

## Joachim of Fiore

*Enchiridion super Apocalypsim*, ed. Edward K. Burger (Toronto, 1986)

*Expositio in Apocalypsim* (Venice, 1527; reprint, Frankfurt on Main, 1964)

*Liber de concordia Noui et Veteris Testamenti*, ed. E. Randolph Daniel (Philadelphia, 1983) (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 73).

*Liber de concordia Noui et Veteris Testamenti* (Venice, 1519; reprint, Frankfurt on Main, 1964)

*Liber figurarum*, in *Il libro delle Figure dell'Abate Gioacchino da Fiore*, ed. Leone Tondelli, Marjorie Reeves, and Beatrice Hirsch-Reich, 2 vols. (Turin, 1953)

*Liber introductoris in Apocalypsim*, printed with *Expositio in Apocalypsim* (Venice, 1527; reprint, Frankfurt on Main, 1964), fols. 1vb-26va.

"*Adversus Iudeos*" di Gioacchino da Fiore, ed. by A. Frugoni (Rome, 1957).

*De articulis fidei di Gioacchino da Fiore. Scritti minori*, ed. by E. Buonaiuti (Rome, 1936).

*Psalterium decem chordarum* (Venice, 1527; repr. Frankfurt on Main, 1965).

*Tractatus super quatuor Evangelia di Gioacchino da Fiore*, ed. by E. Buonaiuti (Rome, 1930).

"Abbot Joachim of Fiore: The De ultimis tribulationibus," ed. by E. R. Daniel, in *Prophecy and Millenarianism*, ed. by A. William (Harlow, Essex, 1980), pp. 165-89.

Grundmann Herbert. *Studien über Joachim von Floris* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1927).

Grundmann Herbert. *Joachim von Fiore. Ausgewählte Aufsätze*. MGH, Schriften. Vol. 25, 2. (Stuttgart, 1977).

Reeves Marjorie. *Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future* (New York et al., 1977).

McGinn Bernard. *The Calabrian Abbot* (New York; London, 1985).

### The Life of Joachim of Fiore

(from Delno C. West, Sandra Zimdars-Swartz. *Joachim of Fiore: A Study in Spiritual Perception and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), pp. 1-9)

THE two primary sources of knowledge about Joachim of Fiore's life are the biographies left to us by Joachim's secretary, Luke of Cosenza, *Virtutum Beati Joachimi synopsis*, and the anonymous *Vita beati Joachimi abbatis*. <sup>1</sup>A few autobiographical facts can be gleaned from Joachim's writings, primarily his testamentary letter, *Epistola prologosis*, written in 1200 to the abbots of his Order of St. John of Fiore. Other incidents are recorded in various chronicles, such as those by Fra Salimbene of Parma and Ralph of Coggeshall, and in apocryphal legends of the times.

In the seventeenth century, Jacobus Graecus Syllanous, a monk at Fiore, produced a narrative of Joachim's life. This narrative listed the supposed miracles of Joachim and may have relied on documents, no longer extant, which were compiled during the fourteenth century effort to canonize Joachim. Gregorius de Laude also produced a *Vita* in the seventeenth century which is

*nearly identical to that of Jacobus Graecus. Both Jacobus Graecus and Gregorius de Laude drew heavily from the Virtutum Beati Joachimi synopsis and the Vita beati Joachimi abbatis. Most modern biographical efforts are based on these narratives. As with most religious figures, early biographical sources are filled with common legends, anecdotes, and other stories promoting the saintliness of the character. Consequently, very little is known of the details of the Calabrian monk's life.*

*Joachim of Fiore was born at Celico in the diocese of Cosenza in the region of Calabria, Italy, about A.D. 1135. He died in 1202. His father was Mauro the Notary who held a bureaucratic office at the court of Roger II of Sicily. Joachim began his career by following in his father's service to the Sicilian court. Outside of one trip to Constantinople and the Holy Lands while in the king's service, Joachim lived out his life in southern*

-1-

Italy, rarely venturing from Corazzo or his beloved wilderness of the Sila Mountains in Calabria.

Calabria was a harsh countryside, wild and desolate. Geographically and politically, the province was more closely associated with Sicily than with the Italian peninsula. Historically, it had been more Greek than Latin, and from the mid-eleventh century, Calabria was a part of the Norman holdings. Culturally this territory was extremely complex. The population was Latin, Lombard, Norman, and Greek. The Muslim influence was strong, particularly in government. In Calabria, Greek was spoken and Greek Orthodox Christianity was dominant in both church and monastery. The Norman rulers maintained an enlightened policy of tolerance toward Jews, Greeks, and Saracens alike, local rights and usages were protected. Greek and Muslim learning and artistic achievements were recognized and patronized under numerous Norman kings.

Politically, the Norman kingdom was the most sophisticated in Europe. Public administration was carried out by bureaucratic specialists recruited by talent rather than feudal birth. The king ruled through a political system designed after the Byzantine. Documents were issued in Greek and Arabic as well as Latin in a format copied from the Byzantine and papal courts.

By the twelfth century, southern Italy and the Norman holdings had become prime targets in the territorial conflicts between the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor. The Emperor Frederick Barbarossa was able to arrange a marriage between his son, Henry, and Constance, the heiress of King William II's throne in southern Italy and Sicily. This alliance seemed to assure that the region would fall under the hegemony of the Empire.

Yet, the unification was not easily forthcoming. In southern Italy and Sicily, a party opposed to this arrangement raised Tancred of Lecce to the throne when William II died and aligned itself with the Papacy. This situation received full support from Richard I of England. The Hohenstaufen Emperor, Henry VI, was thus forced into an Italian campaign from 1191 to 1194.

In the end, the Holy Roman Empire was triumphant due to the capture of Richard I by Duke Leopold of Austria and the death of Tancred in 1194. Finally, on Christmas Day, 1194, Henry VI was crowned King of Sicily, Apulia, and Calabria.

Although Joachim spent most of his life somewhat isolated in southern Italy in monasteries or as a hermit, he could not totally avoid the

-2-

events which raged around him. Joachim's one major journey was important to his final career. Early in his court service, he was sent with an official party to Constantinople by King William I, the Bad. William had recently completed peace agreements with the Byzantine Emperor Manuel I Comnenus and this trip probably was to negotiate further with the Byzantine government.

Joachim was in his early or mid-twenties. For reasons which are unclear, he left William's service while in Constantinople, and instead journeyed to the Holy Lands in search of God's will in his life. There, according to legend, Joachim felt a special call from God while wandering in the Palestine desert. After this experience, he spent the Lenten season meditating on Mount Tabor. Joachim implied in the *Expositio in Apocalypsim* that on the eve of Easter day, he received "the fullness of knowledge" toward the end of his stay on the mountain.<sup>2</sup>

The young convert did not return immediately to Calabria, instead he spent some time as a hermit near Mt. Etna in Sicily. After a while, he became a wandering preacher reentering Calabria as an independent religious. He settled as a visitor in the Cistercian monastery, Sambucina. As he would note later in life, the independent preacher's life was subject to spiritual pitfalls and he was totally against such an occupation. While at Sambucina, he traveled to the bishop of Catanzaro in order to be ordained. Shortly thereafter, Joachim became a monk and entered the Benedictine monastery, Corazzo, where he would eventually become abbot and lead the monks of Corazzo to follow the Cistercian rules.

Luke of Cosenza describes Joachim as a humble and kindly man of extraordinary devotion. Luke tells us that Joachim was given mostly to study and prayer, that he wore the oldest, shabbiest clothes he could find, and that he was a poor sleeper, resting only a few hours a night. He was prone to go without meals. Nevertheless, despite Joachim's seeming disregard for his health, he was, according to Luke, strong and robust.

Luke emphasized Joachim's humbleness and devotion. Whenever he could, Joachim would perform the lowest tasks of the monastery such as bedmaking, cooking, or scrubbing the infirmary floor. It was Luke who assisted Joachim with the Mass, and Luke was unusually impressed with the intensity with which Joachim celebrated the service. Joachim was reported to be an excellent preacher who tended to begin his sermons in a low voice, but who soon would resound "like thunder."<sup>3</sup>

Joachim's humbleness can also be illustrated in his attitude toward

-3-

those who persecuted him. Fra Salimbene records for us how the refectorer of Corazzo disliked Joachim and daily for a full year filled Joachim's drinking vessel with water instead of wine. Such petty abuse Joachim "bore with patience and without complaint." Finally, this abuse came to light when during the one meal the monks shared with the abbot, the abbot insisted that Joachim share his wine with him. The abbot was furious when he tasted the water and forced Joachim to explain why his vessel contained water instead of wine. The abbot was inclined to discipline and dismissed the refectorer immediately, but Joachim intervened by declaring that "water is a sober drink which neither ties the tongue nor brings about drunkenness, nor makes men babble!"<sup>4</sup> Actually, Joachim was quite serious about this as he recommends later in his career that wine was not a proper drink for monks.<sup>5</sup>

Joachim, well-liked by both his superiors and his peers, rose rapidly to prior and then to abbot of Corazzo in 1178. Joachim did not wish to be abbot nor did he enjoy the job after he was appointed. Several influential churchmen, including the Archbishop of Cosenza, had to convince

him to accept the post. Administrative details and the laxity of the lives of his monks kept him from his real mission and love--the recording of the multitude of ideas, visions, symbols, and figures which floated in his mind.

Within five years, Joachim was neglecting the leadership of his monastery. He left Corazzo for the abbey of Casamari where he virtually cloistered himself in 1183 for over a year to begin his great trilogy: *Liber Concordie novi ac veteris Testamenti* (*Harmony of the New and Old Testaments*), *Expositio in Apocalypsim* (*Exposition of Apocalypse*), and *Psalterium decem chordarum* (*Psaltery of Ten Strings*). Although he spent the rest of his life refining these writings, this initial period was so productive that he kept Luke and two other monks busy day and night writing his dictation and making corrections of the manuscripts. At times all three works were in progress simultaneously. With the exhaustive project underway, Joachim traveled to see Pope Lucius in 1184 to seek release from his administrative duties. Pope Lucius had Joachim's unfinished *Liber Concordie novi ac veteris Testamenti* studied, and after the reading, encouraged Joachim to continue his writing. He released Joachim from his office as abbot. Joachim returned to Corazzo and for the next few years continued to write his commentaries. In 1188, Pope Clement III again encouraged Joachim in his efforts and asked that the final product be examined by the papal curia when it was finished.

-4-

Joachim left Corazzo for good in 1189. He and a close friend, Ranier, journeyed to the mountains of Pietralata. There they lived for a time as hermits in cells. It proved impossible for Joachim to remain in seclusion, however, for he and Ranier were soon joined by others wishing a stricter religious life. The result was the foundation of St. John of Fiore Abbey on Mt. Nero.

Joachim and his followers were isolated in the wild mountainous countryside of Pietralata; nevertheless, they were not able to avoid the outside world. Throughout 1192-1193, the new monastery was ravaged by the forces of church and state as each tried to establish control over the region. Also, a nearby Greek Orthodox monastery quarreled with Joachim and his monks over pasturage rights. The quarrel culminated in an attack upon St. John of Fiore by the Greek monks and portions of the new buildings were burned.

The Order of St. John of Fiore received gifts and privileges from Tancred of Lecce in 1195, and from the Emperor Henry VI and his wife, Constance, shortly thereafter. On April 25, 1196, Pope Celestine III issued a bull approving the new Order.<sup>6</sup> Confirmation of that approval was issued in another bull in 1204 by Innocent III and twice by Honorius in 1216 and 1220. The order grew slowly, perhaps reaching 60 houses in all, and it was not the vanguard for any prophetic thrust promoting its founder's ideas. Basically, the Florentine Order conservatively followed the reforms of the Cistercians. Three hundred years later, in 1505, most of the order united with the Cistercians, while other Florentine houses joined the Carthusians or Dominicans.

Joachim's fame as an expositor and prophet spread widely by the end of the twelfth century. During his lifetime, contemporary chroniclers recorded some of his activities and explanations of prophetic Scripture. He visited with three popes and on at least one occasion spoke before Pope Lucius III and the papal curia.<sup>7</sup> Kings sought him out, notably Richard I of England, Philip Augustus of France, and the Emperor Henry VI. After his death in 1202, even while his fame increased, a considerable controversy arose in regard to his significance. Some thought of him as a man of great wisdom, others revered him as a prophet, and still others damned him as a false teacher. His message had special appeal to the new mendicant orders and through their advocacy, Joachim's ideas were rapidly spread northward. Joachim's reputation, however, was damaged by two events in the thirteenth century--the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 and

the special commission established in 1255-1256 to review Joachim's interpretations.

The Fourth Lateran Council condemned Joachim for his supposed criticism of Peter Lombard's doctrine on the Trinity. The tract in question which the council attributed to Joachim is now lost. According to the testimony of the council, Joachim accused Peter Lombard of having defined "essentia" in such a way as to imply a fourth member of the Godhead.

More damaging to Joachim's reputation was the scandal over the so-called "Eternal Gospel" advocated by Gerard of Borgo San Donnino. In 1253 or 1254, Gerard, a Franciscan, composed a gloss of Joachim's works prefaced by a *Liber Introductorius*. *The document has not survived. Our knowledge of this scandal comes from the testimony of the commission appointed in 1255 to investigate Gerard's work.*

*The dispute over Gerard of Borgo San Donnino Liber Introductorius and gloss is far more complicated than a brief summary can adequately explain. Gerard got into trouble on three fronts. Gerard did arrive at basic heretical and disobedient conclusions. His promulgation of Joachim's works as an expected third gospel--the "Eternal Gospel"--served to polarize the disputing Franciscan and secular faculty and students at the University of Paris to the point of open confrontation, but most importantly, Gerard was the first student of Joachim's scheme to reach the potentially radical conclusions in regard to the world order that could be drawn from Joachim's three ages of history. Fra Salimbene, who had known Gerard for many years, felt that the friar had simply 'gone mad.'* <sup>8</sup>

*In the end, the commission meeting at Anagni condemned the natural conclusion a reader could come to that Joachim's third epoch of the world would replace the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Later, in 1263, a provincial council at Arles condemned the whole schema of the three epochs as envisioned by Joachim and his followers.*

*Neither the condemnations by a commission nor by a provincial council are in themselves final acts. Joachim's works were never condemned by a pope or any higher authority than the Anagni Commission. The publicity and notoriety resulting from the investigations, however, raised serious questions about Joachim and his teachings; questions which remain controversial in the scholarly world today.*

*There are over fifty literary works attributed to or associated with*

Joachim of Fiore. Out of this number, perhaps sixteen were written by Joachim himself: the rest are spurious or were written by his disciples. Several modern scholars have attempted to identify exactly which writings were truly Joachim's, a difficult and time-consuming task which continues as many items in the literary corpus remain in question.

The *Liber Concordie novi ac veteris Testamenti*, *Expositio in Apocalypsim*, and *Psalterium decem chordarum* present a trilogy of purpose and organization for Joachim's major themes. Written and corrected over a period of nearly sixteen years, they form an indisputably integrated community of thought despite differences in subject matter and intention. The author finished his drafts of the *Liber Concordie novi ac veteris Testamenti* and the *Expositio in Apocalypsim* before beginning the *Psalterium decem chordarum* while revising the other two, and he cross-

referenced ideas among all three books whenever he felt it necessary. To him, the three works were inseparable and meant to be read as a whole.

The *Liber Concordie novi ac veteris Testamenti* was first in time and order, and it set the style and scene for the other works. In this elaborate parallel of the Old Testament and New Testament, Joachim tried to point out the correspondence of each person, event, and period to be found in the Old Testament with a person, event, or period in the New Testament. Then the correspondences were shown to prefigure similar persons, events, and periods in the third and final age of human history. In essence, the *Liber Concordie novi ac veteris Testamenti* is a grand philosophy of history.

Before the main text of the *Expositio in Apocalypsim*, the abbot included a "Prologue" and "Introduction." The prologue was a justification for his publications in which he warned his readers that his comments were not to be taken lightly. He did not set out presumptuously but with papal authority and blessing. Indeed, at the onset, he instructed the monks of his abbey to deliver his writings to the Holy See immediately should he die before they were finished. In the "Introduction," Joachim summarized his major ideas about the three ages, the seven seals, and the concord between the two Testaments.

In the *Expositio in Apocalypsim*, Joachim goes into great detail to explain fully the symbols, visions, and figures of the Apocalypse. Since Joachim considered the Apocalypse to be the key to understanding all Scripture, the *Expositio in Apocalypsim* is essential to all of Joachim's biblical exegesis.

-7-

As Joachim edited these two great treatises, he feared that he still had not totally clarified his view of the Trinity. He tells us that after earnest prayer, there appeared in his mind the figure of the ten-stringed psalter (or lyre) which would represent the Trinity. The *Psalterium decem chordarum* is an allegorical presentation of Joachim's notion of three historical stages. The body of the instrument represents the Father; the psalms sung with the aid of the instrument represent the Son; and the melody produced by both the instrument and the singing represents the Holy Spirit.

When Joachim died in 1202, he was preparing a fourth book regarded by modern scholars as an integral part of the abbot's major expository plan. The *Tractatus super Quatuor Evangelia* was written to be understood within Joachim's scheme of history as outlined in his other major works. The four Gospels are presented to us as progressive consummations of historical periods that culminate with the eternal Sabbath after the end of history.

Joachim composed a number of minor tracts, letters, poems, and sermons on topics both relevant and non-relevant to his apocalyptic theology. Of these, mention should be made of the *Adversus Iudaeos* in which Joachim wished to prepare the Jews for their inevitable conversion expected at the beginning of the third age.

Although extensive research has been done on the famous *Liber Figurarum*, it remains controversial in authorship. It may have been drawn and written by Joachim, by someone under his direction, or by someone totally outside his direct influence. This book of illustrations, with few exceptions, presents visual images which relate to Joachim's main ideas. This book was extremely important to the spread of Joachim's thought throughout Europe.

Throughout the thirteenth century, and even later, many compositions were attributed to Joachim of Fiore so that pseudo-Joachim works proliferated into a large corpus of their own. The most famous of these were the *Super Hieremiam*, *Super Esaiam*, and *De Septem Sigillis*. Unfortunately, much of Joachim's early reputation derived from these spurious works, especially those which related contemporary events to his apocalyptic themes.

We know few details of Joachim's life and scholars are still attempting to arrive at an exact corpus of his literature. A monk from Southern Italy who knew kings and emperors and popes; a Cistercian who broke from his order and established a more stringent rule; a visionary exegete of

-8-

apocalyptic Scripture who challenged the church fathers in his interpretations; an abbot whose writings were frequently suspect but were never condemned by the Holy See; a holy man who was never sainted but who was placed by Dante in the circle of the Sun next to St. Bonaventura and St. Francis in the Paradiso. Joachim has been hailed as a protoRenaissance figure, yet some of his most vocal supporters were reactionary and extremist elements in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Frank Manuel, in his study, *Shapes of Philosophical History*, comes close to the true picture of Joachim of Fiore when he advocates that Joachim was "heir to the exegetical, tropological, allegorical and numerological traditions of the church fathers. These he fashioned into a symbolism uniquely his own, which he placed in the service of a new world history."<sup>9</sup>

-9-

## Chapter I

1. For a complete list of biographical sources and a comparative analysis of them, see H. Grundmann, "Zur Biographie Joachims von Fiore and Raiers von Ponza," *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 16 (1960), pp. 539-544.
2. *Expositio in Apocalypsim* (Venice, 1527. Reprint edition, Frankfurt/M., 1964), 39r.
3. Luke of Cosenza, "Virtutum Beati Joachimi synopsis," in H. Grundmann, "Zur Biographie. . ." p. 504.
4. Salimbene de Adam, "Cronica", ed. O. Holder-Egger (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, XXXII, Hanover and Leipzig, 1913), p. 241.
5. *Expositio in Apocalypsim* (Venice, 1527. Reprint edition, Frankfurt/M., 1964), 81v.
6. B. Jaffe, *Regesta Pontificum Romanorum*, II (Graz, 1956) no. 17425.
7. The text of his sermon which was an explanation of a sybillian oracle is contained in the *De prophetia ignota*, edited by B. McGinn, "Joachim and the Sibyl," *Citeaux*, no. 2 (1973), pp. 129-138.
8. Salimbene, *Cronica*, p. 457. A fuller discussion of this scandal is found on pp. 104-105.
9. F. Manuel, *Shapes of Philosophical History* (Stanford, 1965), p. 36.