

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### AMBROSE OF MILAN

#### *1. Introductory Remarks*

##### *a) The Text*

The last text group with which we shall be dealing in this study differs in several ways from the previously analyzed texts. To begin with, the term text group requires some nuances in definition because, in fact, it concerns two different textual units. *De mysteriis* and *De sacramentis* are both instructional texts aimed at the newly baptised but it is a question of two separate accounts concerning the sacramental program. If we compare these texts with Cyril's and Theodore's catecheses, we notice immediately that any explanation of the baptismal symbol, which plays such a large role in the other catecheses, is lacking. Here we have only access to the mystagogical parts of catechumenical instruction and these are in some ways a duplicate. This means that we are not only faced with a much shorter text than with the other two but that the content also is more limited. Thus, it becomes impossible to treat the Christological theme at any length on the basis of these texts because the material simply does not treat Christology thematically in the same manner as in an interpretation of the baptismal symbol.

These texts, furthermore, differ from those already analyzed in being of western origin. Disagreement has arisen as to the author. This is not so great in the case of *De mysteriis* as in *De sacramentis*. Whereas it has been usual to attribute the first to Ambrose, a considerable number of attempts have been made to deprive *De sacr.* of its traditional Ambrosian origin.<sup>1</sup> Discussion concerning the connection between the two texts has centred around the evaluation of similarities and dissimilarities in the two text groups. On one hand the similarities are striking. In both cases, as has been said already, concern is with instruction of the newly baptised. Further, the rituals referred to are practically identical and the theological terminology is principally the same.<sup>2</sup> This similarity cannot be incidental. It must be either a case of two works by the same author or one being directly contingent upon the other.

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<sup>1</sup> Botte, Introduction p. 8ff.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 7.

The problem is to decide upon the closer relationship between them and so an evaluation of the dissimilarities comes to the foreground. Whereas *De sacr.* is in the form of a series of sermons, *De myst.* appears to be work in which the sermon form has developed into literary fiction. In addition, a large part of the material from *De sacr.* is not included in *De myst.*<sup>3</sup> Not least of all, differences in style can be demonstrated.<sup>4</sup> The discussion caused by the dissimilarities is thoroughly covered by Botte.<sup>5</sup> His own appraisal is built on analyses which deal with three aspects of the source material: their historical information, their reference to liturgical usage and their use of Biblical texts. Botte's treatment of these themes, in which, moreover, he supports the work of P. Faller and R. H. Connolly,<sup>6</sup> points to Ambrose as the author of both texts.

How then does Botte take the striking stylistic differences in the two texts into consideration? In the first place he points out that a difference in literary genre justifies a difference in style. He goes on to say that there is no genuine Ambrosian sermon material which can be utilized to carry out an adequate stylistic study. But, the most important reason for a number of irregularities in *De sacr.* can be explained on the basis of the theory already launched by F. Probst<sup>7</sup>; *De sacr.* was never published by Ambrose but consists of sermons recorded by a stenographer.

Botte's argument is not considered to be the final word in the debate. K. Gamber's attempt to deny Ambrose's authorship of *De sacr.*<sup>8</sup> has been challenged by, among others, J. Schmitz.<sup>9</sup> We find Botte's argumentation convincing and consider *De sacr.* to be the work of Ambrose on an equal footing with *De myst.*

Thus, we consider Ambrose to be the author of both texts and consequently Milan as their place of origin. They are usually dated 380/1.<sup>10</sup>

### b) *The Liturgy in Milan*

Source records of religious life in Milan in the 3rd century are extremely sparse.<sup>11</sup> Our first information about the 4th century Milanese liturgy is,

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Botte says: "Le *De sacramentis* est assurément inférieur au *De mysteriis* et aux autres oeuvres certainement authentiques d'Ambroise. Le style en est négligé; il est coupé de fréquentes interrogations, qu'on a qualifiées souvent de froides et de puérides", Ibid. p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 8f.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 11 note 3 and 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 10 note 1.

<sup>8</sup> Gamber, *Autorschaft and Gamber, Sakramentarstudien* p. 120-144.

<sup>9</sup> Schmitz, *Gottesdienst* p. XXV note 12; see also Schmitz, *Zum Autor* p. 59-69.

<sup>10</sup> Schmitz, *Gottesdienst* p. 384; Daniélou, *La catéchèse* p. 32.

<sup>11</sup> "Although the ecclesiastical history of Milan appears to date from the beginning of the third century, hardly anything is known of it during the first hundred years", Dudden, *Life and Times* p. 63.