

CORRESPONDENCE

I asked a friend of mine, the artist-painter Etienne Ret of Paris: "As an artist, what is your opinion on this question: Could an artist of the early centuries have created the classical, traditional Face of Christ by looking at the negative imprint on the Shroud? Would this early artist have understood the enigmatic imprint? If the artists of the Renaissance were unable to paint a credible Face of Christ from the Shroud, (as we see in the copies of the XVIth century and later), how can we suppose...etc."

Etienne Ret has been a devotee of the Holy Shroud since he was very young. And he is a man *très spirituel*; his paintings, found in the most discriminating museums of Europe and America, vibrate in a perfect fusion of the Real and the Beyond-the-Real, the seen and the sensed.

In response to your question: with my 86 years and my experience of 60 years as artist-painter—for me there is no doubt that the Holy Shroud is the Christ—(no need for scientific proofs). A painter, however skillful he might be, could neither make the Shroud nor make a copy of it—. On the other hand, what artist could have painted the Christ???

Rembrandt, the most spiritual of all??? He tried nineteen times to paint the Christ, without satisfying himself or anyone else. El Greco?? called the Mystic Painter? El Greco painted seven shrouds, three with the Veronica (at the Prado and at Toledo). He was remembering Byzantium—his figures of Christ are majestic but far from the majesty of the Holy Shroud ...(although he certainly knew of it).

Andre Malraux says, "No one has ever suggested the Sacred, except in the icons and the Gregorian chant!" One day, Malraux was talking with Picasso. "You know the story of Bernadette?" Picasso asked, "Who is Bernadette?" Malraux answered, "A little shepherdess to whom the Holy Virgin appeared. A reproduction of a Raphael painting of the Virgin was shown to Bernadette and she was asked if this picture resembled her vision. Bernadette said 'No!' She was shown other Holy Virgins of different periods and different artists. She responded, 'No!' 'No!' 'No!' Finally she was shown an icon of the Virgin. This time Bernadette answered, 'Yes, that resembles her...a little....' At that, Picasso was much surprised!

Probably it is the same for the icons of Christ. Whether it is Our Lady of Vladimir (1131) or the icon of the Trinity by Andrei Rublev, the icon does not seek an everyday realism but the spiritual realism. It is a symbol, a spiritual Presence, almost a sacrament. The icon painters prepared themselves by long ascetic practices, and meditations and prayers, to attain this goal.

ETIENNE RET