

Peter Rinaldi

by Josep Fernández Capo

Without a doubt, Peter Rinaldi (1910-1993) must be considered as one of the founding fathers of sindonology. He was both the great disseminator of the knowledge about the Shroud and its first promoter as an object of scientific research.

Sometimes, the real progress of a certain science does not start happening until after many years of seeking for it without success. One illustration of this is the recent findings of the gravitational waves and the Higgs boson. On the other hand, other times it seems that it is sheer luck that comes into play and radically changes the course of a scientific discipline: this is what happened with Fleming and his accidental discovery of penicillin. In the history of sindonology we can detect at least three moments of "luck" that changed everything: the first photograph of Secondo Pia¹, the 3D recognition of that photograph by John Jackson, and Rinaldi's experience. We now proceed to examine the latter.



Father Peter Rinaldi

On September 24, 1933, the Shroud Exposition marked the beginning of the celebrations to commemorate the 1900 anniversary of the death of Christ. Rinaldi, a Salesian seminarian, was then living in Turin, his homeland. He was also a devotee of the holy relic. As he noted in his diary, that day he sensed that something big was coming:

A day to remember! The Holy Shroud was exposed today in the Cathedral of Turin (...). It will be exposed for three weeks. I expect to serve Mass at the altar of the exposition at least twice a week. When I asked our rector to allow me to do so, he said to me, "The Shroud means a lot to you, doesn't it?" It does!².

On the last day of the exposition, an impromptu seminar was organized for scientists of various nationalities who had come to Turin to take a closer look at the relic. "Luck" — or providence — led to Rinaldi becoming their interpreter, since he was fluent in Italian, English and French. Rinaldi himself recounted the impact that this unexpected encounter with the young science of the Shroud had on him:

Like most people at that time, I did not regard the Shroud as some sort of

¹ Cf. Fernandez Capo, J., 'Secondo Pia', sequence for David Rolfe's documentary, 2021.

² *Obituary: Father Peter Rinaldi S.D.B.* by Ian Wilson, British Society for the Turin Shroud, Newsletter No. 34 - April 1993 (<https://www.shroud.com/bstsmain.htm>)

*scientific marvel at all. It was, if anything, a religious wonder, a miracle. Unexpectedly, on the closing day of the exposition, I found myself involved as interpreter in a seminar at which several Shroud experts expounded on the scientific aspects of the Shroud. That it should have become an object of intense interest to scientists came as a surprise to me*³.

What do we owe Rinaldi? What did he see that others did not see? Where is his merit? Rinaldi's greatness comes from knowing how to capture an epic moment: *"He was surprised to learn that the Shroud was of interest to science"*⁴. In other words, he was able to appreciate that in the Shroud there was a confluence of both faith and science, a potential alliance between devotion and experimental method, between theology and medicine. Science was not, as some claimed, a type of positive knowledge that came to supplant religion; on the contrary, it was a wonderful source of knowledge that could enter into a harmonious dialogue with a pious object, namely, the Shroud of Turin, the most famous catholic relic.

This alliance between faith and reason had already occurred at other times in the history of theology: it is often said that Saint Augustine of Hippo had christianized Platonic thought and that Saint Thomas Aquinas did the same with Aristotelianism. The novelty—which so fascinated Rinaldi—is that, despite the agnostic positivism inaugurated a century earlier by Auguste Comte⁵, science was interested now in a christian relic and could contribute to the forging of a new synthesis between faith and reason. As John Heller, a member of the famous STURP team, said years later:

*Though it was believed that there would be a confrontation between science and religion, none occurred. Rather, the relationship was harmonious and synergistic*⁶.

It could be said that, *"Believers and non-believers are united by at least three things: in the face of the supernatural, doubt unites them; before the natural, wonderment does; before the existential, a sort of inner imbalance"*⁷. It was this amazement at the natural

³ Rinaldi, P. (1984,) IX, *When America first heard about the Shroud*, Shroud Spectrum International No. 12, p. 3 (<https://www.shroud.com/pdfs/ssi12part3.pdf>).

⁴ Crispino, (1986), *A letter from Secondo Pia*, Shroud Spectrum International No. 18 Part 4 (www.shroud.com/pdfs/ssi18part4.pdf).

⁵ Auguste Comte (19 January 1798 – 5 September 1857) was a French philosopher and writer who formulated the doctrine of positivism. He is often regarded as the first philosopher of science in the modern sense of the term (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auguste_Comte). Comte was the thinker who "divinised" experimental science as the definitive knowledge that overcame religion and metaphysics.

⁶ Schwartz, B.M. (2013). *Religious Freedom in Scientific Research*. TEDx Conference, Vatican City, April 19 (www.shroud.com/pdfs/tedxtext.pdf).

⁷ Fernández Capo, J. "La Síndone de Turín: entre la ciencia y la fe ¿Tiene algo que decir la Síndone al mundo académico?", 18-XII-2018, conferencia impartida en la Universidad de Navarra.

(scientific) phenomena observed in the relic that caused to gather around the Shroud people of all kinds, not just fervent Catholics. It was not wonder, since in the Shroud the scientific-experimental logic was used as a fitful tool to explain what the Gospels relate about the passion of Christ. One of the wishes that, years later, Pope John Paul II would formulate had been fulfilled:

*Just as Aristotelian philosophy, through the ministry of such great scholars as St. Thomas Aquinas, ultimately came to shape some of the most profound expressions of theological doctrine, so can we not hope that the sciences of today, along with all forms of human knowing, may invigorate and inform those parts of the theological enterprise that bear on the relation of nature, humanity and God?*⁸.

Thanks to this synthesis between science and religion, something really curious would happen for the first time: a scientist, Dr. Pierre Barbet, became famous with the publication of a book on the passion of Christ (*A doctor at Calvary*, 1950) and a Catholic priest, Peter Rinaldi, became famous for his popular scientific publications on the Shroud. It would seem that the world was upside down.

For Rinaldi, this unexpected encounter with the science of the Shroud was a vital transformation. Since then, his life was no longer the same: a strong sense of mission transformed his life (that of making known that new alliance between religion and science as applied to the relic). Rinaldi dedicated almost 60 years (from 23 to 82, the age at which he died) to foster the science of the Shroud; making it wonderfully compatible with his demanding and effective pastoral work as a Salesian. The same thing has occurred with other sindonologists; for example, Ian Wilson (the referent historian of the relic since 1966⁹) would say in 2010: “Thanks to my wife Judith who has most admirably suffered forty-two years of being married to the Shroud as well as to her husband”¹⁰.

Rinaldi's first great achievement was to make the young science of the Shroud known to north-Americans, overcoming the prejudices regarding the authenticity of the relic that had already crystallized in the Anglo-Saxon Catholic sphere¹¹. After the experience

⁸ John Paul II, pope. (1988).“Letter to Reverend George V. Coyne, S.J. director of the Vatican Observatory”.

⁹ “I began serious research on the Shroud in 1966 (...) major influences were New York-based Roman Catholic priest Fr Peter Rinaldi (...)” (Wilson, Ian (2010) *The Shroud*, Ed. Transworld Digital).

¹⁰ Wilson, Ian (2010) *The Shroud*, Ed. Transworld Digital.

¹¹ “While I was a student at Fordham University College, I asked one of my Jesuit teachers what he thought about the Turin Shroud. He replied: “*Read the article in the Catholic Encyclopedia on the Shroud, and then we will talk about it.*” I did, and found to my astonishment that the article, written by Jesuit Father Herbert Thurston, dismissed it as a “medieval forgery”. When I told my teacher about it, his laconic reply was: “If that’s what Thurston says, then the Shroud is a forgery (...). I decided there was but one thing to do—write

lived on the last day of the Exposition of 1933, he decided to write an article that could be published in a Catholic magazine in the US. He dedicated several months to prepare it. It was well documented and spoke to the experts. When he eventually finished it, he went to the chapel where the relic is kept and said a short prayer, but full of hope and emotional force: “*It’s in your hands, Lord*”¹². He then submitted the article to *The Sign*¹³ magazine and, within a few months, it had become an unexpected success. This is how Rinaldi himself related it:

I was not prepared for the avalanche of mail that followed in the wake of the article's publication. At the editorial office of The Sign, they would simply package the letters and forward them to me in Turin. Most writers were eager for more information, and nearly all of them requested photographs or picture cards of the Shroud image (...). Surprising, too, for those unecumenical times, was the number of letters from non-Catholics, including clergymen. Wrote the editor of The Sign: "No article in the history of our magazine ever drew such a response in terms of letters from our readers as the article on the Holy Shroud"¹⁴



This was just the beginning. Rinaldi was not satisfied with what had already been achieved and within a few months, he would play a key role in publishing the famous article on the Shroud that appeared in 1937 in *Scientific American*.

(cont.) ... an article, hoping that one of the better-known Catholic magazines in the United States would publish it. I first thought of America, published by the Jesuit Fathers in New York, but quickly discarded the idea, knowing Thurston's ghost would again appear on the scene.”

Rinaldi, P. (1984), IX, *When America first heard about the Shroud*, Shroud Spectrum International No. 12, p. 3 (<https://www.shroud.com/pdfs/ssi12part3.pdf>). See also Fernandez Capo, J., 2021, “Secondo Pia”, sequence for David Rolfe’s documentary.

¹² Rinaldi, P. (1984), IX, *When America first heard about the Shroud*, Shroud Spectrum International No. 12, p. 3 (<https://www.shroud.com/pdfs/ssi12part3.pdf>).

¹³ Cf. Rinaldi, P.M. (1934). *The Holy Shroud*. *The Sign*, 13: 685–688.

¹⁴ *Obituary: Father Peter Rinaldi S.D.B.* by Ian Wilson, British Society for the Turin Shroud, Newsletter No. 34 - April 1993 (<https://www.shroud.com/bstsmain.htm>)



FEATURES

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He Was Long of Body but Short of Intellect, and He Died Out--Just Why, We Do Not Know, There Were Dozens of Types of Dinosaurs, How We Know

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Step by Step, Design, Armament, Armor Have Been Improved with Each New Cruiser Class, We Now Have An Efficient Cruiser Fleet

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The Problem of the Holy Shroud--

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Later, in 1941, he published the book *I saw the Holy Shroud*, which was also a success. But in addition to divulging the science of the Shroud, he took another step, perhaps the most important one in the entire history of sindonology, by putting all his energies to promote direct scientific experimentation on the relic, something that had never been done before. Medical studies prior to Rinaldi had been done on photographic negatives or on corpses (Delage, Vignon, Barbet), but no scientist had yet laid their hands directly on the cloth. It was Rinaldi himself who told it in 1984:

It soon became evident however, that what was needed was more than a recounting of past events. "When will the Shroud be exposed again to the public? Will scientists be given the opportunity to examine it?". These questions were asked over and over again (...). And so it was that in 1955, I personally approached Umberto II of Savoy, Italy's former king, whose family had owned the Shroud for over five hundred years. It was the first of several visits that took place through the years. I was impressed with the King's graciousness and willingness to cooperate. He was indeed agreeable to anything that might be done with the Shroud, "as long as the Church authorities approve it, and I am kept informed" (...). The first breakthrough came in 1969 when the archbishop of Turin appointed a special commission to examine the Shroud. Then came the television exposition in 1973¹⁵. And, finally, the Shroud's finest hour in 1978

¹⁵ In 1973, the first samples of the Shroud were taken: Gilbert Raes cut out a piece of the cloth and Max Frei took dust samples from the surface of the relic.

when, after it was publicly displayed for five weeks, it was literally placed in the hands of the scientists.¹⁶

To all of the above, we must add what could be called a “chain reaction”. It is common in the history of science that a finding serves as a stimulus for many others to come, thus triggering the interest of scientists. Secondo Pia's photograph of 1898 activated the first medical studies (Delage and Vignon) and also the first historical studies (Chevalier)¹⁷. Subsequently, Enrie's 1931 photograph activated Dr. Barbet, who was noted for his experimental studies with corpses. Something similar happened with Rinaldi's article of 1934, since it was the trigger that set in motion and guided many other people: for example, Wuenschel (initiator of the sindonological movement in the USA with the creation, in 1937, of the *American Commission on Studies of the Holy Shroud*), Ian Wilson (historian), John Jackson and his STURP team (1976-1978), Bishop John Robinson (founder of the British Society for the Turin Shroud in 1977), David Rolfe (producer of the first major documentary on the Shroud in 1978: *The Silent Witness*), etc.

In 1986, when Rinaldi was 76 years old, he gave an interview to *Il Nostro Tempo* magazine¹⁸. In that conversation the atmosphere created about the Shroud is clearly reflected: on the one hand, the great prestige that surrounded the relic from the scientific point of view: “*The Turin Shroud, almost totally unknown in the United States fifty years ago, has now become, in the words of The New York Times, ‘a wonder of our scientific age’*”¹⁹; on the other, the expectation at the recent decision to carry out the C14 test, promoted by the sindonologists themselves, as it represented a new step in direct experimentation on the Shroud²⁰. Besides, in that interview, Rinaldi dropped two interesting comments about the radiocarbon test. The first referred to the limitations of the test:

*My hope is that, in the specific case of the Shroud, the experts will in due time clarify for the public at large the potentials and limitations of this test*²¹.

¹⁶ Rinaldi, P. (1984), IX, *When America first heard about the Shroud*, Shroud Spectrum International No. 12, p. 3 (<https://www.shroud.com/pdfs/ssi12part3.pdf>).

¹⁷ Cf. Fernandez Capo, J., 2021, ‘Secondo Pia’, sequence for David Rolfe’s documentary.

¹⁸ Cf. *For the Holy Shroud, a Crucial Hour: An interview with Peter M. Rinaldi, S.D.B.*, Shroud Spectrum International No. 21, p. 16, XII.1986.

¹⁹ Rinaldi, P. (1984), IX, *When America first heard about the Shroud*, Shroud Spectrum International No. 12, p. 3 (<https://www.shroud.com/pdfs/ssi12part3.pdf>).

²⁰ “The decision to proceed with the carbon-14 test and thus date the Shroud, was made at a special symposium held in Turin from September 29 to October 1 this year” *For the Holy Shroud, a Crucial Hour: An interview with Peter M. Rinaldi, S.D.B.*, Shroud Spectrum International No. 21, p. 16, XII.1986).

²¹ *For the Holy Shroud, a Crucial Hour: An interview with Peter M. Rinaldi, S.D.B.*, Shroud Spectrum International No. 21, p. 16, XII.1986.

The second alluded to something more personal: what it would mean to him if the C14 pointed to the inauthenticity of the relic:

I confess I would be painfully disappointed if, for instance, the carbon-14 test were to date the Shroud to the ninth or tenth century after Christ. I have lived to see renowned men of science, medical men and art experts stand in awe before the Shroud. The fact is that, up to now, their findings have, if nothing else, bolstered the conviction that we have in the Shroud—in the words of Pope John Paul II —“a most unusual and mysterious relic, a silent witness to the passion, death and resurrection of Christ”²².

Two years later there happened what is well known by now: the laboratories of Oxford, Arizona and Zurich carried out the radiocarbon test and firmly ruled that the relic was a “medieval forgery” (13.10.1988)²³. Rinaldi must have regretted that they did not make the slightest comment on the limitations of the test. The news was presented both to the public opinion as well as to a good part of the scientific community, as a great success of empirical science, capable of clarifying, once and for all, the “deception” of the Shroud. The radiocarbon result must have felt to all defenders of its authenticity like a kick in the teeth and, thus, confusion and discouragement filled many people’s spirits²⁴. Immediately, the relic suffered a ‘media blackout’ after the end of almost two glorious decades (1969-1988) of what could be called the ‘experimental stage’ of the Shroud. Along with the media blackout, a ‘scientific boom’ period was inaugurated to try to put the C14 test in context: just a quick glance at the document archive of scientific articles collected on the wonderful website www.shroud.com is enough to observe that most of



²² For the Holy Shroud, a Crucial Hour: An interview with Peter M. Rinaldi, S.D.B., Shroud Spectrum International No. 21, p. 16, XII.1986.

²³ Cf. Turin Shroud shown to be a fake in The Independent, 14 October 1988.

²⁴ Cf. D'Muhala, T. 1996. Where do we go from here? (www.shroud.com/dmuhala.htm)

them have been written after 1988²⁵. However, perhaps only one, the Rogers article²⁶, addresses head-on the radiocarbon test from an experimental point of view. Interestingly, this article was hardly given any importance from a media point of view in spite of being so clearly relevant.



1988 Shroud C-14 Dating Press Conference

Another common factor assailing sindonology is affliction or tribulation. Sindonologists who bet on authenticity, sooner or later, feel the paw of misunderstanding, suspicion or the loneliness of going against the tide. It already happened to Secondo Pia almost at the beginning of his relationship with the relic, when some accused him of having ‘manipulated’ his first photographs of the Shroud and it took him many years to be rehabilitated²⁷. In Rinaldi’s case, the

tribulation came in the final stretch of his life, after several decades of repeated achievements. He died in 1993, five years after the radiocarbon test, at a time of great disrepute for the relic from a scientific point of view. After his death, the sindonological archive that he had built with so much effort was cancelled and transferred to another owner. Shortly after, in 1996, the STURP, the team of scientists who were the reference of the ‘experimental stage’ of the Shroud, was also dissolved. Since the radiocarbon test, 33 years have already passed, the same number of years Secondo Pia lived surrounded by shadows²⁸. Some are hoping for a new find that will put the relic back on the front page of the world press.

In any case, it would be a mistake to think that Rinaldi lived a disappointed life for the last five years of it. His hope was anchored in something much more solid than the C14. In the aforementioned 1986 interview he stated:

Aside even from the question of authenticity, what drives me on my knees before the Shroud is its incomparable image. It is what touches the mind and heart of millions of people (...). The marvel at this point is no longer what the Shroud is,

²⁵ Cf. J. Fernández, *Faith and science dialogue in the Shroud of Turin*. *Scientia et Fides*, 3(1) /2015, 37–59.

²⁶ Rogers, R.N. (2005). *Studies on the Radiocarbon Sample from the Shroud of Turin*. *Thermochimica Acta* 425: 189–194

²⁷ Cf. Fernandez Capo, J., ‘Secondo Pia’, sequence for David Rolfe’s documentary, 2021.

²⁸ Cf. *Ibidem*.

but what it does. ²⁹

This a common phenomenon in the history of the Shroud: the fact that many are inclined to accept its authenticity moved ‘from within’; no doubt as well with the support of the data of science, but primarily guided all along by that inner intuition. It is something similar, distances aside, to what happened to the first witnesses of the risen Christ: it was a “*recognition from within that is, however, always shrouded in mystery*” ³⁰.

After the radiocarbon test, the science of the Shroud has run its course. Perhaps one wonders why most of the detractors of authenticity have not continued delving on their thesis, since its apparent provisional status as a medieval forgery is as much a miracle as its possible authenticity³¹. Indeed, if the relic is really false, at least three history narrations should be rewritten: that of the invention of photography, that of Christian iconography, and that of medieval science³². We will see what science has in store for us in the years to come. Perhaps the C14 is one of those tests that seems to point at the beginning towards the ‘forgery’ of the relic only to underpin its authenticity later³³. In any case, one can predict that, regardless of whether the authenticity of the Shroud is proven or not, there will always be reasons for believers and non-believers alike to remain calm in their convictions. In this, what Dostoevsky wrote about the two types of ‘realists’ attitude, that of the atheist and that of the man of faith, is fulfilled:

*(...) in my opinion miracles will never confound a realist. It is not miracles that bring a realist to faith. A true realist, if he is not a believer, will always find in himself the strength and ability not to believe in miracles as well, and if a miracle stands before him as an irrefutable fact, he will sooner doubt his own senses than admit the fact. And even if he does admit it, he will admit it as a fact of nature that was previously unknown to him. In the realist, faith is not born from miracles, but miracles from faith. Once the realist comes to believe, then, precisely because of his realism, he must also allow for miracles*³⁴.

Once again, in the face of the supernatural what counts least is the senses. Believing or not believing is not required by science, but depends on a vital attitude. There is no

²⁹ Cf. *For the Holy Shroud, a Crucial Hour: An interview with Peter M. Rinaldi, S.D.B.*, Shroud Spectrum International No. 21, p. 16, XII.1986.

³⁰ Benedict XVI (Ratzinger, J.), *Jesus of Nazareth*, Vol. II, 2011.

³¹ "At this point, I am reminded of what Dr. Donald Lynn, a dedicated Shroud researcher, said when questioned on the possibility that the Shroud be indeed a forgery. *‘Were the Shroud a forgery, it would be a greater miracle than if it were the actual cloth of Christ’*". (*For the Holy Shroud, a Crucial Hour: An interview with Peter M. Rinaldi, S.D.B.*, Shroud Spectrum International No. 21, p. 16, XII.1986).

³² Cf. Fernández Capo, J. *La Síndone de Turín: entre la ciencia y la fe ¿Tiene algo que decir la Síndone al mundo académico?*, 18-XII-2018, conferencia impartida en la Universidad de Navarra.

³³ Cf. J. Fernandez, *Faith and science dialogue in the Shroud of Turin*. *Scientia et Fides*, 3(1)/2015, 37–59

³⁴. Dostoyevsky, Fyodor (1880) *The Brothers Karamazov*

correlation between being a scientist and being an atheist (or agnostic); nor the opposite. As there is no correlation between being a man of letters, a sportsman or a politician and having or not having faith. Faith is a personal decision. Repeating the quotation above, “*Believers and non-believers are united by at least three things: in the face of the supernatural, doubt unites them; before the natural, wonderment does; before the existential, a sort of inner imbalance*”³⁵. What is impressive, what fascinates us, what interests us here is that the science of the Shroud shows that the observable natural phenomena on the relic (regardless of its origin) are really amazing, and this allows believers and non-believers to walk together in unison.

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The BSTS welcomes suitable articles and papers for publication. Submissions, *ideally*, should be formatted on Word. Please use A5 paper size with narrow margins all round. Typeface: Times New Roman 10pt. Submit to:

editorial@bstsnewsletter.com

This edition of the newsletter includes an article about the Shroud Exhibition which was held recently in Rockwell Green, Somerset. Pam Moon, who created and manages this mobile exhibition, is always on the lookout for new venues such as churches, cathedrals or large halls, which may be able to host such events. If you know a suitable venue which could be made available for such an event, please contact Pam Moon by sending an email to:

familyofmoon@aol.com

³⁵ Cf. Fernández Capo, J. *La Síndone de Turín: entre la ciencia y la fe ¿Tiene algo que decir la Síndone al mundo académico?*, 18-XII-2018, conferencia impartida en la Universidad de Navarra.