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JOACHIM OF FLORA AND THE ETERNAL GOSPEL

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A Thesis presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Systematic Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

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by

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June 1956

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London:

in Dante's *Divine Comedy* when  
he describes the "Paradise"  
in the Heaven  
this "Joachim,  
spirit was endowed with  
the *Divine Comedy*, translated  
(London Press, 1928), p. 150.



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Joachim of Flora is one of the most fascinating characters to arise out of the Middle Ages. In the centuries following his death he has become almost legendary, for as one author puts it, "The story of Joachim takes us into the atmosphere of charming legend."<sup>1</sup> His own contacts with our present age are numerous, and yet he has remained relatively unknown. Dante admired him, honoring him with lines in the Divine Comedy<sup>2</sup>, George Sand based one of her romances, Spiridion, on his life, and the philosophers such as Schelling and Hegel pay tribute to his work. Certainly such a figure cannot be considered unimportant. But of even greater concern for the student of church history is the conclusion drawn by Professor E. Buonaiuti, one of the leading authorities on Joachim,

The struggle of the Curia against the influences of the

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<sup>1</sup>Vida D. Scudder, The Franciscan Adventure (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1931), p. 121.

<sup>2</sup>"Di spirito profetico dotato" is Dante's phrase when Joachim is pointed out to him by Boneventura in the Heaven of the Sun. The White translation renders this "Joachim, the good Calabrian abbot, whose spirit was endowed with prophesy." Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy, translated by L. G. White (New York: Pantheon Press, 1948), p. 150.



Joachimites fills the whole story of the church till the vigil of the Reformation.<sup>3</sup>

Two thoughts are recurrent in Joachim for which the church was at first--the thought of freedom and the thought of the Spirit.

At first glance it would seem an easy and simple task to treat of such an individual and to relate the incidents and doctrinal position which brought him fame. Unfortunately, however, the modern world has treated him somewhat poorly. Not only is there a bare smattering of material concerned directly with him available, but there has been only one edition of his genuine works printed, this at the time of the Reformation. Since that time only two men have given extensive study to his life and work, E. Buonaiuti, and H. Grundmann, the latter being in possession of many of the original manuscripts and fragments, both genuine and spurious, by and pertaining to Joachim. For the English reader only one short study has been produced. For these reasons, we shall in this thesis endeavor to collect the materials which have been brought to light thus far concerning his life and work.

While there are many problems which have arisen concerning his life and writings, we shall restrict ourselves here to a historical-systematic survey of the man and his particular emphasis. Basically, he would be classed with the

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<sup>3</sup>Scudder, op. cit., p. 136.



mystics. And yet, as Professor Buonaiuti comments:

The seer of Celico separates himself from the usual type of Christian mystic, by his omnipresent consciousness of the chain which binds the spiritual destiny of the individual to that of the mass, by the unconquerable inclination to perceive the problem of salvation only against the protecting background of a universal palingenesis, through which a collective spirituality must be raised to a height never reached, let us better say, to its beatific consumation.<sup>4</sup>

Secular sources, if and when they comment upon him, usually regard his teaching as an outgrowth of second century gnosticism. Frequently, the messianic impulses of the modern dictator are ascribed to the influence of Joachim on nineteenth century German philosophy.

Actually, Joachim defies classification. His contact with the early church does lie in the second century, not in gnosticism so much, however, as in the Montanist heresy. The ever present conflict of the church seeking peaceful association with the world as contrasted to the spiritual emphasis and charismatic gifts of the primitive church had remained more or less dormant for those many years. Montanism was eliminated as a contending force, although it did not cease to exist, and with the decline of the Roman Empire and the subsequent organizational development of the church, Joachim's teachings reintroduced this early emphasis most clearly.

Neoplatonism, of course, offered a mystical emphasis of

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 137.



sorts which was to be felt in certain segments of Christendom, particularly through the influence of Augustine. However, the monastic movements of the fifth and sixth centuries encompassed most of these elements, and the organizational consolidation of the church leading into the Middle Ages overcame most of the individual mystic elements. Rufus Jones gives an important insight into the times of Joachim and his followers:

The opening of the thirteenth century was marked by an immense ferment of heretical movements. The most virile and at the same time the most popular of these movements was the one named after its founder, Peter Waldo, the Waldensian Evangelical Movement. More positively anti-Church and more emphatically dualistic in thought was the surge of gnostic ideas expressed in the widespread sect of Cathari. Neither of these movements was essentially mystical, but in the general ferment of the times many mystical elements emerged. There was a restlessness of spirit in the humble circles and in the lay classes of society. There was a strange glow and warmth, a stirring of life even before the birth of the meditant orders. There was a widespread loss of faith in the Church, especially in its moral and spiritual leadership, and a vague turning elsewhere for the resources of life. Probably the influence of the Crusades was the major factor in the ferment. They brought a sense of disillusionment and unsettlement. The glowing expectations, the romantic dream of outward conquest had failed, but the spirit of adventure now turned inward and gave birth to a new kind of romance with vivid dreams of a new Jerusalem to be found here on earth.<sup>5</sup>

Many were not content with the theological-philosophical progress of the Church. They wished a movement of the Spirit. It was to this element that Joachim appealed.

A contemporary of his, Amaury of Bene, a Frenchman, was quite similar in many respects. The central article of faith

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<sup>5</sup>Rufus Jones, The Flowering of Mysticism (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1939), pp. 50-51.



in him and his followers was the recognition that the age of the Spirit had come. The Sacraments, rules, forms, all were a thing of the past. Evidently they had come under the influence of John Scotus Erigena and his neoplatonic emphasis.

Jones comments:

The Church Council which condemned Amaury and ordered his body to be dug up and burned, also condemned a book called Periphysion which is undoubtedly Erigene's De Natura. Cardinal Henry of Ostia in his account of the heresy says: 'The doctrine of the wicked Amuary is comprised in the book of Master John the Scot, which is called Periphysion, which the said Amaury followed.'<sup>6</sup>

This movement centered in Paris and saw a development of ideas quite similar to those of the Joachimites, although it is hardly possible to argue that at this time Joachim's works were known or possessed there. Among the adherents of the movement there was considerable intellectual confusion and probably some moral chaos.<sup>7</sup> In the face of strong persecution, they dropped quickly out of the picture.

Of more concern to the Church at this time was the sect of Cathari. For all practical purposes the Albigenses, a branch of this sect located in northern Italy and southern France, are an excellent example, representing the heretical teachings of the followers found in the countries throughout western Europe. Manichaeistic in their doctrine, they dab-

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>7</sup>Original materials on this movement, and particularly the influences in Paris, can be found in the Chronicles of Guillaume le Breton and Ceaser of Heisterbach.



bled in almost all the heretical notions of the past ages: e.g., docetic in their Christology, montanistic with relation to the gift of the Spirit, and fiercely anti-clerical. Inquisitions were instituted in an attempt to exterminate them in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, but they managed to flourish until the eve of the Reformation. They were representative of the extreme rebellious spirit within the Church at the time of Joachim. Not content with reform from within, they demanded a clean break with clerical power.

However, this was the age of papal supremacy. From Gregory VII forward through the days of Joachim the papal tiara rose to unexcelled heights. All temporal rulers lay at the feet of the Pope, the representative of God on earth. Opposition to this supremacy, moreover, stemmed not only from earthly princes and heretical sects, but even within the church, quietly to be sure, there arose reaction to the secularization and temporalization of ecclesiastical power. Oddly enough, in the early stages the contradictory movements interacted.

Leaders of the new piety, men like Hugo of St. Victor and Bernard of Clairvaux, saw in the Crusades an opportunity for actually participating in the mystical exercises they propounded. The papacy saw in them the subjugation of the temporal princes. Both ends were served, eventually to the mutual exclusion of each other. However, Bernard was no contender of ecclesiastical authority. He was strongly wedded to the Church, and though to react to worldliness opposes the basic



drive of that authority, he did not let his subjectivity overcome ecclesiastical consciousness. Thus, the height of spiritual thought immediately prior to Joachim did not initiate a turn from authority. While Joachim may have attempted to make the Cistercians of Bernard more Spirit-conscious, he retained the master's concern for the hierarchy of the Church.

It was not only individuals, however, that sought a return to the more spiritual. Enthusiasm developed in the late twelfth century for the precursors of the mendicant orders, the Beguines and Beghards. The Beguines appear first at Leige and were originally communities of women devoted to the care of the sick, the watch over the dying, and the offering of prayers at burials. They lived off charity and seem to have derived their name from their association with a reforming priest, Lambert le Beges. The Beghards were their comparable male counterparts, performing similar duties, consisting of pious lay brothers attempting to bring religion into active form.

The organization of these people was quite loose, and this frequently led to heretical tendencies. Both groups were extremely sensitive to the mystical apocalyptic elements of the time. Because of their similarity in action to the Waldensians and Albigenses they were frequently accused of heresy. With the advent of the mendicant orders, the Dominicans swallowed up what remained of the orthodox Beguines, while the Franciscans accommodated the majority



of the Beghards.

It is into this picture that Joachim steps. He is the product of these combined influences, and yet in a sense he repudiates them all by being classified as a follower of none of them. He is a prophet, a builder of a new Jerusalem.

Joachim belongs to the order of the "prophets." His ideals and aspirations are in essential matters like those of the Montanists of the third century. He is in pronounced opposition toward the ecclesiastics. He is tired of bishops and priests. He is eager for a new dispensation in which the Spirit will be the direct and immediate guide of the Church, with a new type of "prophet" as an organ of revelation. We have in Joachim an enthusiast, a framer of dreams, a builder of new Jerusalems, or--as Renan expressed it--a person with "a great instinct for the future."<sup>8</sup>

Europe was expectant, and the times charged their apocalyptic hope. The Crusades had seen thus far a defeat of their hope for a Jerusalem in fact, and so to them Joachim offers his "revelation" as the precursor of a new and more romantic hope.

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<sup>8</sup>Jones, op. cit., p. 54.



## CHAPTER II

### THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOACHIM

Joachim was born about the year 1130 at Celico, in Calabria, then a part of the kingdom of the Two Sicilies, comprising at that time most of lower Italy as well as the island of Sicily. His father was named Mauro and his mother Gemma. It is said that his family name was Tabellione<sup>1</sup>, and that his father held some office at the court of Roger II of Sicily. However, La Piana notes:

Buonaiuti rejects the traditional view that Joachim was a noble, and regards him as having risen up from the peasantry. He bases this upon Joachim's calling himself a homo agricola from his youth up.<sup>2</sup>

The usual marvels have been related concerning his youth. At his baptism, probably when he was ten years old, accounts speak of a vision portraying his prophetic greatness in the future. Unfortunately, in all of these materials dealing with his early life it is difficult to ascertain anything of factual certainty.

The next accurate historical peg in his life seems to be a trip to the Holy Land with several other young companions. A number of these friends perished in Constantinople in the

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<sup>1</sup>Tabellio means notary; therefore, it has been conjectured that this refers to his father's office rather than a family name.

<sup>2</sup>George LaPiana, "Joachim of Flora: a critical survey," Speculum, VII (April, 1932), 271.



plague, and he continued on to Palestine with only a single companion. He suffered tremendously from thirst and hunger while wandering in the desert, and from this experience we have the following account of a vision:

When he was asleep in the desert he had a vision of a river of oil, and one standing by it who bade him drink. In his dream he drank, and when he awoke he found that he understood the entire significance of Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

Tradition states that he spent the Lenten season fasting on Mt. Tabor, and that it was on the eve of Easter Day that he received a revelation determining his future life and work.<sup>4</sup>

On his return to Italy, he entered the Cistercian monastery at Sambucina. Evidently he remained there for some time as a lay student and scholar, at the same time, however, engaging in some religious activity. Legend says that while at Sambucina the following occurred:

He was walking one day in the garden of the monastery when an angel appeared, bearing a jar of wine, and bade him drink. Joachim drank, and, when he had quenched his thirst, returned the vessel. "O Joachim," said the angel, "if thou hadst but drunk it to the last drop, no knowledge would have escaped thee."<sup>5</sup>

This seems to be no more than a variation on the oil story previously noted.

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<sup>3</sup>Henry Bett, Joachim of Flora (London: Methuen & Co., 1931), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup>Joachim says in Expositio in Apocalipsim that the fullness of the knowledge contained in the book was a revelation given to him "in that hour in which the Lion of the tribe of Judah is arising."

<sup>5</sup>Bett, op. cit., p. 7.



There was manifest clerical reaction to his religious activities without benefit of orders, and so in 1168 he was ordained a priest in the abbey at Corazzo by the Bishop of Cantanzano.<sup>6</sup> He soon was made Prior of the abbey, and some time before 1178 succeeded Columbanus as Abbot, in both instances against his own wishes and despite his protestations. In 1183 he repaired as a guest to the monastery of Casamari, remaining there for almost two years, correcting his work and making additions. He visited Pope Lucius III at this time and was given permission to continue his writing wherever he thought best, now officially relieved of the temporal cares at the abbey at Corazzo. While progressing with his writing, he also during this time made a number of strong attacks upon the laxity of monastic life, even among his own Cistercians. This, naturally, aroused a great deal of resentment, but nothing came of it, neither with respect to the reform Joachim wished, nor the censure of Joachim the monastics demanded.

With the ascension of Urban III to the pontificate, he once more sought papal approval of his work. Urban encouraged him in his efforts in 1186 without being specific in any detail. Contemporary with this visit is the legend that Joachim met Emperor Frederick Barbarossa and publically rebuked him for being too devoted to worldly affairs. However, this account does not have the historical certification that his con-

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<sup>6</sup>Casamari, Sambucina, and Corazzo were intimately related, being founded in that order and all Italian Cistercian houses.



versations with others related to the Third Crusade has.

Clement III in 1188 urged him to hasten the completion of his work so that it might be submitted to the Holy See for judgment. Already he was gaining a considerable reputation as a prophet, and it was becoming increasingly important that the papacy know the exact content of his teaching. There is little reason to doubt the authenticity of the account of Roger de Hoveden<sup>7</sup> that in 1190 Richard I (the Lion-hearted) sent for him while stopping at Messina in Sicily on his way to join the Third Crusade. The substance of the conversation seems to have been Joachim's exposition of Revelation 12:1 and 17:9. There also seems to be indications here that Joachim may have called the papacy the potential seat of the Anti-Christ. Tradition has added equally interesting conferences with Philip Augustus of France and Henry VI of the Holy Roman Empire, the latter being more doubtful due to the record's insistence on recognizing the pseudo-Joachim commentary on Jeremiah as authentic.

In 1191 he left Corazzo permanently, retiring into the mountainous solitude of the Pietralata where he built a cell and oratory for himself. The following year the Cistercians summoned him to show cause for his desertion of Corazzo. However, he had attracted a number of followers, unwillingly it seems, and he disregarded the attacks of the Cistercians,

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<sup>7</sup>Roger de Hoveden, Annals, Volume II, pp. 176-180, entry for 1190.



founding the abbey of Saint John of Flora (or Fiore). He intended it to be headquarters for a severe reform of the Cistercian rule, and within a few years had attracted support from the King of the Two Sicilies and the Holy Roman Emperor.

Finally, in April of 1196, Celestine III issued a bull approving the order of Flora and releasing Joachim from Cistercian obedience. This was reinforced after Joachim's death by Innocent III in 1204, reaffirming the order and approving it. Honorius III (1216-1227) issued several bulls forbidding the defamation of Joachim or his order. It seems the Cistercians had neither forgiven nor forgotten!

Actually, the order never became a large institution. It had only about forty houses at its height and never spread outside of Italy. By the sixteenth century it was fast disappearing, some houses returning to the Cistercians, others joining the Carthusians and Dominicans. By 1570 there is no record of any house remaining.

Joachim himself finished his writings in what he considered acceptable form by the year 1200 and submitted them to Rome. Before judgment was passed, he died at San Giovanni in Fiore, March 30, 1202. It is recorded that he passed on "in an odour of sanctity."<sup>8</sup> Though he was never officially beatified, he still is venerated as beatus, May twenty-ninth being the day used for this recognition.

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<sup>8</sup>Edmund G. Gardner, "Joachim of Fiore," Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume VIII, p. 406.



Already before his death numerous legends sprang up concerning his person. We read:

In time we learn that his face, usually like a dead leaf, shone with angelic radiance when he celebrated the Mass. . . . He lived during his later years in a perpetual vision.<sup>9</sup>

It is said that pictures of St. Francis and St. Dominic were painted on the walls of his cell by prophetic inspiration long before they were born. All of these factors tend to cloud any historical material that might have been available. It has become a most difficult task to separate truth from legend concerning the basic facts of his life, much less learn more of the factors influencing his development.

Certainly Joachim's mystic or spiritual illumination did not take the place of study, but probably led him to a much closer examination of Scripture. It seems evident from his attitude toward the Cistercians, a strict order considering the times, that he did not feel adequately satisfied with ordinary monastic life. Nevertheless, as we shall in examining his doctrine, he did not despise the monastery, but merely sought to strengthen it from outside cares and influence. Monasticism was important in his scheme for the ages.

The Cistercian order was to leave its unmistakable marks. Established on a more liberal base of control than previous orders, it fostered manual labor. This became a dominant factor in the preachments of that great monastic figure of the

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<sup>9</sup>Vida D. Scudder, The Franciscan Adventure (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1931), p. 137.



twelfth century, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. He criticizes the excesses of the papal court; he rails against the abuses of the clergy; he urges men and women to enter the monasteries; he dreams of an ascetic society molded on a monastic ideal. All of these can be found behind or in many of the ideas of Joachim. Thus, while we have no direct discipleship, so to speak, there is a direct line of thought.

Moreover, Joachim's physical location gave him an ideal cross section of current thought. Not only was he aware of the contemporary developments in the Roman church, but he also had intimate contacts with those of the Eastern Orthodox persuasion, as well as remnants of Moslem and Jewish migrants living in the lower part of Italy. In Calabria there were a number of Basilian monks who used the Greek rule and Greek liturgy. How much exact intercourse took place between Joachim and them is hard to ascertain; there are indications, however, that even physical conflict occurred between his monastery and them from time to time.<sup>10</sup>

His contact with the Moslem world is fraught with many interesting possibilities. Bett observes that the figure 1260 played an important role in the cult of the Babi among the Moslems and wonders if it is coincidence or a latent idea in Moslem thought which focused Joachim's attention.<sup>11</sup> Whether

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<sup>10</sup>Bett, op. cit., pp. 18ff.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 20.



the latter is valid or not, the fact remains that Joachim no doubt was familiar with many of the elements of Moslem thought and their contributions to the learning of the Middle Ages.

With all of these conflicting interests, however, Joachim was a loyal son of the Church. Froom cites Joachim's own thoughts on the matter in his Tractatus Super Quatuor Evangelia,

Actually Joachim saw no conflict between this idea and his loyalty to the papal church, for he expected the new spiritual church to be welcomed by the pope, just as the child Jesus was embraced by Simeon in the temple.<sup>12</sup>

While there had been anti-clerical and anti-papal movements before his time, he did not look to them as the hope of his spiritual order, but to the papacy. The church had urged him to complete his work, and upon its completion he submitted the work to Rome for approval. As Grundmann notes:

Als Abt und als Gelehrter--nicht als Politiker--steht Joachim in persönlicher Beziehung zum kaiserlichen Haus Heinrichs VI, ebenso zur Kurie unter Lucius III (1181-1185), Urban III (1185-1187), und Clemens III (1187-1191). Wir wissen nichts, und es ist unwahrscheinlich, dass seine Orthodoxie zu Lebzeiten je verdächtigt wurde. Nur sind die Zisterzienser ihm und seiner Stiftung seit der Trennung misgünstig gewesen.<sup>13</sup>

No where can we find a rebellious attitude with respect to the authority of the Church. True, statements as well as stories attributed to him can be found that would make him the veritable prefiguring of reforming zeal, but more often

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<sup>12</sup>Leroy Froom, The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Co., 1950), I, 698.

<sup>13</sup>H. Grundmann, Studien über Joachim von Floris (Leipzig: B. G. Tüebner, 1927), pp. 12-13.



than not these are spurious. Where shown to be authentic, the statements should not be viewed outside the scope of ecclesiastical approval. Joachim was confident that he had a message for the Church--within its official framework!

The genuine works of Joachim are: Liber Concordiæ Novi et Veteris Testamenti, Expositio in Apocalipsin, and Psalterium Davida Secundum. In addition to these major works, there are several small treatises: Contra Julianos, De articulis Fidei, De unitate Trinitatis, Super regula Sancti Benedicti, and Treatus super quatuor Evangelia. Two hymns, De Patria Celesti and De Gloria Paradisi, appended to the Psalterium should also be considered genuine.

It is evident that the three principal works stand close together with respect to time of composition. All were probably begun about the year 1134, with the Concordia finished first, c.1134, the Expositio next, c.1136, and the Psalterium and other minor works finished by the year 1200. However, there can be an arbitrary division based on letters of Joachim; some of his letters indicate that to the very end he was re-working earlier works while finishing the later ones. Thus, there is a real community of thought between them, despite the difference between the formal schemes of the books. Throughout them all he refers to each of the others.

The Concordia seeks to establish an elaborate parallel between the Old and the New Testaments. Every person, event, or age in the one is shown to correspond to a person, age, or



### CHAPTER III

#### JOACHIM'S WRITINGS AND DOCTRINE

The genuine works of Joachim are: Liber Concordiae Novi ac Veteris Testamenti, Expositio in Apocalipsim, and Psalterium Decem Cordarum. In addition to these major works, there are several small treatises: Contra Judaeos, De articulis fidei, De unitate Trinitatis, Super regula Sancti Benedicti, and Tractus super quatuor Evangelia. Two hymns, De Patria Celesti and De Gloria Paradisi, appended to the Psalterium should also be considered genuine.

It is evident that the three principal works stand close together with respect to time of composition. All were probably begun about the year 1184, with the Concordia finished first, c.1189, the Expositio next, c.1196, and the Psalterium and other minor works finished by the year 1200. However, this can be an arbitrary division based on letters of Joachim; these same letters indicate that to the very end he was reworking earlier works while finishing the later ones. Thus, there is a real community of thought between them, despite the difference between the formal schemes of the books. Throughout them all he refers to each of the others.

The Concordia seeks to establish an elaborate parallel between the Old and the New Testaments. Every person, event, or age in the one is shown to correspond to a person, age, or



event in the other, with these two then serving as a prefiguration for the third and final age of the Spirit. Thus, the book becomes a somewhat bizarre philosophy of history, or, as Löwith puts it, "theological historicism."<sup>1</sup>

The Expositio is concerned primarily with the apocalyptic symbols and their interpretation in the book of Revelation. The entire presentation is dominated by this same idea of three dispensations. The Psalterium, it seems, was conceived as a result of Joachim's doubts with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity. In his prayers invoking the Holy Spirit for illumination there was presented to his mind the symbol of the ten-stringed psaltery as the explanation of the mystery of the Trinity. Again the thought of the three dispensations rules, this time represented thusly: the first book treats of the Father, represented by the body of the instrument; the second of the Psalms which are sung with its aid--divine Wisdom--representing the Son; the third the method of psalmody, melody and unction, representing the Holy Ghost.

The minor treatises on the four Gospels, against the Jews, and the against the adversaries of faith are keyed to more immediate needs and do not contribute essentially to his position. As was noted earlier, the only printed edition of his works came out from 1519 to 1527 in Venice.

For the moment, of more interest are a number of pseudo-

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Löwith, Meaning in History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 156.



Joachim works ascribed to him. In the thirteenth century a number of volumes, mostly prophesy or interpretation of prophesy, were fathered upon Joachim. In the main these originated in the midst of the Franciscan spirituals. It is most interesting to note that his distinctive doctrine spread not among his own order, but upon another, and primarily in another land--France. Bett notes in his study:

Every wild dream of the coming of Antichrist, of the last persecutions of the faithful, of the downfall of the Papacy, of the rise of a renewed Church that should be characterized by purity and poverty, of the final judgment, of the end of all things, found expression in some prophetic screed that was attributed to Joachim, or that was supposed to be an exposition of his teaching.<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt as to the spurious character of these writings. Three major considerations point this out. In the first place, Joachim's style is simple and unaffected, while the spurious works are usually bombastic. Secondly, the attitude of Joachim to the Church is mild at its worst and usually that of a loyal Catholic, while the apocryphal writings denounce the Church bitterly and irreconcilably. Finally, the prophetic method is quite different. Joachim is rarely specific, especially with reference to time, while the false documents usually make some exact reference or identification.

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<sup>2</sup>Henry Bett, Joachim of Flora (London: Methuen and Co., 1931), p. 27.



Among the more important of these spurious documents is Interpretatio in Hieremiam prophetam. It is not mentioned in the letter of Joachim which cites his authentic works through the year 1200.<sup>3</sup> Since this and the other apocryphal works would have had to have been produced in the relatively short period of two to three years, and in content actually comprise a greater amount of work than all of his others, it is hardly possible that it could be anything but fraudulent. Much of Hieremiam deals with Frederick II as a persecutor of the Church, and as he was at most two years old at the time Joachim was to have written it, it is hardly conceivable that Joachim authored it. While the work claims to have been written in 1197 at the request of Henry VI, Holy Roman Emperor, it probably came out some time in the 1240's, as a result of the feud between Frederick and the papal party.

In a like position is Scriptum super Esaiam prophetam. Quite similar in structure and content to Hieremiam, it is generally dated later, Grundmann placing it about 1266.<sup>4</sup> It too pictures Frederick II as God's avenger to punish the fallen Church. Froom notes an interesting distinction between the two:

The earlier Jeremiah commentary sees in Frederick II

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<sup>3</sup>Herbert Grundmann, Studien über Joachim von Floris (Leipzig: B. G. Tuebner, 1927), p. 16.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.



the seventh head of the dragon, which is also the antichrist, whereas the Isaiah commentary includes Frederick and his successors, as represented by the red dragon, yet who is not himself the Antichrist but only his forerunner or his vicar;<sup>5</sup>

The ministers of the Church are labeled as the cause of the prevailing evil with a consequent new era of the Spirit to erase this.

Expositio Sibyllae et Merlini are likewise falsely attributed to Joachim. In both these cases the title is quite misleading. Merlin, of course, is famous as the British enchanter at the time of King Arthur. This prophecy to which the exposition has reference, however, has nothing to do with this legendary personage. Rather, it is the creation of the thirteenth century with the borrowed name. Thus, this is a doubly spurious creature. Likewise, the exposition of the Erythraen Sibyl's prophesies has no real connection save sentiment with the parallel accounts in Greek mythology. It dates probably from the thirteenth century also and seems specifically Franciscan in origin.<sup>6</sup>

More interesting is the Vaticinia Pontificum which purports to be a prophetic characterization of the future line of popes. Normally, only the first sixteen of the twenty-four paragraphs are ascribed to Joachim, although later editions credit him with the entire work. This enjoyed

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<sup>5</sup>Leroy Froom, The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Co., 1950), I, 726.

<sup>6</sup>Bett, op. cit., p. 35.



a great many reprints, and with each, redactive efforts of editors attempting to bring it up to date. Thus, the more fantastic of the later predictions were corrected from time to time. Of all pseudo-Joachim works it probably enjoyed the most popularity.

One last work might also be given slight attention because of its unusual nature. This is De Semine Scripturarum. Dating not long after the death of Joachim, it has its influence taken in the main from Jewish cabalism. This movement founded its doctrines upon the deep hidden meanings of numbers, letters, and words. Normally it would not have been considered Joachim's but for the introduction stating "Incipit liber Joachim . . . ." <sup>7</sup> There is little in common with the genuine Joachim to be found in this extreme type of literalism.

Normally, so much attention should not be given to the spurious writings of an individual. However, in the case of Joachim, it was on the basis of these apocryphal works that his fame grew in the late Middle Ages. Most of the later Joachimites quote not from the authentic writings, but from these spurious ones. This is not to say that there was not a connection between the content. In the main, the pseudo-Joachim works derived a good bit of their thought from his genuine writings.

Actually, the reason for the popularity of the false

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<sup>7</sup>Froom, op. cit., p. 719.



works lies in the method and approach of Joachim. He was for the most part dealing in the realm of abstract thinking and theorizing. While they were an attempt at harmonizing divine revelation with everyday facts, they were not specific in prophetic content. This line of thought was in most cases much too difficult for the untrained mind of the common man. He wanted facts and figures that he could visualize. It was not the distant future, but the immediate future that concerned them. Thus, in the spirit of Joachim, the pseudo-Joachims attempted to supply this need.

To be fair in an appraisal of Joachim's doctrinal content, then, we must draw only from the three major works. The line of thought that is often connected with him will seem somewhat broken by such action, but shows clearly that later Joachimite thought actually finds its connection only in the essential hope of a new age of the Spirit.

Actually, Joachim had only one doctrinal theme in all his work--the thought of three dispensations. This eventually came to be called the Eternal Gospel, and we shall examine this closely in detail in the next section. He deals with this general theme in different ways and from different standpoints in each of his major works, however. One might call the treatment in the Concordia historical, in the Expositio exegetical, and in the Psalterium theological.

It was this more or less theological treatment which was to bring him his only official censure from the Church.



Thirteen years after his death one particular phase of his teaching, the doctrine of the Trinity, was condemned by the IV Lateran Council. It is said that Innocent III not only presided, but drew up the canons of the council personally. Joachim's teachings had attacked the accepted doctrine of Peter Lombard. Cayre is somewhat harsh in his judgment of Joachim, although correct when he comments that Joachim maintained the unity of essence in God is not vera and propria.<sup>8</sup> Peter Lombard had taught that it is not correct to say that the Son is generated, or that the Spirit proceeds, from the Divine essentia, but that the Son is generated of the Father, the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, and the Divine essentia belongs alike to all three.

Joachim felt that this was too like a doctrine of quaternity, that is, the Divine essentia being a fourth factor.<sup>9</sup> In opposition, he maintained that the union of the persons was merely collective, quoting John 17:2 to prove this.<sup>10</sup> He compared the Trinity to his psaltery, the three sides indicating the individuals, and the body of the instrument representing the unity. This in the orthodox terminology which he used brought him to the brink of tri-

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<sup>8</sup>J. Cayre, Manual of Patrology, translated by H. Howitt (Paris: Desclees and Co., 1936), II, 692-96.

<sup>9</sup>Joachim, Psalterium Decem Cordarum (Venice: Francisci Bindoni, 1527), p. 229.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.



theism. Table I on page 27 will give his visual representation of this, with the superimposed strings--gifts of the dispensation, on the left of the Son, on the right of the Spirit.

Reproved with respect to his Trinitarian illustrations, Joachim nevertheless escaped the more serious condemnation of his dispensation scheme. The underlying fault of Joachim's presentation is readily manifest. The orthodox terms and concepts became subject to misunderstanding within his program of the three ages, and rather than forsake this essential concern, he allotted theological positions understanding only in the light of history.

In theory according to the three epoch idea there would be no need for this ultimate doctrinal concern since the age of the Spirit was upon the world. Thus, Joachim seems a little embarrassed at the doctrinal issues raised, only wishing to stay within the scope of the churches' teaching. In his scheme, moreover, the age of the theological doctors is past. Therefore, their criticism was invalid in the true sense.

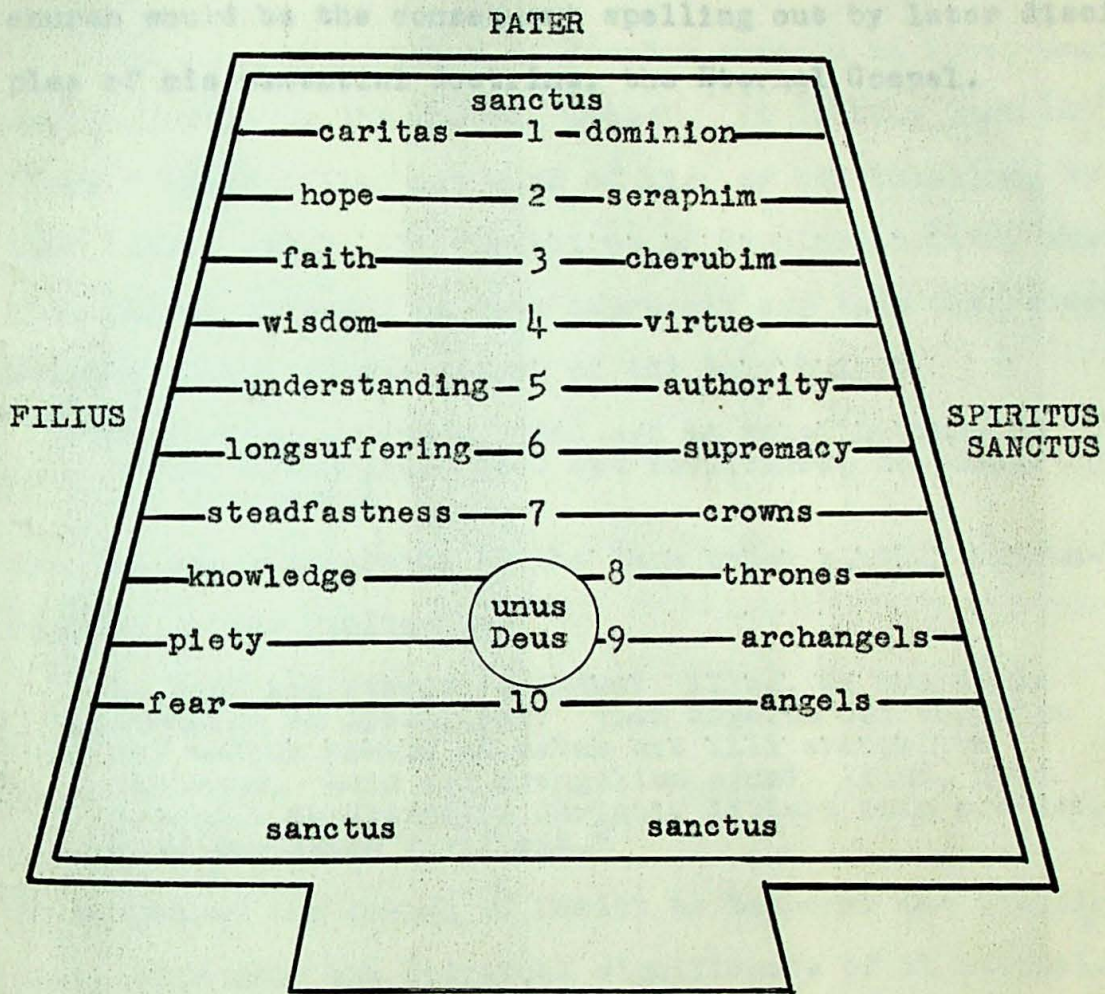
In consequence, even after this censure, Pope Honorius III issued two Bulls, one in 1216 and another in 1220, forbidding the defamation of Joachim and his Order.<sup>11</sup> There seem to have been no further outbreaks of his Trini-

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<sup>11</sup>Bett, op. cit., p. 16.



TABLE 1  
 Joachim's Psalter with Ten Strings





tarian heresy, and Innocent III in condemning it speaks well of the spirit of Joachim in submitting it to papal authority for correction. Of more serious effect to the church would be the consequent spelling out by later disciples of his essential doctrine, the Eternal Gospel.

It is true that he never failed any work of his, or his teaching, by the name of the Eternal Gospel. It is true that in his quotations of Revelation 14:6, where the word is used, he does expressly say that this everlasting gospel is the gospel of the Holy Spirit.

Quod est in spiritu--quod est in littera, temporale est et transitorium.

Reference to the term under similar circumstances in the *Imitation*:

Quod est evangelium ejus? Illud, de quo dicitur in Apocalypsi: vidi angelum dei volentem dare vobis signum et datus est illi evangelium. Quod est evangelium ejus? Illud, quod est evangelium Christi, littera enim occidit, spiritus autem vivificat.<sup>2</sup>

The gospel of Christ as temporal and transitory, and the spiritual significance of it eternal. It is clear that such a phrasing seen in the light of the development should result in the idea of an eternal gospel which was to supersede the

*Imitation of Christ* (Venice: Francisci

*Imitation of Christ* (Venice: Francisci



## CHAPTER IV

### THE ETERNAL GOSPEL

The general doctrine of Joachim came to be known among his followers as the Eternal Gospel. It is true that he himself never called any work of his, or his teaching, by that name. But in his quotations of Revelation 14:6, where this phrase is used, he does expressly say that this everlasting gospel is the gospel of the Holy Spirit.

Evangelium aeternum, quod est in spiritu--quoniam utique evangelium, quod est in littera, temporale non aeternum.<sup>1</sup>

He also makes reference to the term under similar circumstances in the Psalterium:

Et quod est evangelium ejus? Illud, de quo dicit Johannes in Apocalipsi: vidi angelum dei volentem per medium coelum et datum est illi evangelium aeternum. Quid est evangelium ejus? Illud, quod procedit de evangelio Christi, littera enim occidet, spiritus autem vivificat.<sup>2</sup>

He speaks of the gospel of Christ as temporal and transitory, with only the spiritual significance of it eternal. It is only natural that such a phrasing seen in the light of the dispensational development should result in the idea of a final spiritual gospel which was to supercede the

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<sup>1</sup>Joachim, Expositio in Apocalipsim (Venice: Francisci Bindoni, 1527), p. 95.

<sup>2</sup>Joachim, Psalterium Decem Cordarum (Venice: Francisci Bindoni, 1527), p. 260.



gospel of Christ, of the New Testament. This was not Joachim's specific conclusion, but it is not illogical, and his followers struck hard upon the idea of an evangelium aeternum.

The initial use in the latter sense came with the edition of Joachim's works that Gerard of Borgo San Donnino brought out in 1254 in Paris. He wrote a brief introduction to the three main works of Joachim entitled Introductorius in Evangelium Aeternum. This title may not have been the most fortunate had Joachim made the choice but the choice was made and it has remained.

In one sense it is quite easy to recount the doctrine of Joachim's eternal gospel for it is essentially nothing more than the idea of the three dispensations. But Bett comments:

In a sense the task is quite impossible, for his central principle emerges from a cloudy mass of allegory and apocalyptic which is both inconsistent in itself and irrelevant to the main issue, and which could not be reproduced without practically transcribing the whole of Joachim's writings--a wearisome and futile task even if it were to be achieved.<sup>3</sup>

We shall attempt, therefore, to sum up his thought as well as present a few examples of his expository method.

Crucial, of course, to the understanding of his development are the special revelations we noted earlier. Joachim was convinced that revealed to him was both the historical

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<sup>3</sup>Henry Bett, Joachim of Flora (London: Methuen and Co., 1931), p. 37.



and mystical significance of the symbols and figures of the Old and New Testaments. Therefore, we see an attempt to explain history religiously and the Revelation of Saint John historically. The history of the church is intrinsically religious and not merely a department of the history of the world.

The key for Joachim was found in his method of interpretation. He describes six methods of interpretation applied to Scripture.<sup>4</sup> These are the literal (historical) and the moral, tropological, contemplative, anagogic, and typical which are all included under allegorical. However, it is his exaggerated typology and symbolism which form the connecting links for his scheme of the eras. Benz calls this his prophetic function, "die Art dieses Totalverständnisses."<sup>5</sup> It is this prophetic-mystic approach which separates Joachim.

This essentially prophetic nature of his exegetical method distinguishes Joachim from all his predecessors who used the same method, but with primarily moral or dogmatic purposes.<sup>6</sup>

The convenience of such a method soon becomes obvious. By

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<sup>4</sup>Joachim, Liber Concordiae Novi ac Veteris Testamenti (Venice: Simonem de Luere, 1519), p. 60.

<sup>5</sup>Ernst Benz, Ecclesia Spiritualis (Stuttgart: W. Krohlhammer, 1934), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup>George LaPiana, "Joachim of Flora: a critical survey," Speculum, VII (April, 1932), 266.



one method or another, it is feasible to establish almost any parallel and to prove almost any conclusion.

However, it would be unfair to Joachim to accuse him of merely wandering from one innovation to another. In the table on page 33 we have the picture presented as worked out graphically for his edition of the Concordia. Three eras established on the basis of the Trinity and intermeshed with one another is the pattern for all the following interpretations. Successive manifestations of the person of the Trinity is understood. The critical age selected was his own century.

The signs as described in the gospel show clearly the dismay and ruin of the century which is now running down and must perish. Hence I believe that it will not be in vain to submit to the vigilance of the believers, through this work, those matters which divine economy has made known to my unworthy person in order to awaken the torpid hearts from their slumber by a violent noise and to induce them, if possible, by a new kind of exegesis to the contempt of the world.<sup>7</sup>

The table on page 33 shows the basic relationship upon which the dispensations were established. Laying this pattern now against the historical knowledge of the past reveals history as seen in Table 3 on page 34.

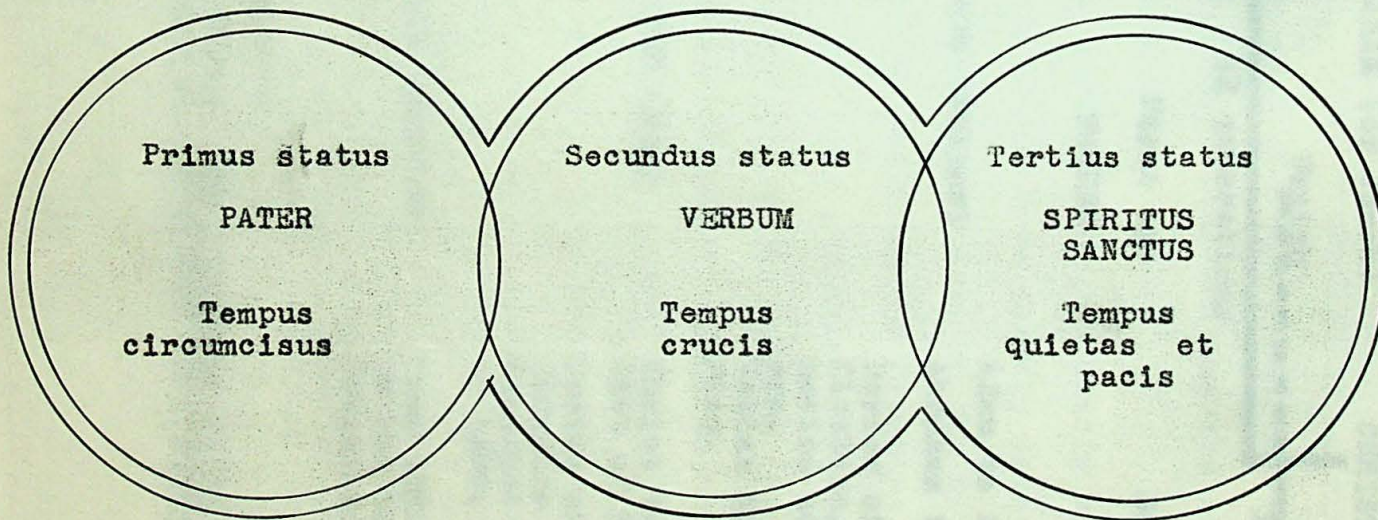
The chronology depends mainly upon notes of time given in the apocalyptic scriptures, such as the following from Daniel and Revelation:

Iste quadraginta duo generationes tricenarii sunt annorum et dicuntur menses quadraginta duo sive dies

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<sup>7</sup>Joachim, Liber Concordiae Novi ac Veteris Testamenti, translated by K. Löwith, preface.





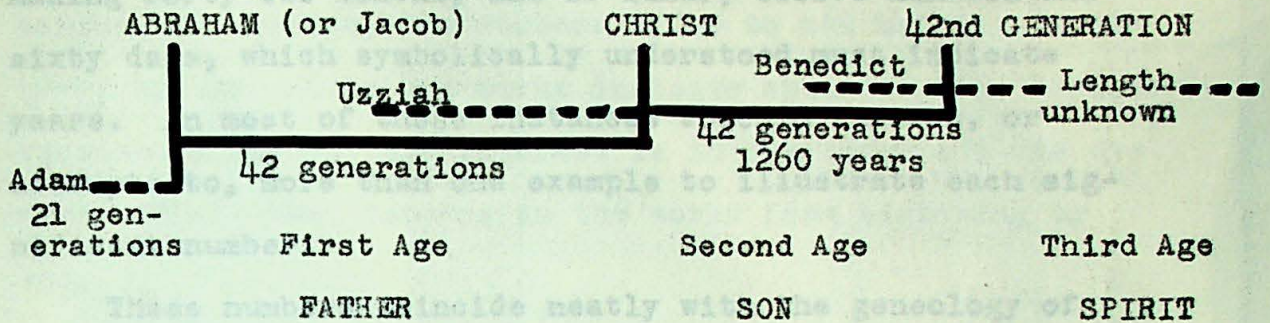
The Three Dispensation Plan

TABLE 2



TABLE 3

Joachim's Scheme of the Ages\*



FIRST AGE (Father)

Adam to Abraham 21 generations  
 Abraham to Uzziah 21 generations  
 Period of fructification, initial period of second age.  
 Uzziah to Zacharias. 21 generations

SECOND AGE (Son)

Christ to Benedict of Nursia. 21 generations  
 Period of fructification from Benedict to 1200 or 1260. 21 generations

THIRD AGE (Spirit)

From 1200 (1260) to the Day of Judgment. 42 generations?

\*Leroy Froom, The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Co., 1950), I, 695.



1260 sive tempus et tempora et dimidium temporis.<sup>8</sup>

This is coupled with a number of scriptural details; for example, Elijah was hidden for three years and six months, making forty-two months, and if lunar, twelve hundred and sixty days, which symbolically understood must indicate years. In most of these instances Joachim adduces, or attempts to, more than one example to illustrate each significant number.

These numbers coincide neatly with the geneology of Matthew<sup>9</sup> and break down exactly into the three series of fourteen, another instance of the Divine symbolism of the figures in the light of the Trinity. The next step would be to conclude that a similar period would elapse through the time until the coming of the Spirit. To accomodate the problem of pre-Abrahamic time, the twenty-one generations here are of unknown length, and the same must be concluded of the first age. Grundmann correctly observes:

Diese nicht mathematisch, sondern typisch bedeutsamen Zahlern, die seinem Hauptgedanken einen so regelmässigen Charakter geben--21 (3 x 7) Generationen also Vospiel jeder Weltzeit, doppelt so lang jede der Zeiten selbst, und dreimal das ganze wiederholt--sind zugleich dehnbar genug, um in denselben Grenzen allerhand andere Schemata einzuschachteln und aufeinander zu beziehen. Denn nicht nur strenge Zahlengleichheit, schon die nahe Verwandtschaft zweier Zahlenkomplexe weist auf wesenhafte Identitäten hin. . . . Auf

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>9</sup>Matthew 1:17.



der Suche nach der Bedeutung wird die Rechnung also nebensächlich miszachtet.<sup>10</sup>

It is well to note again that Joachim, as seen here, is not interested in specific time, but rather in the dispensation scheme. Therefore, the numbers offer to him meaning in history, but do not in his works indicate specific time periods everywhere alike. His interest is in the order and the dynamic of all that happens in the world from beginning to end.

What are the implications of these individual periods? Once more a table (number 4, page 37) will serve as a graphic illustration of his understanding. These comparisons are drawn from all three of the major works, indicating again the constant theme he is stressing. Since there is not the sharp historical break present to substantiate a sharp line of delineation, each period must overlap, with an initial period of twenty-one generations. This is followed by the remaining twenty-one generations, being at the same time the period of fructification (fructificatus) of its age and the initial period of the next. Thus, each age had an initial stage as well as a period of maturity.

With the grand plan established, the subdivision and uncovering of similarities was relatively simple. It is from this point forward that the picture becomes somewhat

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<sup>10</sup>Herbert Grundmann, Studien über Joachim von Floris (Leipzig: B. G. Tuebner, 1927), pp. 52-53.



TABLE 4

Examples of Joachim's Idea of  
Universal Development

First Dispensation	Second Dispensation	Third dispensation
Father	Son	Holy Ghost
Slavery	Filial service	Freedom
Fear	Faith	In love
Law	Grace	A richer grace
Starlight	Dawn grey	Brightness of day
Water	Wine	Oil
Grass	Blade (grain)	Ear (corn)
Septuagesima	Lent	Easter
Children	Men	Elders
Nettles	Roses	Lilies
Knowledge	Partial wisdom	Full understanding
Servant	Freed man	Friend
Married	Clerics	Monks
Winter	Spring	Summer
Labor	Learning	Contemplation
Earth	Water	Fire
Rind	Stone	Kernel

Joachim, *Expositio in Apocalypsin*, p. 5.

Joachim, *Libro Concordie Novi et Veteris Testamenti*, p. 8.



bizarre. Here the comment of Miss Scudder is quite accurate:

Joachim is absurdly and tediously quaint. The "sensus mysticus" that he loves is too often a "sensus fantasticus." He gets tangled among symbolic numbers; he is quite too clear about the Antichrist; the impossible mingling of the nebulous and the precise which marks all apocalyptic interpretation is riotous in him. None the less, his pages vibrate.<sup>11</sup>

Many of these interpretations are not extraordinary; for example, the twelve patriarchs correspond to the twelve apostles; Caleb, Joshua, and Moses equal to Peter, John, and Paul. Some, though, are not only strange, but frequently even irreverent; for example, Zacharias, John the Baptist, and Christ represent the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.<sup>12</sup> Nor are persons confined to persons: Job, Tobias, Judith, and Esther represent nativity, passion, resurrection and ascension of Christ. Similar parallels could be listed, some varying their symbolism with the epoch, others having a variety of meanings within one epoch.

In addition to the three age scheme, we have superimposed upon this a system of five ages, seven ages, and eight ages. The history of the world can be divided into five periods: before the Law, under the Law, under the Gospel, under the Spirit, and in the manifest vision of God.<sup>13</sup> The first and

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<sup>11</sup>Vida D. Scudder, The Franciscan Adventure (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1931), p. 140.

<sup>12</sup>Joachim, Expositio in Apocalipsim, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup>Joachim, Liber Concordiae Novi ac Veteris Testamenti, p. 8.



second eras can be broken down into seven periods--six of strife and then one of peace initiating the age of the Spirit as in table 5 on page 40. He also seems to enlarge upon an idea of eight ages of revelation, but he is not very consistent in his development here and most references to it are forced.

One could go on almost endlessly with descriptions of the variations which he offers. However, this is actually missing the point of his contribution. It is this concept of the third age, the age of the Spirit within history, that marks his efforts as noteworthy. Benz summarizes:

In ihr entwirft Joachim nicht nur das prophetische Bild einer kommenden Form des Christlichen Lebens und der Christlichen Gemeinschaft, sondern er beschreibt auch die kommende Ablösung der gegenwärtigen Form der Kirche--der römischen Papstkirche--durch eine neue geistige Form des Christlichen Lebens.<sup>14</sup>

Joachim's eschatology, thus, consists of neither a simple millennium nor in the mere expectation of the end of the world, but in a twofold eschaton: an ultimate historical phase of the history of salvation, preceding the transcendent eschaton of Christ's second coming.

Since history is still moving forward, and yet an end is expected, the right interpretation of history necessarily becomes prophecy. The correct understanding of the past is intimately tied up with a proper perspective for the future. For the church it meant a radical change in direc-

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<sup>14</sup>Benz, op. cit., p. 8.



TABLE 5\*

## Outline of the Seven Period Scheme

FIRST ERA Prechristian leaders	SECOND ERA Christian kings and leaders      Anti-Christian kings and leaders	
1 Jacob, Joshua, Moses, Caleb	Christ Peter, Paul, and John	Herod Nero
2 Samuel, David	Constantine Sylvester	Constantius, Arius
3 Elijah, Elisha	Justinian Benedict	Chosroes, Mohammed
4 Isaiah, Hezekiah	Gregory, Pepin Zacharias Charlemagne	The New Babylon
5 Ezekial, Daniel Captivity in Babel	Henry VI	Saladin
6 Zerubbabel	Bernard	6th and 7th kings of the Apocalypse
7 Year of Jubilee	the DUX	The Antichrist

\*Leroy Froom, The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Co., 1950), I, 696.



tion. The existing church, founded on Christ, must now yield to the coming church of the Spirit. Joachim saw no conflict here. This new era of evangelical purity was in his mind a logical outgrowth of God's revelation. The Church will welcome this spiritual plenitude, and it is the entrance to it, as Joachim maintains:

Extra Catholicorum ecclesiam non datur alicui donum Spiritus Sancti.<sup>15</sup>

No deviation from the doctrine of the Church here!

The effects, of course, were more far-reaching than he had conceived. For centuries the Augustinian formulation had been the pattern of eschatological thought. History was made subject to theology by excluding the temporal relevance of the last things. Joachim viewed everything with a historical perspective.

To sum it up briefly: Joachim was the turning point marking the return of the historical view of prophecy as opposed to the Tichonius-Augustine view. In Joachim we find a typical and complete renaissance of the apocalyptic spirit with which the early Christian generations were saturated; his motives were not primarily theological, but he used whatever theology was concerned with his interpretation of history.<sup>16</sup>

Normally the Church conceived of two dispensations, the Old and the New Testaments, and had no provision for an intra-historical fulfillment at the end of these.

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<sup>15</sup>Joachim, Expositio in Apocalipsim, p. 221.

<sup>16</sup>Leroy Froom, The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Co., 1950), I, 690.



As we saw earlier, Joachim was gone some fifty years before the Church seriously considered all the implications inherent in his system. Eventually it was for Thomas Aquinas to refute the genuine Joachimite thought. In his Summa Theologica, while not mentioning Joachim by name, he obviously had his work in mind in the following section:

As Augustine says, Montanus and Pricilla pretended that our Lord's promise to give the Holy Ghost was fulfilled, not in the Apostles, but in themselves. In like manner, the Manicheans maintained that it was fulfilled in Manes, whom they held to be the paraclete. Hence none of the above accepted the Acts of the Apostles, where it is clearly shown that the aforesaid promise was fulfilled in the Apostles, just as our Lord promised them a second time (Acts 1:5). You shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence (which we read as having been fulfilled in Acts 2). However, these foolish notions are refuted by the statement (John 7:39) that as yet the Spirit was not given because Jesus was not yet glorified; from which we gather that the Holy Ghost was given as soon as Christ was glorified in his resurrection and ascension. Moreover, this exludes the senseless notion that the Holy Ghost is to be expected to come at some other time.<sup>17</sup>

As Thomas himself admits, it is merely a restatement of Augustine's position and argument, and a vindication of the assertion that the Church exists in the world and as such must establish her practice according to the wisdom of the world for the most wide spread administration of the means of grace.

However subjective Joachim may have personally felt toward the papal court, he had unleashed a spirit that was to

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<sup>17</sup>Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, edited and translated by A. C. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1945), II, 955-56.



divide the yet to be born Franciscan order and result in an ever tighter rein being held by the Church upon her sons and daughters.

La Piana endeavors to summarize the impact of Joachim and his thought thusly:

The problem of the Church, the Sacraments, and the Papacy in the new dispensation, destined to disappear because of the ordo spiritualis would take their place, is the truly revolutionary doctrine of Joachim. For, by prophesying the imminent coming of an age of pure evangelic morals, he provided his contemporaries with a kind of standard by which they could judge and criticize the papal Church. Furthermore, he gave to the monastic orders the right to consider themselves as the bearers of the spiritual Church, to affirm their independence from the Church of the Pope, nay, to consider it as anti-Christ. In other words, the attitude toward the Church of the later Joachites was contained in germ in Joachim's own teaching.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>La Piana, op. cit., p. 280.



## CHAPTER V

### THE IMMEDIATE SUCCESSORS

There are not many traces of the writings of Joachim or his teachings in the years immediately following his death. The Council of Arles which condemned them in 1263 notes that they were "hidden away, unstudied by the learned."<sup>1</sup> It seems likely that they enjoyed something of a revival after the year 1240. The crucial year in the Joachite scheme, 1260, was fast approaching, and a renewed interest in all variations of apocalyptic and prophetic writings was apparent.

The scene for the most demonstrative of these Joachimite cults was Paris. The difficult conditions already existing there made it a tinder box ready for the smallest spark. Conflict had raged since 1223 over the relationship of the Medicants, the Friars, and those of the secular clergy in the university. While the Dominicans were more involved at the beginning, eventually the Franciscans were also well represented on the theological faculty. By mid-1250 the entire university was torn asunder on the issue of Friar versus Secular.

At this moment came the spark that was to set off the reaction within the Franciscans. Rufus Jones, in his work,

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Bett, Joachim of Flora (London: Methuen and Co. 1931), p. 67.



The Eternal Gospel, makes the following observation:

The climax of the movement was reached in 1254 in the appearance in Paris of a book entitled Introduction to the Eternal Gospel. It was written by a young lecturer of theology in the University of Paris, named Gerard of Borgo San Donnino. . . . The storm which burst on the world with the discovery of this book . . . swept the saintly John of Parma out of his office as Minister General of the Franciscan Order and it carried St. Bonaventura into place and power.<sup>2</sup>

The Introductorius made an immediate and immense sensation. A great deal of speculation took place over the late Middle Ages as to its exact make-up. It appears to be a separate work; at least, it is not that of Joachim and there appears together with it selections from all three of Joachim's major works. The Introductorius is an apocalyptic manifesto. The calculations of Joachim are assumed, but added to the scheme are some specific historic prophecies. As John the Baptist and Christ were to the second era, Joachim and Saint Francis are to the third. The followers of Saint Francis were to be the interpreters of the new age.

There was little doubt that it stemmed from the followers of John of Parma, Minister General of the Franciscans. Gerard of Borgo San Donnino has been named by Salimbene, a contemporary and fellow Joachimite, as the author.<sup>3</sup> A lecturer at the university, he had been associated with John

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<sup>2</sup>Rufus Jones, The Eternal Gospel (New York: Macmillan Co., 1938), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Bett, op. cit., p. 106.



of Parma on some of his missions to the Eastern Church. Almost immediately the seculars of the university seized this opportunity to attack the Medicants and protested to the pope. After a commission appointed by the pope studied the work, it was condemned as heretical, twenty-seven articles specifically being noted. Of the excerpts cited as heretical, twenty-four stem from the genuine works of Joachim.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, there are no copies of the Introductorius extant. The only check can be made against the report of the commission, and its excerpts mentioned above agree word for word with authentic Joachite writings.

Though condemned, the judgment was accomplished with discreetness. Concern was especially noted that no reproach should fall on the Franciscans because of this work. Gerard was brought to trial together with an associate, Leonard, when he refused to recant of the position he had taken in the work. In 1258 he was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment, dying eighteen years later, regarding himself a martyr for the sake of truth.

The wilder notions that began to permeate the Joachimite movement found some expression in the Introductorius. In addition to the patronizing attitude shown the Franciscans, Bett notes the following heretical statements from the com-

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<sup>4</sup>Herbert Grundmann, Studien über Joachim von Floris (Leipzig: B. G. Tuebner, 1927), p. 16.



## mission protocol:

The doctrine of the Eternal Gospel surpasses both that of the Old and New Testaments. . . . This Gospel of the Holy Spirit which is to supercede the Gospel of Christ is found in the writings of Joachim. . . . Christ and his Apostles were not perfect in contemplative life; it is only since Joachim that the contemplative life has begun to fructify. . . . The existing congregations of monks will pass away, and an order will arise more worthy than all that is gone before (reference to the Franciscans directly).<sup>5</sup>

Five years after this condemnation, the doctrines of Joachim were condemned by the provincial council of Arles in 1263. This council seems to have been held for the express purpose of condemning the Joachimites who apparently were numerous in that area.

The Joachimite influence seems to have entered the Franciscan order almost from the beginning. Within twenty years of its founding there were two definite parties, the Spiritu-als and the Conventuals. Among the earliest of the Joachim-ite spirituals was Salimbene. Coming in contact with Joachim-ite doctrine about 1240, he became an enthusiastic follower. Most of his Joachimite thought came from the pseudo-Jeremiah commentary which had come out and marked Frederick II to ap-pear as the Anti-Christ in the year 1260. When Frederick died in 1250, Salimbene was so shaken that he refused to be-lieve the word of the death for several months. Finally, he turned away from Joachimite teaching, "after the death of the Emperor and the passing of the year 1260, I entirely dismissed that doctrine and am disposed to believe no more than I can

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<sup>5</sup>Bett, op. cit., pp. 109-111.



see."6

Coincident with the publication of the Introductorius were the charges brought against John of Parma by the Conventuals within the Franciscan order. Part of these charges was the accusation that he defended the doctrine of Joachim on the Trinity. Three years later the Pope, Alexander IV, presided at the Franciscan chapter meeting and urged John to resign. He did this on the grounds of feebleness, weariness, and age--a non-convincing set of reasons considering the fact that he lived another thirty years and had always been the most vigorous of administrators. When asked to name a successor, he chose Bonaventura, a member of the Conventual wing of the order. This was naturally a plea for unity as the situation was becoming tense, and it did achieve peace for the better part of fifteen years within the Franciscans.

Nevertheless, there was still a militant spiritual wing, gathering their inspiration where it could easiest be found, and often erupting with violent attacks upon the Conventual controlled order and especially the papacy. Miss Scudder in her study of the Franciscan spiritual movement has caught the tenor of the strife when she wrote:

The zealots of our period were not heretics, though heresy was always prowling near, inviting them to repudiate a church which they found unsatisfactory enough.

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<sup>6</sup>Chronica of Salimbene as quoted in Bett, op. cit., p. 102.



That they, like Joachim of Flora, remained loyal to this church visible, speaks much for their true humility. But "a man may be a heretic in the truth" says Milton in the Areopagitica; and from that subtle heresy which exalts means into ends, and flouts the very ideal it worships, the more violent natures among the Spirituals were not free.

Under the brief pontificate of Celestine V the spirituals enjoyed a measure of their former prestige, but this was soon taken away from them with the awarding of the papal tiara to Bonafice VIII.

The next centuries did not find the Franciscans without their strong spiritual movements linked in one respect or another with Joachimite thought. The Fraticelli, who had been given their impetus under Celestine V, continued to mold a pattern of Joachimite behavior, with even their histories recording events according to the general age scheme of Joachim. Peter Olivi, admittedly a disciple of Joachim, led a large group of such in southern France.

Other figures also reiterate the Joachimite ideal. Arnold of Villanova felt called upon to reform the Church in his day on partial Joachimite base. One could also see the background of the teachings of Joachim in the tragic Roman political figure of the fourteenth century, Cola di Rienzo, and his self-delusion as the political counterpart of Saint Francis.

As we see the continuance of the Joachimite influence through the Franciscan order, we should be aware of the

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<sup>7</sup>Vida D. Scudder, The Franciscan Adventure (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1931), p. 197.



fact that this was not the product of Saint Francis. He contained his eschatological teachings within the traditional framework of the Church, while his followers became the revolutionaries by interpreting Saint Francis, themselves, and the events of their time as a fulfillment of Joachim's prophecy. It was to take several centuries, but the Church did eventually absorb the spiritual movement in their midst into the more ordered discipline of traditional dogma.

The printing of his three major works in the sixteenth century seems to have enjoyed the backing of the Augustinians. The *Expositio* is dedicated to the Augustinian General, *Agustinus Canonicus of Viterbo*.<sup>2</sup> No doubt the prophecy of a final order of hermits as the spiritual man of the last age found some application here, and they were consequently deeply interested in all that Joachim had written.

Walachter was aware of some of Joachim's writings. He refers to Joachim as a *magister illius temporis vir*, and he sent a copy of the *opus Joachimi Vaticinia Pontificum* to Spalatin.<sup>3</sup> Grandmann also indicates that Luther probably

<sup>1</sup>Joachim, *Expositio de Avocalicia* (Venice: Francisci Zanichelli, 1927), Introduction.

<sup>2</sup>Herbert Grandmann, *Joachim über Joachim von Floris* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1927), p. 194.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 194.



## CHAPTER VI

### LATER INFLUENCES

By the time of the Reformation there was a small revival of interest in Joachim. Most of this was based upon the erroneous conclusion that the pseudo-Joachim writings were genuine. Thus, they saw in him, that is, in the pseudo-Joachim, a reformer before the Reformation, and a number of his works were reissued with this in mind.

The printing of his three major works in the sixteenth century seems to have enjoyed the backing of the Augustinians. The Expositio is dedicated to the Augustinian General, Egidio Canisio of Viterbo.<sup>1</sup> No doubt the prophecy of a final order of hermits as the spiritual men of the last age found some application here<sup>2</sup>, and they were consequently deeply interested in all that Joachim had written.

Melanchton was aware of some of Joachim's writings. He refers to Joachim as a magnus illis temporibus vir, and he sent a copy of the pseudo-Joachim Vaticinia Pontificum to Spalatin.<sup>3</sup> Grundmann also indicates that Luther probably

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<sup>1</sup>Joachim, Expositio in Apocalipsim (Venice: Francisci Bindoni, 1527), frontispiece.

<sup>2</sup>Herbert Grundmann, Studien über Joachim von Floris (Leipzig: B. G. Tuebner, 1927), p. 194.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 198.



knew of him and his work.<sup>4</sup>

The German philosopher Schelling worked out a scheme of the philosophy of religion which resulted in a three age idea quite similar to Joachim. Bett notes:

When Schelling afterward encountered Joachim in his reading of ecclesiastical history, he was surprised and delighted to find that this notion of his, as he thought, had been anticipated and developed by "a man so significant and so prominent in the history of the Church."<sup>5</sup>

Lessing, Hegel, and Nietzsche all worked in a similar fashion attempting a world scheme of redemption within history.

The relationship to Joachim in the latter cases is somewhat forced at times. Time magazine, in an anniversary article several years ago, shows a direct line of thought that runs from second century gnosticism through Joachim down to the totalitarian ideas of our present time. They name Joachim a gnostic, defining the latter heresy thusly:

A Gnostic is one who seeks to rise above nature and find salvation through "hidden knowledge" rather than through faith and works. . . . Voegelin applies the name Gnostic to Joachim and to many present day doctrines and attitudes. Gnosticism--ancient, medieval or modern--never had a common dogma. Since a Gnostic detours all check points of reality, weaving his dreams out of his own wishes, he can believe literally anything, and Gnostics of one sect often oppose Gnostics of another.<sup>6</sup>

One might find points of contact somewhere in this loose definition, but it hardly fits the qualified understanding of gnosticism in the history of the Church. And to continue the

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<sup>5</sup>Bett, op. cit., p. 179.

<sup>6</sup>"Journalism and Joachim's Children" Time, LX (March 9, 1953), 58.



line of descent by analysing current events in the light of Joachimite thought, even referring to those of today as "Joachim's Children"<sup>7</sup> in that sense, would probably make Joachim viewing this, his "age of the Spirit," shudder.

Löwith has caught the connection in a much better way when he offers the link in his opinion that Joachim's expectation of a new age of "plenitude" could have two opposite effects:

It could strengthen the austerity of a spiritual life over against the worldliness of the church, and this was, of course, his intention; but it could also encourage the striving for a new historical realization, and this was the remote result of his prophecy of a new revelation.<sup>8</sup>

This is the connection between a Mussolini and Joachim that many attempt to show. That it even exists can be seen only remotely, and it should always be maintained that it was never Joachim's intention.

The tragic story of the Joachimites, for indeed their spiritual reform of the Church failed and this is tragic, only emphasizes again that there can be no truly "Christian world." Christ came not to reform the world, but to redeem it!

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>8</sup>Karl Löwith, Meaning in History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 159.



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