



**Ambrosiaster.**

***Commentaries on Romans and 1-2 Corinthians***

Translated and edited by Gerald L. Bray

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

The Ancient Christian Texts series (ACT) is meant to serve as a complement to the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture series (ACCS). Whereas ACCS provided snippets of patristic commentary on the various books of Scripture ACT is providing fresh translations of entire commentaries that haven't been translated into English up until this point, or exist in obscure translations that non-specialists wouldn't have access to. Thomas Oden again serves as series editor along with Gerald Bray who is also the translator and editor of the volume under review. This series is meant for the interested non-specialist and the editors implore the reader to allow the commentary to conform to the ancient standards of commentary and not modern historical-critical standards. They ask that the reader read Ambrosiaster (and the other commentators in the series) on his own terms while appreciating patristic exegesis for what it is, not for what exegesis would become. These are fair requests and seemingly the only valid way to read such documents.

Ambrosiaster (= Star of Ambrose) is the name given to the anonymous author by his commentary's Benedictine editors in the late 17th century. Before this the work was attributed to Ambrose of Milan (d. 397). The text is almost as mysterious as its author coming down to us in two or three recensions. Bray notes the difficulty in "untangling" these recensions, not knowing whether they were the product of Ambrosiaster himself or monastic copyists. Bray tells us that the "style of the shortest recension is lapidary to the point of obscurity, and in some ways is more like a series of lecture notes than a finished commentary. It is often difficult or impossible to

know what Ambrosiaster meant, and the second and third recensions were probably trying to explain the obscurities of the shortest text.” (xvii) Bray goes on to note how these difficulties (among others) make reproducing the ‘original’ Ambrosiaster an unrealistic goal. At times editorial additions have been added without note and at other times conjectural emendations have been made and appear in the text in brackets (e.g., see the note on 2Cor. 7:5 on pp. 232-33).

Where Ambrosiaster followed a text it appears to have been a pre-Vulgate Latin translation of the Bible. The Old Testament was translated from the LXX rather than the Hebrew text and at times he doesn’t follow any known text at all, opting rather to paraphrase or recite an unknown text from memory. This only further confirms my suspicion that the obsession with ‘formal equivalency’ in translation is a modern one. It’s also worth noting here that Bray has opted (as have all the translators in this series) for a ‘dynamic equivalency’ method of translation using as his source text *Ambrosiastri qui dicitur Commentarius in Epistulas Paulinas* published in the Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (CSEL). Following ACCS the RSV has been utilized in ACT but Bray says that “quotations have been given in the form Ambrosiaster used, regardless of what the RSV says.” (xviii)

The commentary itself is quite striking and doesn’t bore me to death like modern commentaries. Perhaps that’s because Ambrosiaster is distinctly Trinitarian and bears witness to Nicene orthodoxy all throughout his commentary. His comment on Romans 9:5 brought a smile to my face and joy to my soul as he says:

And there is no mention of the Father’s name in this verse, and Paul is talking about Christ, it cannot be disputed that Christ is called God here. When Scripture is speaking about God the Father and adds the Son, it often calls the Father God and the Son Lord. If someone does not think that it is said here about Christ that he is God, then let him name the person about whom he thinks it is said, for there is no mention of God the Father in this verse.

It is hardly surprising that here Paul should speak openly of Christ as God over all, when elsewhere, in another letter, he confirmed this idea by saying: *That at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth*. These are all the things over which Christ is God. There are no exceptions made, as if there were some things over which Christ is not God, nor can the knees of every creature bow to anything except God. Finally, when the apostle John in ignorance wanted to worship an angel as if he were God, he was told by the angel: *Do not do this, for I am a fellow servant with you. Worship God.* (73-4)

The comment continues for a while giving an argument for the deity of the Son in Paul. Great stuff to say the least! But this is indicative of the commentary as a whole. His comments on 1Corinthians 12-14 are great and there's little if anything to disagree with, other than the possibility that he believes the 'tongues' Paul speaks of are known human languages. But he gets the gist of it right: the gifts of the Spirit are to work by love and build up the body. It's so straightforward that one wonders how anyone can miss it, yet sadly, so many do.

This volume concludes with a full Scripture index which surprisingly shows very little reference to the deuterocanon (a total of 12 verses from 5 books: Baruch, 1Esdras, Judith, Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon) but as Bray notes in the introduction, when Ambrosiaster does quote the deuterocanon he quotes it as Scripture. This is a wonderful translation that should be on the shelf of anybody interested in the field of patristics in general or the subject of patristic exegesis in particular. I look forward to the other volumes in this series.