

OF THE CHURCH

CCCLXVI.

The true church is an assembly or congregation depending on that which does not appear, nor may be comprehended in the mind, namely, God's Word; what that says, they believe without addition, giving God the honor.

CCCLXII.

We tell our Lord God plainly, that if he will have his church, he must maintain and defend it; for we can neither uphold nor protect it; if we could, indeed, we should become the proudest asses under heaven. But God says: I say it, I do it; it is God only that speaks and does what he pleases; he does nothing according to the fancies of the ungodly, or which they hold for upright and good.

CCCLXVIII.

The great and worldly-wise people take offence at the poor and mean form of our church, which is subject to many infirmities, transgressions, and sects, wherewith she is plagued; for they say the church should be altogether pure, holy, blameless, God's dove, etc. And the church, in the eyes and sight of God, has such an esteem; but in the eyes and sight of the world, she is like unto her bridegroom, Christ Jesus, torn, spit on, derided, and crucified.

The similitude of the upright and true church and of Christ, is a poor silly sheep; but the similitude of the false and hypocritical church, is a serpent, an adder.

CCCLXIX.

Where God's word is purely taught, there is also the upright and true church; for the true church is supported by the Holy Ghost, not by succession of inheritance. It does not follow, though St Peter had been bishop at Rome, and at the same time Christian communion had been at Rome, that, therefore, the pope and the Romish church are true; for if that should be of value or conclusive, then they must needs confess that Caiaphas, Annas, and the Sadducees were also the true church; for they boasted that they were descended from Aaron.

CCCLXX.

It is impossible for the Christian and true church to subsist without the shedding of blood, for her adversary, the devil, is a liar and a murderer. The church grows and increases through blood; she is sprinkled with blood; she is spoiled and bereaved of her blood; when human creatures will reform the church, then it costs blood.

CCCLXXI.

The form and aspect of the world is like a paradise; but the true Christian church, in the eye of the world, is foul, deformed, and offensive; yet, nevertheless, in the sight of God, she is precious, beloved, and highly esteemed. Aaron, the high priest, appeared gloriously in the temple, with his ornaments and rich attire, with odoriferous and sweet-smelling perfumes; but Christ appeared most mean and lowly.

Wherefore I am not troubled that the world esteems the church so meanly; what care I that the usurers, the nobility, gentry, citizens, country-people, covetous men, and drunkards, condemn and esteem me as dirt? In due time, I will esteem them as little. We must not suffer ourselves to be deceived or troubled as to what the world thinks of us. To please the good is our virtue.

CCCLXXII.

The church is misery on earth, first, that we may keep in mind we are banished servants, and exiled out of Paradise for Adam's sake. Secondly, that we may always remember the misery of the Son of God, who, for our sake, was made man, walked in this vale of misery, suffered for us, died, and rose again from the dead, and so brought us again to our paternal home, whence we were driven. Thirdly, that we may remember our habitation is not of this world, but that we are here only as strangers and pilgrims; and that there is another and everlasting life prepared for us.

CCCLXXIII.

The very name, the church, is the highest argument and proof of all hypocrites. The pharisees, the scribes, yea, the whole senate of Jerusalem, cried out against Stephen, and said: "This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law." Cain, Ishmael, Saul, the Turks, and Jews, bore and do bear the name and title of the church. But Moses finely solves this agreement: "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God, they have provoked me to anger with their vanities; and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people: I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation." Here was *quid pro quo*; as if God should say: "Could ye find in your hearts to forsake me? so can I again forsake you;" for God and nation, the Word and the church, are *correlativea*;" the one cannot be without the other.

CCCLXXIV.

The amaranth is a flower that grows in August; it is more a stalk than a flower, is easily broken off, and grows in joyful and pleasant sort; when all other flowers are gone and decayed, then this, being sprinkled with water, becomes fair and green again; so that in

winter they used to make garlands thereof. It is called amaranth from this, that it neither withers nor decays.

I know nothing more like unto the church than this flower, amaranth. For although the church bathes her garment in the blood of the Lamb, and is colored over with red, yet she is more fair, comely, and beautiful than any state and assembly upon the face of the earth. She alone is embraced and beloved of the Son of God, as his sweet and amiable spouse, in whom only he takes joy and delight, and whereupon his heart alone depends; he utterly rejects and loathes others, that condemn or falsify his gospel.

Moreover, the church willingly suffers herself to be plucked and broken off, that is, she is loving, patient, and obedient to Christ her bridegroom in the cross; she grows and increases again, fair, joyful, and pleasant, that is, she gains the greatest fruit and profit thereby; she learns to know God aright, to call upon him freely and undauntedly, to confess his word and doctrine, and produces many fair and glorious virtues.

At last, the body and stalk remain whole and sound, and cannot be rooted out, although raging and swelling be made against some of the members, and these be torn away. For like as the amaranth never withers or decays, even so, the church can never be destroyed or rooted out. But what is most wonderful, the amaranth has this quality, that when it is sprinkled with water, and dipped therein, it becomes fresh and green again, as if it were raised and wakened from the dead. Even so likewise the church will by God be raised and wakened out of the grace, and become living again; will everlastingly praise, extol, and laud the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, his Son and our Redeemer, together with the Holy Ghost. For though temporal empires, kingdoms, and principalities have their changings, and like flowers soon fall and fade away, this kingdom, which is so deep-rooted, by no power can be destroyed or wasted, but remains eternally.

CCCLXXV.

An olive tree will live and bear fruit two hundred years; `tis an image of the church; oil symbolizes the gentle love of the Gospel, as wine emblems the doctrine of the law. There is such a natural unity and affinity between the vine and the olive tree, that when the branch of a vine is grafted upon an olive tree, it bears both grapes and olives. In like manner, when the church, which is God's Word, is planted in people's hearts, then it teaches both the law and the Gospel, using both doctrines, and from both winning fruit. The chestnut tree, in that it produces all the better fruit when it is soundly beaten, shadows forth man submissive to the law, whose actions are not agreeable to God, until he has been tried by tribulation. The lemon tree, with its fruit, figures Christ; the lemon tree has the property of bearing fruit at all seasons; when its fruits are ripe, they drop off, and are succeeded by a fresh growth; and this fruit is a sure remedy against poison. Jesus Christ, when his ministers and champions depart from earth, replaces them by others; his produce is ever growing, and it is a sure remedy against the poison of the devil.

CCCLXXVI.

I much marvel that the pope extols his church at Rome as the chief, whereas the church at Jerusalem is the mother; for there the doctrine was first revealed, and set forth by Christ, the son of God himself, and by his apostles. Next was the church at Antioch, whence the Christians have their name. Thirdly, was the church at Alexandria; and still before the Romish were the churches of the Galatians, of the Corinthians, Ephesians, of the Philippians, etc. Is it so great a matter that St Peter was at Rome? which, however, has never yet been, nor ever will be proved, whereas our blessed Saviour Christ himself, was at Jerusalem, where all the articles of our Christian faith were made; where St James received his orders, and was bishop, and where the pillars of the church had their seat.

CCCLXXVII.

The papists rely upon this: the church cannot err; we are the church, *ergo*, we cannot err. To the *major*, I make this answer: true, the church cannot err in doctrine, but in works and actions she may easily err, yea, and often does err; and therefore she prays: "Forgive us our trespasses," etc. The *minor* I utterly deny. Therefore when they argue and say: What the church teaches uprightly and pure, is true, this we admit; but when they argue and say: what the church does is upright and true, this we deny.

CCCLXXVIII.

Many boast of their title to the church, whereas they know not the true church; the holy prophets much opposed the false church. The prophet Isaiah, in the beginning of his first chapter, describes two sorts of churches. The upright and true church is a very small heap and number, of little or no esteem, and lying under the cross. But the false church is pompous, boasting, and presuming; she flourishes, and is held in high repute, like Sodom, of which St Paul complains, Romans viii. and ix. The true church consists in God's election and calling; she is powerful and strong in weakness.

CCCLXXIX.

One of the juggling of the sophists, wherewith the ungodly wretches deceive simple people, is this: a kingdom, say they, which is plagued and tormented, is a temporal kingdom. The Christian church is plagued and tormented: *ergo*, Christ's kingdom is a temporal kingdom. But I answer them: No, not so; the kingdom of Christ is not plagued, but our bodies, by reason of our sins, are plagued and tormented. As St Paul says: "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." He says not that the kingdom of God suffers externally. It is equally false when they say, God is love, God justifies, therefore love justifies. Such, and the like fallacies, may sometimes puzzle even understanding minds, well exercised and practiced; therefore we must take time to answer them, for every one cannot so suddenly detect them

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