

## Addressing Ministry Concerns

*The Shroud is a profound mystery with a powerful message. It is the most analyzed artifact in the world yet science still cannot render a verdict. Whether or not the Shroud is authentic, the message is identical to the Gospel. As people explore the mystery--they encounter the message. No claim of authenticity is made nor is it necessary.*

### **Q: Why is SHROUD ENCOUNTER different from other programs?**

Because everyone loves a mystery! The Shroud of Turin is *One of the most perplexing enigmas of modern times* as described in National Geographic. Time Magazine called it *The Riddle of the Ages*.

### **Q: Would it appeal to non-members?**

Many people have seen one or more of the numerous documentaries on the subject carried by Discovery Channel, Learning Channel, History Channel, and National Geographic. They are intrigued by the mystery but are wary of organized religion. An opportunity to go in depth on a subject that piques their interest may be enough to get them through the door, especially if invited by a friend.

### **Q: We only offer a few special programs a year, why should we consider the Shroud?**

The story of the Shroud appeals to young people and old. It deepens the faith of those who believe, and challenges the faith of those who don't. The program could also be called *CSI Jerusalem* as the science and history are explored. Few programs cover 2,000 years of Christian history along with data gleaned from chemistry, physics, medicine, art and biblical studies. It is a fast-moving visual experience (180 images) that captivates both the head and the heart.

### **Q: Is it too complicated for the average audience?**

Absolutely not. It is recommended for high school on up. A rudimentary understanding of science will be sufficient for comprehending the scientific aspects of the Shroud.

### **Q: Is the presentation uplifting?**

The Shroud is a superbly effective visual tool to explore all aspects of Christ's crucifixion, the nature of his resurrection and the promised resurrection of every believer. The entire Gospel message is revealed visually on this ancient linen cloth.

### **Q: What if it turns out not to be authentic?**

The Shroud is never presented as proven fact. It is a great mystery and a tremendous witness for Christ at the same time. It completely correlates with scripture as well as first century Jewish burial practices. The evidence in support of authenticity is compelling. The very fact that it COULD be authentic warrants our attention and continued research. No one is ever asked to place his or her faith in a linen cloth. It simply points the way.

**Q: Why is the Shroud relevant to our time?**

There are many people who stand on the sidelines of Christianity. They are not sure. They have many questions about God but are wary of organized religion. Yet the intriguing nature of the Shroud attracts those who may never step foot inside a church. Most of the Shroud's mysteries have been revealed in the past century through science and communicated through photography. In an age when we are bombarded with images via TV, computer and smart phones, could the Shroud have been preserved for our image-laden scientific age?

**Q: Is it a relic?**

The Shroud transcends all denominations. The Catholic Church has owned it since 1983. For the previous 600 years it has been in private possession with the Church acting as a custodian. It has been kept in Italy and France since 1353. Although several popes have made strong personal statements affirming its authenticity as a relic, the official position of the Catholic church is neutral. It is described as a "symbol of Christ's suffering." The use of the word "symbol" finds an excellent middle path that allows the Shroud to be used for teaching and reflection while not depending on absolute authenticity to do so.

Before its arrival in France, the Eastern Church kept it nearly a thousand years in Constantinople and earlier in Edessa. It was the original inspiration for Byzantine and Orthodox icons of Jesus beginning in the sixth century. In the 20th century the Protestant church became involved through scientific inquiry. If authentic, the Shroud would be in the same league as the Ark of the Covenant or Noah's Ark. Curiously, those artifacts have not yet been found, but the burial shroud of Christ may be lying in a church today in northern Italy, covered not by dirt and debris, but by controversy and confusion!

**Q: How is it different from other potential relics?**

It may or may not be a relic of Christ, but unlike a bone of some saint or an alleged piece of the cross, the Shroud is unique in its ability to be analyzed. No other known relic has a bloodstained image on it corresponding exactly with the crucifixion account of Jesus. The Shroud is potentially far more than just another relic. Some wonder if it is a photograph of the resurrection!

**Q: What about the second commandment to make no graven image?**

This is exactly why the earliest references to the Shroud in the sixth century refer to it as *not made by human hands*. The intent of the second commandment should be clear when Moses came down from the mount only to see his brother Aaron having crafted a golden calf for the people to worship. We are not to make an image or an idol representing what no man has ever seen. However all that changed with the advent of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, as recorded in John 14:9, *If you have seen me you have seen the Father*. Paul elaborates further and describes Christ as *the image of the invisible God*. Col 1:15 No one had ever seen God but Jesus was the image of God manifested in the flesh for all to see. Is it possible that God offers that same opportunity today through the Shroud? Paul says *I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some*. 1 Cor 9:22 Another translation says, "by all possible means." Does the Shroud speak to the love of God who uses *all possible means* that people may believe?

**Q: Would God use evidence? Didn't Jesus say, "Blessed are those who believe and have not seen"?**

Indeed that is what Jesus said to Thomas, yet once Thomas was face to face with the resurrected Christ, he made the strongest profession of faith in the New Testament, "My Lord and my God." Jesus did not condemn Thomas for his unbelief, but pronounced a blessing on those who don't require such proof. Yet a question remains, is Thomas representative of an element of humanity that may need a little push in the right direction? Does the Shroud give today's Doubting Thomas that same opportunity?

**If the Shroud is authentic...** then it must have a purpose. That purpose may be for believer and unbeliever alike.

**For the believer:** Was it left as a vehicle to strengthen the faith of those who may struggle with unbelief? There is no better teaching tool to visually and graphically portray the agony of Christ's ordeal on our behalf. Nor is there a better tool to help us explore the mystery of the resurrection, the event that gives us hope for an eternal future. Understanding the price that was paid and the hope offered through the resurrection is the foundation for a strong faith. The Shroud challenges those in the church who now question the very fundamentals of the faith.

**For the unbeliever:** The resurrection is the one miracle Jesus performed that had no eyewitnesses and yet it was the vacant shroud inside his empty tomb that was the first piece of evidence that caused John to believe that he had risen! (John 20:1-9)

Acts 1:3 says, *After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.* We know that God wants *all men to be saved and come unto a knowledge of the truth* (1Tim 1:4). And in John 14:10, Jesus challenges his followers to *Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.*(NIV)

Is the Shroud another "convincing proof?" Is it another piece of "evidence" for a skeptical and cynical age? The study of apologetics is the use of "proof" to document the accuracy of the bible and the rational basis of the Christian faith. The Dead Sea Scrolls are but one example. God does not expect us to have blind faith, but rather a faith that is based on fact. The early apostles knew for a fact that Jesus had risen from the dead. Paul elaborates in 1 Cor 15:14 by saying, *if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.*

Now, 2,000 years later, the claims of Christ are constantly being called into question. The eyewitnesses to these events have long passed away. Is the Shroud a "silent witness" to the one miracle upon which the entire Christian faith is built? The Shroud does not yet rise to the level of an archaeological proof. It cannot yet be established with scientific certainty. *The Shroud can never replace faith.* However, as the mystery of the Shroud is explored, the message of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection is clearly and profoundly revealed and is identical to what is recorded in the bible.

## **Q: Wasn't it Carbon Dated to the Middle Ages?**

This has become a proverbial can of worms. The answer is yes, but few are satisfied with the results. The reason is the original protocol to be used in 1988 was so badly breached the results are highly questionable. The most disturbing error was to only cut one small sample from one of the worst sites possible, the outside corner edge where it had been handled for centuries and may have also been repaired at some point.

The original protocol required three samples to be cut from three different locations for comparison. Since only one sample was taken there is no way to conduct comparative analysis to know if there was a problem. Many have speculated that perhaps the area cut for dating was somehow part of a medieval reweave since other parts have been obviously repaired such as the patches that were applied after the fire of 1532. It is also known that "invisible mending" was a skill performed in the Middle Ages to repair expensive tapestries and articles of clothing.

The latest research now indicates it may have been a bad sample and may not fully represent the fabric of the Shroud. A paper published in January, 2005 in a respected scientific journal determined that the area cut for carbon dating is physically and chemically different than the Shroud itself.

Carbon dating, believed by many scientists to be the litmus test that would prove or disprove the Shroud, only compounds the mystery because it is difficult to comprehend how the Shroud originated from the hand of medieval artist at least 100 years before Leonardo daVinci came on the scene. If the Shroud was some obvious work of art, there would be no argument. The exact opposite is true. It is not the work of an artist and the blood is human blood from actual wounds. Pollen and plant images from Israel even demonstrate a Middle East origin. Recent historical documents validate a historical trail to at least the sixth century, predating the alleged carbon age by 700 years. If it is the work of an artist, who was he? He was never identified. Why is there nothing else of significance to his credit? Why can't we fully replicate the image today?

Knowing the carbon date is in error does not prove the Shroud to be authentic nor does it prove it to be first century. However the case for authenticity has become much stronger.

### **Use the Mystery:**

- Use the mystery to draw non-members and marginal Christians struggling with faith.
- Use it to challenge the intellectual looking for a reason to believe.
- Use it as means to dramatically portray God's sacrificial love for us.
- Use it to instill hope in the promise of our own future resurrection.

**EXPLORE THE MYSTERY--ENCOUNTER THE MESSAGE**

[www.ShroudEncounter.com](http://www.ShroudEncounter.com)