

Shroud of Turin

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in dating the shroud. Each has already satisfied the British museum — the independent organization named to supervise the dating project — of the accuracy of its methods.

Yet researchers at all seven institutions continue to wait for an answer. Dr. Gove observes that some Church officials affiliated with the shroud "are people whose lives, whose avocations or vocations, in fact, have revolved around the shroud," and that these people may be afraid of tests that might disprove the shroud's authenticity.

Gove's remarks clearly reveal his appreciation of irony. Although Church officials have long refused to permit any scientific procedure that might damage the shroud's fabric or the image it bears, "the shroud is not kept in the ideal circumstances," Gove asserts, noting that the cloth is rolled up and

stored in a casket behind the altar of the Turin cathedral.

"It's amazing to me that it's managed to survive all these years," he quips.

Moreover, the Church has already allowed tests that could have damaged the delicate cloth. During the 1978 exhibit, for example, the shroud was mounted on a large frame, subjecting its fibres to physical stress. Furthermore, one of the tests conducted in 1978 employed ultra-violet light, "which is well-known to fade fabrics.

"Carbon dating is probably the least invasive technology of all," Dr. Gove remarks. Combined, the seven research labs would need a cloth sample measuring 1 centimeter by 12 centimeters; UR alone would need a single thread about eight inches long.

"I'd like to see it dated, and then I'd like to see as much care taken about other tests as has been taken about carbon dating," he says.

Yet some of the scientists who participated in the 1978 testing sessions have become obsessed with the idea of authenticating the

shroud, Gove said. They began to call themselves the Shroud of Turin Research Project (STURP), and they continue to push for more tests — including several potentially damaging procedures.

Despite STURP's desire to conduct further tests, Gove believes the first order of business is to positively establish the shroud's age. "I can't see how good the other tests are until we know how old it is," he said. "If the thing is 2,000 years old, I think any further tests have to be done with extreme care." If, however, the shroud is a 14th century fraud — as some skeptics assert — then the need for such restraint would be minimal. "Why conserve it if it's useless?" he asked.

Although he acknowledged that many STURP members are "absolutely first-class scientists," the UR researcher considers them religious zealots. "They scare me," he admits. "They're true believers. I think they try desperately to be scientifically dispassionate, but when you're a true believer, that's awful hard."

Father Rosenkranz's display, on the other hand, takes the middle ground regarding the

shroud's authenticity. In the three years he has presented the multi-paneled presentation to area shoppers — in both Midtown and Long Ridge Malls — the Redemptorist priest has carefully avoided asserting that the shroud is actually the burial cloth of Jesus Christ. The display consists of photographs and drawings of the shroud, synopses of its known history and information on the scientific data collected thus far. It concludes by asking the viewer, "Is this the burial cloth of Christ?"

Among the pictures to be included this year are photos of the equipment Dr. Gove will use, if he indeed obtains permission to test the shroud. In addition, viewers of the display have a chance to read — in laymen's terms — how the carbon-dating procedure is conducted.

Dr. Gove says he may even stop by himself.

Readers may view Father Rosenkranz's display at Midtown Plaza between the hours of 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. on Monday through Friday, April 13-15.

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