matters on which their thinking is at odds with our own. We must not shrink, therefore, from the duty of rebutting the contrary opinions of the ungodly to the best of the ability which God imparts. Then, we shall be able to proclaim the City of God and true godliness and the worship of God, in which alone lies the true promise of eternal blessedness. Here, then, let this book end, so that we may make a new beginning in dealing with these matters.

Book II

1 Of the limit which must be set to necessary refutation

With the weakness of understanding common to all mankind, men everywhere presume to resist the clear evidence of truth. If they were to submit that weakness to wholesome doctrine as to a medicine, it would, with divine aid, be healed by the intercession of faith and godliness. Then, men of right understanding would have no need to confute each and every error of vain opinion by engaging in lengthy discussion. They would need merely to express their understanding in words of sufficient clarity. As it is, however, the souls of the foolish suffer ever more severely, and ever more abominably, from this malady. Thus, even after the debt of truth has been paid as fully as one man can to another, they still defend their own unreasonable beliefs as though they were the very stuff of truth. They do this either because they are too blind to discern what is plain, or because they are entirely obstinate in their resolve not to accept even what they do discern. Often, therefore, there arises a need to speak at great length even of matters which are already clear. It is as though we were presenting them not for the inspection of men who will look at them, but as it were for an examination by touch by men whose eyes are closed. To what conclusion, though, shall we bring our discourse, and what will the limits of our discussion be, if we judge that we must always answer those who answer us? For those who cannot understand what is said to them, or those whose minds are so hardened to contradiction that they will not concur even when they do understand: these answer us and, as is written, 'speak hard things' and are tirelessly vain. If we resolved to refute their contrary arguments as often as they resolve obstinately to contradict our reasoning in whatever way they can, without considering the truth of what they say, you see what an infinite and toilsome and fruitless task we should have. And so, my son Marcellinus, I should not like you, or any of those others for whose benefit this labour of ours has been freely undertaken in the love of Christ, to judge my writings in such a way as always to

1 Psalm 94:4.
require an answer to everything you hear that contradicts what you read in them. Do not become like those foolish women of whom the apostle speaks: "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."  

2 Of those things already set forth in Book 1

In the preceding book, then, since I had resolved to speak of the City of God and, with His help, taken in hand this whole work, it seemed to me that I should first resist those who attribute the wars by which this world is consumed, and especially the recent sack of Rome by the barbarians, to the Christian religion by which they are forbidden to offer abominable sacrifices to demons. What they ought rather to attribute to Christ is the fact that, for His name's sake, and against the laws and customs of war, the barbarians provided the largest churches as places of refuge in which men might take refuge, and in many cases showed such honour, not only to the true servants of Christ, but even to those who pretended to be such out of fear, that they pronounced unlawful for themselves things that would otherwise have been permitted them under the rules of war.

There then arose the question of why these divine blessings came even to the ungodly and ungrateful and, by the same token, why the hardships brought about by warfare afflicted the godly equally with the ungodly. This question has many aspects; for, in all our daily doings, both the munificence of God and the calamities of men often come indiscriminately and without distinction to those who live well and those who live ill. This puzzle often disquiets many; and, since the work which I had undertaken required me to solve it, I dwelt on it at some length, especially to bring consolation to those holy women of godly chastity against whom a deed was perpetrated by the enemy which, even though it did not take away their unshaken chastity, nonetheless brought grief to their modesty. I did this lest they be ashamed of life even though they have no guilt of which to be ashamed.

Next, I spoke briefly against those who, with most impudent boldness, taunt us with the Christians who suffered misfortune, and especially with the violation of bodily purity suffered by the women,

1 2 Tim. 3,7.

3 That history must be consulted in order to show what evils befell the Romans when they still worshipped the gods, before the Christian religion grew up

Remember, however, that, in recalling these things, I am still speaking against those ignorant men from whose lack of knowledge has arisen the vulgar saying, "No rain: blame the Christians." Those among our adversaries who are learned in the liberal arts and who love history are very well aware of these facts. They pretend not to know them, however, in order to arouse the greatest hostility in the untutored mob. For they strive to confirm the vulgar in their belief that the calamities which are bound to afflict the human race from time to time and from place to place occur because of the name of Christian, which is now ranged everywhere, and with such great fame and brilliance, against their gods.

Let them recall with us, therefore, the many and diverse calamities by which the Roman commonwealth was consumed before Christ had come in the flesh, and before His name was revealed to

1 Cf. Augustine, Enarrationes in Psalmos, 80,1; Tertullian, Apol., 40.
the nations with that glory which they envy in vain. And let them defend, if they can, in the face of these things, those gods who are worshipped precisely so that their worshippers shall not suffer such evils. If they have suffered such things in our own time, they contend that these are to be imputed to us. But why, then, did those gods of whom I am about to speak permit such things to befall their worshippers long before the preaching of Christ's name and the prohibition of their sacrifices had offended them?

4 That the worshippers of the gods never received from the gods any wholesome precepts, and in their rites celebrated all manner of disgraceful things

First: why did the gods of Rome fail to ensure that their votaries were set free from their worst practices? The true God judiciously neglected those by whom He was not worshipped; but why did those gods whose worship these most ungrateful men complain is forbidden them not give their worshippers laws to help them to live well? Surely it was only fitting that such care on the part of men for the worship of the gods should have been matched by care on the part of the gods for the conduct of men.

But, you reply, it is of his own free will that someone is wicked. Who denies it? Nevertheless, it behoved the gods who were their protectors not to hide from the people who worshipped them the precepts of a good life, but to instruct them by means of plain commandments. By means of prophets, also, they should have called sinners together and censured them, plainly warning evildoers of punishment and promising rewards to those who live righteously. But what of this kind was ever heard to resound in ready and clear speech in the temples of those gods? I myself, when a young man, used sometimes to come to their sacrilegious spectacles and games, and watch the ecstatic priests and listen to the musicians and enjoy the most disgraceful exhibitions which were enacted in honour of the gods and goddesses: of the virgin Caestus, and of Berecynthia the mother of them all. Before the litter of Berecynthia, on the solemn day of her purification, songs were sung by the most loved players which were not fit for the mother of any Senator, or of any honest man, or, indeed, the mothers even of the players themselves, to hear — let alone the mother of the gods! There is, after all, something in the reverence which human beings feel for their parents that not even indecency itself can eradicat. Accordingly, the players themselves would no doubt have been ashamed to rehearse such wickedness at home before their own mothers as the obscene speeches and actions which they performed in public. Yet they performed them before the mother of the gods, and with a teeming multitude of both sexes watching and listening: a multitude which, even though drawn in from every side by curiosity, should at least have gone forth blushing with outraged modesty.

If these are sacred rites, what are profane ones? If this is purification, what is defilement? And these rites involved festa, as though some feast were being celebrated at which the impure demons were to be delighted by a banquet given in their honour. But who does not see what manner of spirits they are who take delight in such filthy things? Who, save one who does not know that there are any foul spirits at all whose intention it is to deceive us with the name of gods, or one whose life is lived in such a fashion that he hopes to propitiate them, and fears their anger more than that of the true God?

5 Of the obscenities by which the mother of the gods was honoured by her worshippers

In this matter, I should certainly not wish to have the opinion of those who take pleasure in these most disgusting practices rather than seeking to end them. I should prefer the judgment of that Scipio Nasica who was chosen as the best of men by the Senate, and who received into his hands the image of that same demon and bore it into the city. Let him tell us whether he would wish to see his own mother so highly esteemed by the commonwealth as to have such divine honours awarded her as the Greeks and the Romans and other nations have indeed voted to certain mortals whose services they greatly valued, and whom they believed to have been made immortal and admitted to the assembly of the gods. Beyond doubt, he would choose such blessedness for his own mother if it were

4 A festa is a litter or bier used to carry the image of a god in procession; but festa are also (a) the trays on which food is served, and (b) the courses of a banquet.
possible. If, however, we then ask whether he would wish to see the celebration of such vile acts among her divine honours, would he not cry out that he would rather see his mother lying dead and bereft of sense than that she should live as a goddess and hear such things with pleasure? God forbid that a Senator of the Roman people, furnished with such a mind that he forbade the building of a theatre in a city of strong men, should wish to see his mother worshipped as a goddess and propitiated with rites whose very words would disgust a virtuous woman. Nor would lie by any means believe that the modesty of so praiseworthy a woman could be so undermined by deification that her worshippers would seek to honour her with language such that, if, while alive among men, she had heard it hurled at someone as an insult without stopping her ears and withdrawing herself, her family and husband and children would have blushed for her.

This mother of the gods, then, was of such a character that even the worst of men would have been ashamed to have her as his mother. Yet, in order to take possession of the minds of the Romans, she sought out the best of men — not to admonish and help him, but to cheat and deceive, like her of whom it is written that 'a woman will hunt for the precious souls of men.' She did this so that this great-soled man should be so lifted up by her seemingly divine testimony as to esteem himself truly the best of men, and hence not seek that true godliness and religion without which every character, however praiseworthy, falters and falls through pride. But how else than by cunning could that goddess have sought out the best of men, when in her rites she seeks such things as the best of men would shrink from at their feasts?

6 That the gods of the pagans never laid down any doctrine of right living

Those divinities, then, took no care of the lives and morals of the cities and peoples by whom they were worshipped. Because they issued no dire prohibition of their own, they permitted them to become the worst of men. They allowed them to fall prey to those horrible and detestable evils which afflict not fields and vineyards,

4 Prov. 6,26.

7 That the findings of the philosophers are useless because they are without divine authority; for men, naturally inclined to sin, is more influenced by the doings of the gods than by the arguments of men

Will our adversaries perhaps remind us of the schools of the philosophers and their disputations? In the first place, these are not

5 On the revival of such mystery religions during the fourth century, see P. de Labadie, La Réaction paëme (Paris, 1959).
7 ‘Sat.,’ 3,68ff.
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Roman, but Greek; or, even if they are now Roman because Greece herself has been made into a Roman province, they are still not the precepts of gods, but the inventions of men. They are the inventions of men who, to the best of their endeavours, and endowed with the finest intellects, sought to investigate by reason what lies hidden in the order of nature, what should be desired and shunned in the sphere of morals, and what, in the field of logic, is culled by strict deduction and what does and does not follow from given premises. And some of them, insofar as they were aided by God, did indeed make certain great discoveries. When impeded by their own humanity, however, they erred, especially when the divine providence justly resisted their pride, so that it might show by comparison with them that it is through humility that the path of godliness ascends on high. There will, however, by the will of God, the true Lord, be an opportunity for us to investigate and discuss this later.

But the philosophers at least tried to discover the means by which a good life is to be lived and blamelessness attained. Surely, then, it would have been more just to vote divine honours to them rather than to the gods. How much better and more honourable it would have been to have a temple of Plato in which his books were read, rather than the temples in which the Galli were mutilated, the effeminate consecrated and madness slashed themselves: temples in which all the cruel and wicked things customarily found in the rites of the gods — the wickedly cruel or cruelly wicked things — were celebrated! How much more satisfactory a way it would have been of training the young in justice if there had been public recitations of righteous laws given by the gods, rather than empty praise of the laws and institutes of the men of old! For even now, possessed as they are by what Persius calls "the burning poison of lust," the worshippers of such gods would rather contemplate what Jupiter did than what Plato taught or Cato believed. Hence, a disgraceful young man in Terence gazes at a certain picture painted on a wall, "in which was shown how Jupiter sent, as they tell, a golden shower to fall into the lap of Damae." He finds, in so great an authority, a pattern for his own wickedness; and so he boasts that, in what he does, he is imitating a god. "And what a god!" he says. "He who

8 Of the theatrical performances by which the gods are not offended but placated by the portrayal in them of their shameful acts

These, however, are only tales of the poets: they do not derive from the rites of the gods. I should not, in fact, like to say whether those mysteries are more shameful than the theatrical performances. I do, however, say this — and history confutes those who deny it: that it was not merely by their own ignorant submission that the Romans introduced into the rites of their gods those displays in which the fictions of the poets hold sway. Rather, the gods themselves, by imperious commands and, in a certain sense, by extortion, caused these things to be solemnly performed for them and consecrated in their honour. I touched briefly on this point in the first book: it was when pestilence was growing ever more severe that theatrical performances were first instituted at Rome by the authority of the Pontiff. What man is there, then, who will not consider that, in living his own life, he ought rather to follow the examples set in plays performed by divine institution than the prescriptions of laws promulgated by merely human counsel? After all, if the poets who portrayed Jupiter as an adulterer did so falsely, then surely the chaste gods would have vented their anger in vengeance upon human beings for presenting such vile plays: not for neglecting to do so!

Of these theatrical performances, the most tolerable are the comedies and tragedies: that is, the dramas which poets compose for the stage but which, unlike so many others, do at least not make use of obscene language, even though they contain many shameful things. These are even included in what is called an honourable and liberal education, and boys are obliged by their elders to read and study them.

9 Persius, 3.437.
10 EE 3.32.
9 How the ancient Romans regarded that poetic licence to which the Greeks, following the judgment of their gods, chose to allow full expression

How the ancient Romans regarded this matter of theatrical performances is attested in the book written by Cicero called De republica, where Scipio, who is one of the disputants, says: "The shameful acts portrayed in the comedies could never have won approval in the theatres had not the manners of the times already accepted such things." The Greeks of earlier times, however, at least preserved a certain consistency in their sinful opinions. For their law permitted the comedy to say what it liked of anyone it chose, and to do so by name. In the same work, therefore, Africurus says: 'Whom did it not mention? Or, rather, whom did it not vex? Whom has it spared? Granted that it struck at mischievous rabble-rousers and seditious men in the commonwealth — Cleon, Cleophon, Hyperbolus: let us tolerate this', he says,

although it were better for such citizens to be noted by the censor than by the poets. But for Pericles, who had for so many years presided over the city with the greatest authority in peace and war, to be attacked in their verses, and for these to be enacted on the stage: this was no more proper than if our own Plautus or Naevius had chosen to speak ill of Publius and Gnaeus Scipio, or Caecilius of Marcus Cato.

Next, a little further on, he says:

Although our Twelve Tables sanctioned the death penalty only for a very few crimes, among those deemed worthy of such punishment was anyone who brought infamy or disgrace upon another by singing or composing verses against him. Splendid! For how we lead our lives should be a matter for the judgment of magistrates interpreting the law rather than for the ingenuity of poets; nor ought we to have to listen to insults without being allowed by law to reply and to defend ourselves before a tribunal.

I have thought it well to quote these lines from the fourth book of Cicero's De republica. I have done so word for word, although

with some few words omitted or somewhat transposed, to make the meaning clear; and the passage is certainly pertinent to the matter which I am endeavouring to explain as well as I can. Scipio next makes some further remarks, and then concludes the passage by showing that the ancient Romans did not allow any living person to be either praised or vilified on the stage. The Greeks, however, as I have said, though less fastidious, were nonetheless more consistent in what they permitted. For they saw that their gods accepted and enjoyed such insults when directed in theatrical performances not only against men, but even against themselves. They saw also that it made no difference whether the scenes commemorated and enacted in the theatres and by their worshippers represented only the fancies of the poets or really their own wicked deeds. (Would that these things were deemed worthy only of laughter and not of imitation!) And so they concluded that it would have been far too proud a thing to spare the reputation of the city's rulers and citizens when the deities themselves did not wish even their own reputations to be spared.

10 With what injurious art the demons chose to allow their crimes, whether false or genuine, to be made known

As for the argument brought forward in defence of such performances, that what is said of the gods is not true, but false and invented: if you judge according to the godliness of our religion, this only makes matters worse. If you reflect upon the malice of the demons, however, what more acute and skilful means of deception could there be? For when some opprobrium is hurled at a good and beneficent governor of the fatherland, is this not unworthy in proportion as it is remote from the truth and foreign to the true facts of his life? What punishments will suffice, then, when such wicked and manifest injury is done to a god? But the malignant spirits whom the Romans suppose to be gods are willing to have even iniquities which they have not committed attributed to them, so long as they can ensnare the minds of human beings with these beliefs as with nets, and drag them down along with themselves to a predetermined punishment. It may be that such things were, indeed, committed, but by men: by men who, to the joy of those who rejoice
in human error, are held to be gods. For the demons use a thousand
harmful and deceitful arts to put themselves forward as objects of
worship. Or again, even though no such crimes were actually com-
mitted by any men, it may be that those most cunning spirits freely
accept such fictions concerning the divine beings, so that a sufficient
authority may seem to have been handed down to earth from heaven
itself for the perpetration of such vile and disgraceful things.

The Greeks, then, when they perceived themselves to be the
servants of such divine beings, deemed that the poets should in no
way refrain from reviling men on the stage just as often and just as
greatly. They thought in this way either because they desired to
resemble their gods in this respect, or because they feared that, if
they required for themselves a more honourable reputation than
they allowed the gods, and so in this sense placed themselves above
them, they might provoke them to anger.

11 That, among the Greeks, actors were admitted to
public office in the commonwealth in the belief that
those who pleased the gods could hardly be rejected
by men.

To the consistency of the Greeks also belongs the fact that they
esteemed those who acted in such plays worthy to receive no small
honour from the city. For in that same book called De republica10 we
are reminded that Aeschines, an Athenian and a man of outstanding
elegance, who as a young man had acted in tragedies, entered the
public life of the commonwealth. Again, Aristodemus, also a tragic
actor, was often sent by the Athenians as their legate to Philip in
great matters of peace and war. For the Greeks did not deem it
appropriate, when they saw how readily theatrical arts and displays
were accepted by the gods, to attach an ignominious station and
esteem to the very persons who performed them.

The Greeks indeed acted shamefully in this; but they were at
least entirely consistent with the character of their gods. They had
not presumed to exempt the lives of their citizens from being lashed
by the tongues of poets and actors when they perceived that the
lives of the gods themselves were defamed with the consent and

10 De rep., 4.11.13.

12 That the Romans, in refusing to the poets the
liberty in relation to men that they allowed them in
relation to the gods, showed more consideration for
men than for the gods.

But the Romans, as Scipio boasts in that dialogue called De repub-
lica, refused to expose their own lives and reputations to the

pleasure of those same gods. And, in the same way, the men by
whom those theatrical performances were enacted which the Greeks
had found to be so pleasing to the deities whose subjects they
were seemed to them to be by no means worthy of rejection, but,
indeed, to be equally worthy of honour. After all, they honoured
the priests through whom they offered sacrificial victims acceptable
to the gods. What reason could they find for doing this, then, while
at the same time holding actors in contempt? For it was through
such actors that they exhibited to the gods, for their pleasure or
honour, those things which they had been taught to believe that
the gods required of them, and which they would be angry at not
receiving.

Labeo, a man considered to be most learned in such matters,
notes that good and bad deities are distinguished by a difference of
worship. For evil gods, he asserts, are propitiated by slaughter and
mournful supplications, and good ones by happy and joyful service
such as—as he himself says—games, festivals and banquets. With
God’s help, however, we shall consider all this more carefully at a
later stage. For the time being, let us remain with the subject in
hand. Thus, it does not matter whether offerings of all kinds are
made to all the gods without distinction, as if all were good, or
whether, as Labeo thought, a certain discrimination is exercised and
one kind of service is given to the gods of one kind and another to
the others. (Although it is not, in fact, fitting to speak of ‘good’ and
‘bad’ gods; for they are all bad: they are all unclean spirits.) The
Greeks are entirely consistent in honouring both the priests by
whom sacrificial rites are administered and the actors by whom
plays are performed. Otherwise, they might be convicted of doing
injustice to all their gods, if the plays were pleasing to all, or—
which is worse—to those who are deemed good, if the plays were
enjoyed only by them.
slanders and injuries of the poets, even establishing it as a capital offence if anyone should dare to compose such verses. As far as they themselves were concerned, this was an honourable enough arrangement. With respect to the gods, however, it was proud and irreligious. For they knew that the gods not only patiently, but indeed willingly, suffered themselves to be lashed by the slanders and malapologies of the poets. Yet they considered it shameful that they themselves should be insulted in the same ways as the gods. Thus, they protected themselves by law even while including such insults in their own solemn rites.

Why, then, O Scipio, do you praise the fact that Roman poets were denied such licence, lest they inflict any dishonour upon the Roman people, when you see that they spared none of your gods? Does it seem to you that your Senate house should be held in greater esteem than the Capitol, and Rome alone than the whole of heaven? Do you consider that your poets should be prohibited by law from wagging their malicious tongues against your citizens, yet should be able to mock your gods with impunity, with no senator, no censor, no prince or pontiff to impose a prohibition upon them? It was, forsooth, improper if Plautus or Naevius should speak ill of Publius or Gnaeus Scipio, or Caecilius of Marcus Cato, yet proper that your Terence should lure a young man to iniquity by the shameful behaviour of Jupiter, the Best and Greatest!

13 That the Romans should have known that gods who desired to be worshipped with disgraceful plays were unworthy of divine honours

But perhaps, if Scipio were still alive, he would answer me by saying, 'How could we not let these things go unpunished when the gods wished that they should be sacred? For it was they who introduced into the customs of Rome the theatrical performances in which such things are celebrated and recited and enacted. It was they who commanded that such things should be inaugurated and exhibited in their honour.' Why, then, was it not seen all the more clearly that they were not true gods, and not in the least worthy of the divine honours conferred on them by the commonwealth? It would not have been thought in the smallest degree worthy or fitting to worship them had they required plays to be acted in which

Roman citizens were mocked! How, then, I ask, can they be thought worthy of worship, and why are they not deemed detestable spirits, when, in their desire to betray us, they demand that their own crimes be celebrated in their honour?

The Romans, then, driven by poisonous superstition, worshipped gods who, as they saw, wished to have shameful performances consecrated to them. But they were so mindful of their own dignity and modesty that they would in no circumstances grant honours, as the Greeks had, to the actors of such plays. As that same Scipio puts it in the dialogue of Cicero: 'Since they held the whole art of comedy and the theatre in contempt, they resolved that all men of that sort should not only be excluded from the honours accorded to other citizens, but should even be removed from the censors' lists as members of their tribe.' This was, of course, a splendid provision, and one which must be attributed with approval to the prudence of the Romans; although I could wish that they had always pursued and initiated it. Behold, how right it was that any Roman citizen who chose to be an actor was not only excluded from any position of honour, but was not even allowed by the censor to retain a place in his own tribe! O what a spirit animated that city, eager for praise and faithfully Roman! But let someone tell me this: by what consistent principle were theatrical persons excluded from every honour, yet theatrical performances included in the honours paid to the gods? For a long time, Roman virtue knew nothing of those theatrical arts which, even when sought only as a means of gratifying human pleasure, bring with them an insidious decline of human morals. It was the gods who required that such things be exhibited for them. So why is it that the actor through whom the god is worshipped is himself cast aside? How can you dare to cen sure the actor of those wicked performances while adoring the god who demands them?

This, then, is the controversy in which the Greeks and Romans are engaged. The Greeks consider that they are right to honour the men who perform the plays, because they worship the gods who demand them. The Romans, however, do not permit actors to dis honour even their plebeian tribe, much less their Senate house. The whole of this discussion may be resolved into the following

10 De rep., 4.10,10 cf. Tertullian, De spect., 22.
syllogism. As the major premise, the Greeks say that, if such gods are to be worshipped, then certainly such men should be honoured also. The Romans state as the minor premise that such men should by no means be honoured. And the Christians conclude that such gods are therefore by no means to be worshipped.

14. That Plato, who accorded to poets no place in his well-ordered city, was better than those gods who wish to be honoured by theatrical performances.

We must next ask why the poets themselves, the composers of such fables, who are prohibited by the law of the Twelve Tables from damaging the reputation of citizens yet who hurl shameful abuse at the gods, are not considered just as dishonourable as the actors are. By what process of reasoning is it considered right that the actors of these poetical creations and ignoble portrayals of the gods are deemed infamous, yet their composers are honoured? Should we not here rather award the palm to a Greek: to Plato, who, in formulating his account of what a city should be like, prescribed that poets should be banished from the city as enemies of the truth? Truly, he could not bear to see base injury done to the gods, and he refused to have the souls of his citizens tainted and corrupted by falsehood.

Compare, now, the humanity of Plato, who banished poets from the city so that the citizens should not be deceived, with the divinity of those gods who demanded theatrical performances in their own honour. Plato urged the fickle and lascivious Greeks — although his arguments did not persuade them — not to write such things. But from the grave and modest Romans the gods extorted that such plays should indeed be performed. Moreover, they wished to have these things not only performed, but dedicated to themselves, consecrated to themselves, and exhibited to themselves at solemn festivals. To which, then, would it be more honourable for a city to accord divine honours? To Plato, who prohibited these base and shameful things, or to the demons who, because they took delight in deceiving men, made it impossible for him to persuade them? Labeo considered that Plato should be commemorated among the demigods, like Hercules or Romulus; and he puts the demigods

\[\text{Cf. Plato, Rep. 3,398c; 8,568c; 11,605c; 609c.}\]
hibit such evils of the soul and morals by their precepts and laws, or take care to extirpate them once they had sprung up? These gods, indeed, were actually at pains to sow and foster wicked acts, by desiring that their deeds— or deeds thought to be theirs— should be made known to the people through theatrical celebrations. Thus, by their will, the most shameful lust was inflamed among human beings as if by divine authority. Cicero exclaims against this, albeit in vain, when he says, in treating of poets: 'When the poets win the applause and approbation of the people as if it were that of some great and wise master, what darkness falls, what fears burst in, what desires they kindle?'

15 That the Romans established certain of their gods through flattery, not reason

But how can we suppose these false gods to have been chosen by reason rather than flattery? The Romans wish to call Plato a demi-god; yet they do not consider him worthy of even a little shrine, even though he toiled in so many dialogues to prevent the corruption of morals by these vices of the mind which ought to be especially shunned. Their own Romulus, however— even though their more secret doctrine commends him as a demi-god and not as a god— they have esteemed more highly than many gods. They have, indeed, assigned to him a flamen— that is, a kind of priest so eminent in the Roman rites (as their pointed hats testify) that only three of their divine beings have flamen appointed for them: the Flamen Dialis of Jupiter, the Flamen Martialis of Mars, and the Flamen Quirinalis of Romulus. (After his reputed reception into heaven, Romulus was, by the grace of his fellow citizens, named Quirinus.) In being given this honour, Romulus was placed above Neptune and Pluto, the brothers of Jupiter. He was even placed above Saturn himself, the father of Neptune and Pluto and Jupiter. For the Romans assigned to Romulus the same great priesthood that they assigned to Jupiter, and also to Mars, the reputed father of Romulus. Perhaps, indeed, they assigned this honour to Mars precisely because he was the father of Romulus.

16 That if the gods had possessed any regard for justice, the Romans would have received precepts of life from them, rather than having to borrow them from other men

Again, had the Romans been able to receive laws of right living from their gods, they would not have had to borrow the laws of Solon from the Athenians some years after Rome's foundation.24 (They did not, however, hold fast to these as they had received them, but endeavoured to improve and amend them.) Also, although Lycurgus pretended that he had instituted laws for the Spartans by the authority of Apollo, the Romans wisely refused to believe this, and so received nothing from that source. Numa Pompilius, the successor of Romulus in the kingdom, is said to have established certain laws; which were, however, not at all sufficient for the government of the city. He also established many sacred rites, although he is not reported to have received even these from divine beings. As to evils of the soul, then— evils of life, evils of conduct which are of so severe a kind that, as the most learned men affirm, states perish because of them even while their towns still stand: the gods of the Romans took not the least care to safeguard their worshippers against being afflicted by these. On the contrary, as we have argued above, they were in every way at pains to increase them.

17 Of the rape of the Sabine women and the other iniquities which flourished in the city of Rome even in the days when she was most highly esteemed

But perhaps the divine beings saw no need to appoint laws for the Roman people because, as Sallust says, 'justice and goodness prevailed among them as much by nature as by law'.25 I take it, then, that the rape of the Sabine women was an instance of this justice and goodness. For what could be more just or good than to use the false promise of an entertainment to carry young women off by force, without the consent of their parents? Even if the Sabines

24 Liv., 33, 14.
25 Colomb., 4, 1.
of the envy of those who sought to disparage his virtue and the
insolence of the tribunes of the people, criminal proceedings were
brought against him. Perceiving the ingratitude of the city which he
had delivered, and realising that he would most certainly be con-
demned, he went voluntarily into exile and, in his absence, was
fined 10,000 asses. Soon, however, he was again to be the saviour of
his ungrateful country.

But it would be a wearisome thing now to recall all those deeds
of shame and injustice by which that city was convulsed as the
mighty strove to make the common people their subjects and the
common people resisted their attempts to subdue them. Suffice it
to say that the defenders of both parties were actuated rather by
love of victory than by any consideration of equity and goodness.

18 What Sallust’s History reveals of the morals of
the Roman people both when oppressed by fear and
at ease in security

I shall, therefore, confine myself to the testimony of Sallust, whose
words in praise of the Romans furnished our present discussion
with its starting-point. ‘Justice and goodness,’ he says, ‘prevailed
among them as much by nature as by law’. He was speaking of that
period just after the expulsion of the kings, when the city had
become great in an astonishingly short time. Yet the same author
acknowledges in the first book of his History – indeed, in the pre-
face to it – that only a little while after the commonwealth had been
transferred from kings to consuls, the more powerful men began to
act unjustly, as a result of which the common people separated
themselves from the patricians and there were other rifts in the
city. He notes first that, between the second and last Carthaginian wars,
the Romans displayed the highest morals and the greatest harmony.
The cause of this happy state of affairs, however, was not the love of
justice, but the fear of an uncertain peace while Carthage remained
standing. (This also was why Nasica opposed the destruction of
Carthage. He wished to suppress wickedness and to preserve those
outstanding morals by restraining vice through fear.) Sallust then
goes on to say: ‘After the destruction of Carthage, discord, avarice,
ambition and the other evils to which prosperity often gives rise
were greatly increased.’ But he gives us to understand that such
things were wont to arise and increase even before this. For he subjoins this explanation of what he has said:

Injuries were wrought by the more powerful men, so that the common people separated themselves from the patricians and there were other disensions also. But these things had occurred in the state from the beginning, and the rule of equitable and moderate law lasted, after the banishment of the kings, only until the fear of Tarquin and the grievous war with Etruria were ended. 20

Note how, even in that short time after the banishment (that is, the expulsion) of the kings when equitable and moderate law to some extent ruled, Sallust says that the cause was fear. The Romans lived as they did only because they feared the war being waged against them by Tarquin the king in alliance with the Etruscans after his expulsion from the kingdom and the city. And note also what he writes next:

Thereafter, the patricians treated the common people as their slaves, and dealt with their lives and bodies after the fashion of the kings, driving them from their fields, and lording it over those who were destitute of land. The common people, oppressed by these cruelties, and especially by high rates of interest, and at the same time bearing the burden of taxation and military service in the ceaseless wars, withdrew under arms to the Sacred Hill and the Aventine, and so presently secured for themselves the Tribunes of the People and other rights. But the end of discord and strife on both sides was brought about only by the second Punic War. 21

You see, then, what manner of men the Romans were at this time—that is, a short while after the expulsion of the kings. And these were the men of whom Sallust said that 'justice and goodness prevailed among them as much by nature as by law!' But if this was the time when the Roman commonwealth is said to have been at its fairest and best, what are we to say or think now, when we come to the succeeding time: to the time when the city, in the words of the same historian, 'altering little by little from the fairest and best, became the worst and most shameful?' 22 This was, of course, as he records, after the destruction of Carthage. How Sallust briefly recollects and treats of these times can be read in his History, where he shows how the bad morals which came forth from prosperity led at last to civil wars. From that time forth, he says, 'the morals of our forefathers were swept away, not by slow degrees, as formerly, but as if by a torrent. Young persons were so much corrupted by luxury and avarice that it may fairly be said that sons were born who could neither preserve their own property nor allow others to preserve theirs.' 23 Sallust then goes on to speak of the vices of Sulla and of all the other depravity in the commonwealth; and there are other authors, though of inferior eloquence, who concur with him in this.

You see, then, I take it—anyone who will reflect on the matter will, after all, easily perceive it—into what a deplorable state of complete moral collapse the city of Rome had fallen long before the advent of our Heavenly King. For these things took place not only before Christ, present in the flesh, had begun to teach, but even before He was born of the Virgin. Our adversaries do not presume to impute to their own gods the many grievous ills of those times: ills which were more bearable in the earlier days, but which became intolerable and horrible after the destruction of Carthage. They do not do so even though it was the gods themselves who, by their malignant cunning, implanted in the minds of men the beliefs from which all such vices arose. Why, therefore, do they impute the evils of this present age to Christ? For by His most wholesome doctrine Christ forbids the worship of false and deceitful gods; and by His divine authority He detests and condemns the poisonous and shameful lusts of mankind. Indeed, He is by degrees withdrawing His servants from a world decaying and collapsing under those evils, in order to build with them an eternal and most glorious City: a City founded not upon the plaudits of vanity, but on the judgment of truth.

19 Of the corruption of the Roman commonwealth before Christ abolished the worship of the gods

Behold, then, the Roman commonwealth which, 'altering little by little from the fairest and best, became the worst and most

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20 Hist. frag. 1,11.
21 Ibid.
22 Catil. 56.
23 Hist. frag. 1,16.
shameful! It is not I who am the first to say this, but their own authors, from whom we learnt these things for a fee, and who spoke long before the coming of Christ. Behold: before the coming of Christ and after the destruction of Carthage, 'the morals of our forefathers were swept away, not by slow degrees, as formerly, but as if by a torrent,' so greatly were young persons corrupted by luxury and avarice. Let our adversaries read to us the commandments against luxury and avarice given to the Roman people by their gods. On the other hand, would that the gods had only been silent on the subjects of chastity and modesty, and not required of their worshippers those indecent and ignoble displays to which they lent a pernicious authority by their pretended divinity! By contrast, let our adversaries read our many commandments against avarice and luxury, found in the prophets, in the holy Gospel, in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles, which are everywhere read to the people who assemble to hear them. How excellent, how divine they are! They are not like the noisy disputers of the philosophers; they are like an oracle of God Himself, pealing from the clouds! Yet they do not impute to their own gods the luxury and avarice and the disgrace and utter shame brought upon the commonwealth before the coming of Christ by its cruel and degraded morals. They do, however, reproach the Christian religion with every affliction which has in these times befallen their pride and luxuriousness.

If the kings of the earth and all nations, princes and all the judges of the earth, young men and maidens, old men and children, people of every age and each sex; if those to whom John the Baptist spoke, even the tax gatherers and the soldiers: if all these together were to hear and embrace the Christian precepts of justice and moral virtue, then would the commonwealth adorn its lands with happiness in this present life and ascend to the summit of life eternal, there to reign in utmost blessedness. As it is, however, one man listens while another condemns, and more are lovers of the evil blandishments of vice than of austere virtue. Christ's servants, therefore, be they kings or princes or judges, soldiers or provincials, rich men or poor, free or slaves, of whichever sex, are commanded to endue this earthly commonwealth, however depraved and wholly vile it may be, if they must. By their endurance, however, they will win for themselves a place of the highest eminence in the most holy and august court of angels, and in that heavenly Commonwealth whose law is the will of God.

20 Of the kind of happiness that those who accuse the Christian age wish to enjoy, and by what morals they live

But those who worship and love the gods of Rome, whom they rejoice to imitate even in their wickedness and shame, do not at all care that the commonwealth is deprived and wholly vile. 'Only let it stand,' they say;

only let it flourish with abundant treasures, glorious in victory or - which is better - secure in peace, and what do we care? What is of more concern to us is that a man's wealth should be always increasing for the support of his daily pleasure, and that the stronger may thereby be able to subject weaker men to themselves. Let the poor serve the rich because of their abundance, and let them enjoy under their patronage a senseless idleness; and let the rich abuse the poor as their clients and the appendages of their pride. Let the poor applaud, not those who take counsel for their welfare, but those who are most lavish with pleasures. Let nothing unpleasant be required; let no impiety be forbidden; let kings care not how good their subjects are, but how docile. Let provinces serve their kings not as the rulers of their morals, but as the lords of their property and the procurers of their pleasures; and let them not honour them in sincerity, but fear them in worthlessness and servility. Let the laws take cognizance rather of the harm done by a man to his neighbour's vineyard than of that which he does to his own life. Let no one be brought to judgment unless he harms another's property or house or health or is troublesome or offensive to someone against his will. Otherwise, let everyone do as he wishes with what is his, either with his own comites or with anyone else who is willing. Let there be plenty of public whores for anyone to enjoy who wishes to do so, and especially for those who cannot afford to keep private ones. Let the most ample and ornate houses be built; let sumptuous feasts be attended, where anyone who wishes and is able may play, drink,
vomit and dissipate day and night. Let the noise of dancing be heard everywhere, and let the theatres boil with cries of dishonourable rejoicing and all kinds of the most cruel and wicked pleasure. If anyone disapproves of this happiness, let him be a public enemy. If anyone attempts to change or abolish it, let the abandoned multitude deny him a hearing, expel him from the assemblies, and remove him from among the living. Let those who procure this state of things for the people and preserve it when they have it be treated as gods. Let them be worshipped as they desire; let them demand whatever games they wish; let them hold them with, or at the expense of, their worshippers. Only let them ensure that such happiness is not assailed by enemy, pestilence or any calamity.

Would not such a commonwealth as this suggest, to any sane man, not the Roman empire, but the palace of Sardanapalus? This was the king who, long ago, was so devoted to pleasure that he caused it to be inscribed on his tomb that his only possessions in death were those things that he had swallowed and consumed by his greed while he was alive. If the Romans had a king of this kind - both indulgent of himself and imposing no irksome restraint on them in such matters - they would surely consecrate to him a temple and a flame with greater pleasure than the Romans of old showed in doing so for Romulus!

21 Cicero's opinion of the Roman commonwealth

It may be, however, that our adversaries scorn him who called the Roman commonwealth 'the worst and most shameful'. Perhaps they do not care how full it is of disgrace and dishonour by reason of its most wicked and shameful morals, provided only that it stands firm and endures. Let them, then, hear, not what Sallust says - that it became 'the worst and most shameful' - but what Cicero contends: that, in his day, it perished entirely, and that nothing at all remained of the commonwealth.

He introduces Scipio - he who had destroyed Carthage - discussing the commonwealth at a time when there were already warning signs that it was shortly to perish from the corruption that

20 Cf. Cicero, De rep., 5.33.101; De fin., 2.34.106.

Sallust describes. Indeed, at the time of the discussion, one of the Gracchi - with whom, as Sallust says, the grave seditions began - had already been put to death; for his death is mentioned in that same work. Now Scipio, at the end of the second book, says:

Among the different sounds of lyres or flutes and the voices of singers, a certain harmony must be maintained which the cultivated ear cannot bear to hear disrupted or discordant; and such harmony, concordant and consistent, may be brought about by the balancing of even the most dissimilar voices. So too, when the highest, lowest and, between them, the intermediate orders of society are balanced by reason as though they were voices, the city may embody a consonance blended of quite dissimilar elements. What musicians call harmony in singing is concord in the city, which is the most artistic and best bond of security in the commonwealth, and which, without justice, cannot be secured at all. Scipio then examined somewhat more broadly and fully how beneficial the presence of justice is to the city and how prejudicial its absence. At this point, Philus, one of those present at the discussion, rose and requested that this question should be treated with greater care. He asked that more should be said of justice in the light of what was then commonly proposed: that a commonwealth cannot be governed without injustice. Scipio accordingly agreed that this question should be discussed and explained. He replied that, in his view, nothing had so far been said about the commonwealth which might enable further progress to be made unless two things were now established: first, that the 'cannot be governed without injustice' maxim is false, and, second, that, on the contrary, it is pre-eminently true that the commonwealth cannot be governed without the most supreme justice. Discussion of this question was deferred until the next day. Then, in the third book, the debate was conducted with great vigour. Philus himself took the side of those who held that the state cannot be governed without injustice. He took special care to dissociate himself from this view, however, lest it be thought that he really held it. He assiduously put the case for injustice against

21 De rep., 2.43.69.
22 De rep., 2.44.70.
The City of God against the pagans

justice, and endeavoured by plausible reasoning and examples to show that injustice is advantageous and justice useless to the commonwealth. At the request of all, Laelius then proceeded to defend justice. He asserted to the best of his ability that nothing is so inimical to a city as injustice; and he urged that no commonwealth can in any way be governed or continue to exist without a high degree of justice. When this question is seen to have been disposed of satisfactorily, Scipio returns to his interrupted theme and recalls and commends his own brief definition of a commonwealth, which he had said to be 'the property of a people'. 'A people' he defines as being not every assembly of a multitude, but an assembly united in fellowship by common agreement as to what is right and by a community of interest. He then explains the great advantage of definition in debate, and he infers from these definitions of his own that a commonwealth -- that is, the property of a people -- exists when it is well and justly governed, either by a single king, or by a few of the highest men, or by the people at large. But when the king is unjust (or a tyrant, as he put it, after the Greek fashion), or the highest men are unjust (he called a union of such men a 'faction'), or the people itself is unjust (in this case he found no term in current use; although he might have called the people itself a 'tyrants') then the commonwealth is not merely flawed, as had been argued the day before. Rather, as the conclusions entailed by Scipio's definitions would indicate, it entirely ceases to be. For it could not be 'the property of a people', he said, when a tyrant or a faction took possession of it. Moreover, the people itself would no longer be a people if it were unjust: for it would then no longer answer to the definition of a people as a multitude united in fellowship by common agreement as to what is right and by a community of interest. When, therefore, the Roman commonwealth was such as Sallust described it, it was not merely 'the worst and most shameful', as he asserts. Rather, according to the reasoning developed in their discussion of the commonwealth by its great and leading men, it had ceased to exist altogether.

Again, at the beginning of the fifth book, where Cicero is speaking his own thoughts rather than those of Scipio or anyone else, he first quotes a line from the poet Ennius, who says: 'Ancient ways

and men sustain the affairs of Rome.' This line, Cicero then says, seems to me, by reason of its brevity and truth, to be like the utterance of an oracle. For neither could the men, had not the ways of the city been what they were, nor the ways themselves, had not such men presided over them, have founded or for so long possessed a commonwealth so vast and broad in its sway.

From time immemorial, the ways of our forebears called forth outstanding men, and these excellent men upheld the ways and institutions of their ancestors. Our age, however, having received the commonwealth as though it were an admirable picture fading with time, has not only neglected to restore it to its former colours, but has taken no care to preserve even the barest vestige of what it was and, as it were, its remaining lin-

ements. For what is left of those ancient ways which, as Ennius said, sustained the affairs of Rome? We see them so far fallen into decay that not only are they not cultivated: they are not even known. And what shall I say of our men? For morals have perished from the want of great men, and we must not only be held accountable for so great an evil: we must, indeed, plead our cause as though charged with a capital offence. For it is because of our vices, and not through any mischance, that we now retain only the name of the commonwealth that we long ago lost in fact.

This was the confession of Cicero. It was made long indeed after the death of Africanus, whom Cicero caused to be one of the disputants in his book De republica, but still before the coming of Christ. If such things had been thought and said after the Christian religion had been preached and had grown great, which of our opponents would not have deemed these evils attributable to the Christians? Why, then, did their gods take no care to prevent the ruin and loss of that commonwealth whose fall Cicero so sorrowfully deplores? Those who praise it should consider whether true justice flourished in it even in the ancient days of men and morals, or whether perhaps even then it was not rather a coloured picture than a moral reality; for, without knowing it, Cicero says as much.

If God wills it, however, we shall consider this question elsewhere. For, in due course, having regard to the definitions which Cicero himself voiced through Scipio when he briefly propounded

29 De rep., 1.15.39.

30 De rep., 5.1.
what a commonwealth is and what a people is (definitions attested by many other utterances both of his own and of those whom he portrayed as taking part in that same discussion), I shall attempt to show that no such commonwealth ever existed, because true justice was never present in it.\footnote{Bk. XII, 21, 24} There was, of course, according to a more practicable definition, a commonwealth of a sort; and it was certainly better administered by the Romans of more ancient times than by those who have come after them. True justice, however, does not exist other than in that commonwealth whose Founder and Ruler is Christ. You may indeed call it a commonwealth if you like, for we cannot deny that it is 'the property of a people'. But if this name, which has become familiar in other places and circumstances, is perhaps too remote from our customary manner of speaking, we can at least say that there is true justice in that City of which Holy Scripture says: 'Glorious things are spoken of thee, O City of God.'\footnote{Psalm 87, 3}

22 That the gods of the Romans never took any pains to save the commonwealth from being destroyed by evil ways

But as to the present question: however worthy of praise they say the commonwealth was or is, it had, according to their own most learned authors, already become entirely evil and profligate long before the coming of Christ. Indeed, it no longer existed, and had perished utterly by reason of its most corrupt morals. To save it from perishing, then, the gods who were its guardians ought above all else to have given precepts of life and morals to the people who worshipped them: by whom they were worshipped in so many temples and with so many priests and kinds of sacrifice, with such a number and variety of rites, and with so many solemn feasts and celebrations of such fine games. But the demons did nothing except look after their own affairs. They did not care how their worshippers lived: or, rather, they were content that their worshippers should live in wickedness provided only that they continued, under the dominion of fear, to do all these things in their honour.

\footnote{Dei, i, 356ff.}
\footnote{Livy, i, 52ff.}
\footnote{Cf. Plutarch, De fort. Rom., i. 12}
lost, 'forsaking shrine and altar'. But what kind of gods were they, I ask, who refused to dwell with a nation that worshipped them when that nation lived wickedly only because they had not taught it how to live well?

23 That the vicissitudes of the temporal world depend not upon the favour or opposition of demons, but upon the judgment of the true God.

Furthermore, what of the fact that the gods seem to assist men in the gratification of their desires, yet manifestly do not help them to achieve restraint? Marius, for example, was an upstart and a man of low birth, a most bloodthirsty author and wager of civil wars. Did they help him to become consul seven times, and to die an old man in his seventh consulship so that he might not fall into the hands of Sulla, who was soon to become victorious? For if the gods did not help him to achieve these things, then it is no light matter to admit that men may acquire so much of that earthly felicity which they so dearly love even without the favour of their gods. It is no light matter to admit that such a man as Marius can amass and enjoy good health, strength, riches, honours, renown and long life in spite of the anger of the gods, whereas such men as Regulus can be tormented by captivity, servitude, poverty, sleeplessness and pain, and suffer death even though the gods are their friends. If our adversaries grant this much, they concede at once that the gods bring them no benefit and that their worship is superfluous. For it seems that the gods are eager for the people to learn the very opposite of those virtues of soul and righteous ways of life whose rewards are to be hoped for after death. It seems also that, with respect to transient and worldly goods, they do nothing either to injure those whom they hate or to benefit those whom they love. Why, then, are they worshipped? And why is the fact that they are not worshipped so grievously deplored? Why, in hard and sorrowful times, is it murmured that the gods have departed because they are offended, and the Christian religion subjected to the most unworthy reproaches for their sakes? For if they have power to do either good or harm in these matters, why did they assist Marius, the worst of men, in them, yet desert the excellent Regulus? In view of this, are they not to be deemed wholly unjust and wicked?
God have enjoyed outstanding felicity in spite of the demons. Nor should we suppose that these same most unclean spirits are to be propitiated or feared for the sake of these earthly goods or evils. For, like wicked men on earth, they also cannot do all that they wish, but only as much as is allowed by the ordinance of Him Whose judgments no man wholly understands and no man justly condemns.

24 The deeds of Sulla, of which the demons showed themselves to be the helpers

In the case of Sulla himself—whose times were such that the earlier days of which he had seemed to be the avenger appeared desirable by comparison—it is established that, when he first marched upon the city from his camp against Marius, the entrails at his sacrifice were so auspicious that, as Livy writes, the diviner Postumius was willing to be imprisoned under sentence of death if Sulla did not attain his heart's desires with the help of the gods.84 The gods, you notice, had not departed, 'forsaking shrine and altar.' On the contrary, they foretold the course of events. But they certainly did nothing to correct Sulla himself. By their forecasts they promised him great good fortune; but they did not by their warnings subdue his wicked greed. And later, when he was waging war in Asia against Mithridates, there came to him by Lucius Titus a message from Jupiter that Mithridates was soon to be overcome; and it was so. Later still, when he was preparing to return to the city to avenge the blood of the citizens his own injuries and those of his friends, he again received a message from Jupiter, this time by a soldier of the sixth legion. The purport of this second message was that, just as Jupiter had earlier foretold his victory over Mithridates, he now promised to give him power to retrieve the commonwealth from his enemies; although not without much bloodshed. Sulla then enquired what kind of apparition the soldier had seen. When he described it, Sulla was reminded of what he had heard on the former occasion from the man who brought the message from the same source concerning the victory over Mithridates. The gods took care to announce these events as though they were fortunate, then; but none of them took care to warn and correct Sulla. They took no such step even though Sulla was about to inflict such harm upon the commonwealth by the crime of civil war as not merely to damage it but to destroy it altogether. What explanation can there be of this? It is clear beyond doubt, as I have often said, and as we are warned in Holy Scripture, and as the facts themselves sufficiently attest, that the demons look after their own affairs; that is, they take care to be regarded and worshipped as gods. But the result is that both those to whom honour is done and those who do it will be bound together in one dreadful accusation at the Judgment Seat of God.

Again, when Sulla had come to Tarentum and sacrificed there, he saw on the apex of a calf's liver the image of a golden crown. And the diviner Postumius then interpreted this to mean that there was to be a resounding victory, and gave instructions that only Sulla was to eat of the sacrificial meal. Shortly thereafter, the slave of a certain Lucius Pontius cried out in prophecy: 'I come as the messenger of Bellona! Victory is thine, O Sulla!' And he then added that the Capitol would burn. When he had said this, he at once left the camp; but he returned the following day in a state of even greater agitation and cried out that the Capitol had burned; and the Capitol had indeed burned. For a demon, however, it was easy both to foresee this and to announce it with the greatest possible speed.

But—and this is the most telling part of our argument: notice carefully to what kind of gods those men wish to be subject who blaspheme against the Saviour by Whom the wills of the faithful are set free from the dominion of demons. The man cried out in prophecy, 'Victory is thine, O Sulla!' And, so that it might be believed that the cry came from a divine spirit, he also proclaimed that something would shortly happen, and then that it had happened, at a place far removed from him through whom the spirit spoke. But he never cried out, 'Abstain from crimes, O Sulla!'—from those horrible crimes which the victor committed even after a golden crown had appeared in the liver of a calf as a most glorious sign of Victory herself.

If those gods who made a practice of giving such signs had been righteous gods and not impious demons, then surely in those entrails they would rather have shown the future evils which were...
to bring such grievous harm to Sulla himself. For that victory brought him more harm through greed than gain through honour. Through it, he became so immoderate in his desires, and so borne up by favourable circumstances, and then cast down, that his own moral ruin was greater than any bodily loss suffered by his enemies. Here were truly sorrowful, truly deplorable things; yet the gods foretold them neither by entrails nor auguries nor by anyone’s dream or prophecy. After all, they had more to fear from Sulla’s correction than from his defeat. Indeed, they were content that Sulla, though a glorious victor over his fellow citizens, should himself be conquered and held captive by shamef ul vices; for, through these things, he was made all the more hopelessly subject to the demons themselves.

25 How greatly the evil spirits incite men to wickedness when they lend authority to the commission of crimes by their own seemingly divine example

Who, then—other than someone who chooses rather to imitate such gods than be withdrawn from their fellowship by divine grace—would not understand from this instance how greatly these evil spirits strive by their example to supply a seemingly divine authority for crimes? Who would not see this? Once upon a time, on a broad plain in Campania, where not long afterwards citizen armies came together in awful combat, they were even seen to fight among themselves. At first, great crashing sounds were heard there. Then, shortly afterwards, many men reported that they had seen two armies fighting for several days. When this battle ceased, they also found marks there, as of men and horses, such as might have been imprinted by that conflict. If, therefore, the divine beings truly fought among themselves, the civil wars of human beings now at any rate have an excuse. Consider, though, the malice or misery of such gods! If, however, they only pretended to fight, is it not surely clear that they did this only so that the Romans, in waging civil war as if by the example of the gods, should seem to commit no wickedness? For the civil wars had by then broken out, and several atrocious battles had been fought, with terrible slaughter. Many were moved by the tale of a certain soldier who, stripping the armour from one of the fallen, recognised the naked corpse of his own brother. He cursed the civil wars and then slew himself, uniting his own body with that of his brother. In order, therefore, to reduce as far as possible the loathing occasioned by such great evils, and instead to inspire more and more delight in the weapons of war, the hateful demons—the demons whom the Romans supposed to be gods and considered worthy of worship—chose to appear to men as fighting among themselves. They did this so that civic affection should not shrink from initiating such strife: they desired that human crimes should be excused by divine example.

With the same astuteness, the evil spirits also commanded that those theatrical displays of which I have already said a good deal should be dedicated and consecrated to themselves. They desired to have their crimes celebrated in musical performances and plays, so that a man, perceiving that the gods were delighted to have such things shown to them, might cheerfully imitate them whether he believed them true or not. Also, they did not wish anyone to suppose that the poets had reproached the gods rather than honoured them by what they wrote wherever they portrayed them as fighting among themselves. Thus, they confirmed the songs of the poets in order to deceive mankind: that is, by displaying their clashes to human eyes not only through actors in the theatre, but also in their own persons on the battlefield.

We have been moved to say these things by the fact that even their own authors have not at all hesitated to say and write that the commonwealth of the Romans had already been destroyed by the depraved morals of its citizens, and that nothing remained of it, long before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. They do not impute this ruin to their own gods. To our Christ, however, they attribute transient evils by which good men cannot be destroyed regardless of whether they live or die. And they do this even though our Christ so often delivered precepts directed towards the highest morals and against wicked ways, whereas their gods never gave such precepts to the nation that worshipped them, to save that commonwealth from destruction. On the contrary, they made its destruction all the more certain by corrupting its morals by the harmful authority of their own example. And no one, I think, will venture to say

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that it perished because the gods departed, 'forsaking shrine and
altar', as if they were lovers of virtue offended by the vices of men.
For they are shown to have been present by the many signs derived
from entrails, auguries and prophecies through which they so loved
to vaunt and commend themselves as foretelling the future and
helping in battle. Had they really departed, the Romans, inspired
only by their own greed and not by the encouragement of the gods,
might have shown more restraint in kindling their civil wars.

26 Of the moral instruction which the demons gave in secret while in their rites every wickedness was
openly taught

Thus, the mingled insanities and cruelties, the scandals and crimes
of the divine beings, whether real or feigned, have, at their own
insistence, and to avoid incurring their displeasure, been publicly
and openly consecrated and dedicated to them in fixed and
established festivals. They have been exhibited to all eyes as objects
worthy of imitation and fit to be seen. Clearly, by such spectacles,
these demons confess themselves to be unclean spirits. By their
own base and vicious deeds, whether actual or pretended, whose
celebration they request from the shameless and demand from the
modest, they attest themselves to be the teachers of a wicked and
impure life. Why, then, are they nonetheless reputed to give certain
good moral precepts to some few chosen initiates in their shrines
and innermost chambers? If they do indeed do this, then the malice
of these harmful spirits must be deemed all the more artful and
deserving of condemnation. For so great is the force of probity and
chastity that the whole, or nearly the whole, of humankind is moved
to praise them; nor is there anyone so ruined by vice as to relinquish
all sense of honour. Accordingly, unless they somewhere 'trans-
formed themselves into angels of light', as we find written in our
Scriptures, the malice of the demons would not fully achieve its
purpose of deception. Out of doors, therefore, foul impiety clam-
ours unceasingly around the people on every hand, while, inside, a
feigned chastity whispers to the few. Shameful things are furnished
with a public stage and the praiseworthy are concealed; honour

[2 Cor. 11:14.]
27 That the obscenity of the games celebrated to propitiate the Roman gods did much to undermine public discipline

When he was about to be made aedile, Cicero, who was a distinguished man and by way of being a philosopher, proclaimed for all the city to hear that among the other duties of his magistracy would be the propitiation of Mother Flora by the celebration of games. By custom, these games were reckoned to be the more devout the more disgracefully they were celebrated. In another place, when he was now consul and the city was in dire peril, he said that the games had been in progress for ten days and that nothing belonging to the propitiation of the gods had been left undone. As if it were not more fitting to annoy such gods by temperance than to pacify them with extravagance: to provoke them to hostility by righteousness rather than pandering to them with such disgrace! For no matter how frightful the cruelty which those men on account of whom the propitiation was being offered were about to inflict, it was not worse than what the gods themselves inflicted when they were appeased by such disgusting corruption. For, in order to avert what the enemy threatened to do to the body, the gods were placated by means which defeated virtue in the mind. They would not come forward as defenders of the city walls against the invaders without first themselves becoming the enemies of good morals.

This propitiation of such deities was so wholly wanton, impure, immodest, wicked and unclean that the actors who performed it were, by the praiseworthy native virtue of the Romans, excluded from public office, expelled from their tribes, recognised as base and declared infamous. This shameful propitiation of such deities was, I say, inimical and detestable to true religion. Yet the whole city learnt these stories of the seductions and crimes of the gods: these ignominious tales of deeds which the gods either viciously and foully did or even more viciously and foully invented for the eyes and ears of the public. The Romans perceived that these deeds were pleasing to the divine beings, and so they believed them not only worthy of display to the gods, but also worthy of imitation by them.

28 Of the wholesomeness of the Christian religion

The perverse and ungrateful, held ever more deeply and obstinately in bondage to that abominable spirit, complain and murmur because men are plucked from the infernal yoke of these most unclean powers through Christ's name. They complain that men are redeemed from fellowship with the demons in punishment, and carried from the darkness of ruinous impiety into the light of most wholesome godliness. They complain because, in chaste observance and with a decent separation of each sex, the people flock to church, where they hear how they should live well at the present time so that they may deserve to live in eternal blessedness after this life: where Holy Scripture and instruction in righteousness are preached from on high in the sight of all; and where those who obey may hear it to their profit, and those who do not obey may hear it to their condemnation. Some, indeed, come only to laugh at such teaching; but all their impudence is either abandoned in a sudden change or restrained by fear or shame. For no foul or disgraceful spectacle or example is ever presented when the teachings of the true God are expounded, or His miracles told, or His gifts praised, or His blessings sought.

29 An exhortation to the Romans to abandon the worship of the gods

Desire these things, then, O admirable Roman character – O offspring of the Reguli, Scaevolae, Scipios, Fabii: desire these things instead; distinguish them from the most shameful emptiness and deceitful malignity of the demons. If by nature there is anything in you truly worthy of praise, it will be purified and perfected by true godliness alone, and by impiety it will be ruined and brought to punishment. Choose now which you will follow, so that your praise may be not in yourself, but in the true God in Whom there is no
error. Once upon a time, the adulation of the peoples was with you, but by the hidden judgment of divine providence the true religion was withheld from your choice. Awake, it is day! You have, indeed, awakened already in some of your people, in whose perfect virtue and suffering for the faith we Christians glory indeed. These people, striving against the most hostile powers on every hand, and triumphing through fearless death, have 'purchased this country for us with their blood'.

To this country we invite you, then; we entreat you to enrol yourselves in the number of the citizens of that place whose sanctuary, as it were, is the true remission of sins. Do not listen to your degenerate countrymen who revile Christ and the Christians. They long for times, not of quiet living, but of secure wickedness, and so they accuse us as though the times were evil rather than themselves. These things were never pleasing to you or of profit to your earthly country. Seize now the Heavenly Country, for the sake of which you will toil only a little, and in which you will truly reign eternally. You will find no Vestal flame there, and no stone statue of Jupiter on the Capitol. But you will find the one and true God, Who 'will set no bounds or duration to your estate, but will grant empire without end'.

Do not desire false and deceitful gods. Abjure these: despise them, and spring forth into true liberty. They are not gods; they are malignant spirits, to whom your eternal felicity is a punishment. Juno, from whom you trace your fleshly origin, was not seen to begrudge the possession of the Roman citadel to the Trojans more than these demons begrudge the whole human race an eternal throne; yet you still hold them to be gods! But you yourselves gave no small judgment against such spirits when you propitiated them with plays, yet declared infamous the men by whom those plays were performed. Allow your liberty to be asserted against the unclean spirits who imposed upon your necks the burden of worshipping them as sacred and celebrating their own dishonour. You excluded the performers of those divine crimes from public office; now beseech the true God to exclude from you those gods who take delight in their crimes, whether true, in which case wholly

shameful, or false, in which case wholly malign. Well done, to have refused of your own accord to allow the fellowship of the city to actors and players. But be yet more vigilant. The Divine Majesty is in no way propitiated by those arts which affront human dignity. How, then, can gods who take delight in such obscenities be deemed to belong to the covenant of the Holy Powers of Heaven, when the men by whom these same obscenities are performed are not deemed to be included in the number of Roman citizens of whatever class? Incomparably fairer is that Supernal City where victory is truth, where dignity is holiness, where peace is happiness and where life is eternity. Much less does it have such gods in its fellowship, if you blushed to have such men in yours! If you desire to approach the Blessed City, then, shun the fellowship of demons. Those who are propitiated by the base are not worthy to be worshipped by the honourable. So let these spirits be excluded from your piety by Christian cleansing, just as those men are excluded from your public honours by the censor's ban.

But, as to fleshly goods, which are all that the wicked wish to enjoy, and fleshly evils, which are all that they wish to avoid: even in this case the demons do not have the power that they are reputed to have. (Although, if they did, we ought rather to despise these goods also than to worship demons for the sake of them, and, by worshipping them, become unable to attain to the things which they begrudge us.) And we shall see in what follows that they do indeed lack the power over material things which men impute to them: power over those very things for the sake of which, it is contended, they ought to be worshipped. This, however, is the end of the present book.


Virgil, Aen., 11, 142ff.

Aen., 11, 138ff.