

## TERTULLIAN ON THE FLESH OF CHRIST

1 Those whose design it is so to disturb the faith of the resurrection as to deny that that hope extends even to the flesh--a faith which, until the emergence of these kinsmen of the Sadducees,<sup>1</sup> had remained exempt from controversy--with good reason tear asunder with inquisitions Christ's flesh as well as ours, alleging either that it existed not at all, or that in any case it was other than human: else, if it were admitted that it was human, this would constitute a leading case against them that flesh certainly does rise again, seeing it has risen again in Christ. We, in consequence, shall need to lay the foundations of the aspirations of the flesh at the point at which these dismantle them. We have to weigh up the corporal substance of the Lord: for concerning his spiritual substance there is no dispute. It is his flesh that is under inquisition. Its verity is under discussion, and its quality--whether it existed, and whence it came, and of what sort it was. A decision concerning it will lay down the law for our own resurrection.

Marcion, with the purpose of denying Christ's flesh, also denied his nativity: or else, with intent to deny his nativity, denied his flesh. Evidently his intention was that nativity and flesh should not give mutual testimony each to the other, inasmuch as there can be neither nativity without flesh nor flesh without nativity--as though he too could not by the same heretical licence either have admitted the flesh and denied the nativity, as did Apelles his pupil and subsequent renegade, or else, admitting both flesh and nativity, have put a different meaning upon them, as did his fellow-pupil and co-renegade Valentinus. And moreover, as he was the first to make the suggestion that Christ's flesh was putative, he could equally well have invented a phantasm of a nativity, so that the Virgin's conception and pregnancy and child-bearing, no less than the subsequent life of the Child himself, might have been held docetically: they would have

1 Cf. Acts 23. 8.

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deceived the same eyes and the same minds as the supposition of flesh played tricks with.

2 Clearly it is nativity that Gabriel announces.<sup>1</sup> 'What,' says Marcion, 'have I to do with the Creator's angel?' And in a virgin's womb that conception is represented. 'What,' says he, 'have I to do with Isaiah, the Creator's prophet?'<sup>2</sup> He abhors delay.

He was for bringing Christ unexpectedly down from heaven. 'Away,' he says, 'with Caesar's enrolments, always a nuisance, and with inns with no room:<sup>3</sup> away with dirty rags and hard mangers: let the angel host take the responsibility when it gives honour to its own God, and that by night: the shepherds had better watch over their flocks: no need for the wise men to be fetched along from afar: for all I care, they may keep their gold: also let Herod be a better man, lest Jeremiah have something to boast of;<sup>4</sup> and let not the Child be circumcised, lest he feel pain, nor brought to the temple, lest he burden his parents with the expense of an offering, nor put into the hands of Simeon, lest he make the old man sorry because he is soon to die: also let that old woman hold her tongue, lest she put the evil eye upon the boy.'<sup>5</sup> It is, I suppose, on these considerations, Marcion, that you have presumed to delete all those documents bearing on Christ's origins, to prevent his flesh being proved to be flesh. On whose authority, pray? Show your credentials. If you are a prophet, foretell something: if an apostle, preach publicly: if an apostolic man, agree with the apostles: if but an ordinary Christian, believe the traditional faith. If you are none of these--I have good reason for saying it--die. Nay, you are already dead, for you are not a Christian, seeing you do not believe that which, when believed, makes men Christians: and you are the more dead as you are the more not a Christian as having been one and having fallen away by annulling what you formerly believed, as you yourself claim in a certain epistle, and as your people do not deny, and ours prove. Therefore, when you annulled what you did believe, you annulled it as no longer believing it. Yet your having ceased to believe was no valid reason for annulling it: on the contrary, by

1 Luke 1. 26-30.      2 Isa. 7. 14.      3 Luke 2. 1-14.  
4 Matt. 2. 1-18.      5 Luke 2. 21-38.

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annulling what you did believe you prove that before you annulled it the case was different, and it was that different belief which was the traditional one. But what was traditional was true, as having been handed down by those who had the right to do so: and thus by annulling what was traditional you annulled what was true, and your act was illegal. But I have already in my book against all the heresies made fuller use of this kind of appeal to fundamental law. That I take for granted as I now of superfluity resume the discussion, demanding the reasons which led you to suppose that the birth of Christ never took place.

3 Inasmuch as you suppose this was within your competence to decide, it can only have been that your idea was that to God nativity is either impossible or unseemly. I answer, that to God nothing is impossible except what is against his will. So then we have to consider whether it was his will to be born: because, if it was, he both could be and was born. I betake myself to a short cut. If it had been God's will for himself not to be born--whatever his purpose might be--neither would he have permitted himself to have the appearance of being a man: for no one, seeing him a man, would refuse to admit that he had been born. Thus, what it had been his will not to be, it certainly would have been his will not to seem to be. Whenever any fact is objectionable, even the supposition of it is disapproved of: because it makes no matter whether a thing is or is not if, when it is not, there is a presumption that it is. But this certainly does matter, that God should not experience as a falsehood that which he is not in truth. 'But,' you say, 'his conscience was enough for him: it was men's fault if they thought him born because they saw him a man.' Well then, with how much more dignity, as well as consistency, would he have borne with men's estimate of him if really born, seeing that even though not born he would have had to bear with the same estimate, with wrong done to his own conscience besides. How much, think you, does it count towards our confidence in him, if while not born he did against his conscience put up with the repute of having been born? Tell me, what made it worth Christ's while, that when he knew what he was he should make himself visible as what he was not? Your answer cannot be,

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'Lest if he had been born and had really clothed himself with man he might have ceased to be God, losing what he was while becoming what he was not.' For God runs no risk of ceasing to be what he is. 'But,' you say, 'the reason why I deny that God was really and truly changed into man, in the sense of being both born and corporated in flesh, is that he who is without end must of necessity also be unchangeable: for to be changed into something else is an ending of what originally was: therefore change is inapplicable to one to whom ending is inapplicable.' I admit that the nature of things changeable is bound by that law which precludes them from abiding in that which in them suffers change--the law which causes them to be destroyed by not abiding, seeing that by process of change they destroy that which they once were. But nothing is on equal terms with God: his nature is far removed from the circumstances of all things whatsoever. If then things far removed from God, things from which God is far

removed, do in the process of being changed lose that which they once were, where will be the difference between divinity and the rest of things except that the contrary obtains, namely that God can be changed into anything whatsoever, and yet continue such as he is? Otherwise he will be on equal terms with the things which, when changed, lose that which they once were--things with which he is not on equal terms, as in all respects so also in the outcome of change. You have read at one time, and believed it, that the Creator's angels were changed into human shape, and that the bodies they were clothed with were of such verity that Abraham washed their feet, and that by their hands Lot was snatched away from the men of Sodom,<sup>1</sup> and an angel also having wrestled with a man with the whole weight of his body desired to be let go, so fast was he held.<sup>2</sup> Well then, that which was permitted to the angels of the inferior God when changed into human corporeity, the faculty of none the less remaining angels--will you deny this to the more mighty God, as though his Christ had not the power, when truly clothed with manhood, of continuing to be God? Or did perhaps those angels too become visible as a phantasm of flesh? No, this you will not dare to say. For if in your

1 Cf. Gen. 18; 19.      2 Cf. Gen. 32. 24-26.

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view the Creator's angels are as Christ is, Christ will belong to that God whose angels are such as Christ is. If you had not maliciously rejected some and corrupted others of the scriptures which oppose your views, the Gospel of John would in this matter have put you to rout when it proclaims that the Spirit in the body of a dove glided down and settled upon our Lord.<sup>1</sup> Though he was spirit he was no less truly dove than spirit, yet had not put to death his own proper substance by the assumption of a substance not his own. But, you ask, where is the body of the dove, now that the Spirit has been withdrawn into heaven? Just like the bodies of the angels, it was suppressed on the same terms on which it had also been produced. If you had seen it when it was being brought out of non-existence, you would have been aware also when it was being withdrawn into non-existence. As its beginning was not visible, neither was its ending. Yet it was a body, a body in three dimensions, at whatever moment it was visible as a body.<sup>2</sup> That which is written cannot possibly not have been so.

4 So then, if your repudiation of embodiment is due neither to the supposition that God would find it impossible nor to the fear that it would bring him into peril, it remains for you to reject and

arraign it as undignified. Beginning then with that nativity you so strongly object to, orate, attack now, the nastinesses of genital elements in the womb, the filthy curdling of moisture and blood, and of the flesh to be for nine months nourished on that same mire. Draw a picture of the womb getting daily more unmanageable, heavy, self-concerned, safe not even in sleep, uncertain in the whims of dislikes and appetites. Next go all out against the modesty of the travailing woman, a modesty which at least because of danger ought to be respected and because of its nature is sacred. You shudder, of course, at the child passed out along with his afterbirth, and of course bedaubed with it. You think it shameful that he is straightened out with bandages, that he is licked into shape with applications of oil, that he is beguiled by coddling. This natural object of reverence you, Marcion, bespittle: yet how were you born? You hate man during his birth: how can you love any man? Yourself at least you evidently did

1 Cf. John 1. 32-34.      2 Cf. Luke 3. 22.

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not love when you withdrew from the Church and the faith of Christ. But it is your own concern if you are an object of displeasure to yourself, or if you were born some other way. Christ, there is no doubt of it, did care for the sort of man who was curdled in uncleannesses in the womb, who was brought forth through organs immodest, who took nourishment through organs of ridicule. For his sake he came down, for his sake he preached the gospel, for his sake he cast himself down in all humility even unto death, yea, the death of the cross.<sup>1</sup> Evidently he loved him: for he redeemed him at a great price.<sup>2</sup> If Christ belongs to the Creator, with good reason he loved his own: if he is from another god his love was even greater, in that he loved one who was not his own. In any case, along with man he loved also his nativity, and his flesh besides: nothing can be loved apart from that by which it is what it is. Else you must remove nativity and show me man, you must take away flesh and present to me him whom God has redeemed. If these are the constituents of man whom God has redeemed, who are you to make them a cause of shame to him who redeemed them, or to make them beneath his dignity, when he would not have redeemed them unless he had loved them? Nativity he reshapes from death by a heavenly regeneration, flesh he restores from every distress: leprous he cleanses it, blind he restores its sight, palsied he makes it whole again, devil-possessed he atones for it, dead he brings it again to life: is he ashamed to be born into it? If indeed it had

been his will to come forth of a she-wolf or a sow or a cow, and, clothed with the body of a wild or a domestic animal, he were to preach the kingdom of heaven, your censorship I suppose would make for him a ruling that this is a disgrace to God, that this is beneath the dignity of the Son of God, and consequently that any man is a fool who so believes. A fool, yes certainly: let us judge God in accordance with our own sentiments. But look about you, Marcion, if indeed you have not deleted the passage: God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, that he may put to shame the things that are wise? What are these foolish things? The conversion of men to the worship of the true God, the rejection of error,

1 Cf. Phil. 2. 8.      2 Cf. 1 Cor. 6. 20.      3 1 Cor. 1. 27.

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instruction in righteousness, in chastity, in mercy, in patience, and in all manner of innocency? No, these are not foolish things. Inquire then to what things he did refer: and if you presume you have discovered them, can any of them be so foolish as belief in God who was born, born moreover of a virgin, born with a body of flesh, God who has wallowed through those reproaches of nature? Let someone say these are not foolish things: suppose it to be other things which God has chosen for opposition to the wisdom of the world--and yet, the professors of this world's wisdom find it easier to believe that Jupiter became a bull or a swan than Marcion finds it to believe that Christ veritably became man.

5 There are, I submit, other things too that are foolish enough, those concerned with the reproaches and sufferings of God. If not, let them call it prudence that God was crucified. Excise this also, Marcion--or rather, this for preference. For which is more beneath God's dignity, more a matter of shame, to be born or to die, to carry about a body or a cross, to be circumcised or to be crucified, to be fed at the breast or to be buried, to be laid in a manger or to be entombed in a sepulchre? You will be the wiser if you refuse to believe these either. Yet wise you cannot be, except by becoming a fool in the world through believing the foolish things of God. Or was your reason for not tearing out of your scriptures the sufferings of Christ that as a phantasm he was free from the perception of them? I have already suggested that he could equally well have undergone the unsubstantial ridicule of an imaginary nativity and infancy. But your answer is now required, murderer of the truth: was not God truly crucified? did he not, as truly crucified, truly die? was he not truly raised

again, seeing of course he truly died? Was it by fraud that Paul determined to know nothing among us save Jesus crucified,<sup>1</sup> was it by fraud that he represented him as buried,<sup>2</sup> by fraud that he insisted that he was raised up again?<sup>3</sup> Fraudulent in that case is also our faith, and the whole of what we hope for from Christ will be a phantasm, you utter scoundrel, who pronounce innocent the assassins of God. For of them Christ suffered nothing, if he in

1 Cf. 1 Cor. 2. 2.      2 Cf. 1 Cor. 15. 4.      3 cf. 1 Cor. 15. 17-19.

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reality suffered nothing. Spare the one and only hope of the whole world: why tear down the indispensable dishonour of the faith? Whatever is beneath God's dignity is for my advantage. I am saved if I am not ashamed of my Lord. Whosoever is ashamed of me, he says, of him will I also be ashamed.<sup>1</sup> I find no other grounds for shame, such as may prove that in contempt of dishonour I am nobly shameless and advantageously a fool. The Son of God was crucified: I am not ashamed--because it is shameful. The Son of God died: it is immediately credible--because it is silly. He was buried, and rose again: it is certain--because it is impossible. But how can these acts be true in him, if he himself was not true, if he had not truly in himself that which could be crucified, which could die, which could be buried and raised up again--this flesh, in fact, suffused with blood, scaffolded of bones, threaded through with sinews, intertwined with veins, competent to be born and to die, human unquestionably, as born of a human mother? And in Christ this flesh will be mortal precisely because Christ is man, and Son of Man. Else why is Christ called Man, and Son of Man, if he has nothing that is man's, and nothing derived from man?--unless perchance either man is something other than flesh, or man's flesh is derived from somewhere else than from man, or Mary is something other than human, or Marcion's god is a man. Unless one of these suppositions were true, Christ could not be described in the Scripture as man except with reference to his flesh, nor as Son of Man except with reference to some human parent: as neither could he be described as God without the Spirit of God, nor as the Son of God without God for his Father. Thus the official record of both substances represents him as both man and God: on the one hand born, on the other not born: on the one hand fleshly, on the other spiritual: on the one hand weak, on the other exceeding strong: on the one hand dying, on the other living. That these two sets of attributes, the divine and the human, are each kept distinct from the other, is of course accounted for by the equal verity of each nature, both

flesh and spirit being in full degree what they claim to be: the powers of the Spirit of God proved him God, the sufferings

1 Matt. 10. 33; Mark 8. 38; Luke 9. 26.

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proved there was the flesh of man. If the powers postulate the Spirit, no less do the sufferings postulate the flesh. If the flesh along with the sufferings was fictitious, it follows that the Spirit also along with the powers was a fraud. Why make out that Christ was half a lie? He was wholly the truth. He thought it better, I am sure, to be born than to be partially a liar, a liar too against himself, by wearing flesh without bones yet hard, without muscles yet firm, without blood yet gory, without a cloak yet clothed, flesh that hungered without appetite, ate without teeth, and spoke without a tongue, so that his discourse should be a phantasm conveyed to the ears by the ghost of a voice. In such a case he was a phantasm even after the resurrection when he offered his hands and feet for his disciples to examine, saying, Behold that I am I, because a spirit hath not bones as ye see me having<sup>1</sup>--undoubtedly meaning hands and feet and bones which a spirit has not but flesh has. How do you interpret this saying, Marcion, when you deduce Jesus from a god who is supremely good and candid and free from all evil? See how he beguiles and deceives and circumvents the eyes of all, their perceptions, their approaches, their contacts. In that case you ought not to have brought Christ down from heaven, but from some band of strolling mountebanks, not as God without manhood but as a man and a magician, not as the high priest of salvation<sup>2</sup> but as the producer of a pantomime, not as the raiser of the dead but as a seducer of the living: except that even if he was a magician he was born.

6 Next we come to certain disciples of this man of Pontus, who, driven to be wise above their master, allow Christ veritable flesh, yet without prejudice to the denial of his nativity. 'We will admit,' they say, 'that he had flesh, provided it was in no sense born.' So we come, as the proverb has it, from the limekiln to the charcoal-furnace, from Marcion to Apelles. This person, after suffering a carnal fall from the school of Marcion in respect of a woman, and thereafter a spiritual overthrow in respect of the virgin Philumena, adopted from her the preaching of a three-dimensional body of Christ, yet without a nativity. Now the apostle will answer that angel of Philumena's in the same terms in

1 Luke 24. 39.      2 Cf. Heb. 9. 11.



which, so long ago, he prophesied of the heretic himself, saying, Even if an angel from heaven preach the gospel to you otherwise than we have preached it, let him be anathema:<sup>1</sup> these further arguings of theirs, however, it shall be ours to resist. They admit that Christ truly had a body. From whence was its constituent matter, if not from matter of that quality in which it was present to sight? From whence the body, if the body was not flesh? From whence flesh, if the flesh was not born? For it had to be born if it was to be such flesh as is born. 'From the stars,' they say, 'and from the substances of the superior world, he took flesh on loan.' And they actually suggest that a body without a nativity is not to be wondered at, seeing that we too admit that angels were permitted, without any functioning of a womb, to appear on the scene in flesh.<sup>2</sup> Now we agree that that is what the scripture reports. Yet what sort of procedure is this, that a faith of a different rule should borrow documentary evidence for its arguings from the faith it is attacking? What has Apelles to do with Moses, when he repudiates the God of Moses? If the god is a different one, all that belongs to him must be differently dealt with. But even supposing we allow all the heretics to make use of the scriptures of that God whose world they also use--and this too will be for them a testimony of judgement, that they find support for their blasphemies from precedents he has provided--it is easy for the truth to win its case, even without raising this kind of objection to their use of the evidence. Therefore I would that these who claim that the flesh of Christ followed the precedent of the angels, alleging that though flesh it was not born, would compare also the reasons, Christ's no less than the angels', for which they made their appearance in flesh. No angel ever came down with the intention of being crucified, of obtaining experience of death, of being raised again from death. If there never was this kind of reason for angels becoming embodied, you have the very reason why they took to them flesh without being born. They had not come to die, and consequently had no need to be born. Christ, on the other hand, being sent to die, had of necessity also to be born, so that he might die. For customarily nothing dies except

1 Gal. 1. 8.      2 Cf. Gen. 19. 1.

what is born. Nativity and mortality have a debt they owe each to the other. The project of dying is the reason for being born. If

Christ died on behalf of that which does die, and if that does die which also is born, it followed--or rather, it preceded--that he no less must be born on behalf of that which is born, since he had to die on behalf of that which, because it is born, does die: it was not competent for him not to be born on behalf of that for which it was competent for him to die. Moreover, on the occasion in question, the Lord himself was one of those angels who appeared to Abraham:1 he appeared without nativity, but certainly with flesh, for the same difference of purpose--though you do not accept this, since you do not accept that Christ who as early as this was habituating himself both to address and to liberate and to judge the human race,2 in the guise of flesh not as yet born because not yet to die, except first there should be an annunciation both of his nativity and of his mortality. Let them then show proof that those angels received the substance of their flesh from the stars. As they do not prove it--because neither is it written--neither will the stars be the origin of Christ's flesh, to which they apply the precedent of the angels. It is agreed between us that the angels wore flesh not their own, seeing they are by nature of spiritual substance--though they have a body, albeit of its own kind--but yet are transfigurable into human flesh, and can on occasion come into sight and into contact with men. Since then it is not reported from what source they took their flesh, it is left for our understanding not to doubt that it is a property of angelic power to take to itself a body from a source not material. 'How much more,' you say, 'from a source which is material.' Certainly. But on this there is no agreement, because the Scripture offers no evidence. Yet why should those who have the power to make themselves into that which by nature they are not, not have the power to make themselves so out of that which is no substance? If they are made into something they are not, why should they not be made into it out of that which is not? But when that which is not comes into existence, it exists out of nothing. For this reason one does not ask, and we are not told,

1 Cf. Gen. 18. 1.      2 Cf. Gen. 18. 5 etc.; 19. 16; 18. 20; 19. 24.

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what afterwards became of their bodies. That which was from nothing became nothing. Being able to change themselves into flesh, they are able to change nothingness itself into flesh. It is a bigger thing to change one's nature than to make matter. But even supposing it was necessary for the angels to have taken flesh from matter it is certainly easier to believe that they took it from terrestrial matter than from any species of celestial substances,

since it was to such an extent of terrestrial quality that it fed on terrestrial food. And further, suppose now we grant that sidereal flesh, while not terrestrial, may have fed on terrestrial food in the same manner as terrestrial flesh, while not celestial, fed on celestial food--for we read that manna was meat for the people, and it says, Man did eat angels' food<sup>1</sup>--yet the attributes of the Lord's flesh, once they are set in a class by themselves, are not affected by a reason which belongs to a different dispensation. As he was to be truly man even unto death, he was under necessity of clothing himself with that flesh to which death belongs: and that flesh to which death belongs has nativity for its antecedent.

7 But as often as there is discussion of the nativity, all those who reject it as prejudging the issue concerning the verity of the flesh in Christ, claim that the Lord himself denies having been born, on the ground that he asked, Who is my mother and who are my brethren?<sup>2</sup> So let Apelles too hear what answer I have already given to Marcion in that work in which I have made appeal to the Gospel which he accepts, namely that the background of that remark must be taken into consideration. Well then, in the first place no one would ever have reported to him that his mother and his brethren were standing without unless he were sure that he had a mother and brethren and that it was they whose presence he was then announcing, having either previously known them, or at least then and there made their acquaintance. This I say, in spite of the fact that the heresies have deliberately removed from the Gospel the statements that those who marvelled at his doctrine said that both Joseph the carpenter, his reputed father, and Mary his mother, and his brothers and sisters, were very well known to

1 Ps. 78. 25.

2 Matt. 12. 48; cf. Mark 3. 33; Luke 8. 20, 21.

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them.<sup>1</sup> 'But,' they say, 'it was for the sake of tempting him that they announced to him the mother and the brethren whom actually he had not.' Now the Scripture does not say this, though elsewhere it is not silent when any action respecting him was taken with a view to temptation. Behold, it says, there stood up a doctor of the law, tempting him:<sup>2</sup> and in another place, And there came to him the Pharisees, tempting him.<sup>3</sup> And there was no reason why it should not have been indicated here that this was done to tempt him. I refuse to accept an inference of your own, which is not in Scripture. Secondly, there has to be some ground

beneath the temptation. What was it they could think worth tempting in him? 'Whether, of course, he had been born or not: for as his answer constituted a denial of this, this was what the tempter's announcement angled for.' But no temptation, which has in view the ascertainment of that in doubt of which it makes the temptation, proceeds with such abruptness as to dispense with a precedent question which by suggesting doubt may give point to the temptation. Consequently, as there had nowhere been any canvassing of Christ's nativity, how can you argue that these people wished by means of a temptation to elicit something they had never brought into question? To this we add that, even if there had been a case for tempting him in respect of his nativity, the temptation would certainly not have proceeded on the lines of an announcement of the arrival of persons whose present existence was no necessary consequence of Christ's having been born. All of us are born, yet not all of us have either brothers or a mother: one is more likely at any point to have a father than a mother, and maternal uncles than brothers. Thus there is here no room for a temptation respecting his nativity, for this could quite well be a fact apart from any mention either of mother or of brethren. It is in fact easier to suppose that, being assured that he had both a mother and brethren, they were making trial of his divinity rather than of his nativity, by attempting to discover whether while busy indoors he knew what there was out of doors, when assailed with a lying report of the presence of people

1 Cf. Luke 3. 23; Mark 6. 2-4; Matt. 13. 55, 56.

2 Luke 10. 25.      3 Matt. 19. 3.

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who actually were not there. And yet, even in this case the device behind the temptation would have failed of its purpose: for it could have been the case that those whom they reported standing without were known by him to be absent, through the claims of illness or of business or of a long journey, which he was already aware of. No one frames a temptation in terms through which he knows that the embarrassment of the temptation may recoil upon himself. As therefore there existed no pertinent ground of temptation, it remains for us to admit the candour of the messenger and to acknowledge that his mother and his brethren really had come for him. But let Apelles, as well as Marcion, hear from me what was the reason behind the reply which for the moment denied mother and brethren. Our Lord's brethren did not believe in him:1 this also is included in the Gospel as it was

published before Marcion's day. His mother likewise is not shown to have adhered to him, though Martha and other Marys are often mentioned as being in his company.<sup>2</sup> At this juncture their unbelief at last comes into the open. When Jesus was teaching the way of life, when he was preaching the Kingdom of God, when he was occupied in healing infirmities and sicknesses, though strangers were intent upon him these near relations were absent. At length they come for him, they stand without and will not enter, evidently not valuing what was being done inside. They do not so much as even wait, but, as though bringing more important business than what he was then engaged upon, they go so far as to interrupt, and wish him to be called away from so great a work. I put it to you, Apelles, or you if you like, Marcion, if perchance when playing dice or laying bets on actors or jockeys you were called away by such a message, would you not ask, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?'" When Christ was preaching God and giving proof of him, was fulfilling the Law and the Prophets, and was dispelling the darkness of long ages past, was it without justification that he used this expression to castigate the unbelief of those who stood without, or at least to expose their unseasonableness in calling him back from his work?

1 Cf. John 7. 5.

2 Luke 10. 38-41; John 11. 5, 19 sqq., 24, 39; Matt. 27. 56; Mark 16. 1.

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For repudiating nativity, on the other hand, he could have chosen the place and time and occasion of a different discourse, not such as could be uttered by one who had both a mother and brethren. When indignation denies kindred, this is not a denial but a reproof. Besides, he gave others prior place, and when he reveals what has caused these to deserve preference, namely the hearing of the word, he makes it clear on what terms he has denied having a mother and brethren: for on the terms on which he adopted to himself those others who clave to him, on these he repudiated those who stood apart from him. It is Christ's custom himself to put into practice the teaching he gives to others. Then how could it be possible for him, when teaching men not to value mother or father or brethren so highly as the word of God, himself to desert the word of God when his mother and brethren were reported waiting? So then, he denied his kinsfolk for the reason for which he taught they ought to be denied, for God's work's sake. And further: in another sense there is in his mother's estrangement a figure of the Synagogue, and in his brethren's

unbelief a figure of the Jews. Outside, in them, was Israel: whereas the new disciples, hearing and believing, and being inside, by cleaving to Christ depicted the Church which, repudiating carnal kinship, he designated a preferable mother and a worthier family of brothers. To conclude, it was in this same sense that he answered also that other exclamation<sup>1</sup>--not as denying his mother's womb and breasts, but as indicating that those are more blessed who hear the word of God.

8 We have expounded, in terms of the truth of the Gospel as it was until Marcion and Apelles mutilated and corrupted it, those passages which these regard as their most effective armoury: and this by itself ought to have been enough to establish the fact of Christ's nativity, and thereby to prove his possession of human flesh. But inasmuch as these Apelleasts make a special point of sheltering behind the dishonour of the flesh, alleging that it was constructed for seduced souls by that fiery prince of evil and therefore is unworthy of Christ, and therefore he must needs have got him a substance from the stars, I have the task of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Luke 11. 27, 28.

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beating them back with the aid of their own ordnance. They tell us the name of a certain mighty angel, and allege that he founded this world, and did penance for founding it. This also I have discussed in its proper place--for I have also a book addressed to them--asking whether one who, according to them, had the spirit and will and power of Christ with a view to those works did anything worthy of penance. This angel they go so far as to interpret by the figure of the Lost Sheep. So, on the evidence of the penance of its founder, the world must be a mistake, since all penance is a confession of sin, seeing it has no place except in case of sin. If the world is a sin, then on the analogy of body and members the sky, and along with the sky the things in it, must equally be a sin, and, if the things in the sky, so also whatever has been conceived and brought forth from them. An evil tree cannot but bring forth evil fruits.<sup>1</sup> In that case the flesh of Christ, being composed of things from the sky, consists of elements of sin, and is sinful by reason of its sinful origin, and will from its very nature be part of that substance, our substance, with which, as being sinful, they think shame to besmirch Christ. As then there is no difference in respect of the dishonour involved, either let them, since they are displeased with ours, think out for Christ a material of purer brand, or else let them acknowledge this, than which

even that from the sky cannot be better. I am aware that it is written, The first man is from the mud of the earth, the second man is from heaven:<sup>2</sup> but this has not in view a difference of material, but is merely opposing to the previous earthy substance of the flesh of the first man, which is Adam, the celestial spiritual substance of the second Man, which is Christ. And so closely does he relate the celestial Man to spirit and not to flesh, that beyond question those whom he brings into parity with him are in this earthly flesh being made celestial, by spirit of course: whereas if Christ were celestial according to the flesh as well, those not celestial according to the flesh could not be brought into parity with him. If therefore those who are being made celestial, as Christ is already celestial, wear an earthly substance of flesh, this provides a further

1 Cf. Matt. 7. 17; 12. 33; Luke 6. 43.

2 1 Cor. 15. 47.

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proof of our case that Christ himself also was celestial, yet in earthly flesh, as are those who are classed with him.

9 My next contention is that nothing that is derived from something else, though it be other than that from which it is derived, is to such an extent other as not to suggest that from which it is derived. No material loses all evidence of its origin, though it be changed into a new identity. Certainly this body of ours, the fact of whose formation from clay the truth has passed on even to the mythologies of the Gentiles, confesses both elements of its origin, earth by its flesh, water by its blood. For though its quality manifests itself under another aspect, this is because it comes into existence as one thing derived from another. Yet what is blood but reddened water, and what is flesh but earth transformed into shapes still its own? Consider its attributes one by one, the muscles as turf, the bones as rocks, even a sort of pebbles round the nipples. Look upon the clinging bands of the sinews as the fibres of roots, the branching meanderings of the veins as the twistings of rivers, the down as moss, the hair as grass, even the very treasures of the marrow in its secret place as the goldmines of the flesh. All these tokens of a terrestrial origin were also in Christ, and these it is which hid the fact that he was the Son of God, since for no other reason was he supposed to be merely man than because he consisted of a human bodily substance. If not, point to something in him that was celestial, begged and borrowed

from the Great Bear or the Pleiades or the Hyades: for the things I have enumerated are no less evidences that his flesh was terrestrial than that it was ours. I find no trace of anything novel or anything outlandish. In fact it was only for his words and works, solely for his doctrine and power, that they were astonished at Christ as man: whereas a new kind of flesh in him would even have been remarked upon and taken for a marvel. But it was precisely the non-marvellous character of his terrestrial flesh which made the rest of his activities things to marvel at, when they asked, Whence hath this man this doctrine and these signs?<sup>1</sup> These were the words of men who even despised his outward appearance, so far was his body from being of human comeliness,

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 13. 54.

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not to speak of celestial glory.<sup>1</sup> Also, though among you the prophets are silent regarding his ignoble presence, the very sufferings, the very revilings tell the tale: the sufferings proved his flesh human, the revilings proved it uncomely. Would any one have dared even to scratch a novel kind of body with the end of his finger-nail, or to defile his face with spittings unless it seemed to deserve it?<sup>2</sup> Why do you allege that that flesh is celestial which you have no data for thinking celestial, why deny that that is terrestrial which you have data for recognizing as terrestrial? It hungers when with the devil,<sup>3</sup> is athirst with the Samaritan woman,<sup>4</sup> weeps over Lazarus,<sup>5</sup> trembles at the prospect of death--The flesh, he says, is weak<sup>6</sup>--and at last sheds its blood. You take these, I suppose, for celestial signs. But, say I, how could he, as he said would happen, be despised and suffer,<sup>7</sup> if in that flesh there had shone any radiance from his celestial nobility? By this means, then, we prove our case that in that flesh there was nothing brought down from the skies, and that that was so for the express purpose that it should be capable of being despised and of suffering.

<sup>10</sup> I turn to others, equally wise in their own eyes, who insist that Christ's flesh was composed of soul, in that soul was made into flesh.<sup>8</sup> In that case his soul was flesh, and as his flesh was composed of soul, so also his soul was turned into flesh. Here, as before, I ask for reasons. If it was for the salvation of soul in himself that Christ assumed soul--because it could not have been saved except through him, by being in him--I do not see why he made it into flesh by clothing himself with flesh composed of soul, as though he were unable to save soul except it were turned into



flesh. For seeing that he affords salvation to our souls when they are not only not fleshly but are even disjoined from the flesh,

1 Cf. Isa. 53. 2.      2 Cf. Matt. 27. 30; Mark 15. 19; Luke 22. 64.

3 Cf. Matt. 4. 2-4.      4 Cf. John 4. 7.

5 Cf. John 11. 35.      6 Matt. 26. 41; Mark 14. 38.

7 Cf. Matt. 16. 21; Mark 8. 31; Luke 9. 22.

8 Throughout this chapter 'composed of soul' stands for animalis, 'turned into flesh' for carnalis, 'fleshly' for carneus. Carneus seems to differ from carnalis as referring to form rather than matter.

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how much more was he able to bring to salvation that soul which he himself assumed, even without its being fleshly. Also, seeing that they premise that Christ came forth for the purpose of delivering not our flesh but our soul alone, in the first place how absurd it is that when intending to deliver soul alone, he should have made it into that sort of body which he was not going to deliver. And again, if the task he took upon him was to deliver our souls by the agency of that soul with which he clothed himself, that too with which he clothed himself must have been ours when he clothed himself with it, that is, of our fashion--of whatever fashion our soul in secret is, at any rate not a fleshly fashion. But if the soul he had was fleshly, it was not our soul that he delivered: for ours is not fleshly. So then, if it was not ours that he delivered, it being a fleshly one that he delivered, it is no concern of ours, because it was not ours that he delivered. In fact it did not even need to be delivered, seeing it was not ours, being fleshly: for it was not in peril if it was not ours, that is, was not non-fleshly. But it is agreed that it was delivered. Consequently it was not fleshly, and it was ours, seeing it was such as to need deliverance, because it was ours that was in peril. So then if in Christ soul was not turned into flesh, neither can his flesh have been composed of soul.

11 But we are faced with a further argument of theirs when we demand why it should be supposed that Christ, by taking upon him flesh made out of soul, was in possession of a soul turned into flesh. 'It was,' they say, 'because God was anxious to display soul visibly to men by making it into body: for it had previously been invisible, by nature seeing nothing, not even itself, by reason

of the impediment of this flesh, with the result that it was even argued whether soul was born or not, was mortal or not: and so in Christ soul was made into body with a view to our seeing it both being born, and dying, and, what is more, rising again.' But it would be a very strange thing if by means of flesh either itself or we should obtain proof of that soul whose existence the flesh precluded from recognition, and if soul should be brought into view only by becoming that to which it was invisible, namely flesh. In that case it has had darkness conferred upon it so that it

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may be able to shine. So then in this connexion let us first discuss whether there was any need for soul to be brought into view in such a manner: and next, when they allege that it was formerly totally invisible, whether they mean it was incorporeal, or even that it possessed some sort of body of its own. Yet even when they affirm that it was invisible, they define it as corporeal, as possessing that which is invisible: for if it possesses nothing invisible how can it be described as invisible? Indeed it cannot even exist if it possesses nothing by which to exist. But since it does exist it must of necessity possess something by which it exists. If it does possess something by which it exists, this must be its body. Everything that exists is body of some kind or another. Nothing is incorporeal except what does not exist. Seeing then that soul possesses an invisible body, he who took upon himself to make it visible might with much more dignity have made visible that of it which it already possessed, though invisible: because in this matter also neither falsehood nor infirmity should attach to God--falsehood if he had displayed soul as other than what it was, infirmity if he had not power to display it as what it was. No one, with the intention of bringing a man into view, pulls a helmet or a mask over his face. Yet this was done to soul if by being changed into flesh it put on a top layer which was not its own. Moreover, even if soul be reckoned incorporeal, so that by some occult violation of reason soul exists while whatever it is that soul is is not body, it was not on that account impossible for God--and it did more appropriately befit his purpose--to display it in some new aspect of body, not in this which is common to all and is already of a different significance: otherwise his anxiety to make soul visible instead of invisible would have failed of its purpose, and an action for trespass would have lain against soul at the instance of human flesh. 'But it was impossible for Christ to be seen among men except as man.' Then give back to Christ his trustworthiness, and it will follow that he whose will it was to walk as man also made soul perceptible under human conditions, not making it fleshly,

but clothing it with flesh.

12 We might at this juncture be prepared to admit that soul was made visible by means of flesh, if it were sufficiently proved that

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it needed in some way or other to be made visible--that is, that it was till then unknown either to itself or to us: although in this context the distinction is idle, as though we were here and soul there, the truth being that the whole of what we are is soul. In fact, without soul we are nothing, a mere name, not even of a man, but of a corpse. If, therefore, we are ignorant of soul, it is soul that is ignorant of itself. So it remains only to examine this question, whether soul was in such sense ignorant of itself as to need by all possible means to be made known. The nature of soul, I imagine, is perceptive. Certainly nothing that has a soul is without perception, and nothing is perceptive apart from soul: and, to speak more precisely, perception is the soul of the soul. Therefore, since soul enables all to be perceptive, and is itself perceptive even of the perceptions of all, not to speak of their attributes, can anyone think it likely that it has not from the beginning been endowed with perception of itself? Whence its faculty of knowing that which from time to time is necessary to it from the necessity imposed by its natural characteristics, if it knows not its own attributes and what is necessary to each? This indeed one can observe in every soul, knowledge of itself: for without this knowledge of itself no soul would have been able to cause itself to function. But even more I think that man, the only rational animal, is endowed also with a soul competent to make him a rational animal, being itself in first instance rational. Yet how is it rational, this which makes man a rational animal, if while ignorant of itself it knows not its own reason? So far however is it from being ignorant of itself, that it knows its Author, and its Judge, and its own estate. While as yet it learns nothing of God, it mentions God's name: while as yet it makes no acknowledgement of his judgement, it professes to commend its cause to God: while it hears at every turn that there is no hope after death, it utters either a blessing or a curse upon this dead man or that. This theme is more fully pursued in the book I have written ON THE TESTIMONY OF THE SOUL. Another point: if soul had been ignorant of itself from the beginning, there is nothing it had more need to obtain knowledge of from Christ than its own qualities. In fact, however, what it has learned from Christ, is not what it

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looks like but how it is saved. For this cause did the Son of God come down and submit to having a soul, that soul might obtain knowledge, not of itself in Christ but of Christ in itself. For it was through ignorance, not of itself but of the Word of God, that it was in peril of its salvation. The life, it says, not 'the soul', was made manifest:<sup>1</sup> and I came, he says, to save the soul;<sup>2</sup> he did not say 'to make it visible'. We were ignorant, were we, that the soul, though invisible, is born and dies, and should have continued so unless it were displayed in the form of a body? We were ignorant, surely, that it will rise again, and the flesh along with it. This it must be that Christ made manifest: yet even this not otherwise in himself than in such a one as Lazarus, whose flesh was not composed of soul, any more than his soul was turned into flesh. What further information did we then acquire of the state of the soul hitherto unknown? What invisible attribute had it that stood in need of visibility by means of flesh?

13 'Soul was made into flesh so that soul might be made visible.' Then was flesh also made into soul, so that flesh might be made manifest? If soul is flesh, it is no longer soul, but flesh: if flesh is soul, it is no longer flesh, but soul. Where then is the flesh, and where is the soul, if both have been made out of each other--nay more, if they are neither, in that each is made into the other? Evidently it is most perverse that while using the word 'flesh' we should understand 'soul', and while talking of soul should interpret it as flesh. All things will be in danger of being taken for other than they are, losing their own identity by being taken for that other, if they are termed otherwise than they are. Fidelity of terms is the safeguard of things being what they are. Even when qualities are changed, things receive new endowments of names. For example, baked clay takes up the name of crockery, and has no joint interest in the name belonging to its original species, seeing it has none in the species itself. Consequently also the soul of Christ, if made into flesh, cannot but be that which it has been made into, and have ceased to be that which it was, now that it has been made into something else. And since I have adduced a closely related illustration, I shall make fuller use of it. For

<sup>1</sup> 1 John 1. 2.      <sup>2</sup> Luke 9. 56.

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certainly crockery made out of clay is one body, and there is one term for it, as being one body: crockery cannot also be called clay, because what it was it is not, and of that which it is not the

name also ceases to be applicable. So also, soul made into flesh is wholly a uniform solidity and singularity, a substance undifferentiated. But in Christ we observe soul and flesh set forth in plain and undisguised terms, that is, soul as soul, and flesh as flesh, never soul-flesh or flesh-soul--though they would have needed to be so described, if such they had been--and even each substance for itself separately named by him, strictly in accordance with the distinction between their two sets of attributes, soul on the one hand, flesh on the other. For example: My soul, he says, is troubled even unto death:<sup>1</sup> and, The bread which I shall give for the salvation of the world is my flesh.<sup>2</sup> But if his flesh had been soul, there would in Christ be one thing, fleshly soul or else flesh composed of soul: but now that he distinguishes their aspects, flesh and soul, he shows them to be two things. If two, of course not one: if not one, evidently the soul is not turned into flesh, nor the flesh composed of soul--for 'one thing' amounts to 'soul-flesh' or 'flesh-soul'--unless perchance he was also carrying about another soul apart by itself, in addition to the one which was flesh, and was carrying round another flesh in addition to the one which was soul. But if there is one flesh and one soul, the latter sorrowful even unto death and the former bread for the salvation of the world, there is conserved the duality of two substances each distinct in its own species, a duality which precludes the singular aspect of a fleshly soul.

14 'But,' say they, 'Christ was also clothed upon with an angel.' By what method? 'The same by which he might have been clothed with man.' Then the reason for it also is the same. For Christ to be clothed with manhood, man's salvation was the reason, the restitution of that which had perished. Man had perished: it was man that must be restored. For Christ to be clothed with an angel there was nothing of this sort by way of reason. For even though perdition is reckoned to angels--into the fire prepared for the devil and his angels<sup>3</sup>--yet never to them has

1 Matt. 26. 38; Mark 14. 34.      2 John 6. 51.      3 Matt. 25. 41.

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restitution been promised: no commandment concerning the salvation of angels has Christ received from the Father. That which the Father has neither promised nor commanded, Christ cannot have administered. To what purpose then was he also clothed with an angel, except perhaps as an attendant to help him in the accomplishment of man's salvation? Then was not the Son of God competent by himself to deliver man whom the

serpent by himself and unattended had overthrown? In that case there is no longer one God, nor one Saviour, if there are two artificers of salvation, the one quite powerless without the other. Or perhaps it was that he might deliver man by the agency of the angel? Then why did he himself come down for a task which he was going to accomplish by the agency of the angel? If by the angel, why also himself? If by himself, why also the angel? Certainly he is described as the angel of great counsel,<sup>1</sup> 'angel' meaning 'messenger', by a term of office, not of nature: for he was to announce to the world the Father's great project, that concerned with the restitution of man. Yet he is not on that account to be understood as an angel, in the sense of a sort of Gabriel or Michael. For the son also is sent by the lord of the vineyard to the husbandmen, as the servants too had been, to fetch of the fruits of it: but the son must not be reckoned one of the servants just because he succeeded to the servants' task.<sup>2</sup> So I shall find it easier to say, if I have to, that the Son himself was the angel (that is, the messenger) of the Father, than that there was an angel in the Son. But seeing that the Son himself is the subject of the pronouncement, Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels,<sup>3</sup> how shall he be thought to have clothed himself with an angel when he is made lower than the angels by being made man (as being flesh and soul) and the Son of Man? For as the Spirit of God, and the Power of the Most High, he cannot be held to be lower than the angels, seeing he is God, and the Son of God. So then, even as he is made less than the angels while clothed with manhood, even so he is not less if clothed with an angel. This view of the matter could have suited Ebion, who determines that Jesus is a bare man, merely of the seed of David, and therefore not also the Son of God--though

1 Isa. 9. 5 (LXX).      2 Cf. Matt. 21. 33 seqq.      3 Ps. 8. 5.

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clearly he speaks of himself in somewhat higher terms than the prophets use concerning themselves--so as to state that an angel was in him in the same way as in Zechariah, for example: though we object that the words, And the angel that spake in me said unto me,<sup>1</sup> were never used by Christ. Nor indeed was that habitual expression of all the prophets, Thus saith the Lord: for he was himself the Lord, declaring openly and on his own authority, But I say unto you.<sup>2</sup> What more do we need, when we hear Isaiah crying out, Not an angel nor a delegate, but the Lord himself hath saved them?<sup>3</sup>

15    Valentinus, by heretical privilege, allowed himself to invent

a spiritual flesh of Christ. One who has refused to believe it human can fashion it into anything he likes, since (and let this remark be addressed to them all) if it was not human and not derived from man, I cannot see what substance Christ himself was referring to when he declared himself both man and the Son of Man: Now therefore ye seek to kill a man who hath spoken to you the truth,<sup>4</sup> and, The Son of Man is lord of the sabbath.<sup>5</sup> Moreover it is of him that Isaiah says, A man under chastisement, and knowing how to bear weakness:<sup>6</sup> and Jeremiah, And he is a man, and who hath known him?<sup>7</sup> and Daniel, And behold, above the clouds as it were a son of man:<sup>8</sup> also Paul the Apostle, A mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus:<sup>9</sup> again Peter in the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus of Nazareth, a man appointed by God for you<sup>10</sup>--where there is another word for 'man', but it still implies humanity. These texts by themselves ought to have been sufficient to non-suit them--as evidence of his flesh being human and derived from man, not composed of spirit, any more than it is composed of soul or of the stars, or is imaginary--if heresies had been able to rid themselves of special pleading and of the tricks of contentiousness. For, as I have read in the works of one of Valentinus' faction, in the first place they refuse to admit that terrestrial and human substance was brought into shape for Christ, lest the Lord should turn out

1 Zech. 1. 14.      2 Matt. 5. 20 etc.      3 Isa. 63. 9 LXX.  
4 John 8. 40.      5 Matt. 12. 8.      6 Isa. 53. 3.  
7 Jer. 17. 9 LXX.      8 Dan. 7. 13.      9 1 Tim. 2. 5.  
10 Acts 2. 22.

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to be of less worth than the angels, who do not consist of terrestrial flesh: and secondly, because flesh like ours would have needed to be born like us, not of the Spirit, nor of God, but of the will of a man. 'And what,' they ask, 'is the meaning of Not of corruption but of incorruption?'<sup>1</sup> And why, even as that flesh rose again and was received up into heaven, is not ours, if it is like his, straightway taken up? Or else why was not his, if it is like ours, likewise dissolved into the earth?' These are the sort of questions the Gentiles also used to canvass: 'Was then the Son of God emptied out to such a degree of humility?' and, 'If he rose again for an example of our hope, why is there no evidence of anything of the kind happening to us?' You might expect such things of Gentiles: yes, you might expect them of heretics too. For is there any difference between them, except that Gentiles by not believing believe, while heretics by believing believe not? They find it written, Thou hast made him a little less than the angels,<sup>2</sup> yet they

deny the inferior substance of Christ, though he declares himself not even a man but a worm,<sup>3</sup> though he had no form nor comeliness, but his aspect was ignoble, worn out more than all men, and he was a man under chastisement, and knowing how to bear weakness.<sup>4</sup> They acknowledge a man mingled with God, yet deny the manhood: they believe he died, yet that which died they claim was born of incorruption--as though corruption were anything else but death. 'But our flesh too ought to be immediately rising again.' Have patience. Christ has not yet put down all his enemies,<sup>5</sup> so as to triumph over his enemies, with his friends to share his victory.

16 Yet once more that Alexander person, through lust of arguing, has, according to the rules of heretical trickery, made himself noteworthy by his suggestion that we affirm that Christ's purpose in clothing himself with flesh of human origin was that in himself he might bring to nought the flesh of sin.<sup>6</sup> Now though we should say this we might by some reasoning or other defend our judgement, provided it was not with that great folly by which he supposes that our opinion is that the very flesh of

1 1 Pet. 1. 23.      2 Ps. 8. 5.      3 cf. Ps. 22.6.

4 Isa. 53. 3.      5 Cf. Ps. 8. 8; 1 Cor. 15. 27, 28.      6 Cf. Rom. 6. 6.

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Christ, as being sinful, was brought to nought in him: for we remember that it sits on high in heaven at the right hand of the Father,<sup>1</sup> and we proclaim that it will come from thence in the eminence of the Father's glory:<sup>2</sup> and consequently, as we cannot say it has been brought to nought, when it is in heaven, so neither can we say it was sinful, when in it there was no guile.<sup>3</sup> Our contention, however, is not that the flesh of sin, but that the sin of the flesh, was brought to nought in Christ, not the material but its quality, not the substance but its guilt, according to the apostle's authority when he says, He brought to nought sin in the flesh.<sup>4</sup> For in another place also<sup>5</sup> he says that Christ was in the likeness of the flesh of sin: not that he took upon him the likeness of flesh, as it were a phantasm of a body and not its reality: but the apostle will have us understand by 'the likeness of sinful flesh' that the flesh of Christ, itself not sinful, was the like of that to which sin did belong, and is to be equated with Adam in species but not in defect. From this text we also prove that in Christ there was that flesh whose nature is in man sinful, and that it is by virtue of this that sin has been brought to nought, while in Christ that same flesh exists without sin which in man did not exist without sin. Moreover



it would not suit Christ's purpose, when bringing to nought the sin of the flesh, not to bring it to nought in that flesh in which was the nature of sin: neither would it be to his glory. For what would it amount to if it was in a better kind of flesh, of a different (that is, a non-sinful) nature, that he destroyed the birthmark of sin?<sup>6</sup> 'In that case,' you will reply, 'if it was our flesh Christ clothed himself with, Christ's flesh was sinful.' Forbear to tie up tight a conception which admits of unravelling. By clothing himself with our flesh he made it his own, and by making it his own he made it non-sinful. Moreover--and let this be addressed to all those who suppose that because he was not of a man's seed, it was not our flesh that was in Christ--let them remember that Adam himself was made into this flesh, though not of a man's seed: as earth was changed into this flesh without a man's seed,

1 Cf. Mark 16. 19.      2 Cf. Matt. 16. 27; Mark 8. 38.

3 Cf. I Pet. 2. 22.      4 Rom. 8. 3.      5 Ibid.

6 Or, by another reading, 'overcame the power of sin'.

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so also the Word of God was able, without coagulation, to pass into the material of that same flesh.

17 But, dismissing Alexander, along with those syllogisms of his which he tortures in his arguings, also along with those psalms of Valentinus which with supreme impudence he interpolates as though they were the work of some competent author, let us now concentrate our attack at one single point, whether it was from the Virgin that Christ took to himself flesh: for by this method, if by no other, it will be established that his flesh was human, if it derived its substance from a human womb: although it has already become clear that it was of human constitution, both from the appellation 'man' and from its natural characteristics, from the sense-perception of handling and from the issue of the passion. Yet before all else we shall need to adduce the reason which prescribed that the Son of God should be born of a virgin: which was, that he must needs be born in a new manner, as being the founder of that new birth concerning which it was proclaimed by Isaiah that the Lord would give a sign. What sign is that? Behold, a virgin shall conceive in the womb and shall bear a son.<sup>1</sup> And so a virgin did conceive, and bore Emmanuel, God with us. This is the new birth, that man is being born in God, since the day when God was born in man, taking to himself flesh of the ancient seed without the agency of the ancient seed, so that he might reshape it with new (that is, spiritual) seed when he had first by sacrifice

expelled its ancient defilements. But that newness in its totality, as also in all its bearings, was prefigured of old, when by a reasonable ordinance by means of a virgin man was born to the Lord. The earth was still virgin, not yet deflowered by husbandry, not yet subdued to seedtime: of it we are told that man was made by God into a living soul. Therefore, seeing that of the first Adam it is so related, naturally the second or last Adam, as the apostle has called him, was likewise from earth (that is, flesh) not yet unsealed to generation brought forth by God to be a life-giving spirit. And yet--that I leave not otiose the introduction of the name of Adam--why was Christ called Adam by the apostle<sup>2</sup> if his manhood was not of terrestrial origin? Here also reason gives

1 Isa. 7. 14.      2 Cf. I Cor. 15. 45.;

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the answer: it is because God by a contrary operation has regained possession of his own image and similitude taken captive by the devil. Into Eve, while still a virgin, had crept the word, constructive of death:<sup>1</sup> into a virgin no less needed to be introduced the Word of God, constructive of life,<sup>2</sup> so that that which through that sex had gone astray into perdition should through the same sex be led back again into salvation. Eve had believed the serpent: Mary believed Gabriel. The sin which the former committed by believing, the latter by believing blotted out. ' But Eve on that occasion conceived nothing in her womb by the devil's word.' Yes, she did. For the devil's word was to her a seed, so that thenceforth she should be abject and obedient, and should bring forth in sorrows:<sup>3</sup> and in fact she did give birth, to the devil, the murderer of his brother.<sup>4</sup> Mary, on the other hand, brought forth him who should sometime bring to salvation his brother according to the flesh, Israel, by whom he himself was slain. So then, God brought down into the womb his own Word, the good brother, that he might erase the memory of the evil brother: for the salvation of man Christ must needs come forth from that organ into which man already under condemnation had entered.

18 Now let us put our case less figuratively. It was not feasible for the Son of God to be born of human seed, lest, if he were wholly the son of man, he should not also be the Son of God, and should be in no sense greater than Solomon or than Jonah, as in Ebion's view we should have to regard him. Therefore, being already the Son of God, of the seed of God the Father (that is, spirit), that he might also be the Son of Man all he needed was to

take to him flesh out of human flesh without the action of a man's seed: for a man's seed was uncalled-for in one who had the seed of God. And so, as while not yet born of the Virgin it was possible for him to have God for his father, without a human mother, equally, when being born of the Virgin, it was possible for him to have a human mother without a human father. Thus, in short, is there man with God, when there is man's flesh with God's spirit--

1 Cf. Gen. 3. 1.      2 Cf. Luke 1. 35; John 1. 14.  
3 Cf. Gen. 3. 16.      4 Cf. Gen. 4. 1.

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from man flesh without seed, from God spirit with seed. Therefore if there was an ordinance of reason regarding the need for the Son of God to be brought forth from a virgin, what room is there for doubt that he received from the Virgin that body which he did bring forth from the Virgin, seeing that what he received from God is something else? 'It is', say they, 'because the Word was made flesh.'<sup>1</sup> This saying testifies and declares what it was that was made flesh, while yet there is no risk that, in spite of this, something else, and not the Word, was made flesh, if it was out of flesh that the Word was made flesh. Or else, if out of himself he was made flesh, let Scripture say so. Since the Scripture says no more than what the Word was made, and not also from what he was so made, it follows that its suggestion is that he was so made out of something else, and not out of himself. If not out of himself but out of something else, beginning with that admission discuss of what it is more fitting to believe the Word was made flesh, if not of that flesh within which he was made flesh--if for no other reason, because the Lord himself has judicially and categorically stated, That which is born in the flesh is flesh, because it has been born of flesh.<sup>2</sup> If he said this of man only, and not also of himself, openly deny that Christ is man, and thus maintain that it did not apply to him. 'Nay, but he adds, And that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit,<sup>3</sup> because God is spirit,<sup>4</sup> and He was born of God:<sup>5</sup> this certainly has him in view, the more so if it has also those who believe in him.' Then if this too applies to him, why not also that other? For you cannot divide them, this to him, the other to the rest of men: for you do not deny the two substances of Christ, that of flesh and that of spirit. But if he possessed flesh no less than spirit, when he makes a statement concerning the condition of the two substances which he bore within himself, he cannot be thought to have made a pronouncement concerning spirit as being his but flesh as not his. Thus, since he was himself by the Spirit of God (and the Spirit is God) born of God, he

was also of human flesh and as man conceived and born in the flesh.

1 John 1. 14.      2 John 3. 6.      3 John 3. 6.  
4 John 4. 24.      5 John 1. 13 (v.1).

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19 'What then is the meaning of, Was born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of a man, but of God?'<sup>1</sup> This text will be of more use to me than to them, when I have refuted those who falsify it. For they maintain that it was thus written, Were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh or of a man, but of God,<sup>2</sup> as though it referred to the above-mentioned believers in his name:<sup>3</sup> and from it they try to prove that there exists that mystic seed of the elect and spiritual which they baptize for themselves. But how can it mean this, when those who believe in the name of the Lord are all of them by the common law of human kind born of blood and of the will of the flesh and of a man, as also is Valentinus himself? Consequently the singular is correct, as referring to the Lord--was born . . . of God. Rightly so, because the Word is God's, and with the Word is God's Spirit, and in the Spirit is God's power, and God's everything that Christ is. As flesh, however, he was not born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh and of a man, because the Word was made flesh by the will of God: for it is to his flesh, not to the Word, that this denial of a nativity after our pattern applies; and the reason is that it was the flesh, not the Word, which might have been expected to be born that way. 'But in denying, among other things, that he was born of the will of the flesh, surely it also denies that he was born of the substance of flesh.' No: because neither does the denial that he was born of blood involve any repudiation of the substance of flesh, but of the material of the seed, which material it is agreed is the heat of the blood, as it were by despumation changed into a coagulator of the woman's blood. For from the coagulator there is in cheese a function of that substance, namely milk, which by chemical action it causes to solidify. We understand, then, a denial that the Lord's nativity was the result of coition (which is the meaning of the will of a man and of the flesh), but no denial that it was by a partaking of the womb. And why indeed does the evangelist with such amplification insist that the Lord was born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh or of a man, except that his flesh was such as no one would suspect was not born of coition? Consequently, his denial that it was born of coition involves no

1 John 1. 13 (v.1).      2 John 1. 13.      3 Cf. John 1. 12.

denial that it was born of the flesh, but rather an affirmation that it was born of the flesh, seeing he does not deny 'of flesh' in the same terms in which he denies 'of coition'. I put it to you: if the Spirit of God came down into the womb without the intention of partaking of flesh from the womb, why did he come down into the womb? For he might have been made spiritual flesh outside the womb with far less trouble than within it. To no purpose did he bring himself into a place from whence he took nothing out. But it was not to no purpose that he came down into the womb. Consequently he did receive something from it, because if he did not receive something from it it was to no purpose that he came down into it, the more so if he were going to be flesh of such a character as, being spiritual, had nothing in common with the womb.

20 But what sort of twistiness is yours, that you try to remove that syllable 'of', prefixed in the function of a preposition, and to substitute another, which in this connexion is not found in the holy Scriptures? You allege that he was born 'by the virgin' not 'of the virgin', and 'in the womb' not 'of the womb', on the ground that when the angel in a dream said to Joseph, For that which is born in her is of the holy Spirit,<sup>1</sup> he did not say 'of her'. Yet surely, though he had said 'of her' he would have meant 'in her': for that was in her which was of her. Equally then, when he says 'in her', the meaning 'of her' is included, because that which was in her was of her. Also it is in my favour that the same Matthew, when rehearsing the Lord's pedigree from Abraham down to Mary, says Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary of whom Christ is born.<sup>2</sup> Paul too imposes silence on these teachers of grammar: God, he says, sent his Son, made of a woman.<sup>3</sup> Does he say 'by a woman' or 'in a woman'? His language is indeed the more accurate in that he says 'made' in preference to 'born'. For it would have been simpler to pronounce that he was born: yet by saying 'made' he has both set his seal on The Word was made flesh,<sup>4</sup> and has asserted the verity of the flesh made of the Virgin. We, moreover, shall have in this connexion the support of the Psalms, not indeed those of that apostate and heretic and Platonic

1 Matt. 1. 20.      2 Matt. 1. 16.      3 Gal. 4. 4.      4 John 1. 14.

Valentinus, but of the most holy and canonical prophet David.

He, in our Church, sings of Christ, because by him Christ sang of himself. Take psalm twenty-one, and hear the Lord conversing with God the Father. For thou art he that didst rend me out of my mother's womb:1 there is one. And my hope is from my mother's breasts. I have been cast upon thee out of the womb:2 there is another. Thou art my God even from my mother's womb:3 there it is in other words. Now let us fight it out in view of the meanings themselves. Thou didst rend me, he says, out of the womb. What is it that is rent out, except that which inheres, which is fastened in, is entwined with that from which its removal requires it to be rent out? If he did not adhere to the womb, how was he rent out? If he who was rent out did adhere, how could he have adhered, except that while coming out of the womb he was knit by means of that umbilical cord, as it were an offshoot of his caul, to the womb where he originated? Even when something external is cemented to something external, it is so united in flesh and entrails with that to which it is cemented, that when it is rent away it forcibly takes with it [something] out of the body from which it is rent away, [as it were] a sort of corollary of broken unity and an aftermath of mutual coition. Moreover, since he also mentions his mother's breasts--undoubtedly implying that he sucked them--let midwives, physicians, and biologists bear witness concerning the nature of breasts, whether they are wont to flow except at the genital experience of the womb, from which the veins pay over into the teat that cess of the lower blood, and in the course of that transfer distill it into the more congenial material of milk. That is why, during lactation, the monthly periods cease. But if the Word was made flesh out of himself, and not out of what the womb contributed, how did a womb which had wrought nothing, performed nothing, experienced nothing, decant its fountain into those breasts in which it causes change only by the process of giving birth? It cannot have possessed blood for the supply of milk without also having reasons for the blood itself, namely the tearing away of flesh which was its own. What novelty there was in Christ, the novelty of his being born of a virgin, is plain:

1 Ps. 22. 9.      2 Ibid.      3 Ps. 22. 10.

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namely, this and nothing else, that he was born of a virgin according to the manner I have expounded, to the further intent that our regeneration should be virginal in a spiritual sense, sanctified from all defilements through Christ, himself virgin even in the flesh, because it was of a virgin's flesh that he was born.

21 If then they claim that novelty required that the Word of God should not be made flesh from the Virgin's flesh, any more than from a man's seed, I ask why the whole novelty should not consist in this, that flesh not born of seed has proceeded forth from flesh <born of seed>. Let them meet my attack at an even closer range. Behold, he says, the virgin shall conceive in the womb.<sup>1</sup> Conceive what? Evidently not a man's seed, but the Word of God. And certainly the intention was that she should bear a son, for it says, And shall bear a son? Therefore, as the act of giving birth was hers, because the fact of having conceived was hers, likewise that which she brought to birth is hers, even though that was not hers which she conceived. On the other hand, if the Word was made flesh out of himself, in that case he conceived and bore himself, and the prophecy is pointless. For the Virgin neither conceived anything nor bore anything unless that which she bore as a consequence of the conception of the Word is flesh which was hers. And this utterance of the prophet will not be the only one to be made pointless. What about that of the angel who announced the Virgin's conception and child-bearing?<sup>3</sup> And what about every single scripture which mentions the mother of Christ? For how is she his mother, except that he has been in her womb, <and to what purpose was he in her womb> if he has received from her womb nothing that should confer motherhood upon her in whose womb he was? Flesh from elsewhere has no right to use this name. Only flesh which is the daughter of the womb talks of 'my mother's womb': and certainly it is no daughter of the womb if it was born to itself. Thus Elisabeth too will keep silence, though she not only carries within her that infant who as a prophet is already conscious of his Lord,<sup>4</sup> but herself also is filled with the Holy Spirit: for without reason does she say, And whence is it to me that

1 Isa. 7. 14; Matt. 1. 23.      2 Ibid.

3 Cf. Matt. 1. 20; Luke 1. 31.      4 Cf. Luke 1. 41, 44.

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the mother of my Lord should come to me?<sup>1</sup> If Mary was carrying Jesus in her womb not as a son but as a guest, what can Elisabeth mean by Blessed is the fruit of thy womb?<sup>2</sup> What sort of fruit of a womb is this, which has neither germinated from the womb, nor struck root in the womb, nor belongs to her whose the womb is? In what sense, really, is Christ the fruit of her womb? Is it not because he is himself the flower from the stem which came forth from the root of Jesse,<sup>3</sup> while the root of Jesse is the house of David, and the stem from the root is Mary, descended from

David, that the flower from the stem, the Son of Mary, who is called Jesus Christ, must himself also be the fruit? For flower is fruit, because by means of the flower and from the flower every fruit is perfected into fruit. What then? They deny to the fruit its own flower, to the flower its own stem, and to the stem its own root, so as to preclude the root from laying claim, by means of its own stem, to the ownership of that which is from the stem, namely the flower and the fruit: whereas in fact the whole ladder of descent is counted back from the final to the principal, that now at length these persons may know that the flesh of Christ adheres not only to Mary, but also to David through Mary and to Jesse through David. Thus it is that God swears to David that this fruit out of his loins, that is, out of the posterity of his flesh, will sit upon his throne.<sup>4</sup> If he is out of the loins of David, the more so is he out of the loins of Mary, for on her account he is reckoned as having been in David's loins.

22 Thus even though they delete also the testimony of the devils who cry out to Jesus 'son of David', yet they will not be able to delete the testimony of the apostles, if the devils' testimony is beneath their notice. Matthew himself, to begin with, a most trustworthy compiler of the Gospel, as having been a companion of the Lord, for no other reason than of making us cognisant of Christ's origin according to the flesh begins thus: The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.<sup>5</sup> The fact that, by a descent which flows from these sources of origin, the sequence is brought down step by step to the nativity of

1 Luke 1. 43.      2 Luke 1. 42.      3 Cf. Isa. 11. 1.

4 Cf. Ps. 132. 11; Acts 2. 30.      5 Matt. 1. 1.

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Christ, can only mean that the very flesh of Abraham and David is registered as making an offshoot of itself through each several ancestor right down to the Virgin, and as bringing in Christ--nay rather, Christ himself comes forth--from the Virgin. Paul also, being a disciple and teacher and witness of the same Gospel, because he is an apostle of the self-same Christ, attests that Christ is of the seed of David according to the flesh<sup>1</sup>--evidently Christ's own flesh. Consequently Christ's flesh is of the seed of David. But it is of the seed of David in consequence of the flesh of Mary, and therefore it is of Mary's flesh, seeing it is of the seed of David. In whatever direction you twist the expression, either his flesh is of Mary's flesh because it is of David's seed, or else it is of David's seed because it is of Mary's flesh. The same apostle resolves this



whole controversy by defining Christ himself to be Abraham's seed: and since he is Abraham's, evidently much more is he David's, who is the more recent. For when tracing back the promise of the blessing of the nations in the seed of Abraham-- And in thy seed shall all the nations be blessed<sup>2</sup>--he says, He said not seeds, as of many, but seed, of one, which is Christ.<sup>3</sup> What quality of flesh must and can we, who (in spite of our opponents' objections) read and believe this, acknowledge in Christ? Evidently no other than Abraham's, in that Christ is the seed of Abraham: nor other than Jesse's, in that Christ is the flower out of the root of Jesse:<sup>4</sup> nor other than David's, in that Christ is the fruit out of the loins of David:<sup>5</sup> nor other than Mary's, in that Christ is from Mary's womb: and, still higher up, no other than Adam's, in that Christ is the second Adam.<sup>6</sup> It follows, therefore, that they must either claim that those others had flesh composed of spirit, so that the same quality of substance may be brought down into Christ, or else admit that Christ's flesh was not composed of spirit, since its descent is not recounted from a spiritual stock.

23 We recognize here the fulfilment of the prophetic word of Simeon which he pronounced over the still new-born infant Lord: Behold, this child is set for the ruin and raising up of many in

1 Rom. 1. 3; cf. 2 Tim. 2. 8.      2 Gen. 22. 18.

3 Gal. 3. 16.      4 Cf. Isa. 11. 1.

5 Cf. Ps. 132. 11.      6 1 Cor. 15. 45.

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Israel, and for a sign that is being spoken against.<sup>1</sup> The sign is that of the nativity of Christ, according to Isaiah: Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign: behold, a virgin shall conceive in the womb and shall bear a son.<sup>2</sup> Consequently we recognize as a sign capable of being spoken against the conception and child-bearing of Mary the virgin, concerning which these Academics say, 'She bare and bare not, virgin and no virgin.' And yet, even though this expression were tolerable, it would be one more suitable for us to use: for she bare, seeing she did so of her own flesh, and she bare not, seeing she did so not of a man's seed, a virgin as regards her husband, not a virgin as regards child-bearing: not however that the expression 'bare and bare not' implies that it was not of her flesh, or that 'virgin and not virgin' means that she was not from her own bowels a mother. With us, however, there is nothing doubtful, or that is twisted back into a plea that can recoil upon

those who make it: light is light and darkness is darkness,<sup>3</sup> and yea is yea and nay is nay, and what is more than this is on the side of evil.<sup>4</sup> She bore which did bear: and if as a virgin she conceived, in her child-bearing she became a wife. For she became a wife by that same law of the opened body, in which it made no difference whether the violence was of the male let in or let out: the same sex performed that unsealing. This in fact is the womb by virtue of which it is written also concerning other wombs: Everything male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord.<sup>5</sup> Who is truly holy, except that holy Son of God? Who in a strict sense has opened a womb, except him who opened this that was shut? For all other women marriage opens it. Consequently, hers was the more truly opened in that it was the more shut. Indeed she is rather to be called not-virgin than virgin, having become a mother by a sort of leap, before she was a bride. Why need we discuss this any further? In stating, on these considerations, not that the Son of God was born of a virgin, but of a woman,<sup>6</sup> the apostle acknowledges the nuptial experience of the opened womb. We read indeed in Ezekiel of that heifer which bare and bare not:<sup>7</sup> but it is more than likely that by this expression

1 Luke 2. 34.      2 Isa. 7. 14.      3 cf. Isa. 5. 20.      4 Cf. Matt. 5. 37.

5 Ex. 13. 2; Luke 2. 23.      6 Cf. Gal. 4. 4.      7 Not in Ezekiel.

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the Holy Spirit, even then having you in mind, censured such as should argue about Mary's womb. Otherwise he<sup>1</sup> would not, with the opposite of his usual clarity, have made a hesitating statement: for Isaiah says, Shall conceive and bear.<sup>2</sup>

24 For by the weapons he<sup>1</sup> hurls in other places also for the bruising of the heretics' persons (not to speak of their opinions), and in the first place, Woe unto them that make sweet bitter and darkness light,<sup>3</sup> he censures of course these who fail to keep even words in the clarity of their proper meaning, that soul should be no other than the soul which is so called, and flesh no other than the flesh which is visible, and God no other than he who is preached. Consequently, this time with an eye to Marcion, he says, I am God, and other apart from me there is not.<sup>4</sup> And when he repeats this in other terms, Before me there was no god,<sup>5</sup> he is having a knock at those I know not what genealogies of aeons, of the Valentinians. And, Was born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh or of a man, but of God,<sup>6</sup> was his answer to Ebion. No less, Even if an angel from heaven preach the gospel to you otherwise than we, let him

be anathema,<sup>7</sup> is directed against the energeme of Apelles' virgin Philumena. Certainly, Whoso denies that Christ is come in the flesh, this same is antichrist,<sup>8</sup> using the word 'flesh' unadorned and unqualified and in the straightforward sense of its own nature, strikes a blow at all who initiate discussions about it: as also when he defines that Christ himself is one,<sup>9</sup> he overthrows these arguers for a multiform Christ, who make Christ one and Jesus another; one who slipped away from the midst of the multitude, another who was arrested; one who having withdrawn to the mountain was glorious in the midst of a cloud in the sight of three witnesses, another who was commonly visible to the rest; <one well known, another> unknown; one courageous, but another anxious; and, at the last, one who suffered, and another who was raised again, whereby they affirm also their own resurrection into other flesh. But it is in my favour that the same will come from heaven as did suffer, the same will be evident to all as was raised up again,<sup>10</sup>

1 he--i.e. the Holy Spirit.      2 Isa. 7. 14.      3 Isa. 5. 20.

4 Isa. 45. 5, 6.      5 Isa. 43. 10.      6 John 1. 14.      7 Gal. 1. 8.

8 1 John 4. 3. 9 Cf. 1 Cor. 8. 6.      10 Cf. Acts 1. 11.

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and that those who pierced him. will look upon him and recognize him,<sup>1</sup> without doubt the same flesh upon which they wrought their savagery, for without it he can neither be nor be recognized as himself: so that those also may be put to confusion who affirm that his flesh is seated in heaven void of perception, like a scabbard with Christ withdrawn, or that his flesh and soul are indistinguishable, or that there exists only soul, but flesh no longer.

25 But enough of the present subject. For I think I have now furnished sufficient proof that the flesh of Christ was both born of the Virgin and was human. The discussion of this in itself ought to have been sufficient, without that tackling of individual hostile opinions to which, beyond the requirements of my case, I have challenged them in terms both of their own arguments and of the texts of Scripture which they employ: and thus not only have I proved what Christ's flesh was and whence it came, but I shall be found also to have established a previous judgement against them all as to what it was not. But, that the conclusion of my argument may recall its preamble, the resurrection of our flesh, which I shall have to defend under a different brief, will here be found to have had its foundation laid, it being manifest now,

if not before, what sort of thing that was which rose again in Christ.

1 Cf. Zech. 12. 10; John 19. 37.