

ANGELO RUSSI

Introduction to the Worldwide Congress “Sindone 2000”

I take the floor on this occasion as Secretary of the Scientific Committee of the Worldwide Congress “Sindone 2000” because of the justified absence of its President, professor Franco Cardini. But it is a pleasure for me to do so, and to welcome all participants of the Congress. I wish you all the best for the outcome of our works, also on behalf of the scientific institution who promoted and strongly supported this Congress, that is LUMSA, Libera Università “Maria SS. Assunta”, one of the best private Universities at present in all of Italy. Its rector, professor Giuseppe Dalla Torre, and the headmistress of the Literature and Philosophy faculty, professor Maria Grazia Bianco, asked me to speak on their behalf and on the whole personnel’s, apologizing for their not wanted absence on this occasion.

On behalf of the earlier mentioned Committee of the Congress and all of the organizers I would like to thank the religious, political and scientific authorities who have contributed to make the Honour Committee of this Congress a prestigious one by deciding to be part of it, showing their friendship and solidarity with this initiative.

At the same time I would like to give a truly heartfelt thank you, and I think it is also on behalf of all of you here, to all the members of the Scientific Committee, whom I had the honour and pleasure to serve being its secretary, and to its President, our colleague prof. Cardini, for the often hard but always exciting work that has faced us in the best of harmony and agreement, so as to assure a dignified and qualified development of the Congress. We hope to have succeeded in this.

Looking back on the two years, in which this Congress has been brought up, it is impossible not to think of all those who started to walk on this road with us but who can’t be here right now to enjoy the results of our hard work. I am referring in particular to those members of the Committee and to the scholars who should have been part of the Congress today whom a cruel destiny has taken away from us, from our affection, friendship and esteem. I’m talking about Alan Adler, Mario Cecchetto, Stefano Cicchetti, Lamberto Coppini, Giorgio Tessitore. I hope that we in these days during the Congress will manage to dedicate to each and every one of them a proper -- though concise -- commemoration. For now, they live in our memory and prayer.

I will spend a couple of words to explain and justify my presence here, even in a coordination role, without being a true Shroud expert. I am actually a Roman History scholar, teaching this subject in Italian Universities for about a

quarter of a century, without having had any occasion to dedicate *ex professo* my study to the Shroud affair so far. The best I could do was to mention it during my courses, especially at Lumsa. Still I have accepted to be part of this venture on the grounds that it is only by involving scientific operators professionally committed in the different fields of research, and of the historical one especially, that we can give a valuable and serious contribution to the study of such an important historical piece as the Shroud.

In the organization of this Congress we in fact privileged the methodological aspect rather than the detailed research, trying to respect as much as possible the “rules” -- «le regole del giuoco», to put it in the words of Arnaldo Momigliano, one of the greatest historians of ancient times -- even in a field not sufficiently acknowledged by the official research such as the Shroud one is, perhaps for the too many and too obvious religious, or at least theoretical and ideological implications that it has. This could be a solution, if not THE solution, to a problem of such importance and weight.

I would like to remind you that, beyond the important religious implications it has, the Shroud is to be considered necessarily as an historical evidence, therefore it has to be the object of an historical study. Every other technical-scientific verification is thus to be framed always and in any case in the historical ambit, and is neither to be considered detached from the rest, nor as a definitive solution to the whole affair. Everything must converge to solve this problem first of all historically, and then also to go on with the verification of its religious meaning.

As to the historical methodology we used, we kept in mind that there are some precise and universal “rules” (“regole del giuoco”), which are the outcome of centuries of work. Not respecting them will result in the rudest *dilettantism*, which is not science. Another matter is the useless waste of energy spent to achieve results already achieved. So, here is the importance of the involvement of the official research institutions, to guarantee the respect of the rules.

But our minds have probably started to wander off, and we could, for instance, start to meditate on the creation of a Worldwide Committee of Research about the Shroud, which could eliminate all kind of boundaries and put an end to centuries of self arrogated privileges, often a consequence of useless and boorish provincialism.

Still, it's not fair that I keep on talking and that I distract you from the real object of this Congress. Other people, with more authority in this field than mine, could propose the Worldwide Committee, better than what I could do. So all that is left to do for me is to thank again the authorities and all of you here also on behalf of the University that I have the honour to represent, and of the members of the Scientific Committee of this *Worldwide Congress “Sindone 2000”*.