

HISTORIC MOVE FOR THE SHROUD?

In May of last year Ian Dickinson of this Society, representing himself rather than the BSTS, sent the following letter to his Holiness Pope John Paul II:

The Holy Shroud - which without doubt covered the body of Jesus - and for which you are ultimately responsible under Canon 1273, is currently surrounded by scaffolding and subjected to dust from building works, and Christians are prevented from being even near the Shroud - which should be in a properly protective full-length transparent housing, safe from pollution and towel-roll treatment and free of stitched on cloth.

The situation is scandalous, and contrary to Canon 1284, par 2:1 - 'be vigilant that no goods placed in their care in any way perish or suffer damage ...'

As Ian Dickinson is already aware, this Editor, on somewhat belatedly receiving a copy of the letter, gave it 'nil points' for diplomacy. It seemed also more than a little unjust, in view of the Church's lack of jurisdiction over Turin Cathedral's Royal Chapel, this being in Italian State territory.

Nonetheless, and even though Ian Dickinson received no reply, the good news is that something is about to be done in respect of the Shroud's continuance in Turin : Cathedral's Royal Chapel while major structural repairs are carried out overhead. First the whisper was that it might be moved at Christmas, then Lent, then more positively May 4.

Now, although May 4 is looking less promising, the move looks certain to take place no later than the autumn. Provisionally, the plan seems to be for the Shroud to be moved down into the main body of the Cathedral, to a special glassed repository behind the high altar, where the casket will be visible to those visiting the Cathedral. Here it will remain during the three to four years of restoration work on the Royal Chapel, also while discussions take place concerning the best methods of scientific conservation.

The move when it takes place will undoubtedly be a historic one. With the exception of World War II, when it was moved for safety to Monte Vergine, east of Naples, the Shroud has been kept above the altar of the Royal Chapel for the last 298 years. So far as is known, the occasion of the move will not be used for any fresh examination of the cloth, though anything is possible in view of the secrecy with which the taking of samples for carbon dating was carried out in 1988.

Also so far as is known the move is supposed to be only temporary, just while the Royal Chapel is undergoing repairs. But it deserves pointing out that the move does at long last transfer the Shroud to territory within the jurisdiction of the Church. It is also a matter of history that on another occasion when the Shroud was 'temporarily' moved - from Chambéry to Turin in 1578, just to save the Archbishop of Milan a journey across the Alps - it stayed rather a long time...