

Our rapid voyage through the centuries has yielded episodes of glorious achievement, needless sacrifice, ignominious failure, contemptible behaviour and intercultural interaction that need much more study. In the last few decades the serious study of religion has emerged from under the rock that has hidden it in a worldly and secular-minded age. I offer one striking example: in the general article entitled 'India' in the 1991 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, of 164 double-column pages dealing with a country that has been said to be 'drunk with religion' for millennia, less than one column is devoted to 'Religions' of all kinds and only 12 lines to Christianity there. Such studies ought to yield much more knowledge and understanding of this interaction in the near future, and make more difficult generalizations that try to indict one culture for all that ails a given region and exculpate another from responsibility for those ills. A Nigerian friend of mine puts it, 'God has always been with man', and if man has been unworthy of that company, he has also demonstrated the capacity for sacrifice, service and love to which his faith summons him.

AVIHU ZAKAI AND ANYA MALI

Time, History and Eschatology: Ecclesiastical History from Eusebius to Augustine*

'The story of the development of man's consciousness of history,' wrote Herbert Butterfield, 'involves a large-scale aspect of the whole evolution of his experience. It is a major part of his attempt to adjust himself to the world in which his life is set.'¹ This comment serves as a useful point of departure for this study of the development of a unique mode of historical thought in early Christianity and how it evolved in light of the church's attempts to adjust to the changing historical circumstances of the world in which it found itself. The reference is to 'ecclesiastical history', or 'church history'—a unique mode of Christian historical thought, or philosophy of salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*)—the unfolding story of God's divine plan of salvation and redemption, or the whole of Christ's divine economy of salvation upon earth.² By examining this Christian sense

1. H. Butterfield, *The Origins of History*, London 1981, p. 14.

2. Today, indeed, the most common, ordinary and regular usage of the term 'ecclesiastical history', or 'church history', refers to the history of churches as institutions. The reader will immediately recognize, however, that throughout this study our usage of the term 'ecclesiastical history' refers more particularly to a coherent, well-defined Christian philosophy of salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*). The reason is that, throughout the history of Christianity, this usage of ecclesiastical history as a unique mode of historical thought, or as a unique Christian ideology of salvation history, was common in the writings of church historians. Therefore, in using the term 'ecclesiastical history', or 'church history', to denote a unique Christian philosophy and ideology of history, we follow, for example, the writings of such famous early church historians as Eusebius Pamphili, *Historia Ecclesiastica* (c.323); Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God* (c.413–c.426); Socrates Scholasticus (c.380–c.450), *Ecclesiastical History*; Sozomen (early fifth century), *Ecclesiastical History*; Theodoret of Cyrillus (c.393–c.466), *Ecclesiastical History*; as well as later ecclesiastical historians such as John Bale, *The Image of Both Churches* (1550), John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1563), Thomas Brightman, *A Revelation of the Revelation* (1609), Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), and Johnathan Edwards, *History of the Work of Redemption* (c.1750).

Among the studies concerned with Christian views of history, see Rudolf Bultmann, *History and Eschatology*, Edinburgh 1975; C. A. Patrides, *The Phoenix and the Ladder: The Rise and Decline of the Christian View of History*, Berkeley 1964, and *The Grand Design of God: The Literary Form of the Christian View of History*, London 1972; K. Lowith, *Meaning in History*, Chicago 1957; H. Butterfield, *Christianity and History*, London 1960, and *The Origins of History*, London 1981; C. T. McIntire, *God, History, and the Historians*, New York 1977, and *History and Historical Understanding*, McIntire and Ronald A. Wells (eds), Grand Rapids 1984; Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, trans. S. C.

*We are grateful to Professor Yehoshua Arieli of the Hebrew University, Ms Elizabeth Spiller of Harvard University, and to the anonymous readers for *The Journal of Religious History*, for their valuable comments and insights in preparing this essay for publication. Avihu Zakai is Lecturer in History, and Anya Mali is Lecturer in Comparative Religion, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

of time and view of history, the aim of this study is to analyse some major changes introduced by the Fathers of the Church from Eusebius to Augustine into the Christian philosophy of history, especially concerning the apocalyptic and eschatological dimensions of time and history and the nature and meaning of the millennium.

From its earliest days the church was 'conscious of its existence as a theological entity' and also acutely aware of the changing historical circumstances of the world in which it found itself.³ Early Christian thinkers, both those who wrote history *per se*, such as Eusebius, or those who grappled with its theological significance, such as Augustine, developed their views and assumptions regarding the process of history in light of their Christian consciousness and interpreted the passage of time and events in eschatological and apocalyptic terms. They were guided by a well-defined and coherent Christian theology of history, according to which the church is considered to be the main agent in the process of history, and the church is understood mainly in relation to the sacred course and progress of the church, or God's chosen people, in the world. Early church writers acknowledged and maintained the distinction between sacred history (the inspired account of divine providence) and secular history (the history of humankind told by human beings), but the contingencies of Christian belief—its spiritual points of reference and eschatological impulse—meant that there was inevitably always an implicit overlapping of the sacred and secular spheres in their understanding of history. If early Christian chronographers concerned themselves with secular history—that is, the account of events in the world—they did so primarily in order to provide Christians 'with a framework, derived from the redemptive history on which their faith was founded, into which they could fit other historical information as it became familiar to them'.⁴

In contrast to secular history which deals with peoples, societies and institutions during time, sacred history deals with the unfolding of God's grand plan of salvation, or with God's saving work and his mighty redemptive acts in the world. Indeed, on this view, all history, secular and sacred, displays the working of divine providence. Yet, it is only sacred, ecclesiastical history which tells what meaning historical events have in the overall divine scheme of things and which elucidates the church's role in this process. The foundation of sacred, redemptive history is therefore

Guthrie and C. A. M. Hall, Philadelphia 1963; R. Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress*, New York 1980; M. I. Finley, *The Use and Abuse of History*, New York 1975; A. Richardson, *History Sacred and Profane*, London 1964; S. Pollard, *The Idea of Progress*, Harmondsworth 1968; E. L. Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia*, Gloucester 1972, and *Redeemer Nation*, Chicago 1968; F. C. Haber, *The Age of the World*, Baltimore 1959; A. Braunthal, *Salvation and the Perfect Society: The Eternal Quest*, Amherst 1979; A. Momigliano, *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography*, Oxford 1977, and *On Pagans Jews and Christians*, Middletown CT 1987; R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Oxford 1961; N. Cohen, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, Oxford 1981; J. G. Gunnell, *Political Philosophy and Time*, Middletown 1968.

3. J. Daniélou, *A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea*, 3 vols, trans. J. D. Baker, Vol. 1, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, London 1964, p. 293.

4. R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine*, Cambridge 1970, pp. 3–4.

the biblical narratives of God's saving work among his chosen people, the promise made in the Old Testament and its fulfilment in the New, as well as the prophetic revelations concerning Christ's Second Coming and the transformation of the world into the Kingdom of God. As Robert Markus has noted, it is the quality of the narrative rather than of the events that marks the 'constitutive difference' between sacred and secular history.⁵ 'Sacred' history enjoys its privileged label not so much because it deals with actions of a divine origin, but rather because the narrative is deemed to be divinely inspired. In like fashion, ecclesiastical history is 'ecclesiastical' not merely because it recounts a series of past events related to the church, but more importantly because it is an interpretive narrative which highlights the meaning of the church in the overall context of redemptive history. In other words, the constitutive feature of ecclesiastical history is the importance it imparts to the church as an idea and not just as a collective entity.

In its regular, general usage, 'ecclesiastical' history purports to present an objective account of events and developments in the history of the church, and to that extent is akin to other examples of historical writing such as *Res Gestae* and related chronicles of the secular history of mankind.⁶ But inherent in such an account is the conception of the church as the theological prism for understanding the evolution and meaning of human history. This conception is best rendered by the term ecclesiastical history and it is important to note from the outset that, in using this term throughout the following study, we are referring not so much to the history of churches as institutions—which is its more common meaning—but more particularly to a unique mode of historical thought rooted in the Christian doctrine of salvation. Thus, while ecclesiastical history is not commonly used as a *terminus technicus* relating to the whole of human history—both sacred and secular—it would be remiss to ignore the philosophical moorings and other-worldly sense of the concept in early Christianity. Indeed, by its very nature as the history of the followers of Christ, the son of God, church history must be seen not just as an objective chronicling of the church's development in the world, but also as the supreme instance

5. Markus, *Saeculum*, p. 14.

6. On the rise and development of ecclesiastical history, see O. Cullman, *Salvation in History*, London 1967; Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, Philadelphia 1983, *Faith and Understanding*, Philadelphia 1987, and *The New Testament and Mythology*, Philadelphia 1989; *The Development of Historiography*, M. A. Fitzsimmons and others (eds), New York 1967; H. E. Barnes, *A History of Historical Writing*, New York 1962; J. W. Thompson, *The History of Historical Writings*, 2 vols, New York 1942; James T. Shotwell, *The History of History*, New York 1939; D. Hay, *Annalists and Historians*, London 1977; Ferdinand Christian Baur, *On the Writing of Church History*, trans. and edited by Peter C. Hodgson, New York 1968; Herbert Butterfield, 'The Establishment of Christian Historiography', in *The Origins of History*; A. Momigliano, 'Pagan and Christian Historiography in the Fourth Century A.D.', in *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography* Oxford 1977; John J. Dawson, *The Dynamics of World History*, New York 1956; Reginald L. Poole, *Chronicles and Annals*, Oxford 1926; Langdon Gilkey, *Maker of Heaven and Earth: A Study of the Christian Doctrine of Creation*, New York 1959; *Church Historians*, Peter Guilday (ed.), New York 1926; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Mystery of Continuity: Time and History, Memory and Eternity in the Thought of Saint Augustine*, Charlottesville 1986, *The Vindication of Tradition*, San Francisco 1987, and *The Excellent Empire: The Fall of Rome and the Triumph of the Church*, San Francisco 1987; Markus, *Saeculum*, Cambridge 1970, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, Cambridge 1990, and *From Augustine to Gregory the Great*, London 1983.

of a distinctive, specifically Christian mode of historical thought which takes the sacred sphere for granted. What follows, then, is essentially a study not so much of historiography but of historical thought or consciousness; and in thus linking ecclesiastical history with the Christian ideology of salvation history, we are following the example of Eusebius Pamphili, 'the father of Church history', and of ecclesiastical historians who perpetuated this usage in later centuries.⁷ It may be useful now to discuss some of the basic features of ecclesiastical history as we understand the term.

Ecclesiastical history constituted an important mode of historical thought from the time of Christianity's rise to predominance in the Western world during the fourth century, right up until 'the secularization of theological teleology of history' announced by the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.⁸ 'Any history written on Christian principles,' wrote R. G. Collingwood, 'will be of necessity universal, providential, apocalyptic, and periodized.'⁹ Ecclesiastical history is a good illustration of this claim. It is universal history inasmuch as the church claims universal validity, for its teaching appeals to the whole world and not merely to one nation, and it deals with the origins of human beings, with God's universal promise and with the end of history. And although ecclesiastical history considers the Church to be the central agency in the providential drama of human redemption, it does not have a particularistic centre such as race, nation or people. Ecclesiastical history is providential history because it espouses the belief that the whole universe is a theocratic one ruled directly and immediately by divine providence; hence, history is God's domain, a space of time regulated and controlled by God, as a play preordained and directed by divine providence. It is periodized history because it divides history into past, present and future according to the divine scheme which God has unveiled to humankind. These epochs in God's all-embracing divine providence include the period before Christ, that after his First Coming and the glorious period which is to unfold after the anticipated Second Coming. Finally, ecclesiastical history is apocalyptic history, dealing with prophetic, redemptive revelations, based on the apocalyptic visions in the New Testament—especially the Book of Revelation—and firmly anticipating the fulfilment of divine promise. Because it progresses in a continuum from historical revelation to the future unveiled glory, from the promise made in Christ's First Coming to its realization in his Second Coming, each age came to perceive this apocalyptic and eschatological dimension of history differently.

At the centre of ecclesiastical—or salvation—history stands Christ—for some obvious reasons. First of all, it is through faith in Christ and membership in the church—which is his symbolic body on earth—that the believer can secure salvation. Moreover, since Christ's First Coming is perceived as a historical revelation, all of history prior to his arrival

7. R. A. Markus, 'Church History and Early Church Historians' and 'Bede and the Tradition of Ecclesiastical Historiography', in *From Augustine to Gregory the Great, and The End of Ancient Christianity*.

8. Bultmann, *History and Eschatology*, p. 65.

9. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 49.

becomes suffused with meaning, and all of subsequent history is seen to bear his mark until the anticipated Second Coming—an event which will bring about the end of time and history. With the First Coming, Christ entered time and history as the Son of God; his Second Coming is thus seen to be inseparable from occurrences within time or developments in the history of the church. The church, as the spiritual body of Christ, inevitably assumes a central place in the sacred history of salvation since, until the Second Coming, history is determined by the revelation of Christ as embodied in the church and its faith. Furthermore, because the process of secular history has a real significance in ecclesiastical history, history in fact comes to be seen as a divine epic stretching back in time to the act of Creation, and pointing forward to a magnificent future event, namely the transformation of the world into the Kingdom of God and his son Christ. For, throughout all the vicissitudes of time and history since the Fall, God's divine providence selects, elects and predestines certain people to restore humanity and reconcile it with its Creator. Accordingly, in this divine epic of redemption the expulsion from Eden marks the beginning of providential history.

Within the context of ecclesiastical history the church is thus the necessary, perhaps even the main, instrument of salvation without which there is no grace and without which Christ's Second Coming is unimaginable. In this divine economy of salvation—that is, the historical process of human salvation in which man sins against God and God is willing to redeem him—the history of the Church (hence the term 'ecclesiastical history' or 'church history') has a most prominent place. The church ultimately came to deny any possibility of salvation outside itself (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*), and thus transformed itself into the primary means by which human beings, alienated from God, could become reconciled with him. Ecclesiastical history is rooted in the notions of human sin and God's saving grace; for without sin and redemption, history—as the space of time from the Fall to Christ's Second Coming—has no meaning.

Ecclesiastical history, then, is essentially the story of the attempts to bring the fallen world to reconciliation with God, with the church as the main agency in the salvation drama. It is a history that deals with the struggles, persecutions and triumphs of the church during time; and, indeed, in Christian historiography this focus became the very theme of history itself. However, within ecclesiastical history, earthly events are significant only insofar as they relate to the sacred history of the church. To be more precise, in this Christian scenario of time and history, past and present events obtain their full meaning not only in relation to the history of the church, but mainly and more fundamentally in relation to the eschatological future and the decisive apocalyptic event which is to transpire at the end of time. The final revelation of God at the close of history, the culminating event in which God's glory is to be proclaimed along with the salvation of the elect, is the goal of ecclesiastical history.

The relationship between sacred, prophetic revelation and the goal of history is the main concern of ecclesiastical history. For on this view, God's

grand scheme, directing, conditioning and controlling each and every event in history, has been unfolding from the beginning of time. History, therefore, is linear and teleological. The task of ecclesiastical history is to both record and illuminate the sacred course of events in the history of salvation. Thus, within this Christian ideology and philosophy of history the past is seen to be replete with symbols and prophecies pointing to the glorious future, the millennium, the Kingdom of God or the heavenly City of God—the New Jerusalem.

Matters touching upon the relationship between prophecy and history obviously have far-reaching consequences for humanity and the meaning of history, and it is not surprising that the apocalyptic and eschatological dimensions of the goal of history and the end of time created a deep strain in ecclesiastical history, particularly in the church's early years. A pressing question, for example, was whether the apocalyptic hope concerning Christ's Second Coming and his millennial role with his saints should be situated within time and history or beyond it.¹⁰ For many centuries (even outside the time frame which directly concerns us) ecclesiastical historians have grappled with this question, not only because of its theological implications, but also because of its crucial social, religious and political significance. As we turn now to examine the intricate relationship between ecclesiastical history, apocalypse and eschatology, we shall see that with the rise of Christianity—and especially in the fourth century—the eschatological and apocalyptic dimension came to be undermined. As the church gradually established a firmer presence in the world, and as Christians began to realize that the Second Coming was less imminent than they had thought, the notions of cosmic eschatology and of an imminent apocalyptic revelation were banished from the historical horizon to some vague future, outside the boundaries of time and history. In general terms, Western Christianity came to adopt the view of those who rejected all literal interpretation of the Apocalypse, or of salvation, in favour of the allegorical.

The establishment of ecclesiastical history as a unique mode of historical

10. Christian historiography, of course, is only one important example of attitudes toward time and history. On the general issue of humanity's sense of time and vision of history, see *Man and Time: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, Joseph Campbell (ed.), Princeton 1983; G. Van Der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestations*, Princeton 1986; *The Voices of Time*, J. T. Fraser (ed.), Amherst 1981; Donald J. Wilcox, *The Measure of Times Past*, Chicago 1987; G. J. Whitrow, *Time in History: Views of Time from Prehistory to the Present Day*, Oxford 1989; Anthony F. Aveni, *Empire of Time: Calendars, Clocks, and Cultures*, New York 1989; Reginald L. Poole, *Studies in Chronology and History*, Oxford 1934; Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, Oxford 1967; John G. Gunnell, *Political Philosophy and Time*, Chicago 1987; Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time*, Chicago 1982; Richard J. Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time*, Cambridge MA 1972; J. L. Russell, 'Time in Christian Thought', in *The Voices of Time*, J. T. Fraser (ed.); Gilles Quispel, 'Time and History in Patristic Christianity', in *Man and Time*, J. Campbell (ed.).

On the relationship between history and apocalypse, see Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages*, New York 1970, and 'Early Apocalypticism', in *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature*, C. A. Patrides and Y. Wittreich (eds), Ithaca 1984; Klaus Koch, *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic*, London 1972; *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature*, C. A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich (eds); Thomas J. J. Altizer, *History as Apocalypse*, New York 1985; Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St John's Apocalypse*, New York 1986.

thought coincided with the transformation of Christianity from a persecuted sect into the official church and faith of the Roman Empire. Eusebius Pamphili (c.260 – c.340), bishop of Caesarea, is rightly considered 'the Father of Church History',¹¹ or ecclesiastical history, because of his celebrated *Ecclesiastical History*. The principal source on Christian history from the Apostolic age up until his own day, its final complete edition appearing in 323 CE, this work is an excellent example of church history proper, that is, a chronicling of developments within the Early Church; but it also sets forth the Christian *Weltanschauung*, or assumptions regarding the sacred beginnings and goal of history.

'It is my purpose', wrote Eusebius, 'to hand down a written account of the successions of the holy Apostles as well as the times extending from our Saviour to ourselves; the number of those who were [the Church's] illustrious guides and leaders', of those who 'in each generation by word of mouth or by writings served as ambassadors of the word of God', along with 'the names, the number and the times' of those who out of the 'extremity of error' were 'mercilessly ravaging the flock of Christ like ravaging wolves', of those who waged war 'against the divine Word; and the character of those who . . . have passed through the contest of blood and tortures in His behalf; and, in addition to this, the martyrdoms of our own times and with them all the gracious and kindly succor of our Savior'.¹² In these words we see not only the clear intention to write an historical account of concrete deeds and developments in the church's first centuries, that is, a 'church history' in the more limited sense of the word, but also the implied divine parameters of the historical process and the tacit meaning of ecclesiastical history as a mode of historical thought—one which later ecclesiastical historians were to adopt.

Eusebius was not without predecessors in his stated endeavour to recount the progress of the 'ambassadors of the Word of God' in the world. Theophilus of Antioch (later second century), Julius Africanus (c.150 – c.240) and Hippolytus of Rome (c.170 – c.236) were among those who had written earlier about the church in relation to world history. But their writing—which survives only in fragmented form—largely reflects the limited self-understanding of the early Christians who perceived the Church of Christ 'not as a historical but as an eschatological phenomenon'.¹³ Eusebius' importance lies not only in the fact that he defined ecclesiastical history proper—even taking credit for being 'the first to enter upon this undertaking, attempting as it were, to travel a deserted and untrodden road' (I, p. 36)—but also, and more importantly, because he gave Christianity meaning within history.

Writing at the time of the conversion of Constantine the Great to Christianity and the subsequent rise of that faith to dominance in the Roman Empire, Eusebius considered this act to be of the highest historical and providential magnitude, 'a divine act, establishing Christianity in the

11. Markus, 'Church History and Early Church Historians', p. 10.

12. Eusebius Pamphili, *Ecclesiastical History*, in *The Fathers of the Church*, trans. R. J. Deferrari, Vol. 1, Washington 1981, pp. 35 – 6. All further references in the text are to this edition.

13. Bullmann, *History and Eschatology*, pp. 57, 37.

citadel of government decisions as a means to its further extension' and 'an essential step in the diffusion of the gospel throughout the empire'.¹⁴ 'For Constantine', Eusebius wrote, 'God was Friend, Protector, and Guardian', and it was for this reason that Constantine and his sons 'cleansed the world of hatred for God' (II, pp. 282, 288). Out of the persecution and suffering which had characterized Christianity from the time of Christ up until the time of Constantine, Christianity had now risen up and finally been acknowledged as the faith of the empire. Eusebius closely identified this historical development and the advance of the church with God's redemptive scheme of history. The conversion of Constantine was for Eusebius a supreme illustration of God's wondrous providence, and in composing his work he seized on this notion of providential and redemptive intervention to imbue Christianity with a new significance in terms of world history. In his view, 'the Christians were a nation' which had 'a transcendental origin'; for standing behind them 'there was Christ', and Christian history, dealing as it did with the Christians' struggles upon earth against Christ's enemies and the Devil lurking behind the scene, was seen to differ radically from earthly, profane history. Eusebius accordingly begins his ecclesiastical history with an account of 'the first dispensation of God in our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ' (I, pp. 36–7), and proceeds to consolidate all the events from Christ to his own time 'in an historical narrative'.¹⁵

Eusebius' endeavour to consolidate ecclesiastical history—an endeavour based on Christian faith—presents a model for providential history, highlighting the view that from the beginning of time God's grand providential design has been unfolding within history. Indeed, the 'Constantine revolution' had not only forced Christians to face the issue of 'Christian orientation within a newly Christianized Roman Empire', it also obliged 'Christianity to reassess itself in relation to its own past'. And with the end of the 'age of martyrs and of a persecuted church in a hostile empire', Christians increasingly began the most crucial process of reconstructing the history of the church upon earth. Such was the case with Eusebius who 'gave the Constantine church a new past in his *Ecclesiastical History*'.¹⁶ No wonder, then, that in this divine Christian epic, the advent of the first Christian emperor stirred up Eusebius' messianic hope in 'a day bright and radiant, with never a cloud casting a shadow upon it, [shining] down with rays of heavenly light upon the churches of Christ throughout the whole world' (II, p. 241). Yet it is noteworthy that the notions of cosmic eschatology and of apocalyptic salvation, or the pursuit of the millennium, are noticeably absent from Eusebius' writings. This absence can be explained by Eusebius' belief that with the conversion of Constantine providential history had reached its zenith and that Christianity would soon spread throughout the world. He

14. H. Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Harmondsworth 1982, p. 71.

15. Momigliano, 'Pagan and Christian Historiography', p. 116.

16. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, p. 137; 'Preface' to *From Augustine to Gregory the Great*, pp. i–ii; 'The Problem of Self-definition: From Sect to Church', *From Augustine to Gregory the Great*, p. 14; and 'Church History and Early Church Historians', *From Augustine to Gregory the Great*, p. 1.

indeed saw the conversion of Constantine as the culmination of providential history and associated the Roman Empire with the realization of God's redemptive plan in history. Nevertheless, Eusebius considered this Christian success to be an earthly triumph which, though achieved 'with the aid of God, the universal King and the son of God' (II, p. 287), was clearly not the climax of salvation history in which the all-time drama of human salvation and redemption would be resolved. In short, while demonstrating by means of ecclesiastical history that Christians 'became history-conscious at this time' because they saw 'events reach a great climax',¹⁷ he pointedly discredited millennial dreams and refused to see the church's earthly victory as a portent of eschatological salvation, or as the last and final act in the all-time mystery of sacred, providential history.

The fact that at this turning-point in Christian history, with the conversion of Constantine and the transformation of Christianity into the faith of the Roman Empire, the apocalyptic dimension—which had once given power and meaning to the persecuted church—was no longer deemed a central feature of Christian expectation, is of tremendous consequence. This, indeed, was a pivotal moment in the history of Christianity, when 'the Church of the Catacombs became the Church of the Empire'¹⁸; hand-in-hand with this transformation came a crucial theological metamorphosis: the belief in the literal realization of the millennium was cast out of mainstream Christianity as the notions of eschatology and apocalypse were pushed beyond history and time. Among the clearest exponents of this de-eschatological trend was Eusebius.

Eusebius was a staunch opponent of chiliasm (from the Greek word for 'a thousand') or millenarianism, the belief (based on Revelation xx.1–5) in a special future era of salvation history which would be inaugurated upon Christ's return and unfold under his reign for a thousand years before the final consummation. This period, so it was believed, would last a thousand years (hence 'millennium'), and would be the period of the glorious rule of Christ and his saints on earth. Eusebius argued against the chiliastic insistence that 'there will be a period of about a thousand years after the resurrection of the dead, when the kingdom of Christ will be established on this earth in material form', claiming that this view was an error of the chiliasts who had made a 'perverse reading of the account of the Apostles, not realizing that these were expressed by them mystically in figures' (I, p. 205). By rejecting the literal interpretation of the Apocalypse in favour of an allegorical reading, and by claiming that the Apocalypse could not 'be understood according to the literal sense' (II, pp. 131–2), Eusebius in effect denied the possibility of historical eschatological revelation. His views were the antithesis of the chiliastic or millenarian belief—one held by many Christians of his day—that at the end of time Christ will return in all his splendour to gather together the just, to annihilate hostile powers and to establish a glorious kingdom

17. Butterfield, *The Origins of History*, p. 177; Markus, 'The Roman Empire in Early Christian Historiography', in *From Augustine to Gregory the Great*.

18. T. Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, Harmondsworth 1963, p. 26.

on earth in which he himself will rule as its king, and in which all the just, including the saints recalled to life, will take part.

Eusebius' rejection of chiliasm or millenarianism left its indelible mark on ecclesiastical history, which was now deemed to be devoid of any apocalyptic dimension. Eusebius, 'the father of Church History', however, did not stand alone. Rather, the position he took gave witness to an increasing tendency among Christians of his day to place *revelation*, as the defined goal of history, beyond time. Other major opponents of millenarianism during the ante-Nicene period were Gaius, or Caius (early third century), who rejected both the Gospel and the Revelation of St John; Origen (c.185 – c.254); and Dionysius the Great (d. c.264), a pupil of Origen and bishop of Alexandria. These writers 'rejected the millenarian doctrine *in toto*, either impugning the canonicity of the *Revelation*, like Gaius [Gaius], or condemning literal interpretation of the text, like Origen . . . seeing the millennium as the time of the Church'.¹⁹

Origen, like Eusebius, had rejected the literal meaning of the millennium as an awaited earthly, historical phenomenon, perceiving it instead as a spiritual event transpiring within the believer's soul. Starting with the presupposition that 'the Kingdom of God is within us', Origen asserted that 'he who prays for the coming of the kingdom of God rightly prays that the kingdom of God might be established, and bear fruit and be perfect in himself'. In the same vein he argued that 'Christ reigns with the Father in the soul that is perfect', concluding that 'by the kingdom of God . . . is meant the happy enthronement of reason and the rule of the wise counsels; and by the "kingdom" of Christ, the saving words that reach those who hear, and the accomplished works of justice and other virtues'.²⁰

Origen's perspective, and that of Eusebius elucidated above, reveal both men as the protagonists of the defence of the church against such 'heterodoxy' as millenarianism, and as the proponents of what soon came to be considered as the orthodox interpretation of Scripture. Indeed their repudiation of chiliasm in the ante-Nicene period eventually came to be the accepted view of the church from that time until the Protestant Reformation.²¹

These adversaries of chiliasm in the ante-Nicene period found themselves up against a rich Christian tradition which stressed the belief in a literal interpretation of the Apocalypse. Among the leading proponents of chiliastic doctrine in these first centuries were Papias of Hierapolis (c.60 – c.130); Justin Martyr (c.100 – c.165); Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (c.130 – c.200), and Tertullian (c.160 – c.225). The views and writings of

19. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, p. 378.

20. Origen, 'Prayer', in *Prayer, Exhortation to Martyrdom*, trans. J. J. O'Meara, *Ancient Christian Writers*, New York 1954, pp. 84 – 5.

21. In clear contrast to Eusebius and Origen, the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century radically transformed the Christian view of history and sense of time by incorporating the sacred prophetic revelations of the Apocalypse within time and history. This important change in the Christian philosophy of history is discussed in A. Zakai, 'Reformation, History and Eschatology in English Protestantism', *History and Theory*, Vol. XXVI, No. 3, October 1987, and in *Exile and Kingdom: History and Apocalypse in the Puritan Migration to America*, Cambridge 1992, ch. 1, 'The Creation of Sacred Time: Religious Reformation, History and Eschatology'.

these advocates of chiliasm illuminate the Christian theology of millenarianism which consists of three elements: the Christian themes of the *parousia* (Second Coming), the resurrection of the saints and the reign of Christ. In addition, there is the allusion to the period of a thousand years. According to Eusebius, for example, Papias believed that there will be a certain period of a thousand years after the resurrection from the dead, 'when the kingdom of Christ will be established on this earth in material form' (I, p. 205). In the same vein Tertullian expressed his eschatological visions and millennial expectations, declaring:

We confess that a kingdom is promised to us upon the earth, before [the entry into] heaven and in a different state of existence; but after the resurrection, and for a period of a thousand years in the divinely-built city of Jerusalem, a kingdom come down from heaven.²²

It may be useful to say a few words about the various strands of millenarian thinking in the Early Church, the roots of which are to be found in early Jewish Christian theology. Those thinkers who were writing from within the Asiatic tradition of millenarianism elaborated the basic teaching of Christ's expected return and the establishment of his kingdom in terms of Jewish apocalyptic symbolism, and imbued this anticipated reign with features of Old Testament prophecy. Many of these features were in fact related to the world to come, and the transfer of prophecies dealing with nature to the millenarian domain: for example, the close linking of the earthly reign of Christ with the idea of renewal of the earth is particularly pronounced in the writing of Papias of Hierapolis. Such transferrals are also a good illustration of the so-called mythical bent of millenarianism which was deemed unacceptable by later theologians. The literal interpretation of biblical prophecy, which identified the triumph of the chosen people with the millennium, was particularly abhorrent to the Hellenic Christians who responded to such notions by rejecting millenarianism altogether.²³

The Syrian – Egyptian type or trend of millenarianism was characterized by astrological impulses which led to eschatological calculations of the cosmic week as the basis for the seven millennia, according to which five millennia had already passed, the sixth was in progress and the seventh – the anticipated day of rest or repose of the saints – was still awaited. Both Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch and one of the Christian Apologists (later second century), and Hippolytus of Rome (c.170 – c.236) represent this trend. Theophilus was one of the first Christian writers to take an interest in the theology of history and he had a marked influence on Irenaeus, whose millenarian thinking synthesizes the two types mentioned above.²⁴

What is important about the various strains of millenarian thought is that their representatives believed in the immediacy of apocalyptic

22. Tertullian of Carthage, *Against Marcion*, cited in Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, p. 389.

23. Daniélou, *Theology*, pp. 382 – 3, 378; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, 5 vols.; Vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, Chicago 1971, pp. 97 – 132.

24. Daniélou, *Theology*, pp. 400 – 3.

revelation and maintained that Christ's Second Coming, like his first, would take the form of an earthly revelation occurring within time and history. Justin Martyr, prominent among the supporters of the literal interpretation of the millennium, when asked whether he 'really believe[d] that this place Jerusalem shall be rebuilt', and whether he did 'actually expect' that 'Christians will one day congregate there to live joyfully with Christ', declared his response in plain words: 'I, with many others, feel that such an event will take place'. While he clearly admits that 'there are many pure and pious Christians who do not share our opinion', he insists that he and 'every other completely orthodox Christian, feel certain that there will be a resurrection of the flesh, followed by a thousand years in the rebuilt, embellished, and enlarged city of Jerusalem'. Justin found a further buttress for his millenarian views in the Book of Revelation, to which he refers in the following manner: 'a man among us named John, one of Christ's Apostles, received a revelation and foretold that the followers of Christ would dwell in Jerusalem for a thousand years, and that afterward the universal and, in short, everlasting resurrection and judgment would take place'.²⁵ Justin and others all identified the millennium with the times of the anticipated messianic kingdom, a position strongly challenged by their opponents in the post-Nicene period.

The existence of these two conflicting traditions within Christianity during the ante-Nicene period, concerning the interpretation of Scripture—the literal interpretation as embraced by the advocates of chiliasm, and the allegorical explanation as expounded by their opponents—is perhaps the key to understanding the history of the Church in the post-Nicene period right up to the Protestant Reformation. For, with the conversion of Constantine and the success of Christianity in the Roman Empire, the vivid chiliastic belief came increasingly to be regarded in Christianity as heterodox, even heretical. Millenarianism was foreign to the Church of Rome where, as Daniélou has noted, the focus was centred on the establishment of the church, the completion of which was seen as the 'condition for the coming of the heavenly kingdom'; this caused a significant shift in Christian thinking, for now the messianic age came to be 'identified with the times of the Church, which themselves constitute the seventh millennium'.²⁶ The challenge to chiliasm—a challenge which constituted a growing trend in the post-Nicene period—is no more apparent than in the resolutions embodied in what came to be known as the Nicene Creed, which reflected the church's attempt to consolidate its position as the official religion of the Roman Empire by formulating a uniform expression of orthodox Christian faith.

25. Saint Justin Martyr, 'Dialogue with Trypho', in *Writings of Saint Justin Martyr*, T. B. Falls (ed.), *The Fathers of the Church*, Washington 1977, pp. 275–8.

For the prevalence of vivid eschatological expectations and the pursuit of the millennium as an earthly, historical phenomenon among other writers at this period see St Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. J. P. Smith, *Ancient Christian Writers*, New York 1952, p. 100; Tertullian, *Treatises on Marriage and Remarriage*, trans. W. P. Le Saint, *Ancient Christian Writers*, New York 1951, pp. 91–2.

26. Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, p. 404. On the important issue of the 'eclipse of the apocalyptic vision' and the decline of 'millenarian hope' in this period, see Pelikan, *Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, pp. 121–32.

The Nicene Creed, or as it is sometimes known, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, incorporated the resolutions of two important ecclesiastical councils, the Council of Nicaea (325) and the Council of Constantinople (381). From the time of the Council of Chalcedon (451) onward, it was acknowledged as the Church's accepted creed.²⁷ The first ecumenical council, at Nicaea, was summoned by the emperor Constantine in order to secure uniformity and unity within the church of the empire and to affirm the belief in the true divinity of Jesus against the Arians who denied it. The Council of Constantinople added the doctrine of the Trinity and later, at Chalcedon, the doctrine of the two united and unchangeable natures of Christ was adopted.

What is important to note is that these councils clearly reflected the eschatological thrust of Christian thinking and adhered to the belief in Christ's Second Coming, the Last Judgment, the Resurrection of the Dead and the Kingdom of Christ. The Nicene or Constantinople Creed expresses the firm belief in 'one Lord Jesus Christ . . . who for us men and because of our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became human'. Confident that Christ 'will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead', and that 'His Kingdom shall have no end', those reciting the creed concluded with the anticipatory phrase 'we look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come'.²⁸ What was missing from the Nicene Creed, however,

was the Millenarianism of Paul and the Book of Revelation: the belief that when Christ returned to earth, his would be a fighting realm in which Christ would reign until he had destroyed all his enemies . . . or in which Christ would reign for one thousand years, after which there would be a last battle with the enemies of the kingdom until the New Jerusalem would come down out of heaven (Rev. 20).²⁹

These official resolutions of the councils of the church set in motion a fateful process which led to the exclusion of chiliasm from the orthodox Christian faith. Indeed, this was the 'de-eschatologization process', a gradual displacement of Christ's Second Coming from this world to the 'world to come'. More than anything else, the process of de-eschatologization which began with the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the empire signified the church's gradual abandonment of millennial expectations—or at least the denial of their relevance for the present or immediate future. A signal transformation had occurred in the Christian sense of time and vision of history; eschatology and apocalypse now stood outside the boundaries of history and so, in stark contrast with chiliastic teaching and millennial expectations, the entire culmination of the redemptive process was placed beyond time and history. By stressing

27. *Creeds of the Churches*, John H. Leith (ed.), Atlanta 1977, pp. 28–36; Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 4 vols, New York 1961, Vol. III, pp. 50–9, 94–104, 215–26; Pelikan, *Catholic Tradition*, pp. 201–2, 228–9, 263–6.

28. 'The Constantinopolitan Creed', *The Creeds of the Churches*, John H. Leith (ed.), pp. 31–3.

29. Braurnthal, *Salvation and the Perfect Society*, p. 147.

the belief that divine, prophetic revelation would be realized beyond time and history, this de-eschatologization process, or the gradual displacement of the eschatological revelation of Christ's Second Coming from this world to the 'world to come', irrevocably separated history from prophecy. No longer considered an intrinsic part of the historical process, eschatological revelation—now associated with an indefinite delay in Christ's Second Coming—receded into a realm outside the boundaries of history, or into some undefined distance. Thus, the fulfilment of sacred prophetic revelations, once considered to be an inextricable dimension of history itself, was now sought only outside the process of history. In other words, it was now felt that although historical events, such as Constantine's conversion to Christianity, might have an ultimate significance in the overall divine scheme of salvation history, their meaning or purpose was by no means knowable on the basis of revelation or decipherable in terms of biblical prophecies. No longer were Christians encouraged to believe that the millennium was upon them, that it hovered on the horizon or that it might be expected within the lifetime of certain generations.

Equally important with regard to the ebbing of the eschatological wave in Christian thought, and parallel to it, was the declaration of the Nicene Creed that the church is the exclusive instrument of salvation—*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. Thus, not only did chiliasm or millenarianism come to be regarded as heresy, but in the historical process of salvation, the church, as the body of Christ, now assumed an exclusive role, for it alone was invested with the means of salvation *upon earth*. The decline of eschatology was due primarily to the establishment of both the ecclesiastical structure of the church and its dogmatic norms during the third and the fourth centuries. Yet this decisive transformation involved the shift from 'the categories of cosmic drama to those of being, from the Revelation of St John the Divine to the creed of the Council of Nicaea'.³⁰ In this process the church surrendered the millenarian interpretation of the Apocalypse in favour of the view that the millennium referred to 'the time of the church' within the world.³¹ Thus, the eschatological and apocalyptic dimensions of the goal and meaning of history were surrendered in favour of 'the church's new affirmation of the place of universal history in the economy of salvation'.³²

Conclusive as it was, however, the process of de-eschatologization, which culminated in the formation of the Nicene Creed, could not lead to a blanket rejection within Christian thought of the eschatological sentiment and apocalyptic hopes expressed in the Pauline epistles and the Book of Revelation. Apart from the obvious reason that, as part of Scripture, these writings had been traditionally accepted as the work of divine authorship, it was also recognized that millenarianism, with its stress on the sense of immediacy of the realization of millennial dreams, had an undeniably powerful appeal and was embraced by many Christians. Millenarianism had existed from the church's first days and had managed

30. Pelikan, *Catholic Tradition*, p. 131.

31. Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, p. 378.

32. Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, p. 129.

more or less to escape the official censure of the church.³³ Such was the case with the first millennial and apocalyptic movement, Montanism, in the latter part of the second century. Those who embraced Montanism were firm adherents of the millenarian hope.

For a long time then, the church could not overlook the millenarian strain of thought, and in fact had to wrestle with the presence of millennial dreams within the framework of ecclesiastical history. In other words, Christian thought had to offer a plausible interpretation for eschatology and Apocalypse, an interpretation sufficiently meaningful to retain the vivid, prophetic visions of Scripture, while holding their loaded message in check so that chiliasm would not thwart the inroads being made by the church triumphant, as the head of the official religion of the empire. For one of the emphatic views of chiliasm or millenarianism is that eschatological salvation is not preordained by, nor exclusively associated with, the church; hence the grave threat which it posed to the church which had come to regard itself as the sole vehicle of salvation. Unable to deny the millenarian dream, Christian thinkers in the post-Nicene period sought a way to accommodate it within the confines of sacred, ecclesiastical history, or within the boundaries of the providential philosophy of salvation history. Obviously, the aim of the newly established church of the Roman Empire was to avoid lending any legitimacy to the millennial movements' tendency to seek salvation outside the boundaries of the institutions of the church itself.

Towards accomplishing this most critical task of keeping within the church the presence of eschatological visions and millennial expectations, while stripping away their revolutionary meaning in regard to the established church, the greatest contribution in terms of ecclesiastical history as a mode of historical thought was undoubtedly made by Augustine of Hippo.

Unlike Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, which totally rejected chiliasm, and unlike the Creed of Nicaea which sidestepped the millenarianism of St Paul and the Apocalypse, the church sought a way in which to accommodate millennial belief without undermining its own exclusive role in mediating divine grace. Another solution in fact existed, one which would allow the church to use eschatological and apocalyptic beliefs in order to consolidate its position within the world. This, however, required reformulating ecclesiastical history in such a way that the millennium would be presented as inextricably bound to the historical process as embodied in the history of the church. It is precisely this unique reformulation which was St Augustine's great achievement.

In his *City of God*, written between 413 and 426, Augustine elucidated the Christian philosophy of time, and particularly the church's unique role in providential history, in so skilful a manner that his views on this subject came to be identified with the essence of Christianity right up to the Protestant Reformation. *The City of God* is a well-articulated example of ecclesiastical history; but not in the sense of an account of concrete events concerning the church. Indeed, Augustine pointedly denies any

33. Pelikan, *Catholic Tradition*, pp. 124–6.

pretensions to historiography and even advises the reader to 'raise himself above' this kind of history. Rather, *The City of God* offers a set Christian view of history.³⁴ The church, which exists both for the City of God and for the Kingdom of Heaven, is the embodiment on earth of that which is to come in the next life and is now more than ever seen as the pivotal and indispensable player in providential history. Furthermore, ecclesiastical history, where the drama of sin and redemption is played out from the beginning to the end of time, is now held up as the sole source of meaning for events in this life. This was the major accomplishment of Augustine's *City of God*. In what follows we shall discuss Augustine's view of history, one which is determined by and inextricably intertwined with his understanding of the church, and also focus on his eschatological teaching, which came to be accepted doctrine in Christianity in subsequent generations.

The City of God was written in a totally different historical context than that of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*. While the latter composed his celebrated opus at the time of Constantine's conversion to Christianity and the rise of the church to prominence in the world, the former wrote under the shadow of a crucial event in the history of the world—the Sack of Rome. In his book, Augustine defends Christ and Christianity against charges that they were responsible for this great disaster of the Western world which occurred when, in August of the year 410, Alaric and the Goths sacked Rome, a city which had been free from the fear of attack for over 800 years. Living in this new and dramatic historical context, Augustine, in marked contrast to Eusebius, was obviously unable to confirm the optimistic belief that the triumph of Christianity would be realized in the process of history, or that the progress of history bears witness to the gradual yet inevitable triumph of the church all over the world. Augustine duly notes that in their attempt to explain an event of such terrifying magnitude, there were many in Rome who pointed an accusing finger at the 'Christian era' under whose influence their city had been for years, and held 'Christ responsible for the disasters which their city endured' (I. 1). After generations of success in the Roman Empire, Christians in his time were once again confronted by hostility and opposition in the world. Once again, therefore, they had to come to grips with the notion that this world was not theirs, for theirs was another kingdom.

In light of recent historical events, it became clear to Augustine that a reassessment or more nuanced expression of the relation between revelation and historical reflection was called for. The general interest in 'ecclesiastical history' as a mode of historical thought was already much in evidence by the fourth century, but Augustine's special interest lay in the exposition of the theological significance of the unfolding course of history, and in particular of the church's role therein.³⁵ Paulus Orosius,

34. As Pelikan notes, he 'explicitly disqualified himself' from being a 'writer of history'. See Pelikan, *The Mystery of Continuity*, p. 35.

35. Markus, *Soeculum*, p. 4, 'Church History and Early Church Historians', pp. 1–9, and 'The Roman Empire in Early Christian Historiography', pp. 343–50.

whose *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans* was composed at about the same time as *The City of God*, saw the writing of history largely as an exercise in apologetics, one guided by the dictates of sacred history. Hence his concern to set forth 'the desires and punishments of sinful men, the struggles of the world and the judgments of God, from the beginning of the world down to the present day . . . but separating Christian times, because of the greater presence of Christ's grace, from the former confusion of unbelief'.³⁶ Paulus, who had written his account at the behest of the 'most blessed Father Augustine', echoed the latter's view of the church as an alien sojourner in this world, and of the inherent dualism of the Christian condition, noting in simple terms: 'Among Romans . . . I am a Roman; among Christians, a Christian; among men, a man . . . I enjoy every land temporarily as my fatherland, because what is truly my fatherland and that which I love, is not completely on this earth'.³⁷

This was also the main theme of the series of sermons which Augustine preached following the Sack of Rome. 'Citizens of Jerusalem,' he called to his fellow Christians in Carthage, 'O God's own people, O Body of Christ, O high-born race of foreigners on earth . . . you do not belong here, you belong somewhere else.'³⁸ Not reconciliation with the world, but alienation from it, not a conquest but a permanent pilgrimage upon earth—this essentially was the business of the Christian in the world, an existential aspect of Christian life upon which Augustine constructed his *City of God*. In this great work the new expositor of ecclesiastical history no longer shows the world as the realm in which the church rises to dominance and glory within the course and progress of history, as Eusebius had done, but depicts it rather as the arena for the crucial contest between the church (the City of God) and the world (the earthly, profane city).³⁹

Firmly ensconced in the world and linked in their activities, the heavenly and the earthly cities are the locus for the unfolding of time, and the struggle between the two constitutes the essence of history which is to culminate in their disentanglement at the end of time and history, or at the Last Judgment. 'My task,' wrote Augustine, 'is to discuss . . . the rise, the development and the destined ends of the two cities, the earthly and the heavenly, the cities which we find, as I have said, interwoven, as it were, in this present transitory world, and mingled with one another' (XI. 1). A closer look at the precise nature and meaning of these two cities is the best starting point for our consideration of Augustine's grasp of 'ecclesiastical history'.

Augustine's understanding of the historical process, as one characterized by the intrinsic contest between the two cities from the beginning to the end of time, evolved from his earlier view of the church as composed of two sorts of people—a view which he now applied to history in general. Up to the writing of the *City of God*, writes Peter Brown, Augustine's

36. Paulus Orosius, *The Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, Washington 1964, p. 363.

37. Paulus Orosius, *The Seven Books of History*, p. 177.

38. P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, Berkeley 1969, pp. 313–14.

39. All references in the text are to the following edition: St Augustine, *City of God*, trans. J. O'Meara, Harmondsworth 1984.

'ideas on the two Cities had developed largely in relation to the human composition of the church',⁴⁰ an institution in which, according to Augustine, two types of people are to be found, good and evil, those destined for salvation and those who would not be saved, and from which the evil types would not be weeded out until the Day of Judgment:

I classify the human race into two branches: the one consists of those who live by human standards, the other of those who live according to God's will. I also call these two classes the two cities, speaking allegorically. By two cities I mean two societies of human beings, one of which is predestined to reign with God for all eternity, the other doomed to undergo eternal punishment with the devil. (XV. 1)

Thus, the dualism which Augustine perceived within the body of the church became the cornerstone of his historical interpretation. It rested on the claim that the entire historical process is signified by an inherent dualism between the two cities.

Augustine characterizes the two cities not only with regard to their final destiny, but also in terms of their mode of existence in this world. He has scathing words for the profane city: 'I cannot refrain from speaking about the city of this world, a city which aims at dominion, which holds nations in enslavement, but is itself dominated by that very lust of domination' (I, Preface). Over against this city he presents the City of God which both 'exists in this world of time, a stranger among the ungodly, living by faith' and resting 'in the security of its everlasting seat' (I, Preface). He makes the distinction in the following manner: 'God's City lives in this world's city, as far as its human element is concerned; but it lives there as an alien sojourner' (XVIII. 1). This dualism of the temporal and spiritual, sacred and profane, lies at the heart of Augustine's view of the existential condition of human life and, by extension, of the church itself. God, as the creator 'of both souls and bodies' determined that by definition, the church, which is the composite of his creatures, would be of this world but also be linked to the heavenly sphere by virtue of its soul (XII. 28). 'For nations have already filled the Church, and the clean and the unclean are contained as it were in the framework of the Church's unity, until the appointed end is reached' (XV. 27).

Only with the end of time and history would this dualism disappear and both cities finally be separated from one another. 'The two cities, the earthly and the Heavenly, which are mingled together from the beginning to the end of their history', are similar in that both 'alike enjoy the good things, or are afflicted with the adversities of the temporal state' (XVIII. 54); for 'just as both the cities started together, as they exist together among mankind, so in human history they have together experienced in their progress the vicissitudes of time' (XVIII. 1). On the other hand, however, each has 'a different faith, a different expectation, a different love'; and in the final scenario the two will be 'separated by the final judgment . . . [when] each receives her own end, of which there is no end' (XVIII. 54).

40. P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 316.

Together with and closely related to this dualism, which Augustine characterized as the essential feature of history and in light of which he attempted to interpret the entire historical process, he introduced an important notion concerning the dimension of time within which this dualism works itself out. According to Augustine, the space of time within which the struggle between the two cities is waged, and hence present history itself, is characterized by what might be called the dimension of 'realized eschatology': 'Jesus' ministry constituted the beginning of the millennium', and during the unfolding of the millennium his 'chief instrument' would be 'the Church'.⁴¹ Thus, from the First Coming of Christ, history became that realm of time within which the fulfilment of eschatology transpires. For according to Augustine, 'the Devil is bound throughout the period embraced by the Apocalypse, that is from the first coming of Christ to the end of the world, which will be Christ's second coming' (XX. 8). Between these two great apocalyptic and revelatory events occurs the millennium, a period which is indeed unfolding in history, or in Augustine's words: 'while the Devil is bound for a thousand years, the saints reign with Christ, also for a thousand years; which are without doubt to be taken in the same sense, and as denoting the same period, that is, the period beginning with Christ's first coming' (XX. 9). Furthermore, during this period of realized eschatology in which the millennium is already taking place within historical time, the church assumes its ultimate role in salvation history. According to Augustine, in the course of the millennium the church assumes the place of the Kingdom of Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, and in it Christ exercises his millennial reign alongside his saints. 'The Church even now', Augustine stressed time and again concerning his present age, 'is the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Heaven', and therefore 'the Church now begins to reign with Christ among the living and the dead' (XX. 9).

When Augustine set the start of the millennium at Christ's First Coming, defining it as the historical period which unfolds from that event to the Second Coming which would signal the final day of judgment, he stripped the millennium of its most revolutionary extrahistorical, apocalyptic dimensions and planted it firmly within the boundaries of time and history. The millennium of Augustine, however, was totally and radically different from that of the chiliasts or the millenarians, even though both stressed its historical, earthly and feasible aspect. While the chiliasts vividly anticipated the culmination of the historical process in Christ's Second Coming and his millennial rule with his saints upon earth, for Augustine that decisive moment in the history of salvation had already occurred with Christ's First Coming.

Augustine's assertion that the millennium had begun with Christ's First Coming enabled him to cleanse ecclesiastical history of the radical ideas that had given rise to revolutionary millennial expectations and eschatological visions. The millennium, argued Augustine, was already in progress within time and history, and was not some glorious period in the future which would be inaugurated by Christ's Second Coming.

41. Brauntal, *Salvation and the Perfect Society*, p. 151.

Augustine could discard the pursuit of the millennium from his ecclesiastical history, because he had made the millennium an integral part of the historical process. The chiliasts or millenarians, on the other hand, strongly adhered to the prophetic revelations of the Apocalypse; for them Christ's Second Coming had signified that most glorious moment in providential history in which the whole mystery of the history of salvation and redemption would be resolved.

The belief that there will be an earthly reign of the Messiah before the end of time and history is an integral part of Christian teaching which is indicated in the New Testament in I-II Thessalonians, I Corinthians and the Revelation of John. It expressed the belief about the *parousia*, or Christ's return to this world at the end of time to establish his Kingdom. Ultimately, millenarianism denotes the belief in cosmic eschatology and eschatological salvation—the view that there would be a glorious period at the end of salvation history and these last days would comprise the return of Christ, the resurrection of the saints, the general judgment and the inauguration of the New Creation.⁴² Therefore, according to chiliasm, the millennium would be signalled by a cataclysmic cosmic event that would unveil the whole course of redemptive history, while for Augustine the time of the millennium is already unfolding in the present and is therefore inextricable from the process of history itself.

The difference between Augustine and the chiliasts on this score is perhaps better illustrated by their respective views concerning the meaning and aim of history. Both sides discerned the redemptive activity of God in the historical process. Yet Augustine, as we have already noted, envisaged the course of history as a constant struggle between the two cities, from which—so divine revelation has assured—the City of God would emerge triumphant. The ultimate goal of the City of God, however, was to be found beyond history, after the eschatological day of judgment which signifies Christ's Second Coming. Since history, according to Augustine, was characterized by a profound dualism, the millennium itself—which he located within history—bore by definition the mark of historical struggles and contests, and thus indeed was very different from the glorious utopia envisaged by the millenarians, in which Christ and his saints would vanquish evil. Augustine believed that divine providence was concerned with salvation, not with history as such, and therefore felt that the intrinsic dualism characteristic of the historical process would be resolved only beyond time and history.

Chiliasm and millenarianism on the contrary stressed the belief that the meaning of history is to be found within history itself, with the advent and final triumph of Christ and his saints upon earth. Thus, in their pursuit of the millennium, they anticipated an apocalyptic event of terrific proportions which would inaugurate Christ's rule, and theirs, in the world. Time and again, Augustine attempted to refute this eschatological view of the millennium. Against all sorts of millenarians, materialists and spiritualists, he wrote: 'those people assert' that during the millennium the saints

42. Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, p. 377.

will spend their rest in the most unrestrained material feasts, in which there will be so much to eat and drink that not only will those supplies keep within no bounds of moderation but will also exceed the limits even of incredibility. But this can only be believed by materialists: and those with spiritual interest give the name 'Chiliasts' to the believers in this picture, a term which we can translate by a word derived from the equivalent Latin, 'Millenarians'. (XX. 7)

This chiliastic or millenarian vision of a tangible thousand-year period of the saints' rule upon earth was totally contradicted by Augustine's own version of a 'historical millennium'—a millennium, it should be noted, which is totally deprived of its most radical eschatological meaning and the revolutionary apocalyptic dimension as described in Scripture.

Thus, the solution which Augustine offered concerning the relation between history and prophecy was a vision of history since Christ's First Coming as the domain of eschatological realization. The millennium thereby became an integral element of the course of history and, as such, was deprived of its most unique character as the apocalyptic climax of redemptive history, becoming instead but one aspect of salvation history. This reflects an important theme of Augustine's ecclesiastical history: namely, that the time-span between Christ's Coming and the end of the world has no meaning in terms of sacred history; for, although world events may be part of the providential plan, we cannot seek or find their meaning in scriptural texts. As Markus notes, even the most earth-shaking world events could no longer be seen to have any meaning in salvation history:

In this long perspective—and nobody could say how long it might be—events could henceforth only be neutral, devoid of sacred significance. There was no room for further 'epoch making' events. The 'sacred history' of the last times was a blank, an open space between the Lord's two comings.⁴³

Accordingly, in Augustine's view, Christ's First Coming was not an apocalyptic event whose final realization will be signified by his Second Coming and his glorious rule upon earth; rather, the First Coming marked the launching of a period—the historical millennium—in which Christ reigns with his saints in the church. Yet it was exactly on this point of the historical millennium, deprived as it was of its radical eschatological import, that Augustine's greatest contribution to ecclesiastical history lay. For by stressing the belief that redemption waits beyond time and history, Augustine, like the earlier fathers of the church who opposed chiliasm, removed the locus of eschatological visions and millennial expectation to an undefined distance in the future, or in fact beyond the realm of history itself.

Augustine's *City of God* must indeed be considered in the context of the de-eschatological trend undergone by the Christian Church from the time of the conversion of Constantine. At first glance this may appear contradictory; but, given Augustine's contention that the historical process since Christ's First Coming is one of 'realized eschatology', there is, in fact, no contradiction here at all. For what Augustine did was to place

43. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, p. 89.

the millennium squarely within history while stripping it of all apocalyptic significance as described for example in the Book of Revelation. The removal of radical, that is, imminentist, anticipations in eschatological thought, and the introduction of the notion of present history as the millennium in process, had great import for ecclesiastical history.

During the period of realized eschatology, or the unfolding of the millennium here and now on earth, the Church assumed the place of the heavenly kingdom on earth, and in it Christ reigned alongside his saints. The church, like the City of God, 'proceeds on its pilgrim way in this world, in these evil days'; for, as Augustine explains:

In this wicked world, and in these evil times, the Church through her present humiliation is preparing for the future exaltation . . . In this situation, many reprobates are mingled in the Church with the good . . . and in this world, as in a sea, both kinds swim without separation, enclosed in nets until the shore is reached. There the evil are to be divided from the good; and among the good, as it were in his temple, 'God will be all in all'. (XVIII. 49)

Time and time again, in reference to the current age, Augustine stressed that 'the Church even now is the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of heaven', and so the church is in effect beginning 'to reign with Christ among the living and the dead' (XX. 9).

Subsequent to the process of de-eschatologization which the Church had undergone in previous centuries, it now emerged all the stronger for its self-proclaimed exclusive role in providential history. Having disposed of the radicalism of the millenarian movements, the church was able to establish its own singular role in the history of redemption and salvation by asserting that *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. It was especially with regard to this new form of the church's role in providential history that Augustine's contribution was significant. For him it was clear that at the end of time and history the City of God would triumph; in the meantime, however, the church took central stage. Hence Augustine developed the 'doctrine of the church as the realization of the millennium'.⁴⁴ For during the millennium, the church as 'the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of heaven' began to realize within her bounds the millennial role of Christ and his saints. Indeed, with the First Coming, Christ's Kingdom had been already established upon earth in the form of the church, the City of God, 'and so even now his saints reign with him'. To the Church on earth were given 'the thrones' of judgment, mentioned in the Book of Revelation, thrones which were interpreted by Augustine 'as the seat of authorities by whom the Church is now governed, and those sitting on them as the authorities themselves' of the church (XX. 9). Thus the church was in effect the realm within which the millennium, or Christ's glorious thousand-year rule with his saints on earth, unfolds and is fulfilled.

The ramifications of the belief in the church as the realization of the millennium are of extreme importance for the Christian sense of time, vision of history, prophecy, and the role of the Church in God's grand design—in short, for ecclesiastical history. With the formulation of this

44. Braunthal, *Salvation and the Perfect Society*, p. 152.

doctrine it became clear that Augustine 'abandoned the eschatological visions of the Apostle Paul and the Book of Revelation' concerning Christ's Second Coming.⁴⁵ Faithful to his dualistic view of history, and in light of his understanding of the millennium as immersed in history, Augustine could not but describe the realization of the millennium exclusively in terms of the City of God, or the church, while excluding from this providential drama the earthly city. In other words, in describing the realization of what to his mind was a historical millennium, he limited himself to one part of the double nature of reality. This directly contradicts St Paul and the eschatological visions of the Book of Revelation, in which the millennium, beginning with Christ's Second Coming, would instantly abolish the dualism inherent in history, thus bearing on reality as a whole, when Christ and his saints would rule upon earth, and not just on the church alone.

Since our concern here is with the relationship between history and apocalypse, or with the Christian sense of time, the issue of the future as the period in which the entire course of providential history would be unveiled is of the utmost importance. By arguing that the millennium commenced with Christ's First Coming Augustine left no room for the anxious apocalyptic anticipation of Christ's Second Coming. If, as Augustine says, the millennium is a historical phenomenon already in progress within the present church, then the quest for the millennium by chiliasts and millenarians, who strove for eschatological nearness to Christ in the future, was altogether unwarranted. While, to Augustine's mind, the future was to bring the eschatological day of judgment, it lacked an apocalyptic revelation of terrifying cosmological proportions. In this way, the whole meaning of the Apocalypse was completely altered. Far from perceiving revelation as the final goal of history, as did the chiliasts, Augustine believed the final goal of history to be beyond history itself; and, refusing to regard the Book of Revelation as a mirror of temporal history reaching its culmination with Christ's Second Coming, he transformed the Apocalypse from a revelation of things to come into the total of past and present events from Christ's First Coming onward.

With the introduction of this understanding of Apocalypse and the nature of the millennium, Augustine offered a new interpretation of present time and of the role of the church within it. By glorifying the present as the period of eschatological realization, Augustine infused present time with new significance. This, moreover, was heightened by his adamant assertion that Christ's First Coming was the decisive event in history, that the millennium was an historical happening and that the church was the explicit embodiment of the millennium. This is indeed one of the most important achievements of *The City of God*, which 'far from being a book about flight from the world . . . is a book whose recurrent theme is "our business within this common mortal life", [and] it is a book about being otherworldly in the world'.⁴⁶ By switching the focus from the visionary future back to present history as the dimension of eschatological

45. Braunthal, *Salvation and the Perfect Society*, p. 152.

46. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 324.

realization, Augustine helped the Christians, who had been universally accused of responsibility for the sack of Rome, to find new meaning in their own time. In short, he paved for them new paths towards self-assurance in a world which, with the fall of Rome, had become hostile to Christ and his church.

The justification for this study of Augustine's views concerning the relationship between history and prophecy and the nature of ecclesiastical history lies in the fact that for centuries these views were accepted as traditional, orthodox doctrines of the Christian Church. Pointing unmistakably to the exclusive, divine role of the church on earth, Augustine's teaching offered the most meaningful solution to the problematic relationship which existed between history and apocalypse, and to the question of the ecclesiastical *raison d'être*. Augustine was concerned in his work to present 'the history of the City of God, as it develops through succeeding periods' and as it reveals 'how the promises . . . are being fulfilled' (XVII. 1).

It has been grudgingly conceded that in Augustine's work we can discern 'some kind of theology of history', and even this is dismissed as 'little more than the view of history as given in the Scriptures, that is the prophesying of redemption and its fulfilment'.⁴⁷ And yet it is clear that Augustine's purpose and achievement were no less than a reappraisal of history, the millennium and the Church's role in fusing the two. By placing the millennium within history and by bringing the kingdom of heaven down to earth (by stressing its embodiment in the church), Augustine not only succeeded in presenting a unified and coherent doctrinal position which took the apocalyptic wind out of the millenarians' eschatological sails—thereby removing the potential threat to church unity—he also established in definitive fashion the meaning of the church in salvation history.

The tendency toward de-eschatologization which is so prominent in *The City of God* was—as we have already noted—part of a trend that was already discernible in earlier resolutions of the councils of the church, and one that paralleled the attempt to circumvent the millennial strain of thought in Christianity. But Augustine's staunch refusal to identify the millennium with any glorious and revolutionary social, political and ecclesiastical transformation in salvation history laid the foundation for the most conservative approach toward the sacred, prophetic revelations of the Apocalypse which Christianity was to embrace in his wake.

Augustine died in 430 while the Vandals were besieging Hippo, the see over which he had presided as bishop. Before his death he managed to complete *The City of God*, which he closed with this sentence: 'Behold what will be, in the end, without end! For what is our end but to reach that kingdom which has no end?' (XXII. 30). It was his preoccupation with what it meant to be a citizen of 'that kingdom'—the kingdom of heaven in this world—which had motivated him to write *The City of God*. Augustine was concerned to show that the kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom unfolding in the present, and not some future reign which is still to be realized. Augustine taught that faith within the confines of the

church—and *not* millennial expectations of social and celestial proportions—is the way of the Christians on earth who are in fact 'citizens of the City of God . . . on pilgrimage on this earth, as they sigh for their Heavenly Country' (XV. 6). By thus giving expression to the existential state of Christians in the world, Augustine bequeathed to his own and to future generations a work which instilled in Christians a new sense of identity in a world that was once again denying Christ. His *City of God* is indeed an ecclesiastical history, not only in the sense of an account of the battle between the City of God and the City of Satan in the world, but also in the sense of a distinctive conception of history which takes the sacred sphere, and the unique role of the church therein, for granted.

47. J. J. O'Meara, 'Introduction' to *The City of God*, p. xxxiv.