

Augustine, *On the Divination of Demons*.

Introduction

This neat little essay begins with a brief account of a conversation held during Holy Week (“the holy days of the Octave,” i.e. the eight days from Palm Sunday to Easter, inclusive). Augustine's interlocutors, laymen he neither numbers nor names, take the part of their pagan acquaintances, pushing back against Augustine's criticisms of traditional religion. What kicked it all off was the question why a pagan oracle had successfully predicted the downfall of the Serapeum, the temple of Serapis in Alexandria. Convinced by Augustine's attacks on paganism, they nonetheless had not received an answer to this question, and so Augustine wrote a brief tract to explain why and how demons achieve their apparent powers of clairvoyance. The essay reveals much about the state of pagan practice and sentiment in North Africa at the time of its composition (usually put between ca. 406 and 410), and neatly summarizes a Christian but not emphatically biblical theory about the intermediary spirits in whose existence and action most pagans, too, believed.

The Latin text is the standard critical edition by Joseph Zycha, in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 41: 599-618 (available on [Internet Archive](#)). There is an English translation in vol. 11 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* published by New City Press, as well as French, German, and Dutch translations with commentary by Gustav Bardy, J. A. Bechaert, and J. Boutet (in *Bibliothèque augustinienne* 11, Paris, 1952), Katrin Kühn (in *Augustiniana* 47 (1997) 291–337), and H. J. Geerlings (*De antieke daemonologie en Augustinus' geschrift De divinatione daemonum*, 's-Gravenhage, 1953). I have consulted all of these at some time or other, but not checked my translation against anyone else's. The translations into other languages I have not seen. A good introduction, if you have first-rate library access, is that by Jan den Boeft in the *Augustinus-Lexicon*.

Translation

Introduction: a conversation on pagan religion

1.1 On a certain day during Holy Week,¹ when many brethren, Christian laymen, were with me in the morning and we had sat down in the customary place, a conversation began about the Christian religion, against the presumption and allegedly wondrous and great knowledge of the pagans: a conversation that, when it was recorded and complete, I thought should be committed to writing, without indicating the persons of those who contradicted me, though they were Christians and seemed rather by contradicting to be asking what reply one ought to give to pagans.²

¹ Lit, “the holy days of the Octave.”

² Augustine had evidently continued his old practice, in evidence in the dialogues written at Cassiciacum in 386-387, of having stenographers record his conversations on theology. *Non expressis personis*, rendered here as “without indicating the persons,” bears a fuller meaning in Latin than in English: *persona* can mean a dramatic “role.” Augustine has chosen not simply to omit his interlocutors' names, but also to fuse into a single voice what must have been the words of several different people. Augustine reports the interlocutors' words in the passive (“it was asked,” “the reply was made,” etc.) or an indefinite singular (“he says/one says”); I render these expressions with the generic “they.”

When, therefore, they posed the question about the divination of demons and affirmed that somebody or other had predicted the overthrow of the temple of Serapis, which was done in Alexandria, I answered that one ought not marvel, if the demons were able both to know that that overthrow awaited their temples and images and to predict it, just like many other things, so far as it is permitted them to know and to pronounce.³

1.2 Then they answered me:⁴ therefore divinations of this kind are not evil nor displeasing to God; otherwise the Omnipotent and Just would not permit these things to take place, if they were evil and unjust. I answered that these things ought not seem just for the reason that the most omnipotent and most just God permits them to take place; for many other things happen that are (as it is utterly manifest) unjust, for example, homicides, adulteries, thefts, robberies, and the other things of that sort, which, although they are without doubt displeasing to the just God because they are unjust, the Omnipotent nevertheless allows to take place by the fixed reason of his judgment, not at any rate with impunity, but to the damnation of those by which those things that displease the Just take place.

1.3 Then they said in rebuttal that one must not, in fact, doubt that God is omnipotent and just, but that for these human sins, which take place contrary to the bond among human beings,⁵ he does not take concern, while they are taking place—that they are able to take place for this reason, but could not take place at all, if the Omnipotent had not allowed them; but that one must believe that he does not at all scorn those things which pertain to religious practice itself.⁶ And (they said) that they could on this account not have taken place, unless they had pleased him, and ought therefore not be thought evil.

To this I also gave a reply: now, therefore, they displease him, when the temples and images are overthrown and those sacrifices of the nations, if they should happen to take place, are punished. After all, just as it is said that those things could not have taken place, if they had not pleased God, and ought therefore to be thought good, because they please the Just, so one can say that they could not have been prohibited, overthrown, and punished, if they did not displease God, and therefore, if they used then to take place rightly, because they were shown to be pleasing to the just God by the fact that he allowed them to take place, therefore they now take place wickedly, because they are shown to be displeasing to God by the fact that he either orders or permits them to be overthrown.

2.4 Against this they said that those things are now indeed unjust, but not evil; and unjust because they take place contrary to the laws by which they are prohibited, but not evil, because, if they were evil, they would never have pleased God at all.⁷ Furthermore, if they had never pleased him, they would never have taken place, without him, who is capable of all things and would not scorn things of such a kind, since they are so great, allowing them, so that they should take place contrary to the very religion by which God is worshipped, if it is evil for them to take place.⁸

³ The temple of Serapis was destroyed in 391 or 392, following riots in the city of Alexandria; just such an oracle is attributed to the Neoplatonist mystic Antoninus by Eunapius, *Lives of the Sophists*, 6.96.

⁴ Augustine introduces the rebuttals in this dialogic section with *et cum* (“and when”). The resulting sentences are tortuous enough in Latin, more so in English, and so I simplify the construction.

⁵ *Contra societatem humanam*: “society” seems often too anemic in contemporary English to get the point across clearly, and “social contract,” though tempting, is anachronistic.

⁶ *ad ipsum religionis cultum*, lit. “the worship itself (characteristic) of religion.”

⁷ Augustine’s interlocutors oppose *iniusta* (“unjust”) to *mala* (“evil”); we might render the former, contrary to etymology and indeed to the ordinary sense of *ius*, which embraces both civil and natural law, as “illegal.”

⁸ A difficult sentence, but the sense is clear.

At this, I said, if they are not evil, because they are shown to be pleasing to God by the fact that the Omnipotent allows them to take place, how will it be good that they are prohibited from taking place and are overthrown? If, however, it is not a good thing that those things which please God are overthrown, the Omnipotent would not allow this to happen, because it is also something that takes place contrary to the religion by which God is worshipped, if those things that please God are overthrown by men. If, however, God permits this, though it is an evil thing when it takes place, those things are not therefore to be thought good, on the grounds that the Omnipotent has permitted them to take place.

2.5 They said in rebuttal that one must concede that those things do not now take place rightly, nay, do not take place at all, because they are now displeasing to the Omnipotent, but had nevertheless pleased him, when they were taking place; we do not know, after all, for what reason they pleased him then, or for what reason they displease him now, though it is nevertheless certain that they could not then have taken place, unless they had pleased the Omnipotent, nor would now have ceased, unless they had displeased the Omnipotent.

To this I said, why, therefore, do such things take place in secret even now, which are either in constant concealment or, being discovered, are punished, if the Omnipotent allows none of them to take place, unless because it pleases him, the Just, though what is unjust cannot please the Just?

Against this they said that such things do not now take place at all. For those rites, they said, do not take place, which are written down in the pontifical books;⁹ inasmuch as those took place rightly then, they were shown then to have been pleasing to God by the fact that the Omnipotent and Just allowed them to take place; but if any of the prohibited sacrifices now takes place secretly and illicitly, it is not to be compared to the pontifical kind of sacrifices, but to be reckoned in that class which also takes place at night time, since it is certain that all these illicit rites are prohibited and condemned by the pontifical books themselves.

At this I answered: why, therefore, does God permit even such things to take place, if he scorns none of those evil deeds that take place contrary to religion,¹⁰ since those who hold a high view of the pontifical books are compelled to concede that he takes heed for these things, on that ground also, that they assert that those things which are prohibited in those books are, at any rate, divinely prohibited? How, therefore, are those things divinely prohibited, unless because they displease God, which he shows by his prohibition not only to be displeasing him but also to be things for which he takes heed and does not scorn at all? From this, one can infer that God may both disapprove of something, as Just, and nevertheless permit it, as Omnipotent.

2.6 When I had said this, they granted that one ought not think that something takes place justly and rightly, on the grounds that God, though he takes care that these things be prohibited, nevertheless allows them to take place; that one must state that those things are also evil, which take place contrary to the religion by which God is worshipped, and that they displease the just God and are permitted by the Omnipotent for reason of his judgment; but that one must now handle another point, whence come the divinations of demons or of whoever they may be, whom the pagans call gods; that one must take care, after all, lest

⁹ Texts ancillary, in ways now obscure, to the duties of the *pontifices*, the pre-eminent college of Roman priests.

¹⁰ In Latin, simply *contra religionem*; here, likely generic, though of course Augustine believes in only one route to God.

perhaps these should not in fact be thought good on the ground that the Omnipotent permits them to take place, but because they are so great that they seem only to be attributable to the power of God. To this I promised I would give a reply afterward, since at that time the hour to go to the congregation was now pressing us, and I have not, when time was available for writing, put off both repeating those things and adding these.

The treatise proper

3.7 The nature of demons is such that by virtue of the sense-perception of an aerial body they easily surpass the sense-perception of earthly bodies. In swiftness also, on account of the superior mobility of the same aerial body they prevail without compare not just over the running of any men or beasts you might happen to name, but even the flying of birds. Endowed with these two things (that is, sharpness of sense-perception and swiftness of movement), so far as pertains to an aerial body, they may foretell (or rather, report)¹¹ things perceived long before, which men marvel at in proportion to the slowness of their earthly sense-perception. The demons have also gained, through the long span through which their life is extended, a far greater experience of events than humans can attain, since their lives are brief.

Through these capacities, which the nature of an aerial body is allotted, the demons not only predict many things to come, but also do many wonders. Since men cannot say and do these things, some judge them worthy of their service and the bestowal of divine honors, especially under the impulsion of the vice of curiosity, on account of their love of false felicity and of earthly, temporal excellence.¹² Those, however, who purify themselves from these desires and do not permit themselves to be carried along and seized by them, but seek after and love something that always exists in the same way, by participation in which they may be blessed, first consider that the demons are not therefore to be preferred to themselves, because they surpass them in sharper sense-perception of the body—I mean an aerial body, that is, one consisting of a subtler element¹³—because they do not think that, even among earthly bodies, the beasts are to be preferred to themselves, which have a sharper perception, in advance, of many things.

Consider, for example, the scent-hound. Because it finds a hiding animal with its extremely sharp smell in such a way that it provides a kind of leadership to the man in order to capture it, it is not, at any rate, endowed with a more prudent intellect in the mind, but a sharper sense-perception in the body; nor is a vulture, because, when a body has been thrown out, it flies over from an unexpected distance; nor is an eagle, because, flying high up, it is said from so great a gap to see a fish swimming under the waves and, beating heavily on the waters, to snatch it with outstretched feet and claws; nor are the many other kinds of living creatures, which, in grazing, wander around plants harmful to their health and do not touch any of them, so as to be harmed, though a human being scarcely learns through experience to avoid them and fears many harmless things, because they are unfamiliar.¹⁴

¹¹ Augustine writes *praenuntiant uel nuntiant*. The point is that the demons' messages only *seem*, in such instances, to be predictions—they have, as it were, sent the report by radio, where everyone else is limited to the speed of horses' hooves or of the wind in ships' sails.

¹² In this sentence and the next, Augustine summarizes what would become a key theme of *City of God* 1–5. *Curiositas* here means roughly what the [Thesaurus Linguae Latinae](#) offers as definition 2, “a useless, vain desire to explore divine things.”

¹³ Augustine's wording is more compressed: *aerii scilicet, hoc est subtilioris elementi*.

¹⁴ All these examples are part of the preceding sentence in the Latin, and lack a governing verb. The meaning is perfectly clear, but I have had to break up the sentence and elaborate on Augustine's wording slightly to make

From this it is easy to infer how much more acute the sense-perception can be in aerial bodies. A prudent person would nevertheless not deem that the demons, who are endowed with it, are therefore to be preferred to good human beings. In this superiority, after all, men are so surpassed not just by the birds, but also by many quadrupeds, that they should be thought leaden by comparison with them, and they nevertheless do not deem that these kinds of living creatures are to be preferred to themselves, over which they exercise command, by strength not of body but of reason, in capturing them, rendering them gentle, and in reducing them to the benefit and advantage of their will.

(4)¹⁵ That third power of demons, however, that they have learned by experience of events how to know and report many things in advance, those who have taken vigilant care to distinguish these things from the truth of the truest light, scorn in the way that upright young men neither deem evil old men who are much experienced and on this account (so to speak) more learned therefore to surpass themselves, nor do they think that doctors or sailors or farmers, whom they have seen to be of corrupt will and wicked desires, are to be preferred to themselves, because those people report in advance many things about medical conditions, storms, and varieties of tree and crop in such a way that they seem to one inexperienced in these matters to be engaging in divination.

4.8 That, however, the demons not only predict some things to come, but also do some wonders (in proportion, at any rate, to the excellence of their body)—why should this not be scorned by the wise, since a good many wicked and corrupt men so exert their bodies and have such ability in diverse arts that those who are ignorant of these things nor have seen them before scarcely believe them even when their feats are reported? How many marvelous things have funambulists and the other theatrical specialists done? How many marvelous things have artisans and especially contrivers made?¹⁶ Are they really then better than men who are good and endowed with holy piety?

I have recounted these things so that the one who thinks them over without stubbornness and an idle ardor for caviling may at the same time consider that, if some men can do such great things in the case of denser underlying material—of their own bodies or of earth and water, various stones, timbers, and metals—that those who cannot do these things often, in their astonishment, call them divine in comparison with themselves, though some of the former people are more capable in their arts and some of the latter better in their morals, how much greater and more marvelous things can the demons do in proportion to the faculty and facility of the most subtle kind of body, that is, an aerial one, though they are nevertheless impure and perverse on account of the corruption of their will and especially the arrogance of their pride, as well as the malice of their envy! How much power the element of the air has to make their bodies capable of rousing, moving, changing, and altering many visible things invisibly, it would take a long time to demonstrate now, and I think will readily be apparent to anyone who thinks about it with even a moderate effort.

5.9 Since these things are so, one must first know, since the question is about the divination of demons, that they very often report in advance things which they are going to do

good English. A strict rendering would have said, “as, for example, the keen-scented hound ... to capture it not out of a more prudent intellect of the mind, at any rate, but a more acute sense-perception of the body.”

¹⁵ Here the chapter-divisions in the critical text break down: chapter III begins part-way through section 7.

¹⁶ “Mechanics” seemed to import rather the wrong sense to *mechanici*. I divide a sentence in two that would jar badly in English.

themselves. They often, after all, receive the power to send sickness and by vitiating the air itself to render it unwholesome and to persuade the perverse and the lovers of earthly benefits, from whose habits they are certain that they will consent to their suasions, to commit evil deeds. They persuade them, however, by penetrating in marvelous and invisible ways through that subtleness of their bodies into the bodies of men who do not perceive them and mixing themselves through certain imaginary sights into their thoughts, whether they are awake or sleeping.

Sometimes, however, they predict beforehand, not things they themselves are doing, but things which they know by natural signs are going to take place. A doctor, after all, is not to be considered divine, either, because he foresees what one ignorant of his art does not foresee. How is it marvelous, then, if in the manner that he, the doctor, foresees states of health, good or bad, that will come to pass in a perturbed or modified temper of the human body, the demons foresees storms that will come to pass in a state and an arrangement of the air known to him, but unknown to us?

Sometimes also they learn with complete ease the dispositions of human beings not only as they are expressed in speech, but also as they are conceived in thought, when certain signs from the mind are expressed in the body, and on this basis predict even many things that will come to pass, things wondrous to others, who have not known these things which were so disposed. Just as an excited movement of the mind appears on the face in such a way that something may be recognized from without by human beings also, it ought not be unbelievable, if more sedate thoughts also give certain signs through the body, which cannot be recognized by men's dull sense-perception, but can by the acute sense-perception of the demons.

6.10 By this ability and abilities like it, demons report in advance many things that will happen, though the depth of that prophecy, which God works through the holy angels and prophets, is nevertheless far removed from them. For if they report in advance anything about that ordinance of God, they hear it so that they may report it in advance; and when they predict those things which they hear from that source, they do not deceive nor are deceived; for the angelic and prophetic oracles are most veracious. Some, however, take it badly that the demons should also hear and proclaim some such things, as if it were unfitting that that not just the good, but also the bad, should not be silent about that which is said in order that it might become known to men, although where human beings are concerned we see that the precepts of a good way of life are also hymned by the just and perverse alike, and that it does not hinder, nay, even furthers, the greater notoriety and fame of the truth, when even those say whatever they know about it, who contradict it by perverse morals.

In the rest of their predictions, however, the demons are very often deceived and deceiving. They are deceived indeed, because, when they report in advance what they have disposed, some command is unexpectedly given from above, which throws all their plans into confusion. It is as if particular men subordinate to certain authorities dispose something, which they judge that their superiors are not going to prohibit, and promise that they will do it, but those in whom the greater authority lies, out of another, superior plan, suddenly prohibit the whole thing that had been disposed and prepared.¹⁷ They are often deceived for natural reasons—just like doctors, sailors, and farmers, they foreknow, but far more acutely and more excellently in proportion to the more dexterous and experienced quality of their

¹⁷ One is reminded that Augustine lived under an autocracy.

bodoes—because even these things are unexpectedly and suddenly changed, out of an unknown disposition, by the angels who dutifully serve the supreme God. It is as if something were to happen to a sick person from without, so that he dies, though the doctor had promised that he was going to live, on account of the true signs of health that preceded; or if having foreseen the quality of the air, some sailors had predicted that the wind was going to blow,¹⁸ but the Lord Christ, when sailing with his disciples, commanded it to be quiet, and a great calm was brought about; or if a farmer, being knowledgeable about the nature of the ground and the reckoning of seeds, were to promise that a certain vine was going to bear fruit in that year, but in that year an extreme weather condition, unforeseen, were to make it dry up or some command from a more powerful person tear it up by the roots. So also do many things that pertain to the foreknowledge and prediction of the demons, of which they see in advance from lesser and more typical causes, that they are going to happen, are blocked and changed by greater and more hidden causes.

They deceive, however, out of enthusiasm for deception and a hostile will, by which they take delight in men's error. But, lest they lose the weight of their authority among their worshippers, they bring it about that the fault is attributed to their interpreters and the explainers of their signs, when they were either deceived or had lied.

6.11 Is it therefore any wonder, if, when the overthrow of their temples and images, which the prophets of the supreme God had predicted so long before, was now impending, the demon Serapis handed over this message from nearby to one of his worshipers, so as to commend his divinity (of sorts) when he was retreating or running away?

(7) They are also put to flight, after all, or, bound by commands from on high, dragged out of their places and alienated from them, so that, concerning those things over which they used to have dominion and in which they used to be worshipped, the will of God might take place, who foretold so long ago that this was going to take place throughout all nations and commanded that it be done through his faithful ones. Why, however, should a demon not be allowed to foretell this, when he had already foreknown that it impended over him, since this prediction was also attested by the prophets, by whom these things were written down, and it was given to the wise to understand how vigilantly one must avoid the deceitfulness of demons and flee their worship? And they, though they had for so long a time been silent in their temples about these things that were to come, things that were predicted, as they could not have been unaware, through the prophets, after their fulfilment began to draw nigh, they wished to foretell them (so to speak), so as not to seem ignorant and defeated.

Therefore, since Zephaniah the prophet had made the following prediction (to omit the other prophecies for now) and written it down so long ago¹⁹—*The Lord will prevail against them and exterminate all the gods of the nations of the earth, and they will adore him, each and every one from his own place, all the islands of the nations*—three possibilities remain.²⁰ 1. They did not believe that these things were going to happen to themselves, who were worshipped in the temples of the nations, and so they did not want to repeat these things

¹⁸ The verb shifts here from a present to a pluperfect subjunctive. Augustine is in this case not posing a general hypothesis, but a contrafactual about a specific, past event.

¹⁹ The Latin employs passive verbs, and so does not unambiguously attribute the prophecy's writing to Zephaniah. Lit., "that had so long before been predicted and written down ... which Zephaniah the prophet says." The quotation is from Zeph. 2:11.

²⁰ This last clause and the numerals are my own addition, to ease breaking up a twenty-two-line sentence into its constituent elements. Augustine simply says, "either ... or ... or."

through their seers and fanatics. Even so their poet introduces Juno saying that she did not in any way believe what Jupiter had said about the death of Turnus (but Juno is called by them an aerial power, who speaks in Vergil thus): *Now speedy death attends the guiltless youth, / If my presaging soul divines with truth; / Which, O! I wish, might err thro' causeless fears, / And you (for you have pow'r) prolong his years!*²¹ 2. The demons, that is, the aerial powers, therefore doubted that those things which they knew had been predicted through the prophets could happen to themselves and so did not want to proclaim their prediction (and one may well infer from this what their character is like). 3. Since they knew that those things were most certainly going to come, they were silent throughout their temples, so that they might not begin even then to be deserted and scorned by people of understanding, because they were corroborating the prophets, who were forbidding them to be worshipped, on the future overthrow of their own temples and images.

But now, after the time has come for the predictions of the prophets of the one God to be completed, who says that they are false gods and gives the most vehement command that they not be worshipped, why should they themselves not also be allowed to predict this thing that has been completed, so that it might become the more clearly apparent that they had either given the least credence to these prophecies before or had been afraid to announce them to their worshippers, but in the end, having nothing more (as it were) that they could do, had wanted to show off their divinatory power even there, where they are now revealed for a long time to have pretended divinity?

8.12

As to what their remaining worshippers say, that these things, foreknown, are contained in certain books of theirs as well—though one ought rather to think that they were made up on the basis of the things that had been fulfilled, since they ought, if they were true, to have become known to their peoples,²² just as our predictions are recited not just in our churches, but also, being exceedingly ancient and well-known, in the synagogues of the Jews (a point that serves as the weightiest testimony against all opponents)²³—nevertheless, not even those very predictions that they hardly advance even rarely and in secret ought to move us, if some particular demon was strong-armed into betraying to his worshippers what he had learned from the statements of the prophets or the oracles of the angels.²⁴ And why should this not take place, since it would not be an assault on the truth, but a corroboration of it? The only point that ought to be demanded of them, they never advanced before nor will ever afterward try to produce (unless perhaps they have concocted it): that their gods have ever dared to predict or say anything through their soothsayers against the god of Israel. Concerning this God their most learned authors, who were able to read and know all these things, asked rather what God he was, than were able to deny that he was God.

²¹ Dryden's translation of *Aeneid* 10.630–32 (from [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Aeneid_\(Dryden\)/Book_X](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Aeneid_(Dryden)/Book_X)) may help to convey the weight of the Latin original for Augustine's readers, to whom Vergil was "the poet" *par excellence*.

²² *populis eorum* suggests, in Christian usage, "their congregations." Augustine may be hinting at a contrafactual that he makes explicit elsewhere: the pagan gods *ought* to have taught their worshippers in the temples as God teaches his people in his churches, but they did not. Cf., e.g., *Ep.* 91.5; the contrafactual is also crucial to the argument of *City of God* 2.

²³ Augustine seems to have taken these pagan predictions more seriously a few years later: cf. *City of God* 8.23–26, where he quotes the apocalyptic predictions of the overthrow of the Egyptian temples in the Hermetic *Asclepius*.

²⁴ "Strong-armed": the word is *extortum*, for which "forced" seemed colorless and "extorted" mere translationese.

The God, furthermore, whom none of them dared deny was the true God—and any, even if he had denied it, would not only have been subject to the penalties owed, but would even have been found guilty by the things that were certain and completed—that God, therefore, whom none of them, as I said, dared deny was the true God, foretold by manifest declaration through his seers, that is, the prophets, that those false gods were going to be completely deserted and their images overthrown, commanded it by his manifest authority, and completed it by his manifest truth. Who, therefore, would be so senseless as not to choose rather to worship him, whom those he worships do not forbid from being worshipped? I hardly doubt that, when he has begun to worship him, he is not any rate going to worship them, whom he whom he worships forbids to be worshipped.

9.13 That, however, the nations were going to worship him after the extermination of the false gods that they had worshipped before, was, I mentioned a little while ago, predicted by the prophets. I now repeat it. *The Lord*, he says, *will prevail against them and exterminate all the gods of the nations of the earth, and they will adore him, each and every one from his own place, all the islands of the nations*. Nor the islands alone, but all the nations, just as also all the islands of the nations, since indeed he elsewhere names, not the islands, but the entire globe, saying, *All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the fatherlands of the nations will worship in his sight, since the kingdom is the Lord's, and he himself will reign over the nations.*²⁵ That these things were fulfilled through Christ is clear enough both from many other testimonies and in very same Psalm from which I quoted this. When, a little above, he himself speaks of his passion through the prophet, saying, *They dug into my hands and my feet, they counted all my bones; but they themselves considered and looked at me. They divided my garments among themselves and cast the lot over my garment*, he adds a little later the text that I quoted, *All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord*, and so on.²⁶

However, even that testimony, which I advanced before, where it is said, *The Lord will prevail against them and exterminate all the gods of the nations of the earth*, shows clearly enough, in that it says *will prevail*, that it was reported in advance that the pagans were first going to assail the Church and persecute the Christian name, so far as they availed, so that, if it could be brought to pass, it would be utterly destroyed from the Earth. And because he was going to overcome them by the endurance of the martyrs, the greatness of the miracles, and the ensuing faith of the peoples, he spoke thus: *The Lord will prevail against them*. He would not, after all, have said, *He will prevail against them*, unless they were going to resist by fighting back. Hence, a prophesy is given in like manner in the Psalm: *Why have the nations raged and the peoples meditated vain things? The kings of the earth have stood by and the princes assembled together, against the Lord and against his Christ.*²⁷ And a little later he says, *The Lord said to me, You are my son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance and the ends of the earth as your possession.*²⁸ Behold, on this account it is said in another psalm, which I inserted above, *All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord*.

By these prophetic documents and others like them that is shown to have been predicted which we see is fulfilled through Christ, that it would come to pass that the God of Israel, whom we understand to be the one true God, would be worshipped, not in that one nation,

²⁵ Ps. 21:28–29 LXX.

²⁶ Ps. 21:17–18 LXX.

²⁷ Ps. 2:1–2.

²⁸ Ps. 2:7–8

which is named Israel, but in all the nations, and that all the false gods of the nations would be removed from their temples and from the hearts of their worshippers.

10.14 Let them come now and dare to defend old-fashioned vanities against the Christian religion, against the true worship of God, so that they may perish with an uproar. For this also is foretold of them in the Psalms, where the prophet says, *You have sat upon your throne, whose judgment is equity.*²⁹ *You have reprov'd the nations, and the impious has perished; you have destroyed their name forever and unto the age of ages.*³⁰ *The enemies have departed from the spear until the end, and you have destroyed their cities; the memory of them has perished with an uproar, and the Lord remains forever.*³¹ It is necessary, therefore, that all these things should be fulfilled.

Nor should we be moved because those few who are still left dare to vaunt their teachings that speak empty things and to mock Christians as the most unlearned people, inasmuch as we see that those things which were predicted are being fulfilled in them. Indeed, Christians' foolishness, as it were of unlearning, which is manifest, to the humble and the saints who are diligently devoted to it, as the lofty and only true wisdom, that very foolishness of Christians, I say, reduces them to this paucity, since, as the apostle says, *The Lord has made foolish the wisdom of this world.*³² He then adds a marvelous thing, if anyone understands it, and follows thus: *For, since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the foolishness of the proclamation to save those who believe; since indeed the Jews ask for signs and the Greeks seek wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, to Jews indeed a scandal, to the nations foolishness, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God; since what is God's foolishness is wiser than men, and what is God's weakness is stronger than men.*³³

Let them make mockery, therefore, as much as they can, at our "unlearning" and "foolishness" and boast about their learning and wisdom. I know this, that those people, our mockers, are fewer this year than they were last year. From the time that *the nations raged and the peoples meditated vain things against the Lord and against his Christ*, when the blood of the saints was shed by them and the Church laid waste, until now and then day by day, their number has been reduced. But the oracles of our God, which we see fulfilled in this matter also and rejoice to see it, make us very bold against their reproaches and proud mockeries. Thus says the prophet, *Hear me, you who know judgment, my people, in whose heart is my law; do not fear the reproach of men and do not be overcome by their back-biting, nor think it of great account that they scorn you. For as a garment so shall they be consumed over time, and as wool will they be eaten up by the moth, but my righteousness remains forever.*³⁴

Nevertheless, let them read these words of ours, if they deign. When their contradictions have reached us, so far as the Lord gives aid, we will answer.

²⁹ *qui iudicas aequitatem* ("you who judge equity"); I take the noun as an internal accusative

³⁰ *in saeculum saeculi*, lit. "to the age of the age."

³¹ Ps. 9:5–8.

³² 1 Cor. 1:20.

³³ 1 Cor. 1:21–25

³⁴ Is. 51:7–8.

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