KNOW YOUR SOURCES BEFORE YOU ARGUE – MINUCIUS FELIX AND AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO ON THE CONFLAGRATION

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Introduction

The idea that fire shall eventually consume the whole world appears frequently in the corpus of surviving Greek and Roman texts.[1] However, in most of these cases, the specific concept is integrated into a superordinate context. An example of this would be the appearance of the theme in ethical or theological discourses. Hence, there is hardly ever a discussion merely about the physical processes involved in the world's destruction in and of itself, without being connected to another topic. Although this finding could be a result of the fragmentary nature of the surviving evidence, especially when it comes to the writings of Hellenistic philosophers, it is at least important to stress that the idea of a global conflagration is not treated by natural philosophers exclusively. It is rather the case that variations of this concept can be found equally in different types of texts with diverse narrative and argumentative settings; for example, in didactic or epic poetry, dialogues, or treatises. Depending on the specific type of text and discourse, the exact details and depiction of the end of the world by fire can thus be highlighted or changed to different degrees. In one tradition, the global fire catastrophe emerges at great

1 This article will expand upon some of the basic ideas about the authorizing techniques of Christian apologists that have arisen in the work on my forthcoming dissertation about concepts of the end of the world in Greek and Latin literature.

length as a dreadful event in the future connected to fear and loss. In another, it is described as a natural occurrence that one should expect with a calm mind and without worry.

As the ancient doxographical tradition witnesses, the Stoics – prominently known for their doctrines about cosmology and ethics – and especially their early school leaders Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysipp, are the prototypical representatives of such ideas. They developed slightly diverging conceptions of a cosmic cycle that included, in the words of Jaap Mansfeld, "the periodical destruction of the ordered universe by 'total conflagration' (which is how I prefer to translate *ekpyrosis*) and its periodical rebirth out of the liquid mass into which the fire – though remaining present with it – converts itself when all fuel has burnt".[2] Apparently, in these teachings, the recurrent dissolution of all complex structures is closely connected to their reconfiguration.[3]

Due to the fact that Stoicism was very popular from the Hellenistic period up until the fall of the Roman Empire,[4] many of its concepts have been broadly received and transformed in ancient literature, including the idea of an *ekpyrosis*.[5] Nevertheless, I do not mean to suggest that the idea of a global conflagration could be traced back to these philosophers exclusively, but merely that the popularity of their ethics and cosmology contributed a great deal to the widespread adoption of this concept.

However, the purpose of the present contribution is not to reconstruct pagan concepts of the *ekpyrosis*, but rather to focus on two Latin Christian writers of Late Antiquity, namely Minucius Felix and Augustine of Hippo, and their method to validate their knowledge about the end of the world. Of particular interest will be how they classified the various already existing concepts about the end of the world, even if they dismissed or ignored them. How they tried to stage Christian knowledge as superior, and, in close connection to the last aspect, if they used pagan and/or specific Christian elements of knowledge to authorize their concepts.

2 MANSFELD, 1979, pp. 136f.

3 See HAHM, 1977, pp. 185-199, as well as the newer contributions of SALLES, 2005; 2009.

4 On this, see, for example, SALLES, 2014.

5 See HARRILL, 2010, p. 122: "Evidence for the widespread treatment of Stoic cosmological motifs appears across the board, in genres as diverse as philosophy, rhetoric, and poetry to biography, satire, scientific handbook compendia, and tragedy."

As a matter of fact, from at least as early as the *Second Epistle of Peter*, many early Christians associated the expected return of Christ with a subsequent conflagration which shall ultimately destroy the earthly world.[6] The relevant passage of the Epistle runs as follows:

δι' ὃν ὁ τότε κόσμος ὕδατι κατακλυσθεὶς ἀπώλετο· οἱ δὲ νῦν οὐρανοὶ καὶ ἡ γῆ τῷ αὐτῷ λόγῳ τεθησαυρισμένοι εἰσὶν πυρὶ τηρούμενοι εἰς ἡμέραν κρίσεως καὶ ἀπωλείας τῶν ἀσεβῶν ἀνθρώπων. […] ἥξει δὲ ἡμέρα κυρίου ὡς κλέπτης ἐν ᾗ οἱ οὐρανοὶ ῥοιζηδὸν παρελεύσονται, στοιχεῖα δὲ καυσούμενα λυθήσεται, καὶ γῆ καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ ἔργα εὑρεθήσεται.[7]

By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgement and destruction of the ungodly. […] But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.[8]

Even if the vivid description does not use the term *ekpyrosis*, it is quite obvious that it has much in common with the Stoic imagery of world-destruction.[9] However, biblical scholars often deny the Stoic influence on the *Second Epistle of Peter* in particular, while postulating a specific uniqueness for early Christianity.[10] Such anachronistic approaches are rightly criticized by J. Albert Harrill who describes them as "unhelpful […] because [their] totalizing interpretative framework sets up 'Judaism' and 'Hellenism' as code words masquerading as fixed historical entities, which are then said to be capable of 'interacting' with each other".[11] Indeed, it would be more appropriate not to construe clean cultural blocks, but rather to emphasize the mutual exchange

6 See RUF, 2011, p. 516.
7 *Second Epistle of Peter* 3.6f.; 10.
8 The translation follows the *New International Version*.
9 For the connection between Stoicism and the *Second Epistle of Peter* see HARRILL, 2010, especially p. 122, who argues that "Stoic cosmology fed the Roman cultural imagination in many and creative ways, in part because the Stoics reformulated popular religious myths into a rational, scientific framework" and, therefore, that Roman readers of the Epistle "have been familiar with the (Chrysippean) imagery of Stoic ἐκπύρωσις, if not the details of the theory that underlay it".
10 See THIEDE, 1986, and the critical reflection on this view in VAN DER HORST, 1998, p. 278, note 28.
11 HARRILL, 2010, p. 118.

between the different individuals making up cultural groups, especially when it comes to early Christianity and its position in a pagan environment.

Compared to the common Stoic conceptions of the *ekpyrosis*, however, the key difference in the *Second Epistle of Peter* is that the concept of conflagration as formulated in the text is not something cyclically occurring but rather a unique and final event.[12] Additionally, in accordance with the Christian image of god, i.e., that the creator is not identical with nature or the world created, but stands outside of it, he – as an external force, not a natural law – will bring the destruction. Because of those and similar early transformation processes, I argue that such methods had already found validity and acceptance in early Christianity in order to convert pagan ideas into specific Christian concepts.[13]

As it can be seen from these paradigmatic transformations, the early Christian apologists faced the challenge of dealing with various pre-existing concepts of nature and god, especially those of the Stoics. Their doctrines are often used as points of comparison in order to articulate what distinguishes the Christian conception of the world's conflagration from the pagan ones.[14] In this context, the apologists emphasize which specific features of the pagan concept can be assimilated and which must be rejected.

Turning now to the dialogue of Minucius Felix, particular attention shall be given to whether he addresses these significant differences between Christian and pagan knowledge about the end of the world, and how he eventually resolves them.

12 Although the conflagration could have been sometimes imagined as a singly occurring event in a pagan context; see, for example, Lucan's *Bellum civile* (especially 1.67-81), which does not imply a subsequent renewal.

13 GNILKA, 2012 has dealt in detail with the methods involved in the reception and adaptation of pagan culture by Christian authors, which he calls *Chrêsis*. On the broader topic of the Christianization of the Roman Empire, see, for example, LEPPIN, 2012.

14 See, for example, Justin Martyr, *Apologia* 1.20.2 and Origen of Alexandria, *Contra Celsum* 4.14.

Minucius Felix – An Archaeology of Truth

Unlike many other early Christian writers, little is known about the life of Minucius Felix, except that he wrote the apologetic dialogue *Octavius*,[15] probably around the first decades of the third century CE.[16] This piece takes on a special position within Christian apologetics in that it bases its entire argument on Greek philosophy and, starting from this, seeks to prove the superiority of the Christian religion while establishing it as the *true* philosophy. The initial scene of the dialogue is displayed as follows: During a walk on the beach, three friends start a dispute about Christianity, whereby the pagan Caecilius and the Christian Octavius debate, and a third figure, Minucius Felix, also a Christian, is appointed as the arbiter. In the course of Caecilius' speech, he raises various topical accusations against the Christians,[17] such as subliminal atheism, cannibalism, and moral transgressions,[18] all of which are easily refuted by Octavius.[19] In addition to the typical *topoi*, Caecilius also polemicizes against the Christian conceptualization of the end of the world:

quid? quod toto orbi et ipsi mundo cum sideribus suis minantur incendium, ruinam moliuntur, quasi aut naturae divinis legibus constitutus aeternus orbo turbetur, aut rupto elementorum omnium foedere et caelesti conpage divisa moles ista, qua continemur et cingimur, subruatur.[20]

What else? That they threaten conflagration to the whole world, and to the universe itself, with all its stars, they meditate on their downfall as if either the eternal order constituted by the divine laws of nature could be disturbed, or the bond of all the elements could be broken up, and the heavenly structure dissolved, and that fabric through which we are contained and bound together could be overthrown.

Strikingly, this accusation draws on a terminology that figures strongly in Stoic philosophy, and is often connected to the idea that the world will be

15 Hereafter, I will refer to this work as "Min. Fel.".
16 See FREUND, 2000, p. 425.
17 See ALAND, 1985, p. 11.
18 Min. Fel. 5-13.
19 Min. Fel. 16-38.
20 Min. Fel. 11.1.

destroyed by fire.[21] In that instance, the term *conpages* refers to the ancient *pneuma*-theory, prominent in ancient Greek medicine, which postulates a physical substance that exists as a link between all living beings.[22] Based on the idea that the cosmos is a living entity, the prominent Stoic Chrysipp has transferred this function of *pneuma* by analogy to the world and postulated the thesis "that the universe was held together by the coherent force and tensional movements of the all-pervasive cosmic πνεῦμα [*pneuma*]".[23] The idea of such a pneumatic tension pervading and holding everything together also appears in the *Astronomica* of Manilius, who likewise describes it as "eternal frameworks" (*aeternae compages*).[24] Thus, the figure of Caecilius takes a philosophical standpoint that postulates that the world will continue to exist forever. If, however, it can be assumed that the group of intended recipients was also familiar with the terminology of Stoicism, as argued above, it appears that the formulation of this accusation already provides the grounds for an answer that uses the same vocabulary.

The response of the Christian Octavius accordingly builds on the fact that the concept of a global conflagration is anything but specifically Christian:

ceterum de incendio mundi aut improvisum ignem cadere aut diffindi caelum non credere vulgaris erroris est.[25]

As for the conflagration of the world, it is an error common among the masses to refuse to believe that sudden fire falls or that the heaven dissolves.[26]

First of all, any opinion that denies an end of the world in fire is labelled as *vulgaris error*, which in philosophical arguments is often used for those who interpret reality by means of myths.[27] This would, for example, also affect the Aristotelian doctrine of the infinity of the world, which, however, is not dealt

21 The accusation could possibly come from a Platonic or Peripatetic milieu. Equally possible, however, would be a Stoic source that distances itself from the concept of the conflagration, as attested by Cicero in *De natura deorum* (2.118) for Panaetius of Rhodes; see also HARRILL, 2010, p. 122.
22 See WHITE, 2003, p. 136.
23 LAPIDGE, 1979, p. 347.
24 Manilius, *Astronomica* 2.803.
25 Min. Fel. 34.1.
26 Translation: CLARKE, 1974, p. 114 with adaptations.
27 See SCHUBERT, 2014, p. 613.

with directly and which is not affected by the following basic assumption since Aristotelians claimed that the world has always existed and has, therefore, no beginning: *quis enim sapientium dubitat*, *quis ignorat*, *omnia quae orta sunt occidere*, *quae facta sunt interire?*[28] The term *sapientes* does not necessarily refer to pagan philosophers exclusively, but also to those Christians who believe in the concept of the conflagration of the world. Furthermore, and this is especially instructive for the examination of authorizing strategies, Octavius alludes to philosophical schools that (allegedly) supported the doctrine of a global conflagration. Therefore, he begins most prominently with the Stoics:

caelum quoque cum omnibus quae caelo continentur, ita ut coepisse desinere fontium dulcis aqua maria nutrire, in vim ignis abiturum Stoicis constans opinio est, quod consumpto umore mundus hic omnis ignescat.[29]

It is an established opinion among the Stoics that the heavens, along with everything enclosed by the heavens, just as they had a beginning, will resolve into the substance of fire once the fountains of sweet water and the seas have ceased to nourish the firmament. They consider that when the supplies of moisture have been exhausted, this entire universe will catch fire.[30]

This description of the Stoic conflagration refers closely – partly literally[31] – to a description in Cicero's philosophical dialogue *De natura deorum*, in which the Stoic Balbus elaborates the doctrine.[32] It is noteworthy that the figure of

28 Min. Fel. 34.2: "What philosopher has a moment's doubt or is unaware that what has a beginning must have an end, what has been made must perish?" This basic premise, that all created things must pass away due to the nature of the material, is a recurrent theme in Greek philosophy. On this, see SCHUBERT, 2014, p. 614, who also points out that the statement is not tautological.

29 Min. Fel. 34.2.

30 Translation: CLARKE, 1974, pp. 114f. with adaptations.

31 SCHUBERT, 2014, pp. 615f.

32 Cicero, *De natura deorum* 2.118: *sunt autem stellae natura flammeae*; *quocirca terrae maris aquarumque reliquarum vaporibus aluntur is qui a sole ex agris tepefactis et ex aquis excitantur*; *quibus altae renovataeque stellae atque omnis aether effundunt eadem et rursum trahunt indidem*, *nihil ut fere intereat aut admodum paululum*, *quod astrorum ignis et aetheris flamma consumat*, *ex quo eventurum nostri putant id de quo Panaetium addubitare dicebant*, *ut ad extremum omnis mundus ignesceret*, *cum umore consumpto neque terra ali posset nec remearet aer*, *cuius ortus aqua omni exhausta esse non posset*: *ita relinqui nihil*

Balbus indicates in this passage that there were certain Stoics, such as Panaetius of Rhodes, who doubted this doctrine. However, the figure of Octavius entirely ignored this, enabling him to rely on his argument of an established opinion (*opinio constans*).

In this context, he also does not mention that, according to Stoic doctrine the differentiated world will be built up again out of its best possible state of fire, and that Stoics usually do not postulate an absolute end of the world, but rather a cyclical model. By doing so, Octavius intents to authorize the Christian concept through these philosophical teachings, whereby specific differences would not have been helpful, which is why they are not mentioned at all.

Regarding the end of the world, Octavius refers to Epicureanism as a second authority: *et Epicureis de elementorum conflagratione et mundi ruina eadem ipsa sententia est*.[33] This reference is brief and rather incidental, which is probably due to the fact that the intended readership did not primarily associate the concept of an *ekpyrosis* with the teaching of Epicurus. Rather obvious would have been a connection to atomic theory, which describes a destruction of the world through a process of dissolution.[34] However, in its brevity the attribution is not wrong either, since the Epicurean Lucretius in his *De rerum natura* certainly takes into account the possibility that the collapse of too many fire-conglomerates could lead to the downfall of the world through a

praeter ignem, a quo rursum animante ac deo renovado mundi fieret atque idem ornatus oreretur.

"The stars are made of fire, and they are accordingly fed by moisture form the earth and sea and the other waters; the sun extracts it from the fields and when they grow warm, and from waters. When the stars and the aether generally have been nourished and refreshed by the moisture, they disgorge it, and then they take it up again from the same sources. Virtually none of the moisture is lost, or at any rate only a minute fraction is consumed by the stars and the flaming aether. Our Stoic spokesmen (they used to concede that Panaetius registered doubts about this) believe that the ultimate outcome will be that the entire universe will go up in flames; for once the moisture has evaporated, the earth cannot obtain nourishment, and the air cannot circulate, since it cannot rise when all the water has dried up, with the result that nothing is left but fire. Then the universe will be restored from this living and divine element of fire; it will come into being established as before." (translation: WALSH, 1997, pp. 89f.).

33 Min. Fel. 34.3: "What the Epicureans believe about the conflagration of the elements and the collapse of the universe is identical."

34 The figure of Vellius, who is a prototypical Epicurean and the main speaker of the first book, presents this theory in Cicero, *De natura deorum* 1.20.

global fire.[35] Whether this was accepted and received by later Epicureans as an alternative model of cosmic dissolution is uncertain. Minucius Felix, who was obviously not concerned with portraying the complexity of the ancient philosophical schools, being more concerned with authorizing and defending the Christian concept, used a rhetorical strategy to quote or allude to decontextualized statements that were not necessarily wrong.

Additionally, as a third argument, Octavius refers to the teachings of Plato, and to his dialogue *Timaeus,* which he then introduces:

loquitur Plato partes orbis nunc inundare, [*dicit*] *nunc alternis vicibus ardescere et, cum ipsum mundum perpetuum et insolubilem diceret esse fabricatum, addit tamen ipsi artifici deo soli et solubilem et esse mortalem. ita nihil mirum est, si ista moles ab eo, quo exstructa est, destruatur*.[36]

Plato mentions that parts of the world are, in turns, at one time under water, at another on fire; though he does say that the world itself was made everlasting and indestructible, he still adds that it is perishable and destructible but only for its maker, God Himself. It would not cause any surprise, then, should this vast structure be destroyed by the one who constructed it.[37]

First of all, a theory of periodic, but local, destructions is cited that is mentioned by the figure of Critias in Plato's *Timaeus* when he talks about the cultural memory of the Greeks and that this commemoration shall always be destroyed by fire and water catastrophes.[38] Thus, the features "fire and water" and "destruction" are combined with each other and attributed to the teachings of Plato.

35 Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 5.407-410: *ignis enim superare potest ubi materiai/ex infinito sunt corpora plura coorta,/et pereunt res exustae torrentibus auris./inde cadunt vires aliqua ratione revictae.*
"For fire can win when from the infinite of mass have risen many compounds and things perish burned by burning hot winds. And then its powers succumb, somehow subdued again."

36 Min. Fel. 34.4.

37 Translation: CLARKE, 1974, p. 115.

38 Plato, *Timaeus* 22c: πολλαὶ καὶ κατὰ πολλὰ φθοραὶ γεγόνασιν ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἔσονται, πυρὶ μὲν καὶ ὕδατι μέγισται, μυρίοις δὲ ἄλλοις ἕτεραι βραχύτεραι.
"Many and manifold are the destructions of humans that have been and shall be, the greatest are by fire and by water, but there are lesser ones in countless other fashions." (translation: ARCHER-HIND, 1973, p. 71 with adaptations).

However, since Platonism is prominently known to postulate a potential eternity of the created world, it would probably have damaged the credibility of the figure of Octavius if he had eliminated this aspect completely. The fact that he introduces the demiurge (*artifex*) at this point and calls him *deus* allows him, in turn, to connect the demiurge to the destruction of the world, which is an essential feature of the Christian concept.[39] He achieves this by alluding to a later passage in the *Timaeus*,[40] which is, however, no longer presented by Critias, but by the figure of Timaeus, who talks about a different philosophical system. Therefore, the second section of the quote in the *Octavius* is originally not related to the theory of periodic disasters. Octavius construes such a link only by combining the initially separate statements to one fitting unit. In doing so, the figure of Octavius, again, deals rather loosely with the sources to which he refers. However, this approach allows him to connect his concept of the conflagration of the world with the authoritative name of Plato, even if the original writings of the philosopher did not stress a coming *ekpyrosis*.

Finally, in order to avoid giving the impression that it is not decisive whether one is an adherent of the Christian faith or of a particular philosophical doctrine, since they allegedly share the same doomsday concept, the Octavius persona adds an aspect that also reveals much about the complex objective of his approach:

animadvertis philosophos eadem disputare quae dicimus, non quod nos simus eorum vestigia subsecuti, sed quod illi de divinis praedicationibus prophetarum umbram interpolatae veritatis imitati sint.[41]

39 The connection between *artifex* and *deus* can also be found in Stoic testimonies; however, in this context, it is used with a Christian connotation. For the Stoic terminology, see WILDBERGER, 2006, pp. 15f.

40 Plato, *Timaeus* 32b-c: καὶ διὰ ταῦτα ἔκ τε δὴ τούτων τοιούτων καὶ τὸν ἀριθμὸν τεττάρων τὸ τοῦ κόσμου σῶμα ἐγγενήθη δι᾽ ἀναλογίας ὁμολογῆσαν, φιλίαν τε ἔσχεν ἐκ τούτων, ὥστε εἰς ταὐτὸν αὑτῷ συνελθὸν ἄλυτον ὑπὸ τοῦ ἄλλου πλὴν ὑπὸ τοῦ συνδήσαντος γενέσθαι.
"For these reasons and out of the elements of this kind, four in number, the body of the universe was created, being brought into concord through proportion; and from these it derived friendship, so that coming to unity with itself it became indissoluble by any force save of him who joined it." (translation: ARCHER-HIND, 1973, p. 99).

41 Min. Fel. 34,5.

You observe that the philosophers discuss the very ideas which we hold. The explanation is not that we have followed after their footsteps but that they have made a shadowy, though distorted, imitation of the truth found in the divine proclamations of the prophets.[42]

At this point, Octavius uses a line of argument that Christian Gnilka describes as "historical basic idea" ("historischer Grundgedanke").[43] The aim of this strategy is, first of all, to explain the overlapping of content between Christian and pagan concepts by claiming that Greek philosophy acquired all its wisdom from the biblical prophets and subsequently deformed it. In doing so, he places Christianity in direct succession to these prophets, thereby granting Christians unrestricted access to the unadulterated truth. Consequently, Christian concepts are thus given a priority by which they are characterized as superior despite their similarity to pagan concepts.

Additionally, Octavius provides this example to demonstrate how a Christian approach to the history of philosophy that does not entirely reject pagan philosophy but evaluates its teachings through Christian reflection could operate.[44] For this purpose, a philosophical archaeology can be applied, as pursued by Octavius, to extract – according to Christian interpretation – essential components of the "deformed" teachings and thereby to reconstruct the "original truth". Such a rhetorical method can also be used to legitimize Christian doctrines, not through the intrinsic citation of concrete Biblical quotations, but from an apparently extrinsic point of view based on independent sources that are, in fact, decontextualized fragments.

As a point of comparison to this extrinsic technique, the relevant remarks of a prominent Christian apologist of intellectual history in Late Antiquity, namely of Augustine of Hippo, will be examined below. In doing so, the focus will lie on his work *De civitate Dei*[45] whereby it will in particular be necessary to examine in what ways, in the context of the two-state doctrine,[46] he authorizes his knowledge of the coming demise of the world.

42 Translation by CLARKE, 1974, p. 115 with adaptations.
43 See GNILKA, 2012, p. 25. For the so-called "proof of age" ("Altersbeweis") see PILHOFER, 1990, p. 281.
44 See also FREUND, 2010, pp. 428f.
45 Hereafter, I will refer to this work as "Aug. civ.".
46 See, in detail, the study of SCHMIDT, 1956.

Augustine of Hippo – The Truth of Divine Revelation

Augustine of Hippo, to whom the later tradition refers to as one of the great Church Fathers of the Christian West, wrote a monumental apologetic work (*De civitate Dei*) as part of his extensive oeuvre in which he formulates a Christian theory of history.[47] Therefore, he claims the existence of two citizenries (*civitates*), one of God (*civitas Dei*) and one of the Devil (*civitas diaboli*), which he also calls the earthly citizenry (*civitas terrena*), in opposition to the heavenly (*civitas caelestis*). According to this doctrine, every human being belongs to either one or the other citizenry. Both communities exist at the same time, and while they are strictly separated from each other in the beyond, in this world the members of both citizenries live side by side. However, Augustine claims that being part of the Christian Church is not enough to bring about eventual redemption. Rather, it lies in the decision of God as to which people will finally be included in the eternal *civitas Dei* that follows the mundane history of the world.

Thereby, Augustine entirely deconstructs the concept of history as a sequence of events. In his understanding, it is not certain occurrences that are crucial for the history of humanity, but only the awareness of the two coexisting communities who are essentially different.[48] Consequently, a central purpose of *De civitate Dei* is to present world's history in terms of this distinction. To achieve this, Augustine formulates the concept of the 'Six Ages of the World' (*aetates*), which he had already developed in his work *De Genesi adversus Manichaeos* (1.35-41).[49] For that reason, he relies on a historical classification, which was also used in Roman historiography to construe an analogy between historical periods and the stages of a human life.[50] According to this correlation, history goes through several stages of aging, just as a human being does, that is, following the Roman conception: infancy (*infantia*), childhood (*pueritia*), youth (*adolescentia*), adulthood (*iuventus*), senior age

47 FUHRER, 2004, pp. 137-149 provides a learned introduction to the subject.
48 See IBID., p. 140, and especially p. 143.
49 See SCHWARTE, 1966, pp. 17-61. For earlier Christian (chiliastic) models, see pp. 119-176.
50 See SCHMIDT, 1956 and, in particular, FUHRER, 2012 for a detailed analysis with a comparison to Florus, Ammianus Marcellinus, the late antique *Historia Augusta*, and Seneca the Elder.

(*aetas senior*/*gravitas*), and senility (*senectus*). In addition to this analogy based on the human lifecycle, he also parallels the stages of history with the days of creation in *Genesis*: the six ages of the world correspond to the six days of creation, and God's seventh day of rest prefigures the eternal *civitas caelestis*.[51] Unlike proponents of chiliastic models, however, Augustine does not attribute a duration of one thousand years to the several ages of the world. He divides them according to his own conception, as Therese Fuhrer summarizes:

> The seventh age of the world, the seventh day, the day of Sabbath rest, the new Aion, initiated by the return of Christ, the judgment of the world, and the end of the world, follow according to Augustine indefinitely. […] The six ages before the seventh day correspond to the stations that the people of Israel pass on their salvation-historical path of development.[52]

In what follows, I want to examine how Augustine depicts the end of the world within the framework of the previously presented conceptualization of the world's history. Focusing on the primary question of this paper, I shall demonstrate which authorizing strategies Augustine uses to legitimize his knowledge about the future demise. In view of this purpose, the twentieth book of *De civitate Dei* is significant, as he predicts the final destinies (*debiti fines*) of the two *civitates* in this book.

As an introduction to his eschatological composition, in which he speaks about the Last Judgment, the end of the world, and the resurrection of the dead, Augustine initially presents several epistemological considerations. Since his subsequent argumentation addresses a realm that lies beyond current human cognition, the matter of which sources can be used to provide sound information about this realm needs to be clarified. In his opinion, the only reliable way to address this subject would be to use divine testimonies (*testimonia divina*), as they are superior in every respect to human theories.[53] By divine testimonies, he refers to quotes from the sacred Scriptures, which he calls God's

51 See FUHRER, 2012, pp. 269f.

52 IBID., p. 271: "Das siebte Weltalter, der siebte Tag, der Tag der Sabbatruhe, der neue Aion, der durch Christi Wiederkehr, Weltgericht und Weltuntergang eingeleitet wird, folgt gemäß Augustin in unbestimmter Zeit. […] Die sechs Lebensalter vor dem siebten Tag entsprechen den Stationen, die das Volk Israel auf seinem heilsgeschichtlichen Entwicklungsweg durchschreitet."

53 Aug. civ. 20.1.1-7.

words mediated through holy souls (*a summo ac vero Deo per animas sanctas dicta*). He also claims that the fact that these testimonies are divine words makes their truth unquestionable, so that every person who hears them is internally convinced, even if they refuse to admit it to the outside world.[54] By building up this line of argument, he uses a rhetorical strategy to refute his opponents' potential objections right from the start. Thus, he can refute any doubts about the legitimacy of the source of his knowledge by arguing that any resistance against the *testimonia divina* is only an external reaction of defiance contrary to an individual's inner conviction. Unlike Minucius Felix, he is at this point not interested in identifying valid elements of knowledge about the end of the world in pagan philosophy. This observation also corresponds to his statements in previous books where he denies pagan philosophers the possibility of being able to lead to the eternal *civitas Dei*, even if he conceded that the Platonists came close to Christian teachings.[55]

In terms of his methodology, he stresses the superiority of the New Testament. While the Old Testament is earlier in date, its value consists – according to Augustine – in announcing the events of the New Testament.[56] However, he does not ignore passages from the Old Testament entirely. These are used in a second step to affirm New Testament's evidence.[57] Consequently, he begins his prediction of coming events by listing passages from the Gospels and the writings of the Apostles that support his arguments.

After some remarks on the Last Judgment and the resurrection of the dead, Augustine also addresses the question of what will happen to the earthly world. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that, above all, he takes an anthropocentric perspective throughout, and his reasoning, therefore, is primarily concerned with how humanity will fare on Christ's return. What will ultimate-

54 Aug. civ. 20.1.7-14.

55 See FUHRER, 2004, pp. 147f.

56 Aug. civ. 20.4.3-5: *quamvis enim vetera priora sunt tempore*, *nova tamen anteponenda sunt dignitate*, *quoniam illa vetera praeconia sunt novorum*.
"For although the Old Testament is prior in time, the New Testament is to be placed before the Old in terms of dignity, because the Old Testament is the herald of the New." (translation: DYSON, 1998, p. 970).

57 Aug. civ. 20.4.5-7: *nova igitur ponentur prius*, *quae ut firmius probemus*, *adsumentur et vetera*.
"The New Testament evidence will be cited first, therefore, and we shall then confirm this by means of proofs derived from the Old." (translation: DYSON, 1998, p. 970).

ly happen to the mundane world is of secondary importance. First, he thematizes at which point of the sequence of events the end of the world will occur:

peracto quippe iudicio, tunc esse desinet hoc caelum et haec terra, quando incipiet esse caelum novum et terra nova. mutatione namque rerum, non omni modo interitu transibit hic mundus. unde apostolus dicit: praeterit enim figura huius mundi, volo vos sine sollicitudine esse. figura ergo praeterit, non natura.[58]

But when the judgment is accomplished, this heaven and this earth will pass away, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth. For when this world passes away, this will not come about by the utter destruction of things, but by their transformation. This is why the apostle say, 'For the figure of this world passeth away. I would have you be without anxiety.' It is, then, the figure, not the nature, that passeth away.[59]

In addition to determining the event after the divine judgment, according to the *Book of Revelation*,[60] he also specifies what shall happen exactly. Thereby, it is essential for him to emphasize that this will not be a destruction of the world, but a complete transformation: The shape (*figura*) of the world may be destroyed, but its actual essence (*natura*) stays intact. To support this idea, he quotes from the *First Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians*.[61] Augustine himself, however, draws the conclusion that this affects only the external nature of the world and not its essence.

Two chapters later, he returns to the biblical prediction of a new heaven and a new earth, again referring to the *Book of Revelation*.[62] In greater detail, he describes the transformation of the world as follows:

58 Aug. civ. 20.14.19-24.

59 Translation by DYSON, 1998, p. 998.

60 Rev. 20.11.

61 1 Cor. 7.31f.

62 Aug. civ. 20.16.7-12: *et vidi*, *inquit*, *caelum novum et terram novam*. *nam primum caelum et terra recesserunt*, *et mare iam non est. isto fiet ordine*, *quod superius praeoccupando iam dixit*, *vidisse se super thronum sedentem cuius facie fugit caelum et terra*.
"'And I saw', he says, 'a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea [Rev. 21.1].' This will come to pass in the order which he has already specified in advance, when he said, 'I saw Him that sat on a throne, from Whose face the heaven and the earth flee away'." (by DYSON, 1998, p. 1002 with adaptations).

[…] *tunc figura huius mundi mundanorum ignium conflagratione praeteribit, sicut factum est mundanarum aquarum inundatione diluvium. illa itaque, ut dixi, conflagratione mundana elementorum corruptibilium qualitates, quae corporibus nostris corruptibilibus congruebat, ardendo penitus interibunt, atque ipsa substantia eas qualitates habebit, quae corporibus inmortalibus mirabili mutatione conveniant; ut scilicet mundus in melius innovatus apte adcommodetur hominibus etiam carne in melius innovatis*.[63]

[…] [T]he figure of this world will pass away in a conflagration of all the fires of the universe, just as it was of old downed by the inundation of all waters of the universe. By that conflagration, as I call it, the qualities of the corruptible elements which were fitted to our corruptible bodies will wholly perish in the burning. Then, by a miraculous transformation, our very substance will take on the qualities which belong to immortal bodies; and the purpose of this will be to equip the world, now made new and better, with a fitting population of humans who are themselves renewed and made better even in their flesh.[64]

Without direct reference to any scriptural testimony, Augustine adds the information that earthly fire will be the means of the transformation of the world. As a point of comparison, he uses the biblical Flood, which should have reminded his recipients directly of the *Second Epistle of Peter*, which employs the same parallel. Relying on this allusion, he apparently felt no need to justify his concept of the conflagration of the world, which might also indicate that he, as Minucius Felix, understood this idea as an established thought.

Equally significant, however, is that he gives a reason for the transformation of the world, namely that immortal humans will need an appropriate world. The world's present shape, which is subject to constant transience, must, therefore, be replaced by a similarly immortal world. This demonstrates the anthropocentric perspective that Augustine pursues in his argument(s).

In a later chapter, he finally cites an extensive section of the *Second Epistle of Peter*, in order to authorize his previously presented statements using the only unquestionable evidence from the New Testament.[65] In his subsequent interpretation of the quote, he attaches great importance to the parallelization between deluge and conflagration, as this is of particular relevance for his

63 Aug. civ. 20.16.16-25.
64 Translation: DYSON, 1998, p. 1002 with adaptations.
65 Aug. civ. 20.18.1-22.

following argumentation. He emphasizes that the upper layers of the heavens containing the stars were spared during the Flood, which means that they will also stay unscathed during the conflagration.[66] To this intact area, he assigns the function of receiving the saved saints during the conflagration and sparing them from the flames, which will change the *figura mundi*.[67] Here again, the concept of the conflagration is strictly connected to another anthropocentric topic.

When it comes to the evidence of the Old Testament, Augustine turns to the *Psalms of David*, which he claims as explicitly addressing the end of this world:

hoc tamen quod de fine huius saeculi apertissime ibi dictum est, nequaquam silentio praeteribo. principio terram tu fundasti, Domine, et opera manuum tuarum sunt caeli. ipsi peribunt, tu autem permanes; et omnes sicut vestimentum veterescent, et sicut opertorium mutabis eos, et mutabuntur; tu autem idem ipse es, et anni tui non deficient.[68]

But I shall by no means pass over in silence what is most clearly said there concerning the end of this world. 'In the beginning hast Thou laid the foundations of the earth, O Lord; and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; and as a vesture Thou shalt change them, and they shall be changed: but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail' [Ps. 101.26-28].[69]

66 Aug. civ. 20.18.24-35.

67 Aug. civ. 20.18.43-50: *quaerat forsitan aliquis*, *si post factum iudicium iste mundus ardebit*, *antequam pro illo caelum novum et terra nova reponatur*, *eo ipso tempore conflagrationis eius ubi erunt sancti*, *cum eos habentes corpora in aliquo corporali loco esse necesse sit*. *possumus respondere futuros eos esse in superioribus partibus*, *quo ita non ascendet flamma illius incendii*, *quem ad modum nec unda diluvii*.
"Perhaps someone will now ask the following question. If, when the judgment is completed, this world is to burn up, where will the saints be during the time of this conflagration, before the world is replaced by the new heaven and the new earth? For they must be in some material place, since they have material bodies. We can reply that they will be in the higher regions to which the flames of that burning will not rise, just as the waters of the flood did not." (by DYSON, 1998, p. 1006).

68 Aug. civ. 20.24.2-7.

69 Translation: DYSON, 1998, pp. 1024f.

Even though the cited passage from the psalms praises an eternal God rather than explicitly depicting the end of the world, it seems to provide enough legitimizing potential for Augustine's argument. According to his proposition that the older biblical writings are predictions of the newer ones, it is not necessary for his argumentation that the testimony explicitly addresses the end of the world. However, it is quite effective in this case that the image of the discarded clothes fits perfectly with the previously mentioned idea that the shape of the world is being changed.

This chapter is also significant because, while referring to the psalm, he deals with an opponent of Christian doctrine:

quid est quod Porphyrius, cum pietatem laudet Hebraeorum, qua magnus et verus et ipsis numinibus terribilis ab eis colitur Deus, Christianos ob hoc arguit maximae stultitiae etiam ex oraculis deorum suorum, quod istum mundum dicunt esse periturum?[70]

Porphyry praises the Hebrews for their pity in worshipping a God who is great and true and terrible even to the gods themselves. Why, then does he follow oracles of those gods in charging the Christians with immense folly because they say that this world is to perish?[71]

Prominently known for his efforts against Christian belief, the Neoplatonist Porphyry of Tyre became a topical synonym for heresy among early Christian apologetics.[72] Therefore, Mark Edwards strikingly points out that

when the Church remembered him by name it was as an antichrist, the arch-defender of polytheism, and plagiarist of demons; it became such a common pastime to refute him that we cannot be sure whether every title cited in the heat of controversy belonged to a different work, and whether every one of these works contained a frank assault on Christianity.[73]

Like Minucius Felix, Augustine sees himself as having been challenged to defend the doctrine of the world's demise against philosophical opponents

70 Aug. civ. 20.24.8-12.
71 Translation: DYSON, 1998, p. 1025.
72 BECKER, 2016 provides a collection of fragments and testimonies of his work.
73 EDWARDS, 2007, p. 112.

convinced of an eternity of the world. The former created, therefore, the figure of the pagan philosopher Caecilius, arguing against the destructibility of the world. Augustine, conversely, invokes Porphyry of Tyre, someone known to the readers as a spokesperson of anti-Christian argumentation. Using these characters, both can work through arguments to support their own teachings and refute their opposition.

Although the initial circumstances of the two Christian authors are comparable, their actual lines of argument are quite different. When Minucius Felix begins with the counterargument that it is common philosophical thought to believe in the conflagration, Augustine aims at revealing the inner contradiction in the reasoning of his opponent. If Porphyry or the gods in his theological treatises compliment the scriptures of the Hebrews for their wisdom, he cannot refuse the concept of world's future end, which is – according to Augustine – already evident in the psalms.[74] After an extensive digression on how the statements of the psalm and the *Second Epistle of Peter* complement each other, Augustine draws a sarcastic conclusion: The only way that the gods of Porphyry can deny the world's end and still praise the wisdom of the Hebrews is that they had not read all of their scriptures.[75]

Conclusion

To sum up the examinations of this contribution, I will finally compare the approaches of both apologists. In the dialogue, the pagan Caecilius blames Octavius for believing in the demise of the world against all reason. To answer the objection, he demonstrates that several philosophical schools allegedly supported the Christian doctrine of the world's conflagration. His rhetorical technique is based on decontextualizing certain elements of philosophical teachings and passing over details that do not match his reasoning. In principle, he acknowledges that the various philosophical schools can provide components of truth that can only be recognized through Christian interpreta-

74 Aug. civ. 20.24.15-26.

75 Aug. civ. 20.24.69-71: *restat ut dicant*, *quod propterea dii eorum Hebraeam sapientiam laudaverint*, *quia istum psalmum non legerant*.
"All that remains for them, therefore, is to say that their gods praised the wisdom of the Hebrews because they had not read this psalm." (translation: DYSON, 1998, p. 1027).

tion, however. Thus, if one wants to study pagan philosophical writings, one should practice – following his example – the archaeology of truth. Therefore, I prefer to describe this approach as extrinsic.

Conversely, Augustine of Hippo, too, makes it a subject of discussion whether it is reasonable to believe in the world's conflagration. As sources for his argument, he uses biblical testimonies exclusively, as he attributes the highest epistemic value to them. Additionally, he categorizes evidence from the New Testament as superior to evidence from the Old Testament, because he understands the latter only as a prediction of the former. When he chooses to argue against his opponents, he rhetorically invalidates their reasoning by demonstrating contradictions of their argumentation. In contrast to Minucius Felix's approach, I understand Augustine's as essentially intrinsic.

However, both share the idea of god as the foundation of unadulterated truth. Their assumption is, therefore, that only his revelation leads to reliable knowledge. For Minucius Felix, this revelation has also influenced pagan philosophy, whereas Augustine acknowledges it as contained in biblical writings, exclusively.

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