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Chapter I

Theologus Autodidactus

I grew up on a mountain where I knew no other people. One day, a certain need compelled me to descend to civilization and to the community of my fellow human beings, and I observed that they adhered to a variety of religions. One sect, adherents of the religion of the first Haniifs, invited me to join their religion. They say that they worshipped the seven stars (the sun and the moon, Saturn, Mars, Jupiter, Mercury, and Venus) and the twelve zodiacal signs. This is because it is these that create and govern this world, dispensing good luck and prosperity in it as well as bad luck and hardship. Their prophet, who told them about such things, is Hermes the Wise.

I left them and was met by some Magians. They said, "Don't pay them any attention! They're not correct! Join us instead, as we have the truth." They say that their great god is called Zurvan (that is, Fortune). Before the world was created, he offered sacrifices for a thousand years that he might have a son, and his wife conceived a son named Hormazd. Nine hundred years after his conception, Zurvan his father began to doubt that he had in fact been conceived. His doubt caused there to

1. The reading 'ma seems dubious. One may compare, however, the instances of cumulative negation cited by Blau (Grammar, 316A-B). 2. It will be recalled that the present treatise comprises the second section of Theodore's On the Existence of God and the True Religion. For section 1, see pp. 165ff.; for section 3, pp. 411f. 3. In the present context, "Hanifs" refers to the pagans of the region in and around Haran. Their religion consisted of a mixture of ancient Babylonian astral cult and Neoplatonism. See Chwolson, Sabaer und Sabismus, as well as the more recent studies of Hjärpe (Subku) and Green (Moon God). 4. More properly, adherents of Zurvanism, the official form of Zoroastrianism during the Sassanid period. See, e.g., Zaechner, Zurvan. 5. Reading sānā. 6. Reading tākh, with Monnot. 7. Reading tā sānā, with Monnot.
be in his wife’s womb another son (that is, Satan). Zorvan realized what had happened and said, “Tell me of your sovereignty to whomever of my children is first to see my face.” While still in his mother’s womb, Hormazd learned of this and informed Satan of it. On learning of it, Satan pierced his mother’s womb and came forth from her side. He came and stood before his father. He was darkness, black of face, and loathsome. His father said to him, “Who are you?” He replied, “I am your son Satan, who arose from your doubt. Give me sovereignty as you promised.” At this Zorvan was sad. In that he did not want to go back on his word, however, he gave him sovereignty over this world for nine thousand years. At the end of a thousand years, his mother gave birth to Hormazd, who came forth as lovely and beautiful light. He created the heaven and the earth, as well as the diverse intermediate elements. Notwithstanding that loveliness and beauty were to be seen in the world, it was dark and had no source of light. Hormazd was thus glad and took counsel with Satan, who suggested that he should marry his mother, which he did. He had sex with her and she conceived and bore the sun, for the light of the day. Satan also suggested that he should marry his sister, which he did. He had sex with her and she conceived and bore the moon, for the light of the night. It is for this reason that Magians marry their mothers, sisters, and daughters, that they might bear children like the sun and the moon, even as Hormazd their god. This then is a description of their gods. Like Hormazd, they are permitted, in whatever way pleases them, to indulge their worldly desires. Indeed, it was for the sake of these desires that Hormazd created them. Their prophet, whom they say brought them this truth, is Zaraoaster.

I left them and was met by some Samaritanians. They said to me, “Pay them no regard! Join us instead; we alone have the truth. We are the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the beloved of God, the God of heaven and earth. He promised our fathers that he would deliver their seed from the land of Egypt and make them inherit the land of Palestine. This is in fact what happened. It took place at the hands of the prophet Moses. God sent him to Pharaoh and struck both Pharaoh and the people of Egypt with well-known wonders and signs and then brought forth our fathers from Pharaoh’s hands by force. He parted the sea for them. He drowned Pharaoh and his armies. He led us fathers into the desert. He fed them with manna and quails. He made water flow from the rock. He gave them the divine law and declared for them the permitted and the forbidden. He destroyed the people of Palestine and gave their lands to our fathers. We are their children, even until today. As long as we keep his law, he is kind to us. When we disobey it, he punishes us and makes us suffer distress in this world. Those of us who do good have a pleasant life in this world; those who do bad, distress. When we leave this world, there is everlasting destruction and no resurrection.”

I left them and was met by some Jews. They said, “Pay them no regard! Don’t join them, for they are in error. As for what they told you, that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that he gave them such promises concerning their seed, that he sent Moses and led them out of Egypt into the land of Canaan—all this really happened. As for what they said about being the seed of Abraham and Israel, this is a lie. No! They are the offspring of Magians. It is we who are the seed of Abraham and Israel. In truth, it was our fathers that God made to inherit the land of Israel. For fifteen hundred years they dwelt there, in incomparable prosperity. They then sinned, and God grew angry with them and delivered them into the hands of the Gentiles, who exiled them from it. God promised our fathers, however, that he would send us the Christ, who would gather us from the ends of the earth into the land of Palestine, who would make us respected as we were initially, who would give us power over the Gentiles. He promised, too, that he would raise our dead and also gather them into that land and that he would command the earth to give us bread that is already baked, forever and ever. God does not lie; this is what will happen. It is for this that we wait. Don’t join anyone but us, for ours is the only true religion.”

I left them and was met by some Christians. They said, “Don’t let the Jews say lead you astray. God has already sent this Christ about whom they speak. When they didn’t accept him, God became angry with them and scattered them to the ends of the earth. They have nothing to look forward to but ruin, forever and ever; their hope is in vain. You should adhere to the religion of Christ and to his teaching, that is, that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, three persons, and in this essence a single God. This is the true religion. It was given us by Christ, the Son of God, in the gospel. He also declared for us the permitted and the forbidden, and promised to raise the dead, rewarding those who did good with the kingdom of heaven and punishing those who did evil with hell. The only true religion is ours. Let no one deceive you.”

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8. Reading “is,” with Monnot. 9. Translation tentative. For the construction, one may compare B33.3–10. 10. Adding “aš” before “šastān.”

1. Meaning, the dead are blotted out of existence. 12. Translation tentative. 13. Cf. 2 Kgs 17:24. 14. Reading “makāthān,” with Monnot. 15. Reading “waṣṣāḥulām.” Cf. Syriac egē. 16. For this tradition, see Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 30b: “In the future, the land of Israel will bring forth ready baked rolls and fine woolen garments.” Cf. the discussion of this statement in Maimonides’ “Helek: Sanhedrin, Chapter Ten” (Twersky, Maimonides Reader, 414–13). 17. The expression “in this essence a single God” is hardly characteristic of Theodore’s manner of talking about the Trinity. It may well be that the text is corrupt.
I left them and was met by some Manicheans, who are also called Zindiqs. They said, "Beware! Don't follow the Christians or listen to the words of their gospel. We have the true gospel, the one that the twelve apostles wrote. The only true religion is ours, and we are the only Christians. Our master Mani alone understands how to interpret the gospel. He taught us as follows: 'Before the world was created, there were two gods. These differed in essence. One was light and good (that is, the good god). The other was wicked and darkness (that is, Satan). In the beginning, each was in his own domain. The darkness then noticed the luminous one, as well as his beauty and his loveliness. Out of desire for him, he attacked him and fought with him, wanting to capture him. The luminous one sought to fight against him, but soon the darkness was on the point of victory. When the luminous one came to fear for himself, he cut off a piece of himself and threw it to him. This the darkness swallowed. Heaven and earth, as well as what is between them, is made—by way of mingling—from the nature of the darkness and from the piece that the luminous one threw to him." The human being, for instance, is created from an internal soul and an external body, and they suggest that the soul is from the nature of the luminous one, while the body is from the nature of Satan, the dark one. The same holds with regard to the state of things. Everything in them that is good and pleasant is from the nature of the luminous one. Everything that is bad and harmful is from the nature of the dark one. For instance, water drowns those who are submerged in it but gives life and pleasure to those who drink it. The part that gives life is from the luminous one, while what drowns and destroys is from the darkness. As for snakes, scorpions, lions, panthers, creeping things, and the like, all these are from the darkness. This is the essence of their religion and of how they describe their gods. As for the permitted and the forbidden, they pander to the worldly desires of those who wish to live a life of pleasure. They are not commanded to get married. Rather, whoever desires a woman can have her, and the same holds for women with regard to men. In fact, this is how they interpret the gospel, suggesting that, when Christ said, "Give to whoever asks," he did not mean that when the poor ask for alms, you should give to them. Because it was God who caused the poor to have misery in this world, no one is allowed to give them anything, not even alms. If we do,
you with the permitted and the doing of good and forbade you from the forbidden and the doing of evil. He has promised to raise the dead. For those who do good, the reward is paradise. From underneath it, there will flow forth rivers of water, milk, honey, and wine—a delight for those who drink. In it, for pleasure, there will be women with black eyes, ones that neither jinn nor men have touched, as well as whatever other good things a person desires, in castles of emerald, ruby, gold, and silver, and so on, forever and ever. For those who do evil, he has promised hell, the fires of which are not extinguished.  

Parable of the Hidden King

After meeting all these people, I began to reflect on what each had said and realized that all of them both agreed and disagreed about three things. As for what they agreed on, each claims to have a god, to have something permitted and forbidden, and to have a reward and a punishment—with one or two exceptions. As for what they disagreed on, they disagree with one another as to the attributes of their gods, as to what is permitted and forbidden, and as to what the reward and the punishment will be. Again, I reflected: Because the god is kind and generous, when he saw his creation deviating from the true worship, he would have sent them messengers and a book, both in order to show them the true worship and to return them to it from their sins. And yet, there are many messengers and many books, and they disagree with one another! One of two things must be the case: either not even one of these messengers has come from God, or there is among them just one true messenger. Because of what we know about God's generosity and about how he cares for his creation, the latter must be the case. But how to recognize this one true messenger? It was then that I realized that my situation was like that of a king's son, one with a father who was hidden and veiled, whom no one had ever seen, apart from his closest and most intimate friends. When a need arose in a certain country, he sent his young son to take care of it. To protect him from disease, he also sent one of his physicians, whom he appointed his son's wazir. (Neither the son nor the physician had ever seen the king.) The youth went to that land, where he neglected the physician and fell gravely ill. On learning of this, the father's love for his son would let him neither leave him in this state nor neglect him. He thus wrote his

26. Much of Theodore's description of paradise is from the Qur'ān: for "a delight for those who drink," see Qur'ān 37:46; 47:15; for "ones that neither jinn nor men have touched," see Qur'ān 35:56, 74. 27. Lit. "the son of a king, whose father is a king."

28. Reading al-şādat for al-šâdat, here and in what follows. 29. Reading wa-ni'ām. 30. Reading with the ms.
that their letters are at variance with one another. Among these letters, there can be only one from the king—if, indeed, there is even one. All their letters touch on three matters: first, the king's description to you of himself; secondly, his declaration to you of the habits that made you ill, his forbidding you from them, and his guiding you to a state that will make you healthy; and thirdly, the medicine that will give you health and ease in a life forever untouched by illness. As I said, I'm a physician and I too understand the habits that cause illness and the states that lead to health. Further, I know your father's attributes from your own likeness, for you are his son—even though I've never seen him. Come, let's first examine these messengers' medicines, what the king forbids and commands you in his letters, and his description of himself. If someone has a medicine that does good constantly; if there is in someone's letter a description of the habits that I know lead to illness and these he forbids you, while at the same time he commands you to do what leads to health; if there is in it a description of your father that, on comparison, is found to agree with your likeness—if all this is true, I say, he must be the true messenger of your father. Him we shall accept; all who disagree with him we shall reject.31

They collected the medicines, and the physician examined them. All were contrary to one another. All also forbade the king's son from doing what was beneficial, while at the same time commanding him to do what leads to illness—with one exception. There was one letter in which there was a beneficial medicine. It was forbidding him from what would make him sick and commanding him to do what would make him healthy. The same held for the king's description of himself. The physician compared all the descriptions to the youth's attributes. And again, there was only one with a description that resembled him, and it was in the same letter that had given the true description of his illness and of the beneficial medicine. He thus took that letter and the medicine, and, putting his trust in it, he acted accordingly. He also summoned the one who brought it and declared him the true messenger of the king. The others he declared liars and drove away harshly.

The hidden king is God. May he be blessed and exalted! His son is Adam and his seed, whom God created. The physician is the mind, which God gave to Adam. By it, he is to recognize God. By it, he is to recognize and do what is right, while at the same time recognizing what is wrong and abstaining from it. The son's neglect of the physician and his falling ill is Adam's neglect of the mind, his falling into sin, his going forth from paradise to the earth, and his causing the mind to incline to

the life of this world, a life like that of the beasts. The king's sending him a messenger represents God's sending, in truth, a messenger and a book to his creation. In this book, it gives them a true description of himself, according to which he is to be worshipped. In it, he forbids them from every form of evil and insolence and commands them to do good in this world. In it, he proclaims for those who do good their blessedness in the next world, as well as unending comfort, while for evildoers he promises hell, the fire of which is not extinguished.32 This is the one true religion. As for the king's enemies, those who wanted to harm the king through his son, those who prepared messengers and letters and sent them so as to destroy him, these are the devils, who have done the same thing. The messenger of God and his true book have come into the world. Against him, each of those devils gathered, each declaring the others to be liars and summoning humanity to himself. Among them was the true messenger, and he, till now, was as one of them, unrecognized. These messengers are those I described above,33 those who met me one after another when I descended from the mountain, each inviting me to join him—namely, the Hanifs, Magians, Samaritans, Jews, Christians, Manicheans, Marcionites, and Bardaisanes. (In the real world, there are yet other religions and still more disagreement.34 We, however, have restricted ourselves to the aforementioned eight or nine and explained what each proclaims with regard to the attributes of God, the permitted and forbidden, and reward and punishment.)

We must now act like the wise physician. We must lay the books to one side and inquire of the mind, how, from the likeness of human nature, we might know God's attributes, which our senses do not see and our minds do not comprehend. We must then inquire how this nature can teach us about what is good and what is evil, about what is commendable and what is reprehensible, and finally, how it can teach us about the eternal reward with which God blesses it and about its punishment and eternal wretchedness. When we have discussed and come to understand these subjects, we shall compare those books that are in our possession. If we find a book with these things in it, we shall know that it is from God. That book we shall confess and accept; every other book we shall reject.

Human Nature as an Image of God

While God is unseen, through the likeness of our own nature's virtues, notwithstanding that God transcends and is contrary to our nature, our minds can see both him and the attributes according to which

31. Reading aratu. 32. Reading with the ms. 33. Cf. Marâk 9:48. 34. See pp. 1–6. 35. Reading with the ms.
he is to be worshipped. To illustrate this, consider the following: We cannot see our own face in and of itself, but only through its likeness. Take, for instance, the man who looks in a mirror and sees his face from the likeness in it. When he does this, it is clear that he, through its likeness, has seen something unseen along with all its attributes. In terms of these attributes, the two faces resemble one another. For instance, suppose two strangers come to us, one knowing the man who looked in the mirror, the other not knowing him. Suppose further that they looked at the face in the mirror. The one who knew the man would recognize that this is the face of his friend. The one who did not know him, when he saw him, would know that his is the face in the mirror. Accordingly, the mind infers from the one to the other and vice versa, from either of the two to that to which it corresponds. At the same time, in terms of these attributes, the two faces do not resemble one another, for the face of the man in and of itself transcends and is contrary to the likeness in the mirror. After all, he exists, while the image does not. He sees, hears, and smells, while the face in the mirror does not. Accordingly, something unseen can be seen from its likeness, notwithstanding that it transcends and is contrary to its likeness.

In the same way, when with our minds we examine Adam’s nature and observe its virtues, we can see God from it and have true knowledge of him, for that nature is its likeness, notwithstanding that God transcends and is contrary to it. (The situation is analogous to the face of a person in and of itself and its likeness.) Adam’s nature has both virtues and defects. For instance, Adam, in his nature, today exists and tomorrow is gone, is living and dead, learned and ignorant, wise and unwise, powerful and weak. The same holds for his other attributes. They come in pairs. Some are virtues; others, defects. God is not comprehended through the defects of Adam’s nature, nor does God resemble Adam in those defects. It is only with regard to his virtues that Adam resembles God. Indeed, one can see God from each one of his virtues and see each one of his virtues in God. After all, Adam’s virtues came to him from God. The situation is similar to the likeness in the mirror. In that likeness, there is no attribute that is not also in the person, for everything in the likeness came to it from the face of that person. It is in this manner that we can see God from the virtues of Adam’s nature.

26. Reading al-ṣahāb (cf. D223.5). 37. Reading wa-nagānī. 38. That is, from the likeness to the real entity and from the real entity to the likeness. 39. Reading at-ṣayyāb for wa-l-bāḥil athlāt, and rejecting Dick’s emendation. 40. Adding ghāṣir before maṣṣūd, and rejecting Dick’s emendation. 41. Reading idān for idā, and rejecting Dick’s emendation. 42. Reading šaytān for šayṭān.

When with our minds we examine Adam’s nature and see that it exists, we say: If Adam exists, he who caused him to be thus must surely exist. In other words, from the existence of Adam we see the existence of God. Nonetheless, God’s existence is not like Adam’s existence, for God’s existence transcends and is contrary to Adam’s existence. After all, Adam’s existence has a beginning and an end, while God’s existence is above and contrary to that, being without beginning and having no end. So also, we see that Adam is alive and say: If Adam is alive, we know that God is alive. Nonetheless, God’s life is not like Adam’s life, but contrary to it. Adam’s life is perishing and in order to persist requires, first, milk, and then, food and drink. It grows up little by little, such that he is now a child, now a youth, now an old man. This is followed by decrepitude, death, and destruction. The same holds with regard to whatever else touches the life of human beings. As for God’s life, it transcends and is contrary to this. It has no beginning and needs nothing. It does not grow up and change from one state to another. It does not fall into decrepitude, death, or destruction. So also, we see that Adam has knowledge and say: If Adam has knowledge, he who caused him to be thus must surely have knowledge. From Adam’s having knowledge, we know that God has knowledge. Nonetheless, God’s knowledge is not like Adam’s knowledge but transcends and is contrary to it. Adam obtained his knowledge through his senses or from someone who taught him. He does not know what was and will be, nor even much that is right in front of him. As for God’s knowledge, it transcends and is contrary to this. He did not obtain it through his senses or from someone who taught him. From him, nothing that was or will be is hidden, from all eternity to all eternity. In a similar manner, when we see Adam’s wisdom, his seeing and his hearing, his strength, his abundance of goodness and generosity, his righteousness, his patience and his mercy, his forbearance and his forgiveness, his justice, and all of his other virtues, we say: If Adam has these virtues, he who caused him to be such surely has wisdom, strength, seeing and hearing, magnanimity and generosity, righteousness, patience and mercy, forbearance, and justice. Because Adam is thus we know that God is thus. Nonetheless, in these attributes, too, God transcends and is contrary to Adam. It is as we explained above regarding existence, life, and knowledge. Accordingly, it is in the virtues of his nature that Adam resembles God, and it is from these that our minds see God and his attributes. In that we see them in Adam, we know that they are in God, notwithstanding that God’s attributes transcend and are contrary to them, as we explained.
In a similar manner, Adam has yet other, more noble virtues that are also in God. Adam resembles God with regard to these in the same way that he resembles him with regard to the virtues we mentioned above, when we said that we with our minds can see God from them. I am speaking of begetting and headship. We see that something resembling Adam in nature was begotten and proceeded from him. We see, too, that he is head over this one who is like him. Since Adam begets and is head over one who is from him, he who caused him to beget and to be head must surely himself beget and be head over one who resembles him. Nonetheless, this is so in a transcendent and contrary manner: Adam’s begetting of a son took place through a woman, sex, and development. So too, Eve proceeded from him “as bone of his bone,” through a decrease of his body. Further, Adam preceded both his son and Eve in time. Moreover, though he is head over them and they share a common nature, their wills do not wholly agree with his. God’s begetting of his Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit, however, transcends and are contrary to this. They did not take place through a woman or sex. They involved neither pregnancy nor development. There was no question of temporal precedence, only simultaneity. So too, God’s headship over those who are from him involves no disagreement. Rather, those two agree with him in nature, will, eternity, and desire. Among them, there is absolutely no disagreement, excepting that one begot, another was begotten, and another proceeded, while the one who begot is head.

Suppose someone denies that Adam and God resemble one another with regard to begetting and headship in the same way that they resemble one another with regard to the other virtues. We answer: You ought not to deny this. There are in Adam no virtues more noble or exalted than begetting and headship. After all, if Adam did not beget, he would have neither felicity of life, nor headship, nor speech, nor generosity, nor any of the other virtues attributed to him. His felicity of life would be with the pigs, asses, and other beasts—which is not felicity. So too, there could be no headship if it were only over such as these, for it would not be headship but degradation and dishonor to be called the head of ticks, pigs, scarabs, and worms. His speech, too, would be empty and unneeded, for he would have no one to understand or answer him. In the same way, none of his virtues would be counted virtues if he had no one who resembles him. Grant that all of Adam’s virtues that are incomparably less than begetting are in God. Grant further that Adam resembles God with regard to these lesser virtues and that they are not to be denied of God. If you grant this, then begetting, which is better than these other virtues, is most surely in God and not to be denied of him. If this were not so, then Adam would be better than God in that he has two virtues—the best of virtues—that are not in God, namely, begetting and headship. No sane mind can accept, however, that Adam has virtues that are not in God, as this is something absurd. Again, would it not be absurd that Adam is head of one like himself but God is head only of his creation? Adam would not be pleased to be head of the creation. Indeed, neither he nor any of us would be pleased to be head of pigs, asses, flies, bedbugs, fleas, scarabs, and worms. If Adam and we are not pleased with this, how is it that we attribute to God that with which we ourselves are not pleased? If we were to say that God is head, but only over angels and humans, this also would be degradation. After all, by nature, angels and humans stand further from God than do pigs, lice, and scarabs from us. While we and those animals share the nature of living being, angels and humans share absolutely nothing with God. The distance between them is incomparably greater than the distance between heaven and earth. Accordingly, if someone were to attribute headship to God, but suggests that his headship is only over creatures, he has attributed to him ignominy and degradation, as well as that with which he himself would not be pleased to be described. If there is attributed to Adam or one of us headship over another human being, one from him or like him, we do not consider that degradation, but glory, exaltation, and honor. If this is so, then God—may he be blessed and exalted—is surely head, not over his creatures, but over one like him. And if he is head over one like him, he, too, has begotten a Son and there has proceeded from him a Spirit, and he and Adam resemble one another with regard to begetting and headship. Thus, among the many things the mind can infer from the likeness of Adam’s nature is that God is three persons: one who begets, another who is begotten, and another who proceeds. In this manner, confirmation is given to the words of the speaker, who did not lie in what he spoke when he said, “And God created humans, and in the image of God he created them.” This, too, is among God’s attributes.

Even as our minds can infer God’s unseen attributes from the likeness of our nature, so also they can infer from our nature knowledge of the permitted and the forbidden, the commendable and the reprehensible, good and evil, what makes us righteous and what makes us corrupt, as

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47. Reading with the ms. 48. For an argument similar to what follows, cf. pp. 142–44, 162–63, and 232–33. 49. Gen 2:23. 50. Because, it seems, Adam would have no equal with whom to share it. 51. Reading with the ms. 52. Similar arguments can be found below at pp. 140–45 and at pp. 223–27. 53. Reading at-hayawun. 54. Reading bi-l-qabīh. 55. Reading nanū. 56. Omitting Allāh. 57. Gen 1:27. 58. Reading with the ms. 59. Reading wa-yafṣalun; cf. the juxtaposition of al-qabīh and al-fā'id at D229.9, 14–15 and D230.1.
well as what enables us to do these things. Instinctively, we all dislike and recognize ugly and corrupt deeds when they are committed by our neighbor. For instance, suppose that someone deceives us or demeans us, mocks us, misleads us, rejects or reviles us, strikes us, takes something of ours; treats us ill, commits a loathsome act with our women, coerces us in something that is our own business, or anything else like this. If this happens, we instinctively dislike it, recognizing that it is something corrupt, reprehensible, evil, and forbidden. Accordingly, we can define what is corrupt, reprehensible, evil, and forbidden as follows: Do not do to your neighbor something harmful that you would dislike him to do to you. As for what enables you to do this, it is that you not covet what your neighbor possesses. Instinctively, we all like and recognize deeds that are good, proper, righteous, and permitted. For instance, we like it when our neighbor treats us with respect and generosity, meets our needs, is kind to us even though we treat him with insolence, forgives us even though we do him evil, and lavishes us with advice, which is the pinnacle of all good. Accordingly, we can define what is good, righteous, and permitted as follows: Do to your neighbor excellent and commendable deeds that you would like him to do to you. As for what enables you to do this, it is that you rid yourself of desire for this world and for everything that you or anyone else possesses. Our nature has thus taught us that what is evil and forbidden is that you do to your neighbor something reprehensible that you would dislike him to do to you, as well as what enables you to do this. It has also taught us that what is good and permitted is that you do to your neighbor the good deed that you would like him to do to you, as well as what enables you to do this.

The objective of all that we have said above is love. Love can be defined as preferring others to one’s self. Take, for instance, the love of a king for an only begotten son born to him in his old age. He wishes him to inherit his kingdom. He is, after all, the apple of his eye and the very essence of his soul. He is unable to harm or make him sad in any way. Rather, for him he would sacrifice himself, his kingdom, and what he possesses. It is the same with those who are perfectly virtuous—except that their love is directed toward all people. If we behave in this manner we are in the likeness of God. This is because God—may he be blessed—desires nothing in the world for himself, nor does he ever desire harm or sadness for any of his servants. Rather, he bears with those who do him evil and is kind to those who forge lies against him, a

fount of goodness for the undeserving. Everything that is in the world he gives to human beings. With his angels, heaven and earth, and the intermediate elements, he serves their lives as a result of his kindness and generosity. He does not prefer the righteous to the unrighteous or the good to the wicked, but his good flows equally to both. Accordingly, the objective of the perfectly virtuous is God himself, who forbids them from evil and wickedness and commands them to do good and to become in their relations with others perfectly good, as is God himself. This, then, is among the things our nature teaches us about what is forbidden and permitted in this world.

Our nature can also teach us about reward and punishment in the next world. Our minds recognize what constitutes our nature’s felicity and wretchedness in this world. From these, we can infer what constitutes its felicity and wretchedness in the next world. For this reason, before we describe the latter, we must treat the former; only then making our inferences about the latter. In this world, the life of created beings has no permanence without external things to assist and uphold it. For instance, the life of human beings does not last and has no permanence apart from the external assistance of food and drink, air to breathe, and the like. There is nothing that lives in and of itself, with no need for other things to sustain its life: excepting God, every living being has permanence of life from other things, in the manner we have explained. For in every living creature, God has established a desire for what sustains and gives permanence to its life, a movement toward it, and an eagerness to seek it. God has also prepared objects from which it might obtain this. When a living creature obtains these, its life is felicitous; when it does not obtain them, its life is wretched. Take, for example, that by which the life of our own nature is sustained and for which our own desires strive: eating food, drinking water, breathing air, wearing clothes to ward off cold and heat, and dwelling in houses, in which we take shelter from sun and rain, snow and ice. (There are other, similar things that the nature of our life requires.) As for the objects toward which our desires are moved so as to obtain these necessities, these include earth for growing food, springs for water to drink, air to breathe, sheep for wool, earth for cotton, flax for clothing, as well as ropes, thickets, rocks, and wood for building houses, and so on. Such are the objects from which we obtain sustenance. When from these our desires obtain sustenance for our life, we are felicitous; when they do not, we are wretched. It is like a man who travels in the desert, who is overcome

60. Reading ṣukraḥ; cf. D229.14 and yahbūb yaṣṣaʿir at D230.5. 61. Reading with the ms. 62. Reading with the ms. 63. Cf. Matt 7:12. 64. Cf. Ezek 20:17. 65. For these last two sentences, I have abandoned Dick’s numerous emendations. 66. Reading ḥādibbā. 67. Reading ḥabbāhā. 68. Adopting only the latter part of Dick’s correction; for the rest, reading with the ms. 69. As mountains seem an odd item to include in a list of objects needed for building a house, I have emended wa-l-ḥibbā to read wa-l-ḥibāl.
by heat and scorching winds and grows thirsty, who searches for water but finds none, so that his innards burn and his tongue is parched, who is wretched in a manner than which there is nothing worse. If he is provided with cold water and partsake of it, however, his innards grow cool and his tongue is moistened, he takes pleasure in it and is refreshed by it, and is felicitous in a manner than which there is nothing greater. The same holds with regard to hunger and the other needs of our nature. Accordingly, the worldly felicity of humans consists in existence and in the obtaining of the objects that God has prepared for the sustenance of their lives and for which God has implanted in them desires. Wretchedness, on the other hand, is being deprived of these and lacking them.

Our minds recognize that there are desires that God has implanted in our nature. Out of need for these, our nature is moved. By these, our life is sustained. For these, God has prepared objects, from which it obtains sustenance. If our nature obtains these, it enjoys felicity; if it does not, it is wretched. In the same manner, our minds also recognize that there are yet other desires implanted in our nature. These are not of this world. They represent, rather, perfect felicity and consummate longing. Corresponding to these, God has prepared objects, through which, for those who obtain them, there is felicity. In short, when our nature obtains these, it enjoys felicity; when it does not, it is wretched. Each of us desires to live forever and not die. Each of us desires a body that cannot be touched by infirmity, injury, change, or corruption: if thrown into fire, that it not be burnt; if into water, that it not be drowned; if a boulder falls on it, that it not be crushed; if struck by a sword, that it not be wounded; if bitten by a snake, that it not be harmed. The same holds for the other misfortunes and infirmities that bring about harm in this world. Each of us desires, on looking at some city or land, to see both it and what it contains, that there come between our sight and what it desires neither distance, nor mountain, nor wall, nor house, nor veil, that no aspect of that city or land be hidden from our sight. Each of us desires to have perfect knowledge, that is, a full knowledge of good and evil, the permitted and the forbidden, and so on, correctly and without error. Each of us desires to be able to repulse all evil and not flag in the performance of what is good, just, and righteous. Each of us desires unceasing wealth, that we might distribute it to all. Each of us desires to be merciful and gentle, pure, good, and just, and—the summit of every virtue—to love all and be loved by all. Each of us desires to live in unceasing and unmeasured felicity. The same holds for what is like these desires. The object of such desires is God, in and of himself. May he be blessed and exalted! He is living and does not die. He does not change and is not subject to corruption. No infirmity befalls him. He sees all and from him nothing that was or will be is hidden. He has perfect knowledge, of good and evil, of the permitted and the forbidden. He is able to repulse evil and do good perfectly. He possesses unceasing wealth, which he gives to all. He is kind and merciful, good, pure, and just. He loves all and is loved by all. His life is characterized by unceasing felicity.

Now that we recognize these exalted desires implanted in us, as well as their object, we must know the following: God implanted in us worldly desires and prepared objects corresponding to them, that we might obtain them and enjoy felicity. God did not deprive us of these objects, lest we be wretched. That would not befit him. Rather, he generously granted them to us, for the felicity and sustenance of our life, as befits him. In precisely the same manner, since he implanted in us desires and he is their object—may he be blessed and exalted!—we know that he does not keep us from himself, lest he make us wretched. That would not befit him. Rather, he generously grants himself to us, and we dwell with him and touch him, partaking of his sweetness and felicity through these desires. It is for these that our souls long. They represent perfect felicity and consummate longing. Through him, we become gods and enjoy him forever. Accordingly, the summit of our nature's felicity is that we become gods and enjoy God. We do not mean to suggest that we shall change from our human nature and become gods by nature. This is impossible. It is not right for the created to become uncreated. Rather, we remain as we were in our human nature, while coming to contain God's nature and through it becoming gods—without change. To illustrate this, consider a piece of iron that is placed in fire, heated, and then removed. It becomes fire but is not changed from its nature. No, it is now iron that contains fire and acts according to fire's nature, for it now burns, gives light, and heats. So also, our nature without change contains and encompasses God's nature. May he be blessed! For this reason, through touching him, we acquire life that is eternal, immortal, untouched by change, corruption, or infirmity, and this, from the totality of his virtues, for which he implanted in us desires, as we have explained. The virtues to which I refer are the virtues of God that we mentioned above, when we compared them with the virtues of Adam's nature and suggested that God transcends and is contrary to Adam in them. We noted that Adam exists but that he is not permanent, but that God, who also exists, transcends and is contrary to Adam's existence, in that he is permanent and does not pass out of existence. This virtue,

70. Reading with the ms.
71. Reading taḥqīmat wa-tāghdīl. 72. See pp. 11ff.
as well as all of God’s other virtues, in which he transcends and is contrary to Adam’s nature—it is for these that God implanted desires in us, thinking it good to bestow them on us and bless our natures with them, forever, in the manner we have explained. This is the felicity about which our nature has taught us that it is that than which nothing is greater. All this is like that thirsty man we mentioned above:

when he found the cold water and drank it, through it he enjoyed felicity; when he lacked it, he was wretched. Nonetheless, the felicity of finding him and the felicity of finding water to drink are not equal, nor are the wretchedness of lacking him and the wretchedness of lacking water equal. Rather, the nobility and exaltedness of God’s felicity over the water is comparable to his own nobility and exaltedness over the water; so also, the intensity of the wretchedness of lacking him is greater than the intensity of the wretchedness of lacking water. This blessing is God’s reward for his beloved. This wretchedness is his punishment for those who disobey him. It is this that our nature teaches us.

Discerning the Religions

Knowing the things explained above, we must now act like the wise physician, comparing the religions we encountered and examining what each says about God, the permitted and the forbidden, and reward and punishment. If we find one that agrees with what our own nature has taught us, we shall know for certain that it is true, that it is from God, and that through it alone God is to be worshipped. We shall wholeheartedly accept it, take our stand on it, and worship God through it, casting aside, rejecting, and despising the rest. On examining the matter, we find that the gospel alone contains what we learned from our own nature.

The gospel alone contains what we learned about God being three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, Christ said to his disciples, “Even as my Father sent me, I have sent you. Go forth to the Gentiles and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and teach them to do all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you until the end of the age. Amen!” This is exactly what our own nature taught us, as a result of its being in the likeness of God. As for the other religions, not one gives any such guidance. Rather, they describe their gods according to the

imaginings of their human and earthly minds. One says that the Deity is stars. One says that God loves two children, Satan and Hormazd, who married his mother. Others say that he is just a single person. Others say that there are two gods with different natures, one good and one evil, the good one being God, the evil one being Satan. Others say that there are three gods, one just, one good, and Satan, who is wicked. Others say that there are five gods, four without intellects and a fifth with intellect. Others say “one, eternal, who did not beget and was not begotten.” Thus do they describe God, not one of them hitting on a true account of him. Their descriptions are from the earth, not from God. The gospel’s description alone is from God. We know this because it offers us what our own nature taught us, as a result of its being in the likeness of God, as we explained above.

So too, the gospel records that Christ commanded his disciples to do what is permitted and to refrain from what is forbidden, to do what is good, to refrain from what is bad, and to be perfectly good, and this in a manner that accords with what our own nature has taught us about refraining from evil and doing good. To this end, he said, “Behold, what you do not like other people to do to you, do not do it to them, and what you like other people to do to you, do it to them.” He also taught how one might acquire the ability to refrain from evil and be perfectly good. This takes place in four different ways: first, abandon and reject the things of the world; secondly, love God and put him above the world; thirdly, love other people and put them above the world; and fourthly, forego retaliation, cling to forgiveness, reward evil with good, and imitate God. This is what Christ said about renunciation: “Sell all you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven. Take up your cross and follow me.” Again, “In the world, do not take bread for two days nor two sets of clothing nor a bag nor copper in your belt.” Concerning the love of God and putting him above the world, Christ said, “In the world, whoever loves father or mother, wife or child, relative or money, more than me, is not worthy of me.” Concerning our love for one another, Christ said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. By this people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” This is the type of love where we prefer the one loved to ourselves: “Even as I have loved you, I sacrificed myself for you.” Concerning forgiveness, rewarding with good, and the imitation of God, he said, “It was said to the ancients, ‘An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.’ I say to you, however: Do not reap evil with evil. Rather, if someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the left. If someone takes your clothes, give him your cloak as well. If
someone forces you to go one mile, go two. If someone asks you, give, and if someone asks you for a loan, do not refuse. Do not hate your enemies, but love them. Bless those who curse you and do good to those who drive you away. Pray for those who persecute you, that you might be the child of your heavenly Father, who makes his sun rise on the good and the bad, on the righteous and the unrighteous. 69 The gospel thus commands us to do the same perfect good that our nature teaches—and in this is health. 69 After all, those who please others with what pleases themselves, those who cast aside and renounce love for the world, those who place love for God above the world and their brethren above both it and themselves, those who renounce retaliation, those who forgive, those who requite evil with good, those who love their enemies, those who imitate God, the summit of every good and virtue, and become his children—they are the most exalted of human beings, and it is they who have banished sickness from their nature and caused it to be in perfect health. Of this health, too, our nature has taught us. With respect to this second subject, we see that not one of the other religions recognized or commanded such things. Indeed, the situation is quite the opposite. They permitted their followers to cling to the world and pandered to their desires for it and to their enjoyment of its sweetness. This was something that slew their nature and made it ill, barring it from love for the creator and from love for one another. Like wild animals, they commanded nothing of virtue, but only vengeance and revenge. Indeed, they were not satisfied with vengeance, but went even further. They abuse, but do not accept abuse, and if abused, they strike, and if struck, they kill. 80 Nor do they limit themselves to this, but they take their swords and go forth to those who have done them no harm, killing and taking them as booty. All the religions consider this acceptable. I cannot help but wonder how they claim God commands them to do this, even though this is contrary to our nature and causes its corruption! God—may he be blessed and exalted!—does not desire our nature's corruption, but its goodness, for he has ordered our nature to keep away from corruption. As for what would cause our nature to inherit hell, God would command neither that, nor our nature's corruption, nor something that bars our nature from himself. Thus, whoever claims that our nature's corruption is from God, that person has erred in suggesting that it has come from God. Whoever makes our nature good and healthy, whoever brings it something that draws it near to God, that person is from God. Accordingly, in that the holy gospel alone brings this, it alone has come from God. Of this there can be no doubt.

86 Matt 5:38-45, 87 Reading al-yihah; cf. D245.18, 246.1 and 247.5. 88 This same image is also found at p. 43.

We turn now to reward and punishment. In the gospel, Christ promised the righteous and the unrighteous the same things that our own nature taught us. The righteous will dwell and be one with the Deity in eternal life, the joy of which is unceasing. The unrighteous will be separated from that life, being in hell forever. On this subject, Christ told his disciples in the gospel, "Those who love me will keep my commandments; and the Father will love them, and I and the Father will come to them and make our dwelling with them." 90 Again, "If you love me, keep my commandments; and I shall ask the Father to give you another comforter, one to be with you forever—the spirit of truth. He was not seen in the world, and no one recognized him or was able to accept him; you recognized him, however, for he dwells with you and is in you." 90 Accordingly, whoever keeps Christ's commandments becomes the eternal dwelling place of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and by them is loved. In that Christ wished to teach them that this would happen not just on earth but also in heaven, he said, "The Father loves you, for you have loved me and believed that I came from the Father and have come into the world; and I shall leave the world and return to the Father." 90 Again, "Believe in God and believe in me. How many dwelling places there are in my Father's house! If this were not so, I would not have told you that I go to prepare dwelling places for you." 90 Again, "I shall come again and gather you to myself, so that where I am you may also be." 90 Accordingly, from heaven, from the Father, Christ came into the world, and to the Father, to heaven, he returned. 90 For those who believe in him, he is preparing dwelling places in heaven with the Father, so that where he is they might also be. It is clear that they will dwell both with the Father and in Christ. After all, Christ went to his Father in heaven and left them behind in the world, and he beseeches the Father concerning them, that he might protect them, until the time comes when he will gather them and they will be one both with him and with the Father. It is thus that he says, "Father, they have received me and know with certainty that I come from your presence, and they have believed that you sent me. And now, I beseech you for them; I am not beseeching you for the people of the world but for those whom you have given me, those who belong to you. All that is mine is yours, all that is yours is mine, and in them I am glorified. I am no longer in the world; they are still in the world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them through your name, the name you have given me, that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them in the world, I protected
them through your name. Those that you gave me, I protected them; not one of them was destroyed, except for the son of perdition. Father, it is not for these alone that I beseech you, but for those who through their words will believe in me, that they may be one. As you, Father, are in me, and I am in you, so also may they be one in us, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that we might all be perfectly one, and so that the world might know that you sent me and that I loved them even as you loved me. Father, my desire is that they may be with me where I am, so that they may look on my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before you formed the world." 95 Accordingly, Christ came from the Father to the world and to him returned, and he is in his Father and his Father is in him, and he is in them and his Father, too, is in them. Again, he made them as he is, that is, as he said, "in his Father" and "one with him." Accordingly, as indicated by Christ's words in the gospel, the dwelling place of the righteous is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in heaven, while the dwelling place of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is also the righteous, and they are one with him in heaven. If the dwelling place of God is the righteous and the dwelling place of the righteous is God, and they are one with him, they are in eternal life, without death, without perishing, and they are like him. As the gospel also says, "God loves his Son and has entrusted him with everything. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever disobeys the Son will not see life; God's wrath remains on him." 96 Again, John the evangelist said, "Until now, we did not know for what we were created. From now, we know that we shall see God as he is and shall become like him." 97 Accordingly, just as our own nature taught us that it desires God, yearns to see him and to dwell in him, and to become, like him, a god, enjoying his eternal life and his unceasing blessing, so too the gospel has taught and promised. For the following reason, too, we recognize that the gospel is truly from God: he created us for one reason, that he might bless both us and his holy angels with himself and not that he might bless us with food, drink, and sexual relations with women—a blessing that he gave to asses, pigs, and other animals. As the holy gospel says, Christ answered those who asked him about marriage in the next world, "You have erred in your reading of the scriptures and have not understood the power of God. It is only in this world that men marry women and women belong to men. As for the next world, men will not marry women nor will women take men. Instead, like angels of God, they will arise together and become the children of God, having become children of the resurrection and gods with him in eternal life" 98—not in nature, but through the communion of life, according to

the example we gave above: the piece of iron that becomes fire without destroying its nature or changing from it. 99 This is something that does not occur to any of the other religions. It simply does not enter their heads. All they can think about is the earth, food and drink, fornication and the pleasures of the body. They know nothing else. Like beasts, it is for this alone that their souls yawn and it is of this alone that they think.

The gospel is thus the true religion of God, through which alone he is to be worshipped. This we learn from the three things our nature taught: first, that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; secondly, concerning the permitted and the forbidden, that we are to please others as we please ourselves, forsaking evil and doing good, standing firm in righteous love and imitation of God; and thirdly, concerning reward and punishment, that the righteous will see God, dwell in him, share with him in his blessed life, and become, like him, gods forever—though without changing their natures—while the unrighteous who believe not in Christ will be separated from him and in their separation experience eternal wretchedness. Because of this, we believe this religion, accept it, and cling to it. For its sake, we endure tribulations in this world, through the promised hope. For it, we die, hoping through it to meet the face of God. So too, we cast aside all other religions, push them away and drive them off, counting them as nothing.

What about Judaism?

Suppose someone objects: The only religion you accept is the gospel's. You do this because of what you have said about how perniciously it describes God, the permitted and the forbidden, reward and punishment—something you claim your own nature teaches you. You also believe that no other religion is from God, declaring him too exalted to have sent the human beings whom the other religions describe, because of their sins and defects. If all this is so, then you have denied that the prophet Moses was sent by God and have declared what he brought to be sin and defect, for he did not bring what the gospel brought. Rather, what he brought is contrary to the gospel and quite defective. Thus, it must be that you think Moses not to have been sent by God. To this we respond: In this book, we have sought to confirm our religion by reason, not by scripture. With regard to reason, we do not think that it should be accepted that Moses was from God. The same holds for what the other prophets brought. This is because of the defects in what they brought and because it is contrary to what our nature teaches. With regard to reason, the only religion we accept as divine is the gospel, because its message is

so perfect and correct, as we have explained. From another perspective, however, we accept that Moses and the prophets, but no others, are from God, and this, for two reasons. First, we know that the gospel is from God. We accept and believe everything in it. The gospel tells us that Moses and the prophets—those mentioned in the Old Testament—were sent by God. We thus believe in Moses and accept those prophets. Secondly, we inquired of the gospel why God sent Moses with this defective religion. In describing the Deity, why did he proclaim the Father alone and summon to him alone? Why did he not bring a perfect understanding of the permitted and the forbidden? Why did he permit so many things? Why did he make no mention of the perfect reward for which we were created, or of punishment? When we inquired of the gospel about this, it told us that this was because of the people’s weakness. As for his description of the Deity, this was because the people were worshipping innumerable devils and idols. Moses thus commanded them, “Get rid of your innumerable multitude of gods and worship God alone.” It was his hope that when they had abandoned their gods and come to worship God, God would reveal to them his Son and Spirit, at a time when it was necessary that they worship him perfectly. It was for this reason that he at that time revealed to them the Father alone. Something similar holds with regard to the permitted and the forbidden. The people were addicted to the ways of the Gentiles—murder, robbery, adultery, theft, false testimony, and so on. They were completely unable to stop doing evil and incline toward good. Because of this, he gave them a law that dealt with the stopping of evil but still permitted them many things. As for doing good, he left this aside until the proper time should come. With regard to reward and punishment, the people were not immediately able to withdraw from the blessings of this world and patiently hope that they would receive a reward from God after death. Their hearts were immersed in worldly desires. These alone they knew. They sought only immediate gratification. Knowing that through it he would draw them to himself, God thus gave them the land of Palestine, something for which they were hoping. This is what the gospel teaches us, and we believe in all that it teaches us about Moses, namely, that he was sent by God and that these subjects are defective for the aforementioned reasons. It is thus that we believe that Moses and his message are from God. If not for the gospel, however, we would not believe that Moses is from God. Indeed, on the basis of reason, we would reject him most earnestly. So also, we believe that the prophets are from God on account of the gospel, not on account of reason. Since Christ told us that

they were prophets, we believe them. At the same time, since we know all the acts of Christ, have read about them in their books, and have found that they precisely described beforehand all his acts, we also believe that they are prophets. In short, we do not believe in Christ and his mission through the books of the prophets. Rather, we believe that they are prophets, first, because Christ called them prophets, and secondly, because we see his deeds described in their books.  

101. Rejecting both of Dick’s emendations.

102. Parallels for the preceding argument can be found at pp. 36-39 and 178.
Chapter 2

Against the Jews

God appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai and chose him to establish a religion for the children of Israel. He commanded him to go to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and deliver from his hands the children of Israel. As for Moses, he declined God's offer and made excuses, refusing God in light of the magnitude of the task he wanted to assign. He said to God, "Who am I to go to Pharaoh and save your people from his hands?" God answered, "I shall help you. I shall strengthen your words. Go and gather the elders of the children of Israel and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, has sent me. The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you.'" Moses said to God, "If I were to go to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' they would say to me, 'What is his name?' What shall I say to them?" God replied, "Tell them, 'He who is sent me to you.'" And God said, "I am HE WHO IS. I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses then said to God, "Perhaps I shall go to them and tell them these things about you, and they will say to me, 'You are a liar! God did not appear to you!' What shall I say to them?" God replied, "What is that in your hand?" Moses answered, "A staff." God said to him, "Throw it on the ground." He threw it on the ground and it became a snake. It frightened Moses, and he began to flee from it. God said to him, "Take it by the tail." Moses took hold of its tail and the snake again became a staff. God then said, "Put your hand

1. It will be recalled that the present work constitutes the first part of the ninth treatise in Baha's edition; part 2 is found below, translated under the title On the Councils.
2. What follows is a summary of Exod 2–3.
3. Adding min before Allah and omitting min el-ha'tbah, with S.
4. Reading wa-te 'abba and omitting el-khauif, with S.
5. Reading it, with S.
inside your sleeve.” Moses put his hand inside, and behold, it became leprous, white like snow. God said to him, “Put it back in your sleeve.” Moses put it back and then took it out, and behold, it had returned to the color of skin. God said to him, “If the children of Israel believe in the first sign, so be it; if not, they will believe the second sign. If they do not believe in the second sign, however, draw some water from the river and pour it on the ground, for it will become blood, that they might believe that the God of their fathers has sent you to them.” After God had given him the ability to perform wonders, Moses consented—with difficulty—to be sent to Egypt.

Miracles Justify Religion

The wise infer from the account of Moses that those examining a religion need not accept it from its propagator unless it is accompanied by wonders. After all, Moses, being a philosopher, knew that if he were to go and claim that God had sent him to establish a religion but were not to prove the truth of what he said through wonders—wonders that could not be performed without God’s help—everyone with any sense would have just cause to chide him and throw his words back in his face, to despise and reject him. At the same time, he knew that if he were given the ability to perform wonders, he would have a powerful tool with which to influence those who were earnestly seeking good for themselves and to lead them to join the worship of God that he was seeking to establish for them. So too, the wise need not accept a religion unless it is founded on divine wonders, which prove that the one propagating it is from God. As for those who accept a religion on any other grounds, they have renounced and set aside sound judgment about that very matter for which sound judgment was created in them; they have given themselves over to harm and capitulated in the face of one who would entice them to destruction and distract them from the way that leads to the blessedness that alone our minds desire.

The Miracles of Moses, Christ, and His Disciples

Those who accepted Moses’ religion were rightly guided—and this, for no other reason than that Moses confirmed both his prophecy and that he had been sent by God by performing wonders that could only be performed through the power of God. Moreover, when he brought arcane knowledge to those who had accepted him, telling them how God created heaven and earth and informing them of incomprehensible things that had taken place long ago, they did right when they compelled themselves to believe and trust him, for only one whose efforts were directed in accordance with God’s and whose summons was to his right and proper guidance would have been able to perform such wonders. So too, Christ our God, the true wisdom, did not begin to teach anything until he had manifested his divine power through wonders. He allowed those afflicted with diverse sicknesses and various painful illnesses to be brought, as well as those subject to every manner of demonic influence, and he cured them and blessed them with perfect health. After this had taken place, he was approached by crowds from Galilee, Jerusalem, and the district of the Jordan. When he saw the crowds around him, he summoned his disciples, opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” He then recited to them his teaching and established for them his law, step by step, assuming the image of Moses. Moreover, he continued to mix wonder with law and law with wonder, until he fulfilled the whole of his mission, was crucified, buried, and rose on the third day. Those who followed Christ on account of his innumerable wonders were thus rightly guided. Indeed, they were as justified in this as were those who accepted Moses because of his wonders.

If you compare how Moses and Christ performed wonders, you will find that, though both are powerful, Christ is the more powerful. How so? Christ’s wonders can be neither enumerated nor counted. Moreover, he did not restrict himself to the performance of wonders in person, but granted his disciples the power to perform them in his name. Moses, on the other hand, performed a limited number of wonders, and these he performed not through his own power but through the power of God, whether because he was commanded or by praying to him. At the same time, Moses never summoned anyone and said, “Go forth and perform wonders in my name.” All such differences between Christ and Moses are understandable. After all, Christ was God and the Son of God, and was thus able to perform wonders through his own power and to enable those he selected to perform similar wonders in his name. As for Moses, however, he was a servant, subject to God’s command, and his ability to perform wonders was not his own but God’s. It was thus that he would not perform a wonder until God had suggested to him that he should or until he had prayed to God for permission.

In the same way that Moses used to perform wonders through the power of God, whether at his command or by praying to him; so also Christ's disciples used to perform wonders, not in the name of God but in the name of Jesus Christ and through his power, whether at his command or by praying to him. Notwithstanding, the disciples were far more powerful than Moses in the performance of wonders. After all, Moses only performed a wonder after it had been suggested to him or he had prayed to God, whereas the disciples performed most of their wonders without praying. All they needed to do was say, "In the name of Christ, let this dead man arise," or "Let this blind man open his eyes," or "Let this paralytic be healed," and it would happen just as they said. Nor was this all, but when St. Peter would walk, whenever his shadow fell on the sick, it would cure them; similarly, when they would take St. Paul's apron and place it on the sick, they would be healed. Through these disciples the words of David were confirmed: "The Lord will grant those who proclaim the good news a word with much power." 18

Miracles and Prophecy

The Jews were less justified in accepting Moses than were the Gentiles in accepting Christ. Indeed, the latter is as much greater than the former as the sun's light is greater than a lamp's. The Gentiles were content with the wonders they saw Christ's disciples performing in his name. This was enough to summon them to accept Christ and have faith in everything that he himself said and that his disciples said about him. Indeed, they would have accepted him even if the law of Moses and the prophets had not prophesied him. The situation is analogous to what happened when Moses came to the children of Israel: they believed him and accepted what he related to them from God, solely because of the wonders he performed among them. They did this even though no one before Moses had prophesied his coming. Further, after he had performed his wonders, the children of Israel did not compel him to confirm himself through a prophecy uttered by some predecessor. So too, the Gentiles would be permitted to believe and trust Christ on account of the innumerable wonders that he himself performed and his disciples performed in his name— even if Moses and the prophets had not prophesied him. Because of the exalted nature of the earlier prophecy of Moses and of all the other prophets, however, much more necessary is it to accept Christ than Moses! These prophets spoke of Christ and the whole of his mission, the crucifixion, the stoning, the nailing of his hands and feet and the dividing of his clothes, the spitting in his face and the whipping of his back, how by his wounds we would be redeemed from our sins and cured from the illness of our misdeeds, how he would be given vinegar to drink and myrrh to eat. Such passages in the prophets are well known. My Jewish friend, I cannot help but be amazed that you accept Moses because of his limited number of wonders but do not accept Christ because of his innumerable and countless wonders. If you were fair, you would have to accept Christ, even if Moses and the prophets had not prophesied him. You did, after all, accept Moses through his wonders alone and did not also make him confirm himself through some prophecy uttered by a predecessor.

Moses Did Not Preclude Christ

If Moses had commanded you to accept no prophet after him, as Christ commanded the Christians, you would indeed have an excuse for doubting Christ. The trouble is that Moses, in his holy law, continually held out the hope of a prophet who would come after him. He commanded you earnestly to heed and obey this prophet in all that he commands. He threatened you with death should you disobey this prophet. He said that this prophet would be like him and that he would establish the law and a new covenant. (Based on this passage, you would be required to reject all prophets, whosoever they might be, except for this one you were commanded to obey. Moses, however, also reported that Jacob prophesied to you that this prophet would not cease among you until Christ, the hope of the Gentiles, had come to you. By this, he confirmed all the prophets before Christ but then singled out this one.) Many times, speaking in God's name, Moses commanded you to obey this prophet. Because of such passages where Moses tells you about the coming of this prophet who will establish a covenant, he must not keep you, even for a moment, from accepting Christ and having faith in him because of the wonders he performed. You are required to ponder in your mind and then proclaim: "The prophet whom Moses commanded me to obey is this one—and this, because of the innumerable wonders that he performed, the likes of which, moreover, even Moses did not do. Indeed, even if Moses were to rescind his command—neither ordering that this

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prophet be obeyed, nor forbidding it—it would still be incumbent on me, if I am fair, to accept him through these wonders alone and not also require him to confirm himself through some prophecy uttered by a predecessor, even as I accepted Moses.”

So also, my Jewish friend, you should note well that this prophet will establish the law and a new covenant. It is for this reason that God repeatedly singled him out by indicating that you should obey him. For instance, hear what God said through the prophet Jeremiah: “The days are coming, says the Lord, when I shall establish a new covenant with the children of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I established with them when I brought them out of the land of Egypt.” Similarly, David said to the Lord, “Raise up for them, Lord, one who will establish a law, in order to teach the Gentiles that they are only human.”

That Christ Actually Did Miracles

My Jewish friend, it may be that you will say: It was among my ancestors and in their days that the one they call Christ appeared. Because they have all passed away, I cannot know whether he really performed wonders. To this we reply: Proof lies close at hand, if in fact you are concerned for the salvation of your soul. You can know that Christ performed the aforementioned wonders from the fact that the Gentiles accepted him and from the fact that he brought them to accept what was contrary to their intellect, will, and desire. He transferred them from a life of ease to one of hardship, from sloth to self-restraint, from wealth to poverty, from license to rigor, from their licentious desires to the complete abandonment of the world for his sake. He made them deny the body’s pleasures and the world’s glory. He caused them to prefer their own death, through every manner of detestable torture, to the denial of him. To them he said, “Those who deny me before others, I shall deny them before my heavenly Father.” Again, “Consider what I have said to you in secret so that you yourselves might make it known on the housetops. Fear not him who kills the body but is unable to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to kill the soul and the body together and cast them into hell.” Again, “Those who destroy their souls for my sake find them in eternal life.” Again, “Whoever follows me and does not hate father and mother, brothers and sisters, children and relatives, is not worthy of me.” Again, “I leave you like sheep among wolves.”

The world will be happy and you will be sad. The days are


coming when those who kill you will think they are offering a sacrifice to God.” He established the practice of self-mortification: cutting off their desires, for instance, and uprooting their wills. He said, “If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to him the other. If someone takes your cloak, give him your clothes. If you look at a woman to lust after her, you have committed adultery with her in your heart. If you say to your neighbor ‘You fool’ or ‘You idiot,’ you deserve the fire of hell.” Again, “You have heard that it was said to the ancients, ‘Love those who love you and hate your enemies.’ I say to you, ‘Love your enemies and do well by praying for them.” (There are other, similar things.) Tell me, my Jewish friend, why is it that the Gentiles accepted Christ despite the hardship and death he required of them? To make matters worse, it was loathsome that Christ suffer crucifixion, pain, and degradation. It was loathsome that his enemies insult him, that they nail his hands and feet and hang him on a piece of wood, that they give him vinegar to drink and myrrh to eat, so that he sweated sweat that was clotted like blood. So also, it was loathsome that he say while on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” All this should have kept those who heard from following Christ and considering him God—and yet, it was as such that all the Gentiles considered him. Clearly, Christ would never have been accepted if not for the actual performance of the wonders mentioned in the gospel and in the writings of the disciples. Surely it is these wonders that overcame the Gentiles’ intellects and compelled them to accept and have faith in Christ.

Suppose that Christ had intended to deceive. If he were to experience the aforementioned forms of degradation, he would have had to command his disciples to conceal them from the Gentiles and rather to extol him among them and to make his life seem attractive. In addition, he would have spoken in such a way as to entice them through an appeal to the permissiveness of his religion and to its ability to fulfill their desires, as this is something that would make them hasten to him. He did not do this, however. Far be it from him! Rather, he made himself loathsome to those who issued the summons to have faith in him and made them endure death and being slain for his sake—confident that the power of his wonders would overcome their minds and draw them to him.

Is the following, too, not amazing? Moses invoked and extolled God, saying that he created heaven and earth and that he transcends heaven.
He also glorified and exalted God in every other conceivable manner. Moses then began to deliver the children of Israel, releasing them from servitude to Pharaoh, parting the sea for them, making manna and quails come down for them, causing water to flow for them from the rock, and killing the Gentiles for them. He also said to them, “God will make you so powerful that you will kill the Gentiles of Syria and possess and inherit their land.” Further, Moses established a law that was full of license. All this notwithstanding, not one Gentile followed him. Indeed, not even the children of Israel were persuaded by what he said or believed in his God. Rather, God descended on Mount Sinai, the mountain shaking under him and smoking, the sight of this striking fear in the hearts of the children of Israel. In no time at all, however, they were worshipping the calf—even while they were still at the foot of Mount Sinai. And what of Christ’s disciples? They went to the Gentiles and said loathsome things about Christ among them. They recalled the aforementioned pains and the cross. They recalled his words, even though they made him seem weak. Moreover, they required of them the hardship Christ had prescribed for them. Notwithstanding, the whole world responded to their summons. Everyone must recognize that this would never have happened apart from the value of the wonders that the disciples were performing in Christ’s name, which wonders are as far above those of Moses as the heaven is above the earth.

My Jewish friend, you cannot say that the Gentiles followed Christ because of tribal zeal resulting from their being related to one another. Such a charge might rather be brought against you. Indeed, one would be justified in charging you with having followed Moses because of tribal zeal—after all, he was one of you—and because you were ennobled through the turn in fortune he brought and through the kingdom God gave him. As for the Gentiles, there is absolutely no occasion for such a charge to be brought against them and their reasons for following Christ. After all, the disciples who summoned them were Jews, and they summoned them to one who was in outward appearance a Jew. This should rather have summoned them to shiver and flee from him, for the Jews were enemies of all the Gentiles. Further, they did not intermix with their summons anything to appeal to their ambitions, ennable them, or increase their power. Rather, the opposite was the case. Accordingly, my Jewish friend, you must recognize that none of the Gentiles would ever have considered Christ to be God and subjected themselves to him in an obedience that every day touched the very core of their souls, if not for the aforementioned wonders that the disciples performed among them in Christ’s name.

Perhaps you will say that the Gentiles followed Christ out of ignorance. If this is your opinion, induce yourself to believe the loathsome things said of Christ and the religious obligations he imposed, and then go and persuade even one ignorant person of their truth. You would not be able to do this. Rather, the ignorant more than anyone else would be eager to avoid accepting such things, for, like animals, all they care about are their appetites. The minds of the ignorant are more likely to take pleasure in words that are deceptive and vulgar. Indeed, my friend, the ignorant would be more ready to accept your religion than that of the Christians—and this, because of what we have already mentioned: its overt glorification and exaltation of God, its inducement to be afraid of him, granting him license and catering to their desires for an earthly kingdom, political power, hone and milk, polygamy and divorce whenever one wants it. Need we mention its urge to subjugate the Gentiles and your claim that you will be their masters and they your slaves, while their daughters become your slave girls, or that you will build yourselves a city and a temple out of emeralds and sapphire? It is things like this that seduce the ignorant. It is things like this that they desire. If someone were to go and summon to such a religion, promising that those who accept it will receive such things, would it be any wonder if people followed that person, especially if they are blown along by the wind of a favorable turn of fortune that they will receive? (It is as we ourselves have seen it happen.)

My friend, suppose you instead say that it was only the wise Gentiles who followed Christ, and that it was their wisdom that summoned them to follow him. It would then be necessary for you to do as they did: you have, after all, just attributed wisdom to them. Nonetheless, those who are wise in worldly matters do not accept the loathsome things said of Christ and attributed to him. Indeed, such things are beyond the world’s wisdom, surpassing the minds of all people until the Holy Spirit is poured out on them and persuades them that Christ is God. It is as St. Paul said: “No one can say ‘Christ is Lord’ except through the Holy Spirit.” If you do not believe this, go and summon to Christ every one who is wise in worldly matters and persuade even one of them of the truth of what you say. You would not be able to do this. Worldly wisdom cares only for worldly glory, and it does not believe what contravenes

50. Reading bi-khayr after suo-siti, with S. 51. Not a literal biblical citation. 52. Exod 32:1-10. 53. Reading pavaîbîk, with S. 54. Cf. the similar expression at p. 50.
the laws of nature, which laws it and not the intellect of the common folk can fathom, and it adorns itself with insolent words that are deceptive in their sweetness. The summons to Christ is the complete opposite. It is as Paul said, "In the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom knew not God, for God wanted to save those who would believe through the foolishness of the summons." 63

If you say that those who followed Christ were intellectually average, you have said something that is simply untrue. The intellectually average aim at a secure judgment with respect to the external things of the world, and they accept only what accords with what they have long known through experience and sensory perception. As for the summons to Christ, it is simply impossible to proclaim it to those who think this way. Rather, such as these recoil from it and find it extremely repulsive.

If you accept what we have said, you must surely recognize that the Gentiles who accepted Christ—no less than five-sixths of human beings—did so both because of the wonders they saw, which wonders are mentioned in the gospel and in the writings of the disciples, and because of the power of the Holy Spirit, who in a mysterious fashion entered their minds and persuaded them of the truth of Christ's claim about himself, that he is God and the Son of God, even though he experienced with regard to the pains and the cross what he is said to have experienced, as well as that he did not experience such pains out of weakness or in vain, but for a good reason, even though that reason was hidden from those whose hearts were not enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Surely, what we have said confirms that the Gentiles accepted Christ because of the wonders mentioned in the gospel and in the writings of the disciples. The fact that they did this compels your own mind also to believe and confess those wonders, as if you yourself had personally seen them.

Christ Confirms Moses

As for the wonders, they establish Christ's own claim about himself, that he is God and the Son of God. In turn, Christ and his disciples testified and confirmed that Moses and all the prophets were prophets. In the present day, too, it is through the testimony of Christ and his disciples that the wise receive confirmation that Moses and the prophets were sent by God. 64 As you, my Jewish friend, in the present day you were compelled to bring a rational proof with which to confirm Moses or one of the prophets for even a single person, you would not be able to do so. Notwithstanding that you had the law of Moses for roughly a millennium and a half, you were unable to persuade even one Gentile that the law was from God. Indeed, not even your own fathers adhered to the law or to the worship of God. When Christ came, however, through his wonders he persuaded all the Gentiles and for them confirmed Moses and the prophets. Christ became, as it were, their herald.

This, in truth, is what Christ did—and what could be more worthy of him? After all, it was he who had sent them and commanded them to prophesy and foreshadow him, lest the human mind deny him when he appeared, walking on the earth. How so? The prophet Micah came and prophesied of him, saying, "Hear, all you Gentiles, and listen, all you peoples; let the Lord testify to you, for the Lord will go forth from his place and descend to tread on the earth. All this is for the sake of the sin of Jacob and because of the transgressions of Israel." 65 Jeremiah, too, said of him, "This is our God; no other can be counted with him. He found the way to knowledge and gave it to Jacob his beloved and to Israel his friend. And after that he appeared on the earth and lived among human beings." 66

As for Moses, God told him to make Aaron a priest and to offer sacrifices according to the pattern shown him on the mountain. 67 In what follows, I shall show you that here there is a priest other than Aaron, of whom Aaron is an image, and that here there is a sacrifice other than those sacrifices, of which those sacrifices are an image. David came and explained for you that priest, of whom Aaron is an image. He informed you that a Lord sits on the throne at the right hand of God and that he is a Son begotten of God before all eternity: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, till I place your enemies under the footstool of your feet.'" 68 To this one God also said, "I begot you from the womb, before the light." 69 He also said to him, "You are a priest forever, after the image of Melchizedek." 70 Explaining for you that sacrifice of which your sacrifice is an image, Isaiah said that Christ said of himself, "I did not disobey or doubt. I gave my back to the whips and my cheek to the slap. I did not turn my face from the humiliation of spittle." 71 He also said in Isaiah, "He had not appearance or glory" 72 that we should look at him. He had not appearance or beauty, but his appearance was lowly, not even that of a man. He was a wounded man, whom knows that he bears sicknesses. He

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was lively and of no account. He bore our sicknesses, and for our sakes he suffered. We accounted him in illness wounded by God, afflicted. He was only wounded for the sake of our iniquities, and there befall him calamities for the sake of our sins. The punishment for our peace was upon him, and by his wounds we were healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray; each of us has erred from the path. The Lord handed him over for the sake of our sins. He did not open his mouth when he was afflicted, like a sheep that is led to slaughter and like a lamb before the butcher, so he was silent and did not open his mouth out of his humility.\[83\] This, my Jewish friend, should make it clear to you, if you will be reasonable, that Aaron your priest was an image of this priest and that your sacrifice was an image of this sacrifice. After all, if your priest were he who could get forgiveness for your sins and your sacrifice were that through which your sins would be forgiven, this priest that David mentioned and this sacrifice that Isaiah mentioned would be just empty play in which God engaged, and Moses would vainly have told you that he was making for you an image of what God had showed him on the mountain. As it is, however, Moses told you\[84\] that what you have is just an image, and David and Isaiah came and explained for you that image. You did not understand it at the time, however. It was as Moses said to you, “You have seen what God did in your presence, but God did not give you eyes with which to see, ears with which to hear, and hearts with which to understand.”\[85\] My Jewish friend, if the things you saw were not an image of something else, if by them something else was not meant,\[86\] how could Moses have told you that you have seen what God did in your presence but that God did not give you eyes with which to see, ears with which to hear, and hearts with which to understand? These things indicate to you, rather, that what you have is only an image and something by which another is meant. Confirming this for you, David said, “Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not understand your wonders.”\[87\]

Conclusions

This should suffice, my Jewish friend, if you are possessed of intelligence and\[88\] desire to obtain what is good for your soul. Healing has come to you; and it would have come to you sooner if you had accepted it from the teachers of Christianity who spoke through the Holy Spirit and made clear everything about Christ, using both reason and scripture together. The arguments I have presented above are a compelling confirmation of

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83. Isa 53:2-7. 84. Reading yaqun ya’nu bi-ha for takun ta’nî, with S. 85. Dt 29:2-4. 86. Reading yaqun ya’nu bi-ha for takun ta’nî, with S. 87. Ps 106:7. 88. Reading wa for ate, with S.