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**AUGUSTINE AND APOCALYPTIC:
THOUGHTS ON THE FALL OF ROME,
THE BOOK OF REVELATION,
AND THE END OF THE WORLD**

J. Kevin Coyle

INTRODUCTION: CRISIS AND RESPONSE

Periodically in Christian history there emerges a speculative trend known as “apocalypticism” which, simply put, is the reading of current events as the fulfillment of “biblical prophecy.” As understood here, biblical prophecy ascribes particular importance to select passages of the Bible, notably Daniel 7 and Ezekiel 38–39 in the Old Testament and Revelation 20–21 in the New — passages regarded as “apocalyptic,” a word meaning simply “revealed” but here practically synonymous with impending catastrophe. Apocalypticism assumes that such passages foretell certain events of human history, events now coming to pass or soon to take place. This speculation recurs, in Lowell Streiker’s words, “whenever societal stress (depression, recession, threat of war) elicits the belief that things are getting worse and will probably stay that way.”¹ In other words, apocalypticism is always a response to a sense of mounting crisis.

While it may be anachronistic to apply a term like “apocalypticism” to their period, it is certain that many inhabitants of Roman territory in

the early fifth century C.E. perceived their own age as one of crisis. Particularly in the West, a sense of social upheaval had been growing for the previous three hundred years. A long string of barracks emperors and political assassinations, an economy in shambles, the flight to the cities from a depopulated countryside, a thinning military defense against ever stronger barbarian tribes — all these factors and more contributed to a general malaise. The stability brought by Constantine in 324 had been short-lived, since at his death the Empire reverted to Diocletian's innovation of at least two rulers at a time. Julian, last of Constantine's dynasty, ruled alone; but his rule lasted scarcely a year and a half (361–363). Thereafter the Empire would know a single ruler only once more, in the person of Theodosius the Great (d. 395). Theodosius' two sons each received half of the empire, thereby exacerbating its already weakened condition: in the West, Honorius occupied the throne for twenty-eight years, but is mainly notable for ineffectuality. The seat of government had long since been moved from Rome to Milan; in 402 Honorius moved it again, to the marshes of Ravenna, even while he relied on barbarian mercenaries to shore up his crumbling dominions.

At that time the Rhine River together with the Danube formed a natural northern frontier for the Western Roman Empire. Since the second century B.C.E. wandering tribes from the East, mostly Germanic, had been massing on this barrier's northern shores, whose waters had long held back all but the trickle of immigrants allowed in by more or less reluctant authorities. Gradually, however, this barrier had weakened. The trickle turned into a flood on the last night of 406 C.E., when the tribes swelling on the northern shore at last crossed the Rhine *en masse*, sweeping past the frontier garrisons and into the undefended lands beyond. Though this event — coupled with the Visigothic invasion of Italy from the East in 401 and again in 408 — was to be a pivotal factor in the fall of Rome and indeed in the ultimate collapse of the Western Roman Empire, few took any notice of it at the time (except, of course, those whose crops were destroyed, houses burned, and the like). It seemed like just another minor military problem, of which Rome already possessed an abundant supply.² That this time something far more serious was afoot, that the barbarians had arrived to stay and that the Western empire's illness was terminal, would sink in only when something truly unthinkable occurred.

The unthinkable took place on August 24, 410, when, after three sieges in as many years, Alaric's Visigoths broke into the city of Rome and spent the next three days in pillage.³ Soon refugees, particularly from the upper

classes, were making their way out as best they could and heading for parts of the empire deemed safer. Many (perhaps the majority) ended up in North Africa,⁴ where their arrival posed new problems for the Church. The sudden influx not only soon taxed local social assistance programs; it was the catalyst of horrendous tales of atrocity and destruction, of the anger of both pagans and Christians looking for a scapegoat, and of fear in a local population only too ready to believe the worst.⁵

In fact, the severest damage among the general citizenry of Roman Africa appears to have been psychological. When Rome fell, confidence in the proper order of things fell with it. True, Rome was no longer the *political* capital: but it was not called the “eternal city” for nothing.⁶ It was still the centre of Western society, the symbol of a whole civilization — indeed, as Romans saw it, of the *only* civilization. “It was,” says Peter Brown, “as if an army had been allowed to sack Westminster Abbey or the Louvre.”⁷ In pre-Christian times *urbs Romana* had represented what Brown terms “a sort of ‘pagan Vatican’,” which is to say that it was seen to enjoy special divine protection (most concretely expressed in the figure of *Dea Roma*). This city personified the Empire itself, with all its splendour and achievement. So long as Rome endured, then, the Empire (meaning the world) must survive.⁸

Rudolph Arbesmann has rightly called the belief in Rome’s eternity “the most tenacious of all the beliefs which survived from the old religion.”⁹ The myth was adapted to a Christian setting by the substitution of apostles for pagan deities.¹⁰ Indeed, the capture of Rome seems to have shocked Christians every bit as much as pagans. “What can be safe, if Rome perishes?” wondered Jerome in Bethlehem on hearing the news of Alaric’s final siege.¹¹ No protective buffer against the Barbarians would then exist, and the Antichrist must surely come.¹² And once the calamity had taken place, he wailed, “The world’s light has gone out, the head of the Roman empire has been lopped off, and by the fall of one city the whole planet perishes!”¹³

Prior to the Edict of Milan it was not unusual for pagan patriots to maintain that the empire had never had it so good, Christians all the while predicting dire consequences for a state which refused to legitimize their religion. After 313 these roles reversed, as Christianity gained first legal status, then respectability, and finally, in 392, became the only legitimate religion of the empire.¹⁴ By then Christians had come to believe that their religion’s changed fortunes had gained for Rome a new and golden age: *tempora christiana*, “the Christian Era.”¹⁵ For nearly three centuries they had been vaunting the fact that Christianity and the empire had simulta-

neous beginnings, Jesus having come to earth during the reign of Rome's first emperor, Augustus.¹⁶ Church and Empire were to be seen, in Eusebius' metaphor, as "two great powers sprung fully up, as it were, from a single source."¹⁷ From this idea it had been deduced that Church and Empire were chronologically and geographically coextensive.¹⁸ It was Eusebius who was mainly responsible for spreading the idea that only these two institutions could now have any historical significance,¹⁹ and that there could be no successor to the Roman Empire, last and greatest of all empires.²⁰

The view is understandable. For most Christians in Roman lands, the empire was the only socio-political context they had ever known, and life without it could not be imagined. The *Pax Romana* was for many the closest earthly image — if not the full reality — of the peace of the heavenly kingdom, and therefore it had to be preserved.²¹ Hence, any speculation on the timing of the end of the world (following naturally from the association of the empire with the world's final age) usually took the form of calculating the date of Rome's demise. At the beginning of the fourth century the Christian Lactantius had figured out that this must occur within 200 years,²² and insisted that to pray for the emperor's well-being was in fact to work to delay the end of the world, and that was why Christians should do it.²³ But as the fourth century wore on, and the legal measures against paganism grew more repressive, the shoe went on the other foot, pagans asserting that the world was going from bad to worse, since the old religion, which had assured Rome's well-being, no longer received proper respect.²⁴

Such affirmations pressured Christians to explain why "their era" seemed so full of unprecedented disasters,²⁵ and the fall of Rome in 410 appeared only to vindicate their accusers. While many Christians were content with stolidly awaiting the world's end (which must surely come soon),²⁶ others sympathized with the pagan thesis.²⁷ Perhaps the ancient divinities of Rome really were exacting revenge for their betrayal. The official stance of the Church might be that these deities were at most mere demons, if they existed at all; but as Augustine was told by one of the flock, "If those demons are going to get angry because they are not adored, who am I to be offending demons?"²⁸

Besides, then, the dilemma created for pastoral care by any large influx of refugees, an ideological problem clamoured for attention. And so it was especially to Christians uncertain how to react to blame by pagans that Augustine formulated an initial response to the disaster of 410. Thereafter he would advance his thought by stages, from sketching out a Christian perspective on an immediate crisis to developing his own ideas on humanity's

ultimate destiny, and from a direct rebuttal of some current notions to a final, composite overview of history itself. This process, worked out over fifteen years in four discernible stages, is the focus of the remainder of this paper.

1. CRISIS AMONG CHRISTIANS: FOUR HOMILIES (C.E. 410–411)

The first stage is discernible in four sermons delivered between late autumn of 410 and late June of 411.²⁹ All were probably preached at Carthage, soon after the arrival of a large group of refugees. These sermons — the only ones in which Augustine gives any extended attention to the problem — possess common features (to the point where Augustine's exasperated listeners are soon muttering, "O si taceat de Roma!").³⁰ Those features will be the next object of investigation.

In the main, the sermons are addressed to Christians trying to cope with both the implications of the disaster itself and with pagan recriminations. But they do not yet reply *directly* to the latter. At the same time they quickly move away from interpreting the event. In each case the issue of Rome's fall is addressed only about halfway through the homily, which always starts out as a reflection on one or more of the biblical readings set by the liturgy of the day. Even when referring to the event, Augustine never dwells on the details, which at first seem unclear and dependent on refugee reports.³¹ In fact, the Goths are mentioned only twice, and then merely to point out that their presence had nothing to do with religion. One might regard these Arians who finally took Rome as (sort of) Christians; but Radagaisus' Arian followers were crushed in 406, when paganism was already proscribed.³²

All four sermons display an ambivalent attitude about the devastation of Rome, a city whose real significance Augustine is now forced to consider for the first time.³³ On the one hand, the old order has obviously undergone a serious transformation; on the other, Augustine never much cared for the city of Rome.³⁴ The only reason for even alluding to the event is to underscore the passing nature of the present life — but in terms applicable to virtually any situation.³⁵

Almost every homily refers to the pagan complaints: "It is in the 'Christian Era' that the world is devastated, collapsing into ruin!"³⁶ How are Christians to respond? Augustine tackles this in the first sermon:

When someone says to you, "Such great evils, the world's very devastation, are taking place in the Christian Era," say in reply, "Christ predicted it to me before it happened." . . . For what is new in what they tell you — that in the era of Christianity the world is devastated and coming to an end!³⁷

Well, we already knew *that*, he says. The Lord predicted the world's destruction, so why get upset if the Lord's predictions are turning out to be true? People should not be astonished if the world really is coming now to its end: "Marvel instead that the world was able to make it to its old age!"³⁸ However, should it be true that the city has been destroyed, some of its citizens have survived (as the refugees in Carthage show). And then a theme that will be touched on again: a city is more than its buildings: "What is Rome, if not Romans?"³⁹

The second sermon continues to focus on the passing nature of this world and of everything in it.⁴⁰ Why should it survive any longer merely because Christ has come?⁴¹ Anyone who (like Virgil)⁴² promised eternity to an earthly empire could only be doing so out of flattery. Yet Augustine argues that Virgil puts the promise in the mouth of Jupiter; Virgil himself would think quite differently.⁴³

As for himself, Augustine does not believe the end is imminent. Alexandria, Constantinople, and Carthage, all of which rejected paganism as Rome did, continue to flourish.⁴⁴ Still, recent developments have made it all too clear that there can be no question of an "empire without end." The fate of Rome serves not as fuel for doomsayers but as a lesson for the Christian life. The earthly Rome must end some day, so why not now?⁴⁵ Not even Constantinople, Christian city and capital though it is, will last for ever.⁴⁶ As Augustine sees it, the real problem for Christians lies in an uncritical acceptance of the pagan mystique of Rome's eternity.

The reading that launches the third sermon,⁴⁷ Daniel 9:20, sets the theme for the entire homily: sin negatively affects a person's relationship to God and thus invites divine correction.⁴⁸ Another reading is Genesis 18:23-32 (the destruction of Sodom). Lot was unable to find even ten just men and thus stay the Lord's destroying hand. But surely it could be objected that there were at least fifty good persons in Rome, Christian as it was? His answer to this query is that the destruction of Rome was not nearly as total as that of Sodom, and many have survived.⁴⁹

But that does not resolve the question of how a just God could permit so much suffering, even to good people.⁵⁰ The negative response is that — even assuming there *are* good people (for who is truly just?) — Christians cannot expect to get through life trouble-free when even Christ suffered.⁵¹ As it was for Job,⁵² suffering can be viewed as a test of faith, one which, if necessary, leads us away from backsliding and once more to God.⁵³

The myth of Rome's eternity becomes the direct target of the fourth sermon.⁵⁴ The context is both the feast (Peter and Paul, June 29) and the

gospel reading for the day (John 21:15–19). About one quarter of the way through his preaching, Augustine broaches the significance of the resting-place of the apostles in the light of the year 410:

“The body of Peter lies at Rome,” people say, “at Rome lies the body of Paul, of Laurence, of other holy martyrs. Yet Rome is in misery, laid waste, afflicted, ground down, burned. How many have been the means of destruction available to death: famine, pestilence, the sword! Where then are the *memoriae* of the apostles? . . .” They are there, but they are not in you. Would that they were. . . .⁵⁵

The true *memoria* is not a monument, but a presence in the mind.⁵⁶ Referring to 2 Cor. 4:17–18, Augustine insists on the temporal quality of flesh and stone. It therefore matters little where Peter’s physical body lies; he himself is with the Lord.⁵⁷ Then comes the challenge: “You whine and you weep, because sticks and stones have collapsed, and people died who had to die eventually?”⁵⁸ But here Augustine carries the idea further: it is not for us to decide the fate of Rome; that belongs to God.⁵⁹

In the following two sections, the bishop deals with the corollary: Why would God decide to do something so terrible?⁶⁰ More specifically, why does Rome suffer in the “Christian Era”? The Christian response: *quia voluit deus*. But that will not satisfy pagans, who rather should be dealt with by pointing out that nothing earthly is meant to last forever. Should that tactic prove ineffectual, one can appeal to history: Rome was destroyed twice before, at times when the “Christian Era” could hardly have been the culprit.⁶¹ Well, then, what of the fact that Christians have suffered along with pagans? There we return to the mystery of God’s will, to the truth that the only worthwhile good is the everlasting one, and to the fact that evils were predicted by prophets, apostles, and Jesus himself.⁶²

Augustine then returns to an earlier question: What is the purpose of the apostles’ *memoria*? It cannot be to maintain the earthly status quo, nor to keep Rome’s buildings from falling down.⁶³ The apostles’ martyrdom, as most suffering, reminds us of our need of the Lord’s correction: *Melius est flagellari, quam damnari*.⁶⁴

In all this Augustine may sound insensitive to real suffering; but he does not intend to add to the misfortunes of Rome (and the world), nor to gloat over them.⁶⁵ It has to be seen that Roman society survives — *Deo gratias* — even if the buildings of Rome have not:

That society (*civitas*), which gave us our birth in the flesh, remains. Thanks be to God. . . . But the world needs to be spiritually born as well, so that it may pass with us to eternity.⁶⁶

In each case Augustine is looking at the long term, at the question of lasting security and peace which will not be found in this world. Whatever has truly befallen Rome, it was all built only to fall into ruin sooner or later. Heaven and earth will pass away (Matt. 24:35): small wonder, then, if society itself should come to an end.⁶⁷ No one can count on absolute security in this life. These are not, however, grounds for despair: God uses the misfortunes of this life to test our faith, as an olive press is turned, less in order to crush the olives than to draw out the oil.⁶⁸ Christians have to view the disaster from the perspective of faith, and believe that "the Eternal One has promised eternal things."⁶⁹ The important thing is to focus less on the world than on the one who created it, always believing that God is present, and that Christ came into the world not to affirm the world's eternity but to give us hope in a future divine life. For there still remains that heavenly community, already present to those who believe.⁷⁰ And *that* is where our energies should be directed.⁷¹

Yet the present circumstances are not lost from view. Two of these sermons end with a pastoral admonition (undoubtedly the real motive for broaching the whole subject in the first place): wondering whether the world (the Roman one, at least) has reached its definitive end is a pointless exercise. Christians should not freeze into immobility, but concentrate on the business at hand: there are refugees out there, and they need help.⁷² Their need takes precedence over worrying about institutions with built-in obsolescence. If perchance the earthly Roman society should find a way to carry on, well and good. But the only way it can endure *forever* is to be incorporated into the *civitas in coelo fundata*, the community established in heaven.⁷³

2. PAGAN ANGER: "CITY OF GOD," BOOKS I-III (C.E. 413)

These last thoughts we find developed in the famous work, *City of God*,⁷⁴ which we will view again in the last section.

It is quite possible that this "huge and arduous enterprise," as Augustine came to call it,⁷⁵ would have been written even without the fall of Rome as a catalyst.⁷⁶ But there can be little doubt that this event first moved Augustine to write *City of God*, sometime in 412.⁷⁷ In the homilies of a year or two before we found him speaking to Christians gathered in worship, answering their questions *about* pagan accusations. Now he would address those accusations head on. The fall of Rome had confronted him with a new, a pagan, audience, albeit in the same locality as the earlier homilies.⁷⁸

The still lively threat of anti-Christian recriminations meant pagans had

to be taken seriously. For Augustine this called for a shift in attitude. It had been his practice simply to dismiss paganism as a dying phenomenon constituting no real threat to the Church's aspirations.⁷⁹ August 410 had changed that.⁸⁰ The refugees who had been crowding into North Africa included numerous pagan intellectuals, some of them deeply committed to the old religion and highly resentful of the new.⁸¹ These could not be effectively countered through oral discourse to a select audience on a Sunday morning. The vehicle had to be something which pagans — at least intellectual ones — understood best: a whole historical, philosophical, literary, and religious tradition, not to confirm that tradition's validity but to propose a new way of viewing humanity's significance upon the earth.⁸²

The first five books, and in particular the first three which appeared together in 413,⁸³ are the second stage of Augustine's response, in the form of a direct challenge to the recriminations levelled by pagans against Christians.⁸⁴

Augustine's opening salvo, based now on a firmer grasp of the details surrounding Rome's destruction, is the question why, if Christians are to blame for this disaster, during the sack of Rome even pagans fled to Christian churches, to which the Goths accorded the right of sanctuary.⁸⁵ After other questions of this nature,⁸⁶ Augustine moves in Books II and III to the pagan thesis that none of this would have happened if the traditional deities had been placated by sacrifice.⁸⁷ He deals with this in much the same way he replied in his earlier preaching, which is to say that he is not really interested in exploring whose fault it was. Taking what Brown calls "the full approach of a true radical faced with the myths of conservatism,"⁸⁸ he sets out to explore instead the meaning of Rome, and to relativize the importance of its destruction within the scheme of human existence. This constitutes a more positive aspect of the message preached earlier, focusing now on the destiny of the individual and thence on the divinely intended end of the human community as a whole.⁸⁹

If the myth of Rome's eternity needed dispelling, so did the notion that the survival of civilization — if not of humanity itself — depended on the survival of Rome.⁹⁰ To accomplish this, Augustine could point out that Rome had been through all this twice before, when Christians scarcely existed: first when the Gauls burned everything but the Capitol in 388 B.C.E., and then in 64 C.E. under Nero.⁹¹

Implied here is that the latest fall of the city was an isolated event, rather than an apocalyptic one with cosmic consequences. The world was not going to end merely because one city had been pillaged, whatever certain

people (like Jerome) might say.⁹² To take any other stance would be to regard Roman history as somehow privileged, and this Augustine had no intention of doing. Like its predecessors, the Roman Empire must some day vanish,⁹³ and Christians would only be playing into pagan hands were they to make Christianity synonymous with a particular civilization. The glory awaiting God's true children could not be found there, but only within the walls of the heavenly kingdom, the true *patria*.⁹⁴ What continued for the present was a human society co-existing with the Society of God, Jerusalem alongside Babylon:

They are mixed, mixed they remain from the human race's beginnings to the end of the world. . . . These two cities were founded, at precise moments, to show in symbolic form these two societies which began in the remote past, and which will continue in this world to the very end, to be separated only then.⁹⁵

Augustine concludes that, far from being the ultimate catastrophe, the fall of Rome in 410 was simply another sad event in human history — a position that panders to neither total defeatism nor reverent fantasy.

3. SIGNS OF THE SECOND COMING? FOUR LETTERS (C.E. 418–419)

By 413 it must have been apparent to most that Rome's traumatic experience of three years before had not completely removed it from the map. Charred ruins served as an eloquent reminder of both the catastrophe and Rome's earlier glory;⁹⁶ but to those ruins life was slowly returning. Augustine would no doubt have been content to drop the whole matter there — he rarely refers to the fall of Rome after this date⁹⁷ — since he saw no connection between Rome's demise, present or future, and "the last days," no reliable contemporary signs of humanity's imminent and wholesale removal from the earth; and he had no time for those who went looking for them.

We already have a preview of this attitude in a sermon preached at Carthage in 411 or 412:

Sometimes people say to themselves, "The day of Judgment has come, so many bad things are happening, so much the tribulations multiply. Everything the prophets foretold is just about accomplished: the Day of Judgment is at hand." Those who speak this way and who speak from conviction are obviously mentally on their way to meet the Bridegroom. But one war follows another, there is tribulation on tribulation, earthquake after earthquake, famine upon famine, invasion after invasion: and still the Bridegroom has not come. It is while awaiting his arrival that all those fall asleep who say, "He is coming, and the Day of Judgment will find us here." And even while they

speak, they fall asleep. Let them be on guard against sleeping; let them persevere in charity until sleep comes. Sleep will find them still awaiting.⁹⁸

A position like this could be securely maintained only so long as apocalyptic preoccupation remained no more than a popular pastime for the theologically uninitiated. It might turn complicated if a fellow bishop were to lay the old question of “signs of the end-times” on Augustine’s doorstep. Around the end of 418 there came a letter from Hesychius of Salona (now Split in Yugoslavia), inspired, it seems, by an eclipse that had occurred on July 19 of that year, this in turn preceding a drought that caused extensive loss of animal and human life.⁹⁹ We do not possess this initial letter from Hesychius, but its contents can be readily deduced from Augustine’s reply, which opens the third stage of his response to apocalyptic.¹⁰⁰

For Hesychius the central question was: What ideas did Augustine, as a recognized theological authority, have regarding the date of the end of the world, given the contradiction in Scripture between so many passages that told what signs to look for, and verses like Matthew 24:36 (“No one knows the day nor the hour”) and Acts 1:7 (“No one can know the times set by the Father’s authority”)? Hesychius himself felt that speculation was still permitted, even that a precise timetable could be drawn up. He was particularly interested, it seems, in the question of the “weeks” spoken of in Daniel 9:24–27.¹⁰¹

Augustine by way of a brief reply¹⁰² sent Hesychius pertinent passages of Jerome’s commentary on Daniel (composed in 407), along with the comment,

The weeks in Daniel, referring to a time now fulfilled, require particular understanding. I for one wouldn’t presume to calculate the time of the Lord’s Coming, which is expected at the end; nor do I understand any prophet to be suggesting a precise number of years in this regard.¹⁰³

And this blunt advice: Take the Lord seriously, “No one can know the times.”¹⁰⁴

Not good enough, replied Hesychius, with the rejoinder¹⁰⁵ that he already had access to Jerome’s commentary, which had not really served to clarify the matter (an understandable reaction from anyone who has read the work). At any rate, Daniel was not the only text in question. There were all those other biblical passages (such as Matt. 24:45–46, Luke 21:24–26, 2 Tim. 3:1 and 4:8, and 1 Thess. 5:1–3) which Hesychius (and not he alone) understood to refer to the world’s end. Among these passages we note one that will surface again, 2 Thessalonians 2:6–8:

At the proper time [the Wicked One's coming] will be revealed. The mystery of the Wickedness is already at work, but what is to happen will not occur until the one who holds it back is moved out of the way. Then the Wicked One will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus, when he comes, will kill him with the breath of his mouth and annihilate him by the glory of his presence.

Hesychius was ready to concede that precise calculations might indeed be impossible. But if one searched through these passages, one could discern certain signs (*signa*), the most telling being: (1) Jerusalem is to be trampled by pagans (Luke 21:24; see Dan. 9:26, Rev. 11:2); (2) there will be signs in the sun, moon and stars (Luke 21:25; see Matt. 24:29); (3) humanity will know great affliction (Luke 21:25); and (4) the gospel will be preached to the whole world, after which the end is to come (Matt. 24:14).

All this, it seemed to Hesychius, provided grounds for his confident conclusion,

Therefore the signs in the gospels and prophets, fulfilled as they are in our day, proclaim the Coming of the Lord, even if those defending or attacking the computation of the day or the year do so in vain. . . . We see some of the signs of the Coming as now fulfilled in those occurrences.¹⁰⁶

Augustine remained unimpressed. From the long letter¹⁰⁷ he was later to title *De fine saeculi*, the reader senses that he would rather not discuss the issue at all.¹⁰⁸ However, if deal with it he must, he will begin by agreeing that all good Christians look for and desire the Lord's Coming, and that doubtless there has to be a "last day" sometime.¹⁰⁹ This concession is, however, no more than the anaesthetic before surgery. The point to be made is that, so far as the individual is concerned, the world ends when that person leaves it.¹¹⁰ On this basis, Augustine proceeds to dissect every text Hesychius has advanced. The whole series of arguments is too long to repeat here — even the biblical passages are too many to list, much less discuss¹¹¹ — but the gist of his reply is that we have to be cautious about the way we read such texts. All are at best vague, all are open to more than one interpretation. One can always find "proofs" of the fulfillment of such "signs." How many times in its long history has Jerusalem been trampled? How often have there been celestial phenomena? How many human beings have known affliction? How to be sure precisely what "preaching the gospel to the whole world" means? Then Augustine brings to the discussion some texts Hesychius neglected to include. What are we to make of 1 John 2:18, which tells us, "Now is the final hour"? What of Psalm 89 (90):4, which declares, "A thousand days for the Lord are like a single day"? Jesus said nation would rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom

(see Matt. 24:7): when has this *not* occurred? And yet, in the same gospel (Matt. 3:2) we can read, "The kingdom of God is near." It is near because Christ has come, the kingdom exists already in our midst. But the actual *end*, in the literal sense of the last set of twenty-four earthly hours, may not be quite so close.¹¹²

Several years later, towards the end of *De civitate dei*, Augustine was to say he found attempts at apocalyptic interpretation of 2 Thess. 2:6–8 "astounding."¹¹³ With Hesychius his exasperation is more restrained. The words of the apostle "are obscure and expressed allegorically (*obscura sunt et mystice dicta*), and do not appear to refer to any definite time or place."¹¹⁴ Different people understand these words in different ways and, whatever the reality intended by the references to time, it remains hidden (*occultum*).¹¹⁵ "Every individual can try to discover or at least conjecture what 'getting the Wicked One out of the way' might mean; but it is not said how long this will take."¹¹⁶ Here for the first time Augustine takes up the question of the Antichrist. The mention is no more than a dismissal, but hints at a later treatment of the issue: the coming of this personage, like that of Christ, "is stated only in obscure fashion."¹¹⁷

But the key text for Augustine, one he repeats tirelessly, is Acts 1:7: *Non est vestrum scire*.¹¹⁸ In both replies to Hesychius he emphasizes that the only real certitude in all this is that the end will not come before the Gospel is preached to the whole world. However, evangelization is a long way from that point, especially if one is prepared to see the notion of "world" as taking in more than the Roman Empire.¹¹⁹ Speculation about the end is therefore a waste of everyone's time. There is no point, Augustine says, in awaiting an event whose timing and description are so uncertain. And to balance off his opening gambit, he concludes with the advice that it is far better to spend the time one is allotted by believing in, hoping for, and loving the One who is to come, rather than the Coming itself.¹²⁰

4. THE BOOK OF REVELATION IN *CITY OF GOD* XX (C.E. 422–426)

When Augustine came to write the latter part of *De civitate dei*, the original motivation for the work had long since faded.¹²¹ The purpose now was not to answer questions raised by Rome's fall, but to prepare a comprehensive view of the meaning of history. The fourth stage in Augustine's response to apocalyptic is found in the third last book of this work, written sometime between 422 and 426.¹²² The last three books envisage the ultimate outcome of human history, in the process dealing with the end of the world and the ultimate condition of humanity beyond it.¹²³ It is in this context that for

the first and only time Augustine pays sustained attention to the Book of Revelation (or Apocalypse), conspicuous by its absence from the previous stages we have viewed.

No study of Augustine's treatment of the last book of the New Testament yet exists,¹²⁴ and this is not the place to try to fill the gap, beyond pointing out one or two pertinent facts.

Before 396 — the year he includes it in his list of canonical books¹²⁵ — Augustine pays almost no attention to the Book of Revelation. Prior to that date it is quoted only a few times, the earliest being in 392, shortly after his presbyteral ordination. Why this limited attention? Two reasons suggest themselves.

First, the Book of Revelation, with its highly symbolic language, is arguably the most difficult book in the New Testament to interpret. Certainly Augustine thought so. When he first tackles it in Book XX of *City of God*, he says (in terms reminiscent of his last letter to Hesychius):

In the book entitled Apocalypse many statements are made in an obscure way, so as to exercise the reader's mind; and few are the statements from whose clarity the meaning of others can be deduced — and then only with effort. This is especially because the book repeats the same ideas in different ways, which gives the impression of saying different things, whereas examination shows it to be speaking of the same matters, though using different forms of expression.¹²⁶

No one, in other words, could read the book in the expectation of fully deciphering its meaning.

The second reason is that before Augustine's time attempts at interpreting Revelation concentrated on giving it a millenarian slant,¹²⁷ with which he held no sympathy. A regular feature of apocalypticism through the ages, "millennialism" (or "millenarianism" or "chiliasm") starts with "the notion that the history of mankind as recorded in the Bible has been divided into seven distinct periods,"¹²⁸ according to the "weeks" of the ninth chapter of Daniel.¹²⁹ In this view, the world is now living in the sixth "week" or age; the seventh and final one is to begin when, according to Rev. 20:4-6, Christ returns to establish a kingdom upon earth. This kingdom is to last for literally a thousand years (in Latin *mille anni*), after which will come the end of the world and the Last Judgment.

I admit to some simplification in presenting this issue; but it is safe to say that among the characteristics ascribed to this thousand-year kingdom by virtually all millennialists throughout Christian history is that it will be an earthly one, will come soon, and will be preceded by cataclysmic

events.¹³⁰ Eusebius, for instance, believed that at the world's end the whole gamut of apocalyptic horrors would be unleashed on the earth and bring history to a close. The Antichrist would appear, after which Christ would come for the second time, to do battle with the Antichrist and vanquish him. Then the whole physical universe would end in destruction, and the Last Judgment would take place.¹³¹

Notwithstanding these ideas, scholars are uncertain whether Eusebius espoused a literal thousand-year reign.¹³² Be that as it may, there were certainly commentators who did, particularly in the West.¹³³ It is quite possible that this sort of thinking had led Augustine to believe that the Book of Revelation was speaking exclusively of the end of the world and its harbingers¹³⁴ — subjects he was ready to discuss only within the view of history he proposed to present. In other words, the context of Augustine's attention has nothing to do with apocalypticism nor millennialism, but everything to do with *eschatology*: his objective is a careful reflection on humanity's ultimate condition, without focusing on the final circumstances of the *material* cosmos.

Nevertheless, as the fifth century dawned, Augustine was under pressure to pay closer attention to Revelation. This resulted from quarrels with the Donatists, especially over the claim (heavily reliant on Revelation texts) that the Donatist Church represented the true final age of humanity on earth. In that controversy the scriptural grounds of debate had for the most part been staked out by Augustine's opponents; but the experience at least had the merit of helping prepare his first and only lengthy treatment of Revelation in *City of God*. There we find the bulk of all his references to the Bible's closing book, in the context of a discussion of New Testament texts dealing with the Last Judgment. Augustine makes clear that his purpose in addressing these texts is to expose faulty interpretations and present a correct one.¹³⁵ The quotations from Revelation 20 and 21 appear in connection with a particular aspect of the opposing interpretations:

Of those two resurrections the same evangelist John, in the book which is called 'Apocalypse', has spoken in such a way that the first [resurrection], not being understood by certain persons among us, is furthermore turned into ridiculous fables.¹³⁶

It is clear that, by 426 at least, Augustine has no sympathy with any notion of a future earthly thousand-year reign,¹³⁷ and does not see in Revelation 20 (or any passage in Scripture) the portents of the world's demise. With the biblical text as the starting-point, he refers to people

who were above all strongly impressed by the number of a 'thousand' years, as though there had to be a sabbatical rest of such an interval for the saints, a holy respite after the labours of six thousand years, dating from the day the first human was created. . . . Thus, since it is written, "For the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a single day" (Ps. 89 (90):4; cf. 2 Pet. 3:8), after six thousand years have gone by as though they had been six days, there will follow as it were a seventh, a sabbath day in the form of the last thousand years. . . .¹³⁸

This is classic millennialism; but it is not Augustine.¹³⁹ If, as he had held since well before 410,¹⁴⁰ the world parallels human life by going through similar stages of growth and decline, there is no compelling reason to think this is done in six neat packages of a thousand years each.¹⁴¹ Augustine develops this argument at some length, but the basic idea remains the same: if the numbers are to be taken literally, it should be easy to calculate the date of the Second Coming. But the numbers are symbolic.¹⁴²

Revelation 20:5-6 claims the bulk of his attention:

Happy and greatly blessed are they who are included in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them; they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they will rule with him for a thousand years.

Augustine does not divest the passage of all significance, but decides that it concerns only a period between two resurrections, an individual and a collective one. The first resurrection is that of the individual soul.¹⁴³ This resurrection is taking place even now, but only for those made righteous in baptism.¹⁴⁴ The second will be more general, belongs in the future, and will include the resurrection of the souls of all who have died in righteousness, as well as a general resurrection of the body.¹⁴⁵ Scholars have long noted the presence of this idea in the earlier Augustine, but without the accompaniment of Revelation.¹⁴⁶ The point here is that the millennium refers to the whole interval between the first and second resurrections: the Church, therefore exists in the millennium, *is* the millennium.¹⁴⁷ This is the only sense in which Augustine can be labelled a millennialist, or, better, a post-millennialist; for his stance has nothing to do with sectarian millennialism, "which almost uniformly holds that history is now deep in a pre-millennial age of decadence from which God's people will be rescued by a divine intervention. *Then* comes the Millennium, teach the sects."¹⁴⁸

It follows that the Beast who appears in chapters 11 through 20 of Revelation is not the Roman Empire, but the world (in the sense of all that is hostile to Christian principles).¹⁴⁹ The Antichrist, too, is a corporate entity: not an individual, not the devil, and not *Nero redivivus*,¹⁵⁰ but the collective of all wicked persons.¹⁵¹

If there really are trustworthy signs of the end, how much time, Augus-

tine asks, is to elapse between signs and end? If we are in the sixth and final age of the world — the last “millennium” (and only to this would Augustine agree) — who can say how long this final indeterminate age is to last?¹⁵² The Holy City which is to be besieged by the devil and his minions (Rev. 20:8) is not the earthly Jerusalem nor any other precise geographical location, but the Church spread throughout the world. This *civitas* will know persecution at the hands of the devil’s disciples, typified in the terms “Gog” and “Magog” of Rev. 20:8 (see Ezech. 38:14),¹⁵³ wherein no one ought to read a reference to any particular ethnic group (as some contemporaries were wont to do, perceiving great significance in the fact that the names of barbarian tribes like the Getae and Massagetae also began with the letters “G” and “M”).¹⁵⁴

This is not to say that Augustine views apocalyptic texts of Scripture in a purely allegorical sense. A millennial reign of Christ is such an assured reality for him that he considers it to have already begun: but it is not literally a thousand-year period. The Antichrist, we have seen, is real in a similar sense, the earthly Holy City is real, the return of Christ, the end of his world¹⁵⁵ — all real.¹⁵⁶ But Augustine interprets them *mystice*, allegorically. The millennium has begun, since the righteous have been dying (and resurrecting) for a long time. The keynote here is faith in the God who tells us there will be an end, without really telling us more. “Thousand” is another way of saying “indeterminate”: the “thousand years” of the Book of Revelation are the indefinite period between the death of the first true follower of Christ and the Last Judgment, which is to occur only God knows when. During this millennium, now under way, the devil is locked in the abyss, and can no longer deceive the nations, where the earthly Church now is.¹⁵⁷ The age of the Church, which is also that of the reign of Christ, coincides with this millennial period of the devil’s restraint: “The binding of the devil not only occurred from the time the Church began to spread from Judaea to other regions, but occurs now and will occur to the end of time, when he will be released.”¹⁵⁸ Certain it remains that Christ *will* eventually come again to earth, at some future time known but to God alone,¹⁵⁹ and that his return will be a prelude to the end of the world. Certain it is, too, that Christ will be preceded by the Antichrist: but we do not know when that will be, either.¹⁶⁰

CONCLUSIONS

We can sum all of this up in a general way with the affirmation that any concern Augustine might have had with apocalyptic thinking does not appear

in his preaching immediately following news of the fall of Rome. Augustine's own involvement in the question came only later, when he would have to address the pagan claim that, due to the Christian religion, the world was now at an end; then, when specific queries were raised by a fellow bishop (himself catalyzed by a local disaster); and finally when dealing with segments of the Book of Revelation as part of a comprehensive view of the end of history.

To this some specific conclusions can be added:

1. Marrou is right, I think, when he says that the first thing Augustine has taught us is the art of living through catastrophe,¹⁶¹ of being able to gaze through disaster to a vision of hope. It is to Augustine's lasting credit that he achieved this by a life spent entirely in a society lurching drunkenly from one disaster to the next. If at any point in time he had been tempted to counsel a total, despairing withdrawal from the world and the sort of individualism which prefers to consign human history to the devil's power, he must have quickly perceived its dangers and definitively renounced them. If he had not,

then, indeed, his work would be the historical document of an inner collapse, paralleled by the outer collapse of the Empire, the end of political active force and responsibility in the Roman Church as in the Roman Empire. But the matter is not to be explained so simply. Augustine was not writing '*de vanitate mundi*', but '*de civitate Dei*'. Certainly, the community it refers to is not of this world, its end and aspiration reached beyond. Nonetheless, it is a real community, '*civitas*', one that is "more enduringly founded and works more profoundly than all the merely political, ever-changing, and vanishing entities of this world."¹⁶²

2. This renunciation not only enabled him to cope personally with disaster, it became part of his legacy to the West. Augustine is one of those rare individuals who become relevant to succeeding generations by rising above most or all of the myths of their time.¹⁶³ To his pagan contemporaries, the only real history was the one which recounted the glorious achievements of their own civilization.¹⁶⁴ To Augustine's own way of thinking, change was simply part of the divine ordinance laid down at Creation.¹⁶⁵ He could thus break definitively with the idea that the meaning of human existence is irrevocably bonded to a particular culture. "In the world" could not be simply equated with "in the Roman Empire"; on the other hand, one could not deem the world to be totally devoid of value (whatever feelings one might harbour about the empire). Had Augustine fallen into either trap, Christianity might have largely disappeared from Western Europe after 500. Instead, the

Church of the West was not only to survive the empire's disappearance, but was itself to become a force for keeping alive at least some of the achievements of the past.

3. Augustine takes no interest in apocalyptic as described at the start of this paper. For him, such a focus would distract from concentrating on the intended destiny of human existence, much as the Eusebian view of Roman history as the final messianic age diminishes concentration on human society as a whole.¹⁶⁶ But if the death of the world is not imminent, there remains an incontrovertible fact: we were born to die, so to speak. No human can dwell on this earth save as part of a *civitas peregrina*, a community of resident aliens,¹⁶⁷ one that to all intents and purposes ends for the individual at the moment of death.¹⁶⁸ Augustine thus perceives the urgency of preserving the centrality of Christian belief in a personal resurrection, which is more closely connected to one's leaving the world than it is to the world's ultimate outcome.¹⁶⁹ On the other hand, Augustine refuses to view the present life as nothing more than a place to mark time, as by stranded travellers packed into some immense waiting-room and searching for ways to relieve their boredom until the final journey shall bring the whole tedious business to an end. In the present life people have no choice but to live in this world, if they are to live at all. While here, they must work to carry out the basic moral command: love God, love neighbour. While other Christian moralists in an age of crisis (above all Pelagius) sought to couch their message exclusively in terms of the inevitable approach of the Day of Judgment, Augustine chose a different tack. He was able to turn away from what others perceived as divine threats in Scripture, and to affirm that such passages could be read in a positive way. His insistence on the Church "in the world" rather than constantly on the verge of leaving it became the norm for how mainstream Christianity views the Church in history which, while provisional, is not simply a one-way street to disaster. For Augustine history is nothing less than the stage whereon God's plan of salvation is played out. This, of course, was already a traditional insight. What Augustine added was the question: *How* is human history this stage?¹⁷⁰

God, the changeless conductor and unchanged Creator of all that changes, imparts, adds, abolishes, curtails, increases or diminishes what is suitable to a particular age, until the beauty that will be the completed course of time, whose parts are the dispensations suitable to each different period, shall have played itself out, like the great melody of some unutterable composer.¹⁷¹

4. In the four-fold response to questions on the significance of Rome, the value of history and the final destiny of humanity, a basic distinction is always at work, and it is this: Human history has value, but *of its own* leaves nothing of permanence. "It is," Augustine says, "that stretch of time in which the dying give up their places to the newly born."¹⁷² What value it possesses comes from outside its own earthly accomplishments — in short, comes from the purpose God gave it. "The ages . . . would have rolled by like so many empty bottles, if they had not served as the means of foretelling Christ."¹⁷³ Without Christ it would indeed have made sense to focus human thought and energies on the world's end, since the world itself would have been the only source for its own meaning, would have provided the only purpose and the only destiny whereof humanity could conceive.
5. Finally: this paper has for its subtitle, "Thoughts on the Fall of Rome, the Book of Revelation, and the End of the World." By now it should be clear that these three subjects have no close connection in Augustine's mind. No apocalyptic significance could be attached to the events of 410, which were merely the springboard for teaching something else, any more than the timetable of the end of the world could be traced from *any* event of human history or *any* passage of the inspired word, whose details have relevance only within the broader framework of the overall message of salvation.

The background for this assertion is the (at least implicit) assumption that Scripture is as much a testimony of how the biblical writers (using various literary forms — narrative, poetry, correspondence, liturgical and moral directives, even apocalyptic sayings) saw *their* world, as it is a continuous divine message. But from the latter viewpoint one has to look at the entire biblical corpus to determine what it is that believers are supposed to discern. Selective quoting at best would deprive the text of its full richness and at worst could bend the message to say anything one wishes it to.

Augustine's particular genius is to have shown the possibility of interpreting the Book of Revelation without reading it through a particular historico-political context. He steps outside that context, in order to speak of the destiny of *all* human beings; *his* context is moral and anthropological, the entire scope of humanity, from creation to the world's end (and even beyond), without ascribing apocalyptic significance to any current or past event. In spite of a certain literalness, he clings firmly to principles of interpretation that ever since have characterized the approach to Revelation by Western mainstream Christianity,¹⁷⁴ where neither apocalypticism nor

millennialism was ever to exercise a more than marginal attraction.

St. Paul University

NOTES

¹ L.D. Streiker, *The Gospel Time Bomb: Ultrafundamentalism and the Future of America* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1984) 107.

² For some of these see F.G. Maier, *Augustin und das antike Rom*, Tübinger Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft, 39 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1955) 48. J. Lamotte remarks, "Le mythe de Rome 'Ville Eternelle' et saint Augustin" in *Augustiniana* 11 (1961) 234: "Qu'il s'agisse de la bataille de Pollentia dont l'issue fut à ce point confuse que l'on ignore le vainqueur, ou de quelque autre combat dont l'Histoire a conservé à peine le nom, du moment que l'issue n'a pas été fatale à Rome, on n'hésite pas à y voir un signe de renouveau." This was Claudian's reaction to the victory over Rhadagaisus at Fiesole in 403: *De bello Gothico* 77 ff. ed. M. Platnauer, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1956) II, 132.

³ For a description of the event, see P. Courcelle, *Histoire littéraire des grandes invasions germaniques* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1964³) 50–56.

⁴ On these see Courcelle (at n. 3) 56–67.

⁵ See F. Paschoud, *Roma aeterna. Etudes sur le patriotisme romain dans l'Occident latin à l'époque des grandes invasions*, Bibliotheca Helvetica Romana, VII (Rome: Institut suisse, 1967) 239.

⁶ On the idea of "eternal Rome," see Paschoud (at n. 5) 239, and Maier (at n. 2) 43–46.

⁷ P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1967) 289.

⁸ See Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae* XIV, 6:3, ed. J.C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1956) I, 36): "victura, dum erunt homines, Roma"; Claudian, *De bello Gothico* 54 (at n. 2) II, 130: "Urbs aequaeva polo"; and *De consolatu Stilichonis* III, 159 f. (op. cit., p. 54): "Nec terminus unquam Romanae dicionis erit"; Rutilius Namatianus, *De reditu suo* I, 137, ed. J. Vesserau and F. Préchac (Paris: Société d'édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1933) 9: "Quae restant nullis obnoxia tempora metis / Dum stabunt terrae, dum polus astra ferret"; and I, 194 (p. 11): "Qui dominas arces et caput orbis habet." See O. Zwierlein, "Der Fall Roms im Spiegel der Kirchenväter" in *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 32 (1978) 46–48; and Paschoud (at n. 5) 23–167. The idea goes back to Virgil, *Aeneid* I, 278–79: "His ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono: imperium sine fine dedi" (quoted by Augustine, *serm.* 105, 7:9, PL 38.622, and *De civitate dei* II, 29, CCL 47, p. 64.24).

⁹ R. Arbesmann, "The Idea of Rome in the Sermons of St. Augustine" *Augustiniana* 4 (1956) 306. See also Maier (at n. 2) 46–48.

¹⁰ See C. Pietri, "Concordia apostolorum et renovatio urbis (Culte des martyrs et propagande pontificale)" in *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'Ecole française de Rome* 73 (1961) 275–322, esp. 310–22.

¹¹ Jerome, *epist.* 123 16:4 (CSEL 56, p. 94:5): "Quid salvum est, si Roma perit?" (All translations of biblical and patristic texts are my own.) On Jerome's attitude see Paschoud (at n. 5) 214 f.; and Zwierlein (at n. 8) 49–51.

- ¹² Jerome, *epist.* 123 15 (CSEL 56, p. 91.17).
- ¹³ Jerome, *Comment. in Hiezechiel.*, prol. (CCL 75, p. 3.12). See also *epist.* 126 2 (CSEL 56, p. 144.3) and *epist.* 127 12 (p. 154.16). To Augustine Jerome quotes a current saying that no one any longer knew his own word, meaning that nothing could any longer be relied on to signify what it was supposed to: *epist.* 165 *inter augustinianas* 2:2 (CSEL 44, p. 543.13).
- ¹⁴ *Codex Theodosianus* XVI, 10:12 (Nov. 8, ed. T. Mommsen, *Theodosiani libri XVI* I/2 [Berlin: Weidmann, 1905] 900 f.). This law had been further extended as recently as mid-November, 408: see *Cod. Theod.* XVI, 5:42 (*ibid.*, p. 869: all non-Christians to be evicted from the imperial court) and 10:19 (p. 902: all pagan idols to be removed from their niches and pagan altars to be destroyed). An edict against pagan worship in public (XVI, 5:51 = 56, Mommsen, p. 872) was published the day after the Visigoths entered Rome.
- ¹⁵ Aug., *serm.* 81 7 (PL 38.504); *serm.* 105 6:8 (PL 38.622); *De civitate dei* I, 30 and 33 (CCL 47, p. 30.5 and 33.15).
- ¹⁶ Melito of Sardes, in Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* IV, 26:7-9 (GCS 9/1, p. 384). For Eusebius himself see H.E. I, 2:23 (GCS 9/1, p. 24.21); *Praeparatio evangelica* I, 4:1-6 (GCS 43/1, p. 14-16); and *Theophaneia* III, 1 (GCS 11/2, p. 126*f.). See the comments by G.F. Chesnut, Jr., *The First Christian Histories. Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret and Evagrius*, Théologie historique, 46 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977) 156 f.; Zwierlein (at n. 8) 57; and F. Paschoud, "La doctrine chrétienne et l'idéologie impériale romaine" in *L'Apocalypse de Jean. Traditions exégétiques et iconographiques, III^e-XIII^es*, Actes du Colloque de la Fondation Hardt, 29 février 3 mars 1976 (Etudes et documents publiés par la Section d'histoire de la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Genève, 11) (Geneva: Droz, 1979) 62-65. On Augustine's view of this idea, see Paschoud (at n. 5) 255 f.
- ¹⁷ Eusebius, *Theoph.* III, 2 (GCS 11/2, p. 127*.12).
- ¹⁸ Optatus of Milevis, *De schismate Donatistarum* III, 3 (CSEL 26, p. 74.3).
- ¹⁹ See Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* I, 4:2-5 (GCS 43/1, p. 14 f.); *Demonstratio evangelica* III, 7:30-31 (GCS 23, p. 145.21); *Theoph.* III, 1 (GCS 11/2, p. 126*.15). On the Eusebian view see Chesnut (at n. 16) 91-166.
- ²⁰ Eusebius, *Laus Constantini* 16:1-5 (GCS 7, p. 248 f.).
- ²¹ So Eusebius, *Dem. evang.* III, 7:30-36, VII, 2:22, VIII, 4:12-15 and IX, 17:13-19 (GCS 23, p. 145 f., 332.7, 396 f. and 441 f.); Ambrose, *Explanatio ps. 45:21* (CSEL 64, p. 343.20). For Augustine's view (indifference) see Paschoud (at n. 5) 256-58. Many Christians went so far as to identify Rome with the fourth and final kingdom spoken of in Daniel 2:31-45 and 7:1-14 (thus Jerome, *In Dan. I*, visio 2, 31-35, CCL 75A, p. 794.399-406.) On this see Paschoud (at n. 16) 45; and Zwierlein (at n. 8) 54-58.
- ²² Lactantius, *Institutiones divinae* VII, 25:5-8 (CSEL 19, p. 664.13). He bases this on the *Sibylline Oracles* III, 364 and VIII, 165 (GCS 8, p. 67 and 150). See Lamotte (at n. 2) 242 f. Around 380 Tyconius predicted that the Church would end 350 years after Christ's resurrection: *Liber Regularum* (or *Regularis*), 5, ed. J.A. Robinson, *Texts and Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, (Cambridge: 1894) 61.4-7.
- ²³ Lactantius, *Inst. div.* VII, 27 (CSEL 19, p. 668, where the editors regard this section as inauthentic). But see Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 32:1 (CCL 1, p. 142 f.): "Est et alia maior necessitas nobis orandi pro imperatoribus, et ita universo orbe et statu imperii rebusque Romanis, qui vim maximam universo orbi imminentem ipsamque clausulam saeculi acerbitates horrendas comminantem Romani imperii commeatu scimus retardari."

Itaque nobis experiri et, dum precamur differri, Romanae diuturnitati favemus." See also 30:1 and 39:2 (p. 141 and 150) and *Ad Scapulam* 2:6-8 (CCL 2, p. 1128). On this idea in Ambrose see Paschoud (at n. 5) 201-208. Is it possible that biblical texts such as Romans 13:1-7, Titus 3:1, 1 Timothy 2:2 and 1 Peter 2:7, 13 should be read in the same light?

²⁴ Aug., *De civ. dei* I, 36 (CCL 47, p. 34).

²⁵ Aug., *sermo Denis* 24 11 (*Miscellanea Agostiniana* [= MA] I) (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1931) 151.13; *De consensu evangelistarum* I, 33:51 (CSEL 43, p. 55.20); *enarr. in ps. 136* 9 (CCL 40, p. 196.6); *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* 2:3 (CSEL 41, p. 624.22); *De civ. dei* I, 1 (CCL 47, p. 2.19-33). See P. Courcelle, "Propos antichrétiens rapportés par saint Augustin," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 1 (1958) 178-83.

²⁶ Aug., *serm. 93* 6:7 (PL 38.576, preached in 411-412). Did Augustine himself share this idea? A number of commentators think so, for example Lamotte (at n. 2) 248: "Alors que le monde attendait sa fin, saint Augustin crut d'abord que l'univers était secoué par les dernières convulsions, annonçant le trépas, mais il sut se dégager assez rapidement des idées traditionnelles qui emprisonnaient ses contemporains." But see *epist. 111* 2 (CSEL 34/2, p. 644.12, end of 409); and *serm. 93* 7:8 (PL 38.576). If there is panic among the listeners, there seems to be little in the preacher, as Paschoud admits (at n. 5) 259: "Il a pu un certain temps penser que la fin était proche, en 410: cette opinion ne s'est pas imposée à lui, il ne l'a pas formulée clairement, mais il semble bien qu'elle l'ait effleuré dans les mois qui ont suivi la prise de Rome." In n. 116 Paschoud takes exception to J. Lamotte ("Saint Augustin et la fin du monde," *Augustiniana* 12 [1962] 14), who says Augustine firmly believed in the imminence of the end from 410 to the writing of the first books of *De civitate dei*. See also Lamotte's "But et adversaires de saint Augustin dans le 'De Civitate Dei'," *Augustiniana* 11 (1961) 434: "En effet, peu à peu, à mesure que le temps s'écoule, revisant ses idées sur la fin du monde, il en arrive à penser que la chute de Rome, bien loin d'être le fait annonciateur de la fin des temps, ne constitue qu'un épisode de l'histoire de l'humanité."

²⁷ See Aug., *De civ. dei* I, 35 (CCL 47, p. 33.9); *serm. Caillau et Saint-Yves II*, 19 7 (MA I, p. 270.1); *serm. 311* 8:8 and 17:14 (PL 38.1416 and 1419); *epist. 111 ad Victorianum* 2 (CSEL 34/2, p. 644.17); and *enarr. in ps. 33 s. 2*, 17 (CCL 38, p. 293.5).

²⁸ Aug., *enarr. in ps. 96* 12 (CCL 39, p. 1364.55).

²⁹ Aug., *sermo 81* (PL 38.499-506); *serm. 105* (PL 618-25); *serm. de excidio urbis Romae (exc. urb.)*, CCL 46, p. 249-262 = PL 40.715-24; and *Sermo Bibliothecae Casinensis I, 133* (*Bibl. Casin.*, MA I, p. 401-412 = *serm. 296*, PL 38.1352-59). This is the probable chronological order, although Maier calls *serm. 105* (on what grounds?) "die früheste der vier Predigten" (at n. 2) 61. A. Kunzelmann, "Die Chronologie der Sermones des hl. Augustinus" in *Miscellanea Agostiniana*, II (Rome: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1931) places *serm. 81* and *105* "gegen Ende des Jahres 410" (p. 500; on *serm. 296* see p. 449 f.). L. Verheijen, "La prière dans la Règle d'Augustin" in A.-M. la Bonnardière, ed., *Saint Augustin et la Bible* (Bible de tous les temps, 3) (Paris: Beauchesne, 1986) 177, sees another allusion to Rome's fall in *enarr. in ps. 66* 3 (preached in 412). O. Perler, *Les voyages de saint Augustin* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1969) 398 f., believes there may already be an oblique reference to the fall of Rome in *sermo Denis* 24 10, preached on Sept. 25, 410. On the four homilies treated here see Perler, *ibid.* 397-405. He dates *serm. 105* "légèrement postérieur [au] sermon 296," which he agrees is from June 29, 411. However, most commentators, following Kunzelmann, *loc. cit.*, place *serm. 105* at the end of 410. At any rate it belongs between *serm. 81* and *Bibl. Casin. I, 133*.

³⁰ *Serm. 105* 9:12 (PL 38.624).

31 *Serm. 81* 9 (PL 38.505): "*Fortē Roma non perit: forte flagellata est, non interempta; forte castigata est, non deleta. . . Forte non modo finis est civitati*"; *serm. 105* 7:9 (c. 622): "*Si non manet civitas quae nos carnaliter genuit . . .*"; *exc. urb.* 2:3 (p. 252.92-94): "*horrenda nobis nuntiata sunt . . . multa audivimus.*" See *De civ. dei* IV, 7 (CCL 47, p. 103 f.).

32 *Serm. 105* 10:13 (PL 38.624 f.). See *Bibl. Casin. I*, 133 11 (MA I, p. 409.7): "Has the Goth taken away what Christ protects?"

33 Maier (at n. 2) 55: "Erst von jetzt ab wird Rom zu einem zentralen Problem in seinem Denken"; Paschoud (at n. 5) 239 f.: "L'évêque réagit immédiatement et avec sa fougue accoutumée. Des lettres et des sermons nous révèlent ces premières réactions. Placé devant des difficultés qu'il n'avait jamais rencontrées et auxquelles il n'avait guère songé, Augustin fut évidemment pris de court."

34 Paschoud (at n. 5) 236-42. Though Augustine often indicts Rome for its decadence, he never says it therefore deserves destruction.

35 This is supported by letters and other writings from the same period. They almost never make an explicit reference to the event of August 410, e.g. *epist. 122* 2 (CSEL 34/2, p. 743.4-21). See J. Fischer, *Die Völkerwanderung im Urteil der zeitgenössischen kirchlichen Schriftsteller Galliens unter Einbeziehung des heiligen Augustinus*, Inauguraldiss., Julius-Maximiliansuniversität, Würzburg (Heidelberg: Kemper, 1948) 72-81 (70-72 on possible references to the fall of 410 in Augustine's later preaching).

36 Aug., *serm. 81* 9 (PL 38.505): "Ecce, inquit, christianis temporibus Roma perit"; *serm. 105* 6:8 (PL 38.622): "Ecce pereunt omnia christianis temporibus"; *serm. Bibl. Casin. I*, 133 9 (MA I, p. 407.1 = *serm. 296*, PL 38.1356): "Ecce temporibus christianis Roma affligitur. . ." See *serm. Denis* 24 13 (MA I, p. 153.20); *De civ. dei* I, 15 (CCL 47, p. 16.34); and *epist. 138* 16 (CSEL 44, p. 142.3, written in late 411 or 412): "Ut quid autem ad illud respondeam, quod dicunt, per quosdam imperatores christianos multa mala imperio accidisse Romano?"

37 *Serm. 81* 7-8 (PL 38.504).

38 *Ibid.* 8 (PL 38.504).

39 *Ibid.* 9 (PL 38.505); see also *exc. urb.* 6:6 (p. 258.232): "An putatis, fratres, civitatem in parietibus et non in civibus deputandam?"

40 *Serm. 105* 6:8-8:11 (PL 38.622 f.). See also *De civ. dei* IV, 7 (CCL 47, p. 103 f.).

41 *Serm. 105* 7:9 (PL 38.622).

42 See *serm. 81* 8 (PL 38.504f.).

43 *Serm. 105* 7:10 (PL 38.623). See *exc. urb.* 6:7 (p. 258.239). On Augustine's attitude to Virgil see Lamotte (at n. 26, "But et adversaires...") 464 f.

44 *Serm. 105* 9:12 (PL 38.624).

45 *Ibid.* 8:11 (PL 38.623); see *serm. 81* 9 (PL 38.505).

46 *Serm. 105* 9:12 (PL 38.624).

47 The authenticity of this sermon has been questioned by some, but is defended by M.V. O'Reilly, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini De excidio Urbis Romae Sermo: A Critical Text and Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Catholic University of America Patristic Studies, 89 (Washington: CUA Press, 1955) 4-6; see also CCL 46, p. 245; Perler (at n. 29) 456 ("411, pas avant l'été"); and G. Cannone, "Il 'Sermo de excidio urbis Romae' di S. Agostino," *Vetera Christianorum* 12 (1975) 325.

⁴⁸ *Exc. urb.* 2:1 (p. 250.36).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 2:2 (p. 251.60). See Cannone (at n. 47) 330: "Sodoma è l'esempio della distruzione, Roma del castigo."

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 2-5 (p. 251.36 257.214).

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 8:9 (p. 261.312). See *epist. 140 ad Honoratum* (= Liber de gratia Novi Testamenti) 13:33 (CSEL 44, p. 183.7), written 411/412; *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* II,11 (CSEL 60, p. 88.6).

⁵² *Exc. urb.* 3:3-4:4 (p. 253.111). See *serm. 81 2* (PL 38.500); *epist. 140* 13:34 (CSEL 44, p. 184.6); and *De pecc. mer. et rem.* II, 11 (CSEL 60, p. 88.9).

⁵³ *Exc. urb.* 8:9 (p. 261.323). See *serm. 81 2* and 7 (PL 38.499 f. and 503 f.) and *Bibl. Casin. I, 133* 12 (MA I, p. 409.26).

⁵⁴ On Morin's edition of *Bibliothecae Casinensis I, 133* (in MA I) as compared to the text of *serm 296* (PL 38), see Zwierlein (at n. 8) 65, n. 63. Here we follow Morin's edition which, if faulty, is still an improvement over that of the Maurists.

⁵⁵ *Bibl. Cassin. I, 133* 6 (p. 404.27-405.4). On the joint veneration of Peter and Paul at Rome in the fourth and fifth centuries, see Pietri (at n. 10).

⁵⁶ *Bibl. Cassin. I, 133* 7 (p. 405.8): "Audi apostolum, si vivit in te memoria ipsius"

⁵⁷ *Loc. cit.* (p. 405.13-15): "In ipso Petro temporalis fuit caro, et non vis ut temporalis sit lapis Romae? Petrus apostolus cum domino regnat, corpus apostoli Petri quodam loco iacet"

⁵⁸ *Loc. cit.* (p. 405.24-25): "Doles ergo, et ploras, quia ruerunt ligna et lapides, et quia mortui sunt morituri?" See *exc. urb.* 6:6 (p. 258.232); *serm. 81 9* (PL 38.505); *serm. 105 9:12* (PL 38.624); and *De civ. dei* II, 2 (CCL 47, p. 36.33).

⁵⁹ *Bibl. Casin. I, 133* 7 (p. 405.30-406.9).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 8 (p. 406.10-31).

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 9 (p. 407.4-26). See p. 9.

⁶² *Ibid.* 10 (p. 407.27-408.10).

⁶³ *Ibid.* 12 (p. 409.19-22): "Debuit ergo apostolorum memoria, per quam tibi praeparatur caelum, servare tibi in terra theatra insanorum semper? Ideo mortuus est Petrus et repositus, ut lapis de theatro non cadat?"

⁶⁴ *Loc. cit.* (p. 410.14).

⁶⁵ On Augustine's patriotism, see Paschoud (at n. 5) 263-72. Though far from fanatic, he seems to have considered himself a loyal Roman citizen: see Paschoud (at n. 5) 247-51; Fischer (at n. 35) 83-87. But see H. Hagendahl, "Zu Augustins Beurteilung von Rom in 'De civitate Dei,'" *Wiener Studien* 79 (1966) 515 f.: "Augustins Stellung dem Römertum und dem römischen Staat gegenüber ist durchaus feindlich Es ist einfach unverständlich, wie man immer von Augustins römischen Staatsgefühl und Patriotismus, sogar in lyrischen Tönen, sprechen kann." Similar remarks in Maier (at n. 2) 62, n. 70.

⁶⁶ Aug., *serm. 105 7:9* (PL 38.622). See *serm. 81 9* (PL 38.505). Here we are already at the theme of the two *civitates*, the two communities or societies, which lies at the heart of *De civitate Dei*. In fact, the theme shows up well before 410: see G. Bardy, ed., *La Cité de Dieu, livres I-V*, Bibliothèque augustinienne, 33 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959) 65-74. A writing on the "two societies" theme is promised in *De Genesi ad litt. imp.* XI, 15 (CSEL 28/1, p. 348.17), begun in 393 and completed around 411. See

Maier (at n. 2) 146–52; Lamotte, “But et adversaires,” (at n. 26) 438–45; and A. Lauras and H. Rondet, “Le thème des deux cités dans l’oeuvre de saint Augustin” in H. Rondet et al., *Etudes Augustiniennes* (Paris: Aubier, 1953) 97–160 (p. 152 f. for pre-augustinian examples of the ‘two cities’ idea). Augustine often expresses the view (e.g. *De civ. dei* I, 35) that Rome (or the empire) can be identified with neither the *civitas dei* nor the *civitas terrena*. It is a mixture of the two. See *enarr. in ps. 64* 2 (quoted p. 10).

⁶⁷ *Serm. 81* 9 (PL 38.505); see *serm. 105* 8:11 (PL 38.623) and *serm. Caillau II*, 19 7 (MA I, p. 270.15).

⁶⁸ *Serm. 81* 2 and 7 (PL 38.499 f. and 503 f.). See *enarr. in ps. 36* 9 (CCL 40, p. 1970.37).

⁶⁹ *Serm. 105* 6:8 (PL 38.622).

⁷⁰ *Serm. 105* 7:9 (PL 38.622).

⁷¹ *Serm. 105* 8:11 (PL 38.623). Augustine selects his Scripture accordingly, for example Romans 8:18 (*Bibl. Casin. I*, 133 6, p. 404.24) or James 1:2 (*ibid.* 10, p. 407.31).

⁷² *Serm. 81* 9 (PL 38.506, emphasis mine): “Rogamus vos, obsecramus vos, exhortamus vos: estote mites, compatimini patientibus, suscipite infirmos; et in ista occasione multorum peregrinorum, egentium, laborantium, abundet hospitalitas vestra, abundant bona opera vestra. Quod iubet Christus, faciant Christiani . . .” See *Bibl. Casin. I*, 133 11–14 (p. 408.15–411.31): “Iam, fratres, dimittamus paululum paganos foris, oculum ad nos convertamus . . . estote ad omnes, videte ne quis malum pro malo alicui reddat . . .” In this last sermon the direct concern is no longer refugees but the welcome of repentant Donatists. But see *serm. 25 de vet. test.* 8 (CCL 41, p. 339.163) and *epist. 122* 1 (CSEL 34/2, p. 743.4–16). Both are probably from 410.

⁷³ *Serm. 105* 7:9–10 (PL 38.622 f.). In these four sermons Zwierlein (at n. 8) 67–80 notes only one passage (*Bibl. Casin. I*, 133 11, MA I, p. 408.9–15) where “Die Verwüstungen der Welt schlimmer geworden seien als früher”: “Sed plus, inquit, plus vastatur modo genus humanum. Interim considerata praeterita historia, salva quaestione, nescio utrum plus: sed ecce sit plus, credo quia plus. Dominus ipse solvit quaestionem. Plus modo vastatur mundus, plus vastatur, ait: quare modo plus vastatur, quando ubique evangelium praedicatur? Attendis quanta celebritate evangelium praedicatur, et non attendis quanta impietate contemnitur.” Against Courcelle (at n. 3) 76 n. 4 and Paschoud (at n. 5) 242, he argues that Augustine is not signifying agreement with this statement. In the first place, we have to remember that this is a *sermon*, whose oral inflection is not preserved in the manuscripts. Secondly, Augustine’s seeming agreement would be the only case of its kind; but it should rather be seen as “eine rhetorisch bedingte Konzession” (p. 79) for the sake of argument, “auf einfache Zuhörer zu wirken” (p. 74). Thirdly, because in each of the three preceding sermons Augustine argues with a fictional opponent or friend (*serm. 81* 4 and 9 [PL 38.502 f. and 505]; *105* 8:10 [PL 38.621]; *exc. urb.* 2, CCL 46, p. 251.57), it seems likely that the same rhetorical device is at work here (see 9–11, MA I, p. 407 f.). Zwierlein’s rendition of the passage (p. 74, n. 83):

“Sed plus,” inquit, “plus vastatur modo genus humanum”. Interim inconsiderata praeterita salva quaestione nescio utrum plus. Sed ecce sit plus, credo quia plus: Dominus ipse solvit quaestionem. “Plus modo vastatur mundus, plus vastatur,” ait. Quare modo plus vastatur, quando ubique evangelium praedicatur? Attendis quanta celebritate evangelium praedicatur, et non attendis quanta impietate [or: perversitate] contemnitur.

⁷⁴ More correctly, Society (or Community) of God. See Aug., *epist. 138* 2:10 (CSEL 44, p. 135.10): “Quid est autem civitas nisi hominum multitudo in quoddam vinculum

redacta concordiae?" This letter discusses the evolution of *De civitate dei*. In Sections 2 and 4 of the present paper the purpose is not to present the entire contents of Augustine's great work, but only what applies to apocalypticism. For an overview of the contents of *De civitate dei* see P. Piret, "La Cité de Dieu," *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 89 (1988) 116-37.

⁷⁵ *De civ. dei* I, praef. (CCL 47, p. 1.8): "magnum opus et arduum." See also XXII, 30 (CCL 48, p. 866.14): "ingentis huius operis"; and *Retractationes* II, 43 (69):1 (CCL 57, p. 124.11): "de civitate dei grande opus."

⁷⁶ So T.D. Barnes, "Aspects of the Background of the City of God," *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa/University of Ottawa Quarterly* 52 (1982) 67.

⁷⁷ *Retr.* II, 43 (69):1 (CCL 57, p. 124.3). On sources for the idea see G. Bardy, "La formation du concept de 'Cité de Dieu' dans l'oeuvre de saint Augustin," *L'Année théologique augustinienne* 13 (1952) 5-19.

⁷⁸ Barnes (at n. 76) 73 says that in the first three books Augustine "designed his arguments primarily to fit the situation in Carthage." This makes sense, as that is where all four sermons treated in the preceding section were preached. See also Brown (at n. 7) 312: "The *City of God* cannot be explained in terms of its immediate origins. It is particularly superficial to regard it as a book about the sack of Rome. Augustine may well have written a book 'On the City of God' without such an event. What this sack effected, was to provide Augustine with a specific, challenging audience at Carthage; and in this way the sack of Rome ensured that a book which might have been a work of pure exegesis for fellow Christian scholars . . . became a deliberate confrontation with paganism."

⁷⁹ Aug., *De divinatione daemonum* 10:14 (CSEL 41, p. 616-18), written between 406 and 410.

⁸⁰ So Lamotte (at n. 2) 250-60. However, see la Bonnardière, "On a dit de toi des choses glorieuses, Cité de Dieu!" in *Saint Augustin et la Bible* (at n. 29) 362: "Mais la problématique de l'évangélisation des païens appartenait depuis longtemps à la pastorale d'Augustin, comme le prouvent les livres 12 et 14 du *Contra Faustum* dès l'année 401-402 et le *De catechizandis rudibus* en 405-406."

⁸¹ Brown (at n. 7) 299-302.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 304-12.

⁸³ See *De civ. dei* V, 26 (CCL 47, p. 163.75).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* I, 1 (CCL 47, p. 1.1). Hagendahl argues (at n. 65) 509 that the full title of Augustine's work ought to be *De civitate dei adversus paganos*, "der freilich selten angeführt wird." For an opposing argument see Barnes (at n. 76) 80. At any rate, by the end of Book V this particular concern is on the wane: cf. V, 26 (p. 163.73). Here we do not have time to go into all of Augustine's counter-arguments. They are summed up by Fischer (at n. 35) 61-69.

⁸⁵ *De civ. dei* I, 1-2 (CCL 47, p. 1.9). See also III, 31 (p. 96.1) and *exc. urb.* 2:2 (CCL 46, p. 252.84). Zwierlein (at n. 8) 46, following Maier (at n. 2) 55, contends that only the basilicas of Peter and Paul were spared during the Gothic pillage of Rome. This may be the meaning of Orosius, *Adversum paganos* VII, 39:1 (CSEL 5, p. 544.15) and Jerome, *epist.* 127 13:3 (CSEL 56, p. 155.22).

⁸⁶ Pagans could ask in return why Christ had not protected his own followers, as well as the Empire now dedicated to him (*De civ. dei* II, 2, CCL 47, p. 35.7). Why were Christians, too, the victims of suffering — permitted to starve (I, 10, p. 12.95), torn from

their land (I, 14, p. 15.1), even tortured to death (I, 10, p. 12.70)? What of Christian women and girls, even those consecrated to Christ, who had been raped (I, 16, p. 17.2) or driven to suicide to escape such a fate (I, 17, p. 18.1)? These questions imply a whole range of Augustine's thought — particularly on the meaning of suffering and the presence of God — which we cannot explore here. See Lamotte (at n. 26) 459 f.

⁸⁷ See *De civ. dei* II, 2 (CCL 47, p. 35.3): "Occurrit mihi resistendum esse primitus eis, qui haec bella, quibus mundus iste conteritur, maximeque Romanae urbis recentem a barbaris vastationem Christianae religioni tribuunt, qua prohibentur nefandis sacrificiis servire daemonibus." See also II, 18 and 25 (p. 49.92 and 61.50); III, 30 (p. 96.1); *serm. 105* 10:13 (PL 38.624); and *Bibl. Casin. I, 133* 9 (MA I, p. 407.5): "Ecce quando faciebamus sacrificia diis nostris stabat Roma: modo quia superavit et abundavit sacrificium dei vestri, et inhibita sunt et prohibita sacrificia deorum nostrorum, ecce quid patitur Roma." This was an application of the idea that all disasters were the fault of Christians. See *De civ. dei* II, 3 and IV, 1 (p. 36.1 and 98.1); also *enarr. in ps. 80* 1 (CCL 39, p. 1120.25) and *enarr. 136* 9 (p. 1969.8). Tertullian had already noted the same mentality in 197 (*Apologeticum* 40:1-2, CCL 1, p. 153.1). See Lamotte (at n. 26) 453-58.

⁸⁸ Brown (at n. 7) 305.

⁸⁹ The key to this eschatological shift has, in my opinion, been identified by A. Benoit, "Remarque sur l'eschatologie de S. Augustin" in *Gottesreich und Menschenreich. Ernst Stähelin zum 80. Geburtstag* (Basel-Stuttgart: Verlag Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1969) 4: "Aussi ne faut-il pas s'étonner de le voir surtout aux prises avec les questions relatives à l'eschatologie personnelle. Ce n'est que plus tard, lorsqu'il sera devenu évêque et consacrer sa vie à l'édification de sa paroisse, lorsqu'il sera aux prises avec les bouleversements qui agiteront le monde au début du V^e siècle, qu'il se tournera vers les questions d'eschatologie globale, vers la question du sens de l'histoire du monde. Et c'est ainsi qu'il écrira la *Cité de Dieu* entre 413 et 426." Books IV and V of *De civitate dei*, in particular, explore the place of the empire in the divine scheme of things. It is at this juncture that Augustine really faces for the first time the question of the Christian's attitude to Roman patriotism. See Paschoud (at n. 5) 236.

⁹⁰ *De civ. dei* II, 29 (CCL 47, p. 64.30).

⁹¹ *Ibid.* III, 29 (p. 95.1). The case of Nero is not mentioned in *City of God*; but see *Bibl. Casin. I, 133* 9 (MA I, p. 407.15-23). As Courcelle points out (at n. 3) 70, in the first three books of *De civitate dei* "la plupart des thèmes développés se trouvaient déjà en germe dans divers sermons et lettres qui datent de la fin de 410 et des années suivantes. Augustin n'a eu qu'à systématiser ses idées pour écrire les premiers livres de son grand ouvrage."

⁹² See Lamotte (at n. 26) 445; (at n. 2) 248.

⁹³ *De civ. dei* II, 29 (p. 65.43).

⁹⁴ For Augustine the real *patria* is heaven: e.g., *De doct. christ.* I, 4:4 (CCL 32, p. 8.5); *De civ. dei.* I, 15 (CCL 47, p. 17.63) and II, 29 (p. 64.20). See Maier (at n. 2) 42.

⁹⁵ Aug., *enarr. in ps. 64* 2 (CCL 39, p. 823.6), preached at the end of 412. Cf. the whole of *enarr. 136* (CCL 40, p. 1964-78). On this theme see A. Lauras, "Deux cités: Jérusalem et Babylone. Formation et évolution d'un thème central du 'De civitate Dei'," *Ciudad de Dios* 167 (1954) 117-50; and P. Borgomeo, *L'Eglise de ce temps dans la prédication de saint Augustin* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1972) 279-98.

⁹⁶ See Orosius, *Adv. pag.* VII, 40:1 (CSEL 5, p. 549.1).

⁹⁷ See J.-C. Guy, *Unité et structure logique de la "Cité de Dieu" de saint Augustin* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1961) 6 (referring to Book I of *De civitate dei*): "Dans les vingt et un livres suivants, le thème de la destruction de Rome n'apparaît que très rarement, et toujours de façon épisodique. Dans les quelques jalons dont Augustin a marqué son oeuvre et où, totalement ou partiellement, il la résume, il n'est presque jamais question de ce fameux sac de Rome. Il ne faut donc certainement pas considérer la *Cité de Dieu* uniquement comme un plaidoyer composé pour laver les chrétiens de la responsabilité qu'on leur imputait injustement de la ruine de Rome."

⁹⁸ *Serm. 93* 6:7 (PL 38.576).

⁹⁹ See J.-P. Bouhot, "Hesychius de Salone et Augustin. Lettres 197-198-199," la Bonnardière, ed. (at n. 29) 231 and n. 7.

¹⁰⁰ On Hesychius see Bouhot (at n. 99) 230 f., who dates the four pieces of correspondence "vers 418-420." See also G. Coulée in Bardy, ed., *La Cité de Dieu, livres XIX-XXII*, Bibliothèque augustiniennes, 37 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1960) 763-65 (note complémentaire 24); and Fischer (at n. 35) 92-99.

¹⁰¹ On the history of the "weeks" theme in Christianity see J. Daniélou, "La typologie millénariste de la semaine dans le christianisme primitif," *Vigiliae Christianae* 2 (1948) 1-16; "La typologie de la Semaine au IV^e siècle," *Recherches de Science religieuse* 35 (1948) 383-411; and O. Rousseau, "Les Pères de l'Eglise et la théologie du temps," *La Maison-Dieu* 30 (1952) 37-44.

¹⁰² *Epist. 197* (CSEL 57, p. 231-35).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 1 (p. 231.14). He repeats the advice to read Jerome's commentary in *De civ. dei* XX, 23 (CCL 48, p. 742.43).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 1 (p. 231.18); also 3 and 4 (p. 233.6 and 234.7). Later in the same letter (5, p. 234.20) he suggests that Daniel was referring to the *first* coming of Christ at the Incarnation. See Bouhot (at n. 99) 229: "Pour autant cette déclaration n'a pas empêché qu'au cours des siècles bon nombre de chrétiens tentent par de laborieux calculs de déterminer cette date avec une plus ou moins grande précision. Toutefois, saint Augustin s'est toujours refusé d'entrer dans une voie si périlleuse et, dès 392 en expliquant les premiers mots du psaume sixième, il fait saisir comment les paroles du Seigneur rendent vains tous les calculs."

¹⁰⁵ *Epist. 198 inter augustinianas* (CSEL 57, p. 235-42).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 5 (p. 239.15). Hesychius was doing no more than express a common opinion (on which see B. Kötting, "Endzeitprognosen in Schriften Lactantius und Augustinus," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 77 (1958): 133-38. But he may have been the first to bring it to Augustine's attention.

¹⁰⁷ *Epist. 199* (CSEL 57, p. 243-92).

¹⁰⁸ *De civ. dei* XX, 5 (CCL 48, p. 705.65-80). See Bouhot (at n. 99) 240-42.

¹⁰⁹ *Epist. 199* 1:2 (p. 245.13).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 1:3 (p. 247.3): "Tunc enim uniuersique veniet dies ille, cum venerit ei dies, ut talis hinc exeat . . ."

¹¹¹ A good summary of Hesychius' points and Augustine's rebuttal can be found in Bardy, ed. (at n. 100) 764 f. (note complémentaire 24). See also Bouhot (at n. 99) 243-47.

¹¹² *Epist. 199* 6:17-7:21 (p. 257-62), where it is evident that Augustine has little use for interpreting Daniel's "weeks" as a precise period of time. See also *serm. 93* 7:8 (PL 38.576): "Aliquis quasi computat sibi: 'Ecce ab Adam tot anni transierunt, et ecce

complentur sex millia annorum, et continuo, quomodo quidam tractatores computaverunt, continuo veniet dies iudicii.' Et ecce dum non speratur, dum dicitur, 'Sex millia annorum expectabantur, et ecce transierunt,' unde scimus iam quando veniet? Media nocte veniet. 'Quid est, media nocte veniet?' Dum nescis, veniet."

¹¹³ *De civ. dei* XX, 19 (CCL 48, p. 732.63): "Multum mihi mira est haec opinantium tanta praesumptio." On such attempts see Bardy, ed. (at n. 100) 780-83 (note complémentaire 32).

¹¹⁴ *Epist.* 199 3:10 (p. 252.14-18): "Quae verba apostolica utinam non tantum modo poneris, verum etiam exponere dignareris; ita sane obscura sunt et mystice dicta, ut tamen appareat eum nihil de statutis dixisse temporibus nullumque eorum intervallum spatiumque aperuisse."

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 3:10 (p. 252.23). Cf. *De civ. dei* XX, 10 (CCL 48, p. 731.44-52 and 732.74-78).

¹¹⁶ *Epist.* 199 3:11 (p. 253.13). Cf. *De civ. dei* XX, 19 (p. 731.41-732.77).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* 3:11 (p. 253.11). Cf. *De civ. dei* XVIII, 52 and XX, 19 (p. 650.1 and 731.26).

¹¹⁸ *Epist.* 197 4 (p. 233 f.); *epist.* 199 1:1 (p. 244.20) and passim. This verse is also the final biblical citation in *City of God* (XXII, 30, CCL 48, p. 865.137).

¹¹⁹ See *epist.* 199 12:47 (p. 285 f.).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* 13:52-54 (p. 289-92).

¹²¹ See above, n. 84.

¹²² See Barnes (at n. 76) 66.

¹²³ On the composition of *De civitate dei* see J.J. O'Donnell, "The Inspiration of Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*," *Augustinian Studies* 10 (1979) 75-79; also Bardy, ed. (at n. 66) 22-35.

¹²⁴ One has been promised by Anne-Marie la Bonnardière in collaboration with Martine Dulaey: see Association internationale d'études patristiques, *Bulletin d'information et de liaison* 15 (1988) 33. Studies already done focus on Augustine's connection with Tyconius. See below, n. 148.

¹²⁵ He lists the *Apocalypsis Iohannis liber unus* as the last of the revealed Scriptures in *De doctrina christiana* II, 8:13 (CCL 32, p. 40.56).

¹²⁶ *De civ. dei* XX, 17 (CCL 48, p. 728.48-53): "Et in hoc quidem libro, cuius nomen est apocalypsis, obscure multa dicuntur, ut mentem legentis exerceant, et pauca in eo sunt, ex quorum manifestatione indagentur cetera cum labore; maxime quia sic eadem multis modis repetit, ut alia atque alia dicere videatur, cum aliter atque aliter haec ipsa dicere vestigetur." Compare *epist.* 199 3:10, regarding 2 Thess. 2:6-8 (above, n. 114).

¹²⁷ M. Dulaey, "L'Apocalypse, Augustin et Tyconius" in la Bonnardière, ed. (at n. 29) 369; J.-B. Frey, "Apocalypse" in *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, Suppl. 1 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1928) col. 321. But see Paschoud (at n. 16) 71: "Pour la période postérieure à 360, les textes transmis semblent unanimement repousser une interprétation littérale de l'Apocalypse. Il ne faut pas oublier qu'ils ont pour auteurs des hommes en vue, parfaitement orthodoxes, qui sont en même temps les penseurs les plus éminents et les plus avancés de leur temps. Il a peut-être existé parallèlement une littérature de seconde zone, de portée locale, plus ou moins divergente des textes des grands auteurs sur le plan doctrinal, constituant sur divers points des noyaux archaïques isolés. Si Commodien est du V^e siècle — ce que je ne crois pas, mais qui n'est pas absolument exclu — il

constituerait un de ces noyaux." And he adds (p. 73): "Avec l'éventuelle exception de Commodien, aucune interprétation littérale de l'Apocalypse n'est attestée dans la littérature conservée postérieure à la paix de l'Eglise."

128 Streiker (at n. 1) 108. I realize that this constitutes but one aspect of a notion whose definition still invites precision: see J.H. Moorhead, "Searching for the Millennium in America," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, ns 8, no. 2 (1987) 17-33, esp. 22-32.

129 See above, n. 101. Commentaries on Revelation in the early Christian centuries are limited to explanations of particular verses, often in the light of Daniel; frequently they have a millenaristic bent as well.

130 On the history of millennialism in early Christianity, see V. Ermoni, "Les phases successives de l'erreur millénariste," *Revue des questions historiques* 70 (1901) 353-88; L. Gry, *Le millénarisme dans ses origines et son développement* (Paris: A. Picard, 1904); H. Leclercq, "Millénarisme" in *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* 11 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1933) cols. 1181-95 (mainly based on Gry); W. Bauer, "Chiliasmus" in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 2 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1954) cols. 1073-78; and Kötting (at n. 106) 125-30. All include the pre-Christian tradition.

131 Eusebius, *Dem. evang.* III, 3:17 (GCS 23, p. 113.1); *Theoph.* IV, 29 (GCS 11/2, p. 207*f.).

132 Compare Chesnut (at n. 16) 162 with Paschoud (at n. 16) 66.

133 Like apocalyptic, millennialism survived in the West, especially through Lactantius (*Inst. div.* VII, 14:7-17:11, CSEL 19, p. 629-40), long after Origen had effectively weakened it in the East. Thus Ambrose, *De excessu fratris sui* II,59 (CSEL 73, p. 281.17): "Ergo isti avi [Phoenix] quingentesimus resurrectionis annus est, nobis millesimus, illi in hoc saeculo, nobis in consummatione mundi." See Gry (at n. 130) 96-108 and 112-14; Bauer (at n. 130) cols. 1076-78; K.-H. Schwarte, *Die Vorgeschichte der augustianischen Weltalterlehre*, Antiquitas, Reihe 1, 12 (Bonn: Habelt, 1966) 62-259; A. Luneau, *L'histoire du salut chez les Pères de l'Eglise*, Théologie historique, 2 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1964) 118-22; Leclercq (at n. 130) cols. 1186-89; Daniélou, "La typologie millénariste" (at n. 100) 16. But compare M. Simonetti, "Il millenarismo in Oriente da Origene a Metodio" in *Corona Gratiarum*. Miscellanea . . . Eligio Dekkers . . . oblata, vol. I (Brugge: Sint Pietersabdij, 1975) 37-58.

134 Dulaey (at n. 127) 385: "Augustin . . . ne fait qu'un emploi restreint de l'Apocalypse. On sait que le théologien se défiait de toute spéculation sur la fin du monde, et il est probable qu'une lecture ancienne de l'Apocalypse lui avait laissé l'impression que c'était l'objet essentiel du livre."

135 *De civ. dei* XX, 1 (CCL 48, p. 699.1): "De die ultimi iudicii dei quod ipse donaverit locuturi eumque adserturi adversus impios et incredulos tamquam in aedificii fundamento prius ponere testimonia divina debemus; quibus qui nolunt credere, humanis ratiunculis falsis atque fallacibus contravenire conantur, ad hoc ut aut aliud significare contendant quod adhibetur testimonium de litteris sacris, aut omnino divinitus esse dictum negent."

136 *Ibid.* XX, 7 (p. 708.1). Chapter 20:1-21:5 is the only substantial quotation from Revelation in the whole Augustinian corpus and the only time Rev. 20 is quoted directly: see Dulaey (at n. 127) 375 f.

137 *De civ. dei* XX, 7 and 21 (p. 709.20 and 737.64). See *De haeresibus* 8 (CCL 46, p. 294.5).

138 *De civ. dei* XX, 7 (p. 709.22-30).

139 For instance, from now on he will refer to Psalm 89 (90):4 *only* to refute the millennialists: see *enarr. in ps. 89* 5 (CCL 39, p. 1246 f.), preached in 414–416.

140 See e.g., *Contra Faustum* XII, 8 (CSEL 25, p. 336.7), written 400.

141 See already *De Genesis contra Manichaeos* I, 22:33–41 (PL 34.189–193), written 389; also *De catechizandis rudibus* 22:39 (CCL 46, p. 163 f.); *De vera religione* 26:49–27:50 (CCL 32, p. 218–20); *epist. 199* 7:19 (CSEL 57, p. 260.7); *De div. quaest. LXXXIII* 58:2 and 64:2 (CCL 44A, p. 107.77 and 132.12). Also Bardy, ed. (at n. 100) 842–44 (note complémentaire 62); E. Sears, *The Ages of Man. Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle* (Princeton UP, 1986) 55–58 and p. 174, n. 5 (bibliography).

142 *De civ. dei* XX, 7 (CCL 48, p. 708–10).

143 *Ibid.* XX, 6 (p. 706.4–8).

144 *Ibid.* XX, 6 and 9 (p. 707.30 and 718.122).

145 *Ibid.* XX, 9 (p. 718.120; see 6, p. 706 f.).

146 See Dulaey (at n. 127) 380.

147 The Church is the *civitas dei* only insofar as “graced” human beings are concerned: *De civ. dei* XX, 9 (p. 715–18). See Bardy (at n. 100) 774–77 (note complémentaire 28); and O’Donnell (at n. 123) 79.

148 Smith, “The Impact of St. Augustine’s Millennialism on the Function of Church Tradition,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 3 (1966) 135. See Aug., *epist. 199* 6:17 (CSEL 57, p. 258.1), where — based on Ps. 89 (90):4 and 2 Pet. 3:8 — the Church is *novissimum tempus*, the *novissimus annus aut mensis aut dies*. The idea comes perhaps from Tyconius, according to P. Fredriksen Landes, “Tyconius and the End of the World,” *Revue des études augustiniennes* 28 (1982) 65, n. 30, and Luneau (at n. 133) 290 f. If so, Augustine goes beyond Tyconius, who equates contemporary events in North Africa with prophecies in Matthew 13:30, 24:15–16 and 2 Thess. 2:3, 8. See Gry (at n. 130) 126–29.

149 *De civ. dei* XX, 9 (p. 718.95): “Quae sit porro ista bestia, quamvis sit diligentius requirendum, non tamen abhorret a fide recta, ut ipsa impia civitas intellegatur et populus infidelium contrarius populo fideli et civitati dei”.

150 *Ibid.* XX, 19 (p. 731.53): “Quidam putant hoc de imperio dictum fuisse Romano, et propterea Paulum apostolum non id aperte scribere voluisse . . . ; ut hoc quod dixit: ‘Iam enim mysterium iniquitatis operatur’ (2 Thess. 2:7), Neronem voluerit intellegi, cuius iam facta velut Antichristi videbantur.” On this idea see L. Kreitzer, “Hadrian and the Nero Redivivus Myth,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 79 (1988) 92–115, esp. 92–99.

151 *De civ. dei* XX, 19 (p. 731.26): “Nulli dubium est eum [Thess. 2:1–11] de Antichristo ista dixisse Nonnulli ipsum principem, sed universum quodam modo corpus eius, id est ad eum pertinentem hominum multitudinem, simul cum ipso suo principe hoc loco intellegi Antichristum volunt”

152 *Ibid.* XX, 7 (p. 710.55 and 711.116).

153 *Ibid.* XX, 11 (p. 720 f.).

154 *Loc. cit.* (p. 720.14). Ambrose identified Gog with the Goths: *De fide ad Gratianum* II, 16:137–138 (CSEL 78, p. 104 f.). See Paschoud (at n. 5) 201. For this idea Jerome attacks Ambrose, *In Hiezechielem* 11, praef. (CCL 75, p. 480.14–19). The notion of identifying Gog and Magog with contemporary barbarian groups was still lively in the fifth century, and beyond: see Quodvultdeus (?), *Liber de promissionibus et praedicationibus* IV, 13:22 (CCL 60, p. 207.40); also Andrew of Caesarea, *In Apocalypsin* 20:7 (PG

106.416B-C). On Augustine's attitude towards barbarians in general, see H.-J. Diesner, "Augustinus und die Barbaren der Völkerwanderung," *Revue des études augustiniennes* 23 (1977) 83-91; also Fischer (at n. 35) 32-105.

155 By the transformation of everything in it, not by its destruction: *De civ. dei* XX, 14 (CCL 48, p. 724.21; see also 16, p. 727.18-21).

156 *Ibid.* XX, 8-9 (p. 712-19).

157 *De civ. dei* XX, 7 (p. 710.81).

158 *Ibid.* XX,8 (p. 713.63).

159 M. Pontet, *L'exégèse de s. Augustin prédicateur*, Théologie, 7 (Paris-Lyon: Aubier, 1945) 294: "Certain du retour du Christ, incertain de l'époque."

160 *De civ. dei* XX, 19 (p. 732.84); see also XVIII, 53 (p. 652.1-24). This section is preceded by a commentary on 1 Thess. 2:1-12. After this chapter, *De civ. dei* refers to Revelation (20:9-10) only in the following book, and only in passing: 10, 23 f. and 26 (p. 776.41, 788.15, 791.105 and 798.101).

161 H.-I. Marrou, *Augustin et l'augustinisme*, (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1957) 7.

162 H. von Campenhausen, "Augustine and the Fall of Rome," *Tradition and Life in the Church. Essays and Lectures in Church History* (trans. of "Augustin und der Fall von Rom" in *Tradition und Leben. Kräfte der Kirchengeschichte* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1960] 253-71, orig. in *Lebendige Wissenschaft* 1 [1947] 2-18) (London: Collins, 1968) 208 (quoting *De civ. dei* I, praef.).

163 See Paschoud (at n. 5) 236; also Lamotte (at n. 2) 248.

164 Brown (at n. 7) 316: "He immediately picked on the conservative assumption, that change was always more shocking than permanence: that the religious history of the human race should have consisted in the preservation of immemorial traditions; and so, that a change of rites could only be a change for the worse." See Aug., *epist. 136* 2 (CSEL 44, p. 95.13).

165 Aug., *epist. 138* 1:2 (CSEL 44, p. 128.4). Brown (at n. 7) 315 f. says: "In the same way, changes in religious institutions, such as had occurred throughout the history of Israel, need not be regarded as unnecessary and shocking reversals of ancestral custom; they could be presented as significant landmarks that hint at a process of growth. In this process, the human race could be conceived of as a vast organism, like a single man that changed according to a pattern of growth that was inaccessible to the human mind, yet clear to God."

166 See Hagendahl (at n. 65) 514; and G.F. Chesnut, Jr., "The Pattern of the Past: Augustine's Debate with Eusebius and Sallust" in J. Deschner et al., *Our Common History as Christians. Essays in Honor of Albert C. Outler* (New York: Oxford UP, 1975) 75-81.

167 See *De civ. dei* XVIII, 1 (CCL 48, p. 592.1). On the notion of *peregrinatio*, see Brown (at n. 7) 323 f.

168 Aug., *epist. 199* 1:2 (CSEL 57, p. 246.3): "Unusquisque debet etiam de die huius vitae suae novissimo formidare; in quo enim quemque invenerit suus novissimus dies, in hoc eum comprehendet mundi novissimus dies, quoniam, qualis in die isto quisque moritur, talis in die illo iudicabitur."

169 I therefore take issue with G. Folliet ("La typologie du sabbat chez saint Augustin. Son interprétation millénariste entre 389 et 400," *Revue des études augustiniennes* 2 [1956] 373, n. 6), who sees Augustine anxiously awaiting the end of the world "jusque dans ses dernières années: *Epistolae* 197 et 199, 17-50; *De civitate Dei*, XX, 5."

¹⁷⁰ It is only in the light of such a question that his acceptance of the "week of the world's ages" becomes understandable.

¹⁷¹ *Epist. 138* 1:5 (CSEL 44, p. 130.7).

¹⁷² *De civ. dei* XV, 1 (CCL 48, p. 453.25).

¹⁷³ *Tract. in Ioannis evangelium* 2:6 9:6 (CCL 36, p. 94.17). See H.-I. Marrou, *L'ambivalence du temps de l'histoire chez Augustin* (Paris: J. Vrin) 1950.

¹⁷⁴ Augustine's particular approach to the Book of Revelation was to dominate exegesis until the nineteenth century: see Dulaey (at n. 127) 386; Guy (at n. 97) 139.