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Holy Shroud led agnostic to priesthood

COLORADO SPRINGS — A book about the Shroud of Turin led agnostic Joseph Marino to the priesthood, he acknowledged during an interview with *The Catholic Herald* regarding his summer work at the *Turin Shroud Center of Colorado* here. Father Marino, a Benedictine priest of St. Louis Abbey in Missouri, has spent the past five summers at the center, where he has built a database of all the major books, articles, videos and audios on the shroud in the English language.

The shroud is believed by many Christians to be the burial cloth of Jesus.

"I was working as a government clerk when I read the book 'The Fifth Gospel' about the shroud, which told of the work of Dr. (John) Jackson," Father Marino recalled.

"It changed my life. I probably would not have become a monk if it had not been for the shroud. It played such a significant part in my conversion. The shroud brought me back to the scriptures and to prayer."

In 1980, three years after he read the shroud book, he left his government job and joined the St. Louis-based monastery. He became a brother and two years ago was ordained a priest.

In 1986, Father Marino finally met Dr. Jackson, a physics professor at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs who led a team of 40 scientists in conducting tests on the shroud in Turin, Italy in 1978. He and his Jewish-born wife, Rebecca, a convert to Catholicism, conduct research and education at the center.

Millions of people, both Christian and non-Christian, thought the shroud was a dead issue following carbon-14 test results in 1988 that dated the cloth to the 14th century. The shroud is anything but "dead," however, according to Father Marino, whose own book on the shroud will be released next summer through the Jacksons' publishing house, St. Mark's Avenue Press.

"The whole field of sindonology is more exciting than ever," the priest said.

"The carbon dating has kept us fine-tuned in our thinking and made us do more elaborate research than we might have done otherwise. Those of us who knew a lot about the shroud did not buy the carbon dating, because it did not match other scientific data about the shroud. In a total of 250,000 hours of testing by Dr. Jackson's team, nothing was found indicating forgery of the shroud. Dr. Jackson personally has spent more than 40,000 hours in research."



Father Joe Marino with the Face of the Holy Shroud.

Photo by Charlene Scott

There are nine or 10 books soon to be published about the shroud, Father Marino said. He also is encouraged by the fact that the shroud will be exhibited publicly in Turin in 1998 and again in the year 2,000, "possibly in Rome for the Holy Year there."

The fact that they are having the expositions indicates the Vatican does not accept the carbon dating," Father Marino said. "Catholics are allowed to venerate a relic as long as there is no absolute proof that it is not authentic.

"The pope has a personal devotion to the shroud, and was given a private showing of it in 1980," Father Marino added. "He will visit Turin during the 1998 exhibit, when 10 million people are expected to see the shroud. Thirteen million are expected in Rome for the Holy Year."

Father Marino sees the shroud as "the relic of relics," and as "a snapshot of the Resurrection."

"At Hiroshima, when the bomb exploded, negative images of people and objects were projected onto surfaces [such as the walls of buildings], which is similar to what is on the shroud," he noted.

"You can see a caricature of a human form with the naked eye, but when you look at a negative of it, everything is crystal clear. This suggests that some form of radiation caused the image."

To visit the Turin Shroud Center of Colorado, which is open to the public by appointment, call (719) 599-5755.