



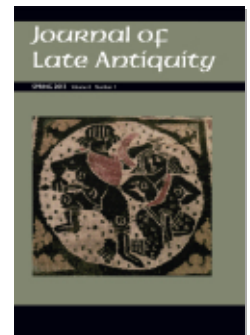
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Hymns as Acclamations: The Case of Ambrose of Milan¹

The hymns of Ambrose of Milan may usefully be seen in the context of other forms of rhythmic chant and song found in the social world of the Roman Empire: above all, they may be connected with popular songs and with acclamations, whether theatrical, political, or religious. Ambrose's hymns in particular share with songs and acclamations a number of formal features, being regular in form and based on accentual stress patterns rather than quantitative meter, and being similarly intended for popular and untrained participation. The most important parallel, however, lies in what may be called their function or effect: for just as did songs and acclamations, Ambrose's hymns demonstrated and articulated the unity of a diverse population by allowing the constituents to express themselves in a single voice. What the hymns may have lacked in spontaneity—being complex and pre-composed—they gained in direction and discipline, so that Ambrose was able to exploit the unity and harmony of his congregation in support of his own political and religious aims. Ambrose's hymns thus reconfigured songs and acclamations as a means of establishing and promoting a Milanese Christian identity and of affirming his own popular authority and legitimacy.

A renewed interest in Ambrose's hymns in recent years has led to the production of numerous editions and translations of the hymns that can be attributed securely or plausibly to the bishop himself.² This has been accompanied by an

¹ Early versions of this essay were read at the Maynooth Patristics Seminar and at the 2006 APA meeting in Montreal: I thank the organizers of these events for their invitations, and the audiences for their patience, comments, and encouragement. I also thank David Scourfield as well as the editor of this journal and the two anonymous readers, all of whom provided helpful feedback and suggestions.

² J. Fontaine, ed., *Ambroise de Milan: Hymnes* (Paris, 1992), whose numbering is followed here; M. Simonetti, *S. Ambrogio: Inni* (Florence, 1988); G. Banterle, G. Biffi, I. Biffi, L. Migliavacca, eds., *Inni, iscrizioni, frammenti* (Milan, 1994); G. Biffi, ed., *Ambrogio di Milano: Inni* (Milan, 1997). Selections are translated in A.S. Walpole, *Early Latin Hymns* (Cambridge, 1922), 16–114; C.P.E. Springer, "The Hymns of Ambrose," in R. Valantasis, ed., *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice* (Princeton, 2000), 347–356; and B. Ramsey, *Ambrose* (London, 2002), 166–173.

increasing emphasis on their literary qualities and relationship to the classical poetic tradition, in addition to their theological and scriptural concerns.³ It should be noted, however, that Ambrose's hymns are available for analysis in this way largely because of the immense impact that they made on Augustine of Hippo. The various mentions of Ambrose's hymns in Augustine's writings thus allow us not only to uphold the authenticity of certain of the traditional texts that have come down to us but also to glimpse the emotional impact of these hymns on an unusually sensitive and introspective contemporary.⁴ His admission that the aesthetic appeal of the melody could enhance but might also distract from the content of hymns, whether sung or chanted, constitutes a famous testimony both to the attractiveness of Ambrose's innovation and to the suspicions it could still arouse.⁵

Yet, Augustine's account provides evidence of more than merely his own personal response to Ambrose's hymns. He also reminds us that the introduction of hymns to Milan was embedded in a particular social and political situation.⁶ The purpose of this article is therefore to consider the effect—or perhaps only the intended effect—of the hymns of Ambrose of Milan in the social contexts in which they were first produced and performed. In so doing, a parallel may be drawn between Ambrose's hymns and the acclamations and popular songs already firmly established in the Roman Empire as a means by which a crowd could express its support, opinions, and political demands, or merely its natural exuberance. Although the hymns share a small number of formal and technical features with at least some recorded acclamations and with what little can be reconstructed of Roman song forms, the most important similarities will have been in performance, when the spectacle of a

³ E.g., J. Fontaine, "Prose et poésie dans la création littéraire d'Ambroise," in G. Lazzati, ed., *Ambrosius Episcopus: atti del Congresso internazionale di studi ambrosiani nel XVI centenario della elevazione di sant'Ambrogio alla cattedra episcopale, Milano, 2-7 dicembre 1974*, vol.1 (Milan, 1976), 124-170; J. den Boeft, "Ambrosius lyricus," in J. Den Boeft, A. Hilhorst, eds., *Early Christian Poetry: a Collection of Essays* (Leiden, 1993), 77-89; Idem, "Delight and Imagination: Ambrose's Hymns," *Vigiliae Christianae* 62 (2008), 425-440. For theological and scriptural content see, e.g., M. Zelzer, K. Zelzer, "Grates tibi . . . novas . . . cano. Der ambrosianische Hymnus auf Protasius und Gervasius vor dem Hintergrund der Tagzeithymnen," in V. Panagl, ed., *Dulce Melos: La poesia tardoantica e medievale: Atti del III convegno internazionale di studi, Vienna, 15-18 novembre 2004* (Alexandria, 2007), 1-18; J. den Boeft, "Aeternae rerum conditor: Ambrose's Poem about 'Time,'" in F. García Martínez, G. P. Lutikhuisen, eds., *Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome: Studies in Ancient Cultural Interaction in Honour of A. Hilhorst* (Leiden, 2003), 27-40; C. Lanéry, *Ambroise de Milan, Hagiographe* (Paris, 2008), 217-275.

⁴ Fontaine, *Hymnes*, 97-98.

⁵ Aug. *Conf.* 10.33.49-50; see, e.g., J. Quasten, *Music and Worship in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*, B. Ramsey, tr. (Washington, 1983; orig. German 1973), 92-94; M. Richter, "'Carmina autem quaecumque in laudem Dei dicuntur hymni vocantur' (Isidore of Seville, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* 1.6)," *JLA* 2 (2009), 116-130.

⁶ Aug. *Conf.* 9.6.14-9.7.15.

large crowd singing or chanting in unison had significant social and political implications.⁷

In effect this is to understand both songs and acclamations in terms of the nature of their performance as a kind of ritual practice. To begin with, then, emphasis here will be not so much on the semantic or propositional content of hymns and acclamations as on the effect of these words and phrases when spoken or chanted or sung in unison. The effect is very different from merely writing or saying the words aloud: it will be shown that in this respect hymns share with songs and acclamations a significant social function.⁸ A connection might therefore be drawn between Ambrose's introduction of communal chanting and singing to the church of Milan and the prominence of acclamations and popular songs in the African church of subsequent decades.⁹ Such displays of collective enthusiasm may be understood as an effective social mechanism by which a crowd could come to be united in pursuit of violence against its perceived enemies; and although uncontrolled enthusiasm and violence was often problematic for Christian leaders, it was possible to make use of chants and songs in order to control and direct this potential aggression.¹⁰ The common features that may be identified among hymns, songs, and acclamations thus allow Ambrose's hymns to be understood in a similar fashion as a means of controlling and directing the energies of his congregation.

The hymns of Ambrose were of course not primarily precursors to religious violence. Indeed, it is clear from the references to them in the works of

⁷ For acclamations see O. Hirschfeld, "Die römische Staatszeitung und die Akklamationen im Senat," in *Kleine Schriften* (Berlin, 1913), 682–702; D.S. Potter, "Performance, Power and Justice in the High Empire," in W.J. Slater, ed., *Roman Theater and Society: E. Togo Salmon Papers I* (Ann Arbor, 1996), 129–159; G. S. Aldrete, *Gestures and Acclamations in Ancient Rome* (Baltimore, 1999). For late antique acclamations see E. Peterson, *Heis Theós: Epigraphische, formgeschichtliche und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Göttingen, 1926); E. Kantorowicz, *Laudes Regiae: A Study in Liturgical Acclamations and Medieval Ruler Worship* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1958); J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Antioch: City and Imperial Administration in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1972), 208–219; A. Cameron, *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium* (Oxford, 1976); C. Roueché, "Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire: New Evidence from Aphrodisias," *JRS* 74 (1984), 181–199; Eadem, *Performers and Partisans at Aphrodisias in the Roman and Late Roman Periods* (London, 1993), 129–156; Eadem, "Acclamations at the Council of Chalcedon," in R. Price, M. Whitby, eds., *Chalcedon in Context: Church Councils 400–700* (Liverpool, 2009), 169–177; H.-U. Wiemer, "Akklamationen im spätrömischen Reich. Zur Typologie und Funktion eines Kommunikationsrituals," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 86 (2004), 27–65.

⁸ Thus M. Bloch, "Symbols, Song, Dance and Features of Articulation: Is Religion an Extreme Form of Traditional Authority?" *Archives Européennes de sociologie* 15 (1974), 55–81; also C. Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover, NH/London, 1998), 13.

⁹ B.D. Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge, 2011), 458–466.

¹⁰ Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 441–442.

Augustine that the hymns served multiple purposes: they might variously be a source of comfort, or of aesthetic pleasure, or a means of instilling basic doctrine and making it memorable. But in their public context, as they were sung in the basilicas of Milan, their most obvious and fundamental effect was to encourage and display the unity of the people of Milan within the church and behind their bishop. Just as with the acclamation of a new imperial governor, the political implications of such visible and audible support were genuine and significant. The words of the hymns the people sang were not invented on the spot; nor were the hymns direct acclamations of the bishop himself. They did, however, regularly praise Milanese martyrs and at times identified the crowd not only with their city but specifically with Ambrose himself. And the singing of hymns under the direction of the bishop, in his church and in his own words, must inevitably have provided a constant reminder of his popularity and influence in the city. This in turn gave him legitimacy and an authority he could exploit when dealing with his critics and rivals, or when negotiating with the civic elite or the imperial court. The hymns of Ambrose of Milan might thus be understood as an example of the reconfiguring of the traditional practice of acclamation for the purposes of a prominent civic bishop.

Hymns and Acclamations in the Roman Empire

Ambrose was by no means the first major figure in the western church to have composed and circulated his own hymns.¹¹ Nevertheless, he played an important role in helping to make the singing of newly composed hymns a respectable feature of public worship, and his authority would ultimately come to be used to justify the broader incorporation of hymns into the Christian liturgy.¹² For even though the singing of original hymns (in addition to the biblical psalms) had formed a part of Christian worship in both east and west for centuries, the practice remained controversial even in Ambrose's time, and the acceptability of singing anything but the biblical psalms during church services would continue to be debated in centuries to come.¹³ In part this was perhaps a result of the anxiety articulated in Augustine's *Confessions*—and also attributed there to Athanasius of Alexandria—that the seductive appeal of music and melody might distract from the true purpose of Christian

¹¹ For precursors see Lattke, *Hymnus*, 307–311.

¹² Second Council of Tours (567 CE), can. 24[23]: CCL 148A, 192.476; E. Cattaneo, *Note storiche sul canto Ambrosiano* (Milan, 1950).

¹³ Council of Laodicea (363 CE), can. 59, in P.-P. Joannou, *Discipline générale antique*, vol. 1.2 (Grottaferrata, 1962), 154; First Council of Braga (561 CE) can.12 (PL 84.567). McKinnon, "Christian Antiquity," 71, notes the ambiguity of the terms "psalm" and "hymn": in the present essay, "hymn" is used to refer to a new composition, as distinct from a biblical psalm.

worship.¹⁴ A more basic concern seems to have been that singing in itself was a dubious practice and had to be carefully controlled: thus Augustine complains that ordinary laborers inevitably accompany themselves with theater-songs and so found it necessary to insist that monks engaged in manual work should confine themselves to chanting or singing Christian songs.¹⁵ Much later, in sixth-century Gaul, Caesarius of Arles continued to rail against those in his congregation who danced and sang vulgar and shameful songs at drunken parties and even at Christian festivals.¹⁶ In this context Ambrose's incorporation of communal singing into the custom of the church and under the control of the local bishop was no small achievement.

Yet it was perhaps even more significant in light of what seems to have been an uncomfortable association, for a church that considered itself catholic, between the singing of hymns and the communal expression of oppositional and subversive religious identities. Caesarius, in the sixth century, stigmatized popular song as a pagan practice; but Augustine, for example, was also well aware that Manichees made use of hymn-singing in propounding their own beliefs.¹⁷ Elsewhere, the origin of hymn-singing in the Greek and Syriac churches is explained by fifth-century church historians as having been prompted by its effective use among heretics. Thus Ephrem of Nisibis began to compose his hymns in response to those of his rivals, Bardaisan and Harmonius, and John Chrysostom's introduction of hymns to Constantinople is similarly explained as a response to their use by an Arian faction.¹⁸ These stories suggest a certain anxiety surrounding the introduction and use of hymns, and a need to excuse it by arguing that the only alternative was to risk falling behind in a kind of arms race. That anxiety in turn may be explained by the potential political implications of the events in Constantinople in particular, in which the Arians were accused not only of mounting a political demonstration accompanied by antiphonal chanting or singing but also of shouting insults against their rivals, including a pointed chant of "Where are those who say that three things are a single power?"¹⁹ In this instance the predictable outcome was a violent clash between the two factions, which the emperor could

¹⁴ Aug. *Conf.* 10.33.49–50.

¹⁵ Aug. *De opere monach.* 17.20: "cantica vero divina cantare"; comparanda in N. Horsfall, *The Culture of the Roman Plebs* (London, 1993), 15–17.

¹⁶ Caesarius of Arles, *Serm.* 16.3: "Nam ille christianus qualis est, qui . . . verba turpia et amatoria vel luxuriosa cantare?" W.E. Klingshirm, *Caesarius of Arles: the Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge, 1994), 198–199; Horsfall, *Culture*, 17.

¹⁷ Caes. *Serm.* 47.5; see R. MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (AD 100–400)* (New Haven, 1984), 74–75. Aug. *C. Faust.* 15.5–6, with Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 444.

¹⁸ Soz. *HE* 3.16; Socr. *HE* 6.8.

¹⁹ Socr. *HE* 6.8: "πολλάκις γὰρ καὶ τοιαύτην ᾠδὴν ἔλεγον· Ἰποῦ εἰσὶν οἱ λέγοντες τὰ τρία μίαν δύναμιν;"

be persuaded to blame on the Arians. But years earlier, in Antioch, John had mounted a comparable mobilization of the Christian masses, to the accompaniment of chanted psalms, in public defiance of the emperor Julian.²⁰ In the fourth century, at least, the singing of hymns and psalms was not always an innocent activity. Here and elsewhere, the communal singing and chanting of Christians united by a political or partisan cause should be understood in the context of the familiar and widespread Roman practice of acclamation.

It is possible to see hymns and songs as sharing certain features with acclamations, defined as the unified chanting of certain fixed phrases by which a crowd could collectively make known its complaints, demands, or desires.²¹ In practice there was some overlap: the triumph songs of the late Republic, for example, whether eulogistic or scurrilous, and whether improvised or planned in advance, gave common public expression to praise or censure in an explicitly political context.²² Theater songs too were frequently repurposed as political commentary.²³ Indeed, popular song and chant can be said to have pervaded the Roman world and was frequently directed (or redirected) to social or political ends.²⁴ Religious chants and hymns were also available for political use as acclamations, as in the example of the crowd raised by the silversmith Demetrius at Ephesus in response to the preaching of the apostle Paul: they rushed to the theater and chanted for two hours the phrase “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”²⁵ Although the demonstration was supposedly in defense of the temple of Artemis, it is likely that many were simply carried along by the crowd and what was presumably a familiar phrase. Unity as much as religious enthusiasm was the point.²⁶ Whether the text around which the participants united was a song, or a phrase from religious worship, or a line from a play, or a Christian hymn, the important aspect is that

²⁰ Soz. *HE* 5.19; see Julian, *Misop.* 357A, with Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 214.

²¹ See Roueché, “Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire,” 181: “The expression, in unison, of wish, opinion, or belief, by a large gathering of people, often employing conventional rhythms and turns of phrase.”

²² Suet. *Julius* 49.4, 80.2–3, with Horsfall, *Culture*, 38; Aldrete, *Gestures*, 141, adds Suet. *Augustus* 57, *Gaius* 6, 16, and Cassius Dio 65.8; see also M. Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 247–248.

²³ Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 158–161; Aldrete, *Gestures*, 104–105.

²⁴ Horsfall, *Culture*, 37, 42–47.

²⁵ Acts 19:23–41; Roueché, “Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire,” 181; Peterson, *Heis Theós*, 141; Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 238.

²⁶ Acts 19:32 (NIV): “Most of the people did not even know why they were there.” See Roueché, “Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire,” 181; Eadem, “Acclamations at the Council of Chalcedon”, 170–171; see also N. Belayche, “*Deus deum . . . summorum maximus* (Apuleius): Ritual Expressions of Distinction in the Divine World in the Imperial Period,” in S. Mitchell, P. van Nuffelen, eds., *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 2010), 162; Peterson, *Heis Theós* 302–303.

it conferred on the crowd a common identity and a common purpose. In the right situation, a song or a hymn could function as an acclamation, uniting and mobilizing a crowd and giving a voice to those ordinarily excluded from positions of power.

To the extent that they functioned in this way, then, songs, hymns, and acclamations provided an opportunity for the general population to participate in Roman politics, or simply to make their voices heard.²⁷ The ideology of both the Republic and the Empire at least in theory committed officials to taking account of the views of the general population; and contemporaries certainly believed that support or opposition expressed by a crowd could influence the decision-making process.²⁸ Our sources vary on the question whether such interventions were to be considered legitimate, largely according to whether or not their authors agreed with the outcome.²⁹ Certainly it was a frequent complaint that crowds could be manipulated easily by one's rivals or opponents, and no doubt this was often the case: thus Suetonius records the future emperor Titus, as head of the Praetorian Guard, sending his soldiers to infiltrate crowds at the theater to demand the removal of various of his private enemies.³⁰ Exactly how common such practices were may be disputed: that the activities of theater clagues and provocateurs are generally frowned upon in the sources is only to be expected, as the beneficiaries would hardly praise them in public, but this is not to say that their role went unrecognized or unrewarded in other ways. The sheer volume of ancient evidence, however, alongside certain modern parallels, makes it highly plausible that crowds in the Roman theater and elsewhere were indeed frequently manipulated.³¹ To the extent that acclamations were important, they are unlikely to have been left to chance.

²⁷ R. MacMullen, *Voting about God in Early Church Councils* (New Haven, 2003), 12–16; Potter, “Performance, Power and Justice,” 131, 159.

²⁸ Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 218; see Ulpian, *Digest* 49.1.12. For further examples see MacMullen, *Voting about God*, 14–15; Wiemer, “Akklamationen,” 56–65; Aldrete, *Gestures*, 159–164; Roueché, “Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire,” 198.

²⁹ Roueché, “Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire” 183–184; T. Gregory, *Vox Populi: Popular Opinion and Violence in the Religious Controversies of the Fifth Century AD* (Columbus, OH, 1979), 5.

³⁰ Suet. *Titus* 6; Aldrete, *Gestures*, 136–138. Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 234–237, adds the examples of Tac. *Ann.* 1.16.3 and the Antioch theater clague of the later empire; on the latter see also Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 211–215; Wiemer, “Akklamationen,” 54–55; R. Browning, “The Riot of A.D. 387 in Antioch: The Role of the Theatrical Clagues in the Later Empire,” *JRS* 42 (1952), 13–20.

³¹ Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 234–249; Roueché, *Performers and Partisans*, 132–133, and “Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire”, 183–184, also accepts the likely presence of clagues in at least some cases.

Nor should the likely presence of theater claque or political agents be understood as having diminished the value of an acclamation. The widespread awareness that they could be manipulated seems to have had little effect on their significance. Indeed, the continuing importance of acclamations in the later Roman Empire was not only validated but codified in the fourth century by the emperor Constantine, who in 331 demanded to be informed of them in order to assess the performance of his governors and other officials—a procedure that was retained and even expedited by his successors, who allowed such messengers to use the *cursus publicus*.³² Constantine admittedly expressed an awareness that acclamations might be rigged, and he insisted that only genuine examples should be forwarded on to the emperor; but there is little reason to think that true acclamations could be distinguished from false ones, especially over such a distance.³³ The result, of course, was a powerful incentive for imperial governors to become experts in managing their own images—and, ironically perhaps, to further encourage the manipulation of acclamations toward that end.

But even though as a system this was open to abuse, acclamations seem nevertheless to have retained their value as part of the system of imperial governance. Whether or not they revealed the true opinions of the masses, they performed the vital function of providing the emperor with an alternative source of information, at least to some extent outside the direct control of the local governors or the civic officials.³⁴ The establishment in this way of an apparently unmediated connection between the emperor and the people was thus politically valuable, but it also conformed with what have been called “the universalizing tendencies of Roman propaganda,” which sought to efface political and regional differences and instead to present the emperor as ruling on the basis of a universal consensus.³⁵ The claim that acclamations were both genuine and spontaneous remained important as part of this rhetoric, but what seems to have mattered above all was that they should be unanimous, offering a consensus that could then be implicitly extended to the population at large.³⁶ Given such a system, it did not necessarily matter that acclamations could be manipulated or rigged, as long as such interventions were not too obvious. Even as political rituals they would remain constitutive of political

³² *CTh* 1.16.6; *CJ* 1.40.3; *cursus publicus*: *CTh* 8.5.32; Wiemer, “Akklamationen,” 57–66; Ando, *Imperial Ideology*, 203–204.

³³ Roueché, “Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire,” 187; Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 241.

³⁴ Thus Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 216–219; see also Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 242–243; Wiemer, “Akklamationen,” 65.

³⁵ Ando, *Imperial Ideology*, 175.

³⁶ Ando, *Imperial Ideology*, 199–205; Roueché, “Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire,” 187–188.

power, as the use of acclamations in Byzantium and in the later medieval west make clear.³⁷

It is notable, then, that the growing importance of acclamations in the later empire seems to have coincided with a greater complexity and apparently more planning and organization.³⁸ Certainly what acclamations survive from the later empire can seem astonishingly formal and elaborate: the famous string of repeated acclamations with which the Roman Senate greeted the completion of the Theodosian Code in 438 seems to resemble a solemn ritual more than it does the apparently spontaneous shouts of a theater crowd.³⁹ Similarly, as the circus in Constantinople became, from the fifth century onward, the chief site at which the emperor interacted with his people, so the Blue and Green factions took on an increasingly prominent role in leading the acclamations—which in turn were gradually transformed into an aspect of formal imperial ceremonial.⁴⁰ The extreme end-point of this process of standardization and ritualization may be found in the tenth-century *Book of Ceremonies* of the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913–959), or in the royal and episcopal acclamations of the medieval west.⁴¹ But such complex acclamations were not limited to the Roman Senate or to the factions in Constantinople, nor restricted to court ceremonial in the immediate presence of the emperor. That provincial crowds were capable of similarly complex performances is shown by the acclamations that greeted the new governor of Osrhoene, Fl. Chaereas, at Edessa in 449, or those from fifth- or sixth-century Aphrodisias in honor of the local benefactor Albinus.⁴²

Nor was it only Roman emperors and officials who were interested in unity and consensus. The Christian church constantly sought to define itself as catholic and universal, and so invested in much the same way as the empire in expressions of unanimous approval and agreement.⁴³ Bishops at church

³⁷ Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 262–270; Kantorowicz, *Laudes Regiae*, 118–120.

³⁸ Ando, *Imperial Ideology*, 202; Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 239–240; see Roueché, “Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire,” 184–187.

³⁹ Hirschfeld, “Die römische Staatszeitung,” 689–692; Wiemer, “Akklamationen,” 29–35.

⁴⁰ Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 245–270; see also Roueché, *Performers and Partisans*, 143–156, on Aphrodisias.

⁴¹ Wiemer, “Akklamationen,” 47; Kantorowicz, *Laudes Regiae*; A. Cameron, “The Construction of Court Ritual: The Byzantine Book of Ceremonies,” in D. Cannadine, S. Price, eds., *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1987), 106–136.

⁴² Edessa: Wiemer, “Akklamationen,” 35–44; Syriac text in J. Flemming, ed., *Akten der ephesischen Synode vom Jahre 449: Syrisch* (Berlin, 1917). Aphrodisias: Roueché, “Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire,” 188–196.

⁴³ Roueché, “Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire,” 186–187; R. Lim, “Christian Triumph and Controversy,” in G. Bowersock, P. Brown, O. Grabar, eds., *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), 196–218, 204–205; MacMullen, *Voting about God*, 16–18.

councils from the fourth century onward confirmed their decisions with brief and general acclamations; but the records of later councils suggest that more complex acclamations began to be used to express partisan opinions during the debates themselves, although these in turn were carefully managed by the presiding officials in order that the outcome might still be an acclamation conveying a final consensus.⁴⁴ Church councils also took account of the views of ordinary people as expressed in public acclamations, as when the Second Council of Ephesus in 449 took in as evidence acclamations from Edessa to Chaereas a few months before, during which the crowd had expressed a firm opposition to their new bishop, Ibas.⁴⁵ In this case the acclamations seem to have begun as spontaneous or at least conventional examples, but when the whole process was repeated a few days later, the demands had become unusually clear and specific: the evidence suggests that dissident local clergy and monks had spotted a chance to be rid of their bishop and had set out to influence the crowd and to prepare or at least direct their acclamations.⁴⁶

Religious as well as political acclamations were therefore open to manipulation and, at times, suggest pre-planning or direction from above. The ideology that presented acclamations as the unmediated voice of the people granted unusual influence to anyone—bishops, monks, local officials, circus factions or *clagues*—who might be in a position to discreetly influence a crowd.⁴⁷ Clergymen as well as actors and politicians were capable of exploiting such tactics: thus the controversial third-century bishop of Antioch, Paul of Samosata, was accused by his rivals not only of encouraging the adulation of his audiences but also of apparently organizing a *claque* to lead the cheering.⁴⁸ Although this may have been merely sour grapes, it is difficult to see anything but careful planning behind the acclamations in Hippo in 426, when Augustine was arranging the installation of his eventual successor, Eraclius, as coadjutor.⁴⁹ The chants here were each in themselves relatively short and made use of familiar formulas, but with repetitions they total 159 separate shouts; and Augustine was explicit in telling his congregation that the acclamations were being recorded by a stenographer so as to provide a “manifest sign of popular assent.”⁵⁰ In this case, then, the words were most likely unscripted, but the

⁴⁴ Roueché, “Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire,” 186–187, 198–199; Eadem, “Acclamations at the Council of Chalcedon,” 171–175.

⁴⁵ Roueché, “Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire,” 187; Wiemer, “Akklamationen,” 40.

⁴⁶ Wiemer, “Akklamationen,” 37–38; MacMullen, *Voting about God*, 17–18, 144.

⁴⁷ Wiemer, “Akklamationen,” 65–66; Gregory, *Vox Populi*, 208–212.

⁴⁸ Euseb., *HE* 7.30.9; Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 292.

⁴⁹ *Aug. Epist.* 213; Hirschfeld, “Die römische Staatszeitung,” 693–694; Roueché, “Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire,” 186; Kantorowicz, *Laudes Regiae*, 119.

⁵⁰ Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 455; *Aug. Epist.* 213.2; see MacMullen, *Voting about God*, 17.

purpose and shape of the event were clear to all: the people knew what was expected of them, and the bishop was there to direct them when required. This was hardly a spontaneous acclamation, but it is clear that Augustine expected it to matter all the same: what was important, here again, was that the event could be taken as presenting a popular consensus.⁵¹ Nor did the fact that this was all by design seem to result in any lack of enthusiasm: the excitement seems not to have come from the spontaneity so much as the sheer pleasure of taking part.⁵²

To participate even in a complex acclamation thus required no great expertise or any substantial preparation. Even the most elaborate acclamations, such as those of the Blues and Greens in Constantinople, need not be assumed to have been composed and memorized in advance: indeed, in many cases where they took the form of a dialogue, there was evidently much improvisation.⁵³ The more one-sided acclamations for the most part follow a conventional structure and consist of metrical or merely rhythmical variations around a limited range of standard and predictable formulas.⁵⁴ Such rhythms and formulas were already familiar to virtually everyone in the empire, whether from theatre songs or the popular songs that derived from them, or from participation in previous acclamations.⁵⁵ As a result, simple acclamatory phrases could achieve complexity through the clever use of variations and perhaps with some careful prompting from cheerleaders or claqueurs.⁵⁶ The usual modern parallels might here be adduced, for instance, the singing of blues or gospel music in the twentieth-century American South, or modern protest marches and supporters at football matches in Europe and South America.⁵⁷ As in these examples, it will scarcely have been difficult on such occasions for late antique participants to know how they were supposed to act, as “the people were well educated in their own culture.”⁵⁸ Chants and acclamations

⁵¹ Kantorowicz, *Laudes Regiae*, 119.

⁵² Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 455.

⁵³ Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 318–333; Wiemer, “Akklamationen,” 47.

⁵⁴ Wiemer, “Akklamationen,” 35–47; Roueché, “Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire,” 188–196; Aldrete, *Gestures*, 129–134, 138–142.

⁵⁵ Wiemer, “Akklamationen,” 54–55; Horsfall, *Culture*, 37–39; Roueché, “Acclamations in the Roman Empire,” 189–190.

⁵⁶ Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 240.

⁵⁷ Examples offered at Roueché, “Acclamations in the Roman Empire,” 183; Aldrete, *Gestures* 142–144; Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 331 n. 1. For modern parallels see L. Back, “Sounds in the Crowd,” in M. Bull, L. Back, eds., *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford, 2003), 311–327; M. Kytö, “We are the rebellious voice of the terraces, we are Çarşı’: Constructing a Football Supporter Group through Sound,” *Soccer & Society* 12 (2011), 77–93; E. Batuman, “The View from the Stands: Life among Istanbul’s Soccer Fanatics,” *New Yorker* (7 March 2011), 56–67.

⁵⁸ Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 455.

that were founded on such familiar elements were easy to pick up and join in with; and so it was possible for “literally thousands” not only to unite around such ritualized and repetitive actions but also “spontaneously to vary and improvise upon the standard formulas.”⁵⁹ Even from the most complex acclamations, all that was required was “a few leaders with clear voices and a good sense of rhythm who knew the score.”⁶⁰

Modern examples, as well as the potential complexity of ancient acclamations, may thus allow us to recognize a significant overlap in both form and function between acclamations and songs. Although in the case of most ancient acclamations it is unlikely that there was any elaborate musical accompaniment, it is unclear that any firm distinction can otherwise be made between the reciting, shouting, chanting, and singing of verses or other rhythmic or metrical phrases.⁶¹ Even in the absence of music and melody, these practices all share an artificial distancing from ordinary language, focusing on the performance as much as the words.⁶² The likely implication is that “by the beginning of the seventh century the chanting of imperial acclamations [will have] sounded like the intoning of the psalms.”⁶³ In their use of predictable and familiar rhythms, largely accentual rather than quantitative meters, and above all with the emphasis on their shared “use of rhythmic repetition and exhortations repeated in unison,” acclamations and popular songs will at the very least have been related forms of cultural expression.⁶⁴ Even in modern culture, the line between chanting and singing is difficult to draw; and certainly songs as much as acclamations may serve to unify a crowd around certain fixed, formulaic phrases.⁶⁵ This communal and ritual aspect of popular song is not to be ignored: and songs too can be adopted or adapted for the sake of political commentary, approval, or dissent.

It is possible therefore to trace some continuity or overlap between acclamations and popular songs, whether in the late Republic, the Roman Empire or the Byzantine world.⁶⁶ As instances of a more widespread popular enthusiasm for “ritual chanting, singing, rhythmic shouting, metrical voices accompanied by bodily gestures like clapping and dancing,” songs and acclamations

⁵⁹ Aldrete, *Gestures*, 128, 103.

⁶⁰ Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 240.

⁶¹ Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 447; see also Richter, “Carmina autem,” who attempts to draw a consistent distinction.

⁶² Bloch, “Symbols, Song, Dance,” 69–70.

⁶³ Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 247.

⁶⁴ Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 442; see also Horsfall, *Culture*, 24.

⁶⁵ Bloch, “Symbols, Song, Dance,” 59, 69–70.

⁶⁶ Aldrete, *Gestures*, 112; Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 231–232; Roueché, “Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire,” 189–190.

alike produced a collective “unity and energy” that could be directed toward political and social ends.⁶⁷ As such, they represented a potential threat to anyone in authority and, in any case, could certainly not be ignored by those who claimed implicitly or explicitly to govern on behalf of the people. The predictable response was that political and religious leaders may be found, on the one hand, condemning such expressions, whether in themselves or as rigged or manipulated; and, on the other hand, promoting their importance as an expression of popular opinion while making efforts to manage or to lead them. This could be easily done: acclamations and songs were ingrained in Roman culture, whether among senators, monks, or provincial laborers; and although it might be difficult to induce a crowd to express sentiments entirely contrary to their real opinions, this was not very often required—and crowds are more easily influenced than one might like to believe.⁶⁸ And if one is tempted to disregard acclamations that show obvious signs of interference—those, for example, that seem too complex or too convenient to be truly spontaneous—we must recognize that such acclamations were often taken seriously in antiquity as expressions of popular sentiment. A crowd that acted together, and in the process showed its strength, was not to be argued with, and it represented much that mattered in Roman politics and religion: unity, common identity, consensus, and, ultimately, authority and legitimacy.

Hymns as Acclamations in Ambrose’s Milan

The common ground here identified between songs and acclamations might be extended to the collective singing of hymns in Ambrose’s Milan. As popular songs, Ambrose’s hymns share certain formal and technical features with at least the most complex acclamations of the empire, and especially the later empire. In this case, admittedly, these are not the records of acclamations but scripts for them, designed to be repeated in certain specified contexts—and which must therefore, it would seem, have been anything but spontaneous. But as has been seen, it is difficult to consider spontaneity as the distinguishing mark of an acclamation. Certainly the exact words of an acclamation were rarely invented on the spot but were instead most often repetitions or adaptations of phrases familiar from previous acclamations or from other appropriate contexts. The modern world too can provide examples of crowds making use of entire songs, and not just fragments of songs, to chant or sing

⁶⁷ Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 441, 442.

⁶⁸ The objection is raised in A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602: A Social, Economic and Administrative Study*, vol.2 (Oxford, 1964), 723, and in Gregory, *Vox Populi*, 208; but see Roueché, “Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire,” 187; Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 240–243; R.H. Turner, L.M. Killian, *Collective Behavior* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1987), 151.

at sporting events or political demonstrations.⁶⁹ In the Byzantine world of the circus factions, complex and pre-composed set pieces appear to have been the norm on certain ceremonial occasions; and even these predictable performances retained a real political significance.⁷⁰ Spontaneity, therefore, in the strong sense of a crowd coming up with an original chant on the spot, was not always required to achieve an effect that at least resembled an acclamation.

What one might consider instead is the capacity for a song or a chant, whether spontaneous or pre-composed, to provide an effective focus for a display of common identity and collective action. Ambrose's hymns in particular seem eminently suited to such a role. As with many of the most effective acclamations, the hymns are remarkably formulaic: they are uniformly structured in eight four-line verses and exhibit a regular pattern of accentual stresses.⁷¹ In addition, their language is notably demotic and accessible, with none of the elaboration of much of the Latin poetry of the period.⁷² Such hymns were therefore well adapted for the purpose of "group singing in a liturgical context" by even an uneducated crowd: there would be no need for Ambrose to train a professional choir.⁷³ It has already been seen that ordinary Romans had no great difficulty in learning the words of popular songs, and the bishop's new hymns could first be taught to a *claque* or a cantor, such as seem to have been increasingly on hand in the fourth-century church.⁷⁴ Thus in the same way as the chanting of an acclamation, or the singing of a theater song or the intoning of a psalm, the singing of Ambrose's hymns had the potential to serve as "an important unifying ritual."⁷⁵ Like an acclamation, a hymn focused a crowd on singing or chanting with a single voice (*una voce*).⁷⁶ The result was a potent demonstration of unity and harmony, the significance of which did not escape Ambrose's notice:

A psalm joins those with differences, unites those at odds, and reconciles those who have suffered offence, for who will not concede to him with

⁶⁹ Back, "Sounds in the Crowd," 320; J.R. Watson, ed., *An Annotated Anthology of Hymns* (Oxford, 2002), 142.

⁷⁰ Roueché, "Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire," 188; Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 262–270.

⁷¹ Den Boeft, "Ambrosius lyricus," 78–83. For these features in acclamations see Aldrete, *Gestures*, 138–142; Cameron, *Circus Factions*, 329.

⁷² Springer, "Hymns," 347–350; Fontaine, *Hymnes*, 23–28; Idem, "Prose et poésie"; M. Roberts, *The Jeweled Style: Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity* (Ithaca, 1989).

⁷³ Group singing: Springer, "Hymns," 347–348; see also Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 465; Lanéry, *Ambroise*, 229–234.

⁷⁴ E. Foley, "The Cantor in Historical Perspective," *Worship* 56 (1982), 194–213.

⁷⁵ Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 464.

⁷⁶ This claim was a common one in early Christianity and prior to the fourth century may be found in Clement of Alexandria and Clement of Rome: see Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 67–70.

whom he sings to God with a single voice (*unam . . . vocem*)? Certainly it is a great bond of unity for the whole body of the people to come together in one chorus. The strings of the cithara are all different, but they bring about harmony.⁷⁷

He had made much the same point earlier in the same passage: a psalm should be thought of as “wringing from various voices a single song.”⁷⁸

It is primarily in performance, then, that Ambrose’s hymns can be seen to share with acclamations a potential function or effect. They were suitable texts around which a crowd could unite in order to make a political point, even if that point might be limited to expressing and advertising a common cause or a common identity. Moreover, as will be seen, Ambrose’s hymns did indeed serve this purpose on at least one occasion, in allowing the Christian congregation of Milan not only to affirm their identity as a single community but also to unite behind Ambrose himself as their legitimate representative. In light of Ambrose’s previous career as a provincial governor (of Aemilia-Liguria), it should come as no surprise that he was familiar with the significance of popular acclamations: Constantine’s law demanding that provincial acclamations be sent with all speed to the emperor had after all been in force for over forty years.⁷⁹ But it seems likely that Ambrose was quite willing, in addition, to apply his experience to his new role as bishop. The account of his election to the see of Milan is a famous example of episcopal acclamation, and it is worth examining briefly as an illustration of the ways in which Ambrose’s authority as bishop was founded on a claim to popular consensus and popular consent.

The surviving story (in two versions, both written decades after the event) is the story of a crowd uniting around an acclamation.⁸⁰ In 374 the death of

⁷⁷ Ambrose, *Exp. Psalm. XII* 1.9: “Psalmus dissidentes copulat, discordes sociat, offensos reconciliat; quis enim non remittat ei, cum quo unam ad deum vocem emisit? magnum plane unitatis vinculum, in unum chorum totius numerum plebis coire. dispares citharae nervi sunt, sed una symphonia”; cf. Bas. Caes. *Homilia in Ps.* 1.2, as noted in Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 70.

⁷⁸ Ambrose, *Exp. Psalm. XII* 1.9: “Ex diversis et disparibus vocibus unam exprimens cantilenam.”

⁷⁹ Ambrose’s career: N.B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1994), 1–13, 37–39; T.D. Barnes, “The Election of Ambrose of Milan,” in J. Leemans, P. Van Nuffelen, S.J.W. Keogh, C. Nicolay, eds., *Episcopal Elections in Late Antiquity* (Berlin, 2011), 39–59.

⁸⁰ Rufinus of Aquileia, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 11.11; Paulinus of Milan, *VAmbrosii* 5.2–6.2. These may be dated to 401–402 and 412–413 respectively: T.D. Barnes, “Valentinian, Auxentius and Ambrose,” *Historia* 51 (2002), 227–237; Idem, “Election of Ambrose,” 53–59. See also Y.-M. Duval, “Ambroise de Milan: De son election à sa consecration,” in Lazzati, ed., *Ambrosius Episcopus*, vol. 2 (Milan, 1976), 243–283, repr. in Y.-M. Duval, *L’Extirpation de l’Arianisme en Italie du Nord et en Occident* (Aldershot, 1998), no.VI; McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 43–52; D.H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Nicene-Arian Conflicts* (Oxford, 1995), 104–127.

Auxentius of Milan led to a dispute over the choice of his successor as bishop, and Ambrose took it upon himself as provincial governor to address the rival factions in the city's basilica. The church historian Rufinus of Aquileia records the pivotal moment:

When he had concluded a long speech in favor of peace and tranquility in accordance with the laws and public order, from the crowd which had been fighting and arguing amongst themselves there arose suddenly and with a single voice (*vox una*) a shout in favor of Ambrose himself: they cried that he should immediately be baptized (for he was a catechumen) and given to them as bishop.⁸¹

Ambrose's biographer Paulinus provides a very similar account, elaborating further on the spontaneity of the clamor for Ambrose:

While he was speaking to the people, suddenly the voice (it is said) of a child cried out from among the crowd, "Ambrose the bishop!" At the sound of this voice the shouts of the whole crowd changed to the single cry, "Ambrose the bishop!"⁸²

That Paulinus here credits the original cry to the voice of an unknown child was perhaps intended to imply divine inspiration.⁸³ It may also have been intended to forestall any suggestion that the acclamation of Ambrose was prearranged and the work of a clique. Modern historians have certainly been suspicious: Ambrose's evident support among imperial officials and with the emperor himself has led to the suggestion that his election, and his subsequent show of reluctance to accept the responsibility, were stage-managed in collaboration with these authorities.⁸⁴ An alternative is that the whole event was

⁸¹ Rufinus, *HE* 11.11: "Cumque inibi multa secundum leges et publicam disciplinam pro quiete et tranquillitate perorasset, pugnantis inter se et dissidentis populi subito clamor et vox una con-surgit Ambrosium postulantes: baptizari hunc protinus clamant, erat enim catechumenus, et sibi episcopum dari."

⁸² Paulinus, *VAmbrosii* 6.1–2: "Cum adloqueretur plebem, subito vox fertur infantis in populo sonuisse 'Ambrosium episcopum!' ad cuius vocis sonum totius populi ora conversa sunt adclaman-tis 'Ambrosium episcopum!'"

⁸³ Barnes, "Election of Ambrose," 54–55; also P. Courcelle, *Les Confessions de saint Augustin dans la tradition littéraire* (Paris, 1963), 195 n. 1.

⁸⁴ Barnes, "Election of Ambrose," 55–59; Ambrose's reluctance is downplayed in H. von Campenhausen, *Ambrosius von Mailand als Kirchenpolitiker* (Berlin/Leipzig, 1929), 26–28, but found plausible in Duval, "Ambroise, de son election," 257–282, and McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 44–50. C. Corbellini, "Sesto Petronio Probo e l'elezione episcopale di Ambrogio," *Rendiconti dell'Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere* 109 (1975), 181–189, gives the initiative to the praetorian prefect, Sex. Petronius Probus: this view is canvassed but ultimately rejected at Williams, *Ambrose of Milan*, 115–116.

arranged and organized by partisans among the Christians of Milan, with or without Ambrose's knowledge.⁸⁵ Ancient observers will scarcely have been any less aware of the possibility of such covert operations.

But whether or not Ambrose had a hand in his own election, and whether or not the acclamation in his favor was truly spontaneous, the further significance of this episode for his new position as bishop will not have escaped him. Both Rufinus and Paulinus emphasize not only the spontaneity of the acclamation but also the stark contrast between the previous factional division and the "wonderful and incredible unanimity" with which the chant for Ambrose was taken up.⁸⁶ Rufinus draws the moral most firmly, concluding his story with the claim of the crowd that "nor could there be otherwise one people and one faith, unless Ambrose were given to them as priest."⁸⁷ Thus although the initial dissension, and the size and nature of the factions involved, has received most attention in the accounts of modern historians, the focus of their ancient counterparts was at least as much on the unanimous outcome of the election.⁸⁸ This claim to unanimity in acclamations "recurs constantly, and is frequently linked with the suggestion that such unison must be evidence of divine inspiration."⁸⁹ For all that the acclamation in the basilica may not have happened exactly as reported—whether because of unregistered machinations behind it, or on account of artistic license on the part of our sources—and for all that the voices of a few hundred in a basilica could not hope to represent the full spectrum of opinion in the city of Milan as a whole, the importance of the story lies in the image it presents of a miraculous unity emerging from chaos. True or not, the acclamation allowed the impression to be given that Ambrose had united the whole of Christian Milan behind him.

Ambrose's authority and legitimacy as bishop were thus from the beginning founded on popular acclaim. This seems to have been the basis on which the emperor Valentinian I granted his approval to the election: the emperor

⁸⁵ McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 38–39, 47–50.

⁸⁶ Paulinus, *VAmbrosii* 6.2: "Itaque qui antea turbulentissime dissidebant . . . repente in hinc mirabili et incredibili concordia consenserunt"; cf. Rufinus, *HE* 11.11: "Dissensio gravi et periculosa seditio urbi propriae parabat exitium."

⁸⁷ Rufinus, *HE* 11.11: "Nec aliter unum populum fore atque unam fidem, nisi Ambrosius sibi daretur sacerdos." See McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 7.

⁸⁸ For varying accounts see Williams, *Ambrose of Milan*, 112–116; McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 43–44; Idem, "Diehards: A Response," *J ECS* 5 (1997), 446–440; E. Cattaneo, *La Religione a Milan nell'età di Sant'Ambrogio* (Milan, 1975), 33–35; Barnes, "Valentinian, Auxentius and Ambrose," 235–236; P.I. Kaufman, "Diehard Homoians and the Election of Ambrose," *J ECS* 5 (1997), 421–440.

⁸⁹ Roueché, "Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire," 187; Eadem, "Acclamations at the Council of Chalcedon," 171; applied to Ambrose in McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 7.

was said to have recognized God's will in the sudden shift from disorder to consensus, an official endorsement that Ambrose would later exploit.⁹⁰ That popular acclamation was tantamount to divine sanction was an argument Ambrose would also make elsewhere, as in his comment, during an intervention in an election at Vercelli, on the legitimacy of the city's former bishop Eusebius: "the man they had all requested was rightly considered to have been chosen by divine judgment."⁹¹ This claim was commonly made throughout the late antique church.⁹² Nor was it unusual for a civic bishop to emphasize his continuing popular support throughout his episcopacy: in the late fourth century, many bishops were increasingly positioning themselves as "officially recognized spokesmen" of the Christian community, or of the urban poor, or even of the urban population in general.⁹³ As a bishop in a city that also hosted an imperial court and that was not prohibitively far removed from the Senate in Rome, Ambrose must have been unusually aware of the importance of finding a constituency of his own and establishing his own authority. His success in constructing a Christian community under his own leadership in Milan was aided by his mastery of the political art of manufacturing consensus. One means by which this was achieved was his reconfiguring of acclamations in the form of hymns.

One may thus return to Augustine's *Confessions*, in which the author reflects upon his time in Milan and in particular upon his own experience of the impact of Ambrose's hymns. Augustine begins with a reminiscence of the circumstances of his baptism at Easter 387:

How much did I weep at your hymns and songs, how keenly was I moved by the sweetly sounding voices of your church! The voices flowed in through my ears and the truth was distilled in my heart, and issued forth as love and affection, and my tears ran down, and I was content for them to do so. The church of Milan had only recently begun this engage in this kind of consolation and exhortation, with all the enthusiasm of brothers singing together with their voices and hearts.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Rufinus, *HE* 11.11; see also Paulinus, *VAmbrosii* 9.1–2.

⁹¹ Amb. *Epist.* 14 [63].2: "Merito creditum quod divino esset electus iudicio quem omnes postulavissent."

⁹² P. Norton, *Episcopal Elections 250–600: Hierarchy and Popular Will in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2007), 13; Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 452.

⁹³ P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, WI, 1992), 89–117; Idem, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover, NH, 2002), 79–80.

⁹⁴ Aug. *Conf.* 9.6.14–7.15: "Quantum fleui in hymnis et canticis tuis, suave sonantis ecclesiae tuae vocibus commotus acriter! voces illae influebant auribus meis, et eliquabatur veritas in cor meum, et exaestuabat inde affectus pietatis, et currebant lacrimae, et bene mihi erat cum eis. non longe coeperat Mediolanensis ecclesia genus hoc consolationis et exhortationis celebrare magno

Given what must have been a highly emotional state, after taking such a momentous step, it is perhaps no surprise that Augustine here emphasizes his personal, aesthetic, and spiritual response. The circumstance of his baptism might be enough to explain his elevated reaction even to hymns he already knew well; but the implication also may be that Augustine here was exposed to Ambrose's hymns, if not for the first time then perhaps only to the full effect of the hymns when combined with the mysteries of the liturgy.⁹⁵ In any of these cases, the singing of hymns seems to have played an important social role: if full participation was reserved for the baptized, the singing was here a part of Augustine's initiation into the Christian community of Milan; and even if not, he seems to have experienced the hymns in some such terms. It is not clear from his account whether Augustine himself participated in the singing; but he evidently felt that the hymns were a sign of his acceptance of Christianity, and its acceptance of him.

But if this was an experience unavailable to him personally before his baptism in 387, Augustine nevertheless immediately went on to situate the origin of hymn-singing in Milan in a precise historical context:

It was indeed a year or not much more since Justina, mother of the boy-king Valentinian [II], had been persecuting your Ambrose on account of her heretical views (for she had been seduced by the Arians). The ordinary faithful kept watch in the church, prepared to die with their bishop, your servant. . . . At this time hymns and psalms were introduced to be sung in the eastern manner, so that the people should not succumb to depression and exhaustion.⁹⁶

Augustine thus places the introduction of hymns a year or so before his own baptism, at the time of the conflict between Justina and Ambrose over the use of Milan's basilicas.⁹⁷ In this he is supported by the account in Paulinus' biography of Ambrose, who also describes such a siege and adds: "It was at this time that antiphons, hymns and vigils first became a custom of the Milanese

studio fratrum concinentium vocibus et cordibus." For commentary see O'Donnell, *Confessions* 3, 104–109.

⁹⁵ Certainly Augustine will have experienced the liturgy for the first time here: O'Donnell, *Confessions* 3, 107. But see also McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 201 n. 145, arguing that Augustine had heard the hymns performed in 386.

⁹⁶ Aug. *Conf.* 7.15: "Nimirum annus erat aut non multo amplius, cum Justina, Valentiniani regis pueri mater, hominem tuum Ambrosium persequeretur haeresis suae causa, qua fuerat seducta ab arrianis. excubabat pia plebs in ecclesia, mori parata cum episcopo suo, servo tuo. . . . tunc hymni et psalmi ut canerentur secundum morem orientalium partium, ne populus maeroris taedio contabesceret, institutum est."

⁹⁷ For additional primary sources on the basilica crisis, discussed below primarily from the letters of Ambrose, see especially Paulinus, *VAmbrosii* 13; Rufinus, *HE* 11.15.

church.”⁹⁸ The exact progression of this controversy, both chronologically and topographically, remains a fiercely disputed question, and this is not the place to deal with it in detail.⁹⁹ Discussion here is confined to the elements of Ambrose’s account that relate not to the progress of the crisis itself but to the issues it raised and his strategies in resolving them. Thus he records in a letter to his sister an attempt by the imperial court in Milan to requisition (not for the first time) the Portian basilica in Milan, and the apparent escalation of this demand to include the city’s Basilica Nova.¹⁰⁰ Ambrose refused these demands; and when agents of the court went ahead and made efforts to commandeer the basilicas anyway, they were met with resistance from the Christian congregation, who responded to the threat with an acclamation of support for their bishop and a very vocal occupation.¹⁰¹

At this point, Ambrose was faced with the challenge of managing a crowd who were evidently ready to confront the imperial court. Significantly, he records that the people at his own service again clamored (*clamavit*) and kept demanding (*poscebat*) to be allowed to join the occupation of the other basilica.¹⁰² The language suggests a spontaneous acclamation, which Ambrose is careful to qualify in his letter as loyal, calm, and restrained: the aim seems to have been to prevent the riotous mood from getting out of control.¹⁰³ Certainly it is a request to which he did not accede: instead, he began a sermon that recapitulated the various readings the congregation had heard, and picks out particular phrases from Job, the New Testament, and the Psalms.¹⁰⁴ The fragment of Psalm 79 that Ambrose recalled at the end of his sermon—by which time the news had arrived that the attempt on the other basilica had been frustrated—has been identified as having been the focus of an earlier acclamation by which the crowd had been incited to violence: “Lord, the heathens have come into your inheritance!”¹⁰⁵ Ambrose, however, is careful throughout the letter to make clear that he had not encouraged or intervened in the occupation of the basilica; and the biblical phrases he puts forward can

⁹⁸ Paulinus, *VAmbrosii* 13.3: “Hoc in tempore primum antiphonae, hymni, ac vigiliae in ecclesia Mediolanensi celebrari coeperunt.”

⁹⁹ For a detailed summary of the previous scholarship on this issue see G. Nauroy, “Le fouet et le miel: le combat d’Ambroise en 386 contre l’arianisme milanais,” *Recherches Augustiniennes* 23 (1988), 72–79; see also the reconstructions of McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 181–196, and J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, ed. and tr., *Ambrose of Milan: Political Letters and Speeches* (Liverpool, 2005), 124–136.

¹⁰⁰ Amb. *Epist.* 76[20].1 (to Marcellina).

¹⁰¹ Amb. *Epist.* 76[20].3: “Acclamatum est sequenti die in ecclesia; . . . populus reclamavit.”

¹⁰² Amb. *Epist.* 76[20].13.

¹⁰³ Amb. *Epist.* 76[20].13.

¹⁰⁴ Amb. *Epist.* 76[20].14–20.

¹⁰⁵ Amb. *Epist.* 76[20].20; Psalms 79:1; see Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 462–463.

just as easily be understood as promoting a policy of steadfast, nonviolent protest.¹⁰⁶ All the same, it is clear that Ambrose was aware of the need to control the crowd. The previous day he had refused a request from the court that he set out to keep the peace; but it will not have been in his own interest for the situation to escalate into full-scale rebellion. But if Ambrose's sermon was an attempt to lower the tension, it was not acknowledged as such by the court. Forced to remain in the basilica overnight, Ambrose responded by leading his clergy in reciting psalms.¹⁰⁷

This context seems to fit Augustine's account of the introduction of hymns: certainly Ambrose and his people were under pressure and in need of comfort and exhortation. That Ambrose speaks only of reciting psalms may be explained by the vagaries of the language of reciting, chanting, and singing, and of psalms and hymns. Certainly a sermon of Ambrose, which belongs either to these same events or to closely related ones, makes reference to the singing of hymns as already a familiar practice:

They also say that the people have been taken in by the charms of my hymns (*hymnorum meorum . . . carminibus*), and certainly I do not deny it. This is indeed a mighty charm (*carmen*) and there is none more powerful; for what is more powerful than the confession of the Trinity, celebrated daily by the voices of the whole people?¹⁰⁸

Ambrose's testimony here seems also to support the main features of Augustine's account. For Augustine, the initial purpose of the hymns was a practical one: they were to keep up the spirits of the people in the course of the siege. But, as Augustine also attests, the singing of hymns was potentially seductive; and Ambrose's mock-defense of the practice suggests that his rivals saw it as demagoguery. The specific accusation seems to have been that Ambrose's hymns encouraged the crowd to identify with his doctrinal and political stance—the first part of which, at least, the bishop was more than glad to admit. But the point of the criticism must have been the fear that Ambrose was directing the crowd toward extremism, that the singing of hymns was a means of “mobilizing mass opinion” on his behalf, which in turn carried with it the threat of violence.¹⁰⁹ This was a factor of which Ambrose himself would

¹⁰⁶ Implied by his references to Psalm 16:7: “[God] will save those who hope in him”; Psalm 76:3: “His abode has been established in peace”; and Psalm 30:9: “What profit is there in my blood?” See also McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 188–189.

¹⁰⁷ Amb. *Epist.* 76[20].24: “Cum fratribus psalmos . . . diximus.”

¹⁰⁸ Amb. *Epist.* 75a[21a].34: “Hymnorum quoque meorum carminibus deceptum ferunt, plane nec hoc abnuo. grande carmen istud est quo nihil potentius: quid enim potentius quam confessio trinitatis, quae cottidie totius populi ore celebratur?”

¹⁰⁹ Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 458 (quoted), 461; Lanéry, *Ambroise de Milan*, 229.

seem to have been well aware. In the remainder of his sermon, and even in the accompanying letter to Valentinian II, he makes repeated reference to the loyalty of the Christians of Milan to him in particular. Referring to a previous attempt by the court, probably in 385, to acquire a basilica, he notes how the people responded: “Do they not remember that, when the people discovered that I had gone to the palace, it was impossible to stop them rushing forward as they set upon the commander and his troops who had come to disperse them, all of them ready to die for their faith in Christ?”¹¹⁰

Here again Ambrose notes that he was asked to restore calm, which on this occasion he was willing to do.¹¹¹ But there remains an unmistakable threat: if Ambrose’s people were willing to face down imperial troops on their own initiative, what might they do under his direction? It is perhaps no surprise that there should have been some anxiety that Ambrose was leading his congregation in collective chanting. As Augustine perhaps recognized, his direct participation only made it more likely that the people would be ready to die for their bishop.¹¹²

Confidence in his popular support enabled Ambrose to demand that the summons with which he had been issued, and which required him to attend a discussion in the consistory, should be withdrawn by the emperor and that any discussion should instead take place in the church and among the people.¹¹³ His sermon on this issue invites his rival Auxentius, whom he presents as a creature of the court, to debate their differences in the basilica in front of Ambrose’s congregation. In support of this deliberately unattractive proposition, Ambrose makes at length the case that the Christians of Milan are more appropriate judges than the emperor, or the outside judges whom the emperor had encouraged both sides to nominate. Ambrose further suggests that as Auxentius has already chosen his judges, they should visit his church, not to sit in judgment but to listen to him preach—and undoubtedly also to witness the popular support that Ambrose is able to boast.¹¹⁴

In his sermon, then, Ambrose predictably emphasizes the role of the people; but he makes the same case, in more circumspect manner, in his letter to the emperor too. The same theme predominates: Ambrose insists, this time on grounds of law and precedent, that bishops must be judged by the church.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Amb. *Epist.* 75a[21a].29: “Nonne meminerunt quod ubi me cognovit populus palatium petisse ita irruit, ut vim eius ferre non possent, quando se comiti militari cum expeditis ad fugandam multitudinem egresso obtulerunt omnes se neci pro fide Christi?”

¹¹¹ Amb. *Epist.* 75a[21a].29–30.

¹¹² As noted in Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 465.

¹¹³ Amb. *Epist.* 75a[21a].3, 26.

¹¹⁴ Amb. *Epist.* 75a[21a].26–29.

¹¹⁵ Amb. *Epist.* 75[21].1–5, 15.

He invites any judges who have been chosen by Auxentius to come to the basilica and decide for themselves—but only for themselves, as ordinary members of the faithful.¹¹⁶ And he again founds his legitimacy and authority as bishop on his support among the Christians of Milan: “I omit the fact that the people themselves have already decided; I am silent about the fact that they have as their bishop the man they requested from the father of Your Clemency; I am silent about the fact that the father of Your Piety assured a peaceful outcome if the one who was chosen should receive the position.”¹¹⁷

The references here are to Valentinian I, whose authority is pressed into service against the interests of his son.¹¹⁸ But the elder Valentinian’s confidence in Ambrose was predicated on the bishop’s claim to have unanimous support in Milan; and this is what Ambrose repeats to Valentinian II. In case there were any doubt that he as bishop still commands such support, he turns his final apology in the letter into a reminder: “I would have come, Imperator, to the consistory of Your Clemency, to explain all this face to face, if either the bishops or the people had allowed me.”¹¹⁹

Ambrose’s constant emphasis on his popular support throughout the basilica crisis thus allowed him to present the dispute as taking place between an isolated court (plus “a few foreigners”) and the ordinary Christians of Milan, of whom he was the sole legitimate representative.¹²⁰ This is the rhetoric of his letters and his sermon, and it was aided by the apparently spontaneous clamor of the crowds in his support in 385 and in the Easter crisis of 386.¹²¹ In addition, their cries were developed or guided by Ambrose himself through the collective recitation of psalms in the mass and in the besieged basilica.¹²² That both Augustine and Paulinus should both have cited this conflict—however long it endured, and whether over one siege or multiple sieges—as the context for the introduction of the collective singing of hymns makes drawing a connection between hymns and acclamations all but irresistible. It has been suggested that Ambrose’s opponents saw his hymns as a way of controlling

¹¹⁶ Amb. *Epist.* 75[21].6.

¹¹⁷ Amb. *Epist.* 75[21].7: “Omitto quia iam ipse populus iudicavit, taceo quia eum quem habet de patre tuae clementiae postulavit, taceo quia pater pietatis tuae quietem futuram spondit si electus suscipere sacerdotium.”

¹¹⁸ But Valentinian was predicting peace and not promising it: McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 48; Liebeschuetz, *Ambrose of Milan*, 138 n. 3.

¹¹⁹ Amb. *Epist.* 75[21].17: “Venissem, imperator, ad consistorium clementiae tuae, ut haec coram suggererem, si me vel episcopi vel populus permisissent.”

¹²⁰ Amb. *Epist.* 75[21].8: “Si de aliquorum peregrinorum assentatione [Auxentius] se iactat”; cf. *Epist.* 76[20].12: “Prodire de Arrianis nullus audebat, quia nec quisquam de civibus erat, pauci de familia regia, nonnulli etiam Gothi”; and *Epist.* 75a[21a].34 “Totius populi ore.”

¹²¹ Amb. *Epist.* 75a[21a].29, 76[21].1.

¹²² Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 462–463.

or directing opinion, or, at the very least, that this was an impression of his hymns that Ambrose was glad to promote.¹²³ That he here describes his hymn as a *carmen* was a way of exploiting that word's ambiguity: it might be a song, or a charm, or a spell by which he bewitched his followers.¹²⁴ But the language of magic is also a recognition of the extent to which the collective chanting or singing of hymns could be understood in ritual terms, as a means of producing unity.¹²⁵ Just as he had at his election, Ambrose here proved again his capacity to unite the Christians of Milan behind him.

Ambrose's hymns thus allowed his congregation to participate in a ritual of communal singing or chanting, uniting in all their diversity around a fixed set of rhythmic phrases. It is, admittedly, not wholly certain exactly how the hymns were performed, and Augustine's comment that they were sung "in the eastern manner" is little help; but Ambrose's own characterization of his hymns as involving "the confession of the Trinity in the mouths of the whole people" leaves no doubt that they were sung by the whole congregation, whether antiphonally, by a congregation divided into halves (as is attested for the eastern church), or in response to a cantor or the bishop himself.¹²⁶ The presence of a cantor, or singing in parts, would also have minimized the complexity of the texts: for even if they were longer and far more rigid than the usual acclamation, their simple and predictable pattern would have made them easy to repeat and to learn. As texts they are close enough to acclamations and popular songs for us to acknowledge at least a family resemblance; but it is in their function and effect that the parallel is at its closest. What they lacked in spontaneity, they made up for in their forceful expression of unanimity and social cohesion. In Ambrose's hymns, a congregation proclaimed in unison a common identity and allegiance, one that mattered greatly in the circumstances in which they proclaimed it. These hymns were not merely conventional expressions of belief in a series of abstract propositions. In addition, they defined social relationships and asserted a social power that could, if necessary, be turned to a political purpose.

Conclusion

The ability to advertise a consensus of opinion in one's favor was a vital tool for any public figure in the Roman world, and it was no less an advantage

¹²³ Amb. *Epist.* 75a[21a].34.

¹²⁴ Liebeschuetz, *Ambrose of Milan*, 159 ("spells"); Lanéry, *Ambroise de Milan*, 229 ("envoûter"); Den Boeft, "Ambrosius Lyricus," 77 n. 3 ("poetry"). See *TLL* 3. 463.10–51, 3.464.9–465.43, 466.75–467.10.

¹²⁵ Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 464.

¹²⁶ Fontaine, *Hymnes*, 18; Springer, "The Hymns of Ambrose", 347–348.

to a bishop than it was to an orator, a governor, or an emperor. The traditional means of achieving this, as endorsed in Constantine's fourth-century legislation, had been through the receipt of an acclamation, whether spontaneous or, failing that, covertly or even openly directed or manipulated. As the Roman Empire and its political ceremonial developed over the course of late antiquity, increasingly complex acclamations came to be recorded in literary and epigraphic sources: the acclamations in the Senate, for example, that greeted the completion of the Theodosian Code, or those inscribed at Ephesus in honor of the otherwise unknown Albinus. It seems likely that the chants of the Byzantine circus factions are a development of this ceremonial behavior; the prominent role that those factions acquired in the negotiation and legitimation of imperial power in Byzantium should serve as a reminder that even the most complex and apparently unspontaneous acclamations had significance all the same. This can be demonstrated too from the late antique church: whether through the chants disapproving of Ibas of Edessa, stage-managed by his enemies but taken seriously by those gathered in judgment at the Council of Ephesus, or through the acclamations arranged and conducted by Augustine of Hippo to establish and ensure the legitimacy of his successor.

Ambrose of Milan was undoubtedly familiar with these methods from his time as an imperial governor, and his election as bishop provided a textbook example of the rhetorical value of a public acclamation. Throughout his episcopal career he remained conscious of the need to retain the support of the Christians of Milan; his letters and sermons reveal that when he came into conflict with the imperial court in the basilica crisis of 386, it was precisely on such grounds that he founded his claim to authority and legitimacy. In the light of the testimony of Augustine and Paulinus that it was at this time that the singing of hymns was introduced to Milan, and that their value was proved in particular in the course of the siege of the city's basilica, it seems reasonable to associate the introduction of hymns with their undoubted capacity to unite and enthuse a crowd. Certainly Ambrose's hymns show a certain resemblance to popular songs and the more complex acclamations, in their accessible language and predictable structure around a set pattern of short, rhythmic phrases. They are moreover recognized by Ambrose himself, in a view he attributes to his critics, as a powerful means of seducing an audience into not only supporting but articulating his doctrinal and therefore (in the circumstances) his political position. It is unclear what exactly was sung in the basilica siege of 386; but even if the content of these hymns is set aside, the very fact of an audience publicly uniting with a single voice under the direction of their bishop will have made its own point. The function and effect of these hymns at the very least brought them close to the status of acclamations.

Hymns, for all that, were undoubtedly a special sort of acclamation. They probably were not the kind of song that a crowd would chant at the theater

or the circus; and their link to the mass, whether or not they were restricted to performance during the liturgy, will have distinguished them from popular songs and acclamations on grounds of both context and content.¹²⁷ Ambrose's hymns in particular may be thought of as emphasizing a didactic and doctrinal purpose in order to encourage or even inculcate a popular resistance to Arianism in Milan.¹²⁸ For that very reason, however, the hymns expressed an important identity that could also be asserted outside the church; it should be no surprise if the hymns, or parts of them, were made use of in contexts and for purposes reminiscent of the use of other acclamatory phrases. Even in 386, for example, perhaps the very year of their introduction to Milan, a phrase from one of Ambrose's hymns played a prominent role in one of Augustine's first philosophical dialogues. Here Augustine's mother, Monica, concludes the general discussion of the nature of happiness by intoning the final line from a hymn of Ambrose's: "nurture those praying, Trinity."¹²⁹ The intervention is certainly relevant as a comment on the point the discussion has reached, but Monica's decisive quotation of Ambrose remains a rallying-cry imported from a different world: for a moment the retreat at Cassiciacum plays host to the basilica of Milan, and reasoned philosophical debate is answered with religious formula. Although the circumstances bear no direct comparison, the sudden introduction of a fragment of a hymn is reminiscent of another chant that also reasserted a religious identity through a familiar acclamatory phrase: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"¹³⁰

Part of Augustine's intended implication in describing Monica's quotation from the hymn, it seems, is that for all her participation in the debate, she had reached her conclusion by means of her faith in God and under the supervision of Ambrose.¹³¹ What she has learned has not reached her directly from Scripture but through membership of the church of Milan; and her quotation of Ambrose both acknowledges this identity and attests to the bishop's authority. Monica's devotion to Ambrose is a minor theme of Augustine's *Confessions*: he notes her immediate acceptance of Ambrose's declaration against the practice of feasting at the graves of the martyrs; and it is unsurprising that after Monica's death, Augustine found himself again comforted by an Ambrosian hymn.¹³² It is surely significant that in her intervention in the dialogue on hap-

¹²⁷ Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 466.

¹²⁸ Lanéry, *Ambroise de Milan*, 228 ("une coloration anti-arienne"); but downplayed in Springer, "The Hymns of Ambrose," 349; Fontaine, *Hymnes*, 48–50.

¹²⁹ Amb. *Hymn* 4.32: "Fove precantes, Trinitas." Aug. *De beata vita* 4.35; C. Conybeare, *The Irrational Augustine* (Oxford, 2006), 64–92.

¹³⁰ Acts 19:28.

¹³¹ Aug. *De beata vita* 4.35: "Quasi evigilans in fidem suam."

¹³² Aug. *Conf.* 6.2.2, 9.12.32.

piness, Monica should speak in words written by Ambrose but, through the learning and singing of his hymns, adopted as the common property of his congregation. Nor should it be a surprise that Augustine in this passage, even before his baptism by the bishop of Milan, should refer to Ambrose as “our priest.”¹³³ No less than his mother, he was finding himself not only a Christian but also a disciple of Ambrose.

There is of course little doubt that Ambrose’s hymns served a variety of purposes, and it is not suggested here that their political or polemical value was the primary reason for their composition. Indeed, it may be that their theological, aesthetic, or literary virtues were all that the bishop considered. Certainly, nothing from Ambrose compares with Augustine’s reflection on his own intentions in his *Psalm against the Donatists*, in which he explicitly acknowledges that his aims are above all polemical and didactic.¹³⁴ The very fact that Augustine was thus prepared to acknowledge the social and cultural significance of popular song, however, may suggest that there is nevertheless some value in understanding Ambrose’s hymns in terms of their resemblance to acclamations. In their lack of spontaneity, their complexity and fixity of form, their relatively formal context in the church or perhaps even as part of the liturgy, and in their address toward God rather than an earthly official, the differences are no doubt obvious to all. But there are similarities nevertheless, broad similarities of structure and form, in their suitability for mass public performance, but more than anything in their function or (strictly speaking) their effect. Ambrose’s hymns provided a short and simple text around which a diverse crowd could unite with a single voice. They offered a focus through which to affirm and to demonstrate a collective identity, the kind of unity and harmony that the church had long sought to cultivate as a prophylactic against harmful division. This was their permanent value: but Ambrose’s hymns could at times be as politically relevant and as potent as a spontaneous acclamation. They offered proof that the people were united behind their bishop, singing or chanting his words at his direction.

As a bishop whose status was repeatedly in question and who had powerful and worldly enemies, Ambrose had good reason to emphasize his popular support. As such, he was able to exploit his hymns as he also exploited acclamations. Both were a means of establishing and promoting a Milanese Christian identity and of affirming his own authority and legitimacy as the catholic bishop of Milan.

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¹³³ Aug. *De beata vita* 4.35: “Sacerdotis nostri.”

¹³⁴ Aug. *Cont. Don.*; Aug. *Retr.* 1.20; Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 475–489.