During the last decennia the works of St. Ambrose have been enjoying a growing interest. One of the fruits of this interest is the translation of the *Exameron*, the *De Paradiso* and the *De Cain et Abel* by J. J. Savage in the series “The Fathers of the Church” (New York, 1961). Unfortunately this translation has failed to stand the test, as was shown in a review elsewhere in this periodical (pp. 246-248). In the present paper it is my intention to discuss the most important texts of St. Ambrose which refer to matter; this discussion will give an opportunity for some further incidental remarks concerning Savage's translation.

The first sentence of the *Exameron* already gives abundant food for reflection. St. Ambrose immediately plunges in *medias res* and begins his sermon as follows: *Tantumne opinionis adsumpsisse homines, ut aliqui eorum tria principia constituerent omnium, deum et exemplar et materiam, sicut Plato discipulique eius, et ea incorrupta et increata ac sine initio esse adseverarent deumque non tamquam creatorem materiae, sed tamquam artificem ad exemplar, hoc est ideam intendentem fecisse mundum de materia, quam vocant Ὑλή, quae gignendi causas rebus omnibus dedisse adseratur...* (p. 3, 2-9 Sch.). Though our attention is mainly turned to what St. Ambrose says on matter, some observations on the translation of the entire sentence may precede. Savage translates: “To such an extent have men’s opinions varied that some, like Plato and his pupils, have established three principles for all things: that is, God, *Ideā*, and Matter. The same philosophers hold that these principles are uncreated, incorruptible, and without a beginning. They maintain that God, acting not as a creator of matter but as a craftsman who reproduced a model, that is, an *Ideā*, made the world out of matter. This matter, which they call Ὑλή, is considered to have given the power of creation to all things.” (p. 3). There is an
inconsistency in this translation, in so far as exemplar is first rendered by “Idea”, and a little further on ad exemplar, hoc est ideam by “a model, that is, an Idea”. It would have been better to render the first exemplar by “model” as well; at any rate, the use of the indefinite article in the second case cannot be defended, for St. Ambrose speaks about one single Idea, just as he speaks about one God and one Matter. The translation of intendentem is not correct either, for the words “who reproduced” fail to bring out the connection of this particle with deum. It would be better to maintain the participle construction and translate as follows: “that God, acting not as a creator of matter but as a craftsman, contemplating the model, that is, the Idea, made the world out of matter”.

Matter, St. Ambrose states, is said to have furnished the causas gignendi to all things. Savage translates these two words by “the power of creation”. It is generally known that matter is regarded by Aristotle as a cause, but only in so far as the ὅλη offers the material out of which things come to existence; it is a passive, not an active cause. Therefore, if the ὅλη is called αἰτία γενέσεως, this does not imply that it possesses “the power of creation”; therefore, we must certainly prefer the literal translation “causes of becoming”. St. Ambrose, however, understands matter as an active principle, not in the sense of the well-known dualistic interpretation, in which matter is the principle of evil and as such opposed to the good, but rather as a power which makes the divine principle at least partly superfluous. This will become evident from the following remarkable texts.

In Exam. I 2, 5 St. Ambrose continues his sermon as follows:

Unde divino spiritu praevidens sanctus Moyses hos hominum errores fore et iam forte coepisse in exordio sermonis sui sic ait: “in principio fecit deus caelum et terram”, initium rerum, auctorem mundi, crea-

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1 See Phys. II 3, 194b 23: αἰτίον λέγεται τὸ ἐξ ὑποταγμοσ.

2 It is a well-known fact that Plato does not actually use the term ὅλη. However, an identification of the χώση and the ἀνάγκη of the Timaeus with the ὅλη of Aristotle has been generally accepted since the age of the latter. On this subject cp. F. Solmsen, Aristotle's Word for ‘Matter', in: Didascaliae. Studies in Honor of Anselm M. Albareda, 395-408; J. C. M. van Winden, Calcidius on Matter. His Doctrine and Sources, Leiden, Brill, 1959, pp. 31 ss.