principles, why does the good god endure with an evil god who opposes him? These Christians I would query as follows: Why does (the good god) wish to destroy the creations of the creator? Why does he impose himself as he does, by cunning and deceit? Why does he steal away those people whom the creator has cursed, and deal with mankind like a slave dealer? If they are the creator's work, why does he teach them to escape from their master? If the creator is their father, why must they flee from home? And what right, lacking consent of the parent, does he have to steal them away from their father? Well, what have we in the end? An impressive god indeed: one who desires nothing more than to adopt sinners as his children; one who takes to himself the creatures who stand condemned by another, the poor wretches who are (as they say of themselves) naught but dung; a god who is not capable of taking vengeance on this creator, but falls prey to him after sending out his son to do the dirty work.

But if these are truly the Creator's works, how can it be that God should make what is evil? How can he repent when they become ungrateful and wicked? How can he find fault with his own handiwork, or threaten to destroy his own offspring? Where is he to banish them, out of the world that he himself has made?

Look further at the creation story credited among them, where we have read that God banishes man from the garden made specifically to contain him. Silly as that may come about. They allot certain days to creation, before the earth fixed or the sun set in the heavens, how could pieced out his work like a bricklayer, saying "Today I shall do this, tomorrow that," and so on, so that he did this on fifth and sixth days! We are thus not surprised to find that, like a common workman, this God wears himself down and so needs a holiday after six days. Need I comment that such a God is no god at all, for God has neither hands, mouth, nor voice, nor any characteristics of which we know. And they say that God made man in his own image, failing to realize that God is not at all like a man, nor vice versa; God resembles no form known to us. They say that God has form, namely the form of the Logos, who became flesh in Jesus Christ. But we know that God is without shape, without color. They say that God moved above the waters he created—but we know that it is contrary to the nature of God to move. Their absurd doctrines even contain reference to God walking about in the garden he created for man; and they speak of him being angry, jealous, moved to repentance, sorry, sleepy—in short, as being in every respect more a man than a God. They have not read Plato, who teaches us in the Republic that God (the Good) does not even participate in being. It is true that all things are derived from the Good, as Plato says; but it is also clear that God made nothing mortal. This God of the philosophers is himself the un.derivable, the unnameable; he cannot be reached by reason. Such attributes as we may postulate of him are not the attributes of human nature, and all such attributes are quite distinct from his nature. He cannot be comprehended in terms of attributes or human
experience, contrary to what the Christians teach; moreover, he is outside any emotional experience.

It will be objected that this God taught by the philosophers cannot really be known: How can I know him? How can one learn the way? Who will show him to me? It may be objected that the philosopher’s God is shrouded in darkness, and that nothing can be known about him. Here, too, we have instruction from Plato, who says that at first, we are in darkness concerning the Good; but once led out of this darkness into the light, our perception does not take well to the brilliance of its source; rather, we think our sight is somehow damaged or incapacitated. But ask a Christian how God is known and you will get a very different answer: for them the way is not difficult, and they need not worry about the darkness any longer. For them, the darkness has been expelled by Jesus, since God is hard to know, he cast his spirit into a human body and journeyed down to earth so that we might all be able to hear and learn from him.

The God of the philosophers need not resort to such preposterous designs. Like the stoics, with whom we have a great deal in common, we say that “God” is a spirit, and like the Greeks we maintain that this spirit, so to speak, permeates all things and contains all things within it; they say that the Son of God possesses a spirit derived from God, and that he was born in a human body; and that the Son of God is not himself immortal but a spirit. Whatever they say, it is certain that there is the nature of a spirit to do so. But the Christians hold the idea that the Son of God had poured out his spirit (in the case of Jesus) and needed to regain it. If this is so, then it is impossible for God to have received back his spirit once it had been defiled by coming into contact with human flesh. Moreover, if God wanted to send down a spirit from himself, why did he have to breathe into the womb of a woman? I mean, he already knew how to make men without such contrivance. And presumably, he could have made an appropriate body for this occasion as well, without needing to befoul himself and his spirit. Had he been truly begotten from on high (as one of their gospels teaches) there might be more reason to believe their story.

And what proof do the Christians allege that this Jesus was the Son of God? Considering his punishment, how could he be proved divine, unless, of course, it was foretold that he should suffer and die as he did? But many Christians deny that his death was foretold. These same Christians speak of two divine sons, locked in combat with one another. They fight like quails, the two sons, since their fathers are in their dotage and too tired to fight.

Now, as to the idea that the divine spirit was all locked up in a human body, we can assume that this body must certainly have differed from ours in size, beauty, strength, appeal, and the like. For it is plainly impossible that a body containing the essence of divinity itself would look just like anyone else’s. But do they in fact say this? No. They claim that Jesus’ body was just like the next man’s. Furthermore, if God was little, ugly, and repugnant. But what do you not find it a little ludicrous to consider that the Christians take such a premise seriously: that the Son of God was sent only to the Jews.
Those who teach the existence of another god besides the God of the Jews have no intelligent answer to give in response to my criticisms. True, they take as their defense the notion that the prophets of the Jews foretold the Christian God. But this is a very old ploy: those who offer up a new god really have none to give; and those who maintain that the prophets spoke of the God of the Jews and not about some other, better god will always come back with, "Yes, it was inevitable that things should have turned out the way they did—and why? Well, because it was predicted that they would." It is easy for the Christians to use the books of the Jews to their advantage, since anyone can prove anything from so-called prophecy: The predictions of the Pythian priestess, or of the priestesses of Dodona, or of the Clarus Apollo, or at Branchidae, or at the shrines of Zeus, Ammon, and of countless other prophets, the Christians regard as so much babble; but the predictions of the Judaean prophets, whether they were predictions or not, since those who live around Phoenicia and Palestine are used to speaking in a certain way, are taught as the unchanging word of God—as something wholly marvelous! Of this I have first-hand knowledge, knowing the people of that region as I do, and knowing the several types of prophecy.

For example, there are countless in that region who will "prophesy" at the drop of a hat, in or out of the temples, plying their trade in the cities or in military outposts. They ply a show of being "inspired" to utter their predictions. These habitually claim to be more than prophets, God," or even "I am the Holy Spirit," and "I have come [to bring life] for the world is coming to an end as I speak.

And the wicked will perish [in the fire] for their sins. I shall save you; you will yet see me, for I am coming again armed with heavenly powers. So blessed is he who worships me now. Those who refuse, whole cities and nations, will be cast into the fiery pit. Pity those who don't know me and what is ahead for them, for they will repent in vain and cry for mercy in vain. Those who hear me and believe in me will be saved (from the fire)." This sort of thing is heard all over Judaea by these most trivial of prophets; and they go on, after parading these threats in front of an audience, to babble about the signs of the Last Days—or to speak of mysterious happenings that no sane and intelligent person would trouble himself to figure out. Their talk is complete nonsense, and for this reason is appealing to the minds of fools and sorcerers, who can take their "predictions" and do with them what they like.

Indeed, I have talked with any number of these prophets after hearing them, and questioned them closely. On careful questioning (after gaining their confidence) they admitted to me that they were nothing but frauds, and that they concocted their words to suit their audiences and deliberately made them obscure.

Now it stands to reason that when the Christians point to the Jewish prophets in order to defend their doctrine of Christ, they are on very shaky ground indeed. To prove that God would suffer all sorts of indignities is no truer just because some Christian claims it was foretold in prophecy; for God does not suffer, and God cannot be humiliated; he does not call the wicked alone to be saved. A god would not eat the flesh of sheep (at Passover); a god would not drink vinegar and gall; a god does not filthily say such things as "I am God," or "I am a son of God," or even "I am the Holy Spirit," and "I have come [to bring life] for the world is coming to an end as I speak.
through meeting the terms of the prophecy it might be believed that he was God? At any rate, this seems to be the run of their argument. But it does a foul injustice to the prophets, who could never have predicted such a thing. It is a perfidious misreading of the oracles of the Jews. So the question of whether they did or didn’t predict the suffering and death of God does not count for anything. All that an intelligent person must ask himself is this: Do such claims do justice to the idea of God, since it is an axiom that what God does is good and that God does no act that is unworthy of his nature? This entails that what is disgraceful, mean, and unworthy should be disbelieved about God, no matter how many babbling fools say it was postulated of him. (For who are we to believe—a rabble of mistaken prophets, or the philosophers?)

It is mere impiousness, therefore, to suggest that the things that were done to Jesus were done to God. Certain things are simply as a matter of logic impossible to God, namely those things which violate the consistency of his nature: God cannot do less than what it befits God to do, what it is God’s nature to do. Even if the prophets had foretold such things about the Son of God, it would be necessary to say, according to the axiom I have cited, that the prophets were wrong, rather than to believe that God has suffered and died.

I ask the Christians to consider further the following case: If the prophets of Yahweh, God of the Jews, were in the habit of telling the Jews that Jesus was to be his son, then why did he give them their laws through Moses and promise them that they would become rich and famous and fill the earth? Why did he guarantee that they races of people, as Moses teaches, before their eyes? Their enemies for their disobedience? Yet we are to believe that his “son,” this man from Nazareth, gives an opposing set of laws: he says that a man cannot serve God or the enemy of his religion on God's promise to give them a land of plenty, but the Christians say one must pay no attention to food, or to one’s larder—any more than the birds do—or to one's clothing, any more than the lilies do. The Jews teach God’s vengeance on their enemies, but Jesus advises that someone who has been struck should volunteer to be hit again. Well, who is to be disbelieved—Moses or Jesus? Perhaps there is a simpler solution: perhaps when the Father sent Jesus he had forgotten the commandments he gave to Moses, and inadvertently condemned his own laws, or perhaps sent his messenger to give notice that he had suspended what he had previously endorsed.

What do the Christians suppose happens after death? Given that they represent God as having a body like our own, it is not surprising to find them saying that we go to another earth, different and better than this one. The latter notion they derive from the ancients, who taught that there is a happy life for the blessed—variously called the Isles of the Blessed, the Elysian fields—where they are free from the evils of the world. As Homer says, “The gods will take you to the Elysian plains at the ends of the gods are sent a region: “The world is enormous, and our part of it, from the Pillars of Hercules to the Phasis, is only a fraction; like so many ants or frogs around a marsh, we mortal cluster about the sea, as do people elsewhere. And in various places around the earth there are hollows and in various sizes and shapes into which water, mist, and of differing sizes and shapes into which water, mist, and air have coalesced. But the land of the souls is pure and lies in the ethereal regions.” Plato’s words are, to be sure, difficult; one cannot know for certain what he means.
when he says that because of our weakness and slowness we cannot get to the ethereal regions that lie atop the heavens, or when he says that only if we were able to bear the vision would we know true heaven and the true light when we saw it.

It seems that the Christians, in attempting to answer the question of how we shall know and see God, have misunderstood Plato's doctrine of reincarnation, and believe in the absurd theory that the corporeal body will be raised and reconstituted by God, and that somehow they will actually see God with their mortal eyes and hear him with their ears and be able to touch him with their hands. Such ideas can also be found among the hero cults of Trophimus, Amphiarus and Mopsus, where it is claimed that gods may be seen in human form. [These, however, are not the supreme God] but men who were human in form and manifested their powers openly—not coming down secretly like this fellow who deceived the Christians in one virtually unnoticed apparition.

The Christians are preoccupied with the question of knowing God, and they think one cannot know God except through the senses of the body. Thus they think not as men or souls think, but as the flesh thinks. Still, I would try to teach them something, slow-witted though they are: If one shuts his eyes to the things of the senses and tries to see with his mind's eye, and if one turns from the flesh to the inner self, the soul, there he will see God and know God. But to begin the journey, you must flee from deceivers and magicians who parade fantasies in front of you. You will be a laughingstock so long as you repeat the blasphemy that the gods of other men are idols, and still that God a man whose life was wretched, who is known to have died (in disgraceful circumstances), and who, so you teach, is the very model of the God we should look to as our Father. The deceit you perpetrate with your ravings about miraculous doings, lions and other animals in double form, and superhuman doorkkeepers (whose names you take the trouble to memorize!) and the general madness of your beliefs, are to blame for the fact that you are marked for crucifixion. It is your rejection of true wisdom—that of inspired poets, wise men, philosophers, and the like—that [leads you to execution].

Plato teaches us the true theology when he writes, "To find the Maker and father of this universe is difficult; but it is impossible, having found him, to proclaim him to all men." Both prophets and philosophers have sought the way of truth; but Plato knew that most men could not follow it. The wise men who speak of such things tell us that any conception of the Nameless First Being is dependent on proper reasoning—either on knowing his manifestations in the synthesis of things, by analyzing his distinction from the material world, or by analogy. In short, to talk about God is fraught with difficulty, because it is to talk about what is indescribable; and of this I would teach you, were you able to grasp it. But seeing that you are given to talking about the flesh and what happens to it, I doubt you would understand my lesson. Still:

Being and becoming are, in turn, intelligible and visible. Truth is inherent in being; error inherent in becoming. Knowledge has to do with truth, opinion with the other. Knowledge is the sight of seeing what is visible. Thus the mind knows, and sight with what is visible. What the what is intelligible, and the eye what is visible. What the what is intelligible, and the eye what is visible. What the eye what is visible. What the...

183, 184
eligible things—of truth itself, of being itself—since he transcends all things and is intelligible only by a certain power which cannot itself be described.

What I have just said, I have said to those able to understand it. You Christians would be doing well to understand any portion of it. And if any divine spirit had come down to preach divine truths about God, that spirit would have preached no other lesson. It was because that spirit operated even among the ancients that they were able to provide so many valuable instructions [for our benefit]. If you are not able to grasp their lessons, then keep quiet and cover your ignorance; do not try to tell us that those who can see are blind and that those who can run are really crippled, since it is you who are blind of spirit and crippled of soul, teaching a doctrine that relates only to the body and living in the hope of raising a dead thing to life. It would have been better had you in your zest for a new teaching formed your religion around one of the men of old who died a hero’s death and was honored for it—someone who at least was already the subject of a myth. You could have chosen Herakles or Asclepios, or if these were too tame, there was always Orpheus, who, as everyone knows, was good and holy and yet died a violent death. Or had he already been taken? Well, then you had Anaxarchus, a man who looked death right in the eye when being beaten and said to his persecutors after being thrown into the mortar: “Beat away; beat the pouch of Anaxarchus; for it is not him you are beating.” But I recall that some philosophers have already claimed him as their master. Well, what of Epictetus? When his master was twisting his leg he smiled and said with complete composure, “You are breaking it.” And when it was broken, he smiled and said, “I told you so.” Your God should have uttered such a saying when he was being punished! You would even get more credit if you had put forward the Sibyl (whom some among you cite any-

THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF RESURRECTION

way) as a child of God. Instead, you take her oracles and twist them, inserting things to suit your purposes, including the notion that a man who lived a bad life and died a bad death was a god. You might even have chosen Jonah instead of Jesus—or Daniel, who escaped from the wild beasts, or those about whom similar fables are told.

You Christians have a saying that goes something like this: “Don’t resist a man who insults you; even if he strikes you, offer him your other cheek as well.” This is nothing new, and it’s been better said by others, especially by Plato, who ascribes the following to Socrates in the Crito:

"Then we should never do wrong?"
"Never."
"And should we not even try to avenge a wrong if we are wronged ourselves, as most would do, on the premise that we should never do wrong?"
"So it seems."
"So, should we do harm, Crito, or not?"
"I should say not, Socrates."
"Well, then, is it just or unjust to repay injury with injury?"
"Unjust, I would think."
"Because doing harm to men is no different from doing wrong?"
"Exactly so."
"So we should never take revenge and never hurt anyone even if we have been hurt."

Thus writes Plato, and he continues:

"Be careful to see whether you agree with me and it is acceptable to you, and then let’s reason together on the assumption that it is never right to do wrong and never right to take revenge; nor is it right to give evil for evil, or in the case of someone who has suffered some injury, to attempt to get even. Do you agree with my premises or not? It seems to me the truth of what I say is evident, and seems as valid today as it did yesterday."
This was Plato’s opinion, and as he says, it was not new to him but was pronounced by inspired men long before. What I have said about it may serve, part for whole, as an example of the sorts of ideas the Christians mutilate. But unless it is assumed that this is the only case, I assure you that anyone who cares to try will find countless other instances of their perversions of the truth: They say they detest altars and images; so do the Scythians; so do the nomads of Libya; so do the Seres, who don’t believe in God at all; and so do many everywhere, who have no use for what is right. Herodotus tells us that the Persians take the same view: “The Persians,” he relates, “do not consider it legal to establish altars and images and temples; and they think people who establish them are stupid. This idea of theirs seems to come from the fact that they do not regard the gods as having a nature similar to that of human beings, as do the Greeks.”193 And Heracleitus confirms this when he writes, “They pray to images as if one were to have a conversation with a house, having no idea of the nature of gods and heroes.”194 Heracleitus, than whom none is wiser, says rather secretively that it is ridiculous to pray to images if one has no understanding of the nature of gods and heroes. Further, Heracleitus may be taken to mean that an image of stone, wood, bronze, or gold, made by a craftsman, cannot be a god, and hence the practice of praying to it is ludicrous. I mean, only a child thinks that things are gods and not images of gods. But if they mean that we should not worship images as divine because God has a different shape, as the Persians seem to think, then the Christians refute themselves: they teach, do they not, that God made man in his own image, and thus man’s form is like his own. What sense is there, then, to their refusal: if they will agree that images and votive offerings are intended for the honor of certain beings (whether they resemble these beings in form or not), why maintain that those to whom they are dedicated are not gods but demons, and then conclude that image worship is demon worship and not to be tolerated by the God-worshipers!

**X. CHRISTIAN ICONOCLASM**

Whatever the outcome of the debate over the form of God and the importance of images, the Christians are the losers, since they worship neither a god nor even a demon, but a dead man! Moreover, why should we not worship gods? I mean, if it is accepted that all of nature—everything in the world—operates according to the will of God and that nothing works contrary to his purposes, then it must also be accepted that the angels, the demons, heroes—everything in the universe—are subject to the will of the great God who rules over all. Over each sphere there is a being charged with the task of governance and worthy to have power, at least the power allotted it for carrying out its task. This being the case, it would be appropriate for each man who worships God also to honor the being who exercises his allotted responsibilities at God’s pleasure, since that being must have been licensed to do what he does by God. Your Jesus says “It is impossible for the same man to serve many masters”195 (and thus makes it appear that beings exist who exercise control over others, even though they quite apart from the will of God; but such a being would not be the great God at all, but some lower power). The notion that one cannot serve many masters is the sort of notion that one exercise control over beings, but one perhaps predictable of a people centric position, who have cut themselves off from the rest of civilization. In so saying, they are really attributing their own feelings to God; for in the ordinary course of affairs, a man who is to God; for in the ordinary course of affairs, a man who is...