

FOR THE HOLY SHROUD, A CRUCIAL HOUR

An interview with

PETER M. RINALDI, S.D.B.

It is now official. New tests have been programmed for the Turin Shroud, including the crucial carbon-14 test that will date the famous Turin relic. In this interview with a reporter from Turin's *Il Nostro Tempo* (October 1986), Father Peter M. Rinaldi, S.D.B., outlines not only the results of the scientific research done on the Shroud in recent years, but also what the scientists propose to do in the near future.

Father Rinaldi is vice-president of America's Holy Shroud Guild. A leading authority on the relic, he has written and lectured extensively on the Shroud. For the past twenty years, he has assisted in coordinating the work of Shroud researchers, acting as liaison between them and the Church authorities responsible for the Shroud.

Father Rinaldi submitted his interview in English.

"Father Rinaldi, not a few people are under the impression that just about everything that could be done to research the Shroud has actually been done. Why, then, this decision to proceed with the new tests?"

"One of the leading members of the Shroud of Turin Research Project, Inc. (STURP), the group of scientists who have been researching the Shroud since 1976, told me recently: 'What we have discovered on the Shroud is so amazing as to be almost unbelievable. This is why we should like to go over some of the tests we made in 1978, and to perform some new ones. We are convinced that the last word on the Shroud has not yet been told.' "

"What did the experts discover on the Shroud?"

"It may sound a bit dramatic to put it this way, but let me say it anyway. From a strictly scientific standpoint, an artifact like the Turin Shroud should not as much as exist."

"It is quite a statement, Father. But what exactly do you mean?"

"As you know, the image on the Turin cloth is the Shroud's central point of interest. It is a shadowlike imprint of an unclad human corpse unlike anything the world of art has ever known. This much is certain: that imprint or image has no substance whatever. What I mean is that it was not produced by any coloring matter that can be isolated and identified by physical or chemical tests."

"How, then, can that image be explained?"

"Here is how STURP's team of experts explains it. 'The image on the Shroud was produced by a change in the structure of the micro-fibrils of the linen which caused it to become discolored. Clearly, the change is the result of oxidation and dehydration, a process that causes linen to turn yellowish with the passing of time.' The

experts are careful to note that the mechanism that triggered the process in the case of the Shroud is as yet unknown."

"This is almost like saying that the Shroud image is made of nothing since, as you said, it is not due to any coloring substance, but solely to a process that affected the very structure of the linen ..."

"Precisely! What is all the more astounding is that this image, 'made of nothing', when photographed and seen on the negative, turns out to be a positive image, an amazing portrait the like of which, in the words of art experts, is not known to exist in the entire history of iconography. There is not a hint of exaggeration in this, because this incredible portrait of Christ in death, imprinted on an ancient linen, besides being a perfect negative, is also three-dimensional."

"How did this discovery come about?"

"Speculating that the Shroud image must in some way reflect the three-dimensional surface of the body it enveloped, the members of the Shroud of Turin Research Project decided to convert all image points to proper vertical relief, using the Interpretations Systems VP-8 Image Analyzer. The result was an amazing three-dimensional brightness of the image. Scientists believe that the three-dimensional quality of the Shroud image proves beyond doubt that the Turin cloth must indeed have been wrapped around a human corpse whose volume contours were encoded in the varying intensity levels of the image."

"What does the three-dimensional quality of the image actually prove?"

"Alone, it suffices to dispose of the notion that the image on the Shroud is the work of an artist. Experiments show that conventional paintings and photographs, when computer-analyzed, turn most into blurs, the originals hardly recognizable. The negativity and three-dimensionality of the Shroud image place the Turin relic in a category by itself. No image or portrait is known to exist that could even distantly compare with the image on the Shroud."

"Father, do you think that the new tests will reveal other things about the Shroud?"

"Let me quote what an expert told me recently: 'We are hoping to shed some light on several points. Most important, how the Shroud image (which is evidently the imprint of an authentic human corpse) was transferred from the body to the cloth. This applies also to the wounds, the outflow of blood, the marks of the scourging and other injuries, all of which experts in forensic pathology relate unmistakably to the cruelties inflicted on the Man of the Shroud before and during the crucifixion.'"

"Has the presence of actual blood on the Shroud been certified?"

"Even a cursory look at the Shroud shows stains easily recognizable as 'blood stains.' Samples of 'blood-stained' fibrils from the Shroud were examined. Such tests fully support the statement released by the investigators that 'all that we see in the blood areas of

the Shroud derives definitely from blood and its components.' I might add that experts expect to confirm the presence of pollen grains on the Shroud. These pollen grains have pointed to the Shroud's existence in the Near East in the early centuries of Christianity. The experts will be looking for the answers to several other questions in line with their previous investigation of the Turin relic."

"It is now certain that, among the tests programmed for the coming investigation, there will also be the carbon-14 test which will date the Shroud. How was this eventual decision finally reached?"

"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. Scientists from several countries, all of them experts in radiocarbon dating, met in Turin at the request of the city's Cardinal-Archbishop, who is the Holy Father's delegate for all Shroud matters. Dr. Carlos Chagas, president of the prestigious Pontifical Academy of Science, presided at the meeting. The experts unanimously concurred that the carbon-14 test be carried out, and recommended procedures which will involve seven laboratories. The British Museum will be guarantor for the project. Results of the test will be announced officially in the spring of 1988. I might add that what finally induced the Church authorities to give their assent for the test is the reliability of the radiocarbon dating, and, too, the fact that minute samples of the Shroud material will be used for the test, so minute, in fact, that their removal from the Shroud will hardly be noticeable."

"Father, this clearly points to the fallacy of some people who kept saying that, with regard to the Shroud, the Church was afraid of the truth..."

"Absurd, to say the least! Our faith in Christ does not need the Shroud. It rests on a far more solid basis. The Church afraid of the truth with regard to the Shroud? Why, as far back as 1969 and again in 1978, the Church authorities placed the Shroud literally in the hands of the scientists. They are ready to do so again."

"It is known that the carbon-14 test, while reliable, does not produce an 'absolute date'. In other words, the test does not zero in on the exact date of the tested artifact. What if, in the case of the Shroud, the test should date it to the third or fourth century after Christ? Could it still be accepted as at least probably the burial cloth of Christ?"

"I am not a scientist nor an expert on the carbon-14 test. I do know that there are many misconceptions about the radiocarbon method of dating among the general public and even among journalists. While the test does usually provide a reliable indication of the true calendar age of a given artifact, there are any number of factors that can influence its measurements and produce significant discrepancies, as much as three hundred years and more, plus or minus. In the case of the Shroud, a carbon-14 age later than the first century A.D. does not necessarily constitute scientific proof of

the non-authenticity of the Shroud, the reason being that radiocarbon dating is based on a number of unverifiable assumptions. 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."

"Assuming the carbon-14 test will render a positive date for the Shroud, will this constitute a definite proof that the Turin relic is indeed the burial cloth of Christ?"

"Assuredly not! Neither the carbon-14 test nor any other test can of itself authenticate the Shroud. We cannot expect science to decide whether the Man of the Shroud is actually Christ. This is totally outside the scientist's field. However, this much is true: a positive date from the carbon-14 test that will connect the relic to the early centuries of the Christian era will certainly lend at least a degree of moral certainty to the possibility that the Man of the Shroud may indeed be Christ, particularly when the overwhelming evidence of other proofs is taken into consideration."

"What if science were ever to prove that the Shroud is a clever forgery of some ingenious medieval artist?"

"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.'

"And now to your question. At an interview which Cardinal Ballestrero, Archbishop of Turin, granted in 1983 to the Columbia Broadcasting Company, when asked how he would react were the scientists to exclude the authenticity of the Shroud, the Cardinal replied: 'To the devotees of the Shroud I would continue to say what I have always told them. Remember, it is your faith in the Lord that brings you to our cathedral. In the Shroud you come to venerate a sign, a symbol that brings before our eyes the sufferings and death of Christ as no other image has ever done. This remains true even if the Shroud were only the work of an artist. It would still be a sublime image, a unique expression of our faith in the Lord, and an aid, too, to our piety.' "

"And you, Father Rinaldi, who through the years have promoted the cause of the Shroud with so much enthusiasm, how would you react if the Turin relic were to turn out to be nothing more than a supremely clever, if unique, work of art?"

"Not differently from my good friend the Cardinal-Archbishop of Turin, though 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'.

"I should like to emphasize the fact, however, that aside from what the scientists have said or may yet say about the Shroud, 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. It deeply touched Pope Paul VI who, pointing to the photograph of the face of the Man of the Shroud on his desk, said to me: 'Every time I look at it, my heart whispers, "It is He! It is the Lord!" Paul Claudel, the great French poet, said beautifully, too: 'It is not just a portrait. It is His very presence!'

"Indeed, there is something uncanny about the Shroud's mysterious hold on people. I have seen it all over the world. Recently, in Hong Kong, nearly three hundred thousand persons paused, silent and pensive, before the luminous panels of a great photographic exhibit of the Shroud. Astonishingly, ninety percent of them were non-Christians. They marvel at this point is no longer what the Shroud is, but what it does. And the Shroud does it through the mysterious power of that face, so marred and so sublime in the serene majesty of death. The Shroud does it as one looks at the battered body which, in the words of Daniel Rops, evokes but one Man—Christ, who said, 'Crucified, I will draw all men to me.' "