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*THE IDENTITY OF THE "AMBROSIASTER": A
FRESH SUGGESTION.*

THE name "Ambrosiaster" was invented by Erasmus to indicate the author of a Latin commentary on the thirteen Epistles of St. Paul, which has come down to us for the most part under the name of St. Ambrose. His rejection of Ambrosian authorship has been almost universally upheld by succeeding scholars, and a large number of guesses as to the real identity of the mysterious author have been put forward during the past four centuries. The bases for most of these were slender enough, and no names need be mentioned save Hilary the Luciferian deacon, Tyconius the Donatist¹ and Faustinus.² Each of these names was supported with some show of argument, but the problem was still unsolved when in 1899 the world-famous French Benedictine, Dom Germain Morin, O.S.B., of the Abbey, Maredsous, Belgium, pointed out a number of indications which seemed to him to favour the idea that one Isaac, a converted Jew concerned in the disturbances at the election of Pope Damasus, might have written the work. This view was made known to the readers of the *EXPOSITOR* in a graceful article by the Reverend A. E. Burn, entitled "The Ambrosiaster and Isaac the Converted Jew" (1899, vol. ii., 368-375). This opinion may be said to hold the field, as it has commanded the adhesion of Professors Theodor von Zahn, Joseph Wittig, and others. But in 1903 Dom Morin gave up his first suggestion in favour of a second, that the author was a distinguished proconsul of the day, Decimius Hilarianus Hilarius. Under the title "A New View about

¹ The view of the erudite patristic scholar, J. B. Morel, presbyter of Auxerre.

² The view of Prof. Joseph Langen, the Bonn Old Catholic.

Ambrosiaster" attention was called to this change of view by the present writer in the *EXPOSITOR* (1903, vol. i., pp. 442-455). The suggestion has claimed hardly any adherents.

Amidst this bewildering variety of opinion it might seem as if it were our duty to rest content with the certain knowledge that the work belongs to the last thirty years of the fourth century and to Italy. But it happens that it contains so many interesting statements, and is of such special excellence, that a knowledge of the author would be a real help in the assignment of its place among the historical documents belonging to its period. Moreover, the problem is not that of one work merely. For two others are now regarded, almost without a dissentient voice, as from the same pen, one the *Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti cxxvii.*, handed down to us under the name of Augustine,¹ and a fragment of a commentary on St. Matthew, preserved in the same manuscript as contains the "Muratorian Canon," and edited by Mercati and Turner.² The real importance of the three works is now gradually coming to be recognised, since Harnack wrote of the author: "We ought to call him the great unknown; for what Western expositor of the early period or the Middle Ages is his equal?" "Both works [the Commentary and the *Quaestiones*] are admirable in their kind, and perhaps the most distinguished product of the Latin Church in the period between Cyprian and Jerome." Jülicher is no less hearty in his admiration: "His exposition of the letters of Paul is not only important by reason of many

¹ Critically edited by the present writer in the Vienna *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, vol. 50 (1908).

² The present writer assigned it to Ambrosiaster, and is followed by Zahn, Morin, etc. The fragment is edited in the *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. v. (1903-04), pp. 218-241, and my argument is published in the same volume, pp. 608-621.

interesting notes on the history of dogma, morals and government, but is also the best written prior to the sixteenth century."

Such opinions constitute an ample reason for continuing to grapple with this difficult problem. Dom Morin amidst much research into other topics has found time to ponder further on it since 1903, and has published the result of his meditations in the *Revue Bénédictine* for January, 1914, in an article entitled, "Qui est l'Ambrosiaster? Solution Nouvelle." His two previous proposals were put forward merely as suggestions: the new view is presented as a certainty. It is right that it should be expounded in the pages of the EXPOSITOR, and some justification for the action of the present writer in doing so may be found in the fact that his own study of the Ambrosiaster engaged nearly ten years of his life. It must, however, be understood that I am not expressing either agreement or disagreement on my own part with the view of Dom Morin. Those who have taken the trouble to read what I have published on the subject will understand why. I am here as a reporter, anxious to extend to the wider world represented by the EXPOSITOR knowledge which might otherwise be confined to the readers of the *Revue Bénédictine*, who are not nearly as numerous as they ought to be.

The person fixed on by Dom Morin is Evagrius of Antioch, who died a little after 392 as bishop of the Eustathians in that city. It will be best to begin by stating what is known of this man's career, and then comparing what can be inferred from the works of the Ambrosiaster as to *his* career. Then one can compare the language of the one work which bears Evagrius' name, the translation of St. Athanasius' Life of St. Anthony, with the works of Ambrosiaster.

Evagrius was descended from Pompeianus, surnamed the Frank, who in A.D. 272 distinguished himself in Aurelian's

war against Zenobia. The family was very popular in Antioch, and some of its representatives lived as far away as Egypt. It was Pompeianus' grandson probably, also named Pompeianus, who was the father of Evagrius, and a great friend of the distinguished rhetorician Libanius. We hear nothing of Evagrius between his birth at Antioch and his first appearance in public life in the year 363. In that year the prefect Sallustius procured him official employment, and in the following year he obtained a higher position. His administration was distinguished by its purity, and he made no attempt to enrich himself, though married and the father of two children. Yet he was prosecuted for an error committed during his period of office, and it required the intervention of his powerful friends, Libanius, Sallustius and Rufinus, to secure his acquittal. In spite of this the Emperor Valentinian inflicted on him an enormous fine, which would have reduced him to beggary, but for the renewed support of his powerful friends.

It seems that this second higher position was in Italy, perhaps at Milan, where the imperial court was at the time. We know in any case that Evagrius came West with St Eusebius of Vercelli in 363 or 364 and did not return to the East till towards the autumn of 373. By this time he was already a priest. During this ten years' residence in Italy he supported the claims of Pope Damasus and exerted himself in opposition to the Arian bishop of Milan, Auxentius.

Returning to the East towards the end of 373, he passed by Caesarea in Cappadocia, and had an interview with St. Basil on the subject of the schism in the Church of Antioch. Evagrius had promised Basil to support Meletius, but joined the party of Paulinus. It was about this period that Evagrius and Jerome were intimate. Evagrius submitted his compositions to Jerome, and Jerome found in him a sympathetic

spirit. Besides sharing the tastes of Jerome, Evagrius had the acquirement, rare among the Oriental clergy, of a speaking and writing knowledge of Latin. His long period of residence in the West had made him almost a Latin, and it is highly probable that the priest Evagrius mentioned in the Acts of the Council of Aquileia of 381 is our Evagrius.

This varied career ended by the election of Evagrius as bishop in succession to Paulinus of Antioch in 388 or 389. The bishops of the West, Ambrose among them, refrained from taking a side in the rivalry between him and Flavian, and made a vain attempt to put an end to this troublesome situation at the council of Capua in 391. The death of Evagrius a year or two after the beginning of his episcopate solved the difficulty.

In the first and fifth chapters of my *Study of Ambrosiaster*¹ I endeavoured to come to some conclusions regarding the life and career of that author from the internal evidence of his writings. It is curious to see how well these correspond with the sketch just given of the life and experiences of Evagrius. "It seems clear that the writer was of high birth" (p. 177). "The references to Egypt are rather frequent" (p. 35). "The author had some connexion with or special interest in Egypt" (p. 36). A "large number of his illustrations are derived from Government and Law" (p. 23). "The references to Law in general or to particular statutes are unusually frequent" (p. 27). "He draws many illustrations from the emperor, the highest state officials, and the senatorial order. He has a keen sense of what it is fitting for them to do. He has a respect for dignities and class distinctions, such as aristocrats and their servants alone have. He knows exactly the duties of all officials . . . he himself was a senator and a high official in the state" (p. 177). "References in both works seem to point to the fact that he had

¹ Cambridge, 1905 (*Texts and Studies*, vii. 4).

also held high administrative posts. . . . His legal terminology is not highly technical in character, but exactly such as an experienced administrator would employ" (p. 178). "There are indications that he had travelled much" (p. 179). The author mentions Eusebius (of Vercelli) in complimentary terms in *quaest. cxxv*.

Almost more striking is the curious relation of Ambrosiaster to the clergy. Most of his work shows a position of detachment from them. The greater part of his writings seems the product of a layman keenly interested in the Bible and in theology. But this characteristic is hard to reconcile with passages which suggest after all some ecclesiastical position. From *Quaestio CI.*, "On the Boastfulness of the Roman Deacons," it may be justly argued that the author was neither bishop nor deacon, but possibly a presbyter. From some of the concluding *Quaestiones*, which on other grounds may be safely assigned to a later period of the author's literary activity, the natural inference is that the author was a bishop.

Ambrosiaster, like Evagrius, was also a declared supporter of Damasus,¹ and a combatant of the Arians.

The great interest in the Jews shown by Ambrosiaster is somewhat of a difficulty in the way of identifying the two. Evagrius was not a Jew. It occurs to me that his wife may have been. But in any case the difficulty is not crucial. Both Professor Cumont and Professor Brewer have declared their conviction that Ambrosiaster was pagan by origin.² To this double testimony may be added the evidence of a Hebrew scholar like Professor G. Buchanan Gray that there is no trace of Hebrew origin in the *Quaestiones*.⁴ Ambrosiaster's interest in the Jews is only more

¹ *Study*, p. 166. ² *Study*, p. 38; Morin, p. 26.

³ Cf. Morin, p. 27, and notes.

⁴ *Manassah College Magazine* for 1908-1909.

pronounced than his interest in many other races, and is due to his cast of mind and his experience as administrator.

Hostility to the Greeks as authorities for the Biblical text seems strange if the author were Greek by birth, but he seems to have imbibed his Biblical learning in Latin centres, probably in North Italy. There is something of Antioch in his method of exegesis, and Jerome also often criticises the Greek authorities unfavourably. Professor E. W. Watson is entitled to the credit of his suggestion that Ambrosiaster was a foreigner, in other words a Greek, by birth.¹

The foregoing discussion lends fresh interest to Jerome's notice of Evagrius in his *De Viris Inlustribus* (A.D. 392). He is described thus:—"Evagrius, bishop of Antioch, a man of keen and exceptional intellect, while still a presbyter, read to me papers on various subjects, which he has not yet published: he has also translated the Life of St. Anthony from the Greek of Athanasius into our language." The papers on various subjects (*diversarum ὑποθέσεων tractatus*) correspond perfectly with the *Quaestiones* and the commentaries, the latter of which are called *tractatus* in the manuscripts. Again, I was led to conjecture that the second edition of the *Quaestiones* at least was published by some one else after the death of the author.² It is quite clear that nos. CI. and CVIII. were first issued apart and anonymously.

The relation of Jerome to the Ambrosiaster writings might well be the subject of a special monograph. I pointed out that Pope Damasus must have had *Quaestiones VI., IX., X., XII., XI.* on Genesis before his eyes, when about 384 he addressed them to Jerome (cf. his Epistle 35), but Jerome knows nothing of them. From letter 73 (398 A.D.) of Jerome we learn that *Quaestio CVIII.* had been sent to him by Evangelus as a separate anonymous work. Epistle 146,

¹ *Classical Review*, xxiii. 237. ² *Study*, p. 11.

addressed to the same Evangelus, shows clear dependence on *Quaestio CI.*¹ If Jerome was acquainted with the real author of these documents, we could explain his silence by that author's resort to schism.

Let me now select some of the most striking linguistic parallels, which Dom Morin has accumulated, between Evagrius' translation of Athanasius' *Life of St. Anthony* and the writings of Ambrosiaster. The references to the sections of the *Life of St. Anthony* precede the others in each case.

Prologue, *uestrae caritatis imperium* : in the Greek simply τὸ παρ' ὑμῶν ἐπιτάγμα, cf. the beginning of *Q. ci.*, dum iussis *caritatis* parere uolumus.

Prol., ut plenius aliquid *addiscens* : *addisco* = disco, favourite of Ambrst.

6 *multimoda* . . . arma : nothing in the Greek corresponding to the adj. *multimodus*. Cf. *Q. xxxiii.*, 7 *multimodam* rationem habent uerba. .

7. *supra memorati* doctoris : no equivalent to *supra memoratus* in the Greek, a favourite expression of Ambrst.

9. *serpens sibilum* personabat : no word of *sibilus* in the Greek : cf. *sibilum serpentum*, *Q. lx.* 5.

20. *fons et origo*, also by the translator (so also 35), occurs *Q. p.* 376, 3.

49. *ea exigor* : *Q. p.* 134, 11 saluator . . . *exigendus* utique non erat.

59. *incongruus* with a dative : *Q. pp.* 267, 21, 300, 8.

65. *gemitu ac lamentatione* : this corresponds to two participles in the Greek, but compare *Q. p.* 397, 1 *lamentatione et gemitu*, p. 217, 24 *lamentationibus et gemitibus*.

69. *verbum dei deus* : with this expression, due to the translator, compare *Q. p.* 367, 21, *uerbum dei deus* est. (But compare also Ambr. *expos. in ps. cxviii.* 11, 5, 1).

75. *ministris auibus* : *Comm. p.* 468 B *ministra* nube, etc,

¹ *Study*, pp. 170 f.

79. *illud autem quale est quod*: so *Q.* p. 308, 18.

80. *deuotus deo*: so *Q.* pp. 210, 9, 223, 10, 364, 14.

82. *cum adsumptione palmarum, quod idololatriae apud Alexandriam insigne est*: an interpolation of the translator, showing special acquaintance with Alexandrian usage, cf. *Study*, pp. 37 f.

93. *Italiae, Illyrico*: these two countries are added by the translator as other places where St. Anthony's name was known. Such knowledge is eminently characteristic of the far-travelled Ambrosiaster.

Ipsi etiam, quae urbium caput est, Romae: the Greek has simply εἰς τὴν Ῥώμην. But such a superfluous addition is quite in the manner of Ambst.: cf. *Q.* p. 195, 13 *urbis Romae, quae caput esse uidetur omnium ciuitatum*.

This is only a small selection from the long list of parallels given by Dom Morin. He is at the same time careful to point out that on the one hand the words *numquidnam* and *ethnicus* are found in the translator and absent from Ambrosiaster, while on the other hand *ac per hoc* and *hinc est unde*, both so characteristic of Ambrosiaster, are absent from the translation. But these facts need cause no difficulty. The translation is after all a translation and not an original work, and it is also a more careful composition than the other works, as it received the final polish of its author and was issued under his own name. Dom Morin sees traces of Jerome's revising hand in it.

A difficulty not mentioned by Dom Morin is to be found in the fact that there is no trace in the Ambrosiaster writings of any interest in monasticism. In this fact I long ago remarked a divergence from his great contemporaries Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine. But it cannot be denied that Dom Morin has furnished us with a powerful argument in favour of the identification of the mysterious Ambrosiaster and the schismatic bishop of Antioch, Evagrius, translator of Athanasius' *Life of St. Anthony*. ALEX. SOUTER.