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30 April 1988

Prof. Luigi Gonella,
Commissione scientifica per gli esami
sulla S. Sindone,
C. Vittorio Emanuele 20,
10123 Torino, Italy

Dear Luigi,

I am sending this letter via Father Rinaldi, and with his encouragement, as a memorandum of some personal thoughts on the timing of any testing of the Shroud ancillary to the carbon dating.

As you are already aware, although I continue to be unhappy with the non-inclusion of a proportional counter laboratory (specifically Harwell), otherwise I have broadly supported your decisions on the carbon dating. There has been little encouragement from me for those who have sought to return to the seven lab protocol. I have also warmly approved your new openness relating to press statements on the Shroud and was amused by your catching everyone by surprise on the 21st!

I do however feel very strongly that a great mistake could be made if you leave ancillary testing until after public announcement of the results of the carbon dating. Let us consider what would happen if, say, all three laboratories produced a fourteenth century date. Regardless of whether that date happened to be true, public confidence in the Shroud would immediately be shattered. And even if, say, ancillary tests were allowed at some later stage which happened to contradict the carbon dating, it would be too late. The ancillary tests would simply be interpreted as 'rigged' to restore the Shroud's credibility. What happened with regard to the Vinland Map is a case in point. It has become so firmly fixed in the public mind as a fake that whether or not this happens to be true, it would need a minor miracle to change it.

My suggestion, therefore, is that when the carbon dating personnel reassemble in Turin, you should invite at one and the same time just a few key personnel to carry out a strictly limited programme of ancillary tests from the proposals as originally outlined by STURP, ASSIST (?) and ourselves. Importantly, these personnel would not be told the results of the carbon dating until their arrival in Turin, thus safeguarding the results' confidentiality. The invited specialists would then apply their expertise to cross-checking the carbon dating. For instance, in the case of a fourteenth century dating, our mediaeval paintings specialist, Anna Hulbert, would have a key role in trying to identify unequivocal evidence of the hand of an artist from that period. Our two archaeological textile specialists would attempt to satisfy themselves that typologically the Shroud's weave characteristics could not be from anything of the order of a first century date. And by the taking of a few microscopic image samples our Dr. Allen, in consultation with specialists back here in Britain, should be able to arbitrate on the McCrone v. Heller & Adler controversy. In fact, I would be quite happy to limit our British representation to just these four, on the

understanding that among all groups the overriding purpose of these tests would be almost exclusively to check once-and-for-all for the hand of an artist, in the light of whatever date the radiocarbon work has indicated. This is assuming that all three chosen labs have furnished a consistent and meaningful date; if there is any discrepancy in this latter I would hope that Harwell might be added to those invited to Turin.

I cannot emphasise enough that however misguided they may be, most of the general public in countries such as my own and the United States expect the carbon dating to "prove" the Shroud authentic or otherwise. And it is precisely because of this false expectation that some low-key ancillary appraisal, of the kind outlined above, really must precede public announcement of the carbon dating results, and be published in unison with those results. Together, and assuming they are not contradictory, these two independent approaches should then carry a genuine authority impossible from carbon dating alone. I for one would not accept a fourteenth century date without having demonstrated to me some unequivocal independent evidence of the hand of an artist, and I would similarly not expect anyone who believes the Shroud to be a forgery to change his mind solely on the evidence of a first century date. While I have not supported Paul Maloney's recent appeal to the Holy See, his arguments do endorse one point of paramount importance: that carbon dating should be used merely as a guide, and most certainly not as an arbitrator in itself.

If you do decide on such ancillary testing, obviously the timing must be your decision, but the best plan would seem to be for this to be held in June or early July, synchronous with the re-assemblage of the carbon dating laboratories for discussion of their findings, with the release of all results perhaps in September or early October. I would happily come to Turin to discuss with you, at the shortest notice, a final choice of invited specialists, if you feel all this may be viable. Obviously our specialists would appreciate as early notice as possible; it has been difficult enough retaining their confidence after a two year history of false starts.

I hope you will convey these thoughts to His Eminence the Cardinal. The carbon dating laboratory scientists will, I am sure, want just to get the results "off their chests" without the distraction of any ancillary work, and if carbon dating were totally reliable I would be the first to agree with them. But it is not. And whatever date the laboratories arrive at, I believe the Cardinal owes it to Christians and non-Christians alike to allow some independent cross-check before release of what could be one of the most momentous announcements in all history ...

Assuring you of very best wishes from all of us here in England,

yours as ever,
[signed]
Ian Wilson