

ST AUGUSTINE

Concerning the
City of God
against the Pagans

Translated by HENRY BETTENSON
With a New Introduction by G. R. EVANS

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worshipper of the gods was deprived of the only country he had, because he kept his oath to them, and was killed as a prisoner by a lingering death with torture of unexampled cruelty. If this was no reproach to those gods, there is much less reason to bring a charge against the Christian profession in respect of the imprisonment of its saints, who look for a heavenly country with true faith and know that even in their own homes they are no more than sojourners.

16. *Violation of chastity, without the will's consent, cannot pollute the character*

Our adversaries certainly think they have a weighty attack to make on Christians, when they make the most of their captivity by adding stories of the violation of wives, of maidens ready for marriage, and even in some cases of women in the religious life. On this point it is not our faith which is in difficulty, nor our devotion, nor is that particular virtue, the term for which is chastity, called in question. But our argument is in a way constrained and hampered, between the claims of modesty and reasoned argument. Here we are not so much concerned to answer the attacks of those outside as to administer consolation to those within our fellowship.

In the first place, it must be firmly established that virtue, the condition of right living, holds command over the parts of the body from her throne in the mind, and that the consecrated body is the instrument of the consecrated will; and if that will continues unshaken and steadfast, whatever anyone else does with the body or to the body, provided that it cannot be avoided without committing sin, involves no blame to the sufferer. But there can be committed on another's body not only acts involving pain, but also acts involving lust. And so whenever any act of the latter kind has been committed, although it does not destroy a purity which has been maintained by the utmost resolution, still it does engender a sense of shame, because it may be believed that an act, which perhaps could not have taken place without some physical pleasure, was accompanied also by a consent of the mind.

17. *The question of suicide caused by fear of punishment or disgrace*

Some women killed themselves to avoid suffering anything of the kind, and surely any man of compassion would be ready to excuse the

emotions which lead them to do this. Some refused to kill themselves, because they did not want to escape another's criminal act by a misdeed of their own. And anyone who uses this as a charge against them will lay himself open to a charge of foolishness. For it is clear that if no one has a private right to kill even a guilty man (and no law allows this), then certainly anyone who kills himself is a murderer, and is the more guilty in killing himself the more innocent he is of the charge on which he has condemned himself to death. We rightly abominate the act of Judas, and the judgement of truth is that when he hanged himself he did not atone for the guilt of his detestable betrayal but rather increased it, since he despaired of God's mercy and in a fit of self-destructive remorse left himself no chance of a saving repentance. How much less right has anyone to indulge in self-slaughter when he can find in himself no fault to justify such a punishment! For when Judas killed himself, he killed a criminal, and yet he ended his life guilty not only of Christ's death, but also of his own; one crime led to another. Why then should a man, who has done no wrong, do wrong to himself? Why should he kill the innocent in putting himself to death, to prevent a guilty man from doing it? Why should he commit a sin against himself to deprive someone else of the chance?

18. *The question of violence from others, and the lust of others suffered by an unwilling mind in a ravished body*

'But', it will be said, 'there is the fear of being polluted by another's lust.' There will be no pollution, if the lust is another's; if there is pollution, the lust is not another's. Now purity is a virtue of the mind. It has courage as its companion and courage decides to endure evil rather than consent to evil. A man of purity and high principle has not the power to decide what happens to his body, but only what he will mentally accept or repudiate. What sane man will suppose that he has lost his purity if his body is seized and forced and used for the satisfaction of a lust that is not his own? For if purity is lost in this way, it follows that it is not a virtue of the mind; it is not then ranked with the qualities which make up the moral life, but is classed among physical qualities, such as strength, beauty, and health, the impairment of which does not in any way mean the impairment of the moral life. If purity is something of this sort, why do we risk physical danger to avoid its loss? But if it is a quality of the mind, it is not lost when the body is violated. Indeed, when the quality of modesty resists