

3 The ends of time and space (c. 600–c. 735)

After the ravages of plague, the long seventh century witnessed a period of great creativity.¹ Many historians have considered this a proper ‘Dark Age’, of chaotic politics and of learning in decline, and yet this was also a time of innovation in law and monastic organisation, when missionaries proactively sought to expand Christendom north and east, and the Irish and Isidore of Seville transformed the frameworks for knowledge. While the power of Merovingian kings might have declined over time, this was in many respects a time of strength and vitality for Frankish, Visigothic, English and Irish political orders compared to the sixth century.² As so often, the colour of history depends on which hues one prefers. Eschatology and apocalypticism were, regardless, rarely divorced from the cultural intersections which shaped change. At times they lurked, unsettlingly, on the peripheries of ‘corporate’ ideas, particularly following Isidore’s reformulation of the Hieronymian-Prosperian chronicle. At other times, they stood centre stage as a major element in ascetic renunciation and attempts to improve morality throughout society. No less than under Gregory the Great and Gregory of Tours, Augustinian sensibilities were adapted, adopted and reshaped to meet new needs – and not silently, or hidden away in impenetrable intellectual tomes, but for a range of publics and situations.

Fundamentally, the major developments in apocalyptic thought responded to the need to orientate personal eschatologies within time. Christianity was a religion with a ‘complete’ narrative, contained between a firm beginning and ending which projected meaning, if not onto everything that happened, then at least onto the temporal space

¹ J. Fontaine and J. N. Hillgarth (eds.), *Le septième siècle, changements et continuités* (London, 1992), esp. the essay by Hillgarth himself, ‘Eschatological and Political Concepts in the Seventh Century’, pp. 212–35.

² As the chapter covers significant ground, readers in need of orientation could consult the following: I. N. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450–750* (Harlow, 1994); R. Collins, *Visigothic Spain 409–711* (Oxford, 2004); C. Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: A History of Europe from 400 to 1000* (London, 2009).

in which it occurred. History was salvation history. At a practical level, envisaging the totality of history was only so useful as a tool of moral correction because it was meditative rather than exhortative, and many historians signalled their lessons rather than explaining them directly. One read not only the story but, as with Roman historiography, also the form and the anti-language.³ Sermons and the rapidly developing tales of the afterworld complemented the big picture by drawing attention to the fate of the individual's soul more directly.⁴ Together, these worlds of moral reflection addressed two different sides of the same issue, drawing on a broad repertoire from the apocalyptic–eschatological spectrum. Judgement concerned everyone, regardless of the proximity of the end of the world, because everyone would die at some point and, one way or another, be catapulted towards that last day. The fate of the individual of the soul had to be adequately theorised, particularly for anyone who would not witness the Last Times themselves, and so who needed to know how they fitted into things at a universal level.

Scholars have often treated the fate of the individual soul and the world-in-collective separately, and sometimes for good reasons. Nevertheless, in this chapter I want to process issues of eschatology and apocalypse alongside each other because they were related bodies of thought and the same people tended to develop both, notably Julian of Toledo (d. 690) and the Venerable Bede (d. 735) in Northumbria. Indeed, this multi-fronted pursuit to understand the End from both personal and collective perspectives is arguably the most radical contribution to apocalyptic thought in the period from the Gregorys and Bede.⁵ So many sources reveal that the shadow of the End continued to weigh heavily upon the imagination as a spur to action, and even millenarianism was not banished as comprehensively as some have believed. Now, it may dampen things to note that the wealth of liturgical material produced in the period contains little to no reference to the End Times, even where Revelation was used – unglossed! – in readings.⁶ Nevertheless, as we shall see, the *battle* for universal liturgical rhythms actively ensured

³ J. Henderson, *Fighting for Rome: Poets and Caesars, History and Civil War* (Cambridge, 1998).

⁴ Important on the development of visions of the afterlife is C. Carozzi, *Le voyage de l'âme dans l'au-delà, d'après la littérature latine (Ve–XIIIe siècle)* (Rome, 1994). For an attempt to see early purgatorial thought detached from its later baggage, see I. Moreira, *Heaven's Purge: Purgatory in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2010), although possibly too much is placed on idiosyncratic Bede.

⁵ Cf. C. Carozzi, *Apocalypse et salut dans le christianisme ancien et médiéval* (Paris, 1999), pp. 62–7.

⁶ *The Bobbio Missal*, cc. 262 and 271, ed. E. A. Lowe, Henry Bradshaw Society, 58 (London, 1920), pp. 78–9, 81–2 (readings from Rev. 1 and 4 at Easter).

that millenarian and apocalyptic thought remained on the agenda. The seventh century witnessed not the triumph of a non-apocalyptic eschatology, but the development of a wider reconceptualisation of humanity's endings and its duties to act.

Columbanus and the ends of the earth

As we left Gregory the Great in the last chapter, his work and worldview were being amplified by the similar ideas of the Irishman St Columbanus (d. 615). He had been a teacher at Bangor in County Down before travelling to the Frankish kingdoms in 590 and embarking on a cantankerous career as monastic founder, missionary and critic of kings. Christianity in Ireland was founded strongly upon eschatological traditions.⁷ St Patrick, the apostle of the Irish, had seen his missionary work in the late fifth century squarely as fulfilment of Christ's missionary imperative (Matt. 24.14) in an apocalyptic framework:

However ignorant I am, he has heard me, so that in these last days I can dare to undertake such a holy and wonderful work. In this way I can imitate somewhat those whom the Lord foretold would announce his gospel in witness to all nations before the end of the world. This is what we see has been fulfilled. Look at us: we are witnesses that the gospel has been preached right out to where there is nobody else!⁸

Patrick's apocalypticism was attractive. Muirchú, in renarrativising the story of Patrick, made the saint's recitation of Revelation central to his assiduity in prayer.⁹ Patrick was also to judge the Irish on Judgement Day, in a nice twist on Gregory representing the English.¹⁰ A different tradition, set down by Tírechán around the same time, had Patrick request that the Irish be spared the floods seven years before Judgement.¹¹ The

⁷ There is no reliable overview of Irish eschatology in this period but many useful things can be found through the *De finibus* project website: <http://definibus.ucc.ie/>.

⁸ Patrick, *Confessio*, c. 34, ed. L. Bieler, *Libri epistolarum sancti Patricii episcopi* (Dublin, 1993), I. 76: 'qui me audieret ut ego inscius et in nouissimis diebus hoc opus tam pium et tam mirificum auderem adgrederi, ita ut imitarem quippiam illos quos ante Dominus iam olim praedixerat praenuntiuros euangelium suum in testimonium omnibus gentibus ante finem mundi, quod ita ergo uidimus itaque suppletum est: ecce testes sumus quia euangelium praedicatum est usque ubi nemo ultra est.' See also Patrick, *Epistola ad milites Corotici*, c. 40, ed. Bieler, I. 80–1.

⁹ Muirchú, *Vita Patricii*, II. 1, ed. L. Bieler, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin, 1979), p. 114.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, II. 6 (5), p. 116.

¹¹ Tírechán, *Collectanea de sancto Patricio*, ed. Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, p. 164. See also the *Cáin Fhuithirbe*, written shortly after 680 (L. Breatnach, 'The Ecclesiastical Element in the Old Irish Legal Tract *Cáin Fhuithirbe*', *Peritia*, 5 (1986), 36–52 at pp. 50–1).

End Times played an important role in early Irish Christian identity with consequences for later developments on the continent.

Elements of Irish eschatology flicker in Columbanus's own career on the continent. In a letter to Pope Boniface IV (608–15), he argued that although the Irish lived in the farthest parts of the world they were orthodox (and, in Gregorian spirit, despite being in a world of stormy seas).¹² He did not shy away from the urgency of their shared situation: 'the world already declines, the prince of shepherds draws near.'¹³ There was even a little linguistic play here, as Columbanus had added 'draws near' (*appropinquat*) in place of Peter's original 'when [he] appears' (*cum apparuit* – 1 Peter 5.4). This is another good example of apocalyptic intensification, turning the indefinite into something more pressing. What alarmed Columbanus was the prominence of heresy in Lombardy, both with Arianism – although he made some headway at the Lombard court – and the Three Chapters controversy, neither of which the pope seemed to have in hand.¹⁴ Peace was needed and soon. Pope Boniface could, perhaps, have pointed to his more immediate problems with famine, plague and floods as an excuse for his inactivity.¹⁵ But Columbanus was struck by the fleeting nature of the mortal life, and the need to keep one's mind on higher things.¹⁶

The transitory nature of earthly things was a major theme in Columbanus's monastic sermons.¹⁷ These the saint composed as a series, in which he explored a number of themes relating to internal discipline and the fate of the soul. 'The world will pass and passes daily, and revolves towards its end (for what does it have that it does not assign an ending?)' he argued, 'and in a manner it is propped up upon the pillars of vanity.'¹⁸ The only way to embrace the eternal was to reject possession and home.

¹² Columbanus, *Epistola*, 5. 3, ed. G. S. M. Walker, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, 2 (Dublin, 1970), p. 38 Compare of course Gregory's letter to Leander: Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, *Epistola*, ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL, 143 (3 vols, Turnhout, 1979–85), I. 2–3.

¹³ Columbanus, *Epistola*, 5. 4, ed. Walker, p. 40. See also 5. 15, p. 54, on Judgement and non-Christians.

¹⁴ See Columbanus, 5. 15, p. 54. On Columbanus and the Three Chapters, see P. Gray and M. Herren, 'Columbanus and the Three Chapters Controversy – A New Approach', *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 45 (1994), 160–70.

¹⁵ *Liber pontificalis*, 69, ed. L. Duchesne (Paris, 1886), p. 317.

¹⁶ Columbanus, *De mundi transitu*, ed. and trans. Walker, pp. 182–5. The attribution to Columbanus is defended in D. Schaller, "'De mundi transitu": A Rhythmical Poem by Columbanus', in M. Lapidge (ed.), *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings* (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 240–54.

¹⁷ The authenticity of the sermons is defended in C. Stancliffe, 'The Thirteen Sermons Attributed to Columbanus', in Lapidge, *Columbanus*, pp. 93–199.

¹⁸ Columbanus, *Instructiones*, 3. 1, ed. Walker, p. 72: 'Mundus enim transibit et cottidie transit et rotatur ad finem (quid enim habet quod fini non assignet?) et quodammodo vanitatis columnis fulcitur.'

It was for that reason, it seemed, that Columbanus left Ireland in the first place, providing a mode of permanent exilic existence which he hoped others could embrace.¹⁹ This seems to have extended to engaging in missionary work as he spent a while as a missionary in Alemannia in c. 610, although there is no extant evidence that this was a deliberate attempt to fulfil prophecy in the way that Patrick or Gregory might have imagined.²⁰ The power of an eschatologically inspired lifestyle nevertheless ran deep and Columbanus's own sadness, when King Theuderic of Burgundy tried to have him exiled a year earlier, was palpable.²¹ It was felt, too, by Columbanus's hagiographer, Jonas of Susa, who was afflicted by fever upon visiting his childhood home until he returned to his monastery.²² Jonas also turned his hand to writing a series of stories about people threatened by visions of Judgement or by demons, all of which served to rephrase Columbanus's argument against worldly things (and, in reality, to encourage those in Columbanian houses to submit to Columbanian discipline).²³

Jonas's repackaging of Columbanus's eschatological piety raises important issues about the direction of Western (continental) monasticism. As Albrecht Diem has argued, there was a point at which Jonas's hagiographical project and the quest for discipline within Columbanian houses cohered to institutionalise the saint's charisma and spirituality.²⁴ For the 'holy man', this meant less opportunity to wander about exploring asceticism in an unregulated manner. It also therefore meant that the ideas of a popular apocalypse-preaching charismatic had been channelled into a monastic setting rather than into excitable public devotion. Columbanus's work can hardly be said to have unfolded without opposition, thanks to his commitment to an Easter reckoning unpopular on the continent, and his harsh asceticism.²⁵ But his eschatological vision

¹⁹ Columbanus, *Instructiones*, 8, ed. Walker, pp. 94–7.

²⁰ Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRG, 37 (Hanover, 1905), I. 27, pp. 213–14. On Columbanian influence on developing ideas of universal mission see W. H. Fritze, 'Universalis gentium confessio: Formeln, Träger und Wege universalmissionarischen Denkens im 7. Jahrhundert', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 3 (1969), 78–130 at pp. 84–8.

²¹ Columbanus, *Epistola*. 4. 8, ed. Walker, pp. 34–5; Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, I. 20 and 23, ed. Krusch, pp. 193–4 and pp. 205–6.

²² Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, ed. Krusch, II. 5, pp. 237–8.

²³ See A. O'Hara, 'Death and the Afterlife in Jonas of Bobbio's *Vita Columbani*', *Studies in Church History*, 45 (2009), 64–73. Dr O'Hara argues that Jonas's stories are 'not eschatological' (p. 72), but I would suggest that the eschatological function supports the institutional one he identifies.

²⁴ A. Diem, 'Monks, Kings, and the Transformation of Sanctity: Jonas of Bobbio and the End of the Holy Man', *Speculum*, 82.3 (2007), 521–59.

²⁵ See especially C. Stancliffe, 'Columbanus and the Gallic Bishops', in G. Constable and M. Ruche (eds.), *Auctoritas: Mélanges offerts au Professeur Olivier Guillot* (Paris, 2006), pp. 205–15.

proved less controversial, even inspiring in the case of Jonas. The institutional context successfully framed Columbanus's spirituality and, with some modifications, took it forward into the next generation of thinkers. Eschatological renunciation was mainstream.

One of the best known facets of Columbanian monasticism was the way it was supported enthusiastically by the Frankish nobility in the seventh century. There were, at times, hints of abuse, of *Klosterpolitik*, with the powerful playing monasteries against ecclesiastical authority by supporting their rights to 'immunities'.²⁶ But there was also a spiritual agenda, stimulated by Columbanus's insistence on divorcing monastic life from things secular, including the Church. Even here, secular leaders stood to the fore where they could. We can see this, for instance, in Clovis II's privileges for Saint-Denis in 654 which talked at length about the intercession of saints and seeking eternal life.²⁷ Political action was being driven by concerns about Judgement. Indeed, it is then doubly striking that Clovis's wife Balthild (d. 680), who sought to use monastic patronage and episcopal appointments politically, was also considered by her hagiographer-apologist to have begun an almost millenarian era of peace through her work.²⁸ The better defined the lines between spiritual and secular, the easier it was to appropriate each side to buttress power.

Lay enthusiasm for Columbanian monasticism paved the way for embracing other eschatologically minded wanderers. The most prominent was St Fursey, an Irishman famed for his visions, who was warmly received by the courts of Sigibert in East Anglia and Clovis II in Neustria.²⁹ The *Journey of Blessed Fursey*, probably written in Péronne late in the seventh century, is an account of Fursey's life which incorporates a number of visions, which mark a turning point in the literary representation of Purgatory and the fate of the soul before Judgement.³⁰

²⁶ E. Ewig, 'Das Privileg des Bischofs Berthefrid von Amiens für Corbie von 664 und die Klosterpolitik der Königin Balthild,' *Francia*, 1 (1973), 62–114. The best treatment of monastic immunities is B. Rosenwein, *Negotiating Space: Power, Restraint, and Privileges of Immunity in Early Medieval Europe* (Manchester, 1999).

²⁷ *Diplomata*, no. 85, ed. T. Kölzer, MGH *Diplomata regum Francorum e stirpe Merovingica* (Hanover, 2001), I. 218; *Chartae latinae antiquiores*, 13 (Zürich, 1981), pp. 40–1 (= no. 558).

²⁸ *Vita Balthildae*, c. 5, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRM, 2 (Hanover, 1888), pp. 487–8 (both versions). J. L. Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History', in her *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London, 1986), pp. 1–48 at pp. 21–2.

²⁹ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, III. 19, ed. M. Lapidge (2 vols, Rome, 2010), II. 82–94. On Fursey's career see M. Brown, *The Life of Fursey: What We Know, Why It Matters*, Fursey Occasional Paper 1 (Norwich, 2001).

³⁰ Carozzi, *Le voyage*, pp. 99–138 but with caution urged fairly by Moreira, *Heaven's Purge*, pp. 127–9. The text is edited by Carozzi at pp. 679–92.

The first was triggered by a near-death experience, with the highlight being a vision of demons defeated by angels.³¹ A sense of personal apocalypse was reinforced by the concern, again, for punishment by fire, meted out according to the severity of sin, with four different stations seen by Fursey as a lesson for the laity.³² It is unlikely this gave hope that penance could be enjoined after death, but rather stood as a warning for the living.³³ More striking still was a vision in which he met two holy men (*virii venerabiles*), who commanded him to return to earth ‘and preach to all that Judgement is near’.³⁴ Asking them about the end of the world, however, Fursey was told that it was not near, but that the human race would be vexed by famine and plague – interpreted allegorically as struggles and punishment. Judgement was ever-present.

While Fursey’s visions represented one of the first medieval tours of the afterlife, the first politicised one followed only shortly afterwards in the *Vision of Barontus*, written sometime after 678/9.³⁵ The text was one of the ‘bestsellers’ of the early Middle Ages, and even generated an illustrated version for the library of King Charles the Bald, all no doubt for its clear moral lessons.³⁶ Barontus was a nobleman and a recent convert to the monastic life in Lonrey, near Bourges, when he fell ill and had a vision of heaven and hell. Much more than Fursey’s, this vision was directly inspired by the Gregorian *Dialogues* and the pope’s eschatological *Homilies on the Gospels*, which meant that there was an emphasis on the living’s intercessions for the dead and penance.³⁷ Barontus himself, when seized by demons for his sins as a layman which included having three

³¹ *Transitus beati Fursei*, cc. 6–8, ed. Carozzi, pp. 681–3. The most recent assessment, in relation to ‘Irish’ tariffed penance, is M. Dunn, *The Vision of St Fursey and the Development of Purgatory*, Fursey Occasional Paper 2 (Norwich, 2007) but see Moreira, *Heaven’s Purge*, pp. 116–17 and pp. 125–9.

³² *Transitus beati Fursei*, c. 8, ed. Carozzi, pp. 682–3. The description of the fires seen by Fursey was the section of the text which most impressed Bede. Carozzi, *Le voyage*, pp. 132–7 on the instructive penitential mode of the account.

³³ Moreira, *Heaven’s Purge*, pp. 115–25.

³⁴ *Transitus beati Fursei*, c. 12, ed. Carozzi, p. 687: ‘ergo omnibus adnuntia quia in proximo est vindicata’.

³⁵ *Visio Baronti*, ed. W. Levison, MGH SRG, 5 (Hanover, 1910), pp. 377–94. The date is indicated at the end with a mark of almost legal authenticity: ‘acta sunt haec omnia viii. kal. April. in sexto anno regnante Theoderico regem Francorum.’ On the text: J. Contreni, ‘“Building Mansions in Heaven”: The *Visio Baronti*, Archangel Raphael, and a Carolingian King’, *Speculum*, 78.3 (2003), 673–706 and Y. Hen, ‘The Structure and Aims of the *Visio Baronti*’, *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 47 (1996), 477–97.

³⁶ Now St Petersburg, Publichnaja Biblioteka, O. v. I. 5 On the manuscript see, Contreni, ‘Building Mansions’, and on the library see R. McKitterick, ‘Charles the Bald (823–877) and His Library: The Patronage of Learning’, *EHR*, 95.374 (1980), 28–47

³⁷ The author of the *Visio Baronti* differed from Gregory in his promotion of almsgiving and good works: Contreni, ‘Building Mansions’, pp. 687–90; Hen, ‘Structure and Aims’, pp. 491–3.

wives, was saved by St Peter because he had given up everything upon his conversion – or at least, what little he had kept for himself, he agreed to release upon his return to the living. This was but one piece in an extended lesson about the communal responsibility for individual eschatologies, with the living and dead bound together to work for individual souls.³⁸ What made the *Vision of Barontus* so political was that it identified recently deceased figures from the monastery in heaven, and named the recently deceased diocesan bishop Vulfoleodus of Bourges and his neighbour Dido of Poitiers in hell.³⁹

The political circumstances of the vision provide some indication of how we should understand all this. Claude Carozzi suggested that there was some regional partisanship involved because the author curiously omitted mention of the monastery's founder, Sigiramnus, in heaven, and because of the hostility towards Vulfoleodus and Dido.⁴⁰ Yet, as Hen pointed out, no one from the distant past is mentioned in heaven, and it is hard to see the condemnation of the bishops as anything other than a political reaction against episcopal involvement in opposition to kings Sigibert III and Dagobert II.⁴¹ Whether this is sufficient, as Hen also suggests, to make the *Vision* a 'declaration [of] affiliation with the Merovingian court', is not clear, especially given the monastic homiletic mood of the text. We could look to a slightly different political context, for 678/9 was the same time that Dido's nephew, Bishop Leudegar of Autun, was captured and murdered by the men of Ebroin and King Theuderic III for taking a leading role in the coup of Childeric II in 673–5, the end of which caused so much distress that 'it was believed that manifestly the coming of Antichrist was at hand'.⁴² Rivalries involved here are well known to have driven the production of competitive hagiographies.⁴³ What better an environment in which to write a lament in

³⁸ A similar point is made by Carozzi, *Le voyage*, p. 173.

³⁹ *Visio Baronti*, c. 8 (heaven) and c. 17 (hell). W. Levison, 'Die Politik in den Jenseitsvisionen des frühen Mittelalter', in his *Aus rheinischer und fränkischer Frühzeit* (Düsseldorf, 1948), p. 234.

⁴⁰ Carozzi, *Le voyage*, pp. 140–4.

⁴¹ Hen, 'Structure and Aims', 494–7. Dido's role in the 'Grimoald coup': *Liber historiae Francorum*, c. 43, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRM, 2 (Hanover, 1888), p. 316. Vulfoleodus holding a synod without Sigibert's permission: Sigibert, *Epistolae Desiderii*, II, 17, ed. W. Arndt, MGH Epp., 2 (Berlin, 1892), p. 212.

⁴² *Passio Leudegarii*, c. 15, ed. Krusch, MGH SRM, 5 (Hanover and Leipzig, 1890), p. 296: 'ut manifeste crederetur adventum imminere Antichristi.' *Liber historiae Francorum*, c. 45, ed. Krusch, p. 317. Context in Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, pp. 224–38; R. Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians and the Liber Historiae Francorum* (Oxford, 1987), ch. 5; P. Fouracre and R. Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography, 640–720* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 198–200.

⁴³ P. Fouracre, 'Merovingian History and Merovingian Hagiography', *P&P*, 127 (1990), 3–38 at pp. 13–26.

a sermonic tone in which bishops could be condemned in hell for their worldliness— 'the proud with the proud, the self-indulgent with the self-indulgent, liars with liars, murderers with murderers, the jealous with the jealous, detractors with detractors, deceivers with deceivers'⁴⁴ The politics would be about defending a rightful order of things as much as promoting any pro-Merovingian sentiments.

With the Gregorian *Dialogues*, *Journey of Blessed Fursey* and *Vision of Barontus*, a new idea of 'moral and personal apocalypse' had been articulated which emphasised personal responsibility for salvation within a collective framework more than ever before. Seeing action in the world as a tension between sin and penance coloured the world in a way which meant that God's mercy on Judgement Day could not be relied on as the ultimate 'get-out clause'. Peter Brown has argued that this is one of the defining features of a distinctly Western early medieval Christian worldview, which had no direct parallels in Byzantine Christianity or Islam where God's final call remained all important.⁴⁵ How souls got from death to the Last Judgement could be visualised and the necessary action by the living for both themselves and the departed could be called for, because all debts had to be paid. In apocalyptic terms, this was literally revelatory but also important for the 'codification' of the relationship between the living and the dead and, therefore, a crucial part of how people understood their own place in the totality of salvation history.⁴⁶ Augustine's 'seventh world age', which runs in parallel to the sixth but which is not earthly, is perhaps a helpful way of thinking about this, because people belonged not to one progression of time but two: one in the world and one outside. If it were otherwise, the apocalypse would only affect the last people, whereas in theological terms it was a matter for everyone regardless of when they lived or died.

Isidore's final countdown and the way back to millenarianism

Developments in the Iberian peninsula brought unintended consequences for apocalyptic thought elsewhere. Gregory's tense sense of imminence

⁴⁴ *Visio Baronti*, c. 17, ed. Levison, p. 391: 'superbi cum superbis, luxoriosi cum luxoriosis, periuri cum periuris, homicidi cum homicidis, invidi cum invidis, detractores cum detractoribus, fallaces cum fallacibus.'

⁴⁵ P. Brown, 'The Decline of the Empire of God: Amnesty, Penance, and the Afterlife from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages', in C. W. Bynum and P. Freedman (eds.), *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA, 2000), pp. 41–59 at pp. 58–9.

⁴⁶ 'Codification' suggested in Carozzi, *Le voyage*, p. 639.

had little place under the Visigoths, despite a strong interest in the pope's works.⁴⁷ There was a healthy concern for Judgement, as Julian of Toledo's popular and influential *Prognosticum futuri saeculi* shows.⁴⁸ In 633, at the Fourth Council of Toledo led by the powerful bishop and influential intellectual Isidore of Seville (d. 636) alongside King Sisenand (r. 661–36), bishops not only affirmed the authority of Revelation but ordered that it be used in preaching at Easter and Pentecost.⁴⁹ Isidore also wrote about Antichrist as a future enemy who would bring persecutions, pretend to be Christ and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.⁵⁰ Few writers used any of this lighter eschatological mood to motor reform or to criticise current affairs, with Braulio of Zaragoza's hopeful grumbling about King Chindesuinth's violence around 642 almost all there is.⁵¹ This impression maybe distorted, however, by the fact that we have a wealth of legal material but little of the rich chronicle or hagiographical material found elsewhere.⁵² We cannot expect the 'logic of apocalypse' to look the same. Nevertheless, the way in which time was conceptualised by Isidore in particular would have far-reaching effects.

The crucial issues emerged out of Isidore's chronographical writings, as Landes pointed out. At one level Isidore followed in the footsteps of other continuators of Jerome's Eusebian canons, with AM^{II} a defining feature of his two chronicles (and the Spanish 'era' date the basic measure

⁴⁷ Hillgarth, 'Eschatological and Political Concepts', p. 225; T. Stancati, *Julian of Toledo: Prognosticum futuri saeculi* (New York, 2010), p. 248. For a survey of eschatological thought in Visigothic Spain see L. A. García Moreno, 'Expectativas milenaristas y escatológicas en la España tardoantigua (ss. V–VIII)', in *Spania. Estudis d'Antiguitat Tardana oferts en homenatge al professor Pere de Palol I Salellas* (Barcelona, 1996), pp. 103–9.

⁴⁸ Julian of Toledo, *Prognosticum futuri saeculi*, ed. J. N. Hillgarth, CCSL, 115 (Turnhout, 1976), pp. 1–126 on which, alongside the commentary by Stancati, see J. Wood, 'Individual and Collective Salvation in Late Visigothic Spain', *Studies in Church History*, 45 (2009), 74–86 at pp. 81–5. See also Fructuosus, *Epistolae Braulii*, no. 43, PL, 80. 691; Ildefonsus of Toledo, *Epistola ad Quirico*, PL, 96. 194; Taio of Zaragoza, *Sententiae*, pref., c. 4, PL, 80. 729–30; Ervig, *Forum Iudicum*, XII. 14, ed. K. Zeumer, MGH LL nationum Germanicarum, 1 (Hanover, 1902), p. 442.

⁴⁹ Toledo IV, c. 17, ed. G. Martínéz Díez and F. Rodríguez, *La colección hispania* (6 vols., Madrid and Barcelona, 1966–2002), V. 205–6. On Isidore see J. Fontaine, *Isidore de Séville: genèse et originalité de la culture hispanique au temps des Wisigoths* (Turnhout, 2000) and P. Cazier, *Isidore de Séville et la naissance de l'Espagne catholique* (Paris, 1994).

⁵⁰ Isidore, *Etymologiae*, VIII. 11. 20–2, ed. W. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911) [unpaginated]; *Sententiae*, I. 25, ed. P. Cazier, CCSL, 111 (Turnhout, 1998), pp. 79–80. Important given the unification of Spain, conversion of the Jews and the building of the new church in Toledo, while things were going less well in the East: García Moreno, 'Expectativas milenaristas', pp. 106–7.

⁵¹ Braulio of Zaragoza, *Epistolae Braulii*, no. 24, PL, 80. 673. *Chronicle of 754*, c. 29, ed. J. Gil, in *Corpus scriptorum Muzarabiorum* (Madrid, 1974), p. 22.

⁵² Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome*, pp. 130–1.

of time's passing in his *History of the Goths, Vandals and Suebi*).⁵³ Prosper, Victor of Tunnuna and John of Biclarum had each arranged chronological material relative to reigns of emperors or to consuls, with AM dates only in summaries at the end.⁵⁴ Isidore, on the other hand, added AM numbers for the emperors' deaths, so, for example, the sack of Rome was now filed under 'Honorius with his younger brother Theodosius, reigned 15 years, AM 5621'.⁵⁵ He had injected a sense of the universal into local date-markers and in the process started to make time more abstract and linear. More problematic still, Isidore accidentally gave rise to a new way to think about apocalyptic time because he was the first person to apply the six world ages as an organisational category within a universal history.⁵⁶ His chronicles divided history accordingly, and therefore served to emphasise that all the history that had happened since the Incarnation had belonged to the Sixth Age and so had unfolded in the shadow of the End. Isidore scarcely acknowledged this in his preface, as he explained time as a relentless 'succession' and pointed out his simple debt to earlier chronographers. At the end of the *Chronica maiora*, he moved to control his readers' understanding of his calculations by citing the usual statements about how the End could not be known. The abstract structures of the work, however, encouraged readers to pay closer attention to the clock ticking down to the Year 6000.

Countdowns, or *summae annorum*, became a common feature of Isidorian chronicles as they entered Irish computistics and Frankish historiography. Isidore had a deep interest in structure, hence etymologies and investigations into temporality and nature – all of which appealed greatly to readers in Ireland who were already working through similar

⁵³ The different extant endings give AM^{II} 5813 (Herakleios 5), AM^{II} 5821 (Herakleios 16) and AM 5831 (Herakleios 21). One explanation for the Era date – that it is based on backprojecting Easter tables – is given by O. Neugebauer, 'On the Spanish Era', *Chiron*, 11 (1981), 371–80 and the texts of the *Historia Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum*, ed. C. Rodríguez Alonso (Léon, 1975).

⁵⁴ Victor of Tunnuna, *Chronica*, ed. T. Mommsen, MGH AA, 9 (Berlin, 1892), p. 206 (AM 5766); John of Biclarum, *Chronica*, ed. Mommsen, MGH AA, 9, p. 220 (AM 5791).

⁵⁵ Isidore, *Chronica maiora*, cc. 371–2, ed. J. C. Martín, CCSL, 112 (Turnhout, 2003), pp. 206–9.

⁵⁶ R. Landes, 'Lest the Millennium Be Fulfilled: Apocalyptic Expectations and the Pattern of Western Chronography, 100–800 CE', in W. Verbeke, D. Verhelst, and A. Welkenhuysen (eds.), *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages* (Leuven, 1988), pp. 137–211 at pp. 165–6. The scheme is not always consistently applied in manuscripts of the *Chronica maiora* – I note in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, lat. 10910 (before 715, possibly Lyon) only the third and sixth ages are labelled (f. 172v and f. 177v) and in Albi, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 29 (= *CLA*, no. 705, Spain or Septimannia, mid-eighth-century) only the fourth age is not labelled but the sixth age starts with Octavian rather than Tiberius (f. 28v). The scheme is more consistently applied in the *Chronica minora*: Isidore, *Etymologiae*, V. 39. 2–25.

issues when Isidore's work appeared there within his lifetime.⁵⁷ The greatest consequence of this Hiberno-Hispanic learning was that time was no longer an Augustinian 'mystery', but a collection of artificial structures superimposed on a natural world full of laws and rhythms, which were often cyclical yet were so only within a rigid linear timeline.⁵⁸ Once combined with eschatological reflection the conclusion was straightforward: 'time is the space which extends from the beginning up until the end.'⁵⁹ It was finite, enclosed and measureable. It was, therefore, a natural extension of counting the years up to the present to then count up to the next big millennial marker, the Year 6000. Of course, as far as we can tell from the calculations, people may have hoped that time continued after that. Regardless, they made the calculation.

Those who did so had to keep in mind that the date was arbitrary. In 686 Bishop Julian of Toledo launched an attack on Jews who had made a two-part argument against the structure of Christian history: first, they had pointed out that, if one compared the Hebrew Pentateuch to the later Greek Septuagint, the age of the world was significantly lower than Christians had calculated; and second, that if there were to be six world ages, each a thousand years in length, with Christ inaugurating the seventh, then clearly Jesus was not the prophesied Christ because he had been born too early in history.⁶⁰ The danger, Julian warned King Ervig in his prefatory letter, was that such thinking could corrupt Christian thought and stimulate false expectations. (Indeed, as we shall see shortly, in England this is exactly what happened.) The bishop could readily appeal to Augustine against the $6 \times 1,000$ structure of history and millenarian hopes – it was generations, not years, which mattered.⁶¹ More unusually, his sifting of the difficult Old Testament dating material led him proclaim that the Year 6000 had passed eleven years previously with

⁵⁷ On the dissemination of Isidore's work see B. Bischoff, 'Die europäische Verbreitung der Werke Isidors von Sevilla', in his *Mittelalterliche Studien* (3 vols, Stuttgart, 1966), I. 171–94 (esp. here pp. 180–2 on Ireland), with corrections and elaborations in M. Herren, 'On the Earliest Irish Acquaintance with Isidore of Seville', in E. James (ed.), *Visigothic Spain: New Approaches* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 243–50. Important remarks on Isidore's influence on computus can be found throughout I. Warntjes, *The Munich Computus: Text and Translation. Irish Computistics between Isidore of Seville and the Venerable Bede and Its Reception in Carolingian Times* (Stuttgart, 2010).

⁵⁸ J. T. Palmer, 'The Ordering of Time', in V. Wieser, C. Zolles, C. Feik, M. Zolles and L. Schlondorff (eds.), *Abendländische Apokalypik. Kompendium zur Genealogie der Endzeit* (Berlin, 2013), pp. 603–18 at pp. 616–18.

⁵⁹ So *The Munich Computus*, c. 1, ed. Warntjes, p. 1.

⁶⁰ García Moreno, 'Expectativas milenaristas', p. 109.

⁶¹ Julian of Toledo, *Prognosticum*, esp. I. 3–5, pp. 150–2. See Chapter 1, p. 46. The emphasis on generations was a cornerstone of Joachim of Fiore's efforts to understand the structures of history in the twelfth century.

no problem, so that was irrelevant too. It is perhaps therefore unsurprising, rather than deeply suspicious, that Julian made nothing of these arguments in his popular handbook on Christian eschatology, *Prognosticum futuri saeculi*.⁶² This book detailed many issues, such as Gregory's purgatorial fires and the fate of the soul, and when Julian turned to the issue of the Last Judgement at length he began by asserting the standard position on how the timing of the End could not be known.⁶³ It may be too much to describe Julian's eschatology as 'anti-apocalyptic' on account of this emphasis, because he drew his argument directly from the Bible. At the same time, in the work as a whole, he had chosen to emphasise the practical side of individual salvation over the catastrophism of uncertain collective doom.⁶⁴

In the Frankish kingdoms, fascination with numbers grew despite such warnings. The added ingredient here was the use of the cyclical 532-year Easter tables of Victorius of Aquitaine as a point of historical reference, much as people would soon use Dionysiac tables and their lists of years *ab incarnatione* (AD dates), as I shall explain below. One *summa annorum* from 672, set down in a copy of Isidore's *Etymologiae*, is typical.⁶⁵ It starts with an AM date from the end of Isidore's chronicle (AM 5812), notes another sixty up to the fifteenth year of Chlothar III, a year when there was a battle against the Danes. The note then states it is twenty-six years since the death of St Sulpicius of Bourges and that it is the 113th year of the Easter table of Victorius of Aquitaine. Finally the author records that 5,873 years have passed since Creation and that there are 127 years left until the Year 6000. The reader is left with multiple points of reference with which to orientate themselves in time, linking politics, saints' cults and liturgical cycles. Moreover, at the end, an apocalyptic tradition had become a useful part of this practice of memory and temporal orientation.⁶⁶

The tradition of countdowns seems to have had some kind of distinct but elusive trigger. Of the fifteen known to us, four date to the years 672–5, which coincide with the height of the conflict between Childeric II, Leudegar of Autun and Ebroin, the mayor of the palace, although these events are otherwise not clearly related to the computations themselves.⁶⁷

⁶² Suspicions cast in Landes, 'Lest the Millennium', pp. 173–4, where Julian's work is presented as being 'swallowed up by the opposition'.

⁶³ Julian of Toledo, *Prognosticum*, III. 1, p. 182. Hillgarth, 'Eschatological and Political Concepts', pp. 226–7.

⁶⁴ Stancati, *Julian*, pp. 252–5.

⁶⁵ Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. lat. 294 (c. 1100), printed in Mommsen, MGH AA, 11 (Berlin, 1894), pp. 505–6.

⁶⁶ Palmer, 'Ordering of Time', p. 617.

⁶⁷ See above p. 86 and n. 42.

Another two date to 727, the same year that Charles Martel first subjugated Burgundy and the *Liber historiae Francorum* was completed, a text which stands as our only sustained Frankish narrative source for the period from 643.⁶⁸ A third of our evidence, then, comes from two narrow windows of time – and both comfortably remote from AM 6000 itself, although that could be read as silent proof that people worried too much about such things thereafter to say anything. The rest of our examples seem rather diffuse. The earliest by some margin was composed in 643;⁶⁹ one in 736 was written in a Burgundian continuation of a chronicle;⁷⁰ an Irish or Lombard computist in 747, and another in 767, added to the tradition;⁷¹ and Beatus of Liébana in 784/5 and John of Modena in 800 itself also played along.⁷² With the possible exception of the first example, what they all had in common was the influence of Isidore of Seville.

The new anxiety about historical time and its structures deeply shaped the chronicles of ‘so-called Fredegar’, and the later extension and revision, the *Historia vel gesta Francorum*.⁷³ Fredegar consciously placed himself as an heir to Gregory of Tours’s historical enterprise, albeit with some differences in approach.⁷⁴ Most of his work was a compilation, drawing on *The Book of Generations*, a hybrid version of Jerome-Hydatius, and the six-book version of Gregory’s *Histories*, to which he added his own composite chronicle up to 643, but with allusions to events as late as 659. There is little of Gregory’s fascination with signs and heretics, and there was only so much editing for the sake of consistency between chronicles. The compilation includes, for instance, the Incarnation dated both to

⁶⁸ *Dialogus de computo Burgundiae*, c. 17C, ed. A. Borst, *Schriften zur Komputistik im Frankenreich von 721 bis 818*, MGH QQ zur Geistesgesch., 21 (3 vols, Hanover, 2006), I, 374; London, British Library, Cotton Nero A ii, f. 35v. *Liber historiae Francorum*, ending at c. 53, p. 328 with a reference to the sixth year of Theuderic III. Dates for this period are not entirely certain but see B. Krusch, ‘Chronologica regum Francorum stirpis Merovingicae’, MGH SRM, 7 (Hanover and Leipzig, 1920), pp. 468–516 (pp. 505–7 on Theuderic).

⁶⁹ A note (printed in Krusch, ‘Chronologica’, p. 493) in Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, Mp. th. f. 28, ff. 67v–68r, an eighth-century copy of Caesarius’s homilies with the note copied directly before a homily on Judgement Day.

⁷⁰ *Historia vel gesta Francorum*, III. 109 = *Chronicon Fredegarii – Continuationes*, c. 16, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SRM, 2 (Hanover, 1888), p. 176.

⁷¹ Florence, Biblioteca Medici Laurenziana, Conv. Soppr. 364, f. 117v; London, British Library, Cotton Nero A ii, 35v (thirty-two years remaining, but the source material had originally said seventy-two years).

⁷² Beatus, *Tractus in Apocalipsin*, IV. 16a–18, ed. R. Gryson, CCSL, 107A (2 vols., Turnhout, 2012), I. 518–519; John of Modena in MGH AA, 11, p. 505.

⁷³ On the text see R. Collins, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken*, MGH Studien und Texte, 44 (Hanover, 2007). A still-useful account of the problems posed by manuscripts and content is provided by W. Goffart, ‘The Fredegar Problem Reconsidered’, *Speculum*, 38.2 (1963), 206–41.

⁷⁴ Fredegar, *Chronicae*, IV, prol., p. 123.

AM 5500 in the *Book of Generations*, and AM 5199, if only by implication, through Gregory and Isidore.⁷⁵ Because the chronicles circulated anonymously, they never achieved the reputation of other early works of history, but they were nevertheless read widely throughout the Frankish world and were adapted and edited wherever they went.⁷⁶ They were, if nothing else, useful as a chain of chronicles to continue.⁷⁷

It is in the eighth-century reception of the compilation that it became a marker of apocalyptic time. In a space at the end of the oldest extant manuscript, after Isidore's chronicle, the priest Lucerius noted that in the fourth year of Dagobert III's reign – namely, to us, in 715 – there were eighty-four years left until the completion of the sixth millennium.⁷⁸ Again, there was the instinct to take a historical composition and work out at the end where one stood in relation to it ('through this chronicle and through the other chronicles', Lucerius wrote).⁷⁹ Twenty-one years later an extension of some version of the chronicle added similar detail, this time adding a reference to Victorius and announcing sixty-three years left to complete 'this millennium'.⁸⁰ By themselves these notes attest to a persistent interest in the approach of the Year 6000. The dynamic was, however, surely only intensified by the next significant editorial development: the integration of Hilarianus's millenarian *On the Duration of the World* into the corpus of the Fredegar chronicles.

Interest in Hilarianus's unorthodox work at this juncture provides a significant challenge to the notion that Augustinian dogma was absolutely dominant and suppressive. As we saw in Chapter 1, Hilarianus taught that there would be 6,000 years of history, to be followed by a 1,000-year

⁷⁵ Fredegar, *Chronicae*, I, ed. Krusch, p. 40 (AM¹), II. 34, p. 58 (building blocks for AM¹¹), III. 73, p. 113 (Gregory's dating of Sigibert I's death to AM 5774). There are also mistakes, for instance equating AD 641 with AM 5149 (p. 42) and AD 378 with AM 5588 (p. 69).

⁷⁶ H. Reimitz, 'Der Weg zum Königtum in historiographischen Kompendien der Karolingerzeit', in M. Becher and J. Jarnut (eds.), *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751. Vorgeschichte, Legitimationsstrategien und Erinnerung* (Münster 2004), pp. 283–326.

⁷⁷ On a related chronicle chain see I. Wood, 'Chains of Chronicles: The Example of London, British Library, Ms. Add. 16974', in R. Corradini and M. Niederkorn-Bruck (eds.), *Zwischen Niederschrift und Wiederschrift* (Vienna, 2010), pp. 67–78.

⁷⁸ Ed. Krusch, MGH SRM, 2, pp. 9–10, reconstructed from Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, lat. 10910, f. 184r, the end of which is now barely visible on account of the deterioration of the parchment. Lucerius's date is often taken to date the manuscript itself but readers should be aware that, on inspection, it is in a different hand to the body text, so the note provides only a *terminus ante quem*.

⁷⁹ 'Per ista croneca et per alia cronesu' (*sic*).

⁸⁰ *Historia vel gesta Francorum*, III. 109, ed. Krusch, p. 176. On the implications of the passage compare Collins, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken*, p. 88 and J. T. Palmer, 'Computus after the Paschal Controversy of AD 740', in D. Ó Cróinín and I. Warntjes (eds.), *The Easter Controversy of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2011), pp. 213–41 at pp. 238–40.

earthly reign of Christ and his saints, and Hilarianus did this with his own countdown, asserting that there were 101 years left. There is no way to ascertain whether the first person to copy it did so because of their own millenarian interests, or because Hilarianus's text was useful as chronography and the millenarianism did not really matter. Either way it was not silenced. Hilarianus's work was first adopted into the corpus in the Lake Constance region in the 'Class 3' of Fredegar manuscripts, in which it is added at the end of Fredegar's Book I, *The Book of Generations*.⁸¹ On the face of it, the move repeated a significant amount of historical information from *The Book of Generations*, with lists of patriarchs and emperors ultimately anchoring the Incarnation in AM 5500. *On the Duration of the World* offered two things: first, it was shorter than *The Book of Generations* (although this was largely redundant where both were copied together); and second, it provided a theological conception of time which tied the 6,000 years of the world to millenarian expectation. At the very least, it demonstrates the scribal impulse to accumulate more material about time and history from the eighth century onwards.⁸²

No efforts at suppression were in evidence as the chronicle was developed. *On the Duration of the World* attracted the author behind the *Historia vel gesta Francorum*, who copied it across from a 'Class 3' manuscript in c. 787 for his new work.⁸³ The decision again raises the question of why a millenarian text was actively preserved in allegedly 'Augustinian' Frankish historiographical circles. Hilarianus's work, in Collins's reconstruction, was now placed alongside the Jerome-Hydatius epitome to form a new Book I, with the Gregory epitome as Book II and Fredegar plus continuations up to 768 as Book III.⁸⁴ If a colophon in one manuscript of c. 900 is to be believed, the composition was commissioned by the father and son Childebrand (up to 751) and Nibelung, dukes of Burgundy and close relatives of the Pippinids who seized the Frankish throne in 751. The *Historia* and its 'heretical' first section emerged, then, in a politically central context – not on the peripheries, and not in a 'semi-detached' intellectual environment. It was widely copied and had influence, giving rise to two more compositions – expanded versions of

⁸¹ Leiden, Universitätsbibliothek, Voss. lat. Q. 5 (continued in Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. lat. 713 and, combined, likely the manuscript in the St Gall library catalogue described as 'Chronicae diversorum temporum libri v. Et gesta Francorum in volumine i': St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 728, p. 12). This was the only manuscript used by Frick for his edition in *Chronica minora*, 1 (Leipzig, 1892), pp. 155–74.

⁸² See in particular R. McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2004); Reimitz, 'Der Weg zum Königum'.

⁸³ The date is suggested by Collins, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken*, p. 92.

⁸⁴ Collins, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken*, p. 89. Note, however, that no manuscript treats Hilarianus and the Jerome-Hydatius epitome as a single book.

Gregory's *Histories* and the *Liber historiae Francorum* of 727 – by the early ninth century. Admittedly *On the Duration of the World* neither played a role in the *Historia*'s popularity, nor gained any popularity outside that work. Presumably what mattered to later copyists and readers was the usefulness of the chronological material rather than the controversial but disproved millenarian prophecy they failed to censor. There is something of an indifference to the heretical at play here.

The heretical Bede

All these different strands – the visions, the calculations of time, the shifting status of millenarianism – crashed together in assorted contexts, but rarely as memorably as in the work of the Northumbrian priest Bede (d. 735).⁸⁵ Bede is famous as the 'Father of English History' and a prolific author of biblical commentaries, textbooks on science and chronology, homilies and poetry. His position in English history is especially marked because he flourished only one eventful century after the Gregorian mission had first set out to convert the English. As unique and special as he may seem, two generations of modern historians have increasingly understood Bede best as someone very much engaged with debates and controversies in Northumbria, Ireland and the continent, rather than a genius out of step with his own time.⁸⁶ That the debates were often hostile, Bede did little to hide. His famous *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (completed 731–4) detailed conflicts over culture, practice and politics, not least where the use of different Easter tables threatened to pull entire kingdoms apart through the disunity of liturgical rhythms. Even then, his *Letter to Plegwine* (708) and *On the Reckoning of Time* (725) reveal further battle lines concerning chronography, computus and eschatology scarcely hinted at in his later work. Indeed, in the *Letter to Plegwine*, Bede's defence of a position which was for all intents and purposes 'Augustinian' got him branded a heretic at a heated dinner debate. Bede takes us to the heart of controversy about apocalypse and salvation only hinted at elsewhere.

⁸⁵ P. Darby, *Bede and the End of Time* (Farnham, 2012). For context see S. DeGregorio (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bede* (Cambridge, 2010) and S. Foot, *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England, c. 600–900* (Cambridge, 2005).

⁸⁶ W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History AD 550–800: Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, NJ, 1988) and A. Thacker, 'Bede and the Irish', in L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald (eds.), *Beda Venerabilis* (Groningen, 1996), pp. 31–59; Warntjes, *The Munich Computus*; D. Ó Cróinín, 'The Irish Provenance of Bede's Computus', *Peritia*, 2 (1983), 229–47, F. Wallis, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time* (Liverpool, 1999).

Bede was scarcely apocalyptic in his outlook but made good use of eschatological themes in his works. In his homilies on the Gospels, Bede was notably cagey about Judgement except in the vaguest terms, and he avoided commenting on the passages from which his hero Gregory the Great had got so much rhetorical apocalyptic mileage (Chapter 2).⁸⁷ The Last Judgement was important as the point towards which all human existence migrated. As such, it stood as something which people should keep in mind so that they could reflect on their sins and correct their behaviour. Bede wrote a poem on precisely this subject, *On Judgement Day*, to console and encourage Bishop Acca of Hexham when he was chased into exile in 731 when King Ceolwulf – to whom the *Ecclesiastical History* was dedicated – was ‘captured, tonsured and restored to his kingdom’.⁸⁸ Art played a pastoral role in Bede’s world here, and he noted that his one-time abbot Benedict Biscop, in 676, had brought back amongst other things wall-paintings depicting scenes from Revelation, which were then hung in the church at Jarrow so that those ignorant of letters could consider the fate of their souls when they entered.⁸⁹ Curiously, given anxiety about how people might interpret scripture, all early visual schemes for Revelation are exclusively literal which suggests faith in the power of the text’s imagery to move, even if the words themselves were difficult. Revelation was useful for encouraging reform. What people should believe about how their souls reached Judgement was an issue that would prove more contentious.

At the safer end of things, Bede was able to use visions of the after-life for political ends, much as had happened in Merovingian Gaul. The ‘revelatory’ content of the *Ecclesiastical History* – aimed, remember, at Ceolwulf’s troubled court – is best represented by a Gregory-of-Tours-

⁸⁷ Bede, *Homilies*, I. 24, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL, 122 (Turnhout, 1955), pp. 170–1 (extract from Gregory’s *Moralia* on salvation and damnation at the Last Judgement, on Luke 21.27) and II. 2, pp. 198–9 (reference to Christ’s return at the consummation of the world, after Matt. 28.20). This might of course indicate that Bede sought not to overlap with Gregory’s work but Markus in general found little of the sense of imminence until Bede’s later writings: R. A Markus, ‘Gregory and Bede: The Making of the Western Apocalyptic Tradition’, in *Gregorio Magno nel XIV centenario della morte* (Rome, 2004), pp. 247–55, esp. p. 250.

⁸⁸ *Baedae continuatio*, s.a. 731, ed. C. Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica* (Oxford, 1898), p. 361: ‘Ceoluulf rex captus, et ad tonsuram et remissum in regnum; Acca episcopus de sede fugatus.’ See J. Story, ‘After Bede: Continuing the *Ecclesiastical History*’, in S. Baxter, C. Karkov, J. L. Nelson and D. Pelteret (eds.), *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald* (Aldershot, 2009), pp. 165–84 at pp. 172–3; Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, p. 103.

⁸⁹ Bede, *Historia abbatum*, I. 6, ed. Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica*, p. 370; P. Klein, ‘The Apocalypse in Medieval Art’, in R. Emmerson and B. McGinn (eds.), *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 1992), pp. 177–9; P. Meyvaert, ‘Bede and the Church Paintings at Wearmouth-Jarrow’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 8 (1979), 63–77.

style antithetical pairing of stories which detailed the experiences of two such visionaries. In the first story, a former laymen named Drythelm from Melrose saw the locations where the saved and damned resided, as well as where the 'not very good' and 'not very bad' were stationed for purgation in between.⁹⁰ Bede's unusual four-point geography for the afterlife has attracted much attention but, within our theme, the key function lies in what followed: Drythelm was inspired to retire to a monastery to live a purer, austere life on earth, which in turn inspired many people including King Aldfrid (d. 705), who would visit him to discuss his experiences.⁹¹ The genre of revelation worked to correct behaviour and attracted the interests of the highest secular powers. The political dynamic is underlined in the second story, in which a doomed sinner warned King Coenred of Mercia about the importance of penance after he had seen two youths with a small book of his good deeds and a horde of demons coming for him with a large book of his bad deeds and thoughts. The man, unlike Drythelm, had left it too late to save himself, but not so late that he could not warn others, who could then hasten to penance.⁹² There is a sequel to this in the *Vision of the Monk of Much Wenlock*, which contains another vision of purgatory in which Coelred, Coenred's successor, had angelic protection taken away from him, after demons asked them to on account of his catalogue of sins.⁹³ Warnings for kings and others to reform their ways abounded.

We might see that Bede's visionary material in the *Ecclesiastical History* represented the 'acceptable face' of the eschatological–apocalyptic spectrum. There was little of the gloom or the ominous signs of Gregory of Tours's *Histories*, which Bede almost certainly knew, and no repeat of Gregory's attempts to integrate AM dates and warnings about the End into his narratives. Indeed, in terms of the ticking clock of apocalypse, Bede notably became the first historian to adopt AD dates for his work which at least had the accidental consequence of side-stepping the Y6K problem. Landes has seen this as a deliberate anti-apocalyptic or anti-millennarian decision by Bede, but it is necessary to ask why this must be the case.⁹⁴ Bede could have been imitating Isidore's 'national' *History of*

⁹⁰ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, V. 12, ed. Lapidge, pp. 372–86. Carozzi, *Le voyage*, pp. 226–53

⁹¹ H. Foxhall Forbes, 'Diuiduntur in quattuor: The Interim and Judgement in Anglo-Saxon England', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 61.2 (2010), 659–84; S. Foot, 'Anglo-Saxon Purgatory', *Studies in Church History*, 45 (2009), 87–98.

⁹² Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, V. 13, ed. Lapidge, pp. 386–92.

⁹³ *Bonifatii et Lulli Epistolae*, no. 10, ed. M. Tangl, MGH Epp. Sel., 1 (Berlin, 1916), p. 14. Carozzi, *Le voyage*, pp. 194–226; P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600–800* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 243–72.

⁹⁴ Landes, 'Lest the Millennium Be Fulfilled', p. 178.

the Goths, Vandals and Suebi with its Spanish Era in place of AM dating, although that text did not enjoy wide circulation and Bede may not have known it. Alternatively, it is notable that in *On the Reckoning of Time*, Bede had advocated using Easter tables as a tool for clarifying dates because of their rich, linear framework for tracking time which included since at least 525 a column for AD dates.⁹⁵ Bede had not added AD dates to his chronographical chronicles in any systematic way, including just a couple of isolated references notably when he dated the conversion of the Ionian monks to Bede's preferred Easter table in 716.⁹⁶ He had, however, begun to compile a significant amount of relative dating material on the basis of letters and other material, so that at least a number of events in English history could be cited under the reign of an emperor (the Gregorian mission under Emperor Maurice, for instance). The extensive use of AD dating in the *Ecclesiastical History* might therefore reflect the maturing of Bede's idea for history, perhaps even taking his cue from notes in some Easter table.⁹⁷ The key point from the perspective of apocalyptic tradition is that the focus seems very much on attention to historical dates and scientific chronology. Nowhere did Bede tie his use of AD dating to concerns about apocalyptic time – a silence more telling because he did address the problems themselves directly.⁹⁸

When it came to how he conceptualised time, the extent to which Bede was a polemicist in the middle of heated fights is often underappreciated.⁹⁹ At the heart of the problem was a battle over Easter tables and for liturgical unity – a point which itself complicates Claude Carozzi's view that focus on the liturgy obscured apocalyptic thought. Different Easter tables in use in the British Isles meant that communities were divided over when to observe the most central feast of the Christian calendar. At the Synod of Whitby in 664 King Oswiu of Northumbria had attempted to heal the rift – and his marriage – by announcing a preference for 'Roman' reckonings over an 'Irish' one, the two reckonings sometimes

⁹⁵ Bede, *De temporum ratione*, c. 65, ed. C.W. Jones, CCSL 123B (Turnhout, 1980), p. 460.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, c. 66, pp. 521, 532.

⁹⁷ J. Story, 'The Frankish Annals of Lindisfarne and Kent', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 34 (2005), 59–109, esp. at p. 73.

⁹⁸ Compare Dionysius's own suggestion that people use AD dates instead of years from the Diocletian persecution to purify time: Dionysius Exiguus, *Libellus de cyclo magno paschae*, ed. B. Krusch, in *Studien zur christlich-mittelalterlichen Chronologie [III]: Die Entstehung unserer heutigen Zeitrechnung*, Abhandlungen der Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Jahrgang 1937, Phil.-hist. Klasse, 8 (Berlin, 1938), p. 64.

⁹⁹ J. T. Palmer, 'The Ends and Futures of Bede's *De temporum ratione*', in P. Darby and F. Wallis (eds.), *Bede and the Future* (Farnham, 2014); Darby, *Bede and the End*, *passim*.

giving Easter dates up to a month apart.¹⁰⁰ Adherents to the Irish table in Dál Riata and Pictland remained unmoved until 716. But more significantly for our concerns, there remained two ‘Roman’ Easter tables in play: the 532-year table of Victorius of Aquitaine (455) and the translation of the ‘Greek’ reckoning by Dionysius Exiguus (525). Now, Easter is calculated by identifying the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox. The problem was that the tables of Victorius and Dionysius used different sub-tables to calculate the age of the moon so they were never quite synchronised, and they had different attitudes to what ‘lunar limits’ were acceptable for Easter.¹⁰¹ Although they disagreed only occasionally, and only by a week, it was enough to be unacceptable. Bede’s works on time, culminating in *On the Reckoning of Time*, were designed as a point-by-point defence of the Dionysiac table, and a subtle attack on the ‘lovers of Victorius’ (*amatores Victorini*). This was, however, only half the battle, as Victorian tables supported the Eusebian age of the world – but Bede most certainly did not, and this was why he was accused of heresy in 708.

The root of the problem was that Bede had come across a revised age of the world, possibly calculated in Ireland, and based on the very Hebrew reckoning we saw earlier attacked by Julian of Toledo.¹⁰² Bede and other critics going back to Augustine had scholarly reasons for doubting the accuracy of AM^{II} because, when they compared biblical time-spans in the *Chronological Canons* of Eusebius-Jerome to those in the Vulgate or Hebrew Bible, they discovered that the translators of the Greek Bible used by Eusebius had often added hundreds to ages early on, with serious implications.¹⁰³ Even at the beginning, when Adam is said in the Greek

¹⁰⁰ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, III. 25, ed. Lapidge, II. 118–34; Stephanus, *Vita Wilfridi*, c. 10, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1927), pp. 20–3. Such has been the advance in knowledge concerning the technical side of this debate one is now advised to begin with Warntjes, *The Munich Computus*, xxxviii–xli and L. Holford-Strevens, ‘Marital Discord in Northumbria: Lent and Easter, His and Hers’, in D. Ó Cróinín and I. Warntjes (eds.), *Computus and Its Cultural Context in the Latin West, AD 300–1200* (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 143–58.

¹⁰¹ Where the full moon is *luna xiv*, the ‘Greek’ attitude was that one could celebrate Easter as early as the next day, *luna xv* (and no later than *luna xxi*), if it was a Sunday, to coincide with the Passion. With the Victorian table, the earliest one could celebrate Easter was two days later, *luna xvi* (and no later than *luna xxii*).

¹⁰² D. Mac Carthy, ‘Bede’s Primary Source for the Vulgate Chronology in His Chronicles in *De temporibus* and *De temporum ratione*’, in Ó Cróinín and Warntjes (eds.), *Computus and Its Cultural Context*, pp. 159–89; *Laterculus Malalianus*, c. 4, ed. J. Stevenson (Cambridge, 1995), p. 124.

¹⁰³ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XV.13, 470–2 (but complicated by XVIII.43, 638–40). Bede, *Epistola ad Pleguinam*, c. 3, ed. C. W. Jones, CCSL, 123C (Turnhout, 1980), pp. 617–18; Bede, *De temporibus*, cc. 16–17, ed. Jones, CCSL, 123C, pp. 600–11 (implied); Bede, *De temporum ratione*, c. 66, ed. Jones, pp. 463–534.

to have fathered Seth when he was 230, the Hebrew and Jerome's Vulgate stated instead that Adam was 130. Pursuing such threads further, Bede and his contemporaries found that one could deduct 1,258 years from AM^{II} and place the Incarnation in AM 3941 instead of AM 5199. This reckoning was then known as the 'Hebrew Truth' because it was based on the original text. Bede's *Letter to Plegwine* (708), in which the scholar first explained this, is a revealing and honest letter. He was acutely aware that he was challenging orthodoxy and that he would receive criticisms, so he followed Jerome in urging his audience simply not to read anything he wrote which might offend them.¹⁰⁴ If Bede's motivation was simply to rejuvenate the age of the world, as Landes supposed,¹⁰⁵ then it is an attempt soaked in scholarly enquiry and self-consciousness rather than an exercise in the suppression of a dangerous date. He could have relied on the Augustinian assertion that prediction was pointless, as he had done in his exegesis when he scolded those who made literal interpretations of 1,000 years.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the argumentative form of Bede's work openly used critiques of opposing points of view to justify his position, so no 'suppression by silence' was involved. Unfortunately for Bede, when he invited his opponents to ignore him if they felt that he was wrong, most did – only on the continent did his revised world chronology obtain any popularity.¹⁰⁷ But the crucial thing for Bede, anyway, was that people should concentrate on the fate of their souls rather than speculation about the end of the world, lest they get caught out by Judgement Day.

Bede's new AM date in fact had opponents on two fronts, as Peter Darby has demonstrated most clearly.¹⁰⁸ The Greek-influenced school of Theodore at Canterbury had already produced one text which poured scorn on the 'Irish' early dating of the Incarnation, and followed Byzantine tradition to defend the passing of the Year 6000 sometime previously.¹⁰⁹ The spirit of Julian of Toledo was at work. Elsewhere, others defended versions of Eusebian orthodoxy against Bede, most famously leading to the accusations against Bede at the dinner table of St Wilfrid, when

¹⁰⁴ Bede, *Epistola ad Pleguinam*, c. 12, ed. Jones pp. 622–3.

¹⁰⁵ Landes, 'Lest the Millennium Be Fulfilled', p. 178.

¹⁰⁶ Bede, *Expositio Apocalypseos*, III. 35. 17–19 and 81–4, ed. R. Gryson, CCL, 121A (Turnhout, 2001), pp. 503/5 and p. 509; Bede, *In epistolas septem catholicas*, ed. D. Hurst, CCL, 121 (Turnhout, 1983), pp. 277–8 (on 2 Peter 3.8).

¹⁰⁷ London, British Library, Harley 3017, f. 66r (Fleury, 862–4); London, British Library, Harley 3091, f. 4r (Nevers, c. 850); Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby 63, f. 26r (Northumbria, 867, but primarily copied from a manuscript from St Bertin).

¹⁰⁸ Darby, *Bede and the End*, ch. 2. See also his 'Bede's Time Shift of 703 in Context', in Wieser et al., *Abendländische Apokalypik*, pp. 619–40.

¹⁰⁹ *Laterculus Malalianus*, cc. 3–4, ed. Stevenson, pp. 122–4; c. 24, p. 154.

an unnamed priest seems to have said that a fourth millennium date ‘denied’ that Christ was born in the sixth age.¹¹⁰ Here the argument, like the one Julian had countered, conflated millennia and world ages so that only dates for the Incarnation after AM 5000, such as those put forward by Julius Africanus and Eusebius, counted as being ‘in the sixth age’.¹¹¹ The only proponent of such a position cited by Bede in his account is the fourth-century author of the *Cologne Prologue* (see Chapter 1), who had followed the older tradition and who Bede himself labels a heretic to discredit his opponents.¹¹² The letter also explicitly scolded those who expected the world to endure for only 6,000 years and those trained in Canterbury who believed it would last 7,000, confirming the presence of the ongoing three-way argument perhaps even just in Bede’s monastery at Jarrow.¹¹³ Bede’s key point, reiterated in *On the Reckoning of Time*, was that no form of prediction was acceptable. What they needed to do was prepare their souls.

Bede’s thought about the Apocalypse was more thoroughly grounded in the Augustinian-Gregorian matrix than it was the debate about numbers. He quoted Gregory the Great’s apocalyptic warnings to Æthelberht of Kent in full and unedited in *Ecclesiastical History*.¹¹⁴ In *On the Reckoning of Time* he quoted Augustine’s *Letter to Hesychius* at length, where the bishop had warned that predictions were liable to place the End too soon or too late and so would lead to disappointment. Only vigilance would do, he stressed in his commentary on Acts, using the words of Jerome: ‘being always uncertain about the coming of the Judge, they should live every day as if the next day they were to be judged.’¹¹⁵ The only two ‘certain signs’ of the End, thought Bede, would be the conversion of the Jews (which he believed to be nearly complete!) and the coming of Antichrist himself for his reign of three and a half years.¹¹⁶ Yet more certainly, he

¹¹⁰ Bede, *Epistola ad Pleguinam*, c. 1, ed. Jones, p. 617.

¹¹¹ Landes, ‘Lest the Millennium Be Fulfilled’, p. 175.

¹¹² Bede, *Epistola ad Pleguinam*, c. 14, ed. Jones, p. 624.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, c. 15, pp. 624–5. For a list of the exclusively continental manuscripts see Jones, CCSL, 123C, p. 616.

¹¹⁴ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, I. 32. 5, ed. Lapidge, pp. 150–2.

¹¹⁵ Bede, *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum*, I. 7, ed. M. Laistner, CCSL, 121, p. 8 (on Acts 1.7): ‘Et quando dicit, non est uestrum scire, ostendit quod et ipse sciat, cuius omnia sunt quae patris sunt, sed non expedit nosse, mortalibus; ut semper incerti de aduentu iudicis sic cotidie uiuant, quasi die alia iudicandi sint.’ See also Bede, *In Marci euangelium exposition*, 4, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL, 120 (Turnhout, 1960), p. 590.

¹¹⁶ Described thoroughly in Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, pp. 95–124. For Bede’s views that the Jews had almost converted see Darby, pp. 201–4 drawing on: Bede, *De tabernaculo*, 2, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL, 119A (Turnhout, 1969), p. 65; Bede, *De templo*, 1, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL, 119A, p. 182; Bede, *In Tobiam*, X. 1–3, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL, 119B (Turnhout, 1983), p. 14, and *In regum librum xxx quaestiones*, c. 1, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL, 119 (Turnhout, 1962), p. 297.

warned Archbishop Ecgberht of York and others, the date of Judgement was unknown.¹¹⁷ Again, we are left in a position where imminence was not being denied, but rather left hanging. Bede's sense of urgency might have been stoked by the accusations of heresy in 708 or the disturbances which saw his friend Bishop Acca of Hexham chased into exile in 731. Nevertheless, he refrained from making anything portentous out of signs he catalogued, and used apocalyptic rhetoric sparingly against his enemies, and even avoided comment on King Ceolwulf's troubles. Bede's was a different kind of battle, and one which points towards the direction of early medieval apocalyptic thought to come.

Where Bede's thoughts on individual judgement, correct liturgical observance and orthodox beliefs come together is in his vision of a church in struggle. It focused on the way in which people took responsibility for action rather than the way that they might fit into salvation history. This is clearest in his *Commentary on Revelation* (c. 703), one of his earliest works and his third-best attested work in the century after his death, after *On the Reckoning of Time* and *On the Nature of Things*.¹¹⁸ In many respects, Bede was not much of an innovator in interpretation but, rather subtly, he refined the line-by-line analysis begun by Tyconius – openly recognised by Bede as a heretic – and developed by Primasius to establish an allegorical reading of the text.¹¹⁹ Still, he saw that John's vision revealed 'by words and figures the wars and internecine tumults of the Church'. Using a model based on the seven movements of Revelation, he identified seven *periochae* or themes to show the Church moving through its 'wars and fires' (*bella et incendia*) towards the Heavenly Jerusalem.¹²⁰ These were (to emphasise the sense of repetition):

- 1 general conflicts and victories of the Church
- 2 future conflicts and triumphs of the Church

¹¹⁷ Bede, *Epistola ad Ecgberhtum*, ed. C. Plummer, *Beda's Opera Historica* (Oxford, 1898), I. 406. See also *In Lucam evangelium expositio*, 5 ed. D. Hurst, CCL, 120 (Turnhout, 1960), p. 316 (Luke 17.23); Bede, *In Marci evangelium expositionem*, 4, ed. Hurst, CCL, 120, p. 603 (Mark 13.32), following Jerome's commentary on Matt. 24.36).

¹¹⁸ See the table in J. Westgard, 'Bede in the Carolingian Age and Beyond', in DeGregorio, *Companion*, pp. 201–15 at p. 211. On the work see G. Bonner, 'Saint Bede in the Tradition of Western Apocalypse Commentary', Jarrow Lecture (Jarrow, 1966) and F. Wallis, *Bede: Commentary on Revelation* (Liverpool, 2013).

¹¹⁹ Bede, *Expositio Apocalypseos*, pref., ed. Gryson, pp. 223–31. On Bede's use of Tyconius and Primasius, see pp. 28–31.

¹²⁰ On the *periochae* see now C. Carozzi, 'Apocalypse et temps de l'église selon Bède le vénérable', in R. E. Guglielmetti (ed.), *L'apocalisse nel medioevo* (Florence, 2011), pp. 115–32. The symbolic value of patterns of seven is a notable feature of Visigothic and Spanish liturgy and exegesis (E. A. Matter, 'The Pseudo-Alcuinian *De septem sigillis*: An Early Latin Apocalypse Exegesis', *Traditio*, 36 (1980), 111–37), although did not influence Bede directly here.

- 3 various events of the Church
- 4 toils and victories of the Church
- 5 the last seven plagues
- 6 the condemnation of the whore, the Ungodly City
- 7 the descent of the Heavenly Jerusalem.

As is evident, these were loose ecclesiological themes rather than World Ages, although he came close to pointing out parallels in his later recapitulation because the sixth and seventh *periochae* were descriptions of the End Times.¹²¹ They were also historical in the sense that they applied to analysis of the real world rather than to spiritual truths, just not in sequence.

Once the Church is viewed as being in a universal, but not quite 'timeless', struggle, various matters began to build up resonance. In the *Commentary on Revelation*, two of the four horsemen plus Gog and Magog readily lent themselves to interpretation as false brothers and heretics, as we might expect.¹²² It took little after the accusations of heresy in 708 to dismiss his enemies as heretics and antichrists when commenting on Luke: 'they are not to be followed.'¹²³ Again, commenting on the Catholic Epistles, John's antichrists who would come at the last hour were the heretics – and there would be many of them until the Last Judgement.¹²⁴ The mood hardly dictated his rhetorical modes, as is shown in *On the Reckoning of Time* where he preferred to chastise his opponents for being un(der)-schooled. But heresy and error were part of a greater struggle. And although Peter Darby has characterised Bede's earlier exegesis as lacking a sense of imminence, we have already seen plenty of evidence to support McGinn's assertion that a radically unpredictable End brought its own fears, little distinct from the fear of dying at any moment which underpinned the second vision in *Ecclesiastical History*.¹²⁵ Indeed, as with Gregory, this seems to have fed into the way that Bede understood missionary work in his own day, as he described St Wilfrid preaching in Frisia in the same terms that he described preachers in the End Times

¹²¹ Bede, *Expositio Apocalypseos*, II. 11. 1–14, ed. Gryson, p. 333 (Rev. 8.1). Carozzi, 'Apocalypse et temps', p. 124; Wallis, *Bede: Commentary on Revelation*, pp. 59–61. Cf. Bonner, *Saint Bede*, pp. 14–15 and E. A. Matter, 'Exegesis of the Apocalypse', in Frassetto (ed.), *The Year 1000*, pp. 34–5 who do draw connections between the *periochae* and world ages.

¹²² Bede, *Expositio Apocalypseos*, III. 35. 92–102, ed. Gryson, p. 511 (Gog and Magog).

¹²³ Bede, *In Lucae evangelium expositio*, 5, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL, 120 (Turnhout, 1960), p. 316 (Luke, 17.23).

¹²⁴ Bede, *In epistolas septem catholicas*, ed. Hurst, p. 295 (on 1 John 2.18). See also pp. 281–2 on 2 Peter, 3.16.

¹²⁵ See also here Wallis, *Bede: Commentary on Revelation*, pp. 51–6 on Bede's variable – even situational – apocalyptic thought.

who would convert Israel and the gentiles.¹²⁶ As an integral part of scripture, apocalyptic text was not suppressed but was deliberately employed to conceptualise and encourage action.

An easily overlooked aspect of Bede's thought here is that, however innovative it was in places, in spirit it often reflected the worldviews of many other, less studied contemporaries. Bernhard Bischoff long ago identified a rich seam of Hiberno-Latin exegesis in Western libraries in the eighth and ninth centuries, much of which is little studied despite providing ready analogues for Bede's ideas.¹²⁷ Struggle against heretics features, for example, in interpretations of the horsemen and Gog and Magog in the mammoth *Pauca problemsmata*.¹²⁸ The earlier *Commemoratorium* proclaims a Tyconian-Augustinian stance against the heretics' literal interpretations of the Devil's binding and Christ's millennial kingdom.¹²⁹ There are differences of emphasis, such as the *Commemoratorium's* focus on the Trinity as unifying motif where Bede had his sevens, but it cannot cover up that in the Hiberno-Irish world – and there alone – there were suddenly multiple efforts to follow the lead of Primasius to provide line-by-line interpretations of Revelation and other books. Whether this was simply because of strong schooling or because of conflicts similar to or related to the ones Bede was engaged in is not so clear. What is clear is that Bede's vision was a widespread one: the many Irish and English religious who travelled to the continent in the seventh and eighth century understood Revelation as a particular story of struggle, and they took many of their commentaries with them to stock libraries in their new

¹²⁶ Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, V. 19. 8, ed. Lapidge, II. 418; Bede, *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum*, III. 1, p. 23. See J. T. Palmer, 'Wilfrid and the Frisians', in R. Higham (ed.), *Wilfrid: Abbot, Bishop, Saint* (Donington, 2013), pp. 231–42 at p. 236.

¹²⁷ B. Bischoff, 'Wendepunkte in der Geschichte der lateinischen Exegese in Frühmittelalter', in his *Mittelalterliche Studien*, I. 205–73. Bischoff's conclusions were challenged in M. Gorman, 'A Critique of Bischoff's Theory of Irish Exegesis: The Commentary on Genesis in Munich Clm 6302 (Wendepunkte 2)', *Journal of Medieval Latin* 7 (1997), 178–233 and 'The Myth of Hiberno-Latin Exegesis', *Revue bénédictine*, 110.1–2 (2000), 42–85, but this met with strong defences from G. Silagi, 'Notwendige Bemerkungen zu Gormans 'Critique of Bischoff's Theory of Irish Exegesis'', *Peritia*, 12 (1998), 87–94 and D. Ó Cróinín, 'Bischoff's Wendepunkte Fifty Years On', *Revue bénédictine*, 110.3–4 (2000), 204–37. On influence on Bede see J. Kelly, 'Bede and the Irish Exegetical Tradition on the Apocalypse', *Revue Bénédictine*, 92 (1982), 393–406.

¹²⁸ *Commemoratorium*, ed. R. Gryson, CCSL 107 (Turnhout, 2003), p. 208 (horsemen) [Wendepunkte, no. 37]. The section of *Pauca problemsmata* concerning Revelation is edited as *De enigmatibus*, ed. Gryson, CCSL 107, pp. 257–8 (horsemen), and p. 290 (Gog and Magog) [Wendepunkte, no. 1]. See also on heresy: *In epistolas septem catholicas*, ed. R. E. McNally, CCSL, 108B (Turnhout, 1973), p. 112 (on 1 John 2.18) [Wendepunkte, no. 35], *Liber questionum in evangeliiis*, ed. J. Rittmueller, CCSL, 108F (Turnhout, 2004), pp. 374–5 [Wendepunkte, no. 16] and various parts of *Expositio evangelii secundum Marcum*, ed. M. Cahill, CCSL, 82 (Turnhout, 1997) [Wendepunkte, no. 28].

¹²⁹ *Commemoratorium*, p. 224. See also *In epistolas septem catholicas*, ed. McNally, p. 106 (on 2 Peter, 3.8).

homes. Apocalyptic discourse across the West could now be grounded in a new, codified interpretation of scripture, which encouraged focus on Judgement and strength in the face of adversity.

Conclusion

‘Apocalypse’ had continued to develop in a number of different guises as the West’s micro-Christendoms sought to define themselves. The Hiberno-Latin projects to process and interpret scripture more systematically than ever before reframed and refocused the logic of apocalypse for a start. Commentators did not just accept Tyconian-Augustinian exegesis – they engaged with it and made it integral to their Christianity, which embraced the idea of a Church in struggle. From that starting point it did not matter if the end was imminent or not, as the action required remained the same, just as the Church’s enemies were typologically the same either way. In some ways this is not so far from the ideas set out by Augustine and Jerome (Chapter 1) and the two Gregorys (Chapter 2), but the intellectual resources for expressing and understanding such matters had been radically expanded. This fed into a continued politicisation of apocalyptic discourse in which reform and the combating of heresy grew as a responsibility for everyone in society, from kings downward. Revelatory material concerning the afterlife and salvation was part and parcel of this way of thinking, rather than something antithetical to apocalyptic discourse. The inevitability of Judgement for all meant that the difference in projected response to eschatology and to apocalypse was minimal.

There were intended and unintentional consequences to the ways in which these things developed in new ways in Spain, Ireland and the English and Frankish kingdoms. The processing of scripture helped to support orthodox stands against predictive apocalyptic beliefs and millenarianism through the authority of accumulated tradition. Calls for reform did inspire secular leaders to engage in change, and maybe the growth in visionary literature played a part too. The broader quest for orthodoxy affected apocalyptic tradition, changed its meaning and even confused it. Arguments to ensure liturgical unity through Easter tables combined with scholarly enquiry into chronology provoked new arguments and the production of new texts in Ireland and England whereas they had not caused so much fuss in, say, Spain. But then one suspects that Isidore would not have predicted that his dismissal of apocalyptic chronologies would have provided fuel for apocalyptic speculation in Gaul, nor that Julian of Toledo’s attack on Jewish chronology had been enacted just as that very chronology was being enthusiastically adopted in Ireland. Nothing ever quite works as it should do.



Figure 2 Tomb of Mellebaudus of Poitiers. Inscription in the Dunes Hypogeum, Poitiers: ‘all things become every day worse and worse, for the end is drawing near.’

Whatever kind of Dark Age modern historians might imagine existed in the seventh and early eighth centuries, many of the intellectual and political foundations for centuries of Christendom were being established. Members of ‘micro-Christendoms’ fought the battles they faced and doctrine and practice evolved in response. The spectre of heresy remained strong but at least political fragmentation and plague were less pronounced as universal anxieties. And yet, as one stone-carver in Poitiers observed gloomily sometime around 700, ‘all things become every day worse and worse, for the end is drawing near’.¹³⁰ Indeed, while all these things had been debated in the West, renewed crisis in the East meant that the Augustinian-Gregorian paradigm was about to be presented with its greatest challenge.

¹³⁰ Crypt of Mellebaudus of Poitiers: ed. E. le Blant, *Nouveau recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes de la Gaule* (Paris, 1892), p. 260: ‘Quoniam quidquid quotidie pejus et pejus, quia jam finis adpropinquat.’