

THE CITY OF GOD AGAINST THE PAGANS

By Saint Aurelius Augustine

[Podcast 19 of 50]

BOOK TENTH. ARGUMENT. IN THIS BOOK AUGUSTINE TEACHES THAT THE GOOD ANGELS WISH GOD ALONE, WHOM THEY THEMSELVES SERVE, TO RECEIVE THAT DIVINE HONOUR WHICH IS RENDERED BY SACRIFICE, AND WHICH IS CALLED "LATREIA." HE THEN GOES ON TO DISPUTE AGAINST PORPHYRY ABOUT THE PRINCIPLE AND WAY OF THE SOUL'S CLEANSING AND DELIVERANCE.

[End of Argument]

1. That the Platonists themselves have determined that God alone can confer happiness either on angels or men, but that it yet remains a question whether those spirits whom they direct us to worship, that we may obtain happiness, wish sacrifice to be offered to themselves, or to the one God only. It is the decided opinion of all who use their brains, that all men desire to be happy. But who are happy, or how they become so, these are questions about which the weakness of human understanding stirs endless and angry controversies, in which philosophers have wasted their strength and expended their leisure. To adduce and discuss their various opinions would be tedious, and is unnecessary. The reader may remember what we said

in the eighth book, while making a selection of the philosophers with whom we might discuss the question regarding the future life of happiness, whether we can reach it by paying divine honours to the one true God, the Creator of all gods, or by worshipping many gods, and he will not expect us to repeat here the same argument, especially as, even if he has forgotten it, he may refresh his memory by reperusal. For we made selection of the Platonists, justly esteemed the noblest of the philosophers, because they had the wit to perceive that the human soul, immortal and rational, or intellectual, as it is, cannot be happy except by partaking of the light of that God by whom both itself and the world were made; and also that the happy life which all men desire cannot be reached by any who does not cleave with a pure and holy love to that one supreme good, the unchangeable God. But as even these philosophers, whether accommodating to the folly and ignorance of the people, or, as the apostle says, "becoming vain in their imaginations," supposed or allowed others to suppose that many gods should be worshipped, so that some of them considered that divine honour by worship and sacrifice should be rendered even to the demons (an error I have already exploded), we must now, by God's help, ascertain what is thought about our religious worship and piety by those immortal and blessed spirits, who dwell in the heavenly places among dominations, principalities, powers, whom the Platonists call gods, and some either good demons, or, like us, angels,—that is to say, to put it more plainly, whether the angels desire us to offer sacrifice and worship, and to consecrate our possessions and ourselves, to them, or only to God, theirs and ours. For this is the worship which is due to the Divinity, or, to speak more accurately, to the Deity; and, to express this worship in a single word, as there

does not occur to me any Latin term sufficiently exact, I shall avail myself, whenever necessary, of a Greek word. Λατρεία, whenever it occurs in Scripture, is rendered by the word service. But that service which is due to men, and in reference to which the apostle writes that servants must be subject to their own masters, is usually designated by another word in Greek, whereas the service which is paid to God alone by worship, is always, or almost always, called λατρεία in the usage of those who wrote from the divine oracles. This cannot so well be called simply “cultus,” for in that case it would not seem to be due exclusively to God; for the same word is applied to the respect we pay either to the memory or the living presence of men. From it, too, we derive the words agriculture, colonist, and others. And the heathen call their gods “cœlicolæ,” not because they worship heaven, but because they dwell in it, and as it were colonize it,—not in the sense in which we call those colonists who are attached to their native soil to cultivate it under the rule of the owners, but in the sense in which the great master of the Latin language says, “There was an ancient city inhabited by Tyrian colonists.” He called them colonists, not because they cultivated the soil, but because they inhabited the city. So, too, cities that have hived off from larger cities are called colonies. Consequently, while it is quite true that, using the word in a special sense, “cult” can be rendered to none but God, yet, as the word is applied to other things besides, the cult due to God cannot in Latin be expressed by this word alone. The word “religion” might seem to express more definitely the worship due to God alone, and therefore Latin translators have used this word to represent θρησκεία; yet, as not only the uneducated, but also the best instructed, use the word religion to express human ties, and relationships, and affinities, it

would inevitably introduce ambiguity to use this word in discussing the worship of God, unable as we are to say that religion is nothing else than the worship of God, without contradicting the common usage which applies this word to the observance of social relationships. "Piety," again, or, as the Greeks say, εὐσέβεια, is commonly understood as the proper designation of the worship of God. Yet this word also is used of dutifulness to parents. The common people, too, use it of works of charity, which, I suppose, arises from the circumstance that God enjoins the performance of such works, and declares that He is pleased with them instead of, or in preference to sacrifices. From this usage it has also come to pass that God Himself is called pious, in which sense the Greeks never use εὐσεβεῖν, though εὐσέβεια is applied to works of charity by their common people also. In some passages of Scripture, therefore, they have sought to preserve the distinction by using not εὐσέβεια, the more general word, but θεοσέβεια, which literally denotes the worship of God. We, on the other hand, cannot express either of these ideas by one word. This worship, then, which in Greek is called λατρεία, and in Latin "servitus" [service], but the service due to God only; this worship, which in Greek is called θρησκεία, and in Latin "religio," but the religion by which we are bound to God only; this worship, which they call θεοσέβεια, but which we cannot express in one word, but call it the worship of God,—this, we say, belongs only to that God who is the true God, and who makes His worshippers gods. And therefore, whoever these immortal and blessed inhabitants of heaven be, if they do not love us, and wish us to be blessed, then we ought not to worship them; and if they do love us and desire our happiness, they cannot wish us to be made happy by any other means than they themselves have enjoyed,—

for how could they wish our blessedness to flow from one source, theirs from another?

2. The opinion of Plotinus the Platonist regarding enlightenment from above. But with these more estimable philosophers we have no dispute in this matter. For they perceived, and in various forms abundantly expressed in their writings, that these spirits have the same source of happiness as ourselves, —a certain intelligible light, which is their God, and is different from themselves, and illumines them that they may be penetrated with light, and enjoy perfect happiness in the participation of God. Plotinus, commenting on Plato, repeatedly and strongly asserts that not even the soul which they believe to be the soul of the world, derives its blessedness from any other source than we do, viz. from that Light which is distinct from it and created it, and by whose intelligible illumination it enjoys light in things intelligible. He also compares those spiritual things to the vast and conspicuous heavenly bodies, as if God were the sun, and the soul the moon; for they suppose that the moon derives its light from the sun. That great Platonist, therefore, says that the rational soul, or rather the intellectual soul,—in which class he comprehends the souls of the blessed immortals who inhabit heaven,—has no nature superior to it save God, the Creator of the world and the soul itself, and that these heavenly spirits derive their blessed life, and the light of truth, from the same source as ourselves, agreeing with the gospel where we read, “There was a man sent from God whose name was John; the same came for a witness to bear witness of that Light, that through Him all might believe. He was not that Light, but that he might bear witness of the Light. That was the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world;”—a distinction which sufficiently proves that the rational or

intellectual soul such as John had cannot be its own light, but needs to receive illumination from another, the true Light. This John himself avows when he delivers his witness: "We have all received of His fulness."

3. That the Platonists, though knowing something of the Creator of the universe, have misunderstood the true worship of God, by giving divine honour to angels, good or bad. This being so, if the Platonists, or those who think with them, knowing God, glorified Him as God and gave thanks, if they did not become vain in their own thoughts, if they did not originate or yield to the popular errors, they would certainly acknowledge that neither could the blessed immortals retain, nor we miserable mortals reach, a happy condition without worshipping the one God of gods, who is both theirs and ours. To Him we owe the service which is called in Greek λατρεία, whether we render it outwardly or inwardly; for we are all His temple, each of us severally and all of us together, because He condescends to inhabit each individually and the whole harmonious body, being no greater in all than in each, since He is neither expanded nor divided. Our heart when it rises to Him is His altar; the priest who intercedes for us is His Only-begotten; we sacrifice to Him bleeding victims when we contend for His truth even unto blood; to Him we offer the sweetest incense when we come before Him burning with holy and pious love; to Him we devote and surrender ourselves and His gifts in us; to Him, by solemn feasts and on appointed days, we consecrate the memory of His benefits, lest through the lapse of time ungrateful oblivion should steal upon us; to Him we offer on the altar of our heart the sacrifice of humility and praise, kindled by the fire of burning love. It is that we may see Him, so far as He can be seen; it is that we may cleave to Him, that we are cleansed from

all stain of sins and evil passions, and are consecrated in His name. For He is the fountain of our happiness, He the end of all our desires. Being attached to Him, or rather let me say, re-attached,—for we had detached ourselves and lost hold of Him,—being, I say, re-attached to Him, we tend towards Him by love, that we may rest in Him, and find our blessedness by attaining that end. For our good, about which philosophers have so keenly contended, is nothing else than to be united to God. It is, if I may say so, by spiritually embracing Him that the intellectual soul is filled and impregnated with true virtues. We are enjoined to love this good with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength. To this good we ought to be led by those who love us, and to lead those we love. Thus are fulfilled those two commandments on which hang all the law and the prophets: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul;” and “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” For, that man might be intelligent in his self-love, there was appointed for him an end to which he might refer all his actions, that he might be blessed. For he who loves himself wishes nothing else than this. And the end set before him is “to draw near to God.” And so, when one who has this intelligent self-love is commanded to love his neighbour as himself, what else is enjoined than that he shall do all in his power to commend to him the love of God? This is the worship of God, this is true religion, this right piety, this the service due to God only. If any immortal power, then, no matter with what virtue endowed, loves us as himself, he must desire that we find our happiness by submitting ourselves to Him, in submission to whom he himself finds happiness. If he does not worship God, he is wretched, because deprived of God; if he worships God, he cannot wish to be worshipped in God’s stead.

On the contrary, these higher powers acquiesce heartily in the divine sentence in which it is written, "He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto the Lord only, he shall be utterly destroyed."

4. That sacrifice is due to the true God only. But, putting aside for the present the other religious services with which God is worshipped, certainly no man would dare to say that sacrifice is due to any but God. Many parts, indeed, of divine worship are unduly used in showing honour to men, whether through an excessive humility or pernicious flattery; yet, while this is done, those persons who are thus worshipped and venerated, or even adored, are reckoned no more than human; and who ever thought of sacrificing save to one whom he knew, supposed, or feigned to be a god? And how ancient a part of God's worship sacrifice is, those two brothers, Cain and Abel, sufficiently show, of whom God rejected the elder's sacrifice, and looked favourably on the younger's.
5. Of the sacrifices which God does not require, but wished to be observed for the exhibition of those things which He does require. And who is so foolish as to suppose that the things offered to God are needed by Him for some uses of His own? Divine Scripture in many places explodes this idea. Not to be wearisome, suffice it to quote this brief saying from a psalm: "I have said to the Lord, Thou art my God: for Thou needest not my goodness." We must believe, then, that God has no need, not only of cattle, or any other earthly and material thing, but even of man's righteousness, and that whatever right worship is paid to God profits not Him, but man. For no man would say he did a benefit to a fountain by drinking, or to the light by seeing. And the fact that the ancient church offered animal sacrifices, which the people of God now-a-days reads of without imitating, proves nothing else than

this, that those sacrifices signified the things which we do for the purpose of drawing near to God, and inducing our neighbour to do the same. A sacrifice, therefore, is the visible sacrament or sacred sign of an invisible sacrifice. Hence that penitent in the psalm, or it may be the Psalmist himself, entreating God to be merciful to his sins, says, "If Thou desiredst sacrifice, I would give it: Thou delightest not in whole burnt-offerings. The sacrifice of God is a broken heart: a heart contrite and humble God will not despise." Observe how, in the very words in which he is expressing God's refusal of sacrifice, he shows that God requires sacrifice. He does not desire the sacrifice of a slaughtered beast, but He desires the sacrifice of a contrite heart. Thus, that sacrifice which he says God does not wish, is the symbol of the sacrifice which God does wish. God does not wish sacrifices in the sense in which foolish people think He wishes them, viz. to gratify His own pleasure. For if He had not wished that the sacrifices He requires, as, e.g., a heart contrite and humbled by penitent sorrow, should be symbolized by those sacrifices which He was thought to desire because pleasant to Himself, the old law would never have enjoined their presentation; and they were destined to be merged when the fit opportunity arrived, in order that men might not suppose that the sacrifices themselves, rather than the things symbolized by them, were pleasing to God or acceptable in us. Hence, in another passage from another psalm, he says, "If I were hungry, I would not tell thee; for the world is mine and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" as if He should say, Supposing such things were necessary to me, I would never ask thee for what I have in my own hand. Then he goes on to mention what these signify: "Offer unto God the sacrifice of praise, and pay thy vows unto the Most

High. And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." So in another prophet: "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? Hath He showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" In the words of this prophet, these two things are distinguished and set forth with sufficient explicitness, that God does not require these sacrifices for their own sakes, and that He does require the sacrifices which they symbolize. In the epistle entitled "To the Hebrews" it is said, "To do good and to communicate, forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." And so, when it is written, "I desire mercy rather than sacrifice," nothing else is meant than that one sacrifice is preferred to another; for that which in common speech is called sacrifice is only the symbol of the true sacrifice. Now mercy is the true sacrifice, and therefore it is said, as I have just quoted, "with such sacrifices God is well pleased." All the divine ordinances, therefore, which we read concerning the sacrifices in the service of the tabernacle or the temple, we are to refer to the love of God and our neighbour. For "on these two commandments," as it is written, "hang all the law and the prophets."

6. Of the true and perfect sacrifice. Thus a true sacrifice is every work which is done that we may be united to God in holy fellowship, and which has a reference to that supreme good and end in which alone we can be truly blessed. And therefore even the mercy we show to men, if it is not shown for God's sake, is not a sacrifice.

For, though made or offered by man, sacrifice is a divine thing, as those who called it sacrifice meant to indicate. Thus man himself, consecrated in the name of God, and vowed to God, is a sacrifice in so far as he dies to the world that he may live to God. For this is a part of that mercy which each man shows to himself; as it is written, "Have mercy on thy soul by pleasing God." Our body, too, is a sacrifice when we chasten it by temperance, if we do so as we ought, for God's sake, that we may not yield our members instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but instruments of righteousness unto God. Exhorting to this sacrifice, the apostle says, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercy of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." If, then, the body, which, being inferior, the soul uses as a servant or instrument, is a sacrifice when it is used rightly, and with reference to God, how much more does the soul itself become a sacrifice when it offers itself to God, in order that, being inflamed by the fire of His love, it may receive of His beauty and become pleasing to Him, losing the shape of earthly desire, and being remoulded in the image of permanent loveliness? And this, indeed, the apostle subjoins, saying, "And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed in the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." Since, therefore, true sacrifices are works of mercy to ourselves or others, done with a reference to God, and since works of mercy have no other object than the relief of distress or the conferring of happiness, and since there is no happiness apart from that good of which it is said, "It is good for me to be very near to God," it follows that the whole redeemed city, that is to say, the congregation or community of the saints, is offered to God as our

sacrifice through the great High Priest, who offered Himself to God in His passion for us, that we might be members of this glorious head, according to the form of a servant. For it was this form He offered, in this He was offered, because it is according to it He is Mediator, in this He is our Priest, in this the Sacrifice. Accordingly, when the apostle had exhorted us to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, our reasonable service, and not to be conformed to the world, but to be transformed in the renewing of our mind, that we might prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God, that is to say, the true sacrifice of ourselves, he says, "For I say, through the grace of God which is given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For, as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another, having gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us." This is the sacrifice of Christians: we, being many, are one body in Christ. And this also is the sacrifice which the Church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar, known to the faithful, in which she teaches that she herself is offered in the offering she makes to God.

7. Of the love of the holy angels, which prompts them to desire that we worship the one true God, and not themselves. It is very right that these blessed and immortal spirits, who inhabit celestial dwellings, and rejoice in the communications of their Creator's fulness, firm in His eternity, assured in His truth, holy by His grace, since they compassionately and tenderly regard us miserable mortals, and wish us to become immortal and happy, do not desire us to sacrifice to

themselves, but to Him whose sacrifice they know themselves to be in common with us. For we and they together are the one city of God, to which it is said in the psalm, "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God;" the human part sojourning here below, the angelic aiding from above. For from that heavenly city, in which God's will is the intelligible and unchangeable law, from that heavenly council-chamber,—for they sit in counsel regarding us,—that holy Scripture, descended to us by the ministry of angels, in which it is written, "He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto the Lord only, he shall be utterly destroyed,"—this Scripture, this law, these precepts, have been confirmed by such miracles, that it is sufficiently evident to whom these immortal and blessed spirits, who desire us to be like themselves, wish us to sacrifice.

8. Of the miracles which God has condescended to adhibit, through the ministry of angels, to His promises for the confirmation of the faith of the godly. I should seem tedious were I to recount all the ancient miracles, which were wrought in attestation of God's promises which He made to Abraham thousands of years ago, that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed. For who can but marvel that Abraham's barren wife should have given birth to a son at an age when not even a prolific woman could bear children; or, again, that when Abraham sacrificed, a flame from heaven should have run between the divided parts; or that the angels in human form, whom he had hospitably entertained, and who had renewed God's promise of offspring, should also have predicted the destruction of Sodom by fire from heaven; and that his nephew Lot should have been rescued from Sodom by the angels as the fire was just descending, while his wife, who looked back as she went, and was immediately turned into salt,

stood as a sacred beacon warning us that no one who is being saved should long for what he is leaving? How striking also were the wonders done by Moses to rescue God's people from the yoke of slavery in Egypt, when the magi of the Pharaoh, that is, the king of Egypt, who tyrannized over this people, were suffered to do some wonderful things that they might be vanquished all the more signally! They did these things by the magical arts and incantations to which the evil spirits or demons are addicted; while Moses, having as much greater power as he had right on his side, and having the aid of angels, easily conquered them in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. And, in fact, the magicians failed at the third plague; whereas Moses, dealing out the miracles delegated to him, brought ten plagues upon the land, so that the hard hearts of Pharaoh and the Egyptians yielded, and the people were let go. But, quickly repenting, and essaying to overtake the departing Hebrews, who had crossed the sea on dry ground, they were covered and overwhelmed in the returning waters. What shall I say of those frequent and stupendous exhibitions of divine power, while the people were conducted through the wilderness?—of the waters which could not be drunk, but lost their bitterness, and quenched the thirsty, when at God's command a piece of wood was cast into them? of the manna that descended from heaven to appease their hunger, and which begat worms and putrefied when any one collected more than the appointed quantity, and yet, though double was gathered on the day before the Sabbath (it not being lawful to gather it on that day), remained fresh? of the birds which filled the camp, and turned appetite into satiety when they longed for flesh, which it seemed impossible to supply to so vast a population? of the enemies who met them, and opposed their passage with

arms, and were defeated without the loss of a single Hebrew, when Moses prayed with his hands extended in the form of a cross? of the seditious persons who arose among God's people, and separated themselves from the divinely-ordered community, and were swallowed up alive by the earth, a visible token of an invisible punishment? of the rock struck with the rod, and pouring out waters more than enough for all the host? of the deadly serpents' bites, sent in just punishment of sin, but healed by looking at the lifted brazen serpent, so that not only were the tormented people healed, but a symbol of the crucifixion of death set before them in this destruction of death by death? It was this serpent which was preserved in memory of this event, and was afterwards worshipped by the mistaken people as an idol, and was destroyed by the pious and God-fearing king Hezekiah, much to his credit.

9. Of the illicit arts connected with demonolatry, and of which the Platonist Porphyry adopts some, and discards others. These miracles, and many others of the same nature, which it were tedious to mention, were wrought for the purpose of commending the worship of the one true God, and prohibiting the worship of a multitude of false gods. Moreover, they were wrought by simple faith and godly confidence, not by the incantations and charms composed under the influence of a criminal tampering with the unseen world, of an art which they call either magic, or by the more abominable title necromancy, or the more honourable designation theurgy; for they wish to discriminate between those whom the people call magicians, who practise necromancy, and are addicted to illicit arts and condemned, and those others who seem to them to be worthy of praise for their practice of theurgy,—the truth, however, being that both classes are the slaves of

the deceitful rites of the demons whom they invoke under the names of angels. For even Porphyry promises some kind of purgation of the soul by the help of theurgy, though he does so with some hesitation and shame, and denies that this art can secure to any one a return to God; so that you can detect his opinion vacillating between the profession of philosophy and an art which he feels to be presumptuous and sacrilegious. For at one time he warns us to avoid it as deceitful, and prohibited by law, and dangerous to those who practise it; then again, as if in deference to its advocates, he declares it useful for cleansing one part of the soul, not, indeed, the intellectual part, by which the truth of things intelligible, which have no sensible images, is recognised, but the spiritual part, which takes cognizance of the images of things material. This part, he says, is prepared and fitted for intercourse with spirits and angels, and for the vision of the gods, by the help of certain theurgic consecrations, or, as they call them, mysteries. He acknowledges, however, that these theurgic mysteries impart to the intellectual soul no such purity as fits it to see its God, and recognise the things that truly exist. And from this acknowledgment we may infer what kind of gods these are, and what kind of vision of them is imparted by theurgic consecrations, if by it one cannot see the things which truly exist. He says, further, that the rational, or, as he prefers calling it, the intellectual soul, can pass into the heavens without the spiritual part being cleansed by theurgic art, and that this art cannot so purify the spiritual part as to give it entrance to immortality and eternity. And therefore, although he distinguishes angels from demons, asserting that the habitation of the latter is in the air, while the former dwell in the ether and empyrean, and although he advises us to cultivate the friendship of some demon, who may be

able after our death to assist us, and elevate us at least a little above the earth,—for he owns that it is by another way we must reach the heavenly society of the angels,—he at the same time distinctly warns us to avoid the society of demons, saying that the soul, expiating its sin after death, execrates the worship of demons by whom it was entangled. And of theurgy itself, though he recommends it as reconciling angels and demons, he cannot deny that it treats with powers which either themselves envy the soul its purity, or serve the arts of those who do envy it. He complains of this through the mouth of some Chaldæan or other: “A good man in Chaldæa complains,” he says, “that his most strenuous efforts to cleanse his soul were frustrated, because another man, who had influence in these matters, and who envied him purity, had prayed to the powers, and bound them by his conjuring not to listen to his request. Therefore,” adds Porphyry, “what the one man bound, the other could not loose.” And from this he concludes that theurgy is a craft which accomplishes not only good but evil among gods and men; and that the gods also have passions, and are perturbed and agitated by the emotions which Apuleius attributed to demons and men, but from which he preserved the gods by that sublimity of residence, which, in common with Plato, he accorded to them.

10. Concerning theurgy, which promises a delusive purification of the soul by the invocation of demons. But here we have another and a much more learned Platonist than Apuleius, Porphyry, to wit, asserting that, by I know not what theurgy, even the gods themselves are subjected to passions and perturbations; for by adjurations they were so bound and terrified that they could not confer purity of soul,—were so terrified by him who imposed on them a wicked command, that they could not by the same theurgy be

freed from that terror, and fulfil the righteous behest of him who prayed to them, or do the good he sought. Who does not see that all these things are fictions of deceiving demons, unless he be a wretched slave of theirs, and an alien from the grace of the true Liberator? For if the Chaldæan had been dealing with good gods, certainly a well-disposed man, who sought to purify his own soul, would have had more influence with them than an evil-disposed man seeking to hinder him. Or, if the gods were just, and considered the man unworthy of the purification he sought, at all events they should not have been terrified by an envious person, nor hindered, as Porphyry avows, by the fear of a stronger deity, but should have simply denied the boon on their own free judgment. And it is surprising that that well-disposed Chaldæan, who desired to purify his soul by theurgical rites, found no superior deity who could either terrify the frightened gods still more, and force them to confer the boon, or compose their fears, and so enable them to do good without compulsion,—even supposing that the good theurgist had no rites by which he himself might purge away the taint of fear from the gods whom he invoked for the purification of his own soul. And why is it that there is a god who has power to terrify the inferior gods, and none who has power to free them from fear? Is there found a god who listens to the envious man, and frightens the gods from doing good? and is there not found a god who listens to the well-disposed man, and removes the fear of the gods that they may do him good? O excellent theurgy! O admirable purification of the soul!—a theurgy in which the violence of an impure envy has more influence than the entreaty of purity and holiness. Rather let us abominate and avoid the deceit of such wicked spirits, and listen to sound doctrine. As to those who perform these filthy cleansings by sacrilegious

rites, and see in their initiated state (as he further tells us, though we may question this vision) certain wonderfully lovely appearances of angels or gods, this is what the apostle refers to when he speaks of "Satan transforming himself into an angel of light." For these are the delusive appearances of that spirit who longs to entangle wretched souls in the deceptive worship of many and false gods, and to turn them aside from the true worship of the true God, by whom alone they are cleansed and healed, and who, as was said of Proteus, "turns himself into all shapes," equally hurtful, whether he assaults us as an enemy, or assumes the disguise of a friend.

11. Of Porphyry's epistle to Anebo, in which he asks for information about the differences among demons. It was a better tone which Porphyry adopted in his letter to Anebo the Egyptian, in which, assuming the character of an inquirer consulting him, he unmasks and explodes these sacrilegious arts. In that letter, indeed, he repudiates all demons, whom he maintains to be so foolish as to be attracted by the sacrificial vapours, and therefore residing not in the ether, but in the air beneath the moon, and indeed in the moon itself. Yet he has not the boldness to attribute to all the demons all the deceptions and malicious and foolish practices which justly move his indignation. For, though he acknowledges that as a race demons are foolish, he so far accommodates himself to popular ideas as to call some of them benignant demons. He expresses surprise that sacrifices not only incline the gods, but also compel and force them to do what men wish; and he is at a loss to understand how the sun and moon, and other visible celestial bodies,—for bodies he does not doubt that they are,—are considered gods, if the gods are distinguished from the demons by their incorporeality; also, if they are gods, how some are

called beneficent and others hurtful, and how they, being corporeal, are numbered with the gods, who are incorporeal. He inquires further, and still as one in doubt, whether diviners and wonderworkers are men of unusually powerful souls, or whether the power to do these things is communicated by spirits from without. He inclines to the latter opinion, on the ground that it is by the use of stones and herbs that they lay spells on people, and open closed doors, and do similar wonders. And on this account, he says, some suppose that there is a race of beings whose property it is to listen to men,—a race deceitful, full of contrivances, capable of assuming all forms, simulating gods, demons, and dead men,—and that it is this race which brings about all these things which have the appearance of good or evil, but that what is really good they never help us in, and are indeed unacquainted with, for they make wickedness easy, but throw obstacles in the path of those who eagerly follow virtue; and that they are filled with pride and rashness, delight in sacrificial odours, are taken with flattery. These and the other characteristics of this race of deceitful and malicious spirits, who come into the souls of men and delude their senses, both in sleep and waking, he describes not as things of which he is himself convinced, but only with so much suspicion and doubt as to cause him to speak of them as commonly received opinions. We should sympathize with this great philosopher in the difficulty he experienced in acquainting himself with and confidently assailing the whole fraternity of devils, which any Christian old woman would unhesitatingly describe and most unreservedly detest. Perhaps, however, he shrank from offending Anebo, to whom he was writing, himself the most eminent patron of these mysteries, or the others who marvelled at these magical feats as divine works, and closely allied to the

worship of the gods. However, he pursues this subject, and, still in the character of an inquirer, mentions some things which no sober judgment could attribute to any but malicious and deceitful powers. He asks why, after the better class of spirits have been invoked, the worse should be commanded to perform the wicked desires of men; why they do not hear a man who has just left a woman's embrace, while they themselves make no scruple of tempting men to incest and adultery; why their priests are commanded to abstain from animal food for fear of being polluted by the corporeal exhalations, while they themselves are attracted by the fumes of sacrifices and other exhalations; why the initiated are forbidden to touch a dead body, while their mysteries are celebrated almost entirely by means of dead bodies; why it is that a man addicted to any vice should utter threats, not to a demon or to the soul of a dead man, but to the sun and moon, or some of the heavenly bodies, which he intimidates by imaginary terrors, that he may wring from them a real boon,—for he threatens that he will demolish the sky, and such like impossibilities,—that those gods, being alarmed, like silly children, with imaginary and absurd threats, may do what they are ordered. Porphyry further relates that a man Chæremon, profoundly versed in these sacred or rather sacrilegious mysteries, had written that the famous Egyptian mysteries of Isis and her husband Osiris had very great influence with the gods to compel them to do what they were ordered, when he who used the spells threatened to divulge or do away with these mysteries, and cried with a threatening voice that he would scatter the members of Osiris if they neglected his orders. Not without reason is Porphyry surprised that a man should utter such wild and empty threats against the gods,—not against gods of no account, but against the heavenly gods, and those

that shine with sidereal light,—and that these threats should be effectual to constrain them with resistless power, and alarm them so that they fulfil his wishes. Not without reason does he, in the character of an inquirer into the reasons of these surprising things, give it to be understood that they are done by that race of spirits which he previously described as if quoting other people's opinions,—spirits who deceive not, as he said, by nature, but by their own corruption, and who simulate gods and dead men, but not, as he said, demons, for demons they really are. As to his idea that by means of herbs, and stones, and animals, and certain incantations and noises, and drawings, sometimes fanciful, and sometimes copied from the motions of the heavenly bodies, men create upon earth powers capable of bringing about various results, all that is only the mystification which these demons practise on those who are subject to them, for the sake of furnishing themselves with merriment at the expense of their dupes. Either, then, Porphyry was sincere in his doubts and inquiries, and mentioned these things to demonstrate and put beyond question that they were the work, not of powers which aid us in obtaining life, but of deceitful demons; or, to take a more favourable view of the philosopher, he adopted this method with the Egyptian who was wedded to these errors, and was proud of them, that he might not offend him by assuming the attitude of a teacher, nor discompose his mind by the altercation of a professed assailant, but, by assuming the character of an inquirer, and the humble attitude of one who was anxious to learn, might turn his attention to these matters, and show how worthy they are to be despised and relinquished. Towards the conclusion of his letter, he requests Anebo to inform him what the Egyptian wisdom indicates as the way to blessedness. But as to those who hold intercourse with

the gods, and pester them only for the sake of finding a runaway slave, or acquiring property, or making a bargain of a marriage, or such things, he declares that their pretensions to wisdom are vain. He adds that these same gods, even granting that on other points their utterances were true, were yet so ill-advised and unsatisfactory in their disclosures about blessedness, that they cannot be either gods or good demons, but are either that spirit who is called the deceiver, or mere fictions of the imagination.

12. Of the miracles wrought by the true God through the ministry of the holy angels. Since by means of these arts wonders are done which quite surpass human power, what choice have we but to believe that these predictions and operations, which seem to be miraculous and divine, and which at the same time form no part of the worship of the one God, in adherence to whom, as the Platonists themselves abundantly testify, all blessedness consists, are the pastime of wicked spirits, who thus seek to seduce and hinder the truly godly? On the other hand, we cannot but believe that all miracles, whether wrought by angels or by other means, so long as they are so done as to commend the worship and religion of the one God in whom alone is blessedness, are wrought by those who love us in a true and godly sort, or through their means, God Himself working in them. For we cannot listen to those who maintain that the invisible God works no visible miracles; for even they believe that He made the world, which surely they will not deny to be visible. Whatever marvel happens in this world, it is certainly less marvellous than this whole world itself,—I mean the sky and earth, and all that is in them,—and these God certainly made. But, as the Creator Himself is hidden and incomprehensible to man, so also is the manner of creation. Although, therefore, the standing

miracle of this visible world is little thought of, because always before us, yet, when we arouse ourselves to contemplate it, it is a greater miracle than the rarest and most unheard-of marvels. For man himself is a greater miracle than any miracle done through his instrumentality. Therefore God, who made the visible heaven and earth, does not disdain to work visible miracles in heaven or earth, that He may thereby awaken the soul which is immersed in things visible to worship Himself, the Invisible. But the place and time of these miracles are dependent on His unchangeable will, in which things future are ordered as if already they were accomplished. For He moves things temporal without Himself moving in time. He does not in one way know things that are to be, and, in another, things that have been; neither does He listen to those who pray otherwise than as He sees those that will pray. For, even when His angels hear us, it is He Himself who hears us in them, as in His true temple not made with hands, as in those men who are His saints; and His answers, though accomplished in time, have been arranged by His eternal appointment.

13. Of the invisible God, who has often made Himself visible, not as He really is, but as the beholders could bear the sight. Neither need we be surprised that God, invisible as He is, should often have appeared visibly to the patriarchs. For as the sound which communicates the thought conceived in the silence of the mind is not the thought itself, so the form by which God, invisible in His own nature, became visible, was not God Himself. Nevertheless it is He Himself who was seen under that form, as that thought itself is heard in the sound of the voice; and the patriarchs recognised that, though the bodily form was not God, they saw the invisible God. For, though Moses conversed with God, yet he said, 'If I have found grace in Thy sight, show me Thyself, that I

may see and know Thee.’ And as it was fit that the law, which was given, not to one man or a few enlightened men, but to the whole of a populous nation, should be accompanied by awe-inspiring signs, great marvels were wrought, by the ministry of angels, before the people on the mount where the law was being given to them through one man, while the multitude beheld the awful appearances. For the people of Israel believed Moses, not as the Lacedæmonians believed their Lycurgus, because he had received from Jupiter or Apollo the laws he gave them. For when the law which enjoined the worship of one God was given to the people, marvellous signs and earthquakes, such as the divine wisdom judged sufficient, were brought about in the sight of all, that they might know that it was the Creator who could thus use creation to promulgate His law.

14. That the one God is to be worshipped not only for the sake of eternal blessings, but also in connection with temporal prosperity, because all things are regulated by His providence. The education of the human race, represented by the people of God, has advanced, like that of an individual, through certain epochs, or, as it were, ages, so that it might gradually rise from earthly to heavenly things, and from the visible to the invisible. This object was kept so clearly in view, that, even in the period when temporal rewards were promised, the one God was presented as the object of worship, that men might not acknowledge any other than the true Creator and Lord of the spirit, even in connection with the earthly blessings of this transitory life. For he who denies that all things, which either angels or men can give us, are in the hand of the one Almighty, is a madman. The Platonist Plotinus discourses concerning providence, and, from the beauty of flowers and foliage, proves that from the supreme God, whose beauty is

unseen and ineffable, providence reaches down even to these earthly things here below; and he argues that all these frail and perishing things could not have so exquisite and elaborate a beauty, were they not fashioned by Him whose unseen and unchangeable beauty continually pervades all things. This is proved also by the Lord Jesus, where He says, 'Consider the lilies, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin. And yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven, how much more shall He clothe you, O ye of little faith!' It was best, therefore, that the soul of man, which was still weakly desiring earthly things, should be accustomed to seek from God alone even these petty temporal boons, and the earthly necessities of this transitory life, which are contemptible in comparison with eternal blessings, in order that the desire even of these things might not draw it aside from the worship of Him, to whom we come by despising and forsaking such things.

15. Of the ministry of the holy angels, by which they fulfil the providence of God. And so it has pleased Divine Providence, as I have said, and as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, that the law enjoining the worship of one God should be given by the disposition of angels. But among them the person of God Himself visibly appeared, not, indeed, in His proper substance, which ever remains invisible to mortal eyes, but by the infallible signs furnished by creation in obedience to its Creator. He made use, too, of the words of human speech, uttering them syllable by syllable successively, though in His own nature He speaks not in a bodily but in a spiritual way; not to sense, but to the mind; not in words that occupy time, but, if I may so say, eternally, neither beginning to speak nor coming to an end. And

what He says is accurately heard, not by the bodily but by the mental ear of His ministers and messengers, who are immortally blessed in the enjoyment of His unchangeable truth; and the directions which they in some ineffable way receive, they execute without delay or difficulty in the sensible and visible world. And this law was given in conformity with the age of the world, and contained at the first earthly promises, as I have said, which, however, symbolized eternal ones; and these eternal blessings few understood, though many took a part in the celebration of their visible signs. Nevertheless, with one consent both the words and the visible rites of that law enjoin the worship of one God,—not one of a crowd of gods, but Him who made heaven and earth, and every soul and every spirit which is other than Himself. He created; all else was created; and, both for being and well-being, all things need Him who created them.

16. Whether those angels who demand that we pay them divine honour, or those who teach us to render holy service, not to themselves, but to God, are to be trusted about the way to life eternal. What angels, then, are we to believe in this matter of blessed and eternal life?—those who wish to be worshipped with religious rites and observances, and require that men sacrifice to them; or those who say that all this worship is due to one God, the Creator, and teach us to render it with true piety to Him, by the vision of whom they are themselves already blessed, and in whom they promise that we shall be so? For that vision of God is the beauty of a vision so great, and is so infinitely desirable, that Plotinus does not hesitate to say that he who enjoys all other blessings in abundance, and has not this, is supremely miserable. Since, therefore, miracles are wrought by some angels to induce us to worship this God, by others, to induce us to worship themselves; and

since the former forbid us to worship these, while the latter dare not forbid us to worship God, which are we to listen to? Let the Platonists reply, or any philosophers, or the theurgists, or rather, periurgists,—for this name is good enough for those who practise such arts. In short, let all men answer,—if, at least, there survives in them any spark of that natural perception which, as rational beings, they possess when created,—let them, I say, tell us whether we should sacrifice to the gods or angels who order us to sacrifice to them, or to that One to whom we are ordered to sacrifice by those who forbid us to worship either themselves or these others. If neither the one party nor the other had wrought miracles, but had merely uttered commands, the one to sacrifice to themselves, the other forbidding that, and ordering us to sacrifice to God, a godly mind would have been at no loss to discern which command proceeded from proud arrogance, and which from true religion. I will say more. If miracles had been wrought only by those who demand sacrifice for themselves, while those who forbade this, and enjoined sacrificing to the one God only, thought fit entirely to forego the use of visible miracles, the authority of the latter was to be preferred by all who would use, not their eyes only, but their reason. But since God, for the sake of commending to us the oracles of His truth, has, by means of these immortal messengers, who proclaim His majesty and not their own pride, wrought miracles of surpassing grandeur, certainty, and distinctness, in order that the weak among the godly might not be drawn away to false religion by those who require us to sacrifice to them and endeavour to convince us by stupendous appeals to our senses, who is so utterly unreasonable as not to choose and follow the truth, when he finds that it is heralded by even more striking evidences than

falsehood? As for those miracles which history ascribes to the gods of the heathen,—I do not refer to those prodigies which at intervals happen from some unknown physical causes, and which are arranged and appointed by Divine Providence, such as monstrous births, and unusual meteorological phenomena, whether startling only, or also injurious, and which are said to be brought about and removed by communication with demons, and by their most deceitful craft,—but I refer to these prodigies which manifestly enough are wrought by their power and force, as, that the household gods which Æneas carried from Troy in his flight moved from place to place; that Tarquin cut a whetstone with a razor; that the Epidaurian serpent attached himself as a companion to Æsculapius on his voyage to Rome; that the ship in which the image of the Phrygian mother stood, and which could not be moved by a host of men and oxen, was moved by one weak woman, who attached her girdle to the vessel and drew it, as proof of her chastity; that a vestal, whose virginity was questioned, removed the suspicion by carrying from the Tiber a sieve full of water without any of it dropping: these, then, and the like, are by no means to be compared for greatness and virtue to those which, we read, were wrought among God's people. How much less can we compare those marvels, which even the laws of heathen nations prohibit and punish,—I mean the magical and theurgic marvels, of which the great part are merely illusions practised upon the senses, as the drawing down of the moon, "that," as Lucan says, "it may shed a stronger influence on the plants?" And if some of these do seem to equal those which are wrought by the godly, the end for which they are wrought distinguishes the two, and shows that ours are incomparably the more excellent. For those miracles commend the worship of a plurality

of gods, who deserve worship the less the more they demand it; but these of ours commend the worship of the one God, who, both by the testimony of His own Scriptures, and by the eventual abolition of sacrifices, proves that He needs no such offerings. If, therefore, any angels demand sacrifice for themselves, we must prefer those who demand it, not for themselves, but for God, the Creator of all, whom they serve. For thus they prove how sincerely they love us, since they wish by sacrifice to subject us, not to themselves, but to Him by the contemplation of whom they themselves are blessed, and to bring us to Him from whom they themselves have never strayed. If, on the other hand, any angels wish us to sacrifice, not to one, but to many, not, indeed, to themselves, but to the gods whose angels they are, we must in this case also prefer those who are the angels of the one God of gods, and who so bid us to worship Him as to preclude our worshipping any other. But, further, if it be the case, as their pride and deceitfulness rather indicate, that they are neither good angels nor the angels of good gods, but wicked demons, who wish sacrifice to be paid, not to the one only and supreme God, but to themselves, what better protection against them can we choose than that of the one God whom the good angels serve, the angels who bid us sacrifice, not to themselves, but to Him whose sacrifice we ourselves ought to be?

