

## Shroud Conference Talk

Ohio State University

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### “Advancing the Shroud into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”

One of the challenges facing Shroud research is the important task of communication. But more specifically, communicating the message of the Shroud to a new generation. Many if not most of us in this room became interested in the subject around the time The Shroud of Turin Research Project, also known as STURP went to Turin to in 1978 or shortly thereafter. We remember all the press and all the excitement. There was a buzz across the entire world. The original Silent Witness film came out that same year. National Geographic published a landmark article in June of 1980. STURP announced their preliminary results in 1981. Their announcement was electrifying. The Shroud image was not the work of an artist and the blood tested positive as being genuine blood. Could the Shroud be authentic? Is that even possible? For ten years we rode a wave of interest that came to an abrupt stop in October of 1988 with the announcement of three carbon dating labs. The party was over.

We are all here today because we believe there is more to the story. Unfortunately the world doesn't know that story. Many thought the publication of Ray Rogers's work in 2005 challenging the carbon date would shift the tide. It didn't. In fact, during the 2006 Olympics held in “Torino”, as it was pronounced by the commentators, NBC made sure the Shroud of Turin was never mentioned until the final day of the event. I can still see Katie Couric on the Today Show dismissing the Shroud as a medieval fake based on the carbon dating tests and made no mention of Ray Rogers work even though his results were published in a peer reviewed scientific journal only a year earlier. A quick search on Google and their news team would have found numerous references. They deliberately and purposely chose to ignore it. The secular media is more comfortable with the Shroud as a fake. Ardent secularists cannot handle the possibility of its authenticity.

In the thirty years since STURP, the challenge of effective communication has been further thwarted by the press and academic elites who have become even more hostile to anything religious much less Christian. However a larger problem today is not a biased media but a fractured media. When STURP was making news, most people got their news through the big three networks, newspapers and magazines. Today the influence of print media is on the wane while digital sources of news and entertainment are almost limitless.

So now we are back to the question of how can we engage and intrigue the next generation and why is it important? The importance of this task hits on two levels, the pragmatic and the imperative.

**From the pragmatic:** I have spoken to many in this room and others who lament on what to do with their personal collection of books, videos, memorabilia, and personal research and writings. Their kids don't want it. If they are like my kids, they run out of the room screaming if the subject comes up. This doesn't seem to be a passion or interest that gets transferred to one's progeny. We are in desperate need of the younger generations to seek this mantle. When young prophet Elisha desired the mantle of Elijah, he was given a double portion. Elijah didn't just hand it to him, Elisha desired it. We need to build interest and enthusiasm in a new generation that will desire the wisdom and knowledge that the older generation of researchers can offer before they leave the stage.

**This leads me to the imperative:** The imperative is related to the most important aspect of the Shroud. It is what has drawn many to this conference. The imperative is the message. I am not particularly interested in old linen cloths. I have little interest in other ancient artifacts or alleged relics either. But a first century Jewish burial shroud that bears the faint front and back image of a 5' 10" bearded crucified man covered with bloodstains that match the passion of Jesus Christ is more than just another relic. It is potentially the most important artifact on the planet. Its importance is derived from the message. What is the message? It is the message of the Gospel as described in the biblical narratives. It is the message that the very Son of God came to earth in the form of a man and humbled himself to dying on a cross in our place but then rose from the

grave defeating the power of sin and death. And he offers the same victory for all who believe. What a message! Can there be a better message? This is the imperative.

The message of the Shroud is identical to the message of the Gospel. In Acts 1:3, it says “After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing **proofs** that he was alive.” Is the Shroud one of those proofs mentioned here? Maybe so, but more important is a verse in John 14:11, Jesus speaking, “Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the **evidence** of the miracles themselves.” With the use of words in Scripture like “proofs” and “evidence” it is very clear that Jesus wanted no ambiguity regarding his resurrection and that faith in what he had accomplished was essential.

The unifying statement that defines my interest in the Shroud is as follows: “**The significance of the Shroud is related to its potential.**” If the Shroud is potentially the burial shroud of Jesus of Nazareth, then its significance is incomprehensible. Why? Because, it potentially confirms the message of God’s love to every human being alive today. I think that’s pretty significant. This is also why it is imperative that we continue our research and engage the next generation because its potential and significance is far too important to allow the Shroud to descend into obscurity.

Towards this end, I have launched a new website called Shroud University.com. My goal is to take the subject and encourage college and high school students to do their own research, to incorporate the Shroud into some aspect of academic study. To encourage them to consider the subject as part of a paper for history, art, or religion. To consider it as a project or presentation for science or as a topic for speech.

For instance, the debate between Walter McCrone versus blood chemists Dr. John Heller and Dr. Alan Adler would be fascinating: Here is the question: *How can qualified scientists arrive at divergent conclusions based on the same data?* Perhaps an investigation into the methodologies of the scientists would be revealing.

Perhaps comparing the Shroud to the Vinland Map would be a good project. It is a superb parallel where McCrone says it's a fake but other scientists claim it is an authentic Viking map including Yale University, Cal Tech and the Smithsonian Institute. See any parallels?

Certainly the current debate over carbon 14 dating would need to be addressed in the light of new evidence. Perhaps incorporating the importance of sampling methodology would be significant here and assessing the wisdom of allowing the most important carbon dating event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to hang on one questionable sample. The possibilities are numerous but we need to engage students and pique their interest first.

Shroud University is broken down into 10 academic schools so those students interested in a narrowly defined aspect of the Shroud will have a ready resource.

The ultimate goal of Shroud University is to speak the language of this generation, and that language is technology. **The emerging generation asks three questions:**

1) "What can I watch?" This is the YouTube phenomenon. 2) Next they ask, "What can I listen to?" This is iPod phenomenon. 3) Lastly is, "What can I find and read on the internet?" Books and magazines are becoming quaint throwbacks to a bygone era. This is the reality we face if we are to engage the new generation. We are making every effort to find or create as much streaming video, streaming audio, podcasts, and video blogs for this purpose. This is a work in progress. The site will continue to grow and improve in its look, functionality and content.

You all remember the movie "Field of Dreams" with the famous quote, "Build it and they will come". Let me assure you they will NOT come unless they know about it. The next phase of emphasis will be a campaign to contact every Catholic and Protestant college in the United States with a request for them to link to Shroud University as an outside academic resource. The site needs to be visible to students.

The second phase of this effort would be towards campus ministries attached to secular colleges and universities. I am under no illusion that most members of secular academia have become ardent opponents to anything religious especially when it steps within the bounds of science. A survey of the one thousand members of the national academy of science was taken a few years ago, regarding faith, 94% indicated they were atheists. With that in mind, our best hope is with schools and ministries that have some kind of affinity with this subject.

How will all this be accomplished? By me paying out of my pocket for part time college students to make the calls and make it happen. It won't happen without effort.

Donations are accepted in the Alumni section of the website. But we don't want to be just visible in cyberspace. We need to be physically visible as well. For that purpose, in the marketing section we have created several downloadable resources including a comprehensive fact sheet, an 11X17 poster and a 8.5X11 flyer for posting in the library, study hall, bulletin boards and wherever enterprising students care to put them. You all know the saying, "Out of sight-out of mind". Our hope is to achieve the opposite effect. We want to be within sight and top of mind.

I will now take you on a short tour of Shroud University as it exists at this moment.