

Theophilus to Autolycus. Book I

Theophilus of Antioch

Patristic · Ante-Nicene · Letter

STROMATA 145

Downloaded from The Stromata (thestromata.com). Free for personal, educational, and ministry use.

INTRODUCTION

Written around 180 AD by the sixth bishop of Antioch to a cultured pagan friend, these three books belong to the earliest wave of Christian apologetics, alongside Justin Martyr and Athenagoras. Book I opens not with argument but with a challenge: Autolycus has demanded to be shown the Christian God, and Theophilus replies that the problem lies in the seeing, not the seen. Notable as the first surviving Christian text to attempt a systematic biblical chronology, the work also shaped later hexaemeral literature through its treatment of the six days of creation. Expect a direct, occasionally sharp address to a single interlocutor, closer to a letter of confrontation than a treatise, with moral diagnosis pressed as firmly as doctrine.

Chapter 1\ Autolycus an Idolater and Scornful of Christians

A fluent tongue and an elegant style afford pleasure and such praise as vainglory delights in, to wretched men who have been corrupted in mind; the lover of truth does not give heed to ornamented speeches, but examines the real matter of the speech, what it is, and what kind it is. Since, then, my friend, you have assailed me with empty words, boasting of your gods of wood and stone, hammered and cast, carved and graven, which neither see nor hear, for they are idols, and the works of men's hands; and since, besides, you call me a Christian, as if this were a damning name to bear, I, for my part, avow that I am a Christian, and bear this name beloved of God, hoping to be serviceable to God. For it is not the case, as you suppose, that the name of God is hard to bear; but possibly you entertain this opinion of God, because you are yourself yet unserviceable to Him.

Chapter 2\ That the Eyes of the Soul Must Be Purged Ere God Can Be Seen

But if you say, "Show me thy God," I would reply, "Show me yourself, and I will show you my God." Show, then, that the eyes of your soul are capable of seeing, and the ears of your heart able to hear; for as those who look with the eyes of the body perceive earthly objects and what concerns this life, and discriminate at the same time between things that differ, whether light or darkness, white or black, deformed or beautiful, well-proportioned and symmetrical or disproportioned and awkward, or monstrous or mutilated; and as in like manner also, by the sense of hearing, we discriminate either sharp, or

deep, or sweet sounds; so the same holds good regarding the eyes of the soul and the ears of the heart, that it is by them we are able to behold God. For God is seen by those who are enabled to see Him when they have the eyes of their soul opened: for all have eyes; but in some they are overspread, and do not see the light of the sun. Yet it does not follow, because the blind do not see, that the light of the sun does not shine; but let the blind blame themselves and their own eyes. So also thou, O man, hast the eyes of thy soul overspread by thy sins and evil deeds. As a burnished mirror, so ought man to have his soul pure. When there is rust on the mirror, it is not possible that a man's face be seen in the mirror; so also when there is sin in a man, such a man cannot behold God. Do you, therefore, show me yourself, whether you are not an adulterer, or a fornicator, or a thief, or a robber, or a purloiner; whether you do not corrupt boys; whether you are not insolent, or a slanderer, or passionate, or envious, or proud, or supercilious; whether you are not a brawler, or covetous, or disobedient to parents; and whether you do not sell your children; for to those who do these things God is not manifest, unless they have first cleansed themselves from all impurity. All these things, then, involve you in darkness, as when a filmy defluxion on the eyes prevents one from beholding the light of the sun: thus also do iniquities, O man, involve you in darkness, so that you cannot see God.

Chapter 3\ Nature of God.

You will say, then, to me, "Do you, who see God, explain to me the appearance of God." Hear, O man. The appearance of God is ineffable and indescribable, and cannot be seen by eyes of flesh. For in glory He is incomprehensible, in greatness unfathomable, in height inconceivable, in power incomparable, in wisdom unrivalled, in goodness inimitable, in kindness unutterable. For if I say He is Light, I name but His own work; if I call Him Word, I name but His sovereignty; if I call Him Mind, I speak but of His wisdom; if I say He is Spirit, I speak of His breath; if I call Him Wisdom, I speak of His offspring; if I call Him Strength, I speak of His sway; if I call Him Power, I am mentioning His activity; if Providence, I but mention His goodness; if I call Him Kingdom, I but mention His glory; if I call Him Lord, I mention His being judge; if I call Him Judge, I speak of Him as being just; if I call Him Father, I speak of all things as being from Him; if I call Him Fire, I but mention His anger. You will say, then, to me, "Is God angry?" Yes; He is angry with those who act wickedly, but He is good, and kind, and merciful, to those who love and fear Him; for He is a chastener of the godly, and father of the righteous; but he is a judge and punisher of the impious.

Chapter 4\ Attributes of God

And He is without beginning, because He is unbegotten; and He is unchangeable, because He is immortal. And he is called God \[Qeos\] on account of His having placed \[teqeikenai\] all things on security afforded by Himself; and on account of \[qeein\], for *qeein* means running, and moving, and being active, and nourishing, and foreseeing, and governing, and making all things alive. But he is Lord, because He rules over the universe; Father, because he is before all things; Fashioner and Maker, because He is creator and maker of the universe; the Highest, because of His being above all; and Almighty, because He Himself rules and embraces all. For the heights of heaven, and the depths of the abysses, and the ends of the earth, are in His hand, and there is no place of His rest. For the heavens

are His work, the earth is His creation, the sea is His handiwork; man is His formation and His image; sun, moon, and stars are His elements, made for signs, and seasons, and days, and years, that they may serve and be slaves to man; and all things God has made out of things that were not into things that are, in order that through His works His greatness may be known and understood.

Chapter 5\ The Invisible God Perceived Through His Works

For as the soul in man is not seen, being invisible to men, but is perceived through the motion of the body, so God cannot indeed be seen by human eyes, but is beheld and perceived through His providence and works. For, in like manner, as any person, when he sees a ship on the sea rigged and in sail, and making for the harbour, will no doubt infer that there is a pilot in her who is steering her; so we must perceive that God is the governor \[pilot\] of the whole universe, though He be not visible to the eyes of the flesh, since He is incomprehensible. For if a man cannot look upon the sun, though it be a very small heavenly body, on account of its exceeding heat and power, how shall not a mortal man be much more unable to face the glory of God, which is unutterable? For as the pomegranate, with the rind containing it, has within it many cells and compartments which are separated by tissues, and has also many seeds dwelling in it, so the whole creation is contained by the spirit of God, and the containing spirit is along with the creation contained by the hand of God. As, therefore, the seed of the pomegranate, dwelling inside, cannot see what is outside the rind, itself being within; so neither can man, who along with the whole creation is enclosed by the hand of God, behold God. Then again, an earthly king is believed to exist, even though he be not seen by all; for he is recognised by his laws and ordinances, and authorities, and forces, and statues; and are you unwilling that God should be recognised by His works and mighty deeds?

Chapter 6\ God Is Known by His Works

Consider, O man, His works,--the timely rotation of the seasons, and the changes of temperature; the regular march of the stars; the well-ordered course of days and nights, and months, and years; the various beauty of seeds, and plants, and fruits; and the divers species of quadrupeds, and birds, and reptiles, and fishes, both of the rivers and of the sea; or consider the instinct implanted in these animals to beget and rear offspring, not for their own profit, but for the use of man; and the providence with which God provides nourishment for all flesh, or the subjection in which He has ordained that all things subserve mankind. Consider, too, the flowing of sweet fountains and never-failing rivers, and the seasonable supply of dews, and showers, and rains; the manifold movement of the heavenly bodies, the morning star rising and heralding the approach of the perfect luminary; and the constellation of Pleiades, and Orion, and Arcturus, and the orbit of the other stars that circle through the heavens, all of which the manifold wisdom of

God has called by names of their own. He is God alone who made light out of darkness, and brought forth light from His treasures, and formed the chambers of the south wind, and the treasure-houses of the deep, and the bounds of the seas, and the treasuries of snows and hail-storms, collecting the waters in the storehouses of the deep, and the darkness in His treasures, and bringing forth the sweet, and desirable, and pleasant light out of His treasures; "who causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of

the earth: He maketh lightnings for the rain;" who sends forth His thunder to terrify, and foretells by the lightning the peal of the thunder, that no soul may faint with the sudden shock; and who so moderates the violence of the lightning as it flashes out of heaven, that it does not consume the earth; for, if the lightning were allowed all its power, it would burn up the earth; and were the thunder allowed all its power, it would overthrow all the works that are therein.

Chapter 7\ We Shall, See God When We Put on Immortality

This is my God, the Lord of all, who alone stretched out the heaven, and established the breadth of the earth under it; who stirs the deep recesses of the sea, and makes its waves roar; who rules its power, and stills the tumult of its waves; who founded the earth upon the waters, and gave a spirit to nourish it; whose breath giveth light to the whole, who, if He withdraw His breath, the whole will utterly fail. By Him you speak, O man; His breath you breathe yet Him you know not. And this is your condition, because of the blindness of your soul, and the hardness of your heart. But, if you will, you may be healed. Entrust yourself to the Physician, and He will couch the eyes of your soul and of your heart. Who is the Physician? God, who heals and makes alive through His word and wisdom. God by His own word and wisdom made all things; for "by His word were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth." Most excellent is His wisdom. By His wisdom God founded the earth; and by knowledge He prepared the heavens; and by understanding were the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the clouds poured out their dews. If thou perceivest these things, O man, living chastely, and holily, and righteously, thou canst see God. But before all let faith and the fear of God have rule in thy heart, and then shalt thou understand these things. When thou shalt have put off the mortal, and put on incorruption, then shall thou see God worthily. For God will raise thy flesh immortal with thy soul; and then, having become immortal, thou shalt see the Immortal, if now you believe on Him; and then you shall know that you have. spoken unjustly against Him.

Chapter 8\ Faith Required in All Matters

But you do not believe that the dead are raised. When the resurrection shall take place, then you will believe, whether you will or no; and your faith shall be reckoned for unbelief, unless you believe now. And why do you not believe? Do you not know that faith is the leading principle in all matters? For what husbandman can reap, unless he first trust his seed to the earth? Or who can cross the sea, unless he first entrust himself to the boat and the pilot? And what sick person can be healed, unless first he trust himself to the care of the physician? And what art or knowledge can any one learn, unless he first apply and entrust himself to the teacher? If, then, the husbandman trusts the earth, and the sailor the boat, and the sick the physician, will you not place confidence in God, even when you hold so many pledges at His hand? For first He created you out of nothing, and brought you into existence (for if your father was not, nor your mother, much more were you yourself at one time not in being), and formed you out of a small and moist substance, even out of the least drop, which at one time had itself no being; and God introduced you into this life. Moreover, you believe that the images made by men are gods, and do great things; and can you not believe that the God who made you is able also to make you afterwards?

Chapter 9\ Immoralities of the Gods

And, indeed, the names of those whom you say you worship, are the names of dead men. And these, too, who and what kind of men were they? Is not Saturn found to be a cannibal, destroying and devouring his own children? And if you name his son Jupiter, hear also his deeds and conduct--first, how he was suckled by a goat on Mount Ida, and having slain it, according to the myths, and flayed it, he made himself a coat of the hide. And his other deeds,--his incest, and adultery, and lust,-- will be better recounted by Homer and the rest of the poets. Why should I further speak of his sons? How Hercules burnt himself; and about the drunk and raging Bacchus; and of Apollo fearing and fleeing from Achilles, and falling in love with Daphne, and being unaware of the fate of Hyacinthus; and of Venus wounded, and of

Mars, the pest of mortals; and of the ichor flowing from the so-called gods. And these, indeed, are the milder kinds of legends; since the god who is called Osiris is found to have been torn limb from limb, whose mysteries are celebrated annually, as if he had perished, and were being found, and sought for limb by limb. For neither is it known whether he perished, nor is it shown whether he is found. And why should I speak of Atys mutilated, or of Adonis wandering in the wood, and wounded by a boar while hunting; or of AEsculapius struck by a thunderbolt; or of the fugitive Serapis chased from Sinope to Alexandria; or of the Scythian Diana, herself, too, a fugitive, and a homicide, and a huntress, and a passionate lover of Endymion? Now, it is not we who publish these things, but your own writers and poets.

Chapter 10\ Absurdities of Idolatry

Why should I further recount the multitude of animals worshipped by the Egyptians, both reptiles, and cattle, and wild beasts, and birds and river-fishes; and even wash-pots and disgraceful noises? But if you cite the Greeks and the other nations, they worship stones and wood, and other kinds of material substances,--the images, as we have just been saying, of dead men. For Phidias is found in Pisa making

for the Eleians the Olympian Jupiter, and at Athens the Minerva of the Acropolis. And I will inquire of you, my friend, how many Jupiters exist. For there is, firstly, Jupiter surnamed Olympian, then Jupiter Latiaris, and Jupiter Cassius, and Jupiter Tonans, and Jupiter Propator, and Jupiter Pannychius, and Jupiter Poliuchus, and Jupiter Capitolinus; and that Jupiter, the son of Saturn, who is king of the Cretans, has a tomb in Crete, but the rest, possibly, were not thought worthy of tombs. And if you speak of the mother of those who are called gods, far be it from me to utter with my lips her deeds, or the deeds of those by whom she is worshipped (for it is unlawful for us so much as to name such things), and what vast taxes and revenues she and her sons furnish to the king. For these are not gods, but idols, as we have already said, the works of men's hands and unclean demons. And such may all those become who make them and put their trust in them\!

Chapter 11\ The King to Be Honoured, God to Be Worshipped

Wherefore I will rather honour the king \[than your gods\], not, indeed, worshipping him, but praying for him. But God, the living and true God, I worship, knowing that the king is made by Him. You will say, then, to me, "Why do you not worship the king?" Because he is not made to be worshipped, but to be revered with lawful honour, for he is not a god, but a man appointed by God, not to be worshipped, but to judge justly. For in a kind of way his government is committed to him by God: as He will not have those called kings whom He has appointed under Himself; for "king" is his title, and it is not lawful for another to use it; so neither is it lawful for any to be worshipped but God only. Wherefore, O man, you are wholly in error. Accordingly, honour the king, be subject to him, and pray for him with loyal mind; for if you do this, you do the will of God. For the law that is of God, says, "My son, fear thou the Lord and the king, and be not disobedient to them; for suddenly they shall take vengeance on their enemies."

Chapter 12\ Meaning of the Name Christian

And about your laughing at me and calling me "Christian," you know not what you are saying. First, because that which is anointed is sweet and serviceable, and far from contemptible. For what ship can be serviceable and seaworthy, unless it be first caulked \[anointed\]? Or what castle or house is beautiful and serviceable when it has not been anointed? And what man, when he enters into this life or into the gymnasium, is not anointed with oil? And what work has either ornament or beauty unless it be anointed and burnished? Then the air and all that is under heaven is in a certain sort anointed by light and spirit; and are you unwilling to be anointed with the oil of God? Wherefore we are called Christians on this account, because we are anointed with the oil of God.

Chapter 13\ The Resurrection Proved by Examples

Then, as to your denying that the dead are raised--for you say, "Show me even one who has been raised from the dead, that seeing I may believe,"--first, what great thing is it if you believe when you have seen the thing done? Then, again, you believe that Hercules, who burned himself, lives; and that AEsculapius, who was struck with lightning, was raised; and do you disbelieve the things that are told you by God?

But, suppose I should show you a dead man raised and alive, even this you would disbelieve. God indeed exhibits to you many proofs that you may believe Him. For consider, if you please, the dying of seasons, and days, and nights, how these also die and rise again. And what? Is there not a resurrection going on of seeds and fruits, and this, too, for the use of men? A seed of wheat, for example, or of the other grains, when it is cast into the earth, first dies and rots away, then is raised, and becomes a stalk of corn. And the nature of trees and fruit-trees,--is it not that according to the appointment of God they produce their fruits in their seasons out of what has been unseen and invisible? Moreover, sometimes also a sparrow or some of the other birds, when in drinking it has swallowed a seed of apple or fig, or something else, has come to some rocky hillock or tomb, and has left the seed in its droppings, and the seed, which was once swallowed, and has passed through so great a heat, now striking root, a tree has grown up. And all these things does the wisdom of God effect, in order to manifest even by these things, that God is able to effect the general resurrection of all men. And if you would witness a more wonderful sight, which may prove a resurrection not only of earthly but of heavenly bodies, consider the resurrection of the moon, which occurs monthly; how it wanes, dies, and rises again. Hear further, O man, of the work of resurrection going on in yourself, even though you are unaware of it. For perhaps you have sometimes fallen sick, and lost flesh, and strength, and beauty; but when you received again from God mercy and healing, you picked up again in flesh and appearance, and recovered also your strength.

And as you do not know where your flesh went away and disappeared to, so neither do you know whence it grew, Or whence it came again. But you will say, "From meats and drinks changed into blood." Quite so; but this, too, is the work of God, who thus operates, and not of any other.

Chapter 14\ Theophilus an Example of Conversion

Therefore, do not be sceptical, but believe; for I myself also used to disbelieve that this would take place, but now, having taken these things into consideration, I believe. At the same time, I met with the sacred Scriptures of the holy prophets, who also by the Spirit of God foretold the things that have already happened, just as they came to pass, and the things now occurring as they are now happening, and things future in the order in which they shall be accomplished. Admitting, therefore, the proof which events happening as predicted afford, I do not disbelieve, t I believe, obedient to God, whom, if you please, do you also submit to, believing Him, lest if now you continue unbelieving, you be convinced hereafter, when you are tormented with eternal punishments; which punishments, when they had been foretold by the prophets, the later-born poets and philosophers stole from the holy Scriptures, to make their doctrines worthy of credit. Yet these also have spoken beforehand of the punishments that are to light upon the profane and unbelieving, in order that none be left without a witness, or be able to say, "We have not heard, neither have we known." But do you also, if you please, give reverential attention to the prophetic Scriptures, and they will make your way plainer for escaping the eternal punishments, and obtaining the eternal prizes of God. For He who gave the mouth for speech, and formed the ear to hear, and made the eye to see, will examine all things, and will judge righteous judgment, rendering merited awards to each. To those who by patient continuance in well-doing seek immortality, He will give life everlasting, joy, peace, rest, and abundance of good things, which neither hath eye seen, nor ear

heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive. But to the unbelieving and despisers, who obey not the truth, but are obedient to unrighteousness, when they shall have been filled with adulteries and fornications, and filthiness, and covetousness, and unlawful idolatries, there shall be anger and wrath, tribulation and anguish, and at the last everlasting fire shall possess such men. Since you said, "Show me thy God," this is my God, and I counsel you to fear Him and to trust Him.

Source: Translated by Marcus Dods. From Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 2. Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.)

<https://www.thestromata.com/texts/theophilus-to-autolycus-book-i>