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The Bishop's Two Bodies: Ambrose and the Basilicas of Milan

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The late ancient body is a historiographical problem. In the combined lights of feminist, Foucaultian, and post-Foucaultian methodologies, much recent scholarship on bodies in late antiquity has focused on bodies as sites on which power relations are enacted and as discourses through which ideologies are materialized. Contemporary concern with definitions and representations of the posthuman, however—for example, in medical technologies that expand the capacities of particular human bodies, in speculative pursuit of the limits of avatars, or in the technological pursuit of artificial intelligence or artificial life—seem both to underline the fundamental lability of the body, and to require a broadening of scholarly focus beyond the traditional visible boundaries of the human organism. At the same time, scholarship on the posthuman emphasizes contemporaneity and futurity to an extent that may seem to preclude engagement with the premodern.[1] I would like to suggest here that doubt about the boundaries of human embodiment is a useful lens through which to reconsider some very traditional questions in the history of Christianity, and that we may begin to think of bodies in Christian premodernity in terms of what we might call

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[1]For a brief general introduction, see Nick Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought," *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14, no. 1 (April 2005): http://www.jetpress.org/volume14/bostrom.html, accessed May 20, 2010; for more detail, see N. Katherine Hayles's history of cybernetics in *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); see also the foundational essay of Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," in *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 7–45. For the general orientation of trans- and posthumanism to the future, see, for example, Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence* (New York: Penguin, 1999) and Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Viking, 2005).

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their pre-humanity, that is, as fundamentally open to extension, transformation, and multiple instantiation.[2] The figure on whom I focus is Ambrose, the fourth-century bishop of Milan, who, I argue, defined his own body in such a way that he was able to instantiate physically in dozens of living human bodies, at least two dead human bodies, thousands of angelic bodies, and four church buildings. Ambrose's dynamic conception of his episcopal body was formed within a complex political and theological situation, so questions concerning the political ideology of bodies remain very much at issue. I add to these questions a concern for premodern uncertainty about how to recognize a body, both when it is visible and, perhaps more importantly, when it is not.

The theoretical questions that transhumanism and posthumanism raise for historians are not entirely new. As my title suggests, I take as one theoretical starting-point, not contemporary posthumanism per se, but Ernst Kantorowicz's 1957 study of medieval political thought, *The King's Two Bodies*.[3] Kantorowicz's pre-Foucaultian study emphasizes the legal and theological reality of the invisible "body politic" that is tied to the "natural body" of the King in late medieval English political thought. The King, by virtue of his office, exists in multiple instantiations, "a *gemina persona*, human by nature and divine by grace,"[4] with one body akin to that of all other persons, and another body, the invisible body politic, which contains and sustains governance. As Kantorowicz notes, however, this bodily multiplication is founded on Christological notions of personhood that date back to the early Christian period,[5] and Kantorowicz traces the development of the legal concept of the King's multiple persons from roots in medieval

[2]Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone, 2005), usefully considers transformation of the human in the middle ages through the lens of the monstrous, and joins her discussion of hybridity to the theology of Bernard of Clairvaux; Bynum's earlier work, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) draws a much closer connection between traditional theological accounts of humanity and the question of human change. Neither of these works, however, focuses extensively on the expansion of the traditional individual human into multiple human and non-human instantiations. More recently, Derek Krueger, "The Unbounded Body in the Age of Liturgical Reproduction," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 17, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 267–79, considers the problem of God's expansive body in sixth- and seventh-century accounts of the Eucharist, and the strategies used to discipline this expansion. Krueger's essay is part of an extremely helpful and provocative collection of papers, "Bodies and Boundaries in Late Antiquity: Essays in Honor of Patricia Cox Miller," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 17, no. 2 (Summer 2009), that explore the relation of bodily imagination and boundary formation in late antiquity.

[3]Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957). It is of course important to note that modern cybernetics began to flourish in the 1940s and 1950s (Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, esp. chap. 3, "Contesting for the Body of Information: The Macy Conferences on Cybernetics").

[4]Kantorowicz, *King's Two Bodies*, 87.

[5]Kantorowicz, *King's Two Bodies*, 16–19.

liturgy.[6] I will argue that Ambrose's work anticipates this kind of multiple instantiation, by stressing the invisible bodies of Christ and the angels that he claims are present during the Christian liturgy, and that are joined to the visible bodies of believers through ritual action. For Kantorowicz, the legal second body of the king, despite its theological foundation, remains a linguistic phenomenon, created to deal with specific implications of kingship;[7] for Ambrose, in contrast, the invisibility of alternate bodies is no bar to their being entirely real, and capable of physical effects.[8] Rather, Ambrose sees visible bodies as performing the same function as textual figures or types.[9] Bodies, for Ambrose, are visible, interpretable signs of an invisible reality, a reality that can also become visible in other physical signs outside the specific body that is being read. Thus, Ambrose's claim that all visible bodies are fundamentally figures for the same set of invisible realities allows him to see himself as physically and figurally tied to multiple bodies, indeed bodies of all kinds. The case of Ambrose's body, in short, provides us with an excellent opportunity to examine the ways that some premodern people may have interpreted the bodies that they saw, precisely by adding to them a number of bodies that they did *not* see.

In order to describe in detail Ambrose's notion of the multiple body, I will begin with the works in which Ambrose presents the dynamic figural body most clearly, particularly his works *De sacramentis* and *De mysteriis*, but also in his conception of the soul as found in his funeral orations. I will then consider how Ambrose applied this conception of his episcopal bodies to one of the major political difficulties in which he found himself, in conflict with the imperial court in Milan in the mid 380s.[10]

[6]Kantorowicz, *King's Two Bodies*, 87–97.

[7]Kantorowicz, *King's Two Bodies*, esp. 336–83, on "The Crown as Fiction."

[8]Cf. Edwin Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 363–64, on the question of extending human intellectual labor outside the bounds of the traditional body: "Sometimes my colleagues ask me if I feel safe metaphorically extending the language of what's happening inside people's heads to these [external] worlds. My response is 'It's not a metaphorical extension at all.'"

[9]See, for example, Foucault's analysis of the way that legal discourse of punishment "describes" the body, in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), chaps. 1, "The Body of the Condemned," and 2, "The Spectacle of the Scaffold"; Foucault sets out his project in dialogue with Kantorowicz at 28–29. See also Judith Butler's analysis of the relationship between the materiality of bodies and the signification of bodies, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), esp. 4–16 and 27–49; Butler engages with *Discipline and Punish* overtly at 33–35.

[10]On the dating of *De mysteriis* and *De sacramentis*, and their attribution, see the introduction to B. Botte's edition, *Ambroise de Milan. Des mystères. Des sacrements. Explication du symbole*. Sources Chrétiennes 25 (Paris: Cerf, 1961), whose Latin text I have used. For ease of reference, I have given here the English translations of Roy J. Deferrari, *Saint Ambrose: Theological and Dogmatic Works*, Fathers of the Church 44 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1963); for the funeral orations, I rely on the Latin text of Otto Faller, CSEL 73.7.209–401; here I give, with slight modifications, the English translations of John J. Sullivan and

I. Figural Bodies

De mysteriis, probably written in the 380s, explains the implications of baptism for the newly baptized of Milan, with particular attention to the sacramental processes at work in both baptism and the Eucharist. The conjunction of the two sacraments in this text suggests at the outset that the newly baptized are understood to be participating in an economy that is both bodily and extrabodily, that is, one in which the boundaries of what is conventionally understood as a human body are not strictly observed, nor are they considered definitional. Baptism, on the one hand, obviously takes the conventional body of the baptized as one of its main points of reference; on the other hand, the Eucharist takes the non-obvious body of Christ as its reference point. By approaching baptism in the light of its relationship to the Eucharist, Ambrose suggests a non-obvious body in addition to the obvious one that is baptized. As Ambrose says, "the Apostle taught you that 'we are not to consider the things seen, but the things that are not seen, for the things seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal.'"[11] The sacraments, including the bodily practice of baptism, are specifically to be considered in terms of their invisible, and hence extrabodily, components.

The most frequent indicator of such invisibility in *De mysteriis* is the use of the exegetical figure or type.[12] In late ancient exegetical practice, identifying

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Martin R. P. McGuire, *On His Brother Satyrus*, and Roy J. Deferrari, *On Emperor Valentinian* and *On Emperor Theodosius*, in *Funeral Orations by St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. Ambrose*, Fathers of the Church 22 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1953). For the Latin text of *epp.* 75, 75A, 76, and 77, I use the text of Otto Faller and Michaele Zelzer, CSEL 82.3., and give here the translation of J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Ambrose of Milan: Political Letters and Speeches*, Translated Texts for Historians 43 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005).

[11] *Myst*. 3.8, quoting 2 Cor. 4:18. Gérard Nauroy, importantly, aligns Ambrose's various methods of exegesis with the progress of the catechumen in "Deux lectures de la liturgie du baptême chez Ambroise de Milan. Du témoignage brut à son elaboration littéraire," in E. Godo, ed., *Littérature, rites et liturgies* (Paris: Imago, 2002), 13–39, repr. in Nauroy, *Ambroise de Milan. Écriture et esthétique d'une exégèse pastorale* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 451–81; more generally on Ambrose's exegesis, see Nauroy, "L'Écriture dans la pastorale d'Ambroise de Milan. Les sens de l'Écriture, les formes et styles de l'exégèse: mimétisme biblique," in *Bible de tous les temps*, vol. 2, *Le monde latine antique et la Bible* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1985), 371–408, repr. in the same volume at 247–300.

[12] What exactly is meant by a verbal "figure" is sometimes ambiguous in ancient theories of grammar and rhetoric: it is common for grammarians to speak of figures as simply the forms of the words themselves, so that a word can have a "simple" or "compound" figure. Quintilian nods in the direction of this definition at *Institutio Oratoria* 9.1: "In the first [sense, the word "figure"] is applied to any form in which thought is expressed, just as it is to bodies which, whatever their composition, must have some shape." *Inst. Or.* 9.1.10, trans. H. E. Butler, *Quintilian: Institutio Oratoria*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1920). A second sense of "figure," however, which Quintilian prefers, is the "special sense, in which it is called a schema, [in which] it means a rational change in meaning or language from the ordinary and simple form, that is to say, a change analogous to that involved

an expression as "figural" often meant tying the meaningfulness or signifying function of the figure to another object, in a way that modern readers have tended to classify as either typological or allegorical.[13] As Quintilian more bluntly suggested, a figure is simply "when the speaker pretends to say something other than that which he actually does say."[14] The figure, then, is not only meaningful but also expansive, embodied both in its original physical instance or utterance and in a second instance, such as when Adam is read as a figure or type of Christ. In this account, a complete figural unit would have its foundation and then its fulfillment in two temporally distinct physical instantiations.[15] These instantiations are construed as ontologically "the same" by virtue of an invisible event or state in which both participate; for Christian scriptural exegesis, this invisible event or state is usually marked as the intentionality of God.[16] Thus, figures are always figures "for" or "of" something else—not just meaningful, but indicative of other things, to which the original figures are linked via invisible meaning. Figures here can be either allegorical or typological, but their salient characteristic is that they are physical referents both to invisible meaning and to something else in which that meaning is also found. Figuration, then, carries with it the notion of an invisibility that accompanies multiple physical instantiations,

by sitting, lying down on something or looking back" (*Inst. Or.* 9.1.11). Both of these senses of "figure" are based on a physical substratum (which Quintilian notably calls a body), and both also rely on an invisible element expressed physically and visibly in words, either simply a thought or, in its more complex form, what Quintilian describes as "a new aspect . . . given by art" (*Inst. Or.* 9.1.14). A figure, then, is a visible representation of an invisible reality, but it is not limited to a simple one-to-one correspondence between word and meaning, since "art" can add a "new aspect" to the expression of meaning.

[13]See the classic discussions of Henri de Lubac, esp. "'Typologie' et 'allégorisme,'" *Recherches de science religieuse* 34 (1947): 180–226, and Jean Daniélou, "La Typologie de la Semaine au IVe siècle," *Recherches de science religieuse* 35 (1948): 382–411.

[14]*Inst. Or.* 9.1.14. For discussion of this sense of figure in late ancient exegesis, and the difficulty in distinguishing between strictly "typological" and "allegorical" reading, see Frances Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), esp. chaps. 8, "Allēgoria and Theōria," and 9, "The Question of Method"; for figuration more broadly in early Christian exegesis, see John David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), esp. chap. 1, "Body against Spirit: Daniel Boyarin"; for a recent reconsideration of "allegory" and "typology," see the excellent survey of Peter W. Martens, "Revisiting the Allegory/Typology Distinction: The Case of Origen," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 283–317.

[15]On the use of typology, as conventionally understood, in *On the Mysteries*, see Enrico Mazza, *Mystagogy: A Theology of Liturgy in the Patristic Age*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Pueblo, 1989).

[16]Cf. Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading*, chap. 4, "The Figure in the Fulfillment: Erich Auerbach."

and it is this sense of figuration that we find in Ambrose's description of the sacraments.

Ambrose describes the process of baptism in *De mysteriis* in classically typological or figural terms. For example, Noah and the Flood are types of baptism: "When, as the flood subsided, he first sent forth a raven which did not return; he afterwards sent forth a dove, which is said to have returned with an olive twig. You see the water; you see the wood; you perceive the dove—and do you doubt the mystery?"[17] Similarly, Ambrose cites the story of Jesus curing a paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda from the gospel of John: "Therefore that pool is also by way of a figure, that you may believe that the power of God also descends into this [baptismal] fountain."[18] Ambrose's purpose here is not merely to recount parallels, but to use the fact of figuration to demonstrate the presence of the invisible extrabodily element, here described as a "mystery" and "the power of God." The word "mystery" (*mysterium*) is used throughout *De mysteriis* to describe, not just the "mysterious" nature of the sacraments, but that which is made clear through reading texts and events figurally. For example at 1.4, "Christ celebrated this mystery in the Gospel, as we have read"; or at 3.9, "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, [scripture] says: 'The Spirit moved over the waters.'"[19] While it is clear that at other times the word "mystery" has a more conventional sense as simply the word that denotes a sacramental practice,[20] its use in close connection with scriptural interpretation strongly suggests that the figural structure of reading is also at work in Ambrose's understanding of the bodily practices of baptism and admission to the Eucharist. Such practices are basically figural, participating in an extraverbal and extrabodily meaning or intentionality connoted by figuration.

Ambrose therefore reads the bodies of the newly baptized as that by virtue of which the invisible element is made clear, that is, as that by virtue of which scripture can be read figurally. Because they point typologically to the invisible, the bodies of the newly baptized are as much figures of scripture as scripture provides figures for them: that is, their bodies, as baptized, are not strictly self-sufficient, but are dependent for their status on the bodies of earlier material and textual figures as well as on an invisible expansion of meaning or divine intent between them.[21] In temporal terms, this figuration

[17]*Myst.* 3.10.
[18]*Myst.* 4.23.
[19]Other examples of *mysterium* applied to figural reading are at 3.10, 4.19, 4.24, and 6.33.
[20]For example, at 4.20, 5.27, 7.40, and 9.56.
[21]Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading*, 92–103, describes this configuration, especially in the work of Erich Auerbach.

is thus both a projection and a retrojection, a fact that Ambrose makes clear at *De mysteriis* 4.24–25. Speaking of Jesus' baptism, he quotes John 1:33–32, "I saw the Holy Spirit descending from heaven as a dove and remaining upon Him." Ambrose then explains this verse-event as follows: "Why did the Spirit here descend like a dove, except that you might see, except that you might know that the dove, also, which the just Noe sent forth from the ark, was the likeness of this dove, that you might recognize the type of the mystery?" Here Jesus' baptism is that by which the Flood story is known to be figural; the figuration is retrospective. At the same time, however, Jesus' baptism, in being linked via invisible meaning to the Flood story, also becomes a figure of that story, and is constrained by it (Noah's dove necessitates the dove at Jesus' baptism). The temporal order of the objects involved in this figuration is not important: that which is temporally later can "figure" what is prior. In the same way, Ambrose's baptismal candidates establish retrospectively the figurative nature of the scriptural accounts to which Ambrose appeals, becoming physical manifestations of the figures of scripture; their baptism becomes the lens through which these accounts are made understandable. Personal embodiment in this sacramental context therefore occurs in more than one time and place, but is conceived of as occurring in each time and place simultaneously, as well as in the realm of the invisible. "Therefore, you should not trust only in the eyes of your body. Rather is that seen which is not seen, for the one is temporal, the other eternal. Rather is that seen which is not comprehended by the eyes, but is discerned by the spirit and the mind."[22] The sacramental body, physically visible in the newly baptized, is also a body of figuration. It is a body that relies on invisible presences in order to be meaningful.

Work on early Christian figural exegesis has made clear the expansive nature of scriptural reading in antiquity.[23] Along the same lines, Ambrose's figural paradigm for the body entails *bodily* expansion. This expansion takes place in three ways: first, as already discussed, the bodies of the newly baptized are configured as simultaneously the scriptural types and their fulfillments, so that the baptized person embodies both herself and, for example, Noah, the paralytic cured by Jesus, and other types. Secondly, this bodily expansion occurs in the sacramental transformation of the baptized person's

[22]*Myst*. 3.15.

[23]For example, Patricia Cox Miller's "Origen and the Witch of Endor: Toward an Iconoclastic Typology," *Anglican Theological Review* 66, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 137–47; or the discussion of exegetical "supplements" in Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 6–8; see also Adam Kamesar, *Jerome, Greek Scholarship and the Hebrew Bible: A Study of the Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 27–28, on Origen's "exegetical maximalism."

body, as well as in the bodies of those administering baptism. The opening gesture of baptism, which in the fourth century was known as the "opening of the ears," begins the process of expansion, in which Ambrose says the body of the baptized person becomes "inspired by the grace of the sacraments."[24] The deacons, priests and the bishop are also transformed at this point, invisibly, into angels: "Do not consider the bodily forms, but the grace of their ministrations. You have spoken in the presence of the angels."[25] The baptized person, next, "drink[s] in the benefits of spiritual grace"[26] in her immersion, and afterwards is anointed with oil, to "drink in the odor of the Resurrection."[27] This anointing is what makes the newly baptized "become 'a chosen race,'"[28] brought into "the kingdom of God."[29] Finally, in putting on white vestments, the final regeneration of the newly baptized body is effected in its union with the resurrected Christ, in whom "flesh was coming up into heaven."[30] Baptism is thus a process of complete physical transformation effected through the taking in of invisible divine realities. Bodily expansion occurs, not simply textually, but also sacramentally, with the entrance of divinity from outside, transforming the flesh of the newly baptized into something physically capable of entering heaven.[31] Like the body of the resurrected Christ, the body of the baptized Christian exists both in heaven and on earth. As Ambrose remarks elsewhere on baptism, "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."[32] Plenitude is the physical effect of the sacraments.

The third mode of bodily expansion in the baptismal process is the focus of the final sections of *De mysteriis*, namely the participation of the baptized person in the Eucharist. Here the expansion occurs in the eucharistic elements of bread and wine, and in their consumption. It is important to remember that Ambrose is one of the earliest Latin writers to discuss in any depth the idea of a physical transformation occurring in the Eucharist, although many earlier figures seem to have accepted a notion of the bodily

[24]*Myst.* 1.3.
[25]*Myst.* 2.6.
[26]*Myst.* 4.20.
[27]*Myst.* 6.29.
[28]*Myst.* 6.30.
[29]*Myst.* 6.31.
[30]*Myst.* 7.36.
[31]This transformation is nonetheless analogous to the transformation of words by the attribution of invisible "meaning," and here Ambrose's view of the sacrament is perhaps not very far away from the Augustinian view of sacrament as "sign." Ambrose's "signifieds," however, are also physically instantiated in the sacraments that point to them.
[32]*Sacr.* 1.3.10.

presence of Christ in the eucharistic elements.[33] Ambrose, in developing the idea of bodily transformation for the Latin West, is setting the Eucharist into the same dynamic of bodily expansion and transformation that he has already described as occurring in baptism. Thus, with reference to the words, "This is my body," and "This is my blood," Ambrose asks: "will not the words of Christ have power enough to change the nature of the elements? You have read about the works of the world: 'that He spoke and they were done; He commanded and they were created.' So, cannot the words of Christ . . . change those things that are into the things that were not?"[34] Although visibly the elements remain bread and wine, their invisible reality has been enlarged to encompass the divine and human body of the incarnate creator.[35] Finally, it is this transformed and expansive body that is consumed by the equally transformed and expanded bodies of the newly baptized: "Christ then feeds His Church on these sacraments, by which the substance of the soul is made strong."[36] The invisible, expansive body here takes priority over the visible body, and becomes the hermeneutic through which the visible body is to be read.

The result is that the transformed body of the newly baptized, with its combination of visible and invisible components, is understood as something profoundly unnatural. Ambrose stresses the unnatural status of the Eucharist: "this is not what nature formed but what benediction consecrated, and . . . the power of benediction is greater than that of nature, because even nature itself is changed by benediction."[37] Later, he asks, "Why do you seek here the course of nature in the body of Christ?"[38] Ambrose then extends this contravention of nature to apply to the larger process of physical instantiation in baptism: "Let us not say, 'How were we regenerated? . . . I do not recognize the course of nature?'—But no order of nature is here, where there is the excellence of grace."[39] By entering into the sacramental process, the newly baptized Christian is understood to be instantiated in a body against nature, one whose boundaries are invisible and expansive. The real body of the Christian is, as it were, an extrabodily body in the sense that its ontological status is not founded in its apparent physical definition but in its expansion beyond those limits. Thus, when Ambrose describes the officiants at baptism as angels "not according to appearance but according to office,"[40]

[33]For discussion, see Johanny Raymond, *L'eucharistie, centre de l'histoire du salut chez Saint Ambroise de Milan* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1968).
[34]*Myst.* 9.52.
[35]Cf. *On the Sacrament of the Incarnation of Our Lord* 4.23.
[36]*Myst.* 9.55.
[37]*Myst.* 9.50.
[38]*Myst.* 9.53.
[39]*Myst.* 9.59.
[40]*Myst.* 2.6.

he is not offering a metaphorical substitution in which the priest is simply *like* an angel. Instead, he is collapsing the distinction between humans and angels by positing a body whose defining characteristic is an expansion beyond the apparent limits of nature.[41] In Ambrose's Easter liturgy, it is not only Christ who has a mysterious body, but everyone who participates in the sacraments. Embodiment thus becomes much more diffuse, since it is at least potentially the case that any Christian can incorporate visible and invisible realities far beyond the apparently natural boundaries of the body.

II. Ambrose and the Soul

That Ambrose should use in the liturgy a notion of the body as something that extends beyond the visible physical body is not in itself surprising, since most thinkers in antiquity held to some notion of a nonvisible soul attached to the body but not coterminous with it. Teachings on the soul could, moreover, easily combine theological speculation with quite concrete comment on the boundaries of human physiology and of the natural world.[42] Indeed, one treatise that suggests a more general Milanese Platonist interest in the problem of how the soul and body are connected is Augustine's *De quantitate animae* of 388, written not long after Augustine's baptism by Ambrose in Milan.[43] Here, Augustine uses the example of the soul remembering Milan to argue that the soul cannot be measured in terms of

[41]For a theoretical discussion of the place of such expanded bodies in contemporary feminist thought, with some reference to Christian tradition, see Donna Haraway, "Ecce Homo, Ain't (Ar'n't) I a Woman, and Inappropriate/d Others: The Human in a Post-Humanist Landscape," in *The Haraway Reader*, 47–61. It is interesting to note Ambrose's divergence from Platonic and Stoic ethics here, with their insistence on recovering or following the natural order. See esp. Gisela Striker, "Origins of the Concept of Natural Law," in *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics*, ed. Striker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 209–20, and "Following Nature: A Study in Stoic Ethics," 221–80 in the same volume.

[42]For an overview of Latin Christian doctrine on the soul, see E. L. Fortin, *Christianisme et culture philosophique au cinquième siècle: la querelle de l'âme humaine en Occident* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1959); for late antique philosophical commentary on the soul, see also H. J. Blumenthal, *Aristotle and Neoplatonism in Late Antiquity: Interpretations of the* De anima (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996). For a slightly later connection between doctrine of the soul and liturgical practice, see Nicholas Costas, "An Apology for the Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity: Eustratius Presbyter of Constantinople, *On the State of Souls after Death* (CPG 7522)," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 267–85.

[43]For the development of Augustine's ideas on the soul, see especially Robert J. O'Connell, *The Origin of the Soul in St. Augustine's Later Works* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987); and its reconsideration in Ronnie J. Rombs, *Saint Augustine and the Fall of the Soul: Beyond O'Connell and His Critics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006); both works deal primarily with Augustine's modification of his views on the pre-existence of the soul in a Plotinian sense. F. B. A. Asiedu compares Augustine and Ambrose on the ascent of the soul in "The Song of Songs and the Ascent of the Soul: Ambrose, Augustine, and the Language of Mysticism," *Vigiliae Christianae* 55, no. 3 (August 2001): 299–317.

physical size, despite its apparent attachment to the body;[44] he argues instead that the soul is capable of activity outside the body, and that in fact such activity occurs commonly in acts like seeing.[45] For Augustine, the tenuous connection between body and soul is the prelude to an exhortation to elevate the soul above material concerns,[46] and Ambrose's writings on the soul may seem at first to fall into similarly predictable dichotomies of "flesh" and "spirit." In *De bono mortis*, for example, Ambrose unambiguously adopts the definition of physical death as the separation of soul from body.[47] This definition, and its underlying premise that the soul *is* separable from the body, forms the ethical bedrock of both *De bono mortis* and its companion work, *De Isaac vel anima*, in which Ambrose describes in Platonic terms the ethical ascent of the soul out of bodily desires.[48]

The clarity of these treatises, however, is unsettled by Ambrose's accounts of soul and body when no-longer-animate bodies are actually before him. In his funeral orations, Ambrose's souls do separate from bodies and do ultimately ascend, but they do so by very circuitous routes, and these circuits, slips, and diffusions of soul are perhaps more revealing of the complexities of Ambrose's notion of human embodiment. Ambrose's funeral orations reveal a paradigm of body and soul that is based on the notion of diffuse animation, in which the individuation of different souls and different bodies is never assured, precisely *because* souls separate from bodies both before and after death. Such mobile souls commingle with other souls and bodies in ways that pass over the conventional boundaries of identity.[49] Thus, Ambrose's notion of the soul in these orations may be seen as a foundation for his development of the extrabodily body in his work on the sacraments. I

[44]*De quantitate animae* 3.8–9.

[45]*De quantitate animae* 23.43–44.

[46]*De quantitate animae* 33.70–76.

[47]*De bono mortis* 2.3. See the detailed discussion in Éric Rebillard, *In Hora Mortis: Évolution de la Pastorale Chrétienne de la mort aux IVe et Ve Siècles* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1994), 11–28; and the similar discussion of differences between Ambrose and Augustine's views on death in John C. 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 V. Klingshirn and Mark Vessey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 232–49. More generally on the evolution of late antique notions of death and the afterlife, see, in the same volume, Peter Brown, "*Gloriosus Obitus*: The End of the Ancient Other World," 289–314.

[48]For example, *De Isaac vel anima* 8.78–79; see, similarly, *De bono mortis* 5.16; cf. Marcia L. Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs: Ethics for the Common Man* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 69–92.

[49]In making this argument I am attempting to modify Peter Brown's dictum in *The Body and Society* that "all forms of 'admixture' and *concretio*—all confused jumbling of separate categories—were deeply repugnant to Ambrose." Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 353. While I agree that physical admixture was problematic for Ambrose in the realm of sexual ethics, in the funeral orations, Ambrose saves commingling as a good, through his descriptions of movement between souls and bodies.

concentrate here on the funeral orations for Ambrose's brother Satyrus, written in 378, and for Valentinian II, from 391, orations which frame Ambrose's work on the sacraments in the 380s; I will refer only occasionally to Ambrose's oration on the death of Theodosius in 395.[50]

It is clear in all of the funeral orations that death, for Ambrose, is the privileged moment of separation between soul and body. Ambrose unsurprisingly characterizes death as part of the soul's journey upward, contrasting this with the body's physical location at the funeral site. The language that Ambrose uses to describe the dead person both on his way to heaven and simultaneously at the funeral site is similar both to the language of apotheosis and to the language used in the veneration of relics.[51] Of Satyrus, Ambrose says, "I have undertaken this address for the sake of being, as it were, his traveling companion, that in spirit I may attend him longer on his journey, and embrace with my mind him whom my eyes behold."[52] More strikingly, with Valentinian Ambrose claims, "I seem to see you withdrawing, as it were, from the body, and, having thrust aside the darkness of night, rising at dawn like the sun, approaching God, and . . . abandoning earthly things."[53] He consoles Valentinian's sisters, however, with the continuing presence of Valentinian's body in Milan: "Let that tomb be for you a brother's habitation, let it be the hall of his palace, in which the members dear to you will repose." The final flourish in Ambrose's oration on Theodosius, whose body was en route to Constantinople for burial, conflates the journeys of body and soul: "But now Theodosius returns there, more powerful, more glorious. Choirs of angels escort him, and a multitude of saints accompanies him. Surely, blessed art thou, Constantinople, for you are receiving a citizen of paradise, and you will possess in . . . his buried body a dweller of the celestial city."[54] Death and burial, in each of these cases, become instances of bilocation, made possible by the basic fact of separability between soul and body. Ambrose thus does not limit bilocation

[50]For excellent descriptions of the political situation at the time of each oration, see Neil B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 68–78 (on Satyrus), 330–41 (on Valentinian II), and 353–60 (on Theodosius). On the echoes of classical and biblical texts in these orations, see Y.-M. Duval, "Formes profanes et formes bibliques dans les oraisons funèbres de saint Ambroise," in *Christianisme et Formes Littéraires de l'antiquité tardive en occident* (Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1977), 235–91.

[51]Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 90–105.

[52]*De exc. frat.* 1.14; Satyrus himself would later become the object of cult.

[53]*De obit. Val.* 64.

[54]*De obit. Theod.* 56.

to saints with already established cults, but applies it simply to the dead, by virtue of the fact of their deaths.[55]

Were the goal of separation all that Ambrose praised in his funeral sermons, it would justify the claim that Ambrose's interest is simply in the opposition of flesh and spirit. He does not, however, allow his subjects' souls and bodies to remain isolated. Both after death and in life, souls and bodies are lauded as joining with the souls and bodies of others. This is perhaps most clear in the case of Satyrus: Ambrose describes his relationship with his brother as if they had been, and continue to be, a physical and psychic unit. "What experience did we not have in common, including almost our very sight and sleep? Were our wills ever in disagreement? Were even our steps not common? Truly, when I raised my foot, did you not seem to be moving my body, or I yours?"[56] Ambrose does, admittedly, claim that "the virile strength of our relationship as brothers permeated both of us so fully that we did not need to demonstrate our love by caresses,"[57] and we might note Ambrose's ascetic concern, as described by Virginia Burrus, with manly chastity.[58] Chaste as it is, the physical union between Ambrose and Satyrus is so complete that they are effectively the same person: "Who looked at you and did not imagine he saw me? How often have I bid the time of day to persons who, having already greeted you, would say that they had already been greeted by me? How many made some remark to you and mentioned that they had spoken to me?"[59] These expressions of unity in life and death owe a great deal to the tropes of ancient friendship literature: Cicero's dictum that "whoever looks at a friend sees an image of himself" notably continues with the idea that this confluence of identity means "the absent are present, and the poor are rich, and the weak are strong; and more incredible, the dead live."[60] In Ambrose, however, the continuation of the union after death takes a decisively Christian turn: "I now have my precious treasure, and no

[55]Of course, it is clear that Ambrose considers emperors different from persons of lower status, and virtuous persons as different from vicious, but there is nothing in his language to indicate that simultaneity of position after death is absolutely dependent on unusual status before it.

[56]*De exc. frat.* 1.21.

[57]*De exc. frat.* 1.37.

[58]Virginia Burrus, '*Begotten, Not Made*': *Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 167–79.

[59]*De exc. frat.* 1.38.

[60]*Laelius de amicitia* 7.23, text ed. C. F. W. Müller (Leipzig: Teubner, 1884). Cicero makes the connection between friendship and mistaken identity in the case of Orestes and Pylades at 7.24. On Ambrose's use of Ciceronian models of friendship generally, see Carolinne White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), chap. 7, "Ambrose of Milan – Ciceronian or Christian Friendship?"; for a comparison of the use of friendship language in ascetic contexts, see also Elizabeth A. Clark, "Friendship Between the Sexes: Classical Theory and Christian Practice," chap. 2 in *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends: Essays and Translations* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1979), 35–106.

journeying can again tear him from me. I possess his relics to embrace, his grave to cover with my body, and his sepulcher to lie upon. And I believe that I shall become more pleasing to God for resting above the bones of this holy body."[61] Ambrose's description of fusion between himself and Satyrus make clear that the movements of body and soul allow for real mingling between persons before and after death, and that this mingling can be, as Ambrose claims, pleasing to God.

In his funeral oration on Valentinian II, from 391, the main resource for Ambrose's descriptions of unity between persons, both living and dead, is the Song of Songs. Ambrose first remarks on his own closeness to the late emperor's body: "now I shall embrace the remains that are dear to me, and shall deposit them in a fitting sepulcher, yet I shall gaze on each member. My Valentinian, my 'youth white and ruddy,' having in himself the image of Christ."[62] The strongest use of this language is again a description of fraternal union. In Ambrose's telling, Valentinian and his deceased elder brother Gratian reenact the Song of Songs in the afterlife. "His brother Gratian runs to meet this soul as it ascends, and embracing it he says: 'I to my brother and his turning to me. . . . Come my brother,' he says, 'let us go forth into the field, let us find rest in the villages, let us get up early to the vineyards. . . . Who shall give you to me, my brother, for my brother, sucking the breasts of my mother. Finding you outside, I shall kiss you; I shall take you up and bring you to my mother's house; and into the chamber of her who conceived me. . . . His left hand under my head, and his right hand shall embrace me.'"[63] The erotic language here makes clear that the separation of body and soul at death is not an event that has pure individuation as its ultimate end. Further, the unions consummated after death are not described here as exclusively, or even primarily, unions with the divine.[64] They are fundamentally personal unions with other human beings. The idea of the separability of soul and body thus allows Ambrose to advance as a positive good the fusion and diffusion of persons in body and soul.

[61]*De exc. frat.* 1.18. NB also *De exc. frat.* 1.72: "You are here, I say, and you are ever presenting yourself at my side. . . . [N]ow the very nights . . . and now sleep itself, long the annoying interrupter of our conversations, have both begun to be sweet, for they restore you to me. . . . For sleep is the likeness and image of death." One may here recall the real presence of a variety of divine and human figures in dreams, which are typical venues for visitations from persons outside the body in antiquity, as well as, for many ancient theorists, proof that the soul is only loosely connected with the body during sleep. For discussion, see especially Patricia Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), chap. 2, "Theories of Dreams."

[62]*De obit. Val.* 58.

[63]*De obit. Val.* 71–74.

[64]On the sexualized trope of unity with the divine, see Elizabeth A. Clark, "The Celibate Bridegroom and His Virginal Brides: Metaphor and the Marriage of Jesus in Early Christian Ascetic Exegesis," *Church History* 77, no. 1 (March 2008): 1–25.

In Ambrose's mixtures, individual identities are not so much unhappily mistaken as actively dissolved: "What amusement I would get," Ambrose exclaims to Satyrus, "and what frequent delight, when I would perceive that people had mistaken us!"[65] This delight in one person existing in two bodies, or two persons in the same body, and in the commingling of souls, may suggest two things. First, that although Ambrose surely was a successful competitor in the elite late Roman male arena, as Neil McLynn has shown, anxious self-differentiation between men was not the only mode of understanding identity available to him. In the funeral orations, Ambrose relies on the idea of the diffusion of soul, and of the fusion of souls with other souls and other bodies, in order to present his listeners with elite men who literally cannot be told apart. Ambrose further relies on the disavowedly sexual language of the Song of Songs precisely in order to praise promiscuities of identity. These funeral orations thus return us to a late ancient paradigm of animation and embodiment in which the individual as normally understood cannot be taken for granted. Bodies do not always indicate identities; neither do souls.

The historiographical problem of the late ancient body in this context is obvious: for Ambrose, the traditional body only sometimes coincides with the location of the person. At other times, identity manifests in multiple bodies, both visible and invisible. If we add to the expansiveness of the soul the sacramental transformations Ambrose outlines in *De mysteriis*, we add the possibility that identity manifests not merely in multiple human bodies (or souls), but in non-human, angelic bodies, and in apparently inanimate sacramental objects. The late ancient body, then, is not necessarily aligned with the late ancient person, and late ancient objects exist as potential manifestations of animate personhood. As Patricia Cox Miller and others have recently argued, the animation of such artifacts as statues and icons in this period suggests a fairly wide acceptance of the notion that animation and personhood are not strictly correlated with the boundaries of the human body.[66] If this is the case, accounting for actors in late ancient history becomes much more problematic, and we should expect the expansive or extrabodily body to be mobilized not merely in the realms of biblical exegesis or the liturgy, but politically as well. In fact, Ambrose does use the

[65]*De exc. frat.* 38.

[66]Patricia Cox Miller, *The Corporeal Imagination: Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), esp. chap. 7, "Animated Bodies and Icons"; on the relation of statues to bodies, see also Troels Myrup Kristensen, "Embodied Images: Christian Response and Destruction in Late Antique Egypt," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 224–50; and on the conventions of statue defacement, see Peter Stewart, "The Destruction of Statues in Late Antiquity," in *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity*, ed. Richard Miles (London: Routledge, 1999), 159–89.

extrabodily body in at least one of his most difficult political encounters, the Milanese basilica crisis, to which I now turn.

III. The Politics of Extrabodily Embodiment

The extension of bodies beyond their visible nature is not, for Ambrose, a purely speculative endeavor. The political force of the funeral orations is relatively straightforward: Valentinian's union with his brother Gratian in the afterlife is not merely a matter of affection, but is the final part of Ambrose's argument that Valentinian, although he was unbaptized at the time of his death, should nonetheless be considered worthy of heaven. Ambrose pleads on Valentinian's behalf: "Do not, I beseech, O Lord, separate him from his brother, do not break the yoke of this pious relationship. . . . With what an embrace does [Gratian] cling to him! How he does not suffer him to be snatched from him!"[67] Ambrose concludes his plea, "Never shall I separate the names of the devoted brothers nor make a distinction in their merits. I know that this joint remembrance will conciliate, and that this union will delight, the Lord." Later in the oration, Ambrose returns to this point, and suggests that union with Gratian, articulated through the Song of Songs, effectively baptizes Valentinian in its own right: "[Gratian] offers the new and the old which he has kept for his brother, that is the mysteries of the Old Testament and of the Gospel, and says, 'Who shall give you to me, O brother, for a brother, sucking the breasts of my mother?' that is, no ordinary person but Christ Himself enlightened you with spiritual grace. He baptized you, because the ministry of men was lacking you. . . . What are the breasts of the Church except the sacrament of baptism?"[68] The inseparability of Gratian and Valentinian requires that if one is baptized, the other must de facto be baptized as well, even if he has in fact *not* been baptized before dying. Ambrose's theology of the sacraments, in which the participants in the sacraments are joined to the body of Christ, is here refracted through the lens of a more general human capacity to mix bodies and souls.[69] Fusion between persons, and perhaps confusion of persons, is clearly advantageous in this context, confirming the unity of the imperial house, and saving that house from the embarrassment of having an unbaptized member in the afterlife.[70]

[67]*De obit. Val.* 54.
[68]*De obit. Val.* 75.
[69]*De mysteriis* 7–9.
[70]There is of course also the difficult moment of imperial succession; Kantorowicz outlines the later development of the legal theory of the immortality of the king as head of the political body: *King's Two Bodies*, chap. 7, "The King Never Dies," esp. at 317–36.

The oration on Satyrus circles around a more complicated, and potentially more dangerous, set of theological issues. As Neil McLynn has pointed out, this oration, given only four years after Ambrose's election to the episcopate, helped Ambrose to consolidate his position as the Nicene leader of a community in which both Nicene and Homoian sympathies were still strong.[71] Moreover, although the dating of these works is difficult, the oration on Satyrus was probably given around the same time as Ambrose was composing the first two books *De fide*.[72] It is likely that Ambrose's insistence on his spiritual inseparability from his brother, and their ability physically to stand in for each other, arises out of an immediate concern to work through the meanings of sameness, similarity, and differentiation, particularly in a context in which familial language is both necessarily used and strongly contested. As Carolinne White notes, *De fide* 1.20 and 4.7 both use stereotypical friendship language to express the unity between members of the Trinity.[73] At a time when Ambrose's own understanding of the theological issues at stake in the development of Trinitarian language was clearly still evolving, however,[74] it is important to note that Satyrus is ultimately saved, not by his union with his brother, as Valentinian later would be, but by his direct physical assimilation to the sacraments. In his dramatic account of the shipwreck that might have taken Satyrus's life before Satyrus was baptized, Ambrose writes, "Though he did not fear death, he was, however, deeply concerned about dying without the Eucharist. So he asked members of the faithful . . . for the Blessed Sacrament, not out of a prying curiosity to look upon it, but to obtain aid and assistance for his faith. He had it wrapped in a cloth, and tied the cloth around his neck, and so cast himself into the sea."[75] When he reaches shore, Satyrus immediately seeks baptism from a cleric in communion with the church of Rome.[76] We see here Ambrose using the language of physical and spiritual unity, but using them more to appeal to ecclesial unity than to work out completely what sameness between persons might mean in a Trinitarian context. The oration on Satyrus ultimately evades the more controversial question of Trinitarian unity in favor of sacramental unity.

Beyond the fates of Satyrus or Valentinian II, however, the political force of Ambrose's expansive bodies has a major impact on what has become known as

[71]McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 76–77.

[72]See Daniel H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Arian-Nicene Conflicts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 128–48.

[73]White, *Christian Friendship*, 127.

[74]Note R. P. C. Hanson's remark in *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318–381* (1988; repr., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2000), 669, that in *De fide* "Ambrose has not . . . struggled with the problem of Arianism and thought it through for himself."

[75]*De exc. frat.* 43.

[76]*De exc. frat.* 44–47.

the Milanese basilica crisis; indeed, it is possible that Ambrose's enthusiastic posthumous praise for Gratian and Valentinian II in 391 is partly spurred by the remembrance of the difficulties he had with them in this period.[77] Ambrose develops his theory of the figural and expansive body in the political context of Milan in the 380s, when the question of shared or exclusive ritual space was being hotly debated. Although the complex series of events in Milan in this period has often been analyzed as an early statement of what would later become the relation between church and state,[78] I would describe it instead as an episode in the politics of extrabodily embodiment. Unfortunately, Ambrose is our only detailed source for the relevant historical narrative, and the traditional account of the clash between Ambrose and the imperial court is open to question.[79] I give the traditional narrative in the paragraph that follows as the context for Ambrose's development of the expansive body; the real difficulties of chronology do not, however, affect the ideological and theological components of the episode.

Late in the year 379 or early in the year 380, the emperor Valentinian II, then aged nine, had taken up residence in Milan along with his mother the empress Justina; the Milanese imperial court favored homoian Christianity.[80] Ambrose had already angered homoian Christians in North Italy by using his connections to arrange for a homoousian bishop to be appointed to the nearby city of Sirmium in 379. He had little reason to expect that the homoian court would be sympathetic to the homoousian cause on its arrival in Milan. In fact, between 378 and 379, in an attempt to sustain religious tolerance in the empire, Gratian, then senior emperor in the West, had ordered Ambrose to allow homoian Christians to use one of the basilicas of Milan for separate homoian services, and Ambrose had apparently obeyed this order. When Gratian began to favor homoousian Christianity, around 381, homoian Christians apparently lost the opportunity to worship in the Portian Basilica.

[77]I am grateful to the *Church History* anonymous reviewer for pointing out this possibility.

[78]Both these analyses come into play in the seminal work of Hans von Campenhausen, *Ambrosius von Mailand als Kirchenpolitiker* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1929), 189–222; a similarly political, if revisionist, analysis is found in McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 170–219.

[79]The traditional chronology of events has been criticized on a number of grounds: for varying discussions of the problems and their possible solutions, see Gérard Nauroy, "Le fouet et le miel. Le combat d'Ambroise en 386 contre l'arianisme milanaise," *Recherches augustiniennes* 23 (1988): 3–86, repr. in Nauroy, *Ambroise de Milan*, 33–149; McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 181–96; Liebeschuetz, *Ambrose of Milan*, 130–35; Hervé Savon, *Ambroise de Milan* (Lonrai: Desclée, 1997), 196–200. For an important alternate topography as well as chronology, see T. D. Barnes, "Ambrose and the Basilicas of Milan in 385 and 386: The primary documents and their implications," *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 4, no. 2 (2000): 282–99.

[80]For an overview of the "Arian" crisis in Milan in the fourth century, see the excellent account of Williams, *Ambrose of Milan*, chap. 7, "Readers and Patrons"; and for a reconsideration of issues of religious space in the conflict, see Harry O. Maier, "Private Space as the Social Context of Arianism in Ambrose's Milan," *Journal of Theological Studies* 45, no. 1 (April 1994): 72–93.

In 383, however, Gratian was killed in a military uprising, and Valentinian II became emperor of the Western Roman Empire at the age of twelve. While it seems likely that the imperial court possessed its own private chapels throughout this time, early in 385 Valentinian II requested the use of one of the basilicas in Milan (again, probably the Portiana) for a larger, more public, homoian service, to be attended by the court. This time, Ambrose refused. Subsequently, over the course of 385, Ambrose was harassed by the court: he was threatened with exile, accused of wrongly appropriating church property, and at one point held services in a basilica that was surrounded by imperial troops. Early in 386, Ambrose was summoned by the court to debate publicly the homoian claimant to the episcopacy of Milan; again Ambrose refused to obey the imperial order. Just before Easter of 386, the court requested the use of two Milanese basilicas (the Basilica Portiana and the Basilica Nova) for its Easter services. Ambrose, for the third time, refused the court's request. Over the course of Easter week 386, there was rioting at one basilica (the Portiana), imperial troops took possession of another (the Basilica Nova), and troops also surrounded a third basilica (the Basilica Vetus) while Ambrose was preaching inside. At this point in the crisis, Ambrose claimed that he was willing to be martyred for the homoousian cause, and in the face of this claim, Valentinian II backed down. He ordered his troops to leave the basilicas, and Ambrose was left triumphant. About two months later, Ambrose sealed his victory by discovering the relics of two local martyrs, Saints Gervasius and Protasius. He interpreted this as a sign of divine favor, and brought the bodies to be reburied in yet a fourth basilica (the Basilica Ambrosiana), which Ambrose himself had commissioned to be built.

The religious and political situation in Milan in the early- to mid-380s was clearly tense. It is important to note, however, that the flashpoint of the crisis was the question of the liturgical use of the Milanese basilicas, especially for an imperially sponsored Easter service.[81] The liturgy marking the physical death and bodily resurrection of God the Son was of obvious symbolic importance to both the homoian and the homoousian parties in Milan.[82] It is also in the context of this liturgy that we find Ambrose's theory of the body first articulated in his treatise *De mysteriis*.

[81]The question of Valentinian II's unbaptized state also comes into play in *ep*. 75.5, and *ep.* 75A.37 ends the letter, oddly, with a seemingly unprompted question on rebaptism. Cf. Marcia Colish, "Why the Portiana?: Reflections on the Milanese Basilica Crisis of 386," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 361–72, who argues that it is precisely the use of baptisteries that is at issue. The standard history of the construction of basilicas in Milan in the fourth century remains Richard Krautheimer, *Three Christian Capitals: Topography and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), chap. 3, "Milan."

[82]Cf. the discussion in Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity*, chap. 2, "Resurrection, Relic Cult, and Asceticism: The Debates of 400 and Their Background."

Notably, the few other ancient texts that mention Ambrose's embattled position in Milan treat the issue as one primarily involving Ambrose's conventional body, that is, as a situation in which the court, and especially Justina, were attempting in various ways to force Ambrose to leave the city of Milan.[83] Only in Ambrose's writing is this attempt transformed into the specific issue of basilica possession, in which the court's demands for the use of one or more of the basilicas in the city, for public worship at Easter, are repeatedly refused.[84] While surely the use of the basilicas was in dispute, the disparity between the accounts, some of which focus on Ambrose individually and others of which focus on the basilicas, suggests that the relationship between Ambrose's visible body and his sacramental body is one of the problems involved. Thus, in his letter 75, in which he explains his decision to defy the summons to Valentinian's court, Ambrose claims that although he was, earlier, willing to go into exile, he now must stay in Milan to protect the churches. "Now the [other] bishops are saying to me: 'it does not make much difference whether you leave or whether you surrender the altar of Christ, for by leaving, you will surrender it.'"[85] Here Ambrose's physical presence is tied to the retention of the "altar of Christ," and with a refusal to comply with what Ambrose then describes as "the occupation of all the other churches."[86] As Ambrose configures the situation later in the dispute, in the sermon he reports giving in letter 76, "What motive could there be for inflicting such a trial on a worm like me, unless it is not me but the Church which they are persecuting?"[87] On the one hand, Ambrose denies that the conflict is about his individual bodily self; on the other, he suggests that his bodily removal is tantamount to a betrayal of the altar of Christ. The tension is only resolvable if Ambrose's visible body also has an invisible component that can be aligned, through expansion, with the possession of the Milanese basilicas.

This is in fact what we find in Ambrose's description of the affair. Visible bodies are repeatedly overtaken by invisible bodies in the course of Ambrose's letter 75A, in which Ambrose exhorts his congregation to support his further refusal to give a basilica to the homoian court for its use.[88] At 75A.6, Ambrose quotes Ephesians 6:12 to explain to his audience that "We are contending not only against flesh and blood, but what is more serious,

[83]Liebeschuetz, *Ambrose of Milan*, 124–25.

[84]See also Neil B. McLynn, "The Transformation of Imperial Church-Going in the Fourth Century," in *Approaching Late Antiquity*, ed. S. Swain and M. Edwards (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), 235–70.

[85]*Ep.* 75.18.

[86]*Ep.* 75.19.

[87]*Ep.* 76.18.

[88]For the immediate context of this sermon, see Liebeschuetz, *Ambrose of Milan*, 125–33.

against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." He then refers to 2 Kings 6:16, the account of the Hebrew prophet Elisha and his servant receiving angelic protection from the Syrians: "The holy prophet prayed that the boy's eyes should be opened, and he said: Look and see how many more are with us than against us, and the boy looked and saw thousands of angels."[89] Along these same lines, Ambrose cites two accounts of the apostle Peter. One is from Acts 12, in which an angel releases Peter from prison. The second is from the apocryphal Acts of Peter, on Peter's encounter with the figure of Christ outside Rome, in which Christ predicts Peter's death with the words, "I am coming to be crucified once more." "So," Ambrose concludes, "you can see that it is Christ's will to suffer in his humble servants."[90] The presence of angels, demons, and the apparitional Christ as the realities behind physical phenomena makes clear that Ambrose regards embodiment as something that occurs in processes not confined to the physical body, but processes that nonetheless have effects in and around what is conventionally visible. Thus, Ambrose can claim in letter 76.14–16, that, like the Old Testament figure of Job, who suffered through the bodies of his children, he himself suffers in the bodies of those in his congregation. Ambrose's visible body is not his entire body, although it is a figure of his entire body, which is both visible and invisible. As a figure, like the scriptural figures in *De mysteriis*, Ambrose's body points to both an invisible element and the instantiation of that element in a visible body outside the original figure.[91]

The link between Ambrose's visible and invisible bodies is articulated primarily in terms of the bishop's office,[92] and it is here important to remember Ambrose's insistence in *De mysteriis* that the clerics who preside at baptisms are angels by virtue of their offices: "He is an angel, who announces the kingdom of Christ, . . . to be esteemed by you not according to appearance but according to office."[93] The thin boundary between visible bodies and invisible bodies that are connoted by offices is portrayed in a dense passage in letter 75A.1–9, in which Ambrose speculates on whether or not he will be martyred for refusing to leave his church. At

[89]*Ep*. 75A.11.
[90]*Ep*. 75A.13–14.
[91]Another of the incidents in the crisis, the dangerous moment at which Ambrose's supporters damage some hangings that are embroidered with imperial emblems (*ep*. 76.20, 24), indicates the extrabodily presence of the emperor as well; cf. also Eric Varner, "Execution in Effigy: Severed Heads and Decapitated Statues in Imperial Rome," in *Roman Bodies: Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Andrew Hopkins and Maria Wyke (London: British School at Rome, 2005), 67–82.
[92]Kantorowicz, *King's Two Bodies*, 43–44, notes that the medieval bishop, like the king, is also occasionally said to be a *persona mixta*, and to have dual status.
[93]*Myst*. 2.6.

75A.1, he suggests that he "was ready to suffer what it is the part of the bishop to suffer." In section 3, however, he claims that leaving the church is not "compatible with episcopal duty," and in section 4 he explains that it is necessary for the bishop to "enter the fray" personally in combat with the devil. Here Ambrose is setting out the parameters of the bishop's extrabodily official body: it is physically aligned with the church buildings, in spiritual combat with the devil, and it may also be physically aligned with the bodies of martyrs. As Ambrose explains in section 6, moreover, wounds inflicted by the devil, physically visible in martyrdom, "are no wounds, [since] by them life is not destroyed, but extended." That is, the interaction of invisible realities may be made visible on the visible body of the bishop, but these visible instantiations of invisible conflicts ultimately have primarily invisible and unnatural effects. Or as Ambrose writes in *De mysteriis*, "no order of nature is here, where there is the excellence of grace."[94] In the final sections of the passage, Ambrose suggests that he will be led to martyrdom like the donkey that Jesus rode into Jerusalem, which was led by "those same apostles, who having shed their bodies, have assumed the likeness of angels invisible to our eyes."[95] Led by these human angels, Ambrose will "depart and be with Christ."[96] This complex speculation on martyrdom as the appropriate role of the bishop allows Ambrose to articulate the conflict over the basilicas as a conflict over his episcopal body, at once physically visible and in danger, and invisibly resident both in the Milanese churches and in the extrabodily spiritual realm. The extrabodily, unnatural body of Ambrose the bishop, like the body of Christ in the Eucharist, or the body of the newly baptized, is figured in the visible, but is not limited to it. Instead, the conjoining of the visible and invisible realities allows Ambrose to be present both in his visible body and elsewhere. When Ambrose insists that persecution of himself is persecution of the Church, that the imperial request for a basilica is a threat to his physical person, and that he physically must not leave the church buildings, he is reading what was undoubtedly a tense political situation through the lens of figural embodiment, the same figural embodiment that he describes in the sacraments.

Of course, Ambrose's expansion of his body to include both church buildings and the bodies of other people is most fully realized in the appropriate ending to the basilica crisis, the discovery of the relics of Gervasius and Protasius in summer of 386. In his letter 77, Ambrose describes the discovery of two bodies that onlookers identified as the bodies

[94]*Myst.* 9.59; cf. Kantorowicz, *King's Two Bodies*, 45–61, on the opposition of nature and grace in one early medieval construction of the king's body and office.
[95]*Ep.* 75A.8.
[96]Ibid., quoting Phil. 1.23–24.

of the local martyrs Gervasius and Protasius.[97] Ambrose then used these bodies in the consecration of the new basilica he himself had had built. In his letter, Ambrose returns to the passage from 2 Kings on the prophet Elisha and his servant surrounded by invisible angels. He equates the opening of the servant's eyes with the discovery of the relics: "These eyes were closed as long as the buried bodies of the saints remained hidden; the Lord opened our eyes, we see the auxiliaries by whom we have always been defended."[98] The Milanese Christians become aware of the longstanding invisible members of their community at the moment in which that community also expands to include physically the bodies of Gervasius and Protasius. The literal incorporation of these invisible and visible elements is then suggested at the end of the sermon, in which Ambrose anticipates the burial of the relics under the altar of the newly consecrated basilica.[99] At this point Ambrose also famously anticipates his own burial under the altar of his own basilica: "In fact I had designed this place for myself, for it is right that a priest should repose where he was wont to make his offering. But I yield the right-hand site to the holy victims."[100] The anticipated transformation of Ambrose's body into a quasi-relic, aligned with the relics of Gervasius and Protasius, and its simultaneous transformation into an architectural element of the basilica, underscore the complexity of the process of embodiment as Ambrose seems to imagine it. Embodiment carries with it an invisible element, expressed here by both the sacramental function of the altar and by the invisible presence of the heavenly saints.[101] This invisible element, however, allows embodiment to happen not merely conventionally but against nature—in the case of Ambrose's body, it allows him to be instantiated in three different bodies as well as in the physical, insensate matter of the basilica. Ambrose's physical and sacramental alignment with the church buildings of Milan is thus complete.

IV. Conclusion

Ambrose's notion of the figural, expansive body describes a body that incorporates and represents invisible realities. It does so not merely in its own visible physical nature but in figurally connecting itself *through* invisible realities to other physical objects, be they other human bodies,

[97] *Ep*. 77.12.
[98] *Ep*. 77.11.
[99] *Ep*. 77.13.
[100] Ibid.
[101] See Brown's classic discussion in *Cult of the Saints*, chaps. 3, "The Invisible Companion," and 5, "Praesentia."

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sacramental objects, or church buildings. Indeed, Ambrose suggests that the goal of liturgical practice is for the practitioners to be able to identify the presence of the invisible bodies to which they are connected by remembering other physical objects in which those invisible realities also reside. Thus, the figural reading of baptism, for example, allows the baptized person to understand her body as physically connected to the mystical body of Christ, the bodies of angels, and the bodies of her scriptural predecessors. Likewise, the notion of the separability of the soul from the body allows the mingling of persons both in this life and in the next. The model of an almost infinite bodily capacity, dependent on the variable connection of visible bodies to invisible realities, is a far cry from the traditional notions of a body/soul or matter/spirit dichotomy that are often attributed to early Christian thinkers. They also call into question the notion that early Christians were necessarily proponents of a "natural law" ethic or an anti-bodily moral stance.

At the same time, the invisible and expansive body is obviously capable of tangible political deployment. In his resistance to imperial demands, Ambrose claims that his own body is under attack through the requisitioning of the basilicas, and he simultaneously claims that all churches are threatened by the imperial pressure placed on him personally. The basilicas are not merely a metonym for the bishop and the bishop a metonym for the basilicas; rather they are understood to be physically connected by virtue of the bishop's mystical body, which is literally incorporated in all of them. This notion of multiple incorporation allows Ambrose to defy imperial orders by claiming that it is physically impossible for him to obey them. The obstreperous episcopal body is certainly a site at which power relations are enacted, but it may be more instructive to say that the bishop's natural body is here only one actor in an entire theater of embodiment that is charged with political and religious significance. This theater contains multiple presences and props that shape and constrain the acts of any one agent, but it is also a place in which multiple actors converge in a singular set of events: in this case, Ambrose's visible body is joined to angelic presences, the sacramental body of Christ, the bodies of his congregants, and the basilicas themselves in the event that is Ambrose's extrabodily body, the body that cannot be moved.[102]

To posit that Ambrose considered himself to be both existing in and actively deploying a non-conventional body in his political and sacramental acts, however, is to admit that we are profoundly ignorant of how late ancient action was thought more generally to occur. Of course, it is a difficult historiographical task to delineate the different roles that bodies both play

[102]For a discussion of literal theater as an extension of human agency, see Evelyn B. Tribble, "Distributing Cognition in the Globe," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 135–55.

and create in any religious setting. Ambrose's theory of the unnatural or invisible body is unsettling, both profoundly otherworldly and politically totalizing. Yet the value of attending to this counterintuitive theory of embodiment lies in its power to complicate historical discourses that either naturalize certain kinds of bodies or attribute certain notions of natural bodies to a dominant Christian tradition. What are the limits of the human body? According to Ambrose, they are not set by death, individuation, or spatial magnitude. The invisible element of embodiment, and the possibility of embodiment outside the visible self, structures both Ambrose's sacramental thought and his political struggles. This diffusion of embodiment makes the study of religious bodies in conventional terms much more complex, but also much richer. The history of Christian religious embodiment may finally turn out to be, in part, an invisible history—and for that very reason indescribable.