

since the human person is a composite of body and soul, this end will be vitiated if both aspects of his or her nature do not endure together (15). The discontinuity introduced into this life by death is no more permanent than the daily discontinuity of sleep (16). So the moral necessity of judgment and recompense are not, for this author, the only rational arguments in favor of resurrection (14); nevertheless, our moral choices are incoherent without such a future reckoning (19), and justice requires the survival of the whole person to take final responsibility for his or her actions (20–21).

Theophilus of Antioch

Theophilus of Antioch's apologetic treatise *To Autolycus*, probably written c. 180, deals with the Christian eschatological hope in a less philosophical, more biblical way than does the treatise we have just discussed. Central in Theophilus' hope, too, is a sense of the appropriateness of a final divine recompense after death: justice demands that the believer be "made immortal" in body and soul and "see God worthily" in a new and incorrupt life (1.7; 1.14; cf. 2.26), while the unbeliever is to be consigned to everlasting fire (1.14).

Theophilus finds "vestiges" or analogies of the promised resurrection of the body in the succession of seasons, the growth of seeds, and the waxing and waning of the moon (1.13). Human nature, however, has no intrinsic claim on immortality, which, for Theophilus as for Tatian, is proper only to God (1.4). The human person is "neither immortal nor mortal, but capable of both, so that if he should incline to the things of immortality, keeping the commandment of God, he should receive as reward from him immortality and become God; but if he should turn to the things of death, disobeying God, he should himself be the cause of death to himself" (2.27; cf. 2.24). So immortality is at once a pure gift, and yet something one "procures for oneself" by faith and action (2.27).

Theophilus is also the first Christian theologian to speak of Christian fulfillment expressly in terms of divinization. The place of this transformation from a human to a divine mode of life will be Paradise, a place "intermediate between earth and heaven" (2.24); there those who have sought for God and kept his commandments will rediscover the original harmony of created nature (2.17), and receive new, unparalleled gifts that will allow them to share in the nature of God (2.26).

Regaining the light: eschatology in the Gnostic crisis (150–200)

By the middle of the second century of our era, the existence of Gnostic groups, alongside and within the larger bodies of Christians throughout the Empire, posed a serious problem both to the interpretation of the gospel and to the life and worship of the communities. The challenge of Gnostic views of God, the world and human salvation prompted Christian writers and leaders to reflect in new depth on the shape of authentic Christian tradition, as well as on the criteria for determining its content.

Gnosticism was not simply a Christian heresy, nor was it a unified, theologically coherent religious movement. It was rather a type of elitist religious thought, present in Jewish and philosophical pagan circles as well as in a fairly wide range of Christian ones, which claimed privileged access to a kind of knowledge that could revolutionize the believer's understanding of existence. Gnostics generally regarded the world of ordinary experience and work as having only a low grade of reality, and promised escape from matter and union with the transcendent source of being to the favored few who accepted the esoteric knowledge that the group possessed. Although our knowledge of Gnostic doctrine formerly depended, for the most part, on hostile Christian sources like Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Epiphanius, the recent publication of the collection of Coptic Gnostic documents found at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1947¹ has made available a wealth of original documents that are only beginning to be studied. The dates of composition of these works, however, seem to range between the mid second and mid fourth centuries; their sectarian origin is often unclear, their language heavily veiled in the symbols of cult and cosmic myth, and their teaching sometimes obscure to the point of unintelligibility. It is impossible, therefore, to give an exposition of Gnostic eschatology that is completely consistent or universally representative of our ancient sources.

Practically all Gnostic groups, Christian, Jewish or pagan, seem to have taught, through elaborate mythic narratives of the origins of things, that the present world is only an accidental by-product of a much larger, more

complex history: the work of ignorant and subordinate cosmic forces, which is destined to pass away when their time of power comes to an end. Our bodies, like the rest of material creation, were generally considered by Gnostics as a prison for the true, immaterial self, rather than a constitutive part of that self (e.g., *Apocryphon of John* 30.25–31.4) – a coarse and illusory shell untouched by redemption. So Christian writers often accused the Gnostics of denying both the relevance of the world and our actions to future salvation, and the Christian hope for the resurrection of the body (e.g., Irenaeus, *AH* 1.24.5 [Basilides]; 1.27.3 [Cerdo and Marcion]; Epiphanius, *Pan* 42.5.1 [Marcion]; Tertullian, *Adv Marc* 5.10 [Marcion]).

In reality, Gnostic eschatology seems to have been a good deal more complex than this. Salvation, in virtually all Gnostic teaching, is certainly conceived as the restoration of the luminous elements in this world that belong to the highest, least material, realms of reality – namely, the souls of the initiate – to their place in the *pleroma* or original “full complement” of hierarchically ordered divine beings. For Valentinian Gnosis, this was simply a “restoration” (*apokatastasis*) of heavenly reality to its original state (so *Treatise on the Resurrection* [Ep to Rheginus] 44.31; cf. Irenaeus, *AH* 1.8.4; 1.14.1 [Marcosians]; *Origin of the World* 127.14–17; *Gospel of Philip* 67.15–18; *Trip Tract* 122.19–23). Basilides, however, the early second-century Alexandrian Gnostic teacher, taught that even the “seed” of this future life, which is to be saved from this world, was made by the supreme God from nothing, and that it grows to a state of full sonship which is infinitely beyond its origins. Those creatures who are not blessed with this degree of fulfillment – a fulfillment Basilides conceived in terms of unitive knowledge and love – will at least be consoled by “enormous ignorance,” so that, in the end, every member of the cosmos will be content to remain within the limitations of its own nature (so Hippolytus, *Elench* 6.27.1–4).²

Within the framework of their “enlightened” depreciation of the material cosmos, some Gnostic sects seem to have made free use of apocalyptic traditions about the end of the world. According to Irenaeus (*AH* 1.7.1), the Valentinians held that when the souls of the righteous reach their final place of rest, “that fire which lies hidden in the world will blaze forth and burn” until all matter, and the fire itself, is destroyed. Several of the Nag Hammadi documents, notably *On the Origin of the World* and *The Concept of our Great Power* (both probably fourth-century works), as well as the non-Christian tract from the same collection called *The Paraphrase of Shem*, contain descriptions of this destruction of the universe in the grand apocalyptic style. Amid thunder and earthquakes (*Origin* 125.33f.; *Concept* 44.5; *Paraphrase* 44.11) and disturbances in the cosmic order (*Origin* 126.10–14; *Concept* 45.31–46.5; *Paraphrase* 45.9–31), the “archons,” or leaders of the opposition to truth, will stir up confusion and war (*Concept* 43.35–44.31;

Origin 126.5–8; *Paraphrase* 44.22–26) on earth at the climax of human history. An “imitator” of the Savior will deceive many into following him (*Concept* 45.1–24) and there will be widespread disease and depopulation (*Origin* 126.3f.; *Concept* 44.6–10). In the end, however, the forces of the primeval Pleroma will vent their wrath on the earth (*Origin* 126.19–21; *Concept* 46.22–47.9), cast the hostile powers into a fiery abyss (*Origin* 126.22–35; *Concept* 46.29–33; cf. *Paraphrase* 45.14–30) and lead the faithful into eternal light (*Origin* 126.35–127.14; *Concept* 47.9–26).

The fate of human individuals is usually not clearly distinguished, in Gnostic documents, from the fate of the “light” or “dark” elements in the cosmos as a whole.³ The *First Apocalypse of James* (33.2–36.1) tells, in folkloric style, of a kind of trial held at each person’s death by three demons acting as toll-collectors;⁴ normally, however, Gnostic writings conceive of death as a blessed release. The reward of the enlightened, who have accepted the saving knowledge revealed to them by the sect, is described in the following terms: as rest (e.g., *Gosp Truth* 22.9–12; 24.14–21; 41.28f.; *Treatise on Res* 44.1ff.; *Gosp Philip* 71.14f.), light and glory (*II Treatise of Great Seth* 67.10; 68.7f.; *Gosp Philip* 85.24–86.5; *Concept* 46.8–12), close fellowship with the rest of the saved (*II Treatise of Great Seth* 67.32–68.5; 68.9–13), and loving union with the Father of all things (*Gosp Truth* 41.30–34). The *Gospel of Philip* describes the goal of salvation as the consummation of a mystical marriage between the soul and truth or light, foreshadowed on earth in the community’s liturgy of initiation (67.14–30; 84.20–86.8; cf. *II Treatise of Great Seth* 57.7–27; 67.5–18).

Positive punishment for those who reject the saving *gnosis* is less often described in the Gnostic treatises. The *Book of Thomas the Contender*, however, describes the fate of apostates from the initiate community as fire, a continually frustrated concern for the things of the flesh, and immersion in an abyss of bitterness (141.4–18; 141.32–142.2; cf. *Pistis Sophia* 147), and gives a vivid description of the imprisonment and torture of each apostate in Tartarus (*ibid.*, 142.11–143.7; cf. *Apocryphon of John* 30.25–31.4, equating Hades with “the prison of the body”). Other Gnostic documents speak, more encouragingly, of a purifying punishment of each soul after death, “until she is liberated from forgetfulness and acquires knowledge” (*Apocr John* 27.4–11; cf. *Concept* 46.23–33); the *Pistis Sophia* describes in some detail the purification of all departed souls – even sinless ones – in fire, until they are judged worthy to drink the “water of forgetfulness” (144–47).⁵

Some Gnostic documents emphasize the future character of this eschatological fulfillment, while others stress its present availability through the sect’s tradition of revealed knowledge. The *Tripartite Tractate*, for instance, suggests that much time will be needed for the perfection that has been achieved in the Logos to be accomplished in his members; only when all are

perfected will the Logos and his body be “restored” to the Pleroma (122.25–124.3; cf. 136.7–24). The *Gospel of Truth*, on the other hand, refers, in Johannine terms, to a “judgment” that has already been accomplished (25.25–26.26). The *Treatise on the Resurrection (Ep to Rheginus)*⁶ pointedly interprets the traditional Christian hope of resurrection as being a call to disregard fleshly existence and “enter into the wisdom of those who have known the Truth” (46.3off.; 47.2–12). Resurrection, as an event in history, is for this author simply the anthropological phenomenon of enlightenment, “the disclosure of those who have risen” (48.5f.). “Therefore do not think in part,” he urges his reader, “or live in conformity with the flesh for the sake of unanimity, but flee from the division and the fetters, and already you have the resurrection” (49.9–16; cf. 49.22ff.).

Those Gnostic groups that made use of sacramental rites seem to have found in liturgical symbols a way to express a fruitful tension between the present, typological communication of saving enlightenment and a fuller realization of that salvation after death (so especially *Gosp Phil* 66.7–23; 67.14–19; cf. Irenaeus on the initiation rites of the Marcosians: *AH* 1.21.3). The *Gospel of Philip* refers to this tension in a more general way when it remarks with characteristic vagueness: “The mysteries of truth are revealed, though in type and image. The bridal chamber, however, remains hidden. It is the holy in the holy . . . If anyone becomes a son of the bridal chamber, he will receive the light. If anyone does not receive it while he is in these places, he will not be able to receive it in the other place” (84.20–23; 86.4–7). In so far as we may speak of a single eschatological hope in Gnosticism at all, its heart is expressed here, in the promised continuity between the present enlightenment claimed by the sect and an eternal sharing in a saving, but largely hidden, truth.

Irenaeus

The broad, synthetic theological vision of Irenaeus of Lyons, including his presentation of the Christian hope, must be seen above all as a polemical response to the typical Gnostic understanding of God, the world and human salvation. Irenaeus’ theology is essentially a plea for the validity of ordinary Christian life and tradition, in the ordinary world. As a result, Irenaeus stresses unities: the unity of God as creator and savior, in contrast to the Marcionite and Gnostic tendency to see in the world continuing conflict between warring supercosmic forces; the personal unity of Christ, as both the eternal Word, the agent of creation, and a full participant in our fleshly, human life; the unity of every person, as a single composite of spirit and flesh who is called, as such, to salvation through Christ; and the unity and continuity of all human history, which begins in its creation by a loving

God, endures the temporary defeat of sin, and is now – thanks to the Incarnation of the Word – drawing near to the lasting union of the human race with God that was history’s goal from the start.

Salvation, for Irenaeus, is not so much God’s unexpected intervention in history to rescue his faithful ones from destruction as it is the end-stage of the process of organic growth which has been creation’s “law” since its beginning. So eschatology, in the apocalyptic sense of the expectation of a wholly new age, is replaced in Irenaeus’ theology by a grand, continuous conception of salvation-history, whose final achievement lies in the not-too-distant future.⁷ A famous passage in book iv of his *Adversus Haereses* (written in Lyons about 180 as a polemical tract against local varieties of Gnostic Christianity) summarizes biblical history in the following terms: “It was necessary that the human person should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover [from the disease of sin]; and having recovered, should be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord. For God is the one who is yet to be seen, and the beholding of God is productive of immortality, but immortality renders one near unto God” (*AH* 4.38.3).

In this perspective, immortal and incorruptible life appears as the goal of God’s plan for humanity from its very creation. Immortality is clearly a gift of God, not a right of nature: for “the soul itself is not life, but partakes in that life bestowed upon it by God” (*AH* 2.34.4). Yet the gift is as old as its recipients, in Irenaeus’ scheme; the first humans lost it by breaking God’s commandment (*Demonstration of the Apostolic Teaching* 15), but God remains with his creation and gradually renews it for the sake of his human creatures, “so that coming to maturity in them, he may produce the fruit of immortality” (*AH* 4.5.1). The heart of this work of renewal, for Irenaeus as for his Gnostic opponents, is revelation, carried on by the activity of the Word and by the enlivening presence of the Holy Spirit. Its fruit is the vision of God (*AH* 4.20.5–7), the knowledge of God (*ibid.*, 5.12.4) that confers immortality and incorruptibility on the human person; this has already been communicated to us in scriptural prophecy and in the “portion” of the Spirit given to us in the Church (*ibid.*, 3.24.1). “We do now receive a certain portion of his Spirit,” Irenaeus writes, “tending towards perfection and preparing us for incorruption, being little by little accustomed to receive and bear God” (*ibid.*, 5.8.1). It is through the “fellowship with God” involved in this charismatic gift of knowledge, ultimately, that we “partake of incorruption” (*Dem* 40; cf. *AH* 5.27.1).

Within the context of this providentially directed process of the human race’s maturing, Irenaeus sketches out a clear, distinctive picture of the

eschatological future humanity can hope for. Rejecting the doctrine of some Gnostic groups that the recipients of sectarian knowledge have thereby already experienced resurrection, he insists that all of us must “observe the law of the dead,” as Christ did (*AH* 5.31.1–2). Our souls will be separated from our bodies, and “go away to the invisible place allotted to them by God” (*ibid.*, 5.31.2), where – as shades – they will retain the “form” of their body and memory of their existence on earth, but not its fleshly substance (*ibid.*, 2.34.1–2). Irenaeus paints the end of human history – which he clearly expects soon⁸ – in traditional and vivid apocalyptic colors. The Antichrist will appear in Jerusalem, endowed with all the powers of the devil, and usurp the place of God, persecuting all the saints and “recapitulating in himself the whole history of sin” (*ibid.*, 5.25; 5.28–30). Then Christ will come again in glory as judge (*ibid.*, 4.33.1) and will cast the Antichrist and his followers into “the lake of fire” (*ibid.*, 5.30.4). Christ’s judgment will be a “winnowing,” a sifting of wheat from chaff (*ibid.*, 4.4.1; 4.33.1); it will be terrible (*ibid.*, 4.33.13; 4.36.3), yet utterly necessary if God’s constant providence and Christ’s return to the earth are to be seen to have a meaning (*ibid.*, 5.27.1). It will be the “day of retribution” prophesied by Isaiah as the end of the “acceptable year of the Lord,” in which salvation is available to all (*ibid.*, 2.22.1–2). Destructive as they will be for the wicked, the tribulations of the end will only refine and purify the just (*ibid.*, 5.28.4; 5.29.1).

Central to Irenaeus’ hope is the resurrection of the body, which he expects at the time of Christ’s return. Hope in such a resurrection is an integral part of the Christian tradition of faith Irenaeus is concerned to protect (see *AH* 1.10.1; 1.22.1; 3.16.6 – all formulaic passages: cf. 3.12.3, where “the resurrection of the dead” is made the content of apostolic preaching). His argument is essentially a moral one: for adequate retribution to be possible, divine justice requires that both the just and the unjust should rise in “their own bodies” as well as “their own souls” (*AH* 2.33.5).⁹ Consistent with this, Irenaeus insists on the fleshly reality of risen bodies: only such a hope can take seriously God’s continued involvement with his creation (*AH* 5.2.2), the biblical promise of “the salvation of the flesh,” and the double reality of the Church – at once spiritual and worldly – that is reflected in our celebration of the Eucharist (*ibid.*, 4.18.5; 5.2.3; cf. 4.38.1).

The long section *AH* 5.1–15, in fact, is an apologia for the material reality of the resurrection of the body, based mainly on passages in Scripture. Beginning from the fleshly reality of Jesus’ own humanity (1–2), Irenaeus stresses that the ability to raise the dead is implicit in God’s creative power (3). To suggest that the God who saves us will not also raise our bodies is to suggest, as the Gnostics do, that the material world is made by a lesser God (4). If the whole human person is made by God to be the temple of his Spirit (6), and if Christ rose in the flesh (7), then our own bodies – transformed,

certainly, and made spiritual by the gift of Christ’s Spirit – must also rise (7–8). In chapters 9–15 of this section, Irenaeus refutes the Gnostic interpretation of the important text I Cor 15.50 (“Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God”), making use of many other scriptural passages to underline his central argument: namely, that “the Word has saved that which really was the humanity that had perished, effecting by means of himself that communion which should be held with it, and seeking out its salvation. But the thing which had perished possessed flesh and blood” (5.14.2); so that which will be saved must also possess them!

At the end of book 5 of *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus goes on, in his apologetic for the future of the material cosmos, to defend the millenarian hope represented by Papias and the “elders” of earlier Asiatic Christianity (cf. 5.33.3–4). Here he presents a prospect of human resurrection in two stages, arguing that “it is fitting for the righteous first to receive the promise of the inheritance which God promised the fathers, and to reign in it, when they rise again to behold God in this creation which is renewed, and that the judgment should take place afterwards” (*ibid.*, 32.1). Irenaeus supports this interpretation by referring to many biblical passages that promise salvation to Israel in typical terms of peace, prosperity and material restoration (*ibid.*, 33–35), and he insists that these may not be allegorized away (*ibid.*, 35.1–2). The purpose of such a millennial kingdom, he suggests, is to allow the just time, in the familiar setting of a renewed earth, to become gradually accustomed “to partaking of the divine nature” (*ibid.*, 32.1). Once again, however, Irenaeus’ underlying concern seems to be to defend the inclusion of the material side of creation in the unified plan of God’s salvation.¹⁰

At the end of this thousand-year period of preparation, Irenaeus foresees God’s final judgment and retribution in terms of Apoc 20 and 21. All the dead will be raised, the unjust will be cast into the eternal fire of Gehenna, and “a new heaven and a new earth” – timeless and incorruptible – will be created as the abode of the just (*AH* 5.35.2; 5.36.1). The physical nature of the saved will be preserved, but transformed into a thing of inconceivable beauty (*ibid.*, 4.39.2; cf. 4.33.11). In accord with Jesus’ promise that the seed of God’s Word, falling on fertile ground, will bear fruit “a hundredfold, sixtyfold and thirtyfold” (Matt 13.23), Irenaeus foresees different grades of beatitude for the just, according to each one’s merit: the most worthy will be taken to “heaven,” the next will be taken to “Paradise” (presumably a place between heaven and earth), and the least worthy will “possess the splendor of the city” (*AH* 5.36.1–2).¹¹ Yet Irenaeus seems to imply the possibility of growth and advancement toward closer union with God even after the judgment, until at last all distinctions disappear (*ibid.*, 2; cf. 2.28.3, on our eternal capacity to “learn the things taught us by God”). Just as the real punishment for sinners will be separation from God – a separation which

they have “chosen of their own accord”¹² – so the real reward of the just is “communion with God” (*ibid.*, 5.27.2; cf. 4.37.7; 4.38.3), “receiving God” (*ibid.*, 3.20.3) as life and light (*ibid.*, 5.27.2), and being made anew in God’s image (*ibid.*, 5.36.3).¹³ Such a relationship, Irenaeus implies, is neither static nor limited by human finitude: it is part of a history of growth, whose term is participation in the glory which is God’s own life.

Senectus Mundi: eschatology in the West, 200–250

The first three decades of the third century were a period of political stability and cultural cohesion in the Roman Empire. It was not until the death of Alexander Severus in 235 that barbarian attacks, economic disasters, and conflicts over the imperial succession began a new period of violence and corruption which would last until the accession of Diocletian in 284. The relative prosperity and peace of the Severan period, however, did not make life any easier for the expanding network of Christian communities throughout the Empire. Christians continued to be despised by the intellectual elite and were considered suspicious by imperial bureaucrats; there were even occasional outbreaks of actual persecution, such as that in Egypt and North Africa during the reign of Septimius Severus (193–211). The social base of the Christian Church seems still to have been among “ordinary” people: uneducated merchants and laborers, who probably had little time for philosophical fashion and Roman cultural ideology. So the extant religious writings of the Western Church, especially, from this period show decidedly sectarian and anti-intellectual tendencies. Apology gives way to controversial theology; the efforts of apologists like Justin and Athenagoras to present Christianity to the cultured Hellenistic world in attractive and irenic terms are replaced now by bitter attacks on classical paganism, on Jewish and Judaeo-Christian teachings, and on the occult speculations of the Gnostics. A spirit of cultural criticism and a strong, often rigorist moral tone dominate most of the works produced within the main Christian community at this time.

This sense of social alienation and religious competition, understandably, had its effect on the articulation of the Christian eschatological hope. Popular expectation of an immediate end of the world seems to have reached fever pitch in many areas of the Western Roman Empire, especially during periods of persecution.¹ Christian writers concerned themselves more and more to reflect ordinary people’s beliefs about the afterlife, and used popular expectations of future reward and punishment as an instru-

adds, "will undoubtedly be tortured then in Gehenna" (Beatus 7.2.15: Sanders 522).

Tyconius was apparently convinced that this apocalyptic program was soon to begin; the prophecies of Scripture were already being realized in Africa, in the persecution his own Church had undergone, and they would soon be realized throughout the world (*Lib Reg* 6: Burkitt 67.10–15; Beatus 4.1.41: Sanders 341f.). According to his calculation, the "three and one-half days" mentioned in Apoc 11.9, in which the pagans will triumph over the dead bodies of the saints, refer to the three hundred and fifty years of oppression and subtle blasphemy that must elapse between Christ's passion and the revelation of the Antichrist (Beatus 5.6.6: Sanders 450; *ibid.*, 6.3.38: Sanders 478): a period just coming to a close, presumably, at the time Tyconius was writing. This sense of the immediacy of the end allows Tyconius to translate the promise of the apocalyptic tradition into a form of "realized" eschatology peculiarly his own; the final trials of the Christian people, with all their paradoxical consolations and their promise of imminent reward, were already a part of the Donatist experience. "The present time is never separate from that last time, when the 'spiritual hosts of wickedness' (Eph 6.12) will be revealed," he writes, "because [Satan] never ceases now to urge wicked deeds on human beings, nor shall he then cease to do these things" (Turin fr. 382f.: Lo Bue 158.3–6).

So Tyconius interprets the millenarian promise of Apoc 20.3–6 as referring to the time of the Church, "from the passion of the Lord until his second coming" (Beatus 11.5.9: Sanders 604).¹² The "first resurrection," which inaugurates the Church's thousand years of rule with the triumphant Christ, is the rebirth of baptism, which brings release from the death of sin (Beatus 11.5.15f.: Sanders 605); it is "the promise, available in the present age through penance . . . the beginning of the eternal day" (Beatus 1.5.91: Sanders 99). In the present age the saints are already enthroned with the triumphant Christ, judging the world (Apoc 20.4). For the throne of the Lord's glory is his glorified humanity; "and the whole generation of the saints is continuously being added to his body, and sits, through its head, at the right hand of the Power, judging through its priests and all its servants. He judges now in the Church, because each [Christian] occupies himself with penance, and one rouses the other to the love that is charity" (Beatus 11.5.3: Sanders 603). All the blessings promised to the faithful for the future life – health, youth, nourishment in plenty – are already available *spiritualiter* in the Church, because "we have put on Christ and are filled with the joy of the Spirit" (Beatus 4.6.75–78: Sanders 404f.). The "servants of God, who give up all activity in the world," already anticipate in their withdrawal the Church's translation to the beatific vision of God, "and in

their contemplation here they begin to enjoy eternal life" (Beatus *prae*f. 4.22: Sanders 9; cf. Beatus 6.2.34: Sanders 465).

In many respects, Tyconius anticipates both the ecclesiology and the eschatology of Augustine, who acknowledged his debt and his somewhat grudging admiration for the Donatist writer.¹³ Yet Tyconius' theological vision also recalls the Church-centered eschatological urgency that characterized the *Shepherd* of Hermas more than two centuries earlier: the sense that the very immediacy of crisis and reward had given the internal discipline and faith of the Church new seriousness and meaning. The time in which Tyconius writes is still an age for preaching and controversy and conversion, an age when there is time for schismatics to return to the unity of faith (Beatus 2.6.101: Sanders 246f.), and for unbelievers to "flee . . . to the doctrine of the apostles, begging the Lord's mercy" (Beatus 4.3.37: Sanders 358). It is a time when many sinners may still return to God, "some through a long penance, others through a brief one" (Beatus 6.2.67: Sanders 470). "But after [Satan] enters into his 'vessel' [= the Antichrist], then no one will be converted, because he will lead off under the yoke of his authority all whom he finds to be fleshly in the concerns of their lives" (*ibid.*). In the eyes of Tyconius and his beleaguered Donatist community, the need to purify and extend the institutional Church is all the more vital, because the time left for doing it is so short.

Augustine

Without a doubt the theologian who has most influenced the development of Latin eschatology, as indeed all Latin theology, was Augustine of Hippo (354–430). Augustine's eschatological doctrine is, in most of its details, thoroughly traditional, based on the accumulated theological resources of the Eastern Church since Origen and the Western Church since Tertullian and Hippolytus, as well as on the practices and the cherished hopes of African Christians in his own day. What is new in Augustine's eschatology is its systematic cohesion, its integration into a broad theological synthesis that is both philosophical and scriptural, speculative and pastorally practical, subtly consistent in theory yet passionately personal and experiential in its source and expression. In Augustine's reinterpretation of early Christian hope for the world and the individual, the Western Church found a balanced, sober, yet profoundly inviting theological structure for articulating its own expectations.

The key to understanding Augustine's eschatological hope is to understand the sharp, metaphysically grounded distinction he draws between time and eternity – between human existence now in history, with all the

ambiguity of value and relationship that comes from our life as changeable spirits embodied in a finite, material universe, and the final existence we long for, released from the “distention” of space and time and united in stable knowledge and love with God, our source and our goal.¹⁴ Eternity, in Augustine’s brand of Christian Neoplatonism, is no longer the endless duration of Origen’s “aeons,” but a total freedom from duration, extension or sequence; it is the utterly simple, unchanging present of God’s being. The dividing line between temporal and eternal existence is, for the creature, nothing less than total transformation: the transformation of our material reality, and that of our world, which God will work at the moment of resurrection. Without destroying human identity as flesh and spirit, without annihilating the world in which that identity has been realized, the resurrection will mean, in Augustine’s view, the end of our existence in time as changeable, restless “fallen souls,” and the confirmation of the present, historically conditioned order of loves in the changelessness of eternal beatitude or eternal self-destruction.

One result of this distinction between time and eternity is a transformation, in Augustine’s thought, of traditional apocalyptic conceptions of the “end of the world.” For Augustine, the eschaton is not simply the end of this present age and the beginning of a new one, but the end of history itself and the beginning of the “eternal Sabbath,” when God, who is beyond all time and all temporal succession, will “rest in us” (*Conf* 13.37). Throughout his life, however, Augustine was prepared to take seriously the details predicted in Scripture for the end of the world. So, in his correspondence on this subject with the Sicilian bishop, Hesychius of Salona, Augustine insists on the literal fulfillment of Matt 24.14 (“The Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world”) as a condition for recognizing the end (*Ep* 197.4; 199.46–51 [dating from 418/19]). In *De Civitate Dei* 20.30 [425/26], he lists the following events as belonging to the final drama, though not necessarily as coming in the following order: the return of Elijah, the conversion of the Jewish people to faith in Jesus, the persecution of the Antichrist, the coming of Christ as judge, the resurrection of the dead, the separation of the good from the wicked, and the burning and renewal of the material world. But he is hesitant to be more specific about the details of this *consummatio saeculi*, careful not to speculate further on the identity and career of the Antichrist, and especially reluctant to identify any of the traditional apocalyptic signs of the end with the disasters of contemporary life (*Ep* 199.34f.).¹⁵

Faced with the threats experienced by Roman society during his episcopate, and challenged by the widespread recriminations and fears that followed the sack of Rome by the Western Goths in 410, Augustine willingly

made use of the old rhetorical *topos* that the world was in a state of senility. Like an old man racked with the “complaints of age – coughing, phlegm, inflamed eyes, anxiety, lack of energy.” Augustine preached in that year, so “the world has grown old, and is full of oppression.” But just as Abraham had a son in his old age, so Christ, the “seed of Abraham, . . . came when all had grown old, and made you anew.” Augustine urges his hearers to “become youthful in Christ, who says to you: The world is dying, the world has grown old, the world is running down and struggles with the breathlessness of age. Do not fear; your youth will be renewed like the eagle’s!” (*Serm* 81.8 [410]).

Augustine seems, in fact, like many of his contemporaries, to have been fascinated by the old Roman fashion of conceiving history as a “cosmic week” of six periods or “ages,” to be followed by a final “Golden Age” of peace and cosmic renewal.¹⁶ In a few early works he compares these historical periods to the six “ages” of a human life: infancy (*infantia*), childhood (*pueritia*), youth (*adulescentia*), young adulthood (*juventus*), mature adulthood (*gravitas*), and old age (*senectus*) (*De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 1.35–41 [388/89]; *De Diversis Quaestionibus* 58.2 [391–95]). More often, he connects them with the account of the six “days” of creation in Gen 1, and superimposes on that narrative a schematized summary of sacred history in six successive periods of renewal and fall, “morning” and “evening,” to be followed by a “day of rest” that will have no end (*ibid.*; see also *Serm* 259.2 [before 394]; *De Catechizandis Rudibus* 22.39 [400]; *Ctr Faustum* 12.8 [c. 400]; *In Jo Ev Tr* 9.6 [407¹⁷]; *De Trinitate* 4.4.7 [401/407?]; *Enarr in Ps* 92.1 [412]; *De Civ Dei* 22.30 [426]). Although in a few early works (*Serm* 259.2; *Serm Mai* 94.4f. [393–95]; *Ctr Adim* 2.2 [394]) Augustine took the further step of identifying the “Sabbath” yet to come with the millennial Kingdom promised in Apoc 20, he soon abandoned this exegesis of the Apocalypse passage in favor of a “realized,” ecclesiological interpretation similar to that of Tyconius.¹⁸

Even in these early allusions to the millennium, Augustine is careful to avoid emphasizing its literal duration of one thousand years, or the details of its earthly delights. He understands it simply as “the future rest of the saints on earth,” when the Church will be purged of all the wicked elements now mixed among its members and Christ will rule peacefully in its midst (*Serm* 259.2). The millennium, for the early Augustine, is still not eternity but a part of history, “the seventh and last period of this age” (*Ctr Adim* 2.2). “It is one thing to rest in the Lord within this present time,” he observes in *Serm Mai* 94.4, “and another thing to pass beyond all time and be united with time’s maker without any end.” The purpose of this “spiritual Sabbath” at the end of history, which the *amici huius mundi* fail to understand, will be to

direct the gaze of the faithful beyond this world to the incorruption and immortality of the eternal “eighth day” that will follow the “second” resurrection.

In *De Civ Dei* 20.7 [425/26], four years before his death, Augustine still acknowledges that such a moderate, “spiritual” millenarianism is a tenable Catholic position, and admits that he once held it himself. He goes on, however, to sketch out in detail an ecclesiological interpretation of Apoc 20.1–6, which he now prefers (*ibid.*, 7–9). In this version, the “thousand years” of the earthly Kingdom stand in a symbolic way for “all the years of the Christian era” (7). Augustine readily identifies this Kingdom with the present Church: “his saints reign now with [Christ], although certainly in a different way from how they shall reign hereafter” (9). The Church in time is a *regnum militiae*, a Church struggling against the forces of evil both outside and inside her own ranks (*ibid.*). Satan is now “chained in the abyss,” according to Apoc 20.2f.: shut up in the hearts of the wicked (7) and restrained by God from exercising his full powers against the faithful, although he is certainly active (8). The “first resurrection,” which stands at the start of this temporal Kingdom of Christ, is for each member of that Kingdom his or her resurrection from sin in baptism (9). The “thrones of judgment” mentioned in Apoc 20.4 are positions of authority in the Church (9), and the souls of martyrs, which the writer also saw (Apoc 20.4), are a reminder that the faithful dead belong, too, to the temporal Church (9).

In thus translating the millenarian vision of Apoc 20 into ecclesiological terms, Augustine undoubtedly laid the foundation for the widespread tendency of later Latin theology to identify the Kingdom of God, at least in its first stage of existence, with the institutional Catholic Church. In the context of *De Civ Dei* 20, however, his purpose is more to clarify his theology of Christian hope than to reinforce a vision of the Church: to sharpen the distinction between the temporal working of God’s saving grace, in any age of human history, and its eschatological fullness in a “Sabbath” that is utterly beyond time and the world as we know them.¹⁹

Throughout his career, Augustine remained steadfastly agnostic about the time of the world’s end, and skeptical about even the most respectable Christian attempts to calculate it from Scripture and contemporary events. Two favorite texts he used to support this position were Acts 1.7 (“It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority”) and Matt 24.36 (“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven nor the Son, but the Father only”), texts from which he concluded that it is not God’s will that humans should ever know when the end is coming. “So we are gladly ignorant,” he adds in an early homily, “because God wants us to be ignorant” (*Enarr in Ps* 6.2 [c. 392]; cf. *Serm* 93.8 [411/12]; *Ep* 197; 199.1 [418/19]). Since the first Christian

Pentecost, Jesus’ followers have spoken of themselves as living in the “last times,” he writes to Bishop Hesychius (*Ep* 199.23); and “if there were ‘last days’ then, how much more now – even if there remained as many days until the end as have already passed from the Lord’s Ascension until today” (*ibid.*, 24). Apocalyptic signs of the end seem always to be appearing, and those who try to compute from them the exact time of the cataclysm are always disappointed (*ibid.*, 34f.; *Serm* 93.7). Christian watchfulness, for Augustine, is simply to wait for the Lord, persevering in Christian love until the “sleep” of death overtakes us (*Serm* 93.7, commenting on Matt 25.5). To insist that the Lord is coming soon and to be wrong, Augustine cautions Hesychius, can be damaging both to one’s own and one’s neighbors’ faith; on the other hand, to long for the Lord’s coming but to believe it will be long delayed gives one grounds for both patience, if one is right, and for a happy surprise, if he *does* come soon. And there is also a third possibility: “The one who admits that he does not know which of these views is true hopes for the one, is resigned to the other, and is wrong in neither of them” (*Ep* 199.54). Augustine confesses, here and elsewhere, that he belongs to this third category.

This agnostic attitude towards the time and details of the end does not mean Augustine is uninterested in the apocalyptic tradition, or considers it unimportant for faith. Only those who now weaken their faith by “yielding to the devil” will have doubts about Christ’s second coming, he writes in *Quaestiones Evangeliorum* 1.15 [399–400]. That coming will allow those who now follow Christ in faith to see his glory directly (*per speciem: ibid.*), and will fill the “house” of his followers – the Church – with glory, as well (*Serm* 50.7.10 [394/95]). Hope in the return of Christ, and in the resurrection that is to follow, is, in fact, the main legitimate source of consolation for Christians who rightly mourn the death of their loved ones (*Serm* 173.3). But the second coming of Christ will also mean judgment: the purifying process of final revelation that will cleanse the Church and its members of the remains of sin, as fire burns away stubble (*Quaest Evang* 1.15 [399/400]; *Serm* 362.9.9 [410/11]; *Enarr in Ps* 103, *Serm* 3.5 [415] – all referring to I Cor 3.13ff.). This unmasking of human history will inaugurate the eternal, irreversible distinction between the saved and the damned, between lovers of God and lovers of self (*Enarr in Ps* 6.2 [c. 392]; cf. *De Civ Dei* 15.1–6 [419/20]).

Augustine’s last and fullest treatment of the end of the world and the final judgment, in *De Civ Dei* 20 [426], is almost entirely a collection, and a sober exposition, of the passages in the Bible that refer to these events. He emphasizes the need for a judgment to reveal the justice and goodness of God’s providence, which are often concealed in the present life (2). He also stresses again the importance of the cosmic conflagration that will accom-

pany God's judgment, "burning away the corruptible characteristics proper to corruptible bodies," and so preparing the way for the transformation of material nature that is to follow (16; 25). It is in this context that he presents the ecclesiological interpretation of the millennial kingdom, Apoc 20.1-6, that I have mentioned already.

Augustine's restraint in interpreting the apocalyptic tradition, like his studied agnosticism on the time of the end, comes undoubtedly from his concern to stress the purely eschatological character of these events, and of the rewards and punishments to follow. Although prophesied in our present history and foreshadowed in our present experience, they escape our powers of prediction precisely because they form the frontier between time and eternity. Augustine occasionally underlines this eschatological "distance" of the last things by contrasting them with their temporal foreshadowings in the present life of the Church. So he contrasts God's final judgment on all his creatures with the constant process of judgment and punishment that he exercises towards sinful individuals within history (*De Civ Dei* 20.1 [425/26]). Following the language of Apoc 20.5f. and 14, Augustine also distinguishes between the "first death" of human beings, in time, which is their separation from God in sin and their consequent liability to the violent separation of soul from body in physical death (*De Civ Dei* 13.3 [417/18]; *Serm* 65.4.5; *De Trin* 4.3.5 [401/407?]; *Enarr in Ps 70, Serm* 2.3 [414/15]), and the "second death" of eternal damnation, to be experienced by sinners in a reunited soul and body that will never be annihilated (*De Civ Dei* 13.2). Correspondingly, he speaks in these same passages of both a "first" and a "second" resurrection: the raising of "dead souls" from sin in this life, through conversion and the acceptance of divine grace, and the final raising of reanimated bodies from death, when Christ will come again as judge (*Enarr in Ps 70, Serm* 2.3; *De Trin* 4.3.5; *In Jo Ev Tr* 23.13ff. [413]; *De Civ Dei* 20.5 [425/26]).

Augustine draws the parallel between these two deaths and two resurrections mainly in terms of *life*. "There are two kinds of life," he writes in *Enarr in Ps 70, Serm* 2.3 [414/15], "one of the body, the other of the soul. As the soul is the life of the body, so God is the life of the soul. So just as the body would die if the soul should depart from it, the soul dies if it departs from God." The point is made still more clearly in *De Trin* 4.3.5 [401/407?]: "The death of the soul is impiety, and the death of the body corruptibility, because of which the soul is separated from the body. Just as the soul dies when God departs from it, so the body dies when the soul departs from it; the soul becomes foolish, the body lifeless. The soul is raised through penance, and in the mortal body this renewal of life begins in the faith by which one 'believes in him who justifies the sinner' (Rom 4.5) . . . The resurrection of [the body] is put off until the end, when our very justification is made perfect in an

unspeakable way." In *Tractatus in Johannis Evangelium* 23.13ff. [419/21], Augustine makes the further, perhaps over-subtle distinction that the "first resurrection" of forgiveness is the work of the whole divine substance, willed by Father and Son and achieved through the Spirit; the "second resurrection," on the other hand, will be the proper work of the incarnate Word (achieved *per dispensationem humanitatis Filii temporalem*), presumably because it has already begun in his own flesh.

One result of Augustine's double use of all these terms is to defer the truly eschatological fate of the individual – be it judgment, life, death or resurrection – until the end of time itself, and to make it simultaneous with the collective judgment and transformation of the whole community of rational creatures. Consequently, he distinguishes clearly between the fate of those now dead, who still belong to the realm of time and are subject to its limitations, and the finality of eternal reward or punishment. True, Augustine confidently asserts, in his later writings, that the souls of the dead are immediately judged at the end of their lives (e.g., *De Natura et Origine Animae* 2.4.8 [419]), and holds that "the separated souls of the saints are now in peace, while those of the wicked are in pain" (*De Civ Dei* 13.8 [417/18]; cf. *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum* 12.24 [429]). Souls enter this place of reward or punishment without the body, but with "some sort of likeness of the body," a phantom that makes possible, in this world, visions of the underworld and apparitions of the dead (*De Gen ad Litt* 12.32.60-33.62 [401/15]). He holds, too, that the time for meriting reward or punishment from God is "here and now," not in the time after death (*Enchiridion* 29.110 [423/24]), and that even the ability of the dead to profit from the prayers and good works offered for them by the living depends on their having come to deserve that ability during their lifetime (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, Augustine insists that the rewards and punishments experienced now by the souls of the dead are only a hint of their full eternal destinies, a dream of the reality that will come when their bodies have been raised (*Serm* 328.6.5 [405/11]; cf. *Ep* 159.4 [c. 414]). Even the martyrs now in glory, though incomparably happier than we are, possess only "a small part of the promise, a consolation as they wait" (*Serm* 280.5). "But when the resurrection occurs," Augustine promises, "then the joy of the good will be greater, and the torments of the wicked worse, as they are tortured [or rewarded] along with their bodies" (*In Jo Ev Tr* 49.10 [413]).

In a few passages, Augustine suggests that the souls of all the just immediately experience the transforming joy of God's presence. So he speaks of his departed friend Nebridius, in *Conf* 9.3.6, as already "happy without end," already "drinking from the fount of the divine wisdom." Arguing from Jesus' words on the cross to the good thief, "This day you shall be with me in Paradise" (Lk 23.43), Augustine concludes that those saved

by God's grace immediately enjoy the "beatific presence of his divinity" after death (*Ep* 164.8 [c. 414]; cf. *Ep* 187.3, 7 [417]). However, Augustine never speaks of this beatitude before the resurrection in terms of vision, or of the "angelic" activity of intuitive contemplation and ceaseless praise – the terms in which he describes the eternal state of the risen saints.²⁰ Usually, he is content to employ vaguer metaphors taken from the Bible and the earlier Latin tradition: the souls of the just are in "the bosom of Abraham," about whose location Augustine confesses his ignorance (*Conf* 9.3.6 [397/400]; *Ep* 187.6; *De Gen ad Litt* 8.5; 12.33.63 [401/15]), but which is at least "the distant, hidden place of rest, where Abraham is" (*De Natura et Origine Animae* 4.16.24 [419]; cf. *Ep* 164.3.7 [c. 414]; *De Gen ad Litt* 12.33.63); they are in Paradise, "a general term meaning a happy state of living" (*Ep* 187.2.6 [417]); they are enjoying "rest" (*requies*: e.g., *Quaest Evang* 2.38.1 [399]; *Ep* 55.9.17 [c. 400]; *De Civ Dei* 13.8 [417/18]), "refreshment" (*refrigerium*: e.g., *De Gen ad Litt* 8.5 [401/15]), "the reward that fulfills" (*merces perficiens*: *De Perfectione Iustitiae Hominis* 8.17 [415/16]). Augustine is equally vague about the place of this "interim" fulfillment of souls. They are "reserved in secret storerooms (*abditis receptaculis*)," he asserts in *Enchiridion* 29.109 [423/24], "at rest or in tribulation according as each has deserved for its situation while it lived in the flesh" (cf. *De Civ Dei* 12.9 [417/18]). For the just, at least, this place of waiting is not a part of hell, but a "dwelling of some hidden kind of repose (*secretae cuiusdam quietis habitatio*)," far removed from hell's sorrows (*Ep* 164.5.7; *De Gen ad Litt* 12.33.63).

Throughout his life, Augustine remained convinced that the souls of some of the dead, who are condemned to punishment immediately after death because of their sins, will be released from that punishment before God's sentence of judgment is passed, either because, in their suffering, they have been "purged" of their attachment to self, or because they have been helped to win God's forgiveness by the prayers of their fellow Christians. In the moving conclusion to book 9 of the *Confessions*, for instance, he asks his fellow Christians to join him in "remembering" his parents "at God's altar," because he is confident God will forgive them, in death, whatever "debts" they may still owe him (*Conf* 9.35ff.). The underlying reason for this certainty is, first of all, the Latin Church's long tradition of intercession for the dead. "There is no doubt," he asserts in a sermon of uncertain date, "that the dead are helped by the prayers of the holy Church, by the saving sacrifice [i.e., the Eucharist], and by alms given for their souls, in order that God may deal more mercifully with them than their sins have deserved." It is the tradition of our ancestors, he continues, to pray by name, during the celebration of the Eucharist, for "those who have died in the communion of the body and blood of Christ . . . And when works of mercy are done in order to commend them [to God], who doubts that they are helped, since prayers

for them are not offered to God in vain?" (*Serm* 172.2). In his tract *De Cura pro Mortuis Gerenda* 1.3 [424/25], Augustine adds to the weight of this Christian tradition the scriptural evidence of II Macc 12.43 as justification for these practices.

Behind Augustine's understanding of Christian prayer for the dead is undoubtedly, once again, his strong sense of the difference between time – to which even the dead still belong – and eternity. "The souls of the holy dead are not separated from the Church, which is now Christ's Kingdom," he observes in *De Civ Dei* 20.9 [425/26]; "otherwise they would not be commemorated at the altar of God in our communion in the body of Christ." They are *membra Christi* (*De Nat et Orig An* 1.9.10 [419]), and so participate still in the struggle and growth of the Church towards its eschatological goal. And since the dead still belong to time, it is perfectly understandable that some of them should still be undergoing the "temporal," limited and often beneficial experience of punishment that sinful members of Christ also undergo during their life on earth (*De Civ Dei* 21.13 [425/26]). "Some people suffer temporal punishments (*temporarias poenas*) in this life only, others after death, others both now and then, but they suffer them before that most severe and final judgment.²¹ Not all, however, who undergo temporal (*temporales*) punishments after death will come to everlasting punishments (*sempiternas poenas*), which will take place after that judgment. For some, as we have said above, will be forgiven in the age still ahead (*in futuro saeculo*) for what has not been forgiven in this age, so that they will not be subjected to the eternal punishments of the coming age" (*ibid.*).

In most of his works, Augustine makes no distinction between the kind of punishment after death designated for those who will ultimately be saved and that meant for the damned. As J. Ntedika has observed, Augustine conceives of this "temporal" punishment of the dead as "une condamnation provisoire": a condemnation that does not anticipate God's final, eternal verdict on them at the end of time.²² Against this background, Augustine's explanation of Jesus' *descensus ad inferos* after his death, mentioned in I Pet 3.19f., is more readily understandable: he insists that Jesus visited not the just, who were in the "bosom of Abraham," but sinners in the hell of the damned, and that he released at least some of them from their "sorrows" (*dolores*) (*Ep* 164.7f. [414]; *De Gen ad Litt* 12.33.63 [401/14]). Apparently hell is not a permanent state, for Augustine, until the common passage of all creatures from time into eternity.

Augustine frequently insists, however, that not all the dead are capable of receiving God's mercy through the prayers and meritorious actions of the Church done in their name. "These things clearly profit the dead," he observes in *Serm* 172.2, "but only those who so lived before their death that these things could be useful to them after death. For those who have left

their bodies without 'the faith that works through love' (Gal 5.6), and without its sacraments, receive acts of such piety from their relatives in vain . . . No new merits are won for the dead, when their relatives do some good work for them, but only complementary merits are added to what they have previously achieved. And nothing is achieved unless they so lived while on earth that these works should be of help to them when they had ceased to live here." Augustine makes this point still more clearly in *Enchiridion* 29.110 [423/24]: "Such acts are of advantage to those who during their life have deserved that such acts should be of advantage to them. For there is a certain manner of living, neither good enough to dispense with the need for these acts after death, nor bad enough to preclude their being of advantage to it after death; and there is a manner of living which is so established in goodness as to dispense with the need for them, as again there is one so established in evil as to be incapable of benefiting even from these when it has passed on from this life."²³ Clearly, neither proven saints nor hardened criminals are in a position to be helped by prayers or to receive God's forgiveness after death. And it is only because she is ignorant of any particular person's true standing before God that the Church prays for all the dead, just as she prays for all the living (cf. *De Civ Dei* 21.24 [425/26]).

It has long been debated, then, whether Augustine presents, in his writings, a doctrine of temporary, remedial suffering after death substantially corresponding to the later Latin doctrine of purgatory.²⁴ Although, as we have seen, he often affirms that some sinners are only punished within history, not eternally, and that the prayers of their fellow Christians are effective in moving God to pardon their offenses, Augustine never presents this temporal punishment as being carried out in a distinctive "place," or as having, of itself, a healing or cleansing effect on the sinner. In fact, Augustine always seems hesitant to speak of punishment for sin as purgative or medicinal, presumably because he is contemptuous of the attempts of other "tender-hearted" Christians to see all punishment as purgative and therefore temporary (see below, and esp. *De Civ Dei* 21.17–27). Augustine's understanding of punishment is, in fact, wholly vindictive: God's truth and justice require that the creature who turns away from him, the one authentic source of its being, should suffer as a result (*Enarr in Ps* 44.18 [403]; *Serm* 19.2 [419]). Punishment is simply the natural, painful effect of sin (*Enarr in Ps* 7.16 [392]); "when God punishes sinners, he does not inflict an evil of his own on them, but sets them loose amid their own evils" (*Enarr in Ps* 5.10 [392]; cf. *Ctr Julianum* 5.16 [423]).²⁵ In *De Civ Dei* 21.13, however, he concedes that the suffering that results from sin may be called "purgative" if it leads the sinner to a change of heart: "We profess that in this mortal life punishments are not purgative, if they are inflicted on those whose life does not improve or even grows worse as a result, but they

are purgative for those who are corrected by their discipline. But all other punishments," he continues, "whether temporal or eternal, as each person is treated by divine providence, are inflicted either for past sins or for sins in which the person being afflicted still lives . . ."

Augustine is even reluctant to apply I Cor 3.10–15, the biblical *locus classicus* for belief in a temporary, purgative "fire of judgment," to the punishment of sinners after death. In at least two passages, he identifies the "fire" Paul refers to here as the pain and sadness involved in detaching ourselves from the "love of temporal things," in order to make Christ our true "foundation" (*Enarr in Ps* 80.21 [403]; *De Fide et Operibus* 16.28 [413]).²⁶ In a few later works, however, Augustine is willing at least to allow the legitimacy of speaking of some kinds of punishment for sin after death as expiatory and purgative, and for that reason as aptly represented by the image of fire (see, for instance, *Quaest in Heptateuchum* 6 [Joshua] 9.2 [420]; *Enchir* 18.69 [423/24]). In *De Civ Dei* 21.26 [426], Augustine uses the language of I Cor 3.10–15 to present the theory some earlier writers (doubtless including Ambrose) have espoused, of a "fire of transitory suffering" through which all the dead must pass, between death and the moment of resurrection. The just, according to this theory, will not feel any burning from the fire, but those whose life and loves in this world were made from a mixture of base "straw" and more precious materials will have their "worldliness, which may be pardonable if damnation is at stake," burned away. Augustine's judgment on such an hypothesis is cautiously affirmative: "I do not reject it, because perhaps it is true." But where and how this "fire of judgment" is to be experienced is, in Augustine's eyes, less clear: "whether there only [i.e., between death and resurrection] or here as well as there, or here and not there." It may, he suggests, include the very experience of "the death of the flesh," which is itself a punishment resulting from original sin; and it seems appropriate, too, to apply it to the persecutions that every Christian, in one way or another, experiences. Surely it will include the tribulations the Church will suffer at the end of the world.

Because it stands as the dividing-line between time and eternity, between humanity's age of growth and change and its age of fulfillment, the resurrection of the dead is, for Augustine, the one genuinely eschatological event. Expectation of a resurrection is "the distinctive faith of Christians" (*Serm* 241.1 [405–10]; cf. *Serm* 214.12 [391]), the hope that marks off the followers of Christ from "the wise among the pagans" (*ibid.*). "Our hope is the resurrection of the dead," he insists; "our faith is the resurrection of the dead. It is also our love, which the preaching of 'things not yet seen' (Hebr 11.1) inflames and arouses by longing . . . If faith in the resurrection of the dead is taken away, all Christian doctrine perishes . . . If the dead do not rise, we have no hope of a future life; but if the dead do rise, there *will* be a future

life" (*Serm* 361.2 [410/11]). If we ask ourselves what Christ has promised us, he remarks in a sermon on the Psalms, and find that it is only the "happiness of this age," we have every right to grumble, since this age is a time of endless change and disappointment. "What happiness did he promise you? What but in the resurrection of the dead?" (*Enarr in Ps* 36.1.9 [403]).

Although he continued, through his life, to accept the indestructibility of the human soul as a philosophically evident truth, Augustine laid less and less stress on the theological importance of this immortality as his thought matured. So in his early treatise *De Immortalitate Animae* [387], Augustine borrowed heavily from Neoplatonic psychological theories²⁷ to prove that the soul is immortal. His argument follows two lines: that the soul, unlike the body, has experience of eternal and immutable truth, and therefore, by the principle that like can only be known be like, must be eternal and immutable in its own essence (1-6.11); and that the soul, which gives being to the body (7.12-10.17), must have the source of its being either in itself or in the supreme, self-existent Good, neither of which will allow it to cease to be (11.18-15.24). In subsequent works, Augustine took a more explicitly Christian approach, arguing to the soul's immortality either from its being made in the image of its creator (*De Quantitate Animae* 2.3 [387/88]) or from the natural desire for beatitude that the creator has implanted in it, a yearning which requires unending existence if it is not to end in frustration (*De Trinitate* 14.8.11 [417/18]). In *De Civ Dei* 13.2 [417/18], however, Augustine points out that this natural immortality is itself of rather limited value, since the soul still experiences a kind of death if it is abandoned by God because of its sin.

Augustine was convinced, as I have already said, that the rewards of the good and the punishments of the wicked after death are only a partial anticipation of what they will be when body and soul are eternally reunited at the end of history (cf. *De Civ Dei* 13.19 [417/18]). So the souls of the departed just "look forward with patient longing for the resurrection of their bodies" (*De Civ Dei* 13.20), and are hindered from enjoying the full vision of God by their "natural appetite for managing the body" (*De Gen ad Litt* 12.35.68 [c. 414]).

The starting-point of Augustine's hope for the resurrection of the dead is unquestionably not philosophical speculation, but the news of the resurrection of Jesus. It is only in their own rising from the dead that humans will be, in the fullest sense, "conformed to the image of the Son" of God (*De Trin* 14.18.24 [417/18]; cf. Rom 8.29). So the whole aim of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances was "that we might believe in the resurrection of the dead" (*Serm* 243.3 [408/409]). Christ's "Pasch," his "passage" (*transit-*

us) to the Father, had as its purpose to prepare for his disciples "dwelling-places in the Kingdom of heaven, which he will give them in the resurrection of the dead" (*Quaest in Hept* 2 [Exodus] 154.1). And just as the gospel accounts stress the corporeality of Jesus' risen body, and its identity with the body in which he preached and underwent death, so Augustine is at pains to oppose any interpretation of the Christian hope that would turn to allegory the promise that our bodies will rise again (see, e.g., *Ep* 147.22.51 [413]).

Christian teaching, he insists, is that "the saints, in the resurrection, will possess the identical bodies in which they labored here on earth" (*De Civ Dei* 13.19 [417/18]; cf. *Serm* 256.2 [418]); as God is the creator of both our souls and our bodies, so he will be the restorer of both (*Serm* 277.3 [413]). It is an essential part of Christian faith that "this visible flesh will rise again" (*De Fide et Symbolo* 10.23 [393]). The contempt for the body that leads to a denial of the resurrection is either Manichean dualism (so *De Agone Christiano* 32.34 [397]) or the "worldly philosophy" of the Platonists and their over-enthusiastic Christian supporters (*Serm* 277.3; cf. the anti-Platonist apologetic in *De Civ Dei* 13.16ff. [417/18]; 21.2f.; 22.26 [425/26]; *Serm* 241 [405/10]). Responding to the ascetic pagan, Manichee or Christian who proclaims, in late classical style, "I am not flesh but spirit; I groan in my prison, and when these bonds and fetters have been dissolved I depart in freedom," Augustine cites I Cor 15, and proclaims as the Christian answer: "I do not put off the flesh forever; I put it aside for a time" (*Serm* 256.2 [418]).

Following this same chapter of Paul, however, Augustine repeatedly emphasizes that the risen body will be a "spiritual body." In a few early works, alluding to I Cor 15.50 ("Flesh and blood will not inherit the Kingdom of God"), he explains that "at the moment of its spiritual transformation [the body] will no longer be flesh and blood, but simply a body" (*De Fide et Symbolo* 10.24 [393]; cf. *De Agone Christiano* 32.34 [397]). In *Retractationes* 1.16 and 2.29 [426/27], however, Augustine modifies this interpretation, taking "flesh and blood" in the Pauline passage to mean either an immoderate love of the "works" of the flesh, or the flesh's present corruptibility. So, in his mature works, he interprets the term "spiritual body" as referring first to the incorruptibility of the risen body (*Enchir* 23.9.1 [423/24]; *De Civ Dei* 22.21 [426]), and secondly to its perfect subjection to the human spirit (*ibid.*; also *Serm* 242.8.11 [405/10]; *De Civ Dei* 13.20 [417/18]). The conflict between the inner and outer person, between the ideals of the "spirit" and the desires of the "flesh," which characterize the human situation in this present age, will be overcome in the resurrection; "we shall have a body, but it will no longer be a burden since it will no longer be corruptible" (*De Civ Dei* 14.3 [418/19]). Reunited with the bodies for

which they have longed since death, and perfectly integrated with them in desire and in action, souls will then be perfectly content (*De Civ Dei* 22.26 [426]).

In a number of his mature works, Augustine also deals with the objections raised by opponents of the Christian hope for resurrection to what seem to be the absurd implications of the doctrine; in the process, he sketches out a concrete picture of how he imagines the resurrected body, which was to exercise great influence on Thomas Aquinas and later Latin scholasticism (see especially *Serm* 242–43 [408/409]; *Enchir* 23.84–93 [423/24]; *De Civ Dei* 22.12–21 [426]). Following the tradition of most of his Patristic forbears, both Eastern and Western, Augustine clearly understands the process of resurrection quite literally as a reassembling of all the particles of matter that originally belonged to each individual. Appealing, like all apologists for the resurrection since Athenagoras and Tertullian, to the omnipotence of God, Augustine also argues from analogies in everyday experience that heavy, earthy bodies can be suspended in a lighter, airy medium, such as heaven must be (*Serm* 242.5ff.). Those who have died as infants or small children will receive additional matter, in order to rise in the size which they would have reached, had they lived to maturity (*Serm* 242.3; *Enchir* 23.85; *De Civ Dei* 22.14f.).²⁸ Parts of the body that have been discarded during life in the interest of appearance, such as hair or nails, will not necessarily be reclaimed in the same form (*Enchir* 23.89; *De Civ Dei* 22.19), nor will present disfigurements of size and shape be restored as they now exist (*Enchir* 23.87, 90; *De Civ Dei* 22.19); harmony and proportion will determine the reshaping of our present, distinctive form (*ibid.*). Matter that has been shared, in the course of time, by more than one person – human flesh eaten by cannibals, for instance, or by animals that are then eaten by other humans – will be restored to its original owner (*Enchir* 23.88; *De Civ Dei* 22.20). All the organs of the present body will be restored in ideal form, even though many of them will not be used (*Serm* 243.4, 7f.). Even the sexual identity of men and women will be preserved, free from its present connection with shame and passion (*De Civ Dei* 22.17). Infused with the quickness and universal intentionality of the mind, the risen body will possess “a wondrous ease of movement, a wondrous lightness” (*Serm* 242.8.11; cf. *Serm* 277.12.12 [413]), and the “inner” life of the mind will be so fully integrated with the body that each person will know everyone else thoroughly, even his or her inmost thoughts (*Serm* 243.5f.).

Augustine’s insistence on the material reality of the risen body is undoubtedly derived, in large part, from his understanding of the resurrection as utter transformation: the beginning of a new phase for created existence in all its aspects, the threshold between time and eternity. The blessed existence promised us is existence in the “land of the living. Nothing

begins and grows there; whatever is there, is in the same way and is so forever” (*Serm* 45.4 [408/11]). To pass into this new, changeless mode of life presupposes death in this historical order, the complete end of this temporal existence and the inauguration of a new, incorruptible mode of being.²⁹ The present form of the material world will also “pass away in a conflagration of earthly fire,” and so will be purged of its “corruptible qualities”; in the end, “the world, remade into something better, will be rightly adapted to human beings who also have been remade, in their flesh, into something better” (*De Civ Dei* 20.16 [425/26]).³⁰ The new cosmos will not simply be a repetition of the old, a setting in which spirits may once again fall and be purged of their sin, he insists against the reported theories of the Origenists (*Ad Orosium contra Priscillianistas et Origenistas* 8.10 [415]). Rather, both we and our world will be so changed that “wherever we turn our eyes we shall, with the clearest accuracy, see God present everywhere and controlling all, even material, things, through the bodies we shall have and through those we shall see” (*De Civ Dei* 22.29 [426]).

In many passages throughout his works, in fact, Augustine stresses the direct contemplative vision of God as the very heart of the eternal beatitude of the saints (e.g., *Enarr in Ps* 26.2.9 [411/12]; *Enarr in Ps* 43.5 [412]; *Serm* 362.29.30–30.31 [410/11]; *Ep* 130.14.27 (c. 412)).³¹ A question that long exercised him, however, was whether after the resurrection the blessed will “see God face to face” with the eyes of their transformed bodies, or will still see him only in the internal, metaphorical sense of “seeing with the heart.” In *Ep* 92 [408], Augustine scornfully rejects as *dementia* the notion that human beings will ever be able to see the essence of God with their bodily eyes, in this world or in eternity, since that would imply God is localized and corporeal. In several later treatises on the same subject (*Epp* 147 [413], 148 [413] and 162 [414]; *Serm* 277.13–19 [413]), his tone is more conciliatory, but his conclusions are much the same: it has been promised that “the clean of heart shall see God,” but the safest interpretation of this promise is to take it as referring to the kind of spiritual “vision” by which we now “see” invisible realities (*Ep* 147.37; 148.3.11). In these works, Augustine does not openly reject the hypothesis that the transformed, spiritual body of the resurrection may also be able to see God in some way, but feels it is, at best, an unresolved question (*Ep* 147.48f.; 148.5.18; *Serm* 277.19). In the final book of *De Civitate Dei* [426], however, while still conceding that philosophical considerations weigh against the possibility of a corporeal vision of God, Augustine suggests that Scripture encourages the believer to take a more daring view, and to hope that as our eyes now “see” life in other bodies, simply by looking at them, so the eyes of the spiritual body will be able to “see” God directly, in their own way: as present in all the material elements of the transformed universe, and as enlivening them by

his rule (*De Civ Dei* 22.29). Whether sensory in any corporeal way, or simply an intuition of the spirit, the vision of God will be the basis for union with him (*Ep* 147.37 [413]), the cause of the “unspeakable joy” in which, “in a certain way, the human mind dies and becomes divine, and is inebriated with the riches of God’s house” (*Enarr in Ps* 35.14 [412]).³²

Augustine does not suggest, however, that the blessed will simply contemplate God passively for all eternity. Heaven will have a kind of activity all its own, perfectly compatible with eternal rest: the activity of praise (e.g., *Enarr in Ps* 85.24 [412]). “Then we shall see best,” he insists in *Serm* 362.30.31 [410/11], “because we shall be supremely at leisure. When, after all, are we fully at leisure, except when these times of labor, these times of the hardships in which we are now ensnared, have passed? . . . We will be at leisure, then, and we will see God as he is, and when we see him we shall praise him. And this will be the life of the saints, the activity of those at rest: we shall praise without ceasing.” In a body reconstituted in perfect harmony and grace, “every fiber and organ will play its part in praising God” (*De Civ Dei* 22.30 [426]). So Augustine often speaks of the joys of eternity in liturgical terms: “all our activity will be ‘Amen’ and ‘Alleluia’” (*Serm* 362.28.29 [410/11]; cf. *Serm* 243.9 [408/409]; *Enarr in Ps* 85.11 [412]), as we celebrate the consecration of God’s everlasting temple (*De Civ Dei* 15.19 [418/19]; cf. *Serm* 337.2 [412]). Heaven will also mean the gift of new qualities and characteristics to the human frame: a share in the eternity of God’s own substance (*Enarr in Ps* 101, *Serm* 2.10f. [395]);³³ a freedom that is beyond the power of human nature alone but given to those who are *participes Dei*, freedom so great as to exclude even the possibility of sin (*De Civ Dei* 22.30 [426]); a healing of our corrupted human natures so that they will be fully integrated and fully subject to God (*De Civ Dei* 19.21 [425/26]); a peace that is the “tranquillity of order,” reigning within each individual and marking all our relationships (*De Civ Dei* 19.13), a peace that is both our ultimate happiness and our highest good (*De Civ Dei* 19.27).

In many passages, Augustine summarizes his hope for eternal beatitude by affirming that those humans who are saved will be “the equals of the angels,” with whom they will comprise a single heavenly community (e.g., *Serm* 303.2 [425/30]; *Ep* 148.2.8 [413]; *Ep* 187.5.16 [417]; *Enchir* 9.29 [423/24]).³⁴ The *societas angelorum*, in fact, is one of the “eternal rewards” he frequently lists when depicting the details of Christian fulfillment (*Serm* 19.5 [419]; *Serm* 80.7 [c. 410]; *Serm* 252.6 [396]; *Serm* 337.4; *Enarr in Ps* 119.6 [412]; *De Gen ad Litt* 7.25.36; 11.18.24 [401/15]; *Hom in I Jo* 9.10 [414?]; *De Adulterinis Coniugiis* 2.8.7 [419/20]; *Ep* 102.2.15 [c. 409]). In a few late passages, Augustine even speculates that God has determined to save some members of the fallen human race in order to make up the

original number of the angels, which had been depleted by their own “revolt from God” (*Enchir* 9.29 [423/24]; *De Civ Dei* 22.1 [426]). Together, the faithful angels and those humans who have been transformed by the grace of Christ will form an eternal community, “one common City of God” (*De Civ Dei* 22.29; cf. 12.9).

This emphasis on eternal fellowship with the angels as a central feature of human beatitude reveals the essentially ecclesial, social character of salvation as Augustine conceives it. So he speaks at length of those who adhere to their creator as the “City of God,” an image that would have no meaning “if the life of the saints were not social” (*De Civ Dei* 19.5 [425/26]). The resurrection of human bodies will mean that “the Church will be perfected in its angelic fullness” (*De Consensu Evangelistarum* 2.75.145 [400]). Even though there will be many different levels of happiness and glory in the eternal city, there will be no envy or discontent among its citizens (*De Civ Dei* 22.30 [426]); all will be joined in the peace that is the heavenly city’s most basic structural characteristic, a peace that Augustine twice defines as “the perfectly ordered and harmonious common life (*societas*) of those who enjoy God and one another in God” (*De Civ Dei* 19.13, 17). “Who does not long for that city,” he asks in *Enarr in Ps* 84.10 [after 410], “where no friend leaves and no enemy enters, where no one tries or disturbs us, no one divides the people of God, no one wearies God’s Church in the service of the devil? . . . We will have God as our common sight (*spectaculum*), we will have God as our common possession, we will have God as our common peace.” The fulfillment of the present life of Christian faith and struggle is not simply the salvation of individuals, but the unity in everlasting love of the body of Christ, “and the end will be the one Christ, loving himself” (*Hom in I Jo* 10.3 [414?]).³⁵

Corresponding to this emphasis on the social nature of salvation is Augustine’s insistence that damnation, too, is meted out justly by God to the human race as a whole, because the whole race is “rooted” in Adam, who freely turned away from God (see, e.g., *De Civ Dei* 21.12 [425/26]; *De Correptione et Gratia* 10.28 [426]). If some individuals are chosen out of this condemned “clay,” this *massa perditionis*, and formed into “chosen vessels” for salvation – a pottery-metaphor drawn from Rom 9.21ff. – such an act of election reveals God’s gratuitous mercy, over and above his justice, with a clarity that would not be achieved if he had simply decided to save the whole condemned race together (see, e.g., *Ep* 186.4.12 [417]; *Ep* 190.3.9–12 [418]; *Ep* 194.2.4f. [418]; *Serm* 26.12.13 [418]; *Ctr Duas Epistulas Pelagianorum* 2.7.13 [422/23]; *Enchir* 25.99 [423/24]; *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum* 8.16 [429]; *De Dono Perseverantiae* 14.35 [429]). So Augustine occasionally applies to human society Tyconius’ metaphor of the *corpus*

diaboli, whose head is Satan, as the foil against which the much smaller community of grace, the *corpus Christi*, can more clearly be seen (*De Gen ad Litt* 11.24.31 [401/15]; *Enarr in Ps* 139.7 [414]).

Augustine is characteristically cautious, however, in attempting to describe the punishments of the damned, generally refusing to go beyond what he takes to be the clear statements of Scripture. He does, it is true, make some conjectures about the nature of damnation. In his early treatise *De Vera Religione* (391), he speculates that the "severe penalties" that await sinners after this life consist mainly in their being deprived of the light of reason and so of their being unable to confess God (52.101). In several passages, too, he advances the opinion that there will be various types and degrees of punishment in Gehenna, suited to the particular crimes of the damned (*De Vera Religione* 54.104f.; *De baptismo* 4.19 [401]; *Ep* 102.4 [c. 409]; *De Civ Dei* 21.16 [425/26]; *Enchir* 23.93 [423/24]). In most of his works, however, Augustine is content simply to use scriptural images for eternal punishment, and to interpret them literally. Relying especially on Is 66.24 and its dependent passage in the New Testament, Mark 9.42–48, he insists that the "fire" of Gehenna, and probably also its "worm that never dies," are material realities that will torture the risen bodies of the damned (*De Civ Dei* 21.9 [425/26]). The misery and pain experienced in Gehenna, both corporeal and psychological, will continue without end.³⁶ Augustine recognizes that to speak of this pain as eternal will appear self-contradictory to his pagan contemporaries, since classical anthropology generally identified suffering with corruption, and thus assumed that both must end in the destruction of the subject (*De Civ Dei* 21.2). So he develops an elaborate apologetic for the paradox of eternal suffering, arguing from parallel phenomena in nature (*ibid.*, 4–7) and appealing to the unknown properties of the risen body (*ibid.*, 3, 8) to support the credibility of the "miracle" of eternal punishment (*ibid.*, 9). Like the physical sufferings we undergo in this life, the "fire" and "worm" of Gehenna will also afflict the souls of the damned, who will be "tortured by fruitless repentance" (*ibid.*). Although it is not clear how they will be affected, Scripture (Matt 25.41) assures us that "the devil and his angels" will also suffer from these same material torments (*ibid.*, 10). In his mature works, Augustine is, understandably, hesitant to hazard a guess as to "what kind of fire this is and in what part of the world or of creation it will be" (*De Civ Dei* 20.16 [425/26]), though he had earlier accepted the traditional belief that the place of torment is under the earth (*De Gen ad Litt* 12.33.62, 12.34.66 [401/15]). He also refuses to speculate on what the damned will look like (*Enchir* 23.92 [423/24]). The most that can be said is that their existence will more truly be termed death than life: "for to be continually in torment is eternal death, not any kind of life . . . It is called 'second death' (Apoc 20.6, 14) and 'death,' and no one there dies. I

should say, more adequately and better, no one there lives. For to live in sorrows is not to live at all" (*Serm* 306.5.5; cf. *De Civ Dei* 6.12 [416]; 19.28 [425/26]).

For Augustine, in fact, the aspect of damnation that needed the most elaborate defense was not its materiality but its eternity: not only before skeptical pagans but also before some of "our tender-hearted [fellow Christians]" (*De Civ Dei* 21.17 [425/26]), who refused to believe that a merciful God could punish anyone without end (cf. *Enchir* 29.112 [423/24]). Augustine devotes some ten chapters (17–27) in *De Civitate Dei* 21 to refuting the various forms of this misplaced trust in God's mercy. Some Christians, like Origen, genuinely hope in universal salvation, believing that all rational creatures, including the devils, will ultimately "be associated with the holy angels" (17). Others believe God will at least pardon every human sinner (18), and still others see his mercy as assured at least to all the baptized (19), or to all Catholics (20), or to Catholics who persevere in the Church until death (21), or to Catholics who have been generous and forgiving towards their neighbors (22). To each of these groups, Augustine offers the same response: "Scripture, infallible Scripture" makes it clear that all sinners, angelic or human, when they have missed the opportunity for conversion, are to be consigned to a punishment that is literally everlasting (23). Thus the Church has never prayed for those whom it knows to be condemned (24). Even if they have been baptized or have shared in the Catholic communion (25), even if they have been merciful to others (27), sinners will be condemned "unless they cease from these actions and have charity, 'which does no wrong' (I Cor 13.4)" (27; cf. *Enarr in Ps* 80.20 [403]). The only concession Augustine is willing to make to those who argue that God's mercy extends even to the most hardened sinners is to allow "that he will let them suffer less horrible punishments than what they deserve" (*De Civ Dei* 21.24), and to conjecture that he may, from time to time, "give some ease or intermission to their torments" (*Enchir* 29.112 [423/24]).

Both the tragic agony of damnation and the blessedness of eternal reward are, for Augustine, far more than simply expressions of God's just response to the value of human action. They represent, respectively, the failure and the success of the rational creature's long quest in time for his true and stable "homeland," for the blessedness of finding his own true identity in "adhering to God" and loving all other creatures in God. The human creature who has found the "way" to his homeland in Jesus Christ and in his Church will rejoice, on arrival there, like the Prodigal Son when he returns to his Father (e.g., *Ep* 55.17f. [400]; *Serm Mai* 94.5; *Conf* 1.18; 2.2; 3.6; 4.15f.; 8.3 [397–400]), or like the pilgrim who discovers that his journey through distant lands has only shown him how much better his homeland

is (*Enarr in Ps 119.6* [412]; cf. *Conf 5.8*). For the “place” of beatitude – eternity in God’s presence – is truly the “home” of the human creature, in Augustine’s view; the Sabbath of rest and the “eighth day” of our new creation are but the restoration of our creaturely existence before the fall, the origin that we dimly remember, and whose lingering presence in our memories gives us hope (*Enarr in Ps 37.9–12* [395]; *Conf 12.10.10*; *12.11.13*; *12.15.21*; *12.16.23* [397/400]; *Ep 55.17f.* [400]).³⁷ “Then we shall return to the beginning,” Augustine says of the eschaton in an early sermon for the octave day of Easter. “Just as when these seven days are over, the eighth is like the first, so after the seven periods of this passing age are finished and all is accomplished, we will return to that immortality and that blessedness from which humanity fell” (*Serm 259.2* [393]). In later works he would be less outspokenly cyclic in his conception of the progress of time, but his underlying conviction remained the same: that human salvation is the achievement, by God’s gracious gift, of the union with God for which alone humanity was made, and that the only genuine meaning of human history is to be found in God’s eternity.

Contemporaries of Augustine

The distinctive character of Augustine’s eschatological hopes can be seen all the more clearly when they are contrasted with the speculations of some of his friends.

(a) One document that seems to come from contemporary Africa, and that may have been written by Augustine’s fellow bishop and correspondent Evodius of Uzala, about 412, is the *Consultationes Zacchaei et Apollonii*, an apologetic exposition of Christian faith composed in the long-familiar form of a dialogue between a pagan and a Christian.³⁸ The document seems to reflect questions raised by educated Roman pagans about the plausibility of Christian faith in the aftermath of the sack of Rome in 410 (cf. Augustine, *Ep 135* and *137*).

Unlike Augustine, the author is convinced by the violence and disasters of his time that the end of the world is very near. Christ came, the Christian Zacchaeus assures his friend, not in the middle of human history but near its end, lest abuses and forgetfulness corrupt, through long ages of further waiting, the faith he left with his followers (1.21). Although the exact time of Christ’s return is known only to God, the signs predicted in the gospels are clearly being fulfilled in contemporary history: wars and violence are everywhere, and the gospel is indeed being preached throughout the world (3.8). With the coming of Elijah, all will be accomplished (*ibid.*). Then the Antichrist will appear, “the devil raging about in a human person” (3.7); he

will try to reestablish the Jewish law and will lead many pagans to pay him divine honors (*ibid.*). After three and one-half years of great turmoil and suffering for the Church, Christ will come as judge and put an end to the confusion. The period left before the end, therefore, is short, but Zacchaeus asks pointedly: “Consider, I beg you, whether the age can bear this for long?”

Zacchaeus strongly denies his pagan friend’s suggestion that souls, after death, are “purged in ethereal fire” and so return, free of all corrupt materiality, to the divine substance out of which they were formed (1.22). Human souls and bodies are alike created by God, whose substance is in no need of purgation; when the end of the world comes, the bodies of the dead will be raised and reunited to their souls, in order to be judged and to receive the reward or punishment their deeds deserve (*ibid.*; cf. 3.9). To the familiar question of how consumed and dissipated particles of matter can be reassembled after so many years, the author gives the familiar answer that God, who has created all things, can certainly recreate them as well (1.23). And since matter never perishes completely, it will be possible for God to reconstitute the very same bodies human beings now possess (1.24).

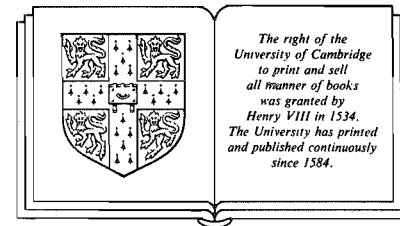
After the resurrection and judgment, “a new heaven and a fresh earth will be revealed,” where the just will “dwell in the splendor of the sun” and be rewarded with the continual vision of God (1.26). The author’s description of this new world seems to be drawn from the millenarian tradition, although he does not mention the millennial Kingdom explicitly. It will be a land of eternal spring, enriched with every kind of fragrance and visual beauty (1.26), a world that will put to shame all the most precious luxuries of this present age (3.9). Armed both with this promise of reward and with his apocalyptic interpretation of the calamities of his age, Zacchaeus urges his pagan friend to accept the Christian message while there is still time. “We are forced now by the nearness of the end and the terror of the judgment ahead of us to abandon our idols and worship the true deity; in this short space between the first coming of Christ, which we know, and the second coming, which we look forward to, we should not let his commandments be forgotten, or despair that the happiness promised us will come” (1.21).

(b) Another friend and contemporary of Augustine, who also offered an apologetic response to the challenges of contemporary paganism, was the Spanish presbyter Paulus Orosius. Orosius is chiefly known to posterity for his *Historia adversus Paganos*, a chronicle in seven books whose express purpose was to provide, at Augustine’s suggestion, further documentation for the argument in the third book of *De Civitate Dei* that the lot of humanity has improved rather than declined since the advent of the Christian faith.

THE HOPE OF THE
EARLY CHURCH

A HANDBOOK OF
PATRISTIC
ESCHATOLOGY

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*In memory of my brother John
(1936–1986)
who taught me, by example,
both scholarship and hope.*

“Fleant ergo, qui spem resurrectionis habere non possunt . . .”
(Ambrose, *De Excessu Fratris* 1.70)

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PREFACE

This book, like its subject, has had a long and somewhat tortuous history. I was asked, in the early 1970s, to contribute the section on Patristic eschatology to the multi-volume *Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte* being published in Germany by Herder-Verlag. When, after a long delay due to doctoral studies, I began research on the project in earnest, I discovered that despite the breadth and obvious importance of the subject, and despite the enormous mass of scholarly literature on eschatological themes in various Patristic authors and periods, no single large-scale survey exists of the whole development of ancient Christian eschatological hope. The most ambitious treatment of the subject to date, Ludwig Atzberger's *Geschichte der altchristlichen Eschatologie innerhalb der vornicänischen Zeit* (Freiburg 1896), stops, as its title indicates, with the Council of Nicaea (325), and is not only obsolete in its information but hopelessly narrow in the range and organization of material it considers. Other, much briefer surveys are available in various languages, but most of them do not exceed article or chapter length, most stop at the time of the Council of Chalcedon (451) or earlier, and all restrict their concern to Latin and Greek Patristic literature.

As I worked on my own survey, I became more and more convinced of the need for something much more comprehensive: a broad sketch, such as this, of the various aspects of early Christian hope for the future of individual, Church and planet; a study directly based on all available Patristic texts that deal with eschatological themes, starting with the writings of the apostolic period and reaching to the authors usually thought of as "the last of the Fathers," Gregory the Great and John Damascene; and one which would include not only Latin and Greek material, but the Syriac, Coptic and Armenian traditions as well. This book is a first attempt to fill that need.

As a historical theologian – a student of the Christian tradition, who is convinced of its living value for faith today – I truly believe that the hope of people in our own age can be nourished and inflamed by an informed acquaintance with the hopes of earlier generations. I am certainly aware of