

# THE CITY OF GOD AGAINST THE PAGANS

By Saint Aurelius Augustine

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BOOK SIXTH.

[continues]

7. Concerning the likeness and agreement of the fabulous and civil theologies. That theology, therefore, which is fabulous, theatrical, scenic, and full of all baseness and unseemliness, is taken up into the civil theology; and part of that theology, which in its totality is deservedly judged to be worthy of reprobation and rejection, is pronounced worthy to be cultivated and observed;—not at all an incongruous part, as I have undertaken to show, and one which, being alien to the whole body, was unsuitably attached to and suspended from it, but a part entirely congruous with, and most harmoniously fitted to the rest, as a member of the same body. For what else do those images, forms, ages, sexes, characteristics of the gods show? If the poets have Jupiter with a beard, and Mercury beardless, have not the priests the same? Is the Priapus of the priests less obscene than the Priapus of the players? Does he receive the adoration of worshippers in a different form from that in which he moves about the stage for the amusement of spectators? Is not Saturn old and Apollo young in the shrines where their images stand, as well

as when represented by actor's masks? Why are Forculus, who presides over doors, and Limentinus, who presides over thresholds and lintels, male gods, and Cardea between them feminine, who presides over hinges? Are not those things found in books on divine things, which grave poets have deemed unworthy of their verses? Does the Diana of the theatre carry arms, whilst the Diana of the city is simply a virgin? Is the stage Apollo a lyrist, but the Delphic Apollo ignorant of this art? But these things are decent compared with the more shameful things. What was thought of Jupiter himself by those who placed his wet nurse in the Capitol? Did they not bear witness to Euhemerus, who, not with the garrulity of a fable-teller, but with the gravity of an historian who had diligently investigated the matter, wrote that all such gods had been men and mortals? And they who appointed the Epulones as parasites at the table of Jupiter, what else did they wish for but mimic sacred rites? For if any mimic had said that parasites of Jupiter were made use of at his table, he would assuredly have appeared to be seeking to call forth laughter. Varro said it,—not when he was mocking, but when he was commending the gods did he say it. His books on divine, not on human, things testify that he wrote this,—not where he set forth the scenic games, but where he explained the Capitoline laws. In a word, he is conquered, and confesses that, as they made the gods with a human form, so they believed that they are delighted with human pleasures. For also malign spirits were not so wanting to their own business as not to confirm noxious opinions in the minds of men by converting them into sport. Whence also is that story about the sacristan of Hercules, which says that, having nothing to do, he took to playing at dice as a pastime, throwing them alternately with the one hand for Hercules, with the other for himself, with

this understanding, that if he should win, he should from the funds of the temple prepare himself a supper, and hire a mistress; but if Hercules should win the game, he himself should, at his own expense, provide the same for the pleasure of Hercules. Then, when he had been beaten by himself, as though by Hercules, he gave to the god Hercules the supper he owed him, and also the most noble harlot Larentina. But she, having fallen asleep in the temple, dreamed that Hercules had had intercourse with her, and had said to her that she would find her payment with the youth whom she should first meet on leaving the temple, and that she was to believe this to be paid to her by Hercules. And so the first youth that met her on going out was the wealthy Tarutius, who kept her a long time, and when he died left her his heir. She, having obtained a most ample fortune, that she should not seem ungrateful for the divine hire, in her turn made the Roman people her heir, which she thought to be most acceptable to the deities; and, having disappeared, the will was found. By which meritorious conduct they say that she gained divine honours. Now had these things been feigned by the poets and acted by the mimics, they would without any doubt have been said to pertain to the fabulous theology, and would have been judged worthy to be separated from the dignity of the civil theology. But when these shameful things,—not of the poets, but of the people; not of the mimics, but of the sacred things; not of the theatres, but of the temples, that is, not of the fabulous, but of the civil theology,—are reported by so great an author, not in vain do the actors represent with theatrical art the baseness of the gods, which is so great; but surely in vain do the priests attempt, by rites called sacred, to represent their nobleness of character, which has no existence. There are sacred rites of Juno; and these are celebrated in her beloved

island, Samos, where she was given in marriage to Jupiter. There are sacred rites of Ceres, in which Proserpine is sought for, having been carried off by Pluto. There are sacred rites Venus, in which, her beloved Adonis being slain by a boar's tooth, the lovely youth is lamented. There are sacred rites of the mother of the gods, in which the beautiful youth Atys, loved by her, and castrated by her through a woman's jealousy, is deplored by men who have suffered the like calamity, whom they call Galli. Since, then, these things are more unseemly than all scenic abomination, why is it that they strive to separate, as it were, the fabulous fictions of the poet concerning the gods, as, forsooth, pertaining to the theatre, from the civil theology which they wish to belong to the city, as though they were separating from noble and worthy things, things unworthy and base? Wherefore there is more reason to thank the stage-actors, who have spared the eyes of men, and have not laid bare by theatrical exhibition all the things which are hid by the walls of the temples. What good is to be thought of their sacred rites which are concealed in darkness, when those which are brought forth into the light are so detestable? And certainly they themselves have seen what they transact in secret through the agency of mutilated and effeminate men. Yet they have not been able to conceal those same men miserably and vilely enervated and corrupted. Let them persuade whom they can that they transact anything holy through such men, who, they cannot deny, are numbered, and live among their sacred things. We know not what they transact, but we know through whom they transact; for we know what things are transacted on the stage, where never, even in a chorus of harlots, hath one who is mutilated or an effeminate appeared. And, nevertheless, even these things are acted by vile and infamous characters; for,

indeed, they ought not to be acted by men of good character. What, then, are those sacred rites, for the performance of which holiness has chosen such men as not even the obscenity of the stage has admitted?

8. Concerning the interpretations, consisting of natural explanations, which the pagan teachers attempt to show for their gods. But all these things, they say, have certain physical, that is, natural interpretations, showing their natural meaning; as though in this disputation we were seeking physics and not theology, which is the account, not of nature, but of God. For although He who is the true God is God, not by opinion, but by nature, nevertheless all nature is not God; for there is certainly a nature of man, of a beast, of a tree, of a stone,—none of which is God. For if, when the question is concerning the mother of the gods, that from which the whole system of interpretation starts certainly is, that the mother of the gods is the earth, why do we make further inquiry? why do we carry our investigation through all the rest of it? What can more manifestly favour them who say that all those gods were men? For they are earth-born in the sense that the earth is their mother. But in the true theology the earth is the work, not the mother, of God. But in whatever way their sacred rites may be interpreted, and, whatever reference they may have to the nature of things, it is not according to nature, but contrary to nature, that men should be effeminate. This disease, this crime, this abomination, has a recognised place among those sacred things, though even depraved men will scarcely be compelled by torments to confess they are guilty of it. Again, if these sacred rites, which are proved to be fouler than scenic abominations, are excused and justified on the ground that they have their own interpretations, by which they are shown to symbolize the nature of things, why are not the poetical

things in like manner excused and justified? For many have interpreted even these in like fashion, to such a degree that even that which they say is the most monstrous and most horrible,—namely, that Saturn devoured his own children,—has been interpreted by some of them to mean that length of time, which is signified by the name of Saturn, consumes whatever it begets; or that, as the same Varro thinks, Saturn belongs to seeds which fall back again into the earth from whence they spring. And so one interprets it in one way, and one in another. And the same is to be said of all the rest of this theology. And, nevertheless, it is called the fabulous theology, and is censured, cast off, rejected, together with all such interpretations belonging to it. And not only by the natural theology, which is that of the philosophers, but also by this civil theology, concerning which we are speaking, which is asserted to pertain to cities and peoples, it is judged worthy of repudiation, because it has invented unworthy things concerning the gods. Of which, I wot, this is the secret: that those most acute and learned men, by whom those things were written, understood that both theologies ought to be rejected,—to wit, both that fabulous and this civil one,—but the former they dared to reject, the latter they dared not; the former they set forth to be censured, the latter they showed to be very like it; not that it might be chosen to be held in preference to the other, but that it might be understood to be worthy of being rejected together with it. And thus, without danger to those who feared to censure the civil theology, both of them being brought into contempt, that theology which they call natural might find a place in better disposed minds; for the civil and the fabulous are both fabulous and both civil. He who shall wisely inspect the vanities and obscenities of both will find that they are both fabulous; and he who shall

direct his attention to the scenic plays pertaining to the fabulous theology in the festivals of the civil gods, and in the divine rites of the cities, will find they are both civil. How, then, can the power of giving eternal life be attributed to any of those gods whose own images and sacred rites convict them of being most like to the fabulous gods, which are most openly reprobated, in forms, ages, sex, characteristics, marriages, generations, rites; in all which things they are understood either to have been men, and to have had their sacred rites and solemnities instituted in their honour according to the life or death of each of them, the demons suggesting and confirming this error, or certainly most foul spirits, who, taking advantage of some occasion or other, have stolen into the minds of men to deceive them?

9. Concerning the special offices of the gods. And as to those very offices of the gods, so meanly and so minutely portioned out, so that they say that they ought to be supplicated, each one according to his special function,—about which we have spoken much already, though not all that is to be said concerning it,—are they not more consistent with mimic buffoonery than divine majesty? If any one should use two nurses for his infant, one of whom should give nothing but food, the other nothing but drink, as these make use of two goddesses for this purpose, Educa and Potina, he should certainly seem to be foolish, and to do in his house a thing worthy of a mimic. They would have Liber to have been named from “liberation,” because through him males at the time of copulation are liberated by the emission of the seed. They also say that Libera (the same in their opinion as Venus) exercises the same function in the case of women, because they say that they also emit seed; and they also say that on this account the same part of the male and of the

female is placed in the temple, that of the male to Liber, and that of the female to Libera. To these things they add the women assigned to Liber, and the wine for exciting lust. Thus the Bacchanalia are celebrated with the utmost insanity, with respect to which Varro himself confesses that such things would not be done by the Bacchanals except their minds were highly excited. These things, however, afterwards displeased a saner senate, and it ordered them to be discontinued. Here, at length, they perhaps perceived how much power unclean spirits, when held to be gods, exercise over the minds of men. These things, certainly, were not to be done in the theatres; for there they play, not rave, although to have gods who are delighted with such plays is very like raving. But what kind of distinction is this which he makes between the religious and the superstitious man, saying that the gods are feared by the superstitious man, but are revered as parents by the religious man, not feared as enemies; and that they are all so good that they will more readily spare those who are impious than hurt one who is innocent? And yet he tells us that three gods are assigned as guardians to a woman after she has been delivered, lest the god Silvanus come in and molest her; and that in order to signify the presence of these protectors, three men go round the house during the night, and first strike the threshold with a hatchet, next with a pestle, and the third time sweep it with a brush, in order that these symbols of agriculture having been exhibited, the god Silvanus might be hindered from entering, because neither are trees cut down or pruned without a hatchet, neither is grain ground without a pestle, nor corn heaped up without a besom. Now from these three things three gods have been named: Intercidona, from the cut made by the hatchet; Pilumnus, from the pestle; Diverra, from the besom;—



by which guardian gods the woman who has been delivered is preserved against the power of the god Silvanus. Thus the guardianship of kindly-disposed gods would not avail against the malice of a mischievous god, unless they were three to one, and fought against him, as it were, with the opposing emblems of cultivation, who, being an inhabitant of the woods, is rough, horrible, and uncultivated. Is this the innocence of the gods? Is this their concord? Are these the health-giving deities of the cities, more ridiculous than the things which are laughed at in the theatres? When a male and a female are united, the god Jugatinus presides. Well, let this be borne with. But the married woman must be brought home: the god Domiducus also is invoked. That she may be in the house, the god Domitius is introduced. That she may remain with her husband, the goddess Manturnæ is used. What more is required? Let human modesty be spared. Let the lust of flesh and blood go on with the rest, the secret of shame being respected. Why is the bedchamber filled with a crowd of deities, when even the groomsmen have departed? And, moreover, it is so filled, not that in consideration of their presence more regard may be paid to chastity, but that by their help the woman, naturally of the weaker sex, and trembling with the novelty of her situation, may the more readily yield her virginity. For there are the goddess Virginiensis, and the god-father Subigus, and the goddess-mother Prema, and the goddess Pertunda, and Venus, and Priapus. What is this? If it was absolutely necessary that a man, labouring at this work, should be helped by the gods, might not some one god or goddess have been sufficient? Was Venus not sufficient alone, who is even said to be named from this, that without her power a woman does not cease to be a virgin? If there is any shame in men, which is not in the deities, is it not the

case that, when the married couple believe that so many gods of either sex are present, and busy at this work, they are so much affected with shame, that the man is less moved, and the woman more reluctant? And certainly, if the goddess Virginiensis is present to loose the virgin's zone, if the god Subigus is present that the virgin may be got under the man, if the goddess Prema is present that, having been got under him, she may be kept down, and may not move herself, what has the goddess Pertunda to do there? Let her blush; let her go forth. Let the husband himself do something. It is disgraceful that any one but himself should do that from which she gets her name. But perhaps she is tolerated because she is said to be a goddess, and not a god. For if she were believed to be a male, and were called Pertundus, the husband would demand more help against him for the chastity of his wife than the newly-delivered woman against Silvanus. But why am I saying this, when Priapus, too, is there, a male to excess, upon whose immense and most unsightly member the newly-married bride is commanded to sit, according to the most honourable and most religious custom of matrons? Let them go on, and let them attempt with all the subtlety they can to distinguish the civil theology from the fabulous, the cities from the theatres, the temples from the stages, the sacred things of the priests from the songs of the poets, as honourable things from base things, truthful things from fallacious, grave from light, serious from ludicrous, desirable things from things to be rejected, we understand what they do. They are aware that that theatrical and fabulous theology hangs by the civil, and is reflected back upon it from the songs of the poets as from a mirror; and thus, that theology having been exposed to view which they do not dare to condemn, they more freely assail and censure that picture of it, in

order that those who perceive what they mean may detest this very face itself of which that is the picture,— which, however, the gods themselves, as though seeing themselves in the same mirror, love so much, that it is better seen in both of them who and what they are. Whence, also, they have compelled their worshippers, with terrible commands, to dedicate to them the uncleanness of the fabulous theology, to put them among their solemnities, and reckon them among divine things; and thus they have both shown themselves more manifestly to be most impure spirits, and have made that rejected and reprobated theatrical theology a member and a part of this, as it were, chosen and approved theology of the city, so that, though the whole is disgraceful and false, and contains in it fictitious gods, one part of it is in the literature of the priests, the other in the songs of the poets. Whether it may have other parts is another question. At present, I think, I have sufficiently shown, on account of the division of Varro, that the theology of the city and that of the theatre belong to one civil theology. Wherefore, because they are both equally disgraceful, absurd, shameful, false, far be it from religious men to hope for eternal life from either the one or the other. In fine, even Varro himself, in his account and enumeration of the gods, starts from the moment of a man's conception. He commences the series of those gods who take charge of man with Janus, carries it on to the death of the man decrepit with age, and terminates it with the goddess Nænia, who is sung at the funerals of the aged. After that, he begins to give an account of the other gods, whose province is not man himself, but man's belongings, as food, clothing, and all that is necessary for this life; and, in the case of all these, he explains what is the special office of each, and for what each ought to be supplicated. But with all this

scrupulous and comprehensive diligence, he has neither proved the existence, nor so much as mentioned the name, of any god from whom eternal life is to be sought,—the one object for which we are Christians. Who, then, is so stupid as not to perceive that this man, by setting forth and opening up so diligently the civil theology, and by exhibiting its likeness to that fabulous, shameful, and disgraceful theology, and also by teaching that that fabulous sort is also a part of this other, was labouring to obtain a place in the minds of men for none but that natural theology which he says pertains to philosophers, with such subtlety that he censures the fabulous, and, not daring openly to censure the civil, shows its censurable character by simply exhibiting it; and thus, both being reprobated by the judgment of men of right understanding, the natural alone remains to be chosen? But concerning this in its own place, by the help of the true God, we have to discuss more diligently.

10. Concerning the liberty of Seneca, who more vehemently censured the civil theology than Varro did the fabulous. That liberty, in truth, which this man wanted, so that he did not dare to censure that theology of the city, which is very similar to the theatrical, so openly as he did the theatrical itself, was, though not fully, yet in part possessed by Annæus Seneca, whom we have some evidence to show to have flourished in the times of our apostles. It was in part possessed by him, I say, for he possessed it in writing, but not in living. For in that book which he wrote against superstition, he more copiously and vehemently censured that civil and urban theology than Varro the theatrical and fabulous. For, when speaking concerning images, he says, “They dedicate images of the sacred and inviolable immortals in most worthless and motionless matter. They give them the appearance of

man, beasts, and fishes, and some make them of mixed sex, and heterogeneous bodies. They call them deities, when they are such that if they should get breath and should suddenly meet them, they would be held to be monsters." Then, a while afterwards, when extolling the natural theology, he had expounded the sentiments of certain philosophers, he opposes to himself a question, and says, "Here some one says, Shall I believe that the heavens and the earth are gods, and that some are above the moon and some below it? Shall I bring forward either Plato or the peripatetic Strato, one of whom made God to be without a body, the other without a mind?" In answer to which he says, "And, really, what truer do the dreams of Titus Tatius, or Romulus, or Tullus Hostilius appear to thee? Tatius declared the divinity of the goddess Cloacina; Romulus that of Picus and Tiberinus; Tullus Hostilius that of Pavor and Pallor, the most disagreeable affections of men, the one of which is the agitation of the mind under fright, the other that of the body, not a disease, indeed, but a change of colour." Wilt thou rather believe that these are deities, and receive them into heaven? But with what freedom he has written concerning the rites themselves, cruel and shameful! "One," he says, "castrates himself, another cuts his arms. Where will they find room for the fear of these gods when angry, who use such means of gaining their favour when propitious? But gods who wish to be worshipped in this fashion should be worshipped in none. So great is the frenzy of the mind when perturbed and driven from its seat, that the gods are propitiated by men in a manner in which not even men of the greatest ferocity and fable-renowned cruelty vent their rage. Tyrants have lacerated the limbs of some; they never ordered any one to lacerate his own. For the gratification of royal lust, some have been castrated;

but no one ever, by the command of his lord, laid violent hands on himself to emasculate himself. They kill themselves in the temples. They supplicate with their wounds and with their blood. If any one has time to see the things they do and the things they suffer, he will find so many things unseemly for men of respectability, so unworthy of freemen, so unlike the doings of sane men, that no one would doubt that they are mad, had they been mad with the minority; but now the multitude of the insane is the defence of their sanity." He next relates those things which are wont to be done in the Capitol, and with the utmost intrepidity insists that they are such things as one could only believe to be done by men making sport, or by madmen. For, having spoken with derision of this, that in the Egyptian sacred rites Osiris, being lost, is lamented for, but straightway, when found, is the occasion of great joy by his reappearance, because both the losing and the finding of him are feigned; and yet that grief and that joy which are elicited thereby from those who have lost nothing and found nothing are real;—having, I say, so spoken of this, he says, "Still there is a fixed time for this frenzy. It is tolerable to go mad once in the year. Go into the Capitol. One is suggesting divine commands to a god; another is telling the hours to Jupiter; one is a lictor; another is an anointer, who with the mere movement of his arms imitates one anointing. There are women who arrange the hair of Juno and Minerva, standing far away not only from her image, but even from her temple. These move their fingers in the manner of hair-dressers. There are some women who hold a mirror. There are some who are calling the gods to assist them in court. There are some who are holding up documents to them, and are explaining to them their cases. A learned and distinguished comedian, now old and decrepit, was

daily playing the mimic in the Capitol, as though the gods would gladly be spectators of that which men had ceased to care about. Every kind of artificers working for the immortal gods is dwelling there in idleness.” And a little after he says, “Nevertheless these, though they give themselves up to the gods for purposes superfluous enough, do not do so for any abominable or infamous purpose. There sit certain women in the Capitol who think they are beloved by Jupiter; nor are they frightened even by the look of the, if you will believe the poets, most wrathful Juno.”

This liberty Varro did not enjoy. It was only the poetical theology he seemed to censure. The civil, which this man cuts to pieces, he was not bold enough to impugn. But if we attend to the truth, the temples where these things are performed are far worse than the theatres where they are represented. Whence, with respect to these sacred rites of the civil theology, Seneca preferred, as the best course to be followed by a wise man, to feign respect for them in act, but to have no real regard for them at heart. “All which things,” he says, “a wise man will observe as being commanded by the laws, but not as being pleasing to the gods.” And a little after he says, “And what of this, that we unite the gods in marriage, and that not even naturally, for we join brothers and sisters? We marry Bellona to Mars, Venus to Vulcan, Salacia to Neptune. Some of them we leave unmarried, as though there were no match for them, which is surely needless, especially when there are certain unmarried goddesses, as Populonia, or Fulgora, or the goddess Rumina, for whom I am not astonished that suitors have been awaiting. All this ignoble crowd of gods, which the superstition of ages has amassed, we ought,” he says, “to adore in such a way as to remember all the while that its worship belongs rather to custom than to reality.” Wherefore, neither those laws nor customs instituted in the

civil theology that which was pleasing to the gods, or which pertained to reality. But this man, whom philosophy had made, as it were, free, nevertheless, because he was an illustrious senator of the Roman people, worshipped what he censured, did what he condemned, adored what he reproached, because, forsooth, philosophy had taught him something great,—namely, not to be superstitious in the world, but, on account of the laws of cities and the customs of men, to be an actor, not on the stage, but in the temples,—conduct the more to be condemned, that those things which he was deceitfully acting he so acted that the people thought he was acting sincerely. But a stage-actor would rather delight people by acting plays than take them in by false pretences. 11. What Seneca thought concerning the Jews. Seneca, among the other superstitions of civil theology, also found fault with the sacred things of the Jews, and especially the sabbaths, affirming that they act uselessly in keeping those seventh days, whereby they lose through idleness about the seventh part of their life, and also many things which demand immediate attention are damaged. The Christians, however, who were already most hostile to the Jews, he did not dare to mention, either for praise or blame, lest, if he praised them, he should do so against the ancient custom of his country, or, perhaps, if he should blame them, he should do so against his own will. When he was speaking concerning those Jews, he said, “When, meanwhile, the customs of that most accursed nation have gained such strength that they have been now received in all lands, the conquered have given laws to the conquerors.” By these words he expresses his astonishment; and, not knowing what the providence of God was leading him to say, subjoins in plain words an opinion by which he showed what he thought about the meaning of those sacred institutions: “For,” he says, “those, however, know the cause of their rites, whilst the greater part of the people know not why they perform theirs.” But



concerning the solemnities of the Jews, either why or how far they were instituted by divine authority, and afterwards, in due time, by the same authority taken away from the people of God, to whom the mystery of eternal life was revealed, we have both spoken elsewhere, especially when we were treating against the Manichæans, and also intend to speak in this work in a more suitable place. 12. That when once the vanity of the gods of the nations has been exposed, it cannot be doubted that they are unable to bestow eternal life on any one, when they cannot afford help even with respect to the things of this temporal life. Now, since there are three theologies, which the Greeks call respectively mythical, physical, and political, and which may be called in Latin fabulous, natural, and civil; and since neither from the fabulous, which even the worshippers of many and false gods have themselves most freely censured, nor from the civil, of which that is convicted of being a part, or even worse than it, can eternal life be hoped for from any of these theologies,—if any one thinks that what has been said in this book is not enough for him, let him also add to it the many and various dissertations concerning God as the giver of felicity, contained in the former books, especially the fourth one. For to what but to felicity should men consecrate themselves, were felicity a goddess? However, as it is not a goddess, but a gift of God, to what God but the giver of happiness ought we to consecrate ourselves, who piously love eternal life, in which there is true and full felicity? But I think, from what has been said, no one ought to doubt that none of those gods is the giver of happiness, who are worshipped with such shame, and who, if they are not so worshipped, are more shamefully enraged, and thus confess that they are most foul spirits. Moreover, how can he give eternal life who cannot give happiness? For we mean by eternal life that life where there is endless happiness. For if the soul live in eternal punishments, by

which also those unclean spirits shall be tormented, that is rather eternal death than eternal life. For there is no greater or worse death than when death never dies. But because the soul from its very nature, being created immortal, cannot be without some kind of life, its utmost death is alienation from the life of God in an eternity of punishment. So, then, He only who gives true happiness gives eternal life, that is, an endlessly happy life. And since those gods whom this civil theology worships have been proved to be unable to give this happiness, they ought not to be worshipped on account of those temporal and terrestrial things, as we showed in the five former books, much less on account of eternal life, which is to be after death, as we have sought to show in this one book especially, whilst the other books also lend it their co-operation. But since the strength of inveterate habit has its roots very deep, if any one thinks that I have not disputed sufficiently to show that this civil theology ought to be rejected and shunned, let him attend to another book which, with God's help, is to be joined to this one.

