

THE RESEARCH MUST CONTINUE

by Giacomo Biffi



The cardinal archbishop of Bologna told the conference that, as long as there is contradictory evidence, the question remains open

Cardinal Giacomo Biffi, archbishop of Bologna. On the opposite page, the Duomo (Cathedral) of Turin and the Chapel of the Shroud

«We are like pilgrims on the earth and, if the precious image of Christ were not before us, we would be totally lost and bereft of everything, as the human species prior to the Flood.»

This passage, which Dostoevsky places on the lips of the staretz Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*, seems beautiful to me and not out of place in a conference like this.

However, it is not only a beautiful passage, it is also a true one: true in its most intense and radical meaning, which refers to the awareness by means of the faith of the personality of the Man-God and his mystery. But true also in its most literal and simple meaning: man has, in the depth of his being, a nostalgia, perhaps unconscious, for the face of the Lord Jesus, and needs some image of the Savior upon which to rest, as a help to the eyes of faith, his bodily eyes. This is, in essence, the teaching which comes down to us from the Council of Nicea (of 787) and from the Church's condemnation of the iconoclasts ("image-destroyers").

We ought therefore to be grateful to God, loving and provident Father, that he has met this great need of our spirit and provided for us an icon as eloquent and stirring to the emotions as the Holy Shroud; an icon that comes down to us accompanied and presented with love, with devoted care, with the veneration of our brothers in faith who have gone before us over the centuries.

We may ask ourselves: today, in 1989, after the Carbon 14 dating tests, what should the faithful do in regard to the extraordinary and inalienable "family treasure"? The faithful should continue to care for it, venerate it, love it and seek in it the "precious image of Christ" which helps us not to lose our

