

*THE FATHERS  
OF THE CHURCH*

A NEW TRANSLATION

VOLUME 26

# THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

A NEW TRANSLATION

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# ***SAINT AMBROSE***

## ***LETTERS***

*Translated by*

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## INTRODUCTION

**S**T. AMBROSE GOVERNED the Church at Milan for twenty-three years, from December 1, 373, until his death on April 4, 397. Of his correspondence, preserved in ninety-one letters, Letters 1-63 of the Benedictine edition (reprinted in Migne, *PL* 16.849-1286), can be dated with exact or approximate certitude; Letters 64-91, however, are impossible to date from either external or internal evidence. Even within the chronological limits of the traditional dates,—the years 379 to 396—scholars find discrepancies, many of which can have no definite solution. For the dates of the letters and other historical events touching their contents, J. R. Palanque, 'Essai de chronologie Ambrosienne,' *Saint Ambroise et l'empire romain* (Paris 1933) 480-556, has been followed unless otherwise noted.

Because of the wide variety of the subject matter of the letters and the unsatisfactory chronological arrangement of earlier editions and translations, the present volume offers the letters in a new order, which is an adaptation of the classification employed by Palanque.<sup>1</sup> The letters have been grouped according to the classes of persons addressed; namely: (1) emperors, (2) bishops, (3) priests, (4) his sister, Marcellina, and (5) laymen. Seven synodal letters, written to emperors or bishops in the name of Ambrose and other

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\*What may be a ninety-second letter, to Gratian, was published by L. Machielsen, in *Sacris erudiri* 12 (1961) 537-539 (cf. 515-532).

1 Palanque, *op. cit.* 466-479.

members of Church councils, are placed after the letters to bishops. Letters to entire congregations follow the letters to individuals within each section. Each group of letters presents the addressees in alphabetical order.

As a result of this arrangement, the letters on related subjects or those written in the same spirit to an individual are frequently found together. They range from affairs of state, problems of Church government, doctrinal disputes, exegesis, and pastoral and legal affairs, to the exchange of greetings between friends in many stations of life, letters of consolation, and the ordinary letter that attempted to bring the absent together in a world where travel and communication were extremely difficult.

The letters are a reflection of the many-sided role of St. Ambrose. His parents were Romans who were residing in Gaul at Trier in 339 when Ambrose was born. His father was praetorian prefect of the Gauls at the time. Ambrose had an older sister, Marcellina, who became a nun in 343, to whom he wrote three letters that are extant, and also an older brother, Uranius Satyrus, whom he loved dearly and over whose early death in 375 he grieved deeply.

Ambrose's education was typical of his day. He learned rhetoric, mathematics, philosophy, and science. He had a wide knowledge of Greek, by which he was able to know the works of the Greek Fathers of the fourth century, to study their writings, and to transmit them in Latin to the Western Church. Since he was desirous of following a legal career, he studied jurisprudence, and this knowledge, too, was frequently used later in the service of the Church.

Although Ambrose's family was Catholic and had a martyr among its forebears, Ambrose was not baptized in his youth. He did, however, study the truths of the Christian faith under the priest Simplicianus. This tutor came to Milan after Ambrose was made bishop and he there continued to

instruct his former pupil, who, as Ambrose himself remarks, 'had to instruct before he had even learned.'<sup>2</sup> Eventually, Simplicianus succeeded Ambrose as Bishop of Milan in 397.

Ambrose's legal career began about the year 365 at Sir-mium, where he practiced law in the praetorian prefect's court. About 370 he became provincial governor of Aemelia-Liguria, with Milan as his place of residence. There in November, 373,<sup>3</sup> Ambrose was summoned to keep order at the election of a successor to Auxentius in the see of Milan upon the death of the Arian bishop. A child's cry, 'Ambrose Bishop!' brought to a unanimous decision the mixed throngs of Arians and Catholics in the cathedral and, despite the protests of Ambrose, who was only a catechumen in the Church, he was chosen by the people; the choice was seconded by the clergy, and it was approved by Emperor Valentinian I. Ambrose was duly consecrated bishop, after receiving the minor and major orders of the priesthood, on December 1, 373.<sup>4</sup>

As bishop of the city where the emperors had their residence, Ambrose raised Milan to recognition as the most important see of the West. He occupied a place of pre-eminence in the Church and contributed much to its prestige in the early years of peace when a strong pagan party still hoped to enjoy the protection of emperors not always Catholic. His religious policy was threefold: the protection of the Church against the violence of the emperors; the demand that the civil power respect the moral law; and the fostering of a close union of Church and state by which the state eventually favored only the Catholic religion and discouraged all others. Thus, without any political ambition on

<sup>2</sup> *De off.* 1.1.4.

<sup>3</sup> B. Altaner, *Patrologie* (2 ed. Freiburg 1950) 330, gives the date as 374. Palanque 483-487, 577, gives October, 373.

<sup>4</sup> For several points of interest regarding Ambrose's election and consecration, see Dudden, *The Life and Times of St. Ambrose*, I 70-74.

his part, Ambrose gained a stronger power than the emperor in that he could exercise a moral check on him.

Ambrose's episcopacy spanned the reigns of several emperors of East and West. Valentinian I (d. 375) had sanctioned his election as bishop. Valentinian's son, Gratian, became Emperor of the West in joint rule with his half-brother, Valentinian II, in 375. The former was murdered by agents of Maximus the Usurper in 383, the latter was a victim of Arbogastes and Eugenius the Usurper in 392. Ambrose had known and corresponded with both emperors and directed their policy of refusing to provide imperial revenues for the upkeep of pagan temples. At the death of Gratian he went to Gaul to beg the body from Eugenius; he arranged the details of Valentinian's burial and delivered a consolatory funeral sermon for him.<sup>5</sup>

While the West had several emperors and two usurpers, the East enjoyed the long reign of Theodosius from 379 until 395. Ambrose had dealt harshly with Theodosius for the affair at Callinicum when the emperor ordered Christians to rebuild a Jewish synagogue which they had burned during a religious riot. The imperial order was rescinded. After the massacre of the Thessalonians by the command of Theodosius in 388, Ambrose exacted public penance of the emperor in the Basilica at Milan. He preached his funeral sermon, however, and praised his victories against the two usurpers of the West and his zeal in striving to unite East and West in the bond of the one faith. Two years later Ambrose died, while acting as unofficial guardian of the youthful Honorius, Emperor of the West.

The letters which Ambrose wrote to Gratian, to Valen-

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<sup>5</sup> Letter 4, which has not hitherto been considered among the consolatory works of Ambrose, was written to Theodosius from whom Ambrose was awaiting instructions for the burial of Valentinian. Sections 1-3 are a 'monody' wherein Ambrose expresses his great grief at the death of Valentinian.



tinian, and to Theodosius, and the synodal letters to the three conjointly, have the sustained dignity which characterized his style when addressing the highest ranking civil rulers of his day. But with all his deference to authority he pursued a relentless logic in championing the rights of God and the Church, using Scripture to illustrate the truth of God's sovereignty in matters human and divine.

Ambrose addressed more letters to bishops than to any other class of persons, and understandably so. Throughout all of Northern Italy, Ambrose acted as metropolitan, but the limits of his episcopal see never corresponded to those of his activity. He founded several bishoprics; he intervened in the election of a successor to Limenius at Vercelli, installing Honoratus; he instructed the Church at Aemelia regarding the date of Easter, having been requested by Eusebius of Bologna to do so. The provinces of Flaminia and Venetia looked to Milan rather than to their see cities; Ambrose was a sort of super-metropolitan of Italo-Illyrian bishoprics.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, he corresponded with the Bishops of Rome, Naples, Gaul, and Alexandria—all outside his province—and with newly elected Bishops of Thessalonica, Como, Imola, and Claterna. Several of those whom he had consecrated he continued to favor with his correspondence. The collection of letters contains six to Sabinus of Piacenza, whom Ambrose begged to criticize his writings, and for whom he wrote letters that embody commentaries of several passages of Scripture. Three letters to bishops concern legal affairs; several are mere pleasant exchanges of greeting.

Individual priests to whom Ambrose wrote are Horontianus, addressed in nine letters, and Simplicianus, addressed in four. The former appears not to have hesitated to call on

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<sup>6</sup> See, in this connection, J. R. Palanque and others, *The Church in the Christian Roman Empire*, trans. E. Messenger (London 1952) II 650-655.

Ambrose for assistance in interpreting any Scriptural passage whose meaning was doubtful to him. In his replies Ambrose is generous, allowing his letters and those of Horontianus to form, as he says, 'a sort of chain' (53). Frequently, he developed the mystical and allegorical sense of Scripture with great originality and depth.<sup>7</sup>

The letters to these priests have a special interest in that the recipients were residents of Milan with whom the contents might have been discussed in person without recourse to writing. Undoubtedly, the letter form helped Ambrose to clarify his thought. A letter to certain members of the clergy who were discontented in the priesthood formulates in a winning manner their spiritual father's advice and encouragement. A lengthy letter to the Church at Vercelli is a veritable treatise on the duties of the clergy.

Two of the letters to Marcellina contain Ambrose's first-hand account of events of historical importance: his struggle with the Arian Empress Justina and her son Valentinian II in 386, and his conduct with Theodosius after the affair of Callinicum in 388. The third letter to his sister tells of his finding the bodies of the martyrs, Gervase and Protase, whose relics are now honored with those of Ambrose in the basilica at Milan.

Laymen to whom Ambrose wrote had in some instances requested instruction on Scripture, as a certain Clementianus did who asked the meaning of St. Paul's words: 'The law has been our tutor unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.'<sup>8</sup> Others appealed for help in a family or legal difficulty, as did Paternus (86), who wished his son to marry the latter's niece, and Studius (90), who wanted to know whether the Church allowed judges who had inflicted sentences of capital punishment to receive the sacraments.

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Letter 46.

<sup>8</sup> Gal. 3.24.

Several letters are mere exchanges of greeting when a messenger travels from Milan. A certain Irenaeus, a resident of Milan, received twelve letters from Ambrose, many of which are comparable to those addressed to Horontianus on exegetical problems. Several contain passages of great depth, and allow us to see the workings of divine grace in this spiritual guide of souls. Letters of consolation were addressed to the clergy and people of Thessalonica on the death of their bishop, Acholius, and to a certain Faustinus at the death of his sister.<sup>9</sup>

The letters give us a clear view of those qualities which made Ambrose the spiritual leader of his day. He was eager to propagate the faith, to defend its dogma, and, if necessary, to shed his blood for its preservation. He held firmly to his principles in dealing with the emperors. Yet, when the occasion arose, he showed great magnanimity in forgiving his enemies and in heaping benefits upon them. His care for souls was not limited to those within his official jurisdiction, but the good of the Church drew him into its concerns elsewhere and prompted him to take a leading part in Church councils at Aquileia, Rome, and Capua. His letters reveal his learning, his wisdom, his holiness, and his freedom from the least taint of worldliness. Clergy and laity alike consulted him. Men found in him the piety, charity, mercy, modesty, justice, and firmness that won their esteem. Ambrose lives as we read his letters almost 1,600 years after they were first penned.

There are details revealed by the correspondence of Ambrose which add to our knowledge of ancient epistolography. The salutations are frequently very simple, for example, 'Ambrose to Titianus,' with an occasional addition of 'greetings.' Then there are the elaborate salutations to the emperors

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9 For a study of these consolatory letters, see C. Favez, *La consolation latine chrétienne* (Paris 1937) 20-22.

(8), and the tenderest of greetings to his sister, 'dearer than life and eyes' (61). Many letters begin with a restatement of the difficulty proposed to him—most welcome to the reader centuries removed.

His biographer Paulinus<sup>10</sup> testifies to Ambrose's habit of writing with his own hand, as Ambrose himself mentions he did (24), particularly at night. He praises Gratian (1) for the letter he had penned with care to Ambrose. Ambrose wrote with his own hand to Theodosius (7) after the affair at Callinicum, so that the emperor alone might know and read his words of rebuke. Several times Ambrose speaks of letter writing as a bond between those who are apart, and, overburdened as he was with ministering to the weaknesses of men,<sup>11</sup> he seems to be reaching out of his loneliness toward companion souls.

That Ambrose collected some of his letters in his lifetime is evident from his words to Sabinus: "These remarks which are a prelude to other discussions I shall put in the collection of our letters, if you are willing, and give them a number" (23). He was conscious of his style, as he speaks to the same Sabinus of 'prating like an old man . . . employing an ordinary and friendly style,' and 'savoring of older writers.'

Whatever the content of Ambrose's letters to bishops, priests, and laymen, he invariably expresses his love for his correspondents in the beautiful refrain: 'Farewell, and love us, because we love you.' The letters to emperors, however, he often concludes with great formality and by imparting a blessing. On several occasions, when he has administered a rebuke, there is no formal conclusion. Thus, the final argument lingers in the reader's consciousness.

The years 385 to 387 were those in which Augustine knew

10 *Vit.* 9.38, trans. John A. Lacy, in this series, Volume 15 (New York 1952).

11 Augustine, *Conf.* 6.3.3.

Ambrose as Bishop of Milan. During that time Ambrose addressed at least two letters to emperors, four to bishops, seven to priests, eight to laymen. These twenty letters are a proportionately large part of his correspondence. Unfulfilled is our longing for even one letter to Augustine at this period or in the years to come!<sup>12</sup>

The present translation is based on the Benedictine text, reprinted in Migne, and J. Wytzes' critical text for Letters 7, 8, and 11 in *Der Streit um den Altar der Viktoria* (Amsterdam 1936). Correspondence with Rev. Otto J. Faller, S. J., of Munich, Germany, discouraged our waiting for the critical edition of the *Letters* which he is preparing for the *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*.

Eleven of the letters, considered by the editors as 'most interesting and important,' were translated by H. de Romestin in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, 10 (1896). H. Walford revised a translation by an earlier unnamed translator of all the letters (except 32 and 33) in the *Library of the Fathers* (Oxford 1881). This last-named work is the only translation of the entire correspondence of Ambrose found in any language. Rev. W. R. Waghorn's unpublished master's thesis, *Saint Ambrose: Letters to Sabinus* (Washington 1952), was also consulted.

Biblical quotations and references abound in the letters of St. Ambrose. Although at times the language is that of the Vulgate, many quotations are given in the language of the Old Latin Bible, some are from the Septuagint, and others have no counterpart in the versions which are at hand. Under these circumstances it has been necessary frequently to adapt the translation of Biblical passages to the text of Ambrose. Where possible, use was made of the New American Catholic Edition of *The Holy Bible* (New York 1950), wherein the

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<sup>12</sup> Evidence of their correspondence before Augustine's baptism is found in *Conf.* 9.5.13.

Old Testament is based on the Douay Version, with Psalms from the New Latin Version authorized by Pope Pius XII, and the New Testament is based on the Confraternity Edition. For the Book of Genesis the translation used was that of the Catholic Biblical Association of America for the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (Paterson, N. J. 1948).

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				91	13



*SAINTE AMBROSE*  
*LETTERS*



## LETTERS TO EMPERORS

*1. To the most blessed Emperor Gratian, most Christian prince, Ambrose, bishop (March, 380)*

**I** DO NOT LACK affection, most Christian of princes: I have nothing more true and glorious to say than this. I am not lacking in affection, I say, but a sense of awe has kept my affection from meeting your Clemency. If I did not go on foot to meet you as you returned, I did meet you in spirit, I met you with prayer, in which lies the most important duty of a bishop. I met you, I say? When I was not with you, did I not follow with all my love you to whom I clung with mind and heart? Surely, the presence of minds is more important. I read of your journey from day to day; I put myself in your camp day and night by my concern for you and by my thought. I stretched out for you a coverlet of prayers; if I was unable to give you the attention which you deserved, yet was I unremitting in my affection.

In fact, when I showed myself solicitous for your welfare, I was acting in my own interest. Here is not flattery, which you do not want and which I consider unbecoming my

office; it is merely the good grace which you have shown me. God who is our judge, He whom you profess, He in whom you piously believe, understands that my strength is refreshed by your faith, your salvation, your glory. And He knows that I give prayers which are due you not only because of your public office, but also because of my personal love for you. For you have given back to me the peace of the Church, you have closed the mouths of the wicked—ah, would that you had closed their hearts, also! You have done this not less by your faith than by the weight of your power.

What shall I say of your recent letter?<sup>1</sup> You wrote the entire letter with your own hand, so that the very marks of punctuation bespoke your faith and piety. In the same way with his own hand did Abraham of old slay an ox<sup>2</sup> to serve his guests at dinner, and in this performance of his duty did not ask the help of others. As a humble servant he ministered to the Lord and His angels, or to the Lord in His angels. O Emperor, you honor a lowly priest with royal dignity, but deference is shown to the Lord when a servant is honored, for God Himself has said: 'What you did to one of the least of these, you did unto me.'<sup>3</sup>

But shall I praise only the lofty humility in you, the emperor, and not rather the faith of your mind fully conscious of your deserts, that faith taught you by Him whom you do not deny? Who else could have taught you not to reproach Him for being of the created nature which you see in yourself? Nothing could be said more characteristically, nothing more clearly. For to say that the creature is Christ is to put forth an insult, not to confess reverence. Futhermore, what is so insulting as to think that He is what we are? You have instructed me, then, the one from whom

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1 See Gratian's letter to Ambrose (*PL* 16.875-876).

2 Cf. Gen. 18.7.

3 Matt. 25.40.



you said that you wanted to learn. I have never read or heard so good an interpretation as yours.

Moreover, how pious, how admirable is the fact that you do not fear jealousy in God! From the Father you expect remuneration for your love of the Son, and by praising the Son you say that you cannot add anything to His glory, but you wish to commend yourself to the Father by praising His Son. This He alone taught you who said: 'He who loves me will be loved by my Father.'<sup>4</sup>

You have remarked in addition that, being weak and frail, you cannot so praise Him as to exalt the Godhead by your words. But you will preach Him according to your ability, not according to what the Godhead warrants. This weakness is more powerful in one who is in Christ, as the Apostle says: 'When I am weak, then am I strong.'<sup>5</sup> Humility like this does away with frailty.

To be sure, I shall come as you bid and I shall hasten to hear these words in your presence, to pick up these words in your presence when they fall from your lips. I have also sent the two books<sup>6</sup> you requested and, since they are approved by your Clemency, I shall not fear any damage to them. Meanwhile, I shall ask indulgence from the Holy Spirit for writing them, since I know who will be the judge of my speech.

In the meantime, your love and faith in our Lord and Saviour, drawn from the Son of God, grows into such overwhelming conviction that you also believe in the divinity of the Holy Spirit, and you do not reproach Him as being of the created nature which you see in yourself, nor think that God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is jealous of His

<sup>4</sup> John 14.24.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Cor. 12.10.

<sup>6</sup> *On Faith (De fide, PL 16. 527-698)*.

Spirit. That which lacks all association with created nature is divine.

If the Lord grants His favor, I shall comply with the will of your Clemency; as you have received His grace, may you realize that one so pre-eminent in the glory of God has a right to our veneration in His own name.

May almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, deign to protect you, that you may be blessed and flourish for many years, and may He deign to confirm your reign most gloriously in peace, O lord, august Emperor, elected by divine choice, most glorious of princes.

*2. To the most clement prince and blessed Emperor Theodosius Augustus, Ambrose, bishop (December, 388)*

I am continually beset with almost unending cares, O most blessed Emperor, but never have I felt such anxiety as now, for I see that I must be careful not to have ascribed to me anything resembling an act of sacrilege. I beg you, therefore, give ear with patience to what I say. For, if I am not worthy of a hearing from you, I am not worthy of offering sacrifice for you, I to whom you have entrusted the offering of your vows and prayers. Will you yourself not hear one whom you wish heard when he prays in your behalf? Will you not hear one who pleads in his own defense, one whom you have heard plead for others? And do you not fear for your own decision that, if you think him unworthy to be heard by you, you will make him unworthy of being heard for you?

It is not fitting for an emperor to refuse freedom of speech, or for a bishop not to say what he thinks. There is no quality in you emperors so popular and so lovable as the cherishing of liberty even in those whom you have subdued

on the battlefield. In fact, it spells the difference between good and bad emperors that the good love liberty; the bad, slavery. And there is nothing in a bishop so fraught with danger before God, so base before men, as not to declare freely what he thinks. Indeed, it is written: 'And I spoke of thy precepts in the presence of kings and I was not ashamed,'<sup>1</sup> and elsewhere: 'Son of man, I have made thee a watchman to the house of Israel,' in order, it is said, 'that if the just man shall turn away from his justice and shall commit iniquity, because thou hast not given him warning,' that is, not told him what to guard against, 'his righteousness shall not be remembered, and I will require his blood at thy hand. But if thou warn the righteous that he sin not, and he doth not sin, the righteous shall surely live because thou hast warned him, and thou wilt deliver thy soul.'<sup>2</sup>

I would rather, O Emperor, have partnership with you in good deeds than in evil. Therefore, the bishop's silence should be disagreeable to your Clemency; his freedom, agreeable. You are involved in the peril of my silence, but you are helped by the boon of my freedom. I am not, then, intruding in bothersome fashion where I have no obligation; I am not interfering in the affairs of others; I am complying with my duty; I am obeying the commands of our God. This I do, first of all, out of love for you, in gratitude to you, from a desire to preserve your well-being. If I am not believed or am forbidden a hearing, I speak, nonetheless, for fear of offending God. If my personal peril would set you free, I should offer myself patiently, though not willingly, for you, for I would rather you were acceptable to God and glorious without peril to me. But, if the guilt of silence and untruthfulness should weigh heavily upon me and set you free, I had rather that you think me too bothersome than useless and

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1 Ps. 118.46.

2 Ezech. 3.17-21.

dishonest. Indeed, it is written in the words of the holy Apostle Paul, whose teaching you cannot disprove: 'Be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, entreat, rebuke with all patience and teaching.'<sup>3</sup>

We have one whom it is more perilous to displease, especially since even emperors are not displeased when each man performs his task, and you patiently listen to each as he makes suggestions in his own sphere; in fact, you chide him if he does not act in accordance with his rank in service. Can this seem offensive in bishops, the very thing you are willing to accept from those who are in your service, since we are saying, not what we wish, but what we are bidden to say? You know the passage: 'When you will stand before kings and governors, take no thought of what you are to speak; for what you are to speak will be given you in that hour. For it is not you who are speaking, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks through you.'<sup>4</sup> If I were speaking in a case involving the commonwealth (even though justice must be maintained there), I would not feel such dread if I were not given a hearing. But in a case involving God, whom will you listen to if not the bishop, who sins at a greater peril? Who will dare tell you the truth if the bishop does not?

I know that you are God-fearing, merciful, gentle, and calm, that you have the faith and fear of God in your heart, but often some things escape our notice. Some persons have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Care must be taken, I think, lest this condition steal upon pious souls. I know your devotion to God, your leniency toward men. I myself am indebted to you for many kind favors. Therefore, I fear the more, I am the more anxious lest you condemn me later in your judgment for the fault you did not avoid,

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<sup>3</sup> 2 Tim. 4.2.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. 10.19,20.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Rom. 10.2.

because of my want of openness and my flattery of you. If I saw you sinning against me, I would not have to be silent, for it is written: 'If thy brother sin against thee, first take hold of him, then rebuke him before two or three witnesses. If he refuse to hear thee, tell the Church.'<sup>6</sup> Shall I, then, keep silence in the cause of God? Let us then consider wherein lies my fear.

It was reported by a count<sup>7</sup> of military affairs in the East that a synagogue was burned,<sup>8</sup> and this at the instigation of a bishop. You gave the order for those who were involved to be punished and the synagogue rebuilt at the bishop's expense. My charge is not that you should have waited for the bishop's testimony, for bishops quell disturbances and are eager for peace unless they deeply feel some wrong against God or insult to the Church. But suppose that this particular bishop was overimpetuous in burning the synagogue, and too timid at the judgment seat; are you not afraid, Emperor, that he may comply with your pronouncement and do you not fear he may become an apostate?

Are you not afraid of what will perhaps ensue, his resisting the count in so many words? Then he [the count] will have to make him either an apostate or a martyr, either alternative very different from this era of your reign, either one equivalent to persecution if he is forced to apostatize or undergo martyrdom. You see what the outcome of this case will be. If you know that the bishop is firm, beware of making him a martyr if he becomes more firm; if you consider him inconstant, have no part in the downfall of one who is frail. He incurs a heavier obligation who compels the weak to fall.

I am supposing that in the present state of affairs the

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6 Matt. 18.15-17.

7 His name is nowhere given.

8 At Callinicum. The incident is well summarized by Gregory Figueroa, S. A., *The Church and the Synagogue in St. Ambrose* (Washington 1949) xiii-xxiv.

bishop will admit that he spread the fires, gathered the crowd, and brought the people together in order not to lose the chance of martyrdom and to present a strong individual instead of many weak ones. O happy falsehood, which wins acquittal for others and for himself grace! This, I ask, O Emperor, that you rather take your vengeance on me, and, if you consider this a crime, attribute it to me. Why pronounce judgment on those who are far away? You have someone at hand, you have someone who admits his guilt. I declare that I set fire to the synagogue, at least that I gave the orders, so that there would be no building in which Christ is denied. If the objection is raised that I did not burn the synagogue here, I answer that its burning was begun by God's judgment,<sup>9</sup> and my work was at an end. If you want the truth, I was really remiss, for I did not think such a deed was to be punished. Why should I have done what was to be without one to punish, and without reward? These words cause me shame but they bring me grace, lest I offend the most high God.

Let no one call the bishop to task for performing his duty: that is the request I make of your Clemency. And although I have not read that the edict was revoked, let us consider it revoked. What if other more timid persons should, through fear of death, offer to repair the synagogue at their expense, or the count, finding this previously determined, should order it to be rebuilt from the funds of Christians? Will you, O Emperor, have the count an apostate, and entrust to him the insignia of victory, or give the labarum, which is sanctified by Christ's name, to one who will rebuild a synagogue which knows not Christ? Order the labarum carried into the synagogue and let us see if they [the Jews] do not resist.

Shall a place be provided out of the spoils of the Church for the disbelief of the Jews, and shall this patrimony, given

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<sup>9</sup> It was probably struck by lightning.

to Christians by the favor of Christ, be transferred to the treasuries of unbelievers? We read that, of old, temples were reared for idols from the plunder taken from the Cimbrians and from the spoils of the enemy. The Jews will write on the front of their synagogue the inscription: 'The Temple of Impiety, erected from the spoils of the Christians.'

Is your motive a point of discipline, O Emperor? Which is of more importance: a demonstration of discipline or the cause of religion? The maintenance of civil law should be secondary to religion.

Have you not heard how, when Julian had ordered the Temple of Jerusalem rebuilt, those who were clearing the rubbish were burned by fire from heaven? Are you not afraid that this will also happen now? In fact, you should never have given an order such as Julian would have given.<sup>10</sup>

What is your motive? Is it because a public building of some sort has been burned, or because it chanced to be the synagogue there? If you are disturbed by the burning of a very unimportant building (for what could there be in so mean a town?), do you remember, O Emperor, how many homes of prefects at Rome have been burned and no one has exacted punishment? In fact, if any of the emperors wanted to punish such a deed more severely, he only aggravated the cause of all who had suffered such a great loss. If there is going to be any justice at all, which is more fitting, that a fire on some part of the building of Callinicum be avenged, or one at Rome? Some time ago the bishop's residence at Constantinople was burned, and your Clemency's son pleaded with his father, begging you not to punish the insult done to him, the emperor's son, in the burning of the episcopal residence. Do you not think, O Emperor, that if you were to

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<sup>10</sup> For an account of Julian's acts, see J. R. Palanque and others, *The Church in the Christian Roman Empire*, trans. E. C. Messenger (London 1949) I 234-239.

order this burning to be punished, he would again plead that it be not so? It was very suitable for your son to gain that favor from his father, for it was fitting that he first forgive what was done to him. Besides, there was a good division of grace there, since the son made the entreaty regarding his injury, and so did the father for the son's. Here is nothing for you to waive in your son's behalf; be careful, then, to derogate nothing from God.

There is really no adequate cause for all this commotion, people being punished so severely for the burning of a building, and much less so, since a synagogue has been burned, an abode of unbelief, a house of impiety, a shelter of madness under the damnation of God Himself. For we read by the mouth of Jeremias, the Lord our God speaking: 'And I will do to this house in which my name is called upon, and which you trust, and to the place which I have given you and your father, as I did to Silo. And I will cast you away from before my face, as I have cast away all your brethren, the whole seed of Ephraim. Therefore do not thou pray for this people, nor show mercy for them and do not approach me for them; for I will not hear thee. Seest thou not what they do in the cities of Juda?'<sup>11</sup> God forbids us to make intercession for those that you think should be vindicated.

If I were pleading according to the law of the nations, I would mention how many of the Church's basilicas the Jews burned in the time of Julian, two at Damascus—one of which is scarcely yet repaired, and that at the expense of the Church, not of the synagogue—while the other basilica is still a rough heap of unsightly ruins. Basilicas were burned at Gaza, Ascalon, Beirut, in fact, almost all over that region, and no one demanded punishment. A basilica of surpassing beauty at Alexandria was burned by heathens and Jews, but the Church was not avenged, and shall the synagogue be avenged?

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<sup>11</sup> Jer. 7.14-17.



Shall the burning of the temple of the Valentinians<sup>12</sup> also be avenged? What is it but a temple where the heathens gather? Although the heathens worship twelve gods, the Valentinians worship thirty-two Aeons, whom they call gods. I have found out that a law was passed and orders given for the punishment of some monks to whom the Valentinians denied the right of way as they sang the psalms by an ancient custom and practice, going on their way to the feast of the martyrs, the Machabees.<sup>13</sup> In anger at their effrontery they [the monks] burned their hurriedly built shrine in some country village.

How many can entertain such hope when they remember that in the time of Julian a man<sup>14</sup> who had thrown down an altar and disturbed the sacrifice was sentenced by the judge and suffered martyrdom? The judge who heard the case was never considered other than a persecutor. No one ever thought him worth meeting or saluting with a kiss. And if he were not dead, I would be afraid, O Emperor, that you would punish him, although he did not escape heaven's vengeance, for he outlived his heir.

But it is said that a trial of the judge was demanded and the decision handed down that he should not have reported the deed, but punished it; and money chests which had been taken had to be restored. I shall omit any other details. The churches' basilicas were burned by the Jews and nothing was restored, nothing was demanded in return, nothing was required. Moreover, what could a synagogue in a distant town contain, when everything there is not much, is of no value, is of no account. In fine, what could those

12 Cf. G. Bardy, 'Valentin,' *Dict. de théol. cath.* 152 2497-2519.

13 The festival honoring the Machabees seems to have been universally celebrated in the Church of the fourth century on August 1.

14 Mark of Arethusa in the time of Constantius had demolished a pagan temple and was tortured under Julian for refusing to rebuild it. Cf. Sozomen 5.10; Theodoret *Ecl. hist.* 3.7.

scheming Jews have lost in this act of plunder? These are but the devices of Jews wishing to bring false charges, so that by reason of their complaints an extraordinary military inquiry may be demanded and soldiers sent who will perhaps say what was said here some time before your accession, O Emperor: 'How will Christ be able to help us who are sent to avenge Jews? They lost their own army, they wish to destroy ours.'

Furthermore, into what false charges will they not break forth, when they even falsely accused Christ with their false witnesses? Into what false charges will men not break forth when they were liars even in matters divine? Whom will they not name as the instigators of the sedition? Whom will they not attack, even though they know them not, just so that they may see countless Christians in chains, see the necks of faithful people bowed in captivity, that the servants of God may go into dark hiding places, be struck with axes, given to the flames, and delivered to the mines, so that their sufferings may not pass hurriedly?

Will you grant the Jews this triumph over God's Church? this trophy over Christ's people? these joys, O Emperor, to unbelievers? this festival to the synagogue? this grief to the Church? The Jewish people will put this solemnity among their feast days, and doubtless they will rank it with their triumphs over the Amorites and the Canaanites, or their deliverance from Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, or from the hand of Nabuchodonosor, the king of Babylon. They will have this solemnity marking the triumphs they have wrought over the people of Christ.

And although they refuse to be bound by the laws of Rome, thinking them outrageous, they now wish to be avenged, so to speak, by Roman laws. Where were those laws when they set fire to the domes of the sacred basilicas? If Julian did not avenge the Church, because he was an

apostate, will you, O Emperor, avenge the harm done the synagogue, because you are a Christian?

And what will Christ say later to you? Do you not recall that He sent word to blessed David through Nathan the Prophet?<sup>15</sup> 'I have chosen you, the youngest of your brethren, and have made you an emperor from a private individual.<sup>16</sup> The fruits of your seed I have put upon the imperial throne. I have made barbarian nations<sup>17</sup> subject to you; I have given you peace; I have brought your captive enemy<sup>18</sup> into power. You had no grain to feed your army; I threw open the gates to you; I opened the granaries to you by the hand of the enemies themselves. Your enemy prepared provisions for themselves and gave them to you. I troubled the counsels of your enemy so that he laid himself bare. I so fettered the usurper<sup>19</sup> of the Empire and bound his mind that while he still had a chance to flee, as though afraid that one of his men should elude you, he shut himself in with them all. His officer<sup>20</sup> and forces on the other element,<sup>21</sup> whom I had routed earlier, so that they would not join battle against you, I brought together again to complete your victory. Your army gathered from many unruly nations I bade keep faith and peace and concord, as if of one nation. And when there was great danger that the perfidious plans of the barbarians would penetrate the Alps, in order that you might conquer and suffer no loss, I brought you victory within the very ramparts of the Alps.<sup>22</sup> I, then, caused you to triumph over your enemy, and are you giving my enemies a triumph over my people?'

15 Cf. 2 Kings 7.8-17.

16 In 382.

17 The Goths.

18 Athanaric.

19 Maximus.

20 Adragathius.

21 The sea.

22 Cf. Sozomen 4.46 and Dudden, *op. cit.* 354.

Was not Maximus undone because, when he heard that the synagogue at Rome had been burned, before the set time for his expedition, he sent an edict to Rome, as if he were the champion of public order? On this account the Christian people said: 'No good is in store for him! The king has turned Jew, we have heard he is a defender of those whom Christ soon made trial of, He who died for sinners.'<sup>23</sup> If this was said of his mere words, what will be said of your actual punishment? He was soon conquered by the Franks, by the Saxon nation, in Sicily, at Siscia, at Pettau; in fact, everywhere. What has the believer in common with this unbeliever? Marks of his baseness should die with the base one. The victor should not imitate, but condemn his injury of the vanquished for his offenses.

I have recounted these details for you, not through ingratitude, but I have enumerated them as rightly due to you, so that by heeding these warnings you, who have been given more, will love the more. When Simon answered in these words, the Lord Jesus said: 'Thou hast judged rightly,' and turning at once to the woman anointing His feet, setting forth an example for the Church, He said to Simon: 'Wherefore I say to thee, her sins, many as they are, shall be forgiven her, because she has loved much. But he to whom little is forgiven, loves little.'<sup>24</sup> This is the woman who entered the house of the Pharisee and cast off the Jew, but gained Christ, for the Church shut out the synagogue. Why is trial again being made within the household of Christ? Is it that the synagogue may shut out the Church from the bosom of faith, from the house of Christ?

These matters, O Emperor, I have gathered together in this address out of love and attachment to you. I am under obligation for your kindnesses at my requests when you

<sup>23</sup> Rom. 5.6.

<sup>24</sup> Luke 7.43,47.

released many from exile, from prisons, and from the extreme penalty of death. I am bound to prefer hurting your feelings for the sake of your welfare (for no one has greater confidence than one who loves from the heart, and certainly no one should harm one whose interests he has at heart); and I should not fear to lose in one moment the favor which other bishops and I have enjoyed for so many years. Yet it is not the loss of that favor that I would avert, but the peril to salvation.

How important it is for you, O Emperor, not to feel bound to investigate or punish a matter which no one up to now has investigated or punished! It is a serious matter to jeopardize your faith in behalf of the Jews. When Gideon had slain the sacred calf, the heathens said: 'Let the gods themselves avenge the injury done to them.'<sup>25</sup> Whose task is it to avenge the synagogue? Christ whom they slew, whom they denied? Or will God the Father avenge those who did not accept the Father, since they did not accept the Son? Whose task is it to avenge the heresy of the Valentinians? How can your Piety avenge them when it has given orders for them to be denied entrance and has denied them the right of assembly? If I give you the example of Josias as a king approved by God, will you condemn in them what was approved in him?<sup>26</sup>

Yet, if you have little faith in me, bid those bishops assemble whom you do esteem. Discuss with them, O Emperor, what ought to be done without injury to the faith. If you consult your officers on money matters, how much fairer is it to consult the Lord's priests on a religious matter!

Let your Clemency consider how many persons plot and spy on the Church. If they find a slight crack, they drive in an arrow. I speak in the manner of men, but God is more

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<sup>25</sup> Judges 5.32.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. 4 Kings 22.1,2.

feared than men, for He is rightly preferred even to emperors. If someone considers it proper to show deference to a friend, or parents or relatives, I think it rightly should be shown to God and that He should be preferred to all. Consult your best interests, O Emperor, or allow me to consult mine.

What shall be my excuse later if it is found out that by authority emanating from here some Christians were slain by the sword or clubs or leaden balls? How will I justify such a deed? How will I make excuse to those bishops who sorely lament the fact that priests or other ministers of the Church who have performed their office for thirty years and more are dragged away from their sacred tasks and assigned to curial offices? If men who war for you are kept for a set time of service, how much more ought you to be considerate of those who war for God? How, I say, shall I justify this before bishops who complain about the clergy and write that the churches are being ruined by the serious attacks being made on them?

For this reason, I wanted this to come to the notice of your Clemency. You will, when it pleases you, condescend to consult and temper your wishes; but exclude and put an end to that which troubles me, and rightly so. Do yourself what you ordered to be done, even if he [the count] is not going to do it. I would rather that you be merciful than that he fail to do what he was ordered.

In return for those whom you now have, you ought to cultivate and win the Lord's mercy for the Roman Empire, for you have more for them than you hoped for yourself. Let their favor, their well-being, appeal to you in these words of mine. I fear that you will entrust your cause to another's will. You still have everything in its original state. In this I pledge myself to our God for you: Have no scruple over

your oath. Can that displease God which is corrected for His honor? Alter nothing in that letter, whether it was sent or not. Order another to be written, which will be filled with faith, with piety. You can still correct yourself; I cannot hide the truth.

You forgave the people of Antioch the injury they offered you;<sup>27</sup> you recalled your enemy's<sup>28</sup> daughters and gave them to a relative to rear, and from your own treasury you sent your enemy's mother a pension. This great faith and piety toward God will be blackened by the present deed. I beg you, after sparing enemies in arms and saving personal enemies, do not presume to punish Christians with such intensity.

Now, O Emperor, I beg you not to hear me with contempt, for I fear for you and for myself, as says the holy man: 'Wherefore was I born to see the ruin of my people,'<sup>29</sup> that I should commit an offense against God? Indeed, I have done what I could do honorably, that you might hear me in the palace rather than make it necessary to hear me in the Church.

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27 The insurrection of 387 in protest against additional taxes to support a celebration honoring Arcadius.

28 It is doubtful whether Maximus had any children except his son Victor.

29 1 Mach. 2.7.

### 3. *To the most august Emperor Theodosius, Ambrose, bishop*<sup>1</sup>

Sweet to me is the recollection of your friendship in the past, and I recall the favor of benefits which you have bestowed with supreme favor upon others at my frequent requests. Hence, you may infer that I could not have avoided meeting you through any feeling of ingratitude, for I had always heretofore ardently desired your coming. I shall briefly set forth the reason for acting as I did.

I saw that I alone of your court had been deprived of the natural right of a hearing, so that I was also shorn of the privilege of speaking. You were disturbed several times because certain decisions in your consistory came to my knowledge. I, therefore, am without a share in the common privilege, although the Lord Jesus says: 'Nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest.'<sup>2</sup> As far as I could, then, I reverently complied with the will of the emperor, and took heed that you yourself should have no cause for displeasure for I managed to have none of the imperial decrees brought to my knowledge. And if I am ever present, either I shall not hear out of fear of all giving me a reputation for conniving, or I shall hear in such a way that, though my ears are open, my voice is stifled so that I cannot utter what I have heard, lest I do injury to those who have incurred the suspicion of treachery.

What, therefore, could I do? Not hear? I could not stop my ears with the wax of which old fables [tell]. Should I disclose what I heard? But I had to be on my guard in what

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<sup>1</sup> Written from Aquileia, to Theodosius, who was in Milan to excite the emperor to repentance for ordering the massacre of the inhabitants of Thessalonica. The subsequent details are related in Ambrose's Letter 62 to Marcellina. Palauque dates this letter about September 8, 390. McGuire, following tradition and the findings of Seeck, accepts the date as c. April, 390; cf. *Catholic Historical Review* 22 (1936-1937) 315.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 8.17.



I said for fear of your orders, lest a bloody deed be committed. Should I keep silence? Then would my conscience be bound, my voice snatched from me—most wretched of all conditions. And where would be the significance of the saying that if a bishop declare not to the wicked, the wicked shall die in his iniquity, and the bishop shall be guilty of punishment because he has not warned the wicked?<sup>3</sup>

Understand this, august Emperor! I cannot deny that you are zealous for the faith; I do not disavow that you have a fear of God—but you have a natural vehemence which you quickly change to pity when one endeavors to soothe it. When one stirs it up, you so excite it that you can hardly check it. If only no one would enkindle it, if no one would arouse it! This I gladly commend to you: Restrain yourself, and conquer by love of duty your natural impetuosity.

This vehemence I have preferred to commend privately to your own considerations rather than to rouse it publicly perchance by any action of mine. I preferred to fail somewhat in my duty rather than in submission, that others should look for priestly authority in me instead of your failing to find reverence in me, who am most devoted. The result would be that, though you restrained your vehemence, your ability to get counsel might be unimpaired. I proffered the excuse of bodily illness, truly severe, and only to be eased by men being milder. Yet I would have preferred to die rather than not await your arrival in two or three days. But that was not what I did.

The affair which took place in the city of Thessalonica and with no precedent within memory, that which I could not prevent from taking place, which I had declared would be most atrocious when I entered pleas against it so many times, and which you yourself, by revoking it too late, manifestly considered to have been very serious, this when

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Ezech. 3.19,20.

done I could not extenuate. It was first heard of when the synod had met on the arrival of Gallican bishops.<sup>4</sup> No one failed to lament, no one took it lightly. Your being in fellowship with Ambrose was not an excuse for your deed; blame for what had been done would have been heaped upon me even more had no one said there must needs be a reconciliation with our God.

Are you ashamed, O Emperor, to do what King David the Prophet did, the forefather of the family of Christ according to the flesh? He was told that a rich man who had many flocks had seized and killed a poor man's one ram on the arrival of a guest, and recognizing that he himself was being condemned in this tale, for he had himself done so, he said: 'I have sinned against the Lord.'<sup>5</sup> Do not be impatient, O Emperor, if it is said to you: 'You have done what was declared to King David by the prophet.' For if you listen carefully to this and say: 'I have sinned against the Lord,' if you repeat the words of the royal Prophet: 'Come, let us adore and fall down before him, and weep before our Lord who made us,'<sup>6</sup> it will be said also to you: 'Since you repent, the Lord forgives you your sin and you shall not die.'<sup>7</sup>

Again, when David had ordered the people to be numbered, he was smitten in heart and said to the Lord: 'I have sinned very much in the command I have made, and now, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant, because I have sinned exceedingly.' And the Prophet Nathan was sent again to him to offer him the choice of three things, that he might select what he chose: a famine in the land for three years, flight from the face of his enemies for three months, or pestilence in the land for three days. And David answered: 'These three things are a great strait to me, yet I

4 It is not known to what council Ambrose refers.

5 2 Kings 12.13.

6 Ps. 94.6.

7 2 Kings 12.13.

shall fall into the hand of the Lord since his mercies are exceedingly great, and I shall not fall into the hands of men.<sup>8</sup> His fault was that he desired to know the number of all the people who were with him, and the knowledge of this he should have left to God alone.

And it is said that when the pestilence came upon the people on the first day at dinner time, when David saw the angel striking the people, he said: 'I have sinned, I, the shepherd, have done evil and this flock, what has it done? Let your hand be upon me, and upon my father's house.'<sup>9</sup> So the Lord repented and He bade the angel to spare the people, but David to offer sacrifice, for sacrifices were then offered for sin, but now they are sacrifices of penance. Thus, by his humility he became more acceptable to God, for it is not strange that man sins, but it is reprehensible if he does not acknowledge that he has erred and humble himself before God.

Holy Job, also powerful in this world, says: 'I have not hid my sin, but declared it before all the people.'<sup>10</sup> To fierce King Saul his own son Jonathan said: 'Sin not against thy servant David,' and 'Why wilt thou sin against innocent blood by killing David, who is without fault?'<sup>11</sup> Although he was a king, he sinned if he killed the innocent. Finally, even David, when he was in possession of his kingdom and had heard that an innocent man named Abner was slain by Joab, the leader of his army, said: 'I and my kingdom are innocent now and forever of the blood of Abner the son of Ner,'<sup>12</sup> and he fasted in sorrow.

These things I have written not to disconcert you but that the examples of kings may stir you to remove this sin from

8 2 Kings 24.10,11.

9 2 Kings 24.17.

10 Job 31.34 (Septuagint).

11 1 Kings 19.4,5.

12 2 Kings 3.28.

your kingdom, for you will remove it by humbling your soul before God. You are a man, you have met temptation—conquer it. Sin is not removed except by tears and penance. No angel or archangel can remove it; it is God Himself who alone can say: 'I am with you';<sup>13</sup> if we have sinned, He does not forgive us unless we do penance.

I urge, I ask, I beg, I warn, for my grief is that you, who were a model of unheard-of piety, who had reached the apex of clemency, who would not allow the guilty to be in peril, are not now mourning that so many guiltless have perished. Although you waged battles most successfully, and were praiseworthy also in other respects, the apex of your deeds was always your piety. The Devil envied you this, your most outstanding possession. Conquer him while you still have the means of doing so. Do not add another sin to your sin nor follow a course of action which has injured many followers.

I among all other men, a debtor to your Piety, to whom I cannot be ungrateful, this piety which I discover in many emperors and match in only one, I, I say, have no charge of arrogance against you, but I do have one of fear. I dare not offer the Holy Sacrifice if you intend to be present. Can that which is not allowable, after the blood of one man is shed, be allowable when many persons' blood was shed? I think not.

Lastly, I am writing with my own hand what you alone may read. Thus, may the Lord free me from all anxieties, for I have learned very definitely what I may not do, not from man nor through man. In my anxiety, on the very night that I was preparing to set forth you appeared [in my dreams] to have come to the church and I was not allowed to offer the Holy Sacrifice. I say nothing of the other things I could have avoided, but bore for love of you, as I believe. May the Lord make all things pass tranquilly. Our God

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<sup>13</sup> Matt. 28.20.

admonishes us in many ways, by heavenly signs,<sup>14</sup> by the warnings of the Prophets, and He wills that we understand even by the visions of sinners. So we will ask Him to remove these disturbances, to preserve peace for you who are rulers, that the faith and peace of the Church continue, for it avails much if her emperors be pious Christians.

You certainly wish to be approved by God. 'There is a time for everything,'<sup>15</sup> as it is written: 'It is time to act, O Lord,'<sup>16</sup> and 'The time of mercy, O God.'<sup>17</sup> You will make your offering then when you receive permission to sacrifice, when your offering has been acceptable to God. Would it not delight me to have the emperor's favor, so that I could act in accord with your will if the case allowed? Prayer by itself is sacrifice, it brings pardon when the other [sacrifice] causes offence, for the one bespeaks humility, the other contempt. We have God's word that He prefers the doing of His command to the offering of sacrifice. God proclaims this, Moses declares it to the people, Paul preaches it to the Gentiles. Do at the right moment what you know is of greater value. 'I desire mercy,' it says, 'and not sacrifice.'<sup>18</sup> Are they not more Christian who condemn their sin than they who hope to defend it, for 'The just is first accuser of himself.'<sup>19</sup> One who accuses himself when he has sinned is just, not one who praises himself.

I wish, O Emperor, that before this you had relied upon me rather than on your own habits. Since I realize that you

14 Palanque and others think Ambrose's reference to 'heavenly signs' refers to a comet which appeared and was visible from August 22 to September 17, 390. McGuire (*op. cit.* 316) does not think Ambrose would use a comet as a 'divine sign of warning.'

15 Eccle. 3.1.

16 Ps. 118.126.

17 Ps. 68.14.

18 Matt. 9.13.

19 Prov. 18.17 (Septuagint).

are quick to pardon, quick to retract, as you have so often done, you have now been prevented and I have not shirked what I had no need to fear. But, thanks be to the Lord who wills to chastise His servants lest He lose them. This I have in common with the Prophets and you will have it in common with the saints.

Shall I not value the father of Gratian<sup>20</sup> more than my eyes? Your other blessed offspring deserves pardon. I conferred a sweet name formerly on those to whom I bore a mutual love. I love, I cherish, I attend you with prayers. If you trust me, follow me; if, I say, you trust me, acknowledge what I say; if you do not trust me, pardon what I do in esteeming God more than you. May you, the most blessed and eminent Emperor Augustus, together with your holy offspring, enjoy perpetual peace.

#### *4. Ambrose to Theodosius the Emperor (August, 392)*<sup>1</sup>

Word from your Clemency has broken my silence,<sup>2</sup> for I had decided that amid so great sorrows I could do nothing better than withdraw as far as possible. Yet, being unable to hide away in some retreat or abdicate my priestly state, I at least retired within myself by my silence.

I sorrow, I confess, with bitter sorrow not only that Augustus Valentinian has died so young, but also because, instructed in the faith and molded by your teaching, he had become so devoted toward our God and clung to me with so

<sup>20</sup> It is uncertain which Gratian is referred to in this passage.

<sup>1</sup> The *Consolation on the Death of Valentinian*, translated by R. J. Defarrari in Volume 22 of this series (New York 1953), should be read in connection with this letter.

<sup>2</sup> On the letter of Theodosius to Ambrose, see Theodoret, *II. E.* 5.15.

much affection as to love now one whom he formerly persecuted; he now esteemed as a father one whom he formerly repulsed as an enemy. I mention this, not as a reminder of his former wrong-doing, but as proof of his conversion. The first-named [wrong-doing] was learned from others; the latter was his own; and he clung so firmly to what you inspired that he was proof against the arguments of his mother. He used to say he had been reared by me; he longed for me as for a solicitous parent and when some persons made believe they had news of my arrival, he awaited it impatiently. Nay, even on the days of great mourning,<sup>3</sup> although he had within the territory of Gaul saintly and eminent bishops of the Lord, he felt obliged to write to me to give him the sacrament of baptism. In this way, unreasonably, but lovingly, he gave proof of his affection toward me.

Shall I not sigh for him with my inmost breath? Shall I not embrace him within the deepest recesses of my heart and soul? Shall I think that he is dead to me? Indeed, he is more than dead to me. How grateful I was to the Lord that he was so changed toward me, so improved, and had assumed a character so much more mature. How grateful was I to your Clemency, also, that you had not only restored him to power, but, what is more, had taught him your own faith and piety. Shall I not grieve that, while young in years, before he had attained as he desired the grace of the sacraments, he met with a sudden death?<sup>4</sup> You have comforted my soul in condescending to bear witness to my grief. I have you, O Emperor, as judge of my affections and interpreter of my thoughts.

But we shall have time to weep later; let us now attend to his burial which your Clemency has commanded to take

<sup>3</sup> The days of Holy Week.

<sup>4</sup> For the various theories of his death, cf. Deferrari, *op. cit.* 264.

place here. If he has died without baptism, I now withhold what I know. We have here a very beautiful porphyry vessel, well suited to the purpose; Maximian, the colleague of Diocletian, was so buried. There are also very precious porphyry tablets with which a cover may be made to encase the king's remains.

This was made ready but we awaited your Clemency's command; its arrival has greatly comforted your holy daughters,<sup>5</sup> sisters of your son Valentinian, who are deeply affected and the more so, since for a long time they received no word from you. Your message has been no small consolation to them, but while the remains are unburied they do not spare themselves, for they daily imagine that they are attending the funeral of their brother. In truth, they are never without many tears and heavy sorrow, and whenever they visit the body they return almost lifeless. It will be good for them and for the dear remains if the burial is hastened, lest the summer heat utterly dissolve them, for we have hardly passed its first tide.

Your command I observe and commend to the Lord. May the Lord love you, for you love the Lord's servants.

#### 5. *Ambrose to Theodosius the Emperor (September, 394)*

You thought, most blessed Emperor, as I learned from your august letter, that I kept away from Milan because I believed your cause was abandoned by God. But I have not been so unwise or so unmindful of your virtue and your merits as not to know that the help of heaven would attend your Piety while you were protecting the Roman Empire

<sup>5</sup> *Justa and Grata, sisters of Valentinian, in whose presence Ambrose delivered the funeral speech on Valentinian.*



from the ravages of the barbarian robber and from the dominion of an unworthy usurper.<sup>1</sup>

I hastened to return here as soon as I learned that the one whom I deemed it right to avoid was now gone, for I had not abandoned the Church at Milan entrusted to me by the judgment of the Lord. I was avoiding the presence of one who had involved himself in sacrilege. I returned, therefore, about the first of August and I have been here since that day. Here, Augustus, your Clemency's letter reached me.

Thanks be to the Lord our God who has responded to your faith and piety! He has refashioned an ancient type of holiness, letting us see in our time that which we marvel at as we read the Scriptures, namely, the great presence of divine help in battles, so that mountain heights have not slowed up the course of your coming, nor were enemy arms a hindrance.

In return for these favors you realize that I should give thanks to the Lord our God. Gladly shall I do so, mindful of your merit. It is certain that the oblation offered in your name will be pleasing to God, and what a mark of great devotion and faith is this! Other emperors, immediately upon a victory, order the erection of triumphal arches or other monuments of their triumphs. Your Clemency prepares an oblation to God and desires an offering and thanksgiving to be presented by priests to the Lord.

Although I am unworthy and unequal to the great privilege, and the solemnizing of your prayers, I will describe what I have done. I took the letter of your Piety with me to the altar. I laid it on the altar. I held it in my hand when I offered the Sacrifice, so that your faith might speak through my words, and the letter of the Augustus discharge the function of the priest's offering.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Letter II, below.

<sup>2</sup> An interesting revelation of the manner of offering Mass for another's intention in the early history of the Church.

Truly is the Lord propitious to the Roman Empire when He chooses such a prince and father of princes, whose virtue and power, set upon such a triumphant pinnacle of power, rests on such humility that he surpasses emperors by his virtue and priests by his humility. What can I yet hope for? What do I yet desire? You have everything and from what is yours I shall take the full measure of prayers. You are pious, O Emperor, and you possess the utmost clemency.

Yet I hope that you will experience even more and more an increase of piety, for God can give nothing more excellent than this, that through your Clemency the Church of God, as it rejoices in the peace and tranquility of the innocent, may even so be gladdened by your pardoning of the guilty. Pardon especially those who have not offended before. May the Lord preserve your Clemency. Amen.

#### *6. Ambrose to Theodosius the Emperor (September, 394)*

Although I have written but recently to your august Clemency and have done so a second time, it did not seem to me that I had responded sufficiently to the duty of intercourse by so answering in turn, for I have been enriched so by the frequent benefits of your Clemency that I can in no way repay the services I owe, most blessed and august Emperor.

Therefore, since that first occasion was not to be lost when, through your chamberlain, I gave thanks to your Clemency and performed the duty of addressing you, lest you think that it was through negligence rather than need that I did not write you on the previous occasion, I had to find a reason for sending my dutiful greeting to your Piety.

To deliver my letter in a manner befitting you I am sending my son, the deacon Felix, that he may at one and the

same time represent me and also bring the appeal of those who fled to the Church, the mother of your Piety, begging mercy. I could not bear their tears but anticipated by my entreaty the coming of your Clemency.

Ours is a great request, but we are asking it of one to whom the Lord has granted unheard-of wonders, of whose clemency we know and whose piety we have as a pledge. Hence, we confess that we hope for more in that you have conquered by your virtue and ought also conquer yourself by your piety. It is said that your victory was granted in the manner of the ancients, with ancient portents like those of blessed Moses, of blessed Josue the son of Nun, of Samuel, and of David; it was granted not by man's foresight but by the outpouring of heavenly grace. We here beg a like piety by whose excellence so great a victory has been gained.

7. *Ambrose, bishop, to the most blessed prince and most Christian Emperor, Valentinian (Summer, 384)*<sup>1</sup>

Not only are all men under the sway of Rome in the service of you, the emperors and princes of the earth, but you yourselves are also in the service of almighty God and of our holy faith. Salvation will not be assured unless each one truly worships the true God, that is, the God of the Christians, by whom all things are governed. He alone is the true God who is worshiped with the inmost being: 'For the gods of the gentiles are idols,' as Scripture says.<sup>2</sup>

Whoever serves this true God, receiving Him with deep affection, in order to worship Him, displays not lying and

<sup>1</sup> This letter gave occasion to the *Relatio* of Symmachus. These works and Ambrose's letter to Eugenius are edited and commented upon by J. Wytzes, *Der Streit um den Altar der Viktoria* (Amsterdam 1936).

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 95.5.

treachery, but a zeal and devotion to the faith. And if he owes not these, he at least owes no worship to idols and to profane ceremonial cults. No one deceives God to whom all things, even the secrets of the heart, are manifest.

Therefore, since you have truly shown your faith in God, most Christian Emperor, I am amazed that your zeal for the faith, your protection and devotion have given hope to some persons that you are now obligated to erect altars to the gods of the heathens and to furnish credit for the upkeep of profane sacrifices. This expense, which for a long time was charged to the revenues or to the treasury, you will appear to expend out of your own resources, rather than to be making restitution from it.

They are complaining of their losses, they who were never sparing of our blood, who ruined our church buildings. They also ask you to give them privileges, who by the recent Julian law refused to us the ordinary privilege of preaching and teaching, those privileges by which even Christians have often been made to apostatize.<sup>3</sup> By these privileges they have wanted to win some persons by improvidence and others through the difficulty of bearing public offices; and, since all are not found steadfast, several, even under Christian princes, have fallen from the faith.

If these privileges had not already been abolished, I would approve their being done away with by your authority. But, since these were almost universally banned and suppressed by several predecessors and annulled by rescript at Rome by your Clemency's brother, Gratian of august memory, through the logic of his true faith, do not, I beg you, repeal these measures on religion or tear up your brother's edicts. It does not occur to anyone to interfere rashly in a

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<sup>3</sup> Wytzes omits this passage in the Latin text, but translates it in the German.

civil matter which is a statute of law, and here you are overriding an edict on religion.

Let no one take advantage of your youth; if it is a pagan who makes these demands, he ought not ensnare your mind in the meshes of superstition, but by his zeal he should teach and instruct you how to be zealous for the true faith since he defends untruth with so much zeal. I agree that we must be respectful of the true merits of men of distinction, but it is certain that God should be preferred to all men.

If one is seeking advice on military affairs, he should await the advice of a man skilled in battle and should hold to his opinion. Now that it is a matter of religion, think of God. No one is offended when almighty God is more esteemed than he is. God has His opinion. You do not compel a man to worship what he does not wish, being unwilling. You, too, O Emperor, are allowed the same, and everyone should bear up graciously if he does not secure from the emperor what he would impatiently bear if the emperor desired to wrest it from him. The pagans themselves are wont to detest one who betrays his conscience; each one should be free to defend faithfully and keep his own principles.

But if some men, Christians in name, think such a decree should be promulgated, let not their mere words overwhelm your mind, their vain assumptions deceive you. Whoever gives this advice or whoever agrees to it is offering sacrifice. But the sacrifice of one is more tolerable than the downfall of all. In this the whole number of Christian Senators is in danger.

If today some pagan emperor—God forbid!—should set up an altar to idols and compel Christians to hold their meetings there, to be present at the sacrifices, so that the Christian's breath and nostrils would be filled with the ashes from the altar, cinders from the sacrifice, and smoke from the wood; and if he would give his opinion in the curia, where in

giving their opinion they would be forced to swear at the altar of the idol (for this is how they interpret the altar erected so that, as they think, each meeting, by his oath, will be held in its midst, although the curia already has a majority number of Christians), the Christian compelled to come into the Senate would on these conditions think it a persecution. This is being done quite generally. They are forced to meet under penalties. Now that you are the emperor, will Christians be forced to take their oath on an altar? What does taking an oath mean except to put one's trust in the divine power of one who you think is the judge of your good faith? Now that you are the emperor, is this being asked for and expected? Are you bidding that an altar be raised and money allocated for profane sacrifices?

A decree like this cannot be enforced without sacrilege. I beg you not to make such a decree, nor pass a law, nor sign a decree of this sort. As a priest of Christ, I appeal to your faith. All priests would make the appeal with me if the sudden news which came to their ears were not unbelievable that such a measure was suggested in your council or demanded by the Senate. Do not let it be said that the Senate demanded this, A few pagans are usurping the name which is not theirs. When the same thing was tried about two years ago, Damasus, the holy bishop of the Roman Church, elected by God's judgment, sent me a counter-petition which the Christian senators had given him. In great numbers they protested that they had made no such demand, that they did not agree with such requests of the pagans or give their assent. In public and in private they murmured that they would not come to the Senate if such a measure were decreed. Is it dignified in your day, a Christian day, that Christian Senators be deprived of their dignity so that heathens may have deference paid to their unholy will? I sent this memorandum to the brother of your Clemency,

wherein was clear evidence that the Senate had made no provision for the upkeep of superstition.

Perhaps it may be said: 'Why were they not present in the Senate when such proposals were being made?' They say clearly enough what they wish, by not being present; they have said enough by speaking to the emperor. Yet it is strange to us that they take from private individuals at Rome the liberty of resisting, while they are unwilling that you be free to withhold ordering what you do not approve and to maintain what you feel is right.

Mindful, therefore, of the commission lately laid upon me I again call upon your faith, I call upon your judgment. Do not think that you have to give an answer favorable to the pagans, nor join to your answer in such a matter the sacrilege of your signature. Refer with assurance to the father of your Piety, Emperor Theodosius, whom you have been accustomed to consult in almost all matters of great importance. Nothing is of more importance than religion; nothing is more exalted than faith.

If this were a civil case, the opposing party would be guaranteed the right of reply. It is a religious case, and I, the bishop, am using that right. Let a copy of the appeal be given me, and I will answer more fully. And may it seem fit to you to consult your faith's opinion on all these matters. Certainly, if any other decision is reached, we bishops cannot tranquilly allow it and pretend not to notice. You will be allowed to come to the church, but either you will find there no priest or you will find one who will gainsay you.

What will you answer the priest who says to you: 'The Church does not want your gifts because you have adorned the heathen temples with gifts. The altar of Christ spurns your gifts since you have made an altar for idols. Yours is the voice, yours the hand, yours the signature, yours the work. The Lord Jesus scorns and spurns your worship since

you have worshiped idols, for He said to you: "You cannot serve two masters."<sup>4</sup> Virgins consecrated to God have no privileges from you, and do Vestal virgins lay claim to them? Why do you ask for God's priests to whom you have brought the unholy demands of the pagans? We cannot be associated with another's error.'

What will you answer to these words? That you are but a boy who has fallen? Every age is perfect in Christ, every one full of God. Childhood is not allowed to faith; even babes have confessed Christ before persecutors with fearless words.

What will you answer your brother? Will he not say to you: 'Because I left you as emperor, I did not think I was vanquished; I did not grieve dying, because I had you as heir; I did not mourn in leaving my kingdom, because I believed that my imperial commands, especially those on divine religion, would last forever. I had set up these memorials of pious virtue, these trophies from the world, these spoils from the Devil, I offered these victories over the adversary of all in whom there is eternal victory. What more could my enemy take from me? You have annulled my decrees; even he [Maximian], who took up arms against me, did not do this. In this I am wounded by a heavier weapon in that my brother has condemned my decrees. The better part of me is imperiled with you; that was death of the body, this the death of my reputation for virtue. Now my power is annulled and, more serious, is annulled by your acts, is annulled by my own family, and that is annulled which even my enemies had praised in me. If you have acquiesced willingly, you have destroyed my faith in you; if you have yielded unwillingly, you have betrayed your own faith. And this is even more serious, the fact that I am imperiled with you.'

What will you answer your father, who will confront you with great sorrow, saying: 'Son, you have judged me very

<sup>4</sup> Matt. 6.24.



ill, thinking that I would have connived with the pagans. No one ever told me that there was an altar in the Roman Senate House; I had never believed such wickedness, that in the common meeting place of Christians and pagans the pagans offered sacrifice, that is, the pagans reviled the Christians present and Christians unwillingly were forced to attend the sacrifices. When I was emperor, many kinds of crimes were committed. I punished those I detected. If some one escaped my notice, should it be said I approved what no one had appraised me? You have judged me very ill if the Gentiles' superstition and not my faith preserved the Empire.'

Wherefore, O Emperor, you see that if you decree anything of this kind you will offer injury first to God and then to your father and brother; I beg you do what you know will benefit your own salvation before God.<sup>5</sup>

8. *Ambrose, bishop, to the most blessed prince and most clement Emperor Valentinian Augustus (Autumn, 384)*

The illustrious prefect of the city, Symmachus, has made an appeal to your Clemency that the altar which was removed from the Senate House in the city of Rome be restored to its place.<sup>1</sup> You, O Emperor, still young in age, a new recruit

<sup>5</sup> In his second letter on this subject to Valentinian, Ambrose seems to imply that Valentinian had already rejected the proposal of the Senate when he addressed this letter to him. He likewise says (*Cons. Val.* 19) that 'when all who were present in the consistory, Christians and pagans alike, said that these privileges should be restored, he alone [Valentinian] like Daniel, with the spirit of God aroused within him, denounced the Christians for lack of faith and resisted the pagans by saying: "How can you think that what my brother took away should be restored by me?" since thereby both his religion and his brother, by whom he was unwilling to be surpassed in piety, would be offended.' (Trans. Deferrari, *Fathers of the Church* 22, pp. 274-275). The above statement is difficult to reconcile with the general tone of reproof in this letter.

<sup>1</sup> Symmachus, *Memorial*, ed. J. Wytzes, *op. cit.* 48-61.

without experience, but a veteran in faith, did not approve the appeal of the pagans. The very moment I learned this I presented a request in which, although I stated what seemed necessary to suggest, I asked that I be given a copy of the appeal.

Not doubtful, therefore, regarding your faith, but foreseeing the care that is necessary, and being confident of a kindly consideration, I am answering the demands of the appeal with this discourse, making this one request that you will not expect eloquence of speech but the force of facts. For, as holy Scripture teaches,<sup>2</sup> the tongue of the wise and studious man is golden, decked with glittering words and shining with the gleam of eloquence, as though some rich hue, capturing the eyes of the mind by the comeliness of its appearance, dazzling in its beauty. But this gold, if you examine it carefully, though outwardly precious, within is a base metal. Ponder well, I beg you, and examine the sect of the pagans. They sound weighty and grand; they support what is incapable of being true; they talk of God, but they adore a statue.

The distinguished prefect of the city has brought forth in his appeal three points which he considers of weight; namely, that (according to him) Rome is asking again for her ancient rites, that the priests and Vestal virgins should be given their stipends, and since these stipends have been refused to the priests there has been general famine.

According to the first proposal, as he says, Rome is shedding tears with sad and mournful complaints, asking again for her ancient ceremonies. The sacred objects, he says, drove Hannibal from the city and the Senones from the Capitol. But at the same time as the power of the sacred objects is proclaimed, their weakness is betrayed. Hannibal reviled the sacred objects of the Romans for a long time, and while the

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2 Cf. Eccle. 6.11; Prov. 15.2.

gods warred against themselves the conqueror reached the city's walls. Why did they allow themselves to be besieged when the weapons of their gods did battle for them?

Why should I make mention of the Senones, whom, when they penetrated the innermost recesses of the Capitol, the Roman forces could not have withstood had not a goose (with its frightened cackling) betrayed them. See what sort of protectors guard the Roman temples. Where was Jupiter at that time? Was he making a statement through a goose?

Why do I refuse to admit that their sacred objects warred in behalf of the Romans? Hannibal, too, worshiped the same gods. Let them choose whichever they wish. If these sacred objects conquered in the Romans, then they were overcome in the Carthaginians. If they triumphed in the Carthaginians, they certainly did not help the Romans.

Let us have no more grudging complaint from the people of Rome. Rome has authorized no such complaints. She addresses them with the words: 'Why do you stain me each day with the useless blood of the harmless herd? Trophies of victory depend not on entrails of sheep but on the strength of warriors. I subdued the world by other skills. Camillus was a soldier of mine who slew those who had captured the Tarpeian rock and brought back the standards which had been taken from the Capitol. Valor laid low those whom religion had not reached. What shall I say of Attilius,<sup>3</sup> who bestowed the service of his death? Africanus found his triumphs not amid the altars of the Capitol but among the ranks of Hannibal. Why do you give me these examples of ancient heroes? I despise the ceremonies of the Neroes. Why mention emperors of two months' duration? And the downfall of kings coupled with their rising? Or is it something new, perhaps, for the barbarians to have overrun their territory? In those wretched and strange cases when an

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3 Regulus.

emperor was held captive, and then a world held captive under an emperor, was it the Christians who revealed the fact that the ceremonies which promised victory were falsified? Was there then no altar of Victory? I lament my downfall. My old age is accompanied by shame over that disgraceful bloodshed. But I am not ashamed to be converted in my old age along with the whole world. Surely it is true that no age is too late to learn. Let that old age feel shame which cannot rectify itself. It is not the old age of years which is entitled to praise, but that of character.<sup>4</sup> There is no disgrace in going on to better things. This alone I had in common with the barbarians, that I did not know God before. Your sacrifice consists in the rite of being sprinkled with the blood of beasts. Why do you look for God's words in dead animals? Come and learn of the heavenly warfare which goes on on earth. We live here, but we war there.<sup>5</sup> Let God Himself, who established the mystery of heaven, teach me about it, not man who does not know himself. Whom more than God shall I believe concerning God? How can I believe you who admit that you do not know what you worship?

So great a secret, it is said, cannot be reached by one road. We [Christians] know on God's word what you do not know. And what you know by conjecture we have discovered from the very wisdom and truth of God. Your ways do not agree with ours. You ask peace for your gods from the emperors; we beg peace for our emperors from Christ. You adore the works of your hands; we consider it wrong to think that anything which can be made is God. God does not wish to be worshiped in stones. Even your philosophers have ridiculed these ideas.

But if you say that Christ is not God because you do not

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Wisd.* 4.9.

<sup>5</sup> In heaven.

believe that He died (for you do not realize that that was a death of the body not of the divinity, which has brought it about that no believer will die), why is this so senseless to you who worship with insult and disparage with honor, thinking that your god is a piece of wood? O worship most insulting! You do not believe that Christ could have died. O honorable stubbornness!

But, says he, the ancient altars should be restored to the images, the ornaments to the shrines. Let these demands be made by one who shares their superstition. A Christian emperor knows how to honor the altar of Christ alone. Why do they force pious hands and faithful lips to do service to their sacrilege? Let the voice of our emperor utter the name of Christ and call on Him only whom he is conscious of, for 'the heart of the king is in the hand of God.'<sup>6</sup> Has any heathen emperor raised an altar to Christ? While they demand the restoration of all things which used to be, they show by their own example what great reverence Christian emperors should give to the religion which they follow, since the heathens offered everything to their superstitions.

We had our beginning long ago, and now they are following those whom they excluded. We glory in [shedding] our blood; they are disturbed by the spending of money. We think these acts take the place of victory; they reckon them a loss. Never did they confer more upon us than when they ordered Christians scourged and outlawed and put to death. Religion made a reward out of that which unbelief thought was a punishment. See these magnanimous individuals! We have increased through our losses, through want, through punishment. They do not believe that their ceremonies can continue unless donations continue.

Let the Vestal virgins, he says, keep their privileged state. Let men say this who are not able to believe what virginity

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6 Prov. 2.1.

can do without reward. Let them derive encouragement from gainful means, having no confidence in virtue. How many virgins get the rewards promised to them? About seven Vestal virgins are accepted. Lo! that is the whole number of those attracted by fillets and chaplets for the head, or purple-dyed robes, the pomp of a litter surrounded by a group of attendants, the greatest privileges, great gains, and a set period of virginity.

Let them raise the eye of the mind and of the body and see a nation of modesty, a people of purity, an assembly of virginity. Fillets are not the adornment of the head but a veil in common use, ennobled by chastity. The finery of beauty is not sought after, it is relinquished. There are none of those purple insignia, no charming luxuries, but rather the practice of fasts, no privileges, no gains. All are such, in fine, that you would think enjoyment restrained while duties are performed. But while *they* perform their duty, enjoyment grows apace. Chastity mounts by its own sacrifices. That is not virginity which is bought for a price and not kept through a desire for the virtue. That is not purity which is paid for with money at an auction and only for a time. Chastity's chief victory is to conquer the desire for wealth because eagerness for gain is a temptation to modesty. Let us grant that bountiful provisions should be given to virgins. What amounts will overflow upon Christians! What treasury will supply such riches? Or if they think that only Vestals should be given grants, are they not ashamed that they claimed the whole for themselves under heathen emperors and do not think that under Christian princes we should have a like share?

They complain also that public support is not being duly granted to their priests and ministers. What a storm of words has sounded on this point! On the other hand, under recent laws we were denied even the inheritance of private

property, and no one is complaining. We do not think that is an injury because we do not grieve over losses. If a priest seeks the privilege of declining the municipal burden, he has to give up the paternal and ancestral ownership of all his property. If the heathens suffered this, how would they urge their complaint, if the priest had to buy free time for the exercise of his ministry by the loss of his patrimony, and purchase the power of exercising his public ministry at the expense of all his private means! In addition, alleging his vigils for the common safety, he must console himself with the reward of domestic poverty, because he has not sold his service but has obtained a favor.

Compare the cases. You wish to excuse a decurion when it is not permitted the Church to excuse a priest. Wills are made out in favor of the ministers of the temples; no ordinary person is excluded, no one of the lowest condition, no one openly shameless; only the clergy are denied the common privilege, and they are the ones who offer common prayer for all men and render a common service.<sup>7</sup> They may have no legacy even from venerable widows, no gifts. And where no fault of character can be found a fine is imposed upon one's official capacity. A bequest made by a Christian widow to the priests of the temple is valid, but what is left to the ministers of God is invalid. I have described this not to complain but so that they will know of what I do not complain, for I prefer that we be poorer in money than in grace.

They answer that what has been given or left to the Church has not been touched. Let them say also who it is that has taken away gifts from the temples, for that is what has been done to the Christians. If this had happened to

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<sup>7</sup> An imperial constitution of 370 had forbidden clerics or ascetics to inherit from any woman or to receive any gift from a woman while they were both alive. In 390, Theodosius forbade deaconesses to leave their property to clerics or to the Church (*Cod. Theod.* 17.11.27).

heathens, the wrong would be rather a reprisal than an injury. Is it only now that justice is being demanded and a claim being made for fairness? Where was that feeling when they despoiled all Christians of their property, grudged them the very breath of life, and finally forbade them the privilege of burial, a privilege denied to none of the dead anywhere? The sea gave back those whom the heathens had thrown into it. This is the victory of faith, that they now reap the deeds of their ancestors. But, alas! What sense is there in seeking the favors of those whose actions were not approved by them?

No one, however, has refused gifts to the shrines or legacies to the soothsayers; only their land has been taken away because they did not use in a religious way what they claimed as a right of religion. Why did they not make use of our practice if they are using us as an example? The Church owns nothing except her faith. It furnishes her with returns, it furnishes her with increase. The property of the Church is the support of the poor. Let them take account of how many captives the temples have brought back, what food they have provided for the poor, to what exiles they have furnished the means of a livelihood. Their lands have been taken away, not their rights.

See, they say, a sad condition atoned for<sup>8</sup>—a public famine avenged what had taken place and that which served only the advantage of priests began being advantageous to all. For this reason, they say, the bark was stripped from the woods and carried off and the fainting men drank with their lips<sup>9</sup> the unsavory sap. Therefore, changing Chaonian wine for the acorn,<sup>10</sup> going back again to the food of cattle and to the nourishment of wretched provisions, they shook the oaks

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<sup>8</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.184. This is the first of numerous imitations of Virgil in this letter. See also, Sister M. D. Diederich, *Vergil in the Works of St. Ambrose* (Washington 1931).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Aen.* 2.211.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Georg.* 1.8.



and satisfied their dire hunger in the woods.<sup>11</sup> Surely, these are strange events in earth, which never happened before when the heathen superstition was fervent throughout the world! In fact, when before did the crops mock the prayers of the greedy farmer with empty stalks,<sup>12</sup> or the blade of corn sough in the furrows deceive the hopes of the rustic crew?<sup>13</sup>

And how is it that the Greeks considered their oaks oracles,<sup>14</sup> except that they thought that the sustenance of their sylvan food is the gift of religion? Such they believe to be the gifts of their gods. What people except heathens have worshiped the trees of Dodona when they paid honor to the sorry food of the woods? Is it not likely that their gods in anger inflicted on them as a punishment what they, when they were appeased, used to give them as a gift? What fairness would there be of grudging the food denied to a few priests if they would deny it to everybody, for the vengeance would be more unbearable than the injury? There is no real reason for bringing such suffering on a world to accomplish one man's downfall as that the full-grown hope of the year should suddenly perish while the stalks were green.

And, surely, it has been many years since the rights of temples were taken away throughout the world. Has it just now entered the mind of the heathen gods to avenge the wrong? Did the Nile fail to overflow in its accustomed course to avenge the losses of the priests of the city while it did not avenge its own?

Suppose that they think that the wrongs done to their gods were avenged last year, why have they been unnoticed this year? The country people no longer tear up roots and feed

11 Cf. *Georg.* 1.159.

12 Cf. *Georg.* 1.226.

13 Cf. *Georg.* 1.134.

14 Cf. *Georg.* 2.16.

upon them, nor look for refreshment from the berries of the woods,<sup>15</sup> nor pluck their food from thorns, but, taking joy in their prosperous labors and even marveling at their harvest themselves, they have sated their hunger with the full enjoyment of their wishes.<sup>16</sup> The earth gave us her fruit with interest.

Who, then, is such a stranger to men's affairs as to be astonished at the alternation of the seasons of the year? Yet we know that last year several provinces had an abundance of produce. What shall I say of the Gauls who were richer than usual? They sold the grain of Pannonia which they did not sow, and Rhaetia Secunda incurred hostility owing to her fertility, for she who was ordinarily safe in her scarcity made herself an enemy by her fertility. The fruits of autumn fed Liguria and the Venetias. Last year had no drought because of sacrilege; in fact, it flourished with the fruits of faith. Let them try to deny that the vineyards abounded with immense produce. We have received a harvest with interest and we also possess the benefit of a more abundant vintage.

The last and most important point remains, O Emperors, whether you ought to reinstate those helps which have profited you, for our opponent says: 'Let them defend you and be worshiped by us!' This, most faithful Princes, is what we cannot tolerate, that they taunt us saying that they supplicate their gods in your name and without your command commit a great sacrilege. For they interpret your suppression of feelings as consent. Let them have their guardians to themselves; let these, if they can, protect their devotees. For, if they cannot help those who worship them, how can they help you who do not worship them?

But, he says, we must keep the rites of our ancestors. What of the fact that everything has made progress later to

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15 Cf. *Aen.* 3.650.

16 Cf. *Georg.* 1.103.

a better condition? The world itself, which at first was composed of elements in a void, in a soft mass, hardened or was clouded with the confusion of a shapeless piece of work, did it not later receive the forms of things by which it appears beautiful when the distinction between sky, sea, and earth became set? The lands shaking off their misty shadows wondered at the sun. The day does not shine at first, but as time proceeds it is bright with an increase of light and grows warm with an increase of heat.<sup>17</sup>

The moon herself, by which the appearance of the Church is mirrored in the sayings of the Prophets, when first rising waxes to her monthly age, but is hidden in night's shadows. Gradually filling up her horns,<sup>18</sup> finishing them in the region of the sun, she glows with the brightness of clear shining.

Formerly, the earth did not know how to be worked for her fruits. Later, when the careful farmer began to rule the fields and to clothe the shapeless soil with vines, she put away her wild dispositions, being softened by domestic cultivation.<sup>19</sup>

The first part of the year itself, stripped of growing things which have tinged our fields with a likeness to itself, springlike with flowers which will fall, grows up later on to full fruits.

We, too, the uninstructed ages, have an infancy of reasoning, but, changing over the years, we lay aside the rudiments of our faculties.

Let me say that all things should have remained in their first beginnings; the earth shrouded in darkness now displeases us because it has been illumined by the rays of the sun. And how much more pleasing is it for the shadows of the mind to have vanished than those of the body, and for the ray of faith to have shone rather than that of the sun. So, then, the

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17 Cf. *Ecl.* 6.31.

18 Cf. *Aen.* 3.645.

19 Cf. *Georg.* 1.99.

primeval age of the world has changed just as the age of all things and in the same way the venerable old age of hoary faith may change. Let those whom this disturbs find fault with the harvest for its abundance in the late season; let them find fault with the vintage for coming at the fall of the year; let them find fault with the olive for being the last of fruits.

So, then, our harvest is the faith of souls; the grace of the Church is the vintage of merits which has flourished in the saints since the beginning of the world, but in the last age it has spread among the nations in order that all may know that the faith of Christ has not crept upon unlettered minds (for there is no crown of victory without an adversary), but, the opinion having been rejected which prevailed before, that which was true has rightly been preferred.

If the old ceremonies gave pleasure, why did Rome also take up foreign ones? I will make no mention of the ground hidden by costly buildings and the shepherds' huts glittering with ill-suited gold. Why? In order that I may refer to the very matter of which they complain. Why have they eagerly taken statues from captured cities, and conquered gods, and foreign rites of alien superstition? Whence comes the precedent for Cybele to wash her chariot in the stream of the counterfeiting Alma? Whence come the Phrygian seers and the deities of unjust Carthage ever hateful to the Romans? Whence is she whom the Africans worship as Coelestis, the Persians as Mithra,<sup>20</sup> and most people as Venus, according to a diversity of names, but not a variety of deity? They believed that Victory was a goddess, yet it is a gift, not a power; it is granted and it does not rule; it is the result of the legions, not of the power of religion. Is that goddess great

<sup>20</sup> Ambrose wrongly makes Mithra a goddess, not a god; cf. McGuire, *op. cit.* 308.

whom a number of soldiers claim or the outcome of battle gives?

They ask to have her altar erected in the Senate House of the city of Rome, the very place where most of those who meet are Christians. There are altars in every temple and an altar even in the Temple of Victories. Since they take pleasure in numbers, they offer their sacrifices everywhere. Is it not an insult to the faith to insist upon a sacrifice on this one altar? Must we tolerate a heathen offering of sacrifice in the presence of a Christian? Let them imbibe, he says, although they are unwilling, let them imbibe the smoke with their eyes, the music with their ears, the cinders with their throats, the incense with their nostrils. And let the dust raised from our hearths cover their faces although they detest it. Are not the baths and colonnades and streets filled with enough statues for them? Will there not be a common privilege in that common meeting place? The dutiful portion of the Senate will be bound by the voices of those who call upon the gods, by the oaths of those who swear by them. If they refuse, they will appear to utter a lie; if they consent, to acknowledge what is sacrilegious.

Where, he says, shall we swear fealty to our laws and decrees? Does your mind which is contained in the laws gain assent and bind to faithfulness by the rites of heathens? Not only is the faith of those present attacked but also of those absent, and, what is more, O Emperors, your faith is attacked, for you compel if you command. Constantius of august memory, although he had not yet been admitted to the sacred mysteries, felt he would be polluted if he saw the altar. He ordered it to be removed; he did not order it to be replaced. That removal has the authority of an act; the replacing of it has not the authority of a command.

Let no one flatter himself over his absence. He is more present when he joins himself to the thoughts of others than

if he gives assent before their eyes. It is more important to be drawn together by the mind than to be united with the body. The Senate has you as its presidents to convene its assembly. It meets in your behalf; it gives its conscience to you, not to the gods of the heathens. It prefers you to its children, but not to its faith. This is the affection you should seek; this is a love greater than power, provided the faith which preserves the power be safe.

Perhaps it may cause concern to some that, if this be so, a most faithful emperor has been forsaken, as if the reward of merits were to be thought of in terms of the passing value of those present. What wise man does not know that human affairs have been arranged in a kind of round and circuit, that they do not enjoy the same success, but that their state varies and they undergo changes?

Whom have the Roman temples sent forth more prosperous than Gnaeus Pompey? Yet, when he had circled the earth with three triumphs, after suffering defeat in battle, a fugitive from war, and an exile within the boundaries of his own empire, he fell by the hand of a eunuch of Canopus.

What king have the lands of all the East produced more noble than Cyrus of the Persians? He, too, after conquering extremely powerful princes who opposed him, and keeping the conquered as prisoners, was overthrown and perished by the weapons of a woman. And that king who had treated even the vanquished with honor had his head cut off and placed in a vessel full of blood, while he was bidden to be sated with the plaything of a woman's power. The mode of his own life was not repaid with similar conduct on the part of others, but far otherwise.

And whom do we find more devoted to sacrifice than Hamilcar, the leader of the Carthaginians? Although all during the battle he stood between the fighting ranks and offered sacrifice, when he saw that his side was conquered he

threw himself into the very fires which he was feeding, so that he might extinguish with his own body the fires which he knew were of no avail.

What shall I say of Julian? When he foolishly trusted the responses of the soothsayers, he destroyed his own means of retreat. Therefore, in similar cases there is not a similar offense, for our promises have not deceived anyone.

I have answered those who provoked me as though I had not been provoked, for my object was to refute the appeal, not to expose superstition. But let their very appeal, O Emperor, make you more cautious. After saying that of former princes, the earlier ones practiced the cult of their fathers, and the later ones did not abolish them, it was claimed in addition that if the religious practice of older princes did not set a pattern, the act of overlooking them on the part of the later ones did. This showed plainly what you owe to your faith, that you should not follow the pattern of heathen rites, and to your affection, that you should not set aside the decrees of your brother. If in their own behalf only they have praised the permission of those princes who, although they were Christians, did not abolish the heathen decrees, how much more ought you to defer to your brotherly affection, so that you who must overlook some things, even though you do not approve them, should not abrogate your brother's decrees; you should maintain what you judge to be in agreement with your own faith and the bond of brotherhood.

*9. To the most clement Emperor and most blessed Valentinian Augustus, Ambrose, bishop (February, 386)*

Alleging that he was acting at your command, the tribune and notary Dalmatius came to me and asked that I choose judges just as Auxentius has done. Yet he has not indicated the names of those who have been demanded. But he adds that there will be a discussion in the consistory, and the judgment of your Piety will be the deciding factor.

To this I am making, as I think, a suitable response. No one should find that I am being insolent when I assert that your father of august memory not only gave his answer by word of mouth, but sanctioned by law this truth: In a matter of faith or of any Church regulation the decision should be given by him who is neither unsuited to the task nor disqualified by law. These are the words of his decree; in other words, he wished priests to make judgments regarding priests. In fact, if a bishop were accused of any charge and the case of his character needed to be examined, he wished these matters to belong to the judgment of bishops.

Who, then, has given your Clemency an insolent answer? One who wishes you to be like your father, or one who wishes you to be unlike him? Perhaps little importance is attached by some persons to the opinion of that great emperor, although his faith was proved by his firm confession and his wisdom was declared by his development of a better commonwealth.

O most clement Emperor, when have you heard the laity judge a bishop in a matter of faith? Are we so bent down with flattery as to forget our priestly privileges and think that we should entrust to others that which God has given to us? If a bishop has to be instructed by a layman, what next? If so, the laity will dispute and the bishop will listen; and the bishop will learn from the laity! But if we examine the



context of holy Scripture or of times past, who will deny that in a matter of faith, in a matter, I say, of faith, bishops usually judge Christian emperors; not emperors, bishops.

By God's favor you will reach a ripe old age, and then you will realize what kind of a bishop subjects his priestly power to the laity. By God's favor your father, a man of ripe old age, said: 'It does not belong to me to judge between bishops';<sup>1</sup> your Clemency now says: 'I must be the judge.' He, although baptized, thought he was unfit for the burden of such a judgment; your Clemency, who must still earn the sacrament of baptism, takes to yourself a judgment concerning faith, although you are unacquainted with the sacraments of that faith.

We can well imagine what sort of judges he [Auxentius] will choose, for he fears to reveal their names. Of course, let them come to the church, if there are any to come. Let them listen to the people, not so that each may sit in judgment, but that each may have proof of his disposition and choose whom he will follow. The matter concerns the bishop of that church; if the people decide after hearing him that he argues a better case, let them follow the faith he teaches. I shall not be jealous.

I will not mention the fact that the people have already passed judgment. I am silent about their demand from the father of your Clemency for the one whom they have.<sup>2</sup> I am silent about the promise of the father of your Piety that there would be peace if the one chosen would assume the bishopric. I have kept faith in these promises.

If he boasts of the approval of some foreigners, let him be bishop there where there are people who think that he

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<sup>1</sup> Valentinian, who began his reign in 364, made a practice of not interfering with the bishops in matters of faith.

<sup>2</sup> Ambrose had been promised that he would not be harassed by the Arians if he accepted the bishopric of Milan. He certainly had been unwilling to become a bishop. Cf. Paulinus, *Vita Ambrosii* 3.7-9.

should be given the name of bishop. But I neither recognize him as a bishop nor know whence he comes.

When have we ever decided a matter on which you have declared your judgment? Nay, have you not even promulgated laws and not allowed anyone freedom of judgment? When you made such a provision for others, you also made it for yourself. An emperor passes laws which he first of all keeps. Do you want me to try to see whether those who have been chosen judges will begin to go contrary to your opinion, or at least excuse themselves on the grounds that they cannot act against so severe and rigid a law of the emperor?

This, then, is the action of an insolent individual, not of a well-meaning bishop. See, O Emperor, you are rescinding your own law in part. Would that you did so, not in part, but entirely, for I would not want your law to be above the law of God. God's law teaches us what we are to follow; man's laws cannot teach us this. These alter the conduct of the timid; they are unable to inspire confidence.

What man will there be who reads that at one moment it has been decreed that one who opposes the emperor should be struck with the sword, and whoever does not hand over the temple of God is straightway slain; what man, I say, either singly or with a few could say to the emperor: 'Your law does not meet my approval'? If priests are not allowed this, are the laity permitted? And will he be the judge in a matter of faith who either hopes for favor or fears to give offence?

Shall I agree to choose laymen as judges, who, if they maintain the truth with faith, will be proscribed or killed, because a law passed about faith has so decreed? Shall I expose these men either to the denial of truth or to punishment?

Ambrose is not worth so much that he would throw away his priestly office for his own sake. The life of one man is not

worth the dignity of all priests on whose advice I made these statements, since they suggested that we would perhaps surrender the triumph of Christ to some pagan or Jew, chosen by Auxentius, if we gave them judgment regarding Christ. What else do they rejoice to hear but the harm being done to Christ? What else can please them except that (God forbid!) Christ's divinity is being denied? Plainly, they agree completely with the Arians, who say that Christ is a creature, for heathens and Jews readily admit this.

This decree was made at the Synod of Ariminum and I rightfully despise that council, for I follow the rule of the Council of Nicaea from which neither death nor the sword can separate me. This is the creed which the parent of your Clemency, Theodosius most blessed emperor, follows and approves. This creed is held by the Gauls, it is held by the Spaniards, who keep it with pious profession of the Holy Spirit.

If there must be discussion, I have learned from my predecessor to have the discussion in church. If there has to be a conference about the faith, it should be a conference of bishops, as was done under Constantine, prince of august memory, who promulgated no laws until he had given free judgment to the bishops. This was also done under Constantius, emperor of august memory, heir of his father's dignity. Yet, what began well is ending otherwise. The bishops had subscribed at first to a definite creed. Then, when certain persons within the palace wished to pass judgment on the faith, they managed to alter the judgments of the bishops by surreptitious methods. The bishops at once called for resolute opinions. And, certainly, the greater number at Ariminum approved the creed of the Council of Nicaea and condemned the Arian decrees.

If Auxentius appeals to a synod to dispute the faith (please God it may not be necessary for so many bishops to be wearied on account of one man, for, even if he were an

angel from heaven, he must not be esteemed above the peace of the Church), when I shall hear that the synod is gathering, I myself will not be missing. Pass the law if you want a struggle!

I would have come, O Emperor, to your Clemency's consistory to make these remarks in person if either the bishops or people had permitted me, but they said rather that discussions of the faith should be held in church in the presence of the people.

Would, O Emperor, that you had not sentenced me to go wherever I wished! I went out daily; no one guarded me. You should have dispatched me where you wished, me who offered myself for anything. Now I am told by the bishops: It makes little difference whether you willingly leave the altar of Christ or hand it over, for, when you leave it, you will be handing it over.

Would that it were clearly evident to me that the Church would not be handed over to the Arians! I would then willingly offer myself to the wishes of your Piety. But, if I am the only one guilty of making a disturbance, why is there the decree to invade all the other churches? Would that there were the assurance that no one would harm the churches! I choose that you pass on me whatever sentence you wish.

Wherefore, O Emperor, receive with dignity my reason for being unable to come to the consistory. I have not learned to take my place in a consistory except to act in your behalf,<sup>3</sup> and I am unable to dispute in the palace, neither seeking nor knowing the secrets of the palace.

I, Ambrose, the bishop, offer this notice to the most clement emperor and most blessed Augustus Valentinian.

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<sup>3</sup> Ambrose had gone twice to the Consistory of Maximus and bore many affronts while there, first in the winter of 383-384 when he pleaded for peace in behalf of the young Valentinian, and later at the beginning of 385 when he begged that the body of Gratian be returned for burial at Milan.

*10. Ambrose to Emperor Valentinian (386)*

You have had such confidence in my recent embassy that no report of it was demanded of me. It was sufficiently clear from my having stayed some days in Gaul that I did not accept the terms favorable to Maximus<sup>1</sup> or agree with those which favored his will rather than peace. Moreover, you would never have sent me on a second embassy unless you had approved the first. But, inasmuch as I was forced to the necessity of contesting with him on my arrival, I have determined to give an account of my embassy in this letter so that no one's report will confuse the false with the true before, on my return, I make a clear and trustworthy account of the truth.

The day after I arrived at Trier I went to the palace. The grand chamberlain Gallicanus, a royal eunuch,<sup>2</sup> came out to me. I asked the privilege of entering; he asked if I had an imperial order from your Clemency. I answered that I did. He retorted that I could be interviewed only in the consistory. I replied that this was not customary for one of episcopal rank and, in fact, that there were certain matters of which I had to speak in earnest with the prince. In short, he went and consulted him, but maintained that the conditions would have to hold, so that it became clear that even his first remarks had been prompted by the other's wishes. I remarked that it was not in keeping with my office, but that I would not fail the embassy entrusted to me. I was happy to be humbled, especially on your behalf and in the performance of a duty which involved the affection you bear your brother.

As soon as he was seated in the consistory, I entered; he arose to give me the kiss of greeting; I was standing with the

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<sup>1</sup> Maximus was offering peace, but only on the condition that Valentinian himself come to Trier.

<sup>2</sup> *praepositus cubiculi*.

members of the consistory. Some began urging me to step forward; he began summoning me. I said: 'Why would you greet with a kiss one whom you do not know? If you knew me you would not see me here.' 'Bishop,' he said, 'you are greatly upset.' 'Not by the insult,' I answered, 'but by the embarrassment of standing in a place where I do not belong.' 'You came into the consistory,' he said, 'on your first embassy.' 'That was not my fault,' I said, 'but the fault of the one who summoned me; I merely came in answer to the summons.' 'Why did you come?' he asked. 'Because,' I replied, 'at that time I was asking for peace for one who was weaker than you, but I do so now for one who is your equal.' 'Equal by whose kindness?' he asked. 'That of almighty God,' said I, 'for He preserved for Valentinian the kingdom He had given him.'

At length he broke forth, saying: 'You and that Bauton have tricked me. He wanted to get the power for himself under the figurehead of a child, and he sent barbarians against me! As if I do not have just as many thousands of barbarians in my service and in my pay whom I can call upon. Had I not been restrained from doing so at your coming, who would have been able to withstand me or my forces?'

To this I replied gently: 'You need not be angry; there is no cause for alarm. Listen patiently to what I have to say to your remarks. You assert that while you trusted me I deceived you by coming and taking part in your first embassy—a glorious accusation that I was safeguarding the emperor who was a mere child. Whom are we bishops to guard if not children? It is written: "Judge for the fatherless, and defend the widow, and free the one receiving harm."<sup>3</sup> And elsewhere: "Defenders of widows and fathers of orphans."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Isa. 1.17.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. 67.6.

'Still, I shall not censure Valentinian for services I rendered him. To say the truth, when did I prevent your legions from streaming into Italy? With what cliffs or battlelines or troops? Or did I block the Alps with my body? Would that I had the power! I would not have feared to lie in your way nor would I have dreaded your accusations. With what promises did I trick you into making peace? Did not Count Victor<sup>5</sup> come to meet me near Mayence in Gaul, he whom you had sent to make peace? In what way has Valentinian played you false, for he was asked for peace before he asked it. How has Bauton played you false—by showing his loyalty to the emperor? Because he did not betray his lord?

'How have I deceived you? On my arrival you said that Valentinian should come to you like a son to his father. I said it was unreasonable to expect a boy to cross the Alps with his widowed mother during the roughest part of winter. Moreover, was he to embark on the hazards of such a journey without his mother? I was sent on an embassy of peace, not to promise his arrival. It is clear that I could not promise what was not enjoined on me. At least I made no promise; therefore you said: "Let us wait and see what reply Victor will make." It is well known that he reached Milan while I was being detained [at Trier], and his request was refused. It was said that peace was the only issue, not the return of the emperor, who was not to be moved from there. I was present when Victor returned. How, then, did he influence Valentinian? The legates who were sent again and said that he would not come met me at Valence in Gaul. I found soldiers of both sides guarding the mountain heights. What armies of yours did I turn from you? What standards have I caused to leave Italy? What barbarians has Count Bauton brought against you?

'If Bauton, who came from across the Rhine, had done so,

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5 Son of Maximus.

would it have been strange? You yourself were threatening the power and boundaries of Rome with barbarian troops and squadrons, with men to whom the food supplies of the provinces went as tribute. Note the difference between these threats of yours and the mildness of the august child Valentinian. You were intent upon coming into Italy surrounded by troops of barbarians. Valentinian made the Huns and Alans<sup>6</sup> who were approaching Gaul turn back to the lands of the Germans. What harm if Bauton had set barbarians against barbarians? While you were employing Roman soldiers and he opposing those attacking him on either side, the Juthungi were laying waste the Raetias within the the very heart of the Roman Empire. For this reason he set the Huns against the Juthungi. Yet, because the Germans were already crushing and threatening Gaul with approaching ruin, he was forced to abandon his triumphs lest you have ground for fear. Compare your deeds and his. You made the Raetias subject to attack; Valentinian has bought peace for you with his own money.

'Look at the man on your right.'<sup>7</sup> Valentinian sent him back to you in honor, although he had the opportunity of avenging a personal wrong. He had him within his own country at the very moment when his brother's death was announced, and he restrained his anger. He did not treat in the same manner one who is of different dignity but of the same relationship with you. Compare your conduct with his. You be the judge. He gave you back your brother alive; give him back his, even though dead. How can you refuse him his brother's remains when he did not refuse those forces that were used against him?

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6 The Alemanni, a tribe of Juthungi, were at Maximus' instigation raiding Raetia. To get rid of them, Count Bauton invited Huns and Alans to raid the territory of the Alemanni.

7 Marcellinus, the brother of Maximus, who was sent back to Trier with Ambrose.



'You say you fear to arouse the sorrow of the soldiers when the remains are returned. This is your excuse. Having abandoned him alive, will they now defend him when he is dead? Why fear one who is dead, whom you slew, although you could have saved him? I killed my enemy, you say. He is not your enemy, but you are his. He no longer puts up a defense, but consider why. If someone began plotting here today to rob you of your lands, would you say, I ask, that you were his enemy or he yours? If I am not mistaken, the usurper brings war; the emperor protects his rights. Then why refuse to part with the remains of one you should not have slain? Let Emperor Valentinian have his brother's remains as a pledge of your peace. And how can you keep alleging that you did not give the order to slay him if you do not allow him to be entombed? Will people be able to believe you did not grudge him life, when you grudge him burial?

'But to get back to myself. I hear that you are charging that the people who were with Emperor Valentinian went over to Emperor Theodosius. What did you expect would happen when you demanded that refugees be punished and captives slain, while Theodosius enriched them with favors and granted them honors?' 'Whom did I put to death?' he asked. 'Vallio,' I answered. 'What a man, and warrior, besides! Was it a just cause for his murder that he was faithful to his emperor?' 'I did not order him to be killed,' he said. 'We heard,' said I, 'that such orders were given.' 'But,' said he, 'if he had not destroyed himself, I did order that he be dispatched to Châlons and there burned alive.' 'True,' said I, 'this is the reason you are thought to have killed him. Who would expect to be spared when such a vigorous warrior, so loyal a soldier, so useful a count, had thus been slain?' I then departed so that he might say he would consider the matter.

Later, when he observed that I stayed aloof from the bishops who were in his service and who were asking that certain persons, heretics, should be put to death, he became very angry and ordered me to leave at once. I went, although several thought I would not escape his ambushes. I was overwhelmed with sorrow finding that the old bishop, Hyginus, though he had but the last breath of life left in him, was being sent into exile. When I approached some of his men and begged them not to allow him to be driven forth without clothing, without a bed to lie on, I was myself driven out.

This is the account of my embassy. Farewell, O Emperor, and be on your guard against a man who is cloaking war under the mask of peace.

*11. To the most clement Emperor Eugenius, Ambrose, bishop  
(Summer, 393)*

My reason for leaving [Milan]<sup>1</sup> was the fear of the Lord to whom I direct all my acts, as far as possible, never turning my mind from Him nor considering any man's favor of more worth than the grace of Christ. By preferring God to everyone else I harm no one, and trusting in Him I have no fear of telling your majesties, the emperors, what I feel with my own conviction. Thus I shall not refrain from saying to you, most clement Emperor, what I have never refrained from saying to other emperors. And in order to preserve the order of events I shall review one by one the facts which concern the present difficulty.

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<sup>1</sup> Ambrose left Milan and went to Bologna, thence to Faenza, and finally to Florence. Cf. *Vit.* 27, where a portion of this letter is quoted by Paulinus. The letter is in effect an implicit notice of excommunication served to Eugenius for his donations to the upkeep of pagan temples.

The most excellent Symmachus, when prefect of the city,<sup>2</sup> appealed to Emperor Valentinian the younger, of august memory, begging that he would command the restoration to the temples of what had been removed, for he fulfilled his obligations in accordance with his own wish and religious conviction. It was also fitting that I, as bishop, should know my duties. I presented two petitions<sup>3</sup> to the emperors in which I declared that a Christian could not contribute to the upkeep of sacrifices; that I had not proposed that they be removed; but that I did now propose they should not be decreed; and, finally, that he would seem to be giving rather than restoring contributions to the images. What he had not withdrawn he could not be said to be restoring; he seemed rather to be willingly donating money for the cost of superstition. Lastly, if he had done so, he either must not come to the church, or, if he should come, he would find no priest or one withstanding him in the church. Nor could he plead the excuse that he was only a catechumen, since even catechumens are not allowed to contribute to the upkeep of idols.

My petitions were read in the consistory in the presence of Count Bauton, a man of the highest military rank, and of Rumoridus, of the same dignity and devoted from early boyhood to the heathen religion. Valentinian then listened to my suggestion and did only what the practice of our faith demanded. The counts acquiesced to their lord.<sup>4</sup>

Later, I openly addressed the most clement Emperor Theodosius,<sup>5</sup> and did not hesitate to speak to him face to face. And when he received word of the same sort from the Senate, although it was not the whole Senate that made the demand,

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2 In 384.

3 See the two letters to Valentinian, above.

4 Wytzes' emendation of a troublesome passage: *acquieverunt comites domino suo*.

5 In 390.

he at length gave approval to my suggestion. Then, for some days I did not go near him, nor did he take it amiss, because I was acting not for my own advantage but for his profit and that of my own soul; 'I was not ashamed to speak in the presence of the king.'<sup>6</sup>

Again an embassy was sent by the Senate to Emperor Valentinian, of august memory, when he was in Gaul,<sup>7</sup> but they could extort nothing from him. I was absent at the time and had not written anything to him.

But, when your Clemency assumed the government of the Empire,<sup>8</sup> these donations were found to have been made to distinguished citizens of the heathen religion. Perhaps, O august Emperor, it may be said that you yourself did not make the donations to the temples, but merely gave benefits to men who deserved well of you. But the fear of God, you know, ought to make us act firmly as do priests in the cause of liberty, and as those do who serve in your armies or hold rank among the provincials. As emperor, you asked the envoys to make restitution to the temples, but you did not. Others also made these demands and you withstood them. Yet, later, you decided to bestow gratuities on the petitioners themselves.

The imperial power is great, but consider, O Emperor, how great God is. He sees the hearts of all; He probes their inmost conscience; He knows all things before they come to pass; He knows the innermost secrets of your heart.<sup>9</sup> You do not allow yourself to be deceived; do you expect to hide anything from God? Has this thought not occurred to you? Although they persisted in their requests, was it not your duty, O Emperor, out of reverence for the most high, true,

6 Ps. 118.46.

7 In 391, following his and Theodosius' joint order, forbidding pagan sacrifices and visits to pagan temples.

8 In August, 392.

9 Cf. Acts 1.24; Dan. 13.42.

and living God, to oppose them still more persistently and to refuse what was harmful to the holy law?

Who grudges your giving to others what you choose? We do not pry into your benefactions, nor are we jealous of the privileges of others. But we are the interpreters of the faith. How will you offer your gifts to Christ? Few will respect your actions; all will respect your wishes. Whatever they did will be to your credit; what they did not do will be to theirs. You are indeed the emperor, but you must all the more submit to God. Otherwise, how will Christ's priests distribute your gifts?

There was question of this kind in former times, and then persecution itself was overcome by the faith of the patriarchs and paganism gave way. When that game, occurring every fifth year, was held at Tyre and the wicked king of Antioch had come to see it, Jason appointed and sent messengers from Jerusalem to bring 300 didrachmas of silver and give them to the sacrifice of Hercules.<sup>10</sup> The patriarchs would not give the money to the pagans, but, sending trusted men, they asked that it not be assigned to the sacrifice of the gods, for it was not needed, but be deputed to other expenses. And it was decided that, because Jason had stipulated that the money be sent for the sacrifice of Hercules, it must be used for that purpose. Yet, when those who brought it pleaded in opposition, in their zeal and devotion insisting that it should not be used for the sacrifice, but for other necessities, the money was given over to the building of galleys. Although they sent the money under force, they did not use it for the sacrifice but for other public expenses.

Undoubtedly, those who brought the money might have maintained silence, but they broke their trust knowing to what their action was leading. So they sent God-fearing men to use their effort to have it employed, not for the temple,

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. 2 Mach. 41.18-20.

but for the building of galleys. They entrusted their money to men who would plead the cause of divine law, and He who clears the conscience was made judge of the affair. If those who were under foreign power took such precautions, there is no doubt concerning what you, O Emperor, should have done. Since no one constrained you, nor had you in his power, you ought certainly to have consulted the advice of a bishop.

At least, when I withstood you, although I alone withstood you, I was not the only one to wish or advise this course of action. Being bound by my words before God and men, I knew I could not, must not, consult anyone but myself, for I could not reasonably trust you. For a long time I stifled and concealed my distress and determined to give no hint to anyone, but now I may no longer pretend, nor am I at liberty to be silent. This is why at the beginning of your reign I made no reply to your letters, foreseeing what would take place. Afterwards, when you found I was not writing and you demanded a reply, I said: 'The reason is that I think they will get it from him by force.'

Yet, when a just occasion for exercising my duty arose, I wrote and petitioned for those who were worried on their own account to show that in the cause of God I have a just fear, and I do not value flattery more than my own soul. And in matters where it is fitting to petition you I show a just deference to your authority, as it is written: 'Honor to whom honor is due; tribute to whom tribute.'<sup>11</sup> Since I am deeply respectful of a private individual, why should I not be so of the emperor? Just as you wish to be held in respect, allow us to respect Him from whom you would like to prove that your authority is derived.

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<sup>11</sup> Rom. 13.7.

## LETTERS TO BISHOPS

### *12. Ambrose, bishop, to Brother Anysius<sup>1</sup> (383)*

**I** HAVE BEEN quite sure for a long time of what I have just now read; you were mine by your deeds even though I had not laid eyes on you. I grieve over that which has happened, but I rejoice over the later happy succession of events. I did not wish that to happen while I lived, yet I did hope after his death that only one of this merit might possibly be his successor. And so we have you, the disciple for a long time of Acholius of blessed memory, now his successor and the heir of his rank and of his grace. You have been given a great recompense, brother, and I rejoice on your account that there was not a moment's doubt regarding the successor of one so great. It is also a great burden, brother, to support the weight of so great a name, of so great esteem, of so great a scale. Men are looking for Acholius in you, and as he was held in affection by you, so in the performance of his ministry there is needed a replica of his virtue, of his learning, and the vigor of mind in so aged a body.

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<sup>1</sup> The successor of Bishop Acholius.

I saw him, I say; and I owe it to him that I had this glimpse of him. I saw him in the body in such a way that I thought he was not of the body; I saw the image of him [Paul] who, not knowing whether in the body or out of the body, saw himself raised to paradise.<sup>2</sup> He used to travel everywhere—on frequent trips to Constantinople, to Achaia, to Epirus, to Italy—in such fashion that younger men could not keep up with him. Men of more sturdy physique yielded to him, for they knew that he was free from the hindrance of the body; he used his body only for a covering, not an instrument, surely a means of servitude, not of companionship. He had exerted such influence on his body as to crucify the world in it and himself to the world.

Blessed was the Lord, and blessed was the youth of this man spent in the tabernacle of the God of Jacob, living in a monastery where, to his parents or relatives in search of him, he used to say: ‘“Who are my brethren, and who is my mother?”’<sup>3</sup> I do not know my father or mother or brethren, unless they are those who hear the Word and keep it.’ Blessed also were his mature years when he was raised to the office of high priest, deemed worthy of an early recompense for virtue. He came like David to restore peace to the people; he came like the ship carrying with him pure gold, cedar woods, and precious stone,<sup>4</sup> and that dove<sup>5</sup> with rings of silver with which amid the lots he slept the sleep of peace and the repose of tranquility.

Sleep is the workman of the saints according to what has been written: ‘I sleep and my heart watches,’<sup>6</sup> and according to holy Jacob<sup>7</sup> who while asleep saw divine mysteries which

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2 Cf. 2 Cor. 12.2.

3 Matt. 12.48.

4 Cf. 2 Par. 9.21.

5 Cf. Ps. 67.14.

6 Cant. 5.2.

7 Cf. Gen. 28.13.



he had not seen when he was awake—a path in the heavens for the saints, leading from sky to earth, and the Lord looking down upon him and promising him the possession of that land. Asleep in this way for a short while, in his dream he asked and obtained what his descendants later acquired with great toil. The sleep of the saints is free from all pleasures of the body, from all disturbance of the mind; it brings calm to the mind and peace to the soul, so that, released, as it were, from the ties of the body, it raises itself aloft and clings to Christ.

This sleep is the life of the saints such as blessed Acholius lived, whose old age also was blessed, for old age is truly venerable when it grows hoary not with grey hairs but with good deeds. This hoariness is revered, hoariness of soul, gleaming with shining thoughts and deeds. What truly is old age if it is not a spotless life<sup>8</sup> which is measured not by days or months, but by ages whose durability knows no end, whose longevity knows no weakness? The older it is, the stronger it is, and the longer he has lived that life, the more vigorously does he grow into the perfect man.

May the Lord, therefore, set His approval upon you, his successor, not only in honor, but also in character, and may He see fit to establish you in great grace so that to you also the people may run and you may say of them: 'Who are those who fly about like clouds and like doves with their young?'<sup>9</sup> Let them come, too, like the ships from Tharsis<sup>10</sup> and bring in grain which the true Solomon gives, the twenty measures of wheat. Let them receive oil and the wisdom of Solomon, and let there be peace between you and your people, and may you guard well the covenant of peace.

Farewell, brother, and love us, because we also love you.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Wisd.* 4.8,9.

<sup>9</sup> *Isa.* 60.8.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *2 Par.* 9.21.

*13. Ambrose to Brother Candidianus*<sup>1</sup>

There is in your language the utmost clarity, but it shines even more in your love for me; indeed, in your letters I behold the brilliance of your mind, dearly beloved and most blessed brother. May the Lord bless you, and give you His grace, for I see in your letters your good wishes more than my own excellence. What excellence of mine could compare with your language?

Love us, brother, because we love you.

*14. Ambrose to Chromatius (c. 390)*<sup>1</sup>

Does God tell a lie? He does not; it is impossible for God to tell a lie. Is this an impossibility because of some weakness? Certainly not! How could He be the cause of all things if there were something which He could not cause? What, then, is impossible to Him? Not what is difficult for His power, but what is contrary to His nature. It is impossible, it is said, for Him to tell a lie. The impossibility comes, not from weakness, but from His power and greatness, for truth admits of no lie, nor God's power of the fault of inconstancy, for 'God is true, and every man is a liar.'<sup>2</sup>

Truth, therefore, is always in Him; He remains reliable; He cannot change or deny Himself. For, if He says He is not true, He tells a lie, and to lie belongs not to power, but to weakness. Nor can He change Himself, because His nature admits of no weakness. This impossibility comes from

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<sup>1</sup> Undated.

<sup>1</sup> Intended as the first of a series of letters to Chromatius, Bishop of Aquileia, of which this is the only one extant.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. 3.4.

His fullness which cannot diminish or increase, not from weakness which is powerless in that which increases it. Hence we gather that this impossibility for God is a very powerful attribute. What is more powerful than not to know any weakness?

Yet there is a weakness in God which is stronger than men, and a foolishness in God which is wiser than men.<sup>3</sup> The one is the foolishness of the Cross, the other of His divinity. If, then, His weakness is power, how is His power weakness? Let us keep in mind that God does not deceive.

There is no diviner in Israel, in accordance with the law of God.<sup>4</sup> How, then, does Balaam say he was prevented by the oracle of God from going to curse the people of Israel? Yet he went and an angel of the Lord met him who told him to go no farther and stood in the path of the ass which he was riding. Nonetheless, the angel himself did tell him to proceed and to speak only what was put in his mouth. If there was no soothsayer in Israel, whence came the oracle of God which disclosed the future to one who was a soothsayer? If he spoke as the mouthpiece of God, whence had he derived the privilege of divine inspiration?

But do not be surprised that the diviner was inspired by the Lord what to say, since you read in the Gospel that it was granted the chief of the synagogue, one of Christ's persecutors, to prophesy that one man should die for the people.<sup>5</sup> In him was not the gift of prophecy, but the statement of a truth, so that even by the witness of enemies the truth might be declared and the treachery of unbelievers refuted even by the words of their own diviners. In fact, Abraham, a Chaldean, was brought to the faith to put to

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 1.25.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Deut. 18.10.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. John 11.50.

silence the superstition of the Chaldeans. It is not, then, the merit of the one who confesses, but the mouthpiece of the one who calls, the grace of God, who makes the revelation.

Was it not Balaam's guilt that he said one thing and planned another, whereas God demands a clean vessel, not one soiled with uncleanness? Balaam, therefore, was tried and was not found worthy, for he was full of guile and deceit. Moreover, when he inquired whether he should go to the vain people and was forbidden, he made an excuse to go. When other more honorable messengers came, asking him, he should have refused, but attracted by greater promises and more numerous gifts<sup>6</sup> he decided he should again inquire [of God] as if God would be influenced by money or gifts.

He received a miser's answer, not that of one seeking the truth, so that he was mocked rather than given information. He set out; an angel met him in a narrow place,<sup>7</sup> and revealed himself to the ass, not to the diviner. He revealed himself to the one; he scorned the other. Then, that Balaam might recognize him for some little while, the angel opened his eyes. He saw and still did not trust the plain oracle, and, though he should have trusted his eyes, he gave doubtful and confusing answers.

Then the Lord, being angry, said through the angel: "Go and speak what I shall command you,"<sup>8</sup> that is, not what you wish, but what you are forced to say. You will furnish your tongue, as an empty instrument, for my words. It is I who speak, you only echo what you hear and do not understand. You will accomplish nothing by going, for you will return without a reward of money and without the

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6 Cf. Num. 22.19.

7 Cf. Num. 22.22,23.

8 Num. 22.35.

profit of grace.' His first words were: 'How shall I curse him whom God hath not cursed?'<sup>9</sup> to show that the blessing of the Hebrew people depended not on his will but on the grace of God.

'I shall see them,' he says, 'from the tops of the mountains,'<sup>10</sup> since I cannot with my vision embrace this people which will dwell apart, marking their boundaries not by their ownership of places, but by the indwelling of virtues, and by the perfection of their character which will make them live for everlasting ages. Which of the neighboring nations will be numbered with this one, for it far surpasses their fellowship? Who can understand the nature of its foundation, for we see that the bodies of its citizens are compounded and fashioned from human seeds, but their souls spring from higher, more marvelous seeds?

'"Let my soul die with their souls,"'<sup>11</sup> die to this bodily life that among the souls of the just it may attain the grace of that eternal life.' Herein was revealed already the excellence of the heavenly sacrament and of the holy baptism by whose operation men die to original sin and the works of the unjust, that, being transformed in newness of life into fellowship with the just, they may rise again to the just man's way of life. And why is it strange that when they die to sin they live to God?

When Balak heard this he was angry and said: 'I brought you here to curse and you are uttering a blessing.' He answered: 'I suffer insult for what I know not, for I speak not my own words, I merely utter sounds like a tinkling cymbal.'<sup>12</sup> When he was brought to a second and a third place, although he wished to utter a curse, he continued to

9 Num. 23.8.

10 Num. 23.9.

11 Num. 23.10.

12 Cf. 1 Cor. 13.1.

bless: 'There is no labor in Jacob, no sorrow.'<sup>13</sup> The Lord protected him. Then he commanded seven altars and sacrifices to be made ready. Surely, he should have gone his way, but his weak mind and changeable notions made him think he could alter God's will. Being in a trance, he kept desiring one thing and saying another.

'How beautiful,' he said, 'are thy dwellings, O army of Hebrews! Thy tabernacles are like wooded valleys, as a park near rivers, and as cedars by the waterside. A man will go forth from Jacob and will take many nations, and his kingdom will be lifted on high; and on earth he will spread his kingdom over Egypt. They that bless him, shall be blessed, and they that curse him, shall be cursed.'<sup>14</sup> What people does he mean except the people of Christ? God blesses that people into whose heart the Word of God comes down even to the division of soul and of joints and of marrow.<sup>15</sup> Balaam would have had the grace of God in him if he had acted according to the interest and purpose of his heart. But, because a wicked mind is bound by its counsels, and the secrets of the soul are betrayed by events, his mind was discovered by his later wicked deeds.

Therefore he received a reward in keeping with his malice, for, when he realized that, being in a trance, he was unable to utter a curse, he told the king: 'Let my utterances be of things which God has commanded; hear now my counsel against the words of God. This is a just people; it enjoys God's protection since it has not given itself to divining and augury, but to the eternal God alone, excelling others in faith. Yet sometimes even faithful minds fall prey to the enticements of the body and the blandishments of beauty. You have many women here, many of them are not un-

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Num. 23.21 (Septuagint).

<sup>14</sup> Num. 24.5,6,9.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Heb. 4.12.

adorned with beauty. Now the male sex is led astray and captivated by nothing more quickly than by a woman's beauty, particularly if by frequent conversation the love of their hearts is aroused, set afire as if by torches; but if it clings to the hope of enjoyment it keeps its feelings pent up. Let your women cast their fishhooks with words, let them be of easy access at first, let them roam about exposed to view, affable in speech, going everywhere about the camp. Let them draw these men so skillfully that they allow them no intercourse until they have first pledged their mutual love by participating in sacrilege. Thus will they be deprived of heaven's protection if by sacrilege they will depart from their Lord God.'

In advising fornication and sacrilege, Balaam proved himself unjust; even in the Apocalypse of John the Evangelist this is plainly written, where the Lord Jesus says to the Angel of the Church of Pergamum: 'Thou hast there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, that they might eat and commit fornication. So thou hast also some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaites.'<sup>16</sup> Hence comes the sacrilege of the Manichaeans and of Manasse, who mingle and unite sacrilege with impiety.

God was not unjust, nor was His opinion changed, for He detected Balaam's mind and the secrets of his heart, and He tested him as a diviner, but He did not choose him as a prophet. Surely, he ought to have been converted by the grace of those great oracles and by the sublimity of the revelation, but his mind, full of wickedness, uttered words but did not attain faith, frustrating by its counsels what it had predicted. Then, because he could not gainsay the prophecy, he suggested fraudulent ideas which tempted but did not overcome the people of the Jews. By the righteousness of one

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<sup>16</sup> Apoc. 2.14,15.

priest all the advice of this corrupt man was undone,<sup>17</sup> for it was much more wonderful that our many forefathers could be delivered through one man than deceived by one.

I am sending your holy soul this little work in response to your wish that I make some compilations from the interpretations of earlier writers. I have presumed to write this letter in a friendly style, somewhat reminiscent of the manner of the patriarchs. Provided you approve their flavor, I shall not hesitate later on to send you others of this kind. I prefer to prate of heavenly matters with you, in an old man's fashion, which in Greek is called meditating. 'Isaac was gone forth into the field to meditate,'<sup>18</sup> seeing in Rebecca's coming the mystery of the future Church. Lest I give the impression of having lost my skill in writing—I prefer, I say, this prating with you in the words of an old man instead of uttering in vehement style words unsuited to our interests or strength.

Farewell, and love us, because we love you.

### *15. Ambrose to Constantius (before Lent, 379)*

You have entered upon the office of bishop and, sitting at the helm of the Church, you are piloting the ship in the face of the waves.<sup>1</sup> Take firm hold of the rudder of faith so that the heavy storms of this world cannot disturb you. The sea is mighty and widespread, but do not fear, because 'He hath founded it upon the seas; and hath prepared it upon the rivers.'<sup>2</sup> Therefore, not without cause does the Church

17 Num. 25.11.

18 Gen. 24.63.

1 Cf. Cicero *Epist. ad fam.* 9.15.3: *sedebamus enim in puppi et clavum tenebamus.*

2 Ps. 23.2.



of the Lord, built upon the rock of the Apostles, remain unmoved amid the many storms of this world and, with her foundation unshaken, stand firm against the assaults of the seething sea.<sup>3</sup> She is lashed by waves, she is not shattered, and, although the elements of this world often beat upon her with loud crashing sound, she has a place where she receives those in distress, the well-guarded harbor of salvation.

Nevertheless, although she tosses on the sea, she rides on the floods; see that she rides no more upon those floods of which it is said: 'The floods have lifted up their voice.'<sup>4</sup> There are rivers which flow from the belly of him who drinks from Christ and partakes of the Spirit of God.<sup>5</sup> These rivers, therefore, when they redound with the grace of the Spirit, lift up their voice. There is also a stream which overflows upon its holy ones like a torrent.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, there is a stream of a river which gladdens the peaceful and tranquil soul.<sup>7</sup> Whoever receives of the fullness of this stream, like John the Evangelist, like Peter and Paul, lifts up his voice. Just as the Apostles with the harmony of their message spread the sound of their preaching of the Gospel to all the ends of the earth, so also does he begin to tell the good tidings of the Lord Jesus. Drink, then, from Christ so that your sound, too, may go out.

The sea is holy Scripture which has within it profound meanings and the mysterious depths of the Prophets. Into this sea many rivers have entered. Delightful and clear are these streams; these fountains are cool, springing up into life everlasting;<sup>8</sup> there, too, are pleasant words, like 'honey-

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3 Cf. Matt. 16.18.

4 Ps. 92.3.

5 Cf. John 7.38.

6 Cf. Isa. 66.12.

7 Cf. Ps. 45.5.

8 Cf. John 4.14.

comb,<sup>9</sup> and courteous conversations which water souls with the sweetness of moral commands. The streams of holy Scripture are diverse; you know that which you should drink from first, second, and last.

Store up the water of Christ, that which praises the Lord.<sup>10</sup> Store up the water from many places, the water which the clouds of prophecy pour out. He who gathers water from the mountains and draws it to himself, or drinks from the fountains, he himself also sheds dew like the clouds. Therefore, fill the center of your mind so as to have your plot of land moistened and watered by fountains from the family estate. Accordingly, he who reads much and also understands is filled; he who has been filled sheds water upon others. So Scripture says: 'If the clouds be full, they will pour out rain upon the earth.'<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, let your sermons be flowing, let them be clear and lucid so that by suitable disputation you may pour sweetness into the ears of the people, and by the grace of your words may persuade the crowd to follow willingly where you lead. But if in the people, or in some persons, there is any stubbornness or any fault, let your sermons be such as to goad the listener, to sting the person with a guilty conscience. 'The words of the wise are as goads.'<sup>12</sup> Even the Lord Jesus goaded Saul when he was a persecutor. Consider how salutary was the goad which made of a persecutor an apostle, saying: 'It is hard for thee to kick against the goad.'<sup>13</sup>

There are also sermons like milk which Paul gave to the Corinthians;<sup>14</sup> those who cannot eat strong food develop from infancy by drinking a natural milk.

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9 Cf. Prov. 17.24.

10 Cf. Ps. 145.5.

11 Cf. Eccle. 11.3.

12 Eccle. 12.11.

13 Acts 9.5.

14 Cf. 1 Cor. 3.2.

Let your exhortations be full of meaning. Concerning this Solomon says:<sup>15</sup> 'The weapons of the intellect are the lips of the wise.' And in another place: 'Thy lips have been bound for wisdom,' that is, let the revelation of your sermons shine forth, let your understanding be bright, and let your sermon by itself protect itself, as it were, with its own weapons, and let not any word of yours go out in vain and go forth without meaning. Speech is a bandage which ties up the wounds of souls, and if anyone rejects this, he shows his despair of his own salvation.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, with those who are vexed by a serious sore, use the oil of speech that you may soften their hardness of heart; apply a poultice; put on a bandage of salutary advice, so that you may never allow those who are astray or who are wavering regarding the faith or the observance of discipline to perish through loss of courage and a breakdown of activity.

Warn the Lord's people, therefore, and beg them to abound in good works, to renounce vice, not to enkindle the fires of passion—I shall not say on the Sabbath, but in every season. Let them not destroy their bodies; let there be no immorality and uncleanness in the servants of God, because we are the servants of the unspotted Son of God.<sup>17</sup> Let each one know himself and possess his vessel,<sup>18</sup> and when the soil of the body has been ploughed, let him wait for the fruit in due season, and let his land not bring forth thorns and thistles,<sup>19</sup> but let him, too, say: 'Our earth has yielded her fruit,'<sup>20</sup> and in the once thickly wooded frailty of passion let there flourish ingrafted virtues.

Teach and instruct them to do what is good, and let no one interrupt a laudable work whether he is being seen by

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15 Prov. 14.3; 15.5.

16 Isa. 1.6.

17 Cf. Eph. 5.3.

18 Cf. 1 Thess. 4.4.

19 Cf. Gen. 3.18.

20 Ps. 84.13.

many or is without a witness, for conscience is a trustworthy security for him.

Let the people also shun evil deeds, even though they do not believe they can be found out. Although men are enclosed in the house, surrounded by darkness, without a witness, without an accomplice, they have the Judge of their deeds whom nothing deceives, to whom all deeds cry out.<sup>21</sup> Each one also has himself and his soul as a severe judge of himself, as an avenger of wickedness, a vindicator of crime. In fear and trembling Cain wandered over the earth<sup>22</sup> paying the penalty of the murder of his brother, so that for him death was a remedy, for it set free the wandering exile who at every moment had a dread of death. Let no one either alone or with another do anything base or wicked. And if anyone is alone, let him respect himself, rather than others, himself whom he ought especially to reverence.

Let your people not desire many things, for the reason that a few things are many to them: poverty and riches are names which imply want and satiety. He is not rich who wants anything, nor poor who does not want. Let no one spurn a widow, or cheat an orphan, or defraud his neighbor. Woe to him who has a fortune amassed by deceit, and builds in blood<sup>23</sup> a city, in other words, his soul. For it is this [the soul] which is built like a city.<sup>24</sup> Greed does not build it, but sets it on fire and burns it. Do you wish to build your city well? 'Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasures without fear.'<sup>25</sup> The riches of a man ought to work to the redemption of his soul, not to its destruction. Wealth is redemption if one uses it well; so, too, it is a snare if one does not know how to use it.<sup>26</sup> For what is a

21 Cf. Gen. 4.10.

22 Cf. Gen. 4.14.

23 Cf. Hab. 2.6.

24 Cf. Ps. 121.3.

25 Prov. 15.16.

26 Cf. Prov. 13.8.

man's money if not provision for his journey? A great amount is a burden; a little is useful. We are wayfarers in this life; many are walking along, but a man needs to make a good passage; the Lord Jesus is with him who makes a good passage. Thus we read: 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and the rivers shall not cover thee, nor fire burn thy garments when thou shalt walk through.'<sup>27</sup> But, one who keeps a fire pent up in his body, the fire of lust, the fire of immoderate desire, does not pass through but burns the covering of his soul.<sup>28</sup> A good name is more excellent than money, and above heaps of silver is good favor.<sup>29</sup> Faith itself redounds to itself, sufficiently rich and more than rich in its possession. There is nothing which is not the possession of the wise man except what is contrary to virtue, and wherever he goes he finds all things to be his. The whole world is his possession, since he uses it all as his own.

Why, therefore, is a brother cheated? Why is a hireling defrauded? The gain from the sale of a harlot is not great, he [the writer of Proverbs] says;<sup>30</sup> it is the gain of fleeting frailty. A harlot is not one's own possession, but a public possession; not woman alone is a harlot, but every wandering desire is a harlot. Every act of faithlessness, every lie, is a harlot, and not the one who prostitutes her body, but every soul which sells her hope, which seeks disgraceful profit and an unworthy reward. We, too, are hired men who work for a price and hope for the price of our labors from our Lord and God. If anyone wants to know how mercenary we are, let him hear the one who says: 'How many hired men in my father's house have bread in abundance, while I am perishing here with hunger!' And below: 'Make me as one of thy

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27 Isa. 43.2.

28 Cf. Prov. 6.7.

29 Cf. Prov. 22.1.

30 Prov. 6.20.

hired men.<sup>31</sup> All are hired men, all are laborers. Let the man who is waiting for the fruit of his labor consider that he who defrauds another of his pay will himself be defrauded of his own. In lending he acts unwisely and will repay later with greater measure. Therefore, let one who does not wish to lose what endures forever, take not from another what is only for a time.

Let no one speak deceitfully to his neighbor. A snare is on our lips, and often one is not set free by his words but is ensnared.<sup>32</sup> The mouth of one speaking ill is a great pit, a steep precipice for the innocent, but steeper for one of ill-will.<sup>33</sup> An innocent man, though easily credulous, falls quickly,<sup>34</sup> but when he has fallen rises again. The slanderer is thrown headlong by his own acts, from which he will never emerge or escape. Therefore, let each one weight his words without fraud and deceit: 'A deceitful balance is an abomination before the Lord.'<sup>35</sup> I do not mean that balance which weighs out another's pay (in trivial matters the flesh is deceitful). Before God that balance of words is detestable which simulates the weight of sober gravity while practicing at the same time cunning fraud. God condemns especially the man who deceives his neighbor with kind promises and overwhelms his debtor with treacherous injustice. He will have no gain from his clever skill. For, what does it profit a man if he gains the wealth of the whole world but defrauds his own soul of the payment of eternal life?<sup>36</sup>

Pious souls must consider another scale by which the deeds of individuals are weighed, in which, generally, sins are overbalanced toward judgment, or deeds well done are of more weight than sins. Alas for me if my sins are heavy and

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31 Luke 15.17,19.

32 Cf. Prov. 6.2.

33 Cf. Prov. 22.14.

34 Cf. Prov. 14.15.

35 Prov. 11.1.

36 Cf. Matt. 16.26.

incline toward a decree of death by their mortal weight! More tolerable would it be if all the things manifest to the Lord came to pass, even before my judgment; good deeds cannot be concealed nor can those be hidden which are full of offense.<sup>37</sup>

How happy is the man who has been able to cut out the root of vices, avarice. Surely he will not dread this balance. Avarice generally dulls men's senses and corrupts their judgments,<sup>38</sup> so that they think piety a gain, and money, a sort of reward for sagacity. But great is the reward of piety and the gaining of sobriety; the possession of these virtues is sufficient. For, what do superfluous riches profit in this world when they do not assist our birth or impede our dying? We are born into this world naked, we leave it without a cent, we are buried without our inheritance.

Each one will have the weight of his good deeds hung in the balance, and for a few moments of a good work or a degenerate deed the scale often inclines to this side or that. If evil inclines the scale, alas for me; if good, pardon is ready at hand. No one is free from sin, but, when good deeds prevail, the weight of sins is lessened; they are cast into the shadow and covered up. So, in the day of judgment, our works will either succor us or plunge us into the depths, like men weighted down with a millstone. Iniquity is heavy, supported, as it were, on a talent of lead;<sup>39</sup> avarice is hard to carry; so, too, all pride and ignoble fraud. Urge the people of the Lord to hope more in the Lord, therefore, to abound in the riches of simplicity, in which they may walk without a snare, without hindrance.<sup>40</sup>

The guilelessness of plain speech is also good; it is rich before God, even if it walks amid snares, for, not knowing

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37 Cf. 1 Tim. 5.24.

38 Cf. 1 Tim. 6.10.

39 Cf. Zach. 5.7.

40 Cf. 2 Cor. 8.2.

how to weave snares or bands for another, it is not bound.

It is also very important that you persuade them to know how to be humbled, to know the true character and nature of humility. Many have the appearance of humility, but they do not have the virtue. Many make a pretense of it on the outside, yet within they fight against it. They make a display of it for pretense, yet reject the truth; they say 'no' to grace, for 'There is one who humbleth himself wickedly and his interior is full of deceit.'<sup>41</sup> Such a person is very far from humility. Humility does not exist except without pretense, without fraud. That is true which has a pious sincerity of soul. Great is its virtue. Finally, through the disobedience of one man death entered,<sup>42</sup> and through the obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ was wrought the redemption of all men.

Saintly Joseph<sup>43</sup> knew how to be humble. When he was sold into slavery by his brothers and purchased by merchants,<sup>44</sup> bound in fetters, as Scripture says,<sup>45</sup> he learned the strength of humility, he scorned frailty. When he was bought in Egypt by an official of the royal palace—a man in charge of the household—although he knew his noble lineage and his descent from the sons of Abraham, Joseph did not become disgusted with his lowly condition, unworthy [as he was to perform] the duties of a servant. Rather, he showed himself diligent and faithful to his master's commands, knowing by great prudence that it makes no difference in what condition of life one is found trustworthy, but that the purpose of a good man is to be approved in any condition, and, in particular, that character dignifies the position more than position the character. In fact, the lower the status, the more outstanding the virtue. He proved so earnest that his

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41 Eccli. 19.23.

42 Cf. Rom. 5.19.

43 Cf. Gen. 39.1-12.

44 Cf. Gen. 37.28.

45 Cf. Ps. 104.18.



master entrusted to him his whole house and committed to him all his goods.

Then the wife of his master cast her eyes upon him, captivated by his comeliness. We need not be concerned whether his age or beauty is coveted by her impure glances: provided these be artless, there is no crime in comeliness; provided enticement is not present, seemliness and charm of beauty are innocent. This woman, deeply aroused and maddened, accosts the young man, and driven on by lust, overcome by the sting of passion, admits her crime. But he disowns any wickedness, saying that it is not in keeping with the custom or the laws of the Hebrews for those to violate the stranger's bed who have the duty of protecting its purity; that the chaste spouse may be joined in marriage with chaste maidens, but they are not allowed marriage with a woman who does not make use of her legitimate marriage rights. Moreover, he is bound not to be overcome with wanton intemperance or to be ungrateful for his master's kindness, nor may he bring deadly injury upon one to whom he owes obedience.

Was he ashamed to say that his owner was a despised person, and to admit that he himself was a slave? Nay, even when the woman strove to gain him, entreated him with fear of betrayal, or poured out passionate tears in order to win him by force, he was not drawn to consent to the crime through a sense of duty, nor compelled by fear, and he resisted her entreaties. He did not yield to her threats, preferring to have as his reward honor fraught with danger, a base remuneration for his chaste modesty. Again, beginning with greater inducements when she saw him inflexible and unmoved by her second attempt, wild with passion, her shamelessness furnishing strength, the woman went up to the young man, and, catching hold of his garment, dragged him to a couch, offering her embrace. And she would almost

have succeeded in holding him, except that Joseph tore off the garment by which he was held, lest he tear off the cloak of humility, the garment of purity.

He knew how to be humble, for he was humbled even to prison, and while he bore this outrage he preferred to submit to a false charge rather than to bring a true one. I say he knew how to be humbled for the sake of virtue. He was humbled in the manner of Him who was humbled unto death, even to the death of the Cross.<sup>46</sup> He was to come to arouse this life of ours from sleep, and to show that our use of life, in which there are various sorts of vicissitudes, was a dream with nothing solid or firm therein, as in sleep we see a dream but do not see, hearing do not hear, eating are not filled, rejoicing are not made glad, running do not reach our goal. Vain are the hopes of men in this world when they think they must attain things which do not exist, as if they did exist. So the empty and vain appearances of things, just as in sleep, come and go. They stop beside us, they vanish. They are near and they disappear. They seem to be grasped but they are not. Finally, when one hears it said: 'Awake, sleeper,'<sup>47</sup> and he rises from his dream of this world, he knows then that everything is false. He awakes and his dream flees; he loses his concern over an inheritance, over the charm of beauty and the desire for honors. These are dreams by which those are undisturbed who watch with the heart, while those who are asleep are disturbed.

The saintly Joseph provides material for my statement that the things of this world are not everlasting or even of long duration. He who from youth was of noble lineage, rich in his possessions, is suddenly a lowly slave, and to further embitter his mean estate of servitude his purchase was paid for with the money of a degenerate master. It is considered

46 Cf. Phil. 2.8.

47 Eph. 5.14.

less disgraceful to be the slave of a freedman; slavery is twice servitude when one is the slave of a slave. Joseph, the slave, was nobly born, a pauper, richly sired, experiencing instead of love, hatred, instead of favor, punishment, dragged time and again from prison to palace, from criminal charge to seat of judgment. Yet he was not broken by adversity or carried away by success.<sup>48</sup>

That the turn of events is momentary is further proved by the constantly changing fortune of blessed David, who was an object of scorn to his father, but precious to God. Noble in triumph, cheapened by envy, called to a kingly ministry, loved as a son,<sup>49</sup> but later changed in appearance and features,<sup>50</sup> fleeing his own murderous son, he used to deplore his personal offenses and atone for those of others, more noble in winning back his heir's affection than if he had disgraced him. Having experienced all this, he fittingly remarked: 'It is good for me that thou hast humbled me.'<sup>51</sup>

Yet, this saying can also be referred to Him who, being God by nature, could bend the heavens without effort, but, coming down to earth and taking the nature of a slave, bore our infirmities,<sup>52</sup> because He foresaw that His saints would not think it fitting to claim honors due to themselves, but would submit to their equals and prefer others to themselves, He said: 'It is good for me that thou has humbled me.' It is good for me that I have brought myself down so that all things may be under me, and God may be all in all.<sup>53</sup> Infuse this humility into every individual soul, and show yourself an example to all, saying: 'Be imitators of me as I am of Christ.'<sup>54</sup>

48 Cf. Gen. 41.39-45.

49 Cf. 1 Kings 18.3.

50 Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.658.

51 Ps. 118.71.

52 Cf. Phil. 2.6.

53 Cf. 1 Cor. 15.27,28.

54 1 Cor. 11.1.

Let them learn to search for the riches of good works and to be rich in character. The beauty of riches is not in the purses of the rich, but in their support of the poor. In the weak and needy, riches shine brighter. Let the wealthy learn to seek not their own interests, but those which are Christ's, so that Christ may search for them to bestow His possessions upon them. He spent His blood for them;<sup>55</sup> He poured out His Spirit; He offers them His kingdom. What more will He give who has offered Himself? Or what is the Father not going to give, who delivered His only-begotten Son to death for us? Therefore, admonish them to serve the Lord in purity and grace, to lift up their eyes to heavenly things with all the intensity of their minds, to count nothing as gain except that which is for eternal life, because all the gain of this world is the loss of souls. Finally, the one who wished to gain Christ suffered the loss of all things,<sup>56</sup> and although he spoke wonderfully well, he still fell short of expressing what he had received, for he spoke of things which were not his own; but Christ has said: 'If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself.'<sup>57</sup> In this way he becomes his own loss, that he may become Christ's gain. All such possessions are perishable, accompanied by loss and without gain. There is gain only where there is everlasting enjoyment, where eternal peace is the reward.

My son, I am giving to your care the church at Forum Cornelius,<sup>58</sup> so that by reason of its nearness you may visit it from time to time until a bishop is ordained for it. I cannot travel such a distance, because I am occupied with the approaching days of Lent.

You have there Illyrians, imbued with the false teaching

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55 Cf. Rom. 8.32.

56 Cf. Phil. 3.8.

57 Luke 9.23.

58 Modern Imola.

of the Arians; beware of their cockle, do not let them come near the faithful or insidiously spread their false seeds of doctrine. Let the faithful take note of what has happened to them because of their perfidy; let them be quiet so they may follow the true faith. With difficulty can minds imbued with the poisons of infidelity be delivered from their impiety. And if the virus unfortunately is implanted in them, do not think they can be easily trusted. The strength and power of wisdom is not to be trusted rashly, especially in the matter of faith, which is rarely perfect in man.

Nevertheless, if you find one tainted with this dangerous doctrine and of doubtful disposition, who wishes to get rid of the reputation in which he is held, permit him to think that he has made satisfaction, indulge him somewhat, for if satisfaction is not allowed a person his mind is estranged. Even skilled doctors, when they notice the signs of illness, do not immediately upon naming them administer medicine, but wait for the proper time for dispensing it. They do not give up the patient, but with words or with what ointments they can use, they soothe him so that the neglected illness may not grow worse through a loss of spirit, or the patient, being sick to his stomach, spit out the medicine; if a physician inexperienced in matters of this kind treat the illness prematurely, it will never be able to come to a head. So also an unripe apple quickly rots if it is shaken from a tree.

Continuing our figure from agriculture, teach your people to keep sacred their boundary laws, to guard their fathers' boundary stones which the law will protect.<sup>59</sup> The good favor of a neighbor is frequently of more value than the love of one's brother.<sup>60</sup> A brother is often far away; a neighbor is near, a witness of a whole life, the judge of daily living.

59 A reference to boundary laws; cf. Daremberg-Saglio, *Dict. antiq. grecq. et rom.*, art., 'Finium regundorum actio,' II.2 1140-1141.

60 Cf. Deut. 19.14.

One should be glad to have his neighbor's flock wander freely through the nearby open spaces and lie on the green grass,<sup>61</sup> taking its rest without a care.<sup>62</sup>

Let the master also keep his slaves subdued by the law of slavery instead of by control of force, treating them as kindred souls. For he is called *paterfamilias* so that he may govern them as sons; and he himself is a slave of God and calls the Lord of heaven Father, the Ruler of all the powers.

Farewell, and love us as you do, for we love you.

### 16. *Ambrose to Constantius*<sup>1</sup>

Many persons are disturbed over the question, not by any means unimportant, why circumcision should have been made of obligation under the ruling of the Old Testament, and set aside as useless by the teaching of the New Testament,<sup>2</sup> especially since it was Abraham who first received the command to observe the rite of circumcision,<sup>3</sup> he who saw the day of the Lord and was glad.<sup>4</sup> It is certainly evident that he was considering not the physical, but the spiritual sense of the divine law, and saw in the sacrifice of the lamb the true suffering of the Lord's body.

What purpose shall we think Abraham our father intended by first instituting what his posterity would not continue? Or why are infants' bodies circumcised and imperiled at birth, and commanded thus by a divine pronouncement so that by reason of a mystery of religion their life is endangered? What does this mean? The true cause lies hidden; the

61 Cf. Virgil, *Ecl.* 6.59; *Aen.* 5.330.

62 Cf. Virgil, *Georg.* 3.376.

1 Undated.

2 Cf. Acts 15.10.

3 Cf. Gen. 17.10.

4 Cf. John 8.56.

meaning should have been disclosed by a clear mystery or enjoined by a type of mystery not so fraught with danger.

And why was the sign of the divine testament given to that member of the body which is considered unseemly to behold, or for what reason did the Creator of our body, at the very beginning of our race, choose to have His work circumcised, and wounded, and stained with blood, and a part cut off which He, who has arranged all things in order, thought proper to mold together with our other members as something necessary? This part of our body is either contrary to nature, and all men should not have what is contrary to nature, or it is according to nature, and that which was molded for the perfection of our nature ought not to be cut off, especially since those who are unfriendly, being outside the flock of the Lord our God, are wont to make this the chief subject of ridicule. Since it is God's purpose, as He has frequently declared, to bring as many as possible to the observance of holy religion, how much the more would these persons be attracted were they not deterred either by the danger of this very circumcision or disapproval of it?

But to return to my first purpose, following the order I have laid down, it seems best to speak of the exact nature of circumcision. Its defense should be twofold, since the accusation is such: the one brought forward by the Gentiles, the other raised by those belonging to the people of God. The stronger objection comes from the heathens who think that men who have been marked with circumcision are worthy even of scorn and mockery. Yet their wise men show such approval of circumcision that they think it right to circumcise those set apart to know and celebrate their mysteries.<sup>5</sup>

And the Egyptians, who devote themselves to geometry and the observation of the courses of the stars, consider unholy

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<sup>5</sup> Herodotus 2.37.