

## Augustine's Attack on Apocalypticism

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THE ROMAN CITY OF SALONA, the birthplace of the Emperor Diocletian, is on the Dalmatian coast not far from Split in modern Croatia. The city boasts the remains of no less than three early Christian basilicas. The ruins of the fifth-century church of St. Domnius, the local martyr and patron, still contains the remains of the original lintel stone, which has the inscription “Deus noster propitius esto rei publicae romanae” (“May our God be favorable to the Roman State”), a phrase that is an apt summation of the providential theology of history linking the destinies of Rome and Christianity. This lucky survival is a striking coincidence because it was to Hesychius, the early fifth-century bishop of Salona, that Augustine of Hippo addressed one of his two most extensive treatments of the end of history, the treatise *De fine mundi*, or Letter 199.<sup>1</sup> The other major treatment, of course, is in the *De civitate Dei*, especially books 18–20, which deal with temporal eschatology.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Augustine's Epistle 199 can be found in PL, 33:904–25. There is a translation in *Saint Augustine: Letters*, vol. 4, *Letters 165–203*, trans. Sister Wilfried Parsons (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1955), 356–401.

<sup>2</sup> The *De civitate Dei* (hereafter, DCD) is found in many editions. I will use that of *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Episcopi De civitate dei Libri XXII*, ed. B. Dombart, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1877). For English translation, see *The City of God by Saint Augustine*, trans. Marcus Dods et al. (New York: Random House, 1950). The literature on the DCD is vast, so here I mention only the helpful introduction by Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), and the essays in *The City of God: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Dorothy F. Donnelley (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), and *Augus-*

Augustine's theology of history, more than two decades in the making, was crafted to respond to two popular fourth-century views that attempted to deal with one of the most remarkable changes in Western society of the previous two millennia: Constantine's conversion and the subsequent growing alliance between the Roman Empire and the Christian Church.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in slightly more than a century (303–427 CE), three major Christian theologies of history were created. The first was due primarily to Constantine's court theologian, Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260–340), while the second was the work of the Christian rhetor Lactantius (ca. 250–325), who educated Constantine's son, Crispus. The Eusebian imperial theology of history was providentialist and optimistic, even messianic, in its view of Constantinian Rome as the fulfillment of prophetic texts of both the Old and the New Testaments. In his *Divinae institutiones*, Lactantius, on the other hand, took a pessimistic view of the future of the Roman Empire by combining elements of early Christian apologetics and apocalyptic expectations into a new synthetic format. Augustine was familiar with the writings of these two theologians<sup>4</sup> and, at least up to about 400, shared some of their views. But the bishop's maturing thought on the nature of temporality,<sup>5</sup> his explorations of the proper exegesis of scriptural prophecy, and his meditations on the shock of the sack of Rome in 410 led him away from what he came to think of as facile solutions to the meaning of history,<sup>6</sup> hence the long composition of the *De civitate Dei* (ca. 413–427) and his epistolary exchange with Hesychius around 418–419. I will

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tine's "City of God": A Critical Guide, ed. James Wetzel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Augustine's view of history has been much written about. A classic book is R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

<sup>4</sup> Augustine explicitly refers to Lactantius in DCD 18.23. On the connection of the two, see Michael P. McHugh, "Lactantius," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 489–90. On Augustine's knowledge of Eusebius, see Andrew Carriker, "Eusebius of Caesarea," in Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages*, 339–40, as well as O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God*, 263–64.

<sup>5</sup> Augustine's thoughts on the nature of time and temporality, an important part of his theology of history about which so much has been written, are too complex to be taken up here.

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of the attitude of early Christians toward Rome, see R. A. Markus, "The Roman Empire in Early Christian Historiography," *Downside Review* 81 (1961): 340–53.

look at Augustine's responses to Eusebian providentialism and to the apocalypticism of Lactantius and those who believed that the Bible provided a clear and predictable account of the course of history and its imminent end, especially his response to the latter.<sup>7</sup>

To see how Augustine positioned himself in the great fourth-century debate over sacred history, we can start with a brief account of his reaction to the imperial theology of history pioneered by Eusebius.<sup>8</sup> From the late second century on, Christian thinkers had begun trying to fit the sacred history of the Bible into the secular chronology of classical historians in order to demonstrate the greater antiquity of God's people and to show the superiority of the Christian view of universal history based on the centrality of the Incarnation.<sup>9</sup> The creation of a Christian theology of history involved first of all establishing a framework for universal history, something that Eusebius worked out in his *Chronica*, a book that became the basic source for world history for centuries to come.<sup>10</sup> In the second place, such a theology required a theological vindication of God's providential plan for salvation, especially in the last age initiated by Jesus Christ. This was something Eusebius explored in several works, but especially his *Historia ecclesiastica*. Throughout his writings, notably in his *Vita Constantini* and *De laudibus Constantini* (the *Tricennial orations* of 335/336), Eusebius lauds the manifest destiny that had led to the unifying of Rome and the Church, often adopting messianic texts, especially from the Old Testament, to demonstrate that the promised reign of God on earth is the triumph of Christian Rome realized by Constantine and handed on to his descendants. As he put it in the Sixteenth Oration:

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<sup>7</sup> Some of what follows relates to my earlier treatment in "The Development of Christian Theologies of History," in *The Calabrian Abbot: Joachim of Fiore in the History of Western Thought* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), 51–73 (ch. 1).

<sup>8</sup> For an account of Eusebius's theology of history, see Glenn F. Chestnut, *The First Christian Histories: Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, and Evagrius* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977), chs. 3–6. See also Chestnut, "The Pattern of the Past: Augustine's Debate with Eusebius and Sallust," in *Our Common History as Christians: Essays in Honor of Albert C. Outler*, ed. John Deschner, Leroy T. Howe, and Klaus Penzel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 69–95.

<sup>9</sup> For a summary, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Finality of Jesus Christ in an Age of Universal History: A Dilemma of the Third Century* (London: Lutterworth, 1965).

<sup>10</sup> Eusebius's *Chronica* consisted of two parts: the *Chronographia* summarizing the history of the ancient peoples and the *Canones chronologicae* synchronizing the dates of these peoples from the time of Abraham to 325 CE. The latter was translated and extended to 378 CE by Jerome. Augustine used Jerome's version (see DCD 4.6 and 18.8).

But two great powers—the Roman Empire, which became a monarchy at that time [the reign of Augustus], and the teaching of Christ—proceeding as if from a single starting point, at once tamed and reconciled all to friendship. Thus each blossomed at the same time and place as the other. . . . For at one and the same time that the error of the demons was refuted, the eternal enmity and warfare of the nations was resolved. . . . Thus, the predictions of the ancient oracles and utterances of the prophets were fulfilled, . . . including those which said of the saving Logos that “He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the rivers to the ends of the earth” (Ps. 71:8).<sup>11</sup>

Eusebius did not deny traditional Christian teaching about the coming end, but he also did not consider the last times to be near. Like his hero Origen, he opposed any literal reading of the images of John’s Apocalypse, such as the thousand-year earthly kingdom of the saints in Apocalypse 20.

Eusebius’s pro-Roman theology was popular in both East and West, being found, if in a modified way, in Ambrose, Rufinus, and Prudentius. We should not be surprised, then, that the young Augustine seems to have shared it. Although his early study of the six ages of the world led him to see that the whole of the final age should be considered as a single period without inner divisions,<sup>12</sup> he hailed the Theodosian outlawing of paganism as a providential moment predicted by the Bible. In his *De consensu evangelistarum* of circa 400, for example, he says: “Now the God of Israel is everywhere destroying the idols of the heathens. . . . Through Christ the King he has subjugated the Roman Empire, by whom the Jews were conquered, . . . and he has converted it to the defense and service of the Christian faith.”<sup>13</sup> In a later passage, he speaks of how “in Christian times”

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<sup>11</sup> Eusebius, Oration 16, in *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius’ Tricennial Orations*, trans. and ed. H. A. Drake (Berkeley: University of California, 1975), 120–21. See also *Vita Constantini* 3.33.

<sup>12</sup> On Augustine’s doctrine of the world ages, see: Auguste Luneau, *L’Histoire de salut chez les Pères de l’Eglise: La doctrine des âges du monde* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1964); Karl-Heinz Schwarte, *Die Vorgeschichte der augustinischen Weltalterlehre* (Bonn: Habelt, 1966); R. Schmidt, “Die Weltalter als Gliederungsprinzip der Geschichte,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 67 (1955–1956): 287–317.

<sup>13</sup> Augustine, *De consensu evangelistarum* 1.14.21: “. . . nunc ipse Deus Israel ubique delet idola gentium. . . . Et Romanum imperium, a quo gens illa victa est, per Christum regem suo nomini subjugavit, . . . Christianae fidei robore

(*temporibus christianis*) God has brought the prophetic utterances to completion.<sup>14</sup> In the contemporary *De catechizandis rudibus*, like Eusebius, Augustine emphasizes the legibility of the events of the day as seen through the lens of Scripture: "For all the things that you now see happening in the Church of God, and in the name of Christ throughout the whole world, were already foretold ages before. And even as we read them, so also do we see them, and thereby we are edified unto faith."<sup>15</sup> We could almost be listening to Eusebius.

Turning to Lactantius and his apocalyptic theology of history, we need to back up and take a brief look at the role of apocalypticism from the beginnings of Christianity.<sup>16</sup> Apocalyptic eschatology involves a teleological and deterministic belief in God's control over history considered as a structured succession of ages down to the end times, which are seen as in some way imminent. As the creation of Second Temple Judaism in reaction to the traumas that the Jewish people endured in the last centuries BCE, apocalyptic revelations (at least some of them) saw the present age as a time of crisis in which the forces of evil were mounting their last and most serious attack on the remnant of believers. The faithful were counseled to endure perse-

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ac devotionem convertit" (PL, 34:1051). On Augustine's brief adherence to providentialism, see Markus, *Saeculum*, ch. 2, as well as: A. Mandouze, "Saint Augustin et la religion romaine," *Recherches augustiniennes* 1 (1958): 187–223; T. E. Mommsen, "St. Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1951): 346–74 (reprinted in Donnelley, *The City of God*, 353–72); F. E. Cranz, "The development of Augustine's Ideas on Society before the Donatist Controversy," *Harvard Theological Review* 47 (1954): 255–316.

<sup>14</sup> Augustine, *De consensu evangelistarum* 1.34.52. Goulven Madec shows that Augustine used this term in at least four different ways, not all of them triumphalist ("Tempora Christiana": Expression du triomphalisme chrétien or recrimination païenne?" in *Scientia Augustiniana: Studien über Augustinus, den Augustinismus und den Augustinerorden* [Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1975], 112–36).

<sup>15</sup> Augustine, *De catechizandis rudibus* 27.53: "Omnia enim quae nunc vides in Ecclesia Dei, et sub Christi nomine per totum orbem terrarium geri, ante saecula jam praedicta sunt, et sicut ea legimus, ita et videmus; et inde aedificamur in fide" (PL, 40:346; translation in *St. Augustine: The First Catechetical Instruction*, trans. Joseph P. Christopher [Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1946], 84).

<sup>16</sup> Two good surveys of the development of early Christian eschatology and apocalypticism are Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), and Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).

cution in expectation of a coming divine intervention to judge the wicked and reward the just, in both an earthly and a heavenly way, with both a time of peace and plenty on earth (i.e., the millennium) and the resurrection of the body and eternal felicity beyond this life.<sup>17</sup>

The apocalyptic mindset was a part of the Jewish matrix in which Christianity was born, whether we want to conceive of Jesus as an apocalyptic preacher or not. A number of early Christian leaders, such as Paul, were apocalyptic in outlook, although this label does not exhaust their religious identity. But the imminent and futurist emphasis of early Christian apocalyptic thinking was already being modified in the New Testament, especially in the Johannine texts that immanentized expectations about the future and its events, such as expectations of the appearance of Christ's final nemesis, the "Antichrist," into a message about the current life of the believing community. The quarrel between futurist and presentist apocalyptic expectations goes back to the first century of the followers of Jesus. Despite the claims of some scholars that the delay of Jesus's expected Parousia led to the abandonment of literal apocalypticism in the second and third centuries CE,<sup>18</sup> there is good evidence that aspects of apocalyptic beliefs remained strong, not only among the literal-minded who looked forward to the proximate return of the Lord but also, if in a revised way, among the writers who were willing to give a more spiritual and non-chronological interpretation to apocalyptic images, such as those found in the Apocalypse of John. These writers still insisted that all believers should live "in the shadow of the Second Coming," with the conviction that the Christian outlook on life and history was based on expectation of the coming end. In this latter camp, those we may describe as more broadly eschatological than properly apocalyptic, we can number the mature Augustine.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> For an introduction to the beginnings of apocalypticism, see the essays in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 1, *The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. John J. Collins (New York: Continuum, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Martin Werner, *The Formation of Christian Dogma* (Boston: Beacon, 1957), and John Gager, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975).

<sup>19</sup> There are a number of surveys of Augustine's eschatology, such as Michael J. Scanlon, "Eschatology," in Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages*, 316–18, and Hermann Häring, "Eschatologie," in *Augustin Handbuch*, ed. Volker Denning Drecoll (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 540–47. On Augustine's influence on later eschatology, see Thomas Fliethmann, "Eschatology," in *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, 3 vols., ed. Karla Pohlmann, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2:942–46.

Lactantius is the best example of a Latin theologian who took up the challenge of keeping apocalyptic expectations alive in the new context of the Christian Roman Empire, the *Respublica Romana*. This North African thinker's *Institutiones*, written between 303 and 314 and later dedicated to Constantine, was, on the one hand, the last and most ambitious Latin *apologia*—that is, defense of Christianity against its pagan opponents<sup>20</sup>—and on the other, an apocalyptic *summa*, as set forth in book 7.<sup>21</sup> The first six books deal with typical apologetic themes (an attack on Roman religion, a refutation of the philosophers, treatments of the wisdom of Christ, justice, and true worship). The first half of book 7, on “The Blessed Life” (chs. 1–13), shows how the creation of the world for the sake of humanity reveals that immortality is the highest good and that this ultimate prize can be gained only by virtuous behavior. Thus, there is a divine design for history, a teleology based on God's providential *dispositio*.<sup>22</sup> In order for virtue to be rewarded and vice punished, God has ordained a just judgment at Christ's Second Coming: “The providence of Almighty God has ordained that this unjust age should reach an end after the course of the ages at a time when every evil shall be instantly destroyed and the souls of the faithful called back to a blessed life.”<sup>23</sup> For Lactantius, the last judgment and the events leading up to it are witnessed to not only by the Hebrew prophets but also by all the sages of the Gentiles, especially the Sibyls.<sup>24</sup>

Like Augustine and many other early Christians, Lactantius adhered to the “world week” schema, according to which the course

<sup>20</sup> On the importance of Lactantius as an apologist, see Nicholas L. Thomas, *Defending Christ: The Latin Apologists before Augustine* (Turnhout, BE: Brepols, 2011), ch. 5.

<sup>21</sup> For the text of the *Divinae institutiones*, see the edition of S. Brandt in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, vol. 19.1 (Vienna, AT: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1890), 580–672. The translation is my own from my *Apocalyptic Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 25–80. Helpful studies of Lactantius can be found in *Lactance et son temps*, ed. J. Fontaine and M. Perrin (Paris: Beauchesne, 1978).

<sup>22</sup> Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 7.1 and 7.4.

<sup>23</sup> Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 7.2.

<sup>24</sup> Lactantius had a particular fondness for the Sibylline Oracles, quoting them fifty-one times across his works, with twenty-five citations in bk. 7. *Divinae institutiones* 1.6 contains a handy summary on the Sibyls much used by later authors. In bk. 7, Lactantius also cites other pagan prophetic sources that he believes agree, at least in part, with scriptural prophecy (Vergil nine times, Hermes Trismegistus four times, and the Iranian Oracle of Hystaspes twice).

of history, mirroring the Genesis creation account, would consist of six ages of a thousand years each, to be followed by the millennium of the reign of the returned Christ and the saints on earth, as predicted in Apocalypse 20.<sup>25</sup> Following Hippolytus's chronology of the world week, he held that Christ's Incarnation came in the middle of the sixth age, which meant that, by his own time, there might still be as much as two hundred years remaining before the last events.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the exact time was up to God and the scriptural theme of the "shortening of the weeks or days" (see Dan 9:24; Matt 24:22) meant that Lactantius had a strong sense that the end was near: "The voices of the prophets of this world [i.e., the pagans] agree with those of the other world and announce the proximate end and destruction of all things [*finem rerum et occasum post breve tempus*]." <sup>27</sup> Although Lactantius explicitly refers to John's Apocalypse only about eight times, his scenario of the last events parallels that of John with the addition of some events that had become traditional in early Christian hopes and fears for the last age, such as the distinction between two Antichrists.

The first Antichrist is described as "a mighty enemy from the far North" who will destroy and co-opt the ten kings who will divide world rule after the decline of Rome (based on Dan 7:2–8, 23–25; Rev 13 and 17). "He will afflict the world with unbearable tyranny," according to Lactantius.<sup>28</sup> The second, or Antichrist proper, comes after the return of Elijah and will be a king arising from Syria who destroys the first king, slays Elijah, and fulfills the job description of Antichrist found in the Apocalypse and early Christian apocalyptic traditions.<sup>29</sup> However, God will heed the pleas of his persecuted people and send "the Great King" to rescue them.<sup>30</sup> Thus, according to Lactantius, Christ will return on Easter night, overcome the Antichrist in a series of four battles, and bring universal peace.<sup>31</sup> After

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<sup>25</sup> On the "world week," see the works cited in note 12.

<sup>26</sup> Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 7.25.

<sup>27</sup> Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 7.14. There are other expressions of the proximity of the end in, for example, 7.14 ("cuius iudicii propinquare tempus ostendam [I will show that the time of its judgment is near]") and 7.25 ("... et iam propinquare summum illum conclusionis extremae diem [. . . and the final day of the last end is already drawing near]").

<sup>28</sup> Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 7.16.

<sup>29</sup> Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 7.17.

<sup>30</sup> Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 7.17, based on Rev 19:11–21.

<sup>31</sup> Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 7.19.

this victory, the dead who died for Christ will arise in the first resurrection<sup>32</sup> and reign with Christ for a thousand years, while the Devil will be bound in hell for the same period, along with all evil people, as described at length in *Divinae institutiones* 7.20–23.<sup>33</sup>

In chapter 24 of book 7, Lactantius goes into detail about the millennial kingdom, including the descriptions of peace and plenty of this “golden age” that the poets wrongly thought had taken place in the past, rather than still being awaited in the near future. He also advances the theologically suspect notion that the just will enjoy “great sex”: “Those who live then will not die, but will propagate an infinite multitude through those thousand years. Their offspring will be holy and beloved by God.”<sup>34</sup> At the end of the thousand years, Satan will be freed and summon all the nations to make war on the Holy City (Rev 20:7–8). God will then destroy the nations while his people “hide in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains” (Rev 6:15). At that time, the second resurrection, the public resurrection of all people, will take place and God will renew the earth, change the just into “the likeness of angels,” and allow them to offer sacrifices forever in his sight.<sup>35</sup> Lactantius ends by noting that the account he has given is generally not publicly taught because “God has commanded that we peacefully and silently keep his secret hid within our conscience.”<sup>36</sup> Finally, we should underline the fact that, although Lactantius himself served Constantine and hailed the advent of Christian rule over the empire, he had no doubt that the end of Rome was near: “Roma delenda est” is a crucial aspect of his apocalyptic theology.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 7.20, based on Rev 20:5–6.

<sup>33</sup> In 7.20–23, Lactantius mingles Sibylline and biblical witnesses. He also makes use of the philosophers and poets, like Vergil, but admits that they often confused the divine truths about the end.

<sup>34</sup> Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 7.24: “. . . sed per eosdem mille annos infinitam multitudinem generabunt et erit suboles eorum sancta et deo cara.” Eusebius refers this highly physical, or “carnal,” reading of Rev 20 back to the heretic Cerinthus in *Historia ecclesiastica* 3.28. For an account, see Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, trans. John A. Baker (Chicago: Regnery, 1964), ch. 14.

<sup>35</sup> Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 7.26.

<sup>36</sup> Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 7.26: “Deo iubente ut quieti ac silentes arcanam eius in abdito atque intra nostram conscientiam teneamus.”

<sup>37</sup> On the necessary, if fearful, approach of the coming collapse of Rome, see Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 7.15–16 and 7.24.

Millenarianism of various kinds was fairly widespread in the fourth century, and we need not be surprised to find even the sober-minded Augustine indulging in it.<sup>38</sup> Augustine's Sermon 259 was preached probably in 393.<sup>39</sup> The purpose of the homily was to encourage Christians to set their minds on the future life ("In futuram vitam esse debet Christianorum intentio") by learning to be merciful as God has had mercy on us. Given that the sermon was preached on the octave of Easter, Augustine introduces a section on "The Mystery of the Seventh and the Eighth Day," in which "the eighth day signifies the new life at the end of the age, while the seventh [marks] the future rest of the saints on this earth [*in hac terra*]." God's earthly reign in his saints is presented as a scriptural teaching (Rev 20) dealing with how the Lord will purge the Church from all ill so that it "will appear in great brilliance and justice."<sup>40</sup> After a description of the Church as the grain winnowed from all imperfections, Augustine concludes with a reference to the scheme of the world week, noting that, "as the sixth day passes, there will come a rest after this winnowing, and the saints and just ones of God will enjoy the Sabbath [*et sabbatizabunt sancti et iusti Dei*]."<sup>41</sup> After this will come the end of all history. Augustine is sparing of details about the nature of the earthly millennium, but as he himself admits in *De civitate Dei* 20.7, this was once his teaching,

<sup>38</sup> On expectations of the end of the world ca. 400, see B. Kötting, "Endzeitprognosen zwischen Lactantius und Augustinus," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 77 (1957): 136–38.

<sup>39</sup> Sermon 259 (PL, 38:1196–201) was studied by G. Folliet, who dated it to ca. 400 ("La typologie du sabbat chez saint Augustin: son interprétation millénariste entre 388 et 400," *Revue des études augustiniennes* 2 [1956]: 371–90). Martine Dulaey's detailed analysis of all Augustine's "millenarian" texts dates it to 393, thus indicating he gave up his millenarian expectations fairly early ("A quelle date Augustin a-t-il pris ses distances vis-à-vis du millénarisme?" *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 46 [2000]: 31–60).

<sup>40</sup> Sermon 259: "Octavus ergo iste dies in fine saeculi vitam significat; septimus quietem futuram sanctorum in hac terra. . . . Nam ecclesia hic primo apparebit in magna claritate et iustitia [The eighth day signifies the new life at the end of the age, while the seventh the future rest of the saints on this earth. . . . For the church here will first appear in great splendor and justice]" (PL, 38:1197; my translation). The key millennialist phrase *in hac terra* appears in other works from the period, ca. 390–394, such as *Diversae quaestiones* 57 and *Sermo Mai* 94. For a listing and discussion of millennial and non-millennial texts, see Dulaey, "A quelle date?"

<sup>41</sup> Sermon 259: "Sextus autem dies iste cum transierit, veniet requies post illam ventilationem et sabbatizabunt sancti et iusti Dei" (PL, 38:1198; my translation).

although he had not indulged in the “carnal” aspects of endless feasting and propagation of children.<sup>42</sup>

Up to the last decade of the fourth century, then, Augustine was mildly millenarian and perhaps not-so-mildly Eusebian in his views. This all changed over the next two decades, as he created a theology of history that rejected the view of the conversion of Rome to Christianity as a singular proof of divine providence, criticized the Christian *Respublica Romana* as God's visible agent on earth, and came to adopt an agnostic view of biblical prophecies as guides to current history and the proximity of the end. As Paula Fredriksen put it, the bishop's confrontation with the shock of the fall of Rome in 410 and those who saw it as a sign of the approach of the end, or who blamed the Christian God for abandoning the sacred empire, “led to Augustine's definitive and daringly original reformulation of orthodox apocalyptic belief in the closing books of the *City of God*.”<sup>43</sup>

To be sure, Augustine never denied that the prophets of the Old Testament had foretold the coming of Christ in detail, as he laid it out in *De civitate Dei* 18.26–35. Nor did he deny that the predictions of the New Testament about the end of history found in the Synoptics, Paul, and the Apocalypse were true prophecies of what would *someday* come to pass.<sup>44</sup> What he did reject with consistency and exegetical ingenuity was that these prophecies gave believers any information about how to read the “signs of the times” (the mounting crises of the early fifth century) or that they could provide any handle about when the end itself might come. Surrounded by pessimistic apocalyptic calculators like the good, but rather slow, Hesychius of Salona, Augustine strove to achieve a difficult goal: to keep Christian hope in the coming of the Lord fervent (something the apocalypticists could easily do) while, at the same time, observing the injunction the Lord gave to the Apostles at the Ascension when they asked him when he would return to restore the Kingdom of Israel: “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own author-

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<sup>42</sup> Dulaey summarizes the dating of the transition in Augustine's thought in saying that, if Augustine the recent convert and Augustine the priest were millenarian, Augustine the bishop no longer was (“Si chez Augustin le recent converti et le prêtre furent millénaristes, l'évêque ne l'était plus”; “A quelle date?” 57). She also argues that Augustine's abandonment of millennialism was an internal development of his thought and not due to the influence of Tyconius, as has been sometimes claimed.

<sup>43</sup> Paula Fredriksen, “Apocalypticism,” in Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages*, 49.

<sup>44</sup> DCD 20.6–20.

ity” (Acts 1:7). This and similar expressions in the Synoptics and elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g.: Matt 24:36; Mark 13:32–33; 1 Thess 5:1–3) formed the exegetical core of the bishop’s attack on apocalypticism, with Acts 1:7 being cited ten times in Epistle 199.<sup>45</sup>

In 418, Bishop Hesychius, probably influenced by the turmoil descending on the Roman world, and perhaps worried about an eclipse of the sun on July 14 of that year, wrote to the bishop of Hippo asking for advice about reading biblical prophecies in relation to current events. Apparently (the letter is lost), Hesychius was particularly concerned about the meaning of the prophecy of the seventy weeks in Daniel 9, because Augustine responded by sending him a brief missive and excerpts from Jerome’s *Commentarium in Daniele*, in which Jerome laid out seven different readings of this *crux interpretationis* but refused to decide among them. Hesychius was not happy with this, complaining that Jerome left him hanging (*suspendit lectorem*), and also widening his ambit of questions about how to interpret biblical end-time prophecies (Epistle 198).<sup>46</sup> Augustine responded with Epistle 199, his most detailed rebuttal of apocalyptic literalism.<sup>47</sup> Throughout the letter, Augustine remained polite to the well-meaning Dalmatian bishop, but one can sense his exasperation creeping through in a number of places.

In analyzing Augustine’s position, it may be best to start with the three last chapters of the fifty-four that make up the letter-treatise. Here Augustine identifies three groups of “servants of the Lord” who are earnestly waiting for his return. From their reading of biblical prophecy, those in the first group are sure that Christ is coming quickly, and from this perspective, they and their hearers have no difficulty in keeping hope of the end alive. The second group believes that Christ’s coming is far off, but they still try to live in fervent hope, though with difficulty. The third, among whom Augustine numbers himself, are the agnostics who admit that they simply do not know

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<sup>45</sup> Augustine references Acts 1:7 ten times in Epistle 199 (see chs. 1, 4, 6, 9, 10, 13, 18, 22, 33, and 35). There are a number of studies of Augustine’s attitude toward apocalypticism, e.g., the summary by Fredriksen, “Apocalypticism,” 49–53, as well as the essays in “Part II: Apocalypse,” in *History, Apocalypse, and the Secular Imagination: New Essays on Augustine’s “City of God,”* ed. Mark Vessey, Karla Pollmann, and Allan D. Fitzgerald (Bowling Green, OH: Philosophy Documentation Center, 1999), 133–233.

<sup>46</sup> Hesychius’s letter is Epistle 198 (PL, 33:901–4).

<sup>47</sup> Augustine refers to Epistle 199 in DCD 20.5, demonstrating its importance and allowing us to date it.

whether Christ is coming sooner or later. The problem with the first group (Hesychius and his allies) is that if people believe them and the promised Parousia does not eventuate they “may begin to think that the Lord’s coming is not so much delayed as non-existent.”<sup>48</sup> Hence: “For those who love the manifestation of the Lord, it is sweeter to listen to the first group, safer to believe the second, but the one who admits that he does not know which of these views is true hopes for the first, is resigned to the second, and is wrong in neither of them, because he neither affirms nor denies any of these things.”<sup>49</sup> The letter lays down the reasons for this sober agnosticism through a careful analysis of the many biblical texts used by Christian apocalypticists to predict the time of the end.

In the course of his argument, the bishop of Hippo advances a number of principles, both theological and exegetical, to undercut literalist readings. Theologically, the believer does not know the time of the end, although he or she should always love it,<sup>50</sup> saving one’s fear for the imminent personal end, for the day of one’s own death, when each will be judged individually.<sup>51</sup> Exegetically, Augustine recognizes the frequent obscurity of prophetic texts,<sup>52</sup> something that God designed to test our minds. He is also aware that different authorities have taken different views of many of these passages, a fact he feels should lead to humility rather than self-assuredness in anyone bold enough to try to interpret such texts. Augustine constructs his anti-apocalyptic argument from common sense, from the context of the biblical texts in question,<sup>53</sup> and from careful attention to the

<sup>48</sup> Augustine, Epistle 199, ch. 53.

<sup>49</sup> Augustine, Epistle 199, ch. 54: “Ac per hoc ab eis qui diligunt manifestationem Domini, ille auditur suavius, isti creditur tutius: qui autem quid horum sit verum ignorare se confitetur, illud optat, hoc tolerat, in nullo eorum errat, quia nihil eorum aut affirmat aut negat” (PL, 39:925; English in Parsons, 367).

<sup>50</sup> On loving the end, whether near or far off, see Augustine, Epistle 199, ch.15: “Non ergo ille qui diligit adventum Domini, qui eum asserit propinquare, aut ille qui asserit non propinquare; sed ille potius qui eum, sive prope sive longe sit, sinceritate fidei, fimitate spei, ardore caritatis exspectat [Therefore, it is not the one who asserts that He is near nor the one who asserts that He is not near who loves the coming of the Lord, but the one who waits for Him, whether He be near or far, with sincere faith, firm hope and ardent love]” (PL, 33:909; Parsons, 367).

<sup>51</sup> Augustine, Epistle 199, chs. 2–3.

<sup>52</sup> E.g., Augustine, Epistle 199, chs. 10, 45.

<sup>53</sup> See Epistle 199, ch. 42: “. . . sed quoniam Scripturae scrutandae sunt, ne earum superficie debemus esse contenti, quae ad exercitationem nostram ita modificatae sunt, ut aliis se penetrari velint, diligenter sunt inspicienda sequentia [. . . but

meaning and tenses of words. Thus, in confronting his first problem, the seeming contradiction between Acts 1:7 (“It is not for you to know the times”) and the announcement in 1 John 2:18 (“It is the last hour”), Augustine easily shows that, in the Bible, “hour” can mean any extended period of time, even the whole time of the Church.<sup>54</sup> He also gives rules about how to interpret the generic predictions of portents in the skies and impending wars that undercut attempts to read them as relating to specific current events.<sup>55</sup> His basic contention is that many of the signs announced in Scripture pertain to the whole life of the Church on earth as reminders that we must always live in expectation of the end.<sup>56</sup>

Epistle 199 moves through biblical prophecy, starting with some general principles (chs. 1–6), then turning to the exegesis of Pauline texts from 1 and 2 Thessalonians (chs. 7–11) and Romans (chs. 22–24), and on to correcting Hesychius on Daniel’s Prophecy of Weeks, which Augustine insists pertains to Christ’s first coming, not his second (chs. 12–21). The bulk of the letter (chs. 25–45) is a consideration of the “little apocalypse” of the Synoptic Gospels. Here Augustine is guided by two principles. First, the Synoptic accounts, though different, are meant to supplement each other in predicting three events: (1) the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE; (2) Christ’s constant coming in the life of the Church, which is where the bishop’s main interest lies (see ch. 45); and (3) the future Second Coming (ch. 25 and throughout). It is noteworthy that this approach allows Augustine to defuse apocalyptic understandings of even the “abomination of desolation” (see Matt 24:15–19; Mark 13:14). Many Christians saw this mysterious text as a reference to the final Antichrist, but Augustine argues that it more probably refers to the siege of Jerusalem and not to the end of the world.<sup>57</sup>

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as the Scriptures are to be closely studied, and we are not to be satisfied with a general view of them, since they yield a changed meaning to our effort and demand a deeper insight, the sequence of passages must be closely examined]” (PL, 33:920; Parsons, 390).

<sup>54</sup> Augustine, Epistle 199, chs. 1, 7, 17–18.

<sup>55</sup> Augustine, Epistle 199, chs. 34–35.

<sup>56</sup> Augustine, Epistle 199, ch. 45.

<sup>57</sup> Augustine, Epistle 199, chs. 28–30. In ch. 31, Augustine admits that the “abomination of desolation” is difficult to understand: “*Quanquam ipsa desolationis abominatio propter obscuritatem dicti non uno modo ab omnibus potuerit intelligi* [However, this abomination of desolation is such an obscure saying that it could be understood by men in more than one way]” (PL, 33:916; Parsons, 381).

Augustine's second principle is his contention that in this central prophetic narrative, while some things are certainly clear, much is and will remain obscure until the actual events unfold.<sup>58</sup> At the end of his treatment, Augustine takes up differing views of the prediction that the end will not come until the Gospel has been preached throughout the world (Matt 24:14). Hesychius seemed to think this prophecy was about to come true. Augustine demurs, noting that the whole world extends well beyond the Roman Empire.<sup>59</sup> Hesychius, naïve if sincere apocalypticist that he was, seems to have agreed with Lactantius that the destruction of Rome had to mean the end of the world. Augustine, polite as always to a fellow bishop, begged to differ, especially in the *De civitate Dei*, whose final books he was working on while writing to Hesychius.

As one of the great monuments of Christian theology, it would be foolish to think of giving any substantive account of the *De civitate Dei* here. Nevertheless, a few general reflections on the character of the work and its specific response to apocalyptic expectations are important for understanding this aspect of Augustine's theology of history. Although Augustine never abandoned the "world week" scheme,<sup>60</sup> in the *De civitate Dei*, the meaning of history shifts away from this external chronological model and toward the internal drama of the two cities: "Therefore, two loves built two cities; the earthly by the love of self even unto the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God even unto the contempt of self."<sup>61</sup> The two loves are instantiated across history in the lives of myriad humans, such that the inner story of the opposition between *caritas* and *cupiditas* becomes the true meaning of history, not the rise and fall of earthly realms. To be sure, the two cities pursue a joint course: "The mortal course of the two cities, the heavenly and the earthly, . . . are mingled together from the beginning down to the end," Augustine says. He continues: "Yet both alike either enjoy temporal goods, or are afflicted with temporal

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<sup>58</sup> Augustine, Epistle 199, chs. 26–27.

<sup>59</sup> Augustine, Epistle 199, chs. 46–51.

<sup>60</sup> The early Augustine held to the "world week" scheme of history, as can be seen in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 1.23.35–41 (PL, 34:190–193) and a number of other texts. This pattern does not play a large role in the DCD, although it is summarized in DCD 22.30. What Augustine does decisively reject are pagan cyclical notions of time and history (see DCD 12.21).

<sup>61</sup> DCD 14.28: "Fecerunt itaque civitates duas amores duo: terrenam scilicet, amor sui usque ad contemptum Dei, caelestem vero, amor dei, usque ad contemptum sui" (Dombart ed., 2:56).

evils, but with diverse faith, diverse hope, and diverse love, until they must be separated by the Last Judgment.”<sup>62</sup>

The story of the two cities is resolutely teleological: they are known only by their ends or goals. This is brought out especially in book 19, which discusses the supreme good (*summum bonum*). After briefly treating Varro’s analysis of philosophical views of the *summum bonum*,<sup>63</sup> Augustine sets forth the Christian position that “life eternal is the supreme good, death eternal the supreme evil, and . . . to obtain the one and escape the other we must live rightly,”<sup>64</sup> a position close to that of Lactantius. True happiness, then, is possible only in eternal life. It is nothing else but “peace in eternal life, or eternal peace in life [*vel pax in vita aeterna vel vita aeterna in pace*].”<sup>65</sup> Augustine extends his discussion of peace and the kinds of peace through the remainder of the book, concentrating on the relation between the peace of the earthly city and that of the heavenly. Earthly peace, “the well-ordered concord of civic obedience and rule,” is a good thing, but it is always merely instrumental in the life of the heavenly city. “Even the heavenly city,” says Augustine, “while in its state of pilgrimage, avails itself of the peace of the earth.” But the true and lasting peace is the real goal of the heavenly city: “In its pilgrim state the heavenly [city] possesses this peace by faith; and by this faith it lives righteously when it refers to the attainment of that peace every good action toward God and man; for the life of the city is social [*vita civitatis utique socialis est*].”<sup>66</sup> Living in the world (*in hoc saeculo*) is not to have a fixed abode, but to be on pilgrimage toward the full realization of the City of God in the age to come.<sup>67</sup> In book 20, Augustine relates this pessimistic view of earthly life to the statement in Ecclesiastes, true for both good and evil people, that all of life is nothing more than “vanity of vanities” (Eccl 1:2), summarizing the message with a neat turn of phrase: “This wisest man devoted this whole book to a full exposure of this vanity, evidently with no other object than that

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<sup>62</sup> DCD 18.54: “. . . quisnam sit duarum civitatum, caelestis atque terrena, ab initio usque in finem permixtarum mortalis excursus. . . . Ambae tamen temporalibus vel bonis pariter utuntur vel malis affliguntur, diversa fide, diversa spe, diverso amore, donec ultimo iudicio separentur” (Dombart ed., 2:345).

<sup>63</sup> DCD 19.1–3.

<sup>64</sup> DCD 19.4.

<sup>65</sup> DCD 19.11.

<sup>66</sup> DCD 19.17.

<sup>67</sup> The notion of life *in hoc saeculo* as a *peregrinatio* (see Heb 13:14) is omnipresent in the DCD (e.g., 17.20, 18.54, 22.23).

we might long for that very life in which there is no vanity under the sun, but verity under Him who made the sun [*quae vanitatem non habet sub hoc sole, sed veritatem sub illo qui fecit hunc solem*].”<sup>68</sup>

From this perspective, the Roman Empire loses any transcendental value or direct connection to the goal of history. It is just one more manifestation of the *civitas terrena*, no different from Assyria or Babylon.<sup>69</sup> Toward the end of book 19, Augustine even argues that Rome was never a true *res publica*, because it did not render justice to its citizens, or just worship to the one true God.<sup>70</sup> Thus, over the course of the writing of the *De civitate Dei*, Augustine became more and more convinced that any progressive optimistic view of the union of the Roman Empire and the Christian Church was a serious error. It was not that he did not think that divine providence was not active in the world of external history, even in the case of Rome.<sup>71</sup> It was rather that he had come to realize that there was no evident relation between the events of secular history and the inner story of the progress of love that constitutes the development of the City of God. In *De civitate Dei* 4.33, he noted that God gives earthly kingdoms both to good and to bad rulers, fortuitously, from our perspective. Nevertheless, he acts “according to the order of things and times, which is hidden from us, but thoroughly known to himself.”<sup>72</sup> In 5.24–25, Augustine mentions the Christian emperors, noting Constantine as a good ruler who had a happy reign. His point, however, is the same: “Such Christian emperors, we say, are happy in the present time by hope [not by worldly success], and are destined to be so in the enjoyment of the reality itself, when that which we wait for shall have arrived.”<sup>73</sup> As Glenn Chestnut put it, “Augustine’s *City of God* was a work of anti-patriotism.”<sup>74</sup>

This agnostic, and we might even say secularized, view of exterior history lays the basis for the bishop’s reaction against apocalypticism evident throughout the *De civitate Dei*.<sup>75</sup> It is especially strong in book

<sup>68</sup> DCD 20.3.

<sup>69</sup> The pairing of Babylon and Rome is another frequent theme of the DCD (e.g., 18.2, 18.22).

<sup>70</sup> DCD 19.21.

<sup>71</sup> See, e.g., DCD 18.27 and 18.51.

<sup>72</sup> DCD 4.33: “. . . sed pro rerum ordine ac temporum occulto nobis, notissimo sibi . . .” (Dombart ed., 1:188).

<sup>73</sup> DCD 5.24.

<sup>74</sup> Chestnut, “The Pattern of the Past,” 89.

<sup>75</sup> The debate over how far it is legitimate to speak of Augustine’s view of history as “secular” in the sense of expressing some neutrality among competing reli-

20.<sup>76</sup> Since one cannot really correlate the events found in the *historia* of the Greek and Roman historians with the meaning of history that God had partly revealed in the Old Testament and that was now being realized in secret in the time between Christ's Ascension and his return in glory, Augustine rejected the concordism by which some Christians had tried to work out parallels between the "ten persecutions" of the Jews in Egypt and ten persecutions of Christians under the Roman Empire. About such calculations, Augustine says: "I do not think the persecutions were prophetically signified by what was done in Egypt, however nicely and ingeniously those who think so seem to have compared each with the other in detail, not by the prophetic spirit but by the conjecture of the human mind, which sometimes reaches truth and sometimes fails."<sup>77</sup> Thus, the "concordist mentality," an important feature of much apocalyptic and eschatological thought, is a delusion, according to Augustine.<sup>78</sup>

Immediately after the rejection of concordism, Augustine broad-

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gious claims in the arena of public life continues. This line of interpretation, fostered by Markus in his *Saeculum*, has seen a push-back in recent studies, such as Wetzel's "Introduction" in *Augustine's "City of God,"* 3–4, and the literature cited there. For a detailed study of Augustine's views on the *saeculum*, see Paul J. Griffiths, "Secularity and the *Saeculum*," in Wetzel, *Augustine's "City of God,"* 33–54.

<sup>76</sup> DCD 20, the most eschatological book of the work, has been analyzed by Marco Rizzi, who says concerning the conclusion of the book: "...e con esso ritenere liquidate la legittimità di ogni forma di millenarismo e di decifrazione dell'approssimarsi dei tempi ultimi, a vantaggio della consapevolezza che già qui ed ora Dio ha operato il suo giudizio giusto e definitivo, per quanto inperscrutabile [. . . and with this the legitimacy of every form of millenarianism and the deciphering of the approach of the last times is considered liquidated from the perspective of the recognition that God has already worked his just and definitive judgment, although it is inscrutable]" ("Il libro XX del *De civitate dei*: Cronologia ed Escatologia," in *Lettura del "De civitate dei" Libri XVIII-XXII* [Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2012], 85–103; my translation).

<sup>77</sup> DCD 18.52: "Sed ego illa re gesta in Aegypto istas persecutiones propheticae significatas esse non arbitror; quamvis ab eis, qui hoc putant, exquisite et ingeniose illa singula his singulis comparata videantur, non prophetico spiritu, sed coniectura mentis humanae, quae aliquando ad verum pervenit, aliquando fallitur" (Dombart ed., 2:338). On these calculations, see Joseph Vogt, "Die Zaehling der Christenverfolgerungen im Römischen Reich," *La parola del passato: Rivista di studi classici* 9 (1954): 5–15.

<sup>78</sup> Bernard McGinn, "The Concordist Imagination: A Theme in the History of Eschatology," in *Revealed Wisdom: Studies in Apocalyptic in Honour of Christopher Rowland*, ed. John Ashton (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 217–31.

ens his attack with a chapter (18.53) emphasizing the hiddenness of the final persecution of the Antichrist. Picking up on Acts 1:6–7, the text cited throughout Epistle 199, Augustine says: “In vain do we attempt to compute definitely the years that may remain to this world, when we hear from the mouth of the Truth that it is not for us to know this.”<sup>79</sup> At this point what remains to be done for Augustine is to vindicate his agnosticism about the end in terms of an investigation of the scriptural prophecies concerning the Last Judgment, which is the task of book 20. The book is divided into three parts: chapters 1–4 introduce the notion of judgment in general; chapters 5–20 concern the New Testament texts about the events of the end, especially from the Apocalypse; and finally, chapters 21–30 take up the Old Testament texts on the Judgment.

As in Epistle 199, Augustine provides some general exegetical principles for dealing with prophetic texts.<sup>80</sup> For example, he twice notes that “prophetic expression loves to mingle figurative things into proper words and thus in a certain way to veil what is said.”<sup>81</sup> Hence, one must always be attentive to which sections are to be taken literally and which not. Augustine is also willing to admit several possible readings of difficult and obscure passages,<sup>82</sup> and he uses readings from the Septuagint (which he considered inspired) when they seem to make more sense than the received Latin text.<sup>83</sup> With regard to the Book of Revelation, Augustine notes the many obscure passages in the text and says that there are few places so plain as to assist us in interpreting the others. (*Quot verba, tot sacramenta*, as Jerome once put it.) He also recognizes the hermeneutical principle of *recapitulation*, first advanced by the late-third-century bishop Victorinus: “This difficulty [i.e., obscurity] is increased by the repetition of the same things, in forms so different that the things referred to seem to be different, although in fact they are only differently stated.”<sup>84</sup>

<sup>79</sup> DCD 18.53: “Frustra igitur annos, qui remanent huic saeculo, computare ac definire conamur, cum hos scire non esse nostrum ex ore Veritatis audiamus” (Dombart ed., 2:340). Acts 1:6–7 is also cited in DCD 18.50 and 22.30.

<sup>80</sup> Earlier in the work, in DCD 17.3, Augustine had distinguished three kinds of Old Testament prophecies: those that pertained to the earthly Jerusalem; those that announced the heavenly Jerusalem; and those that referred to both.

<sup>81</sup> DCD 20.16: “. . . sicut amat prophetica locutio propriis verbis translata miscere ac sic quodam modo velare quod dicitur. . .” (Dombart ed., 2:446).

<sup>82</sup> DCD 20.25.

<sup>83</sup> DCD 20.29.

<sup>84</sup> DCD 20.17: “. . . maxime quia sic eadem multis modis repetit, ut alia atque alia dicere videatur, cum aliter atque aliter haec ipsa dicere vestigetur.” Augustine

It is well known that Augustine's reading of the Apocalypse was influenced by his study of the *Expositio Apocalypseos* of the Donatist Tyconius, which marked a major turning point in the exegesis of John's mysterious Revelation by giving it a thorough spiritual interpretation, a message about the moral struggle between good and evil in the life of the Church, rather than a prophecy of historical events up to and including the end.<sup>85</sup> This influence is certainly seen throughout the bishop's reading of the Apocalypse, especially the promise of the thousand-year reign of the saints on earth from Revelation 20, which he interprets as a description of the reign of the saints in the whole time of the Church from Christ's first coming until his second.<sup>86</sup> Augustine's spiritualizing reading goes even further in book 22, where he interprets the seventh day and the life of the resurrected saints as taking place in heaven, not on the transformed earth.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, it is to be realized *in* the just themselves. At the end of the *De civitate Dei*, after once again citing Acts 1:7, Augustine says: "After this time God will rest, as it were, on the seventh day; and he will cause us, who are the seventh day, to find our rest in him. . . . This seventh day will be our Sabbath, whose end will have no evening."<sup>88</sup>

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also refers to *recapitulatio* in 2.14. He may not have taken the principle of *recapitulatio* directly from Victorinus, but from its reprisal as *regula* 7 of Tyconius's *Liber regularum*, which we know he read. On the importance of Victorinus, see Bernard McGinn, "Turning Points in Early Christian Apocalypse Exegesis," in *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity*, ed. Robert J. Daly (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 81–105.

<sup>85</sup> On the eschatological thought of Tyconius, see Paula Fredriksen-Landes, "Tyconius and the End of the World," *Revue des études augustiniennes* 28 (1982): 59–75. For his influence on Augustine, see Paula Fredriksen, "Tyconius and Augustine on the Apocalypse," in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 20–37, and Fredriksen, "Tyconius," in Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages*, 853–55. See also Paul B. Harvey Jr., "Approaching the Apocalypse: Augustine, Tyconius, and John's Revelation," in Vessey, Pollmann, and Fitzgerald, *History, Apocalypse, and the Secular Imagination*, 133–52.

<sup>86</sup> DCD 20.9. For Tyconius's reading of Rev 20:4–6, see the edition by Roger Gryson, *Tyconii Afer Expositio Apocalypseos* (Turnhout, BE: Brepols, 2011), 7.19–22 (pp. 219–20).

<sup>87</sup> DCD 22.4–5 and 22.11.

<sup>88</sup> DCD 22.30: "Post hanc tamquam in die septimo requiescat Deus, cum in eundem diem septimum, quod nos erimus, in se ipso Deus faciet requiescere. Haec tamen septima erit sabbatum nostrum, cuius finis non erit vespera" (Dombart ed., 2:635).

Now that we have a critical edition of Tyconius's *Expositio*,<sup>89</sup> it would not be difficult to compare Augustine's reading of the figures and events of the last book of the Bible with that of the Donatist exegete to spell out the similarities and dependences in more detail, but that is not a task for the present. What is worth noting, however, is that, at the conclusion of his long analysis of the biblical predictions about the end time, Augustine provides a summary of the events awaited by the faithful, but also a final caution about their interpretation: "All these things, we believe, shall come to pass; but how, or in what order, human understanding cannot perfectly teach us, but only the experience of the events themselves."<sup>90</sup>

### Conclusion

The late Patristics scholar Gilles Quispel once spoke of Augustine's "demythologized eschatology."<sup>91</sup> Perhaps it would be more accurate to see Augustine's view of the end as a "de-secularized eschatology," in the sense that it had only a peripheral relation to what was going on in the realm of external politics *in hoc saeculo*, whether for good or for evil. It was also "de-historicized" in the sense that it did not indulge in calculating the years, weeks, or decades that make up the course of external affairs in order to make history and its end somehow "legible," capable of being read by those with the correct know-how. For Augustine, the realm of inner history (not the external events, in which he had little interest) was not a message written in invisible ink, but was the realm of learning to practice love: "Two loves built two cities."

Augustine rejected the two most popular theologies of history of his time (the Eusebian and the Lactantian) to create a distinctive third option. His anti-triumphalist and anti-apocalyptic reading of history, pessimistic as it is, may continue to give food for thought. The bishop of Hippo expected little from rulers, no matter how good their

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<sup>89</sup> Along with his edition of Tyconius's *Expositio*, Gryson has also produced a series of important articles on the history of early Latin Apocalypse exegesis.

<sup>90</sup> DCD 20.30: "Quae omnia quidem ventura esse credendum est; sed quibus modis et quo ordine veniant, magis tunc docebit rerum experientia, quam nunc ad perfectum hominum intellegentia valet consequi" (Dombart, ed., 2:486). The events in the order that Augustine thinks will happen are: (1) the coming of Elijah; (2) the conversion of the Jews; (3) Antichrist's persecution; (4) the Last Judgment; (5) the resurrection of the dead; (6) the separation of good and evil; and (7) the conflagration and renewal of the world.

<sup>91</sup> Gilles Quispel, "Time and History in Patristic Christianity," in *Man and Time: Papers from the Eranos Jahrbuch* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), 98.

intentions. Past history was mostly a succession of failures, tragedies, and sinful behavior; it would be naïve to expect anything better in the future. The “manifest destiny” reading of Rome’s history was an illusion, and to anyone promising “to make Rome great again,” Augustine would have responded that Rome was never great and did not promise greatness in the future. This was not exactly an encouraging or patriotic message.

Augustine’s view of history was theologically deep and consistent, but given its pessimistic cast, it is no surprise that it was often disregarded or misunderstood over the centuries. The bishop of Hippo would probably not have been surprised to learn that millions of believers still use faulty biblical exegesis as the basis for expectations of their imminent rapture and the coming end of the world while others expect the dawning of an earthly millennium of restored greatness for later faux-Christian *imperia*. He might well have responded to both camps with one of the most famous passages from the *De civitate Dei*: “Remota itaque iustitia quid sunt regna nisi magna latrocinia?”—“When justice is removed, what are kingdoms but great acts of thievery?”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> DCD 4.4.