

# Saint Ambrose, the Father of Western Hymnody

Vincent A. Lenti

**S**aint Ambrose (339-397) was the first person to successfully introduce to the Western Church the practice of singing metrical hymns. His story is all the more interesting because he was one of the great leaders in church history and a writer of hymns, some of which remain in use today, 1600 years after his death.

## Early Life and Education

Ambrose was born in the early months of the year 339.<sup>1</sup> Although history has not preserved his mother's name, we know that his father was Augustus Ambrosius, a man from a distinguished Roman family who held the important position of Praetorian Prefect of the Gauls. He was responsible for administering a region which consisted of the ancient equivalent of France, Spain, Portugal, part of Germany, and Britain, as well as the islands of Sardinia, Corsica, and Sicily. Augustus and his family lived in the ancient city of Augusta Treverorum (now the German city of Trier on the Moselle River near Luxembourg). That city is remembered in Christian history as the location of the first episcopal see in northern Europe.

Ambrose had two older siblings, a sister named Marcellina and a brother named Uranius Satyrus. When the children were still very young, their father died, and the family moved back to Rome, where Ambrose received his education.

The education of a young Roman consisted of three levels. Ambrose would have begun at an elementary school where he learned the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Then he would have been sent to the Grammaticus to study classical Latin and Greek literature. Finally, at age 15, Ambrose would have attended the School of the Rhetor to study the theory of oratory and oratorical composition. As a young man from a distinguished family, he probably was given additional studies in philosophy, natural science, and jurisprudence.

Though Ambrose's education took place after official persecution of Christians had ceased, education in Rome was still mainly in the hands of non-Christians. To learn the fundamentals of the Christian faith, Ambrose studied with a presbyter named Simplician.<sup>2</sup> Since he was apparently destined for a civic rather than a religious career, Ambrose's religious education may not have been overly thorough.

## A Civic Career

When Ambrose and his family lived in Rome, the city had a population of about 2 million people, but it had ceased to be the capital of the Roman Empire, having been superseded by Constantinople in the east, Milan and Trier in the west. Therefore, bright, educated young men often sought opportunities outside of the ancient capital itself.

Sometime around 365, when Ambrose was in his mid-20s, he and his brother went to serve as advocates at the Court of the Italian Praefecture in Sirmium, an important ancient town near the modern Serbian city of Sremska Mitrovica. Three years later Ambrose was promoted to being a member of the Praefect's Judicial Committee, a clear indication that he was destined for a successful civic career. It is not surprising that he next was nominated to be the Consular (i.e., Governor) of the Province of Aemilia-Liguria in northern Italy. This occurred about 370.

Ambrose was now a man of recognized importance, a member of the Roman Senate and the official Roman aristocracy. His new responsibilities took him to Milan, then the principal seat of western imperial government. Church leadership in this important city was in the hands of an Arian bishop named Auxentius, who had originated from the area of Cappadocia in Asia Minor.

To understand the significance of Auxentius, we must recall that Arianism was an important heresy in the early church. Arianism was named for Arius (256-325), a priest of Alexandria, who taught that Christ was not the equal of the Father nor was he True God. The spread of Arianism was vigorously fought by St. Athanasius (296-373), the bishop of Alexandria in whose name we have received the Athanasian Creed. The heresy of Arianism was officially condemned by the Council of Nicea in 325.

The fact that Arianism had wide influence is illustrated by the presence of an Arian bishop in Milan when Ambrose arrived there. Fortunately, Bishop Auxentius was known for his moderation and conciliation; moreover, Arianism was gradually losing ground throughout Christendom.

## The Call to the Episcopacy

In October 373, Bishop Auxentius died, and there was a meeting in the cathedral to discuss who might be chosen as successor. During the meeting a child supposedly called out "Ambrose Bishop!" and the entire congregation began to shout for the selection of Ambrose as their new bishop.

Ambrose apparently was horrified at the prospect of being selected as bishop. To discourage interest in his selection, he returned to his home and tortured some prisoners to show his cruelty, but the people forgave him rather than condemning him. He next invited some women of questionable repute to his home, but once again the people refused to condemn him and reportedly shouted, "Your sin be on us!" Finally, Ambrose decided to

<sup>1</sup> Source material concerning the life of Ambrose is surprisingly abundant. Among primary sources are his own writings and a contemporary biography, *Vita Sancti Ambrosii*, by Paulinus who served as Ambrose's secretary for the final three years of his life. There is also ample mention of Ambrose by various Latin and Greek authors. Good biographical summaries can be found in various source books today, including Butler's *Lives of the Saints*, but any researcher will surely be indebted to D. Homes Dudden, author of *The Life and Times of St. Ambrose* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935).

Vincent A. Lenti is a member of the piano faculty at the Eastman School of Music, Rochester, New York, where he has served since 1963. He is currently serving as a member of the Editorial Advisory Board for *THE HYMN*.

flee Milan during the night, but he became lost and found himself back at the city gates. He was then seized by the people of Milan and kept under guard while a message was sent to the emperor, asking him to ratify the election of Ambrose as the new bishop of Milan.

Bowing to the will of God—or perhaps more to the will of the people—Ambrose finally agreed to become bishop with the stipulation that he be consecrated by a Catholic, not an Arian, bishop.

His consecration as bishop had to wait, however, since at the time Ambrose was not even baptized, much less a priest. It was not uncommon in the fourth century for Christians to wait until adulthood to be baptized, and Ambrose was one who apparently chose to wait. Therefore, the first step towards becoming bishop was to be officially initiated into the Catholic faith by being baptized. This was done on November 24, 373, when he was 34 years old. Following baptism Ambrose needed to be ordained to the various levels of ecclesiastical status which precede consecration as bishop; on successive days, he was ordained as doorkeeper, reader, exorcist, subdeacon, deacon, and presbyter.

Finally, on December 1, 373, Ambrose was consecrated bishop of Milan by the Catholic bishop of Aquileia; Ambrose was the 11th man elevated to this important office. His cathedral was the Basilica of Santa Tecla, a large, five-aisle building constructed in the earlier half of the fourth century.<sup>3</sup> In the months and years that followed, Ambrose vigorously pursued the responsibilities of his office: administering baptism, dispensing penitential discipline to confessed sinners, superintending the charities of the church, judging civil causes brought to his attention, supervising his clergy, and presiding at liturgical functions in his cathedral.

## Widening Influence and Leadership

In addition to fulfilling episcopal responsibilities, Ambrose exercised far-reaching influence and leadership. First, he played an important part in preventing the resurgence of paganism. In 384, it appeared that many former privileges of the pagan religion were to be restored in Rome, a situation which even the Pope seemed incapable of opposing. The situation was saved only through the intervention of Ambrose, who sent Emperor Valentinian II a strongly worded letter including the following:

You, Sir, may come to the church, but either you will find no priest there, or you will find one who will resist you. What answer will you give to the priest when he says to you, "The Church seeks not your offerings, because you have adorned with offerings the temples of the heathen. The altar of Christ rejects your gifts, because you have made an altar to idols—made it by your word, your hand, your signature, your act. The Lord Jesus refuses and rejects your service because you have served idols; for he has

said to you 'Ye cannot serve two masters.' What will you answer to these words?"<sup>4</sup>

Ambrose's position was such that even the emperor could not withstand his opposition. Valentinian refused to restore pagan religious privileges, and the crisis passed. In reacting so firmly, Ambrose was motivated largely because he believed that the heathen gods were real demonic existences rather than benign creations of people's imagination. In his mind, opposing the pagan religion meant opposing the Devil himself.

Ambrose also vigorously opposed Arianism. Although this heresy was a diminishing force in western Europe, it remained strong in the Danube basin, including in Sirmium, where Ambrose himself had lived and worked at the beginning of his career. Largely through Ambrose's intervention and forceful opposition, Arianism was defeated in this part of Europe.

The most serious Arian challenge arose in his own city of Milan in 385 and led to Ambrose's second confrontation with imperial authority. The Dowager Empress Justina, herself an Arian, came to live in Milan with her young son, Emperor Valentinian II. Seeking to restore the privileges of the Arians in Milan, she requested that one of the city churches be turned over to Arian clergy. Ambrose refused, replying that "a bishop cannot give up the temple of God."<sup>5</sup> Despite continuing pressure on him, Ambrose refused to give in, and Empress Justina was forced to capitulate.

The following year, she renewed her efforts to re-establish Arianism in Milan through an imperial edict granting "toleration" to all Christians who wished to worship in the city and threatening severe punishment for anyone who resisted. It was apparent to everyone that the law was directed against Ambrose. During the ensuing crisis, attempts were made to force him into exile. To avoid arrest, Ambrose and his followers continuously remained in the cathedral, besieged by imperial troops. His steadfast defense of orthodoxy, combined with the overwhelming support of the people, once again triumphed over imperial authority, and the Catholics in Milan and their bishop were left in peace. More important, the advance of Arianism was thwarted once again.

Ambrose's actions may strike us today as intolerant and unreasonably harsh. However, Christianity was still in its infancy and surrounded by a wide array of competing religions. Had the basic tenets of the faith, including the divinity of Christ, not found strong defenders such as Ambrose, Christianity's development and spread would have been seriously checked. Ambrose's actions should be judged in this context.

Ambrose's quarrels with imperial authority extended beyond Emperor Valentinian II. In 390, Emperor Theodosius was partially responsible for the massacre of 7,000 people in Thessalonica. Horrified when the news reached Milan, Ambrose determined that the emperor should acknowledge

<sup>2</sup>In 397, Simplician succeeded his famous student as bishop of Milan.

<sup>3</sup>The Basilica of Santa Tecla stood slightly west of the present Cathedral of Milan. During his episcopacy, Ambrose enlarged Santa Tecla and built a separate baptistery to the rear of the basilica. The location of both cathedral and baptistery is now occupied by the large public square in front of the present cathedral. In addition to Santa Tecla, the Basilica Vetas (or Ancient Basilica) was located a short distance to the east. Its baptistery probably was the location of Ambrose's own baptism in 373.

<sup>4</sup>Ambrose. *Epistolae*. 17. pp. 12-15.

<sup>5</sup>Ambrose. *Epistolae*. 20. p. 2.

his dreadful offense and seek forgiveness and reconciliation. Ambrose took the extraordinary step of excommunicating Theodosius, who eventually did public penance and was solemnly readmitted to the Church and to full communion at Christmas the same year.

This event was a great turning point in the history of the Church because it established that no one, not even an emperor, could refuse to be held accountable before God for his actions. To his great credit, Theodosius subsequently conferred with Ambrose on many important matters of policy and spoke with great admiration of the bishop, reportedly saying, "I know of no one except Ambrose who deserves the name of bishop."<sup>6</sup>

## Ambrose and Augustine

Among witnesses to the tumultuous events in 386, when Ambrose and his followers were besieged in his cathedral by Valentinian's troops, was a man born 32 years earlier in northern Africa. His name was Aurelius Augustinus, but he is better known today as St. Augustine (Augustine of Hippo), one of the most brilliant minds in the history of the Christian Church. Augustine had come to Milan to be a professor of rhetoric. He had arrived as an unconverted soul with sympathy for Manichaeism, yet another heresy which had arisen in the third century.

For a variety of reasons, not the least of which was the influence of Ambrose, Augustine abandoned Manichaeism and embraced Catholic Christianity. His official initiation into the Church occurred at the Easter Vigil in 387, when he was baptized by Ambrose. Augustine subsequently left Milan and went to Rome before returning to northern Africa in 388. There is no evidence that he and Ambrose had any further contact, yet this brief encounter between the two greatest churchmen of the age left a profound impression on Augustine. His admiration of Ambrose is surely an accurate measure of this remarkable bishop whom he described in these words:

...the excellent steward of God whom I venerate as a father, for in Jesus Christ he begat me through the Gospel, and through his ministry I received the washing of regeneration—the blessed Ambrose, whose grace, constancy, labors, perils for the Catholic Faith, whether in words or works, I have myself experienced, and the whole Roman world unhesitatingly proclaims with me.<sup>7</sup>

That an age could claim both Ambrose and Augustine is quite remarkable. The two men's accomplishments complemented one another. To Augustine was given the greater intellect and a special insight into the depths of the Christian faith. Ambrose was perhaps the simpler man; he was what we might describe as a "doer," a man of action. His leadership was invaluable during Christianity's struggle for supremacy over heathens and heretics alike.

Ambrose died on April 4, 397, the day before

Easter, at the age of 58. He had served as bishop of Milan for slightly more than 23 years. In Milan, the Church of Sant' Ambrogio still preserves his earthly remains in a silver shrine located in the crypt below the high altar.

## The Origin of the Western Hymn

The introduction of metrical hymns occurred in 386 when Ambrose and his followers were besieged in the Cathedral of Milan. The confrontation with imperial authority was lengthy and fraught with danger, so Ambrose sought to bolster confidence through singing. In doing so, he seems to have introduced two practices new to the western Church.

First, he had various psalms sung antiphonally by dividing the singers into two groups which alternated in the singing. This ancient method of singing, a practice observed among the Jews, is said to have been introduced to Christianity by Ignatius of Antioch.<sup>8</sup> From Antioch it spread to other churches in the Eastern Roman Empire. Ambrose may have witnessed the practice, or at least become aware of it, when he was working in Sirmium.

Second, Ambrose introduced the singing of metrical hymns, another practice observed in the Eastern churches but previously unknown in the West. In fairness it should be mentioned that Hilary of Poitiers had previously attempted to introduce hymn singing, and he might be credited with being the first Latin hymnwriter.<sup>9</sup> However, Hilary was unsuccessful in teaching people to sing hymns, and the surviving fragments of Hilary's hymns suggest that they were poorly composed and not appropriate for congregational singing.

Therefore, it is not at all incorrect to credit Ambrose with being the originator of Latin hymnody. The introduction of metrical hymns and of antiphonal singing by Ambrose is documented not only by Ambrose's own writings and by his biographer Paulinus, but also by St. Augustine, who was present when the Cathedral of Milan was under siege:

The pious people kept watch in the church ready to die with their bishop. Then it was that the custom arose of singing hymns and psalms, after the use of the Eastern parts, lest the people should wax faint through the tediousness of sorrow; and from that day to this the custom has been retained, in many, nay, almost all of the Christian congregations throughout the rest of the world following therein.<sup>10</sup>

## The Hymns of St. Ambrose

We do not know specifically what hymns might have been sung during those dramatic events in 386. Perhaps Ambrose had already composed hymns, or perhaps he borrowed material from Eastern sources. At some point he turned his own talents toward writing hymns.

<sup>6</sup>Dudden, *The Life and Times of St. Ambrose*, p. 392.

<sup>7</sup>Augustine. *Contr. Julian. Pelagian*. i. 10.

<sup>8</sup>Ignatius was the third man to hold the important office of bishop of Antioch. He served in that capacity for 40 years before suffering martyrdom in the year 114.

<sup>9</sup>Hilary, a staunch defender of Catholicism against Arianism, served as bishop of Poitiers from 353 until his death in 368 or 369.

<sup>10</sup>Augustine. *Confessions*. ix. 7.

Ambrose used iambic tetrameter, sometimes referred to as "Ambrosian meter," with each stanza consisting of four eight-syllable lines. In English hymnals, this is known as "long meter." It has been said that his hymns are easily understood, remembered, and sung.<sup>11</sup> What more can be said in praise of a hymn? The popularity of Ambrose's hymns spawned many imitations which came to be generically identified as "Ambrosian hymns."

Ambrose and his anonymous imitators dominated the early years of Western hymnody and established a basic model of style and metrical form for centuries to come. The "Ambrosian hymn" is, therefore, a recognizable entity, but determining precise authorship is much more difficult.

Most authorities believe that Ambrose is the author of these four hymns:

- *Aeterne rerum conditor*
- *Deus creator omnium*
- *Jam surgit hora tertia*
- *Veni redemptor gentium*

These four display the characteristics of Ambrose's own hand; in addition, their authorship is authenticated by the testimony of St. Augustine.

Of the group, *Veni redemptor gentium* ("Savior of the nations, come") is the most frequently encountered in contemporary American hymnals.<sup>12</sup> Despite being one of only four hymns definitely attributed to Ambrose, the text has had little use in Roman Catholic liturgical books since the Middle Ages. Its popularity in modern hymnals probably owes more to its use in the Lutheran Church, for it was one of several Latin hymns that Martin Luther translated into German. His text, with the German title *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*, was sung to an adaptation of the plainsong melody used with the original Latin text. The result is a particularly fine example of an early German Reformation hymn, its reputation being further enhanced when Bach used the chorale melody in several of his compositions.

The hymn then passed from German into English, principally through a translation by William Morton Reynolds (1812-1876). His version first appeared in 1851<sup>13</sup> and is still encountered in several hymnals, although it seems to have fallen out of favor with Lutheran editors. Reynolds was an interesting churchman of the nineteenth century, serving as a Lutheran pastor in New Jersey in the 1830s before becoming president of Capital University and later of Illinois State University. He eventually sought ordination in the Episcopal Church and subsequently spent the rest of his life in the Episcopal ministry.

Ambrose's Latin text and Reynolds's translation of Luther's German version are as follows:

Veni, redemptor gentium,  
ostende partum Virginis;  
miretur omne saeculum:  
talīs decet partus Deum.

Non ex virili semine,  
sed mystico spiramine  
Verbum Dei factum est caro  
fructusque ventris floruit.

Alvus tumescit Virginis,  
claustrum pudoris permanet.  
Vexilla virtutum micant,  
versatur in templo Deus.

Procedat e thalamo suo,  
pudoris aula regia,  
geminæ gigas substantiæ  
alacris ut currat viam.

Aequalis aeterno Patri,  
carnis tropæo cingere,  
infirma nostri corporis  
virtute firmans perpeti.

Praesepe iam fulget tuum  
lumenque nox spirat novum,  
quod nulla nox interpolet  
fideque iugi luceat.

Sit, Christe, rex piissime,  
tibi Patrique gloria  
cum Spiritu Paraclito  
in sempiterna saecula.

This is an exceptionally strong Trinitarian hymn, with unmistakable teaching concerning the divinity of Christ, a clear refutation of the Arian heresy. It is interesting to note that Reynolds has rendered line 5 as "Not by mortal blood or birth." Nineteenth-century Protestant congregations might have been scandalized by a more literal translation of Ambrose's original text.

Nineteenth-century British translators, fascinated with the ancient Latin hymns, also produced versions of *Veni redemptor gentium*. Among several such translations from the Latin is one by that preeminent translator John Mason Neale (1818-1866). His version, entitled "Come, thou redeemer of the earth," was published in 1852 in the first part of the *Hymnal Noted*, a collection which, when completed, contained 94 contributions by Neale in a total of 105 hymns.

### Other Hymns Attributed to Saint Ambrose

In addition to the four hymns which can be definitely attributed to Ambrose, he may be the author of about 14 others. Despite an absence of conclusive evidence, it is not unusual to find Ambrose listed in hymnals as the author of these hymns. One of them, *Splendor paternae gloriae* ("O splendor of the Father's Light"), is frequently encountered in modern hymnals.<sup>14</sup> There is a fairly strong argument in favor of attributing this hymn to Ambrose, since Fulgentius, bishop of Ruspe in North Africa in

Come, Thou Saviour of our race,  
Choicest Gift of heavenly grace!  
O Thou blessed Virgin's Son,  
Be Thy race on earth begun.

Not of mortal blood or birth,  
He descends from heaven to earth:  
By the Holy Ghost conceived,  
Truly man to be believed.

Wondrous birth! O wondrous Child  
Of the Virgin undefiled!  
Though by all the world disowned,  
Still to be in heaven enthroned.

From the Father forth He came  
And returneth to the same:  
Captive leading death and hell,  
High the song of triumph swell!

Equal to the Father now,  
Thou to dust Thou once didst bow;  
Boundless shall Thy kingdom be;  
When shall we its glories see?

Brightly doth Thy manger shine,  
Glorious is its light divine.  
Let not sin o'ercloud this light;  
Ever be our faith thus bright.

Praise to God the Father sing.  
Praise to God the Son, our King,  
Praise to God the Spirit be  
Ever and eternally.

<sup>11</sup> Canon Mulchay, *Hymns of the Roman Breviary and Missal* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1938).

<sup>12</sup> The hymn is #28 in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978), #13 in *Lutheran Worship* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), #54 in *The Hymnal 1982* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1985), #14 in *The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), #372 in *Worship* (Chicago: G.I.A. Publications, 1986), and #184 in *The Collegeville Hymnal* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> William Morton Reynolds, "Come thou saviour of our race," published in *Hymns, Original and Selected, for Public and Private Worship, in the Evangelical Church* (n.p.: General Synod of the Lutheran Church, 1852).

the mid-sixth century, identified it as his. Although his testimony occurred more than a century after Ambrose's death, Fulgentius provides an early identification of the text. Later writers, including Bede in the eighth century and Hincmar in the ninth, also attributed the hymn to Ambrose.

Since the early years of the nineteenth century, *Splendor paternae gloriae* has been rendered into English by dozens of translators. Perhaps the most successful was Robert Seymour Bridges (1844-1930), whose excellent version ("O splendor of God's glory bright") first appeared in the *Yattendon Hymnal* (1899) and was still found in *The Hymnal 1982*. The opening two stanzas convey the qualities which have made this hymn so endearing to Christians over the centuries. Here is the Bridges' translation (left column) and the translation in the 1904 edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (right column):

O splendor of God's glory bright,  
O thou that bringest light from light,  
O Light of Light, light's living spring,  
O Day, all days illumining.

O thou true Son of heavenly love,  
pour down radiance from above:  
the Spirit's sanctifying beam  
upon our earthly senses stream.

O splendor of God's glory bright,  
Who bringest forth the light from Light;  
O Light, of light the fountain-spring;  
O Day, our days illumining.

Come, very Sun of truth and love,  
Come, in thy radiance from above,  
And shed the Holy Spirit's ray  
On all we think or do today.

We find an interesting difference in these two translations of the Latin "sol" which Ambrose used in line 5. The word means "sun," and Ambrose used it as an obvious representation of the Son of God. The editors of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* allowed Ambrose's symbolic use of "sol" to remain by translating it literally as "Sun," while Bridges eliminated the metaphor by using "Son." While the meaning is clearer in his version, something of the poetry and imagery of the stanza gets lost in the process.

Another hymn associated with Ambrose which appears in modern hymnals is *O lux beata, Trinitas* ("O Trinity, O blessed light"); however, assigning a definite authorship to this hymn is difficult. It was ascribed to Ambrose by Hincmar in the mid-ninth century and has long been accepted as Ambrosian by the Catholic Church, but there is no evidence earlier than Hincmar. It may be significant that *O lux beata, Trinitas* did not find a role in the liturgical traditions in Milan. It would seem that the hymn should have had a role, had it been written by Ambrose. All of this is conjecture, however. Some hymnals indicate Ambrose as the author, but others do not.<sup>15</sup> *O lux beata, Trinitas* shows the characteristic meter of an Ambrosian hymn, as well as having a typically Ambrosian focus on the Trinity. The hymn is relatively short, consisting of only three stanzas, the last of which is a doxology.

Like many early Latin hymns, *O lux beata, Trinitas* was edited and severely rewritten by the Catholic Church in the early seventeenth century. This revision of centuries-old texts was motivated by an ill-conceived desire to update and modernize the language of these hymns.<sup>16</sup> Over 100 classic hymns were thus despoiled, and of this total, *O lux*

*beata, Trinitas* was one of more than 30 whose opening line was altered. In its so-called revised form, the hymn came to be known by a new title, *Jam sol recedit igneus*.

In addition to the two Latin versions, Martin Luther produced a German version in 1543 bearing the title *Der du bist drei in Einigkeit*. All three of these versions—two Latin and one German—have been used to produce English versions. Because these English translations come from widely varying sources, we encounter a bewildering array of different titles. Translations from the original Latin customarily are entitled something like "O blessed light, O Trinity" or "O Trinity, most blessed light," while translations from the revised Latin text bear titles like "Now sinks in night the flaming sun" or "Now doth the fiery sun decline." Luther's version has been translated as "Thou who art three in unity, True God." These differing titles hardly suggest that these hymns have a common ancestry. This situation illustrates the incredible adaptability of hymn texts to suit different times and different situations.

## Conclusion

Saint Ambrose is justifiably regarded as one of the great men in the early history of the Church. He is remembered for inspired leadership when the Church was threatened by imperial authority, paganism, and heresy. However, he should be particularly remembered for the gift of hymn singing which he introduced to the people of Milan, and ultimately to the entire Western Church. St. Augustine, in recalling those momentous events of the year 386, wrote as follows:

How I wept at thy hymns and canticles,  
touched to the quick by the voices of thy melodious Church. The voices flowed into my ears, and the truth distilled into my heart, and then there streamed forth a devout emotion, and my tears ran down, and I found relief therein.<sup>17</sup>

It is unfortunate that we cannot identify with greater certainty the hymns written by Ambrose. Yet his importance and enormous influence during the earliest years of Western hymnody is demonstrated by the innumerable imitations his own hymns inspired. If Ambrose was not the author of all "Ambrosian" hymns, he was most definitely the inspiration for them. His position might be likened to that of Martin Luther, from whom he is separated by more than 11 centuries of church history. Both men saw the potential for hymns to inspire and uplift the people of God, particularly in times of trouble. Both created hymns of enduring value; both provided the example and inspiration for others to turn their talents and energies toward hymn writing. Therefore, the special legacy of Ambrose—the man who stood firm against emperors, pagans, and heretics alike—was the introduction of the metrical hymn to the western Church, something which Christians of all denominations continue to share in their worship. ■

<sup>14</sup> See #271 in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, #481 in *Lutheran Worship*, #5 in *The Hymnal 1982*, #679 in *The Methodist Hymnal*, or #474 in *The Presbyterian Hymnal*. Among Roman Catholic publications, this hymn is not included in either *Worship* or *The Collegeville Hymnal*. Ambrose is cited as an author only once in *Worship* and twice in *The Collegeville Hymnal*. For a more generous sampling of hymns attributed to Ambrose, see *The Hymnal for the Hours* (Chicago: G.I.A. Publications, 1989).

<sup>15</sup> See #275 in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* or #487 in *Lutheran Worship*; by contrast, see #29 in *The Hymnal 1982*.

<sup>16</sup> Vincent Lenti, "Urban VIII and the Revision of the Latin Hymnal," *Sacred Music* 120:3 (Fall 1993), pp. 30-33.

<sup>17</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, ix. 6 and 7.