

Address to the Greeks

Modern English version · SermonIndex

Tatian · c. AD 170

A sharp defense of Christianity addressed to Greek readers, written about AD 170 by a former pupil of Justin Martyr. Tatian rejects Greek philosophy and religion, argues that Moses is older than Homer, and tells how he came to the Scriptures.

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Chapter 1

1a Greeks, do not be so bitterly hostile to the barbarians, and do not begrudge them their teachings. Which of your pursuits did not get its start from the barbarians? The most distinguished of the Telmessians invented divination by dreams. The Carians invented foretelling the future by the stars. The Phrygians and the most ancient of the Isaurians invented divination from the flight of birds, and the Cypriots divination from sacrifices. The Babylonians gave you astronomy, the Persians magic, the Egyptians geometry, and the Phoenicians learning through letters. So stop calling your imitations discoveries. Orpheus taught you to practice poetry and song, and he also taught you initiation into the mysteries. The Tuscans taught you sculpture, and the Egyptian records of past times taught you to compose histories. You took flute-playing from Marsyas and Olympus, two Phrygian countrymen who devised the music of the shepherd's pipe. The Tyrrhenians invented the trumpet, and the Cyclopes invented bronze-working. A woman who once ruled the Persians, as Hellanicus says, was the first to compose letters. Her name was Atossa.

Translator's note. "Tuscans" and "Tyrrhenians" are both names for the Etruscans of Italy, though Tatian lists them separately.

1b So lay down this arrogance, and do not put forward the elegance of your phrases. You praise yourselves, and naturally you have your own people at home to speak up for you. A person with any sense should wait for the testimony of others. People should also agree

with one another in the way they speak. But you alone have ended up not even speaking alike in everyday conversation. The Dorians do not speak the same way as the people of Attica, and the Aeolians do not speak like the Ionians. With so much disagreement where there ought to be none, I do not know whom I am supposed to call a Greek. And the most absurd thing of all is that you have honored ways of speaking that are not your own. By sometimes making free use of foreign words, you have made your language a jumble. This is why we have said goodbye to your wisdom, even though someone was highly regarded in it.

Translator's note. "Someone" may be Tatian's modest way of referring to himself. The older translation takes it that way: "though I was once a great proficient in it."

1c As the comic poet says: "These are gleanings and chatter, music-halls of swallows, ruiners of art." Those who chase after this bawl until they are hoarse and croak like ravens. You devised rhetoric for injustice and slander. You sell the freedom of your words for pay, and you often present as not good what you just now presented as right. And you devised poetry so that you could compose battles, the love affairs of the gods, and the corruption of the soul.

Translator's note. Tatian does not name the poet. The lines are from Aristophanes, *Frogs* 92-93, where they mock the young tragic poets.

Chapter 2

2a What impressive thing have you produced by philosophizing? Which of your most serious men has stayed free of boasting? Diogenes was proud of his self-sufficiency and boasted about his jar. Then he ate a raw octopus, was seized by a bowel disease, and died of it through his lack of self-control. Aristippus walked about in purple and lived a dissolute life with an air of respectability. Plato, the philosopher, was sold by Dionysius because of his gluttony. And Aristotle ignorantly set a limit to providence and fenced in happiness with the things that pleased him. With no sense of what a teacher owes his pupil, he flattered Alexander and forgot that he was only a youth. Alexander, in true Aristotelian fashion, shut up his own friend because the friend would not bow down to him, and carried him around like a bear or a leopard. He certainly followed his teacher's doctrines! He showed off his courage and virtue at drinking parties, running his own dearest friend through with a spear. Then he wept and starved himself, on the pretext of grief, so that his own people would not hate him.

Translator's note. The older translation says Aristippus lived loosely "in accordance with his professed opinions." The Greek word means something like "plausibly" or "with an air of respectability."

2b I would also laugh at those who still misuse his teachings. They say that the things below the moon are not under providence. Yet they are nearer to the earth than the moon, and lower than its

course, and they exercise providence over things that have none! And according to Aristotle, those who have no beauty, no wealth, no bodily strength, and no noble birth have no happiness. Let people like that go on philosophizing.

Chapter 3

3a I could not approve of Heraclitus, who said, “I searched myself out,” because he was self-taught and proud. Nor could I praise him for hiding his writing in the temple of Artemis, mysteriously, so that it might be published later. Those who care about such things say that the tragic poet Euripides went down there and read it. Little by little he committed it to memory and carefully passed on the darkness of Heraclitus. His death exposed his ignorance. He was seized by dropsy and practiced medicine as if it were philosophy. He plastered himself with cow dung, and when the dung hardened it drew his whole body into contractions. He died in convulsions. Zeno must also be rejected. He declares that after the world-fire the same people will rise again to do the same things: Anytus and Meletus to accuse, Busiris to murder strangers, and Heracles again to perform his labors. Yet in his teaching about the world-fire he brings back more wicked men than just ones. There is one Socrates and a Heracles, and a few others like them, but only a few, not many.

Translator’s note. The older translation says Heraclitus was “pulled in pieces”; σπασθείς can mean “torn,” but after the contractions just described it more likely means “seized with spasms.”

3b For the wicked will turn out to be far more numerous than the good. And by his account God will be shown to be the maker of evils, since he dwells in sewers and worms and in those who do unspeakable things. The eruptions of fire in Sicily exposed the boasting of Empedocles: he was no god, yet he all but passed himself off as one. I also laugh at the old wives’ tales of Pherecydes, at the teaching Pythagoras inherited from him, and at Plato’s imitation of Pythagoras, even if some would rather not admit it. Who would give his support to the dog-like mating of Crates? Would he not rather turn away from the puffed-up, mad chatter of men like him and set himself to seek what is truly worthwhile? So do not let yourselves be swept away by the gatherings of these philosophers who are no philosophers. They teach doctrines that contradict one another, and each one blurts out whatever comes into his head. They also have many quarrels among themselves. Each hates the other. They hold opposing opinions, and in their arrogance they choose the most prominent places for themselves. They ought not to court kings uninvited or to fawn on rulers, but to wait until the great men come to them.

Translator’s note. The older translation reads “cynogamy” for κυνογαμία. The word refers to the Cynic Crates’ reported public sexual union with Hipparchia, which Tatian compares to the mating of dogs.

Chapter 4

4a Why, men of Greece, do you want to pit the governments against us, as if in a boxing match? And if I do not wish to follow the customs of certain people, why am I hated like the vilest criminal? Does the emperor order me to pay taxes? I am ready to pay. Does my master order me to serve him as a slave? I recognize my slavery. A man is to be honored as a man, but God alone is to be feared. He cannot be seen with human eyes, and no human craft can grasp him. Only if I am commanded to deny him will I not obey. I would rather die than be shown to be a liar and ungrateful. Our God has no origin in time. He alone is without beginning, and he himself is the beginning of all things. God is spirit. He does not run through matter. He is the maker of material spirits and of the forms found in matter. He is invisible and cannot be touched, and he himself is the Father of things perceived by the senses and of things unseen. We know him through his creation, and through his works we grasp his invisible power.

Translator's note. The last sentence echoes [Romans 1:20](#), where God's invisible qualities and eternal power are understood through the things he has made.

Scripture: [John 4:24](#); [Romans 1:20](#); [Romans 13:7](#); [1 Peter 2:17](#)

4b I do not wish to worship the created work that he made for our sake. The sun and moon came into being for us. How then can I worship my own servants? How can I declare wood and stone to be gods? The spirit that runs through matter is lower than the more divine Spirit. And that lower spirit, which is likened to the soul, must not be honored equally with the perfect God. Nor should the God who has no name be bribed with gifts. He who needs nothing must not be slandered by us as though he were in need. But I will set out our teaching more plainly.

Translator's note. The older translation has "ineffable" for ἀνυνόμαστον, literally "unnamable." It also renders δωροδοκητέον ("be bribed with gifts") as "presented with gifts," which loses the word's sense of bribery.

Chapter 5

5a God was in the beginning. And the beginning, we have been taught, is the power of the Word. The Master of all things, who is himself the foundation of everything, was alone, since creation had not yet come into being. But since he was all power and himself the foundation of things seen and unseen, all things were with him. With him, by his power of reason, the Word himself, who was in him, also came to exist. By the will of his simple being the Word springs forth. The Word did not go out in vain but became the firstborn work of the Father. We know him to be the beginning of the world. He came into being by distribution, not by cutting off. What is cut off is separated from the original. But what is

distributed takes on its own role in God's plan and does not leave the one from whom it was taken lacking anything. Just as many fires are lit from one torch, yet the light of the first torch is not made less by the lighting of the many, so the Word, coming forth from the power of the Father, did not leave the one who begot him without Word.

Translator's note. The last clause says the Father is not made ἄλογος, "without Word" or "without reason."

Scripture: [John 1:1](#); [Colossians 1:15](#)

5b I myself am speaking and you are listening. Yet surely I, who am addressing you, do not become empty of speech because my speech has passed over to you. By sending out my voice I intend to put in order the unordered matter in you. And just as the Word, begotten in the beginning, in turn begot our creation, having made the matter for himself, so I too, born again in imitation of the Word and having gained a grasp of the truth, am reshaping the confusion of the matter that is akin to me. For matter is not without beginning as God is. Nor is it equal in power to God, as it would be if it had no beginning. It came into being, and it was not made by anyone else. It was brought forth by the Maker of all things alone.

Translator's note. Tatian is rejecting the view, common among Greek philosophers and especially Platonists of his day, that matter is eternal and uncreated.

Chapter 6

6a For this reason we also believe that there will be a resurrection of bodies after the end of all things. We do not mean what the Stoics teach, that things come round in certain cycles, the same things always coming into being and passing away to no useful purpose. We mean a resurrection that happens once for all, when our ages have run their course. This restoring will be of human beings only, and it will be for the purpose of judgment. Our judges are not Minos or Rhadamanthus, before whose death, according to the myths, no soul was ever judged. The one who tests us is God himself, our Maker. You may think us complete babblers and scrap-gatherers, but we do not care, because we have put our faith in this teaching. Before I was born I did not exist, and I did not know who I was; I existed only in the substance of fleshly matter. But once I was born, though I had not existed before, my birth made me sure that I exist. In the same way, I was born, and through death I will exist no longer and be seen no longer. Yet I will exist again, just as before I did not exist and then was born.

Translator's note. The Greek of the clause about "human beings only" is difficult and probably damaged in the manuscripts. The older translation takes it differently ("the constitution of things under which men alone live").

Scripture: [Acts 17:18](#)

6b Even if fire wipes out my poor flesh, the world takes in the vaporized matter. Even if I am consumed in rivers or seas, or torn apart by wild beasts, I am laid up in the storerooms of a rich Master. The poor and godless man does not know what is stored away. But God the King, when he wishes, will restore to its original state the substance that only he can see.

Chapter 7

7a The heavenly Word became spirit from the Father, and Word out of the rational power. In imitation of the Father who begot him, he made man an image of immortality. The purpose was that, as incorruption is with God, so man, by sharing in a portion of God, might also have immortality. Before the making of men, then, the Word became the maker of angels. Each of these two kinds of creature was made with free will. Neither has goodness by nature, for that again belongs to God alone. Goodness is brought to completion by human beings through the freedom of their choice. The result is that the wicked man is justly punished, having become depraved through his own fault, while the righteous man is rightly praised for his good deeds, because in the exercise of his free will he did not transgress God's will.

Translator's note. Tatian speaks of the Word as "becoming spirit" from the Father. This language differs from the later, more settled wording of Christian teaching about the Son.

7b That is how matters stand with angels and men. The power of the Word has in itself foreknowledge of what is going to happen. What happens comes about not by fate, but by the decisions of free agents who make their choices. So the Word's power announced beforehand the outcomes of things to come. It also forbade wickedness by prohibitions, and it praised those who remained good. Men followed one who was shrewder than the rest, because he was the firstborn, and they declared him to be God, though he was rising up against the law of God. Then the power of the Word shut out from its company the one who began this madness and those who followed him. So the one who was made in the image of God became mortal, because the stronger spirit was separated from him. The firstborn one, through his transgression and ignorance, was shown to be a demon. Those who imitated him and his illusions became an army of demons, and because of their free will they were handed over to their own folly.

Translator's note. The Greek phrase about "his illusions" (phantasmata) is unclear. It may mean that his followers imitated his illusions, or that they were themselves his phantoms.

Scripture: [Genesis 1:27](#)

Chapter 8

8a Men became the occasion for the demons' revolt. The demons drew up a chart of the arrangement of the stars for men and, like people playing at dice, they introduced Fate, which is grossly unjust. Under this Fate the judge and the one judged were both made, and the killers and the killed, the rich and the poor, are all the offspring of the same Fate. Every birth, as in a theater, provides entertainment for these beings, among whom, as Homer says, "unquenchable laughter arose among the blessed gods." They watch men fighting in single combat, and each eagerly takes a side. One of them marries, corrupts boys, and commits adultery; he laughs and is angry, runs away and is wounded. How can such a being not be thought mortal? The very deeds by which they showed people what kind of beings they really are have urged those who hear of them to do the same.

Translator's note. The older translation reads "the material of their apostasy." The Greek hypothesis can mean the basis, subject matter, or occasion. The pronoun "they/them" in this section refers to the demons.

8b Surely the demons themselves, with Zeus their leader, have fallen under fate too, since they are mastered by the same passions as men? And besides, how can we honor beings whose teachings contradict each other so much? Rhea, whom the people of the Phrygian mountains call Cybele, is said to have made a law of castration because of Attis, whom she loved. But Aphrodite delights in the embraces of marriage. Artemis is a sorceress, while Apollo heals. The Gorgon, Poseidon's beloved, was beheaded, and from her sprang the horse Pegasus and Chrysaor. Athena and Asclepius then shared out the drops of her blood. He used his share to save lives, while she, from the same gore, became a killer of men and a maker of wars. It seems to me that the Athenians did not want to slander Athena. So they attribute to the Earth the child born from Hephaestus's union with her. They did this so that Athena would not be thought, like Atalanta because of Meleager, to have lost her manly courage through Hephaestus.

Translator's note. Where the older translation has "poisoner," the Greek says Artemis is a magos, a "sorcerer" or "magician." The child born to the Earth is Erichthonius in Athenian legend, though Tatian does not name him.

8c For the lame god, who makes brooches and curled spiral ornaments, probably tricked the motherless, orphaned girl with girlish trinkets. Poseidon goes sailing. Ares delights in wars. Apollo plays the lyre. Dionysus rules as tyrant over the Thebans. Kronos kills a tyrant. Zeus sleeps with his own daughter, and she becomes pregnant by him. Eleusis will now bear witness for me, and so will the mystic serpent, and Orpheus, who says, "Shut the doors against the uninitiated." Aidoneus seizes the Maiden, and his deeds have become mysteries. Demeter weeps for her daughter, and some people are deceived because of the Athenians. In the sacred precinct of Leto's son there is something called the Omphalos, but the Omphalos is the tomb of Dionysus. I praise you now, Daphne!

By overcoming Apollo's lack of self-control you proved his gift of prophecy false. He did not foresee what would happen to you, so his art did him no good. Let the far-shooter tell me now how Zephyrus killed Hyacinthus. Zephyrus overcame him. The tragic poet says, "A breeze is the most honored carriage of the gods." Yet Apollo was beaten by a mere breeze and lost the one he loved.

Translator's note. "The Omphalos" is the "navel" stone at Delphi. Tatian says it was the tomb of Dionysus. "Lyre" translates the Greek kitharistēs, one who plays the kithara.

Chapter 9

9a Such are the demons, and these are the ones who laid down fate. Their starting point was the making of animal figures. They had been thrown out of their dwelling in heaven, and they now lived among the creeping things on the earth, the swimming things in the waters, and the four-footed animals on the mountains. These creatures they thought worthy of heavenly honor. They wanted to be thought of as living in heaven themselves. By placing these creatures among the stars, they also wanted to make the senseless life on earth look reasonable. So the hot-tempered and the hard-worked, the self-controlled and the self-indulgent, the poor and the rich, all owe what they are to the very ones who legislated their birth. For the drawing of the zodiac is the work of gods. They say that when the light of one of them gains the upper hand, it robs most of the others of their due. And the one that is beaten usually prevails again later.

9b The seven planets are pleased with them, like men amusing themselves at a board game. But we are even higher than fate. Instead of wandering demons, we have learned to know one Master who does not wander. We are not led by fate, so we have rejected those who laid down its laws. Tell me, in God's name, did Triptolemus sow the wheat and help the Athenians after the time of mourning? And why was Demeter not a benefactor to humankind before her daughter was lost? Erigone's dog is shown in the sky, and so are the Scorpion, Artemis's helper, Chiron the Centaur, the half-ship Argo, and Callisto's bear. Then how was the sky left without decoration before these did the deeds mentioned? And to whom will it not seem ridiculous that the Delta is set among the stars? Some say this is because of Sicily, and others say it is the first letter of Zeus's name.

Translator's note. The "Delta" (Deltoton) is the triangle-shaped constellation. In Greek, Zeus's name in the genitive is Dios, which begins with delta. Sicily was called "the Triangle" because of its shape.

9c Why are Sardinia and Cyprus not honored in heaven too? And Zeus's brothers divided the kingdoms among them. Why, then, have figures shaped like the letters of their names not been fixed in the sky as well? How can Kronos, who was put in chains and thrown out

of his kingdom, be made the manager of fate? And how can someone who no longer reigns give out kingdoms? So drop this nonsense. Do not break the law by hating us unjustly.

Chapter 10

10a Men are said in the myths to be changed into other forms, but among you the gods are changed as well. Rhea becomes a tree. Zeus becomes a dragon because of Persephone. The sisters of Phaethon become poplars. Leto becomes a lowly creature, and because of her the island now called Delos was once named Ortygia. Tell me, does a god become a swan, take the form of an eagle, and take pride in his love for boys because Ganymede pours his wine? Why should I worship gods who take bribes and grow angry if they do not receive them? Let them keep their Fate. I do not want to bow down to wandering stars. What is this lock of hair of Berenice? Where were her stars before she died? How was the dead Antinous, a handsome youth, set up in the moon? Who took him up there? Perhaps it went like this. A man once mocked the gods by swearing falsely, for pay, that kings had gone up to heaven, and he was believed. In the same way someone made a god of Antinous, and was thought worthy of honor and reward for it.

Translator's note. The perjured witness who swore he saw a ruler rise to heaven was a known Roman practice. Cassius Dio (56.46) reports that a senator was paid to swear he had seen Augustus ascend.

10b Tell me, why have you robbed God? Why do you dishonor his creation? You sacrifice a sheep, yet you worship the same animal. There is a Bull in the sky, and you slaughter its image. The Kneeler crushes a harmful creature, and the eagle that ate Prometheus, the maker of men, is honored. The swan is beautiful, of course, because he was an adulterer! The Dioscuri are beautiful too, who live on alternate days and carried off the daughters of Leucippus. Helen is better still, who left fair-haired Menelaus and followed Paris with his turban and his gold. Just and wise indeed is the one who moved that harlot to the Elysian fields! Yet not even Tyndareus' daughter has been made immortal. Euripides wisely shows Orestes putting this woman to death.

Translator's note. In Euripides' play "Orestes," Orestes tries to kill Helen, but Apollo snatches her away and makes her immortal. Tatian's summary simplifies the play.

Chapter 11

11a How then can I accept a birth governed by Fate, when I see what kind of managers it has? I do not want to be a king. I do not wish to be rich. I have refused military command. I hate fornication. I do not sail the seas out of insatiable greed. I do not strive to win crowns. I am free from the mad craving for glory. I despise death. I

am above every kind of disease. Grief does not eat up my soul. If I am a slave, I put up with slavery. If I am free, I take no pride in my noble birth. I see that the sun is the same for everyone, and that there is one death for all, whether they have lived in pleasure or in want. The rich man sows, and the poor man shares in the same sowing. The richest die, and those who beg have the same limit to their lives. The rich need more things, and they gain credit along with reputation. But the poor man, and the one who is most modest, who reaches only for what suits his own station, gets by more easily. Why do you lie awake at night out of love of money, as if Fate made you do it?

11b Why, as if by Fate, do you reach for things again and again, and die again and again? Die to the world, and refuse its madness. Live to God, and by coming to know him, put away your old birth. We were not made in order to die. We die through our own doing. Our free will has destroyed us. We who were free have become slaves. We were sold because of sin. God made nothing wicked. It was we who brought wickedness forth. But we who brought it forth are able to refuse it again.

Translator's note. "Sold because of sin" echoes Paul's "sold under sin" ([Romans 7:14](#)). "Die to the world... live to God" recalls [Romans 6:10-11](#) and [Galatians 2:19](#).

Scripture: [Romans 7:14](#); [Romans 6:11](#)

Chapter 12

12a We recognize two kinds of spirit. One is called the soul. The other is greater than the soul and is the image and likeness of God. Both were present in the first human beings, so that in one respect they were material, and in another they were above matter. It stands like this. One can see that the whole structure of the world, and all of creation, came from matter, and that matter itself was brought forth by God. So matter is to be thought of as crude and shapeless before it was divided, and as ordered and arranged after the division was made in it. So the heaven is made of matter, and so are the stars in it. The earth too, and everything we conceive as coming from it, has the same makeup, so that all things have a common origin.

Translator's note. Tatian holds that matter is not eternal like God but was itself produced by God. He argues this earlier in the Address (chapter 5).

Scripture: [Genesis 1:26](#)

12b Given all this, there are differences among the things made of matter. One is more beautiful. Another is beautiful too, but surpassed by something better. Take the body: its makeup follows a single plan, and the reason it was made is bound up with it. Even so, there are differences of honor within it. One part is an eye, another an ear, another the arrangement of the hair and the

ordering of the inner organs, and another the joining together of marrow, bones and sinews. Each part differs from the others, yet in the way they are arranged there is a harmony, like voices in agreement. In the same way the world, by the power of the One who made it, has some things that are brighter and others unlike them. By the will of the Creator it has received a share of material spirit. A person can understand these matters in detail if he does not, out of empty conceit, push away the most divine explanations. These have been set forth in writing over the course of time, and they make those who give heed to them very dear to God.

Translator's note. The older version has "great lovers of God." The Greek word θεοφιλεῖς can mean "loved by God" or "loving God"; the older version took the second sense, and "dear to God" follows the first.

12c Even so, the demons (as you call them) took their structure from matter and gained the spirit that comes from it. They have become dissolute and greedy. Some of them turned toward what is purer. Others chose the lesser part of matter and live in a way that matches it. These are the ones you worship, men of Greece: beings made of matter and found far from good order. For the ones I have described turned, through their own folly, to vain glory. They slipped the reins and were eager to become robbers of deity. The Master of all has let them revel until the world reaches its end and is dissolved and the Judge arrives. Then all people who, under the demons' attack, have reached out for the knowledge of the perfect God will receive, through their struggles, a fuller witness on the day of judgment.

12d So there is spirit in the heavenly lights, spirit in angels, spirit in plants and waters, spirit in people, spirit in animals. It is one and the same spirit, yet it has differences within itself. We say these things not from mere talk, nor from plausible notions and clever argument, but using words of a more divine utterance. So those of you who want to learn, make haste. You do not reject the Scythian Anacharsis, so do not now think it beneath you to be taught by people who follow a barbarian code of law. Make use of our teachings, at least as you would the foretelling of the Babylonians. Listen to us as we speak, at least as you would to an oak giving oracles. Yet those things I mentioned are only the rival cleverness of demons who have lost their senses. The things taught among us are higher than the world's way of grasping things.

Translator's note. "The Babylonians' foretelling" refers to their astrology and divination. The speaking oak is probably the oracle at Dodona, where priests interpreted the rustling of a sacred oak. Anacharsis was a Scythian sage whom the Greeks admired.

Chapter 13

13a The soul, men of Greece, is not immortal in itself. It is mortal. Yet it is possible for the same soul not to die. If it does not know the

truth, it dies and is dissolved along with the body. But at the end of the world it rises again with the body, and receives death by way of punishment, in immortality. Again, if it has gained the knowledge of God, it does not die, even though it is dissolved for a time. For in itself it is darkness, and there is nothing luminous in it. This is what was meant by the saying: “The darkness does not comprehend the light.” For the soul did not save the Spirit; it was saved by the Spirit, and the light comprehended the darkness. Indeed the Logos is the light of God, and the soul that lacks knowledge is darkness.

Translator’s note. The Greek verb translated “comprehend” can mean “grasp with the mind” or “overtake and overcome.” Here it may carry something of both senses.

Scripture: [John 1:5](#)

13b This is why the soul, when it lives alone, bends downward toward matter and dies together with the flesh. But when it has joined itself to the divine Spirit, it is no longer without help. It goes up to the places where the Spirit leads it, for the Spirit’s dwelling is above, while the soul’s origin is from below. From the beginning the Spirit was the soul’s companion. But the Spirit left the soul when it would not follow. The soul kept something like a spark of the Spirit’s power, but because of the separation it could not see perfect things. In seeking God it went astray and invented many gods, following the demons with their rival cleverness. The Spirit of God is not present in everyone. But it took up its dwelling with some who lived justly and was joined with their souls, and through predictions it announced hidden things to the other souls. The souls that obeyed wisdom drew to themselves the kindred Spirit. The ones that did not obey, and rejected the servant of the God who suffered, showed themselves to be fighters against God rather than worshipers of God.

Translator’s note. The Greek has a perfect participle, “the God who has suffered,” which most likely refers to Christ’s suffering; interpreters differ on whether “the servant” is the Spirit or the prophets and messengers through whom the Spirit spoke.

Chapter 14

14 You Greeks are like that too. You are smooth talkers, but your thinking is strange. You have practiced the rule of many rather than the rule of one, supposing that in following demons you follow strong powers. A robber, being inhuman, usually overpowers people like himself by sheer daring. In the same way the demons, having drifted into great wickedness, have deceived the souls among you that are left on their own, using ignorance and illusions. These demons do not die easily, because they have no share in flesh. But while they live they practice the pursuits of death, and they themselves die as often as they train their followers in sins. So what is now their special advantage, that they do not die as men do, will still be theirs when they are about to be punished. They will not

share in everlasting life. Instead of death they will receive their share in an immortal state. We, for whom dying comes easily now, will afterward receive either immortality with enjoyment or pain together with immortality. In the same way the demons misuse the present life for wrongdoing and die continually through living itself. Afterward they will have the same immortality, like that of the time when they lived. In its makeup it will be like that of the people who deliberately did what the demons laid down for them during their lifetime. Is it not the case that fewer kinds of sin blossom among men because they do not live long, while for these demons wrongdoing has grown greater because their life has no limit?

Translator's note. The Greek has no word for “blessed.” The clause is compressed but seems to mean that the demons receive, in place of death, a share in an immortal state, and that this endless existence is part of their punishment.

Chapter 15

15a So now we must seek again what we once had and have lost. We must join the soul to the Holy Spirit and work at the union that is according to God. The human soul has many parts and is not of one part only. It is composite, so that it can be seen through the body. It could never appear apart from a body, and the flesh does not rise again without a soul. Man is not, as the croakers teach, “a rational animal, able to receive understanding and knowledge.” By their own account even the irrational animals would then turn out to be able to receive understanding and knowledge. Man alone is the image and likeness of God. By “man” I do not mean the one who acts like the animals. I mean the one who has gone far beyond mere humanity, toward God himself.

Translator's note. “Croakers” translates a Greek word meaning “raven-voiced.” It is Tatian’s insult for the philosophers who define man as a “rational animal.”

Scripture: [Genesis 1:26](#)

15b I have dealt with this more exactly in my work *On Animals*. For now I must say what the main point is: what the image and likeness according to God really is. What cannot be compared is nothing other than Being itself. What is compared is nothing other than what is like it. The perfect God is without flesh, but man is flesh. The soul is the bond of the flesh, and the flesh is what holds the soul. If this kind of composite creature is like a temple, God wants to dwell in it through the Spirit who acts as his representative. If the dwelling is not like that, man is better than the wild beasts only in his articulate speech. In everything else he lives as they do, and he is not a likeness of God.

Translator's note. *On Animals* is a work of Tatian’s that has not survived.

Scripture: [Genesis 1:26](#); [1 Corinthians 3:16](#)

15c No demon has any flesh. Their make-up is spiritual, like fire or air. Only people guarded by God's Spirit can easily see the bodies of the demons. The rest cannot see them at all; I mean those who have only soul. The lesser cannot grasp the greater. For this reason the nature of the demons has no room for repentance, for they are reflections of matter and of wickedness. Matter wanted to rule over the soul. By their own free choice the demons handed down laws of death to men. But men, after losing immortality, have conquered death by the death that comes through faith. A calling through repentance has been given to them, in line with the saying: "Since they were made a little lower than the angels." Anyone who has been defeated can win again, if he rejects what makes up death. What that is will be easy to see for those who desire immortality.

Translator's note. The last sentence of the Greek is awkward, and its exact sense is uncertain.

Scripture: [Hebrews 2:7](#)

Chapter 16

16a The demons who give orders to men are not the souls of men. How could human souls be active after death? Only if a man who was foolish and powerless while alive were believed to receive a more active power once he is dead. That is not so, as we have shown elsewhere. It is also hard to believe that the immortal soul, hindered by the parts of the body, becomes wiser once it leaves the body. The demons, in their wickedness, rage madly among men. They turn men's minds aside with various false stage-performances. Those minds already lean downward, and the demons make them unable to rise up for the journey to heaven. But the things of the world are not hidden from us. The divine is easily grasped by us, because the power that makes souls immortal has come to us.

Translator's note. Here Tatian probably speaks of the "immortal soul" on his opponents' terms. Elsewhere (chapter 13) he says the soul is not immortal by nature, though it is able not to die. Souls lost immortality and receive it again through union with God's Spirit.

16b The demons are also seen by those who have only soul. Sometimes they show themselves to men so that they may be thought to be something. Sometimes they do it to harm them, as ill-intentioned friends might harm enemies. Sometimes they do it to give those who are like themselves occasions to honor them. If they could, they would certainly have dragged down heaven along with the rest of creation. But they do not do this at all, because they cannot. Instead they use the lower matter to make war on the matter that is like themselves. Anyone who wants to conquer them must renounce matter. Armed with the breastplate of the heavenly Spirit, he will be able to save everything it encloses. There are indeed diseases and disorders of the matter in us. But when these occur, the demons claim to be their cause. They attack whenever

sickness overtakes a person. Sometimes they themselves shake the condition of the body with the storm of their own folly. But when they are struck by the word of God's power, they go away in fear, and the sick person is healed.

Translator's note. The "breastplate" recalls the armor imagery of [Ephesians 6:14-17](#) and [1 Thessalonians 5:8](#).

Chapter 17

17a What can we say about Democritus and his "sympathies and antipathies"? Only that, as the common saying goes, the man from Abdera is an "Abdera-talker." The man who gave the city its name was, they say, a friend of Heracles, and he was eaten by the horses of Diomedes. In the same way, the man who boasts of Ostanēs the magician will be handed over on the day of the end as food for eternal fire. And you too, if you do not stop your laughter, will suffer the same punishments as the sorcerers. So listen to me, Greeks, as I cry out as if from a height. Do not mock me and so pin your own senselessness on the herald of the truth. An affliction is not destroyed by a counter-affliction. A madman is not cured by little leather charms hung on him.

Translator's note. Tatian is playing on words. "Sympathy" and "antipathy" are built on the Greek word *pathos* ("feeling," "suffering," "affliction"), and his last sentences turn that word against the theory.

17b Demons do visit people. The sick man, the man who says he is in love, the man who hates, and the man who wants revenge all take them as helpers. This is how their scheme works. The shapes of written letters, and the lines made from them, cannot in themselves signify what is written. Men have made them signs of their thoughts, and they know, from the particular combination, how the order of the letters has been fixed to mean something. In the same way, the many kinds of roots, and the use of sinews and bones, have no power of their own. They are only the "alphabet" of the demons' wickedness, and the demons have set what each is good for. When the demons see that men have accepted the service these things offer, they take hold of the men and make them their slaves.

Translator's note. The word rendered "alphabet" (*stoicheiōsis*) comes from *stoicheion*, which means both "element" and "letter of the alphabet." That double meaning is what ties it to Tatian's comparison with writing.

17c How could it be good to serve adultery? How could it be worthy to help those who come wanting to hate others? Or how is it right to credit matter, and not God, with help for the insane? By craft the demons turn men away from the worship of God, and persuade them to trust in herbs and roots. But if God had made these things to do whatever men want, He would be the maker of evil things. In fact He Himself made everything that is good in its way. It is the reckless excess of the demons that used what is in the world to do

harm. The form of evil in these things belongs to them and not to the perfect God. Think about it. Suppose that while I am alive I am not wicked at all. How could it be that once I am dead, what remains of me will produce something perceptible? It does nothing of my doing, and it cannot move or even feel. And how will a man who has died a most pitiable death be able to serve in punishing someone? If that were so, he would much sooner avenge himself on his own enemy. If he could help others, he could much more make himself his own avenger.

Translator's note. "Wicked" translates *mochthēros*, which can also mean "wretched" or "worthless." The exact point of the clause is uncertain.

Tatian seems to mean that a person's dead remains cannot have powers the living person never had.

Chapter 18

18a Drug-lore in every form, whether medicine or sorcery, comes from the same contrivance. If someone is healed by matter because he trusts in it, he will be healed far better by looking to the power of God. Poisons are material compounds, and in the same way the remedies are made of the same stuff. Suppose we refuse the worse kind of material. Even so, people often try to heal by combining one of the bad things with another, and so they misuse bad things for a good end. Someone who dines with a robber may not be a robber himself, but he shares the punishment because he shared the table. In the same way, a man who is not wicked but mixes with the wicked, and joins them in using something for a supposed good, will be punished by God the Judge for sharing in it. Why will the man who trusts in the workings of matter not trust God?

Translator's note. The Greek word *pharmakeia* covers drugs, medicine and sorcery, and since Tatian goes on to speak of healing remedies he seems to include all of these, so neither "medicine" nor "sorcery" alone captures it.

18b Why do you not go to the more powerful Master? Why do you rather treat yourself, as the dog does with grass, the deer with a viper, the boar with river crabs, the lion with apes? Why do you make gods of the things in the world? And when you treat your neighbor, why are you called a benefactor? Follow the power of the Word. Demons do not heal. By their craft they take men captive. The most admirable Justin rightly declared that these beings are like robbers. Robbers are accustomed to take people alive and then give them back to their families for a ransom. In the same way, the so-called gods visit the limbs of certain people. Then they work through dreams to win glory for themselves. They order such people to come out in public, with everyone watching. When they have had their fill of worldly things, they fly away from the sufferers, cancel the sickness they had contrived, and restore the people to their former state.

Translator's note. The older English says Justin "denounced them as

robbers.” The Greek says he declared that they “are like robbers.”

Chapter 19

19a You do not understand these things, so let us who know them teach you. You claim to despise death and to practice self-sufficiency. But your philosophers fall so far short of any such discipline that some of them take 600 gold pieces a year from the emperor of the Romans for nothing useful. They are paid so that not even their long beards go unpaid. Crescens, who made his nest in the great city, surpassed everyone in his love of boys, and he was thoroughly given to the love of money. He claimed to despise death, yet he feared death so much that he schemed to bring it on Justin, and on me too, as though death were an evil. He did so because Justin, by preaching the truth, exposed the philosophers as gluttons and cheats. Which of the philosophers was he accustomed to persecute, except you alone? If you say that death should not be feared, in agreement with our teachings, then do not die out of human craving for glory, as Anaxarchus did. Become despisers of death for the sake of the knowledge of God.

Translator’s note. The question “Which of the philosophers...except you alone?” is obscure in the Greek, and the text may be faulty.

19b The structure of the world is good, but the way of life in it is bad. As at a public festival, you can see people who do not know God being cheered as if in a theater. For what is divination? Why have you been led astray by it? It is your servant in the greed of this world. You want to make war, and you take Apollo as your adviser in bloodshed. You want to carry off a girl, and you choose to have the demon fight on your side. You fall sick through your own fault, and just as Agamemnon wished for ten counselors, you want gods to be with you. A woman drinks water and goes into a frenzy, and from incense she loses her senses, and you say that she prophesies. Apollo was a foreseer and a teacher of prophets, yet in the matter of Daphne he deceived himself. Tell me, does an oak prophesy? Do birds, too, foretell the future? Are you, then, lower than animals and plants?

Translator’s note. In Homer’s Iliad (book 2), Agamemnon wishes he had ten counselors like Nestor. The prophesying oak is probably the famous oak oracle of Zeus at Dodona.

19c So it is a fine thing for you to become a prophesying piece of wood, and to take on what belongs to the creatures that roam the air! The one who makes you love money also predicts that you will be rich. The one who stirs up strife and fighting also forecasts victory in war. If you rise above the passions, you will despise everything in the world. We are people like this, so do not loathe us. Reject the demons and follow the one God. “All things came into being by him, and apart from him not one thing came into being.” If there is poison among growing things, that has come about because

of our sinfulness. I can show you the likeness of these things. Only listen, and the one who believes will recognize it.

Translator's note. Tatian's words echo [John 1:3](#), though he writes "by him" where John has "through him."

Scripture: [John 1:3](#)

Chapter 20

20a Even if you are healed by drugs (I grant you this as a concession), you must still credit the cure to God. For the world still drags us down, and in my weakness I go looking for material things. The wing of the soul is the perfect spirit. The soul threw this spirit off through sin and fluttered like a fledgling, and it fell to the ground. Having left its fellowship with heaven, it longed to share in lesser things. The demons were moved to another dwelling, and the first-formed human beings were driven out. The demons were thrown down from heaven. The humans were driven from earth, though not from this earth, but from an order of things better than the one here. Now, since we long for our former state, we must put aside everything that stands in the way. The heaven, my friend, is not boundless. It is limited and has an end. Beyond it are the better realms. They have no change of seasons, which is what brings on various diseases. They enjoy a perfect temperature, and they have a day that never ends and a light that people down here cannot approach. Those who worked on geographies recorded the regions as far as a man can go. They had nothing to say about what lies beyond, because it cannot be observed. So they pointed instead to ebbing tides, to seas full of weed or mud, and to places scorched with fire or frozen solid.

Translator's note. "The better realms" translates Greek aiones (literally "ages"), used here for the higher worlds beyond the heavens. "A light that people...cannot approach" recalls [1 Timothy 6:16](#).

Scripture: [1 Timothy 6:16](#)

20b But we have learned through the prophets what we did not know ourselves. They were convinced, along with their souls, that the heavenly spirit would acquire a covering over mortality, and so they foretold what other souls did not know. Everyone who is stripped bare can obtain this adornment and run back to the ancient kinship.

Translator's note. The Greek is compact: "along with their souls" may go with "convinced" or with "the heavenly spirit." Compare [2 Corinthians 5:1-4](#), where Paul speaks of being clothed over (ependysasthai), the same root as the Greek word for "covering" here.

Scripture: [2 Corinthians 5:4](#)

Chapter 21

21a We are not being foolish, men of Greece, and we are not talking nonsense when we announce that God came to be in the form of a man. You who revile us, compare your myths with our accounts. Athena, they say, became Deiphobus for Hector's sake. Phoebus, with his uncut hair, pastured the shambling cattle for Admetus's sake. And the wife of Zeus came to Semele as an old woman. When you dwell on such stories, how can you laugh at us? Your Asclepius is dead. The man who deflowered the fifty virgins at Thespieae in one night gave himself up to be eaten by fire and is gone. Prometheus, chained to the Caucasus, suffered punishment for the good he did to humans. By your own account Zeus is jealous, and he hides the dream from people because he wants them to perish. So look at your own records, and at least accept us as telling myths like yours.

Translator's note. This is probably an allusion to Iliad 2, where Zeus sends Agamemnon a deceptive dream in order to bring ruin on the Greeks.

Scripture: [Philippians 2:7](#)

21b We are not out of our minds; it is your stories that are nonsense. If you speak of the birth of gods, you also show them to be mortal. Why is Hera not pregnant now? Has she grown old, or is there no one to inform you? Listen to me now, men of Greece, and do not turn your myths and your gods into allegory. If you try to do this, you yourselves do away with the divinity you believe in. If your demons are what they are said to be, they are bad in character. If they are given a more natural meaning, they are not what they are said to be. As for worshiping the substance of the elements, I could never be persuaded to do it, and I could never persuade my neighbor to do it. Metrodorus of Lampsacus, in his work on Homer, has argued very foolishly, turning everything into allegory.

Translator's note. Metrodorus of Lampsacus was a Greek thinker of the fifth century BC, an associate of Anaxagoras. He was known for explaining Homer's gods and heroes as symbols of natural forces.

21c Metrodorus says that Hera, Athena, and Zeus are not what the people think who set up sacred enclosures and precincts for them. They are, he says, forms of nature and arrangements of the elements. And of course you will say the same about Hector, Achilles, Agamemnon, and absolutely all the Greeks and barbarians, with Helen and Paris. Since they are all of the same nature, you will say they were brought into the poem for the sake of its plot, and that none of these men existed. We have put these points forward only for the sake of argument. It is not right even to compare our grasp of God with the views of people who wallow in matter and mud.

Chapter 22

22a What are your teachings like, anyway? Who would not mock your public festivals? They are held in honor of wicked demons, and

they bring men into disgrace. I have often seen a certain man. I was amazed at the sight, and after the amazement I felt contempt. Inwardly he is one person, but outwardly he pretends to be what he is not. He puts on great airs of delicacy and twists himself about in every way. Now he flashes his eyes, now he bends his hands about, and he raves like a man possessed behind a face of clay. At one moment he becomes Aphrodite, at another Apollo. He is a single man who accuses all the gods, a summary of superstition, a slanderer of heroic deeds, an actor of murders, a recorder of adultery, a storehouse of madness, a teacher of perverts, and a cause of men being condemned. Yet such a man is praised by everyone. I have rejected him, false in everything as he is. I reject his godlessness, his practices, and the man himself.

Translator's note. "A face of clay" is uncertain. It may mean a mask, or a face smeared with paint or mud. The man described is evidently a stage performer, probably a mime or dancer.

22b But you are carried off like plunder by such people, and you abuse those who do not share your pursuits. I do not want to stand gaping at a crowd of singers, and I do not want to share the feelings of a man who nods and moves in unnatural ways. What wonderful or exceptional thing is done among you? They speak shameful things through the nose. They make movements they should not make. Your daughters and sons watch men on the stage play the teacher on how one ought to commit adultery. Fine places your auditoriums are! They proclaim everything that is wickedly done at night, and they delight their hearers with the sound of shameful words. Fine, too, are your lying poets, who deceive their hearers with their artful devices.

Chapter 23

23 I have seen men weighed down by bodily training, carrying around the load of the flesh on them. Prizes and crowns are set before them, and the organizers of the games urge them on, not to courage but to a contest of violence and strife, and the one who hits hardest is crowned. These are the lesser evils. Who would not hesitate to speak of the greater ones? Some give themselves up to idleness because of their dissolute living, and they sell themselves to be killed. The poor man sells himself, and the rich man buys the killers. Spectators sit down to watch them, and the fighters battle one another in single combat over nothing, and no one comes down to help. Is this really something you do well? The man who stands highest among you gathers an army of murderers, promising to keep a band of robbers. These robbers go out from him, and all of you come together for the show. There you become judges, partly of the wickedness of the organizer and partly of the wickedness of the men who fight. The man who has missed the killing is grieved, because he was not sentenced to be a spectator of wicked, godless and foul deeds. You sacrifice animals to have meat to eat, and you

buy men to provide your soul with cannibal feasting, feeding it with the most godless bloodshed. The robber kills in order to take; the rich man buys gladiators in order that they may be killed.

Chapter 24

24 What good does it do me to watch a man playing Euripides' madman and acting out the matricide of Alcmaeon? He does not even keep his own natural appearance. He gapes wide, carries a sword about, shrieks, is set on fire, and wears an inhuman costume. Away, too, with the mythical tales of Acusilaus, and with Menander, who put that same kind of talk into verse. Why should I stand amazed at the legendary flute-player? Why should I busy myself with Aristoxenus and the Theban Antigenides? We leave to you the things that bring no benefit. Either be persuaded by our teachings, or in the same way give up your own.

Translator's note. The Greek about Aristoxenus can be read two ways. He may be named alongside Antigenides, as here, or he may be a comparison ("like Aristoxenus"), as in the older translation. Aristoxenus wrote on music, and Antigenides of Thebes was a famous flute-player.

Chapter 25

25a What great and wonderful thing do your philosophers do? They neglect one of their shoulders and leave it bare. They wear their hair long and grow beards, and they go about with nails like the claws of wild beasts. They say they need nothing, but like Proteus they need a tanner for their wallet, a weaver for their cloak, and a woodcutter for their staff. Because of their gluttony they need the rich, and a cook as well. You who imitate the dog, you do not know God, and so you have turned to imitating an animal without reason. You cry out in public with an air of authority and make yourself the avenger of your own cause. If you receive nothing, you hurl abuse, and philosophy becomes for you a trade for making a living. You follow the teachings of Plato, and a loud Epicurean debater stands up against you. Again, you want to follow Aristotle, and someone who follows Democritus abuses you.

Translator's note. "Proteus" is probably Peregrinus Proteus, a Cynic philosopher of the second century. "Dog" alludes to the Cynics, whose name comes from the Greek word for dog.

25b Pythagoras says that he was once Euphorbus, and he is the heir of Pherecydes' teaching. Aristotle, on the other hand, attacks the immortality of the soul. The schools that succeed one another among you are quarrelsome, so you who disagree with each other fight against those who agree among themselves. One of you says that God is a body; I say that He is without a body. One says the world cannot be dissolved; I say it will be dissolved. One says a burning up of the world happens at set times; I say it happens once for all. One says that Minos and Rhadamanthus are the judges; I say

God Himself is. One says that only the soul is made immortal; I say that the poor flesh joined to it is made immortal too. What harm are we doing you, men of Greece? Why do you hate those who follow the word of God as if they were the most defiled of men? There is no cannibalism among us. It is you, the educated, who have become false witnesses. Among you, Pelops becomes a meal for the gods and also the beloved of Poseidon. Kronos eats up his sons, and Zeus swallows Metis.

Translator's note. Tatian refers to the myths of Pelops, served up to the gods by his father Tantalus, and of Zeus swallowing Metis. The Greek simply adds "and the beloved of Poseidon." The old translation's "although beloved by Poseidon" is an interpretation.

Chapter 26

26a Stop parading the words of others in triumph, like the jackdaw decking itself out in feathers that are not its own. If every city took back its own dialect from you, your clever arguments would fail. You search for who God is, yet you do not know what is within you. You gape at the sky and fall into pits. Your books are like labyrinths, and their readers are like the jar of the Danaids. Why do you divide time for me, saying that one part of it is past, another present, and another future? How can the future go by if the present is here? Sailors on a moving ship think in their ignorance that the mountains are running past. In the same way you do not realize that it is you who are running past, while the age stands still for as long as the One who made it wills it to exist.

Translator's note. The Danaids were punished in the underworld by having to fill a leaking jar forever. The Greek word *aiōn* (translated "age") can mean "age," "world," or "time."

26b Why am I accused for speaking what is my own, while you hurry to tear down everything I say? Were you not born in the same way as we were, and did you not share in the same ordering of the world? Why do you claim that wisdom is found among you alone? You have no other sun, no different risings of the stars, no more distinguished kind of birth, and no special kind of death set apart from other men. The grammarians started all this foolish talk. You divide wisdom into parts, and so you have been cut off from the wisdom that is according to truth. You then gave the names of those parts to particular men. You do not know God, and you fight among yourselves and pull each other down. For this reason you are all nothing. You claim the words of others as your own, and you talk together like a blind man to a deaf one. Why do you keep a carpenter's tools when you do not know how to build? Why do you take up words while staying far away from deeds? You are puffed up with glory, and brought low when misfortunes come.

Translator's note. The old translation reads "you arrogate to yourselves the sole right of discussion." The Greek says that you appropriate (take as your own) the words, that is, the arguments of others.

26c You make irrational use of outward appearances. In public you parade yourselves, but you hide your teachings away in corners. When we recognized you for what you were, we left you. We no longer touch anything of yours, and we follow the word of God. Why, my friend, do you stir up a war among the letters? Why do you make their sounds clash like fists in a boxing match, with your Athenian lisping, when you ought to speak more naturally? If you speak Attic though you are not an Athenian, tell me why you do not speak Doric. Why does one dialect seem to you more barbarous, and the other more pleasant for conversation?

Translator's note. "Outward appearances" translates schēmata, which can mean dress, bearing, or manner (here probably the philosophers' costume and pose). Attic and Doric were Greek dialects.

Chapter 27

27a If you hold on to the education of those people, why do you fight against me for choosing the teachings I want? Is it not absurd that you do not punish a robber just because of the name he is charged with, until you have learned the truth exactly, yet you hate us on the strength of an unexamined slander? Diagoras was an Athenian, but you punished him for divulging the mysteries of the Athenians. And yet you read his Phrygian discourses and hate us. You own the writings of Leo, but you resent the refutations we bring against them. You have the opinions of Apion about the gods of Egypt on your own shelves, and yet you proclaim us the most godless of men. Among you the tomb of Olympian Zeus is shown, even if someone says the Cretans are liars. The whole assembly of your many gods is nothing. Even if Epicurus, who despises them, serves as torchbearer, I still do not hide from the rulers the understanding of God that I hold concerning the universe.

Translator's note. The last sentence is obscure in the Greek, and the text may be damaged. The sense given here follows the older translation.

27b Why do you advise me to be false to my way of life? You say we should despise death, so why do you teach us to escape it by skill? I do not have the heart of a deer. But the pursuits of your discourses are like Thersites, who spoke without measure. How could I be persuaded by someone who says the sun is a red-hot lump of metal and the moon is earth? Such claims are contests of words, not an orderly setting out of the truth. And is it not foolish to trust the books of Herodorus on the story of Heracles? They proclaim that there is an upper earth, and that the lion killed by Heracles came down from it. What good are Attic style, the philosophers' heaped-up chains of argument, the plausibility of syllogisms, the measurements of the earth, the positions of the stars and the courses of the sun? Anyone who busies himself with such inquiries is making his own doctrines into law for himself.

Translator's note. "Heaped-up chains of argument" translates a word

meaning “heap.” The same word was also a technical term for the “sorites,” a type of chain argument.

Chapter 28

28 This is why I also condemned your legislation. There ought to be one way of life, common to all. As it is, there are as many sets of laws as there are kinds of cities, so that what is shameful among some people is admirable among others. The Greeks, for example, think that sleeping with one’s mother is to be avoided, but the Persian Magi hold this practice to be most noble. Sex with boys is punished by the barbarians, but the Romans honor it with special privileges, as they try to gather herds of boys like herds of grazing mares.

Chapter 29

29a So I saw these things. I also took part in the mysteries, and I examined the religions found everywhere, which are carried on by effeminate men and men-women. Among the Romans I found their Latiarian Zeus delighting in human gore and in the blood of men killed. I found Artemis, not far from the great city, taking up the same kind of deeds. And I found one demon in one place and another in another, stirring up outbreaks of evil. So I withdrew by myself and looked for a way to discover the truth. While I was thinking over serious matters, I happened to come across some barbarian writings. They were older than the doctrines of the Greeks and more divine than the Greeks’ error. I was persuaded by them for these reasons: the plainness of their language, the lack of artifice in those who spoke, the easily grasped account of the making of the universe, the foretelling of things to come, the extraordinary quality of the commandments, and the teaching that one ruler governs the whole.

Translator’s note. “Latiarian Zeus” is Jupiter Latialis, worshiped at the Latin festival. Other early Christian writers also claimed that human blood was offered to him. “The great city” is Rome. The Artemis meant is probably Diana of Aricia, near Rome, whose priest was said to win his office by killing his predecessor.

29b When my soul had been taught by God, I understood that some things have the character of a sentence of condemnation, while others set us free from slavery in the world. They pull us away from many rulers and ten thousand tyrants. They give us not something we had never received, but what we had received and were prevented by error from keeping.

Translator’s note. The Greek says only “some things... others,” without saying which is which. The older English takes the first group to be the Greek writings, but that is an interpretation.

Chapter 30

30 Now that I have been initiated into the grasp of these things and have made it my own, I want to strip off, like a child, the things of infancy. For we know that the make-up of wickedness is like that of the tiniest seeds. It grew strong from a small starting point, but it will be dissolved again if we obey the words of God and do not scatter ourselves. For through a certain hidden treasure he gained mastery over what is ours. In digging for it we are filled with dust, but we give it the basis for its standing. By accepting the whole of his possession, he took control of the more precious wealth. Let this be said to our own people. To you Greeks, what else should I say than this: do not abuse those who are better than you, and do not take it as a reason for mockery if they are called barbarians. If you wish, you will be able to find the reason why not everyone can understand one another's language. For to those who want to examine our teachings I will give an easy and plentiful account.

Translator's note. The sentences about the "hidden treasure" are very obscure, and the Greek does not make clear who "he" is or what "it" refers to; the hidden-treasure image may recall Jesus' parable of the treasure hidden in a field, for which a man sells all he has ([Matthew 13:44](#)).

Scripture: [1 Corinthians 13:11](#); [Matthew 13:44](#)

Chapter 31

31a But now I think it right to show that our philosophy is older than the pursuits of the Greeks. Moses and Homer will be our boundary markers, since both are very ancient. Homer is older than all the poets and historians, and Moses is the founder of all barbarian wisdom. Let us now take the two of them and compare them. We will find that our teachings are older not only than Greek learning but even than the invention of letters. I will not call on witnesses from among our own people. I will rather use Greeks as my helpers. The first course would be foolish, since you would not accept it anyway. The second, if it can be done, is remarkable, because I fight back against you with your own weapons and take from your own side proofs that are beyond suspicion. The earliest writers have already investigated Homer's poetry, his family, and the time when he flourished. They include Theagenes of Rhegium, who lived in the time of Cambyses, Stesimbrotus of Thasos, Antimachus of Colophon, Herodotus of Halicarnassus, and Dionysius of Olynthus. After them came Ephorus of Cyme, Philochorus the Athenian, and the Peripatetics Megacleides and Chamaeleon. Then came the grammarians Zenodotus, Aristophanes, Callimachus, Crates, Eratosthenes, Aristarchus, and Apollodorus. Of these, Crates and his followers say that Homer flourished before the return of the Heraclidae, within eighty years after the Trojan War. Eratosthenes and his followers say it was after the hundredth year from the capture of Ilium. Aristarchus and

his followers place him at the time of the Ionian migration, which was 140 years after the Trojan War. Philochorus puts him after the Ionian migration, in the archonship of Archippus at Athens, 180 years after the Trojan War. Apollodorus and his followers say it was 100 years after the Ionian migration, which would be 240 years after the Trojan War.

Translator's note. The Greek says only “the one... the other” and does not name either man. But the sense is clearly that Homer is the oldest of the poets and historians and Moses is the founder of all barbarian wisdom, and we have named them to make this plain. “Barbarian” here simply means non-Greek. Ilium is another name for Troy.

31b Some said that he lived ninety years before the Olympiads, that is, 317 years after the capture of Ilium. Others brought the date further down and said that Homer was a contemporary of Archilochus. Archilochus flourished around the twenty-third Olympiad, in the time of Gyges the Lydian, 500 years after the Trojan War. So, for those who are able to investigate accurately, let this summary be enough about the date of this poet (I mean Homer), about his origin, and about the disagreement of those who have written about him. It is possible to show that the opinions they hold about their accounts are false as well. Where the record of dates does not hold together, the history cannot be true either. For what causes error in writing, if not putting together things that are not true?

Translator's note. The sense of συστάσεως (here “his origin”) is uncertain, and the phrase τὰς περὶ τοὺς λόγους δόξας (“the opinions about the accounts” or “about the teachings”) is compressed; its exact meaning is uncertain.

Chapter 32

32a Among us there is no longing for empty glory, and we do not deal in a medley of doctrines. We have separated ourselves from the public and earthly teaching. We obey the commands of God and follow the law of the Father of incorruption. So we reject everything that rests on human opinion. Not only the rich practice philosophy among us. The poor also receive the teaching free of charge, for what comes from God is far beyond any payment the world could give. So we welcome everyone who wishes to listen, even old women and young people. In short, every age receives honor among us, while licentiousness is kept far away. We do not lie in what we say. As for your stubborn persistence in unbelief, it would be good if it were brought to an end. If not, let our teachings stand confirmed by the judgment of God.

32b You laugh, but you will also weep. Is it not absurd that, by your own account, Nestor is admired for trying to fight on equal terms with the young men, though he was slow at cutting his horse's traces because of the weakness and sluggishness of his age? Yet those among us who wrestle with old age and busy themselves with

the things of God are laughed at! Who would not laugh when you claim that the Amazons, Semiramis, and certain other warlike women existed, and yet you slander our maidens? Achilles was a youth, and he is believed to have been very noble. Neoptolemus was younger still, but he was strong. Philoctetes was sick, but the divine power needed him against Troy. What was Thersites like? Yet he served as a commander. And if his ignorance had not made him unrestrained in speech, he would not have been mocked as pointy-headed and bald. With all who want to practice philosophy among us, we do not judge by what is seen. We do not judge those who come to us by their outward appearance. We reckon that strength of mind can be found in anyone, even if their bodies are weak. But your ways are full of envy and a great deal of dullness.

Translator's note. In Homer (Iliad 2.212-219), Thersites is a common soldier, not a commander. Homer calls him "unmeasured in speech" and describes his pointed head and thin hair. Tatian's statement that he commanded does not match Homer.

Scripture: [Luke 6:25](#)

Chapter 33

33a For this reason I was eager to show, from the things you hold in honor, that our customs are sober and sensible, while your customs are full of madness. You say that we babble among women and youths, maidens and old men, and you mock us for not being with you. Then listen to the nonsense that goes on among the Greeks. Your pursuits are foolish, though you hold them in greater honor than your gods. And you disgrace yourselves where women are concerned. Lysippus cast Praxilla in bronze, though her poems said nothing useful. Menestratus cast Learchis. Silanion cast Sappho the courtesan. Naucydes cast Erinna the Lesbian. Boiscus cast Myrtis. Cephisodotus cast Myro of Byzantium. Gomphus cast Praxigoris, and Amphistratus cast Cleito. And what should I say of Anyte, Telesilla and Mystis?

Translator's note. The sentence about "your pursuits" is obscure in the Greek. It may instead mean that your gods' pursuits are foolish, all the more because of their great fame.

33b The sculptors were Euthykrates and Cephisodotus for the first of these, Niceratus for the second, and Aristodotus for the third. Euthykrates made Mnesiarchis the Ephesian, Silanion made Corinna, and Euthykrates made Thalarchis the Argive. I was eager to name these women so that you would not think anything strange goes on among us. I want you to compare the practices that lie before your eyes, and then stop mocking the women among us who pursue philosophy. Sappho was a lewd, love-crazed little woman who sang of her own shamelessness. All our women are chaste, and our maidens, working at their distaffs, speak of the things of God more earnestly than that girl of yours. So be ashamed. You are found to be disciples of mere women, yet you mock the women who

share our way of life, along with the gatherings they attend with us. What noble child did Glaucippe give you? She bore a monster, as her statue shows, which Niceratus, son of Euctemon, an Athenian by birth, cast in bronze.

33c If she gave birth to an elephant, why should Glaucippe enjoy public honor? Praxiteles and Herodotus made Phryne the courtesan for you. Euthykrates cast in bronze Panteuchis, pregnant by a seducer. Besantis, queen of the Paeonians, bore a black child, and Deinomenes saw to it that she was remembered through his art. I condemn Pythagoras too, who set Europa on the bull. I condemn you also, who honor this accuser of Zeus because of that sculptor's skill. I laugh as well at the skill of Myron, who made a calf and put a Victory on it, because by carrying off Agenor's daughter it had won the prize for adultery and lack of self-control. Herodotus of Olynthus made Glycera the courtesan and Argeia the harp-player. Bryaxis set up Pasiphae. By keeping her wantonness in memory, you have all but chosen to have the women of today be like her. Melanippe was a wise woman, and that is why Lysistratus made her statue. And yet you refuse to believe that there are wise women among us!

Translator's note. The Pythagoras named here is a sculptor, not the philosopher. The statue "accuses" Zeus because it shows his abduction of Europa, Agenor's daughter, in the form of a bull.

Chapter 34

34a Very dignified, certainly, is the tyrant Phalaris, who feasted on babies at the breast. Through the work of Polystratus of Ambracia he is shown to this day as a kind of marvelous man. The people of Agrigentum dreaded to look at that face because of his cannibalism, but those who care about culture now boast that they can look at him in a portrait. Is it not shameful that you honor the killing of a brother? You look at the figures of Polynices and Eteocles, and you have not buried them along with their maker Pythagoras. Destroy these memorials of wickedness along with them! Why should I regard as a marvel, because of Periclymenus, the work showing a little woman who bore thirty children? She carried off the first prize for great lack of self-control, and it would have been right to be disgusted at her. She is compared to the Roman sow, which, they say, was likewise thought worthy of a more mysterious kind of worship for the same reason.

Translator's note. The "Roman sow" is the sow of Roman legend that bore thirty piglets, a sign tied to the founding of Alba Longa (Virgil, Aeneid 3.390-392; 8.42-45). The Greek says the woman is compared to this Roman sow.

34b Ares committed adultery with Aphrodite, and Andron made their daughter Harmonia for you. Sophron handed down nonsense and trifles in his writings, yet he became more famous thanks to a

bronze statue, which still stands today. Not only his fables but also the sculpture of Aristodemus have made Aesop, that teller of lies, remembered forever and greatly admired. Then are you not ashamed? You have so many women poets who were of no use for anything, and countless prostitutes and worthless men, yet you slander the dignity of our women. Why should it matter to me to learn that Euanthe gave birth in the Peripatos? Why should I gape at the art of Callistratus, or fix my eyes on the Neaera of Calliades? She was a courtesan. Laïs was a prostitute, and Turnus made her a monument to prostitution. Why are you not ashamed of the fornication of Hephaestion, even if Philo portrays him very skillfully?

Translator's note. Sophron was a writer of mimes (short comic sketches) from Syracuse. The Greek more likely means his fame owed something to a bronze statue of him, though the phrase is not certain.

34c Why did you honor the effeminate Ganymede, made by Leochares, as if you owned some precious treasure? Praxiteles also fashioned a woman who is stained with impurity. You ought to have rejected everything of this kind and looked for what is truly worth your attention. Instead you claim the unspeakable inventions of Philaenis and Elephantis for yourselves, and yet you turn in disgust from our way of life.

Translator's note. "Philaenis and Elephantis" were women remembered in antiquity as authors of erotic handbooks.

Chapter 35

35 I have not learned what I have set out here from anyone else. I have traveled through many lands. I practiced the sophist's trade in your own learning, I came across many arts and inventions, and finally I lived for a time in the city of the Romans and studied the great variety of statues that you Greeks have carried off there. I do not try, as most people do, to support my own position with other people's opinions. In everything I put forward, I want to set down my own understanding and write the record myself. So I said goodbye to the boasting of the Romans and the cold chatter of the Athenians, with their disconnected doctrines, and took up our barbarian philosophy. I had begun to write about how this philosophy is older than your pursuits, but I put it off because the matter I was explaining was pressing. Now that the time has come, I will try to speak about its teachings. Do not take offense at our teaching. Do not prepare a reply against us full of nonsense and buffoonery, saying, "Tatian, going beyond the Greeks and beyond the countless multitude of philosophers, is introducing the doctrines of barbarians as something new." What is so hard about people who have been shown to be ignorant being refuted by a man who shares their human nature? And what is out of place, as your own sophist puts it, in growing old while always learning everything?

Translator's note. "Your own sophist" is probably Solon, who wrote, "I grow old always learning many things." Herodotus counts Solon among the "sophists," that is, the wise men of Greece. Tatian does not name him.

Chapter 36

36 Let Homer be no later than the Trojan events. Let him be understood to belong to the very time of that war, and even to have served in the army with Agamemnon's men. If anyone likes, let him even have lived before the invention of letters. Even so, the Moses I mentioned earlier will be shown to have lived many years before the capture of Troy itself, and to be far more ancient than the founding of Ilium and than Tros and Dardanus. To prove this I will use as witnesses the Chaldeans, the Phoenicians, and the Egyptians. Why should I say more? A man who promises to persuade should keep his accounts of events brief for his hearers. Berosus was a Babylonian, a priest of their god Belus, who lived in the time of Alexander. He arranged the history of the Chaldeans in three books for Antiochus, the third after Alexander. In setting out the history of the kings he tells of one named Nebuchadnezzar, who marched against the Phoenicians and the Jews. We know that these events were proclaimed by our prophets. They happened much later than the time of Moses, seventy years before the rule of the Persians. Berosus is a very reliable authority. Proof of this is Juba, who, writing *On the Assyrians*, says he learned the history from Berosus. Juba has two books *On the Assyrians*.

Translator's note. "Letters" translates a Greek word for the basic elements of writing, the letters of the alphabet.

Chapter 37

37 After the Chaldeans, the Phoenician evidence stands as follows. Among them there were three men: Theodotus, Hypsicrates, and Mochus. Chaitus, who also wrote an exact account of the lives of the philosophers, translated their books into Greek. The histories of these writers show that the abduction of Europa happened under one of the kings. They also record the arrival of Menelaus in Phoenicia and the affairs of Chiramus. He gave his daughter in marriage to Solomon, king of the Jews, and gave him timber of every kind for building the temple. Menander of Pergamum also wrote a record of these same matters. The time of Chiramus comes close to the Trojan events. Solomon, who lived in the time of Chiramus, is far later than the age of Moses.

Translator's note. Chiramus is the Greek form of Hiram, king of Tyre. The Bible tells how Hiram supplied Solomon with timber for the temple ([1 Kings 5](#)). It does not say that Hiram gave Solomon his daughter. That detail comes from the non-biblical histories Tatian cites.

Chapter 38

38 The Egyptians have accurate chronicles of dates. The interpreter of their history is Ptolemy, not the king but a priest of Mendes. In setting out the deeds of the kings, he says that the Jews left Egypt under the leadership of Moses, for the lands they went to, in the time of Amosis, king of Egypt. He puts it this way: “Amosis lived in the time of king Inachus.” After him comes Apion the grammarian, a highly esteemed man. In the fourth book of his Egyptian History (he wrote five books), among many other things, he says that Amosis, who lived in the time of the Argive Inachus, destroyed Avaris, as Ptolemy of Mendes wrote in his Chronicles. The time from Inachus to the capture of Troy amounts to twenty generations. The proof runs as follows.

Translator’s note. Avaris was the capital of the Hyksos, the foreign rulers whom the pharaoh Ahmose (Amosis) drove out of Egypt. Some ancient writers linked their departure with the Exodus.

Chapter 39

39a These were the kings of the Argives: Inachus, Phoroneus, Apis, Criasus, Triopas, Argeius, Phorbas, Crotopas, Sthenelaus, Danaus, Lynceus, Proetus, Abas, Acrisius, Perseus, Sthenelaus, Eurystheus, Atreus, Thyestes, and Agamemnon. In the eighteenth year of Agamemnon’s reign Troy was taken. Anyone with sense should understand, with full care, that by the Greeks’ own tradition they had no written historical record at all. For Cadmus, who gave the letters to the people I have mentioned, came into Boeotia many generations later. After Inachus, in the time of Phoroneus, a limit was set, and only with difficulty, to their beast-like, wandering way of life, and people began to live in an ordered society. So if Moses is shown to have lived in the time of Inachus, he is four hundred years older than the Trojan War. This is proved from the succession of the Attic kings [and of the Macedonian, Ptolemaic, and Antiochene kings as well].

Translator’s note. The last clause is in square brackets in the Greek text, which marks it as possibly a later addition.

39b So if the more notable events among the Greeks were recorded and became known only after Inachus, it is clear that this was also after Moses. In the time of Phoroneus, who came after Inachus, the Athenians remember Ogygus, in whose time the first flood occurred. In the time of Phorbas came Actaeus, from whom Attica was called Actaea. In the time of Triopas came Prometheus, Epimetheus, Atlas, Cecrops of the double nature, and Io. In the time of Crotopas came the burning of the earth in the days of Phaethon, and the flood in the days of Deucalion. In the time of Sthenelus came the reign of Amphictyon, the arrival of Danaus in the Peloponnese, the founding of Dardania by Dardanus, and the bringing of Europa from Phoenicia to Crete. In the time of Lynceus came the abduction of Kore, the founding of the sacred precinct at Eleusis, the farming of Triptolemus, the arrival of Cadmus at

Thebes, and the reign of Minos. In the time of Proetus came the war of Eumolpus against the Athenians. In the time of Acrisius came Pelops' crossing from Phrygia, the arrival of Ion at Athens, the second Cecrops, the deeds of Perseus and Dionysus, and Musaeus, the pupil of Orpheus. In the reign of Agamemnon, Ilium was taken.

Translator's note. Kore ("the Maiden") is Persephone. Cecrops is called "of the double nature" probably because legend made him half man and half serpent, though ancient writers also gave other explanations.

Chapter 40

40 So it is clear from what I have said that Moses is older than the ancient heroes, the wars, and the demons. We should trust the one who is older in age, rather than the Greeks, who drew his teachings from the spring without understanding them. Many of their sophists, driven by meddling curiosity, tried to counterfeit whatever they learned from the followers of Moses and from those who philosophized as he did. Their first aim was to be thought to have something of their own to say. Their second was to cover over, with some artificial wordiness, whatever they did not understand, and so to pass off the truth as a mere fable. As for our way of life and the history behind our laws, I will show in my work against those who have made pronouncements about God what they learned among the Greeks have said about them, and how many of them there are and who they are.

Translator's note. The Greek says literally "from those of Moses' school" (that is, Moses' followers), not simply "from Moses."

Chapter 41

41a Now I must make every effort to make the main point perfectly clear: Moses is older not only than Homer, but also than the writers before Homer. These are Linus, Philammon, Thamyris, Amphion, Musaeus, Orpheus, Demodocus, Phemius, the Sibyl, Epimenides of Crete (who came to Sparta), Aristaeus of Proconnesus (who wrote the Arimaspeia), Asbolus the Centaur, Isatis, Drymon, Euclius of Cyprus, Horus of Samos, and Pronapis of Athens. Linus was the teacher of Heracles, and Heracles lived one generation before the Trojan War. This is plain from his son Tlepolemus, who campaigned against Ilium. Orpheus lived at the same time as Heracles. Besides, the writings circulated under his name are said to have been composed by Onomacritus of Athens, who lived under the rule of the Pisistratids, around the fiftieth Olympiad. Musaeus was a pupil of Orpheus.

Translator's note. In Homer's Iliad (book 2), Tlepolemus, son of Heracles, leads the men of Rhodes to Troy.

41b Amphion lived two generations before the Trojan War, and that keeps me from writing more about him for those who want to learn.

Demodocus and Phemius lived at the time of the Trojan War itself, for one stayed with the suitors and the other with the Phaeacians. Thamyras and Philammon were not much older than these. I think I have written to you very fully and accurately about the work of each of these writers, their dates, and the record of them. To fill in what is still lacking, I will also give proof concerning the men who are thought to be wise. Minos was considered supreme in every kind of wisdom, sharpness of mind, and lawgiving. He lived in the eleventh generation after Inachus, in the time of Lynceus, who reigned after Danaus. Lycurgus was born long after the capture of Troy, and he gave laws to the Lacedaemonians a hundred years before the Olympiads began.

41c Draco is found to have lived about the thirty-ninth Olympiad, Solon about the forty-sixth, and Pythagoras about the sixty-second. I have shown that the Olympiads began 407 years after the events at Troy. With this demonstrated, I will now write briefly about the age of the seven wise men. Thales, the oldest of them, lived about the fiftieth Olympiad. So in giving his date I have in effect already told you briefly about those who came after him as well.

Translator's note. "Olympiads" here means the Greek system of dating by the four-year cycle of the Olympic Games, traditionally counted from 776 BC.

Chapter 42

42 I, Tatian, who practice philosophy in the barbarian way, have composed these things for you, men of Greece. I was born in the land of the Assyrians. I was educated first in your learning, and then in the teaching that I now profess to proclaim. Now that I know who God is and what his creation is, I present myself to you ready for an examination of my doctrines. My way of life according to God remains firm, and I will not deny it.

Translator's note. "Barbarian" was the Greek term for non-Greeks, and Tatian applies it to himself with pride. The Greek *ho kata barbarous philosophōn* means "who philosophizes in the barbarian manner." The Ante-Nicene Fathers translation renders it "a disciple of the barbarian philosophy."

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