In the late fourth century, the church at Rome was torn by factionalism, its bishop and clergy accused of sexual impropriety and financial mismanagement. Challenges to clerical authority emerged from several different directions: from sectarian Christian groups (Novatianist and Donatist), from the new ascetic movement, and from traditional pagans. In the early 380s an anonymous biblical commentator and clergyman now called “The Ambrosiaster” (the “Would-be Ambrose”) addressed many of these concerns, developing theories of secular and ecclesial government, gender relations, priestly celibacy, and lay/clerical relations that remained influential for centuries.

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