Feb. 15, Prof. Hall, "Director of Oxford Research Laboratory,

one of the three labs which analyzed the Shroud", gave a lecture in London entitled, "The Turin Shroud: A Lesson in Self-Persuasion".

France. *Sciences et Avenir*, October, presents a 6-page article by Jean-Louis Lavallard: "The Shroud in the Laboratory", in which a current news item, i.e., the proof by C14 that the Shroud is false, serves merely as a lead into a discussion about scientific methods being used in the battle against forgeries in the world of art. In this milieu, the author is not a bit surprised to learn that the Shroud is a fraud.

30 Days is a Rome-based journal now published in five languages. The French edition of November carried an article by Mirella Pennisi expressing "Rage, Doubts and Deception". By January, balance regained, the same author reported on "New Tests for the Shroud", programmed at the plenary gathering of the Centro Internazionale di Sindonologia.

In *France Catholique*, Gerard Leclerc marshals his knowledge and conviction to assure readers that "The Shroud of Turin has not divulged its mystery". Now and again, he quotes excerpts from Mons. Jean-Charles Thomas' book, *C'est le Seigneur*. He finds occasion at the very end, as he ponders what it would mean if the Shroud is really not the relic we believed. A thought from Mons. Thomas is tested: "Let this mysterious image radiate toward us as we assume an attitude of prayer. Rest in its presence, calmly, a long time. That too, is a discovery of the Shroud". But, Leclerc reflects, we can make this discovery in contemplation thanks only to the Gospels.

On Nov. 6, *l'homme nouveau* appeared with an article by Marcel Clement, "The Holy Shroud is not a fake". Two full pages (11½ x 17) of thoughtful and penetrating considerations concern the dilemma created by the C14 date. A couple of remarks are culled: Why was there never controversy about the many other "shrouds" —of Cadouin, Cahors, Besançon, Compiègne—but only about this one? And further on: Those who affirm that the face on the Shroud is "entirely conformable" to the iconography of the fourteenth century forget that, at that period, a negative was not conformable to anything! Clement concludes reminding readers that the Shroud testifies to the reality of a sacrifice lived through; the sacrifice that Jesus offered to his Father as the price of our salvation.

The most elaborate treatment of the subject appeared in *de Rome et d'Ailleurs*, published in Versailles. The November/December issue, #91, is entirely devoted to the Holy Shroud, 36 pages strong. Three pieces are by Georges Salet, who signs the first two with his pseudonym, Michel Martin.

The first sentence of "The Shroud of Turin, special grace reserved for our time", plunges immediately into dark waters. "A goodly number of priests before the Shroud of Turin as well as the

apparitions of the Lord or His Mother, [apparitions] recognized by the Church, say to us: 'We don't need all that; the Gospels and the infallible doctrinal instruction of the Church is enough for us'. [With astonishment we hear many declare: *I don't need the Shroud for my faith*. Such discourtesy! God leaves us this stupendous souvenir—that has nothing to do with faith but a lot to do with love—and one declines to receive it! Since God never expends his power on uselessness, there must be some purpose here that we are invited to fathom.]

Martin continues: "A strange attitude to take, as if to say to Jesus and Mary: 'What have you come here for now? Why don't you just stay quietly in heaven? Don't you know that Revelation is finished...?'" [Awakes again, in clammy chill, the nameless nocturnal anxiety that crouched in the cell of the Grand Inquisitor the night the Visitor appeared—and was rebuffed, rebuked, upbraided, and sent away. Go, the Inquisitor commands with trembling voice, *Go and come not again. Come not at all, never, never!* (Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*).]

The author's pen scorches the pages as he compares the intellectual "smitten by his own knowledge" with the crowds of simple believers—such as the three million pilgrims who came to Turin in 1978 from all over the world. [I remember a Japanese man and his little son who stood in line three separate times, at least a couple hours at a stretch, for 30 seconds on the ramp before the Shroud.] And for what? As Martin says, photographs of the Shroud, being drastically reduced, accentuate contrast and the entire figure can be viewed; whereas looking at the Shroud itself, one sees the patches, the scorches, the bloodmarks and, faintly, the body imprints. [What was it, then, that changed so many lives?]

Carbon 14, he says, is an excellent test, but the results announced on October 13 seem to have placed two certitudes in contradiction: the undoubted authenticity of the Shroud and the acknowledged value of the scientific data on which C14 dating is based.

The second piece, "The Proofs of Authenticity of the Shroud of Turin" is a republication of the author's article of 1979, addressed to "readers of good will, who won't close their eyes and ears" to the plain facts. Eleven pages just about cover everything from Barbet to Bonnet-Eymard. Martin opts for a natural origin of the imprints, "by a concurrence of circumstances so improbable that they could not have been managed except by God".

Seventeen pages discuss the radiocarbon method, carefully, thoroughly and understandably. As for accuracy, I am no judge of that. In conclusion, Martin/Salet repeats that he does not know the true explanation of the aberrant results obtained by the three labs. "But it would be irrational to think that Christ, in resurrecting, increased the quantity of C14 that ought to be found naturally on the Shroud.... Would he lay a trap for us?..."