

OBITUARIES

Fr. Maurus Green, OSB

By Ian Wilson

It typified Fr. Maurus Green's self-effacing nature that he should have died on September 12, 2001, just when everyone had their attention diverted by the terrible events in New York the day before. 'Dom Maurus', as his friends knew him, shied from attending the general round of 'Shroudie' conferences. His publications on the Shroud consisted only of articles, mostly for small circulation English ecclesiastical journals, and they could be numbered virtually on one hand. Yet my own historical researches on the Shroud owed more to his scholarly guidance, voluminous correspondence and pioneering sleuthings than to any other individual.

Anthony Maurus Green was born around 1920. He acquired his interest in the Shroud from his father, a career soldier who served in India. Under the pseudonym 'B.G.Sandhurst' Green Senior, whom Maurus jocularly referred to as 'the Bo'sun', left an unpublished manuscript on the Shroud 'The Silent Witnesses, which he wanted his son to carry on after his death. In the event neither the title nor the content went neglected. Sadly, Maurus' mother died of tonsillitis in India in 1932, when Maurus was just twelve. Seven years later, at the outbreak of war, his brother Gerald joined the RAF while Maurus took his vows as a Benedictine monk at the famous English Benedictine abbey of Ampleforth in Yorkshire. Tragically, Gerald died just four days after the end of World War II. Posted to Calcutta, his plane crashed into dense jungle on his being caught in a monsoon while on a training mission.

In 1947 Maurus became ordained, and when I first met him in 1966 he was parish priest in Maryport, Cumberland. In that same year he had published in the Catholic journal *Tablet* an authoritative article on the Veronica of Rome, and its associations with the Shroud. Effectively he was one of three individuals representing virtually the sum total of active Shroud research in the UK, the other two being Miss Vera Barclay and Guildford general practitioner Dr. David Willis. It was through Dr. Willis that I became introduced to Maurus, and it precipitated the most intense correspondence during the late 1960s, continuing throughout the 1970s.

In the autumn of 1969, by which time he had moved to St. Mary's Priory, Warrington, Maurus published in the *Ampleforth Journal* his most seminal

article on the Shroud 'Enshrouded in Silence'. In just 24 pages he effectively set down the guidelines for all future research on the Shroud's history, this being the most scholarly UK based approach to the subject since the sceptical Jesuit Fr. Herbert Thurston's articles written more than forty years earlier. In November 1973 Maurus travelled to Turin at very short notice, in company with Dr. Willis and myself, for the first showing of the Shroud in 40 years, for a special TV programme introduced by Pope Paul VI. The following April, in the Focolare movement's *New City Magazine*, Maurus published an account of this experience 'We would see Jesus'. Quoting from the Frenchman Paul Claudel, he rhetorically asked of the Shroud: 'Do we not feel with Claudel, 'It is not so much an image as a presence'? Maurus went on: 'Here is the Son of Man representing everyman, the most beautiful of the sons of men hideously tortured by our sub-human treatment of each other. Is not his bruised face a unique call to a service of love without limit, as we meet him again forsaken and abandoned in every section of humanity?'

Typifying this spirit, and as indicated by his writing for the *New City* magazine, Maurus' interests had already begun straying well beyond the Shroud. Around the mid-1970s he moved parish to St. Austin's, Grassendale, Liverpool. In 1977, under the pseudonym George Francis, he published a 172-page book *She Died, She Lives*, the story of Maria Orsola Bussone, from Vallo near Turin. Maria had died of electrocution in 1970 she was while still a teenager, but she left a moving spiritual diary and letters, and her short life proved to have had an immense spiritual impact amongst her young friends. Although Maurus had never met the living Maria, her story inspired him to find out all he could about her, leading to his becoming involved with the international Focolare movement, aimed at inspiring young people, and indeed people of all ages, to really *live* the gospel of Jesus.

In January 1998 Maurus suffered an aortic aneurism which rendered him unconscious for four days, but from which he made a good recovery. He was moved back to his alma mater Ampleforth Abbey, from which he wrote to say 'It looks as though I'm fairly permanent here ... until the great Meeting, for which big prayers, please.' He passionately wanted a Shroud Stall at the Millennium Dome in London. However, given the Dome's sad subsequent history it is perhaps just as well this dream was not realised. Both as a priest and a scholar 'Dom Maurus' belonged to, and typified a golden age of Shroud studies, before the subject became enmired with chimerical flower images and ephemeral inscriptions. Maurus was one of those who helped translate into English the 1976 Turin Commission Report on the Shroud. It was through him that I met Vivien Godfrey-White, the originator of the theory of the Shroud-Templecombe panel-painting connection. It was through him that I came to be contacted by the late Fr. Francis O'Leary, and discovered the

Jospice mattress imprint. I owe to him a precious microfilm of the Grimaldi manuscript on the history of the Veronica. In my early years of Shroud researches, whatever ideas I put forward for the Shroud's history had to pass a 'trial by fire' under Maurus' scrutiny. He introduced me to many otherwise little-known historical references to the Shroud and utterly selflessly subordinated his own literary interests in the subject to acting as 'Devil's Advocate' towards mine. I will always be indebted to him, and the ranks of those Shroudies who preceded him to his long-anticipated heavenly 'great Meeting' will be all the richer for his loss here on earth.