

REFUTATION OF THE SECTS

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A Retelling of Yeznik Koghbatsi's Apology

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INTRODUCTION

But for the Grace of God and the efforts of the scribe Luser, the book we are about to retell would have been lost to us forever. For it was in 1280, by Luser's hand, that the sole surviving copy of Yeznik Koghbatsi's *Refutation of the Sects* was made at the University of Gladzor in the Province of Siunik, some 20 miles southeast of Yerevan. The life of a book is precarious. One wonders whether it could simply be an accident that one day 700 years ago a certain monk began copying a book written 800 years earlier and that this book (Matenadaran manuscript No. 1097) should have reached us to be retold in a distant time and land.

We will probably never know why this book was preserved, but its significance is relatively easy to discern: it is the earliest sustained expression of the Armenian mind arguing in behalf of Armenian religious and cultural identity. There are many ways to show the significance of a book: comparison to universal standards, the consensus of learned opinion, the judgment of the general readership. The significance of this book is most easily understood if we consider Yeznik's times and the task he set for himself: "We, out of love for our friends and because of the mistaken views of our opponents, are obliged, within our bounds and with the help of God's grace, to undertake this study, confident that our readers will be open-minded and straight-thinking." (Book I Chapter 5) [p.8]

YEZNIK AND HIS TIMES

Yeznik was born in the town of Koghb in the Ayrarat region of Armenia during the fall of the Arshaguni Dynasty. He lived from about 387 to 450 and was trained as a priest in Ashtishat, where his teachers were Sts. Mesrob Mashdotz and Sahag Bartev. One of the circle of Holy Translators, he was among the first to learn the newly invented Armenian alphabet and to use the written language for the purpose of original philosophical and theological discourse. Well-versed in the philosophy of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Democritus, Zeno, Plotinus, and Origen, he stretched the Armenian language to meet the rigorous demands of Greek philosophy and, in so doing, enriched it with much of the terminology and patterns of the word-building which have made Armenian capable of handling the technical terminology of our times.

Put yourself in Yeznik's place for a moment. You are well educated and well versed in the languages, religions and philosophies of the great civilizations around you. You are a Christian in a land where Christianity has been the official state religion for better than a century. You just helped translate the Bible and Divine Liturgy into Armenian. Since 387 your country has been under foreign rule, divided between Persia, the great power to the east, and Byzantium, the great power to the west. In 428 after decades of lawlessness, the last king of the Arshaguni line, Artashes IV, is dethroned along with the Catholicos, St. Sahag, your teacher and spiritual leader. A decade later a new Persian emperor, Yazdegerd II (438-457), ascends to the Persian throne. Early in his reign he issues an edict making

Zoroastrianism the compulsory religion throughout the Persian empire, including Armenia, and imposes severe punishments upon those who do not comply.

In 449 the Council of Artashat is convened by Armenian noblemen and church leaders to chart out a course for the restoration of order in the land. You, Yeznik, Bishop of [p.9] Bagrevand, are in attendance. It devolves upon you, as one of the most learned men of your time, to respond to the Emperor's policy, administered through the Persian governor, Mihr Nerseh. In this letter, preserved by the historian Yeghishe in Chapter 2 of his *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, you defend your nation's fidelity to Christianity and its right to self-determination.

Peaceful pleading is of no avail. The Persian overlords are determined to force their religion on your people. Your countrymen under Vardan Mamikonian suffer martyrdom at the Battle of Avarayr (451) in defense of their nationhood and Christianity. A generation would pass before Armenia would, by the Treaty of Nvarsag (484), enjoy some measure of political, religious, and cultural freedom, but only after armed rebellion against its Persian overlords. Naturally, you have no way of knowing what the future will hold. You can see only that there is great oppression and corruption in the land. Something must be done: "The military instructor teaches his students how to conduct themselves in battle and to pursue victory even unto death, for it is preferable to die in the name of dignity than to live in dishonor. In the same way, God arms men with His commandments in order to encourage them in their battles." (1.14)

Despite Armenian protestation, the Persian king Yazdegerd and his Governor are undeterred in their plan to convert all their subjects to the Zoroastrian religion. They seem willing to use any means, economic or military, fair or foul, to gain their end. Some of your countrymen are yielding to the pressure; others did not convert to Christianity in the first place; still others construe Christian doctrine in ways that distort Christ's message to mankind. These are the Christian and non-Christian sects which you set out to refute. The very least you can do is to try to arm your countrymen with ideas so that they can defend themselves or disarm those who would deceive them. [p.10]

CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

"It is the task of the Church of God to judge and argue with those outside on the basis of true facts without reference to the Holy Scriptures and those inside, the seeming believers, by reference to the Holy Book." (1.28)

When arguing with those of different religions, you cannot rely on the authority of the prophets and the Gospels, saying, "What I believe is true because the Bible says so." Those with whom you are arguing do not accept the Bible or the other articles of Christian faith. They may deny that Christ is the Son of God, or that He exists at all. Your only recourse is to meet them on their own ground. As a Christian philosopher you must start from universally

valid assumptions and seek to reach conclusions which support your beliefs. You may not be able to convince non-believers to accept your beliefs, but you can at least show them, on the basis of universally accepted premises and logical arguments, that their beliefs are internally inconsistent or otherwise flawed, and hence, unworthy of acceptance.

Pushing back the frontier of flawed thought in this way is as valuable an achievement, and perhaps a more lasting achievement than pushing forward the frontier of knowledge, though we are accustomed to thinking only of the latter as progress. This kind of argumentation -- exposing the flaws in others' thinking -- is Yeznik's main strategy in the *Refutation of the Sects*. First, he presents a widely-held opinion, then he dismantles it point by point, using the standard repertoire of rhetorical and logical discourse. If ideas are seen as tools for understanding, he shows us the flaws in their construction and the limitations on their use, so that we can use them properly or reject them for better tools.

For Yeznik, his writing was a shield against beliefs he thought harmful not only to Christianity, but also to his fellow man. There is no question that he was an apologist for Christianity in a beleaguered corner of the civilized world of [p.11] his day. Although he can be seen simply as a defender of ideas or institutions he held dear, this would deprive his work of its moral intent; namely, the salvation of his fellow man. And if he could not lead them to Christian salvation, then at least he could try to liberate them from ideas, which he, through long study, had found to be unsupportable and misleading.

If we are tempted to think that the battles in this field of endeavor have less lasting significance than battles fought on fields of war, then let us consider some of the questions he addressed: If the all-good, all-powerful God created the world from nothing, then where does evil come from? What is the nature of man? Does God exist? Is there more than one god? Is all the world divided into two warring camps: good and evil? Why do bad things happen to good people? If God is all-powerful and all-knowing, why doesn't He intervene to spare us our suffering? These questions keep confronting us from generation to generation. They are built into human life.

There are, of course, always answers in the air. There are popular theology and popular psychology, and then there are the answers proffered by proselytizers of all stripes, each presenting a theory, as he or she has been able to find one, seeking to gain followers by offering explanations of the observed conditions of life. There is in the midst of all this a line of prophets and revelations from God, which are revered by the Judeo-Christian tradition and serve as the foundation of Christianity. It is Yeznik's aim to clear the intellectual field so that this tradition can grow and prosper.

YEZNIK'S *REFUTATION* CONSISTS OF FOUR PARTS:

1. Arguments against the Heathens, in which he addresses issues such as the existence of God, the sources of evil, and man's free will. In the course of these arguments, he exposes the

logical flaws of dualism, which he takes to be the belief that there are two creative forces at odds in the universe, one good and the other evil. [p.12]

2. Arguments against the Persians, in which he gives the first Christian refutation of the Zurvanist sect of Zoroastrian, which was imposed in the fifth century AD as the state religion in the Armenian territory under Persian rule.

3. Arguments against the pre-Christian Greek philosophers, in which he shows the limitations of classical Greek philosophy from the Pre-Socratics to Plato and Aristotle in understanding the true nature of God.

4. Arguments against the Christian heretic Marcion, in which he discredits the beliefs and practices of the Marcionite sects of Christianity with their unfounded claim that there are two Gods: the God of Love, who was revealed in the New Testament, and the Lord of Justice and Creation, who was revealed in the Old Testament. According to this doctrine, Jesus was sent by the God of Love to save man from the Lord of Justice and Creation.

YEZNIK'S PREDECESSORS AND CONTEMPORARIES

Early Christian thinkers had a difficult task before them. They had to find their way through a maze of irreconcilable concepts--the goodness of the spirit versus the temptations of the flesh, the transience of life versus the eternity of the spirit, a Loving God versus a Just God, human beings without free will versus human beings capable of salvation by their own will and power.

Yeznik was not alone in trying to lead people to Christianity by philosophical discourse. In the West, his contemporary, St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), dealing with many of the same issues, raised Christian doctrine to new heights. Both philosophers devoted much of their energies to the refutation of Persian dualism. In its simplest form, it is the belief that from the beginning of time there have been two powers--good and evil. These two powers have been in perpetual struggle. Good is to be equated with what is spiritual, and evil, with all that is material. [p.13]

On opposite sides of the Mediterranean, Augustine and Yeznik reached the same conclusion: evil is not a positive entity or force, but simply the absence of goodness. Evil is the corruption of the good world created by a good God. Both Augustine and Yeznik also argued that the almighty and all-knowing God endowed man, the bearer of His divine image, the freedom to obey or disobey Him. That these thinkers at two ends of the Christian world were concerned at the same time with the same problems helps to show how much Armenians were a part of that world.

Yeznik brought the best of the Church Fathers to the Armenians. Through meticulous comparisons, scholars have found that he consulted and quoted at least 12 of the most influential theologians and philosophers of early Christianity, including Methodius of

Olympus, Aristides, Epiphanius, Basil of Caesarea, Hippolytus, Irenaeus, Origen, Cyril of Alexandria, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Ephraem Syrus. In addition, he built upon the sermons and writing of his teachers, Sts. Mesrob Mashdotz and Sahag Barteve.

WHY READ THIS BOOK?

One can wonder why Yeznik devoted most of his energy to refuting false ideas instead of persuading others to become Christian. Perhaps he understood that baptism and faith granted by divine grace are essential to conversion to Christianity. Our intellectual powers have been given us to light the way, to influence and nurture our spiritual growth. But philosophical discussion of the articles of religious faith consists of rhetorical or poetic truth, not deductive demonstration. It is not possible to talk someone into being a Christian. There again, perhaps the greater threat, then and now, is posed by alluring falsehoods. Knowing what not to believe is, of course, a good first step toward true understanding and faith. Philosophical argumentation alone is insufficient for conversion; however, when [p.14] dealing with non-believers, it is the Christian's best God-given tool short of praying for faith and divine grace. Yeznik understood this fact and acted accordingly.

Why, then, should we bother to read and retell what someone 1500 years ago said to the opponents of Christianity in Armenia? To begin with, it is not often that we have the opportunity to know what people were thinking when they made a choice that we continue to live with to this day. Whether directly through Yeznik's efforts or not, Armenians chose to remain Christian, so he must have understood what was on his countrymen's minds. We are indebted to him for having taken the time to articulate their concerns and write them down. Besides, why else would Divine Providence have preserved one lone copy of this book, if not for us to read it so that we can better understand ourselves and His ways? [p.15]

EDITOR'S NOTE: A retelling is based on a rereading of a book for a new audience. Since this is a retelling, we are not free to deal as we choose with the many fundamental questions Yeznik raises, nor are we free to address questions he does not address, nor can we correct his errors, which arose either from his own misunderstanding or through errors in the transmission of ideas to him. All omissions and insertions have been made with only one purpose in mind: to make Yeznik's work accessible to the readers of the Armenian Church Classics Series. The original in Classical Armenian as well as scholarly translations into Modern Armenian, Russian and French are available for the needs of research. To these the reader must turn to make a final assessment of Yeznik. Our purpose here, however, is to give new life to a book by making it accessible to readers who might otherwise not read it, in particular young readers. This retelling is, therefore, not intended to be the final word on Yeznik in English, but a first word on him for a new audience.

BOOK I

The Nature of God

GOD, OUR KNOWLEDGE OF HIM, GOD'S NATURE (1.1)

God is beyond the comprehension of the human mind. We, by our own insight, cannot examine God. Only through the illumination of Divine Grace can we use our God-given intellect to contemplate the Almighty. God's existence is a matter of conscience rather than experience. We can, however, begin to understand Him through His creations: the heavens, the earth, the angels, man, the animals, and the plants.

God is eternal. He has no beginning or end. He owes His existence to no one. By definition there is nothing higher than God. There is nothing that can be considered *His* cause or creator. God is the first and final cause of all the lines of causation that the human mind can construct. No one was before Him, nor will anyone be after Him, nor is anyone equal to Him. Nor was it necessary for anyone to supply Him with matter in order to create the universe, nor was matter itself necessary.

God is the creator of everything. He did not merely give shape to the universe; He created everything from nothing, *ex nihilo*. He created the visible world and the invisible souls of men and angels. He unselfishly gave life to all living beings in order that they might know His benevolence, charity and love. He withheld nothing--not knowledge, not power, not freedom, not life--for His power and generosity are infinite. [p.18]

Consider: if the springs which He created continue to pour forth water without running dry, how much more inexhaustible must be the strength of the Creator! How inexhaustible is the source of Goodness, who created everything with beauty: the thinking beings and the unthinking beings, man and the animals, the talking and non-talking creatures!

He arranged the universe so that the thinking beings would receive beauty through Him, but goodness through their own efforts, for He made Man's free will the source of goodness.

GOD DID NOT CREATE ANYTHING EVIL; GOD IS THE HARMONIZER OF CREATION. (1.2)

God did not create anything evil; nothing is evil by nature. Rather, everything is "good" in relation to other "good" things. The good is a kind of balance. Good as the sun is, everything would dry up and die without water. And good as water is, everything would wash away without the sun. This is what is meant by Divine Providence. God provides for and guides His creation, keeping the elements in balance.

GOD, THE HARMONIZER, IS INVISIBLE. WE SHOULD WORSHIP THE DESIGNER AND NOT THE DESIGNED, THE CREATOR AND NOT THE CREATURES (1.3)

By looking at the visible elements, each of which can do harm by itself, we can conclude that there must be yet another force to keep them in balance. This is the creative force, the being called God. The Creator of balance and harmony is an invisible power. The design of the natural universe points to the existence of a Designer, by necessity greater than what he designed.

What sense is there, then, in the practice of the pagans, who worship finite creatures--the animals, the planets, the sun, man-made idols--when it is clear that there is an infinite being? Besides, all the visible creatures, even the light-giving sun and moon, are imperfect and give way to darkness. The proper object of worship is the perfect Creator, who does not change. [p.19]

Some might ask: If we cannot see this Creator and He is beyond our comprehension, why and how should we worship Him? Is it not better to worship the visible things and gain their good favor than to risk offending them by worshipping this invisible force, which we are not even sure exists?

Of course, there is no reason to dishonor these magnificent creations of God. Still, it is not the heavenly bodies and the creatures on Earth which are beneficent, but the Creator who unselfishly provided them. It is He who sustains the invisible beings, the angels and the souls of men, and keeps everything operating in its proper course.

Any of the four elements--fire, water, air, or earth--can cause harm; but that harm is not due to anything we might have done. The sun does not grow dark because we have offended it. Nor does fire burn, the earth quake, or the waters flood because we have not honored them. Rather, it is in their own nature to grow dark, burn, quake, and flood. Clearly, then, He who holds these forces in check is the One deserving of our worship. The world is a cart hitched to four forces--warmth, coldness, dryness, and dampness--and it is the invisible Force which governs them and keeps them in harmony that is worthy of worship, not the elements which are the mere agents of these forces.

WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF EVIL? EVIL, CONTRARY TO THE BELIEFS OF VALENTINUS, THE Gnostics, Manicheans and Philosophical Dualists, is not an entity or force. (1.4)

Some might ask: If God is the creator of good things, then from where are the disharmonies and imbalances which cause earthquakes and floods? From where are the darkness and cold and heat which discomfort man, and from where are the evils which men perpetrate against one another? What causes all this evil, if not a force of evil, which is their source and creator? It is unthinkable that evil acts and events are the work of [p.20] a good God. For this reason there are people who believe, mistakenly, that along with God there was also *Matter* (called *hiulé* from the Greek), from which God created all things and beings. Furthermore, they believe that all evil arises from this shapeless, directionless, imperfect

Matter. God saw that it was in need of shaping. Like a skilled architect, He used what He could to shape the good things and threw away the material which was unfit for His creations. They say that the Matter that was thrown away is the source of evil.

MATTER AS THE SOURCE OF EVIL: REFUTATION 1

TWO UNCREATED, PRINCIPAL ENTITIES--GOD AND MATTER--ARE INCOMPATIBLE WITH LOGIC. (1.5)

It is true that the evils of the world have misled many people into the false belief that there must be a creator of Evil as well as a creator of Good. Some people for this reason have wanted to suppose that there is another eternal force which exists besides God; others, that there is inert matter; still others have given up on the problem entirely. But we, out of love for our friends and because of the mistaken views of our opponents, are obliged, within our bounds and with the help of God's grace, to undertake this study, confident that our readers will be open-minded and straight-thinking. In this way, our readers will learn the truth, and we will no longer have to waste words showing them that these misconceptions about God are unworthy of belief.

It is clear that two unrelated entities could not have existed simultaneously. For if God and this other principal force (whether Matter or an Evil force) were both uncreated, then they would have to be related to one another in some way. If God were in all or part of Matter, then however great we imagine God, matter would be greater. On the contrary, if God were not in it, then there must have been vast space around them, which contained and separated them, and was bigger than them both. In that case, there would be three uncreated entities--God, [p.21] matter, and the empty space (the abyss) wherein they dwelt--and the abyss would be the greatest of the three. Thus the belief in two uncreated, separate entities entails the belief in a third, greater entity, which leaves only two solutions: either God was in Matter or Matter was in God.

It cannot be that God was in matter. If He were, then He would have been as shapeless as the Matter in which He dwelt, and it is not possible that God was originally shapeless chaos. Besides, this would mean that in the course of shaping matter into creatures God was shaping Himself; in other words, as He gave the individual creatures their shapes, He would have been dividing Himself. This, of course, is impossible, for God is indivisible, and it is not possible that God was originally shapeless chaos. Besides, this would mean that in the course of shaping matter into creatures God was shaping Himself; in other words, as He gave the individual creatures their shapes, He would have been dividing Himself. This, of course, is impossible, for God is indivisible.

Therefore, as we can see, the only belief consistent with logic is that in the beginning there was only God, who created heaven and earth from nothing.

THE SOURCE OF EVIL: REFUTATION 2

GOD, THE ARTISAN, HAD TO EXIST BEFORE HIS ART AND THE MATTER WITH WHICH HE CREATED IT. IN ANY CASE, IT IS NOT THE INANIMATE THINGS, BUT THE ANIMATE, THINKING BEINGS WHICH ARE THE TRUE FEATS OF GOD'S CREATIVE POWER. (1.6)

Rather than continue this fruitless line of discussion, let us consider the source of evil. By definition it cannot be God. For this reason, as we have seen, some people suppose it is Matter. Now, man makes cities not from cities, but from shapeless stone. And once a city is built, it is no longer called stone; rather, because of the art the artisan invested in it, it is called a city. Stones are the work of nature, and cities the work of man. Man, [p.22] however, cannot create from nothing; he is not a creator, but an artisan. In contrast, God, the all-powerful, is more than man, more than an artisan. Just as man has to exist before his art, so God before his art. Carpentry proceeds from the carpenter, not vice versa.

Even we human beings can create inanimate forms from shapeless matter. But what of the animals, plants and other living creatures? These are obviously the work of One greater than man. How, then, can we believe that so great a Being had to depend on matter to provide the material for Him to shape His creatures, animate and inanimate? It is clear that Matter cannot be the source of evil, for God had no need of Matter to realize His creation.

THE SOURCE OF EVIL: REFUTATION 3

EVIL IS NOT FROM GOD, NOR FROM MATTER. EVIL IS THE CONSEQUENCE OF ACTIONS. (1.7)

So let us ask again, whence evil?

Before answering, consider: Are the evils which befall us some kind of beings, or are they the result of the actions of things or beings? It is plain to see that they are the result of actions and not beings themselves. Then how could shapeless Matter be their cause? Matter does not have the ability to act of its own accord; it is inert. If evil is the result of actions, then there is no longer any need to posit Matter as the source of evil. For example, killing is not a being, but an action. Just as a doctor is called a doctor because of his doctoring, and a craftsman, a craftsman because of his skill, so the evil are called evil because of their evil action.

Thus, it is actions that are evil. Moreover, whatever provokes evil is evil too. Now we must ask: is the evil-doer himself evil or basically good? After all, we have been taught, "hate the sin and love the sinner." Before answering, let us examine the impulse to do evil.

Some people say that if God created the animate beings, then [p.23] he is ultimately responsible for their evil actions. How so? Whatever the starting point, God is only a force for good: shaper, life giver, harmonizer, provider. It is not possible for God to be the source of evil, nor is it possible for any other being to be the evil force in itself.

Even if good and bad Matter existed independently, God can only have improved it by giving it shape. As for the bad, leftover Matter, which some say is the source of evil, why would the Almighty have left it? If it was out of fear of this evil Matter, then evil Matter should have vanquished the good God, and there should have been no good in the world at all. Evil Matter should have ruled the world in the shape of many evil gods. However, the existence of any good, means that evil is not a force, not a substance, not Matter.

ONE LAST LOOK AT MATTER AS THE SOURCE OF EVIL (1.8)

If you are not yet convinced that Matter cannot be the source of Evil, then let us ask: Is Matter simple or complex? If simple, that is, consisting of a single element, then the diversity of irreducible basic elements in the world would not be possible. And if complex, then the elements must have existed before Matter, which would have been composed of them. Thus, there would have been a time when Matter did not exist. Matter, in this instance, would also be a created entity and, therefore, could not be an eternal force struggling against the good God. Furthermore, if all things are composed of the four irreducible elements, then there is no sense in believing that Matter exists at all. Logic dictates that in the beginning, God created everything, including the elements. Therefore, Matter as such did not exist in the beginning, nor is it the material out of which God created the universe, so it cannot be the source of evil. Contradictory though it may sound, evil can only be the result of the actions of the good beings created by God. [p.24]

EVILS ARE NOT BEINGS. HUMAN EVIL FROM HUMAN WILL. (1.9)

We have shown that Matter is not an uncreated entity, nor a being, nor the source of evil. What, then, is the cause of evil? Let us begin with the evil closest to us-human evil.

Human action is the result of the person who wills it. Evil actions-murder, lechery, physical harm to others-are the result of the person's actions, which are in turn caused by that person's will. These evils, being the result of a person's actions, are not eternal. In general, they did not exist until human beings were created. In particular, they come into being only after a particular human being is born and acts wrongly. Our sense of justice tells us that the agent of these evils is responsible for them. The person who commits the crime is held responsible. God cannot be blamed for the evils man perpetrates.

THEODICY-JUSTIFICATION OF GOD'S WAYS TO MAN. HOW CAN EVIL COEXIST WITH AN ALL-GOOD, ALL-POWERFUL, ALL-KNOWING GOD? (1.10)

Let us look at our world for a moment. If human evils were caused by God, then it would make no sense for Him to punish us for our transgressions, yet he does. The way in which both God and men react to human evil makes it clear that human beings are to blame for human evil. Human evil must be from the will of man; otherwise, we would not hold criminals responsible for their actions, nor would we ourselves feel guilty for our own wrong doing.

Consider also that actions in themselves are often not immoral if performed within proper bounds; for example, having sex to create a family, striking someone in self-defense, or killing in retribution for the murder of innocents. The intentions which we ourselves conceive and act upon determine whether these actions are moral or immoral. In short, will or intention appear to be the determining factor. Similarly, when we worship in the right way, but to a false god or idol, we have [p.25] nonetheless done wrong. It is not so much the action, as the aim, that makes an action right or wrong. There is no harm in making a statue for its beauty, but if we make it for worship, we have sinned.

FREE WILL AND MAN'S DISOBEDIENCE (1.11)

Why is man prone to do wrong? We cannot attribute man's depravity to God, for God endowed the first man with free will and self-determination, which he passed on to us, his successors.

The gift of free will is God's greatest gift to man. All the other creatures act on God's command within the bounds He set for them, but man can serve whom he chooses for whatever purposes he chooses. The regularity of the motions of the heavenly bodies is a sign, therefore, not of their superiority to us, but of their inferiority. Unlike them, we are not compelled by forces beyond our control to act as we should, but act according to our God-given free will which we exercise either to obey or disobey God. Obedience to God's will is the source of good and disobedience is the source of evil.

Man is not simply an instrument in God's hands to be used for good or evil, nor was man created good or evil by nature. A moment of introspection shows us that we ourselves choose to act as we do. We know right from wrong. An instrument is not capable of choice, nor can it be conscious of the way it is being used: for good or for evil. We human beings, however, are conscious of our actions. God wanted more for us. He made us capable of acting rightly so that we might be deserving of praise and do Him honor by our right choices. Without free will, man would be diminished as a being.

Like a father to his children, God urges us to be good by teaching and persuading us to follow His commandments, but He does not deprive us of our freedom. Instead of simply setting mankind in motion like the heavenly bodies, God has nurtured mankind. He has given us freedom instead of the instincts by [p.26] which the animals live. God has great joy in all creation, but how much greater is His joy when the beings to whom He gave free will act rightly! Surely the Almighty could have created man without free will and even now could use His power to force man to worship Him, but then He would deprive Himself of the joy of nurturing, changing, developing, progressing beings who praise Him because they want to, and not because they have no other choice.

In summary, the internal sense of justice shared by people everywhere is one of the best proofs of the existence of free will. Without freedom, our sense of justice and moral

responsibility would not have emerged. How can a person be held responsible for a crime he did not choose to commit? Justice and moral responsibility are founded on the premise that people can choose to obey or disobey the laws of goodness, the will of God. Man's disobedience is the cause of evil. Adam's disobedience has been inherited by us all. Ultimately, the source of evil is man's pride: our awareness that we can act contrary to the laws of God and our willfulness which leads us to do so.

Hence, evil is not some uncreated thing or force, nor does it come from God, nor are people instigated to do evil by forces which control them. People do wrong freely. The devil may have tempted Adam and Eve because he was jealous of them for having been created in the image of God, but it was the first two human beings who abused this special gift from God to act contrary to His commandment.

Thus, the source of man's greatest flaw is also man's greatest gift. Having been created in the image of God, man is free to act as he chooses. The cause of evil, then, is within man. Its name is pride.

SATAN AND EVIL (1.12)

Some might ask: "If nothing is evil by nature, then where did the snake come from, which you call Satan, and how did he know of evil?" [p.27]

In fact, Satan did not know about evil. He was jealous of man and only knew that man had been forbidden by God to eat of the tree in the Garden of Eden. Satan instigated man to disobey God's commandment. Like an enemy in disguise, who persuades a sick man to do the opposite of his doctor's order, Satan tempted Adam and Eve to disobey God in the hope that harm might come to them as a consequence.

We cannot, however, on this account consider Satan to be the cause of evil. Satan was motivated by envy or pride. However, the evil in this incident is the direct outcome of man's disobedience, and disobedience is not a being, but a consequence of an act of free will.

SATAN'S NATURE (1.13)

Our opponents say: "You don't want to consider God to be the creator of evil. Instead you argue that Satan tempts or deceives man and that man could refuse to do wrong, but does not. Did God create Satan evil or did Satan become evil?"

If God created Satan evil, then he would not have punished him or sought vengeance for his act of rebellion. After all, one can be held accountable only for those acts one freely performs. We must conclude that Satan was created good, but turned his will against God and was justly punished for being an instigator of rebellion against God. If he had not turned from good to evil, then he would not be called a rebel. He cannot be an uncreated source of evil either. For if he were, then we would not speak of his changing. He would have made

himself as he chose and would have no reason to be jealous of others. The uncreated have no need to change.

SATAN'S FALL-PLANNED BY THE ALL-KNOWING GOD? (1.14)

Some might question: "If God created Satan, and Satan turned from good to evil by his own will, then did God know? If He did know, would God then be the cause of Satan's fall? And [p.28] if He did not know, then why did He create an entity whose future He did not know?"

It is foolish to say that God did not know, for He is all-knowing. He created Satan, knowing that he would go astray and tempt man. But in so doing, God gave man the opportunity to use his free will. He left Satan in our midst that we might see evil and understand that there is forgiveness for our transgressions. Without this event, man would not have been able to know God's goodness. Temptation gives man the chance to actualize his potential. By using our free will we can resist evil and do good.

Similarly, it would have been easy for God to have destroyed Satan. But had He done that, what would man have learned? Man would not have learned of God's goodness, for there would have been no example of God's charity from which man could judge God's character. Also if God had reacted more strongly, then man might have thought that Satan was God's equal or that God was weak or fearful of Satan. Instead, He left Satan to be defeated by man. Thus He gave us the opportunity to regain our honor.

The military instructor teaches his students how to bear themselves in combat and to pursue victory even to the point of death, for it is preferable to die in the name of dignity than to live in dishonor. So too does God instruct us that we must pursue victory over Satan. Otherwise, we will suffer ill-repute and face the penalty of death for our sinfulness. God arms us with His commandments in order to encourage us in our battle, but if we do not obey, then we are sure to be defeated by the tempter and pay with our immortal souls for our disobedience. In short, God left Satan in the world so that we could prove ourselves and test our mettle.

NO CREATURE IS EVIL BY NATURE (1.15)

To return to the central issue: where, then, is evil from? If it were from nature, then the punishments which we administer [p.29] in our civil life would not be effective. We know, however, that punishment is a deterrent to crime, which proves that human evil must arise from human will and not from nature. Nature cannot be the source of evil.

Moreover, man by nature strives to be good. If this were not so, those who do evil would not pretend to be good, nor would we be offended by false accusations. The example of fierce and tame animals should not mislead us into believing that mankind is likewise divided. The animals are divided for a purpose. The tame were created to provide man with food and serve as beasts of burden, and the fierce to frighten man and keep him in his place, for man is very

haughty. Besides, even the fierce animals can be trained not to do harm, which is proof that they cannot be wholly bad.

It is clear that those who say the earth is good and the animals are bad, speak nonsense. Why would a good thing like the earth feed and nurture bad creatures? Moreover, the animals cannot be bad creatures, not even the fiercest of them; for if they were bad by nature, then nothing of theirs would be good. As we know, however, the furs and pelts of the fierce animals keep man warm, and their flesh is a source of food. Similarly, the creatures and plants which are said to be totally good-cattle and sheep, lettuce and other vegetables-can also do man harm, if they are not properly treated and prepared.

Because of these inconsistencies, some have mistakenly thought that God made things good or bad by nature. As we have seen, God created us wise enough that we can avail ourselves of everything good and healthful and find, by ingenuity, the good in that which is thought to be harmful. Thus we must reject the black-and-white verdict of superficial judgment and grant that there is nothing which is evil by nature.

FIERCENESS OF THE ANIMALS AND WEATHER (1.16)

Neither the weather nor the animals are fierce by nature. Since Adam named the animals one by one, we can conclude that [p.30] at first they were all good and tame. It was later, as a consequence of man's disobedience, that God made the animals fierce. That the animals can be domesticated is yet another sign of their former tameness. As for warm and cold weather, each has its good: the cold and snow prepare and restore the earth, and the warmth and light make the plants grow.

DISEASES, THE NATURAL INFIRMITIES OF MAN (1.17)

Some may ask: "What of the diseases and the other natural infirmities to which man is subject? Where do these come from, if not from an Evil Force?"

If those who believe in an Evil Force were believers in Christianity, then we would answer them on the basis of the Scriptures, but since they are not, we must answer them in their own terms.

If diseases are from an Evil Force, then which is stronger: the Creator of Good or this Evil Force? If the stronger be the Creator of Good, then He would not allow these evils to be done to man. If He could protect man from them but He did not, then He would not be good. If this were so, then those who say that Good will eventually defeat Evil would be mistaken, for if Good was not able to defeat Evil right from the start, it never will. However, we live in a world which is not totally evil or totally good. The only proposition consistent with the world as observed is that there is but one force-the Good Creator. Either the evils which we perceive are not really evil or they are caused by man and other circumstances, for they cannot be caused by the Good Creator.

As for us, we can explain these evils in this way: When man disobeyed God's commandment, he made himself subject to death and pain. "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children ... in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." (Genesis 3:16-19) These ills cannot be concessions to some Evil Force. Surely God, who made our immortal souls from nothing and gave us life, could have kept our bodies alive and free of pain and disease. [p.31] Mankind's physical infirmities are the result of disobedience to God.

IMMORTALITY OF BODY AND SOUL (1.18)

Some might ask: "What of those who say that the body was mortal to *begin with* and only the soul is eternal? And what of those who say, 'If the body was not mortal to begin with, then why did God subject it to death for such a trifling misdeed? Why did He not have pity and forgive man?' "

God was indeed merciful. He did not simply come to the garden and punish Adam with death. He let his footsteps be heard so that Adam would have a chance to repent. But Adam did not. Even then, God gave a lesser punishment than He first said He would: "You will die the day you eat of the tree." God had to punish man for man's sake. If He had not punished man, then man would have believed Satan. However, God acted with forbearance. By sparing Adam instant death and making him and his children mortal, he showed mankind that it was Satan who was evil and blameworthy. By the same token, He who created the angels and men's souls could easily have preserved the immortality of men's bodies, just as easily can he give them life again through resurrection.

THE CAUSE OF DEATH IS NOT GOD, BUT SATAN'S JEALOUSY (1.19)

God was not, however, the cause of death. God made man in His eternal image and it hurts Him deeply for us to die. As we have seen, death is a consequence of man's disobedience, and indirectly, Satan's jealousy. If death by natural causes is difficult to understand and prevent, it is yet more difficult to understand death at the hands of other men. Some people ask why God drives men to make war. This very question implies a denial of our free will and our responsibility for our actions.

God did not want man to live like the animals under constant surveillance and control. Under such a regime, man's free will would be no free will at all. While God may see the struggle [p.32] between His creatures, He does not instigate the battle. Rather, He allows two creatures, both endowed equally with free will, to do battle and work out their differences. An observer, even an almighty observer, is not the cause of the battle he observes. God cannot be blamed for human strife, but neither can Satan. Satan is not stronger or wiser than man, nor does he have the foresight or omniscience some people attribute to him as the instigator of human strife. If he were omniscient, he would not have had to ask Eve, "What did God say to you?" in order to find out the conditions of God's commandment. Similarly, if Satan had foreknowledge, he would not have tried to tempt Job, who could not be tempted.

If Satan were omniscient, he would have known Christ was the Son of God and would not have tried to tempt Him in order to find out. Our power to resist Satan and our failure to do so are the cause of human mortality.

SOURCES OF OTHER ILLS, INFIRMITIES OF THE SOUL, POSSESSION BY DEMONS (1.20-26)

Of untimely death: Foreseeing great harm, God spares the would-be victim from unbearable torment. Moreover, never knowing when we might die keeps us ever vigilant. We must always be ready to meet our Creator.

Of other ills, such as blindness and physical handicaps: Some are caused by sin, others for the glory of God that he might cure them. Others are due to imbalances of the body caused by eating improper foods, or eating too little or too much, or working in the sun or in the cold.

Of social ills: Envy, greed and, ultimately, man's pride are the cause of many ills from war to licentiousness and adultery.

Of the suffering of innocents: In some cases their suffering serves as an example to us all. When the righteous suffer so, how much worse off should the unrighteous expect to be!

Of possession by demons: Magicians and witches cast spells on people and manipulate them. The believers cannot be affected by them. Like Daniel in the lions' den they shall be protected. [p.33]

While we are on the subject of demons, let us pause to consider the relationship among the demons, angels, God, and man. With respect to will, their relationship can be characterized thus: the angels carry out the will of God; the demons have turned away from God; and man is free. As for their composition, souls are not made of known elements. They are purely incorporeal beings which take on shapes in order to be visible to man. They themselves are not physical beings. Only that which affects our senses is physical. Since they are purely spiritual beings, they are not born; they are eternal. The angels, the demons, and human beings are the only rational, thinking creatures. They are the only beings which have souls and which contain the divine spark of intellect. All other fairies and fantastic creatures are figments of man's imagination. They have yet to be found. The imaginary dog-shaped creatures called *haralez*, which are supposed to be able to cure wounds by licking them, do not exist either. These are all fairy tales. Some believe that there is a guardian angel for each of us. There are grounds on which this might be believed.

ANIMAL WORSHIP AND OTHER IDOLATRY (1.27)

Some might ask: There are people who still persist in worshipping animals, the sun, the moon, and other idols. Are they being misled by Satan?

If people are misled by Satan, then we would expect him to make them worship him. He, however, is unable to command their worship, because he has been discredited, and no one would tolerate his followers in their community. Nevertheless, people tolerate those who worship the heavenly bodies or animals. But woe unto idol worshippers! For "those who profess to know God, but reject Him by their deeds" are punished. Who can imagine what is in store for those who do not acknowledge Him at all?

ENEMIES OF THE TRUTH (1.28)

Non-believers have been armed with many weapons. The [p.34] Greeks mistakenly equated Matter with Evil because the words are similar in their language. (In Greek *hiulé* = matter, *ilus* = evil or sediment.) Thus some came to believe that man was created out of bad matter, which they believe to be the sediment left over after creation of the good world. It is their belief that this sediment is the cause of evil.

The Persians, on the other hand, believe that the first being had two sons, one good and one evil, who created, respectively, the good and evil creatures. These creatures are in perpetual strife, whence human suffering and the injustice of this world.

Some Christian sects have fallen into the same trap, holding that there were originally three sources of being: one good, one just, and one evil. Others believe that there are seven sources of being, others that there are two sources of being, and yet others that there is no source of being at all.

It is the task of the orthodox Church to condemn those outside the church on the basis of true facts without reference to the Holy Scriptures, and those inside, the seeming believers, by the Holy Book.

In dealing with the Greeks, it is enough to rely on the arguments of our predecessors. In dealing with the Persians, we must rely on our own lights and seek the aid of Divine Grace. [p.35]

BOOK II

Refutation of Zurvanism

Toward the middle of the fifth century, the Persian overlords of Armenia, notably Yazdegerd II (438-457), decreed that all their subjects had to convert to Zurvanism, a non-Christian religion related to Zoroastrianism. As we read in Agathangelos' History of Armenia, some form of this Persian religion was, in fact, practiced in Armenia before the Armenians' conversion to Christianity in 301. By the year 450, however, Christianity was an essential

part of Armenian cultural and political life. Religious freedom had been linked to the general issue of Armenian national autonomy.

For this reason, a thorough critique of Zurvanism had become a pressing need both for the survival of Christianity and for the regulation of Armenian-Persian political relations. The Council of Artashat was called to address the question of Armenian rights and religious beliefs. Bishop Yeznik of Bagrevand took part in the Council, which issued a letter to the Persian governor. The letter is recorded in Chapter 2 of the History of Vardan by the historian Yeghishé. Below we shall read one version of that letter, which forms the introduction to Book II of Yeznik's Refutation of the Sects.

As Yeznik notes at the end of Book I, he is the first Christian theologian to attempt a refutation of Zurvanism. Consequently, this is the most original part of his theological tract. Yeznik begins his critique of the Persian religion by presenting the Zurvanist account of how the universe was created by Zurvan's sons: The good Ormizd (Ahura Mazda) and the evil Ahriman. Perhaps it is best if we begin our retelling there as well. [p.36]

THE BIRTH OF ZURVAN'S SONS AND THE CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE (2.1)

They say that before there was anything, not heaven, or earth, or any creature in heaven or on earth, there was someone called Zurvan by name, which can be translated as *fortune* or *glory*. For a thousand years he made sacrifices that he might have a son, Ormizd by name, who would make heaven and earth and everything in them.

Now, after a thousand years of making sacrifices, Zurvan began to wonder and said, "What good are these sacrifices doing? Am I really going to have a son? Or am I making all this effort in vain?" And while he was thinking this, Ormizd and Ahriman were conceived in their mother's womb: Ormizd by the faithful sacrifices, and Ahriman, by the doubt. When Zurvan found out, he said, "There are two sons in the womb; whichever comes to me first, I shall make him king." And Ormizd, having learned of his father's intention, told Ahriman that their father Zurvan would make king whichever of them reached him first. When Ahriman heard this, he pierced the womb and went before his father. But when Zurvan saw Ahriman, he didn't know who he was. So he asked, "Who are you?" and Ahriman replied, "I am your son." Then Zurvan said to him, "My son is supposed to be sweet-smelling and radiant, but you are dark and foul." And while they were speaking, Ormizd was born, in his hour, radiant and sweet-smelling, and he came before Zurvan. When Zurvan saw him, he knew that this was his son Ormizd, for whom he had made sacrifices for so long. He took the bundle of ritual sticks which were in his hand and gave them to Ormizd, saying, "Until now I have made sacrifices for you, from now on you will make them for me."

When Zurvan gave Ormizd the sticks and blessed him, Ahriman approached Zurvan and said, "Didn't you make a vow that whichever of your two sons reached you first, you would make him king?" Then Zurvan, so as not to break his vow, said to Ahriman, "Why, you false

evil-doer, may the kingship be [p.37] given to you for 9000 years under Ormizd's supervision, and after that shall Ormizd be sole king and do whatever he wishes." When that was settled, Ormizd and Ahriman began to make the creatures. And everything which Ormizd made was good and straight, while everything Ahriman made was evil and crooked.

DUALISM IS PHILOSOPHICALLY UNTENABLE (2.2)

Like the Persian mystic Mani, whom they flayed alive, the followers of Zurvanism are dualists. They might differ in certain manners and practices, but their beliefs are essentially the same. For example, Manicheanism advocates celibacy and an ascetic life, whereas Zurvanism is more wordly and sensual. Nevertheless, they are both dualistic religions; that is, they are both founded on the premise that there is not one, but two forces in the world—a good force and an evil force—and as we concluded in Book One, such dualism is untenable, for evil is not a force, but simply imperfect goodness.

INTERNAL INCONSISTENCY IS ENOUGH TO REFUTE ZURVANISM (2.3)

If the fundamental philosophical inadequacy of dualism is not enough to convince you of the unworthiness of this religion, then let us look more closely at their account of creation, which is fraught with inconsistencies.

Let us ask: Is there someone higher than Zurvan? And was Zurvan perfect or imperfect? If perfect, then he would not have had to ask anyone for a son; and if imperfect, then he is unworthy of worship, for there is someone higher than he, who created heaven and earth and everything in them. If the defenders of Zurvanism object that he was making these sacrifices for glory, we reply: If he were eternal, he would be glorious by virtue of that fact; for glory is not a being, but a product of circumstances. If glory had to be bestowed upon him by someone else, then there is someone higher than he. Moreover, if no one is higher than he, then his 1000 years sacrifice was in vain indeed. In short, Zurvan is neither a supreme being nor [p.38] a perfect being; hence, he is unworthy of worship.

There are other inconsistencies as well. For example, if there were no sun or moon, how was time measured and where did he get the ritual sticks before the universe was created? These, of course, are superficial, but telling flaws in the Zurvan myth.

What better proof can there be that Zurvan was imperfect and weak than that it took him 1000 years to doubt his course? Moreover, since Ahriman would not have been born if Zurvan had not doubted, it is the imperfect Zurvan who is ultimately the source of evil. Let us remember too that from one spring two kinds of water cannot flow, nor can one tree bear two kinds of fruit. We are justified in asking: If the lower creatures remain within the bounds of their natural courses, how much more should a god? Neither do donkeys come from cows nor snakes from horses, how then can we believe that Zurvan, the first and eternal being, fathered sons of two completely opposite types?

Now, if Zurvan existed at all, he was in all probability some man of titanic proportions, and as has happened among the Greeks and other pagans, a cult developed around this man. Later, it was claimed that he made heaven and earth and all that is in them. Moreover, they say that the planets, moon and sun were born through intercourse with his mother and sister. This is yet further proof that Zurvan was not an immortal god, but an ordinary man, who engaged in ordinary relations and experienced ordinary carnal desire, which his followers have enshrined in their religion. In any case, it is not appropriate for true gods to create and procreate as a result of ordinary, contingent sexual relations. Rather, the creation of the universe should be an inevitable event, like the heat which comes from fire or the river which flows from a spring.

With regard to his sons, there are other questions as well. What business did he have naming his son before he was born? How is it that it took 1000 years to conceive and bring forth the first son and but a moment of doubt to bring forth the second? [p.39] And if he knew there were two, why did he not know one was good and one bad? If he knew and did not destroy the evil one, then Zurvan himself is the cause of evil. Moreover, even when he saw how bad Ahriman was, he still made him king over Ormizd and Ormizd's good creations. In light of this, how can we believe that Zurvan was a good god?

There are other unanswered questions as well: If Ormizd and the good are to be victorious in the end, then why does he wait? Why allow Ahriman to rule for 9000 years and only then give the crown to Ormizd? Why should Ahriman rule at all? We can draw but two conclusions: either Ormizd is not strong enough or he is not good after all. Either way, he is his father's and brother's accomplice in creating evil in the world.

As for Zurvan, he could not have existed. By definition everything is either a creator or a creation, that is, something created by a creator. We know that Zurvan was not a creator, for he had to wait for his sons to create the world, nor was he created, for there was no one to create him. Therefore, he could not have existed.

ORMIZD'S LACK OF FORESIGHT, YET ANOTHER FLAW (2.4)

If Ormizd understood his father's doubt and told his brother about it, why did he wait? Why didn't he foresee his brother's intentions? And why didn't Zurvan do something about it? Both Ormizd's and Zurvan's inaction shows a lack of foresight and a failure of good will, neither of which are becoming to truly good gods.

NOT ONLY ARE FATHER AND SONS FLAWED, BUT THERE IS, OBVIOUSLY, SOME HIGHER BEING. (2.5)

Once he made Ahriman king, Zurvan gave the ritual sticks to Ormizd and instructed him to make sacrifices for his sake. But why should Ormizd have complied? And to whom should he have made sacrifices? As we have asked before, if only Zurvan [p.40] existed, then only Zurvan is deserving of worship. If there was someone else higher than father and son, then

that being should have undertaken the Creation. Surely, this higher being would not have needed to give Zurvan a son to create the world, for he could have done it himself. Moreover, if there is someone higher, then Zurvan is not eternal, but created by the higher power. And indeed, there must be some higher being, or else there would have been no higher power for Zurvan to make sacrifices to. Plainly, this whole tale is one absurdity on top of another: a non-existent being making sacrifices to another non-existent being for what does not exist.

ZURVAN CANNOT BE FATE EITHER, FOR FATE IS NOT A BEING BUT THE RESULT OF CIRCUMSTANCES (2.6)

If Zurvan is fate, as they say, then he did not exist, for fate or fortune are the result of someone's action. We are told that Ormizd was conceived from his father's sacrifices and Ahriman from his father's doubting. There is some sense to this; good and evil cannot coexist peacefully; one must prevail and destroy the other. Still, the account is fraught with inconsistency. It is not possible for two kinds of seed to come from one source, nor is it possible for one womb to accept them both.

When Zurvan promised the kingdom to his first-born, he knew there were two in the womb, yet he did not foresee the possibility of a struggle. Moreover, the son Ormizd is plainly superior to the father, for he can read his father's mind, yet the father cannot read his sons' minds. Yet, even though he is superior to his father and brother, he does not come forward first to claim sovereignty over the universe. Another thing that is hard to believe is that Zurvan did not recognize his foul son. Nothing else existed; to whom else could it have belonged? All this shows that Zurvan was flawed. He should have slain both his sons: Ahriman for being evil and Ormizd for having revealed his father's doubt. [p.41]

QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE DIVINITY OF ORMIZD AND THE EVILNESS OF AHRIMAN (2.7-2.9)

To judge by their actions, the natures of Ormizd and Ahriman are not as clearly distinct as some would have us believe. If Ormizd was divine and could create everything, what need had he of the ritual sticks? The power rests in him, not in the sticks. In any event, sacrifices are men's work, not god's.

While Ormizd appears less than divine, Ahriman does not appear to be totally evil. After all, he did help to make the sun and moon. As he proved by creating the peacock, Ahriman, like everyone else, is not evil by birth, but by will.

LEGEND ABOUT ORMIZD'S SON (2.10)

Some say that upon Ormizd's death his seed shall be thrown into a spring and from that spring shall come forth a virgin who will bear a son who will destroy Ahriman's forces. They believe that Ormizd's offspring can destroy Ahriman's; in other words, that good will prevail.

If this were so, Ormizd should have destroyed Ahriman right from the start. Moreover, if Ormizd is mortal, he cannot be a god.

ON GOOD AND EVIL CREATURES: EVIL EXISTS TO TEST AND TEMPER THE GOOD. THEODICY. THIS IS THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS (2.11)

Not even Ahriman is evil by nature; no being can be. Beings are called evil because of their actions. The Zurvanists, for example, call Ahriman evil and give him the name *Kharaman* because he deprived them, sun worshippers that they are, of their sun. Similarly, Satan, the fallen angel, is so named because of the evil consequences of his actions and habits. Actions are historical events and are determined neither by nature nor by birth.

There is, therefore, no need to posit two creators in order to account for the existence of good and evil beings, for goodness and evilness are acquired characteristics and not in-born traits. Besides, from the very beginning good beings and evil beings [p.42] cannot coexist; one must prevail over the other. Good and evil cannot be attributed to the nature of the beasts either. If judged by the danger the creatures pose to each other or to man, then man would be the most dangerous and most evil of all creatures, and this cannot be so.

So we see, the creatures cannot be traced to two independent creators. Rather, they are all from one good creator, each endowed with its own virtue: some are good for food, some good for decoration and clothing, and others for keeping man's pride in check. Whatever harm they do, they do unknowingly or instinctively. And if this harm is considered evil, then how much more evil is the harm done by man through premeditated trickery and deceit!

The fierce and mighty beasts hold our pride in check, but so too do the small creatures-the ants and flies, fleas and mice-who through their annoyances strip us of our undeserved, inordinate pride.

Once again we see that God in His wisdom ordered the world for the best. Everything has its place in the grand design. He has subjected us to the small annoying creatures, but made us masters of the great beasts of burden-the elephant and horse-and given us a bountiful source of nourishment-the cows.

NOTHING IS EVIL BY NATURE, ONLY BY ACTION (2.12)

Some say that God created Satan evil. This makes no sense. If God had created Satan evil, then it would not have made sense to punish him as a fallen angel and banish him to Hell. After all, we do not blame fire for burning. On the other hand, even the angels, whom we take to be good, have at God's command wrought much harm in retribution for man's disobedience. So neither can all harm be attributed to Satan, nor can evil be attributed to a being's nature. Actions are good or evil, not beings.

FATALISM. UNEXPECTED DEATH SHOWS THAT DEATH IS NOT FATED, FOR WHAT IS FATED CANNOT BE CAUSED [p.43] BY ACCIDENTS. (2.13)

Some say that the life and death of mortals is decided by the Fates. What is this fate, which is said to determine these events? We believe that the length of our lives is in God's hand: he can shorten or lengthen them at will. However, some think that our births and deaths are determined by the stars. Their beliefs do not stand up under scrutiny. Consider wartime, for instance, when people meet their deaths randomly and under many contingent circumstances, unconnected with their age or date of birth. Obviously, people born under the same star die at different times and people born under different stars die at the same time, so the stars cannot control our lives any more than they control the color of our skin or the other circumstances of our life.

ASTROLOGY. CAUSALITY OF STARS UNDERMINED BY FACTS (2.14)

Belief in the power of the houses of the zodiac is meaningless too, as a simple inspection of our daily lives proves. They say, for example, that a person born under the sign Leo is destined to be a king; that a Taurus is destined to be strong and fortunate; an Aries, to be rich and luxurious like the ram's coat; and a Scorpio, to be evil and sinful. Others say that when Saturn enters a house, the king will die. As we know, this happened twice during the time of Theodosius, but he did not die. Moreover, many people are born under the Leo, but few of these are kings. Predictions based on the stars and houses of the zodiac lack consistency and contradict simple truths: the son of the king becomes king on account of his being the king's son and not because he is born under any particular sign of the zodiac.

Indeed the stars are inanimate creations. Let us ask which is higher, these unthinking, dumb lights or man? Plainly, the lower cannot rule over the higher. The stars in any case are no more alive than a torch, and their movement is hardly proof that they are living beings. After all, the water moves, but we [p.44] know that it is not alive. Rather, the heaven and earth are immobile vessels in which the Creator placed everything, including the lights of the sky like torches in a dark room. These lights are no more conscious of their own existence than a torch is of its existence. How then, we ask, can a thing which does not even know it exists determine the lives of thinking, conscious beings like us?

AS THE ACTIONS OF MEN SHOW, NEITHER THE STARS NOR FATE DETERMINE OUR LIVES (2.15)

As we have established, the stars cannot determine men's fortunes any more than they can determine who will be king. The vicissitudes of human existence are too many and complex to be explained by reference to a handful of stars; unless, of course, one star causes many things. To say, however, that one star can cause many things is tantamount to saying it can *cause* anything, hence *determine* nothing.

How impotent are fate and destiny, when puny thieves and bandits can overturn them at their whim! If crimes were predestined, then neither would we be justified in punishing criminals, nor would punishment be a deterrent to crime. However, since punishment *is* a deterrent to crime, it is clear that the thieves are acting according to their own violent wills and not the dictates of fate. Where does this leave those who believe that we are fated to be glorious or miserable? Who or by what hand is this fate written that men should submit to it passively?

If people exist who believe that pillage and plunder are fated and inescapable, let them simply submit to the pillage and plunder and not raise forces to defend themselves. Let them reason thus: It is the land's fate to be destroyed by thieves; why stand in the way of fate? We shall see that their actions will betray their true beliefs. They will show that they do not believe these things; for even those who profess belief in the stars [p.45] and fate raise armies to defend themselves in the hope of deterring plunderers.

WHY DOESN'T THE OMNISCIENT, OMNIPOTENT GOOD GOD PREVENT EVIL FROM HAPPENING? (2.16)

It is true that evil befalls us all, even the just and innocent. What we do not know is how many evils God has protected us from. That only God knows. Trying times give us the opportunity to show our true selves. After all, if God were to govern us and the angels, the thinking beings, by coercion and necessity, then we could not show our true selves. Our actions would not be our own. Our noble acts would be deprived of their nobility. Being performed under duress, they would be morally meaningless.

God's foreknowledge of our actions, however, does not mean that He causes or desires the evils we do or suffer. Like one who sees someone doing evil, God knows, but does not will our acts. God does not want to punish man, but to lead him back to proper living. There is no doubt that He wanted Adam to refrain from sin, and knowing that Adam would go astray, He warned him. However, Adam, of his own free will, disobeyed God's commandment, and it is for this disobedience that he was justly punished.

GOD WILLS GOOD, NOT EVIL FOR US, IN THIS LIES HIS BENEVICENCE (2.17)

Then why did God harden Pharaoh's heart against captive Israel? Is this not an act of malevolence? The apostle is right when he responds that it was not God who hardened Pharaoh's heart, but Pharaoh himself. On the contrary, God in his mercy appears to feel responsible for not having destroyed Pharaoh earlier. He raises Pharaoh to power in order to show His long suffering benevolence. Only when His patience is spent, does He show His wrath. God wants all to be saved. He leaves it up to man, however, to decide whether to serve justice or injustice. [p.46]

God's justice and mercy are to all people and all ages. God, in His wisdom and benevolence, chose the saints before the creation of the world and designated the elect before all time. His

benevolence is further shown by His willingness to extend to all believers everlasting life. There can be no doubt; God created us straight and we went astray. The proof is simple: It would make no sense for God to reward those who are good and punish those who are evil if their Creator created them so that they could act in no other way. That would be tantamount to rewarding and punishing Himself, which is nonsensical indeed.

THE GREAT GIFT OF FREE WILL (2.18-2.20)

The animals act unthinkingly whether for their own good or for the detriment of others. They are motivated by instinct and necessity. We too have some instincts, such as closing our eyes when being hit or yawning when tired. These are not from the Devil, as some believe, but are part of our bodies' natural functioning. Similarly, dreams and hallucinations have natural causes in the food we eat and the conditions under which we live; they are usually not the work of the Devil or God.

God has given us free will that we might do good or evil. Free will gives us the chance to earn our just reward. Because of our free will, we are not like the animals who cannot act except as their instincts dictate. We are at our human best when, against all odds, we act of our own free will for the good.

SATAN AND HUMAN ILLS (2.21-2.24)

Some say that the insane are possessed by demons and that Satan is the root of human ills. The Gospels give us reason to believe this is so. Still, we can be saved from Satan's temptation by prayer and faith. As for Satan, God did not create him evil that he might tempt us. On the contrary, Satan was jealous of man's special position in the cosmos, so he rebelled. The temptations of this world are part of the divine plan. They are like a refiner's fire through which the virtuous emerge purified. [p.47] Satan's temptations are not so much the cause of our ills as the occasion for us to show our virtue.

THE PLANETS AND STARS ARE NOT THE SOURCE OF HUMAN ILLS, RATHER THEY ARE TESTIMONY TO THE GLORY OF GOD (2.24-2.27)

As we have already shown, the lights of heaven cannot control man's destiny. Their proper role in the universe is to give light and measure the time. They are signs of God's handiwork. God created the universe from nothing. He created the four elements out of nothing as well. David says in the Psalms that the elements obey God's command. As we know, only the created owe obedience to their creator. All creation, even the creatures and events fearful to man, are testimony to God's glory.

PROGRESSIVE REVELATION OF GOD'S GLORY (2.28)

From generation to generation, from prophet to prophet, God's truth has been more clearly articulated to mankind. Any apparent changes in our understanding of the universe are

merely clarifications of the primary truth which the Holy Spirit has moved one or another prophet to express: God created the world from nothing. All creation owes its existence to God. Creation is a testimony to His goodness, His power and His glory. [p.48]

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BOOK III

Refutation of the Greek Philosophers

THE ERRORS OF THE GREEK PHILOSOPHERS ARE LESS BLAMEWORTHY THAN THOSE OF OTHER NON-BELIEVERS (3.1-3.2)

The very early Greeks believed that the sun and moon governed the interaction of the four basic elements. Misguided by appearance, they worshipped these spectacles of nature as gods. The later Greeks, however, are not to be blamed too harshly. Their errors are more excusable than those who worship wood or stone. After all, they were right in searching for divine beings. Their fundamental error was in thinking that there could be more than one.

PLATO, ARISTOTLE, AND THE SIN OF PRIDE (3.3)

The philosophers committed the sin of human pride by trying to understand the world by human insight. They—for example, Aristotle—believed that the world is moved by an unmoved self-mover, the first and last cause of everything. They reached this conclusion through reliance on the thoughts of their minds and information of their senses. However, by considering thought and sight the only sources of truth, they closed the door to knowledge by faith. Thus they came to think of the sun as a visible god whose rays spread reality through all creation, much as light makes the world visible and real to human eyes.

PRACTICES AND BELIEFS OF PYTHAGOREANS, [p.50] PERIPATETICS, STOICS, EPICUREANS AND PLATONISTS (3.4)

The Pythagoreans and Peripatetics (followers of Aristotle) are monotheistic and reject sacrifices. For these they are praiseworthy. The Pythagoreans, moreover, do not eat meat or drink alcohol. In Pythagorean thought, everything above the moon is immortal, and everything below, mortal. They subscribe to the belief that souls transmigrate, even among animals and human beings. As for their other practices, Pythagoras himself took a vow of silence, and then proclaimed himself divine—an act of human pride and folly.

The Platonists are not monotheistic. They believe that alongside God, there are matter and the Ideas. They also err in believing that the soul is divisible into three parts. Although they rightly believe that the soul is immortal, they, like the Pythagoreans, accept the possibility of the transmigration of souls among animals. As a way of life, they advocate the immoral practice of communal marriage. Nevertheless, their fundamental fault is in believing that many gods come forth from one god.

The Stoics err in a different way. They profess pantheism; that is, the belief that everything is part of one divine body. For them the whole visible world is God, and the matter of which it is made is fire. The mind is God, which is the soul of heaven and earth. The world is the divine body and the stars and planets are its eyes. The individual human body perishes on death, but the soul transmigrates.

The Epicureans believe that in the beginning there were atoms in motion. Everything which exists is made of atoms and everything which ceases to exist dissolves into atoms. Atoms are the indivisible, primal building blocks of the universe. There is no God, nor is there any divine plan which guides creation. Without duty or purpose, human beings are left to seek their individual pleasure, which becomes their aim in life. [p.51]

ORIGINS OF PAGANISM AND IDOLATRY (3.5)

Paganism began in the time of Seruk, a descendant of Noah's son, Shem. Whenever an outstanding person died, the ancients made his image permanent in wood or stone and worshipped this idol as a cult figure. This is the source of idolatry.

THE PHILOSOPHERS ERRED IN SEEKING THE INFINITE GOD WITH THE POWER OF THEIR GREAT, THOUGH FINITE INTELLECT (3.6)

It is praiseworthy that the Philosophers sought God with the power of their own intellect. But they tended toward polytheism and pantheism, both of which are damnable. They knew God, but they did not glorify him as God. (Romans 1:20-21) They honored the creatures when they should have been honoring the Creator, whose glory was revealed in His creation. The breath of life which dwells in all living beings comes from God, and everything, including the heavenly bodies, draws its being from God.

"Drawing being from God" and "being part of God" are, however, to be clearly distinguished. If the beings were part of God, then God would be divisible: part good and part bad. This is not worthy of a divine being. The point is that life is not God, but the creation of God.

Various kinds of life exhibit movement and procreation. Of these, human beings are the most magnificent, for though the body is composed of the four elements, the soul is pure, indivisible spirit. Man shares rational powers with the angels and higher beings. The animals are similarly made of the four elements, but having only instinct, they are not rational beings. In the same way, the life which seeds seem to have within them is really only a

natural and non-spiritual impulse. In making these distinctions, the philosophers were justified.

HEAVENLY BODIES DO NOT HAVE RATIONAL POWERS, THEREFORE, IT IS UNBECOMING FOR RATIONAL BEINGS SUCH AS MAN TO WORSHIP THEM (3.7-3.10)

The heavenly bodies do not have rational powers either. They [p.52] simply follow their set course. God shaped them, lit them and set them in motion, much as He created the wind and the rain. While some move fast and others slow, some appear and others disappear, all move according to set courses and not according to their own will. For example, the eclipse of the moon is caused by the earth's shadow and is not a sign of the moon's displeasure.

However accurately we come to understand and predict the motions of the heavenly bodies, of this much we can be sure, they are not signs of anything. They are simply a way of measuring time. Those who worship them as gods or living beings, err in worshipping the creature instead of the Creator.

POINT BY POINT REFUTATION OF PYTHAGORAS (3.11)

While Pythagoras is laudable for believing in providence, he is condemnable for believing that the source of being is distinct from providence. He is likewise praiseworthy for condemning animal sacrifice, though he did it for the wrong reasons. He mistakenly believed that animals had souls. Worse still, he held that they transmigrated, and, therefore, the slaughtering of animals was tantamount to killing a part of immortality, that is, God. This vegetarianism would be acceptable as an ascetic practice, but not if it is simply an excuse to avoid killing animals, on account of his mistaken beliefs. The idea that all above the moon is immortal, whereas all below is mortal, is ridiculous for only living beings can die, and the heavenly bodies are not living beings. Their rule of five years' silent discipleship is foolish as well. What if a disciple has a profound insight and dies before the five years have passed? His insight would be lost to all. As for Pythagoras' self-proclaimed divinity, it was sheer arrogance, unmitigated by his profound insights.

POINT BY POINT REFUTATION OF PLATO'S FALSE BELIEFS (3.12)

Plato errs in positing three sources of being: God, matter, and the Ideas. He misses the mark by holding that God created only [p.53] the Forms of beings and not the substance of which they are made. In his scheme, God gave shape to the pre- or self-existent matter. Such a view reduces God to a mere craftsman. Plato was also inconsistent in considering the world destructible and as old as God. As for his beliefs concerning the human soul: if the soul is immortal by virtue of being of the same substance as God, then how can it be divided into three parts—reason, passion, and appetite? Only reason is characteristic of the divine.

MATERIALISM OF THE STOICS AND EPICUREANS REFUTED (3.13-3.14)

Stoics do not believe that an intelligible force exists and governs the universe. For them, the visible universe is itself the manifestation of God, and is, as such, worthy of worship. Some believe the world came into being out of fire. Others believe that the mind is God, who dwells in all creation, and that the luminaries are the eyes of the universe. This is tantamount to believing there is no God at all.

The Epicureans came to a similar conclusion by a different route. They believe that the world is self-existent and came into being by the random collision of atoms. Thus there is no need for God or Divine Providence. As Job said, "They wandered the world without God." They were so insolent that they left the world believing in nothing. In sum, while the Greeks stumbled upon some portion of the truth by human understanding, the whole truth escaped them.

IT IS FAIR TO CRITICIZE THE PRE-CHRISTIANS FOR THEIR FALSE BELIEFS. TRUE BELIEF IN GOD AND THE CHURCH WERE PRESENT FROM THE BEGINNING OF TIME (3.15-3.16)

Some may object: How can we criticize those who lived before the coming of Christ for not knowing the truth? Why was the coming of Christ delayed, leaving so many in darkness?

While the whole truth escaped the Greeks, the children of Abraham had seen the light, at least in part. God always sent messengers and prophets into the world to preach the worship [p.54] of God. Therefore, this objection cannot be sustained. Let the non-believers blame themselves. In its infancy mankind needed milk. Only in youth, when mankind began to stray, did God find it necessary to send the prophets and finally Jesus to set mankind straight. In maturity, the world was ready for perfect knowledge of God through His son, who was sent at exactly the right time, neither too early nor too late. God created man last, after all the other creations, so that man might be the inheritor of creation. For freely and unselfishly giving man these gifts, He is deserving of gratitude. He also showed His benevolence through His son, whom He sent, like a doctor, at the moment we needed Him. He, in His perfect knowledge, does everything for the best. God is completely self-sufficient by definition; otherwise, He would not be God. There can be no reason to posit, as the Greeks mistakenly did, any other primordial being or force.

IMPORTANT ARGUMENTS FOR GOD'S GOODNESS (3.17)

The Greeks, then, must be wrong in positing a primordial force—namely, *Matter*—out of which they suppose God created the creatures and which they believe is the source of evil. Matter cannot be the source of evil, nor is there a "Devil" or creator of evil as the Magi say. Everything, including matter, was created by God, and God is by definition Good. As we showed in *Book I*, belief in dualism is untenable.

So why did God create the universe when He did? First, the exercise of His power to create is implicit in His perfection. Second, the possessor of such power must use it to show his

beneficence; otherwise, it would be wasted. Of what use are power and benevolence without acts of beneficence? Finally, we know God through his works; hence, He created the world to reveal His existence. He created man for His own glory, that there might exist a being to glorify the Creator and be grateful for His beneficence. God and creation coexisted from the beginning, for all the universe existed in God's mind from the [p.55] beginning. In God, thought, will, and power are one. God created the universe out of nothing. He gave all the things which exist all aspects of their existence. We must learn the truth about God through revelation and from the example of the martyrs who, for the sake of their belief in God and for the salvation of their souls, despised this life.

As for the Greeks, they are hopelessly lost because they incorrectly equate the Creator with his creations and, thereby, conclude that there are a multitude of gods. They try to understand God with their minds alone, but human insight is not sufficient to this task. Plato, the best of them, mistakenly believed that God did not create the universe, even though He existed from the beginning of time. Much as I love Plato for his readiness to seek God, I cannot help deploring his vain pride. [p.56]

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BOOK IV

Refutation of the Heretic Marcion

The relationship between Man and God was profoundly changed by the revelation of God among mankind in the person of Jesus Christ. God as revealed in the Old Testament was a stern, jealous creator, a vengeful God of Justice, a God of Laws and Commandments, whereas God as revealed in the New Testament was a loving, forgiving, self-sacrificing God. In the second century, Marcion, the son of the bishop of Pontus in Asia Minor, seized upon this dichotomy to propound a new doctrine of faith. Relying on the teachings of St. Paul, he set out to draw a clean line between Christian doctrine and its Judaic heritage. His writings have not survived, but we know of his doctrine through the writings of his opponents: Tertullian, Epiphanius and, as we shall see, Yeznik Koghbatsi.

Marcion was deeply impressed by how differently God is depicted in the two Testaments. He carried this difference to the extreme conclusion that in fact there is not one God, but two: the one, known before the coming of Christ, created the universe and was revealed in the Laws and through the prophets of the Old Testament; the other, the unknown true God, who sent His Son to redeem man, was revealed only in the New Testament. In addition, Marcion absorbed some of the ideas current in Greek philosophical thought and Gnosticism

concerning the evil nature of matter. On the basis of these beliefs he framed a doctrine which reconciled, to his mind, the differences between God as revealed in the two Testaments and accounted for human life as experienced and understood by philosophers and mystics in his time. [p.58]

For ease of reference, the God of the Old Testament shall be called Lord of the Laws and Creation or simply, Lord of Creation or Lord of the Laws. The God of the New Testament shall be called the Other God, the Unknown God, or the God of Love.

MARCION'S VIEWS AS RELATED BY YEZNIK (4.1)

As is well known, Marcion strayed by introducing another God into his doctrine. He opposed this God both to Matter and to the Lord of Creation, who was revealed in the Old Testament and who created the universe and set out the laws. He believed, therefore, that there were three primary forces: 1) Matter, 2) the Other, Unknown God, who was revealed in the New Testament, and 3) the Lord of Creation. Each of these three primary forces dwelt in separate realms: the Other God in the First heaven, the Lord of Creation in the Second heaven, and Matter on earth. Through the sexual union of Matter and Lord of Creation, the world and the creatures came into being. Each of the parents, Mother-Matter and Father-Lord of Creation, established a realm: Matter with her children on Earth and the Lord with his creations in heaven.

When the Lord of the Laws and Creation saw how beautiful the world was, he decided to create man. He descended to Earth and asked matter to give him clay out of which to shape man in their image. Then he breathed the spirit of life into the first man, Adam, whose name means clay. When he finished creating Adam and his spouse, he placed them in paradise where they would dwell for eternity in obedience to their creator, living in bliss as the children of Matter and the Lord of Creation.

When the Lord of Creation, who was master of the world, saw how noble Adam was, he plotted to steal him from Matter. He took Adam aside and told him that he was the one and only God and that Adam would die if he recognized any god but Him. Thus threatened, Adam began to withdraw from Matter.

Matter, noticing that Adam no longer obeyed her commands and had withdrawn from her, surmised that the Lord of [p.59] Creation had a hand in Adam's change of behavior. In retaliation, Matter created a multitude of gods and idols to confuse Adam so that he would not know which was the true God. Henceforth, neither Adam nor his descendants could find God. Confused, they worshipped the false gods and Matter. The Lord of Creation grew angry with man. One by one, beginning with Adam, because he ate of the forbidden fruit of the tree, the Lord of Creation cast the souls of the dead into Hell for a period of twenty-nine centuries.

They say that the Unknown God, the God of Love, who was in the first heaven, was hurt by seeing so many souls suffering at the hands of the two imposters: Matter and the Lord of Creation. Therefore, the Unknown God sent His Son to work miracles and cure the blind and foresaw that men would be jealous and crucify him. He also knew that once crucified and buried as mortal, His Son would descend into Hell and empty it by freeing the souls which had been cast there by the Lord of the Laws and Creation.

And indeed, after the Son was crucified, he descended into Hell and freed the captive souls and took them to heaven with His Father, the God of Love. Thereupon, the Lord of Creation grew angry and darkened the skies and dressed the world in black.

The second time Jesus descended in the form of God, he opened a case against the Lord of Creation for having put him to death. When the Lord of Creation saw the Godliness of Jesus, he knew that there was a God higher than himself. Jesus leveled his charges against the Lord of Creation and demanded that the Laws which the Lord of Creation had written be the judge in their case.

When he placed the Laws between them, Jesus asked, "Did you not write, 'And who ever kills, shall die and who ever spills the blood of the righteous, his blood shall be spilled.?' " After the Lord of Creation acknowledged that he had written them, Jesus demanded that he surrender himself to be punished by death. Then Jesus added, "I have been more just than you to your [p.60] creations," and he began to list the kindnesses he had done them. Seeing that he had been condemned by his own laws for killing Jesus, the Lord of Creation pleaded that he had killed Jesus unknowingly and offered in retribution to give Jesus all those who believe in him to take where he pleased. After Jesus left the Lord of Creation, he appeared to Paul. He revealed to his apostle the compensation, and thereafter, Paul preached that Jesus "redeemed us for a price." This, then, is the basis of Marcion's doctrine as we have come to know it.

MARCION'S UNKNOWN GOD OF LOVE CANNOT BE A GOD (4.2)

We might ask: What kind of god is this Unknown God of Love who creates nothing? Such a god is no god at all. If he were truly a god, he would not have coveted the Lord of Creation's creatures; he would have made his own.

Furthermore, putting pre-existent Matter at the same level as the Other God and Lord of Creation is tantamount to polytheism. None of these eternal beings can be divine. In the course of telling how everything was created through the union of Matter and the Lord of the Laws, Marcion has denied the role of the Holy Spirit. What, then, is the status of the Laws enunciated by the Holy Spirit through the saints and prophets?

MARCION COMMITS THE SIN OF PRIDE IN REJECTING THE LAW (4.3)

Marcion committed an act of arrogance by rejecting the Law spoken by the Holy Spirit. He did not stop there either. He rejected the Canon and formed his own Gospel. It was not becoming for him to do this. For Paul said, "It is not possible to tell the things which I have heard." (cf. II Cor. 12:4) Marcion, however, presumed to say: "I have heard."

THE LORD OF THE LAWS AND CREATION IS A FLAWED BEING TOO (4.4)

If the Lord of the Laws and Creation were an eternal, perfect being, then he would be prescient and omniscient. Although [p.61] he showed his power by creating the earth, the creatures on earth, and two heavens, he is obviously flawed in not realizing that there was one higher than he. If he knew and did nothing, this too is a flaw. He should have taken steps to secure his position and possessions and prevent his opponent from inciting his creatures to rebellion.

If the Good God of Love had no power to cause suffering in him, why would he interfere with the creatures of the Lord of Creation, causing him anguish and misery, and finally snatch them away?

THE JUST LORD OF LAWS AND CREATION COMMITS INJUSTICE (4.5)

After abandoning his creation alone with Matter, what right had the Lord of the Laws to demand clay from Matter to create man? If the Just God were truly just, he would have stayed in heaven and would not have demanded of Matter the clay from which to make Adam and Eve. How should Matter, betrayed as it was, feel about Adam and Eve's allegiance to the Lord of Creation? If the Lord of the Laws and Creation were truly just, then he could give Adam only just advice; yet he competes with Matter for Adam's loyalty. This is mean-spirited and unbecoming of a divine being. A just god would never have tried to establish sole dominion over a common creation. The Lord of Creation could not have had much foresight, either, if he did not anticipate Matter's response—a proliferation of idols to mislead man. In every way, the Lord of Creation is flawed and not a credible god. By his covetousness he spoiled the honesty and justice of his relationship with Matter and mankind.

IS THE LORD OF THE LAWS JUST IN CONDEMNING ADAM AND EVE TO DEATH FOR THEIR DISOBEDIENCE? (4.6)

The Lord of the Laws and Creation condemned man to death because man did not worship him exclusively. Given the circumstances of man's error, is this just? It does not seem just to throw all their souls into hell for all eternity because of the [p.62] disobedience of the first man and woman. After all, Matter is to blame for leading them astray. Clearly, it would have been fairer to condemn and punish Matter for confusing Adam and Eve.

WHY DID THE GOD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT WAIT SO LONG TO REDEEM MAN? (4.7)

If the unknown God of Love is so good and forgiving, he should not have waited so long to intervene. In reality, of course, there is no question of intervention, because there is only one God whose unique, divine plan is unfolding. Since there is but one God, there can be only one heaven. The notion of two heavens is based on a misunderstanding of the grammatical plural (e.g., the Armenian *ergin-k*, *k* is the Classical plural marker).

AGAINST DOCETISM, OR THE DOCTRINE THAT JESUS ONLY APPEARED TO BE GOD CRUCIFIED (4.8)

Some say that Jesus was not really crucified, but only appeared to have been. If Jesus only appeared to have been crucified, then he did not suffer and there is no salvation. The crux of the matter is whether Jesus is corporeal or not. If not, then there is no salvation, for there was no suffering. Furthermore, docetism undermines Marcion's belief that we were redeemed at the price of Christ's blood, for no blood was shed. Without Jesus' resurrection, there is no resurrection for anyone. We must ask, however, if Jesus were not really crucified, why do the Jews insist that their forefathers had Him crucified?

JESUS MUST BE THE SON OF THE LORD OF THE LAWS (4.9)

Jesus must be the Son of the Lord of the Laws and Creation. Why else would the Lord of the Laws allow Jesus to enter the world without interference? Besides, it does not make sense that Jesus would have relied on the Laws of a lesser god to plead his case. Jesus came to enunciate a new law and had been condemned for defying the laws as understood and practiced before His coming.

There cannot be two gods for another reason as well. Only [p.63] if Jesus were the son of the Lord of the Laws and Creation could he cure and regenerate mankind, reveal new laws, and inspire a new Gospel. He could not have performed these feats without the permission of the Lord of the Laws. Jesus came to find His lost sheep. They could only be considered *His* lost sheep if He and the Lord of the Laws and Creation are one and the same. Thus, Jesus is the son not of the God of Love, but of the Lord of the Laws.

NO CONFLICT BETWEEN THE TWO DEPICTIONS OF GOD AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES (4.12)

Many people exaggerate differences between the Old and New Testaments. They stress that the concept of the Law in the Old Testament conflicts with the idea on Divine Grace offered by Jesus in the New Testament. Some say that the Laws served only the interests of the rich, but that the grace offered in the New Testament means salvation for the poor. They have misunderstood Christ's mission: "I came not to destroy the laws, but to fulfill them." (Mat. 5:17)

As for Marcion's and Mani's adherence to asceticism and celibacy, nowhere is the eating of meat prohibited or celibacy mandated. We should turn to the example of Jesus himself to

guide us in dietary practice. There are ample scriptural grounds to say that dietary laws are extraneous to Christianity and salvation. (Acts 11:6-9. Mark 7:15) To those who say you should eat only fish because Jesus ate only fish after the resurrection, tell them to wait until they are resurrected, for that is when Jesus ate fish. Besides, fish are cannibalistic, whereas even pigs eat only grain. The real point is this: man is not defiled by what he eats, but by what he says, thinks and does. (Matthew 15:11) Moreover, fish are often unclean. Who ever heard of fish being sacrificed to a divinity, even among the heathens? These dietary laws are groundless, as is the belief that drinking wine is forbidden. [p.64]

AGAINST ASCETICISM (4.13)

Instead of earning praise, those who refuse to partake of God's bounty with thanks should be cursed for their arrogance against God and undue pride over their fellow men. True ascetics and virgins seek by celibacy to emulate the Angels, among whom there is no male or female. The ascetics and followers of Marcion and Mani, however, practice celibacy and virginity because they mistakenly believe the flesh to be evil.

AGAINST MARCION'S PRACTICES, MAN'S ACCOUNTABILITY BEFORE GOD (4.14)

Marcion forswears marriage and the eating of meat. However, marriage is enjoined in the Gospel and declared sacred by Jesus, and the eating of meat is not forbidden.

The contention that the God of Love cannot be the God of the Old Testament because the God of Love would never cause suffering, obscures the facts. If the God of Love causes no suffering, then he cannot offer rewards either, for punishment and reward are two sides of the same coin. The tortures with which Jesus threatens the unbeliever are no less severe or brutal than those of the Lord of the Laws, so there is no sense in turning from the Lord of the Laws to Jesus-they are one and the same, Father and Son. There is no escape from accountability for our misdeeds.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY (4.15)

Marcion does not believe in the resurrection of the body, for it is written, "The Body and the Blood do not inherit the Kingdom of God, any more than impurity inherits purity." (cf. I Cor. 15:50) However, later it is written that "This impurity shall be clothed in purity and this mortal being with immortality." (cf. I Cor. 15:53). As we know, the soul is immortal, so the reference can only be to the body. It is written further, "We shall be called before the court of Jesus to be judged body and soul." (II Cor. 5:10) This warning is given to preclude the absurd [p.65] deduction that, since the body is impure and will be left behind anyway, it is of no concern what carnal sins we commit. What a conjurer this Marcion is! He accepts one passage and conveniently overlooks the other.

Further proof that our bodies will be resurrected along with our souls is baptism. Why are our bodies baptized, if only our souls are to be resurrected? Marcion says that since the body

does not matter, "In place of dead children, living relatives should be baptized." This, however, makes no sense, for each must be "born by soul and water." (John 3:5)

The body is like a seed. Whatever you sow, that is what is reborn. You never bury wheat and have corn rise from it. Marcion is distorting the message by arguing that the body is material, hence incapable of resurrection. The correct meaning is that while man is still engaged in activities governed by considerations of flesh and blood, he cannot be resurrected, (cf. Romans 8:5-9. "Whoever is after the flesh thinks of bodily things. But you, the believers, think not of the body but of the soul.") Obviously, the reference is to people who have bodies, but think and act differently from most people. In any case, on the Day of the Last Judgment, we will be resurrected in renewed, purified bodies. (I Cor. 15:52; also John 5:28-29)

A FINAL WORD ON THE HERETIC MARCION (4.16)

Marcion was from Pontus, the son of a bishop. Having seduced a virgin, he became a fugitive and was excommunicated by his father. He went to Rome seeking absolution, but when he did not receive it, he turned against the faith.

His heretical views are many. He preached that there were two Gods and three eternal forces—the Just Lord of the Laws and Creation, the Good God of Love, and Evil Matter. He considered the Old Testament defunct upon the revelation of the New Testament. He rejected the resurrection of the body and professed three baptisms. He proposed that women conduct baptism and be ordained. He tampered with the word of the [p.66] Holy Spirit, editing his own version of the sacred books. Worst of all, he failed entirely to understand Jesus' message: "I came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it."

So ends the book of Yeznik Koghbatsi, Bishop of Bagrevand, student of Saints Mesrob and Sahag.

Written during the decade before the Battle of Avarayr in AD 451 for the glory of God and the preservation of His church among the Armenians.

Copied in AD 1280 (729 of the Armenian era) by the scribe Luser at the University of Gladzor for Nerses Vardapet of Moush.

Translated into Modern Eastern Armenian by A. A. Abrahamian and published in Yerevan, Armenia in 1970.

Retold in English by [Thomas Samuelian](#) for the Armenians of America in 1986.

Converted into electronic form by Roger Pearse, 2005.

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