Augustine

The City of God against the Pagans

EDITED BY

A.C. Cassoc
now, though rather by future hope than in present reality. Present reality without that hope, however, is a false happiness and a great misery, since, in that case, the true goods of the soul are not enjoyed. For no wisdom is true wisdom if it does not direct all its prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice towards that final state where God shall be all in all in an assured eternity and perfect peace.

21 Whether there ever was a Roman commonwealth answering to the definitions proposed by Scipio in Cicero's dialogue

I come now, then, to the place where, as I promised in the second book of this work, I shall demonstrate that, according to the definitions proposed by Scipio in Cicero's book De republica, there never was a Roman commonwealth. I shall do this as briefly and as clearly as I can.

Scipio briefly defines a commonwealth as 'the property of a people'. If this is a true definition, however, there never was a Roman commonwealth, for the Roman state was never 'the property of a people' which the definition requires a commonwealth to be. Scipio defined a 'people' as a multitude 'united in fellowship by common agreement as to what is right and by a community of interest'. In the course of the discussion, he explains what he means by 'common agreement as to what is right', showing that a commonwealth cannot be maintained without justice. Where, therefore, there is no true justice there can be no right. For which is done according to right is inevitably a just act, whereas nothing that is done unjustly can be done according to right. But the unjust institutions of men are neither to be called right nor supposed to be such; for even men themselves say that 'right' [ius] is that which flows from the fount of justice [iusinitia]. As for the definition of justice commonly offered by certain persons who do not understand the matter rightly, that it is 'the interest of the stronger': this is false. Where there is no true justice, then, there can be no association of men 'united in fellowship by common agreement as to what is

right', and therefore no people according to the definition of Scipio or Cicero. And if there is no people then there is no 'property of a people', but only a multitude of some kind, not worthy of the name of a people. If, therefore, a commonwealth is 'the property of a people', and if there is no 'people' where there is no 'common agreement as to what is right', and if there is no right where there is no justice, then it follows beyond doubt that where there is no justice there is no commonwealth. Moreover, justice is that virtue which gives to each his due. What kind of justice is it, then, that takes a man away from the true God and subjects him to impure demons? Is this giving to each his due? Or are we to call a man unjust if he takes a piece of property away from one who has bought it and hands it over to someone who has no right to it, yet just if he takes himself away from the lordship of the God who made him, and serves evil spirits?

In this same book, De republica, a most vigorous and forceful argument is developed on behalf of justice against injustice. Earlier in the discussion a case was made out in favour of injustice and against justice, and it was stated that a commonwealth cannot stand or be governed except by injustice. For it was proposed as a quite incontestable point here that it is unjust for some men to rule and others to serve; yet an imperial city to which a great commonwealth belongs cannot govern her provinces other than by means of such injustice. On the side of justice, it was urged in reply that this state of affairs is, in fact, just, because servitude may be to the advantage of such men as the provincials are, and is indeed so when rightly established: that is, when dishonest men are deprived of their freedom to do wrong. It was also urged that subjugated peoples will in any case be better off, because they were worse off when they were not subjugated. To strengthen this reasoning, there is added a notable example taken from nature. 'Why', it is asked, 'does God rule man, the soul the body, and the reason the desires and other vicious parts of the soul?' By this example it is shown plainly enough that servitude is beneficial for some men, and that servitude to God is indeed beneficial for all. For, when it serves God, the soul rules the body rightly; and, in the soul itself, when the reason is subject to God as its Lord, it rightly governs the

---

88 Cf. Ht II.21.
The City of God against the pagans

desires and other such things. That being so, however, what justice can we suppose there to be in a man who does not serve God? For if the soul does not serve God it cannot by any means govern the body justly, nor can human reason govern the vices. And if there is no justice in such a man, then it is beyond doubt that there is no justice in a collection of men consisting of persons of this kind. Here, then, there is not that 'common agreement as to what is right' by which a multitude is made into a 'people' whose 'property' a commonwealth is said to be. And why need I say anything of that 'community of interest' which, according to our definition, makes a gathering of men into a 'people'? For if you attend diligently to the matter, you will see for yourself that nothing is 'in the interest' of those who serve not God, but demons: demons whose iniquity is all the greater in that they desire to have sacrifices offered to them as if they were gods rather than most unclean spirits. For my part, I consider that what I have already said concerning a 'common agreement as to what is right' is enough to make it apparent that, by this definition, there can be no 'people', and therefore no 'property' called a commonwealth, where there is no justice.

But perhaps our adversaries will say that the Romans did not serve unclean spirits in their commonwealth, but good and holy gods. Must we, then, repeat yet again those things which we have already said often enough, and more than often enough? Must not anyone who has perused the earlier books of this work down to this point be either exceedingly stupid or shamelessly contentious if he still doubts that the Romans served evil and impure demons? But, to say no more of the kind of gods whom the Romans worshipped with sacrifice, it is written in the Law of the true God, 'He that sacrificeth unto any god save unto the Lord only, shall be utterly destroyed.'

He Who uttered so great a threat does not desire that we should sacrifice either to good or bad gods.

22 Whether the God Whom Christians serve is the true God to Whom alone sacrifice is due

But the following reply is possible: 'Who is this God, and what proof is there that He is the only one Whom the Romans should

Exod. 22,20.

have obeyed, and that they should have worshipped and sacrificed to no god save Him?' Anyone who is even now asking Who this God is must be very blind. He is the same God Whose prophets foretold the events that we now see accomplished. He is the God from Whom Abraham received the promise, 'In thy seed shall all nations be blessed.' And this promise has been fulfilled in Christ, Who sprang from Abraham's seed according to the flesh. Even those who have remained hostile to the name of Christ acknowledge this, whether they wish to or not. He is the God Whose divine Spirit spoke through those whose prophecies I have cited in earlier books: prophecies which have been fulfilled in the Church which we now see spread throughout the whole world. He is the God Whom Varro, the most learned of the Romans, supposed to be Jupiter. Varro did not understand what he was saying; but, nonetheless, I have considered it worthwhile to note the fact that a man of such great learning did not think this God to be non-existent or insignificant, but believed Him to be the same as the supreme god. Finally, He is the God whom Porphyry, the most learned of philosophers - though the bitterest enemy of the Christians - acknowledges to be a great god, even according to the oracles of those whom he supposes to be gods.

23 Porphyry's account of the answers given by the oracles of the gods concerning Christ

For in his book called Philosophy from the Oracle35 - a work in which he collects and comments on what he takes to be divine answers to philosophical questions - Porphyry speaks as follows (I give his own words, though translated into Latin from the Greek). 'To one who asked what god he should appease in order to recall his wife from Christianity, Apollo gave the following reply in verse.' Then come the following words, supposedly those of Apollo himself.

33 Exod. 22,20.

34 Cf. Augustine, De caelo et mundo, 1,30,32.
35 Cf. Ennius, Paeon, xxi, 4.4.3. The surviving fragments of this work have been edited by John O'Meara on Porphyry's Philosophy from Oracle (London, 1959).