

Translated Texts for Historians
Volume 43

Ambrose of Milan

Political Letters and Speeches

Letters, Book Ten, including the oration on the death of
Theodosius I

Letters outside the Collection (*Epistulae extra collectionem*)

Letter 30 to Magnus Maximus

The oration on the death of Valentinian II

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ocused precisely on only one emperor. Ambrose may well have thought that the Helena episode would give greater emphasis to his central message. It remains puzzling why he decided to place *On the death of Theodosius* between *Ep.* 76 and 77, that is, between the description of the conflict in Easter week 385 and the account of the finding of the bones of martyrs later in that year.¹ Perhaps he was hinting at a parallel between Helen's finding of the cross and his own discovery of the relics of two martyrs.

Like the speech on the death of Valentinian, this address is packed with biblical citations and allusions. Ambrose's use of biblical citations bears some resemblance to citations from Virgil and other classical authors by secular orators, if only up to a point. As a rule Ambrose's quotations from the Bible rarely correspond word for word to the texts familiar from the English Authorised Version or Revised Standard Version or even Jerome's Latin Vulgate. Our footnotes contain some references to the biblical text followed in particular citations.² Faller's text in CSEL 73 marks references which diverge from the Latin Vulgate text with an asterisk. He distinguishes references which are close to the Septuagint with (Sept.) He warns readers that closeness to the Septuagint does not necessarily mean that Ambrose is following the Greek directly. He could be following the *Vetus Latina* (Itala)³ which in his view was itself close to the Septuagint.⁴

TRANSLATION OF THE *DE OBITU THEODOSII*

1. This was what severe earthquakes and incessant rain were threatening, and a darkness gloomy beyond experience was foretelling,⁵ that our most merciful emperor Theodosius was about to withdraw from this earth. Thus the very elements were mourning his passing: the heavens were shrouded in darkness; the charged air trembled in unbroken gloom; the land, which was shaken by tremors, was deluged with inundating waters. And why should not the very universe bewail the fact that this prince was about to be snatched

1 Noted by K. and M. Zelzer in 'Retractationes zu Brief und Briefgenos bei Plinius, Ambrosius und Sidonius Apollinaris', in *Alvarium, Festschrift für Christian Gnllka, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum Suppl.* 33, 2002, 393–405, relevant 396.

2 See also the notes of Mannix 1925.

3 See the many volumes of *Vetus Latina: die Reste der altlateinischen Bibel, nach Petrus Sabatier neu gesammelt von der Erzabtei Beuron*, Freiburg: Herder 1949–.

4 CSEL 73, 4*.

5 Cf. Marcellinus Comes, *Chronicle* (ed. Th. Mommsen) *MGH (AA)* 11.60–104, the year 394, p. 64, 6.

away, he through whom the hardships of this world were often alleviated, when he let reprieve forestall punishment?¹

2. He has indeed departed, he has not laid aside his kingdom but has exchanged it, and has been admitted by right of his piety into the tents of Christ, into that heavenly Jerusalem. There in his present abode he says: *As we have heard, so we can now see in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God, which God has founded forever.*² But he has left behind very many, and above all his sons, destitute without the support of his fatherly protection. But they are not without support, for he has left them as heirs of his piety; they are not cut off, for he has won them the favour of Christ, and the loyalty of the soldiers to whom he was proof that God upholds piety and avenges treachery.

3. This was the emperor whose death all of us recently lamented. Now, forty days after, we are performing the solemn ceremony with the emperor Honorius standing by the altar. For just as Joseph, that holy man, carried out the obsequies for his father Jacob over forty days, so too did Honorius when he paid the respect due to his father Theodosius. And because some people are accustomed to observe the third and the thirtieth day and some the seventh and fortieth, let us look closely at what the text of scripture teaches. When Jacob died, it says, *Joseph instructed the undertakers in his service to bury him. And they buried Israel. And forty days were completed for him; for this is how the days of the funeral rites are reckoned. And Egypt mourned him for seventy days.*³ This, then, is the observance to be followed, which is set out in the text. But equally, in Deuteronomy it is written that *the children of Israel mourned Moses for thirty days and the days of mourning were completed.*⁴ So either observance has the authority through which the duty required of filial piety is fulfilled.

4. So Joseph was a good man who laid down the model of filial devotion; his father loved him and said to him, *'May my God help you, and may*

1 Although Theodosius' wrath was feared, as was shown most dramatically by the panic at Antioch after the Riot of the Statues in 387, the semi-official line of panegyrics was to stress his philanthropy and clemency: Themistius, *Or.* 15, 9; Themistius, in *Or.* 19.8f (between 383–87), praised Theodosius' clemency in terms very similar to those used by Ambrose in this passage. Emphasis on Theodosius' clemency recurs throughout our speech.

2 Echoes of Ps. 14.1; Rev. 21.10; and citation of Ps. 48.8 (Vulg. 47.9) in which Ambrose's Latin differs slightly from both the *Itala* and the *Vulgate*.

3 Gen. 50.2–3. Here Ambrose is quoting directly from the *Itala*. He is no doubt being careful to quote directly, citing the biblical texts as the law, because of the dispute over proper practice.

4 Deut. 34.8. Again, the direct quote is from the *Itala*.

he bless you with the blessing of the all-containing earth, through the blessings of the breasts and the womb, the blessings of your mother; and through the blessing of your father.¹ Joseph was the good offspring of a pious² father. He, then, celebrates the fortieth day of his father Jacob, that supplanter;³ and we are celebrating the fortieth day of Theodosius who, modelling himself on holy Jacob, supplanted faithless tyrants;⁴ and who did away with the false images of the gentiles – for his faith did away with the worship of idols and suppressed their ceremonies;⁵ he even grieved that the remission of punishment which he had granted to those who had offended against him had come to naught, and their pardon had been rescinded.⁶ But the sons will not refuse what the father has granted, they will not refuse it, even if someone has tried to subvert it, for those who rescind what he gave to individuals will not be able to refuse what he granted to everyone.⁷

5. No more glorious circumstance attended the passing from power of so great a leader, who had already handed everything to his sons – rule, power, the title of Augustus, nothing, I say, that he left behind when he died was more admirable than the fact – of huge importance to how many! – that, even though the promised mitigation of the exaction of the grain tax is delayed⁸ his remissions have been transmitted [to his heir] as an inheritance,⁹ with the result that the man who wanted to obstruct them has made himself

1 Gen. 49.25f. (Septuagint?).

2 'Pious' echoes the double sense of *pious*: dutifulness both to family and to gods.

3 See Gen. 25.25f. The verb *supplantavit* ('has supplanted') is used to describe Jacob's treatment of Esau in Gen. 27.36.

4 The faithless tyrants are the defeated usurpers Magnus Maximus and Eugenius.

5 See Gen. 31.19f. and 31.34; see also *CTh* 16.10.7–12.

6 According to Pacatus in *Pan. Lat.* 12.44 Theodosius had wanted to pardon even the usurper Maximus, but had been forestalled by his soldiers. Theodosius publicly praised Eugenius' pagan praetorian prefect Flavianus, who committed suicide after the battle of the Frigidus: *CIL* VI, 1783 lines 16ff.

7 It seems to be implied here that there was opposition to the general amnesty, and this can also be deduced from the emphatic emphasis on the Christian commandment of forgiveness through the whole of the oration. That some people should have called for exemplary punishment of the rebels is not surprising, though we do not know who they were. But clemency won the day. In *Epp. ex.* 2 and 3 Ambrose had commended clemency to Theodosius. After his death a policy of clemency was adopted: according to Oros. 7.35, only Eugenius himself and Arbogast died. Laws issued subsequently to this speech do in fact amount to an amnesty: see *CTh* 15.14.9–12. Ambrose claims that this policy had already been inaugurated by Theodosius.

8 See *CTh* 11.28.2 (of 24 March AD 395).

9 *Indulgentiae*: remission of taxes has been delayed but it, as well as the remission of punishment of the rebels, will be granted by Honorius.

hated, while Theodosius has not been deprived of a huge mass of gratitude. And not undeservedly, for if the final wishes of private citizens and the last wills of the dying are held as having permanent validity, how can it be that the last will of so great a prince should be invalid? Theodosius is more glorious in this also, that he did not make a will in accordance with public law;¹ he had nothing further to determine as regards his sons, to whom he had given everything, except to place them under the protection of a close relative² who was present.³ As regards his descendants and those committed to his care, he was obliged to make a will in order to distribute legacies and designate trusts. He requested the promulgation of an edict of indulgence, which he had left in writing.⁴ What is more fitting than that the last testament of an emperor should be a law?

6. An emperor of such greatness, then, has withdrawn from us. But he has not wholly withdrawn; for he has left us his children, in whom we can both see and embrace him. Their age should not trouble us!⁵ The loyal support of his soldiers⁶ makes the emperor's age fully grown. For age is fully grown when strength is. This is reciprocal. For the faith (*fides*) of the emperor produces strength in his soldiers.

7. You are calling to mind, no doubt, what victories the faith of Theodosius gained for you.⁷ When, because of the problems of the terrain and the hindrance of the camp followers, the army was falling into the battle line too

1 The fact that Theodosius had not put his last wishes regarding the government of the empire and the guardianship of his sons into writing left it to Stilicho in the west and Rufinus the praetorian prefect in the east to proclaim contrary versions of what Theodosius had wanted.

2 Stilicho, who was married to a niece of Theodosius. Note that according to Ambrose Stilicho had been appointed protector of both sons, not only of Honorius in the west but also of Arcadius in the east. This was what Stilicho claimed, and the basis of his bitter conflict with the East. See Alan Cameron, *Claudian*, Oxford 1970, 38–41.

3 *Praesenti* implies that Stilicho was present when Theodosius made his last arrangements, the word does not imply his presence at the funeral service, though Stilicho surely did attend the service, and prominently.

4 This was presumably the basis of the legislation published in the name of his sons between April and June 395: *CTh* 15.14.9–12.

5 At the death of Theodosius Arcadius (born c. 377) was 18 years old, Honorius (born 9 September 384) 11.

6 The pun making use of two meanings of *fides* is a compliment to Stilicho and his army, and at the same time also an expression of hope.

7 According to Zos. 4.57.2–3 in the campaign against Eugenius Timasius commanded the legions, Stilicho was his second in command, and the federates were under Gainas and Saul. Theodosius himself was in overall command.

slowly, and through the delay in joining battle the enemy's cavalry was seen to be charging, the emperor leapt down from his horse and, advancing alone before the line, cried out, 'Where is the God of Theodosius?'¹ He was saying this as one already close to Christ. For who possibly could say this except one who knew himself to be united with Christ?² By his cry he put heart into everyone, by his example he moved everyone to arms, a man undeniably advanced in years, but mighty because of his faith.³

8. Thus the faith of Theodosius was your victory; let your faithfulness⁴ be the strength of his sons. Thus does faith augment age. After all, Abraham,⁵ in seeking to beget a son in his old age, did not think about his time of life; and nor did Sara, in intending to give birth. And it is not to be wondered at that faith augments age, since it also makes the future present. For what is 'faith', other than assurance (*substantia*) of those things for which we hope?⁶ So the scriptures teach us. If, then faith is an assurance of things hoped for, how much more is it an assurance of things which are visible?⁷ Faith is good:

1 Ambrose is the only source to report these precise words.

2 See 1 Cor. 6.17.

3 There are many sources for the battle of the Frigidus, and their evidence is far from consistent. For a discussion of what happened, together with text and translation of all the sources see F. Paschoud, *Zosime, Histoire nouvelle*, Paris 1986, vol. 4, pp. 474–500. Ambrose's account is the earliest, but not it would seem the one closest to the truth. Ambrose gives no hint that the battle took place on two successive days, nor that on the first day it was Theodosius' Goths advancing out of a pass into the plain who launched the battle. John Chrysostom, *Homilia 6, adversus Catharos* (PG. 63.491–92) is the only other source to state that Theodosius jumped from his horse, but according to him Theodosius uttered 'a prayer to heaven', rather than the all but desperate exclamation reported by Ambrose. All Christian sources agree that Theodosius' decisive contribution was a prayer, but except for Ambrose, and perhaps John Chrysostom, they do not suggest that he prayed in the front line in the heat of battle.

4 Ambrose here uses the same word twice: *Theodosii fides* and *vestra fides* in this highly rhetorically wrought short sentence (exhibiting metaphor, isocolon, homoiopoton and alliteration); different words are needed in English to convey what was in Latin a different emphasis in a usage in which the one implies the other.

5 See Rom. 4.19–22; Hebr. 11.11; both referring to Gen. 17.17.

6 Hebr. 11.1. Ambrose's version differs here from other versions. The Vulgate text, to which RSV is close, gives *Est autem fides sperandarum substantia rerum argumentum non apparentium*.

7 The faith in 'things which can be seen', for which Ambrose calls, is confidence in the boy emperors, especially the 11-year-old Honorius. This was indeed vital if the dangers of child-rule were to be avoided.

concerning which it is written: *The just man lives by faith, but if he withdraw himself (from faith) he will not please my soul.*¹

9. Now, let us not withdraw ourselves at the expense of our souls, but stand fast in the faith for our souls' salvation.² Committed to this service of faith, our elders Abraham, Isaac and Jacob *received divine acknowledgement*,³ and consequently left us an inheritance of faith. Abraham was faithful, and he was justified not by his actions but by his faith, because he trusted in God;⁴ Isaac was faithful, and because of his faith did not fear the sword, even as his father was about to strike;⁵ and Jacob, following closely the track of his father's faith, in his wanderings saw an army of angels, and hailed it as the council of God.⁶

10. And elsewhere, too, that is in the book of Kings,⁷ Elisha was deep within Samaria and suddenly an army of Syrians surrounded and closed in on him. Gehazi saw them and said to his master: '*Lord, what shall we do?*' And Elisha the prophet said: '*Don't be afraid. For there are more with us than with them.*' And he prayed that the Lord would open the eyes of Gehazi. And his eyes were opened, and he saw the mountain full of horses and chariots around Elisha. And Elisha prayed that God would strike the Syrians with blindness. And they were struck blind and they went into the city into which they were making their way seeing nothing at all. You have surely heard, you soldiers who were surrounded (during the battle of the Frigidus),⁸ that wherever there is perfidy, there also is blindness. So the army of unbelievers deserved to be struck blind.⁹ But wherever there is faith, there is an army of

1 Hebr. 10.38. See also Rom. 1.17 and Gal. 3.1. Ambrose's quotation again differs from both the Vulgate and the *Itala*.

2 See Hebr. 10.39.

3 See Hebr. 11.2 (Vulg.: *testimonium consecuti sunt senes*).

4 See Gen. 15.6 and Rom. 4.1–22.

5 See Gen. 22.6ff.

6 See Gen. 32.1ff.

7 The following narrative from Kings is based on 2 Kg. 6.13–20. Ambrose also refers to this passage in his accounts of the confrontation with the Court of Valentinian II, in *Ep.* 75a.11 and *Ep.* 77.11.

8 This is a reference to an incident in the battle of the Frigidus, where Theodosius' army was caught between the forces of Eugenius in the plain and another hostile detachment in the mountains. Theodosius was saved because he managed to persuade the enemy forces behind him to change sides (Oros. 7.35.16; Sozomen, *HE* 7.24.5). Ambrose is therefore reminding the soldiers in his congregation that they have taken part in the battle and therefore must have heard of the miraculous blinding of the enemy army.

9 The troops of Eugenius were deprived of vision by a violent gale that suddenly blew clouds of dust in their faces. The troops are called upon to recognise a parallel between the biblical blinding of the Syrians and the blinding of the troops of Eugenius.

angels. Faith therefore is a good thing, which frequently is effective even among the dead. Indeed, our Adversary and his legions are daily tormented by the power of the martyrs.¹ On this account, I think, the strings of a zither are appropriately called *fides*, because, though dead, they produce sound.²

11. So we must try harder and harder to make sure that we are not ungrateful as we perform the obligations of life, let us bestow a steady and fatherly affection on the offspring of so pious a prince. Pay to his sons what you owe to their father. You owe him more now that he is dead than you did to him living. For if, even in the case of children of private citizens the rights of minors cannot be violated without grave sin, how much more is this true of children of an emperor?

12. And, above all, in the case of the children of so great an emperor as this – a pious emperor, a merciful emperor, a faithful emperor, the sort of emperor about whom scripture has spoken in terms that are not commonplace, saying: *great and held in honour is a merciful man, but to find a man worthy of trust is hard.*³ If it is a great thing to find any man whatsoever who is merciful, or who is worthy of trust, how much more so is it to find an emperor, whom power drives on to revenge but whom compassion yet calls back from vengeance? What is more striking than the faith of an emperor whom power does not exalt, pride does not puff up, but whom piety makes humble. Of him Solomon strikingly says: *The threat of a king is like the roaring of a lion, but like dew on the grass is his good humour.*⁴ How great a thing it is, then, to lay aside the fearsome power and to give preference to amiable benevolence (*gratia*).

13. Theodosius of revered memory⁵ thought that he had been done a good turn whenever he was asked to pardon, and he was especially keen to forgive especially when the passion of his anger had been particularly great. For him to have been furious was a guarantee of pardon, and in his case one longed for what one dreaded in others, that he should be in a rage. This was

1 Faith is effective among the dead in the first place because it enables the dead to rise, but also because the devils are tormented by the martyrs.

2 See *Ep.* 77 for the powers of martyrs; also *Exh. virg.* 2.9. The paradox with which Ambrose ends this passage has echoes of 1 Cor. 14.7.

3 Pr. 20.6. Ambrose is closest to Septuagint here. The Latin *vir fidelis* means a man of faith as well as of trust.

4 Pr. 19.12 (*Itala*).

5 *Augustae memoriae Theodosius*: this phrase employs a genitive of quality, a characteristically Christian usage, often used in reference to the patriarchs, to martyrs and to highly regarded bishops after their deaths.

a boon to the accused, because while holding supreme power over everyone, he would rather remonstrate like a parent than punish like a judge. We have often seen men quaking as he as was rebuking them. Yet when they had been convicted and had given up all hope, they were acquitted of the charge. For he wished to overcome them, not to crush them, a just judge and not a hanging judge, who never denied pardon to one admitting guilt; or if there was anything which a furtive conscience seemed to conceal, he left that to God. Men used to fear that voice of his more than punishment, because the emperor behaved with such magnanimity (*verecundia*) that he preferred to attach men to himself by bonds of devotion rather than of fear.

14. They say that the greatest of the philosophers' granted immunity from punishment to those crimes which had been committed through anger, but divine scripture says something better: *Be angry and do not sin.*² It preferred to cut sin out rather than to excuse it. It is better in a moment of anger to win praise for mercy rather than to be roused by rage to retribution.

15. So who therefore will doubt that when he is in the presence of the Lord, Theodosius will be a most effective advocate for his sons? With the Lord's help, the emperor Arcadius is already a robust young man, Honorius is already knocking on the door of adulthood, a little older than Josiah.³ The latter, having lost his father and taken supreme power, lived on to the thirty-first year of his reign; and he pleased the Lord because, more than the other kings of Israel, he celebrated the pasch⁴ of the Lord, and abolished false religious practices. Similarly Asa was not as yet fully mature physically⁵ when he took up the reins of government, yet he ruled for forty years in Jerusalem.⁶ He it was who, when pressed by an unending and unnumbered

1 Presumably Plato, see *Laws* 9.7–9; he does not, however, allow full impunity. By using *ferunt* (they say) Ambrose implies that he has not read the pagan philosopher himself.

2 Ps. 4.4 (Vulg. 4.5).

3 2 Kg. 22–3. Josiah was 8 years old at his accession. Like Honorius he acceded as a boy, but also, like Theodosius, he later fought idolatry and promoted the religion of the Lord. The implication is that Honorius might grow up to be a second Theodosius.

4 Josiah's Passover: 2 Kg. 23.21–23; 2 Chron. 35.1–19. This was the Jewish Passover, but the Pasch of the Lord is of course also the Christian Easter.

5 2 Kg. 23.4–20. Josiah purged religious practices of pagan elements, which the biblical context suggests had corrupted the pure Jewish religion taught by God to Moses, but which modern scholars think were traditional cults now found incompatible with the pure monotheism preached by the prophets and institutionalised by Josiah.

6 See 1 Kg. 15.9–24; also 2 Chron. 14.2–16.14: Asa's length of reign is actually given here as forty-one years.

multitude of Ethiopians, trusted that with the Lord [on his side], and with only small numbers he could be saved. If only he had been as faithful throughout as he was at the outset! For, after having been saved with only small numbers and winning the victory, he later appealed for help to the Syrians, abandoning the Lord, and summoning doctors for a disease of the feet. Seeing that he had received so great an indication of divine favour, he ought not to have cast aside his helper, but clung to Him. Consequently, even doctors did him no good, and he paid the penalty of death like an unbeliever.

16. But the fathers of these men,¹ Abijah and Amon, were both faithless.² Theodosius, on the other hand, was full of the fear of God, full of mercy; we therefore hope that he is assisting his children in the presence of Christ, if the Lord is favourably inclined to human concerns. A merciful man is a blessing. As he helps others, he also benefits himself, and in healing others tends his own wounds. For the man who knows forgiveness acknowledges his own humanity, and follows the paths of Christ, who, on assuming flesh, chose to come into this world as a redeemer rather than as a judge.

17. Hence the psalmist has nobly said: *I have loved, seeing that the Lord will hear the voice of my prayer*. In this psalm, as it was read,³ we seemed to hear Theodosius himself speaking. 'I have loved', he says; I (Ambrose) recognise that pious voice, I also recognise the testimony of that voice. And he (Theodosius) did truly love, he who fulfilled the duties of one who loves,⁴ who spared his opponents, who loved his enemies, who pardoned those who entreated him, who did not allow those who contested his rule to perish. The voice saying *I have loved* belongs to one who is not partly, but fully perfect in the Law; for *love is the fulfilling of the Law*.⁵ But now let us hear what he

1 The fathers respectively of Josiah and Asa.

2 The Latin *infideles* can mean 'faithless' or 'unbelievers', usually the latter in ecclesiastical writers of this period, though both senses are present here. Both of the kings named turned to idolatry, which is an implicit contrast with Theodosius, who attacked it.

3 Ps. 116.1 (Vulg. 114.1). Duval 1976, 234–301, esp. 277ff. argues convincingly that Ps. 116, on which the central sections of Ambrose's address is based, had been read at the service. Ambrose goes on to say that these words of the psalm might have been spoken by Theodosius himself, because they so perfectly express his piety. Subsequently he assumes the identity of the points of view of Theodosius and of the psalmist to the point of assigning the words of the psalm to Theodosius himself, or rather he uses the words of the psalm to illustrate what Theodosius might have said, but he omits anything like an 'as it were' which would signal that he is using an illustration.

4 The Latin word for 'to love' here is *diligere*, which together with *requies*, rest, or 'the peace that passes all understanding' become central concepts in subsequent parts of the sermon.

5 Rom. 13.10.

has loved. When we are not told what kind of love is meant, the reference is surely to the grace of divine charity, with which we love that which is desirable above all desirable things,¹ of which it is written *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.*²

18. And so the devout soul,³ as it was departing from earth, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and as if he was answering questions of those (angels) who came to meet him⁴ as he was rising to the lofty regions above, kept saying: 'I have loved'. Nothing more explicit than this, nothing more detailed. The angels and archangels were asking him: 'What did you do on earth?' – for God is the sole observer of hidden things⁵ – and the soul kept saying, 'I have loved.' This is to say *I have fulfilled the Law,*⁶ I have not ignored the Gospel; this is to say *I have offered myself to death, and all day long I am accounted as a sheep for the slaughter.*⁷ *For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels nor powers, nor height nor depth nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*⁸

19. Our Lord Jesus in the gospel also teaches that this commandment of the law is to be obeyed⁹ when he says to Peter: '*Simon, son of John, do you love me?*' and he replied, '*You know, Lord, that I love you.*' And He said a second time, '*Simon, son of John, do you love me?*' And again he answered, '*Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.*' And asked a third time he said, '*Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you.*'¹⁰ And so his threefold answer confirmed his love, indeed wiped out the fault of his threefold denial. And here,¹¹ if we search, we find a threefold answer: '*I have loved because the Lord will hear the voice of my prayer; I have loved*' because '*He inclined his ear to me*' so that '*in all my days*' I should pray to him; '*I have loved,*' since

1 Compare Pr. 8.11.

2 See Deut. 6.5; Mt. 22.37.

3 Compare this section with Origen, *In Rom.* fr. 8.38.

4 Angels and archangels.

5 See Dan. 13.42 (Vulg.): unlike God, angels do not know everything that men do think. Dan. 13, the story of Susanna and the elders, has been transmitted in the Greek and not the Hebrew tradition as one of the Apocryphal books. See *New English Bible: Apocrypha*, Oxford 1970, 267–70.

6 Rom. 13.8

7 See Ps. 116.1 (Vulg. 114.1), compare Ps. 44.22 (Vulg. 43.22).

8 Rom. 8.38–39.

9 Deut. 6.5; Mt. 22.37: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God'.

10 Jn 21.15–17.

11 Once more in Ps. 116 (Vulg. 114).

'I have met with pain and anguish' and in the name of my God I have not fled 'the dangers of Hell', but have waited that they could seize and find me.¹

20. And nobly² does he say 'I have loved', because now he had completed the course of his life. And so the Apostle also says when already in the midst of his suffering: 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith; for the rest, there is reserved for me a crown of justice.'³ Great is the Lord, who has given us contests in which he who has conquered will earn a crown. 'I have loved', he says, full of trust, 'because the Lord will hear the voice of my prayer.'⁴

21. I have loved and therefore, He has inclined his ear to me⁵ to raise up the fallen and to quicken the dead. For God does not incline His ear to hear in a bodily sense, but so as to bring himself down to our level, so that He can deign to hear us and raise up the weakness of our human condition. He inclines Himself toward us so that our prayer may ascend to Him. He who grants mercy does not need a voice; nor did He need a voice, when he heard a speechless Moses.⁶ As Moses was interceding without speaking, God kept saying that he was crying out *with sighs too deep for words*.⁷ God is also able to hear blood, which has no voice to assist it, and is without a tongue; but it received a voice in the glory of the sacred Passion.⁸ It cried out in martyrdom, it cried out in that act of fratricide, which it endured as a sacrifice.⁹

1 The passage is largely composed out of bits of Ps. 116.1-3 (Vulg. 114.1-3).

2 The epithet applied to the psalmist in c.17 is now applied to Theodosius..

3 2 Tim. 4.7ff.

4 Ps. 116.1 (Vulg. 114.1). After using the psalm to comment on Peter's reply to Christ, Ambrose once more cites 'I have loved' as spoken by Theodosius to sum up his life, and then extends the characterisation by quoting Paul's final summing up of his own career. The effect is to suggest that the struggles experienced by Theodosius in the course of his reign were comparable to the struggles and sufferings of apostles and martyrs.

5 Ps. 116.2 (Vulg. 114.2).

6 See Ex. 14.13-15 which does not report any verbal intercession by Moses to account for the Lord's 'Moses why do you cry to me'. This has been interpreted by Origen (*In ex. hom.* 5.4, trans. R. E. Heine, *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, Washington, DC 1982) to mean that Moses' intercession had been non-verbal. Ambrose adopted this interpretation here as in his *Explanation* of Ps. (Vulg.) 38.7 (CSEL 64.189), and *Commentary* on Ps. (Vulg.) 118.19.9-10 (CSEL. 62.426-27).

7 The phrase is from Rom. 8.26. But there it is the Holy Spirit not Moses who intercedes 'with sighs too deep for words'.

8 The reference here is to Christ's suffering; Ambrose also refers to the voice of blood in similar terms in *Ep.* 77.23.

9 The parricide is the murder of Abel by his brother Cain (Gen. 4.10).

22. 'I have loved', he said, 'and in loving I have therefore done the will of the Lord and I have called upon Him, not a few times, but in all the days of my life.'¹ For to call on Him on certain days, and not on all, is the behaviour of an arrogant person, not of one living in hope, and it is to offer a payment of gratitude in return for enjoying abundant advantages, not out of devoted love. And so Paul said: 'In all circumstances give thanks.'² For are you ever without something which you owe to God? Or is there ever a time when you are without a gift of God, seeing that each day the enjoyment of life comes to you from God? For *what do you have that you did not receive?*³ It follows that because you are always receiving from God, you must always call upon Him; and, because all that you have is from the Lord God, always acknowledge that you are His debtor. But I would rather have you pay your debt as one who loves than under compulsion.

23. You hear Theodosius saying: 'The pangs of death have encompassed me,⁴ still, even in the pain of death, I have loved the Lord. The perils of hell have found me⁵ not at all afraid, but loving, but hoping that no persecution, no dangers, no sword shall separate me from Christ.' In fact, he willingly encountered *suffering and sorrow*, knowing that *suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces proof, and proof, hope.*⁶ And indeed, like a good athlete he entered contests to gain the crown, but yet he knew that it was given to him not by his own strength but through the help of the Lord. For he could not have been victorious had he not called upon Him who supports those who are contending.

24. Wretched man enters the contest in order to be victorious, and he gratuitously rushes headlong into danger, unless the name of the Lord be present with him, unless when he is filled with dread he prays, saying *Lord, save my soul.*⁷ Hence the following saying of the Apostle: *I see a law of my flesh fighting against the law of my mind and making me prisoner to the law of sin that is in my bodily members. Wretched man that I am, who will*

1 See Ps. 116.1, 2, 4 (Vulg. 114.1, 2, 4); Ps. 27.4 (Vulg. 26.4). Ambrose here again introduces the direct voice of Theodosius.

2 1 Thess. 5.18.

3 1 Cor. 4.7.

4 Ps. 116.3 (Vulg. 114.3).

5 Ps. 116.1, 3. The words put into Theodosius' mouth here are a paraphrase of this together with Rom. 8.35.

6 Rom. 5.3.

7 Ps. 116.4 (Vulg. 114.4).

*save me from that body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*¹

25. The man that wins is he who hopes for the grace of God, not he who presumes upon his own strength.² For why not presume upon grace when you have a judge over the contest who is merciful? For *merciful and just is the Lord and our God shows mercy*.³ He referred to mercy twice, justice once; justice is in the middle, enclosed by twin walls of mercy; sins greatly abound, let mercy therefore greatly abound. With the Lord there is an abundance of all the virtues,⁴ since He is *the Lord of virtues*.⁵ Nevertheless, there is neither justice without mercy nor is there justice without compassion; for it is written *be not over-just*.⁶ Whatever exceeds (the right) measure, even if it is a good in itself, you will not be able to bear the consequences. Observe measure, in order that you may receive according to measure.⁷

26. For justice does not stand in the way of mercy, because mercy itself is justice. *He has distributed, he has given to the poor, his justice endures for ever*.⁸ For the just man knows that he ought to come to the help of the weak and the needy. Hence the Lord coming to baptism, in order to forgive us in our weakness our sins, said to John: '*let it be so now; for it is proper for us to do this for full justice to be achieved*'.⁹ Clearly, then, justice is mercy and mercy is justice. In fact, if the mercy of God did not sustain us, how could we ever survive our very beginning as infants, when cast out of the womb from warmth into the cold, from moist to dry, we flounder like fish, shipwrecks cast into this life by some tidal wave of nature?¹⁰ Reason is absent, but divine grace does not fail. So then, He himself *protects the little children*,¹¹ or at least those who by their humble demeanour confess themselves to be little children.

1 Rom. 7.23–25.

2 See Jg. 6.15.

3 Ps. 116.5 (Vulg. 114.5).

4 See Rom. 5.20.

5 Ps. 24.10 (Vulg. 23.10). Where the Latin has *dominus virtutum* ('the lord of virtues') both King James and the RSV have 'the lord of hosts'.

6 Ec. 7.17 (Vulg.).

7 See Mt. 7.2; Eph. 4.7; Origen, *De princ.* 2.11.6, 107; Ambrose, *Ep.* 7.6.

8 Ps. 112.9 (Vulg. 111.9).

9 Mt. 3.15.

10 See Philo, *De mundo opificio* (*Concerning the Creation of the World*) 161; could Ambrose also have had Lucretius, 5.222–25, in mind?

11 Ps. 116.6. (Vulg. 114.6).

27. Humility is therefore a good thing, which extricates people from danger, and raises those who are prostrate. King David was familiar with this, when he said: *'See it is I; I have sinned, I the shepherd have done wrong, and these in this flock, what have they done? Let your hand be against me.'* He too (Theodosius) expressed this well, when he placed his kingdom under God and did penance; and having confessed his sin, asked for pardon. So he attained salvation through humility.² Christ humbled himself in order to raise up all.³ So he attained Christ's rest, when he imitated Christ's humility.

28. And so, because Theodosius, the Emperor, showed himself to be humble and asked for forgiveness when sin stole upon him, his soul has returned to its rest,⁴ as scripture expresses it, which says, *return, O my soul, to your rest, for the lord has been good to me.*⁵ How nobly it says to the soul, *return*, as to one utterly wearied by the daily round, so that it might turn from work to rest. The horse returns to the stable when it has completed its race; and the ship to port, when it is drawn from the immensity of the waves to its trusty mooring. But what can scripture mean by *to your rest* if not that you are to understand it in the light of this our Lord saying: *Come, you who are blessed by my father, take possession of your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*⁶ For what was promised to us we receive as an inheritance, for *God is faithful,*⁷ and what he has once prepared for his servants he does not take away. If only our faith remains constant, his promise will remain constant too.

29. Observe, O man, the grace of Christ all around you! You are still hounded on earth, yet you have possessions in heaven! So let your heart be, where your possessions are.⁸ This is the rest which is owed to the just but denied to the unworthy. That is why the Lord says: *As I swore in my anger,*

1 2 Kg. 24.17.

2 This refers to the act of penance performed by Theodosius in 390, after the massacre at Thessalonica. See *Ep. ex. 11*; Paulinus, *V. Ambr. 24*; Rufinus, *HE 2.18*; Sozomen, *HE 7.25*; Theodoret, *HE 5, 7*.

3 See Phil. 2.8.

4 *Requies*: 'rest' is a rather colourless translation for what is in effect 'the peace of God that passes all understanding' (Phil. 4.7). The whole subsequent passage is a development of the theme of *requies*, 'rest'.

5 Ps. 116.7 (Vulg. 114.7).

6 Mt. 25.34.

7 1 Cor. 1.9.

8 See Mt. 6.21. Ambrose has changed the mood and the order of the phrases.

they shall not¹ enter into my rest.² For they who have not known the ways of the Lord, do not go into the rest of the Lord. To him, however, who has fought the good fight and finished the race,³ it is said: Return to your rest.⁴ It is a blessed rest, to pass by the things of this world and to find repose in the fellowship of the heavenly mysteries, which are above the world. This is the rest toward which the Prophet hastened, saying: *Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly and be at rest?*⁵ This rest the holy man⁶ knows to be his, to this rest he tells his soul to return. It follows that his soul was already familiar with that rest, to which he says it must return. This is the rest of the Great Sabbath,⁷ in which each one of the saints exists above the sensible things of the world, wholly intent on that intelligible mystery, and clinging fast to God.⁸ This is the rest of that great sabbath on which God rested from all the work of this world.⁹

30. Now that he has been released from toil, Theodosius is glad to have been *snatched away*¹⁰ from these worldly responsibilities, and, lifting up his soul, sets its course towards that eternal rest, and declares that he had been splendidly looked after, seeing that God *has snatched his soul from death*; that death which he often withstood in the treacherous conditions of this world, buffeted by the waves of sin. And God has also snatched *his eyes from tears*.¹¹ For *sorrow and sadness and sighing have fled away*.¹² And elsewhere we have: *He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying nor sorrow*.¹³ If, then, death shall be no more, he being settled in that rest will not be capable of experiencing

1 So Ps. 95.11 (Vulg. 94.11); the oath is that recorded in Num. 14.26ff.

2 Ps. 95.11; also Hebr. 4.3.

3 See 2 Tim. 4.7.

4 Ps. 116.7 (Vulg. 114.7).

5 Ps. 55.7 (Vulg. 54.6).

6 The author of Ps. 116 (Vulg. 114), and by implication also Theodosius.

7 The eternal rest in heaven.

8 In this sentence Ambrose employs the vocabulary of later Platonism, which contrasted the 'sensible' world, i.e. that known through the bodily senses, with the 'intelligible' world, known through the mind or soul. See R. T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, London 1972, especially 84–85 on the return of the soul to the intelligible world; cf. also Augustine, *Conf.* 9.10.

9 See Gen. 2.2.

10 Echoes Ps. 116.8 (Vulg. 114.8).

11 Ps. 116.8 (Vulg. 114.8).

12 Is. 53.10.

13 Rev. 21.4.

a fall,¹ but will please *God in the land of the living*.² For, while here man is enveloped in a *body of death*,³ and is liable to fall and transgress, that emphatically is not so there. For that is the land of the living and it is the soul that is there, which has been made *in the image and likeness*⁴ of God, and not flesh formed *from dust*.⁵ So the flesh returns to earth, the soul hastens to celestial rest, and to it is said *Return, my soul, to your rest*.⁶

31. Theodosius hastened to enter into this rest, and to enter the city of Jerusalem, of which it has been said: *and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it*.⁷ It is the true glory, which is displayed there; it is the most blessed of kingdoms, which is possessed there, the kingdom to which the apostle was hastening, when he said *We are therefore of good courage and would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord; and so whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please Him*.⁸

32. Freed, therefore, from the uncertainty of the contest, Theodosius of revered memory now enjoys eternal light and lasting peace, and in return for the deeds he performed in this body he rejoices in the fruits of divine recompense. It was therefore because Theodosius of revered memory loved the Lord his God he has earned the fellowship of the saints.

33. And I too – to close my address with some sort of peroration⁹ – *have loved*¹⁰ a merciful man, humble in power, endowed with a pure heart and a

1 The Latin *lapsus*, 'fall', here refers to sin.

2 Ps. 116.9 (Vulg. 114.9).

3 See Rom. 7.24.

4 See Gen. 1.26ff. In stressing here that it is the soul and not the body that is made in God's image, Ambrose is presenting a Platonic interpretation, similar to that found in Origen, *De principiis* 3.6.1. This work is translated into English by G. W. Butterworth, *Origen on First Principles*, Gloucester, MA 1973.

5 See Gen. 2.7

6 Ps.116.7 (Vulg. 114.7).

7 Rev. 21.24.

8 2 Cor. 5.8.

9 A very long peroration. There is an unresolved scholarly debate whether the 'Helena excursus' (cc. 40–53) was part of the speech as originally delivered, or whether it was subsequently added for the benefit of readers, contemporary and in years to come.

10 This starts a new section: Ambrose now praises Theodosius specifically for his relations with the Church, and especially the Church's representative at Milan. He now speaks in his own person the word of the psalmist which he had previously put in the mouth of Theodosius: 'I have loved'. This is in accordance with Menander Rhetor's advice on the composition of a consolatory speech: 'it will not preserve the sequence of the encomia, because the speaker gives the impression of being out of his mind and distracted by emotion' (Menander Rhetor, edited

gentle disposition, a man such as the Lord is wont to love, saying *in whom shall I find consolation if not in the humble and meek.*¹

34. *I have loved* a man who valued a critic more than a flatterer. He threw to the ground all the royal attire he was wearing; he wept publicly in church over his sin which had stolen upon him through the deceit of others;² with groans and tears he prayed for forgiveness.³ What private citizens blush to do the emperor did not blush to do, to perform public penance; and afterwards not a day passed on which he did not grieve for that fault of his. What about the fact that, after he had gained a famous victory,⁴ he nonetheless, because of his enemies fallen in battle, abstained from participation in the sacraments, until he sensed the grace of the Lord God towards him in the arrival of his children?⁵

35. *I have loved* a man who in his last moments and with his last breath kept asking for me. *I have loved* a man who, in the very moment he was being set free from the body, was more anxious about the state of the churches than about his own dangers.⁶ Yes, *I have loved*, I admit it, and for that reason my grief has pained me to the core of my being, and I have thought it right to relieve my grief by attending his funeral with the extended tribute of my address. *I have loved* and I am confident that the Lord will accept the *voice of my prayer*, with which I am attending his pious soul.

with translation and commentary by D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, Oxford 1981, 181). Ambrose also seems to be implying that his attitude to Theodosius parallels that of Theodosius to God.

1 See Is. 66.2. Ambrose reads: *supra quem requiescam*, the Vulgate: *ad quem autem respiciam*, the Itala: *super quem respiciam*.

2 According to *Ep. ex. 11.6* (Maur. 51) Theodosius wanted to cancel the order for the massacre but was forestalled.

3 On the ritual for penance in Milan at this time see R. Gryson, *Le prêtre selon saint Ambroise*, Louvain 1968, 275–90. Ambrose, *De paenitentia*, PL 16.847–50 (CSEL 73.117–206; trans. H. de Romestin, 'On Penitance', in *Some Principal Works of St Ambrose*, NPNF 10, 329–59). Ambrose implies here that Theodosius prostrated himself on the ground in his royal state and so begged the congregation for forgiveness and the bishop for readmission.

4 After the defeat of Eugenius at the river Frigidus on 8 September 394, Theodosius sent to Constantinople for Honorius, who was accompanied by Serena, the niece of Theodosius, and wife of his general Stilicho. They arrived shortly before the emperor's death.

5 Since there is no reason to suppose that Arcadius left Constantinople, the reference to 'children' indicates that his daughter Galla Placidia was in the party.

6 Throughout his reign, and to the last, Theodosius devoted a great deal of energy to trying to resolve the various conflicts that were dividing the Church.

36. *The sorrows of death encompassed me, the perils of hell have found me;*¹ for those in peril are many, but the remedies only for few. The bishop shares the peril with everyone, he suffers anguish with every guilty person; for whatever others suffer, he also endures; on the other hand, he too is released when others who have been in danger are set free. I am sick at heart because a man has been snatched away from us whom it is hardly possible to replace. Nevertheless it is You, O Lord, and You alone who must be called on,² who must be implored to bring him back in his sons. O Lord, *protector even of the least*³ in this lowly place, *save those whose hope is in You.*⁴ Give perfect rest to your servant Theodosius, the same rest which you have prepared for your saints. Let his soul return to the place from which it descended, where it will not be unable to feel the sting of death,⁵ where it will experience that this death is the end not of existence, but of wrongdoing. *The death he died, he died to sin,*⁶ so that now there cannot be any place for sin. But he will rise again, so that by a gift of renewed grace a more perfect life shall be restored to him.

37. *I have loved, and so I attend him right up to the land of the living,*⁷ and I shall not desert him until I conduct the man with tears and prayers to the place where his merits call him, *to the holy mountain of the Lord,*⁸ where there is life eternal, where there is no touch of decay, no sighing, no sorrow,⁹ no community of the dead. (This is) the true *land of the living*, where this *mortal nature shall put on immortality and this perishable nature imperishability.*¹⁰ (This is) the great *peace* which fulfils the prayer of the loving soul, (our) most glorious promise.

1 Ps. 116.3 (Vulg. 114.3).

2 Ps. 116.4 (Vulg. 114.4).

3 Ps. 116.6 (Vulg. 114.6).

4 Ps. 17.7 (Vulg. 16.7).

5 See Ps. 116.8 (Vulg. 114.8); also the hymn *Te deum laudamus*, v. 17, on whose authorship see A. E. Burn, *The Hymn 'Te deum' and its Author*, Cambridge 1926; and E. Kahler, *Studien zum 'Te deum'*, Göttingen 1958.

6 Rom. 6.10.

7 Ps. 116.1, 9 (Vulg. 114.1, 9), the act of 'escorting' is the speaking of this sermon.

8 See Ps. 2.6; 3.4; 15.1.

9 See Is. 35.10.

10 See 1 Cor. 15.53.

That is why the psalm is numbered the one hundred and fourteenth.¹ Earlier (in the Book) we have indeed learnt from psalm fourteen² what makes a perfect man. But there the man is still being educated, though he is being perfected yet he is still subject to sin, because he is living in this world. True perfection is in that place, where guilt has indeed ceased and which is radiant with the grace of perpetual peace.³

38. The reason therefore why the psalm is the hundredth plus the fourteenth⁴ is because it is (about) the reward for love (charity).⁵ The Pasch of our Lord has been assigned a schedule of celebration on the fourteenth day⁶ for the same reason, because he who celebrates the Pasch ought to be perfect, he ought to love the Lord Jesus, who, loving His people, subjected Himself to his passion with perfect devotion (charity).⁷ As to ourselves, let our love too be so great that for the sake of the Lord's name, if the need arises, we do not flee from death, we count pain as naught, and fear nothing; for *perfect love (charity) casts out fear*.⁸ The number indicates a great mystery, because when the Father gave up his only Son for all of us, the moon at full orb was radiant with its light. For so too the Church is radiant as it piously celebrates the Pasch of our Lord Jesus Christ: *like the moon it remains perfect forever*.⁹ Whoever here on earth celebrates fittingly the

1 Modern editors take this to be an example of Ambrose's usage of the mystic significance of numbers, in particular 4 and 10. In such number symbolism, the Greek letters indicating the number 14 could be taken to signify 'Jesus-Gift'. A more explicit discussion of this in Ambrose's work is found at *De Abraham*, 2, 9, 65, which is based on Philo, *De Abraham*, 13. The interpretation represents the numbers 10 and 4 as containing all creation and leading to perfection or the perfected life.

2 Ps. 14 (Vulg.) (= 15 RSV).

3 The word is once more *quies*, which I have elsewhere generally translated colourlessly as 'rest'.

4 14 indicates *caritas*, 114 the reward for it.

5 In this section Ambrose employs three words which can all be translated by 'love', but in this passage he uses 'charity', *caritas*, in the sense in which it is used in 1 Cor. 13.4-8.

6 See Gen. 12.6; Lev. 23.5. The Sunday after the Jewish Passover (14 Nisan) was the day of Christ's resurrection, and this became the date of the Christian feast of Easter, identified as the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox. As often, Ambrose is here following Roman practice. The date of Easter was a controversial issue, which Ambrose discusses at length in *Ep. ex.* 13. See below pp. 281-91.

7 Cf. 1 Cor. 16, 22.

8 1 Jn 4.18.

9 Ps. 89.37 (Vulg. 88.38).

Pasch of the Lord shall be in light perpetual. (But) who celebrated it more gloriously than the man who got rid of sacrilegious errors, closed the temples, destroyed the images?¹ For doing the same, king Josiah was preferred to his predecessors.²

39. Theodosius, therefore, abides in the light, and glories in the throngs of the saints.³ There, at this moment he is embracing Gratian, no longer sorrowing over his wounds because he has found his avenger. Gratian may have been carried off prematurely by a death he did not deserve, but he now possesses his soul at peace.⁴ There, the two men, each a good man, and each an industrious exponent of religious duty, rejoice together in the fellowship of the mercy they have shown [on earth]. Of them it can appropriately be said, *Day to day pours forth speech*.⁵ But, by contrast, Maximus and Eugenius are in hell, and just as *night to night declares knowledge*, so they teach by their wretched example how foolhardy it is for men to take up arms against their princes. Of such men it is fittingly said, *I have seen an irreligious man raised high and towering over the cedars of Lebanon: and I passed by again and behold! He was no more*.⁶ The pious man has crossed over from the darkness of the world into eternal light, and *the irreligious man was no more*, wicked as he was, he has ceased to exist.⁷

40. Now Theodosius⁸ of august memory has become truly aware that he is a ruler, now that he is in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus and gazing upon

1 That is, Theodosius.

2 See 2 Kg. 23.4–25 and above c. 15. Note also that in the *De ob. Val. 57* Ambrose refers to Josiah in similar terms: 'In the eighteenth year of his reign, Josiah celebrated the Passover of the Lord in such a way that he exceeded in devotion the princes of earlier times ... the righteous king was preferred.'

3 See 1 Jn 2.10.

4 Gratian, the Emperor for whom Ambrose wrote *De fide* and to whom *Ep. ex. 4, 5 and 6* were addressed, who had indeed been responsible for making Theodosius his co-emperor, had died in 383, killed by the supporters of the usurper Maximus shortly after the start of his revolt. See Amm. Marc. 31.10.18–19; Zos. 4.36.5; Rufinus, *HE* 11.13. Ambrose himself also refers to the death of Gratian in his commentary on Ps. 61.17. On Ambrose's relations with Gratian see above pp. 11–14 and below 246–47.

5 Ps. 19.2 (Vulg. 18.3).

6 Ps. 37.35–36 (Vulg. 36.35–36). 'The cedars of Lebanon' are the saints.

7 Cf. Ps. 37.36 (Vulg. 36.36).

8 The theme of the following chapters does not seem to follow on from c. 39. The interrupted argument is only resumed in c. 53. It has been plausibly, though not conclusively, argued that the intervening chapters are not part of the original speech, but a later addition by Ambrose. See also above pp. 174–75.

His temple.¹ Now he is a king in his own eyes, now that he also welcomes Gratian, his son,² and Pulcheria,³ the children so very dear to him, whom he had lost on earth; now that his Flacilla,⁴ a soul faithful to God, embraces him, now that he rejoices that his father⁵ has been restored to him; now that he embraces Constantine. Admittedly it was only in his final hours that Constantine was freed from all his sins by the grace of baptism, nevertheless because he was the first of the emperors to believe, and left to the princes after him an inheritance of faith, he has found a place (in heaven) which he very much deserves. In his time the following prophecy was fulfilled: *On that day that which is on the bridle of the horse will be holy to the Lord Almighty.*⁶ For this was what Helena of sainted memory, mother of Constantine, being filled with the spirit of God, uncovered.⁷

41. How fortunate was Constantine to have a mother like this, who when her son was emperor sought for him the support of divine protection, that he might take his place in battles unharmed, and be without fear of danger! How great was the woman, seeing that she found something to bestow on the emperor, which was very much greater than anything she could receive from him! A mother anxious for a son to whom rule of the Roman world had fallen, she sped to Jerusalem, and thoroughly examined the scene of the Lord's passion.

1 Cf. Ps. 27.4 (Vulg. 26.4).

2 See *Ep. ex.* 11.16–17 and p. 269 n. 6, which suggests that Theodosius had a short-lived son Gratian.

3 Daughter of Theodosius and Flacilla, who died in childhood; cf. *PLRE* 1.755.

4 First wife of Theodosius, and mother of Arcadius and Honorius; cf. *PLRE* 1.341–42.

5 The elder Theodosius, commander in chief in Africa, who was executed in obscure circumstances in 375; cf. *PLRE* 1.902–04, s.v. Theodosius 3.

6 Zech. 14.20. Jerome in his commentary on Zechariah, written in 406, denies that the line refers to the nails of the Cross.

7 For references to literature on this much-discussed episode see above p. 175 n. 5. What Ambrose has in effect done is to replace the visions of Constantine by Helena's discovery of the cross and her working the nails into imperial regalia. This in Ambrose's interpretation becomes the divine sign, calling not only Constantine but all subsequent Roman emperors to be Christian emperors and protectors of the Church. The finding of the cross sanctions the Christian empire just as the finding of the bones of martyrs sanctioned Ambrose's episcopate. We have no evidence for the bridle and the diadem earlier than this passage. They are mentioned subsequently in the ecclesiastical historians: Rufinus, *HE* 9.8; Socrates, *HE* 1.17; Sozomen, *HE* 2.1; Theodoret, *HE* 1.18. There is, I think, no evidence that objects claimed to be either the diadem (or helmet) or the bridle actually existed, in the way fragments of the cross were believed to exist, and were shown. It looks as if Ambrose has taken up a current story, and used it to demonstrate the Christian heritage of Roman emperors, and in doing this treated a legend as historical fact.

42. They claim that she was originally the hostess of an inn,¹ and as such known to the elder Constantius,² who subsequently obtained imperial office. Good hostess, who so painstakingly searched for the manger of the Lord! Good hostess, who knew about that inn-keeper who cared for the wounds of the man set upon by robbers!³ Good hostess, who preferred to be esteemed as dung in order to win Christ! That is why Christ raised her from the dung to royalty, according to what is written, that *He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the dung.*⁴

43. So Helena came, she began to visit the holy places once more. The Holy Spirit inspired her to search for the wood of the Cross. She approached close to Golgotha, and said: 'Behold, the place of combat, but where is the victory? I am looking for the banner of salvation, but I cannot find it. Am I,' she said, 'to be with kings, while the cross of the Lord lies in the dust? Am I to have gold all round me, while the triumph of Christ lies among rubble? While this object remains hidden, so does the palm of eternal life! How can I consider myself redeemed, if redemption itself is not visible?'

44. I see what you have done, Satan, to make sure that the sword which destroyed you was covered up. But Isaac dug out the wells, which had been covered up by foreigners, and did not permit the water to lie hidden.⁵ Therefore let the rubble be shifted so that life may be seen; let the sword be displayed by which the head of the true Goliath was cut off,⁶ let the earth be opened up so that salvation may shine forth. What did you achieve, Satan, by hiding the wood, other than to suffer a second defeat? Mary defeated you, when she gave birth to the conqueror, when without any impairment to her virginity⁷ she brought Him forth, who was crucified to conquer you, who died to subject you. You will be defeated again today, when a woman uncovers your snares. The holy one bore the Lord, I shall search for His cross. She gave proof of His birth, I shall give proof of His resurrection. She caused God to be seen among men; I shall raise the divine banner from the rubble to be a remedy for our sins.'

1 *Stabularia*, the feminine form of the word for innkeeper used in Latin version of the parable of the good Samaritan. Lewis and Short define *stabularius* as a host of the lowest kind, cf. n. 3 below.

2 Father of Constantine, see *PLRE* 1.227–28, s.v. Fl. Val. Constantius 12.

3 Lk. 10.34ff, the innkeeper described as *stabularius*.

4 Ps. 113.7 (Vulg. 112.7).

5 See Gen. 26.18.

6 See 1 Sam. 17.51.

7 Cf. *De virgin.* II.2.7.

45. So she opens up the earth; she clears away the soil; she lays bare three forked gibbets tangled together, which rubble had covered up, and the Enemy had concealed. But the triumph of Christ could not be effaced. Doubtfully, she hesitates, woman-like she hesitates, but the Holy Spirit inspires a particular line of investigation, because of the fact that two thieves had been crucified with the Lord.¹ So she picks out the middle piece of wood; but it was possible that the rubble had jumbled up the crosses and accidentally interchanged their positions. She goes back to the Gospel passage, she finds that on the middle gibbet there had been an inscription: *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*. From this, a true line of reasoning was deduced: the inscription revealed the cross of salvation. This is what *Pilate answered* to the Jews when they protested: *What I have written, I have written*² that is: 'I have not written these things to please you, but that future ages may know them, I have not written for you, but for posterity.' He was virtually saying, 'Let Helena have something to read, by which she can identify the cross of the Lord.'

46. So now, she found the inscription; she adored the king – most definitely not the wood, for this is Gentile error and the folly of the impious,³ but she adored Him, who hung on the tree, whose name was cited on the inscription, who like a scarab⁴ cried out so that His Father might forgive the sins of His persecutors. Eagerly the woman was in a hurry to touch the elixir of immortality, yet she was afraid to trample on the mystery of salvation. With joyful heart but hesitant footstep, she did not know what to do; she nevertheless made her way towards the resting place of truth. The wood shone, and grace sparkled, because just as previously Christ had visited a woman in the person of Mary, so now the Spirit visited a woman in the person of Helena. He taught her what being a woman she did not know,⁵ and led her on to a path that could not be known by any mortal.

47. She hunted for the nails with which the Lord was crucified, and found them. From one nail she ordered a bridle to be made, and from a second she

1 See Mt. 27.38.

2 See Jn 19.19–22.

3 Pagans argued that the reverence Christians showed to relics contradicted the claim that they worshipped only the one God.

4 Cf. *Ep.* 40.53 (Maur. 32); Habakuk 2.11 (Sept.). Faller thought that Ambrose is here using Origen, see *CSEL* 73.395 note on 46.4.

5 Does Ambrose mean inspiration to undertake the voyage to the Holy Land and to engage in various activities which fell outside the normal role of women?

fashioned a diadem; she converted one to ornamental, the other to devotional use. Mary was visited to set Eve free; Helena was visited so that emperors should be redeemed. That is why she sent to her son Constantine a diadem¹ brilliant with jewels, which were embedded in the more precious jewel of divine redemption bound in the iron of the cross; that is why she also sent the bridle. Constantine used both, and passed on the faith to subsequent rulers. Thus the holy object on the bridle is the foundation of the belief of emperors.² From this came faith, in order that persecution should end and true religion take its place.

48. Wisely did Helena act when she placed a cross on the head of kings so that the cross of Christ might be adored among rulers. It is not presumption but piety, when deference is shown to holy redemption. A good nail, then, this nail of the Roman empire, which rules the entire globe, and adorns the forehead of princes so that men who used to be persecutors might become preachers. It is right that the nail should be on the head, so that there should be protection where the mind is situated. On the forehead a crown, in the hands a bridle: a crown made from the cross, so that faith spreads its light; reins too from the cross so that power rules, but here is just government, not unjust enactment. Moreover, by the generosity of Christ our princes are to have the privilege that what has been said of the Lord can be said of the Roman emperor: *You have placed on his head a crown of precious stones.*³

49. On account of this, the Church manifests joy, the Jew blushes; not only does he blush but he is also tormented, because he is himself the author of his own confusion. While he insults Christ, he admits that Christ is king. He who did not believe admitted his own sacrilege when he hailed Him King of the Jews. 'See,' they say, 'we have crucified Jesus so that Christians shall not only rise after death, but reign though dead. We have crucified Him, whom kings adore; they adore him whom we do not adore. See, the very nail is held in reverence, and the man we marked down for death is the cure that offers salvation, and he torments demons by some unseen power. We thought that we had conquered, but admit ourselves conquered. Christ has risen again, and princes acknowledge that He has risen. He lives again unseen. Now for us the struggle is greater, now the battle against Him is

1 In the three ecclesiastical historians it is a helmet not a diadem. In Theodoret, *HE* 1.17, Helena has helmet and bridle made, but in Socrates, *HE* 1.17, and Sozomen, *HE* 2.1, the bridle and helmet are made on the order of Constantine, from nails he obtained from Helena.

2 This sums up the message of the Helena episode, cf. above p. 174.

3 Ps. 21.4 (Vulg. 20.3).

more furious. We have spurned Him upon whom kingdoms attend, whom the powerful serve. How shall we stand against kings? Kings bow before the iron of His fetters!¹ Kings worship him and yet the Photinians² deny His divinity! Emperors carry the nail of his cross on the front of their diadem, and yet the Arians belittle His power!

50. But I am asking: why is there *a holy thing upon the bridle*, unless it is to curb the arrogance of emperors, to check the wantonness of tyrants, who bray like horses at stud because they have got away with adultery without being punished? What terrible abuses do we read about as being committed by the Neros, the Caligulas and the rest, emperors who did not have *a holy thing upon the bridle*!

51. What, then, did the action of Helena's accomplish, when she took control of the reins, other than to say with the Holy Spirit to all emperors: *Do not become like the horse or mule*,³ and to control *with bridle and bit the mouths of those* who did not acknowledge that it was their duty as kings to rule the people subject to them. For power was rushing headlong into vice, and they defiled themselves with rampant lust like cattle. They were ignorant of God. The cross of the Lord was what checked them, and called them back from their fall into wickedness. It raised their eyes to seek Christ in heaven. They freed themselves from the bit of perfidy and took up the bridle of devotion and faith, following Him who said: *Take my yoke upon you; for my yoke is sweet, and my burden is light*.⁴ Hence, the succeeding emperors were Christian – except Julian alone, who abandoned the author of his salvation when he abandoned himself to the errors of philosophy – then came Gratian and Theodosius.

52. Prophecy, then, did not lie in saying *Kings will walk in Your light*.⁵ Assuredly *they will walk* and especially Gratian and Theodosius, princes at the forefront of the rest; protected now not by the weapons of soldiers but by their own merits; arrayed now not in purple robes, but in the mantle of glory. These men in this world took pleasure in pardoning many. How much happier will they be made in heaven by the memory of their pious actions,

1 Peter Walsh has suggested that *pedum* (of feet) of the text might be a transmission error for *compedum* (of fetters).

2 Followers of Photinus, a bishop of Sirmium, who taught that Father, Son and Spirit were a single person, cf. *Ep. ex.* 4.12.

3 Ps. 32.9 (Vulg. 31.9).

4 Mt. 11.29–30.

5 Is. 60.3.

as they recall the many that they have spared. These men now enjoy radiant light, having acquired far better dwellings there than those they used to occupy here, and saying, *O Israel, how great is your house, and how vast is the place of His possession! It is great and has no end.*¹ Men who have performed very heavy work say one to another: *It is good for a man, when he has borne a heavy yoke from his youth, he shall sit apart in silence, because he has borne a heavy yoke.*² For the man who has borne a heavy yoke from youth rests afterwards; far removed from the throng he now dwells in that privileged region where he has peace, saying, *for you alone, Lord, have settled me in hope.*³

53. Lazarus, a poor man, bore a heavy yoke from his youth, so now, on the evidence of God's writ, he rests apart in the bosom of Abraham.⁴ Theodosius bore a heavy yoke from youth when the men who had struck down his father in his triumph plotted against his safety.⁵ He bore a heavy yoke when he endured exile out of loyalty, when he took command after barbarians poured into the Roman Empire. He bore a heavy yoke in order to shift tyrants out of the Roman empire. But, because he laboured on earth, he rests in heaven.

54. But now let us set about the dispatch of the imperial body. You are weeping, Honorius, imperial offspring, and you are displaying filial sorrow with your tears. For you are sending the body of your father far away, a body which still has not been honoured with the honour of a tomb. But, in a comparable situation, the patriarch Jacob,⁶ because of the need to rescue his people, whom a dread famine was threatening with grave danger, left his home though an old man, and went off to a foreign land; and after he had died there he was escorted with his son in attendance, a journey of some days, back to the tomb of his fathers. And it did not in the least detract from

1 See Bar. 3.24ff. (*The Book of Baruch* is in *The New English Bible: the Apocrypha*, Oxford 1970, 252–58).

2 Lam. 3.27–28. The text here differs from Vulg. and RSV, but follows *Itala*.

3 Ps. 4.8 (Vulg. 4.10).

4 See Lk. 16.23.

5 Theodosius' father was executed at Carthage in 376, shortly after his defeat of Firmus, leader of the Moorish rebellion, evidently in the course of the manoeuvring that followed the death of Valentinian I. See H. Sivan, *Ausonius of Bordeaux*, London and New York 1993, p. 208 n.16. Ambrose seems to imply here that Theodosius' own life was then also under threat. He retired to his estates in Spain until called upon by Gratian after Hadrianople, Paccatus, *Pan. Lat.* 2(12).9.1–10.2; Oros. 7.33.7

6 See Gen. 50.13.

his merit, rather it redounded to his renown that, denying himself his destined place of rest for the sake of his people, he was, as it were, in exile in a foreign country at the time of the funeral.

55. You are also weeping, august emperor, because you will not yourself accompany the honoured remains as far as Constantinople. The reason is the same for you and for us: we all accompany him with appropriate justified sorrow, we would all wish, if it were possible, to be pall-bearers with you. But Joseph went into a neighbouring province: in this case many intervening lands separate us, and there are seas to be crossed. And this would indeed not be difficult for you, if the good of the state did not hold you back, something which good emperors have put before both parents and children. In fact, you father made you emperor, the Lord confirmed you not merely to serve your father but to have command over all.

Do not be afraid that the triumphal relics will be received with less than conspicuous honour, wherever they arrive. This is not the sentiment of Italy, which has witnessed his spectacular triumphs; and which, set free from tyrants once more, acclaims the author of her freedom. This is not the sentiment of Constantinople, which has sent her prince to victory for a second time; though she wished to keep him, she could not. Indeed, she was anticipating triumphal celebrations and the emblems of victory on his return; she was anticipating the emperor of the entire world, surrounded by the army of Gaul, and supported by the might of the entire world. Yet now Theodosius is returning there more powerful, more glorious: a company of angels escorts him, a throng of saints accompanies him. Constantinople, you are surely blessed, you who are receiving a citizen of paradise, and will possess in the august lodging of his buried body an inhabitant of the kingdom of heaven.