

TWELVE TOPICS ON THE FAITH

Gregory Thaumaturgus

Table of Contents

<u>TWELVE TOPICS ON THE FAITH</u>	1
<u>Gregory Thaumaturgus</u>	1
<u>TOPIC I</u>	1
<u>TOPIC II</u>	1
<u>TOPIC III</u>	2
<u>TOPIC IV</u>	2
<u>TOPIC V</u>	2
<u>TOPIC VI</u>	3
<u>TOPIC VII</u>	3
<u>TOPIC VIII</u>	3
<u>TOPIC IX</u>	3
<u>TOPIC X</u>	4
<u>TOPIC XI</u>	4
<u>TOPIC XII</u>	4

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- [TOPIC I.](#)
- [TOPIC II.](#)
- [TOPIC III.](#)
- [TOPIC IV.](#)
- [TOPIC V.](#)
- [TOPIC VI.](#)
- [TOPIC VII.](#)
- [TOPIC VIII.](#)
- [TOPIC IX.](#)
- [TOPIC X.](#)
- [TOPIC XI.](#)
- [TOPIC XII.](#)

WHEREIN IS GIVEN ALSO THE FORMULA OF EXCOMMUNICATION, AND AN EXPLICATION IS SUBJOINED TO EACH.(1)

TOPIC I.

IF any one says that the body of Christ is uncreated, and refuses to acknowledge that He, being the uncreated Word (God) of God, took the flesh of created humanity and appeared incarnate, even as it is written, let him be anathema.

EXPLICATION.

How could the body be said to be uncreated? For the uncreated is the passionless, invulnerable, intangible. But Christ, on rising from the dead, showed His disciples the print of the nails and the wound made by the spear, and a body that could be handled, although He also had entered among them when the doors were shut, with the view of showing them at once the energy of the divinity and the reality of the body.

Yet, while being God, He was recognised as man in a natural manner; and while subsisting truly as man, He was also manifested as God by His works.(2)

TOPIC II.

If any one affirms that the flesh of Christ is consubstantial with the divinity, and refuses to acknowledge that He, subsisting Himself in the form of God as God before all ages, emptied Himself and took the form of a servant, even as it is written, let him be anathema.

EXPLICATION.

TWELVE TOPICS ON THE FAITH

How could the flesh, which is conditioned by time, be said to be consubstantial⁽³⁾ with the timeless divinity? For that is designated consubstantial which is the same in nature and in eternal duration without variability.

TOPIC III.

If any one affirms that Christ, just like one of the prophets, assumed the perfect man, and refuses to acknowledge that, being begotten in the flesh of the Virgin,⁽⁴⁾ He became man and was born in Bethlehem, and was brought up in Nazareth, and advanced in age, and on completing the set number of years (appeared in public and) was baptized in the Jordan, and received this testimony from the Father, "This is my beloved Son,"⁽⁵⁾ even as it is written, let him be anathema.

EXPLICATION.

How could it be said that Christ (the Lord) assumed the perfect man just like one of the prophets, when He, being the Lord Himself, became man by the incarnation effected through the Virgin? Wherefore it is written, that "the first man was of the earth, earthy."⁽⁶⁾ But whereas he that was formed of the earth returned to the earth, He that became the second man returned to heaven. And so we read of the "first Adam and the last Adam."⁽⁷⁾ And as it is admitted that the second came by the first according to the flesh, for which reason also Christ is called man and the Son of man; so is the witness given that the second is the Savior of the first, for whose sake He came down from heaven. And as the Word came down from heaven, and was made man, and ascended again to heaven, He is on that account said to be the second Adam from heaven.

TOPIC IV.

If any one affirms that Christ was born of the seed of man by the Virgin, in the same manner as all men are born, and refuses to acknowledge that He was made flesh by the Holy Spirit and the holy Virgin Mary, made became man of the seed of David, even as it is written, let him be anathema.

EXPLICATION.

How could one say that Christ was born of the seed of man by the Virgin, when the holy Gospel and the angel, in proclaiming the good tidings, testify of Mary the Virgin that she said, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?"⁽¹⁾ Wherefore he says, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of the Highest."⁽²⁾ And to Joseph he says, "Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins."⁽³⁾

TOPIC V.

If any one affirms that the Son of God who is before the ages is one, and He who has appeared in these last times is another, and refuses to acknowledge that He who is before the ages is the same with Him who appeared in these last times, even as it is written, let him be anathema.

EXPLICATION.

How could it be said that the Son of God who is before the ages, and He who has appeared in these last times, are different, when the Lord Himself says, "Before Abraham was, I am;"⁽⁴⁾ and, "I came forth from God, and I come, and again I go to my Father?"⁽⁵⁾

TOPIC VI.

If any one affirms that He who suffered is one, and that He who suffered not is another, and refuses to acknowledge that the Word, who is Himself the impassible and unchangeable God, suffered in the flesh which He had assumed really, yet without mutation, even as it is written,

EXPLICATION.

How could it be said that He who suffered is one, and He who suffered not another, when the Lord Himself says, "The Son of man must suffer many things, and be killed, and be raised again the third day from the dead;"(6) and again, "When ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of the Father;"(7) and again, "When the Son of man cometh in the glory of His Father?"(8)

TOPIC VII.

If any one affirms that Christ is saved, and refuses to acknowledge that He is the Saviour of the world, and the Light of the world, even as it is written,(9) let him be anathema.

EXPLICATION.

How could one say that Christ is saved, when the Lord Himself says, "I am the life;"(10) and, "I am come that they might have life;"(11) and, "He that believeth on me shall not see death, but he shall behold the life eternal?"(12)

TOPIC VIII.

If any one affirms that Christ is perfect man and also God the Word in the way of separation,(13) and refuses to acknowledge the one Lord Jesus Christ, even as it is written, let him be anathema.

EXPLICATION.

How could one say that Christ is perfect man and also God the Word in the way of separation, when the Lord Himself says, "Why seek ye to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God?"(14) For God the Word did not give a man for us, but He gave Himself for us, having been made man for our sake. Wherefore He says: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. But He spake of the temple of His body."(15)

TOPIC IX.

If any one says that Christ suffers change or alteration, and refuses to acknowledge that He is unchangeable in the Spirit, though corruptible(16) in the flesh,(17) let him be anathema.

EXPLICATION.

How could one say that Christ suffers change or alteration, when the Lord Himself says, "I am and change not;(18) again, His soul shall not be left in Hades, neither shall His flesh see corruption?"(19)

TOPIC X.

If any one affirms that Christ assumed the man only in part, and refuses to acknowledge that He was made in all things like us, apart from sin, let him be anathema. EXPLICATION.

How could one say that Christ assumed the man only in part, when the Lord Himself says, "I lay down my life, that I might take it again, for the sheep;"(1) and, "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed;"(2) and, "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life?"(3)

TOPIC XI.

If any one affirms that the body of Christ is void of soul and understanding,(4) and refuses to acknowledge that He is perfect man, one and the same in all things (with us), let him be anathema.

EXPLICATION.

How could one say that the body of the Lord (Christ) is void of soul and understanding? For perturbation, and grief, and distress, are not the properties either of a flesh void of soul, or of a soul void of understanding; nor are they the sign of the immutable Divinity, nor the index of a mere phantasm, nor do they mark the defect of human weakness; but the Word exhibited in Himself the exercise of the affections and susceptibilities proper to us, having endued Himself with our passibility, even as it is written, that "He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows."(5) For perturbation, and grief, and distress, are disorders of soul; and toil, and sleep, and the body's liability to wounding, are infirmities of the flesh.

TOPIC XII.

If any one says that Christ was manifested in the world only in semblance, and refuses to acknowledge that He came actually in the flesh, let him be anathema.

EXPLICATION.

How could one say that Christ was manifested only in semblance in the world, born as He was in Bethlehem, and made to submit to the circumcising of the flesh, and lifted up by Simeon, and brought up on to His twelfth year (at home), and made subject to His parents, and baptized in Jordan, and nailed to the cross, and raised again from the dead?

Wherefore, when it is said that He was "troubled in spirit,"(6) that "He was sorrowful in soul,"(7) that "He was wounded in body,"(8) He places before us designations of susceptibilities proper to our constitution, in order to show that He was made man in the world, and had His conversation with men,(9) yet without sin. For He was born in Bethlehem according to the flesh, in a manner meet for Deity, the angels of heaven recognising Him as their Lord, and hymning as their God Him who was then wrapped in swaddling-clothes in a manger, and exclaiming, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will among men."(10) He was brought up in Nazareth; but in divine fashion He sat among the doctors, and astonished them by a wisdom beyond His years, in respect of the capacities of His bodily life, as is recorded in the Gospel narrative. He was baptized in Jordan, not as receiving any sanctification for Himself, but as gifting a participation in sanctification to others. He was tempted in the wilderness, not as giving way, however, to temptation, but as putting our temptations before Himself on the challenge of the tempter, in order to show the powerlessness of the tempter.

Wherefore He says, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."(11) And this He said, not as holding

TOPIC X.

TWELVE TOPICS ON THE FAITH

before us any contest proper only to a God, but as showing our own flesh in its capacity to overcome suffering, and death, and corruption, in order that, as sin entered into the world by flesh, and death came to reign by sin over all men, the sin in the flesh might also be condemned through the selfsame flesh in the likeness thereof;(12) and that that overseer of sin, the tempter, might be overcome, and death be cast down from its sovereignty, and the corruption in the burying of the body be done away, and the first-fruits of the resurrection be shown, and the principle of righteousness begin its course in the world through faith, and the kingdom of heaven be preached to men, and fellowship be established between God and men.

In behalf of this grace let us glorify the Father, who has given His only begotten Son for the life of the world. Let us glorify the Holy Spirit that worketh in us, and quickeneth us, and furnisheth the gifts meet for the fellowship of God; and let us not intermeddle with the word of the Gospel by lifeless disputations, scattering about endless questionings and logomachies, and making a hard thing of the gentle and simple word of faith; but rather let us work the work of faith, let us love peace, let us exhibit concord, let us preserve unity, let us cultivate love, with which God is well pleased.

As it is not for us to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power,(13) but only to believe that there will come an end to time, and that there will be a manifestation of a future world, and a revelation of judgment, and an advent of the Son of God, and a recompense of works, and an inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, so it is not for us to know how the Son of God became man; for this is a great mystery, as it is written, "Who shall declare His generation? for His life is taken from the earth."(1) But it is for us to believe that the Son of God became man, according to the Scriptures; and that He was seen on the earth, and had His conversation with men, according to the Scriptures, in their likeness, yet without sin; and that He died for us, and rose again from the dead, as it is written; and that He was taken up to heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the Father, whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead, as it is written; lest, while we war against each other with words, any should be led to blaspheme the word of faith, and that should come to pass which is written, "By reason of you is my name(2) continually blasphemed among the nations."(3)

ELUCIDATION.

THESE "twelve anathemas," as they are called, do evidently refute the Nestorians and later heretics. Evidently, therefore, we must assign this document to another author. And, as frequent references are made to such tests, I subjoin a list of OEcumenical or Catholic Councils, properly so called, as follows:

1. JERUSALEM, against Judaism,[1] A.D. 50. 2. NICAEA, " Arianism (1),[2] A.D. 325. 3. CONSTANTINOPLE (I.), " Semi-Arianism (2), A.D. 381. 4. EPHESUS, " Nestorianism (3), A.D. 431. 5. CHALCEDON, " Eutychianism (4), A.D. 451. 6. CONSTANTINOPLE (II.), " Monophysitism (5), A.D. 553. 7. CONSTANTINOPLE (III.), " Monothelitism (6),[3] A.D. 680.[4]

These are all the undisputed councils. The Seventh Council, so called (A.D. 537), was not a free council, and was rejected by a free council of the West, convened at Frankfort A.D. 794. Its acceptance by the Roman pontiffs, subsequently, should have no logical force with the Easterns, who do not recognise their supremacy even over the councils of the West; and no free council has ever been held under pontifical authority. The above list, therefore, is a complete list of all the councils of the undivided Church as defined by Catholic canons. There has been no possibility of a Catholic council since the division of East and West. The Council of Frankfort is the pivot of subsequent history, and its fundamental importance has not been sufficiently insisted upon.