

Confessions - Book VII - Chapter II

by St. Augustine

Transcript

3. But it was not sufficient for me, O Lord, to be able to oppose those deceived deceivers and those dumb orators--dumb because thy Word did not sound forth from them--to oppose them with the answer which, in the old Carthaginian days, Nebrius used to propound, shaking all of us who heard it: \"What could this imaginary people of darkness, which the Manicheans usually set up as an army opposed to thee, have done to thee if thou hadst declined the combat?\" If they replied that it could have hurt thee, they would then have made thee violable and corruptible. If, on the other hand, the dark could have done thee no harm, then there was no cause for any battle at all; there was less cause for a battle in which a part of thee, one of thy members, a child of thy own substance, should be mixed up with opposing powers, not of thy creation; and should be corrupted and deteriorated and changed by them from happiness into misery, so that it could not be delivered and cleansed without thy help. This offspring of thy substance was supposed to be the human soul to which thy Word--free, pure, and entire--could bring help when it was being enslaved, contaminated, and corrupted. But on their hypothesis that Word was itself corruptible because it is one and the same substance as the soul.

And therefore if they admitted that thy nature--whatsoever thou art--is incorruptible, then all these assertions of theirs are false and should be rejected with horror. But if thy substance is corruptible, then this is self-evidently false and should be abhorred at first utterance. This line of argument, then, was enough against those deceivers who ought to be cast forth from a surfeited stomach--for out of this dilemma they could find no way of escape without dreadful sacrilege of mind and tongue, when they think and speak such things about thee.

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