



PILGRIMAGE TO TURIN IN REPARATION AND SUPPLIANT ADORATION OF THE HOLY SHROUD OF JESUS CRUCIFIED

FOUR nineteen centuries, it was through the meticulous and unflinching study of the Gospel documents that the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, theologians and historians sought to determine all the circumstances of the Passion, Death, and Burial of Christ, as well as of His Resurrection.

Since 1898, even the physical sciences have been furnishing abundant and converging proofs of the Holy Shroud of Turin's authenticity, making it a major archaeological relic by contributing a multitude of details that had remained hitherto unsuspected. Not only are the Gospel facts clarified, but the theology of the fourth Gospel itself sheds an admirable light on the phenomenon of the Holy Shroud.

St. John designates by the word *soudarion* the piece of cloth that he found in the empty tomb on Easter morning: « *He bent down and saw the linen cloths (othonia) lying on the ground, but did not go in. Simon Peter, following him, also came up, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying on the ground, and also the Shroud (soudarion) that had been over His Head; this was not with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by Itself. Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in; he saw and he believed.* » (Jn 20:1-8)

John appears to be in serious disagreement with the Synoptics. In fact, the Synoptics relate the burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea in a *sindôn*, a sheet that wrapped the Body of Jesus. Matthew specifies that this *sindôn* was « *unstained* » (*kathara*, Mt 27:59), emphasising that the linen did not have those « *stains* » that could be seen on it at the time when he was writing his Gospel, and that would be the object throughout the centuries of the close examination of artists, and then of the inquiry of scientists.

John, however, speaking as an eyewitness, does not mention this *sindôn*. According to him, Joseph and Nicodemus « *took the Body of Jesus and bound it with strips of cloth (othonia)* » (Jn 19:40). The difference with the Synoptics is due both to the choice of the verb *dein*, « *to bind* », and the plural *othonia*. It excludes any identification between these cloths and the *sindôn* of the Synoptics and, *a fortiori*, with the venerable cloth of Turin. The whole question is to know what St. John means by *soudarion*.

Basing himself on the Latin etymology of this Greek term, Fr. Feuillet maintained that it was only a transcription of *sudarium*, « *a piece of cloth of variable size, either carried in the hand or worn around the neck, intended mainly to wipe perspiration.* » In that case, however, we no longer

understand for what reason St. John made this special mention of it as apart from the other *othonia* that were « *lying* » (*keimena*) in the sepulchre.

Our exegesis answers this question by identifying the *soudarion* of St. John with the *sindôn* of the Synoptics and both of them with our Holy Shroud of Turin. In fact, we read in the Palestinian targums of the Exodus that at the moment when he came down from Mount Sinai holding « *the two tables of the Testimony, Moses failed to notice that the image of his face radiated a brilliance that came to him from the brilliance of the Glory of the Presence of Yahweh, at the time when he had spoken with Him.* »

Furthermore, after Moses had finished stating to Aaron and to the children of Israel, terrified by « *the brilliance of the image of his face, all that Yahweh had said to him on the mountain, he covered the image of his face with a veil (soudarâ)* ». It is this word from the Aramaic "targum", *soudarâ*, that St. John has transposed into Greek by using the word *soudarion*, by reason of the parallel established, beginning with his Prologue, between Moses and Jesus: « *For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ.* » (Jn 1:17; cf. 1:45).

In the eyes of St. John, it was not so much at the Transfiguration, which he also witnessed on Mount Tabor, that the glory of God shone on the Face of Christ, but rather at the moment of His supreme humiliation, at the « *Hour* » of His Passion. It is on the Cross, planted on Mount Calvary as on a new Sinai, that the divine Glory shone from His Face. Coming down from Calvary, He hides His glory in order to be seen by men in His state of abasement. As Moses veiled his face, so Jesus is clothed in His Shroud.

At the moment of the Resurrection, His light, the light of His Face, shone forth. Was this the burning that is identified on the Holy Shroud of Turin? The conclusions of the *symposium* held at New London shortly after that of Bologna, on 10 and 11 October 1981, seemed to arrive at this hypothesis. The carbon 14 test intervened, however, and seemed to put out the light that was already pouring forth from the Holy Shroud, the negative of the divine glory that had remained illegible for nineteen centuries. That light was again put out at the moment when it suddenly passed from negative to positive, from obscurity to illumination, allowing the features of our glorious Saviour to appear to our eyes. All the proofs of its authenticity seemed to have been extinguished and the very French mystical tradition of its reparatory devotion annihilated.