6

Training the Senses

Ambrose of Milan and Visual Knowing

By the time Ambrose became bishop of Milan in the early 370s, Christianity looked much different than it had the previous century. The fiery debates over the doctrine of God in the wake of Nicaea and an influx of elites joining the Christian ranks did much to alter the conditions of Christian life in the fourth century.[1] And yet, as discussed in the Introduction, we should not presume that these changes led to a dramatically transformed catechetical practice. I am less confident that we can describe Ambrose's approach to catechesis, as Everett Ferguson has put it, as "training to live in a state church."[2] In the remaining chapters, the

[1] For overviews of the Nicene debates, see esp. R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, repr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), and, for Ambrose especially, Daniel H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Arian-Nicene Conflicts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). For good accounts of the changing landscape of Christian leadership, see Michele Renee Salzman, "The Evidence for the Conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity in Book 16 of the *Theodosian Code*," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 42, no. 3 (1993): 362–78; Neil B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Rita Lizzi Testa, "The Bishop as *Vir Venerabilis:* Fiscal Privileges and Status Definition in Late Antiquity," *SP* 34 (2001): 125–44; Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

[2] Everett Ferguson, "Catechesis and Initiation," in *The Early Church at Work and Worship*, vol. 2: *Catechesis, Baptism, Eschatology, and Martyrdom* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 34. For a good account of Ambrose's understanding of the role of teaching for the bishop, see Carmen Angela Cvetković, "*Si docendus est episcopus a laico, quid sequester?* Ambrose of Milan and the Episcopal Duty of Teaching," in *Teachers in Late Antique Christianity*, ed. Peter Gemeinhardt, Olga Lorgeoux, and Maria Munkholt Christensen (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 92–110.

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analysis of catechesis in post-Constantinian Christianity will highlight the lines of continuity more than discontinuity, even as I want to grant sufficient space for these figures to speak in their distinctive idioms. In this chapter and the next, we will look at the catechetical writings of Ambrose and other leading lights of Northern Italy. In the two subsequent chapters, we will turn to Augustine and others in North Africa. Though other texts and authors would no doubt enrich our study, these figures offer a rich supply of evidence for understanding catechesis as a knowledge-shaping practice in the post-Constantinian era.[3] Appreciating the distinctive contexts and discourses of each figure, we will see how these figures approached theological epistemology in catechesis in ways much indebted to the traditions that emerged in the pre-Nicene period.

Ambrose is central to this story. His mystagogical treatises, *De sacramentis* and *De mysteriis*, and his exposition of the creed, the *Explanatio symboli* – even despite the challenges these texts present in terms of authorship and textual history – have been central texts in many studies of patristic catechesis.[4] In addition, several of Ambrose's sermons on the

[3] For example, Hilary of Poitiers's *De mysteriis*, Pacian of Barcelona's *De baptismo*, and Nicetas of Remesiana's six books on catechetical instruction. We also have sermons from Maximus of Turin and Chromatius of Aquileia that possibly originated in a baptismal setting, as well as several anonymous credal expositions, such as the Ps.-Ambrosian *Exhortatio de symbolo ad neohytos* (CPL 178), the Ps.-Athanasian *Enarratio in symboloum apostolorum* (CPL 1744a), and the anonymous *Expositio symboli* (CPL 1751), which have been identified with fifth-century Northern Italy. For these texts, see Liuwe H. Westra, *The Apostles' Creed: Origin, History, and Some Early Commentaries* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002). I have written on Hilary of Poitier's *De mysteriis* as a possible catechetical text in Alex Fogleman, "Peccatrix Ecclesia: Hilary of Poitier's *De Mysteriis* as Biblical Ecclesiology," *JECS* 28, no. 1 (2020): 33–59.

[4] See, for example, Bonaventura Parodi, *La catechesi di sant'Ambrogio: Studio di pedagogia pastorale* (Geneva: Scuola Tipografia Opera SS. Vergine di Pompei, 1957); L. L. Mitchell, "Ambrosian Baptismal Rites," *Studia Liturgica* 1 (1962): 251–53; Edward Yarnold, "The Ceremonies of Initiation in the *De Sacramentis* and *De mysteriis* of St. Ambrose," *SP* 10 (1970): 453–63; Hugh R. Riley, *Christian Initiation: A Comparative Study of the Interpretation of the Baptismal Liturgy in the Mystagogical Writings of Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Ambrose of Milan* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1974); Josef Schmitz, *Gottesdienst im altchristlichen Mailand: eine liturgiewissenschaftliche Untersuchung über Initiation und Messfeier während des Jahres zur Zeit des Bischofs Ambrosius (d. 397)* (Köln-Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1975); Thomas M. Finn, *From Death to Life: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 212–38; Pamela Jackson, "Ambrose of Milan as Mystagogue," *AugStud* 20 (1989): 93–107; Cesare Alzati, *Ambrosianum Mytserium: The Church of Milan and its Liturgical Tradition*, trans. George C. R. Guiver (Nottingham: Grove, 1999); Craig Alan Satterlee, *Ambrose of Milan's Method of Mystagogical Preaching* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002);

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patriarchs have been associated with Lenten catechesis, even if in their extant form they show evidence of revision for a broader audience.[5] While we could look at many aspects of his catechesis, I focus mainly on how he approaches instruction in terms of training the spiritual senses – especially vision. Ambrose teaches catechumens what Peter Cramer has called "seeing-in-faith" or what Brian Dunkle has described as a "resensitization" of the spiritual senses.[6] More precisely, as Dunkle puts it, Ambrose taught catechumens a pro-Nicene understanding of God that would enable them to "perceive the world as somehow elevated by the grace that flows from Christ."[7] This practice entailed, on the one hand, a calculated distrust of physical perception while, on the other hand, an accent on the new possibilities entailed in spiritual perception. Ambrose maintained that the spiritual power conveyed in baptism

Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 169–75. After some debate about the authorship of the *De sacramentis* in particular, the general inclination tends toward authenticity. See Satterlee, *Ambrose of Milan's Mystagogical Method*, 20–9; Christine Mohrmann, "Observations sur le 'De Sacramentis' et le 'De Mysteriis' de saint Ambroise," in vol. 1 of *Ambrosius Episcopus: atti del Congresso internazionale di studi ambrosiani nel XVI centenario della elevazione di Sant'Ambrogio alla cattedra episcopale, Milano, 2–7 dicembre 1974*, ed. G. Lazzati (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 1976), 103–23.

[5] This thesis owes in large part to the proposal of Karl Schenkl in his critical edition of the patriarch homilies. Schenkl argues that, while the sermons are difficult to date, they do in fact form a corpus and were intended to be read in sequential order; they were also transmitted together as such in the earliest manuscript evidence. See CSEL 32/1:ii–v. For studies that treat the patriarch homilies as having emerged in Lenten catechesis, see Marcia L. Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs: Ethics for the Common Man* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005); J. Warren Smith, *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtue: The Theological Foundations of Ambrose's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); William McDonald, "Paideia and Gnosis: Foundations of the Catechumenate in Five Church Fathers" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1998); Brian Dunkle, *Enchantment and Creed in the Hymns of Ambrose of Milan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); David Vopřada, *La mistagogia del commento al Salmo 118 di Sant'Ambrogio* (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2016); Gerald Boersma, "Ambrose's *De Isaac* as a Baptismal Anthropology," *Pro Ecclesia* 26, no. 3 (2017): 311–32.

[6] Peter Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 64–65; Dunkle, *Enchantment and Creed*, 74–84. While Cramer only considers the mystagogical homilies, part of my argument is that Lenten and Holy Week sermons are also key to the acquisition of spiritual sight. On the spiritual senses in Ambrose, see Georgia Frank, "Taste and See: The Eucharist and the Eyes of Faith in the Fourth Century," *Church History* 70 no. 4 (2001): 619–43. More broadly, see Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley, eds., *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[7] Dunkle, *Enchantment and Creed*, 2.

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capacitated catechumens to know God, and he taught catechumens both about this transformation itself as well as how they could experience it.

We can observe Ambrose teaching this kind of spiritual vision across his Lenten and Easter catechetical writings. It has become commonplace to subdivide the stages of Ambrose's catechumenate in terms of morality (Lent), creed (Holy Week), and mystagogy (Easter Octave), but I will highlight the ways that instructing spiritual vision occurs across the Lenten and Easter series. In the Lenten homilies, first, Ambrose teaches catechumens to make the eschatological vision of God their main goal and to see the "death" of baptism as an epistemological good. During Holy Week, in his exposition of the baptismal creed and his homilies on the *Hexameron*, Ambrose develops a more nuanced approach to training the spiritual senses, drawing on pro-Nicene categories to articulate how God is known in the created world. Finally, in *De mysteriis* and *De sacramentis*, Ambrose develops this understanding of spiritual vision even further, training catechumens to perceive the invisible spiritual realities present in the physical signs and actions of the initiation rituals.

BEGINNING WITH THE END: THE ESCHATOLOGY OF BAPTISM AND THE INITIAL TRAINING OF VISION

Several of Ambrose's extant sermons on the patriarchs seem to have begun as Lenten sermons with a catechetical audience in mind. The traces of this provenance are not always evident, because they were likely revised for publication for a broader audience. But several clues point to a baptismal orientation, chief among them being the description provided at the beginning of *De mysteriis*:

> We have given a daily sermon on morals, when the deeds of the Patriarchs or the precepts of the Proverbs were read, in order that, being informed and instructed by them, you might become accustomed to enter upon the ways of our forefathers and to pursue their road, and to obey the divine commands, whereby renewed by baptism you might hold to that manner of life which befits those who are washed.[8]

[8] Ambrose, *mys.* 1.1 (CSEL 73:89; FC 44:5): De moralibus cottidianum sermonem habuimus, cum uel patriarcharum gesta uel prouerbiorum legerentur praecepta, ut his informati atque instituti adsuesceretis maiorum ingredi uias eorum que iter carpere ac diuinis oboedire oraculis, quo renouati per baptismum eius uitae usum teneretis, quae ablutos deceret.

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Other clues also point to baptismal settings. *De Abraham* refers at several points to those "proceeding to the fount."[9] *De Isaac uel anima* shows a preponderance for aquatic and fontal imagery.[10] It has been proposed, even, that *De Abraham*, *De Isaac uel anima*, *De Iacob et uita beata*, and *De Ioseph* constituted a Lenten catechetical series, with each sermon offering a distinctive contribution to an overarching pattern of growth – Abraham demonstrating faithfulness, Isaac purity, Jacob constancy, Joseph chastity, and so forth.[11]

The patriarch sermons reveal much about Ambrose's pedagogy. Of special note is the way he highlights the patriarchs as moral exemplars and figures of Christ from whom catechumens can learn to imitate virtue. Marcia Colish has seen Ambrose's preaching on the patriarchs as a form of Christian *paideia*.[12] Instead of the classical paragons drawn from Virgil and Homer, however, Ambrose has substituted the patriarchs to offer an imitation-based pedagogy for living the Christian life. Warren Smith and Gerald Boersma, meanwhile, have looked to the baptismal setting of these texts to articulate aspects, respectively, of Ambrose's approach to virtue

[9] References to baptism or to those approaching baptism appear throughout these texts. In *De Abraham*, for example, Ambrose addresses "those who have given their names at the grace of baptism" (*Abr.* 1.4.23 [CSEL 32/1:518]) and the "daughters who seek the Lord's grace" (*Abr.* 1.9.89 [CSEL 32/1:560]). He also notes that Sarah's chastity "instructs those who strive for the grace of baptism [to] learn as catechumens the sober discipline of continence" (*discite enim qui ad gratiam baptismatis tenditis uelut quidam fidei candidati continentiae disciplinam sobriam*). Ambrose, *Abr.* 1.7.59 (CSEL 32/1:540).

[10] In *De Isaac*, the image of Rebekah coming to the "well" forms a central theme of the treatise. Gerald Boersma draws support for a baptismal setting by noting that "forms of the word *mysterium* occur thirteen times, forms of *aqua* occur fourteen times, and forms of the word *fons* appear twenty-two times." Boersma, "*De Isaac* as Baptismal Anthropology," 314 n17.

[11] Again, this idea originates with Schenkl (CSEL 32/1:ii) and is developed by Colish (*Ambrose's Patriarchs*). For a succinct statement, see Ambrose's comment at *Ios.* 1.1 (CSEL 32/2:73): In quo [i.e., Joseph] cum plurima fuerint genera uirtutum, tum praecipue insigne effulsit castimoniae. Iustum est igitur ut, cum in Abraham didiceritis inpigram fidei deuotionem, in Isaac sincerae mentis puritatem, in Iacob singularem animi laborum que patientiam, ex illa generalitate uirtutum in ipsas species disciplinarum intendatis animum. nam licet illa diffusiora, tamen ista expressiora sunt eo que facilius mentem penetrant quo magis circumscripta ac determinata sunt.

[12] For Ambrose's catechesis as Christian *paideia*, see esp. Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs*, 27–29. On Ambrose's use of *exempla*, see Goulven Madec, *Saint Ambroise et la philosophie* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1974), 179–86. Cf., however, Warren Smith's recent argument that Ambrose's exemplarist pedagogy was also motivated by intra-Christian dynamics about the enduring role of the Old Testament. J. Warren Smith, *Ambrose, Augustine, and the Pursuit of Greatness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 109.

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and anthropology.[13] While these scholars rightly elucidate the multi-faceted approach of Ambrose's pedagogy, I think we can also glean much from observing his approach to teaching spiritual vision. This is evident already in the way Ambrose teaches the patriarchs as allegorical figures of Christ.[14] But also in these sermons, he teaches catechumens a certain distrust of physical perception and to approach Christian baptism in eschatological terms as a kind of death. By stressing the eschatological framework in *pre*-baptismal teaching, however, Ambrose demonstrates a way of understanding *post*-baptismal life as participating already in heavenly knowledge. In this, the Lenten catechesis plays a key role in Ambrose's pedagogy of spiritual vision. They teach catechumens first to distrust a purely materialist vision of creation, which then prepares them to cultivate a desire for seeing and knowing a truly transcendent God.

We can note these themes especially well in the paired set of sermons, *De Isaac uel anima* and *De bono mortis*.[15] If Ambrose arranged these homilies in the order of their subjects' appearance in Genesis, which seems likely, then these two works would have occurred toward the beginning of the *competentes*' education, after the sermons on Abraham.[16] Both works treat anthropological questions about the nature of the human

[13] Smith, *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtue*; Boersma, "*De Isaac* as Baptismal Anthropology."

[14] On Isaac as a figure of Christ, see *Is.* 4.22 (CSEL 32/1:657): in figura per Isaac, in ueritate per Christum.

[15] At the beginning of *De bono*, Ambrose mentions a previous sermon "de anima," which many take to be *De Isaac uel anima*. On dating, Courcelle thought this pair was given in 387, with Augustine perhaps even present. Pierre Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de Saint Augustin* (Paris: de Boccard, 1968) 124. Allan Fitzgerald places them much later, in Lent 396, a year after *Ps. 118*. Fitzgerald, "Ambrose at the Well: *De Isaac uel anima*," *Revue d'études augustiniennes et patristiques* 48 (2002): 79–99. As for audience, Fitzgerald suggests a mixed group, though several references to "the weak" (4.33; 6.57; 8.69) might suggest catechumens or new Christians ("Ambrose at the Well," 80–81). Boersma makes a stronger case for a catechetical setting ("*De Isaac* as Baptismal Anthropology"). On the difficult structure of *De Isaac*, see Gérard Nauroy, "La structure du *De Isaac vel Anima* et la cohérence de l'allégorèse d'Ambroise de Milan," *Revue des études latines* 63 (1985): 210–36; Mechthild Sanders, *Fons Vitae Christus: Der Heilsweg des Menschen nach der Schrift 'De Isaac et anima' des Ambrosius von Mailand* (Altenberg: Oros Verlag, 1996). On *De bono*, dating and audience are much harder to adduce if taken in isolation. William Wiesner proposes 387–89, based on proximity to *hex.*, *Luc.* and *Ps. 118*. Wiesner, *S. Ambrosii de Bono Mortis: A Revised Text with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1970), 10–15.

[16] Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs*, 14, following Schenkl, CSEL 32/1:iii–v. Not all take these works to be *pre*-baptismal. For the view that they were post-baptismal catechetical works, see Sanders, *Fons vitae*, 15.

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person – whether it is to be identified with the soul only or a combination of soul and body. These anthropological questions, however, are situated in a broader discourse about the telos that orients human life in the present age: "Consider then, O man, who you are and to what end you maintain your life and well-being."[17] For Ambrose, Lenten catechesis was a time for teaching not only moral virtue and human nature but also eschatology and the nature of spiritual reality. Even at this stage, catechumens were learning how the Christian God was to be known in the material conditions of the world.

In *De Isaac*, Ambrose deploys a mix of Plotinian and Pauline motifs to describe baptism as the soul's ascent to God, but in a way that entails not the denigration of the body but the realignment of soul and body within the church. Ambrose concludes with an exhortation to "flee to our truest fatherland," which turns out to be the heavenly Jerusalem.[18] In Ambrose's telling, the heavenly Jerusalem is a communal and ecclesial image of the saints dwelling together in the presence of God.[19] While this rhetoric may have the appearance of promoting the absolute rejection of the world, it is important to keep in mind its appearance in a pre-baptismal setting. In this context, the eschatological image encourages hearers to see that beatitude begins not with physical death but with the spiritual death of baptism. The Lenten catechumenate is, for Ambrose, a period of learning to "flee to the fatherland" of the church, which is itself the earthly inauguration of the heavenly kingdom. Learning to see God in the world begins with a strong admonition to desire a city that transcends the physical senses.

The eschatological orientation of baptism appears again in *De bono mortis*. This text contains many charactersitics of consolation literature common in antiquity, but it deploys them for distinctly catechetical purposes.[20] After discussing the nature of the soul in *De Isaac*, Ambrose

[17] Ambrose, *Is.* 2.3 (CSEL 32/1:643; FC 65:12): Intuere igitur, o homo, qui sis, quo salutem tuam uitam que tuearis.

[18] Ambrose, *Is.* 8.78 (CSEL 32/1:698; FC 65:63): Fugiamus ergo in patriam uerissimam. Illic patria nobis et illic pater, a quo creati sumus, ubi est Hierusalem ciuitas, quae est mater omnium.

[19] On the social and corporate dimension of life that distinguishes the Plotinian and Ambrosian *patria*, see Boersma "*De Isaac* as Baptismal Anthropology," 330.

[20] On the sources of Ambrose's consolation literature, Wiesner cites Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* 1 and 3, as well as earlier Latin sources like Cyprian's *De mortalitate*, though the theme is widespread, especially in Stoic writers. Wiesner, *De Bono Mortis*, 23–30. Ambrose's earlier funeral oration for his brother Satyrus, *De excessu fratris Satyri*, also drew on this genre. See Charles Favez, "L'Inspiration chétienne dans les

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now addresses the question of whether death is to be feared or embraced.[21] Distinguishing three kinds of death – the death induced by sin, which is bad; the death to sin, which is good; and the death that is the final separation of body and soul, which occupies a middle position (*tertia mors media sit*) – Ambrose explains that death is only to be feared by those who do not live virtuously.[22] But for those who die to sin and take up the life of virtue, Ambrose can say, "In every respect, therefore, death is a good."[23] Death separates the body from its conflict with the soul; it offers refuge amid the turbulent seas of this life; and it preserves the virtuous soul from future judgment.[24] A key scriptural text throughout is Philippians 1:23–24: "I desire to be dissolved and be with Christ, for it is a much better thing; but to remain in the flesh for your sake is the more urgent need." The former is better because it is attended by "grace and union with Christ" (*gratiam et copulum Christi*); the latter is necessary on account of the "fruits of the work" (*fructus operis*).[25]

Ambrose then proceeds to show catechumens how the death of baptism shapes life in the age after baptism. Ambrose writes:

> He [the apostle Paul] teaches also that this death must be longed for by those placed in this life so that the death of Christ might shine forth (*eluceat*) in our bodies; and that blessedness must be longed for, whereby the outer man is destroyed, so that the inner person may be renewed and our earthly home (*domus*) may be dissolved to unlock a heavenly habitation (*habitaculum*).[26]

Ambrose here is not simply proposing a flight from earthly life through longing for a literal death; instead, he is outlining a vision of earthly life conformed to and so radiating Christ's passion and resurrection. The Christian life is one in which Christ's death shines forth in the

consolation de saint Ambroise," *Revue des études latines* 8 (1930): 82–91, and, more broadly, Han Baltussen, ed., *Greek and Roman Consolations: Eight Studies of a Tradition and its Afterlife* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2013).

[21] Ambrose, *bon.* 2.3 (CSEL 32/1:704; Wiesner, *De Bono Mortis*, 88–89).

[22] Ambrose, *bon.* 2.3 (CSEL 32/1:704; Wiesner, *De Bono Mortis*, 88–89). See Origen, *Heracl.* 25 for a similar threefold parsing of death. Wiesner also notes the Stoic resonances of good, bad, and *adiaphora* (*De Bono Mortis*, 165).

[23] Ambrose, *bon.* 4.15 (CSEL 32/1:716; Wiesner, *De Bono Mortis*, 102–3).

[24] Ambrose, *bon.* 4.15 (CSEL 32/1:716; Wiesner, *De Bono Mortis*, 102–3).

[25] Ambrose, *bon.* 2.7 (CSEL 32/1:708; Wiesner, *De Bono Mortis*, 92–93).

[26] Ambrose, *bon.* 3.9 (CSEL 32/1:710; Wiesner, *De Bono Mortis*, 96–97): Itaque docet et istam mortem in hac uita positis expetendam, ut mors Christi in corpore nostro eluceat, et illam beatam, qua conrumpitur exterior ut renouetur interior homo noster et terrestris domus nostra dissoluatur, ut habitaculum nobis caeleste reseretur.

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Christian's body, transforming the person into a divine dwelling place. The goodness of death, when approached through the lens of baptism, means that the Christian can live in the present in a way that conforms to the heavenly pattern of the crucified and resurrected Christ.

Understanding the eschatological focus of Ambrose's writing in a catechetical setting – encouraging catechumens to perceive baptism as a death that facilitates true knowledge – tempers the view that Ambrose was an unreconstructed Platonist who flatly condemned earthly life.[27] Rather, when seen against the backdrop of baptismal catechesis, it becomes clear how Ambrose deployed themes of world-rejection to teach catechumens how baptism facilitated a renewed vision of God. By instructing catechumens to confront death as the final conflict between the soul and its vices, Ambrose conceives of post-baptismal life as a proleptic state of heavenly existence in which Christians are privy to a real, though only penultimate, knowledge of God.

PERCEIVING GOD IN CREATION AND THE CHURCH: HOLY WEEK IN MILAN

Having begun the initial stages of training the spiritual senses during Lent, Ambrose offered a more nuanced account of divine perception in his instruction during Holy Week. During this time, catechumens received instruction not only on the creed, or the symbol of faith, exemplified in Ambrose's *Explanatio symboli ad initiandos*, but also on the six days of creation in the *Hexameron*. While the *Explanatio* is more directly addressed to catechumens, the *Hexameron* addresses both catechumens and the faithful in the week leading up to Easter.[28] When read together, these works offer a glimpse of Ambrose's Holy Week catechesis of knowledge. Guided by pro-Nicene principles about the nature of Christ and the creator–creature distinction, these sermons supplement the eschatological focus of the Lenten homilies by offering more precise conceptual language

[27] As argued by John Cavadini, "Ambrose and Augustine: *De Bono Mortis*," in *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R. A. Markus*, ed. William E. Klingshirn and Mark Vessey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 232–49; Éric Rebillard, *In hora mortis: Évolution de la pastorale chrétienne de la mort aux IVe et Ve siècles dans l'Occident latin* (Rome: École francaise de Rome, 1994), 11–28.

[28] Ambrose references the *traditio symbolorum* taking place a week before Easter at *ep.* 20.4–6.

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for how divine knowledge is mediated through the church as a created "work" of God.

In the *Hexameron*, usually dated to the mid to late 380s,[29] Ambrose adopts many themes from Basil of Caesarea's work of the same title, though he cannot be said to be guilty of the plagiarism of which Jerome accused him.[30] Ambrose inherited a body of apologetic writing that articulated beliefs about God and creation in light of anti-pagan commitments, now conditioned also by the Nicene debates.[31] In particular, the categorical rejection of an ontologically subordinate role for the Son, along with a sharp separation of creator and creation as metaphysical categories, ruled out certain views of articulating Christ's participation in God that were once more palatable. As a result, a new freedom emerged to speak of the creature's intimate participation in God, along with a corresponding sense of the immediacy of the divine presence in creation.[32]

Ambrose's first homily on Genesis indicates the direction of these arguments as they concern Christian perception of God.[33] In the opening

[29] On dating the *Hexameron*, much attention has been given to the year it was composed, with Courcelle's view of 386 (*Recherches*, 93–106) challenged by Madec (*Saint Ambroise*, 71–72). Less controversial is the view that they were presented as a "series of catechetical sermons from the week preceding Easter," as James O'Donnell puts it. O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3:251. The opening chapters of Genesis were the subject of many Paschal sermons in the fourth century: including those from Zeno of Verona, Basil of Caesarea, and Augustine. For Augustine, see Cyrille Lambot, "Une série Pascale de sermons de saint Augustin sur les jours de la Création," *RBén* 79 (1969): 206–14.

[30] For a comparison of Basil and Ambrose, see Louis Swift, "Basil and Ambrose on the Six Days of Creation," *Augustinianum* 21 (1981): 317–28; Hervé Savon, "Physique des philosophes et cosmologie de la Genèse chez Basile de Césarée et Ambroise de Milan," in *Philosophies non chrétiennes et christianisme* (Brussels: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1984), 57–72; Gérard Nauroy, "Ambroise de Milan émule critique de Basile de Césarée, à propos de Genèse 1,2," in *La création chez les Pères*, ed. Marie-Anne Vannier (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 77–101; Alexander H. Pierce, "Reconsidering Ambrose's Reception of Basil's *Homiliae in Hexaemeron*: The Lasting Legacy of Origen," *ZAC* 23, no. 3 (2019): 414–44.

[31] On the development of these traditions, see, among many others, Jean Pépin, *Théologie cosmique et théologie chrétienne (Ambroise, Exam. 1, 1–4)* (Paris: University Press of France, 1964); Gerhard May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of "Creation out of Nothing" in Early Christian Thought*, trans. A. S. Worrall (London: T&T Clark, 1994); Paul Blowers, *The Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[32] This way of phrasing it owes to Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy*, 316–17. See also Blowers, *Drama of the Divine Economy*, 142–43.

[33] I have argued elsewhere that Ambrose's writing on the *Hexameron* illuminates aspects of his apologetic writing against the Roman prefect Symmachus in the famous altar of Victory controversy. See Alex Fogleman, "'Since Those Days All Things Have

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homily, he makes clear the distinction between Christ as creator and creation as the workmanship of Christ. He begins with a polemic against the contradictions of pagan views that consider creation to be coeternal with God.[34] Eliminating the possibility of multiple first principles, Ambrose elucidates the implications of a thoroughgoing doctrine of monotheism and *creatio ex nihilo*. The world is temporally bounded, with a finite beginning and end,[35] bestowed with "infirmity" so that the creature is not mistaken to be unoriginated, uncreated, or a "sharer of the divine substance."[36] In speaking of Christ, however, Ambrose stresses his status as eternal creator. Based on expositions of pivotal Nicene texts like John 8:25, Proverbs 8:22, John 1:3, and Colossians 1:15, Ambrose articulates a view of Christ as "the beginning" (*principium*) of Genesis 1 in a way that understands the Son to be equal to the Father. Christ is the *principium* who "in a moment of his power made this great beauty of the world out of nothing, which did not itself have existence and gave substance to things or causes that did not themselves exist."[37]

Having stressed Christ's coeternity with God, Ambrose then depicts the immediacy of God to creation. He emphasizes that creation is a sign that makes known the divine artist, yet it is a sign related to God not by nature but by will (*uoluntas*).[38] Ambrose describes the world as a "sign (*specimen*) of the divine operations, because, while the work is seen, the Worker is brought before us."[39] Yet he also discourages his hearers from thinking of the world as a shadow or reflection of divine power, for these depictions would render the creation coeternal with God.[40] Instead, Ambrose teaches

Progressed for the Better': Tradition, Progress, and Creation in Ambrose of Milan," *HTR* 113, no. 4 (2020): 440–59. The following paragraphs owe to the analysis developed there.

[34] Ambrose, *hex.* 1.1.2 (CSEL 32/1:3; FC 42:4): Quid igitur tam inconueniens quam ut aeternitatem operis cum dei omnipotentis coniungerent aeternitate.

[35] Ambrose, *hex.* 1.3.10–4.12 (CSEL 32/1:9–10; FC 42:10–11).

[36] Ambrose, *hex.* 1.3.8 (CSEL 32/1:8; FC 42:8): Dedit ergo principium mundo, dedit etiam creaturae infirmitatem, ne ἄναρχον, ne increatum et diuinae consortem substantiae crederemus.

[37] Ambrose, *hex.* 1.4.16 (CSEL 32/1:14; FC 42:16): Qui momento imperii sui hanc tantam pulchritudinem mundi ex nihilo fecit esse, quae non erat, et non extantibus aut rebus aut causis donauit habere substantiam.

[38] On the distinction between relations of will and relations of nature, see Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 42–98.

[39] Ambrose, *hex.* 1.5.17 (CSEL 32/1:14; FC 42:16, alt.): est enim hic mundus diuinae specimen operationis, quia dum opus uidetur, praefertur operator.

[40] Ambrose, *hex.* 1.5.18 (CSEL 32/1:15; FC 42:17): Nec otiose utique factum legimus quia gentiles plerique, qui coaetemum deo mundum uolunt esse quasi adumbrationem uirtutis

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that the Son alone is the image, or reflection, of God, sharing in the same divine nature, while the creation relates to God through his will (*uoluntas*).[41] The effect of this kind of locution is to render creation both inherently unstable but also – and precisely as such – ordered to a divinely administered stability: "The earth is not suspended in the middle of the universe like a balance hung in equilibrium, but the majesty of God holds it together by the law of his own will."[42] For Ambrose, the world endures and remains stable through the divine will, not through sharing in the divine nature.[43] Having designated image language for the Son's eternal and coequal relation to God, Ambrose uses the language of *uoluntas* to name the grace by which the world endures. The intended effect, however, does not posit creation as more distant from God but in fact more immediate to it. For Ambrose, it is the pagan conception of creation as eternally self-subsisting that obscures creation as revelatory of God's power. By understanding Christ as sharing in the same nature as God and the world as sustained by the divine will, Ambrose provides a theological grammar by which to understand creation as a sign that points to and reveals the creator.

This account of the Christ-creature relation in the opening homilies gives rise to a discussion in a later homily on the nature of vision. In *Hexameron* 4, Ambrose emphasizes the purification required for attaining true vision. In expositing the Genesis account of the creation of the sun, moon, and stars on the fourth day, Ambrose draws on Platonic imagery about gazing at the sun as a way to instruct his hearers about the perception of divine power in creation:

> The sun begins to arise. Cleanse, now, the eyes of your mind and the inward gaze of your soul, lest any mote of sin dull the keenness of your mind and disturb the

diuinae, adsenint etiam sua sponte subsistere. Et quamuis causam eius deum esse fateantur, causam tamen factum uolunt non ex uoluntate et dispositione sua, sed ita ut causa umbrae corpus est, adhaeret enim umbra corpori et fulgur lumini naturali magis societate quam uoluntate arbitra.

[41] Ambrose, *hex.* 1.5.19 (CSEL 32/1:16; FC 42:18): omnia enim ex eius uoluntate coeperunt, quia unus deus pater, ex quo omnia.

[42] Ambrose, *hex.* 1.5.22 (CSEL 32/1:18–19; FC 42:21): non ergo quod in medio sit terra, quasi aequa lance suspenditur, sed quia maiestas dei uoluntatis suae eam lege constringit.

[43] Ambrose, *hex.* 1.5.22 (CSEL 32/1:20; FC 42:23): sed omnia reposita in eius existimo uoluntate, quod uoluntas eius fundamentum sit uniuersorum et propter eum adhuc mundus hic maneat. See also Ambrose, *hex.* 1.5.22 (CSEL 32/1:19–20; FC 42:22): uoluntate igitur dei inmobilis manet et stat in saeculum terra secundum ecclesiastae sententiam et in uoluntate dei mouetur et nutat. Non ergo fundamentis suis innixa subsistit nec fulcris suis stabilis perseueiat, sed dominus statuit eam et firmamento uoluntatis suae continet, quia in manu eius omnes fines terrae.

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aspect of your pure heart. Cleanse your ear, in order that you may receive the clear flow of holy Scripture in a clean receptacle, so that no impurity may enter therein. With its great splendor the sun precedes the day, filling the world with its great light, encompassing it with warm exhalations.[44]

This cleansing and gradual purification is entailed in the ordering of the days itself. That the sun was only created on the fourth day – after the creation of the firmament, the earth and seas, even the creation of vegetation and plants – suggests to Ambrose that we ought not consider the sun as "a god to which the gifts of God are to be preferred."[45] Though the sun may be the "eye of the world" and the "beauty of the heavens," it is nevertheless younger than the bramble patch and the blade of grass. This relativizing is intended, all the same, to garner praise for the creator: "When you behold it, reflect on its author. When you admire it, give praise to its creator."[46] One should not perceive the greatness of the sun without, on the one hand, recognizing its subservient place in the order of creation but also, on the other hand, its instrumental role in enabling life and growth on earth. Later in the sermon, he again reflects on the nature of vision and the objects of vision. When we perceive the sun to be of different sizes throughout its daily cycle, we should not think that the objects change in size; it is rather our perception that changes.

Our vision is clouded. Are we to conclude that the sun or moon is clouded, too? Our vision is limited. Does that make more limited the things that we see? . . . Take account, therefore, of the weakness of your eyesight and like a just judge rely on yourself, putting trust at the same time in those things which we affirm to be true.[47]

This passage reminds of the way a certain distrust of physical vision is embedded in Ambrose's pedagogy of vision. In the *Hexameron*, Ambrose

[44] Ambrose, *hex.* 4.1.1 (CCSL 32/1:110; FC 42:126): Sol incipit. Emunda oculos mentis, o homo, animae que interiores optutus, ne qua festuca peccati aciem tui praestringat ingenii et puri cordis turbet aspectum. Emunda aurem, ut uase sincero scripturae diuinae nitida fluenta suscipias, ne qua ingrediatur contagio. Procedit sol magno iubare diem, magno mundum conplens lumine, uaporans calore.

[45] Ambrose, *hex.* 4.1.1 (CCSL 32/1:111; FC 42:126): Anterior brucus quam sol, antiquior herba quam luna. Noli ergo deum credere, cui uides dei munera esse praelata.

[46] Ambrose, *hex.* 4.1.2 (CCSL 32/1:111; FC 42:126): sed quando hunc uides, auctorem eius considera, quando hunc miraris, lauda ipsius creatorem.

[47] Ambrose, *hex.* 4.6.26 (CCSL 32/1:133; FC 42:160): Caligat aspectus noster: numquid sol caligat aut luna? Angustus noster obtutus: numquid ideo angustiora efficit quae uidentur? Species minuitur, non magnitudo detrahitur. Neque enim infirmitatem nostrae passionis passioni luminarium debemus ascribere. Mentitur noster aspectus; noli ergo fidele eius aestimare iudicium, sed caelestium minor spectaculi figura, non sui forma.

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guides his hearers in a reflection on the nature of vision, and especially of the distinction between physical and spiritual perception, all of which is shaped by key theological convictions about the Christ-creature relationship.

This account is especially instructive when read alongside Ambrose's handing over of the creed, as evidenced in the *Explanatio symboli*. The *Explanatio* develops not only a pro-Nicene view of God's trinitarian nature but also what we might call a pro-Nicene epistemology – especially with a view to how the church, a created entity, mediates divine knowledge. At the outset, Ambrose admits that while the Milanese creed was sufficient for healing the "sickness" of earlier heresies (he mentions the "Patripassians" and "Sabellians"), recent innovations proved that misunderstanding was still possible and so further instruction is still necessary.[48] While the Homoians took the creed's wording of the Father's omnipotence, invisibility, and impassibility as a tacit confirmation that the Son should not be ascribed these attributes, Ambrose defends the view that Christ's incarnation entails no diminishment of glory or majesty and is commensurate with an understanding of the Son as coequal with the Father in divinity.[49] Like other pro-Nicene theologians, Ambrose interprets the creed to guard against viewing the Son and Spirit as subordinate to the Father's power. In this light, Ambrose needed to show how the three divine persons, coequal in the Godhead, relate to the creation. For if Christ were not coequal with the transcendent Father, he could not impart divine knowledge to creatures. For Ambrose, this conviction generated a more focused attention on the church as the creaturely mediator of divine knowledge.

After emphasizing the anti-Homoian argument that the Son's assumption of flesh and a rational soul entailed no diminution of the Son's coequal majesty, Ambrose raises the question of why the church is a part of the creed: "As we believe in Christ, as we believe in the Father, so we believe in the church and in the forgiveness of sins and in the resurrection of the flesh."[50] The church is not a divine being, coequal with the triune

[48] Ambrose, *expl.* 4 (CSEL 73:5–6).

[49] D. H. Williams notes that this argument echoes Ambrose's *De fide* 3 and *De incarnatione*. See Williams, "Constantine, Nicaea and the 'Fall' of the Church," in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric, and Community*, ed. Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones (London: Routledge, 1998), 117–36 (at 127).

[50] Ambrose, *expl.* 6 (CSEL 73:8): sic credimus in Christum, sic credimus in patrem, quemadmodum credimus et in ecclesiam, et in remissionem peccatorum et in carnis resurrectionem.

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God, but a creature. Why, then, Ambrose asks, is it listed in the baptismal confession? The reason, he explains, has to do with the epistemological conditions necessary for divine knowledge. Although the true essence of God is hidden and incomprehensible, God is known through his activities or "works." Drawing on John 10:38 ("If you do not believe me, believe at least the works"), Ambrose uses similar language as that of the *Hexameron* about how the work reveals the divine author: The one who believes in "the author" (*auctor*) also believes in the "work of the author" (*opus auctoris*) – in this case, the church. "Your faith will now shine all the more," he says, "if in the work of the author you put your faith, which is to be delivered true and integral, in the holy church and in the forgiveness of sins ... and in the resurrection."[51] In this passage, we find Ambrose's pro-Nicene arguments about the nature of Christ as true God and the relation of God as "author" and creation as "work" impinging upon convictions about the church as a mediator of God's sanctifying power.[52] This emphasis is necessary because, again, Christ is not viewed as mediating God by being ontologically inferior. Absent this kind of mediation, the visible and creaturely church fills the gap, as it were, providing the earthly means by which the triune God is encountered.

Appreciating Ambrose's credal exposition in light of the Trinitarian theology developed in the *Hexameron*, we can see more clearly how Ambrose approached the ordering of knowledge in catechesis. While the *Hexameron* presents a more thoroughgoing refutation of pagan cosmologies and seeks to develop a pro-Nicene doctrine of Christ and creation, the exposition of the creed draws these issues into focus by stressing the church as the creaturely "work" that reveals divine knowledge. Both in the *Hexameron* and the exposition of the baptismal creed, catechumens encounter instruction on how to perceive God in the world. When he at last came to instruct the newly baptized during the Easter Octave, Ambrose took up these themes and pressed them into even greater focus.

[51] Ambrose, *expl.* 6 (CSEL 73:8–9): nunc fides tua amplius elucebit, si in opus auctoris tui fidem ueram et integram putaueris deferendam, in ecclesiam sanctam et in remissionem peccatorum.

[52] David C. Alexander, *Augustine's Early Theology of the Church: Emergence and Implications, 386–391* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 134: "Just as with the remission of sins or the resurrection of real bodies, the church pertains to the realm of the tangible and material world; but, also like forgiveness and resurrection, it is more than tangible and is presented here with a strongly implied spiritual aspect."

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"IS THIS ALL?": SENSING THE DIVINE IN EASTER MYSTAGOGY

Ambrose provides his most fulsome treatment of divine perception in his two mystagogical treatises, *De sacramentis* and *De mysteriis*. Before baptism, Ambrose was hesitant to say much about the sacraments, because, as he puts it, "the light of mysteries will infuse itself better in the unsuspecting than if some sermon had preceded them."[53] In these sermons, we see an explicit description of how Ambrose guided new Christians to see God in the world as he explains to them the rites of initiation they have recently undertaken.

Between Holy Week and the mystagogical homilies, baptismal candidates underwent an extraordinary ritual process. After the instruction and fasting during Lent, the credal teaching during Holy Week, *competentes* participated in a series of dramatic rituals that constituted the baptismal initiation at Easter. It began with the eye-opening rite of *ephphatha* (see Mark 7:34), followed by the procession to the baptismal font where candidates were stripped naked and anointed. They then made a series of exorcisms and credal professions as they were immersed in the baptismal waters. Next came a post-baptismal anointing and prayer from the bishop, the washing of the neophytes' feet (*pedilauium*), the donning of white robes, the bishop's invocation of the Holy Spirit in the signing of the "spiritual seal," and finally the procession to the altar (perhaps with the chanting of Psalm 22 or 41 LXX) and their reception of the Eucharist. During the following week, the baptizands received guided instruction on what these rituals meant in the mystagogical homilies.

At several points in these mystagogical homilies, Ambrose raises a rhetorical question about what catechumens saw in baptism and their potential disappointment.

> You entered; you saw the water; you saw the priest; you saw the Levite. Lest, perchance, someone say: "Is this all?" – yes, this is all, truly all, where there is all innocence, where there is all piety, all grace, all sanctification. You have seen what you were able to see with the eyes of your body, with human perception; you have not seen those things that are effected but those that are seen. Those that are not seen are much greater than those that are seen, "For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18).[54]

[53] Ambrose, *mys.* 1.2 (CSEL 73:89; FC 44:5): einde quod inopinantibus melius se ipsa lux mysteriorum infuderit, quam si ea sermo aliqui praecucurrisset.

[54] Ambrose, *sacr.* 1.3.10 (CSEL 73:19; FC 44:272): Ingressus es, uidisti aquam, uidisti sacerdotem, uidisti leuitam. Ne forte aliqui dixerit: Hoc est totum? Immo hoc est totum, uere totum, ubi tota innocentia, ubi tota pietas, tota gratia, tota sanctificatio. Vidisti, quae

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Drawing attention to the difference between both the visual dimensions of the rites and the visual capacities of the neophytes, Ambrose counters their potential disappointment with an assurance of the real presence of divine power at work. They previously only viewed the rites through the "eyes of the body, with human perception," a mode of vision that can only perceive the visible elements of the ritual. These senses contrast the "eyes of the heart," a spiritual or noetic faculty, which are able to perceive the invisible and eternal power of the sacraments.[55] Despite the apparent simplicity of the ritual, he encourages the neophytes to search for divine power, and he identifies such power with the spiritual realities "effected" through the corporeal elements.

We need not assume that this kind of rhetorical dialogue reveals a transparent window into the catechumen's viewpoint. What interests us more is the tactic Ambrose takes in training the spiritual perception of his hearers. Ambrose first introduces a calculated distrust of the physical senses, which coincides with the actuation of their spiritual senses. In a way, perhaps, he needs his hearers to be disappointed with the rites, for only then can they learn to seek the divine power operative in them. By providing his hearers with questions they may or may not actually have, he leads them in an exercise of learning to see creation spiritually. He trains them to seek divine power in the apparently simple rituals of water baptism.

In these moments, Ambrose reveals how his approach to catechesis has been informed by the Nicene debates. In explaining the apparent disappointment of the baptismal rites, Ambrose finds an opportunity to teach catechumens the relation between a creaturely "work" (*opus*) and the divine "working" (*operatio*). In the present context, the latter term (*operatio*) correlates with the divine presence (*praesentia*) of the Spirit in baptism, while the former refers to the material aspect of the baptismal ritual. Pre-Nicene theologians had been happy to associate the Holy Spirit

uidere potuisti oculis tui corporis et humanis conspectibus, non uidisti illa, quae operantur, sed quae uidentur. Illa multo maiora sunt, quae non uidentur quam quae uidentur, quoniam quae uidentur, temporalia sunt, quae autem non uidentur, aeterna.

[55] Earlier Ambrose makes this point even more explicitly. Ambrose, *sacr.* 1.2.11 (CSEL 73:44): Considera et tu oculos cordis tui. Videbas quae corporalia sunt, corporalibus oculis, sed quae sacramentorum sunt, cordis oculis adhuc uidere non poteras. Ambrose, *mys.* 3.14 (CSEL 73:94): Non ergo solis corporis tui credas oculis. Magis uidetur, quod non uidetur, quia istud temporale, illud aeternum. Magis aspicitur, quod oculis non conpraehenditur, animo autem ac mente cernitur.

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as the visible "work" of the invisible God. Pro-Nicene theologians, by contrast, emphasized the Spirit's coequal sharing with the Father and the Son. In *De spiritu sancto*, Ambrose, more so than his Latin predecessors, defended the consubstantiality of the Spirit by stressing that the Spirit is not a work or *opus* of God but one who shares equally in the "operating" of the divine being.[56] In the mystagogical homilies, this language appears at several points to help Ambrose instruct the neophytes in how God is perceived in the rites of initiation.

Two passages especially draw out this emphasis: *De mysteriis* 3.8 and *De sacramentis* 1.5. In the former, Ambrose uses several scriptural texts to explore the visible–invisible dimensions of baptism: 2 Corinthians 4:18 ("For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal"), Romans 1:20 ("That the invisible things of God, since the creation of the world, are understood through those things which have been made; his eternal power also and Godhead are estimated by his works"), and John 10:38 ("If you believe not me, believe at least the works").[57] We have already seen in the *Explanatio* the use of John 10:38, and of similar language in the *Hexameron*, in the context of a pro-Nicene argument about knowing Christ as creator through the work of creation/church. Here, Ambrose reflects on this passage to note the close correlation between the "operation" of sanctification in baptism with the divine "presence" itself: "Believe . . . that the presence of divinity is at hand there. Do you believe the operation but not the presence? Whence would the operation follow unless the presence went before?"[58] On the one hand, Ambrose needs to counter the Homoian view that sees the Spirit's operation in baptism as an attenuated form of divine presence. For Ambrose, there is no operation of the Spirit without the equally cooperative

[56] On this text within its political–ecclesiastical and rhetorical contexts, with a helpful discussion of Latin Homoian pneumatology, see Andrew Selby, *Ambrose of Milan's "On the Holy Spirit": Rhetoric, Theology, and Sources* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2020).

[57] Ambrose, *mys.* 3.8 (CSEL 73:91; FC 44:7–8): Quid uidisti? Aquas utique, sed non solas: leuitas illis ministrantes, summum sacerdotem interrogantem et consecrantem. Primum omnium docuit te apostolus non ea contemplanda nobis, quae uidentur, sed quae non uidentur, quoniam, quae uidentur, temporalia sunt, quae autem non uidentur, aeterna. Nam et alibi habes, quia inuisibilia dei a creatura mundi per ea, quae facta sunt, conpraehenduntur, sempiterna quoque uirtus eius et diuinitas operibus aestimatur. Vnde et ipse dominus ait: si mihi non creditis, uel operibus credite.

[58] Ambrose, *mys.* 3.8 (CSEL 73:91; FC 44:8): Crede ergo diuinitatis illic adesse praesentiam. Operationem credis, non credis praesentiam? Vnde sequeretur operatio, nisi praecederet ante praesentia?

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presence of Father and Son. On the other hand, however, Ambrose frames these admonitions in the form of a rhetorical exercise that teaches the neophytes how to perceive the world spiritually. They are provided a theological and epistemological framework for seeing, with the eyes of the heart, the invisible powers of divine presence that are operative in baptism.

Ambrose's account of the divine work and presence in baptism appears again shortly thereafter in his discussion of the antiquity of the sacrament of baptism. Drawing together reflections on Genesis 1:2 and Psalm 32:6 – two passages that were critical in pro-Nicene defenses of the Holy Spirit[59] – Ambrose shows how the Spirit's operation is inseparable from divine presence.

> Consider, moreover, how old the mystery is and prefigured in the origin of the world itself. In the very beginning, when God made heaven and earth, it says: "The Spirit moved over the waters" (Gen. 1:2). He who was moving over the waters, was he not working over the waters? Why should I say, "He was working"? As regards his presence, he was moving. Was he not working who was moving? Recognize that he was working in that making of the world, when the Prophet says to you: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made and all their strength by the breath of His mouth" (Ps. 32:6).[60]

Where Genesis depicts the Spirit as "moving" (*superferebatur*) over the waters, this is but another way of naming the Spirit as true divine presence in creation. Ambrose maps the language of *superferebatur* onto the earlier language of *praesentia*, while correlating these terms with the Spirit's "working" (*operebatur*) in creation, as attested in Psalm 32:6. While it could seem that the Spirit's operation represented an attenuated form of divine presence, the combined prophetic testimonies of David and Moses prove, for Ambrose, that the Spirit's operation in the creaturely rites is inseparable from the coequal divine presence of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Another way Ambrose attempted to explain the true but hidden presence of divinity in the baptismal rituals appears in *De sacramentis*

[59] See Michel Barnes, "The Beginning and End of Early Christian Pneumatology," *AugStud* 39, no. 2 (2009): 169–86.

[60] Ambrose, *mys.* 3.8 (CSEL 73:91; FC 44:8): Considera autem, quam uetus mysterium sit et in ipsius mundi praefiguratum origine. In principio ipso, quando fecit deus caelum et terram, spiritus, inquit, superferebatur super aquas. Qui superferebatur super aquas, non operabatur super aquas? Sed quid dicam operabatur? Quod ad praesentiam spectat, superferebatur. Cognosce, quia operabatur in illa mundi fabrica, quando tibi dicit propheta: uerbo domini caeli firmati sunt et spiritu oris eius omnis uirtus eorum.

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1.5. Distinguishing between the two aspects of the ritual – the element of water and the consecration of the Holy Spirit – Ambrose employs the language of "work" (*opus*) and "operation" (*operatio*).[61]

> You have seen water, but not all water cures, only the water that has the grace of Christ cures. One is the element, the other the consecration; one is the *opus*, the other the *operatio*. *Opus* belongs to water; *operatio* belongs to the Holy Spirit. Water does not cure unless the Holy Spirit descends and consecrates that water.[62]

Here again, we see Ambrose not only providing an explanation of baptism but also detailing a mode of perception that allows catechumens to see God at work in creaturely media. By clarifying the clear separation of the creaturely work and the divine working, Ambrose can offer visual strategies for training catechumens to perceive the divine presence in the rituals.

The mystagogical homilies allow us to track Ambrose's pedagogy of divine perception – of teaching his catechumens the kind of "seeing-in-faith" for which his Lenten and Holy Week instructions had been preparing them. Ambrose notes at the beginning of *De mysteriis* that, in accordance with the custom of the *disciplina arcani*, it would be improper to disclose the sacred mysteries before baptism because the illumination of baptism is required to understand them truly. But we should not take Ambrose entirely at his word, for in fact he has been preparing his catechumens to know God in this way ever since he began preaching on the patriarchs during Lent. To be sure, we can take it for granted that Ambrose understood baptism to capacitate his hearers to understand Scripture and the initiation rites in new ways. At the same time, however, we should also see the mystagogical treatises as part of a larger catechetical strategy that began with the Lenten sermons on the patriarchs, continued through the cosmological and credal catechesis of Holy Week, and culminated in the post-baptismal mystagogical sermons of the Easter Octave.

CONCLUSION

Ambrose's corpus allows us to observe the unique ways that training the spiritual senses functioned in his approach to catechesis. As much as

[61] Ambrose, *sacr.* 1.5.15 (CSEL 73:15; FC 44: 274). Cp. Ambrose, *mys.* 9.50.

[62] Ambrose, *sacr.* 1.5.15 (CSEL 73:15; FC 44:274, alt.): Quid ergo significat? Vidisti aquam; sed non aqua omnis sanat, sed aqua sanat, quae habet gratiam Christi. Aliud est elementum, aliud consecratio: aliud opus, aliud operatio. Aquae opus est, operatio spiritus sancti est. Non sanat aqua, nisi spiritus sanctus descenderit et aquam illam consecrauerit.

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learning certain propositions about God or the moral life, Ambrose's catechesis was also about training catechumens to discern God's presence in the world – not only in the church and its rites but also in creation more broadly. In Lenten sermons, he sought to detach his hearers from worldly knowledge by stressing the heavenly, eschatological dimensions of baptism. In Holy Week, Ambrose drew on pro-Nicene categories to show how the church could mediate the knowledge of a God who was categorically distinct from creation. Finally, in the mystagogical homilies, Ambrose gave explicit instruction on the rites of initiation as training in spiritual vision. In all these efforts, Ambrose sought to guide hearers into a distinctive mode of knowing the triune God.

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