

Apologetics and the Beginnings of Christian Philosophy

1. THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRISTIAN APOLOGY

What born fools were all who lived in ignorance of God! From the good things before their eyes they could not learn to know him who is, and failed to recognize the artificer though they observed his handiwork! Fire, wind, swift air, the circle of the starry signs, rushing water, or the great lights in heaven that rule the world—those they accounted gods. If it was through delight in the beauty of these things that people supposed them gods, they ought to have understood how much better is the Lord and master of them all; for it was by the prime author of all beauty they were created. If it was through astonishment at their power and influence, people should have learnt from these how much more powerful is he who made them. For the greatness and beauty of created things give us a corresponding idea of their creator.

*Wisdom of Solomon 13:1-5.*¹

What can be known about God is perfectly plain to them since God himself has made it plain. Ever since God created the world his everlasting power and deity—however invisible—have been there for the mind to see in the things he has made. That is why such people are without excuse: they knew God and yet refused to honor him as God or to thank him; instead, they made nonsense out of logic and their empty minds were darkened. The more they called themselves philosophers, the more stupid they grew, until they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for a worthless imitation, for the image of mortal man, of birds, of quadrupeds and reptiles. . . since they refused to see it was rational to acknowledge God, God has left them to their own irrational ideas and to their monstrous behavior.

St. Paul, *Romans* 1:18-23, 28.

The first steps toward a Christian philosophical tradition were taken when educated Christians, in the face of persecution, began to defend their faith in pamphlets and letters. This apologetic literature operated,

¹Translated by Pelikan (1993) 1. Note that the author identifies only stupidity at work here, whereas Paul explains the stupidity as the outcome of a deliberate and sinful avoidance of the truth.

at first, on rather a low level of argumentation and philosophical sophistication,² abysmally low compared to the work of the best professional Pagan philosophers of the time, but since part of its professed point was to appeal to educated Pagans who did not share Christian presuppositions, it did undertake rational justification for portions, at least, of the Christian world view, and it was natural that it to draw on stock arguments from the Pagan philosophical tradition for this justification. Although the impossibility of a faithful Christian entertaining alternative world views hampered the introduction of philosophy at a more sophisticated level, a number of other factors were nonetheless encouraging.

For one thing, as Christianity moved into the mainstream it became important to Christian intellectuals to have answers to philosophical criticisms of their world view. This was in part because of simple pride. However sure they are of their beliefs, educated people dislike admitting that they cannot give good reasons for them, or answer objections against them. Certain of the Christian beliefs cried out for a metaphysical defense, in particular, the belief in a God transcending the natural world, and the complex, and implausible, developing ideas about Jesus, who was supposedly both fully God and fully man, and one member of a Triune God. Hence, a new brand of metaphysical reflection became the natural centerpiece in the rational defense of the Christian world view.

For another thing, the opinion was abroad right from the beginning that reason could not discover and justify the truth about God and salvation, that by faith and revelation alone could we come to knowledge of God. It was natural, then, for Christians to develop some form of skeptical epistemology, supporting the claims of faith against reason. For a time after Christianity had claimed philosophy as the spoils of its ideological victory, skepticism was rejected by most Christian thinkers as a violation of common sense, and as a road block in the way of its newly acquired resource for establishing the faith, especially in its metaphysical dimensions. But the victories of skepticism among the Scholastics of the 14th century, though they may mark the beginning of the decline of Christian rationalist metaphysics, seem also to mark the re-emergence of what, for a Christian, is a natural line of thought. We find a struggle among Christian thinkers right from the beginning over the place of philosophy in the faith. Some, at first, generally followers of Plato, were to argue that many basic Christian

²The arguments rise only to an initial plausibility, without considering even crucial objections that might be raised against them. They often misrepresent their opponents, selecting freely whatever view will be most damaging from the wide variety of Pagan ideas available, and acting as if it is the only opinion anyone held. They generally attack popular views, often of the crudest sort, rather than the more sophisticated notions of the educated. In citing evidence they often rely on forgeries such as the Sybilline Oracles, and on bad history, presenting only the illusion of any critical sense of their sources, and, of course, their own scriptures. Moreover, all these faults persist in the fourth century apologists such as Lactantius. The level of argumentation in Celsus, Porphyry and Julian, among the Pagan attacks on Christianity, is much higher, though they too can be caught out on more than one occasion.

truths could be proved, and that Greek philosophy represents a valuable preparation for the Good News of revealed truths that are beyond reason. Others held that philosophy had nothing to do with Christianity, no matter whether we mean by philosophy the various existing philosophical schools and institutions in the Ancient world, or a search for truth relying on the rational techniques of the philosophers. Reason, they held, was incompetent to discover the truth about God and salvation, and faith was in any case a necessary virtue for salvation, and could not be maintained simultaneously with a searching philosophical stance towards life.

There was no doubt much confusion in the minds of Christians about the legitimate claims of faith against reason. Faith, that is, trust in Jesus Christ, was necessary for salvation, of course, and this meant reliance on Jesus rather than one's own resources. Now if we trusted Jesus because we had figured out that it is the best thing to do, and perhaps even developed an objective proof that it was the best thing to do, this would seem to cast doubt on the sincerity our faith, first of all, because we are relying on our own reason to guide us, and should be relying on Christ, and in the second place, because this sort of faith seems too cold and calculating. We are tempted to think that faith in people based on long acquaintance and objective evidence of their reliability is somehow less noble and pure than faith without any such reasons behind it. Certainly we value the latter sort of faith when others have it in us, and we also value the faith of others when it cannot easily be destroyed by occasional bad behavior on our own part. So perhaps, if we are not cynics, we come to value this sort of faith in general, finding it noble because it involves a certain potential for self-sacrifice, and finding it pure because it perhaps betrays a certain naivete characteristic more of children and those dependent on others than it is of fully functioning adults. It also, of course, accompanies love of the person in whose views one has faith.

But does it follow from any of this that knowledge of God and salvation is best obtained through faith? Perhaps, if it happens that there is no other way to know about such things—but there are two difficulties here. The first is that God, if perfectly good and all-powerful, would surely be in a position to convince even the skeptical of the saving truths. One response to this seems to have been that he has in fact made the truth perfectly plain, as we shall see. Another response would be to argue that only the faithful deserve to be saved, and so there is no reason for God to make the truth plain to those who demand proofs and reasons. The second difficulty is that certain fundamental truths would surely have to be made rational before the possibility of faith in Jesus Christ emerges. For instance, one would have to have reason to believe that there is a God, and know the career of Jesus Christ. The more clear-sighted of Christian thinkers would see all this, and argue that reason has a definite, if limited, role to play in enabling faith, and consequently salvation, even if it has to be

abandoned after a certain point for reliance on God's word if we are to know all that can be known and needs to be known about these matters. As Augustine remarks, in this matter of faith, at least the question who is to be trusted must be left to reason.

Christian apologetics grew, in the first instance, out of Jewish apologetics, including such works as Philo's *Hypothetica* and Josephus's work *Against Apion*, written in reply to an anti-Jewish writer. Commonplace Jewish arguments about the absurdity of Pagan practices became standard fare in Christian writings. The earliest apologetic passages are found in the speech of Paul at the Areopagus in *Acts* 17:22-31, and Paul's condemnation of Paganism at *Romans* 1:18-32, and in both passages Paul draws on Jewish themes.

The passage in *Acts* is addressed, it seems, to intelligent Pagans who may be critical of their own religion, and it tries not to be too inflammatory.³ Paul first praises the Athenians for the scrupulous way in which they dedicate an altar even to an unknown god, and suggests that they in fact worship a God they do not know, the creator, in whom we "live and move and have our being" (an expression suggested by a line from the poet Epimenides), who does not dwell in any shrine made by human hands, nor have any appearance that a man could represent in a cult statue. He then suggests that God will not put up any longer with our worshiping cult statues, but calls on us for repentance, and begins to exposit the Christian revelation, and Christ's resurrection as proof of it. Paul seem to have thought that the more educated people in his audience would be attracted by his criticism of popular beliefs, and, indeed, they might well have taken him for a philosopher, at least in the beginning of his talk, and given him the polite attention thought due a philosopher.

The passage in *Romans* is not an appeal to Pagans, but an attack on them for the benefit of a Christian audience, and in it Paul displays considerably less delicacy. He makes no attempt here to find an ally in Pagan philosophy. Rather, he views philosophy as nothing more than a bankrupt attempt at a rational defense of Paganism. Indeed, Paul seems unhappy with anything resembling complex reasoning. Philosophical reason carries the odor of the sophistry of the Pagan professors who control higher education. Paul insists that the truth about God (that he is creator of the world, and presumably that he resembles no creature) is perfectly obvious, and only a contumacious obstinacy, rooted in pride, can explain how Pagans got it wrong. As a result of their deliberate stupidity, God has abandoned them to their sexual passions, homosexuality, and other vices. But despite his hostility to Pagan philosophy, Paul does insist that Christian beliefs are reasonable, and Pagan beliefs unreasonable, and when he says that the more they call themselves philosophers the more corrupted their

³*Acts* 17:18 is the first portrayal of a Christian encounter with philosophers, as certain Epicureans and Stoics ask among themselves what this "babbling" will say, and identify him as a purveyor of foreign gods.

reasoning is, he certainly does not mean that they were *true* philosophers. If a true philosopher followed reason, he would no doubt see the truth of Christianity, or at least so a Christian with an interest in philosophy might conclude.⁴

Jewish apologetic was not the only source for Christian apology. The Pagan philosophers themselves provided much useful material, especially to the later, Latin apologists. Varro's critique of Roman religion forms the basis for Tertullian's early *To the Nations*, the first draft of the far more brilliant *Apology*. Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods* provides the basis for Minucius Felix's *Octavius*, and for Lactantius's work. Arnobius depended on Neo-Platonic sources. Those who drew on such sources might well fall into the notion that philosophy, which is set against Pagan religion, could after all be made Christian. The opposite view was fostered by the appeals of Gnostics to philosophy (though the philosophers attacked Gnosticism, as a matter of fact). So Hippolytus's *Refutation of all Heresies* is rooted in the notion, commonplace among Christians at the time of its composition, that the various schools of philosophy are the source of the various heresies.

As a form of literature, the Christian apology is something of a literary conceit. An apology is generally explicitly addressed to an official, or a Pagan whose conversion is envisioned, and its ostensive purpose is to convince the Pagans at least to tolerate Christianity. But it is unlikely that the apologies were read much by Pagans, or intended to be. They are in fact addressed to the educated or prospective converts, to shore up their faith, and to Christians in general, to convince them of the injustice of the persecutions. It is for this reason that Christian apologetic generally attacks Pagan religious practices and beliefs, and often attacks philosophers and other literary figures in the Pagan canon, in a way that could only alienate a Pagan audience. Even the most skillful and conciliatory apologies, those of Aristides and Athenagoras, for instance, fall into this practice. However, some of the apologies might well have been submitted as petitions to Roman officials, and it seems likely that Celsus's book against the Christians is in part a response to such petitions.⁵

Moreover, if the apologies were all genuinely addressed to the Pagans, they would have to be

⁴We can add to the list of Pauline passages hostile to philosophy the following: I *Corinthians* 1:17-27, 20: "Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? . . . For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness." *Colossians* 2:8: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." It should be noted that Philosophers at the time often followed a rule of life, living together in a community, and wore special garb, as it were, a habit, identifying their school. A philosophy looked a great deal like a competing religion to a Christian, and so Philosophy (the institution) had to be rejected. But, of course, there were many opposing Philosophies, and that Christianity was itself a Philosophy was asserted by Justin. That philosophy in the sense of an employment of reason to explore certain questions might be allowed a Christian was obscured by confusion of this with Philosophy as a pre-existing institution competing with Christianity.

⁵Fox (1986) 306.

considered failures. Not one addresses convincingly the real objection to Christianity, that is, the withdrawal of Christians from the life of the larger society to which they belonged. Christians rejected ordinary pleasures, whether we speak of sex or the games and civic festivals, and essential practices such as the initiation of the young into adulthood, the common rituals of marriage, and so on, as sinful, because they all involved at least nominal offerings or petitions to the Pagan gods, and Christians refused to honor even the forms of Pagan communal ritual. More in particular, they refused to go along with the program of Hellenization and Romanization, largely through religious institutions, that the government depended on to unite the Empire. From the Christian standpoint, of course, this is more than justifiable, for the Pagan gods are demons who wish to lead the souls of men into damnation, and the worship of demons, even in the smallest things, is a sure way to that end. But for an apologist addressing Pagans to give that reason, as most did, is to suggest what was surely true, given events, that Christians would obliterate other religious practices themselves if they could. And indeed, suspicion that this was the case, that Christians posed a real danger to the tolerant religious pluralism aimed at by the Romans, was one of the chief motives behind the persecutions. Again, the tale is told in the most skillful and conciliatory of the apologies. Even Athenagoras leaves an aftertaste of anti-communal and anti-Hellenic attitudes, and asks that the Christians be left alone to follow their own peculiar communal life in separation from the rest of humankind. A political liberal might well claim that Athenagoras's request should be granted, that even the unpleasantly intolerant should be conceded religious freedom, but a conservative could argue that such principles betray a Liberal death wish, for it nurtures within its bosom the very forces that would, and in this case, *did*, destroy the Liberal program. In any case, rubbing their noses in Christian intolerance was not the best way to convince the Romans to be tolerant to Christians.

The same general strategy, based closely on St. Paul in *Romans*, quoted at the head of this section, is employed in all the apologies written in the 2nd century. The apologies seem to fall into two groups, those which, following *Romans*, are openly hostile to philosophy, and those which, following *Acts*, take philosophy as an ally, a preparation for the Gospel, and appeal to the intellectually sophisticated Pagan for support both of central elements of the Christian view of things, and of the Christian condemnation of Pagan practices. They usually employ the argument from design to show the existence of a single transcendent God who made and rules the world.⁶ Then they condemn Pagan worship as a misguided devotion to mere natural objects,

⁶The word used for monotheism in these works is usually "*monarchia*," which means in the first instance the existence of only one power ruling the world, from which all other power is derived, and which nothing can challenge. This, of course, directly implies monotheism, at least as long as one takes it that anything truly a god has to have an independent power and existence of its own. The

condemning all the philosophers but Plato (and sometimes Plato too) for their failure to recognize the transcendent God and His providence in the world. The more philosophically inclined make a good deal of Plato's *Timaeus*, seen as parallel to *Genesis*, to support their case. They argue that sacrifice should be replaced, for a believer in such a transcendent God, by morality and justice, and suggest that Christians are peculiarly ethical, due to their belief in an afterlife and God's judgment. They may point out that Christians pray for the Emperor even if they do not sacrifice to him. In their epistemology they lean toward the view that inspiration, revelation through the Holy Spirit, is the only reliable source of knowledge about the origins of the world, God, and the like, insisting that an eye-witness, not argument from theory, is the only trustworthy road to the truth in such matters. Of course, they attack the reliability of the poetic inspiration of Pagan mythographers by the Muses. They generally conclude that the Pagan gods are in fact demons who have seduced human beings to their worship.⁷ But let us turn to the individual apologies to see how they work out this Pauline strategy.⁸

2. QUADRATUS, THE LETTER TO DIOGNETUS, MARCIANUS ARISTIDES

Before his advent, who among mankind had any notion at all of what God is? Or do you accept the vapid and ludicrous suggestions of your own pretentious philosophers? – some of whom assure us that God is Fire (thus giving the name of God to what they will surely come to one day themselves!), some that he is Water, and others one of the other various elements of his creation. If any of these ideas were admissible, there would be no reason why anything else in the world could not be declared to be God. Assertions of that sort are no more than the hocus-pocus, the 'hey, presto!' of professional illusionists, for no man living has ever seen Him or known Him; it is He Himself who has given us the revelation of Himself. But He has only revealed Himself to faith, by which alone are we permitted to know God.

*Letter to Diognetus 8.*⁹

implicit argument is reminiscent of Xenophanes of Colophon.

⁷The general strategy laid out here is followed (and the usual argumentative faults occur), for instance, in the address delivered by Constantine in Antioch on Good Friday in 325, which is recorded at the end of Eusebius's *Life of Constantine*. See Fox (1986) 643-8 for a discussion of this document. One item not represented in the apologetic literature of the second century is any reference to free will to explain why God did not make all men ethical, or soften their hearts to receive Christ.

⁸For the apologies of the second century, I have used Lebreton and Zeiller (1962) Chapter 9; Harnack (1961) II.169-230;

⁹Translated in Staniforth (1968) 179.

The earliest Christian apology we know of was that of one Quadratus, directed to the Emperor Hadrian, who reigned 117–138.¹⁰ The sense of the one citation we have from it is that the healing works of Christ had lasted so well that some he had cured were still alive—and so more than a hundred years old. No doubt the intent is that the healing works of Pagan gods often did not last, that the victim's symptoms quickly returned. This would be a clear sign that the apparent recovery was merely psychosomatic, of course.

Another early apology, the *Letter to Diognetus* (written around 125), is probably typical for Christians of this time in its approach to philosophy.¹¹ It takes a skeptical approach, insisting that no one knew what God was until God revealed Himself to us. Philosophers, in particular, thought God, absurdly, to be fire or water or some such thing.¹² It might be asked why God revealed Himself to us so late. The author answers that we needed to learn first that we could not enter the Kingdom (by practicing virtue in accord with the Law), or know God, by our own power (that is, through reason). Until we learn that, we will not accept Christ's ransom for our sins, or God's self-revelation. Our pride of intellect, typical of a philosopher, must be chastened before He can reveal Himself to us.¹³ It takes faith to accept God's revelation. This explanation of Christ's late appearance in the world is new, and in the 2nd century it is found elsewhere only in Irenaeus. Later apologists like to argue that the Pagans have the more recent cult, since Christianity goes back to Moses, who lived long before the Greeks' arrival on the scene.

Christians, the author tells us, live in the world like resident aliens in a city. They obey the laws, but do not participate in the public life of the world. Nonetheless they love all men, and are like the soul in the

¹⁰Eusebius, *History of the Church* IV.iii.2, translated in Lebreton and Zeiller (1962) I, 239.

¹¹Lebreton and Zeiler II.242-5; translated in Staniforth (1968) 169-185, and Richardson (1970) 205-212. The work as we have it is composite. We are interested in the first ten chapters, chapters 11-12 being by a later writer. There is no mention of this work under the present title in Eusebius or any other early Church writer, and so some scholars have identified it with the apology of Quadratus. It is fairly clear that it is to be dated around 125 in the reign of Trajan, but the arguments in favor of this identification leave it unproven.

¹²Section 8, Staniforth (1968) 179. This rather unfair accusation is typical of the apologists' unsympathetic handling of opposing views. He argues, for instance, that idols of stone cannot be gods since they change and are eventually destroyed, when no Pagan, of course, had ever thought a cult statue to be the God himself. Against the Jews, he objects that God does not need our sacrifices, and that their dietary restrictions and the like are just silly. The basic technique is always to find the most damaging explanation for any religious practice. If they care for a cult statue, they must believe it is a god, and if they sacrifice to Yahweh, as the Jews do, they must believe Yahweh needs food, and so on.

¹³Section 9, Staniforth (1968) 180. The suggestion is not nonsensical when applied to an individual. A good teacher may well leave a student to his own devices for a while so that he becomes frustrated with his own efforts and is at last willing to listen to advice. But the cost is high if God applies such reasoning to the human race, for many people will be lost while God waits to reveal himself. (Perhaps even more would be lost if he did not wait, of course.)

body—they are diffused throughout the world without being part of it, and they hold the world together, loving the world as the soul loves the flesh, while the world wars against them as the flesh wars against the soul. Finally, they are immortal, like the soul, and are only passing through on their way to a nobler place. Thus Christians should be tolerated, despite their withdrawal from civic life, just as resident aliens are tolerated, since they are harmless, and perhaps do some good. To a Pagan, of course, this “apology” would look rather arrogant.

Another apology, much more friendly to philosophy, was directed to the Emperor Antoninus (138-147) by Marcianus Aristides, who describes himself as “a philosopher of the Athenians.”¹⁴ The piece opens with a brief argument for God’s existence, which, following St. Paul in *Romans*, makes no reference to Scripture, but relies on reason alone. One must be “amazed at the arrangement of the world,” so that we are entitled to say that “the world, and all that is therein, are moved by another,” presumably because there is nothing within the world that could account for its motion, or for its order. But the mover and ruler must be more powerful than what is moved and ruled by it. The author perhaps thinks, in addition, that only a mind or soul could be an unmoved mover, and so he identifies the mover of the world as the “God of all, who made the world for the sake of man.” Thus he argues to a god transcending nature, and goes on to say that this God is perfect, incomprehensible, eternal and without beginning or end, immutable, Wisdom and wholly mind, and contains all. The argument is organically connected with what follows, for Aristides next argues that the barbarians have all held that parts of creation are gods, even though it is clear that they are imperfect, destructible, and lacking in power and wisdom, so that their views must be wrong. The Greeks invent gods wholesale rather than misidentifying parts of creation, but their error is plain from the imperfections and crimes they attribute to their made-up deities, and Aristides suggests that such stories as the Greeks tell corrupt their morals. The argument draws on Plato in his *Republic* and other Greek philosophers critical of the Olympian religion, as well as Jewish apologetic, when it criticizes the worship of natural things, or worse yet, idols, which are destructible, and cannot be God. Aristides’s handling of the Jews is very brief, and it is hard to see how he could develop much of an argument against them, given that they profess exactly the sort of transcendent God he assumes, but he does criticize their observances (the execution of the ritual demands of the Law) as suitable

¹⁴Lebreton and Zeiller (1962) I, 239-242; Copleston (1962) page 30. Aristides’s apology exists in two versions, one in Syrian, and an adaptation in Greek occurring as an apologetic speech before a king in John of Damascus’s holy novelette, *The History of Barlaam and Josaphat*. My remarks are based on the Syrian version, which, aside from the fact that it must be regarded as superior to the Greek version wherever it differs from it, displays greater logical coherence. For a translation of both versions, with introduction, see Menzies, ed., pp. 259-279.

expressions of reverence toward angels rather than such a God. Christians, on the other hand, worship God through their excellent moral behavior and love for their fellow man, which is appropriate to God, who stands in no need of sacrifices or praise, but deserves love and demands morality.¹⁵

3. JUSTIN MARTYR

If we then in particular respects even teach something similar to the doctrines of the philosophers honored among you, though in many cases in a divine or more sublime way; and we alone do it in such a way that the matter is proved...

Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 20.

Our doctrines are more sublime than any human teaching, because the Christ who appeared for our sakes was the whole fullness of reason.

Justin Martyr, *Second Apology* 10.

In Justin Martyr we encounter the first Christian writer with some claim to be a philosopher. Justin was born Flavius Justinus of Greek parents about 100 CE, in Palestine, and then lived afterwards for some time in Ephesus, and finally moved to Rome where he ran a school, presenting himself as a philosopher, in philosopher's garb.¹⁶ He converted to Christianity some time before 132, and died between 163 and 168. Accused of being a Christian, perhaps by the Cynic philosopher Crescens, by Justin's account a spiteful rival with whom he had debated in the past, he confessed his faith, refused to sacrifice to the Emperor, and was executed. Justin's surviving works are his *First Apology* (153–4 or later?), *Second Apology* (after the first), and the *Dialogue with Trypho* (after 160?).¹⁷

¹⁵The argument against idols, and the remarks concerning Jewish observance of the Law and sacrifices to their God, and the properly ethical Christian worship, are all paralleled in the *Epistle to Diognetus*, sections 2 through 6. Indeed, the basic argumentative strategy of Aristides against the barbarians is also present in section 8 of the *Epistle to Diognetus*, where the views of philosophers, identifying such things as fire as gods, are attacked on the same grounds, and the same insistence on a transcendent God is present. But Aristides does not want to attack the philosophers, rather attributing these absurdities to non-Greek religions, and no reasoned argument for a transcendent God is to be found in the *Epistle*.

¹⁶See the opening of the *Dialogue with Trypho* and *First Apology* 1.4. Adherents of philosophy could, by this time, be identified by their special dress. On Justin, see especially Chadwick (1966) 9–22, and Minns, "Justin Martyr." Ch 14 in Gerson (2010).

¹⁷The fragments of *On the Resurrection* attributed to Justin are actually by Athenagoras, and another work *Against All Heresies* is lost. The *First Apology* is translated by Edward Rochie Hardie in Richardson (1970). These three works are preserved in a single Greek manuscript dated 1364, and no Latin translation was made of Justin's works before the 16th century. There are also some

The *First Apology* deliberately echoes Plato's *Apology of Socrates*. The Christians are accused of the same crime that Socrates was, atheism,¹⁸ and are, like Socrates, guilty only of rejecting Gods that are in fact demons who have seduced men from reason. Moreover, like Socrates, Christians would rather die than compromise their principles. Justin asserts that the Romans can kill them, but cannot do them any real harm,¹⁹ just as Socrates had asserted the Athenians had no power to harm a good man, even if they could execute him.²⁰ If Christians reject the deities of the Romans, it is because, like Socrates, they worship a high, ethical god. The Christians form a school of philosophers, and should be tolerated as such.

In the *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, Justin has his protagonist explain (one assumes more or less autobiographically) how he had sought wisdom among the philosophers, going to a Stoic, to a Peripatetic, to a Pythagorean, and finally to a Platonist, but always failing to find what he wanted. He followed the common conception of philosophy at the time as a way of personal salvation, agreeing with Trypho that “philosophers turn every discourse on God,” and “questions continually arise among them about his unity and providence,” so that “it is truly the duty of a philosopher to investigate the deity.” Thus, he claims that religion and philosophy have the same ultimate aim, to find God. The Stoic, it seems, did not believe there was a God, the Peripatetic demanded a fee, thus proving that he was not truly teaching salvation but in it for the money, and the Pythagorean insisted that he learn mathematics and music first, and presumably Justin thought the saving truth would be available even to the unlearned. After he became a Platonist, he reports,

the perception of immaterial things quite overpowered me, and the contemplation of ideas furnished my mind with wings, so that in a little while I supposed that I had become wise, and such was my stupidity, I expected forthwith to look upon God, for this is the end of Plato's philosophy.²¹

After he was a Platonist for a little while, Justin says, he met an old man who convinced him that his

fragments preserved in Irenaeus, Tatian and Methodius, which are translated and discussed by R.M. Grant in *Biblical and Patristic Studies in Memory of R.P. Casey* (Freiburg, 1963) pp. 182–188.

¹⁸*First Apology* 5, 6.

¹⁹*First Apology* 2.

²⁰Justin thought the world tyrannized by demons, that is, the Pagan Gods, who drove people to lustful and evil actions, and terrorized them into worshipping them. Just as these demons drove the Athenians to execute Socrates, who threatened their power by unmasking their pretensions, so they now drive the Romans to execute the Christians when they will not worship them. As Paul had said in *Ephesians* 6:12, it is not against men the Christians fight, but against Principalities and Powers.

²¹*Dialogue with Trypho*, Chs.1–2. Compare Apuleius, *On the God of Socrates*, for the aim of Platonism here.

philosophical notions were absurd,²² compared to the solid sense of the scriptures, and so he became a Christian. Thus we see how philosophy prepares the way for the Gospel, by showing people the correct aim, and helping them find out enough about God so that they can recognize the truth of Christianity when they encounter it, but we also see how philosophy fails to achieve the aim itself.

Indeed, Christians *are* philosophers, and philosophers, up to a point, at least, Christians.²³ Christians live as philosophers do, in accord with reason (*logos*), for Christ is Reason.²⁴ Justin is not influenced in this doctrine by the *Gospel of John* or Philo, and it is not entirely clear he is familiar with either source, though he did identify the Logos with God's Wisdom in *Proverbs*. As a Platonist, Justin *does* hold that Reason mediated the creation just as these authors said, and was begotten before creation, through an act of will in the way that we utter a word within our souls, which remains united to them, through an act of will.²⁵ This presumably means that the Logos was *not* created, and he likens its origin to the lighting of a lamp, in which the fire that lit the lamp is undiminished, despite the fact that the new fire now has an existence of its own from it. (He does not explore his analogy further to make it clear whether there is one God or two Gods here, one subordinate to the other, no doubt because this distinction was not yet an issue as long as the Logos is uncreated.) But Justin makes Christ Reason not because Christ participated in creation, but because, as a Platonist, he thinks Reason is divine, and Christ is, by definition, as it were, the divine as it occurs in human beings, and the source of God's revelation.²⁶ There is an implanted seed of *Logos*, part of the divine *Logos spermatikos* (!), in the soul.²⁷ Since Christ *is* Reason, whatever philosophers have rightly said comes from Christ, since it comes from reason,

²²R.M. Grant, "Aristotle and the conversion of Justin," JTS n.s. 8 (1956), points out that Justin deploys some Aristotelian arguments against Plato here. The argumentation will be detailed below.

²³*First Apology* 46.

²⁴*First Apology* 4.

²⁵*Second Apology* 6, *Dialogue with Trypho* 61. Assuming he follows the *Timaeus* and makes time begin with the creation of the world, Justin presumably did not think that being begotten before creation meant that the Logos was begotten at some time.

²⁶It is not only through Logos that God is revealed. *First Apology* 6 mentions the three, the Logos = Son, the Father, and the Holy Spirit, referring to the latter as the spirit of prophecy and clearly distinguishing it from the Logos. *Dialogue with Trypho* 55 ff. argues that the appearances of God to the patriarchs in the *Old Testament* must have been appearances of the Christ-Logos, since the supreme Father of all could not have become so circumscribed as to appear incarnate without abandoning his care for the whole of his creation. This view was generally approved until the end of the 4th century, when it became associated with Arianism, and was abandoned by the orthodox. There is precedent for it in Philo.

²⁷*Second Apology* 13.6.

and so Christians can claim it as their own. Rational thought is a gift from God, designed to lead us to Him.²⁸ In particular, it is through our rational faculties that we choose to do what is right, and so pleasing to God, and thereby become worthy of immortality and fellowship with God.²⁹ (Christ is also said to be the Truth in *John*, of course, but since Justin did not know this Gospel, he does not argue, as Clement of Alexandria did later, that inasmuch as reason leads men to the truth Christ, that is, God Himself, leads men to God.)³⁰

Still, having praised philosophy thus, Justin insists that reason is not, in a world overcome by sin, the best road to God. Revelation is superior to philosophy because it is accessible to all, whereas only a few, in our present state, can fight their way to the truth through reason. Moreover, philosophers only share partially in the *logos*, whereas Christians, even the least intellectual, partake wholly of it. Christians behave rationally when they follow the authority of Christ, that is, they do the reasonable thing, even if they do not use their own reason to determine that it is reasonable. The immorality of the philosophers indicates that they can behave unreasonably (do the unreasonable thing) while depending on their reason, and, given the weakness of our reason, we might behave most reasonably (do reasonable things most reliably) by depending on God's Word instead. The inadequate share of philosophy in the *logos* is indicated in the way in which philosophers contradict themselves, and, indeed, the Pagans would not have figured out the truth at all if they had not taken their views from the *Old Testament*.³¹ Our reason fails us, though, not because it is intrinsically weak, but because human beings have become subject to demons through sin (as Paul would have it in *Romans*), for the Pagan gods are

²⁸*Second Apology* 8, 10, 13. There is something rotten in the argument—perhaps it is this: one who clings to Christ may cling to reason as a matter of fact, but does not cling to reason under the aspect of reason or because it is reason. It is as though I believed whatever Tom said about mathematics, not because he was known by me to have any special knowledge in the field, but because he was my brother. Clinging to reason in this way is *not rational*, first of all, and, in the second place, it betrays no commitment to or understanding of rational procedures, and is certainly not prescribed by reason. A true philosopher has a commitment to reason as such, and so would demand that it be shown, through rational means, not urged through faith, that Christ is in fact reason. Hence, *pace* Justin, most Christians are in no wise philosophers.

²⁹*First Apology* 10. In particular, sacrifices are not what pleases God, since he has no need of anything. Only good behavior pleases Him.

³⁰Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* I. v, 32; VI. x, 83.

³¹*First Apology* 44, 59. *Second Apology* 40. The inconsistency in philosophy seems finally to be the inability of philosophers to argue that salvation has been attained on their view of the world. They cannot consistently claim to provide salvation, the ultimate aim of every philosophy. On this point, note the accusation that Plato's survival of the rational part of the soul cannot constitute salvation, discussed below.

simply demons. Thus it is that reason must become incarnate if we are to harken to it,³² and it must reside, as it were, outside us, and make demands as of authority on our belief. The old man convinced Justin to become a Christian, in the end, because Justin had lost faith in the power of his reason to achieve knowledge of God, and he saw, suddenly, a clear account why reason should have failed. Christianity, with its unique belief in the influence of demons on a mind made their prey through its fall into sin, appealed powerfully to the dissatisfied intellectual vainly seeking a saving belief through reason. Whether he sought to believe, as Paul did, in his own fundamental goodness, despite the evidence of his sin and weakness, or, as Justin did, in the possibility of knowing God, despite his evident personal failure to do it, the discovery at once of an explanation for failure and a method of success might relieve a strain grown intolerable, and in the joy of the release, lead to the experience of conversion to a new faith.³³

It might nonetheless be asked, even by the intellectual on the threshold of conversion, why we should believe that Christianity contains God's revelation of Himself. Justin's reply relies on the prophecies of Christ's life and crucifixion in the *Old Testament*.³⁴ The prophecies cannot be magic, which is done with the aid of demons, since one must know God's will to prophesy, and Christ's coming would have been concealed from the demons. Only the prophecies certify the miracles performed by Christ and his Disciples as acts of God, rather than magic.³⁵ The demons, it seems, attempted to imitate the events prophesied in the *Old Testament* to create doubt that it was the coming of Christ that was prophesied, but they could not understand the prophecies

³²Justin extols the good effects of belief in the Christian God, arguing that believers, fearing inevitable punishment for wrong-doing, are always good people (*First Apology* 12).

³³Pagels (1995) presses this source of Christianity's powerful appeal, in connection with Justin, in Chapter V. As evidence of the release from demonic influence, Justin cites the conversion of manners of Christians, who give up old vices and addictions that had seemed unconquerable after baptism (*First Apology* 16). The Pagan Gods, of course, were able to influence character, and even individual actions, pouring valor into a man, or inspiring him with fear, making wise suggestions, or sending foolish dreams. In particular, Aphrodite produced lust. So the influence of demons on us, who were those very Pagan gods, seemed a natural enough thing to accept. Moreover, anyone could tell you that the Gods, who personified the great impersonal forces of nature, were often anything but benevolent and good. To know oneself, for a Pagan, is to admit that one is a mortal, the plaything of Gods and nature, without even a personality that one could reliably maintain against their power (Euripides's *Hecuba*). One must recognize and mollify the power even of madness (in Euripides's *Bacchae*) and shameful lust (in the *Hippolytus*). This picture, in the converted Christian, was transformed into an image of a world thronging with demons seeking to seduce and destroy our souls. The assertion of free will, recoverable by the power of God, represented an escape from the Pagan world in which we are so powerless, and the insistence that only the good is divine entailed the rejection of the Pagan Gods, who, if they still seemed real enough, became demons.

³⁴*Dialogue with Trypho*, Chs. 6-7. Justin in fact suggests that there are prophecies outside of scripture, too, that is, that testimonials to Christian doctrine are to be found in the Sybilline Oracles, and other Pagan books. Later authors suggest that the Pagans prophesied Christ without knowing what they did.

³⁵*First Apology* 30-42, 45-53.

of the crucifixion, so there are no imitations of that event to muddy the waters.³⁶ In connection with these points, Justin argues that human beings must have free will to be morally responsible for their actions, but God can nonetheless foresee their actions, though not in such a way as would necessitate them.³⁷

Concerning the superiority of Christian revelation to Platonic reason, the old man in the *Dialogue with Trypho* argues that we cannot see God unless we are “clothed with the holy ghost,” that is, not through our own efforts, but only through God’s self-revelation, and after the expulsion of demonic influence through God’s power. (The reference is no doubt to baptism, in which one renounces Satan, and welcomes the aid of the Spirit in expelling the demons, and after which one no longer traffics with demons in the omnipresent rituals of Pagan religion.) Justin responds that we see God, according to Plato, through reason, which is divine and immortal, not through our own, mortal and inadequate efforts, and that we see God especially when reason is separated from the body, but do not remember seeing God when reason is joined to the body later. The old man replies first that animals’ bodies are like ours, and so we should be no better than they are at seeing God, but Justin objects that we differ from animals not in our bodies but in our possession of reason, so that the similarity of bodies is not relevant to this issue. The old man makes a better point, though, or so Justin thinks, when he argues that one gains no advantage from the sight of God if one is then reborn and cannot remember it in this life, no more than suffering as an animal is a disadvantage to him who has done wrong when the animal cannot even remember the evil deed or view its life as inferior to that of a human being. In the end, this is an attack on the Platonic notion of an impersonal survival after death as pure reason. A satisfactory salvation from death has to extend to the human being in the body, with his memories and passions, not merely to his rational part.³⁸ But it also rejects the Platonic notion that it is through Reason that we see God, asserting instead that we see God only through the action of the Spirit, which, of course, is God Himself. He rejects this view despite the fact that he is willing to view Reason as Christ the Logos in us.

Plato taught rightly that God transcends matter, time and space, that He is immutable and impassible, and cannot be named. Moreover, he was right about the soul’s special kinship to God, and in his insistence that

³⁶*First Apology* 54-55.

³⁷*First Apology* 43-44. Justin does not explain *how* it is that God can foreknow an action without necessitating it, though he does point out that God’s foreordained punishment for evil actions is not fated regardless of the action, but on account of God’s foreknowledge that the action meriting punishment was going to be freely committed.

³⁸*Dialogue with Trypho*, Chs. 2-4. The old man’s refutation of Plato makes use of Aristotelian arguments, as R.M. Grant points out in his “Aristotle and the conversion of Justin,” *JTS new series* VII (1956) 246-248.

human beings are responsible for their actions, and will suffer judgment in the world to come. But the soul does not experience repeated incarnations, nor does it possess a natural immortality, despite its kinship to God.³⁹ Its immortality depends on God's will. Justin thought that Plato had learned from Moses (that is, the *Pentateuch*), and praises him for this. It was this and Christ, that is, reason, in him, that gained him freedom enough from the influence of the demons so that he could get this much right. Justin praises Socrates for perceiving the corruption of Pagan religion, and treats him as a precursor of Christian martyrs. He was hounded to death at the instigation of the demons that Pagans worship and he opposed.⁴⁰

Justin takes the goal of philosophy to be the vision of God, not merely knowledge about God, but direct acquaintance and reconciliation with Him, and given this aim Justin's disappointment with philosophy in general, and with Platonism in particular, which seems to promise the attainment of this goal, is not unreasonable. He would presumably hold it is obvious from his creation that God exists. His philosophical task, then, is to argue that the acceptance of the Christian revelation is sufficient to produce acquaintance and reconciliation with God. The validation of Christian Scripture through the prophecies is his chief strategy for accomplishing this. It is natural to assume that God would want to communicate with us, to tell us how to proceed in His world, so the issue is this—which of the purported revelations of God that are current is the genuine one. Such arguments as Justin makes surely would help us decide that. But Justin also depends on the natural human reliance on tradition, claiming that Christian doctrine is more ancient than all the Pagan writings (since the Prophets are more ancient), and asking us to accept it not because it resembles philosophy, but simply because it is true.⁴¹ The reliance on tradition here is rooted in the notion (apparent in *Romans*) that the truth is clear, and has always been known, and that rational argumentation is only a seductive, but endlessly complex and unreliable way either for people favoring nonsensical but “progressive” views to avoid the obvious, or for misguided defenders of common sense to provide uncertain “proofs” for what is clear in itself. And so Justin tells us that where Christian views agree with philosophy they will often be presented in a more sublime

³⁹Justin seems to think the soul is material, a kind of breath (spirit) that would naturally dissipate upon death. Perhaps everything subject to change is material, so that only God would be immaterial, assuming that Justin retained the Platonic notion that God and the Forms, at least, are immaterial. *Dialogue with Trypho* 1.5 suggests that the soul cannot be incorporeal because it would then be incapable of suffering punishment for sin, presumably because it would be incapable of sensation, since the soul remains capable of sensation after death so that it can suffer punishment (*First Apology* 18.2–4; 20.4).

⁴⁰*First Apology* 5. The *Euthyphro* seems to be referred to in Chapter 10, when Justin remarks that God has no need of our offerings, and the *Phaedo* in *Second Apology* 4, observing that one has a duty of remaining at the post God has assigned one, so that it is wrong to commit suicide.

⁴¹*First Apology* 23.

way by the Christians, and it is Christianity, not philosophy, that has the proof.⁴² Justin is after truth, but he sees no difficulty in the task. All this thought is unnecessary and ineffective—we should simply accept the answer from God.

4. TATIAN, ATHENAGORAS, THEOPHILUS

The soul, men of Greece, is not in itself immortal but mortal; yet it also has the power to escape death. For if it is ignorant of the truth it dies and is dissolved with the body, but rises later at the end of the world along with the body, to suffer death by immortal punishment; on the other hand it does not die, even if it is dissolved for a time, if it has obtained knowledge of God. In itself it is dark and there is no light in it, and so the saying goes 'The dark does not comprehend the light.' For the soul does not itself preserve the spirit, but was preserved by it... if it gains union with the divine spirit it is not unaided, but mounts to the realms above where the spirit leads it; for the spirit's home is above, but the soul's birth is below. So the spirit became originally the soul's companion, but gave it up when the soul was unwilling to follow it. The soul kept a spark, as it were, of the spirit's power, yet because of its separation it could no longer see things that are perfect, and so in its search for God went astray and fashioned a multitude of gods, following the demons and their hostile devices.

Tatian, *Address to the Greeks* 13

Tatian (about 120 - after 170)⁴³ wrote an apology, the *Address to the Greeks*, sometime before 172. A Syrian, he was said by Irenaeus to have studied under Justin Martyr. Late in life he became a Valentinian, and founded a rigorist sect, Encratism, that regarded even marriage as fornication. Of some education, he produced a history of the life of Christ, based in particular on *Matthew* and *John*, which he regarded as the Apostolic sources, *Luke* and *Mark* being sub-apostolic. This work, the *Daitessaron*, is usually called a "concordance" of the Gospels, since it was put together as a patchwork from the Gospels arranged in chronological order. But it reveals a very careful study of its sources, of the sort an ancient historian might make in an attempt to convert collections of sayings and anecdotes bearing on some person or set of events into a unified historical account. The work was ignored and finally condemned, perhaps in part because of its awareness of disagreements

⁴²*First Apology* 20.

⁴³For Tatian, see Harnack (1961) 190-193. A good modern translation of the *Address to the Greeks* is to be found in Tatian (1982).

between the Gospels on the sequence and even the nature of events. Tatian pretty clearly takes the Gospel writers to get things wrong on occasion.⁴⁴

Tatian's attitude to the philosophical tradition is quite hostile, and if Justin's apologies are modeled on Socrates's apology, Tatian's smacks strongly of the Cynic diatribe. He claimed that the Greeks stole all their ideas from the Barbarians, including many from the *Old Testament* (which he argues at length is much older than any Greek book) and then turned them into absurd allegories,⁴⁵ and that the lives of all the philosophers except Socrates were immoral and base.⁴⁶ Christianity provides a readily intelligible picture of the world, and one made available even to the poor and uneducated, unlike the incomprehensible complexities of philosophy, which can only be learned by those who can afford a good deal of leisure.⁴⁷ Tatian appeals throughout to the hostility felt by many non-Greeks toward the Hellenistic culture their rulers and their own upper classes tried to impose upon them. Christianity, of course, is reasonable, and a man of wisdom, whose mind is not clouded by sin and the work of demons, will accept the religion.⁴⁸ This is not, as it turns out, due to the natural ability of a person to know, but rather to the presence of the Spirit in those who are free of sin. It is through the Spirit that we recognize the word of God. Tatian, of course, nowhere equates the Spirit with rationality, and even if he speaks of the Logos, Christ, as one with the Father, and the 'firstborn' of the Father, which is in God's essence,⁴⁹ he also refuses Justin's line that Christ is to be identified with the philosopher's Reason. In all probability he would be scandalized by any such suggestion, and rejects the notion that philosophy is a preparation for the Gospel, or that reason is divine. He also rejects quite explicitly the Platonic notion that matter existed prior to God's creation, insisting that matter was created by God.⁵⁰

⁴⁴For the *Diatessaron* see Grant (1961) 22-28. The work apparently virtually replaced the four gospels where Syrian was spoken, and one can imagine a situation like that obtaining with the *Pentateuch*, in which the original documents would have disappeared in favor of this farrago, and scholars might nowadays be teasing out the original sources. Probably Tatian's heresy was, more than anything else, responsible for the *Diatessaron*'s dropping out of circulation.

⁴⁵*Address to the Greeks* 40.

⁴⁶*Address to the Greeks* 2, 3 (for Socrates), 19, 25.

⁴⁷*Address to the Greeks* 29, 32.

⁴⁸*Address to the Greeks* 12, 13, 29.

⁴⁹Is in God essentially? More likely it is intended that the logos is in God, as reason is in a human being.

⁵⁰*Address to the Greeks* 5.

But Tatian follows Justin in denying the natural immortality of the soul.⁵¹ Immortality is a divine trait, like reason, and must come from some participation in the divine, and so Tatian identifies the Spirit as the source of the soul's immortality, and that wherein its likeness to God resides. The soul must follow the Spirit if it is to escape death, though death is figurative for Tatian, that is, the sinner will suffer forever in Hell.⁵² Since the Fall, the Spirit dwells in a human being only after conversion to the faith, for it fled from human beings when the demons gained dominion. Without the Spirit human beings differ from animals only in the power of speech, for animals too have souls, or so Tatian tells us.⁵³ But Tatian also says it is by the right use of free will, something we are all capable of, and something in which we differ from the beasts, that we can regain the Spirit. This free will is present in the sinful because the soul "kept a spark, as it were, of the Spirit's power" even when the Spirit had left it.⁵⁴

The doctrine of the Spirit here smacks of a Gnostic approach, at least to later tastes, and Tatian's general picture of salvation certainly fits the Gnostic picture. To be saved, one must come to be "taught of God," and freed from the demons by the knowledge thus gained, one will regain the lost portion of the divine spirit, and so become immortal, living out an eternal life in a better world than this. Nonetheless, the *Address* suggests that its author is orthodox on other points by the standards of his day,⁵⁵ and his views about the Spirit and the human soul seem to differ but little from Justin's, so one can only assume that they represented acceptable doctrine in his time. But the fragments of his other works make his later heresy clear, identifying the Law as the property of a God alien to Christianity, and making the Creator subordinate to the Christian

⁵¹*Address to the Greeks* 13.

⁵²*Address to the Greeks* 14.

⁵³*Address to the Greeks* 15. The notion that animals and human beings have similar souls is also exploited by Justin, *First Apology* 4, to establish that human beings are not able to know God simply in virtue of having souls akin to God. In no way, he argues, in either body or soul, do human beings differ from animals, and so knowledge of God must come from without, from the Spirit. The notion that one simply dies, rather than spending an eternity in Hell, if one is not saved, is Pharisaic, and Pauline. So I *Corinthians* 15:54 (compare I *Timothy* 6:15-16). Later, of course, Paul's death was taken as a metaphor for survival in Hell, and this is not completely unnatural, to the extent that Hell is simply the *gehenna* of the Hebrews or *Hades* of the Greeks, to which everyone supposedly went upon their deaths.

⁵⁴*Address to the Greeks* 13, 15. Note that free will was generally supposed by philosophers to be a consequence of reason, which Tatian identified with Spirit.

⁵⁵*Address to the Greeks* 5—The one God created the world through the Word, which is one with the Father; 6—There is a resurrection of the body at the end of the world, and judgment by the one God; 7—God created men and angels, each with free will, and many angels and men fell into sin.

God.⁵⁶ No doubt his views on the soul and the Spirit helped the slide into heresy, and that is surely part of the reason such views ceased to be acceptable to later Christian thinkers.

Tatian knows the basics of the Pagan systems, and says, for instance, that if there is a Stoic world-soul, it is not God, but a creature, for God is a transcendent cause of the world order, not an immanent one. God, of course, has no cause, and causes all else that is, and can be known from his creation. Evil is rooted in free will, men following the rebellious angels, and is not due to any Stoic Fate.

Athenagoras wrote his *Plea for the Christians* about 177, addressing it to Marcus Aurelius and Commodus.⁵⁷ Like Justin, he argues that the “atheism” of the Christians is like that of Socrates, for even philosophers regard the gods of the Pagans as demons, but he does not call the Christians philosophers, but rather insists that their religion is an old, established one, and not something new. If it *were* new it might justly be condemned, but as it is, it deserves the protection of the Empire as much as any other established religion. The attitude Athenagoras takes toward philosophers in his work is not hostile, though perhaps it would have been if he had not realized that Marcus Aurelius fancied himself a philosopher. He points out that a knowledge of the technical aspects of philosophical logic does not make a person virtuous, even though those who teach these things say it will, but here he seems to criticize rhetoric, after the manner of Plato, not true philosophy.⁵⁸ His disagreement with philosophy rests on questions of method, not questions of the philosopher’s understanding of virtue, an understanding he relies on when he undertakes to convince the two Emperors of Christian innocence. God can only be known through revelation, and the rational demonstrations of the philosophers, even when one can get them, lend no certainty to their conclusions. Human reason is effective, as a matter of fact, only insofar as there is a certain sympathy between the soul and the divine spirit, a Stoic-Platonic notion that Athenagoras adapts to his case, arguing that the affinity between the soul and the divine is limited, and that a direct reliance on divine revelation would be superior to reliance on this limited affinity. “They were able, indeed, to get some notions of reality, but not to find it, since they did not deign to learn

⁵⁶*Address to the Greeks* 29-30. Tatian (1982) Introduction, xvi-xvii. The Fragments referred to are Fragments 6, and 7-8.

⁵⁷The work is translated in Richardson (1970) 290-340, and in Athenagoras (1956).

⁵⁸*A Plea for the Christians* 11. Athenagoras makes these criticisms immediately after noting that he is addressing true philosophers in the two Emperors, and so may speak freely, so he seems to be enlisting the loyalties of philosophy against rhetoric.

about God from God, but each one from himself.”⁵⁹ In his *On the Resurrection of the Body*, Athenagoras provides a rational demonstration of the resurrection, and offers no reason why we should not expect to find one, so it seems to be the *exclusive* reliance on reason he is concerned to reject. Reason, he holds, is too weak in us to be trusted, whether this is due to its own nature or our sinful condition, and we need the help of divine revelation to keep reason on the right track, perhaps in the way that someone might need hints from the teacher to develop a proof in geometry (at least it is very helpful to have the theorem already stated). His position is close to that later to be taken by St. Augustine.

The *Plea for the Christians* answers three charges against Christianity, Atheism, cannibalism, and incest.⁶⁰ Let us take up the reply to the first. Against this charge Athenagoras insists that the Christians believe in a God, but a single, uncreated, eternal God that created the world and can be grasped only by the mind, not by the senses, not the multiplicity of anthropomorphic, Pagan gods. Those who accuse the Christians are the uneducated who understand no philosophy, and measure people’s religion by their participation in the civic sacrifices, not realizing that the true worship of God is embodied in a spiritual and virtuous life, not in sacrifices that God does not need, made to idols of stone and wood, who are not God in the first place.⁶¹ In the course of his discussion Athenagoras first indicates that the poets and philosophers held this view, citing Euripides and Sophocles, Philolaus, most especially Plato’s *Timaeus*, Aristotle, and the Stoics. He then undertakes to establish a rational basis for it.⁶² His argument is rooted in Plato. If there are several gods, then they either participate in the same being (the same Form) or they do not. If they do, they are of a single kind, and they would be alike, but that cannot happen with uncreated things. Presumably he means that whatever things participate in the same form must arise in time, and so are created, or at least must share a dependence on the Form in which they participate—but a god is not created or dependent. So these two gods do not share any Form and must be completely unlike one another. But where would this second God be? Our author holds that it cannot be in the world, for the world does not belong to it. The point seems to be that the world imitates the Forms in the first God’s mind—bear in mind Plato’s view that the world itself imitates a single Form, the Form of the

⁵⁹*A Plea for the Christians* 7. Harnack (1961) II:188-190. There seems to be an oblique reference to the puzzle in the *Meno* here. They have gained enough knowledge about God, perhaps, to be able to recognize him if they should come across him, but no more.

⁶⁰*A Plea for the Christians* 2.

⁶¹*A Plea for the Christians* 13.

⁶²*A Plea for the Christians* 8.

Good, and that the other, lower Forms are but expressions of the Good, so there will be no room in the world for anything imitating something other than the good in one of its aspects—thus there is no room in the world for a second God, perhaps with a different set of Forms unrelated to The Good. Nor does this second God surround the world, for all the space outside it is taken up by the God of this world, its creator and the bearer of its forms.⁶³ That means the second god can be nowhere at all, and so cannot exist.

But perhaps we should reject this conclusion, for why should a god have a location? Indeed, if God transcends the natural world as Christian belief suggests, he should be entirely outside space as well as outside time, and that does not mean he is located just outside the space this world is in, at its limit or in some extension of it. This Platonic picture must be taken as a metaphor, indicating that God is related to the natural world, forming the limit of the goodness found in the world, for instance, while still standing completely outside it, and so completely outside of space. So even though Athenagoras insists that everything that exists is somewhere, and holds that God, though immaterial, is everywhere, which reflects an inadequate grasp of God's transcendence, something remains of the argument. The unity of the world, with its single set of related natural kinds and natural laws, reflecting a single Form of the Good, may be thought to imply the unity of the God which is its creator. If it is objected that the God of this world is composed of a number of other gods, Athenagoras suggests, then it can be pointed out that this God is uncreated, therefore indestructible and impassable (that is, it cannot be affected in any way by anything else—it stands outside the order of nature), but this implies that it is indivisible, and so has no parts. Moreover, Athenagoras points out, if, despite its impossibility, we allow a second God, then it would have to be the God of some other world, standing in no relation at all to this world, and so of no concern to us, since it cannot possibly affect us. It could not have power over this world and its God unless, of course, this world and its god somehow fell under the providence of the second God, participating in whatever serves as the analogue of the Form of the Good in that second God. But then the God of this world would not be uncreated or independent.

Having established God's unity, his central point against the Pagans, Athenagoras goes on to state that

⁶³Why? Perhaps the notion is that all space that is not the place of some part of this world is at least the place of something necessary to this world, so that the limits of space and this world must be occupied by the God of this world and the Forms imposing the Forms on the inner part, where the world is. After all, space itself is reasonably regarded as a part of the realization of The Good Itself, and so no space will be found outside the one universe that realizes the Form of the Good. Compare the *Phaedo* on the vision of the Forms at the outer edge of the universe by the disembodied soul, and the notion of God, or at least the forms, as something just outside the prime moveable, the outer sphere of the world, drawn from both the *Phaedo* and Aristotle's astronomy.

God is apprehended only by reason, and to lay out the doctrine of the Trinity.⁶⁴ This he does without referring to the incarnation of Christ, and so it looks very much like a form of Middle Platonic doctrine, the Son being the mind (*Nous*) and reason (*Logos*) of God, through which the world is created. The Logos not only provides the forms that shape matter, but also the power that lies behind causal activity in material things. In the course of this discussion Athenagoras seems to approve the Middle Platonic notion of a matter outside of God, which is of itself formless and merely potential, and which receives form and actuality from the Logos. If he thought God had created this matter he does not say so here, and one could form the impression that it preexisted creation, given that it is through the Logos that creation occurred, and the Logos was only said to provide causal power and form to material things. But given the omission of any mention of the incarnation, one must suppose that Athenagoras is trying to look as Platonic as possible, without actually saying anything he doesn't believe, by omitting crucial points. The Holy Spirit would look more mysterious to a Pagan intellectual. Its functions are to unify the Son and the Father, so that each is in the other, and to serve as the spirit of prophecy.

The arguments against the other charges against the Christians, cannibalism and incest, focus on proving the virtue of the Christians. Athenagoras argues that the Christians are harmless people, who avoid sexual vice, and every sort of cruelty, even going so far as not harming their enemies, and that they do all of this because of their expectation of the resurrection and judgement of God (reflecting Plato's remarks on the role of a belief in an afterlife and judgment in keeping people virtuous, for instance, in the *Laws*).⁶⁵ In answer to the most serious charge, that Christians will not sacrifice to the Gods of the state, Athenagoras points out that people worship their own gods in the Empire, and no one worships every god. That, of course, is dreadfully off the point. One should worship the god of the community to which one belongs, and everyone in the Empire should worship the gods of Rome. More to the point, but also much more inflammatory, is the attack Athenagoras makes on the worship of Pagan gods as a worship of purely natural things, in which he finally insists that the Pagan gods are lower *daemones* of the sort Platonists recognize to exist, and should not be worshiped since they have rebelled from God.⁶⁶ As a matter of fact, Athenagoras cannot claim that the Christians participate as full members in their political communities. By avoiding the Pagan religion they

⁶⁴*A Plea for the Christians* 10.

⁶⁵*A Plea for the Christians* 11-12, 32-36.

⁶⁶*A Plea for the Christians* 14, 15-27. In 28-30 he argues that the gods of the Pagans were all merely human beings in the beginning, the position of Euhemerus, though it is not clear how this squares with the notion that these gods are daimones.

effectively cut themselves off from the life of the community, and withdrew into their own private community. He can only argue that they are harmless, possessing their own reasons to adhere to their ethical duties even in the absence of the usual effects of the communal culture, and that they cooperate where it is necessary with the rulers, praying for the Emperor in their own way.

Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch in 169, wrote an apology *To Autolytus* about 181.⁶⁷ The opening of his book follows the road mapped out by his predecessors, arguing that God can be seen, but not with the physical senses, rather with the “eyes of the soul and ears of the heart,” but only if these eyes are not covered over with sins and evil deeds. The eye of the soul must be burnished like a mirror to see God.⁶⁸ In his description of God Theophilus makes it clear that He is transcendent, the almighty, eternal creator outside the natural world (which is identified implicitly with the sensible world), and so although God appears to the soul of the faithful, or will at least do so when the faithful have put on an immortal body, and so are enabled to see the immortal, this appearance cannot be described, nor can what God is in Himself. The words we use to describe God all refer to His actions, effects and the like, none to what He is in Himself.⁶⁹ God is known through His works, and Theophilus suggests an argument from design, God being inferred as we infer a pilot in a ship steering for the harbor, or a King from the order and the laws we observe in his kingdom, for all creation contains the Spirit of God, through which it is ordered.⁷⁰ Theophilus concludes his positive argument with a defense of faith, which is necessary in all things. We must trust the outcome of sowing, the skill of a pilot or physician, and so on. Surely faith in God is rational enough, “can you not believe that God who made you is able also to make you afterwards,” that is, recreate you in the resurrection? This defense of faith is possible, of course, because the object of faith has already been established. God’s existence is not at issue at this point in the argument, only the rationality of trusting God’s power and good will.⁷¹

An attack on Greek, that is, Pagan, beliefs follows. It is pointed out that the Pagan gods are conceived

⁶⁷For an English translation, see Coxe, ed. (1956), Vol. II: 85-121.

⁶⁸*To Autolytus* I.2.

⁶⁹*To Autolytus* I.3-4. For the soul’s vision after death, see *To Autolytus* I.7. Note the dependence on Plato’s *Phaedo*, and *Phaedrus*, where the soul can perceive the Forms (which transcend the sensible = natural world) when it is separated from the body, due to its kinship with the Forms and the removal of the body’s disturbing influence.

⁷⁰*To Autolytus* I.5-6.

⁷¹*To Autolytus* I.8.

to be immoral, and part of the natural world, so that it is irrational to worship them. In particular, it is irrational to worship the Emperor, though one ought to pray for him, and obey him, since his authority is derived from God, who charges him to rule justly.⁷² Several times he alludes to the discord among the Pagan authors as demonstration that they know nothing. The disagreement among the poets on the subject of providence he took to show that their poetic inspiration must in fact be from demons, while the unity of doctrine among the prophets, including the authoress of the Sybilline Oracles, show that the Holy Spirit inspires their writings.⁷³ Despite his presentation of the argument from design at the beginning of the work, Theophilus insists in the third book that one can only know about the beginning of the world and God through an eye-witness or some good authority. Like the poets, he disallows the possibility of reliable extrapolation to the unobserved based on theory, and so thinks one must depend on inspiration or revelation. So the demonstration that the poets have no inspiration from any reliable source leaves no other source for knowledge of God and the beginnings of the world than Christian revelation through the inspired prophets.⁷⁴ Where the Greeks agree with the Christians, as the Sybilline Oracle does, and some of the poets and philosophers writing on morality and the afterlife, Theophilus attributes the agreement to direct inspiration of the Pagans by the Spirit of God, whether this be in accord with their will or despite themselves and the demons that rule them, though he allows the possibility in some cases that the Pagans simply stole the material from Scripture.⁷⁵ He is at some pains to demonstrate the superior antiquity of Christian Scripture (that is, the *Old Testament*), producing a detailed chronology at the end of his work, and arguing that the Greeks only recently acquired

⁷²To *Autolytus* I.9-11.

⁷³To *Autolytus* II.8-9. The argument seems bad. After all, we could find discord in any tradition, even within a single author, if we cared to, especially if we count as a "tradition" the totality of everyone who at any time wrote from the background of a given culture. There would be no problem arguing in a similar way that Christians have no real guide to the truth, and cannot be inspired by the Spirit of God, since there is so much disagreement among the various schools. We would include among Christian schools, of course, sects regarded by most as heretical. Anyone, Pagan or Christian, could get agreement within their favored school by simply excluding everyone who disagreed with their views as members of the school. Still, the argument has some force. If the claim is that inspiration by the Gods provides the truth, then it must at least be considered how we can tell if someone is truly inspired, and inspired by a god rather than a demon, and we must be able to tell this independently of the doctrines espoused by the person to avoid begging the question. The problem was one for Christians as much as Pagans. The argument is not directed against philosophy, of course, since philosophers do not claim to know the truth through inspiration, but rather through the use of reason, but philosophers must still explain how it is that the use of the techniques involved in reasoning do not always lead to the same conclusions, and how one can tell, independently of the conclusions, when the techniques are properly employed. This is the problem approached, for instance, by Descartes.

⁷⁴To *Autolytus* III.2-3.

⁷⁵To *Autolytus* II. 36-38.

writing, so that the *Old Testament* speaks of times before anything the Greeks ever recorded.⁷⁶

Theophilus has little use for any of the philosophers. He attacks their morality, criticizing even Socrates as someone possessed by a demon, and Plato, “the most respectable philosopher among them,”⁷⁷ for the communism of wives and sexual license he proposes in the *Republic*. He sees most of them as holding to a naturalistic point of view, denying that there is a God, or making gods a part of nature, or God the world soul, at best.⁷⁸ Despite a grudging approval of Plato because of his Supernatural God, he rejects the Platonic notion that God created the world from preexisting, formless matter, and insists on creation *ex nihilo*, that is, the production of the world out of no previously existing thing whatsoever.⁷⁹ The creation *ex nihilo* was done through the Logos, which is the Spirit of God and God’s wisdom, which, existing from eternity within God, was somehow emitted from Him to cooperate in the creation and governance of the world.⁸⁰ Much of the second book of his work is devoted to a recitation of *Genesis* with commentary, this being the most acceptable part of Scripture to a Pagan philosopher, as Philo, for instance, knew, but also because of its clarity about the supernatural transcendence of God, which Theophilus saw as the main point of difference between the Christians and the Philosophers.

5. PAGAN ATTACKS—GALEN AND CELSUS

The one doctrine upon which all the world is united is that one God is king of all and father, and that there are many gods, sons of God, who rule together with God. This is believed by both Greek and barbarian.

⁷⁶To *Autolytus* III.16-29. The point about the recency of Greek literacy no doubt originated in Plato’s *Timaeus*, in which Egyptian priests are reported to comment on the youth of Greek culture in comparison to their own.

⁷⁷To *Autolytus* III.6, translated in Copleston (1962) 34.

⁷⁸To *Autolytus* II.4; III.7.

⁷⁹To *Autolytus* II.4. Pelikan (1981) I:36 hesitates whether Theophilus has fully grasped the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Apparently he is concerned that Theophilus claims here, to put it literally, that “out of things that are not God makes whatever he pleases.” Perhaps, then, he thinks that “things that are not” have some sort of being which is prior to the things God makes. This was apparently the view of the Gnostic Basilides, who held that God first gave being to matter, which was not before. His chief objection to Plato’s view is that an uncreated, eternal matter would necessarily be unchanging, a serious objection if it can be maintained. Perhaps his view is that whatever is uncreated and eternal has no external cause of its being, and so can have no external cause affecting it in any way at all, lest its being be somehow threatened by such a cause.

⁸⁰To *Autolytus* II.10.

Maximus of Tyre II.5.

Some say that Apollo, Helios, and Dionysus are the same god, as indeed you also think; and many maintain that all the gods are simply one particular force and power so that it makes no difference whether one worships this one or that one.

Dio Chrysostom XXI.11.

Christian apologies, however much they might have responded to popular opinions, went unnoticed, with Christianity itself, by Pagan philosophers for some time. One finds stray references to Christians in Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, who both remark that the apparent virtue in the martyrs' contempt of death is rooted in superstition and ignorance, mere habit, or sometimes even in madness, but not in true reason.⁸¹ Their remarks suggest that there were those who did see the martyrs' fearlessness as a mark of true virtue (assuming, unlike the Stoics, that there can be virtues not rooted in wisdom), and we shall see that Galen had a better opinion of Christians than these fellows express. No doubt the apparent courage of the martyrs shook the confidence of many liberal Pagans accustomed to thinking of self-control and a fearless acceptance of death as the mark of wisdom.

The earliest complete work devoted to the Christians was a pamphlet addressed to the Emperor and philosopher Marcus Aurelius by his teacher and friend, the Latin rhetorician Fronto of Cirta (100-166 C.E.).⁸² This pamphlet accused Christians of the ritual devouring of babies and sexual license. There might have been some substance to the accusations, inasmuch as some splinter groups, particularly the Carpocratians, attacked by Clement of Alexandria, may have engaged in the sexual practices. (The accusations of orthodox Christians against them, of course, must be taken with a grain of salt.) Somewhat later Lucian's *Peregrinus*⁸³ (167 C.E.) mocks Christians for their gullibility, but Galen of Pergamum makes the earliest substantial remarks on Christianity we have from a Pagan philosopher.

The general attitude of the intellectual elite to Christianity and Judaism seems to be reflected in

⁸¹Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 11.3; Epictetus, *Discourses* 4.7.6.

⁸²See Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 9.5-6, 31.2 for our knowledge of Fronto.

⁸³Lucian, *Peregrinus* 11.

Galen's⁸⁴ reference to some who

compare those who practice medicine without scientific knowledge to Moses, who framed laws for the tribe of Israel, since it is his method in his books to write without offering proofs, saying "God commanded, God spake."⁸⁵

The point is that these people cite authorities for their positions, but give no arguments. He would have expected a philosopher to argue that the laws proposed were suited to human beings, given their nature and the nature of human good. He does not limit the criticism to Christianity, recognizing that many philosophers were open to it as well, and that people in general choose their views on the basis of what their parents, teachers or friends believe, or because of the reputation of a school of thought, rather than on the basis of demonstrative evidence.⁸⁶ Nonetheless, Galen thought of Christianity as a philosophical school of sorts, rather than a superstition, since it did foster a virtuous way of life.

Most people are unable to follow any demonstrative argument consecutively; hence they need parables, and benefit from them just as we now see the people called Christians drawing their faith from parables and miracles, and yet sometimes acting in the same way as those who practice philosophy. For their contempt of death and of its sequel is patent to us every day, and likewise their restraint in cohabitation... and they also number individuals who, in self-discipline and self-control in matters of food and drink, and in their keen pursuit of justice, have attained a pitch not inferior to that of genuine philosophers.⁸⁷

Philosophy was generally viewed in later Antiquity as a way of life, chiefly involving moral idealism and self-restraint, that is, the practical wisdom which philosophy studies from a theoretical point of view.

Apparently some Christians liked this assessment of their religion, and aimed to correct the note of criticism within it. We have a text cited in Eusebius describing a group led by Theodotus the Tanner at Rome, whom Bishop Victor (187-189) excommunicated for their heretical view of the nature of Christ. They maintained an independent congregation under Victor's successor, Zephyrinus, but gave it up after their Bishop deserted them.

Instead of asking what Holy Scripture says, they strain every nerve to find a form of syllogism

⁸⁴For Galen I rely chiefly on Walzer (1949) and Wilken (1984) Ch. 4.

⁸⁵*On Hippocrates's Anatomy*; a similar remark occurs also at *On the Differences of Pulses* 2.4. For citations from Galen, see Walzer (1949).

⁸⁶Galen, *Libr. ord.*, in Walzer (1949) 19-20.

⁸⁷*Commentary on Plato's Republic*, translation from Walzer (1949) 15. Note that three of the four cardinal virtues, courage, self control, and justice, are attributed to Christians here, but not the fourth, wisdom.

to bolster up their impiety. If anyone challenges them with a text from divine Scripture, they examine it to see whether it can be turned into a conjunctive or disjunctive form of syllogism. They put aside the holy scriptures of God, and devote themselves to geometry... they admire Aristotle and Theophrastus, and some of them almost worship Galen... So it was that they laid hands unblushingly on the Holy Scriptures, claiming to have corrected them.⁸⁸

Here are Christian philosophers, it would seem, the earliest school of such we know, more committed to the rational pursuit of wisdom than any of the apologists, and in agreement with Galen's talk about the necessity of authority and parables for the mass of believers, reserving reasoned discourse for the few who could and would profit by it. Note how their approach to the text eschews the allegorical interpretations of a Porphyry or Origen, subjecting it to critical argumentative analysis instead, and how they seem to have taken an interest in textual criticism, not hesitating to change traditional readings when they thought the evidence warranted it. These philosophical Christians are heirs not of Neoplatonism, but of an older tradition, less given to the religious and literary, and more interested in a straightforward philosophical approach. They treat the scriptures in rather the way that Galen treats his Plato. The heresy of the group, called Adoptionism, may in fact have stemmed from careful textual scholarship, done with philosophical difficulties in mind. Its import is that Christ was born a man, though miraculously, and, after his virtue was thoroughly tested to make sure he was worthy, became the Son of God through adoption, because of the infinite degree to which he was filled with divine wisdom and power—that is to say, these people adhered to a version of the exaltation Christology of *Acts*, a view which had grown out of favor so much that the Church no longer remembered ever having held it. They denied that Jesus became God, at least in this life, though some seem to have held that he became God with the resurrection.⁸⁹ Of course, the view seemed metaphysically less difficult to many than the orthodox view, which makes Christ wholly man and wholly God at once. It was taken up again in one form or another several times later, most notably by Paul of Samosota around 260.

We possess a criticism of the Jewish-Christian doctrine of creation in one of Galen's treatises. The topic is the reason why the hair on the forehead does not grow long like that on the top of the head. The obvious answer is that long hair there would obscure vision, and Galen is in favor of this sort of teleological

⁸⁸*History of the Church* 5.28.13-15, translation from Wilken (1984) 78. For Theodotus the Tanner, who should not be confused with the Valentinian of the same name excerpted by Clement of Alexandria, see especially Harnack (1961) III Chapter 1.

⁸⁹Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* VII 35. In a possibly apocryphal story, Theodotus was said to have denied Christ to avoid persecution, and then, in defense of his action, claimed that he had denied not God, but a man, i.e. "if anyone blaspheme the Son of Man it will be forgiven him, but he who blasphememes the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven."

explanation, but, like a good Platonist, he thinks that one also needs to take into account the design constraints faced by whoever made human beings, if we are to understand this completely, for we need to explain how the physical arrangements of the human body achieve this desired result. Speaking of the God of *Genesis*, which he identifies as a creator with Plato's demiurge (as did Justin), he asks:

Did your demiurge simply enjoin this hair to preserve its length always equal, and does it strictly observe this order either from fear of its master's command, or from reverence for the God who give this order, or is it because it itself believes it better to do this? Is not this Moses's way of treating nature, and is it not superior to that of Epicurus? The best way, of course, is to follow neither of these but to maintain, like Moses, the principle of the demiurge as the origin of every created thing, but also adding to it the material principle. For our demiurge created it to preserve a constant length, because this was better. When he had determined to make it so, he set under part of it a hard body as a kind of cartilage, and under another part a hard skin attached to the cartilage through the eyebrows. For it was certainly not sufficient merely to will their becoming such; it would not have been possible for him to make a man out of stone in an instant, by simply wishing so. It is precisely this point in which our own opinion and that of Plato and of the other Greeks who follow the right method in the natural sciences differ from the position taken up by Moses. For the latter it seems enough to say that God simply willed the arrangement of matter and it was presently arranged in due order; for he believes everything to be possible with God, even should he wish to make a bull or a horse out of ashes. We, however, do not hold this; we say that certain things are impossible by nature and that God does not even attempt such things at all but that he chooses the best out of the possibilities of becoming.⁹⁰

The objection to Epicurus is that he ignores the teleological aspect of natural explanation, attributing the outcome to chance. But Moses, though he does better on this, speaks as though God can simply bring any state of affairs to exist simply by willing it, though he does not explain why things obey God's will. This is problematic not only because it is hard to see how it could be so, it also robs us of most of our explanation. The way we proceed is first to see what is best, and postulate a God that seeks it, and then to ask how this state of affairs can be accomplished, so as to explain why the particular arrangements that are in fact present in nature are the best arrangements possible under the circumstances. In so doing we wind up with the part of the explanation that Moses omits, that is, we can see what natural processes are used to give rise to the desired effect, and don't have to rely on some ridiculous explanation, such as things' fear of God, to see how nature accomplishes what it does. If God is not limited in some way in his resources for accomplishing his wishes, then half our explanation of the existing state of affairs simply vanishes, and the world becomes arbitrary. (In

⁹⁰Galen, *On the Uses of the Parts* 11.4, translation from Wilken (1984).

particular, we are left with no explanation of the shortcomings and evils inherent in the arrangement of the world, which a Platonist roots in the resistance of matter to the Forms.) The Platonic assumption of a resistant matter coeval with God captures this aspect of teleological explanation.

Now Galen's criticism is off the mark if applied to Philo, or Justin Martyr, both of whom seem to take it that God created the world from preexisting matter.⁹¹ The earliest Christian we know to have advanced creation *ex nihilo*, which Galen criticizes here, seems to have been Basilides, a Gnostic of the second quarter of the second century.⁹² This does not mean he invented the idea, of course. In any case it also appears in Theophilus,⁹³ and Tertullian gets it from him,⁹⁴ while Clement of Alexandria asserts it on the Platonist side,⁹⁵ and it becomes the usual doctrine among Christians, who were generally concerned to preserve God's sovereignty as absolute as possible.

The *True Doctrine* of Celsus (ca. 178) is the first serious work against the Christians by a Pagan thinker. It was answered by Origen in his *Against Celsus*, and it is that work we depend on for our knowledge of what Celsus said, for his book, like other Pagan attacks on Christianity, did not survive the Christianization of Rome.⁹⁶ Celsus is unknown outside the information provided about him in Origen. He seems to have been a conservative intellectual, an eclectic in philosophy, leaning toward Platonism (though Origen in the beginning identifies Celsus as an Epicurean of that name who was a friend of Lucian, he recognizes his leanings to Plato in the later portions of his work).⁹⁷ Celsus knew a good deal about Christianity at first hand, and had read

⁹¹Philo, *De opificio* 171; Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 10, 20, 59.

⁹²Wilken (1984) 88-89. Basilides held that God made the world out of nonexistent matter, which he brought into being through the creation of "seeds," and then fashioned into the world.

⁹³*To Autolytus* 2.4.

⁹⁴*Against Hermogenes* 21.3, for which see Chapter 6. Tertullian remarks that the doctrine is not stated in scripture, but that does not count against it, for neither is creation out of pre-existing matter, and surely that other doctrine would have been if it had been true, since otherwise the explanation of the world's origin would have remained incomplete.

⁹⁵Clement, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 4.63.3.

⁹⁶Wilken (1984) 94. Luckily, Origen is so careful to cite Celsus's arguments, often almost word for word, that his book can be reconstructed in detail from Origen's reply to it. An excellent translation with introduction and extensive notes is Origen (1953). My remarks are based on Wilken and Origen.

⁹⁷Wilken (1984) 95; Origen (1953) xxiv-xxvi.

Christian writings with attention.⁹⁸

Celsus's account of Jesus's early life is drawn from a non-biblical source, perhaps a story current among the Jews. He claims that Jesus was the child of adultery with one Panthera, and that his mother's husband, a carpenter, abandoned her. Celsus must have thought that Jesus made up the stories of his youth after returning to Judea from Egypt. Whatever the merits of his story, which seems slanderous, Celsus points out repeatedly that Christians rely on pure hearsay of the weakest sort for their history of Jesus, namely the testimony of the man himself and his adherents.⁹⁹ (Origen's reply is a *tu quoque*, suggesting that there is no better evidence for any of the Greek stories.) We are used to relying on the *Gospels* alone for our knowledge of Jesus, so this may look to us like slander, but Celsus tries to stay in touch with the facts, and does not, for instance, press charges of atheism, cannibalism or incest. There was perhaps no especially good reason why he should not have believed his source, especially given that it fit his view of things, just as the *Gospel* accounts fit the Christian view of things. He is sympathetic enough to say that much in the *Gospels* must have gotten there because his followers, in their enthusiasm, wished that it had happened, and so enjoyed dreams and visions that were eventually translated into waking reality.¹⁰⁰

Celsus reverses the charge that the philosophers got their stuff from Moses, holding that Jesus had read Plato, and St. Paul Heraclitus, so that insofar as their teachings are any good they are borrowed. Much of what is in the *Old Testament*, he thought, had been borrowed by Moses from Greek mythology, for instance, the story of the flood from the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha. In general, he sees the Christians as intellectually arrogant, with their claim to understand completely doctrines that philosophers only understand partially. Despite these claims, they have no arguments for their views, and they insist that people not ask questions, only believe.¹⁰¹ In fact, he says, Christians are for the most part ignorant bamboozlers of women, children, and slaves, who

⁹⁸In particular, it has been argued by Carl Andresen in *Logos und Nomos* (1955), that Celsus responded in detail to Justin's works. For a review of his arguments in English, see Chadwick (1966), note 59 to Chapter 1. Chadwick notes on his own that Celsus mocks Justin's unorthodox opinion that Christ's blood was divine (*Against Celsus* I 66, II 36).

⁹⁹For instance, Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.41. At 2.55 Origen tells us Celsus points out, among other things, that the testimony to the resurrection is that of a single woman, presumably Mary Magdalene, and suggests she suffered a hallucination or dream, if she did not simply tell the story to impress the others.

¹⁰⁰Wilken (1984) 108-12.

¹⁰¹Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.9. We should recall that for Plato and Aristotle knowledge involves the ability to give an account of what one knows, and defend oneself against objections. To tell the questioner to keep still, rather than answer his questions, betrays only ignorance.

reject the educated and praise the stupid, and urge children to rebel from their parents and teachers,¹⁰² though he does admit that some Christians take a more reasonable approach toward education and philosophy. (Origen observes that the proportion of the educated in Christian communities is about the same as it is in the population at large.)

On the social front, Celsus is especially critical of the Christian refusal of military service and civic office.¹⁰³ The refusal to resist evil or participate in public affairs means that, even if they are themselves well-behaved, they don't hold up their end in society. If they want to isolate themselves from their polity they should withdraw to the deserts. Otherwise they are morally obligated to assume their responsibilities in the social order that protects and supports them.

As for the status of the religion in the Empire, the Christians are antisocial rebels against the Jews. The Jews at least follow the customs of their ancestors, and recognize their civic duties, but Christians reject the Jewish Law, inventing a new tradition.¹⁰⁴ They refuse to recognize the authority of the ancients, who were closer than we are to the Gods. Celsus, as Origen recognizes, believes that the ancient wisdom of one's people ought to be followed, and he understands that ancient wisdom varies from one people to the next, but attributes this to the wisdom of the gods, who gave each people the laws they need.¹⁰⁵ He assumes that ancient wisdom is rooted in the communications of the gods, long ago. For this reason he sees anything of the shape of Christianity, a novelty that abandons the ancient ways, and attempts to get others to abandon their ancient ways as well, as an attack on Law itself, a subversion of the order of things set up by God. Here lies his most fundamental objection to Christianity.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, even the political order of the Empire was undermined by the Christians, for they set up Jesus as a rival to the one high God who watched over the Empire, and if everyone followed them, there would be "nothing to prevent the emperor from being abandoned, alone and deserted, while earthly things would come into the power of the most lawless and savage barbarians."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰²Origen, *Against Celsus* 3.55.

¹⁰³Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.73, 75.

¹⁰⁴Origen, *Against Celsus* 2.4. Cf. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 7.

¹⁰⁵Origen, *Against Celsus* 5.26.

¹⁰⁶Wilken (1984) 120-4.

¹⁰⁷Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.68.

The miracles of Christ and the Apostles he sees as magic, and claims that Jesus learned his magic in Egypt.¹⁰⁸ One needs to know, here, both that the Platonists disapproved of magic (which works by an appeal to lower *daemones*), and that it was a criminal offence in the Empire.¹⁰⁹ He sees invocations of Jesus's name to exorcize demons, for instance, as the use of spells, and no doubt both the less presentable sort of Christian and others in fact used Jesus's name for magical purposes. (This is an old accusation, for in *Matthew 9:34* the Pharisees claim that it is by the Prince of Devils that Jesus casts out devils.) It is precisely because Pagans were quite accustomed to magical performances and faked miracles of healing that Christians, as we have seen, relied on prophecy rather than miracles to establish the truth of their faith. The demons would not know God's intentions, and so prophecies cannot be faked.

Celsus's criticism of Christian doctrine presupposes monotheism, and the spiritual God of a Platonist. The High God could not have come down to live among men, he insists, not only because this is shameful and subjects the perfectly blessed to misfortune, but also because God is both immutable and immaterial.¹¹⁰ We should bear in mind, also, that the God of a Platonist is the mind that contains the Forms, and so, of course it does not interact with this world. It is instead the image of perfection this world strives to imitate. Celsus also claims that Christians, though they claim to worship one God, in fact worship Jesus as well, so they don't live up to their own principles.¹¹¹ This is a point that the Apologists seem to glide over when addressing themselves to Pagan intellectuals. Celsus did not object so much to worshipping Jesus, for Pagans often worshiped great heroes, lower gods, and the like, though he did argue that Jesus was less worthy of worship, say, than Jonah or Daniel.¹¹² Rather it was the fact that Christians gave Jesus honors equal to that of God the Father that seemed wrong to Celsus, just as it seemed wrong to the Pharisees.¹¹³ The Pagan worship of many gods is all right, Celsus maintains, because the worship of the one god is made perfect by worshipping him under his various aspects, and worshipping, with suitably reduced honors, the divine beings subordinate to him who run the

¹⁰⁸Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.6; 1.38; 1.68.

¹⁰⁹Wilken (1984) 99.

¹¹⁰Origen, *Against Celsus* 4.2, 14.

¹¹¹Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.12.

¹¹²Origen, *Against Celsus* 7.53.

¹¹³Wilken (1984) 105-8.

world.¹¹⁴ Like Galen, Celsus also criticized Christianity for its belief in supernatural powers, arguing in particular that the resurrection of the dead is impossible. “As for the flesh... God would neither desire nor be able to make it everlasting contrary to reason. For he himself is the reason of everything that exists; therefore he is not able to do anything contrary to reason, or to his own character.”¹¹⁵

He raises suspicions concerning the Christian story of salvation on a number of grounds. For one thing, why need God descend to Earth as a man to reveal himself,¹¹⁶ and if He chose to do this, why in such an obscure corner of the world as Judea? The notion of a people elected by God betrays both insularity and a certain arrogance, as if God did not care for the entire world. The God of the *Old Testament* is rather a muddler, constantly scrambling to make up for mistakes, and seeks the recognition of men, as though he was subject to mortal ambition. Why did God come to Earth, anyway? To put things right, it seems, but why had things gone wrong in the first place? Is the Creator incompetent? And if the world was in need, why did He not come sooner?¹¹⁷

Celsus, of course, thought that the problem of evil could be dealt with within a Pagan philosophical system, but the solution there relied on the notion that existence, at least of particular things, was metaphysically inseparable from evil. God simply could not make individual things not subject to evil. The Christian God is a particular thing, separate from His creation, not a Platonic mind in which the Ideas, and so the substances of all things, dwell. Moreover, he is omniscient, omnipotent and perfectly benevolent, and so presumably could have made a world free from evil. We will see Christian Platonists arguing that it is not particularity, but rather finiteness, that is inevitably subject to evil, but this adaptation of Pagan resources does not work as well as it might, for their story of salvation speaks of angels who have never fallen, so that it seems that not *all* finite things (even those with free will) inevitably fall into moral evil, and the question is left why *any* should do so. Moreover, the Christian outlook does not recognize the intrinsic value of any part of God’s creation except human beings, and so it is denied another resource available to the Pagans, as well, who viewed everything that exists as having intrinsic value, so that it made sense for men to suffer, if it could not be avoided, to make room for the rest of the natural world.

¹¹⁴Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.66.

¹¹⁵Origen, *Against Celsus* 5.14.

¹¹⁶Origen, *Against Celsus* 4.2, 3.

¹¹⁷Origen, *Against Celsus* 4.8.

6. ATHENAGORAS ON THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

Thus does reason, tracing out the truth from the natural sequence, afford ground for believing in the resurrection, since it is safer and stronger than experience for establishing the truth.

Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection of the Body* 17.

Following the *Plea for the Christians* Athenagoras wrote a treatise *On the Resurrection of the Body*,¹¹⁸ the first serious philosophical work we have from a Christian thinker. The resurrection of the body was a stumbling block for the philosophers, even the Platonists, who, though they could grant an afterlife, thought that it was only the immaterial soul that survived. Celsus, in his attack on Christianity, asks “what sort of body, after being entirely corrupted, could return to its original nature and that same condition which it had before it was dissolved? As they have nothing to say in reply, they escape to a most outrageous refuge by saying ‘that anything is possible to God.’ But, indeed neither can God do what is shameful nor does he desire what is contrary to nature.”¹¹⁹ Athenagoras responds directly to these arguments, and we can securely venture that the occasion for his treatise was Celsus’s publication of the *True Discourse* in 178.

Athenagoras begins with a point of method.¹²⁰ He proposes first to answer objections against the doctrine, the objections raised by Celsus, as it turns out, and then to go on to demonstrations that the doctrine is true. He suggests that the objections he is about to answer are captious, a deliberate attempt to destroy the truth, and that answering objections to true doctrines would not be needed if it were not for the sort of ill will shown by enemies of the truth. Probably he thought his replies to the objections were pretty obvious, and could not easily envision anyone rejecting them, or even failing to anticipate them.

In any case, he proceeds to consider whether it is possible that God should bring about the resurrection of the body, in order to approach these objections, considering first whether God has the power. He begins with the observation that God is omnipotent and omniscient, and that whatever God first created he can

¹¹⁸This treatise is translated in Coxe (1956) Vol. II: 149-162, and in Athenagoras (1956).

¹¹⁹Quoted in Origen, *Against Celsus* 5.14, translation from Wilken (1984) 104.

¹²⁰*On the Resurrection of the Body* 1.

certainly reconstruct, but this is just the sort of thing that Celsus would reject, of course. Is it even logically possible for a physical thing to come into being again once it has been utterly destroyed? Athenagoras argues that it is, since the material making up a human body could be reassembled by God in the same way as before, and joined with the same soul, and that would constitute resurrection of the body. It might be urged that the elements of a particular human body are not only dispersed, but are actually incorporated into other human bodies, so that they would have to end up in two bodies at once in the last days, but Athenagoras replies that it is at least possible that God should prevent any element of a human body from ever being reused in this way. Indeed, not every piece of material in the human body is proper to it considered as a human body, and only the more subtle elements apparently wind up in the resurrection body (drawing on St. Paul's account of the new body as a spiritual one), so that makes the task of keeping each person's bodily elements separate from everyone else's even easier.¹²¹

Should Celsus have been impressed? He would have been aware of discussions of such problems as "the ship of Theseus" in the Megaran school, in which it is proposed that an Athenian tourist site, the Argos, has by now had every single plank and nail replaced, one by one, in occasional repairs, so that no piece at all of the original ship remains, but it might be argued nonetheless that it is the same ship. Perhaps Athenagoras could have replied that the presence of the soul made a difference, since the soul persisted even over the interval during which the body was dispersed, but then why wouldn't just any body associated with this soul count as its resurrection body? why fuss over preserving the same material makeup for it? Because, it seems, the person is composed of both body and soul, and the preservation of personal identity requires that both be the same. But if the body in question is only the material making a person up, Athenagoras's conviction that this material precisely is essential to the identity can surely be challenged. As long as there is continuity and the same organization is maintained (the same substantial form, Aristotle would say), the material need not be the same. Apparently Athenagoras would not buy that, but requires that the material of the body, at least some part of it "proper" to the person, continue as part of it along with its substantial organization. Perhaps such a view is the popular one, people, it might be objected, are not like Heraclitus's river. There is some core of material that must be preserved for human life to continue, however less essential parts may interchange matter with the environment, and this material must be recovered in the resurrection body.

Athenagoras now addresses the second issue, whether it is proper and just for God to bring about

¹²¹*On the Resurrection of the Body* 4-8.

resurrection of the body. He argues that there is no injustice here to the soul or the body, nor is it unjust to animals, for having not the same nature as human beings, in particular, no rational soul or free will, they cannot justly claim to be deprived by annihilation at death. “To creatures whose nature is not alike the Just Being does not assign a like end. And, besides, with creatures that have no notion of justice there can be no complaint of injustice.”¹²²

Having established that it is possible to a Just God to bring about the resurrection of the body, Athenagoras goes on to show that He actually does so. He gives three proofs, of which the second, he says, arises from the nature of human beings, and so constitutes a proper demonstration. A human being by nature consists of an immortal soul and the body it rules. Now the soul, being immortal, needs a body at all times, so given the evident fact of death, a resurrection of body as well as soul is to be expected. But for it to be the same person, it must be the same soul and the same body. (In response to Plato, Athenagoras argues that understanding and reason inhere in the person, a combination of body and soul, not in the soul alone.)¹²³ It might be questioned here whether a human being could cease to exist for a time and then come into existence again, and Athenagoras seems to respond to this concern with the remark that death is to be viewed as a temporary lapse of functioning, like sleep.¹²⁴ Perhaps we are to view the soul as asleep, and the body as dispersed, rather like a piece of electronics temporarily disassembled for shipment, so that neither is functioning for the moment, or can function until the body is reassembled.

The first proof asks what the purpose of a human being is in God’s creation. God, like any rational agent, would have made humans only for His own use, for the use of another, or for their own sakes, so that they should live. God, of course, has no needs of his own, and is perfectly blessed without outside assistance. And human beings seem not to have a place in the natural order for the sake of anything else, rather, all other things serve rational natures as their inferiors. So God could only have made human beings for their own sake, so that they could enjoy existence. The argument gets a little fuzzy at this point, but Athenagoras apparently thinks that only things made for the sake of some limited aim outside themselves are reasonably given a limited life. Human beings would be given eternal life by a reasonable God, for at no point could God say that now they have fulfilled their purpose. Their purpose is simply an ongoing life. Given this much, Athenagoras now

¹²²*On the Resurrection of the Body* 10.

¹²³*On the Resurrection of the Body* 15.

¹²⁴*On the Resurrection of the Body* 16.

argues that a human life requires a body. The life the soul is one in which it governs a body in wisdom, and so it must have a body to govern.¹²⁵

The third line of argument draws on moral grounds. People are due rewards and punishments for their virtuous or vicious behavior in this life, and clearly they do not always receive it in this life. So, if God is just, there must be an afterlife in which they do. Athenagoras points out that this argument does not quite show that everyone is resurrected, as it stands, since some infants die without deserving judgment. In a restatement of the argument, however, he makes it more fundamental. If human life is to be accountable to law, which reason requires, then a judgment is required, for else we cannot recognize the dictates of reason, requiring virtue and justice, but like the animals, should pursue only pleasure. Man, “as being in want, requires food; as being mortal, posterity; as being rational, a process of judgment.”¹²⁶ But judgment is not provided in this life, so a resurrection is assured, and, such a resurrection requires a resurrection of the body, for the body is as much implicated in a person’s acts as the soul. The person, not the soul or the body, did the thing, and so a person must be judged for it, not the body or the soul. Athenagoras speaks of injustice toward the soul, if it were to be judged alone, for it did not alone produce the acts for which it is judged. It has no natural inclination to sex or hunger, for instance, and every action, apparently, springs as much from the body as the soul.¹²⁷ This all seems more than a little open to question, for it is not as if soul and body are two different persons, each with partial responsibility for an act, but perhaps we should be charitable. If Athenagoras meant that an entire person must be brought before the bar at judgment, not merely a body (a dead body, one assumes), or merely a (non-functioning) soul, then his point makes some sense, and can be seen as a protest against the Platonic view of the soul as identical to the person, and against Gnostic notions, to be dealt with below in Chapter 5. Athenagoras might have claimed Peripatetic antecedents for his position inasmuch as he suggests that the soul cannot function, even in thought, without the body. In the end, if human beings are to be happy, accomplishing the aim for which they were made, they must rationally contemplate the natural objects of reason, and God and his commandments, and this requires a body.¹²⁸

¹²⁵*On the Resurrection of the Body* 13.

¹²⁶*On the Resurrection of the Body* 14, 18-19, 24.

¹²⁷*On the Resurrection of the Body* 20-23.

¹²⁸*On the Resurrection of the Body* 25.

7. MINUCIUS FELIX

Our good brother had disclosed feelings of displeasure, annoyance, indignation and grief that unlearned, poor, and ignorant people should discuss heavenly things. Yet, he should know that all human beings, without respect to age, sex, or rank, are born capable of and fit for reasoning and understanding; they do not acquire wisdom by good fortune, but receive it as an innate gift from nature... There is, then, no reason for indignation or grief if a common man makes inquiries into things divine and holds and pronounces his views on the subject.

Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 16.5-6.

The apology of Minucius Felix, the *Octavius*, which seems to respond to Celsus in some points, was written before 197 in Latin.¹²⁹ Nothing is known of Felix's life, but he was presumably, like Tertullian, a native of North Africa, for Tertullian models much of his *Apology* on the *Octavius*. All the authors discussed up to this point wrote in Greek, and Christianity seems to have been largely restricted to colonies of Greek-speaking people in the cities in the first two centuries. The growth of a Latin Christian literature in the third century gives notice a new group of Christians in the West, found at first, it seems, in North Africa around Carthage. The *Octavius* is a dialogue, modeled loosely on Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods*, in which a Pagan, Caecilius, is convinced by a Christian, Octavius, to adopt Christianity. Felix is less skeptical than the Greek Apologists, and thought that philosophy had proven beyond any doubt the existence of God and his providence (through the argument from design), and God's unity (from the unity of design observable in the world, since when there are several rulers, there is always conflict),¹³⁰ and borrowed from the prophets the natural immortality of the soul, and the existence of future rewards and punishments.¹³¹ Nonetheless, the philosophers, in particular those who, like Socrates, take a skeptical line, are full of the vices they condemn in others.¹³² Caecilius is a

¹²⁹For a translation, see Felix (1974).

¹³⁰*Octavius* 17-18. Minucius argues here that God should be called only by the name "God," so that we will not be misled about God's nature, thinking him mortal and like creatures—this as a counterbalance to the Pagan argument that the supreme God has many names, and it is suitable that He should, so that we can more fully conceive him under his many aspects. Chapter 19 argues in detail that the philosophers agreed with this view, so that (Ch. 20.1) "one might think that either the Christians of today are philosophers, or that the philosophers of old were already Christians."

¹³¹*Octavius* 34. He says the philosophers garbled these doctrines in such deviations as the notion of the transmigration of the soul to animal bodies. In reply to the objections against the resurrection, he suggests that the body, even though it is destroyed for us, still exists for "God, the preserver of the elements," presumably arguing along the lines of Athenagoras.

¹³²*Octavius* 38.5, which attacks Socrates for his *daemon* as well as his skepticism.

Skeptic, and argues that one should be a Pagan simply because one has to live by some beliefs, and reason cannot settle which are true. In particular, the world might have arisen by chance, not design, and the prevalence of evils in the world, and their indifference to the moral character of those who suffer them, suggest that there is no ethical god in charge of things.¹³³ So it is best to go along with one's tradition, for it establishes the existence of the gods not through reason, but through the testimony of our ancestors, and not only is this superior to the uncertain testimony of reason, but we ought to show respect to our ancestors by believing them. It follows, of course, that each person should follow the local tradition, and these traditions are various.¹³⁴ On the other hand, they agree in the existence of a multiplicity of gods, and the suggestions of philosophers, relying on reason alone, that there are no gods, are justly treated with contempt.¹³⁵ Felix's trust in reason is a response to this argument—one *can* know enough through reason to see that the Pagans are wrong and reject the testimony of tradition. His apology does not elaborate on the notion that the Christian tradition is older than everyone else's, and it avoids mention of any Christian belief without a parallel in Pagan philosophy, for Felix's strategy is to undermine the authority of tradition as such, and present Christianity as primarily a religion of reason. In doing this he leaves the impression that a virtuous Pagan who adopted Christianity. He would simply follow the best elements of his own tradition. The more peculiar tenets of Christianity would surely be discovered by any Pagan who actually started to investigate the possibility of conversion, but Felix is not trying to convert. He is trying to win tolerance, and he does not expect most of his readers to seek out more exact information at the source, but only to decide that this new religion is not so crazy as has been reported. Like Judaism, it is a kind of philosophical sect.

8. TERTULLIAN

¹³³*Octavius* 6. In Chapter 36 Felix responds to the argument from evil, arguing that the just suffer in order that their goodness may be tried, so that God can justly distribute rewards and punishments. As for fate, God determines our fates ahead of time, but makes his decision on the basis of what he knows beforehand will be our deserts, given our characters. Our minds are free. There is an interesting contrast, noted in Rand (1928) 44–47, between Caecilius's almost comic characterization of the Christian God as a sort of busybody, always present and watching and prying and judging (rather than, like a proper God, maintaining a noble distance from the affairs of men, the details of which are too petty to concern him), and Octavius's expansion at the end of the discussion on God's immanence in the world, which makes temples and shrines unnecessary.

¹³⁴*Octavius* 7. Octavius accuses Caecilius of inconsistency in Chapter 16, though there seems to be no logical inconsistency here. There may, of course, be an inconsistency in attitude—can one really be said to believe if this sort of thing is the ground of one's belief. (Of course, for a genuine Pagan, such an argument would likely not be the ground, but only a justification, for his belief.)

¹³⁵*Octavius* 8.

It is the law of mankind and the natural right of each individual to worship what he thinks proper, nor does the religion of one man harm or help another. But, it is not proper for religion to compel men to religion, which should be accepted of one's own accord, not by force, since sacrifices also are required of a willing mind. So, even if you compel us to sacrifice, you will render no service to your gods.

Tertullian, *To Scapula* 2.

These testimonies of the soul are as true as they are simple, as simple as they are common, as common as they are universal, as universal as they are natural, as natural as they are divine... Nature is the teacher; the soul is the pupil. Whatever either the one has taught or the other has learned has come from God, that is, the Teacher of the teacher. What the soul can divine with regard to its chief teacher, you are able to judge from that which is within you. Learn to perceive that which makes you perceive... Is it really something strange if it knows him by whom it was bestowed? Even deceived by its adversary, it remembers its Author, His goodness and law, its own end, and its adversary. Is it so extraordinary, then, if, being a gift of God, it proclaims the same things which god has given to His own people to know?

Tertullian, *The Testimony of the Soul* 5.

Tertullian was born perhaps about 170 in Carthage, apparently in an upper class family. He received training in rhetoric, medicine and law, which shaped his writing, and may have been working as a lawyer when he converted to Christianity about 193. He was married. Shortly after his conversion, in 197, he wrote *To the Pagans* (*Ad Nationes*) and then his *Apology*, the first work an early draft of the second.¹³⁶ The book draws on Minucius Felix, Varro's analysis of religion, and training in the law. He wrote more than thirty other works, generally controversial in tone, and often strikingly idiosyncratic. We will examine the more philosophical of these in the following chapters. His work is responsible for the establishment of much of Christian theological vocabulary in Latin. From 206 his writings show increasingly the influence of Montanism, and Tertullian later became leader of a separatist Montanist group in Carthage, writing openly against the Orthodox view. This did not disable Tertullian as a theologian for the Orthodox, since the Montanists differed from the Orthodox only on issues of morality and the authority of the Bishops. In particular, Tertullian's works against heresy were

¹³⁶The letter *Ad Scapulam* forms a third, brief apologetic work addressed, perhaps in 217, to the Proconsul of Carthage.

valued. His last writings can be placed about 212, the presumable date of his death.¹³⁷

Tertullian's *Apology*, unlike any work we have examined so far, makes a genuine attempt to argue the legal case for the Christians, and in so doing appeals often to the liberal principles of the magistrates, its supposed audience. Its violent attacks on Pagan religion suggest that the work was not intended primarily for the Pagan magistrates, but rather for Christians, but Tertullian is typically so violent in his attacks on views not his own that it is no impossible he did wish to bring his work to the attention of the government, if just to set the record straight rather than actually convincing anyone of anything. Tertullian opens with an attack on the consistency of the persecutors in their actions against Christianity. Christians can be convicted of no crime other than their name, which makes the law against them an unjust one.¹³⁸ The law against secret societies, which Trajan wished to uphold, is intended to prevent partisanship and violence in politics, and there is no danger of Christians engaging in partisan politics since they eschew politics entirely.¹³⁹ Trajan's reply to Pliny's letter specifies that he not hunt down Christians, as though it were not really a crime to be one.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, only the 'crime' of Christianity induces judges to torture people, not to get them to confess, but to get them to deny their crime so they can be released.¹⁴¹ Indeed, it is only the cruelest of the Emperors who have tried to enforce the law against Christians with any consistency—the others, it seems, were aware of its injustice.¹⁴² It is only Christians who are denied the right to worship their own God.¹⁴³ Elsewhere Tertullian argues that the

¹³⁷Barnes (1971) argues in detail against the traditional view of Tertullian's life rooted in the testimony of Jerome's *Concerning Famous Men*. The notion that his father was a military man is traced to a corruption in the manuscript tradition. Tertullian was probably a member of the upper, professional classes by birth. He cannot be identified with the jurist, Tertullian, whose works are reported in Justinian's *Digest* and *Institutes*. As for Jerome's assertion that he died at an advanced age, and wrote much that is not preserved, Barnes suggests that he may have been martyred and that little was lost. Despite the fact that the *Passion of Perpetua*, reporting a set of martyrdoms in Carthage in 203, is clearly a Montanist work (Barnes (1971) 71–79), it was adopted into the Catholic Church with its martyrs, and Eusebius, in his *History of the Church* V 16.20 ff., 18.6 ff. declares that no Montanist ever died a martyr (despite, or rather because of, the Montanist belief that martyrdom must not be avoided, but even sought out, if one was to be saved). So if Tertullian, the best known spokesman for the Montanists, had been a martyr, this might have been suppressed by the orthodox.

¹³⁸*Apology* 4.

¹³⁹*Apology* 38.

¹⁴⁰*Apology* 2.6-9.

¹⁴¹*Apology* 2.12.

¹⁴²*Apology* 5. In the apology *To Scapula*, an open letter to the governor of Africa in 211-213, who had initiated a persecution, Tertullian lists many governors who avoided persecuting the Christians as much as they could.

¹⁴³*Apology* 24. Also *Apology* 28, *To Scapula* 2.

Christians are so many that a proper enforcement of the law is impossible, and hence persecutions serve only to give license to Pagans who unjustly attack their personal enemies with accusations.¹⁴⁴

Origen, writing somewhat later, accused the Pagan persecutors of violation of natural law, which the Stoics had distinguished from the laws of particular nations, and claimed that Christians, in worshiping God properly, are only following the natural law, as they ought to when it conflicts with the laws of their country.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, Origen claims, it conforms with reason to form illegal associations if one does this “for the sake of truth.” Just as one does well to form secret associations to overthrow a tyrant, so Christians do well to form associations to oppose the power of the Devil, and a government under the influence of the Devil, so that, barbarous and despotic, it outlaws those who follow virtue and the truth.¹⁴⁶

Tertullian’s attack on Paganism follows Minucius Felix, in particular in the view of Euhemerus that the Pagan gods were all originally men.¹⁴⁷ An interesting original touch is provided by the argument that the gods cannot be expected to favor Rome, since they were all born abroad, and their protection may not be worth much, since they could not protect their own peoples from Rome.¹⁴⁸

On the resurrection of the body, Tertullian seems to follow the line taken by Athenagoras, even to arguing that the body must be resurrected because it was involved in the sins and virtues of the man and so must, in all justice, be punished or rewarded together with the soul. He refers to the absolute power of God to explain how the resurrection can occur, arguing that if God could make us out of nothing, He can certainly make us a second time out of nothing.¹⁴⁹ This has a nice ring, but, of course, it may be questioned whether we could be made from nothing a second time. Would the new person be ourselves, or only an exact copy? Ordinarily mere similarity, however great, would not establish the identity of two things, unless they are both parts of a continuous and unbroken history appropriate to the nature of the thing at issue, so that later stages

¹⁴⁴*To Scapula* Ch. 5.

¹⁴⁵Origen, *Against Marcion* V 37. Notice should be taken of two late apologies, that of Arnobius *Against the Peoples (Adversus Gentes)*, written ca. 303, *The Establishment of Divine Things (Divinarum Institutionem)*. Neither has any noticeable philosophical content, or develops arguments going beyond what we have seen in the second century.

¹⁴⁶Origen, *Against Celsus* I 1.

¹⁴⁷*Apology* 10; Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 20-21.

¹⁴⁸*Apology* 25.

¹⁴⁹*Apology* 48.

of the thing are explained from earlier stages and natural causal processes. Can God perhaps decide what the criteria of identity are, or is this a matter of necessary truths that God cannot affect? Surely the latter must be the case. But we should pursue this matter when we deal with thinkers who penetrated further into it, and not press too hard what was no doubt an offhand remark. Besides, Tertullian elsewhere argues that the soul continues to exist after death in Hades until the resurrection, when it is once more united to its body, and so does not put continued personal identity at risk.

When he finally turns to the philosophers, Tertullian points out how often they protest against common religious practices, and argues that Christians deserve the same tolerance they are granted to express their views. Indeed, even the most uneducated Christian knows more than the philosophers about God, and Christians are free of the vices of the philosophers as well.¹⁵⁰ The disagreement of the philosophers about divine matters demonstrates that they don't really know what they are talking about. Presumably he thinks a genuine cognitive faculty will produce agreement when it operates in an area where it is competent, so reason is not competent in these matters. As for Christians, their rule of truth is the faith of the Apostles, which provides unity of belief, ruling out heresies.¹⁵¹ So presumably also he thinks that whatever produces agreement amounts to a genuine cognitive faculty. This is all quite absurd, of course. Presumably one needs to determine what really comes from the Apostles to obtain unity of belief, and some heretics may have the wrong opinion about this, and, in the same way, a philosopher could argue that reason provides unity if we really restrict ourselves to what reason tells us, and rule out the results of mistaken reasoning. More seriously, the rule of Apostolic faith seems merely ad hoc unless we explain why it is a reliable guide to the truth. To do that, we must resort to reason, not the pure reason of the sciences, of course, but reason as it is applied to a historical argument in favor of this rule of truth. Tertullian argues in the usual way that the myths and philosophies of the Pagans, insofar as they have any plausibility at all, are distortions of the truth of Scripture, borrowed from Moses. When one espouses a single way of getting at the truth, all truth *has* to be traced back to this origin.

In the odd little treatise *On the Testimony of the Soul* (written 197 or 198), Tertullian refers to another source of truth. The soul, taught by Nature, knows Him by whom it is bestowed, so that when teaching occurs, God is the real teacher. The idea is not quite Platonic, and Tertullian seems to be making an effort not to attribute this innate knowledge of the soul to philosophical reason. He argues instead that the soul necessarily

¹⁵⁰*Apology* 46.

¹⁵¹*Apology* 47.

picked up some mark from its maker, so that it knows by nature the chief facts not only about God, but also about its role in the world. The problem is to get people to be honest about what they believe on instinct. To do this, Tertullian refers to common expressions in everyday speech, expostulations and the like, which reveal our underlying beliefs in a just God, a proper morality, judgment and an afterlife, and so on. Similarly one may find noble sentiments and truths in Pagan thinkers that are due not to plagiarism from Moses, nor to the presence of the Logos, but rather to this natural knowledge of God and his law.¹⁵² All this should remind us of St. Paul in *Romans*. In the end, all this innate knowledge of the soul does for those who will not become Christian is to leave them without excuse on the day of judgment.

¹⁵²Tertullian, *On the Crown* 6.2; *Against Marcion* 5.15.3; *On Monogamy* 1.1. See Pelikan (1981) I:32.