

World & Nation

Church adviser blasts reports of shroud test results

By Agostino Bono

Rome (NC) — The Catholic Church's scientific adviser on the Shroud of Turin has criticized a British professor for saying that the shroud is a hoax, after the professor hinted that information had leaked from a laboratory conducting tests on the relic.

The adviser, Luigi Gonella, said he doubts that test results have been leaked. He said that no one is in a position yet to speak definitively about the status of the shroud, believed by many to be the burial cloth of Jesus Christ. None of the labs involved has been told which of the cloth samples they were given for testing came from the shroud.

Gonella criticized statements by British professor Richard Luckett of Cambridge as "non-news" and unprofessional. He noted that Luckett is not involved in the testing.

"It sounds like a campaign by someone who wants to use the tests for ideological or anti-church purposes," said Gonella, the Church's liaison with scientists conducting Carbon-14 tests to determine the date of the shroud.

Gonella said that scientists still have to analyze test results and it will be weeks before a final report is ready. He was

interviewed by telephone from his home in Turin after the *London Evening Standard* published an article quoting Luckett as saying Oxford University scientists have determined that the shroud was made in the 14th century.

Neither Luckett nor Cambridge University are involved in the shroud testing. The testing is being done by Oxford University and two other laboratories under the supervision of the British Museum.

"I am amazed that a university professor would write an article on a study that he has not done," said Gonella.

He said he also doubted that Oxford University would have leaked information about its results because it would be an "evident violation" of the rules agreed upon by the testing labs.

Under the agreement each lab is doing "blind testing" because they have not been told which of three pieces of cloth they have been given belongs to the shroud, he added.

The job of the labs is to date three pieces of cloth, not to determine which is part of the shroud, he said.

No official information about the results will be released until the studies of all three

labs have been analyzed under the supervision of the British Museum, he said.

Gonella said that in mid-September the scientists involved in the testing will decide when to meet to analyze the results. After that a scientific report will be written for publication in a professional journal and a decision will be made on how and when to announce the findings, he said. Only Michael Tite of the British Museum and Cardinal Anastasio Ballestrero of Turin know which pieces belong to the shroud, Gonella said.

The shroud belongs to the Vatican but for centuries it has been in the custody of the Archdiocese of Turin.

Gonella heads the Shroud of Turin Project, formed by the cardinal to oversee outside scientific testings of the shroud.

"I officially have not been informed about anything and regard as non-news that which is coming from London," said Gonella.

"If it's true that Oxford would have let leak something about the results of their analysis, it would be an evident violation of the procedures of the pacts," he added.

Gonella said that the blind testing arrangement was requested by the labs. Each

was given a piece of cloth from the shroud, a piece of cloth each from the first century and the Middle Ages, Gonella said. Luckett touched off the row August 26 by saying the shroud was a 14th century forgery discovered by the Oxford testing.

"I think that as far as seems possible the scientific argument is now settled and the shroud is a fake" Luckett said. "I suppose there will be certain people who will never want to believe it, but it seems unlikely" the tests could be 1,300 years off target.

Luckett, while not involved in the testing, has been associated with investigations of the shroud's history since examining it in 1973. He was not available for comment on the newspaper's report in which he did not specify the source of his information beyond remarking that "laboratories are rather leaky institutions."

"The main thing to report about this lightly-stained cloth with its traces of damage by fire and flood, is that at first sight there seems nothing to it... it is now evident that, superficially, the carbon-testing will confirm this view. A probable date of about 1350 looks likely," he said.



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