Against the Heathen Appendix

Arnobius of Sicca (d. c. AD 330)

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We do not deny that all these things which have been brought forward by you in opposition are contained in the writings of the annalists. For we have ourselves also, according to the measure and capacity of our powers, read these same things, and know that they have been alleged; but the whole discussion hinges upon this: whether these are gods who you assert are furious when displeased, and are soothed by games and sacrifices, or are something far different, and should be separated from the notion even of this, and from its power. For who, in the first place, thinks or believes that those are gods who are lost in joyful pleasure at theatrical shows and ballets, at horses running to no purpose; who set out from heaven to behold silly and insipid acting, and grieve that they are injured, and that the honours due to them are withheld if the pantomimist halts for a little, or the player, being wearied, rests a little; who declare that the dancer has displeased them if some guilty fellow passes through the middle of the circus to suffer the penalty and punishment of his deeds? All which things, if they be sifted thoroughly and without any partiality, will be found to be alien not only to the gods, but to any man of refinement, even if he has not been trained to the utmost gravity and self-control.

For, in the first place, who is there who would suppose that those had been, or believe that they are, gods, who have a nature which tends to mischief and fury, and lay these aside again, being moved by a cup of blood and fumigation with incense; who spend days of festivity, and find the liveliest pleasure in theatrical shows and ballets; who set out from heaven to see geldings running in vain, and without any reason, and rejoice that some of them pass the rest, that others are passed, rush on, leaning forward, and, with their heads towards the ground, are overturned on their backs with the chariots to which they are yoked, are dragged along crippled, and limp with broken legs; who declare that the dancer has displeased them if some wicked fellow passes through the middle of the circus to suffer the punishment and penalty of his deeds; who grieve that they are injured, and that the honours due to them are withheld if the pantomimist halts for a little, the player, being wearied, rests a little, that puer matrimus happens to fall, stumbling through some unsteadiness? Now, if all these things are considered thoroughly and without any partiality, they are found to be perfectly alien not only to the character of the gods, but to that of any man of common sense, even although he has not been trained to zealous pursuit of truth by becoming acquainted with what is rational.

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.