The Salesians and the Shroud

In the 1840s don Giovanni Bosco wrote for the young boys that followed him the *Sacred History* (first published in 1847 and then re-published several times). Its first paragraph, “Jesus into the Sepulchre”, says:

“Joseph of Arimathea helped by Nicodemus, another secret disciple, lowered Jesus' body from the cross. Then, he put oil on it, and, after wrapping it in a cloth, put it inside a new sepulchre carved into the rocks. Nobody had ever been put there before him”. This passage is accompanied by a note saying “This cloth, after many prodigious events, was brought to Torino. It is still preserved into the Royal Chapel of the Shroud, next to the Cathedral of this city”. Through this text and through many other of texts and books, Don Bosco proves that he knows the Shroud and, most of all, he is aware of how important the Shroud is for the Church in Torino. He proves also that he is very much aware of its value in religious education and of the particular role that it may have played for the youth.

Don Bosco’s participation to the Public Display of the Shroud set up for the wedding of the future king Vittorio Emanuele II is documented in 1842. Don Bosco was there together with the kids of the “Oratorio” (the place inside the parish where young people could gather to pray and spend time together). Lemoyne, in his *Biographic Memories*, remembers that: “Don Bosco joined it and all the young people of the “Oratorio” were with him. He was very sensitive to the pain felt by the Saviour and his Holy Mother. Through this touching episode Don Bosco encouraged his young people to hate the sin deeply and love Jesus the Redeemer ardently. And this is what he did for his whole life, anytime he had the chance to speak about the Lord’s Passion e the pain of his Holy Mother. The young people of the “Oratorio” joined also in the Public Display of 1868, set up for Umberto I’s marriage.

Following its founder, the Salesian Congregation, also because of its roots in Torino's diocese, has always been very close to the Shroud. This originated a Salesian “school” of the Shroud at the time the first photograph of the Shroud was taken, in 1898. Don Noël Noguier de Malijay (1861-1930), through his studies and conferences, was somehow the founder of such school. Its characteristic was to support spirituality and catechetical education with rigorous scientific research. Its promoting centre was the Collegio Valsalice, where don Bosco wanted to establish the Seminary for Foreign Missions. Noguier was a Chemistry, Sciences and Physics teacher there. The seminarians trained there spread the message and the awareness of the Shroud throughout the whole world. The rights to the photographic images of the Shroud, generously refused by their author Secondo Pia, were given not accidentally to Salesian missions. This was written in the “Bollettino salesiano” (the Salesian Bulletin) in April 1900: “We would like to inform you that, according to previously signed agreements, the office for the Holy Shroud Charity Activities, moved to our “Oratorio” by the “Magazzino Somministranze Salesiane” on 1st April. Any of you who would like to purchase the original photographs of the Holy Shroud, or to deal with any other topic with the above mentioned Charity Raising, may apply to the address: *Opera di Beneficenza della SS. Sindone* presso l’Oratorio Salesiano, via Cottolengo 32 (nowadays Piazza Maria Ausiliatrice).
Don Antonio Tonelli (1877-1938), was Noguier's pupil and was also a researcher, apostle and author of important publications about the Shroud. The study about the folding method of the cloth explaining the origin of the assymmetric burns of the fire of 1532 belonged to him.

One should remind, among the many – and this is just a short list - don Alberto Caviglia (1868-1943) for historic research, the tireless researcher and propagator don Antonio Cojazzi (1880-1953); the precious work of don Pietro Scotti (1899-1982) and his translations which took to Italy the fundamental studies of the French medician Pierre Barbet; don Giovanni Calova (1905-2003); don Eugenio Valentini (1905-1992); don José-Luis Carreño Etxeandía (1905-1986); don Geremia Dalla Nora (1915-1987); don Pietro Rinaldi (1910-1993), who significantly contributed to raise awareness of the Shroud in the United States and to carry out the examinations of 1978; the historic and bibliographic studies of don Luigi Fossati (1920-2007).

This is still very much part of the Salesian tradition, as proved by the activities of don Gaetano Compri, apostle of the Shroud in Japan, following don Vincenzo Cimatti (1879-1965), and those of don Giuseppe Terzuolo, certainly the greatest scholar of the Shroud iconography today.

One should also remember those generations of young people, and not only, that discovered the Shroud through the so called "filmine" (short films) and the collections of slides with the comments of some of the scholars mentioned above published by salesiana LDC.