**Leonard Cheshire Resonate Project**

File Name: ‘Silent Witness’. GLC talking about the Turin Shroud
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Start of Transcription

[00:00 to 00:19 Musical interlude]

00:20 Leonard Cheshire: This is a piece of cloth and a most remarkable piece of cloth. Ever since the turn-of-the-century when it was photographed for the first time, it's been the object of great deal of scientific investigation, which not only shows that it once enveloped the dead body of a young man but also reveals in great detail the story of how he died.

00:50GLC: That face is an enlarged photograph of a very small part of a large linen cloth known as the Holy Shroud which according to tradition once enveloped the body of Christ in the tomb. And wherever it's been known over it's very long history it's always aroused intense interest and also, I suppose one can say, controversy. And since the turn-of-the-century more than 50 books have been written about it and I don't know how many pamphlets and articles of one kind or another, mostly technical and scientific. The reason for that is that on this shroud is an image - a very mysterious image - it's life size - it's the contour of a man's body, front as well as back. When you look at the shroud as it's always been seen when it's brought out to be viewed you're first, of course, struck by those black marks down either side - they focus your attention. They are, in fact, burn marks and the little white triangles are patches that were sewn on to mend the burn, the - what was burnt. But in between the dark line, if you look carefully, particularly if you just concentrate on the bottom half, you can see very faintly the outline of a man's body - the head coming down to the shoulders with the hands crossed across the middle, right down to the legs. And this is what generation after generation of people have persistently maintained was caused through contact with the body of Christ. And that is what's made this Shroud unique. Its early history, obviously, is a little bit uncertain because the first three centuries the church was under persecution. But there are fairly persistent reports of linen cloths distributed amongst the followers of Christ. The first very specific and definite mention of it comes from Edessa in northern Greece, where it was found bricked-up in an archway in the city walls. It had been put there to safeguard it when the city was overrun in war. And from this moment on there's something very definite that attaches to the Shroud. Then it's not at its full length, it's folded up so that only the face can be seen, and people talk of it as the true likeness. And they also say that it's not made with human hands; they attribute something mysterious to it. And it's held in great veneration. And it seems to have sparked off a whole series of holy face pictures which originate from that time, from about the 7th century. Then in 942 it was taken by force by the Roman eastern Emperor to Constantinople. And now, something different is said about it. This time it's fully stretched out - its full 14 1/2 foot length - and for the first time we get pictures of the body of Christ at the foot of the cross with - lying on the bottom half of the linen shroud with top half being folded over him. And now people are more specific about this image. They know that it's not been painted but they say that it's been caused by sweat - they seem to think that it was caused through contact with the body of Christ at the foot of the cross. Then 200 years later in 1204, it disappears from Constantinople at the time of the sack of Constantinople. It's lost for about 100 years and then reappears in France in the family one of the Crusaders. And from that moment on it's known completely - it's documented, artists copy it, Albrecht Durer copied it, all sorts of people try to copy it. Always puzzled because there's something about it they can't understand but they believe that if only they could copy it properly, they would know what Christ looked like. In 1532 it was involved in a fire. The church in which it was kept caught fire and only the village blacksmith and one of the monks managed to break the lock and dash into the church and pull out the casket in which it was kept. And if we look at The Shroud as it is, of course in miniature, we can see from the burn marks how it was folded - it was folded down the middle, over again, this way and then that way and then just one little corner was burnt by the fire. And that accounts for those marks. And then so, it went down the centuries, finally moving through France to Turin where it is today - always attracting people that come and see it. And I think that, probably, it would just have gone on being just another point that people come to look at had it not been for a most remarkable thing that happened in 1892 - in 1898. It was once again brought out for people to see and there was a lawyer in Turin who was an amateur photographer, and he asked if he could photograph it. I think this came as a strange request to the authorities - the cathedral authorities - at Turin, who are very conservative by nature, and their idea is that what they should do is preserve the Shroud intact. Anyway, they gave him permission. He was only an amateur and the Shroud, 14 1/2 feet long, was high up above the ground. He had an enormous camera, and you can still see it in Turin, about 18 inches deep, I should think, and 12 by 12 square - a great heavy wooden camera, a concertina like camera. He had to get up on scaffolding, he had to light this enormous shroud high up - I mean for an amateur it really was a remarkable feat. He managed to get just one photograph - only one plate - and he took it back into his dark room and developed it. When he developed it - I think before fixing it - he just held it up to the light and looked at it, wondering what this peculiar image of the face would look like in negative. And then what he saw before his eyes was not the unrecognisable negative face but this. He realised that he was looking at a real face, a real face you can understand and identify. And being a photographer, the implication, I think, was pretty obvious. What he was looking at was the negative of what was on the Shroud and as the negative was the right way round that meant that he was looking at the real likeness of the man who'd been in the Shroud and he also realised quickly that it couldn't have been drawn, that this must have some inexplicable origin. And as one might expect, the news of this photograph spread very rapidly and it led, in the first place, to the French Academy of Science ordering a full scientific investigation into the Shroud. The investigation that lasted a year and a half, was conducted by three of their eminent scientists and their findings were read out to a plenary session of the French Academy. And I think it really was a very historic occasion, everybody listening to what appeared to be rather an extraordinary story. Now their findings very conclusive and very definite. They were all in complete agreement as to what they had found. In the first place looking at the cloth, they said that you can see when you look at it that it's a 3-to-1 herringbone weave; it's good linen; they said, and all subsequent investigations have corroborated this, that it was consistent with linen of the first century in the near East. It was not consistent, for instance, with linen that you would get in France in the 13th or14th century - the only time when there's a little gap in its history and anything could have possibly been done to it. As regards the image itself, they were quite definite that it was not a fake or a painting or a drawing or due to any process known to human art at that time. When you paint, inevitably, you take pigment and you cover your canvas with it. But on the Holy Shroud nothing is covered. At no point is any one of the threads actually covered, even the darkest places. If anything, the image is an impregnation. It's not a drawing because when you draw, inevitably, you leave an outline, you leave some sort of [10:15 unclear] some trace of your handiwork, which even if you can’t see - to the naked eye - you can see when you enlarge it. Well the more you enlarge this image on the Shroud the more diffuse it becomes. Much more characteristic of a natural process like photography, not characteristic of a human handiwork. Obviously, it couldn't be printed. I mean, you've got this great floppy piece of linen - 14 half and a half foot long - and suggests that in the 12th century - 13th century - somebody could have printed it is a little bit difficult to believe even if it's, one could believe, that it was painted. Then from the anatomical and the physiological point of view it was extraordinary because they claim that everywhere it was perfect - anatomically and physiologically perfect. All the proportions of the body exact and correct and on the body, something like 200 wounds of one kind or another, which you see as little red spots at the moment. And every single one of those, according to them, and to all those who've examined it since, conforms to reality. So as far as I know there's never been a doctor who has looked at any one of those wounds and said, "No, it couldn't be like that." And I don't think that artists, by and large, expect to get that kind of reality when they paint. But in addition to that, the whole thing's in negative. And it's been demonstrated that it's absolutely impossible, even you when know what a negative is, to get exactly the expression and the form that you want. You can't do it because you can't see what you're doing. People have tried to paint it in negative to show that it can be done, but they don't succeed. And, of course, it's not only that the light values have been reversed - there's an inversion, there's a lateral inversion, left has become right and right has become left. So, it isn't just a question of colours having gradually changed their density. As to how the image got there, that they could not explain. And nobody's ever been able to explain it ever since. It defies explanation. Various theories have been put forward as to how. None of them hold water. But even if they did hold water you're faced with a basic contradiction because in order to get such a good image you have to postulate a flat surface. If the Shroud was around the face like this then you stretch it out, obviously, my ears would be out here. I mean there would be a complete distortion. But there's no distortion on the Holy Shroud. And if you explain some way in which the Shroud, perhaps, could have been absolutely flat, then you're faced with the problem "How did the blood stains get there?", because the blood stains are not in negative, they're in positive and they appear to be informed by direct contact - the transfer of the blood stain, as it was on the skin, onto the Shroud. That means contact. So, if you explain the straight, the flat Shroud to get the image, then you can't explain the blood stains. So, you're up against a contradiction. On the positive side as to what they found about the image, again they were very specific. They said that it clearly showed the body of a young man who died in the prime of life, probably a Jew, and who had been grossly maltreated before his death. And if we look at the Shroud, in the light of what these scientific researches have told us over these past 80 years, we do see what, I think, is a very painful but also a very moving story. If we come first to the face - here you have the face - you'll see that on the right cheek is a great swelling, goes diagonally upwards to the nose. On the right, high on the right cheekbone under the eye there's also a swelling. Then in the head you've got the characteristic signs of something like the crown of thorns. You've got these flows of blood that come down from the top of the head down to the forehead, very similar to something like the crowning with thorns. If you look at the body itself, I think the first thing that strikes you is, all over the body there are these little red marks, which are in fact the scourging - signs of the scourging. And if you look at them closely you can see that they have a particular shape, which identifies with what we know from archaeology of the Roman scourge or flagrum. The Roman soldiers used for Roman citizens a rod, a wooden rod. But for foreigners and for slaves they used this - known as "the scorpion," because of the dreadful pain that is inflicted. In fact, we know that it was quite frequent for a man not to survive a Roman scourging, to die under it. And that is what the Holy Shroud has to to tell us about the scourging. Then the hands, if you look at the hands crossed in the middle of the body you see very clearly a wound - a blood stain that comes from it. Now, there's something remarkable about that blood stain because, whereas in art you always see the nail through the middle of the palm, here in the Shroud you see it in the base of the palm. Now, the point is in crucifixion - the whole point of crucifixion - is that you hang, you hang from your outstretched arms. But a nail through the palm would not take the weight of your body - couldn't - it would tear. The only place that it could take the weight of your body is at the base through the bones of the carpus. And that is where it's shown on the Holy Shroud. Again, we have the wound in the side. This, too, is very realistic. Because whereas in art the wound is usually just a straight gash, on the Holy Shroud it goes diagonally downwards in line with the ribs. In fact, the only way that it could be, between as it happens 5th and the 6th rib. It's very realistic. Also, to those who have studied it, the whole body shows us what in fact happens when you are hung on a cross, when you are crucified. Hanging on the cross means that the whole weight of your body is taken and it's the actual fact of hanging that will eventually bring on death. But it's so painful hanging in that position that you can't stand it and so you have to find some way of relieving the pressure on your chest. And, so, you press up on your feet to relieve it, which in itself is a great struggle and very painful. And in the Gospels, it tells us that the soldiers came and broke the legs of the two thieves. But they found that Christ was dead. People have always wondered what was it about breaking the legs that brought on death. Well, from the Shroud doctors have been able to work out that when you break the legs you can no longer press up and, therefore, you die simply through the sheer strain of hanging from your arms. So, I think we can say that the Holy Shroud tells us that it once enveloped the body of a man who, before his death, was crowned with thorns, was scourged and then went through crucifixion. Of course, it cannot tell us precisely that this was Christ. But it can tell us that the man on the Shroud suffered everything that we know from the Gospels and from history, that Christ himself suffered and that nobody else known to history did suffer. But that's not the end of the story because if we come back and look at the Shroud, we will see that it's covered with all these wounds. But every wound is perfect. And, so, the question is: "How did the body leave the Shroud?" Because although science can find out a way of transferring a blood stain from the skin onto a piece of cloth without losing its identity - with difficulty it can do that - it can't, then, find out a way of removing the cloth without smudging it, without smudging the wound. So, evidently, something very mysterious has happened to that cloth and to the body in it, in the tomb. If we go back to the tomb for a moment and see what it was that happened there, we know that it was late in the evening, time was very short. Joseph of Arimathea went off and he bought this good linen cloth. And when he brought it they took the body down - they were in a great hurry. They almost certainly put the body on the bottom half of the Shroud - if we take this Shroud in miniature. They took a napkin which is mentioned in St. John's Gospel and tied it around the head to keep the mouth shut as is normal in a burial. They'd have folded the Shroud over, like that, and then, presumably, folded the edges over and then tied it around with the, what the Gospels called, the othonia - the little linen bandages. And then, they would have carried the body in the Shroud down, down through the garden into the tomb. We know that it was a new tomb, cut into the rock. There are many tombs like that in that area, so we know approximately what they look like. Many of them, of course, have several tombs in the one rock chamber for a family. Well, whether this was the case now we don't know. We're obviously in the area of guesswork. The body would have been put on the ledge. We know that there were also about a hundredweight of spices to keep the body fresh till the completion of the burial after the Sabbath. We don't know what they did with them. Then the women left, and the stone was rolled into position - the great heavy stone - and it was the end of the story - appeared to be. The disciples were completely demoralized. Half of them were running away out of Jerusalem, terrified. The only people who seem not to have thought it was the end of the story were the Pharisees who, inexplicably, put a guard on the tomb or wanted a guard put on the tomb. Then after the Sabbath on the Monday morning - on the Sunday morning - the women came down to complete the burial. And they were worrying about how they were going to move the stone, this great huge stone. And they found, of course, nobody there and the stone moved. Well, all the accounts of the different Gospels are different because, clearly, it was such a cataclysmic event for them all that they describe that they don't know what quite how they're describing it.

22:30 The women went inside and according to one account they found what appeared to be a young man there who said to them, “What are you doing looking for the living among the Dead? Go back and tell his disciples that he is alive.” And they were terrified, they ran off or they appeared to have been terrified - and tell the disciples they wouldn't believe them, in fact the disciples thought they were talking madness, but not Peter and John. Peter and John evidently wanted to be satisfied themselves and they went to the tomb, running - John running faster than Peter, but waited there until Peter caught him up. And they looked in. And what they saw there about the linen cloths persuaded them that something inexplicable had happened. And we've never known what it was about those cloths that had this extraordinary effect upon them. Well, the shroud I think gives us the clue. What they saw was everything lying in position as it had been, the othonia still around the outside of the shroud, but the body that had been inside it missing, and no trace of it having disappeared, the bandages completely untouched. And then, as if another little personal touch, the cloth that had been round the head no longer inside with the cloths, but outside on its own in the place apart. Now, when you think that St. John was writing this account 60 years after the event, he is describing the turning point of History and all he can find to talk about is these linen cloths - the othonia and the sudarion and so on. Now to me that's inexplicable unless what he's telling us is that these linen cloths are the silent witness to the Resurrection that convinced him that it was true when all the other evidence of the women had no effect on him at all. And today we still have this linen shroud, still with us, speaking now in a medium that we understand, a visual medium, inviting us, as it were, to look for ourselves, and if we want to, and see what message it has to tell us.

25:08: End of Speech

[25:09 – 25:34 Music Outro]

25:27 End of Recording

End of Transcription