

## DOM AMBROSE LAMBERT

(1936 – 2011)



Father Ambrose was not a monk with a high public profile and his latter years were shadowed by chronic ill health and depression. Yet, now that he is dead, what we remember is his extraordinary kindness, gentleness and sympathy. He was truly a man of God and a good shepherd. I extend the condolences of his monastic brothers to his sister Gillian, to his stepmother Margaret, and to his four nephews and their families. We will miss him.

Michael Lambert, Mike to his family, was born in Manchester on 12 May 1936, son of Professor Victor Lambert, a distinguished medic, and his wife Myra (born Farnworth). He went to Worth (then evacuated to Downside) in 1944 and proceeded to the senior school in 1949. He was an outstanding schoolboy. He was head of the school and was awarded the Gregorian Medal. He was awarded school colours for fencing. Known as ‘Bert’ or ‘The Emperor’ he combined self-confidence with a heart-felt caring attitude to all. He seemed to have a great future ahead of him.

He entered the monastery, just eighteen years old, and was clothed with four others on 26 September 1954 by Abbot Christopher Butler. Dom Columba Thorne, now

aged ninety-eight, remains in the community and Brian Butler, another contemporary, is with us today. He made his Solemn Profession in 1958 and was ordained priest on 31 July 1960 by Bishop Rudderham of Clifton. His chalice, which he used at his first Mass and is now on his coffin, contains his mother's engagement ring. His mother died when Father Ambrose was thirteen.

His monastic name Ambrose, which he was given at his clothing, put him under the protection not only of the great fourth century Latin doctor, Ambrose of Milan, whose love of music and hymns our Father Ambrose shared but also of the seventeenth century Gregorian monk, Ambrose Barlow, the apostle of Manchester, who shared our Ambrose's sense of fun and mission.

He spent many years in study starting off in Rome, continuing in Brussels, and finishing at Cambridge where he studied Geography as a member of Christ's College. Geography, and particularly meteorology, remained a lifetime's interest. He was an assiduous recorder of the local rainfall and later researched part-time for a never completed Ph.D. at Durham. He had a passion for his adopted Mendip countryside and was, before the word and the idea became fashionable, a dedicated environmentalist. He was a critic and a scourge to those – especially among what we might now call 'the quarrying community' – who tried to damage the ecological balance. He taught Geography in the school at Downside from 1962 – 8 while at the same time acting as assistant priest at Radstock.

The Second Vatican Council formed the background to his monastic and intellectual formation, a time of hope, of change and of new horizons. Worth, by then an independent abbey, had established a mission in Peru and Father Ambrose (along with Father Edward Crouzet) from Downside went to assist them. Father Ambrose learnt Spanish in Bolivia and then became a founder member of the Apurimac mission in Peru from February 1969 – May 1970. The climate and the primitive conditions did not suit

him but he was, as everywhere he went, much loved. The Spanish language, too, helped him later. He long acted as chaplain to the domestic staff at Downside many of them Spanish at that time and he was an enthusiastic welcomer of our Manquehue friends from Chile. Alongside Martin Appleby he founded the Amazon Trust which continued his interest in Latin America and its evangelisation.

Back at Downside he acted as Father Laurence Kelly's assistant in Ramsay and as House Master of Barlow from 1975 – 83. He was Novice Master from 1983 – 6. He was my Novice Master for a time and had already shown a kindly interest in the lay staff of which I was part of when I first came here in 1978. Until recently, for example, he used to telephone the Director of Music every Monday to congratulate him on the excellence of the Sunday music. He would still phone if it was not excellent. He felt isolated as Novice Master and was glad to be appointed as Parish Priest of St Benedict's in 1987 succeeding the formidable Dom Gregory Murray. He remained in post until 1999 and for some time after he served as my assistant.

As Parish Priest he was full of pastoral zeal and initiatives. He was assiduous in visiting, developed the liturgy and founded the parish choir. His last bequest were the jubilee trumpets on the organ. He wrote asking for funds to all he could. It was not surprising that it was not the first time the Queen, via her secretary, sent her best wishes and sadness in not being able to contribute. He served as a Governor of St Gregory's in Bath, acted for a while as Assistant Chaplain at the Royal United Hospital (also in Bath) and was a co-founder of the Radstock Volunteer Bureau. Beyond the immediate Downside 'territory' he was chaplain (from 1970) to many of the Catholic People's Weeks and was principal priest assistant for his latter years. This continued the work of Dom Ralph Russell who had been his Novice Master in his last novitiate year. His first Novice Master was the meticulous and authoritarian Dom Alban Brooks.

By 1999, still a comparatively young man, he was showing signs of serious decline not helped by his heavy smoking of cigarettes (he was the last surviving cigarette smoker in the Downside community) and his drinking, especially of coffee. Nevertheless, until his last few months, he continued his wonderful ministry of the telephone among the vulnerable, the lonely and the elderly. If they could all ring today then every line in Somerset would be blocked.

It is fashionable now to have memorial services where a person's celebrity is remembered and their deeds enumerated. This is not my intention here. We are here, as Michael Ambrose Lambert would have liked it, to pray for him. It is foolish, however, not to remember someone in their life's work and witness. We are all called by name in Baptism. Ambrose combined kindness, sympathy and gentleness with an underlying sadness. This sadness never quite overtook him and his childlike sense of humour never left him. It was typical of him to die on Christmas Day.

He remained in the monastery as long as we could look after him and he received much love and assistance from the community and from our monastic nurse, Sister Rose. His mobility, or lack of it, caused us to send him to Fosse House where he also received great care. He gave up some time ago and was obviously, after almost seventy years since his first arrival here, ready to move on and let go. This was the fulfilment of his monastic vows. Giving all to God, falling back into the loving arms of God, and returning to his Maker.

May he rest in peace!