

DE FIDE
AND
DE SPIRITU SANCTO

SAINT AMBROSE OF MILAN



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De Fide and De Spiritu Sancto by Saint Ambrose of Milan (340-397)

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*Dedicated by the author
to the Emperor Gratian*

The editor gratefully dedicates this volume to F.M.

INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL

INTRODUCTION TO DE FIDE

ON THE EVE OF SETTING OUT FOR THE EAST, to aid his uncle Valens in repelling a Gothic invasion, Gratian, the Emperor of the West, requested that Saint Ambrose write him a treatise in proof of the Divinity of Jesus Christ. Gratian's object in making this request was to secure some sort of preservative against the corrupting influence of Arianism, which at that time (A.D. 378) had gained the upper hand of Orthodoxy in the Eastern provinces of the Empire, owing to its establishment at the Imperial Court. In compliance with Gratian's wish, the Bishop of Milan composed a treatise, which now forms the first two Books of the *De Fide*. With this work the Emperor was so much pleased that on his return from the East, after the death of Valens at Hadrianople, he wrote to Saint Ambrose, begging for a fresh copy of the treatise, and further, for its enlargement by the addition of a discourse on the Divinity of the Holy Spirit. The original treatise was, indeed, enlarged by Saint Ambrose in 379, but the additional Books dealt, not with the Divinity of the Holy Spirit, but rather with new objections raised by the Arian teachers, and points which had either been passed over or not fully discussed already. In this way Saint Ambrose's Exposition was brought into its present form.

The object of the Exposition is, as has already been indicated, to prove the Divinity of Jesus Christ, and His co-eternity, co-equality, and consubstantiality, as God the Son, with God the Father. This the author does by constant appeal to the Scriptures, both of the Old and of the New Testament, which the Arians had in many cases forced into the mould of false interpretation to make them fit their doctrine.

INTRODUCTION TO DE SPIRITU SANCTO

THE THREE BOOKS ON THE HOLY SPIRIT are, as Saint Ambrose says himself, a sequel to those on the Faith, and the two treatises together have been sometimes quoted as if one, with the title, *De Trinitate*. But we see from Gratian's letter to Saint Ambrose, and from the reply, that each treatise is separate and that *De Spiritu Sancto* was written some years later, A.D. 381.

In the first book Saint Ambrose commences by allegorizing the history of Gideon and the fleece, seeing in the drying of the fleece and the moistening of the threshing-floor a type of the Holy Spirit leaving the Jews and being poured out on the Gentiles. Passing to his more immediate subject, he proves that the Holy Spirit is above the whole Creation and is truly God, alleging as a special argument that the sin against the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven, here or hereafter. He shows how the Holy Spirit is in Scripture called the Spirit of God; that He spake by the prophets and apostles; that He sanctifies men, and is typified by the mystical ointment spoken of in Scripture. Next, Saint Ambrose treats of His oneness with the other two Persons of the Holy Trinity, and shows that His mission in no way detracts from this oneness, but that there is in all the Divine Persons a perfect unity of peace, love, and other virtues.

The second book commences with a treatment of the history of Samson in the same way as that of Gideon in Book I. Samson always succeeded so long as the Holy Spirit was with him, but fell into misfortune so soon as he was forsaken. It is shown that the power of the Holy Spirit is the same as that of the Father and the Son, and that there is an agreement in design and working, and in vivifying man. He is Creator and therefore to be worshipped, and He worked with the Father and the Son in founding the Church, and in conclusion is proved the unity of operation in the Three Persons.

The third book continues the same argument, showing that the mission of prophets and apostles, and even of the Son Himself, is to be referred to the Spirit, yet without any subjection on the part of the Son, seeing that the Spirit also receives His mission from the Father and the Son. The Godhead of the Holy Spirit is next taken up and proved, when occasion is taken also to show that there are not three Gods or three Lords, for the Three Divine Persons are one in holiness and nature; and the work is concluded with a summary of some of the principal arguments.

SAINT AMBROSE'S EXPOSITION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

BOOK II



PROLOGUE

The Three Persons of the Godhead were not unknown to the judges of old nor to Moses, for the equality of the Son with the Father, as well as of the Three Persons among Themselves, is laid down both elsewhere and by him. Samson also enjoyed the assistance of the Holy Spirit, his history is touched upon and shown to be in some points typical of the Church and her mysteries. When the Holy Spirit left Samson he fell into various calamities, and Saint Ambrose explains the spiritual significance of his shorn locks.

EVEN IN READING THE FIRST BOOK of the ancient history it is made clear both that the sevenfold grace of the Spirit shone forth in the judges themselves of the Jews, and that the mysteries of the heavenly sacraments were made known by the Spirit, of Whose eternity Moses was not ignorant. Then, too, at the very beginning of the world, and indeed before its beginning, he conjoined Him with God, Whom he knew to be eternal before the beginning of the world. For if any one takes good heed he will recognize in the beginning both the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. For of the Father it is written: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."¹ Of the Spirit it is said: "The Spirit was borne upon the waters."² And well in the beginning of creation is there set forth the figure of baptism whereby the creature had to be purified. And of the Son we read that He it is Who divided light from darkness, for there is one God the Father Who speaks, and one God the Son Who acts.

2. But, again, that you may not think that there was assumption in the bidding of Him Who spoke, or inferiority on the part of Him Who carried out the bidding, the Father acknowledged the Son as

1. Genesis 1:1

2. Genesis 1:4

equal to Himself in the execution of the work, saying: “Let Us make man after Our image and likeness.”¹ For the common image and the working and the likeness can signify nothing but the oneness of the same Majesty.

3. But that we may more fully recognize the equality of the Father and the Son, as the Father spoke, the Son made, so, too, the Father works and the Son speaks. The Father works, as it is written: “My Father works hitherto.”² You find it said to the Son: “Say the word and he shall be healed.”³ And the Son says to the Father: “I will that where I am, they too shall be with Me.”⁴ The Father did what the Son said.

4. But neither was Abraham ignorant of the Holy Spirit; he saw Three and worshipped One, for there is one God, one Lord, and one Spirit. And so there is a oneness of honour, because there is a oneness of power.

5. And why should I speak of all one by one? Samson, born by the divine promise, had the Spirit accompanying him, for we read: “The Lord blessed him, and the Spirit of the Lord began to be with him in the camp.”⁵ And so foreshadowing the future mystery, he demanded a wife of the aliens, which, as it is written, his father and mother knew not of, because it was from the Lord. And rightly was he esteemed stronger than others, because the Spirit of the Lord guided him, under Whose guidance he alone put to flight the people of the aliens, and at another time inaccessible to the bite of the lion, he, unconquerable in his strength, tore him asunder with his hands. Would that he had been as careful to preserve grace, as strong to overcome the beast!

6. And perhaps this was not only a prodigy of valour, but also a mystery of wisdom, an utterance of prophecy. For it does not seem to have been without a purpose that, as he was going to his marriage, a roaring lion met him, which he tore asunder with his hands, in

1. Genesis 1:26

2. John 5:17

3. Matthew 8:8

4. John 17:24

5. Judges 13:25

whose body, when about to enjoy the wished-for wedlock, he found a swarm of bees, and took honey from its mouth, which he gave to his father and mother to eat. The people of the Gentiles which believed had honey, the people which was before savage is now the people of Christ.

7. Nor is the riddle without mystery, which he set forth to his companions: "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness."¹ And there was a mystery up to the point of the three days in which its answer was sought in vain, which could not be made known except by the faith of the Church, on the seventh day, the time of the Law being completed, after the Passion of the Lord. For thus you find that the apostles did not understand, "because Jesus was not yet glorified."²

8. "What," answer they, "is sweeter than honey, and what is stronger than a lion?" To which he replied: "If you had not farmed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle."³ O divine mystery! O manifest sacrament! We have escaped from the slayer, we have overcome the strong one. The food of life is now there, where before was the hunger of a miserable death. Dangers are changed into safety, bitterness into sweetness. Grace came forth from the offense, power from weakness, and life from death.

9. There are, however, who think on the other hand that the wedlock could not have been established unless the lion of the tribe of Judah had been slain; and so in His body, that is, the Church, bees were found who store up the honey of wisdom, because after the Passion of the Lord the apostles believed more fully. This lion, then, Samson as a Jew slew, but in it he found honey, as in the figure of the heritage which was to be redeemed, that the remnant might be saved according to the election of grace.⁴

10. "And the Spirit of the Lord," it is said, "came upon him, and he went down to Ascalon, and smote thirty men of them."⁵ For he

1. Judges 14:14

2. John 7:39

3. Judges 14:18

4. Romans 11:5

5. Judges 14:19

could not fail to carry off the victory who saw the mysteries. And so in the garments they receive the reward of wisdom, the badge of intercourse, who resolve and answer the riddle.

11. Here, again, other mysteries come up, in that his wife is taken away, and for this foxes set fire to the sheaves of the aliens. For their own cunning often deceives those who contend against divine mysteries. Wherefore it is said again in the Song of Songs: “Take us the little foxes which destroy the vineyards, that our vineyards may flourish.”¹ He said well “little,” because the larger could not destroy the vineyards, though to the strong even the devil is weak.

12. So, then, he (to sum up the story briefly, for the consideration of the whole passage is reserved for its own season) was unconquered so long as he kept the grace of the Spirit, as was the people of God chosen by the Lord, that Nazarite under the Law. Samson, then, was unconquered, and so invincible as to be able to smite a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass;² so full of heavenly grace that when thirsty he found even water in the jawbone of an ass, whether you consider this as a miracle, or turn it to a mystery, because in the humility of the people of the Gentiles there would be both rest and triumph according to that which is written: “He that smites you on the cheek, turn to him also the other.”³ For by this endurance of injuries, which the sacrament of baptism teaches, we triumph over the stings of anger, that having passed through death we may attain to the rest of the resurrection.

13. Is that, then, Samson who broke ropes twisted with thongs, and new cords like weak threads? Is that Samson who did not feel the bonds of his hair fastened to the beam, so long as he had the grace of the Spirit? He, I say, after the Spirit of God departed from him, was greatly changed from that Samson Who returned clothed in the spoils of the aliens, but fallen from his greatness on the knees of a woman, caressed and deceived, is shorn of his hair.

14. Was, then, the hair of his head of such importance that, so long as it remained, his strength should endure unconquered, but when

1. Song of Songs 2:15

2. Judges 15:15

3. Matthew 5:39

his head was shorn the man should suddenly lose all his strength? It is not so, nor may we think that the hair of his head has such power. There is the hair of religion and faith; the hair of the Nazarite perfect in the Law, consecrated in sparingness and abstinence, with which she (a type of the Church), who poured ointment on the feet of the Lord, wiped the feet of the heavenly Word, for then she knew Christ also after the flesh. That hair it is of which it is said: "Your hair is as flocks of goats,"¹ growing on that head of which it is said: "The head of the man is Christ,"² and in another place: "His head is as fine gold, and his locks like black pine-trees."³

15. And so, also, in the Gospel our Lord, pointing out that some hairs are seen and known, says: "But even the hairs of your head are all numbered,"⁴ implying, indeed, acts of spiritual virtues, for God does not take care for our hair. Though, indeed, it is not absurd to believe that literally, seeing that according to His divine Majesty nothing can be hidden from Him.

16. But what does it profit me, if God Himself knows all my hairs? That rather abounds and profits me, if the watchful witness of good works reward me with the gift of eternal life. And, in fine, Samson himself, declaring that these hairs are not mystical, says: "If I be shorn my strength will depart from me."⁵ So much concerning the mystery, let us now consider the order of the passage.

CHAPTER 1

The Spirit is the Lord and Power; and in this is not inferior to the Father and the Son.

ABOVE, YOU READ THAT "THE LORD BLESSED him, and the Spirit of the Lord began to go with him." Farther on it is said: "And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him."⁶ Again he

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1. Song of Songs 4:1
 2. 1 Corinthians 11:3
 3. Song of Songs 5:11
 4. Matthew 10:30
 5. Judges 16:17
 6. Judges 14:6

says: “If I be shaven, my strength will depart from me.”¹ After he was shaven, see what the Scripture says: “The Lord,” he says, “departed from him.”²

18. You see, then, that He Who went with him, Himself departed from him. The Same is, then, the Lord, Who is the Spirit of the Lord, that is, he called the Spirit of God, Lord, as also the Apostle says: “The Lord is the Spirit, now where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” You find, then, the Holy Spirit called the Lord; for the Holy Spirit and the Son are not one Person [*unus*] but one Substance [*unum*].

19. In this place he used the word Power, and implied the Spirit. For as the Father is Power, so, too, the Son is Power, and the Holy Spirit is Power. Of the Son you have read that Christ is “the Power of God and the Wisdom of God.”³ We read, too, that the Father is Power, as it is written: “You shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power of God.”⁴ He certainly named the Father Power, at Whose right hand the Son sits, as you read: “The Lord said unto My Lord, Sit on My right hand.” And the Lord Himself named the Holy Spirit Power, when He said: “You shall receive Power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.”⁵

CHAPTER 2

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are One in counsel.

FOR THE SPIRIT HIMSELF IS POWER, as you read: “The Spirit of Counsel and of Power (or might).”⁶ And as the Son is the Angel of great counsel, so, too, is the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Counsel, that you may know that the Counsel of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is One. Counsel, not concerning any doubtful matters, but concerning those foreknown and determined.

1. Judges 16:17

2. Judges 16:20

3. 1 Corinthians 1:24

4. Matthew 26:64

5. Acts 1:8

6. Isaiah 11:2