

THE DONATION OF THE SHROUD TO THE HOLY SEE

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On March 18th ex King Umberto II of Savoy died in Geneva (Switzerland) and immediately more or less truthful news spread about his testamentary dispositions. The newspapers of those days were full of information also about the future destination of the Holy Shroud, private property of that family. The present article, more than describing the official events, quotes the official documents of the donation to the Holy See and of the appointment as Pontifical Custodian of the Shroud for the pro-tempore archbishop of Turin. The solemn obsequies took place on March 24th in Hautecombe Abbey¹, where the body was privately transferred.

The announcement of the Holy Shroud donation to the Holy See in the person of the pontifical sovereign John Paul II was made on March 25th 1983 in Geneva from the lawyer Armando Radice who read the following statement:

“In data 23 marzo, il conte Fausto Solaro del Borgo ha consegnato a sua eminenza reverendissima il Cardinale Agostino Casaroli, segretario di stato di Sua Santità, una lettera degli esecutori testamentari di Sua Maestà Umberto II, Sua Maestà Simeone di Bulgaria e Sua Altezza Reale il Langravio Maurizio d’Assia, con la quale lo pregavano di informare sua Santità Giovanni Paolo II che il defunto Sovrano aveva disposto tra le sue ultime volontà che la Santa Sindone conservata nel Duomo di Torino venisse offerta in piena proprietà al Sommo Pontefice.

Sua Altezza Reale il Principe di Napoli, anche a nome dell’intera famiglia ha espresso la gioia di potere, rispettando la volontà dell’augusto genitore - che è intesa a garantire per il futuro definitivamente l’affidamento alla Santa Sede di una delle reliquie più insigni della Passione di Nostro Signore - compiere un gesto di devozione verso la persona del Sommo Pontefice della Chiesa romana. Il Principe di Napoli ha voluto che l’intenzione del defunto Sovrano fosse portata a conoscenza di Sua Santità Giovanni Paolo II alla vigilia dell’apertura dell’Anno Santo” (La Sindone donata a Wojtyla, in *La Stampa*, March 26th 1983).

“On March 23rd, count Fausto Solaro del Borgo handed over to his eminence right rev. Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, secretary of state of His Holiness, a letter of His Majesty Umberto II’s testamentary executors, His Majesty Simeone of Bulgaria and His Royal Highness the Landgrave Maurizio of Assia, with which they begged him to inform His Holiness John Paul II that the late Sovereign has disposed between his last wishes that the Holy Shroud, kept in Turin Cathedral, was offered in property to the Supreme Pontiff.

His Royal Highness the Prince of Naples, also on behalf of the whole family, has expressed the joy to accomplish, respecting his august parent’s wish - which is intended to definitely guarantee for the future the entrustment to the Holy See of one of the most famous relics of Our Lord’s Passion - a deed of devotion to the person of the Supreme Pontiff of the Roman Church. The

¹ The secular Hautecombe Abbey on the western side of the Bourget Lake in Savoy was built under various abbots during the second half of the XII century in Cistercian style on lands given to the monks by Count Amedeo III of Savoy (1095-1148). Its fame rose during the following centuries with the increase of the monks number until the sad period of the commendatory abbots established by Amedeo VIII, who later became the antipope Felice V (1383-1451), buried in opposition to tradition in Ripaglia. In 1792 with the occupation by the revolutionary government the abbey was suppressed, the monks were scattered, the properties confiscated, the sepulchral monuments demolished and the buildings transformed into a ceramics factory, and the church used like a oven. In few years the complex became a pile of ruins, until King Carlo Felice (1765-1831), in 1824 bought it back and decreed its restoration, carried on, after his death, by the widow Maria Cristina of Bourbon. The royal couple was buried in Hautecombe. In 1860 after the assignment of the Savoy to France, Hautecombe with a provision apart included into the Italo-French treaty, remained personal property of the King of Italy. If could be of remarkable interest the consultation of Cibrario’s monumental work: *Storia e descrizione della Reale Badia di Altacomba (History and description of Hautecombe Royal Abbey)*, Torino, 1843-1844

Prince of Naples wanted that His Holiness John Paul II became acquainted with the intention of the late Sovereign on the eve of the Jubilee Year opening."

On October 19th 1983 the *Osservatore Romano* on the first page reported the following short communication:

“Perfezionato l’atto di donazione della Sindone alla Sede Apostolica. Nella mattinata di oggi, 18 ottobre 1983, l’Em.mo Cardinale Agostino Casaroli, Segretario di Stato, in nome e per conto della Santa Sede, ha sottoscritto con S.M. Simeone di Bulgaria e S.A.R. Maurizio d’Assia ed alla presenza di S.A.R. Amedeo d’Aosta, il documento con il quale e’ stato perfezionato l’atto di donazione della Sacra Sindone alla Sede Apostolica, in esecuzione della disposizione testamentaria del Re Umberto II di Savoia. Al termine dell’atto, il Cardinale Segretario di Stato ha manifestato la riconoscenza del Santo Padre per il gesto deferente del defunto Sovrano e per i sentimenti di devozione verso la Sede Apostolica che lo hanno ispirato.

I timori che la Sacra Sindone, dopo l’annuncio ufficiale della donazione alla Santa Sede, dovesse lasciare Torino per essere trasferita a Roma furono presto fugati dalla lettera del Segretario di Stato Cardinale Agostino Casaroli nella quale l’Arcivescovo di Torino veniva nominato delegato della Santa Sede per tutto cio’ che concerne la conservazione e il culto della preziosa reliquia atteso che essa continuerà a restare a Torino”.

"Executed the Shroud deed of gift to the Apostolic See. This morning, October 18th 1983, His Eminence Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, Secretary of State, in the name and on behalf of the Holy See, undersigned with His Majesty Simeone of Bulgaria and His Royal Highness Maurizio of Assia and in the presence of His Royal Highness Amedeo of Aosta, the document, with which the deed of gift of the Holy Shroud to the Apostolic See was executed, to accomplish King Umberto II of Savoy’s testamentary disposition. At the end of the deed, the Cardinal Secretary of State manifested the Holy Father’s gratitude for the late Sovereign deferential gesture and for the feelings of devotion for the Apostolic See that have inspired him.

The fears that the Holy Shroud, after the donation to the Holy See official announcement, should leave Turin for being transferred to Rome, were soon dispelled by the Secretary of State Cardinal Agostino Casaroli’s letter in which the Archbishop of Turin was appointed delegate of the Holy See for whatever concerns the preservation and the cult of the precious relic assuming that it will continue to remain in Turin."

Here is the whole text of this letter quoted by the *Rivista Diocesana Torinese*, November 1983, pp. 957-958.

LETTERA DEL CARDINALE SEGRETARIO DI STATO

L’Arcivescovo nominato delegato per la Santa Sindone, SEGRETERIA DI STATO N. 115.046 dal Vaticano, 14 novembre 1983, Signor Cardinale,

Come noto, Sua Maesta’ Umberto II di Savoia, in data 27 marzo 1981, con documento firmato a Ginevra, dispose che, dopo la sua morte, la piena proprietà della Santa Sindone conservata nella Reale Cappella del Duomo di Torino fosse trasferita in proprietà alla Santa Sede.

Il 18 ottobre scorso, alla presenza di Sua Maesta’ Simeone di Bulgaria, Sua Altezza Reale Maurizio d’Assia, in qualità di esecutori testamentari, e del Duca Amedeo di Savoia Aosta, ho accettato la donazione della Santa Sindone a nome e per conto della Santa Sede, come Ella potrà rilevare dal verbale qui unito in fotocopia.

Mi do ora premura di comunicarLe che il Santo Padre ha nominato l’Arcivescovo pro-tempore di Torino delegato della Santa Sede per tutto ciò che concerne la conservazione e il culto della preziosa Reliquia, atteso che essa continuerà a restare a Torino.

***Profitto della circostanza per confermarvi con sensi di profonda venerazione dell’Eminenza Vostra Reverendissima
Dev.mo in Domino***

A. Card. Casaroli

**A Sua Eminenza Reverendissima il
Signor Cardinale ANASTASIO BALLESTRERO
Arcivescovo di Torino**

LETTER OF THE CARDINAL SECRETARY OF STATE

The Archbishop appointed delegate for the Holy Shroud, SECRETARIAT OF STATE N. 115.046 from Vatican, November 14th 1983, Mr. Cardinal,

It is common knowledge that His Majesty Umberto II of Savoy, on March 27th 1981, with a document signed in Geneva, disposed that, after his death, the whole property of the Holy Shroud, kept in the Royal Chapel of Turin Cathedral was transferred of property to the Holy See.

Last October 18th, in the presence of His Majesty Simeone of Bulgaria, His Royal Highness Maurizio of Assia, in capacity of testamentary executors, and of Duke Amedeo of Savoy Aosta, I accepted the donation of the Holy Shroud in the name and on behalf of the Holy See, as you could notice in the minutes here enclosed in photocopy.

Now I take care of let you know that the Holy Father appointed the pro-tempore Archbishop of Turin delegate of the Holy See for whatever concerns the preservation and the cult of the precious Relic, assuming that it will continue to remain in Turin.

I avail myself of the opportunity to prove myself with senses of deep veneration to your Eminence Right Rev.

Dev.mo in Domino

Card. A. Casaroli

*To His Eminence Right Rev.
Mr. Cardinal ANASTASIO BALLESTRERO
Archbishop of Turin*

On August 19th 1990 the *Osservatore Romano* published on page 2 the following statement:

“Il Santo Padre, accogliendo il desiderio manifestato dall’Em.mo Cardinale Anastasio Alberto Ballestrero, ha trasferito l’incarico di Custode Pontificio per la conservazione e per il culto della Sacra Sindone alla responsabilita’ di sua Eccellenza Mons. Giovanni Saldarini, Arcivescovo di Torino”.

("The Holy Father, granting the desire manifested by His Eminence Cardinal Anastasio Alberto Ballestrero, has transferred the task of Pontifical Custodian for the preservation and for the cult of the Holy Shroud to the responsibility of His Excellency Mons. Giovanni Saldarini, Archbishop of Turin.")

More extensively the Bulletin of the Holy See’s press room of August 18th 1990 informed about the activity carried by Cardinal Ballestrero and expressed wishes for the new Pontifical Custodian.

It is opportune to underline the two expressions: "Delegate of the Holy See", in the first document, and "Pontifical Custodian" in the second one, to remember that the object’s property is of the Holy See and that the Turin Church, in the person of the Archbishop, is only its custodian with great care and that whichever intervention by anyone on the Holy Cloth must be always authorized by the Holy See, excluding any arbitrary personal interpretation.

I conclude with the clear and firm DECLARATION ABOUT THE EXPERIMENTS ON THE HOLY SHROUD by Cardinal Giovanni Saldarini transmitted to the press on September 5th 1995.

DICHIARAZIONE SUGLI ESPERIMENTI RIGUARDANTI LA SANTA SINDONE

Alcuni organi di stampa hanno diffuso in questi ultimi tempi notizie riguardanti la Santa Sindone, sulle quali il Custode Pontificio sente il dovere di prendere posizione.

Circolano sempre piu’ notizie di esperimenti fatti su campioni di materiale sindonico allo scopo di verificare i risultati delle analisi effettuate col metodo del Carbonio 14 nell’estate del

1988. Per quanto l'obiettivo possa essere legittimo e la Chiesa riconosca a ogni scienziato il diritto di fare le ricerche che ritiene opportuno nell'ambito della sua scienza, in questo caso è necessario chiarire che:

- a) nessun nuovo prelievo di materiale e' avvenuto sulla Santa Sindone dopo il 21 aprile 1988 e alla Custodia della Sindone non consta che possa esserci materiale residuo di quel prelievo in mano di terzi;*
- b) se questo materiale esistesse, il Custode ricorda che la Santa Sede non ha dato a nessuno il permesso di tenerlo e farne qualsiasi uso e chiede agli interessati di rimmetterlo nelle mani della stessa;*
- c) non essendoci nessun grado di sicurezza sull'appartenenza di materiali sui quali sarebbero stati eseguiti detti esperimenti al lenzuolo sindonico, la Santa Sede e la Custodia dichiarano di non poter riconoscere alcun serio valore ai risultati dei pretesi esperimenti;*
- d) ciò non vale evidentemente per le ricerche avviate con materiale prelevato con esplicita autorizzazione del custode durante gli stessi esami dell'ottobre 1978;*
- e) nel clima di reciproca fiducia con il mondo degli scienziati, la Santa Sede e l'Arcivescovo di Torino invitano gli scienziati a pazientare finché sia giunto il tempo per la realizzazione di un chiaro programma di ricerche organicamente concertate.*

Torino, settembre 1995

*Giovanni Card. Saldarini
Arcivescovo di Torino
Custode della Santa Sindone*

DECLARATION ABOUT THE EXPERIMENTS ON THE HOLY SHROUD

Some press organs lately spread news about the Holy Shroud, regarding which the Pontifical Custodian feels bound to take up a position.

More and more news circulate about experiments made on samples of Shroud material with the purpose to verify the results of the radiocarbon test realized in the Summer of 1988. However much the objective could be legitimate and the Church recognizes the right of each scientist to carry out the researches that he thinks opportune within the ambit of his science, in this case it is necessary to clarify that:

- a) no new drawing of material from the Holy Shroud is happened after April 21st 1988 and it has not come to the Shroud Custodian's knowledge that there could be residual material of that drawing in possession of a third party;*
- b) if this material really exists, the Custodian reminds that the Holy See has not given anybody permission to keep it and to make any use of it and ask to all concerned to deliver it into its hands;*
- c) not existing any degree of certainty about the appartenance to the Shroud of materials on which it would have been realized such experiments, the Holy See and the Custodian declare that they cannot recognize any serious value to the results of these supposed experiments;*
- d) evidently this is not valid for the researches on material drawn with explicit authorization of the Custodian during the scientific examinations in October 1978;*
- e) in a climate of mutual trust with the scientific world, the Holy See and the Archbishop of Turin invite scientists to have patience until the time for the realization of a clear program of organically planned researches will arrive.*

Turin, September 1995

*Card. Giovanni Saldarini
Archbishop to Turin
Custodian of the Holy Shroud*