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Tatian, His Works, and His Theology

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“Nobody likes Tatian.” So one scholar’s opening line on the second century Christian apologist goes.¹ This is a fairly accurate summary of how the Early Church Fathers and those throughout history deem the man Tatian. In fact, while some historians today are more hesitant to do so, Reformation scholars such as Calvin² as well as modern Reformed theologians like F.F. Bruce³ follow suit in labeling or assuming Tatian to be a heretic with passing reference:

Eusebius, citing Irenaeus, says that Tatian introduced the “blasphemy” of Encratism. Jerome labels him the “patriarch of the Encratites”; Epiphanius concurs. Even those who more recently have worked intimately enough with Tatian to edit his work offer judgments like this: “[T]he harshness and obscurity of his style seem to mirror his arrogant and intransigent personality.” He is often characterized as Justin Martyr’s slightly crazed student: vicious and brutal, excessive in his rhetoric.⁴

This is striking, considering Tatian’s *Ad Graecos* (To the Greeks), and *Diatessaron*—the only surviving early church Gospel harmony, although no longer extant as a whole in its original language—are generally appreciated by the same critics. The *Diatessaron* alone had an enormous reach and influence on the spread of the Eastern Church. In fact, Tatian is considered to be mainly responsible for the development of the Eastern Church by returning in the latter part of his life essentially as a missionary to his native Assyria. Some modern books on Early Church History make no heretical reference to Tatian—if they mention him at all, while grouping him with Justin Martyr and the other Greek apologists. Often, his tone in *To the Greeks* is painted as almost un-Christian by modern scholars, although it seems at least no stronger than the Reformers’ rhetorical style.

So what to make of Tatian the man? Helpful or heretical? Or both? This paper aims to explore these questions about a relatively obscure early church father by way of a brief survey of his life, summary analysis of his two major works that have survived antiquity, and a consideration of his doctrine with an interplay of his writings and heretical accusations toward him by most Christian historians juxtaposed with attempts by others to caution against such judgments, or even vindicate him.

¹ Laura Nasrallah, “Mapping the World: Justin, Tatian, Lucian, and the Second Sophistic,” *Harvard Theological Review* 98 no 3 (July 2005) : 298.

² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960) : 1250.

³ F. F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame: The Rise and Progress of Christianity from its First Beginnings to the Conversion of the English*, (Exeter, Devon, England: The Paternoster Press, 1958) : 286.

⁴ Nasrallah, 298-299.

Tatian the Man

In his concluding remarks of *To the Greeks*, Tatian tells us he was born in Assyria⁵, the frontier of Parthia⁶ “on the extreme eastern verge of the Roman Empire, in the province of Mesopotamia.”⁷ He came into the world through pagan parents probably about AD 120.⁸ Robert Wilson Evans suggests that Tatian likely mused over the grand ruins of Babylon and Nineveh in his homeland, which might have inspired his fervor to explore life’s meaning through the sophisticated Grecian culture that had long engulfed his country.⁹ His spiritual journey, driven by a marvel for Greek philosophy, history, and literature, led him to Rome by about 150.¹⁰ But he grew disenchanted with Greco-Roman life during his expedition through a sobering witness of pagan immorality and evil worship practices: “glaring inconsistencies forced themselves upon him.”¹¹ Although he devoured and mastered Greek literature, philosophy, and history, over time “he found no satisfaction in the bewildering mazes of Greek speculation.”¹²

An encounter with the Greek Septuagint in Rome led to his conversion,¹³ which he shares about in the twenty-ninth chapter of his address *To the Greeks*:

... I happened to meet with certain barbaric writings, too old to be compared with the opinions of the Greeks, and too divine to be compared with their errors, and I was led to put faith in these by the unpretending cast of the language, the inartificial character of the writers, the foreknowledge displayed of future events, the excellent quality of the precepts, and the declaration of the government of the universe as centred in one being.¹⁴

A few observations of his testimony above are worth considering as we interact with what follows. First, notice some of the apologetic aspects that could be categorized as presuppositional in modern terms. Unlike his mentor Justin Martyr, he held the Scriptures to be antithetical to Greek philosophy, not sharing ultimately in truth. In fact, divine revelation is incomparable to Greek error. Rather than looking for common ground between “barbaric” Christianity and a continually refining Grecian worldview, he exposed the contradictory

⁵ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers : translations of the writings of the fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1780): 45.

⁶ Rob Bradshaw, “Tatian (110-180 AD): Synopsis” (17 September 2008), <http://www.earlychurch.org.uk/tatian.php>.

⁷ Robert Wilson Evans, *Biography of the Early Church*, (London: J.G. & F. Rivington, 1837) : 162.

⁸ William L. Petersen, *Tatian’s Diatessaron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History of Scholarship* Leiden, (The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1994) : 72.

⁹ Evans, 163.

¹⁰ Petersen, 72.

¹¹ Evans, 167.

¹² Roberts and Donaldson, 3.

¹³ Petersen, 72.

¹⁴ Roberts and Donaldson, 34.

epistemologies. He was also moved to faith in the simple, plain, straight-forward nature of God's self-revelation that was "beneath" the sophisticated vagueness of speculative Greek elitism. This reaction to the Scriptures is an interesting contrast to Augustine's later epiphany that what he held to be discouragingly primitive could be rescued for him when cast in an allegorical hermeneutic.¹⁵ At least during his conversion, Tatian embraced a simple man's religion free of confusion and unified in the one true God communicating His one consistent purpose without pretension or cloaked meaning. And he was not one who rejected what he was not inclined to or couldn't understand in Greek philosophy. Rather, what he was remarkably experienced and able in, as *To the Greeks* profoundly demonstrates, he later found in want:

These things which I have thus set before you [an expert indictment of the Greek gods and their imperfections] I have not learned at second hand. I have visited many lands; I have followed rhetoric, like yourselves; I have fallen in with many arts and inventions; and finally, when sojourning in the city of the Romans, I inspected the multiplicity of statues brought thither by you: for I do not attempt, as is the custom with many, to strengthen my own views by the opinions of others, but I wish to give you a distinct account of what I myself have seen and felt. So, bidding farewell to the arrogance of Romans and the idle talk of Athenians, and all their ill-connected opinions, I embraced our barbaric philosophy [Christianity].¹⁶

Following his conversion, Tatian took up study in Rome under Justin Martyr's school of Christian philosophy between 150 and 165 AD.¹⁷ "Both had been ardent students in Greek literature—both had earnestly sought the truth, and had conceived a disgust at the vanity of their former pursuits."¹⁸ Petersen observes that Justin and Tatian's "conversions were essentially intellectual exercises brought about by encounters with the Scripture, not charismatic experiences."¹⁹

Tatian was Justin Martyr's "most famous disciple"²⁰ and later began his own school around AD 150.²¹ He "succeeded his master both in conducting instruction, and in defending

¹⁵ Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 1, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1984) : 210, 211.

¹⁶ Roberts and Donaldson, *Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, American Reprint, vol. 2., *Fathers of the Second Century*, (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885) : 79, 80.

¹⁷ Bradshaw.

¹⁸ Evans, 168.

¹⁹ Petersen, 69.

²⁰ González, 54.

²¹ Petersen, 71.

the faith. He began with eminent success in both.”²² McGehee describes how Tatian’s center of learning would likely have operated:

If Tatian followed the normal procedure in managing his “school,” his students would have been expected to pay for their course of study ... Tatian almost certainly would have earned his living from the fees his students paid. His means of support, therefore, would have allowed bishops and others within a developing hierarchy little leverage over his instruction. In fact, there is no definite implication of outside influence being exerted on Tatian’s activities as a teacher. Teachers like Tatian could have been very independent and may, at times, have been difficult for other authorities to work with.²³

Tatian’s most famous and surviving writings are his apology, *To the Greeks*, and his *Diatessaron*—the latter no longer fully extant in its original language but available to study through large parts of manuscripts in myriad languages. Petersen cites other works (not a complete list) credited to Tatian by Early Church Fathers as *Problems*, *On Animals*, *On Perfection According to the Savior*, and *To Those Who Have Propounded Ideas About God*.²⁴

Following the martyrdom of Justin, Bradshaw says that “Tatian’s teaching gradually became more and more ascetic, until he broke with the Church in about 172 and returned to Mesopotamia”²⁵ “According to Irenaeus, it was after the death of Justin ... that Tatian lapsed into heresy.”²⁶ A major impetus for the allegations of heresy stems from Tatian’s connection with the Encratites, which F.F. Bruce describes as the “continent people” and “a vegetarian sect”.²⁷ Roberts and Donaldson explain that Encratites means “The self-controlled” or “The masters of themselves”, and that the sect was supposed to have begun about AD 160.²⁸ It is important to heed Petersen’s disclaimer that Tatian was never regarded as a heretic by the Eastern churches, and that “Epiphanius reports Tatian’s teaching had great influence in regions of Antioch of Daphne (Syria, on the Orontes), Cilicia, and Pisidia.”²⁹ More on whether Tatian was a heretic will be addressed in the section at the end of this paper that deals with his theology. Tatian died somewhere between 180 and 190 AD.³⁰

²² Evans, 170.

²³ Michael McGehee, “Why Tatian Never ‘Apologized’ To The Greeks,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1 (2 Summer 1993) : 156.

²⁴ Petersen, 67.

²⁵ Bradshaw.

²⁶ Petersen, 70.

²⁷ Bruce, 286.

²⁸ Roberts and Donaldson, Original, 3.

²⁹ Petersen, 71.

³⁰ Ibid, 72.

Tatian's Works

Both of Tatian's surviving works, the *Diatessaron* Gospel harmony and his address *To the Greeks*, are remarkable in their purpose, scope, and reach at such a significant period of the history of the Church—both warrant our attention.

Diatessaron

Tatian's *Diatessaron* was an effort to put the four Gospels now canonized into one unified witness: "... Tatian wove his sources into a single continuous account. He excised duplications, removed or reconciled contradictions, and harmonized parallel passages."³¹

Baarda dates it at about AD 175;³² Justin Martyr's earlier harmony was probably the skeleton for it.³³ The *Diatessaron* is an extremely significant Early Church document that predates all New Testament manuscripts save a tiny fragment of John referred to as P⁵².³⁴ The work in the original text is no longer extant, but it "left its imprint on many documents ... More than 170 specific MSS or works are known to contain Diatessaron readings and sequences of harmonization."³⁵ William J. Petersen argues that internal evidence demonstrates an original Syrian composition, which is supported by the fact that there is no reference to it in the West until 546.³⁶ He also thinks it was likely written while Tatian returned to his homeland after being pushed out of Rome.³⁷

Importance:

Petersen says that the *Diatessaron* is "one of the most important and fascinating chapters in the study of Early Christianity and the New Testament ..."³⁸ and that "scholars accorded Tatian's harmony of the Gospels pride of place because it is considered the oldest of the versions [of the New Testament]. As such, the Diatessaron is of fundamental importance for the study of

³¹ Ibid, xiv.

³² Tjitze Baarda, *Essays on the Diatessaron*, (Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1994), 53.

³³ Petersen, 430.

³⁴ William L. Petersen, "The Diatessaron of Tatian," In *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis*, Ed., Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) : 77.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron*, 428-429.

³⁷ Ibid, 430.

³⁸ Ibid, xiv.

the text of the Gospels and for the study of the evolution of the gospel tradition.”³⁹ Baarda concurs: “It seems to have been the first successful Gospel Harmony in the early centuries of Christianity, not only because the idea of one Gospel was attractive to many, but also because it was a quite intelligent composition.”⁴⁰ Beside the fact that Tatian’s Gospel “harmony” is one of the oldest of its kind, it also spread over a tremendous geographical expanse through a broad range of cultures and languages: “It has been argued that the Diatessaron was the first Gospel text in Latin, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, and Arabic. Its appearance in Old High German and Middle Dutch lags the translation of the separate Gospels by only a few decades; Diatessaron readings appear in some of the oldest Old Norse and Old Icelandic homily books as well.”⁴¹ And the fact that pieces of it have even been found in Britain and China witnesses to its once wide ranging popularity.⁴² F.F. Bruce states, “Tatian’s Diatessaron ... almost displaced the ‘separate Gospels’ altogether. When a revision of these ‘separate Gospels’ and of most of the other New Testament books ... was introduced among the Syriac churches by Episcopal authority early in the fifth century, it was not without a struggle that they were induced to give up the use of the Diatessaron.”⁴³

No wonder Petersen concludes his enormous work on Tatian’s harmonization of the Gospels and its impact on the Church with a sober respect for such study: “No scholar will live long enough to master all of the languages necessary for studying the Diatessaron.”⁴⁴ One other thing ought not to be overlooked about the *Diatessaron*: “The novelty of Tatian’s composition is that he also integrated the Gospel of John, whose canonical status was in those days still in dispute in Rome.”⁴⁵

This helps us understand how early the book of John was beginning to be received by the Early Church along with the Synoptic gospels, especially considering Tatian’s concern was to demonstrate a unified witness against the plurality of error he so detested within Greek mythology (which we will discuss further below). Roberts and Donaldson note the importance

³⁹ Petersen, “The Diatessaron of Tatian,” 77.

⁴⁰ Baarda, 5.

⁴¹ Petersen, 77.

⁴² Petersen, *Tatian’s Diatessaron*, xiii.

⁴³ Bruce, 286.

⁴⁴ Petersen, 367.

⁴⁵ Baarda, 22.

of the title of Tatian's union of the gospels, "harmony", for "showing that the four Gospels, and these only, were deemed authoritative about the middle of the second century."⁴⁶

In summary, the fact that Tatian's *Diatessaron* is available to us today, albeit incomplete, through such varied sources over an expanse of nations and generations is impressive: "It is striking that – with two exceptions – all of the traditions and harmonies ... quickly become extinct or obscured. The two exceptions are the canonical gospels and the *Diatessaron*. Tatian's harmony remained a living tradition well into the second millennium; indeed, copies are still being executed today."⁴⁷

Purpose:

According to Petersen, Tatian "saw himself principally as an *historian* and his *Diatessaron* as a 'scientific' work, the definitive account of Jesus' life."⁴⁸ It is important to remember that Tatian was a philosopher and trained Greek apologist during a time in the Early Church that was still developing a formal identity in the face of first, dismissal, then, indignation, and later, increasing persecution. And, as will be demonstrated in an analysis of his apology later on, a harmonious testimony was a chief concern for him. A significant feature of his address, *To the Greeks*, is his criticizing of contradictory teachings in Greek mythology about the gods. This is an important frame of mind that surely was behind Tatian's intent and framing of his *Diatessaron*:

It seems to me ... that Tatian's real motive for producing his Harmony was his belief that disagreement between two accounts of the same historical incident renders it impossible for one to believe in the truth of those accounts. Knowing, as he must have known, that there are differences between the Gospel accounts of the life of Christ, especially in the Synoptics, and being a devoted Christian, loyal to the Holy Scriptures, he may have deliberately set about to preserve the integrity of the Gospels by eliminating what he conceived to be discrepancies in the narrative.⁴⁹

The word used for Tatian's work, "Diatessaron", essentially means "harmony". Evans describes it as "a musical term denoting the 4th, which held the same fundamental position in Greek music that the 3rd does in modern."⁵⁰ This seems more or less to be the consensus among

⁴⁶ Roberts and Donaldson, 4.

⁴⁷ Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron*, 34.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 76.

⁴⁹ Gerald F. Hawthorne, "Tatian and His Discourse to the Greeks," *Harvard Theological Review* 57 (3 July 1964) : 164.

⁵⁰ Evans, 179.

historians, but Petersen provides a disclaimer: “It is incontestable that the terms *diatessaron* and *diapente* were used in music; the theory that these musical ideas inspired the titles handed down to us must, however, remain a conjecture, for no ancient author explains the title in terms of musical theory.”⁵¹ Still, considering Tatian’s obviously strong concern in his apology for harmony, with disharmony being a sure proof of error, it seems very likely that his intent with the title was a contemporary implication that perhaps he and the ancients deemed to be understood and in need of no explanation.

Petersen nonetheless grants that “There is no question but that unity was an important concept for Tatian ... other harmonies existed before his ... The historical circumstances in which Tatian found himself invited the creation of harmonies: they were useful in confounding pagan critics.”⁵² In fact, a defense of the Christian faith before the pressure of elite unbelievers was forefront in Tatian’s thinking while composing his *Diatessaron*:

If – as Tatian has it in his apology against the Greeks – disharmony implies a dubious character of infidelity, falsity and untruth, one can easily imagine the problem with which he saw himself confronted. In my opinion – this is the most important motive which urged him to compose a gospel harmony – it is a philosophical or theological interest which is at the base of his enterprise ... [the *Diatessaron*] served an apologetic purpose.⁵³

In fact, Tatian appeals to the disunity of the Greek philosophers as a witness to their error in *To the Greeks*: “Wherefore, be not led away by the solemn assemblies of philosophers who are no philosophers, who dogmatize one against the other, though each one vents but the crude fancies of the moment. They have, moreover, many collisions among themselves; each one hates the other; they indulge in conflicting opinions ...”⁵⁴ Harmony is undoubtedly his chief concern in his apology, saying, “You who receive from your predecessors doctrines which clash with one another, you the inharmonious, are fighting against the harmonious.”⁵⁵

To the Greeks

Robert M. Grant provides us with a sobering sense of the time leading into Tatian’s apology: “In the year 177, perhaps in July or August, the Christian world was shaken by the news of the tortures and executions of a group of martyrs at Vienne and Lyons in Gaul. It is not

⁵¹ Petersen, *Tatian’s Diatessaron*, 51.

⁵² *Ibid*, 74-75.

⁵³ Baarda, 22, 44.

⁵⁴ Roberts and Donaldson, 8.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 30.

unlikely that earlier in the year, on February 23, there had been several martyrdoms at Smyrna. This crisis provoked a small outburst of literary apologetic.”⁵⁶ Like any apology, there was history behind Tatian’s address *To the Greeks* and the tone and method which he chose. We should remember that Justin his mentor, who also abandoned Greek philosophy in favor of a worldview disdained as barbaric by what were once his elite colleagues, earned his surname, Martyr. And the persecution also had professional aspects:

The martyrdoms in Gaul show that relations with Christians had worsened by 177 or 178, probable dates for the *Oration* of Tatian. This work can best be dated from its criticism of philosophers who “receive 600 aurei annually from the Roman emperor” just for “letting their beards grow long” (c.19). Presumably Tatian had in view the autumn of 176 at Athens when Marcus Aurelius established four (or eight) chairs of philosophy and one of rhetoric, each with a stipend of 10,000 drachmae (= 400 aurei) ... The event was important, especially for the “Greeks” whom Tatian was addressing and for rhetoricians like Tatian himself. He therefore probably wrote not long after the end of 176 ... “Tatian probably wrote, moreover, after the corpses of the Gallican martyrs had been “burned and reduced to ashes” and “swept down into the river Rhone... so that not even a trace of them might remain upon earth.”⁵⁷

Darryl W. Palmer concurs that “Although the apology is not addressed to the political authorities, the opening sentence of the body of the writing shows that the political and forensic dimension is certainly on the author’s mind.”⁵⁸ This raises another distinction of Tatian’s work: he writes to the Greeks as a whole and against their whole worldview, rather than addressing a specific political ruler seeking legitimacy as Justin Martyr did with his apologies and as has been the standard approach throughout much of Church History. He attacks the entire Greek system as false and inferior. And it is his aggressive and pejorative approach that many historians find offensive.

Tone and its critics:

Besides accusations of heresy that will be addressed later, the other most common cause for chagrin toward Tatian is his rhetoric:

The vituperative tone of *Pros Hellenas* is not at all what one would expect in an apology whose function was to rebut false charges made against the Christians. Instead, Tatian seems to go out of his way to insult the religions, philosophies, and morality of the

⁵⁶ Robert M. Grant, “The Date of Tatian’s Oration,” *Harvard Theological Review* 46 (2 April 1953) : 99.

⁵⁷ Robert M. Grant, “Five Apologists and Marcus Aurelius,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 42 (1 March 1988) : 10-11.

⁵⁸ Darryl W. Palmer, “Atheism, Apologetic, and Negative Theology in the Greek Apologists of the Second Century,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 37 (3 September 1983) : 243.

Greco-Roman world. His condemnations and ridicule are not qualified by the polite (or valid) stipulations one would expect in a plea for Christians to receive legal toleration.⁵⁹

But what seems to go unaccounted for by some, besides the fact that we see Scripture denounce all other religions—and vehemently so, is Tatian’s historical context and that of the Church in the middle and late second century. It was a time of growing socio-religious and political persecution to which *To the Greeks* seems to address:

... [Tatian] refers to the resurrection which will take place even though flesh is destroyed by fire, consumed in rivers or seas, or torn apart by wild beasts. The bodies of the martyrs of Vienne and Lyons, some of whom were torn by wild animals, were burned and the ashes were swept into the river Rhone, which flows into the sea. The provocation of persecution explains the tone of Tatian’s treatise, in which he vehemently attacks everything Greek or Roman.⁶⁰

Further, personal persecution both politically and professionally probably became the impetus for Tatian’s apology: “A specific occasion for the *Ad Graecos* was given by the hostility of the Cynic “philosopher” Crescens in Rome, who claimed to despise death but apparently accused both Justin and Tatian of being Christians in order to get them executed.”⁶¹ Tatian clearly has such circumstances in mind, asking “For what reason, men of Greece, do you wish to bring the civil powers, as in a pugilistic encounter, into collision with us? ... why am I to be abhorred as a vile miscreant?”⁶²

Another aspect that should be considered about his time is the nature of Tatian’s profession and that of the Greeks that he addressed. It may not have seemed so out of place to his original audience as it often comes across to historians:

The second century was perhaps a peak in the production and exhibition of an elite, antiquarian Greek identity that was (variously) an act of resistance towards the Roman Empire and an item of social capital to be acquired by provincial and Roman elites alike ... The second sophistic was ... an educational and political trend in which Justin, Tatian, and Lucian participated, which spawned satire and debate over culture or education (*paideia*), cultic practices, and ethnic identity under Rome.⁶³

Nonetheless, the reaction of most historians to the nature of Tatian’s address is that of disdain: “The tone of the Discourse is violently hostile, harshly dogmatic.”⁶⁴ A full reading of

⁵⁹ McGehee, 146.

⁶⁰ Grant, “The Date of Tatian’s Oration,” 100.

⁶¹ Grant, “Five Apologists and Marcus Aurelius,” *Vigiliae Christianae* : 11.

⁶² Roberts and Donaldson, 8.

⁶³ Nasrallah, 286-287.

⁶⁴ Hawthorne, 162.

Tatian's apology itself while considering his heightened situation should demonstrate that this kind of caricature is an exaggeration, especially when considering his frequent appeals in the text to convert to his new philosophy and refrain from continuing to accuse him and the "barbarians". In addition, Nasrallah cautions that "This reading of Tatian does serious injustice to the passion and humor of *To the Greeks*. Tatian's over-the-top critique of the Greeks is not the product of embarrassingly angry Christian apologetic, but draws upon satirical conventions of the second sophistic."⁶⁵

Purpose:

Tatian's address *To the Greeks* is normally referred to as an apology, especially as he is grouped with Justin and the other apologists of his time in Church History. But some argue it is more of a farewell address in abandoning what he once embraced on his way out of Rome, and others, simply call it a harangue: "It looks like a *logos syntakitos* or 'farewell discourse' to the culture of Greece and Rome ... The rhetorician Menander describes such 'leavetaking' addresses. 'The orator should acknowledge his gratitude to the city from which he is returning, and praise it on whatever grounds the occasion permits' ... Tatian, however, is producing an exercise in vituperation (*psogos*), not an encomium."⁶⁶

In his article, "Why Tatian Never Apologized," McGehee seems to best categorize Tatian's literary genre:

Tatian's "To the Greeks" (*Pros Hellenas*) has usually been classified as either an apology or a harangue. Yet neither of these genres can explain the work's vituperative style, denigration of Tatian's rivals, frequent digressions, and intent. If we classify the work as a *protrepticus*, however, we can see it as an integrated whole which was given with the intent of attracting people to study the "barbarian philosophy" with Tatian. The use of this genre implies that Tatian understood Christianity to be a philosophy and himself to be an independent teacher who could work without ecclesiastical oversight.⁶⁷

The *protrepticus* does appear to be the best understanding of Tatian's tone and method in *To the Greeks*. While he directly attacks the very core of Greekness and defends the incomparable truth of Christianity, his aim is clearly not simply to defeat his opposition; he wants to convert them to his worldview and his school of philosophy:

⁶⁵ Nasrallah, 299.

⁶⁶ Grant, "Five Apologists," 12.

⁶⁷ McGehee, 143

The *protrepticus* was intended to attract students to philosophical instruction ... A brief discussion of protreptic discourse can be found in Epictetus 2.23.33-38. Epictetus sees the *protrepticus* as a type of speech parallel to display (*epideiktikos*), teaching (*didaskalikos*) and refutation (*elegtikos*) speeches, whose function is to demonstrate to the individual, as well as to the crowd, the warring inconsistency in which they are floundering about, and how they are paying attention to anything rather than what they truly want. For they want the things that lead to happiness, but they are looking for them in the wrong place.⁶⁸

Nasrallah apparently concurs by emphasizing that Tatian's writing is "a piece of humor, a satire, a joke of sorts. Because it is hard to hear the sound of play in cultures different from our own, Tatian's wicked humor has gone unrecognized. But he does signal that what he said may or should be taken as a joke ..."⁶⁹ Admittedly, a first reading of *To the Greeks* can miss this aspect of Tatian's style and situation. It seems fairly curt, but revisiting it with such an understanding brings out its nuances, especially when considering the work as a whole with the refrains of calls to end mockery and begin believing. McGehee agrees that "his audience would have seen his sarcasm and abuse as following the standard technique of highlighting the various weaknesses of one's opponents while presenting one's own superior case ... abuse was a standard technique in protreptic discourse."⁷⁰ It would behoove those who revile Tatian's critical tone to better consider his profession, his audience, and his purpose: "In *To the Greeks*, vocabulary of jokes and laughter is used again and again; we know from Lucian that irony, joking, and satire can reveal the core of a bitter truth. In Tatian's work, the joke is on the Greeks, since he mocks their famed philosophers and customs through quick, devastating character sketches and illustrations."⁷¹

Ultimately, Tatian offers a personal testimony with the goal of demonstrating to the Greeks that they should follow him in abandoning their vain musings and turning to the only true religion; and he does so in the medium to which they would relate (finding a common point of contact): "What scholars do not generally observe is the carefully crafted autobiographical context of this conversion, which plays upon two themes especially relevant to the second sophistic ... : first, travel and education, or *paideia*, and second, education and language."⁷²

⁶⁸ Ibid, 144-145.

⁶⁹ Nasrallah, 300.

⁷⁰ McGehee, 146, 149.

⁷¹ Nasrallah, 300.

⁷² Ibid, 302.

Again and again Tatian explicitly demonstrates his purposes: first, to vindicate himself and his religion, second, to seek an appeasement of accusations and reviling, and third, to elicit conversion. There are at least fourteen direct statements to one or all of these concerns in *To the Greeks*. In his very opening he writes, “Be not, O Greeks, so very hostilely disposed toward the Barbarians [Christians], nor look with ill will on their opinions.”⁷³ He exhorts them to “Reject ... these absurdities and do not become transgressors by hating us unjustly.”⁷⁴ He proclaims, “Do not abhor us who have made this attainment, but, repudiating the demons, follow the one God.”⁷⁵ And he closes with resolve and an interest in dialogue: “Henceforward, knowing who God is and what is His work, I present myself to you prepared for examination concerning my doctrines, while I adhere immovably to that mode of life which is according to God.”⁷⁶

Other Aspects:

At the risk of making an anachronistic comment, one observation of Tatian’s apology that could be made is that it might be said to resemble what we today understand as presuppositional in terms of his method. He places the world views of Christianity and Greek philosophy in utter contradiction: “No educated Christian of this time period has more consistently separated from paganism ...”⁷⁷ Lacking explicit exegesis, it also is completely philosophical: “... he is advertising the fact, both by the form of *Pros Hellenas* and by its content, that he is available as a teacher of the Christian faith ... the purpose of the speech appears to be an encouragement to accept the barbarian philosophy and to learn of it through the instruction of Tatian.”⁷⁸

One unusual but recurring label Tatian applies to the very religion he means to defend and to which he wishes to win over the Greeks is “barbarians”, a pejorative term to be sure; it was one of the regular criticisms toward early Christians. Rather than posture defensively against it, he employs the term throughout to further push the simple and true antithetical nature of Christianity over against feigned Greek superiority: “Tatian’s use of the phrase “barbarian philosophy” would have been understood as a reference to his own position ... [his] listeners

⁷³ Roberts and Donaldson, 5.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 15.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 25.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 45.

⁷⁷ Jay Rogers, “Tatian’s Address to the Greeks,” (17 September 2008), <http://forerunner.com/churchfathers>.

⁷⁸ McGehee, 152.

would have understood Christianity, therefore, to be a rival to other Greco-Roman philosophies and not merely as an alternative to the traditional cults.”⁷⁹

An example of Tatian’s apology being more than simply a defense of the faith is how he employs one method of the classical arguments to demonstrate the absurdity of Greek mythology and philosophy. For instance, he writes, “If you speak of the origin of the gods, you also declare them to be mortal.”⁸⁰ He also demonstrates a broad knowledge of cultures and nations, probably in part due to his travels. In his opening, a component of his denunciation of the arrogance of the Greeks is the fact that they are unoriginal: “For which of your institutions has not been derived from the Barbarians [here not restricted to his frequent term for Christians]? ... To the Babylonians you owe astronomy; to the Persians, magic; to the Egyptians, geometry; to the Phoenicians, instruction by alphabetic writing. Cease, then, to miscall these imitations inventions of your own.”⁸¹ Much of his work lists in great detail his knowledge of Greek philosophy and history so as to renounce their obvious foolishness. By way of historical survey, he categorically dismisses by name the “vices and errors” of Plato, Aristotle, Heraclitus, Zeno, Miletus, Socrates, and Pythagoras.⁸² He shows a remarkable knowledge of world history, kings, and ancient testimonies to Moses as proving he clearly is the oldest and most credible source of truth.⁸³ And as touched upon earlier, he demonstrates a “presuppositional” method by contrasting worldviews and denouncing Greek thought as having no value: “And are not the demons themselves, with Zeus at their head, subjected to Fate [he argues against such a concept] being overpowered by the same passions of men?”⁸⁴ Not only are their gods demons, but “ ... such are you also, O Greeks, profuse in words, but with minds strangely warped.”⁸⁵ Tatian implores the Greeks to “Die to the world, repudiating the madness that is in it. Live to God, and by apprehending Him lay aside your old nature.”⁸⁶ He pleads with them to “transfer your own want of reason to the herald of truth”⁸⁷ and “yield to the power of the Logos!”⁸⁸

⁷⁹ Ibid, 154.

⁸⁰ Roberts and Donaldson, 27.

⁸¹ Ibid, 5.

⁸² Ibid, 6, 7.

⁸³ Ibid, 45.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 12.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 19.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 16.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 22.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 24.

One thing that at first appears to be a glaring omission is Tatian's lack of quoting Scripture. It seems a fair expectation that what he was converted by is what he would have appealed to more explicitly in argumentation beyond crediting the Scriptures to his conversion experience:

Although convinced of the Scriptures' extreme value and power to convert even a pagan (himself), yet he makes almost no use of them in his Discourse. One concludes therefore that either his Discourse was never intended to convert—only to build the ego of the Christian by destroying that of the Greek; or else that he felt the average pagan was not sufficiently prepared to make adequate use of biblical citations (he himself not an average pagan).⁸⁹

The latter conclusion seems to be behind Tatian's method. It is a legitimate concern that, while he points to the superiority of divine revelation and has it as his philosophical framework—and the language of Scripture is woven into his witness—he does not quote them as a source of authority to his message. In a sense, he speaks for God, but doesn't exactly let God speak. Why? Probably because of the elite group from which he came that he now tries to reach with what he thinks will impact them: "Since a pagan audience would have been unfamiliar (and probably unimpressed) with Christian texts, he might have considered that there was no advantage in quoting from them."⁹⁰ Remember that the address is literally "To the Greeks" and that what Tatian anticipates would be meaningful to them in style and word choice had to govern his approach. Nasrallah states, "Like other writers of the second sophistic, Tatian meditates upon Greekness. And like his contemporary Lucian, he meditates upon Greekness in part in order to mock it, but he does so while using its tools and *topoi* with great sophistication."⁹¹

Hawthorne concurs that "Tatian ... but borrowed arms from the arsenal of the Greeks to combat the Greeks."⁹² Tatian states this as exactly his strategy within *To the Greeks* itself in Chapter 31: "... by contending against you with your own weapons, I adduce arguments of which you had no suspicion."⁹³ And for his time, regardless of whether one approves, it is quite in character for an early apologist who was converted out of such a system: "Like Lucian, his near-contemporary and fellow Syrian, Tatian performs Greekness—he has a full repertoire of philosophical and cultural references on hand—at the same time that he subverts the

⁸⁹ Hawthorne, 182.

⁹⁰ McGehee, 156.

⁹¹ Nasrallah, 306.

⁹² Hawthorne, 177.

⁹³ Roberts and Donaldson, 35.

contemporary cultural valuation of Greekness and praises barbarian identity.”⁹⁴ Tjitze Baarda , an expert on Tatian and his *Diatessaron*, confirms that “ ... as an apologist he does not stand alone in this respect ... The idea is that an apologist in a polemical work against a pagan audience cannot argue from a source that was not well-known to them.”⁹⁵

A brief letter from St. Gregory Thaumaturgus responding to a request from Tatian may also shed some light on why the apologist only alluded to inspired Writ: “You have directed me, O worthy Tatian, to send you the discourse on the soul, set forth with effective proofs, and you have asked me to do this without using the testimonies of Scripture, although that is for those who wish to think piously, true teaching which is more convincing than any human reasoning.”⁹⁶ While he first lifts up Scripture as most authoritative, yet he agrees to provide philosophical arguments for Tatian’s apologetic use, and seems to be flattered to be asked by Tatian. Notice that St. Gregory states what he knows Tatian himself to believe as a bit of a disclaimer—that the Scriptures trump human reasoning to prove its own doctrine. There is no doubt that in *To the Greeks* that this is so for Tatian; he writes, “... obeying the commands of God, and following the law of the Father of immortality, we reject everything which rests upon human opinion.”⁹⁷ Still, St. Gregory allows that Tatian’s desire to bring down those who will not submit to the Scriptures as an appropriate reason for the strategy:

For you say that you do not seek this for your own benefit, already having been taught to depend on the holy Scripture and traditions and not to confuse your mind with the twists and turns of human arguments. [You seek it] to refute the opinion of the heterodox, who are unwilling to believe the Scriptures, and use their expertise to try to upset ... those who are unused to such arguments.⁹⁸

Again, Tatian’s own words confirm this intention, saying to the Greeks, “... I have been desirous to prove from the things which are esteemed honourable among you, that our institutions are marked by sober-mindedness, but that yours are in close affinity with madness.”⁹⁹

Before we are too quick to judge Tatian for a philosophical argument instead of appealing to Scripture, let us consider Paul’s style and choice words in Athens to the Greeks on Mars Hill in Acts 17:22-31. Frankly, it could be argued that Tatian followed Paul’s model. Paul’s opening

⁹⁴ Nasrallah, 299.

⁹⁵ Baarda, 299.

⁹⁶ Michael Slusser, *St. Gregory Thaumaturgus: Life and Works*, (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998) : 181

⁹⁷ Roberts and Donaldson, 36.

⁹⁸ Slusser, 181.

⁹⁹ Roberts and Donaldson, 36.

remarks accuse the Greeks of being too superstitious (verse 22) and of worshipping in ignorance (verse 23), he says that God made all things and cannot be worshipped in things made by men (verse 24-25, 29), he quotes their own poets (verse 38), and he refers to “that man” rather than explicitly naming Christ while pointing to the final judgment and resurrection. No one would dare question Paul as being unbiblical, and yet Tatian’s *To the Greeks* is remarkably similar to Paul’s address to the Greeks—it is philosophical, it does not quote Scripture, and it uses the Greeks’ own resources to be convincing to them. It also is important to observe that Tatian does have a Biblical framework, just as Paul did. He alludes to Scripture, Hawthorne noting the majority no surprise being to Pauline passages.¹⁰⁰ In addition, he often paraphrases John’s Gospel: “In making frequent use of the Johannine Prologue it would seem that Tatian sincerely desires to base his theological statements on an exegesis of the biblical texts.”¹⁰¹ No less than Paul did on Mars Hill. In fact, he does reference the Scriptures at least twice as his authority for his Christian philosophy: “Why do you hate those who follow the word of God ... we have abandoned you, and no longer concern ourselves with your tenets, but follow the word of God.”¹⁰²

Tatian’s Theology

Before we address the heretical accusations toward Tatian by most historians for some of his unfortunate teachings and belongings, it behooves us to first applaud how much he got right as evidenced in his address *To the Greeks*.

Laudable Doctrines

Doctrine of God

Tatian says that “God alone is to be feared, who is not visible to human eyes” (invisible). His religion recognizes that God “did not begin to be in time: He alone is without beginning, and He Himself is the beginning of all things” (eternal). “God is a Spirit” who is “impalpable”¹⁰³ and

¹⁰⁰ Hawthorne, 185.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Roberts and Donaldson, 31, 32.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 8, 9.

“without a body”.¹⁰⁴ And God is sovereign: “... time remains present as long as the Creator wills it to exist.”¹⁰⁵ As well, “Nothing evil has been created by God ...”¹⁰⁶

Christology

J.N.D. Kelly writes: “Tatian was a disciple of Justin, and like his master spoke of the Logos as existing in the Father as His rationality and then, by an act of His will, being generated. Like Justin, too, he emphasized the Word’s essential unity with the Father, using the same image of light kindled from light.”¹⁰⁷ Reflecting the language of the first chapter of Hebrews and that of his mentor Justin, Tatian taught of Christ the “Logos” that he

Himself also, who was in Him, subsists ... He came into being by participation, not by abscission; for what is cut off is separated from the original substance, but that which comes by participation, making its choice of function, does not render him deficient from who it is taken. For just as from one torch many fires are lighted, but the light of the first torch is not lessened by the kindling of many torches, so the Logos, coming forth from the Logos-power of the Father, has not divested of the Logos-power Him who begat Him.¹⁰⁸

Tatian teaches that the Logos in heaven “emanating from the Father” was “before the creation of men ... the Framer of angles”¹⁰⁹ and “the light of God”.¹¹⁰

Creation

Bradshaw suggests of Tatian that “He was apparently the first Christian writer to declare that God created matter by the power of the Logos ... from this it was only a small step for later Christian thinkers to arrive at the doctrine of creation out of nothing.”¹¹¹ In *To the Greeks*, Tatian says God is “... Himself the Father of both sensible and invisible things.”¹¹²

Doctrine of Revelation

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 30.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 31.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 16.

¹⁰⁷ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines, Revised Edition*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978) : 98.

¹⁰⁸ Roberts and Donaldson, 9-10.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 11.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 18.

¹¹¹ Bradshaw.

¹¹² Roberts and Donaldson, 9.

For Tatian, we know God “... from His creation, and apprehend His invisible power by His works.”¹¹³ And God has specially revealed Himself “through the teaching of the prophets” who “foretold things”.¹¹⁴ As stated earlier, he twice boasts in following the “word of God” against false, man-made religion.

Problems and Accusations Examined

Gnosticism

Jay Rogers says that Tatian “...succumbed to Gnosticism and extreme asceticism in the late second century.”¹¹⁵ Evans notes that Tatian leaves out genealogies of Matthew and Luke and passages that spoke of Jesus as David’s seed according to the flesh from his *Diatessaron*.¹¹⁶ But excluding the genealogies could be due to overlooking the full import of their theology and witness; and, as they have two different foci, may have seemed to him extraneous for his purpose of harmony. Still, Roberts and Donaldson conclude that “His Gnostic views led him to exclude from the continuous narrative of our Lord’s life, given in this work, all those passages which bear upon the incarnation and true humanity of Christ.”¹¹⁷

Peterson notes that Tatian was charged with following Valentinus, and while intimating that his address *To the Greeks* had a heterodox anthropology with Gnostic tendencies and thus that the *Diatessaron* came first, he cautions that “‘formal’ indications of Gnosticism are absent from the *Diatessaron*.”¹¹⁸ Whatever speculations are made of where Tatian ended up after his important writings at the end of his life, it is hard to fathom how he would have strayed from such strong language against things that Gnosticism upholds. His doctrine of the resurrection is incredibly inspiring:

Even though fire destroy all traces of my flesh, the world receives the vaporized matter; and though dispersed through rivers and seas, or torn in pieces by wild beasts, I am laid up in the storehouses of a wealthy Lord. And, although the poor and the godless know not what is stored up, yet God the Sovereign, when He pleases, will restore the substance that is visible to Him alone to its pristine condition.¹¹⁹

¹¹³ Ibid, 9.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 26.

¹¹⁵ Rogers.

¹¹⁶ Evans, 179.

¹¹⁷ Roberts and Donaldson, 4.

¹¹⁸ Peterson, *Tatian’s Diatessaron*, 77.

¹¹⁹ Roberts and Donaldson, 11.

Notice his very hope is in the resurrection, and that his understanding of the resurrection is clearly laid up in a new material body victorious over death in the face of Greek mockery of such a notion that Paul too experienced upon its proclamation. Tatian writes, “... we believe there will be a resurrection of bodies after the consummation of all things; not, as the Stoics affirm ... but a resurrection once for all ... for the purpose of passing judgment upon men.”¹²⁰ Against the Greeks, Tatian emphasizes that “... neither could [the human soul] ever appear without the body, nor does the flesh rise again without the soul ... man is flesh. The bond of the flesh is the soul; that which encloses the soul is the flesh. Such is the nature of man’s constitution; and, if it be like a temple, God is pleased to dwell in it by the spirit ...”¹²¹ Tatian goes out of his way to teach the compatibility of the body with the soul over against a Gnostic antithetical idea of salvation, saying, “One of you asserts that ... the soul alone is endowed with immortality, but I say that the flesh also is endowed with it.”¹²²

In addition, Tatian affirms that “... the whole structure of the world, and the whole creation, has been produced from matter, and the matter itself brought into itself by God ...”¹²³ Hawthorne rightly observes: “Certainly his view of matter as the creation of God, and hence good, seems to set him apart from that heresy of docetic gnosticism which denied to matter any worth.”¹²⁴

Encratism

Considering the above observations on the Gnostic charges against Tatian, Hawthorne qualifies:

Since, therefore, matter is so susceptible to perversion and to becoming an instrument of evil, though in itself it is not an evil, Tatian urges men to repudiate matter and thus nullify the power of demons (ch.16). Obviously it was this that made an encratite of him, but it has been this same forceful motive that has driven men to the monastic life throughout the entire history of the Christian Church. Can it legitimately be labeled heresy when practiced by Tatian?¹²⁵

It is a fair question, although not one many historians are asking. Whether or not it is fair to call it heresy, for most his Encratitic bent “... seems to have introduced some of his peculiar

¹²⁰ Ibid, 10.

¹²¹ Ibid, 20.

¹²² Ibid, 30, 31.

¹²³ Ibid, 16, 17.

¹²⁴ Hawthorne, 174.

¹²⁵ Hawthorne, 174.

notions into the text of the Diatessaron. John the Baptist, for example, was made to turn near-vegetarian, and to live on *milk* and honey instead of *locusts* and honey!”¹²⁶ But Petersen warns us to hold judgment on Tatian, as “... the traditions found in the Diatessaron are neither capricious nor egregious: one cannot assume that Tatian is responsible for all the Diatessaron’s deviations from the text of the canonical gospels, for in some instances he is reliably transmitting a very ancient tradition.”¹²⁷ Contrary to the popular assumptions, “At the most, the variants illuminate only one aspect of Tatian’s personality. His “need” to create a harmony – that is, to reconcile all the loose ends of the various gospel accounts – may reflect another feature of his character. Otherwise, however, a gospel harmony affords little latitude for transmitting information about its composer.”¹²⁸ In addition:

... it is always difficult and often impossible to tell whether a given variant in the Diatessaron springs from Tatian himself, his sources, or the transmission history of the Diatessaron itself. Many scholars have failed to discriminate among these possibilities ... Even in the case of the Encratitic variants, care must be exercised, for there is no assurance that all of the changes – although similar – were executed at the same time, by the same person, for the same reason.¹²⁹

J. E. Ryland links Tatian and Encratism with Montanism as laying “the egg which Tertullian hatched ... for he was rather the disciple of Tatian than of the Phrygians ...”¹³⁰ While Tertullian’s apologetic method certainly matches Tatian’s, such an assertion, if it could be proven true, would raise two questions. First, is Tertullian to be labeled a heretic for turning to Montanism? And, if we are so dependent on him for the development of the doctrine of one person and two natures with Jesus, and the one substance and three persons doctrine of the Trinity which he developed after becoming a Montanist, are we not obliged to credit Tatian in some manner for important aspects of the Nicene faith? This connection to Tatian with Montanism also seems to imply Tatian himself founded Encratism, but this is questionable. Peterson explains that Eusebius was the first to call Tatian the sect’s founder, but earlier Iraneaus calls Tatian a “follower” of Saturninus and Marcion, the latter whom he blames for its origination.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Bruce 286.

¹²⁷ Petersen, *Tatian’s Diatessaron*, 20.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 67.

¹²⁹ Petersen, 370.

¹³⁰ Roberts and Donaldson, American Edition, 62.

¹³¹ Petersen, 79.

Free Will

Quoting Chapter 11 where Tatian is concerned to teach human responsibility and warn against blaming God for evil, Hawthorne concludes: “In other words, free will has destroyed us, free will also will save us! ... True, he sees God as the necessary means by which we repudiate the old generation, but first one must himself make the choice to lay hold of God.”¹³² Tatian’s “free will” language is not something that seems to get a lot of attention from those who study his works, but he does use the phrase; however, perhaps considering the immediate context of the term along with other comments in the work as a whole would preclude such an interpretation of his theology in this regard. He is contrasting free will against the Greek notion of Fate and its logical impact on the doctrine of man and God.¹³³ Tatian says that “the ignorant soul is darkness ...”¹³⁴ and “the divine is easily apprehended by us if the power that makes souls immortal visits us.”¹³⁵ Are these not statements that demonstrate an understanding of total depravity, election, and illumination?

General List of Heretical Accusations and Response

While he never quotes Tatian himself or anyone else in his biographical sketch of the Early Church Father, Evans waxes poetic from beginning to end about his failings: “... Tatian, uninformed, and uncorrected by due insight into his own mind, and rich in a store of learning which he could not manage, became vain, perverse, paradoxical, heretical.”¹³⁶ And he only offers the typical list of alleged problems that Irenaeus provides, whom Petersen cites as the first to link Tatian with heresy and qualifies that “Subsequent reports of the Fathers all depend upon Irenaeus.”¹³⁷

Was Tatian a heretic? Hawthorne summarizes Tatian’s obviously disconcerting beliefs and practices related to the question:

Irenaeus was the first to state that Tatian seceded from the Church. He then proceeded to enumerate his heresies: a) imagining invisible aeons like Valentinus (a Gnostic), b) denouncing marriage as defilement and fornication as did Marcion and Saturninus, and c)

¹³² Hawthorne, 172, 173.

¹³³ Roberts and Donaldson, Original, 14.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 18.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 21.

¹³⁶ Evans, 174.

¹³⁷ Petersen, 76.

denying the salvation of Adam. R.M. Grant points out passages from the Discourse which seem to support the contention of Irenaeus.¹³⁸

He then provides helpful guidelines about how to interpret these accusations in light of historical context and what we don't know:

1) It is quite possible that Irenaeus' catalog of heresies is derived solely from his acquaintance with the Discourse. 2) Subsequent references to Tatian as a heretic among the early Fathers seem to be based on Irenaeus' remarks with very little new evidence for his heresy. 3) Some of the things for which Irenaeus condemned Tatian can hardly be classified as heresy. Encratism, for example, seems to have been a spirit permeating the Christian Church from its inception, even that aspect of encratism that repudiated marriage ... 4) Some orthodox writers of the early Church considered Tatian the opposite of a heretic; they spoke of him as the champion of orthodoxy. Rhodo, for example, Tatian's own pupil, testifies that he combated [the] heresy of Marcion ... Taking all these things into consideration, one should be more tolerant and sympathetic with Tatian, and study him less as a heretic and more as one who made a great contribution to the Church – especially to the Eastern Church.¹³⁹

According to Petersen, “The exact nature of Tatian’s “error” is unclear since the reports of the Fathers are inconsistent, perhaps poorly-informed, and quite probably prejudiced.”¹⁴⁰ One consideration in all of this is that Tatian did not appear to officially be under the authority of the Catholic institution working together “according to the whole”,¹⁴¹ a primary concern against heresy in the Early Church. Bradshaw agrees with Hawthorne’s conclusions about Tatian: “Given these considerations it is less easy to dismiss Tatian out of hand as a heretic. The charge that Tatian was a Gnostic is difficult to substantiate. Tatian clearly declared his belief in Christ’s incarnation, His suffering and bodily resurrection. We can only guess at the real reason for Tatian’s condemnation at the hands of Irenaeus.”¹⁴² Petersen points out the following facts as frequently ignored when considering Tatian’s “heterodoxy”: “(1) there was no set canon in the second century; (2) some gospels which would later be considered heretical were used by ‘orthodox’ members of the Great Church; and (3) some gospels, which were originally regarded as ‘heterodox’ by many in the Great Church later became ‘orthodox’ (e.g., the Gospel of John).”¹⁴³ While we may never know enough to be certain, and we shouldn’t underestimate the

¹³⁸ Hawthorne, 165-167.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Petersen, *Tatian’s Diatessaron*, 70, 71.

¹⁴¹ González, 66.

¹⁴² Bradshaw.

¹⁴³ Petersen, *Tatian’s Diatessaron*, 9.

reviews of Tatian by men who lived during or closer to his time, perhaps his oddities, then, were hastily accused as heresy by Early Church Fathers who became increasingly anxious about mavericks not officially under their control.

“It may turn out that his heresy and the heresies of other second century teachers were more related to the profession of teaching than to anything which was taught.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ McGehee, 158.

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