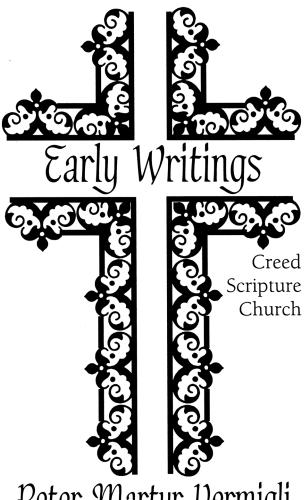
The Peter Martyr Library Volume One

Early Writings



The Peter Martyr Library Volume One



Peter Martyr Vermigli

Translated by Mariano Di Gangi and Joseph C. McLelland Edited, with Introduction and Notes, by Joseph C. McLelland Biographical Introduction by Philip M. J. McNair

> **VOLUME XXX** SIXTEENTH CENTURY ESSAYS & STUDIES KIRKSVILLE, MISSOURI USA ◆ 1994

ing and introduces paragraphs) was used for this translation, and collated with the first edition of 1544.²⁶

Mariano Di Gangi first translated the treatise in 1949, as an appendix to his Bachelor of Divinity thesis for The Presbyterian College, Montreal. The present translation has had the benefit of careful editing by Professor Rita Belladonna of York University, Toronto. Dr. Di Gangi was assisted in his task by two secretaries, Cathy Knox and Grace Cherian, to whom thanks are due.

The goal of translation, to allow the author to speak in his own words while using contemporary modes of speech, must steer between the poles of Latinism on the one hand and paraphrase on the other. We have aimed at a balance, attempting to follow the author's meaning while providing a smoother reading—Martyr's own style tends to be ponderous, with overuse of connectives and superlatives. The thorny problem of inclusive language has also been in our minds. While we try to use inclusive language whenever possible, it is anachronistic to change the masculine in historical documents, particularly since an inclusive intention seems clear in most cases. Hugh T. Kerr observes the "thoroughly masculinist" language of Calvin, and quotes Jane Dempsey Douglass on the problem this poses for the contemporary translator: "In a discussion of historical theology there seems no good reason to obscure this fact by modernizing the language. . . . such an attempt would merely obscure the realities of the thought world of the sixteenth century."²⁷ Finally, Martyr's frequent biblical quotations are usually from the Vulgate, sometimes from the Hebrew, and often from memory. We have translated them with due regard for his own words, relying on the Revised Standard Version for modern equivalence.

²⁶See BIB 130ff. for data and title pages.

²⁷H. T. Kerr, Calvin's Institutes: A New Compend (Louisville: Westminster, 1989), 14.

The Apostles' Creed

A Plain Exposition of the Twelve Articles of the Christian Faith

 $\int_{\it WILL\ NOT\ DIE}$ but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done. (Non moriar, sed vivam, et narrabo opera Domini) —Psalm 117.

To my Christian readers, grace and peace through Jesus Christ our Lord. A Christiani Lettori. . . (1544), 3–6; (1833), 7–9.

1. The condition and counsel of the wise and prudent is inconsistent with careless living. On the contrary, it is clear that all their decisions and actions are distinguished by the fact that they can be ascribed to proper motives and sound reasons. Everyone expects this to be so in the case of great men, espe-

The chapter is a translation of *Una Semplice Dichiaratione sopra gli XII Articoli della Fede Christiana*. *Di M. Pietro Martyre Vermigli Firentino* (Basel: [Johan Hervagius], February 1544). 4°, approx. 11.5 x 18 cm; gatherings a–z.4, 181 pp. We use the 1883 edition, which is vol. 3 of the Biblioteca della Riforma Italiana series (Rome and Florence: Claudiana), collated with the 1544 original. The 1883 edition modernizes spelling and introduces paragraphs. Its page breaks are indicated by square-bracketed numbers within the text. Section numbers, from *Loci Communes*, ed. R. Masson (1576), 2.18, are also included for convenience. An English translation is "A Briefe and Most Excellent Exposition of the XII Articles of our Fayth, Commonly Called the Apostles Creede" (London: H. Jackson,1578). Thereafter it appears in the various editions of the LC, and in the CP of A. Marten (London, 1583), 2.18.

cially when they deal with matters of considerable importance. Yet how does it happen, my dearest brothers, that many Christians today have turned away from the effort to understand what their faith contains? Why is it that they hardly care to know the importance and the implications of being a Christian? [8] Christianity is nevertheless a profession of wisdom, heavenly and divine. The end it holds in view is not any degree or condition whatever, but man's ultimate happiness, desired by all. It deals not with treasures of gold, jewels, or silver, but with the heavenly kingdom. The sum total and impact of Christianity bears not merely on the use of a day, or the way one lives through a week, but on the ordering of our entire life. Therefore, everyone who bears the name or mark of Christian should constantly give himself to the diligent study of the faith. If he finds himself diffident in this regard, let him share his need with those who can help.

Many excuse their ignorance and negligence by saying that today few can be found who are willing or able to give spiritual aid to anyone who gropes in the darkness of our common blindness. So that their negligence and ignorance may be left without excuse, and that I may not be unjustly accused of thoughtlessly and godlessly withholding help, and since I was both enabled and obliged to do so by the immortal bond of Christian charity, I will now expound the brief but significant affirmations of the Christian faith, commonly called articles, in the short treatise that follows. For the consolation of many, I shall clearly present these matters which are discussed, read, and heard, but (for the most part) [9] hardly ever understood. In what follows, I will explain these truths in due order and strive to declare them as clearly as the Spirit of Christ our Lord will enable me. Of his favor I doubt not, since I am aware that all this has been inspired by the thought of his glory and the good of his holy Church. Therefore, I am certain that the fabric of our discourse will be woven to the end by the moving of his Spirit, just as it was by his inspiration that it was begun. [11]

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth

All the statements and articles of our faith are for no other purpose than to make known our blessed Lord God. Although we cannot fully comprehend his incomprehensible being, yet we can truly taste and see his goodness as he reveals himself to us. Since the godhead comprises the Father, the Son, and

¹La bramata da tutti Final beatitudine; the familiar category, both Aristotelian and Reformed, of human "felicitas" (eudaimonia); see Aristotle Nichomachean Ethics 1.4.1095–13ff.

the Holy Spirit, three persons of a common essence,² whatever we believe relates to one of the three. This first article, which refers particularly to the Father, brings to mind four great truths: first, the one in whom you believe is truly God; second, he is also Father; third, he is omnipotent; lastly, he is the author and originator of all things created.

Now let us see in detail just what it means to say: "I believe in God." What we are saying is simply this, that we recognize God as God. But what is the meaning of "God"? Putting aside the infinite, incomprehensible, and profound abyss opened up by this question, as well as all the subtlety of human wisdom, you can confidently conclude—without straining your brain—that God is the eternal good from whom alone all other good proceeds. From this [12] one can see that if we put anything above God, or even on a par with him, we cannot rightly and sincerely say "I believe in God."

If you regard God as the supreme good, you will not put anything above or beside him. Nor do you show true belief in this article if you put your hope in something or someone other than God, since all hope must relate to the source of all good. If, as we have said, God is the good from whom all good comes down to us, whoever seeks good elsewhere does not consistently trust in him. Moreover, those who look to their own righteousness, effort, and works, and ascribe to their own merit the blessings they enjoy, know nothing of the meaning of the first statement of our Creed. And what shall we say of those who, according to some vain designs or philosophical, political, or earthly conclusions, have been led astray in their quest for good? These have set for themselves goals in which they find uneasy rest when achieved, or which they strive to obtain in their quest. Obviously, they do not have God as their God, but fix on fantasies and speculations of the mind instead. Please understand that it is no small matter to have the true God as your God. David was right when he wrote in Psalm 144: "Happy the people whose God is the Lord."3

2. This is how we understand what it means to believe in God. But why should we call him "Father"? We do this mainly for two reasons: first, because he is the Father of Jesus Christ our Lord, the second person of the godhead; the other reason is that it has pleased him to be and to be called our Father, since he shares with us both likeness and inheritance. Thus Paul, writing to the Romans, calls us [13] "heirs of God" and Peter in his epistle calls us

²Tre persone d'una medesima sostanza.

³Ps. 144:15.

"partakers of the divine nature." These, of course, are the two main things fathers give their children: first, likeness of character, and then endowment as heirs. The likeness that the regenerate have from God the Father is seen in wisdom, righteousness, simplicity, strength, charity, and affections heavenly and divine by which they show themselves to have been created in God's image. The longed-for inheritance promised by the Father is a life blessed and everlasting.

This is far different from mere human generation. Certainly, the heritage of eternal life is something other than receiving fields, vineyards, houses, cattle, money, and other goods usually bequeathed in another's will. All these benefits of providence we receive through him, but now we speak of why he is particularly called the Father of the renewed in Christ. Whoever believes this fervently will not pervert these beautiful gifts of our Father nor appear as less than a legitimate son by insensitive and unseemly acts, as many do today. Our Christ calls us to resemble the Father, saying, "Be perfect as is your heavenly Father."5 Nor does he withhold the promise of a rich and beautiful inheritance, since our Lord said to Peter: "Whoever has left his goods for my name's sake will not only receive a hundredfold, but shall also possess life everlasting." Whoever truly believes and hopes for this inheritance does not grow arrogant because of his worldly prosperity. Nor do the righteous, [14] endowed with such a hope, become too upset over severe adversities. They have set their hearts on greater goods. Nor do they suppose that the toils and tribulations of this life may ever equal or match the promised mercies in the world to come.

3. Now we come to the third consideration, that we believe in God Almighty.

First, by his power God produced all that heaven and earth contain. If he chooses to protect me from all evil and provide me with every good, since I am his handiwork he can undoubtedly do this, being omnipotent. Our faith rests on a sure and firm foundation. When we oppose human wisdom, the world, the flesh, the judgment of the senses, and the temptation of the devil, we fight back with this truth: the divine promises of Scripture. Paul reminds the Romans that Abraham glorified God, believing that he was able to perform perfectly all that he had promised, even though the promise could not be squared with the usual course and strength of nature.⁷ You should dismiss as

⁴Rom. 8:17; 2 Pet. 1:4.

⁵Matt. 5:48.

⁶Matt. 19:29.

⁷Rom. 4:18-21.

nonsense whatever troublesome men or your own disturbing thoughts suggest in contradiction to what the sacred oracles or divine promises contain. Concentrate instead on the infinite power and benevolent plan of the God in whom you profess to believe. Remember that miracles are not wrought, nor prayers answered, unless we rely wholly on the omnipotent power and fatherly affection of God. As Christ says in the Gospel, "All things are possible to him who believes." [15]

4. The last part of this first article remains yet to be expounded: "Creator of heaven and earth." Here we clear away the mist of error caused by the schools of those philosophers who allege that the world never had a beginning, or that it is impossible for the world to have been created ex nihilo. 9 Our eyes—I am speaking of believers—perceive far more accurately than theirs. It is useless to measure the planning and power of God by the yardstick of nature's works. We believe that if he is the one who created, he is also the one who conserves. Beyond all doubt, if his might did not govern all that he created, everything would immediately fall back into the nothingness out of which he drew them. From this article of faith you may also gather another happy conclusion. If all has been created by God, and he is your true and kind Father, then everything he has made must work together for your good. By the kindness of God, virtually all was made subject to the first Adam. But that ungrateful man deprived both himself and us of that rich and full heritage by his most grievous fall. That inheritance was later restored to us by Christ, as Paul so plainly shows to the Romans. With lively and intense reasoning he declared that the grace of Christ superabounds over the sinfulness of Adam. He also tells them that all things work together for good to those who really love God. ¹⁰ So now it is our duty to use God's creation wisely and justly, for one another's comfort and benefit, giving praise and thanksgiving to the divine goodness for allowing us to use created things, and for its bounty. As Paul wrote in his first letter to Timothy, God created all good things so that the faithful [16] might enjoy them with due gratitude. II None of these things should be rejected as inherently evil. Even if they were to be tainted, they can be sanctified by the Word and prayer. Furthermore, the creation serves not only to sustain our earthly existence, but also bears strong witness to the per-

⁸Mark 0:22

⁹E.g., Plato's Demiurge shaped preexistent matter (*Timaeus* 28Cff.); Aristotle taught that the world was eternal; see, e.g., *Phys.* i.8 (191b.10ff.): "Nothing can be said without qualification to come from what is not."

¹⁰Rom . 5:12-21; 8:28.

¹¹ Tim. 4:4, 5.

fection, skill, and unique goodness of our blessed Father, a witness not to be despised since it is absolutely true.

5. The next article pertains to the person of the Son:

I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD, WHO WAS CONCEIVED OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY, SUFFERED UNDER POINTIUS PILATE, WAS CRUCIFIED, DIED, AND WAS BURIED. HE DESCENDED TO HELL. ON THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD. HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN AND SITS AT THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE FATHER ALMIGHTY. FROM THERE HE WILL COME AT LAST TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD.

These articles, in which we confess what is necessary for our salvation concerning the second divine person (already acknowledged as Son), contain five phrases of greatest importance that call for careful consideration. First, that this Son of God, the blessed Christ Jesus, is our right and lawful Lord. Next, that he was born for our good. Third, he endured all that he suffered on our account. Fourth, he rose above the skies for our benefit. Finally, he will personally return at the day of judgment for our redemption. [17]

Let us consider the first part, that this Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, is our true Lord. If we would proceed in orderly sequence, we must first see just who it is that we call "our Lord," and then we shall more easily discern whether or not such noble prerogatives belong to him. On this point, according to our confession of faith, we must acknowledge this Jesus Christ of ours as a unique [singolar] person in whom the divine and human natures are indissolubly united. John the Evangelist refers to this in his first chapter when he says: "The Word became flesh." 12 By "Word" and "flesh" he means nothing other than these two natures—deity and humanity in the one person of Christ-now eternally united. By "Word" we clearly understand that he is God, as the Evangelist himself wrote: "The Word was with God and the Word was God."13 Now all who study the Holy Scriptures with alert minds will know that human nature is often referred to as "flesh." In this connection, let me give you some specific references. The first of these is in Isaiah, who wrote: "All flesh shall see that God has spoken." The second comes from Joel, who writes: "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh." ¹⁴ In both of these texts, "flesh"

¹²John 1:14.

¹³John 1:1.

¹⁴ Isa. 40:5; Joel 2:28.

plainly means humanity. So it is evident that when the Evangelist John says: "The Word became flesh," he means precisely what we have already explained, that the two natures, human and divine, were conjoined and united in Christ. [18]

6. The following phrases undoubtedly prove that he shared in human nature. I refer to the allusions regarding his suffering, death, and burial. Nor do the foes of Christianity—I mean the majority and most astute of them oppose the truth of the humanity of Christ. Even those who have at times dared to do so have been persuaded otherwise without too much difficulty. But those who have questioned repeatedly the divinity of Christ have been more numerous and harder to persuade. Nevertheless, their lying opinion (to the everlasting shame of those who profess it) has to yield to the clear and salutary light of Holy Scripture. Beyond the testimony of John the Evangelist that the Word is God, there is also that of Paul to the Romans. He writes that Christ took his origin from the Jewish people so far as his humanity is concerned, and then adds: "He is God, blessed forever. Amen." ¹⁵ Surely these two clear texts should be sufficient to confirm the souls of believers in the truth. But many other sacred passages also help us, if we take time to consider them. I will leave such consideration to my judicious and godly readers of the sacred books, content to mention one more reason that should convince and constrain us to confess that Christ is God.

We know that God repeatedly warns us against putting our confidence in things created. He particularly warns us about trusting in men. Jeremiah, for example, openly declares: "Cursed is he whose arm and strength rely [19] on flesh." David strongly condemns trusting in mere men, even if they are princes. ¹⁶ If Christ were only human, we should be forbidden to hope in him. But in the Scriptures we are not only permitted but actually commanded to put loyal faith and lively hope in Jesus our Christ, or Messiah as the Jews would say. As a matter of fact, whoever does not believe or hope in him remains under God's wrath. So we may conclude that this unique person of whom we now speak has within himself true divinity and true humanity.

7. For this very reason, according to the Scriptures and in everyday parlance as well, he is known by these two glorious names: "Christ" and "Jesus." One of these, "Jesus," means nothing less than Savior, because he has liberated the children of God from their sins and consequently from all evils.

¹⁵Rom. 9:5.

¹⁶Jer. 17:5; Ps. 146:3.

To Joseph, engaged to marry Mary the virgin, the angel said: "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." ¹⁷ I have added "from all evils" because there is no evil that does not flow from sin. Whoever takes away the root of evil also removes all consequent evils. Though we cannot completely enjoy it now, the fullness of this liberation will eventually be experienced by us, after the blessed and holy resurrection. His other name, "Christ," presents him as the king anointed and consecrated by God. This title he rightly deserves, since he sends and directs the true children of God to eternal life by the clear promptings of his Spirit and his words. From his two names, and the two natures united in his person, we clearly see why he should [20] also be given the beautiful title of "our Lord."

8. First of all, there is no doubt as to his divinity. Often in the Old Testament God is called "Lord" because he is the true owner of all that he has created. This title, furthermore, becomes the man whose unique person also embraces divinity. He was not only sinless, but filled with all goodness. Now tell me, if there were such a man in the world, so superior to all the rest, would he not seem to you to be endowed with lordly qualities and gifts? I believe so, since whoever is free from sins is not a slave. Slavery first came into the world through sin, and whoever is rich in divine qualities can freely help others. That is why rulers, if carefully chosen, are exalted above their subjects; they are so free of defects that they cannot harm their subjects, and so rich in virtue that they can aid all those committed to their care.

There is no need to be wordy in order to prove that Christ was free from sin. First of all, as the Evangelist Matthew in chapter 1 testifies, he was conceived of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ He was not stained with original sin, nor did he commit sins when living on earth. Peter affirms that he did not sin, and Paul concurs. Writing to the Corinthians, he says, "God, for our sake, made him to be sin who knew no sin." And John the Baptist presented him to his disciples as the innocent Lamb of God, destined to take away the sins of the world. ²⁰ It was required that he should be sinless, just as the victim offered to God in sacrifice [21] had to be absolutely unblemished. The eternal Father testified with supernatural voice to his delight in him because he was innocent, pure, and holy, pleasing in his sight. Nor is there any doubt about the divine attributes

¹⁷Matt. 1:21.

¹⁸Matt. 1:20.

¹⁹1 Pet. 2:22; 2 Cor. 5:21.

²⁰John 1:29.

and qualities that were his enduring characteristics. Writing to the Colossians, Paul calls him "the image of the invisible God." This is appropriate, in view of his sanctity and excellence. Has there ever been, or will there ever be, a son who is a more perfect image of his father? We acknowledge and confess him as the only Son of God, truly God and truly man. As to his divine nature, he has no brothers. He is the one and only divine Word of whom we speak. Also among men—even though he has many brothers by adoption—he stands alone in the excellence of his grace, most pleasing to God. He is the perfect portrait and likeness of his eternal Father, so that he can be called truly unique. Whether it is on account of his sinlessness, or because he is filled with the riches of the divine treasury, he is worthy to be called our Lord.

9. Whoever has paid the price for a slave becomes his lawful master. No believer should ever doubt that Christ has redeemed us, miserable slaves once subject to sin and the devil. Paul reminds both the Romans and the Ephesians that Christ has obtained our release from the penalty of sin by his blood so freely shed for us on the cross.²² We must, therefore, rightly acknowledge him as our Master [Padrone].

Among the sons of kings and great princes, is it not lawful and common practice that the firstborn has lordship over his younger brothers? [22] Whoever has read both sacred and secular histories, as well as observed the governments of realms and kingdoms in this world, knows that this is the case. All believers are children of God, as both the Roman and Galatian letters plainly declare. The Romans are told "the Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." To the Galatians it is said, "So that you may be his children, God sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts."²³ As believers we are now all brothers and sisters by God's adoption. But the firstborn of all is Christ, as it is written in Romans: "We are conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."24 It is no wonder, then, that the apostle Paul—that holy and learned vessel elect of God—almost always in his letters calls God "Father" and then gives Jesus Christ the title "Lord." This usage we have retained in the Church, so that in our prayers when we make request or give thanks for what is already ours, we do it all through Jesus Christ our Lord.

²¹Col. 1:15.

²²Rom. 5:9; Eph. 1:7, 2:13.

²³Rom. 8:16; Gal. 4:6.

²⁴Rom. 8:29.

Since what has been affirmed of the Lordship of Jesus Christ is so clear and definite, which of us (having such a Master and Brother) can allow himself to become a slave of vile tyrants? Which of us will disown so great a head as Christ, to serve enemies already defeated and broken by him but still hostile to our best interests? Who among us will rebel against so gracious a Lord, and put himself under one who only conspires to destroy us, body and soul? I do not think that anyone who has tasted the sweetness of his sovereignty [la soavità di questa dolce signoria] could ever do so. Even as Christ Jesus [23] said, "My yoke is easy and my burdens are light." ²⁵ He speaks of a submission that is spontaneous and willing, as was prophesied in Psalm 110 according to the Old Testament revelation, where it is said to the Messiah: "Your people freely offer themselves." Paul says, "You are no longer under law, but under grace." ²⁶ Every pressure and weight involved in his lordship has been put not on our shoulders but on those of our Lord Jesus Christ. As Isaiah prophesied of him, "the government will be on his shoulders." Note well: it does not say that the burden will be on some miserable subjects. From such a mild and gentle kingship Christian princes should take their pattern and example for government, putting aside any tendency to tyranny. Turning from them, let us rejoice in him. By divine goodness we have been gathered into the happy army and under the banner of so noble a prince and so great a brother. He will spare neither goodwill nor great power to help us. Let us yield ourselves completely to him. We cannot serve in a better or more useful way. Let us serve him thoughtfully and diligently, obeying him heartily and revering him everlastingly because it is our duty and his deserving.

Conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary

10. This blessed Jesus Christ, both God and man, whom we have discovered from the oracles and testimonies of the Holy Scriptures to be our right and lawful Lord, with respect to his divinity has been the same yesterday and today and forever, but as it is said in the epistle to the Hebrews: "yet he was not without beginning [24] as to his humanity." Thus the apostle Paul, writing to the Galatians, says that "God sent him, made of a woman, made under the law." He says the same to the Romans: "by the eternal Father was he

²⁵Matt. 11:30.

²⁶Ps. 110:3; Rom. 6:15.

²⁷Isa. 9:6.

²⁸Heb. 13:8; the quotation marks seem to be misplaced; 4-7:13.

sent as the seed of David."29 So that we may be spared from uncertainties, doubts, and speculations on the subject of his birth, let us note the two affirmations made in the confession of our holy faith: first, that he was conceived by the work of the Holy Spirit; second, that he was born—and this of the virgin Mary. This is regularly confessed by us. It is taught unambiguously by the Gospel writers. Thus we understand him to be clean of sin and condemnation as regards his humanity. All the descendants of the first Adam were subject to sin and the wrath of God, without exception. But to spare the humanity of Christ from the common condition of our race, cleansing it from what is inherent in human nature, the divine wisdom devised an amazing and wondrous plan: the man who was joined to God and was to have both deity and humanity in the same person would be thus conceived. As the angel prophesied to the virgin Mary, so the Holy Spirit descended on her. With matchless skill, from her blood already made pure by most holy grace, he formed this unique and perfect man. Thus, by the God of mercy, the eternal Word assumed humanity. The womb of the virgin Mary became the divine furnace from which the Holy Spirit, out of sanctified flesh and blood, drew that body destined to be the obedient servant [25] of a no less noble soul. Thus none of the defects of the fallen Adam were transmitted to Christ, though the bodies of both were produced in a similar way. Our first father was miraculously formed from the earth, without the seed of man, but by the power of God. So also was the second Adam.

11. There is no need for me to discuss at length just how far the qualities and gifts of Christ's humanity exceeded the endowments granted Adam. Nor will I fully expound what can be read in the sacred history of the Gospels about the nativity and poverty of Christ, or those magnificent and glorious manifestations that revealed his divine majesty and angelic nature. Let me instead focus on what may be most useful for our consideration. Everyone reborn in Christ ought to contemplate the great love God has shown towards us. He did not loathe our nature, dirty and filthy because of sin, but instead purified it and clothed himself with it, so that we might share in his divine nature.

Deceived by the devil's lies, idolaters have supposed that the gods they adored sometimes took human form. But they did this not to cleanse but to contaminate mankind with the dregs of foul uncleanness. From the appearances of these gods described by the poets, idolaters gained nothing but

²⁹Gal. 4:4; Rom. 1:4.