

“This image, impressed upon the cloth, speaks to our hearts and moves us to climb the hill of Calvary, to look upon the wood of the cross, and to immerse ourselves in the eloquent silence of love.”

### Witness to Mercy:

A biographical survey of those who, after scientific and/or historical study of the shroud, have arrived at a prudential judgement that it is in fact the burial cloth of Jesus Christ indicates the transformative capacity of this encounter with the shroud. The lives of many scientists and other shroud students have been so often profoundly changed by following where the evidence led.

Why would this be so? Surely in the first instance because it speaks to them of the extraordinary nature of God's love.

If this shroud is that which enwrapped the crucified body of Jesus Christ and if Jesus Christ is God, then this cloth bears witness to the terrible sufferings of the God-Man who knew even before He became Man, even before He created human beings, that He would come among us and suffer this for us.

This, then, is witness to God's love in action towards His creatures, His children. Each of the six hundred wounds evidenced on the Shroud speak of a Love willing to endure the most terrible of sufferings to atone for our sins.

In the contemplation of the shroud then, as in the contemplation of the cross, Heart speaks to heart.

Saint Francis de Sales reminded us that the shortest way to the love of God is contemplation of Christ Crucified. That is because this contemplation deeply reveals to each of us that we are loved personally. He did this for me. He would have done it just for me. How much He must love me! Loved, I am drawn to love in return. Having been treated so mercifully by One who paid such a high price for my sins, I am enabled to be more merciful towards others. How small are the offences I receive, even at their worst, compared to the terrible offence committed against the Lamb of God.

This encounter in the shroud is the gentlest of encounters. Drawn by curiosity, intrigue, scientific challenge, perhaps even a desire to debunk, how often men and women, lovers of truth and possessed of great learning, have found in the pursuit of their own specialist scientific disciplines a deeper sense of the meaning of their own existence and a profound consolation in the confirmation of the truth that God is indeed Love.

Saint Paul told us long ago: “What proves that God loves us is that Christ died for us.”

Those who arrived a personal prudential judgment that the Turin Shroud is in fact the burial cloth of Christ have so often found the initial proof of God's love for them personally precisely in this artefact.

How deeply merciful God must be! Heart desires to speak to heart, and God desires to do so in many ways and at all times. Whatever one's personal conclusions about the shroud after an open-minded investigation of the subject, the fact remains that if Jesus Christ is God, then, as Saint Paul was constantly at pains

to convince his readers and listeners through his proclamation of the Cross of Christ, God loves you and me much more than we can ever dare to hope, and He wants to express that love to each of us in this life as Mercy.

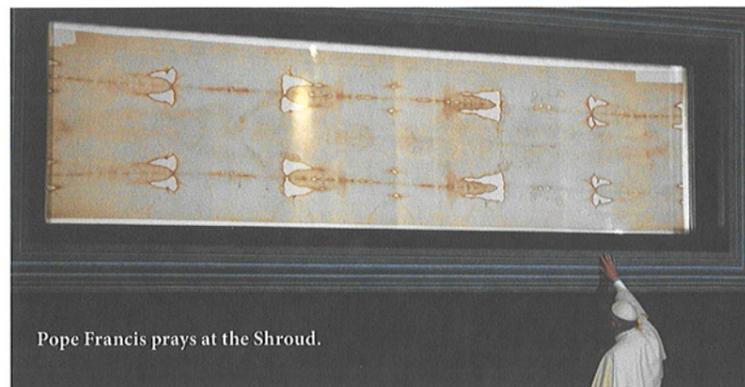
If this is Christ's burial cloth, it also assists the Catholic Christian to contemplate more devoutly the reality of the Eucharist which is primarily the making present of Christ's sacrifice. It bears witness to the Resurrection. It fills the penitent with confidence and hope in the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

May this Year of Mercy bring very many to a knowledge of the infinite love of God poured out in Jesus Christ Crucified and Risen.

*“This Face has eyes that are closed. It is the face of one who is dead and yet, mysteriously, He is watching us and in silence He speaks to us. How is this possible? How is it that the faithful ...pause before this Icon of a man who has been scourged and crucified? It is because the Man of the Shroud invites us to contemplate Jesus of Nazareth. This image, impressed upon the cloth, speaks to our hearts and moves us to climb the hill of Calvary, to look upon the wood of the cross, and to immerse ourselves in the eloquent silence of love.*

*“Let us therefore allow ourselves to be reached by this gaze, which is directed not to our eyes but to our hearts. In silence, let us listen to what He has to say to us from beyond death itself. By means of the Holy Shroud, the unique and supreme Word of God comes to us: Love made man, incarnate in our history; the merciful Love of God who has taken upon himself all the evil of the world in order to free us from its power. This disfigured Face resembles all those faces of men and women marred by a life that does not respect their dignity, by war and the violence that afflict the weakest... And yet, the Face of the Shroud conveys a great peace. This tortured body expresses a sovereign majesty. It is as if it let a restrained but powerful energy within it shine through, as if to tell us: have faith; do not lose hope; the power of God's love, the power of the Risen One, conquers all.”* Pope Francis, March 30 2013. ■

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Pope Francis prays at the Shroud.

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# INFORM

Informative  
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The Holy  
*Shroud*  
Witness to Mercy

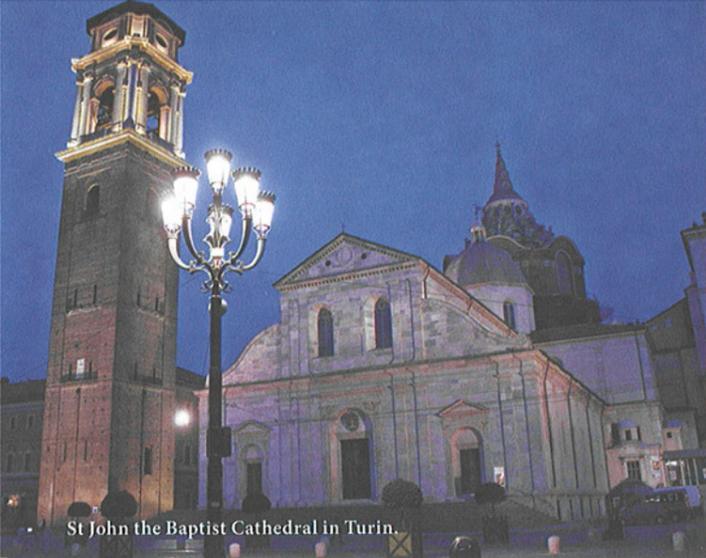
“By means of the Holy Shroud, the unique and supreme Word of God comes to us: Love made man, incarnate in our history; the merciful Love of God who has taken upon himself all the evil of the world in order to free us from its power...”

Pope Francis, March 30 2013.

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Whenever the Shroud of Turin is exposed for veneration, it draws millions of pilgrims, including saints, scientists and popes. The last exposition in 2015 drew 2 million visitors. What have they each discovered? What message does the image on the Shroud bring to us in the Year of Mercy? Fr Brendan Murphy SDB takes us into an indepth view of the Shroud.





St John the Baptist Cathedral in Turin.

*anyone should be scandalised there still exist traces of his earthly life."*

Over a century after Delage's studies and after hundreds of thousands of hours of peer-reviewed study on the linen cloth in the last forty years, it remains an object and a subject of fascination and controversy, perhaps in part for the reasons Delage adduced in 1902.

As Delage noted, the question of the authenticity of the Shroud is essentially not a religious one, not a faith exercise. It is a scientific and an historical issue. If the Shroud is authentic (that is, if it is Christ's actual burial cloth), of course, it has implications for the Christian believer because it is a witness to Christ's sufferings. And if, by the way, it is not authentic, it is by far the cleverest forgery in human history, and still a credible witness to Christ's sufferings because it conforms so accurately to the Gospel accounts and to medical knowledge.

The challenge of those interested in the Turin Shroud is to examine the available evidence and to arrive at a personal prudential judgment on its authenticity. This process is in no way a test or exercise of religious faith; it belongs to the order of judgment involved in one's conviction as to, for example, the roundness or flatness of the earth, the existence of extra-terrestrial life, or the size of the universe. It is a matter of following where the evidence leads.

And so it is not for the Catholic Church to pronounce on the authenticity or otherwise of the Shroud. As Pope John Paul II stated on the occasion of his visit to Turin on May 24 1998: "Since it is not a matter of faith, the Church has no specific competence to pronounce on these questions. She entrusts to scientists the task of continuing to investigate, so that satisfactory answers may be found to the questions connected with this Sheet which, according to tradition, wrapped the body of our Redeemer after he had been taken down from the Cross."

In this Year of Mercy, it is not inappropriate to look again at the Shroud to see if it has anything to tell us about the nature of God. We will of course find our primary reference for our knowledge of God's mercy in the Scriptures and the Church's Tradition, but God can speak to us powerfully through nature and through others of His gifts. Is the Shroud such a gift?

And in terms of the present progress of Shroud research, this is a good time to investigate. A brief paper such as this can only hope to introduce the Shroud; it cannot deal satisfactorily with the voluminous material presently available on the Shroud, but it can point the reader to further areas of inquiry.

In particular, the website [www.shroud.com](http://www.shroud.com), established twenty years ago by Jewish-American photographer Barrie Schwartz, is an excellent, comprehensive library on Shroud matters.➤

Is there any artefact on Earth that has been the subject of greater scientific scrutiny than has the Shroud of Turin? The Shroud is a 4.4 X 1.1 metre (8 X 2 cubits) linen cloth kept in St John the Baptist Cathedral in Turin, and believed by many to be the burial cloth of Jesus Christ referred to in St John's Gospel. The cloth bears a faint frontal and dorsal image of a man. Of known location since 1355, the Shroud catapulted to world attention in May 1898 after Turin lawyer and amateur photographer Secondo Pia photographed it, and discovered the extraordinary and now-famous positive image contained in the photographic negative.

Shortly after Pia's discovery, famous French zoologist and agnostic Yves Delage set out to prove the Shroud a fake.

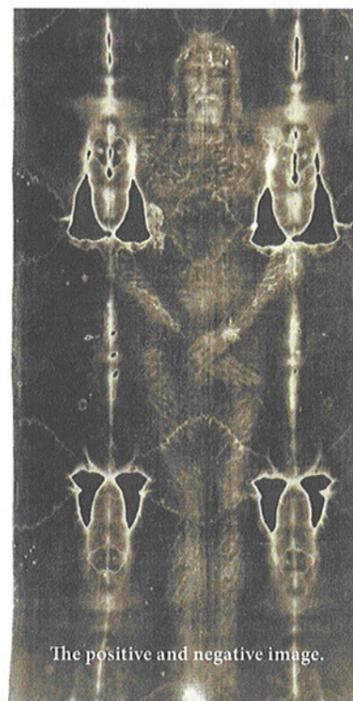
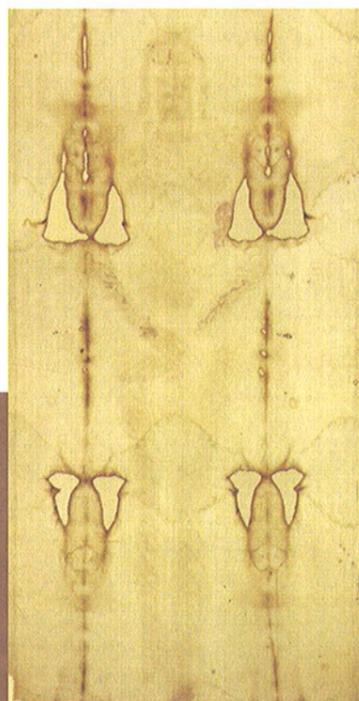
On 21 April 1902, Delage startled the Paris Academy of Science, declaring that the figure's anatomical details and traces of wounds were, from a medical perspective, too exact to be attributed to a painter. The likelihood of it being anyone other than Christ was, he said, one in ten billion. The Academy refused to publish Delage's paper, and in the aftermath Delage was led to declare:

*"I willingly recognise that none of these given arguments offer the features of an irrefutable demonstration, but it must be recognised that their whole constitutes a bundle of imposing probabilities, some of which are very near being proven... a religious question has been needlessly injected into a problem which in itself is purely scientific, with the result that feelings have run high, and reason has been led astray. If, instead of Christ, there were question of some person like a Sargon, an Achilles or one of the Pharaohs, no one would have thought of making any objection... I have been faithful to the true spirit of science in treating this question, intent only on the truth, not concerned in the least whether it would affect the interests of any religious party... I recognise Christ as an historical personage and I see no reason why*



photographer Secondo Pia

**...the question of the authenticity of the Shroud is essentially not a religious one, not a faith exercise. It is a scientific and an historical issue.**



The positive and negative image.

**Pollen grains found on the shroud indicate its presence in Israel at some point in its history.**

### A brief summary of late Twentieth Century scientific and historical research and discovery:

The two best-known Shroud events of the second half of the Twentieth Century were the 1978 STURP (Shroud of Turin Research Project) scientific tests and the 1988 carbon dating tests. Extensive studies have continued across the scientific disciplines since 1988, and continue today. British (and now Brisbane resident) historian Ian Wilson has published more than one work tracing a credible path of the Shroud from Jerusalem to Edessa (now Sanliurfa, eastern Turkey) in Turkey, thence to Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey) and thence to France.

What can be confidently asserted about the Shroud after so much study and testing, based on the peer-reviewed scientific and historical evidence? Among other things:

1. The shroud is of a weave type known at the time of Christ.
2. There is no paint on the shroud.
3. There is blood on the shroud, of type AB.
4. Computer image enhancement and analysis by a device known as a VP-8 image analyzer show that the image has unique, three-dimensional information encoded in it.
5. The (non-blood) image on the shroud is present only on the top two or three fibres of the threads. These individual fibres of the threads are 10 to 20 times thinner than a human hair. (Every linen thread is composed of 70-120 linen fibres.)
6. The blood on shroud precedes the surface image imprint (there are no image marks under the blood stains.)

7. The cause of this superficial image formation still defies the best efforts of science, and continues to be an area of ongoing research.

8. On the forehead of the shroud figure there are samples of both venous and arterial blood. (The difference was not known to medicine until the late Sixteenth Century.)

9. Blood flow patterns on the shroud conform completely to medical experience. (French surgeon and shroud student, Doctor Pierre Barbet, noted: "The bloodstained pictures were clearly not drawn by the hand of man; they could be nothing but the counter-drawings made by blood which had been previously coagulated on a human body. No artist would have been able



The spiny thistle, *Gundelia tournefortii*.

to imagine for himself the minute detail of what we now know about the coagulation of blood, but which in the 14th century was unknown. But the fact is that not one of us would be able to produce such pictures without falling into some blunder.")

10. Patterns of directionality in the one hundred and twenty scourge wounds indicate two scourgers, of differing height.

11. There are traces of bilirubin in the blood on the shroud, indicative of traumatic death, and explaining why the blood marks remain red on the shroud.

12. Pollen grains found on the shroud indicate its presence in Israel at some point in its history. Swiss criminologist Max Frei took dust samples from the shroud; subsequently pollen grains from 58 plant species were identified – 17 from Europe, 41 more prevalent in Asia and Africa. Only one area in the world boasted 38 of those 41 plant species – Judea [the region around Jerusalem]. Israeli botanist Prof Avinoam Danin further discovered that three of those were unique to the Holy Land, including the spiny thistle, *Gundelia tournefortii*, many pollen grains of which are concentrated around the head on the shroud.

13. Mineral deposits have been discovered around the feet of the shroud figure, with a large concentration of travertine aragonite (found almost exclusively in Jerusalem), a polymorphic variety of calcium carbonate, which was used in building work in ancient Jerusalem.

This summary statement of present consensus on the Shroud is by no means exhaustive, and research continues on other areas of possible future consensus.

The one factor that would appear to challenge claims to the authenticity of the shroud as belonging to Christ is the 1988 statement of the three shroud carbon dating laboratories that the shroud dates to a period between 1260 and 1390.

There is much material available in current Shroud literature about this whole issue for one who wishes to pursue it. Perhaps the best brief response concerning the carbon dating comes from American scientist Raymond N. Rogers. In a peer-reviewed scientific paper titled "Studies on the radiocarbon sample from the Shroud of Turin," published in the journal *Thermochimica Acta*, Volume 425, Rogers, retired Fellow of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, concluded: "As unlikely as it seems, the sample used to test the age of the Shroud of Turin in 1988 was taken from a rewoven area of the Shroud. Pyrolysis-mass spectrometry results from the sample area coupled with microscopic and microchemical observations prove that the radiocarbon sample was not part of the original cloth of the Shroud of Turin. The radiocarbon date was thus not valid for determining the true age of the Shroud."➤