



# **Christian Grace and Pagan Virtue: The Theological Foundation of Ambrose's Ethics (Oxford Studies in Historical Theology)**

*J. Warren Smith*

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Ambrose of Milan (340-397) was the first Christian bishop to write a systematic account of Christian ethics, in the treatise *De Officiis*, variously translated as "on duties" or "on responsibilities." But Ambrose also dealt with the moral life in other works, notably his sermons on the patriarchs and his addresses to catechumens and newly baptized. There is a vast modern literature on Ambrose, but only in recent decades has he begun to be taken seriously as a thinker, not just as a working bishop and ecclesiastical politician. Because Ambrose was one of the few Latin Christian writers in antiquity who knew Greek, another major area of Ambrose scholarship has been the study of his sources, notably the Jewish philosopher Philo, and Christian writers such as Origen of Alexandria.

In this book, Warren Smith examines the neglected biblical, liturgical and theological foundations of Ambrose's thought on ethics. Earlier studies have found little that was distinctively Christian in Ambrose's image of the virtuous person. Smith shows that though, like the pagans, Ambrose emphasized moderation, courage, justice, and prudence, for him these characteristics were shaped by the church's beliefs about God's salvific economy. The courage of a Christian facing persecution, for example, was an expression of faith in Christ's resurrection and the church's eschatological hope. Eschatology, for Ambrose, was not pagan wisdom clothed in pious language, but the very logic upon which virtue rests.

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