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## Saint Ambrose of Milan in the Context of the Trinitarian Theology of the Fourth Century

### Abstract

The Synod of Nicaea, in the year 325, definitively sealed the One Church's attitude regarding Arian heresy. It insisted, through Saint Athanasius the Great, on the *homoousios* (ὁμοούσιος: of the same being, consubstantial), the only work able to express the oneness of being, the equality, and the consubstantiality of our Savior Jesus Christ, as the Embodied Son of God, with God the Father.

The perception in the West of this Nicene decision wasn't simple because of the influence of Arian heresy among the recently arrived migratory peoples in the Occident. The center of theological authority was not in Rome, as one would have expected, but in Milan, with the outstanding personality of Saint Ambrose of Milan.



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The present study aims to identify, in the Ambrosian representative works, this anti-Arianism fight, with a very concise Trinitarian terminological specification, and to briefly analyze the homiletics and the vast correspondence undertaken by the great bishop.

## Keywords

Arianism, being, Godhead, grace, perichoresis, person, Trinity

## 1 Introduction

In the fourth century, both in the Eastern and Western Church, they were affected by doctrinal struggles that had implications for doctrinal and social-political plans.

Among the numerous heresies, Arianism and Pneumatomachianism were the more prominent. While the Holy Three Hierarchs, Basile the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and Saint John Chrysostom, and, adding to them, Saint Athanasius the Great, adopted a direct and immediate stance, through their works and also at the synodal assemblies, in the West stood out Saint Ambrose of Milan.

Since the very beginning, we have to specify the fact that the holy theologians, who were great defenders of the Trinitarian theology from Century IV, they conveyed the right-teaching not only by writing, but especially by their homilies and by their catechesis from *intra* and *extra* ecclesial spaces, as also in the liturgical environment, they being the composers of the holy prayer for anaphora, or of some baptismal rules directly involving the confession of the Trinitarian faith.

In the liturgical context, the Ambrosian Trinitarian confession has been preserved in two essential works: *De mysteriis* and *De*

sacramentis, the first of which was translated into Romanian by emeritus university professor Dr. Ene Braniște<sup>1</sup>.

The Holy Mysteries, only the first three of them being analyzed by the Holy Father and reckoned as mysteries of the initiation in the Christian life, though having his analyzes, at their origin, his catechetical homilies addressed to the catechumen, they comprise the doxological and Trinitarian confession, and, in the same time, the confession of the Church from the golden age, and epoche that had recently escaped the fire of the persecutions. Still, it faced a double missionary provocation: the conversion of the pagan peoples to Christianity and the defense of the Orthodox faith against the heresies of the fourth century.

Most probably addressed to the newly baptized ones<sup>2</sup>, either on Holy Easter's night, or during the Enlightened Week, the catechesis regarding the Holy Mysteries had their purpose of making the freshly baptized aware of the fact that into Christ there is actually the communion life with all the Holy Trinity, a think which we can encounter, from a mystagogical point of view, also at Saint Cyril of Jerusalem<sup>3</sup>.

The openness of the soul to the communion of the Holy Trinity, as reckoned by Saint Ambrose, began with listening to sermons

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<sup>1</sup> Sfântul AMBROZIE al Milanului, *De mysteriis*, trad. Ene Braniște, vol. 53, colecția Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești (în continuare, P. S. B.), Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, (în continuare, EIBMBOR), București 1994, pp. 8-25.

<sup>2</sup> Sfântul AMBROZIE al Milanului, *Scrisoarea II. Ambrozie către Constanțiu*, trad. Ene Braniște, vol. 53, P. S. B., EIBMBOR, București 1994, p. 34: "He sacrifices His blood for them, He instills His Ghost to them, he gives them His Kingdom. What more can give He Who has given Himself? Or what has remained ungiven by the Father Who has given His Only Begotten Son to death for us (Rom. 8: 32)? Therefore, advice the people to serve the Lord in simplicity and in grace, and to elevate with the leavers of their mind their eyes to heavens, and not to reckon as a gain (Phil. 3: 8) but that what belongs to the eternal life".

<sup>3</sup> Sfântul CHIRIL al Ierusalimului, *Catehezele (partea I și a II-a)*, trad. pr. Dumitru Fecioru, EIBMBOR, București 1943 și 1945.

and catechesis addressed to those seeking conversion to Christianity.

“Therefore, open your ears and enjoy the good fragrance of the eternal life overflowed upon you through the gift of the mysteries; I have made you understand this thing when, by officiating us the rite of the opening of the ears, I have said: ‘*Effata*, namely: open yourself!’, so that anyone to come to the grace, to know what he is going to be asked, to owe to keep in his mind what he should answer”<sup>4</sup>.

The knowledge of God is the only possibility of having access the eternal life, though the Father remains the profoundly apophatic Person in the process of that knowledge; in exchange, His Son Embodied Himself and *we saw* His glory (Jn. 1: 14) and we saw the Holy Ghost as a dove, at the baptism from River Jordan, remaining upon Him, namely resting Himself on Son’s human nature.

“There cannot be true faith without knowing the true God, who is a loving Person, namely, He is the Father of a Son. A different knowledge, it won’t be faith, or a faith without this knowledge won’t be a true faith. He who truly believes, he knows the true God; and he who knows the true God, he believes. A God who is not believed, He won’t be known in His living reality, and vice versa. I don’t need to believe for me to admit a so-called God as an essence of nature. That knowledge that doesn’t accomplish a communion with God as Person, above nature, it won’t be a faith”<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Sfântul AMBROZIE al Milanului, *De mysteriis*, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *nota 1914*, la Sfântul Chiril al Ierusalimului, *Comentariu la Evanghelia Sfântului Ioan*, vol. 41, P. S. B., EIBMBOR, București 2000, p. 1015.

## 2 Ambrosian Trinitarian Sacramentology

By receiving the Mystery of the Holy Baptism, the believer becomes a chosen vessel of the Kingdom of God, which is a Kingdom of the Holy Trinity, God Who is One in Being and threefold in Persons, Who works through the godlike and deifying grace. Both in the baptismal water and in the religious service officiated by bishop, priest, and deacon, God the All-Holy Trinity is really and personally present through the work of His Godhead. Saint Ambrose of Milan confesses in this regard that: “I believe, therefore, that there is present the Godhead. Do you believe in His work, but you don’t believe in His presence? Where would the work come from if there was not the presence before?”<sup>6</sup>.

In the Holy Trinity, there is one Being, or Godhead, three Persons, or Hypostases, but there is only one work, one grace, i.e., deifying energy and a sole will. Although the difference between Being and Hypostasis was clarified in the East by Saint Basil the Great, it was also known in the Ambrosian Triadology, especially in the *oikonomia* of God’s work through the Holy Sacraments. In this regard, the Trinitarian Orthodoxy was the same. The being of the created realities is brought to existence by God through *παρασυγή* (production). Still, one cannot properly speak about a being related to God, for God transcends everything. God’s *divine being* is different from the *created being*, i.e., from everything that exists in Creation. The divine *Ουσία* transcends all existing realities and is above all realities. “The divine nature is above composition”<sup>7</sup>, but not separated in Persons<sup>8</sup>, and if “the Scripture had given to us a definition of the substance or of the being,

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<sup>6</sup> Sfântul AMBROZIE al Milanului, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Sfântul VASILE cel Mare, *Despre Sfântul Duh*, trad. pr. Constantin Cornișescu, P. S. B., vol. 12, EIBMBOR, București, 1988, p. 37.

<sup>8</sup> Pr. prof. dr. D. Stăniloae, *nota 8*, la Sfântul Chiril al Alexandriei, *Despre Sfânta și cea deoființă Treime*, trad. și note pr. D. Stăniloae, P. S. B., vol. 40, EIBMBOR, București 1994, p. 18: “The name of being comes from *to be*. So, as only God exist on His own, likewise the name of *Being* is properly due only to Him. That’s why, in Romanian, *being* is called also

there wouldn't have been made any speculation about what has been said referring to person"<sup>9</sup>, namely that its concrete subsistence form, of the uncomposed for the Persons of the Holy Trinity do not either compose or undo the nature.

"How would be uncomposed The One Who is simple according to His nature? This is because the modes that show what He actually is do not alter the rationality of His simplicity. Because, in this way, everything we say about God will show us a composed God. And from here it turns out that, if we want to save the idea of the simplicity and of the non-division, we will have not to tell anything about God except that He is unmade and us to abstain from calling him incorruptible, creator, judge, and all the things we accept these days in theology or, by receiving those names, what will us do?"<sup>10</sup>

In working the Holy Mysteries, the Church and the believers are imparted with God as work, and not as Being. The Godhead is non-impartable either in this age or in the eternal life. The pantheistic current, of pagan origin, confounded the Creator with the creature. It confounded the Being of God with His works in the world, or, in theological-dogmatic terms, it confounded the theology with the *oikonomia*, and God as Trinity was seen more from an essentialist point of view, namely, impersonal, rather than as a Tri-Personal Godhead. If God had been an impersonal reality, as pantheism argues, God wouldn't have been able to arrogate to Himself the qualities of Creator and Pantocrator, because He would have been Himself submitted to all laws and principles of the universe, and that would have altered His quality as Cause and Mover of all realities. As the Holy Trinity, or another being

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*existing* (from *to be*). But God tells to Moses: *I am Who I am*, showing Himself as Person. This is for being, or existence, do not exist but in persons".

<sup>9</sup> Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Epistola 38, Către fratele Grigorie. Despre deosebirea dintre ființă și ipostas*, în P. S. B., vol. 17, trad. pr. D. Fecioru, EIBMBOR, București, 1986, p. 179.

<sup>10</sup> *Idem, Contra lui Eunomie*, 2 P G 29, 640 B C.

and work in relation to the world, God can best express the quality of a free and almighty person, especially since He is also a giving-of-birth and a proceeding Father, if He is present through His works in the Church's life. Saint Ambrose confessed this truth: "I believe that there (at Baptism, o. n.) is present the Godhead. Do you believe in His work and you don't believe in His presence?"<sup>11</sup>; and when commenting on the days of the Creation, Saint Ambrose said:

"He Who was hovering above waters, wasn't He doing His work upon waters? But why should I say: *He was doing His work*? Regarding His presence, *He was hovering above the waters*. Wasn't Him doing His work while hovering? You must know that He was doing his work in the creation of the world<sup>12</sup>".

The matter of the Holy Mysteries is deified, or sanctified, through the work of the grace, and the grace and the truth came only through the embodied Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 1: 17). The grace, as Trinitarian work, it removes the corruption of the nature, being imparted by the Holy Ghost, but being incompatible with the sin and with the state of wickedness. Referring to the Noah's Deluge, Saint Ambrose confirmed this fact: "Fall into corruption were all bodies, because of the lawlessness. *My Ghost won't remain within people* – said the Lord – *because they are bodies* (Gen. 6: 3). By that God showed that through the bodily uncleanness and through the even graver defilement by sin, the grace of the Ghost will be lost"<sup>13</sup>.

The matter has no savior power on its own, without the work of the grace within it. Naturalism created the idea of an autonomous individual, a diabolical anthropocentrism that annuls the idea of a tri-personal and almighty God. This thinking, revived by modern postmodernism, is actually a return to the pagan dictum: *Deus sive natura*. In sacramental ecclesiology, Ambrosian

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<sup>11</sup> Sfântul AMBROZIE al Milanului, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

thought undermined this pantheistic ideology. Not the matter has miraculous, savior, and healing powers on its own, but there is the grace of God sent by the Father, through Christ, into the Holy Ghost: “the fact of somebody being cleaned up (through Baptism, o. n.) it doesn’t stay in the power of the waters, but of the Grace<sup>14</sup>”.

What is important in the Ambrosian Trinitarian sacramentology is the fact that for the West of the Century IV, situated at the confluence of the great conversions as also of the Arian and Pneumatomachian heresies, the Trinitarian confession was doxological, namely tied to the glory of the Holy Trinity by honoring and by remembering the worshipping of the Holy Cross concomitantly with the mentioning of the names of Father and of Son and of Holy Ghost, and that denotes the equality and the consubstantiality of the Persons as a direct and missionary standing against the mentioned heresies, even though through the mediation of the less initiated ones, namely of the catechumen.

“And the catechumen believes (and he confesses) in the cross of Lord Jesus, which he also marks upon himself with; but if he isn’t baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, he won’t receive forgiveness of his sins neither to sip up the spiritual grace”<sup>15</sup>, “but you have been baptized in the name of the trinity. Remember what you have done: you have confessed the Father, you have confessed the Son, you have confessed the Holy Ghost”<sup>16</sup>.

Christ our Savior, as Embodied Son of God, He is the source of all the Holy Mysteries and “there where He deigns to share us with His presence there the Church is, where His Mysteries are”<sup>17</sup>. This is the Triadological synthesis of Saint Ambrose. The Triadology is, at the same time, the expression of the ecclesiology and

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16.

the expression of the sacramentology. The equality and the consubstantiality of the Trinitarian Persons, as concrete life of the Church through Mysteries, it is the essence of the Ambrosian thinking:

“Remember what you said: that you believe in the Father, you believe in the Son, you believe in the Holy Ghost. You don’t have there: I believe in the biggest, in the smallest, and in the last one, but by the same promise and guarantee of your mouth you have tied yourself to believe equally in the Son as you believe in the Father too, and you to equally believe in the Holy Ghost as you believe in the Son too”<sup>18</sup>.

If the Mystery of the Holy Baptism, founded on the confession of the faith into the Holy Trinity, it has as immediate effect the forgiveness of all sins, as a rebirth, it also necessarily needs a power of the growing into the Trinitarian grace through the succession of the anointing with the Holy and Great Chrism, *the godlike seal of the Holy Trinity*: “God the Father has marked you, Lord Christ has strengthened you, and the Ghost has given surety within your heart, as you have learnt by reading the Apostles”<sup>19</sup>.

Saint Ambrose insisted here on the immediate succession of the two mysteries having a Trinitarian character: the Baptism and the Unction, a fact indicating that in the West of the century IV these two mysteries were officiated unitedly, both of them having an indestructible and inseparable Trinitarian character, and the mysteries of the initiation (here being comprised the Holy Eucharist too) were reckoned by Ambrose as being older than the mysteries of the synagogue. It is here being mentioned Melchisedec, the one without mother or father, the one without beginning and without end of his days:

“(Christ is) *motherless*, according to his Godhead, for he was born out of God the Father, being of-the-same-Being with the Father; He is *fatherless*, according to His Embodiment, for He was born out of Virgin; He is *without beginning and without*

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

*end for Himself is the beginning and the end of everything, The First and The Last One*"<sup>20</sup>.

The matter<sup>21</sup> of the Holy Mysteries, through the work of the Trinitarian grace, it is elevated from its state of corruption and corruptibility, by the work of the grace the nature has been transformed and overcome, and through Eucharist the bread and the wine become central elements of the creation capable of offering to the Church and of the believers a mode or real and personal presence.

"The Holy Ghost descended in the world at Pentecost, through the fully pneumatized body of the Savior Christ, and He makes Christ fully accessible to us, within the Church, through the Holy Mysteries, and especially in the Holy Mystery of the Eucharist. The Christian attending the Holy Liturgy have the conscience e that through Eucharist, by being them imparted with the Body and with the Blood of Christ, they are all of them gathered into Christ through His Ghost and through Christ together with the whole Holy Trinity, they becoming inheritors of the Kingdom of God the Father, together with the embodied Son, having the Holy Ghost resting upon them, through His uncreated energies imparted by Him to all the believers within Church"<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> Sfântul AMBROZIE al Milanului, *Scrisoarea VIII, Ambrozie către Justus*, pp. 53, 55: "Let's ask ourselves what is beneath the matter, and what is that nourishes the soul, and let's search for that nourishment even in darkness. Learn from me: the nature of the things helps him who tries to find out. But God is the maker of the nature. It depends on God us to learn well, for the own nature it to consummate the learning. They who have a petrified heart they won't learn. Bu nature, that is the godlike gift, God gives the beginning, the growing, and the consummation, namely that very different and godlike nature of the Trinity".

<sup>22</sup> HIMCINSCHI Mihai, *Doctrina trinitară ca fundament misionar. Relația Duhului Sfânt cu Tatăl și cu Fiul în teologia răsăriteană și apuseană. Implicațiile doctrinare și spirituale ale acesteia*, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia 2004, p. 361.

### 3 **The Ambrosian Eucharistic Triadology**

Even though the mystagogy of the Holy Mysteries of the initiation into the Christian life has been explained in detail by Saint Nicholas Cabasilas in the 14th century, the theological, dogmatic, and especially liturgical preoccupations weren't strangers to the Milanese Church in the fourth century. The fact that Saint Ambrose, in his treatises *De mysteriis* and *De sacramentis*, insisted upon this aspect is the result of reckoning that the Mysteries of the Baptism and of the Unction and of the Eucharist composed a complete corpus, and they represented the foundation of the new Christian life for the freshly converted to Christianity.

The central hypothesis regarding the Eucharist consists of the fact that to the newly converted, the great temptation of the mind is concretized in refusing to perceive the real and personal presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements, and especially how the grace of the Holy Trinity, the common work of the Three Hypostases, is above the created nature used in officiating the Holy Liturgy. That's why the argument brought by Saint Ambrose was, in the first place, a biblical one, showing that the miracles worked by Moses in the desert were being worked through grace and so they overcame the nature of the created elements. The Ambrosian expression *that the grace worked against the nature* must be understood that the grace doesn't destroy the created nature, but the grace restores it by eliminating the nature's corruption and by elevating the nature on a new ontological stage, or, as appropriate, on that initial stage thought by the Creator at the beginning of the world, and in the case of the human nature just for this one to achieve the purpose which it has been bought to existence for.

“At the time of Prophet Elisha, to one of the sons of the prophets, the iron of the hatchet fell into the water, and it immediately sank. He who lost the hatched begged Elisha; Elisha threw a wood in the water, and the iron floated above (2

Kings 6: 5 and the following)<sup>23</sup>. We know, of course, that that too was done against nature, because the matter of the iron is heavier than the waters' liquid. So, we realize that grace has more power than nature does. If a human blessing had so much power that it changed the nature, what will we say about the godlike sanctification itself, where even the words of the Savior Master operated? Therefore, the words of Christ, words which had power to create, from nothing, the realities which did not exist, could they not change the existing realities in what they have not been? This is for it is not less to bring the things to existence than to change their nature"<sup>24</sup>.

Between rationality and faith, in a supreme target, there is no contradiction. Rationality without admitting faith in a supreme mystery would be irrational. We ascend to the supreme mystery by rationality. The supreme mystery itself requires to be admitted by rationality. The Orthodox teaching confirms the Eucharistic Triadology, meaning that the grace of the Holy Trinity, though being a common work of the godlike Persons, working through the matter of the Holy Mysteries, it makes real the presence of Savior Christ, and through Him of the entire Trinitarian communion, there being also the Father and the Holy Ghost. The Eucharist is the real Body and Blood of the Savior, so that His presence if personal, the nature of the Eucharistic elements is different even though the physical countenance remains the same, namely a created one.

"The Virgin gave birth outside the natural order. And this body that we have (at the Holy Eucharist) is also out of Virgin. But why, therefore, are you searching for the natural order in the body of Christ, while Himself, our Lord Jesus, was born out of a Virgin, above nature? It is the true body of Christ, that was crucified, that was buried; it is real; truly, therefore, it is the mystery of His body. Therefore, Christ nourishes His

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<sup>23</sup> In King James Bible, we usually use the name for this book as 2 Kings.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23.

Church with these mysteries, which He strengthens by the soul's substance, seeing the ceaseless increase of its grace"<sup>25</sup>. The mysteries are works of God the All-Holy Trinity, above human thought, and for that, the man who is a speaking being, when facing these realities, can be speechless. That's why Saint Ambrose urges us to unconditionally accept the mystery with our human rationality, but that must also be accompanied, mandatorily, by a clean life:

"The mystery must remain sealed within you, and not to be defiled by the deeds of an evil life and by defiling the cleanliness (...), in order to preserve without blemish the fullness of the life and of the silence. Due to this reason, the Church too, by guarding the height of the heavenly mysteries, rejects from itself the stronger storms of the wind, and it calls to the sweetness of the springtime grace"<sup>26</sup>.

The correspondence of Saint Ambrose of Milan, beyond the richness of the sent or received letters, comprises a spiritual richness mirrored, on one hand, by the so important dogmas of that Milanese epoch, as also by presenting and implementing those dogmas within the Church's life.

Without a spiritual life, the dogma risks becoming a mere ideology, and that's why ecclesial Dogmatics is empirical or existential; otherwise, it won't belong to the Church. The dogma and the life are two elements that are not only congruent, but they are also complementary, and without them the Church is barren, lacking the vitality of the grace and the work of the All-Holy Trinity.

The Ambrosian epistolary care has its red line in this regard. It is a request, a missionary imperative, and an imperial concern, too. Emperor Gratian (375-383) asked Saint Ambrose for help in this regard in order to clarify the Church's teaching related to the external heresies. This fact would have brought, indisputably, also

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24.

to the peace of the empire and of the society recently escaped from the awful pagan persecutions:

“Preach me the truths of the faith not for the sake of the words, neither for I would want to comprise God more with the word than with the thought, but for the unveiling of the godhead to have a dwelling place within my heart openly (...). I want to bestow myself to the Father too, by extolling the Son (...) and a right-speaking about the Holy Ghost”<sup>27</sup>.

#### **4 The Occidental Post-Nicaean Context**

The Christian emperors' preoccupation with clarifying the teachings of the faith in the fourth century was evident. Convoking the Synod from Nicaea, in the year 325, and the Synod from Constantinople, in the year 381, it was at the initiative and with the direct support of Emperors Constantine the Great (324-337) and Theodosius the Great (379-395). Beyond the peace in the empire, the Christian emperors were reckoned as the anointed of the Lord, and they were the guarantors of the application of the canonical and doctrinal norms decided by the synodals. Not admitting those norms led to the exile to the border areas of the empire, against the upholders of the false teachings, for the purpose of protecting the Church and its members from wrong teachings.

“During the fourth century, the synods became a usual instrument, and they were reckoned as the only effective means for appeasing the controversies. But in the unfolding of events, in the Church-state relations, a new element emerged that was important to the subsequent history of the relationship between spiritual and temporal power. Starting with Constantine the Great, the state participated in religious disputes and

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<sup>27</sup> Sfântul AMBROZIE al Milanului, *Scrisori*, traducere și note David Popescu, vol. 53, P. S. B., EIBMBOR, București 1994, p. 26.

led as it thought appropriate. In many cases, obviously, the state's interests didn't correspond to those of the church"<sup>28</sup>. Emperor Gratian (375-383), though had a common initiative with Saint Theodosius for convoking the Ecumenical Synod II, the doctrinal problems from Occident and from the Occidental Iliria, they determined him to convoke at Aquilae, on 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 381 a synod whose documents and decisions were thoroughly described by Saint Ambrose, who actually missed from physically attending the respective assembly<sup>29</sup>.

Although it seemed focused on the fight against Arianism, Emperor Gratian also asked the Milanese Bishop for clarification regarding the Person of the Holy Ghost. The doctrinal specifications made by Saint Ambrose were among the most obvious:

“Your thought and faith about our Lord and Savior as Son of God are limpidly shown, they having an abundance of ideas which you show your faith through, in the eternal godhead of the Holy Ghost, and you do not attribute Him a being equal to that which you see within yourself, neither you reckon that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ have any evilness in His Ghost”<sup>30</sup>.

Arianism held that Christ was born like all other human beings. If Jesus had been only a man, or the first creature of the Father, he couldn't have been the true Savior of the world, the true Mediator between mankind, fallen into the slavery of corruption, sin, and death. Saint Apostle Paul referred to the term "Mediator" in his Epistle to Timothy (1 Tim. 2:5), but he cannot conceive that the Embodied Son is not of the same Being as the Father, namely, *true God out of true God*. The Arians contested the equality and

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<sup>28</sup> VASILIEV Aleksandr Aleksandrovicû, *Istoria Imperiului Bizantin. Arianismul și Sinodul de la Niceea*, trad. și note Ionuț Alexandru Tudorie, Vasile-Adrian carabă, Sebastian-Laurențiu Nazăru, Editura Polirom, Iași 2010, p. 99.

<sup>29</sup> Sfântul AMBROZIE al Milanului, *Scrisori VIII-XII*, pp. 55-77.

<sup>30</sup> *Idem, Scrisoarea I, Episcopul Ambrozie către preafericitul și preacredinciosul împărat Grațian August*, p. 28.

the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, namely, they refused the term *homoousios* (ὁμοούσιος: of-the-same-Being, consubstantial) and they at most agreed with the term *homoiousios* (ὁμοιούσιος: from ὅμοιος, *hómoios*, "similar" and οὐσία, *ousía*, "essence, being"). The difference between the two terms was quite subtle for being perceived by the masses of believers. Still, to the Milanese theologians, the Nicæan terminology was normative, and that's why he warned Emperor Gratian about that imminent risk posed to the area of Western Christianity, for the Aquilian area, including for the Ilirian Occident. These areas were contaminated with Arianism and semi-Arianism. Saint Ambrose told the emperor, in a categorical and trenchant tone:

"You have the Illyrians there, from the Arians' sect, shun yourself of their evil teaching. Let them not get close to the believers, so that they cannot sow the seeds of the straying, notice what has happened to them because of their wrong faith, sit peacefully, and follow the true faith<sup>31</sup>".

The Arianism confounded the Pauline term *Mediator* to something in the middle between God and people, neither true God nor true man. Christ wasn't the true Mediator between man and God the Father, being only a man, a *god* who reached this quality by climbing the steps towards consummation, and Christ reached the highest possible level.

The Church teaches us that «Mediator» in a proper sense was but Christ, who is both real God and real man, and who can bring the people to a real union with God, through an infinite thriving, without the people being confounded to God. The «Mediator», of-one-Being with the Father, actually shows God's love for the people and the great value God places on them. The Arian «Mediator» shows the law's mastery over everyone. On the other hand, a mono-personal God Who has no Son of-the-same-Being with Him, but His Son is rather a being superior to all other beings, cannot live the contemplation of His infinity and of His love into

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<sup>31</sup> *Idem, Scrisoarea II, Ambrozie către Constantius*, pp. 34-35.

a Son Who is within Himself, and He cannot rejoice in the loving infinite contemplation of His Son. His own life would be a limited, a poor life.

Striking at the structure of supreme love, Arianism undermined not only the basis of Christian spirituality but also the doctrine regarding the role and importance of the Holy Mysteries in the life of the Church and of the believers. The grace of the All-Holy Trinity, which is invoked and sanctifies the matter of the mysteries at the prayers of the Church, is sent by the Father through the deified nature of the Resurrected Christ, ascended and sitting on the right hand of the Father, and through the impartation of the Holy Ghost. Or, if the Son had been a creature only similar to the Father, also that energy coming through Him would have been unable to sanctify the matter, the human nature, or the liturgical elements. It is true that the Father approves this grace and He sends it gradually according to the intensity of the ascetical-mystical zeal of those in question. In this sense, Saint Apostle Paul specified the sharing of the grace in measure: "The Spirit has given each of us a special way of serving others. Some of us can speak with wisdom, while others can speak with knowledge, but these gifts come from the same Spirit. To others the Spirit has given great faith or the power to heal the sick" (1 Cor. 12: 7-9). Saint Ambrose insisted upon the fact that this graduality, though existing in the Holy Mysteries as well, wouldn't exhaust the presence of the Savior, especially in their source, which is the Holy Eucharist. The graduality always depends on the receiver, and not on The One Who integrally bestows Himself in each morsel of the mysteries, and it must be seen as an effect and not as a determining cause. So,

"One can more fully understand the blood of Christ, whose grace doesn't get diminished, and it doesn't get added. Either you take much or a little, the measure of the redemption is fulfilled the same for all. The grace is equally imparted to everyone; it is imparted the salvation, it is imparted the grace (...)

the grace is equal to everyone, but the virtue differs for everyone”<sup>32</sup>.

True man and true God, Savior Jesus Christ, in the eyes of the faithless ones, he was only a man, only matter. The Arians couldn’t extend their thinking beyond material reality. Crossing beyond it, from a dogmatic point of view, means looking at acts of objective salvation and then transferring them to the subjective level, namely, the personal level. The first stage would be redemption, and the second would be straightening. They are conditioned by the workings of grace within the Church through the mysteries. The Arian heresy didn’t see in the content of the Gospel the God-Man in equal measure. Still, they saw him as a simple prophet who brought another message to mankind, a new Law, and they didn’t mention His miracles committed upon the world by the godlike and deifying grace.

“They who were under the law were redeemed through the law. But they who are redeemed through *the Gospel*, they pay a drachma according to the law, and they are redeemed through the blood of Christ according to the grace, so that they have a double redemption: of the covenant and of the blood. This is because it won’t be enough faith for consummation, if one doesn’t receive also the grace of baptism, and if the redemption doesn’t receive the blood of Christ”<sup>33</sup>.

The Arian conception promoted the ontological accent placed on the Trinitarian Persons by upholding a unique and common godlike being. The Ambrosian Trinitarian doctrine contested just that aspect by specifying that in the Trinity, the difference among Persons isn’t one regarding the being. Still, it is exclusively due to the properties of the Persons, namely: the Father is unborn, the Son is born, and the Holy Ghost proceeds. One is the Being, another is the Person with the Person’s characteristic features,

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<sup>32</sup> Sfântul AMBROZIE al Milanului, *Scrisoarea VII, Ambrozie către Justus, sănătate!*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 52; *ibid*, p. 52.

and another is their common work. Out of the Arian conception comes the view that any hypostasis or person also entails a difference in the common being. So, any hypostasis of a person is united in himself as a common being and an own being that is different. They had no clear idea of the person who doesn't bring forth existence from the common being, an idea specified by the Christian faith. Here intervenes the specification made by Saint Athanasius the great (295-373), at the Synod of Nicaea, in the year 325, regarding the introduction of the term *homousios* (ὁμοούσιος; *of-one-being*), and Saint Ambrose declared his deep respect for the personality of Saint Athanasius the great: "But because the Illyrian raises suspicions, the places by the sea have been searched, which are safer. It is true that I have introduced some form changes; keeping in the synod the things decided by Athanasius, may his memory be holy, for he was a true monument of the faith"<sup>34</sup>.

Saint Ambrose regarded the fight against the dogmatic truth as an offense brought to the grace of God, a grace shared to the Church by the Ghost of the truth through the Holy Mysteries. Grace and truth are complementary realities in the life of the saints, and they are the surest weapons for undermining the teachings brought about by the sliding away from the right faith. The heretics and their heresies, especially the Arianism, they didn't see the divine-human Person of our Savior Jesus Christ spring of the grace, and the ascetic-mystic effort of the believers and of the saints was in their view a vain effort, or,

"the grace of the Church is the picking up of the merits, which has been shining within the saints since the beginning of the world, and it finally has started to be spread among peoples, in order all of them to learn that not in the unknowing souls entered the faith of Christ (because of not being there any victory crown without a fight), but through banishing away the

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<sup>34</sup> *Idem, Scrisoarea XIV, Ambrozie și ceilalți episcopi către preafericitul împărat și preabunul principe Theodosie, p. 80.*

opinion, which was strong before, so that it has been received the truth as such”<sup>35</sup>.

Human rationality extends beyond the beginning of the world and of a created savior, and it posits the idea of a Person God, or a Tri-Personal God, Who is the cause of all realities and Who has neither beginning nor end. The limited origin of a created savior cannot, therefore, commit the work of the world’s salvation. Only a Savior born out of the Father before all ages has also in Himself an infinite life, for His origin is infinite as well. If the Son had been created too, as the Arian argued, that would have meant that the Father Whom the Son was born out of was not of-the-same-being with Him, so that in this case the created savior would not have had the same will with the Father, He would not have had the same conscience like the Father, being submitted to corruption, namely to corruptibility. The Milanese apologetic of the right-faith urged the shepherd to defend without any fear.

“The servant of Christ is guarded not by the bodily guard, but by the godlike Providence. Satan pretends to be an angel of peace, and he uses his power to commit evil. Naboth defended his vineyard with his own blood. When Christ is praised, the heretics say that a rebellion is triggered. The heretics say that death is prepared for those, and they truly have death in the praises of Christ. How can He accept the praises when they say about Him that He is powerless? So that, even today, when Christ is praised, the insanity of the Arians is whipped”<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> *Idem, Scrisoarea XVIII, Episcopul Ambrozie către preafericitul principe și preabunul împărat Valentinian Augustus*, p. 98.

<sup>36</sup> *Idem, Scrisoarea XXI, Episcopul Ambrozie către prea blândul împărat și prea fericitul August Valentinian. Cuvânt împotriva lui Auxențiu despre predarea bisericilor*, p. 118, 119 și 120.

## 5 The Ambrosian Triadology Synthesis

If the Son is of one being with the Father, that means that the Father is the Son's Source since eternity, a spring of the same being with Him, and not a virtual godhead that would mean that the Father too, as the spring of the Son's birth, was a virtual Father too. The Orthodox teaching insists upon the fact that the Father is Birth-Giver of the Son and Proceeding of the Holy Ghost from eternity, and between the birth of the Son and the existence of the Father, there was no time interval, meaning that God had not waited for His Son to be born, and after that, the Father would have become Father. In this sense, Arianism also upholds a certain evolution in God from an eternal Father to a created Son. Still, such an evolution would not have been towards consummation, but rather would have been an involution, or a degradation of the Godhead. Only a Son who is born out of the Father since eternity can mirror the Father as an eternal Parent. Without this birth since eternity and of the same being, the Father would have remained undefined. The non-birth of the Father and the birth of the Son are acts from ever, and that's why they express a paternal unity and a filial unity at the same time, and consummately. Both the Father and the Son have existed since eternity, namely, without being confounded as a Person with Another. Only as the Father and as the Son from eternity, they can have, together with the Holy Ghost, the mastery over all the created realities. If Jesus had been only a man, he couldn't have saved mankind. He couldn't have defeated the corruption, the sin, and the death. An eternal Father without an eternal Son couldn't have been either Himself from eternity, but by being of the same being, the Son becomes the perfect Image of the Father Whom he has entered with, from eternity, the dialogue and the filial love as an expression of the full communion.

“Within Church I know a sole image, that of an unseen God, for God said: *Let's make man in our image and in our likeness* (Gen. 1: 26), image which it has been written that it is Christ, *the shininess of the glory and the image of the being of God*

*Hebr. 1: 3*). as the Lord Jesus Himself said: *He who sees Me he sees the Father* (Jn. 14: 9). This image isn't separated from the Father, and He taught me that it is the unity of the trinity, saying: *I and the Father are one* (Jn. 10: 30)"<sup>37</sup>.

If Jesus Christ hadn't been the Son of God and of the same being with the Father, He could not have saved mankind, nor could He have deified the entire nature, and God in Himself would have been a mono-personal God, and in such a case, the structure of the full love would not have been possible either. In His pluri-personal structure, God is free love, and from this position He creates the world also out of free will and love, so that the world isn't an emanation of a mono-personal God who does not create freely but under external constraint. Only as the Father and the Son, equal and consubstantial, together with the Holy Ghost, God gives meaning to creation, and he endows the creation with the gift of freedom.

Only as a true man, our Savior can save mankind from under the mastery of the devil, because the devil too is a creature as well. Only a Savior who is both true God and true man would have this power for restoring the entire fallen nature. Until today, in Judaism and in Islam, Jesus Christ is only a man, or at most one of the prophets. Arianism held that Christ was the first creature of the Father. Being a creature, even being the first creature among the created realities, He couldn't have been equal and consubstantial to the Father, respectively to the Holy Ghost. If God hadn't been a whole God, the entire mankind would have remained under the eternal kingdom of sin and death, and that's why in Orthodoxy the Trinity is doxological, and the doxology is Trinitarian. In this sense, Saint Ambrose praised in the daily confession, by cult and prayer, the equality and the consubstantiality of the persons of the Holy Trinity, the Only One giving validity to the Holy Mysteries within the Church of Christ Who is true man and true God:

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 122.

“What can be greater than the savior power of the Holy Trinity that is daily celebrated in front of the people? All the believers, competitively, aspire to strengthen their faith, to confess in verses that they know the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. Why, therefore, does Auxentius<sup>38</sup> think that the faithful peoples must be baptized anew, once they have been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity? The Apostle says: *A sole faith, a sole baptism* (Eph. 4: 5), and he says that he opposes the people and not Christ, and Auxentius despises the commandment of God (Lk. 7: 30), and he condemns the Baptism given to us by Christ for the redemption of our sins”<sup>39</sup>.

If the Son of God hadn't been equal to the Father from eternity, neither the dialogue between the Father and His Son would have been accomplished as from equal to equal, and the communion would have been imperfect. The consummate communion is always done between persons of-the-same Being, having common will and work.

“If the Father, as God, is consummated, and the Son was inferior to the Father, the Son would not be able to consummately unite Himself with the Father. The creature, however high it

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<sup>38</sup> David Popescu, *note la Sfântul AMBROZIE al Milanului, Scrisori*, vol. 53, P. S. B., EIBMBOR, București 1994, pp. 328-329: “Auxentius originated from Scythia, and he was initially called Mercurius, but he changed his name to Auxentius (as the Arian bishop from before him was called), in order for him to be more pleasant to the Arian believers of the former bishop. On 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 386, in consequence of the insistence of the Arian heretic Auxentius and Empress Justina, the emperor issued a law authorizing Arian gatherings and providing punishments for those who would disturb them. Because Auxentius wanted to remove Bishop Ambrose from his chair and to take his place, tribune Dalmatius was sent to Ambrose to announce him to come in front of the imperial council accompanied by supporters from the right-believers, as Auxentius was to do as well, under the sanction that, in case he didn't come, the episcopal chair of Mediolanum will be taken away from him and it would be given to Auxentius”.

<sup>39</sup> Sfântul AMBROZIE al Milanului, *Scrisoarea XXI, Episcopul Ambrozie către prea blândul împărat și prea fericitul August Valentinian. Cuvânt împotriva lui Auxențiu despre predarea bisericilor*, p. 124.

ascends towards union with God by His grace, will never reach the full union with God. This is because the creature will not become persons of God's infinity"<sup>40</sup>.

If Jesus Christ, as the embodied Son of God and as Savior of the world, had been inferior to the Father by His being, he wouldn't have been a real Son of the Father, nor would His work have been a godlike one. Such an adopted Son, as the Milanese Arians preached Him, He wouldn't have the power for saving the human nature fallen into sin, and the Ghost sent by Him upon the Holy Apostle and upon their disciples (Jn. 20: 22) would have been, similarly, as Ghost differing in His being from the Son Who sent the Ghost in the world on Pentecost, and the Ghost would have differed also from the Father Who would have given birth to and Who would have proceeded only created persons Who cannot save and sanctify the world, and the Father would have remained alone as true God, from ever and forever. In exchange, if the Son is of the same being as the Father, as Saint Ambrose was teaching against the Arian heresy, then the Son will be able to show the entire world the full glory of the heavenly Father. Those who believe in His quality as true God and as Savior of the world will be saved within the Church, and they will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. By subordinating the Son to the Father, the Son will no longer be reckoned as a free person, but as a person subordinated and enslaved by the paternal ontology. Within the Church, the Savior is the *Emperor of Emperors and the Lord of the lords* (Apoc. 19: 16, Whom the Father has given to the authority upon the entire world and upon the entire creation, namely, He is the absolutely free God-Man, and the freedom and the exercise of the freedom reveal the Son as equal and consubstantial with the eternal source of His birth. The Arianism, by reckoning the Son as inferior to the Father, it was teaching that Christ doesn't have

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<sup>40</sup> Dumitru STĂNILĂOAE, *nota 37*, la Sfântul Chiril al Ierusalimului, *Comentariu la Evanghelia Sfântului Ioan*, vol. 41, P. S. B., EIBMBOR, București 2000, p. 31.

the fullness of the power of the eternal life, and therefore the Son wasn't able to defeat the sin or the death, neither was Him able to save, and the saints and the martyrs had no power coming from Jesus, because He was only a man like we are, respectively the merits of the martyrs have neither value nor power for defeating the power of the devil working within world.

“The Arians say: These are not martyrs and they cannot torment the devil, neither can they set somebody free, because the torments of the devils are proven by their voices themselves, as the benefactions of the martyrs are shown by the healing of the ill ones and by the witness of the liberated ones<sup>41</sup>”.

If Christ had been a creature of the Father, even though the first creature of the world's order, because of being created, He couldn't have been able to justify the miracles He worked in the Holy Gospels rationally, and His disciples, the Holy Apostles, and all the Church's saints would have been helpless in what regards their missionary involvement by witnessing the miracles committed by them during their life and even after their death, by their holy relics. The Church has always taught that the working of miracles, the power of the saints from earth, is endorsed, permitted, and permanently assisted by the Savior, through the work of imparting the uncreated grace, by His Holy Ghost. If Christ had not been God, the grace would have been created, so that the Holy Ghost would have been only an impersonal energy; therefore, those miracles couldn't have been worked or seen, and consequently they wouldn't have been credible either. Saint Ambrose strengthened the Orthodox faith against the Arians by speaking plainly about the reality of the miracles that happened and continue to happen in Milan. If the Father works into and through the Son<sup>42</sup>, who is of one Being with Him, their together-

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<sup>41</sup> Sfântul AMBROZIE al Milanului, *Scrisoarea XXII, Fratele către sora sa mai iubită decât viața și decât ochii*, p. 128.

<sup>42</sup> Sfântul AMBROZIE al Milanului, *Scrisoarea XXX, Ambrozie către Irenaeus, sănătate!*, p. 156: “For the same Who has been born as a Strong One as

working will be continued in the Church's saints, as also through the work of the Son into and through the Ghost, of the same Being with Him, so that They uphold the miracles visibly worked within the world until the end of time. In the miracles worked by the saints, one can see their living and conscious relationship with Christ in the Holy Ghost. After their death, the miracles continue for the uncreated grace and of Christ, and of one uncreated Ghost shares with the saints an imperishable value, sustainable, and eternal. The witness of the Arians in this regard, it surpassed even the witness of the devils who *believe and tremble* (Jas. 2: 19), and the Arians witness rather tended to atheism than towards a diabolical antitheism.

“Not even the demons can deny that faith strengthened by the ancestral faith, but the Arians do deny it. Nobody will be healed if he doesn't believe in the Father and in the Son and in the Holy Ghost, because that one who denied the Holy Ghost and who didn't believe in the almightiness of the Holy Trinity was dead and buried. This is confessed by the devil, but the Arians do not want to confess it at their turn. The Arians say: We don't know it, we don't want to know it, and we don't want to believe it”<sup>43</sup>.

## Conclusions

The teaching of Saint Ambrose of Milan conveys especially the godlike truth according to which Jesus Christ unveils Himself directly in the plenitude of His Godhead, and from here is highlights the character of communion of His, as godlike Person, with the Father and with the Holy Ghost.

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a Strong One, as Redeemer out of Virgin, in the same difference of the double nature, the Great Savior has been truly Fulfilled as the Only Son of God”.

<sup>43</sup> Sfântul AMBROZIE al Milanului, *Scrisoarea XXII, Fratele către sora sa mai iubită decât viața și decât ochii*, p. 129.

If Jesus Christ had been the first creature created by the Father, as Arians were teaching, that would have meant that He was a beginning, as the world has too. The Arians taught that Christ had a beginning and, because of that, He could not be God; therefore, both Christ and the world would have a beginning, and both are limited, meaning they have obvious imperfections.

Saint Ambrose contextualized the Milanese Triadology within the Church's space, in the liturgical space, in the homiletic space and of the permanent correspondence, either with the Orthodox hierarchy of that time, or with the contemporary to him public personalities, descending the dogma within life on human existential level, and that confers to the ecclesial human being a starting point towards a new ontological perspective in what regards the present Christian spirituality.

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