

# Plea for the Christians

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Athenagoras of Athens



CHRISTIAN  
CLASSIC  
COLLECTION

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## Athenagoras of Athens

Athenagoras of Athens (c. 133–190) was one of the earliest Christian philosophers to speak with clarity and grace in the language of Greek reason—transforming apologetics into an art of persuasion and peace. A highly educated Athenian and likely a former Platonist, he converted to Christianity after studying the Scriptures and the witness of believers, finding in the Gospel the true fulfillment of philosophy’s deepest questions.

His masterpiece, the *Plea for the Christians*, written around AD 177 and addressed to the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, defended Christians against charges of atheism, immorality, and political disloyalty. With eloquence and calm logic, Athenagoras demonstrated that Christians worship the one true God, live with moral purity, and seek the common good. In his other surviving work, *On the Resurrection of the Dead*, he boldly argued that belief in resurrection is both rational and consistent with divine justice.

Athenagoras combined intellect and humility, proving that faith and philosophy can enrich one another. In an age of persecution, he stood as a bridge between Athens and Jerusalem—a voice of reason, reverence, and radiant conviction that truth and love never contradict.

## Introduction

Athenagoras's *Plea for the Christians* is a model of calm courage—an elegant appeal to reason addressed to Emperor Marcus Aurelius and Commodus in the late second century. Against rumors of atheism, cannibalism, and immorality, he invites Rome to examine the facts: Christians worship the one uncreated God, honor the emperor by praying for him, cherish marriage and chastity, refuse bloodshed, and care for the vulnerable. His refrain is as modern as it is ancient: punish crimes, not names.

What makes this work sparkle is its intellectual confidence. Athenagoras argues that genuine philosophy points beyond idols to the living God, that the Logos orders the universe, and that Christian worship is the fulfillment—not the enemy—of sound reason. He exposes the inconsistency of pagan cults with courteous precision and shows Christian ethics as the empire's quiet leaven: truthful speech, self-control, generosity, and prayer.

Read this as a handbook for persuasive witness. It teaches how to answer slander with clarity, power with patience, and curiosity with transparent lives. By the final page, you'll feel steadied to speak—not defensively, but hospitably—so that truth can be seen as well as heard.

# Chapter 1. Injustice Shown Towards the Christians.

In your empire, greatest of sovereigns, different nations have different customs and laws; and no one is hindered by law or fear of punishment from following his ancestral usages, however ridiculous these may be. A citizen of Ilium calls Hector a god, and pays divine honours to Helen, taking her for Adrasteia. The Lacedæmonian venerates Agamemnon as Zeus, and Phylonoë the daughter of Tyndarus; and the man of Tenedos worships Tennes. The Athenian sacrifices to Erechtheus as Poseidon. The Athenians also perform religious rites and celebrate mysteries in honour of Agraulus and Pandrosus, women who were deemed guilty of impiety for opening the box. In short, among every nation and people, men offer whatever sacrifices and celebrate whatever mysteries they please. The Egyptians reckon among their gods even cats, and crocodiles, and serpents, and asps, and dogs. And to all these both you and the laws give permission so to act, deeming, on the one hand, that to believe in no god at all is impious and wicked, and on the other, that it is necessary for each man to worship the gods he prefers, in order that through fear of the deity, men may be kept from wrongdoing. But why — for do not, like the multitude, be led astray by hearsay — why is a mere name odious to you? Names are not deserving of hatred: it is the unjust act that calls for penalty and punishment. And accordingly, with admiration of your mildness and gentleness, and your peaceful and benevolent disposition towards every man, individuals live in the possession of equal rights; and the cities, according to their rank, share in equal honour; and the whole empire, under your intelligent sway, enjoys profound peace. But for us who are called Christians you have not in like manner cared; but although we commit no wrong — nay, as will appear in the sequel of this discourse, are of all men most piously and righteously disposed towards the Deity and towards your government — you allow us to be harassed, plundered, and

persecuted, the multitude making war upon us for our name alone. We venture, therefore, to lay a statement of our case before you — and you will deem from this discourse that we suffer unjustly, and contrary to all law and reason — and we beseech you to bestow some consideration upon us also, that we may cease at length to be slaughtered at the instigation of false accusers. For the fine imposed by our persecutors does not aim merely at our property, nor their insults at our reputation, nor the damage they do us at any other of our greater interests. These we hold in contempt, though to the generality they appear matters of great importance; for we have learned, not only not to return blow for blow, nor to go to law with those who plunder and rob us, but to those who smite us on one side of the face to offer the other side also, and to those who take away our coat to give likewise our cloak. But, when we have surrendered our property, they plot against our very bodies and souls, pouring upon us wholesale charges of crimes of which we are guiltless even in thought, but which belong to these idle praters themselves, and to the whole tribe of those who are like them.

## **Chapter 2. Claim to Be Treated as Others are When Accused.**

If, indeed, any one can convict us of a crime, be it small or great, we do not ask to be excused from punishment, but are prepared to undergo the sharpest and most merciless inflictions. But if the accusation relates merely to our name — and it is undeniable, that up to the present time the stories told about us rest on nothing better than the common indiscriminating popular talk, nor has any Christian been convicted of crime — it will devolve on you, illustrious and benevolent and most learned sovereigns, to remove by law this despiteful treatment, so that, as throughout the world both individuals and cities partake of your beneficence, we also may feel grateful to you, exulting that we are no longer the victims of false accusation. For it does not comport with your justice, that others when charged with crimes should not be punished till they are convicted, but that in our case the name we bear should have more force than the evidence adduced on the trial, when the judges, instead of inquiring whether the person arraigned have committed any crime, vent their insults on the name, as if that were itself a crime. But no name in and by itself is reckoned either good or bad; names appear bad or good according as the actions underlying them are bad or good. You, however, have yourselves a clear knowledge of this, since you are well instructed in philosophy and all learning. For this reason, too, those who are brought before you for trial, though they may be arraigned on the gravest charges, have no fear, because they know that you will inquire respecting their previous life, and not be influenced by names if they mean nothing, nor by the charges contained in the indictments if they should be false: they accept with equal satisfaction, as regards its fairness, the sentence whether of condemnation or acquittal. What, therefore, is conceded as the common right of all, we claim for ourselves, that we shall not be hated and punished because we are called Christians (for what has the name to do with our being bad

men?), but be tried on any charges which may be brought against us, and either be released on our disproving them, or punished if convicted of crime — not for the name (for no Christian is a bad man unless he falsely profess our doctrines), but for the wrong which has been done. It is thus that we see the philosophers judged. None of them before trial is deemed by the judge either good or bad on account of his science or art, but if found guilty of wickedness he is punished, without thereby affixing any stigma on philosophy (for he is a bad man for not cultivating philosophy in a lawful manner, but science is blameless), while if he refutes the false charges he is acquitted. Let this equal justice, then, be done to us. Let the life of the accused persons be investigated, but let the name stand free from all imputation. I must at the outset of my defense entreat you, illustrious emperors, to listen to me impartially: not to be carried away by the common irrational talk and prejudice the case, but to apply your desire of knowledge and love of truth to the examination of our doctrine also. Thus, while you on your part will not err through ignorance, we also, by disproving the charges arising out of the undiscerning rumour of the multitude, shall cease to be assailed.

## **Chapter 3. Charges Brought Against the Christians.**

Three things are alleged against us: atheism, Thyestean feasts, Œdipodean intercourse. But if these charges are true, spare no class: proceed at once against our crimes; destroy us root and branch, with our wives and children, if any Christian is found to live like the brutes. And yet even the brutes do not touch the flesh of their own kind; and they pair by a law of nature, and only at the regular season, not from simple wantonness; they also recognise those from whom they receive benefits. If any one, therefore, is more savage than the brutes, what punishment that he can endure shall be deemed adequate to such offenses? But, if these things are only idle tales and empty slanders, originating in the fact that virtue is opposed by its very nature to vice, and that contraries war against one another by a divine law (and you are yourselves witnesses that no such iniquities are committed by us, for you forbid informations to be laid against us), it remains for you to make inquiry concerning our life, our opinions, our loyalty and obedience to you and your house and government, and thus at length to grant to us the same rights (we ask nothing more) as to those who persecute us. For we shall then conquer them, unhesitatingly surrendering, as we now do, our very lives for the truth's sake.

## **Chapter 4. The Christians are Not Atheists, But Acknowledge One Only God.**

As regards, first of all, the allegation that we are atheists— for I will meet the charges one by one, that we may not be ridiculed for having no answer to give to those who make them — with reason did the Athenians adjudge Diagoras guilty of atheism, in that he not only divulged the Orphic doctrine, and published the mysteries of Eleusis and of the Cabiri, and chopped up the wooden statue of Hercules to boil his turnips, but openly declared that there was no

God at all. But to us, who distinguish God from matter, and teach that matter is one thing and God another, and that they are separated by a wide interval (for that the Deity is uncreated and eternal, to be beheld by the understanding and reason alone, while matter is created and perishable), is it not absurd to apply the name of atheism? If our sentiments were like those of Diagoras, while we have such incentives to piety— in the established order, the universal harmony, the magnitude, the color, the form, the arrangement of the world — with reason might our reputation for impiety, as well as the cause of our being thus harassed, be charged on ourselves. But, since our doctrine acknowledges one God, the Maker of this universe, who is Himself uncreated (for that which is does not come to be, but that which is not) but has made all things by the Logos which is from Him, we are treated unreasonably in both respects, in that we are both defamed and persecuted.

## Chapter 5. Testimony of the Poets to the Unity of God.

Poets and philosophers have not been voted atheists for inquiring concerning God. Euripides, speaking of those who, according to popular preconception, are ignorantly called gods, says doubtfully:—

If Zeus indeed does reign in heaven above,  
He ought not on the righteous ills to send.

But speaking of Him who is apprehended by the understanding as matter of certain knowledge, he gives his opinion decidedly, and with intelligence, thus:—

Do you see on high him who, with humid arms,  
Clasps both the boundless ether and the earth?  
Him reckon Zeus, and him regard as God. translated—  
"Seest thou this boundless ether on high which  
embraces the earth in its moist arms? Reckon this  
Zeus." Athenagoras cannot so have understood  
Euripides.}}-->

For, as to these so-called gods, he neither saw any real existences, to which a name is usually assigned, underlying them (Zeus, for instance: who Zeus is I know not, but by report), nor that any names were given to realities which actually do exist (for of what use are names to those who have no real existences underlying them?); but Him he did see by means of His works, considering with an eye to things unseen the things which are manifest in air, in ether, on earth. Him therefore, from whom proceed all created things, and by whose Spirit they are governed, he concluded to be God; and Sophocles agrees with him, when he says:—

There is one God, in truth there is but one,  
Who made the heavens, and the broad earth beneath.

[Euripides is speaking] of the nature of God, which fills His works with beauty, and teaching both where God must be, and that He must be One.

## Chapter 6. Opinions of the Philosophers as to the One God.

Philolaus, too, when he says that all things are included in God as in a stronghold, teaches that He is one, and that He is superior to matter. Lysis and Opsimus thus define God: the one says that He is an ineffable number, the other that He is the excess of the greatest number beyond that which comes nearest to it. So that since ten is the greatest number according to the Pythagoreans, being the Tetractys, and containing all the arithmetic and harmonic principles, and the Nine stands next to it, God is a unit — that is, one. For the greatest number exceeds the next least by one. Then there are Plato and Aristotle — not that I am about to go through all that the philosophers have said about God, as if I wished to exhibit a complete summary of their opinions; for I know that, as you excel all men in intelligence and in the power of your rule, in the same proportion do you surpass them all in an accurate acquaintance with all learning, cultivating as you do each several branch with more success than even those who have devoted themselves exclusively to any one. But, inasmuch as it is impossible to demonstrate without the citation of names that we are not alone in confining the notion of God to unity, I have ventured on an enumeration of opinions. Plato, then, says, To find out the Maker and Father of this universe is difficult; and, when found, it is impossible to declare Him to all, conceiving of one uncreated and eternal God. And if he recognises others as well, such as the sun, moon, and stars, yet he recognises them as created: gods, offspring of gods, of whom I am the Maker, and the Father of works which are indissoluble apart from my will; but whatever is compounded can be dissolved. If, therefore, Plato is not an atheist for conceiving of one uncreated God, the Framer of the universe, neither are we atheists who acknowledge and firmly hold that He is God who has framed all things by the Logos, and holds them in being by His Spirit. Aristotle, again, and his followers, recognising

the existence of one whom they regard as a sort of compound living creature (ζῶον), speak of God as consisting of soul and body, thinking His body to be the ethereal space and the planetary stars and the sphere of the fixed stars, moving in circles; but His soul, the reason which presides over the motion of the body, itself not subject to motion, but becoming the cause of motion to the other. The Stoics also, although by the appellations they employ to suit the changes of matter, which they say is permeated by the Spirit of God, they multiply the Deity in name, yet in reality they consider God to be one. For, if God is an artistic fire advancing methodically to the production of the several things in the world, embracing in Himself all the seminal principles by which each thing is produced in accordance with fate, and if His Spirit pervades the whole world, then God is one according to them, being named Zeus in respect of the fervid part (τὸ ζέον) of matter, and Hera in respect of the air (ὁ ἄήρ), and called by other names in respect of that particular part of matter which He pervades.

## Chapter 7. Superiority of the Christian Doctrine Respecting God.

Since, therefore, the unity of the Deity is confessed by almost all, even against their will, when they come to treat of the first principles of the universe, and we in our turn likewise assert that He who arranged this universe is God — why is it that they can say and write with impunity what they please concerning the Deity, but that against us a law lies in force, though we are able to demonstrate what we apprehend and justly believe, namely that there is one God, with proofs and reason accordant with truth? For poets and philosophers, as to other subjects so also to this, have applied themselves in the way of conjecture, moved, by reason of their affinity with the afflatus from God, each one by his own soul, to try whether he could find out and apprehend the truth; but they have not been found competent fully to apprehend it, because they thought fit to learn, not from God concerning God, but each one from himself; hence they came each to his own conclusion respecting God, and matter, and forms, and the world. But we have for witnesses of the things we apprehend and believe, prophets, men who have pronounced concerning God and the things of God, guided by the Spirit of God. And you too will admit, excelling all others as you do in intelligence and in piety towards the true God (τὸ ὄντως θεῖον), that it would be irrational for us to cease to believe in the Spirit from God, who moved the mouths of the prophets like musical instruments, and to give heed to mere human opinions.

## Chapter 8. Absurdities of Polytheism.

As regards, then, the doctrine that there was from the beginning one God, the Maker of this universe, consider it in this wise, that you may be acquainted with the argumentative grounds also of our faith. If there were from the beginning two or more gods, they were either in one and the same place, or each of them separately in his own. In one and the same place they could not be. For, if they are gods, they are not alike; but because they are uncreated they are unlike: for created things are like their patterns; but the uncreated are unlike, being neither produced from any one, nor formed after the pattern of any one. Hand and eye and foot are parts of one body, making up together one man: is God in this sense one? And indeed Socrates was compounded and divided into parts, just because he was created and perishable; but God is uncreated, and, impassible, and indivisible — does not, therefore, consist of parts. But if, on the contrary, each of them exists separately, since He that made the world is above the things created, and about the things He has made and set in order, where can the other or the rest be? For if the world, being made spherical, is confined within the circles of heaven, and the Creator of the world is above the things created, managing that by His providential care of these, what place is there for the second god, or for the other gods? For he is not in the world, because it belongs to the other; nor about the world, for God the Maker of the world is above it. But if he is neither in the world nor about the world (for all that surrounds it is occupied by this one), where is he? Is he above the world and [the first] God? In another world, or about another? But if he is in another or about another, then he is not about us, for he does not govern the world; nor is his power great, for he exists in a circumscribed space. But if he is neither in another world (for all things are filled by the other), nor about another (for all things are occupied by the other), he clearly does not exist at all, for there is no place in which he can be. Or what does he do, seeing there is another to whom

the world belongs, and he is above the Maker of the world, and yet is neither in the world nor about the world? Is there, then, some other place where he can stand? But God, and what belongs to God, are above him. And what, too, shall be the place, seeing that the ether fills the regions which are above the world? Perhaps he exerts a providential care? [By no means.] And yet, unless he does so, he has done nothing. If, then, he neither does anything nor exercises providential care, and if there is not another place in which he is, then this Being of whom we speak is the one God from the beginning, and the sole Maker of the world.

## Chapter 9. The Testimony of the Prophets.

If we satisfied ourselves with advancing such considerations as these, our doctrines might by some be looked upon as human. But, since the voices of the prophets confirm our arguments — for I think that you also, with your great zeal for knowledge, and your great attainments in learning, cannot be ignorant of the writings either of Moses or of Isaiah and Jeremiah, and the other prophets, who, lifted in ecstasy above the natural operations of their minds by the impulses of the Divine Spirit, uttered the things with which they were inspired, the Spirit making use of them as a flute-player breathes into a flute — what, then, do these men say? The Lord is our God; no other can be compared with Him. And again: I am God, the first and the last, and besides Me there is no God. Isaiah 44:6 In like manner: Before Me there was no other God, and after Me there shall be none; I am God, and there is none besides Me. Isaiah 43:10-11 And as to His greatness: Heaven is My throne, and the earth is the footstool of My feet: what house will you build for Me, or what is the place of My rest? Isaiah 66:1 But I leave it to you, when you meet with the books themselves, to examine carefully the prophecies contained in them, that you may on fitting grounds defend us from the abuse cast upon us.

## Chapter 10. The Christians Worship the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

That we are not atheists, therefore, seeing that we acknowledge one God, uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, illimitable, who is apprehended by the understanding only and the reason, who is encompassed by light, and beauty, and spirit, and power ineffable, by whom the universe has been created through His Logos, and set in order, and is kept in being — I have sufficiently demonstrated. [I say His Logos], for we acknowledge also a Son of God. Nor let any one think it ridiculous that God should have a Son. For though the poets, in their fictions, represent the gods as no better than men, our mode of thinking is not the same as theirs, concerning either God the Father or the Son. But the Son of God is the Logos of the Father, in idea and in operation; for after the pattern of Him and by Him were all things made, the Father and the Son being one. And, the Son being in the Father and the Father in the Son, in oneness and power of spirit, the understanding and reason (νοῦς καὶ λόγος) of the Father is the Son of God. But if, in your surpassing intelligence, it occurs to you to inquire what is meant by the Son, I will state briefly that He is the first product of the Father, not as having been brought into existence (for from the beginning, God, who is the eternal mind [νοῦς], had the Logos in Himself, being from eternity instinct with Logos [λογικός]); but inasmuch as He came forth to be the idea and energizing power of all material things, which lay like a nature without attributes, and an inactive earth, the grosser particles being mixed up with the lighter. The prophetic Spirit also agrees with our statements. The Lord, it says, made me, the beginning of His ways to His works. Proverbs 8:22 The Holy Spirit Himself also, which operates in the prophets, we assert to be an effluence of God, flowing from Him, and returning back again like a beam of the sun. Who, then, would not be astonished to hear men who speak of God the Father, and of God the Son, and of the Holy

Spirit, and who declare both their power in union and their distinction in order, called atheists? Nor is our teaching in what relates to the divine nature confined to these points; but we recognise also a multitude of angels and ministers, whom God the Maker and Frammer of the world distributed and appointed to their several posts by His Logos, to occupy themselves about the elements, and the heavens, and the world, and the things in it, and the goodly ordering of them all.

## **Chapter 11. The Moral Teaching of the Christians Repels the Charge Brought Against Them.**

If I go minutely into the particulars of our doctrine, let it not surprise you. It is that you may not be carried away by the popular and irrational opinion, but may have the truth clearly before you. For presenting the opinions themselves to which we adhere, as being not human but uttered and taught by God, we shall be able to persuade you not to think of us as atheists. What, then, are those teachings in which we are brought up? I say unto you, Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; pray for them that persecute you; that you may be the sons of your Father who is in heaven, who causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. Luke 6:27-28; Matthew 5:44-45 Allow me here to lift up my voice boldly in loud and audible outcry, pleading as I do before philosophic princes. For who of those that reduce syllogisms, and clear up ambiguities, and explain etymologies, or of those who teach homonyms and synonyms, and predicaments and axioms, and what is the subject and what the predicate, and who promise their disciples by these and such like instructions to make them happy: who of them have so purged their souls as, instead of hating their enemies, to love them; and, instead of speaking ill of those who have reviled them (to abstain from which is of itself an evidence of no mean forbearance), to bless them; and to pray for those who plot against their lives? On the contrary, they never cease with evil intent to search out skilfully the secrets of their art, and are ever bent on working some ill, making the art of words and not the exhibition of deeds their business and profession. But among us you will find uneducated persons, and artisans, and old women, who, if they are unable in words to prove the benefit of our doctrine, yet by their deeds exhibit the benefit arising from their

persuasion of its truth: they do not rehearse speeches, but exhibit good works; when struck, they do not strike again; when robbed, they do not go to law; they give to those that ask of them, and love their neighbours as themselves.

## Chapter 12. Consequent Absurdity of the Charge of Atheism.

Should we, then, unless we believed that a God presides over the human race, thus purge ourselves from evil? Most certainly not. But, because we are persuaded that we shall give an account of everything in the present life to God, who made us and the world, we adopt a temperate and benevolent and generally despised method of life, believing that we shall suffer no such great evil here, even should our lives be taken from us, compared with what we shall there receive for our meek and benevolent and moderate life from the great Judge. Plato indeed has said that Minos and Rhadamanthus will judge and punish the wicked; but we say that, even if a man be Minos or Rhadamanthus himself, or their father, even he will not escape the judgment of God. Are, then, those who consider life to be comprised in this, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die, and who regard death as a deep sleep and forgetfulness (sleep and death, twin brothers ), to be accounted pious; while men who reckon the present life of very small worth indeed, and who are conducted to the future life by this one thing alone, that they know God and His Logos, what is the oneness of the Son with the Father, what the communion of the Father with the Son, what is the Spirit, what is the unity of these three, the Spirit, the Son, the Father, and their distinction in unity; and who know that the life for which we look is far better than can be described in words, provided we arrive at it pure from all wrong-doing; who, moreover, carry our benevolence to such an extent, that we not only love our friends (for if you love them, He says, that love you, and lend to them that lend to you, what reward will you have? ) — shall we, I say, when such is our character, and when we live such a life as this, that we may escape condemnation at last, not be

accounted pious? These, however, are only small matters taken from great, and a few things from many, that we may not further trespass on your patience; for those who test honey and whey, judge by a small quantity whether the whole is good.

## Chapter 13. Why the Christians Do Not Offer Sacrifices.

But, as most of those who charge us with atheism, and that because they have not even the dreamiest conception of what God is, and are doltish and utterly unacquainted with natural and divine things, and such as measure piety by the rule of sacrifices, charges us with not acknowledging the same gods as the cities, be pleased to attend to the following considerations, O emperors, on both points. And first, as to our not sacrificing: the Framer and Father of this universe does not need blood, nor the odour of burnt-offerings, nor the fragrance of flowers and incense, forasmuch as He is Himself perfect fragrance, needing nothing either within or without; but the noblest sacrifice to Him is for us to know who stretched out and vaulted the heavens, and fixed the earth in its place like a centre, who gathered the water into seas and divided the light from the darkness, who adorned the sky with stars and made the earth to bring forth seed of every kind, who made animals and fashioned man. When, holding God to be this Framer of all things, who preserves them in being and superintends them all by knowledge and administrative skill, we lift up holy hands to Him, what need has He further of a hecatomb?

For they, when mortals have transgress'd or fail'd  
To do aright, by sacrifice and pray'r,  
Libations and burnt-offerings, may be soothed.

And what have I to do with holocausts, which God does not stand in need of?— though indeed it does behove us to offer a bloodless sacrifice and the service of our reason.

## Chapter 14. Inconsistency of Those Who Accuse the Christians.

Then, as to the other complaint, that we do not pray to and believe in the same gods as the cities, it is an exceedingly silly one. Why, the very men who charge us with atheism for not admitting the same gods as they acknowledge, are not agreed among themselves concerning the gods. The Athenians have set up as gods Celeus and Metanira: the Lacedæmonians Menelaus; and they offer sacrifices and hold festivals to him, while the men of Ilium cannot endure the very sound of his name, and pay their adoration to Hector. The Ceans worship Aristæus, considering him to be the same as Zeus and Apollo; the Thasians Theagenes, a man who committed murder at the Olympic games; the Samians Lysander, notwithstanding all the slaughters and all the crimes perpetrated by him; Alcman and Hesiod Medea, and the Cilicians Niobe; the Sicilians Philip the son of Butacides; the Amathusians Onesilus; the Carthaginians Hamilcar. Time would fail me to enumerate the whole. When, therefore, they differ among themselves concerning their gods, why do they bring the charge against us of not agreeing with them? Then look at the practices prevailing among the Egyptians: are they not perfectly ridiculous? For in the temples at their solemn festivals they beat their breasts as for the dead, and sacrifice to the same beings as gods; and no wonder, when they look upon the brutes as gods, and shave themselves when they die, and bury them in temples, and make public lamentation. If, then, we are guilty of impiety because we do not practice a piety corresponding with theirs, then all cities and all nations are guilty of impiety, for they do not all acknowledge the same gods.

## Chapter 15. The Christians Distinguish God from Matter.

But grant that they acknowledge the same. What then? Because the multitude, who cannot distinguish between matter and God, or see how great is the interval which lies between them, pray to idols made of matter, are we therefore, who do distinguish and separate the uncreated and the created, that which is and that which is not, that which is apprehended by the understanding and that which is perceived by the senses, and who give the fitting name to each of them — are we to come and worship images? If, indeed, matter and God are the same, two names for one thing, then certainly, in not regarding stocks and stones, gold and silver, as gods, we are guilty of impiety. But if they are at the greatest possible remove from one another — as far asunder as the artist and the materials of his art — why are we called to account? For as is the potter and the clay (matter being the clay, and the artist the potter), so is God, the Framer of the world, and matter, which is subservient to Him for the purposes of His art. But as the clay cannot become vessels of itself without art, so neither did matter, which is capable of taking all forms, receive, apart from God the Framer, distinction and shape and order. And as we do not hold the pottery of more worth than him who made it, nor the vessels of glass and gold than him who wrought them; but if there is anything about them elegant in art we praise the artificer, and it is he who reaps the glory of the vessels: even so with matter and God — the glory and honour of the orderly arrangement of the world belongs of right not to matter, but to God, the Framer of matter. So that, if we were to regard the various forms of matter as gods, we should seem to be without any sense of the true God, because we should be putting the things which are dissoluble and perishable on a level with that which is eternal.

## Chapter 16. The Christians Do Not Worship the Universe.

Beautiful without doubt is the world, excelling, as well in its magnitude as in the arrangement of its parts, both those in the oblique circle and those about the north, and also in its spherical form. Yet it is not this, but its Artificer, that we must worship. For when any of your subjects come to you, they do not neglect to pay their homage to you, their rulers and lords, from whom they will obtain whatever they need, and address themselves to the magnificence of your palace; but, if they chance to come upon the royal residence, they bestow a passing glance of admiration on its beautiful structure: but it is to you yourselves that they show honour, as being all in all. You sovereigns, indeed, rear and adorn your palaces for yourselves; but the world was not created because God needed it; for God is Himself everything to Himself — light unapproachable, a perfect world, spirit, power, reason. If, therefore, the world is an instrument in tune, and moving in well-measured time, I adore the Being who gave its harmony, and strikes its notes, and sings the accordant strain, and not the instrument. For at the musical contests the adjudicators do not pass by the lute-players and crown the lutes. Whether, then, as Plato says, the world be a product of divine art, I admire its beauty, and adore the Artificer; or whether it be His essence and body, as the Peripatetics affirm, we do not neglect to adore God, who is the cause of the motion of the body, and descend to the poor and weak elements, adoring in the impassible air (as they term it), passible matter; or, if any one apprehends the several parts of the world to be powers of God, we do not approach and do homage to the powers, but their Maker and Lord. I do not ask of matter what it has not to give, nor passing God by do I pay homage to the elements, which can do nothing more than what they were bidden; for, although they are beautiful to look upon, by reason of the art of their Framer, yet they still have the nature of matter. And to this view Plato also bears testimony; for,

says he, that which is called heaven and earth has received many blessings from the Father, but yet partakes of body; hence it cannot possibly be free from change. If, therefore, while I admire the heavens and the elements in respect of their art, I do not worship them as gods, knowing that the law of dissolution is upon them, how can I call those objects gods of which I know the makers to be men? Attend, I beg, to a few words on this subject.

## Chapter 17. The Names of the Gods and Their Images are But of Recent Date.

An apologist must adduce more precise arguments than I have yet given, both concerning the names of the gods, to show that they are of recent origin, and concerning their images, to show that they are, so to say, but of yesterday. You yourselves, however, are thoroughly acquainted with these matters, since you are versed in all departments of knowledge, and are beyond all other men familiar with the ancients. I assert, then, that it was Orpheus, and Homer, and Hesiod who gave both genealogies and names to those whom they call gods. Such, too, is the testimony of Herodotus. My opinion, he says, is that Hesiod and Homer preceded me by four hundred years, and no more; and it was they who framed a theogony for the Greeks, and gave the gods their names, and assigned them their several honours and functions, and described their forms. Representations of the gods, again, were not in use at all, so long as statuary, and painting, and sculpture were unknown; nor did they become common until Saurias the Samian, and Crato the Sicyonian, and Cleanthes the Corinthian, and the Corinthian damsel appeared, when drawing in outline was invented by Saurias, who sketched a horse in the sun, and painting by Crato, who painted in oil on a whitened tablet the outlines of a man and woman; and the art of making figures in relief (κοροπλαθική) was invented by the damsel, who, being in love with a person, traced his shadow on a wall as he lay asleep, and her father, being delighted with the exactness of the resemblance (he was a potter), carved out the sketch and filled it up with clay: this figure is still preserved at Corinth. After these, Dædalus and Theodorus the Milesian further invented sculpture and statuary. You perceive, then, that the time since representations of form and the making of images began is so short, that we can name the artist of each particular god. The image of Artemis at Ephesus, for example, and that of Athenâ (or rather of Athelâ, for so is she named by

those who speak more in the style of the mysteries; for thus was the ancient image made of the olive-tree called), and the sitting figure of the same goddess, were made by Endœus, a pupil of Dædalus; the Pythian god was the work of Theodorus and Telecles; and the Delian god and Artemis are due to the art of Tectæus and Angelio; Hera in Samos and in Argos came from the hands of Smilis, and the other statues were by Phidias; Aphrodité the courtesan in Cnidus is the production of Praxiteles; Asclepius in Epidaurus is the work of Phidias. In a word, of not one of these statues can it be said that it was not made by man. If, then, these are gods, why did they not exist from the beginning? Why, in truth, are they younger than those who made them? Why, in truth, in order to their coming into existence, did they need the aid of men and art? They are nothing but earth, and stones, and matter, and curious art.

## Chapter 18. The Gods Themselves Have Been Created, as the Poets Confess.

But, since it is affirmed by some that, although these are only images, yet there exist gods in honour of whom they are made; and that the supplications and sacrifices presented to the images are to be referred to the gods, and are in fact made to the gods; and that there is not any other way of coming to them, for

'Tis hard for man  
To meet in presence visible a God;

and whereas, in proof that such is the fact, they adduce the energies possessed by certain images, let us examine into the power attached to their names. And I would beseech you, greatest of emperors, before I enter on this discussion, to be indulgent to me while I bring forward true considerations; for it is not my design to show the fallacy of idols, but, by disproving the calumnies vented against us, to offer a reason for the course of life we follow. May you, by considering yourselves, be able to discover the heavenly kingdom also! For as all things are subservient to you, father and son, who have received the kingdom from above (for the king's soul is in the hand of God, Proverbs 21:1 says the prophetic Spirit), so to the one God and the Logos proceeding from Him, the Son, apprehended by us as inseparable from Him, all things are in like manner subjected. This then especially I beg you carefully to consider. The gods, as they affirm, were not from the beginning, but every one of them has come into existence just like ourselves. And in this opinion they all agree. Homer speaks of

Old Oceanus,  
The sire of gods, and Tethys;

and Orpheus (who, moreover, was the first to invent their names, and recounted their births, and narrated the exploits of each, and is

believed by them to treat with greater truth than others of divine things, whom Homer himself follows in most matters, especially in reference to the gods)— he, too, has fixed their first origin to be from water:—

Oceanus, the origin of all.

For, according to him, water was the beginning of all things, and from water mud was formed, and from both was produced an animal, a dragon with the head of a lion growing to it, and between the two heads there was the face of a god, named Heracles and Kronos. This Heracles generated an egg of enormous size, which, on becoming full, was, by the powerful friction of its generator, burst into two, the part at the top receiving the form of heaven (οὐρανός), and the lower part that of earth (γῆ). The goddess Gê moreover, came forth with a body; and Ouranos, by his union with Gê, begot females, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos; and males, the hundred-handed Cottys, Gyges, Briareus, and the Cyclopes Brontes, and Steropes, and Argos, whom also he bound and hurled down to Tartarus, having learned that he was to be ejected from his government by his children; whereupon Gê, being enraged, brought forth the Titans.

The godlike Gaia bore to Ouranos  
Sons who are by the name of Titans known,  
Because they vengeance took on Ouranos,  
Majestic, glitt'ring with his starry crown.

## Chapter 19. The Philosophers Agree with the Poets Respecting the Gods.

Such was the beginning of the existence both of their gods and of the universe. Now what are we to make of this? For each of those things to which divinity is ascribed is conceived of as having existed from the first. For, if they have come into being, having previously had no existence, as those say who treat of the gods, they do not exist. For, a thing is either uncreated and eternal, or created and perishable. Nor do I think one thing and the philosophers another. What is that which always is, and has no origin; or what is that which has been originated, yet never is? Discoursing of the intelligible and the sensible, Plato teaches that that which always is, the intelligible, is unoriginated, but that which is not, the sensible, is originated, beginning to be and ceasing to exist. In like manner, the Stoics also say that all things will be burnt up and will again exist, the world receiving another beginning. But if, although there is, according to them, a twofold cause, one active and governing, namely providence, the other passive and changeable, namely matter, it is nevertheless impossible for the world, even though under the care of Providence, to remain in the same state, because it is created — how can the constitution of these gods remain, who are not self-existent, but have been originated? And in what are the gods superior to matter, since they derive their constitution from water? But not even water, according to them, is the beginning of all things. From simple and homogeneous elements what could be constituted? Moreover, matter requires an artificer, and the artificer requires matter. For how could figures be made without matter or an artificer? Neither, again, is it reasonable that matter should be older than God; for the efficient cause must of necessity exist before the things that are made.

## Chapter 20. Absurd Representations of the Gods.

If the absurdity of their theology were confined to saying that the gods were created, and owed their constitution to water, since I have demonstrated that nothing is made which is not also liable to dissolution, I might proceed to the remaining charges. But, on the one hand, they have described their bodily forms: speaking of Hercules, for instance, as a god in the shape of a dragon coiled up; of others as hundred-handed; of the daughter of Zeus, whom he begot of his mother Rhea; or of Demeter, as having two eyes in the natural order, and two in her forehead, and the face of an animal on the back part of her neck, and as having also horns, so that Rhea, frightened at her monster of a child, fled from her, and did not give her the breast (θηλή), whence mystically she is called Athêlâ, but commonly Phersephoné and Koré, though she is not the same as Athênâ, who is called Koré from the pupil of the eye — and, on the other hand, they have described their admirable achievements, as they deem them: how Kronos, for instance, mutilated his father, and hurled him down from his chariot, and how he murdered his children, and swallowed the males of them; and how Zeus bound his father, and cast him down to Tartarus, as did Ouranos also to his sons, and fought with the Titans for the government; and how he persecuted his mother Rhea when she refused to wed him, and she becoming a she-dragon, and he himself being changed into a dragon, bound her with what is called the Herculean knot, and accomplished his purpose, of which fact the rod of Hermes is a symbol; and again, how he violated his daughter Phersephoné, in this case also assuming the form of a dragon, and became the father of Dionysus. In face of narrations like these, I must say at least this much, What that is becoming or useful is there in such a history, that we must believe Kronos, Zeus, Koré, and the rest, to be gods? Is it the descriptions of their bodies? Why, what man of

judgment and reflection will believe that a viper was begotten by a god (thus Orpheus: —

But from the sacred womb Phanes begot  
Another offspring, horrible and fierce,  
In sight a frightful viper, on whose head  
Were hairs: its face was comely; but the rest,  
From the neck downwards, bore the aspect dire  
Of a dread dragon );

or who will admit that Phanes himself, being a first-born god (for he it was that was produced from the egg), has the body or shape of a dragon, or was swallowed by Zeus, that Zeus might be too large to be contained? For if they differ in no respect from the lowest brutes (since it is evident that the Deity must differ from the things of earth and those that are derived from matter), they are not gods. How, then, I ask, can we approach them as suppliants, when their origin resembles that of cattle, and they themselves have the form of brutes, and are ugly to behold?

## Chapter 21. Impure Loves Ascribed to the Gods.

But should it be said that they only had fleshly forms, and possess blood and seed, and the affections of anger and sexual desire, even then we must regard such assertions as nonsensical and ridiculous; for there is neither anger, nor desire and appetite, nor procreative seed, in gods. Let them, then, have fleshly forms, but let them be superior to wrath and anger, that Athênâ may not be seen

Burning with rage and inwardly angry with Jove;

nor Hera appear thus:—

Juno's breast  
Could not contain her rage.

And let them be superior to grief:—

A woeful sight my eyes behold: a man  
I love in flight around the walls! My heart  
For Hector grieves.

For I call even men rude and stupid who give way to anger and grief. But when the father of men and gods mourns for his son —

Woe, woe! That fate decrees my best belov'd  
Sarpedon, by Patroclus' hand to fall;

and is not able while he mourns to rescue him from his peril:—

The son of Jove, yet Jove preserv'd him not;

who would not blame the folly of those who, with tales like these, are lovers of the gods, or rather, live without any god? Let them

have fleshly forms, but let not Aphrodité be wounded by Diomedes in her body:—

The haughty son of Tydeus, Diomed,  
Hath wounded me;

or by Arês in her soul:—

Me, awkward me, she scorns; and yields her charms  
To that fair lecher, the strong god of arms.

The weapon pierced the flesh.

He who was terrible in battle, the ally of Zeus against the Titans, is shown to be weaker than Diomedes:—

He raged, as Mars, when brandishing his spear.

Hush! Homer, a god never rages. But you describe the god to me as blood-stained, and the bane of mortals:—

Mars, Mars, the bane of mortals, stained with blood;

and you tell of his adultery and his bonds: —

Then, nothing loth, th' enamour'd fair he led,  
And sunk transported on the conscious bed.  
Down rushed the toils.

Do they not pour forth impious stuff of this sort in abundance concerning the gods? Ouranos is mutilated; Kronos is bound, and thrust down to Tartarus; the Titans revolt; Styx dies in battle: yea, they even represent them as mortal; they are in love with one another; they are in love with human beings:—

*Æ*neas, amid Ida's jutting peaks,  
Immortal Venus to Anchises bore.

Are they not in love? Do they not suffer? Nay, verily, they are gods, and desire cannot touch them! Even though a god assume flesh in pursuance of a divine purpose, he is therefore the slave of desire.

For never yet did such a flood of love,  
For goddess or for mortal, fill my soul;  
Not for Ixion's beauteous wife, who bore  
Pirithöus, sage in council as the gods;  
Nor the neat-footed maiden Danæe,  
A crisis' daughter, her who Perséus bore,  
Th' observ'd of all; nor noble Phœnix' child;  
. . . . . nor for Semele;  
Nor for Alcmena fair; . . .  
No, nor for Ceres, golden-tressèd queen;  
Nor for Latona bright; nor for yourself.

He is created, he is perishable, with no trace of a god in him. Nay, they are even the hired servants of men: —

Admetus' halls, in which I have endured  
To praise the menial table, though a god.

And they tend cattle:—

And coming to this land, I cattle fed,  
For him that was my host, and kept this house.

Admetus, therefore, was superior to the god. prophet and wise one, and who can foresee for others the things that shall be, you did not divine the slaughter of your beloved, but even killed him with your own hand, dear as he was:—

And I believed Apollo's mouth divine  
Was full of truth, as well as prophet's art.

(Æschylus is reproaching Apollo for being a false prophet:)—

The very one who sings while at the feast,  
The one who said these things, alas! Is he  
Who slew my son.

## Chapter 22. Pretended Symbolical Explanations.

But perhaps these things are poetic vagary, and there is some natural explanation of them, such as this by Empedocles: —

Let Jove be fire, and Juno source of life,  
With Pluto and Nêstis, who bathes with tears  
The human founts.

If, then, Zeus is fire, and Hera the earth, and Aïdoneus the air, and Nê stis water, and these are elements — fire, water, air — none of them is a god, neither Zeus, nor Hera, nor Aïdoneus; for from matter separated into parts by God is their constitution and origin:—

Fire, water, earth, and the air's gentle height,  
And harmony with these.

Here are things which without harmony cannot abide; which would be brought to ruin by strife: how then can any one say that they are gods? Friendship, according to Empedocles, has an aptitude to govern, things that are compounded are governed, and that which is apt to govern has the dominion; so that if we make the power of the governed and the governing one and the same, we shall be, unawares to ourselves, putting perishable and fluctuating and changeable matter on an equality with the uncreated, and eternal, and ever self-accordant God. Zeus is, according to the Stoics, the fervid part of nature; Hera is the air (ἀήρ)— the very name, if it be joined to itself, signifying this; Poseidon is what is drunk (water, πόσις). But these things are by different persons explained of natural objects in different ways. Some call Zeus twofold masculine-feminine air; others the season which brings about mild weather, on which account it was that he alone escaped from Kronos. But to the Stoics it may be said, If you acknowledge one God, the supreme and uncreated and eternal One, and as many compound bodies as

there are changes of matter, and say that the Spirit of God, which pervades matter, obtains according to its variations a diversity of names, the forms of matter will become the body of God; but when the elements are destroyed in the conflagration, the names will necessarily perish along with the forms, the Spirit of God alone remaining. Who, then, can believe that those bodies, of which the variation according to matter is allied to corruption, are gods? But to those who say that Kronos is time, and Rhea the earth, and that she becomes pregnant by Kronos, and brings forth, whence she is regarded as the mother of all; and that he begets and devours his offspring; and that the mutilation is the intercourse of the male with the female, which cuts off the seed and casts it into the womb, and generates a human being, who has in himself the sexual desire, which is Aphrodité; and that the madness of Kronos is the turn of season, which destroys animate and inanimate things; and that the bonds and Tartarus are time, which is changed by seasons and disappears — to such persons we say, If Kronos is time, he changes; if a season, he turns about; if darkness, or frost, or the moist part of nature, none of these is abiding; but the Deity is immortal, and immoveable, and unalterable: so that neither is Kronos nor his image God. As regards Zeus again: If he is air, born of Kronos, of which the male part is called Zeus and the female Hera (whence both sister and wife), he is subject to change; if a season, he turns about: but the Deity neither changes nor shifts about. But why should I trespass on your patience by saying more, when you know so well what has been said by each of those who have resolved these things into nature, or what various writers have thought concerning nature, or what they say concerning Athênâ, whom they affirm to be the wisdom (φρόνησις) pervading all things; and concerning Isis, whom they call the birth of all time (φύσις αἰῶνος), from whom all have sprung, and by whom all exist; or concerning Osiris, on whose murder by Typhon his brother Isis with her son Orus sought after his limbs, and finding them honoured them with a sepulchre, which sepulchre is to this day called the tomb of Osiris? For while they wander up and down about the

forms of matter, they miss to find the God who can only be beheld by the reason, while they deify the elements and their several parts, applying different names to them at different times: calling the sowing of the grain, for instance, Osiris (hence they say, that in the mysteries, on the finding of the members of his body, or the fruits, Isis is thus addressed: We have found, we wish you joy), the fruit of the vine Dionysus, the vine itself Semelé, the heat of the sun the thunderbolt. And yet, in fact, they who refer the fables to actual gods, do anything rather than add to their divine character; for they do not perceive, that by the very defense they make for the gods, they confirm the things which are alleged concerning them. What have Europa, and the bull, and the swan, and Leda, to do with the earth and air, that the abominable intercourse of Zeus with them should be taken for the intercourse of the earth and air? But missing to discover the greatness of God, and not being able to rise on high with their reason (for they have no affinity for the heavenly place), they pine away among the forms of matter, and rooted to the earth, deify the changes of the elements: just as if any one should put the ship he sailed in the place of the steersman. But as the ship, although equipped with everything, is of no use if it have not a steersman, so neither are the elements, though arranged in perfect order, of any service apart from the providence of God. For the ship will not sail of itself; and the elements without their Framer will not move.

## Chapter 23. Opinions of Thales and Plato.

You may say, however, since you excel all men in understanding, How comes it to pass, then, that some of the idols manifest power, if those to whom we erect the statues are not gods? For it is not likely that images destitute of life and motion can of themselves do anything without a mover. That in various places, cities, and nations, certain effects are brought about in the name of idols, we are far from denying. None the more, however, if some have received benefit, and others, on the contrary, suffered harm, shall we deem those to be gods who have produced the effects in either case. But I have made careful inquiry, both why it is that you think the idols to have this power, and who they are that, usurping their names, produce the effects. It is necessary for me, however, in attempting to show who they are that produce the effects ascribed to the idols, and that they are not gods, to have recourse to some witnesses from among the philosophers. First Thales, as those who have accurately examined his opinions report, divides [superior beings] into God, demons, and heroes. God he recognises as the Intelligence (νοῦς) of the world; by demons he understands beings possessed of soul (ψυχικαί); and by heroes the separated souls of men, the good being the good souls, and the bad the worthless. Plato again, while withholding his assent on other points, also divides [superior beings] into the uncreated God and those produced by the uncreated One for the adornment of heaven, the planets, and the fixed stars, and into demons; concerning which demons, while he does not think fit to speak himself, he thinks that those ought to be listened to who have spoken about them. To speak concerning the other demons, and to know their origin, is beyond our powers; but we ought to believe those who have before spoken, the descendants of gods, as they say — and surely they must be well acquainted with their own ancestors: it is impossible, therefore, to disbelieve the sons of gods, even though they speak without probable or convincing proofs; but as they profess to tell of

their own family affairs, we are bound, in pursuance of custom, to believe them. In this way, then, let us hold and speak as they do concerning the origin of the gods themselves. Of Gê and Ouranos were born Oceanus and Tethys; and of these Phorcus, Kronos, and Rhea, and the rest; and of Kronos and Rhea, Zeus, Hera, and all the others, who, we know, are all called their brothers; besides other descendants again of these. Did, then, he who had contemplated the eternal Intelligence and God who is apprehended by reason, and declared His attributes — His real existence, the simplicity of His nature, the good that flows forth from Him that is truth, and discoursed of primal power, and how all things are about the King of all, and all things exist for His sake, and He is the cause of all; and about two and three, that He is the second moving about the seconds, and the third about the thirds; — did this man think, that to learn the truth concerning those who are said to have been produced from sensible things, namely earth and heaven, was a task transcending his powers? It is not to be believed for a moment. But because he thought it impossible to believe that gods beget and are brought forth, since everything that begins to be is followed by an end, and (for this is much more difficult) to change the views of the multitude, who receive the fables without examination, on this account it was that he declared it to be beyond his powers to know and to speak concerning the origin of the other demons, since he was unable either to admit or teach that gods were begotten. And as regards that saying of his, The great sovereign in heaven, Zeus, driving a winged car, advances first, ordering and managing all things, and there follow him a host of gods and demons, this does not refer to the Zeus who is said to have sprung from Kronos; for here the name is given to the Maker of the universe. This is shown by Plato himself: not being able to designate Him by another title that should be suitable, he availed himself of the popular name, not as peculiar to God, but for distinctness, because it is not possible to discourse of God to all men as fully as one might; and he adds at

the same time the epithet Great, so as to distinguish the heavenly from the earthly, the uncreated from the created, who is younger than heaven and earth, and younger than the Cretans, who stole him away, that he might not be killed by his father.

## Chapter 24. Concerning the Angels and Giants.

What need is there, in speaking to you who have searched into every department of knowledge, to mention the poets, or to examine opinions of another kind? Let it suffice to say thus much. If the poets and philosophers did not acknowledge that there is one God, and concerning these gods were not of opinion, some that they are demons, others that they are matter, and others that they once were men, — there might be some show of reason for our being harassed as we are, since we employ language which makes a distinction between God and matter, and the natures of the two. For, as we acknowledge a God, and a Son his Logos, and a Holy Spirit, united in essence — the Father, the Son, the Spirit, because the Son is the Intelligence, Reason, Wisdom of the Father, and the Spirit an effluence, as light from fire; so also do we apprehend the existence of other powers, which exercise dominion about matter, and by means of it, and one in particular, which is hostile to God: not that anything is really opposed to God, like strife to friendship, according to Empedocles, and night to day, according to the appearing and disappearing of the stars (for even if anything had placed itself in opposition to God, it would have ceased to exist, its structure being destroyed by the power and might of God), but that to the good that is in God, which belongs of necessity to Him, and co-exists with Him, as color with body, without which it has no existence (not as being part of it, but as an attendant property co-existing with it, united and blended, just as it is natural for fire to be yellow and the ether dark blue) — to the good that is in God, I say, the spirit which is about matter, who was created by God, just as the other angels were created by Him, and entrusted with the control of matter and the forms of matter, is opposed. For this is the office of the angels — to exercise providence for God over the things created and ordered by Him; so that God may have the universal and general providence of the whole, while the particular parts are provided for by the angels appointed over them. Just as

with men, who have freedom of choice as to both virtue and vice (for you would not either honour the good or punish the bad, unless vice and virtue were in their own power; and some are diligent in the matters entrusted to them by you, and others faithless), so is it among the angels. Some, free agents, you will observe, such as they were created by God, continued in those things for which God had made and over which He had ordained them; but some outraged both the constitution of their nature and the government entrusted to them: namely, this ruler of matter and its various forms, and others of those who were placed about this first firmament (you know that we say nothing without witnesses, but state the things which have been declared by the prophets); these fell into impure love of virgins, and were subjugated by the flesh, and he became negligent and wicked in the management of the things entrusted to him. Of these lovers of virgins, therefore, were begotten those who are called giants. And if something has been said by the poets, too, about the giants, be not surprised at this: worldly wisdom and divine differ as much from each other as truth and plausibility: the one is of heaven and the other of earth; and indeed, according to the prince of matter, —

We know we oft speak lies that look like truths.

## Chapter 25. The Poets and Philosophers Have Denied a Divine Providence.

These angels, then, who have fallen from heaven, and haunt the air and the earth, and are no longer able to rise to heavenly things, and the souls of the giants, which are the demons who wander about the world, perform actions similar, the one (that is, the demons) to the natures they have received, the other (that is, the angels) to the appetites they have indulged. But the prince of matter, as may be seen merely from what transpires, exercises a control and management contrary to the good that is in God: —

Ofttimes this anxious thought has crossed my mind,  
Whether 'tis chance or deity that rules  
The small affairs of men; and, spite of hope  
As well as justice, drives to exile some  
Stripped of all means of life, while others still  
Continue to enjoy prosperity.

Prosperity and adversity, contrary to hope and justice, made it impossible for Euripides to say to whom belongs the administration of earthly affairs, which is of such a kind that one might say of it:—

How then, while seeing these things, can we say  
There is a race of gods, or yield to laws?

The same thing led Aristotle to say that the things below the heaven are not under the care of Providence, although the eternal providence of God concerns itself equally with us below —

The earth, let willingness move her or not,  
Must herbs produce, and thus sustain my flocks, —

and addresses itself to the deserving individually, according to truth and not according to opinion; and all other things, according to the general constitution of nature, are provided for by the law of reason.

But because the demoniac movements and operations proceeding from the adverse spirit produce these disorderly sallies, and moreover move men, some in one way and some in another, as individuals and as nations, separately and in common, in accordance with the tendency of matter on the one hand, and of the affinity for divine things on the other, from within and from without — some who are of no mean reputation have therefore thought that this universe is constituted without any definite order, and is driven here and there by an irrational chance. But they do not understand, that of those things which belong to the constitution of the whole world there is nothing out of order or neglected, but that each one of them has been produced by reason, and that, therefore, they do not transgress the order prescribed to them; and that man himself, too, so far as He that made him is concerned, is well ordered, both by his original nature, which has one common character for all, and by the constitution of his body, which does not transgress the law imposed upon it, and by the termination of his life, which remains equal and common to all alike; but that, according to the character peculiar to himself and the operation of the ruling prince and of the demons his followers, he is impelled and moved in this direction or in that, notwithstanding that all possess in common the same original constitution of mind.

## Chapter 26. The Demons Allure Men to the Worship of Images.

They who draw men to idols, then, are the aforesaid demons, who are eager for the blood of the sacrifices, and lick them; but the gods that please the multitude, and whose names are given to the images, were men, as may be learned from their history. And that it is the demons who act under their names, is proved by the nature of their operations. For some castrate, as Rhea; others wound and slaughter, as Artemis; the Tauric goddess puts all strangers to death. I pass over those who lacerate with knives and scourges of bones, and shall not attempt to describe all the kinds of demons; for it is not the part of a god to incite to things against nature.

But when the demon plots against a man,  
He first inflicts some hurt upon his mind.

But God, being perfectly good, is eternally doing good. That, moreover, those who exert the power are not the same as those to whom the statues are erected, very strong evidence is afforded by Troas and Parium. The one has statues of Neryllinus, a man of our own times; and Parium of Alexander and Proteus: both the sepulchre and the statue of Alexander are still in the forum. The other statues of Neryllinus, then, are a public ornament, if indeed a city can be adorned by such objects as these; but one of them is supposed to utter oracles and to heal the sick, and on this account the people of the Troad offer sacrifices to this statue, and overlay it with gold, and hang chaplets upon it. But of the statues of Alexander and Proteus (the latter, you are aware, threw himself into the fire near Olympia), that of Proteus is likewise said to utter oracles; and to that of Alexander —

Wretched Paris, though in form so fair,  
You slave of woman —

sacrifices are offered and festivals are held at the public cost, as to a god who can hear. Is it, then, Neryllinus, and Proteus, and Alexander who exert these energies in connection with the statues, or is it the nature of the matter itself? But the matter is brass. And what can brass do of itself, which may be made again into a different form, as Amasis treated the footpan, as told by Herodotus? And Neryllinus, and Proteus, and Alexander, what good are they to the sick? For what the image is said now to effect, it effected when Neryllinus was alive and sick.

## Chapter 27. Artifices of the Demons.

What then? In the first place, the irrational and fantastic movements of the soul about opinions produce a diversity of images (εἰδωλα) from time to time: some they derive from matter, and some they fashion and bring forth for themselves; and this happens to a soul especially when it partakes of the material spirit and becomes mingled with it, looking not at heavenly things and their Maker, but downwards to earthly things, wholly at the earth, as being now mere flesh and blood, and no longer pure spirit. These irrational and fantastic movements of the soul, then, give birth to empty visions in the mind, by which it becomes madly set on idols. When, too, a tender and susceptible soul, which has no knowledge or experience of sounder doctrines, and is unaccustomed to contemplate truth, and to consider thoughtfully the Father and Maker of all things, gets impressed with false opinions respecting itself, then the demons who hover about matter, greedy of sacrificial odours and the blood of victims, and ever ready to lead men into error, avail themselves of these delusive movements of the souls of the multitude; and, taking possession of their thoughts, cause to flow into the mind empty visions as if coming from the idols and the statues; and when, too, a soul of itself, as being immortal, moves conformably to reason, either predicting the future or healing the present, the demons claim the glory for themselves.

## Chapter 28. The Heathen Gods Were Simply Men.

But it is perhaps necessary, in accordance with what has already been adduced, to say a little about their names. Herodotus, then, and Alexander the son of Philip, in his letter to his mother (and each of them is said to have conversed with the priests at Heliopolis, and Memphis, and Thebes), affirm that they learned from them that the gods had been men. Herodotus speaks thus: Of such a nature were, they said, the beings represented by these images, they were very far indeed from being gods. However, in the times anterior to them it was otherwise; then Egypt had gods for its rulers, who dwelt upon the earth with men, one being always supreme above the rest. The last of these was Horus the son of Osiris, called by the Greeks Apollo. He deposed Typhon, and ruled over Egypt as its last god-king. Osiris is named Dionysus (Bacchus) by the Greeks. Almost all the names of the gods came into Greece from Egypt. Apollo was the son of Dionysus and Isis, as Herodotus likewise affirms: According to the Egyptians, Apollo and Diana are the children of Bacchus and Isis; while Latona is their nurse and their preserver. These beings of heavenly origin they had for their first kings: partly from ignorance of the true worship of the Deity, partly from gratitude for their government, they esteemed them as gods together with their wives. The male cattle, if clean, and the male calves, are used for sacrifice by the Egyptians universally; but the females, they are not allowed to sacrifice, since they are sacred to Isis. The statue of this goddess has the form of a woman but with horns like a cow, resembling those of the Greek representations of Io. And who can be more deserving of credit in making these statements, than those who in family succession son from father, received not only the priesthood, but also the history? For it is not likely that the priests, who make it their business to commend the idols to men's reverence, would assert falsely that they were men. If Herodotus alone had said that the Egyptians spoke in their histories

of the gods as of men, when he says, What they told me concerning their religion it is not my intention to repeat, except only the names of their deities, things of very trifling importance, it would behoove us not to credit even Herodotus as being a fabulist. But as Alexander and Hermes surnamed Trismegistus, who shares with them in the attribute of eternity, and innumerable others, not to name them individually, [declare the same], no room is left even for doubt that they, being kings, were esteemed gods. That they were men, the most learned of the Egyptians also testify, who, while saying that ether, earth, sun, moon, are gods, regard the rest as mortal men, and the temples as their sepulchres. Apollodorus, too, asserts the same thing in his treatise concerning the gods. But Herodotus calls even their sufferings mysteries. The ceremonies at the feast of Isis in the city of Busiris have been already spoken of. It is there that the whole multitude, both of men and women, many thousands in number, beat themselves at the close of the sacrifice in honour of a god whose name a religious scruple forbids me to mention. If they are gods, they are also immortal; but if people are beaten for them, and their sufferings are mysteries, they are men, as Herodotus himself says: Here, too, in this same precinct of Minerva at Saïs, is the burial-place of one whom I think it not right to mention in such a connection. It stands behind the temple against the back wall, which it entirely covers. There are also some large stone obelisks in the enclosure, and there is a lake near them, adorned with an edging of stone. In form it is circular, and in size, as it seemed to me, about equal to the lake at Delos called the Hoop. On this lake it is that the Egyptians represent by night his sufferings whose name I refrain from mentioning, and this representation they call their mysteries. And not only is the sepulchre of Osiris shown, but also his embalming: When a body is brought to them, they show the bearer various models of corpses made in wood, and painted so as to resemble nature. The most perfect is said to be after the manner of him whom I do not think it religious to name in connection with such a matter.

## Chapter 29. Proof of the Same from the Poets.

But among the Greeks, also, those who are eminent in poetry and history say the same thing. Thus of Heracles:—

That lawless wretch, that man of brutal strength,  
Deaf to Heaven's voice, the social rite transgressed.

Such being his nature, deservedly did he go mad, and deservedly did he light the funeral pile and burn himself to death. Of Asklepius, Hesiod says:—

The mighty father both of gods and men  
Was filled with wrath, and from Olympus' top  
With flaming thunderbolt cast down and slew  
Latona's well-lov'd son — such was his ire.

And Pindar: —

But even wisdom is ensnared by gain.  
The brilliant bribe of gold seen in the hand  
Ev'n him perverted: therefore Kronos' son  
With both hands quickly stopp'd his vital breath,  
And by a bolt of fire ensured his doom.

Either, therefore, they were gods and did not hanker after gold —

O gold, the fairest prize to mortal men,  
Which neither mother equals in delight,  
Nor children dear —

for the Deity is in want of nought, and is superior to carnal desire, nor did they die; or, having been born men, they were wicked by reason of ignorance, and overcome by love of money. What more need I say, or refer to Castor, or Pollux, or Amphiaraus, who, having been born, so to speak, only the other day, men of men, are looked

upon as gods, when they imagine even Ino after her madness and its consequent sufferings to have become a goddess?

Sea-rovers will her name Leucothea.

And her son:—

August Palæmon, sailors will invoke.

## Chapter 30. Reasons Why Divinity Has Been Ascribed to Men.

For if detestable and god-hated men had the reputation of being gods, and the daughter of Derceto, Semiramis, a lascivious and blood-stained woman, was esteemed a Syria goddess; and if, on account of Derceto, the Syrians worship doves and Semiramis (for, a thing impossible, a woman was changed into a dove: the story is in Ctesias), what wonder if some should be called gods by their people on the ground of their rule and sovereignty (the Sibyl, of whom Plato also makes mention, says:—

It was the generation then the tenth,  
Of men endow'd with speech, since forth the flood  
Had burst upon the men of former times,  
And Kronos, Japetus, and Titan reigned,  
Whom men, of Ouranos and Gaïa  
Proclaimed the noblest sons, and named them so,  
Because of men endowed with gift of speech  
They were the first);

and others for their strength, as Heracles and Perseus; and others for their art, as Asclepius? Those, therefore, to whom either the subjects gave honour or the rulers themselves [assumed it], obtained the name, some from fear, others from revenge. Thus Antinous, through the benevolence of your ancestors towards their subjects, came to be regarded as a god. But those who came after adopted the worship without examination.

The Cretans always lie; for they, O king,  
Have built a tomb to you who art not dead.

Though you believe, O Callimachus, in the nativity of Zeus, you do not believe in his sepulchre; and while you think to obscure the truth, you in fact proclaim him dead, even to those who are

ignorant; and if you see the cave, you call to mind the childbirth of Rhea; but when you see the coffin, you throw a shadow over his death, not considering that the unbegotten God alone is eternal. For either the tales told by the multitude and the poets about the gods are unworthy of credit, and the reverence shown them is superfluous (for those do not exist, the tales concerning whom are untrue); or if the births, the amours, the murders, the thefts, the castrations, the thunderbolts, are true, they no longer exist, having ceased to be since they were born, having previously had no being. And on what principle must we believe some things and disbelieve others, when the poets have written their stories in order to gain greater veneration for them? For surely those through whom they have got to be considered gods, and who have striven to represent their deeds as worthy of reverence, cannot have invented their sufferings. That, therefore, we are not atheists, acknowledging as we do God the Maker of this universe and His Logos, has been proved according to my ability, if not according to the importance of the subject.

## **Chapter 31. Confutation of the Other Charges Brought Against the Christians.**

But they have further also made up stories against us of impious feasts and forbidden intercourse between the sexes, both that they may appear to themselves to have rational grounds of hatred, and because they think either by fear to lead us away from our way of life, or to render the rulers harsh and inexorable by the magnitude of the charges they bring. But they lose their labour with those who know that from of old it has been the custom, and not in our time only, for vice to make war on virtue. Thus Pythagoras, with three hundred others, was burnt to death; Heraclitus and Democritus were banished, the one from the city of the Ephesians, the other from Abdera, because he was charged with being mad; and the Athenians condemned Socrates to death. But as they were none the worse in respect of virtue because of the opinion of the multitude, so neither does the indiscriminating calumny of some persons cast any shade upon us as regards rectitude of life, for with God we stand in good repute. Nevertheless, I will meet these charges also, although I am well assured that by what has been already said I have cleared myself to you. For as you excel all men in intelligence, you know that those whose life is directed towards God as its rule, so that each one among us may be blameless and irreproachable before Him, will not entertain even the thought of the slightest sin. For if we believed that we should live only the present life, then we might be suspected of sinning, through being enslaved to flesh and blood, or overmastered by gain or carnal desire; but since we know that God is witness to what we think and what we say both by night and by day, and that He, being Himself light, sees all things in our heart, we are persuaded that when we are removed from the present life we shall live another life, better than the present one, and heavenly, not earthly (since we shall abide near God, and with God, free from all change or suffering in the soul, not as flesh, even though we shall have flesh, but as heavenly spirit),

or, falling with the rest, a worse one and in fire; for God has not made us as sheep or beasts of burden, a mere by-work, and that we should perish and be annihilated. On these grounds it is not likely that we should wish to do evil, or deliver ourselves over to the great Judge to be punished.

## Chapter 32. Elevated Morality of the Christians.

It is, however, nothing wonderful that they should get up tales about us such as they tell of their own gods, of the incidents of whose lives they make mysteries. But it behooved them, if they meant to condemn shameless and promiscuous intercourse, to hate either Zeus, who begot children of his mother Rhea and his daughter Koré, and took his own sister to wife, or Orpheus, the inventor of these tales, which made Zeus more unholy and detestable than Thyestes himself; for the latter defiled his daughter in pursuance of an oracle, and when he wanted to obtain the kingdom and avenge himself. But we are so far from practising promiscuous intercourse, that it is not lawful among us to indulge even a lustful look. For, says He, he that looks on a woman to lust after her, has committed adultery already in his heart. Matthew 5:28 Those, then, who are forbidden to look at anything more than that for which God formed the eyes, which were intended to be a light to us, and to whom a wanton look is adultery, the eyes being made for other purposes, and who are to be called to account for their very thoughts, how can any one doubt that such persons practice self-control? For our account lies not with human laws, which a bad man can evade (at the outset I proved to you, sovereign lords, that our doctrine is from the teaching of God), but we have a law which makes the measure of rectitude to consist in dealing with our neighbour as ourselves. On this account, too, according to age, we recognise some as sons and daughters, others we regard as brothers and sisters, and to the more advanced in life we give the honour due to fathers and mothers. On behalf of those, then, to whom we apply the names of brothers and sisters, and other designations of relationship, we exercise the greatest care that their bodies should remain undefiled and uncorrupted; for the Logos again says to us, If any one kiss a

second time because it has given him pleasure, [he sins]; adding, Therefore the kiss, or rather the salutation, should be given with the greatest care, since, if there be mixed with it the least defilement of thought, it excludes us from eternal life.

## **Chapter 33. Chastity of the Christians with Respect to Marriage.**

Therefore, having the hope of eternal life, we despise the things of this life, even to the pleasures of the soul, each of us reckoning her his wife whom he has married according to the laws laid down by us, and that only for the purpose of having children. For as the husbandman throwing the seed into the ground awaits the harvest, not sowing more upon it, so to us the procreation of children is the measure of our indulgence in appetite. Nay, you would find many among us, both men and women, growing old unmarried, in hope of living in closer communion with God. But if the remaining in virginity and in the state of an eunuch brings nearer to God, while the indulgence of carnal thought and desire leads away from Him, in those cases in which we shun the thoughts, much more do we reject the deeds. For we bestow our attention, not on the study of words, but on the exhibition and teaching of actions, — that a person should either remain as he was born, or be content with one marriage; for a second marriage is only a specious adultery. For whosoever puts away his wife, says He, and marries another, commits adultery; Matthew 19:9 not permitting a man to send her away whose virginity he has brought to an end, nor to marry again. For he who deprives himself of his first wife, even though she be dead, is a cloaked adulterer, resisting the hand of God, because in the beginning God made one man and one woman, and dissolving the strictest union of flesh with flesh, formed for the intercourse of the race.

## **Chapter 34. The Vast Difference in Morals Between the Christians and Their Accusers.**

But though such is our character (Oh! Why should I speak of things unfit to be uttered?), the things said of us are an example of the proverb, The harlot reproves the chaste. For those who have set up a market for fornication and established infamous resorts for the young for every kind of vile pleasure — who do not abstain even from males, males with males committing shocking abominations, outraging all the noblest and comeliest bodies in all sorts of ways, so dishonouring the fair workmanship of God (for beauty on earth is not self-made, but sent hither by the hand and will of God) — these men, I say, revile us for the very things which they are conscious of themselves, and ascribe to their own gods, boasting of them as noble deeds, and worthy of the gods. These adulterers and pederasts defame the eunuchs and the once-married (while they themselves live like fishes; for these gulp down whatever falls in their way, and the stronger chases the weaker: and, in fact, this is to feed upon human flesh, to do violence in contravention of the very laws which you and your ancestors, with due care for all that is fair and right, have enacted), so that not even the governors of the provinces sent by you suffice for the hearing of the complaints against those, to whom it even is not lawful, when they are struck, not to offer themselves for more blows, nor when defamed not to bless: for it is not enough to be just (and justice is to return like for like), but it is incumbent on us to be good and patient of evil.

## Chapter 35. The Christians Condemn and Detest All Cruelty.

What man of sound mind, therefore, will affirm, while such is our character, that we are murderers? For we cannot eat human flesh till we have killed some one. The former charge, therefore, being false, if any one should ask them in regard to the second, whether they have seen what they assert, not one of them would be so barefaced as to say that he had. And yet we have slaves, some more and some fewer, by whom we could not help being seen; but even of these, not one has been found to invent even such things against us. For when they know that we cannot endure even to see a man put to death, though justly; who of them can accuse us of murder or cannibalism? Who does not reckon among the things of greatest interest the contests of gladiators and wild beasts, especially those which are given by you? But we, deeming that to see a man put to death is much the same as killing him, have abjured such spectacles. How, then, when we do not even look on, lest we should contract guilt and pollution, can we put people to death? And when we say that those women who use drugs to bring on abortion commit murder, and will have to give an account to God for the abortion, on what principle should we commit murder? For it does not belong to the same person to regard the very foetus in the womb as a created being, and therefore an object of God's care, and when it has passed into life, to kill it; and not to expose an infant, because those who expose them are chargeable with child-murder, and on the other hand, when it has been reared to destroy it. But we are in all things always alike and the same, submitting ourselves to reason, and not ruling over it.

## **Chapter 36. Bearing of the Doctrine of the Resurrection on the Practices of the Christians.**

Who, then, that believes in a resurrection, would make himself into a tomb for bodies that will rise again? For it is not the part of the same persons to believe that our bodies will rise again, and to eat them as if they would not; and to think that the earth will give back the bodies held by it, but that those which a man has entombed in himself will not be demanded back. On the contrary, it is reasonable to suppose, that those who think they shall have no account to give of the present life, ill or well spent, and that there is no resurrection, but calculate on the soul perishing with the body, and being as it were quenched in it, will refrain from no deed of daring; but as for those who are persuaded that nothing will escape the scrutiny of God, but that even the body which has ministered to the irrational impulses of the soul, and to its desires, will be punished along with it, it is not likely that they will commit even the smallest sin. But if to any one it appears sheer nonsense that the body which has mouldered away, and been dissolved, and reduced to nothing, should be reconstructed, we certainly cannot with any reason be accused of wickedness with reference to those that believe not, but only of folly; for with the opinions by which we deceive ourselves we injure no one else. But that it is not our belief alone that bodies will rise again, but that many philosophers also hold the same view, it is out of place to show just now, lest we should be thought to introduce topics irrelevant to the matter in hand, either by speaking of the intelligible and the sensible, and the nature of these respectively, or by contending that the incorporeal is older than the corporeal, and that the intelligible precedes the sensible, although we become acquainted with the latter earliest, since the corporeal is formed from the incorporeal, by the combination with it of the intelligible, and that the sensible is formed from the intelligible; for

nothing hinders, according to Pythagoras and Plato, that when the dissolution of bodies takes place, they should, from the very same elements of which they were constructed at first, be constructed again. But let us defer the discourse concerning the resurrection.

## **Chapter 37. Entreaty to Be Fairly Judged.**

And now do you, who are entirely in everything, by nature and by education, upright, and moderate, and benevolent, and worthy of your rule, now that I have disposed of the several accusations, and proved that we are pious, and gentle, and temperate in spirit, bend your royal head in approval. For who are more deserving to obtain the things they ask, than those who, like us, pray for your government, that you may, as is most equitable, receive the kingdom, son from father, and that your empire may receive increase and addition, all men becoming subject to your sway? And this is also for our advantage, that we may lead a peaceable and quiet life, and may ourselves readily perform all that is commanded us.