

### III. CHRIST'S INCARNATION.

"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the Only Begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

115. By "flesh" we understand the whole man, body and soul, according to the Scriptures, which call man "flesh," as above, when it is said: "Not of the will of the flesh"; and in the Creed we say: "I believe in the resurrection of the body" (German: flesh), that is, of all men. Again Christ says: "Except those days had been shortened, there would be no flesh saved," that is, no man, Math. 24, 22. Again: "He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again," Ps. 78,39. Again: "Thou gavest him authority over all flesh, that to all whom thou hast given him, he should give eternal life," John 17, 2.

116. I speak of this the more fully because this passage has occasioned so much offense on the part of heretics at the time when there were learned and great bishops. Some, as Photinus and Appollinaris, taught that Christ was a man without a soul, and that the divine nature took the place of

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the soul in him. Manichaeus taught that Christ did not have true, natural flesh, but was only an apparition, passing through his mother, Mary, without assuming her flesh and blood, just as the sun shines through a glass, but does not assume its nature. In opposition to all these the Evangelist uses a comprehensive word, and says: "He became flesh," that is, a man like every other man, who has flesh and blood, body and soul.

117. Thus the Scriptures, one part after another, had to be tried and confirmed, until the time of the Antichrist, who suppressed them not in parts, but in their entirety. For it has been prophesied that at the time of Antichrist all heresy should be united into one parasitic whole and devour the world. This could not have happened at a better time than when the Pope set aside the whole Scriptures, and in their place set up his own law. Therefore bishops are now no more heretics, nor can they become heretics; for they have no part of the book by which heretics are made, to wit, the Gospel. They have piled up all heresy within and among themselves.

118. In times past, heretics, however bad they were, still remained in the Scriptures, and left some parts intact. But what is left since this divine birth

and faith are no more acknowledged and preached, and in their stead only human law and works? What matters it, whether Christ is God or not God, whether he was flesh or a mere apparition, whether he had a soul or not, whether he had come before or after his mother, or whether all error and heresy which have ever been, would prevail? We would have no more of him than all those heretics and do not need him. He seems to have become man in vain, and all things written about him seem to be to no purpose, because we have ourselves found a way by which we may by our own works come to the grace of God!

119. Therefore there is no difference between our bishops and all heretics that have ever lived, except this that we name Christ with our mouth and pen, for the sake of appearance. But among ourselves we speak of him, and are as little benefited by him, as though he were one with whom all heretics might play the fool. Thus St. Peter has prophesied and said: "These

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shall be false teachers among you, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them." (2 Peter 2, 1).

120. What does it profit, though Christ be not what the heretics make him, if he is no more to us than to them, and does no more for us? What does it profit to condemn the heretics, and know Christ aright, if we have no different faith in him than they had? I see no reason for the need of Christ, if I am able to attain grace by my works. It is not necessary for him to be God and man. In short all that is written about him is unnecessary; it would be sufficient to preach God alone, as the Jews believe, and then obtain his grace by means of my works. What more would I want? What more would I need?

121. Christ and the Scriptures are not necessary, as long as the doctrine of the pope and his schools exist. Therefore I have said that pope, bishops, and schools are not good enough to be heretics; but they surpass all heretics, and are the dregs of all heresies, errors, and idolatry from the beginning, because they entirely suppress Christ and the Word of God, and only retain their names for appearance's sake. This no idolater, no heretic, no Jew has ever done, not even the Turk with all his violent acts. And although the heathen were without the Scriptures and without Christ before his birth, yet

they did not oppose him and the Scriptures, as these do. Therefore they were far better than the Papists.

122. Let us be wise in these times in which Anti-Christ is powerful, and let us cling to the Gospel, which does not teach us that reason is our light, as men teach us, but which presents Christ as indispensable to our salvation, and says: The Word, by which all things were made, is life, and the life is the light of men. Firmly believe that Christ is the Light of men, that without him all is darkness in man, so that he is unable to know what to do or how to act, to say nothing about being able to attain the grace of God by his own works, as the foolish schools with their idol, the Pope, teach and deceive all the world.

123. He came that he might become the Light of men, that is, that he might become known; he showed himself bodily

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and personally among men and was made man. He is the light on the candle-stick. The lost piece of money did not of itself and with light in hand go after and seek the lighted candle, but the candle with its light sought the piece of money and found it; it has swept the house of this whole world in every nook and corner with its broom; and it continues to seek, sweep and find even until the last day.

124. But that the Word and not the Father was made flesh, and that both are one complete, true God, is a great mystery. Yet faith apprehends it all, and it is proper that reason should not apprehend it; it happened and is written that reason should not apprehend it, but become altogether blind, dazzled and stupefied, changing from its old false light into the new light.

125. Yet this article is not opposed to the light of reason, which says that we must serve God, believe, and be pious, which accords with this article. But if reason is called on to say exactly who this God is, it is startled and says: "This is not God," and so makes a God according to its fancy. Therefore when it is informed that this Word is God and that the Father is the same God, it doubts, hesitates and imagines the article to be wrong and untrue, continues in its conceit and fancy, and thinks it knows better what God is and who he is than any one else.

126. Thus the Jews continue in their opinion, and do not doubt at all that God is to be believed and honored; but who this God is, they explain according to their own fancy, claim to be masters themselves, and even make God a liar. See then, thus reason does to all of God's works and words, continues to cry that God's work and Word are to be honored, but claims that it is its privilege and judgment to say what is God's work and Word. It would judge God in all his works and words, but is unwilling to be judged by him. What God is or is not, must be according to its caprice.

127. Consider whether God does not justly express his anger in the Scriptures against such immeasurable wickedness, whether he does not rightly prefer open sinners to such saints. What would you think more vexatious than such wicked

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presumptuous? I say this that we may recognize the delicious fruit to which the pope and his schools attribute so much, and which of itself and by its own exertions, without Christ, provides the grace of God. They are God's greatest enemies, and would annihilate him, in order that they might be God themselves, and succeed in making men believe that the grace of God is obtained as they prescribe. This surely is real darkness.

128. See, in this way reason must make idols, and cannot do otherwise; it knows very well how to talk of God's honor, but goes and bestows the same honor on him whom it fancies to be God. Such a one is certainly not God, but is reason's fancy and error, of which the prophets in various ways complained. Nor does it improve the matter, if any one were to say, as the Jews do: "Yes, I mean the God who has created the heavens and the earth; here I cannot be mistaken, and must be right." In Isaiah 48, 1 God himself answers: "Hear ye this, who swear by the name of Jehovah, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness." And Jeremiah 5, 2 says: "And though they say, as Jehovah liveth; surely they swear falsely."

129. How is this to be accounted for? It happens thus that he who does not accept God in the particular manner in which God has revealed himself, will profit nothing, if he afterwards accepts God in the manner which he has selected for himself. If Abraham had said that it was neither God nor God's work that commanded him to sacrifice his son Isaac, but would have

followed his reason and have said he would not sacrifice his son, but would serve the God who made heaven and earth in some other way, what would it have profited him? He would have lied; for he would in that very thing have rejected the God who created the heavens and the earth, and would have devised another God, under the name of the God who had created the heavens and the earth, and would have despised the true God, who had given him the command.

130. Behold, thus they all lie who say, they mean the true God who created the heavens and the earth, and yet do not

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accept his work and Word, but exalt their own opinion above God and his Word. If we truly believed in the God who had created heaven and earth, they would also know that the same God is a creator of their imagination, makes, breaks and judges it as he pleases. But as they do not allow him to be a creator of themselves and their fancies even in a small degree, it cannot be true that they believe him to be the creator of all creation.

131. Perhaps you will say: What if I were deceived, and he were not God? I answer: Do not worry, dear soul; a heart that does not trust in its own fancy God will not allow to be deceived; for it is not possible that he should not enter such a heart and dwell there. Mary says: "He hath filled the hungry with good things," Luke 1, 53. The Psalmist says: "He satisfieth the longing soul," Ps. 107, 9. But if any is deceived it is certain that he trusted in his own fancy, either secretly or openly. Therefore a hungry soul always stands in fear in those things that are uncertain, whether they be of God. But selfconceited persons are immediately taken with them, thinking it sufficient if the things glitter and take their fancy. Again what is certain to be of God, the simple accept at once, but the arrogant persecute it.

132. Now there is no surer sign of a thing of God than that it is against or beyond our fancy. Likewise the arrogant think, there is no surer sign that a thing is not of God than that it is against their fancy. For they are makers and masters of God, and so make those things God and of God which accord with their fancy. Therefore all those who depend upon themselves must be deceived, and all those who are simpleminded, and not preoccupied with themselves, are safe; they are they who keep the true Sabbath. Where this fancy goes so far as to employ the Word of God in defense of its arrogance

and to apply the Scriptures according to its own light, there is neither hope nor help. Such people think the Word of God on their side, and they must safeguard it. This is the last fall, and is the real mischief of Lucifer, of whom Solomon speaks: "A righteous man falleth seven times, and riseth up again; but the wicked are overthrown by calamity." Prov. 24,16.

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133. Of this there is now enough; let us come back again to the Gospel. John says: "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us;" that is, he lived among men upon earth, as other men do. Even though he was God, he became a citizen of Nazareth and Capernaum, and conducted himself as other men did. Thus St. Paul says: "Who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being man equality with a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross." Phil. 2, 6- 8.

134. Now this "likeness" and "dwelling" of Christ must not be understood of his human nature, in which he has been made like unto men. But these words must be understood as referring to his external being and mode of living such as eating, drinking, sleeping, walking, working, resting, hearth and home, walking, and standing, and all human conduct and deportment, by which no one could recognize him as God, had he not been so proclaimed by John in the Gospel.