

CONCEPTS OF PROPHECY IN THE MIDDLE AGES: INSPIRED EXEGESIS, VISIONS
FROM GOD, AND THE INTERACTION OF THEORIES AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

CONCEPTS OF PROPHECY IN THE MIDDLE AGES: INSPIRED EXEGESIS, VISIONS FROM GOD, AND THE INTERACTION OF THEORIES AND PRACTICE

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This dissertation examines medieval conceptualizations of prophecy beginning in the twelfth century, when Europe produced its first widely-noticed prophets, and ending in the early sixteenth century when the Fifth Lateran Council sought to subject dissemination of prophecy to the control of the bishops. This dissertation finds that the conceptualization of prophecy in the Middle Ages evolved over time, in part due to shifting intellectual currents, and in part due to interactions with prophecy as it was practiced. Furthermore, research presented in this study identifies two broad arcs of development as a way of understanding the evolution of medieval thinking about prophecy. The first begins with Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1135-1202) who both theorized and practiced a new way of thinking about prophecy that challenged the existing conception that regarded prophecy as the passive and direct reception of divine revelation. Rather than see himself as a direct conduit or mouthpiece for God, Joachim believed he was an inspired exegete and that God granted him special methodological insights that guided his efforts to interpret the Scriptures and derive from them hidden truths and predictions about the future. The second arc begins midway through the fourteenth century with the decline of this type of prophecy and the return to widespread belief that a prophet ought to be a passive conduit of divine revelation. The second arc is also characterized by the emergence of concerns about the possible role of demons as a source of apparently prophetic vision, and accordingly, greatly increased attention on the part of both prophets and theologians in determining which was which. By examining a longer history of conceptualizations of prophecy, and by seeking a synthetic

understanding of how medieval thinking about prophecy and its practice interrelated, this dissertation proposes both structures and explanations for these developments.

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Introduction

My interest in medieval conceptions of prophecy began as I was studying the immortality of the soul and the relationship between philosophy and faith around the time of the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517).¹ Included in the documents of the council were two that stood out for what they said concerning prophecy: a sermon delivered at the opening of the council expressing prophetic hopes for reform, and a decree from 1516 that sought to impose controls on the preaching of prophecy.² The council's simultaneous interest in and fear of prophecy led me to wonder how matters had arrived to this point and further, why such an important matter in Christian belief as prophecy seemed to remain so unsettled. And while many historians have studied medieval prophets and their prophecies, a relative few have concentrated on medieval thinking about prophecy as an intellectual or theological concept or have attempted to trace the relationship between prophecy theory and practiced prophecy, especially over the entire period leading up to the Fifth Lateran.

The ambivalence toward prophecy seen at the Fifth Lateran goes back to the earliest days of the Church. In the New Testament, Christ is described as fulfilling Old Testament prophecies,

¹ Eric A. Constant, "A Reinterpretation of the Fifth Lateran Council Decree Apostolici Regiminis (1513)," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 33, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 353–79.

² The decree, *Supernae majestatis praesidio* is found in J.D. Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum Conciliorum, Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, vol. 32, 53 vols. (Florence, Venice, Paris, Leipzig, 1773), 944A-947E; Giuseppe Alberigo, J. A Dossetti, and Periclis-Petros Ioannou, eds., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, trans. Norman P Tanner (London; Washington (D.C.): Sheed and Ward ; Georgetown University press, 1990), 605ff. On prophecy and the council see, Nelson Minnich, "Prophecy and the Fifth Lateran Council 1512-1517," in *Prophetic Rome in the High Renaissance Period*, by Marjorie Reeves, Oxford-Warburg Studies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 63–88 and Stephen D. Bowd, *Reform Before the Reformation: Vincenzo Querini and the Religious Renaissance in Italy*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 87 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), especially 180ff.

and Hebrew prophets such as Isaiah, Micah, and Zechariah are interpreted as foretelling the messiah. Similarly, figures such as David and Daniel, who in the Old Testament were not principally portrayed as prophets, are interpreted by New Testament authors as foretelling the Son of Man, and Adam and Moses are seen to prophetically prefigure Christ. In the Vulgate Old Testament, the word *propheta* is used to translate one of several Hebrew terms. Most frequently *propheta* is used for the Hebrew *nabi'*, occurring more than 400 times and meaning a spokesperson or mouthpiece for God, as when God tells Moses: "I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet who shall speak to them everything that I command." (Deut 18:18) Another term, *videns*, used 27 times, is roughly synonymous and variously translates the Hebrew *hozeh* or *ro'eh*, both meaning "seer."³ The Old Testament refers to Moses, Aaron, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah and numerous others as "prophets"; Samuel, Amos, and others are described as "seers," and still others are referred to as both prophets and seers. Besides these terms, various introductory formulas signal prophecy, such as: "Thus says the Lord..." (occurs more than 400 times in the Old Testament); "The word of the Lord came to [someone], saying..." (over 100 times); "Thus you shall say to [someone]..." (43 times).⁴ Conveyed through visions, dreams, or forms of direct communication, the God of the Old Testament speaks to humans who in turn speak for Him, giving His commands, delivering warnings, or explain mysteries.

The prophetic tradition continues in the New Testament. John the Baptist is portrayed as an Old Testament style prophet, both announcing the arrival of the Savior as well as serving as a link between the old and new covenants, and Jesus himself is at times described as a prophet.

³ David Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1983) provides valuable surveys for both Old Testament and New Testament prophecy. Felix Just, S.J., "What Is Biblical Prophecy?," accessed November 24, 2014, <http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Prophecy.htm> gives a useful quantitative overview of prophetic terms in the Old Testament.

⁴ Just, "What Is Biblical Prophecy?"

From Pauline letters and Acts it is clear that prophets operated in early Christian communities, and at least in some churches prophecy existed as an institution alongside the offices of apostle and teacher. In Acts, especially, the Christian community is described as being guided by prophecy, and following Pentecost nearly every major event is directed or accompanied by a dream, a vision, or revelatory message from an angel. Prophecy, therefore marks the New Testament in several important ways. Besides looking backward into history to find Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by Christ, New Testament writers also looked to prophecy and prophets to understand the present status of the Church, and especially in the Book of Revelation, the future.⁵

Among the writings in the New Testament, the letters of Saint Paul are especially important for describing his understanding of prophecy, providing the beginnings of a Christian theological treatment of the topic. In 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, for example, Paul presents prophecy as one of many “gifts of the Spirit.” To some are given the gift of knowledge, to others speaking in tongues, to others prophecy, to others to test or discern the spirit of the prophets, and so on. Related to these gifts of the Spirit are those God has appointed to serve and guide the Church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then those who work miracles, healers, administrators, speakers in tongues.⁶ To each is granted a special gift and function, and, in particular, prophecy is given to the prophets in order to edify and strengthen the Church. Unlike speaking in tongues, prophecy is delivered in a language that all can understand, and for this reason Paul regards prophecy as superior. Prophecy is the result of revelation. Through it the faithful learn what was once hidden, hear God’s commands, and come to understand the Lord’s plan for the Church.

⁵ Niels Christian Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-Biblical Tradition* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 58–73. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*.

⁶ 1 Cor 12:28-30.

Prophets held an important role in the earliest Christian communities but during the second century their institutional position gradually diminished and their functions in the structure of the Church were increasingly taken over by other ministerial authorities, especially the bishops. The causes for this development are a matter of debate among historians of early Christianity.⁷ Some scholars hold that growing institutionalization marginalized the prophets, and that the office of the prophet was assumed by the bishops, further pushing prophets to the periphery.⁸ Other scholars, conversely, maintain that it was a decline of prophecy that necessitated the Church's institutionalization.⁹ Whatever the explanation, it is clear that during the second century the function and role of the prophet was increasingly subordinated to the teaching authority of the bishops.

In response to these developments, the Montanists arose as a movement in the mid-second century. Although the Montanists attempted to reestablish the importance of prophecy in the early Christian Church, the reaction against them served to further marginalize prophets and was a key factor in the declining place for lived prophecy by associating it with heresy and schismatic disorder.¹⁰ The Montanists believed that special revelation had been given to Montanus (and certain of his followers), that this represented the promised full coming of the Holy Spirit, and that it superseded not only the revelation that had come via the apostles but even the teachings of Christ. Originating in Phrygia around 156, the movement spread to Gaul, Italy, and northern Africa, gaining followers attracted to an ascetic and more radical version of Christianity typical of first-century communities. Although it was condemned in various synods in Asia Minor

⁷ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 81-88 outlines the primary issues in this debate.

⁸ Ben Witherington, *Jesus the Seer: The Progress of Prophecy* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 350.

⁹ Hans Von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries*, trans. John Austin Baker (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1969), 178.

¹⁰ Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 88-90.

during the later second century, the movement continued to flourish, particularly at Carthage under the leadership of Tertullian (160 - 220).

As Montanism spread, its prophets challenged and criticized ecclesiastical authority and eventually developed their own community and church structure that existed mostly outside the mainstream Church. For the first time prophecy was utilized in an attempt to challenge the historical and institutional authority of the Church, which provoked not only reaction against the Montanists but suspicion of all forms of prophecy. Although some thinkers argued against the Montanists but in support of a continued presence of prophecy in the Church,¹¹ significant damage was done, and, especially since Montanism arose at a time when many formative patristic writings were being composed, the Church's experience with Montanus and his followers had a long-lasting negative effect on attitudes concerning ongoing prophecy in the life of the Church.

The skepticism of the Church toward modern prophets, furthered and given particular theoretical bases by Augustine, served as a barrier that held until the twelfth century. The Gregorian Reform and the struggles of the Investiture Contest, however, prompted increased use of apocalyptic imagery and a desire to understand what information the Scriptures might contain about the eschatological significance of the present or even the future. These impulses were joined with monastic practices of contemplative, spiritual readings of the Biblical texts that sought both deeper understanding of Scriptural meaning and cultivated visionary experiences to help acquire that knowledge. As a result of this combination of factors, several individuals encountered experiences variously understood as moments of supernatural insight or divine revelation. As these individuals sought to understand the nature of their inspiration, they found

¹¹ For example Eusebius (263 - 339), Irenaeus (130 - 202), Epiphanius (310 - 403), and Clement of Alexandria (150 - 215). See, Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 90-91.

that their experiences did not always agree with the received tradition for how (or whether) God communicated with human beings, and thus new possibilities had to be considered. Both the Augustinian heritage, and the twelfth-century developments that began to challenge that heritage, are discussed in chapter one. But the ongoing discussion of what prophecy was and how to recognize it began only with the emergence of Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1135-1202).

It is this debate that is the subject of this dissertation. The essential questions to be answered are: What did medieval people think prophecy was? How did it come to the prophet and how was it understood to exist and operate? What was true prophecy, and what was not? Was it possible to reconcile new prophecies with canonical revelation, or accommodate prophets within the institutional structures of the Church? This study examines how medieval thinkers, prophets, and their hearers formulated and attempted to answer these questions, beginning in the twelfth century when Europe produced its first widely-noticed prophets, and ending in the early sixteenth century when the Fifth Lateran sought to subject dissemination of prophecy to the control of the bishops.

The work historians of prophecy have done so far mostly consists of considerations of the beliefs of the prophets and the content of their prophecies. But the practice of prophecy did not pass unstudied or undiscussed among theologians, and the theological concepts they debated also came to influence the practice of the prophets. My research in this dissertation focusses on more closely examining these interrelations between prophecy theory and practiced prophecy. What emerges from this research is an interpretive structure of two broad arcs taking shape across the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries, as new prophets appeared and new ideas were advanced, often in tension with prior or competing concepts and against a backdrop of religious and intellectual developments. The first of these arcs began with Joachim of Fiore's thinking on

prophecy, discussed in chapter one. In many ways the most important prophet of the Middle Ages, Joachim insisted he was not one. Rather than receiving directly revealed knowledge as would a prophet, Joachim believed that through prayerful study and contemplation God granted him methodological insights that guided his efforts to interpret the Scriptures and derive from them hidden truths and predictions about the future. Joachim understood the Augustinian categories of conjecture and prophecy, but believed neither described his experience. Conjecture was the working of solely human reasoning and prophecy, as in Augustine's view, was no longer how God chose to communicate with man. Instead, Joachim believed that inspired spiritual exegesis represented a third type of revelatory communication, and that this new means of revelation had replaced prophecy in the modern age. Furthermore, for Joachim the appearance of inspired spiritual intelligence was itself an eschatological development, key to his theology of history and intertwined with his predictive schema.

Joachim's innovations were misunderstood by many of his direct contemporaries, who most commonly saw him as a prophet. The meaning of Joachim's thought was better understood, however, by men in the schools and universities, but unlike Joachim, these theologians approached prophecy as a series of academic questions to be studied and defined rather than as an element of their own contemplative experience. Chapter two explores their conceptions, how the schoolmen subjected thinking about prophecy to their methods, and the ensuing debate. Especially as Aristotelian thought came to be synthesized with Christian doctrine, the concept of *habitus* became a crucial factor for how individual theologians viewed the nature of prophecy, and also how they responded to Joachim's ideas. Another factor for how theologians thought about prophecy were broader controversies that Joachim's predictions either caused or were associated.

To understand how these factors affected theological thinking and influenced the development of two main schools of thinking, chapter two gives particular attention to the contrasting thought of Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure. Aquinas both rejected Joachite ideas and reasserted or further developed mostly Augustinian views according to Aristotelian principles. Bonaventure, on the other hand, held to a reconfigured Joachite eschatology centered on the apocalyptic significance of Saint Francis; although Bonaventure remained fairly conventional in his understanding of prophecy itself, he also allowed for the existence of an inspired exegesis he believed could both uncover hidden truths and reveal the future.

Chapter three examines how thought surrounding inspired exegesis and its practice reached its furthest maturation, but also, during the first half of the fourteenth century, how opposition from the Church eventually served to discredit it as a means for thinking about and expressing divine inspiration. The thought and activities of Peter John Olivi (1248-1298), a Franciscan theologian, are central to these developments. Furthering certain lines of Bonaventuran thought, Olivi was also influenced by practicing visionaries, and his writings articulate both an experiential and contemplative understanding of inspiration as well as a defense of Joachite conceptions according to the terms of scholastic theology. Drawing particularly on his opinion that prophecy is a *habitus*, Olivi argued that Joachim should be regarded not only as an inspired exegete, but just as a prophet, because he considered Joachim to possess a dispositive ability to spiritually interpret the hidden meanings of Scripture.

Olivi's preaching to groups of lay Beguins, and his advocacy and joining of his eschatological views with a group of Franciscans known as the Spiritual Franciscans helped diffuse his thought about the nature of inspiration to both laity and those in orders, as did the posthumous circulation of his writings in the vernacular. Some who took inspiration from these

writings professed that Joachim (or Olivi himself) had been granted *spiritualis intelligentia*. Less educated followers, however, failing to grasp the theological subtleties, maintained that both Joachim and Olivi were prophets whom God spoke to directly, and at least one Beguin woman claimed that she was such a prophet. Reflecting hopes that God might still speak to the Church through prophets as well as uncertainty about how He might do so, some of these predictions were heard, but with great ambivalence. Mostly, however, the Church's reaction was negative and those who claimed inspiration were frequently condemned, imprisoned, or executed. Principally, it was the association with the Spirituals that did the most to discredit Joachite and Olivian conceptions of prophecy; following even earlier condemnations, in 1317 the papacy of John XXII began a decades-long suppression and persecution of the Spirituals and their followers. As a result, inspired exegesis largely ceased to exist, either as a means for practiced prophecy or as an intellectual category for understanding how God might speak to humans.

The decline of spiritual intelligence by the middle of the fourteenth century represents the closing of the first arc of developments this dissertation sees as defining the medieval history of the conception of prophecy. Chapter four explores a second arc of developments, beginning in the second half of the fourteenth century that finds new contexts and impulses motivating a convergence of prophetic practice and theory, as well as new intellectual problems that had to be considered. With inspired exegesis discredited, the prophets of the later fourteenth century returned to a visions and voices model of direct revelation, in which the prophets presented themselves as mouthpieces for God. Different types of people are represented as prophets: they were primarily laity whose visions compelled them to enter religious or quasi-religious life, and frequently they were women. Visionary prophets, including women, likely existed earlier in the Middle Ages. Unlike those prophets, however, the prophets of the later fourteenth century found

a wider hearing, in part because they spoke to men in power and claimed to deliver divine pronouncements about significant political matters, especially as the prolonged displacement of the papacy to Avignon (1309-1378) or the Schism (1378-1417).

Bridget of Sweden (1303-1373) and Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) can be seen as prototypes of this new type of prophet, after which a long line appeared, beginning especially in the 1380s. Much of what is known about these prophets' experiences comes from their confessors, a comparatively new institution (at least for laypersons) of educated male clerics who recorded the prophets' revelations, verified and broadcast them to a wider public, and counseled and guided the prophets as they sought to understand what they were experiencing. Largely as a result of these confessors and their relationship with prophets, practiced prophecy and prophetic expression came into close alignment with theories of prophecy. Prophets, for example, are portrayed ruminating about their visions in terms consonant with Augustine's theory of visions, and their revelatory voices are themselves presented as speaking about these concepts. Furthermore, confessors helped guide their prophets' behaviors in the face of doubts about whether God spoke to women. They argued that the nature of women and aspects of female religious expressions were congruent with theological conceptions of prophecy. Through these arguments and by emphasizing how these women conformed to these expectations they helped to encourage others to practice similar behaviors and influenced assumptions about what prophecy was supposed to look like.

Reflecting fears about the workings of demons in the world, the prophets and their confessors were very concerned about demonic illusions actually masquerading as good spirits or that others might think their visions were demonic. Arising from these fears, vision accounts increasingly portray instances of the prophets withstanding demonic attempts to tempt or

deceive. Prophets and their confessors (as well as revelatory voices) also consider demons from the perspective of *discretio spirituum*, or the discernment of spirits. Although the Bible and authoritative writings provided several means to distinguish spirits, developments in demonology suggested that the demons knew these markers as well and could imitate them. Confessors thus found it necessary to articulate more strident sets of observable criteria that could be used to indicate true prophecy and to explain how their prophets met these criteria. Concurrently, the prophets they advised sometimes spoke about discernment, but more frequently they insisted that they themselves possessed special abilities for distinguishing between spirits. Usually expressed as a supernatural endowment, such portrayals attempted to correlate a charism of discernment with the gift of prophecy.

As the Schism drew longer and the number of people claiming to be prophets grew, the idea that a confessor's verification or that a prophet could judge the truth of his or her own prophecies was increasingly called into question by university theologians. Responding to the uncertainties posed by demons, women prophets, and the crisis in ecclesiastical authority, the theologians attempted to construct rational means and mechanisms to evaluate prophets and their prophecies. But the problem was ultimately unresolvable. In attempting to address these issues these theologians were presented with an assortment of theoretical uncertainties and conflicting opinions that could not be reconciled, and further, an empowered devil was almost impossible to contend with. In the end, they only further codified the uncertainty and instead of establishing objective criteria they created mechanisms of proof that failed when applied in real cases. Chapter five explores the efforts of these theologians, it examines the trials of Joan of Arc and Savonarola as case studies to understand the application and failure of discernment, and ends

with a consideration of the Fifth Lateran Council's effort to resolve, or at least manage the problem of prophecy.

Chapter 1 Joachim of Fiore and the Problem of Inspired Exegesis

In 1195 the Cistercian Adam of Persigny had an opportunity to meet with Joachim of Fiore (c.1135-1202), an abbot from Calabria in southern Italy who had become widely known for his predictions about the future and the Last Days. By the time of this meeting Joachim had founded a religious order, consulted popes, and his advice had been sought by a king and an emperor. Opinions about the nature of Joachim's predictions varied. Some regarded him as a skilled exegete of Scripture and interpreter of prophetic texts, whereas others believed he was a divinely inspired prophet. From Joachim's writings it was not entirely clear which he was. Thus when Adam of Persigny met with Joachim he put the question to him directly: Did his predictions come from conjecture (that is, exegetical speculation), or were they the result of a supernatural gift of revelation or prophecy? (*an ex prophetia an conjectura seu revelatione*).¹

Underlying Adam's query were a host of issues that had developed out of a patristic background, drawn especially from the thought of Augustine. Indeed, Augustine's thinking about prophecy was organized around the categories expressed later in Adam's question and Augustine's writings provided theological foundations that significantly influenced how these categories were conceptualized and practiced during the Middle Ages. These ideas continued to

¹ The interview is recorded by contemporary chronicler Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon Anglicanum*, ed. Joseph Stevenson, vol. LXVI, Rolls Series (London, 1875), 67–70. On the dating of this encounter, Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 12–14 places it at 1198. Robert E. Lerner, *The Powers of Prophecy: The Cedar of Lebanon Vision From the Mongol Onslaught to the Dawn of the Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 96 n. 27, however, places it at 1195, using evidence from another manuscript copy of Ralph of Coggeshall's chronicle. Joachim's answer to Adam's question is discussed below, p. 30ff.

develop, especially in the hundred years leading up to Joachim, but it was primarily Augustine's conceptions that Adam and Joachim would have been thinking about at their meeting.

Joachim was an important figure in medieval thinking about prophecy because he theorized as well as practiced a new conception of prophecy that would be both influential and controversial for at least two hundred and fifty years. Joachim's new category, what he called *spiritualis intelligentia*, proposed that inspired Scriptural exegesis – that is, human efforts to study and contemplate upon passages from the Bible aided by moments of divine insight – represented God's preferred method for communicating with human beings in the modern age. This was different from the means to predict the future that are described in Augustine's writings: apart from varieties of divination or astrology (which Augustine rejected), Augustine discussed conjecture, or wholly human efforts of deduction; and prophecy and revelation as instances of divine communication that fully and directly transmitted the intended message to a passive recipient. Whereas Augustine believed *prophetia* had primarily occurred in the past, Joachim's exegesis (that he considered inspired by God) compelled him to make his own predictions in the present. Moreover, Joachim's predictions included the view that God would increase the gift of *spiritualis intelligentia* in the present, and in the future grant it to an order of “spiritual” men in order that they reform the Church and lead it into the final age of history.

1.1 Augustine: Prophecy and Visions, Conjecture and Apocalyptic Speculation

Augustine (354-430) considered Biblical prophecy a significant means by which God had revealed Himself, His Son, and general information about the eschatological future. However, to interpret prophecy to make detailed predictions was not permitted, as Christ Himself had said. To do so might invite demonic interference or lead to heresy and disorder, as with the Montanists or

millennialist interpretations of Scriptures. This, along with Augustine's ecclesiology, prompted him to treat genuine prophecy as something that had all but ceased after the apostolic era; these factors also caused Augustine to place limits on the possibilities for exegetical speculation and promote a limited approach to interpreting messages from the Bible, especially its most apocalyptic passages.

Augustine wrote no systematic treatment of prophecy, yet his writings touching upon its various aspects were highly influential in shaping attitudes toward and informing medieval readers about revelatory knowledge and predicting the future. In particular, Augustine influenced later developments through his writings on auguries, divination, and astrology; his thought on prophecy, especially as it related to his theory of different types of visions; and his consideration of exegetical speculation. On each of these topics Augustine's thought was significantly conditioned by his reactions to contemporary situations or by what he considered faulty attempts to understand hidden meanings or predict the future. For instance, to Augustine the ancient practices of augury, divination, and astrology were not just superstitious and blasphemous but in fact invitations for demonic activity, which could also masquerade as prophecy.

Augustine's rejection of all the various forms of divination, augury, and soothsaying, can be found in *De divinatione daemonum* (406/408) and especially book eight of *De civitate Dei* (413 - 426/7).² While Augustine admitted that such practices might produce accurate prediction, he attributed much of their efficacy to demonic activity. The Bible makes it clear that demons attempt to deceive humans and interfere in human affairs and Augustine argues that much of

² Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 2 vols., Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 47 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955), especially 8.14-24; *De Divinatione Daemonum*, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, vol. 41 (Vienna, 1900).

pagan religion is in fact the worship of demons, which, he says, explains its immorality.³ According to Augustine, demons cannot actually foresee the future, but they can give humanity the impression that they do.⁴ Their greater sensory perception allows them to predict through natural signs what human senses cannot. Moreover, their long existence has given them experience and knowledge of human nature, which they use accurately predict men's actions.⁵ In Augustine's view, God restricts the harm that demons can do, but He uses demons to test souls and allows demons to deceive humans and lead the sinful into error.⁶ Human weakness, thus provides demons their opportunity, and divination and augury arise from man's curiosity and desire to know more than he should. Augustine warns that, even when accurate predictions are gained through such practices, this is part of the demons' plan, for they mix truth with falsehood in order to deceive.

Augustine also rejected the use of astrology to predict the future or interpret the present, although here he was somewhat more ambivalent.⁷ In his youth, Augustine had himself been attracted to astrology, but following his conversion to Christianity he argued against many of astrology's practices and claims.⁸ As with divination, Augustine admitted that astrology could sometimes produce accurate predictions; he also accepted the idea that astral influences had some effect on natural occurrences and even human actions. Augustine nonetheless rejected

³ The New Testament describes the devil tempting Christ in the desert (Matthew 4 and Luke 4), demonic possessions (Luke 8:30, 9:39, 11:14), taking the form of an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), and leading people astray, including Judas (1 Peter 5:8, John 13:2 Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, books 6-10 are presented as an argument that the immorality of paganism is related to the worship of demons.

⁴ Acts 16:16 describes a slave woman possessed by an evil spirit who earned money for her master by soothsaying.

⁵ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 9.22.

⁶ Ibid., 2.23.

⁷ Tim Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology* (Peter Lang, 2007).

⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. James Joseph O'Donnell (Oxford : Oxford ; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1992). In book 4 Augustine's discusses his early fascination and eventual turning away from astrology. Augustine's most sustained mature attack on astrology comes in Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, Book 4.

astrology for several reasons: astrology is determinist and limits God's authority and he felt astrologers blamed God for sin by believing that the movement of the stars (which God controlled) compelled both good and evil behaviors. Moreover, Augustine regarded astrology as a type of blasphemous worship of creation rather than of the creator. He was also skeptical of situations he felt that astrology could not adequately explain (for instance, the case of two children born at the same time leading very different lives). Finally, Augustine believed that certain astrological practices invited the fellowship of demons.⁹

With divination, augury, and astrology excluded from consideration, medieval readers thus found in Augustine two main options for predicting the future: prophecy (*prophetia*), or exegetical speculation or conjecture (*conjectura*). Throughout *De civitate Dei* and especially in books seventeen and eighteen, Augustine discusses various prophecies, especially Old Testament prophecies that foretold the advent of Christ and the Church. Although he does not define it here, elsewhere in *De civitate Dei* Augustine states that prophecy is revealed to the prophets by the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ From his examples in books seventeen and eighteen, it is clear that Augustine understood prophecy to be divine communication, transmitted by word or vision or conveyed directly to the mind of the prophet. Sometimes the prophet fully understands the meaning of what is revealed to him; at others a gift of prophecy allows the prophet to understand the true meaning of what was revealed to someone else. Often, the prophet only understands that what he received is from God and the full meaning of the message remains unclear until the prophecy is fulfilled.

⁹ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 7.7. Also, Augustine, *De Genesi Ad Litteram*, ed. Agaesse and Solignac (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1972), 2.17. See Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology*, 145-146 and 160-162.

¹⁰ For example: Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 8.23.

One of Augustine's most important theoretical contributions concerning prophecy was his epistemology of visions. Extremely influential throughout the Middle Ages, Augustine addresses the topic of visions in a number of writings but gives it most attention in *De Genesi ad litteram* where it takes up the bulk of book twelve. Augustine posits three types of visions, in ascending order of importance and reliability: corporeal, spiritual or imaginary, and intellectual.¹¹ Corporeal vision (*visio corporalis*) pertains to images that a person experiences with the five physical senses while fully awake. Such visions might include things that others could not perceive but that the visionary or prophet might nonetheless be able to see, hear, touch, taste, or smell.

Spiritual vision (*visio spiritualis*), which during the Middle Ages was sometimes also referred to as imaginative vision (*visio imaginaria*), is realized through the mind's imaginative faculties apart from the physical senses. These are the most common type of visions. They can be realized through dreams, but Augustine writes that they are also experienced in states of ecstasy (*exstasis* or *excessus mentis*) when the mind is wholly turned away from the senses, no longer seeing or hearing with one's eyes or ears.¹² Visions of the first and second kind might constitute true prophecy, for, as Augustine writes: "when a good spirit seizes or ravishes the spirit of a man to direct it to an extraordinary vision, there can be no doubt the images are signs of things which is useful to know, for this is a gift of God."¹³ Such visions were not always from God or good spirits though, for demons could also produce visions of a corporeal or spiritual nature.¹⁴

¹¹ Augustine, *De genesi*, Book 12; On Augustine's theory of visions see Peter Dinzelbacher, *Vision Und Visionsliteratur Im Mittelalter*, Monographien Zur Geschichte Des Mittelalters, Bd. 23 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1981), 82ff; Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 134–38; Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 228–62.

¹² Augustine, *De genesi*, 12.12.

¹³ Ibid., 12.13.28. "Cum autem spiritus bonus in haec visa humanum spiritum assumit aut rapit, nullo modo illas imagines signa rerum aliarum esse dubitandum est, et earum quas nosse utile est: Dei enim munus est."

¹⁴ Ibid., 12.19.31.

Intellectual visions, however, offer certainty.¹⁵ Augustine theorized that intellectual vision relates neither to the senses nor the imagination but instead is immediate, God-given understanding. Because this type of vision is directly communicated to the intellectual function of the soul, Augustine believed intellectual vision avoided mediating influences or interference, either from demons, imperfections of the physical senses, or defects of the imagination. In Augustine's view, therefore, intellectual vision is both the highest level of knowledge and the greatest type of prophecy.

According to Augustine, prophecy can occur through one or a combination of vision types, whether to an individual person or distributed among multiple people. The visionary, for example, might see a vision corporeally or spiritually but in order to fully understand the prophecy he might also be granted intellectual vision. It was also possible that one person receives only the corporeal or spiritual vision and another person is given intellectual vision in order to understand what the other had seen. In either case, the depth and certainty of understanding is proportional to the level of vision. As Augustine explains: "He is less a prophet, who sees in spirit nothing but the signs representative of things, by means of the images of things corporeal: he is more a prophet, who is merely endowed with the understanding of these signs; but most of all is he a prophet, who excels in both ways."¹⁶

Adam of Persigny asked Joachim whether his predictions were the result of prophecy, conjecture, or revelation. At first glance it might seem that prophecy and revelation are nearly

¹⁵ Ibid., 12.14.29; See also, Karin Schlapbach, "Intellectual Vision in Augustine, *De Genesi Ad Litteram*," in *Studia Patristica: Augustine; Other Latin Writers* (v. 43), by Frances Margaret Young, Mark J. Edwards, and Paul M. Parvis (Peeters Publishers, 2006), 243–44.

¹⁶ Augustine, *De genesi*, 12.9. "Proinde, quibus signa per aliquas rerum corporalium similitudines demonstrabantur in spiritu, nisi accesserat mentis officium, ut etiam intellegeerentur, nondum erat prophetia; magisque propheta erat, qui interpretabatur quod alius vidisset, quam ipse qui vidisset. Unde apparet magis ad mentem pertinere prophetiam, quam ad istum spiritum, qui modo quodam proprio vacatur spiritus, vis animae quaedam mente inferior, ubi corporalium rerum similitudines exprimuntur."

the same thing but Adam's division of prophecy and revelation makes greater sense in consideration of Augustine's thinking about visions. Augustine's story of Baltasar in Daniel 5 provides an example for this possibility when the king at his wedding feast saw a vision of a disembodied hand write a message on the wall. Baltasar saw this with his eyes (corporeal vision) and once the writing had disappeared an image remained in his thoughts (spiritual vision). But when neither Baltasar nor his wise men could decipher the message, Daniel came forward, and "his mind illuminated with the spirit of prophecy" experienced intellectual vision that allowed him to decipher the message and interpret its meaning for the king. In terms of Adam's question Baltasar possessed *revelatio* because he saw the writing hand but since he did not understand he lacked *prophetia*. Conversely, Daniel did not receive *revelatio* but because God gave Daniel understanding, Augustine states, "Daniel was more a prophet than the king."¹⁷

Augustine's writings about exegetical speculation, or conjecture (*conjectura*) also bear directly on Adam of Persigny's question to Joachim of Fiore. Literally meaning "throwing together," the term *conjectura* refers to opinions or deductions formed from available facts or observations. In classical Latin, *conjectura* had particular relevance in the language of augury, and in that context it could refer to conclusions drawn from signs or omens, from divination, or from the interpretation of dreams.¹⁸ Within a Christian context conjectural speculation looked primarily to the Scriptures and saints although certain pagans that were considered inspired (because they seemed to predict the birth of Christ) such as the sibylline oracles or Virgil, might serve as conjectural sources too.¹⁹ Conjecture, therefore, might be derived from prophecy or revelation but it was not prophecy itself; rather, conjecture is the working of purely human

¹⁷ Ibid., 12.11.

¹⁸ For example, Cicero, *Divinatione*, 2, 31, 66; 1, 36 78; 2, 63 129; Ovid, *Tristia* 1, 9, 51; Suetonius, *Viti Caesarum*, 18.

¹⁹ See, for example Bernard McGinn, *The Calabrian Abbot: Joachim of Fiore in the History of Western Thought* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), 78.

deduction. For Augustine, therefore, prophecy and conjecture differed in their source, in the means through which they were arrived at, and in their authority. Prophecy (especially when conveyed through intellectual vision) is certain knowledge about matters unknowable through normal human intelligence; it originates from a divine source and is directly revealed to a chosen individual via supernatural means. Conjecture, on the other hand, he regarded as uncertain prediction or opinion arrived at through the workings of human intelligence.

Conjectura might arrive at truth but, by lacking the divine illumination of prophecy, it is subject to the failings and faults of human nature and therefore is prone to error, as Augustine makes clear in an example he describes in book eighteen of *De civitate Dei*.²⁰ Here Augustine argues against a group of Christians who believed that the hour of Antichrist was near. This group, whose methods resembled what Joachim of Fiore would advocate, believed that the persecutions of Egypt in the Old Testament corresponded to persecutions of the Christian Church. In Exodus God brought down ten plagues upon Egypt before the Hebrew slaves were freed, followed by an eleventh plague that destroyed the pursuing Egyptian forces by drowning them in the waters of the Red Sea. According to the group Augustine describes, the Church had now endured ten persecutions, beginning with Emperor Nero's and continuing through those of Diocletian and Maximian. All that remained was for an eleventh and final persecution to be brought about by Antichrist, who the group predicted would come soon.

Augustine characterizes these ideas as ridiculous. To begin with, he challenges their enumeration and points out their logical failings by offering his own examples of numerous persecutions against Christians that have already brought this number well past eleven. Augustine writes that while this group expressed themselves in ways that might make them

²⁰ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 18.52.

sound like prophets their predictions were not divinely inspired but were mere speculation and the workings of imperfect human reason. As he explains: “Yet I do not think persecutions were prophetically signified by what was done in Egypt, however nicely and ingeniously those who think so may seem to have compared the two in detail, not by the prophetic Spirit, but by the conjecture of the human mind, which sometimes hits the truth, and sometimes is deceived.”²¹

Augustine had other reasons to be skeptical about such conjecture. In particular, conjectural speculation that sought to understand specific eschatological details, such as calculating the date and time of the final persecution or the literal identity of Antichrist, contradicted Christ’s statement to his disciples, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power” (Acts 1:6ff). Reflecting on Christ’s words, Augustine writes, “in vain, then, do we attempt to compute definitely the years that may remain to this world, when we may hear from the mouth of the Truth that it is not for us to know this.” Although many have attempted to predict these things through “human conjectures,” Christ, Augustine says, “puts aside the figures of the calculators, and orders silence.”²²

The temptation to know too much about the future might also invite demonic deception, and Augustine states that even now worshipers of false gods have consulted with demons to predict how long the Christian religion would endure.²³ Augustine also would have associated speculation about the details of the end of time with millennialist interpretations of the

²¹ Ibid., 18.52. “Sed ego illa re gesta in Aegypto istas persecutiones prophetice significatas esse non arbitror; quamvis ab eis, qui hoc putant, exquisite et ingeniose illa singula his singulis comparata uideantur, non prophetico spiritu, sed coniectura mentis humanae, quae aliquando ad uerum peruenit, aliquando fallitur.”

²² Ibid., 18.53. “Non est, inquit, uestrum scire tempora, quae Pater posuit in sua potestate. Non utique illi de hora uel die uel anno, sed de tempore interrogauerant, quando istud accipere responsum. Frustra igitur annos, qui remanent huic saeculo, computare ac definire conamur, cum hoc scire non esse nostrum ex ore Veritatis audiamus; quos tamen alii quadringentos, alii quingentos, alii etiam mille ab ascensione Domini usque ad eius ultimum aduentum compleri posse dixerunt. Quem ad modum autem quisque eorum astruat opinionem suam, longum est demonstrare et non necessarium. Coniecturis quippe utuntur humanis, non ab eis aliquid certum de scripturae canonicae auctoritate profertur. Omnium uero de hac re calculantium digitos resoluit et quiescere iubet ille, qui dicit: Non est uestrum scire tempora, quae Pater posuit in sua potestate.”

²³ Ibid., 18.53.

Scriptures. Such speculation usually derived from literal exegesis of apocalyptic passages to support expectations of an earthly kingdom of God preceding the Last Judgment. Millennialist readings were commonplace among persecuted Christian communities in the first century, for these expectations offered hope that an oppressive Roman empire would be overturned, to be replaced by a more just earthly rule, or a kingdom of God on Earth.²⁴ During the late second century, however, as the Church was growing into a settled institution and seeking to live in peace with the Roman empire, millennialists were increasingly a source of embarrassment to Church leaders who wished to emphasize to Roman authorities that Christ's kingdom was not of this world. By the fourth century Christianity had become a state religion and millennialism therefore represented a subversive and revolutionary threat to the established order.

In contrast to literal readings of the Apocalypse, Augustine offered an approach influenced by the now-lost work of Tyconius (died c. 400) that interprets these texts' figures and images as symbols referring to a general struggle between good and evil throughout the whole history of the Church.²⁵ For Augustine, the apocalyptic passages of the Bible are not to be understood as detailed prophecies of an imminent future or signs of the times for the present day. Rather, he advises exegetes to read the texts for the moral and spiritual truths they contain. Augustine considered the thousand year kingdom of God described in Apocalypse 20, for example, not as a literal span of one-thousand years, but instead as a symbolic description of the relationship between Christ and the Church. With Jerome (who also rejected millennialist interpretations),²⁶

²⁴ James D. Tabor, "Ancient Jewish and Early Christian Millennialism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 252–66. Not all millennialist views believed in an earthly kingdom of God, but many did.

²⁵ Paula Frederiksen, "Tyconius and Augustine on the Apocalypse," in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Kenneth Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1992), 20–38.

²⁶ Jerome, *Commentaires de Jérôme sur le prophète Isaïe. Livres XII-XV. Livres XII-XV.*, ed. C Gabriel and Roger Gryson (Freiburg: Herder, 1996), XVIII quoted in McGinn, *Calabrian Abbot*, 77. Another tactic of Jerome's was to recalculate the chronology of the End Times by adding of three more centuries – thereby

Augustine was the most significant proponent of Tyconius' views, and especially through Augustine's influence this interpretative approach became the dominant framework for understanding apocalyptic Biblical passages for at least the next seven centuries.²⁷

As Augustine opposed literal interpretations of the Apocalypse and predictions that attempted to know too much, his writings seem cautious about the possibility for contemporary prophecy. His discussions of prophecy usually avoid contemporary examples, focusing instead on Biblical examples, or ancient pagan oracles. One of the few contemporary prophets Augustine mentions in his writings is a certain John, who Augustine says possessed the gift of prophecy when he consulted Theodosius, the Christian emperor who defeated Maximus in 387.²⁸ For the most part, however, Augustine's assessment of practicing prophets was negative, especially when prophecies were apocalyptic. This can be seen in his negative appraisal of the Montanists, who continued to exist in the fourth century, although in a much reduced form.²⁹ In *De haeresibus* Augustine rejects the Montanists for falsely claiming to possess the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and elsewhere he criticizes their doctrinal excesses.³⁰ For Augustine and others, the history of the Church suggested that prophecy – especially of the sort that directed the Church or revealed the end of time – had all but ceased following the apostolic age. Whereas the Holy Spirit once spoke through the prophets and the inspired the authors of Scripture, it was now for

“resetting” the apocalyptic clock so that the advent of the millennium (whatever one interpreted it to mean) was less immediate and resided more comfortably in a far off future.

²⁷ On Augustine's use of Tyconius and how this manner of interpretation influenced medieval readings, see especially McGinn, *Calabrian Abbot*, 80ff; E. Ann Matter, “The Apocalypse in Early Medieval Exegesis,” in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Kenneth Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1992), 38–51.

²⁸ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 5.26.

²⁹ Augustine, *De haeresibus ad Quodvultdeus*, ed. J.-P. Migne, vol. 42, *Patrologia Latina* (Paris, 1841), 86.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 42:162–63; Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, ed. Joseph Zycha, vol. 25, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna: Tempsky, 1891), 32.17; Augustine, *De agone Christiano*, ed. Joseph Zycha, vol. 41, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna: Tempsky, 1900), 28.30.

the bishops – the successors of the apostles-- to safeguard and transmit the divine word. Himself a bishop, Augustine subscribed to this conception of episcopal authority.³¹

Augustine's influence on the conception of prophecy in the Middle Ages was great and wide ranging. In the first place, he was instrumental in describing what came to be considered the two primary categories for attaining knowledge of the future: *prophetia* and *conjectura*. His warnings against demonic attempts to influence efforts to predict the future and his caution surrounding post-apostolic prophecy had far-reaching affect, and largely because of his views relatively few people claiming to be prophets appear in the records of Western Christendom for the next 700 years.³² For those that do appear, the opposition they encountered suggests just how prevalent Augustine's thought remained on these topics.³³ Augustine's interpretation of the ages of the Church and especially his approach to understanding the Apocalypse were similarly influential, and at least until the later eleventh century subsequent commentaries and eschatological formulations followed his lead, and avoided making specific speculations about the Last Days.³⁴ Furthermore, Augustine's conception of the three types of visions formed a basis not only for many medieval theoretical treatments of prophecy, but eventually it also influenced how certain prophetic figures described their gifts.

³¹ See, for instance, Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, 33.9 which asserts that the authority of Christ has been passed through the succession of bishops.

³² Bernard McGinn, "'Trumpets of the Mysteries of God': Prophetesses in Late Medieval Christianity," in *Propheten Und Prophezeiungen - Prophets and Prophecies*, ed. Matthias Riedl and Tilo Schabert (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), 126.

³³ See below, p 33.

³⁴ McGinn, *Calabrian Abbot*, 85-89.

1.2 Joachim of Fiore and a New Paradigm for Prophetic Knowledge

Operating within a framework of Augustinian assumptions about prophecy and apocalyptic interpretations but also reacting against them was Joachim of Fiore. Joachim of Fiore was born around 1135 in Calabria in southern Italy.³⁵ His father was a notary who held a bureaucratic position at the court of Roger II of Sicily and Joachim trained for an administrative career and as a young man worked at the royal chancery in Palermo. Around 1167 he was sent with a diplomatic group to Constantinople but for an unknown reason he left the party and journeyed to the Holy Land instead, seeking meaning for his life. While in the Holy Land, Joachim had a conversion experience. Some later accounts say he also received the first of several divine revelations he believed gave him insights about the true meaning of the Scriptures. When he returned to Italy around 1170 he began a new life as Benedictine monk and about 1176 became abbot and led the monks at Corazzo to follow Cistercian rules. About this same time Joachim began writing speculations about the future based on his reading of the Bible.³⁶

As abbot, Joachim sought to incorporate his monastery into the Cistercian Order, but he also found time to write and study the Scriptures. Initially, he was motivated by monastic reform and searching the Scriptures for understanding about the most perfect form of religious life. Soon, however, he discovered what he believed were concordances linking books of the Bible with each other but also with events in post-Biblical history. During a stay at Casamari from 1183-

³⁵ Biographical information about Joachim comes primarily from Luke of Cosenza, "Virtutum Beati Joachimi synopsis," in *Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, by Herbert Grundmann, vol. 2, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* Schriften 25 (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1977), written by Luke of Cosenza (d. 1224), secretary and scribe to Joachim later abbot and archbishop at Cosenza; and also an anonymous vita of the early thirteenth century, but which appears to be based on earlier material now lost. "Vita beati Joachimi abbatis," in *Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, by Herbert Grundmann, vol. 2, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* Schriften 25 (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1977). Some additional details about Joachim's life are provided by Joachim's own testamentary letter, *Epistola prologasis*, written in 1200.

³⁶ Stephen Wessley, "A New Writing of Joachim of Fiore: Preliminary Observations," *Florensia*, no. 7 (1993): 39–58.

1184 Joachim began to simultaneously write three books: *Psalterium decem chordarum*, on the Trinity (completed in 1186), *Liber de concordia Noui et Veteris Testamenti*, on concordances between the Old and New Testaments (completed in 1196), and *Expositio in Apocalypsim*, a commentary on the Apocalypse (completed by 1200). These three books would be the primary literary expressions of Joachim's exegesis and theology of history, and through them his predictions about the future.³⁷

During his lifetime Joachim was regarded in a mostly positive fashion, and on account of his predictive insights he enjoyed a widespread reputation. Following his death, however, elements of his thought began to elicit controversy. In 1215 certain of his ideas about the Trinity were condemned at the Fourth Lateran Council, and in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Spiritual Franciscans and others who took Joachim's exegetical conclusions as their main influence were persecuted as heretics by the Church. Yet, throughout these controversies Joachim himself was mostly spared. In part this may have been due to early papal recommendation of his exegetical work, his saintly life and careful submission to papal authority, and that he founded a papal-approved order. Joachim's continued status also seems due to ongoing interest and enthusiasm for his ideas and predictions, even as later followers utilized them to challenge the authority of the Church.³⁸

Throughout his writings Joachim developed an approach to reading the Scriptures that provided him a means for interpreting history and predicting the future; and, for those who understood his theories and methods, Joachim offered a third category of predictive knowledge apart from *conjectura* and *prophetia*. This third category, *spiritualis intelligentia*, involved

³⁷ Joachim of Fiore, *Psalterium decem cordarum*, ed. Kurt-Victor Selge (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2009); Joachim of Fiore, *Liber de Concordia Noui Ac Veteris Testamenti*, ed. E. Randolph Daniel, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 73 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1983); Joachim of Fiore, *Expositio in Apocalypsim*. (Frankfurt a.M.: Minerva, 1964).

³⁸ Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 28–32.

human study and deduction as well as prayerful contemplation, but ultimately it was a gift of the Holy Spirit – a gift that Joachim believed he possessed and that others after him would possess as they remade the Church and helped lead it to the end of time. Although there were some who understood what he was claiming and proposing, many did not, and the implications of his views would not be fully recognized for about fifty years after his death. Until this time, and even thereafter, there were many who were unaware or failed to understand the true nature of his claims, and thus continued to view Joachim through the lens of the two traditional categories of *prophetia* or *conjectura*.

1.2.1 Joachim's Initial Reception: Conjecture or Prophecy?

Joachim's writings consisted primarily of Scriptural studies and reflections on the Trinity and featured complex calculations and schema that provided dates and information about the coming of Antichrist and consummation of ages. These works read like the efforts of an exegete, but they also describe moments that Joachim said were visions from God that revealed important insights that he applied in his continued Scriptural studies. Thus, for a reader in the 1180s and 1190s it was possible to regard him in one of several ways. In particular, some considered Joachim an exegete or skilled interpreter of oracles whereas others believed him to be a prophet of God.

Joachim's meeting in 1184 with Pope Lucius III (d. 1185), for example, suggests that the pope regarded Joachim as an exegete and interpreter of prophecies. A contemporary account of this meeting indicates that the pope sought Joachim to interpret a sibylline oracle text found among the papers of a recently-deceased cardinal that Joachim proceeded to interpret according

to his exegetical theories.³⁹ Joachim seems also to have taken advantage of the situation to review his writing projects with the pope who approved Joachim's efforts and encouraged him to continue, with specific reference to a book on concords and a commentary on Revelation.⁴⁰

There are no indications that Pope Lucius regarded Joachim as anything other than an exegete. Others, however, considered Joachim a prophet. In 1191, for example, English chronicler Roger Howden recorded an interview between Joachim and Richard the Lion-Heart:

In the same year Richard, king of England, through the common fame and report of many heard that there was a monk in Calabria named Joachim, the abbot of Corazzo of the Cistercian order, who had the spirit of prophecy (*spiritum propheticum*) and used to predict what was to come to the people. He sent for him and willingly heard the words of his prophecy (*prophetiae*) and his wisdom and teaching.⁴¹

From Roger's description that Joachim had the "spirit of prophecy" it appears that the king, encamped at Messina before departing for the East, sought out Joachim to give him predictions about his coming battles.

During this meeting Joachim gave Richard the prediction he was looking for and, employing his concordance method of calculation, Joachim explained how the seven-headed dragon of Apocalypse 12 and 17 referred to the persecutions of the Church. The first five heads were the five persecutors who had already come – Herod, Nero, Constantius, Muhammad, and Melsemoth (a North African Muslim ruler). Joachim identified the sixth persecutor as Saladin, who now oppressed "God's Church and holds it captive along with the Lord's sepulcher, the holy city Jerusalem and the land where the Lord walked..." According to Joachim, Saladin would soon

³⁹ Bernard McGinn, "Joachim and the Sibyl: An Early Work of Joachim of Fiore from Ms. 322 of the Biblioteca Antoniana in Padua," *Cîteaux* 24 (1973): 97–138.

⁴⁰ Luke of Cosenza, "Virtutum Beati Joachimi synopsis," 528–38; "Vita beati Joachimi abbatis," 538–44.

⁴¹ Roger of Howden, *Chronica Magistri*, ed. William Stubbs (London: Rolls Series, 1870), 49.2. Translated in McGinn, *Calabrian Abbot*, 26. "Eodem anno Ricardus rex Angliae, audiens per communem famam, et multorum relationem, quod quidam vir religiosus erat in Calabria, dictus Joachim, abbas de Curacio, de ordine Cistrensi, habens spiritum propheticum, et ventura poulo praedicebat, misit pro eo, et libenter audiebat verba prophetiae illius, et spientiam et doctrinam."

lose all this, and Richard's coming he foretold as "most necessary, because the Lord will give you victory over your enemies and will exalt your name over all the princes of the earth."⁴²

Later in that same year Joachim encountered the German emperor, Henry VI, and here too Joachim seems to have been received as a prophet. A near contemporary account relates that Joachim approached the emperor much like an Old Testament prophet, castigating Henry for his cruelty and foretelling the emperor's future. The meeting must have made an impression. In 1194, after Henry became king of Sicily he granted Joachim legal title for a monastery at San Giovanni, and the following year he provided the new monastery with a steady income. Around this same time the *vita* records another meeting with the emperor and has him greet the abbot with the words: "This is Abbot Joachim, who a while ago prophesied (*prophetavit*) everything that happened to us, both the bad that is past and the good that you see."⁴³

1.2.2 Adam of Persigny's Question: *prophetia, conjectura, seu revelazione*

Although Joachim's reputation had grown considerably, by the mid 1190s it was still not clear to many whether he was an exegete engaging in conjecture or a prophet. Thus, when Adam of Persigny had the opportunity to meet with Joachim in Rome about 1195, he put it to him directly. Was his knowledge about the future, Adam asked, from "prophecy, or conjecture, or

⁴² Ibid., 51.3. "... et unus est, scilicet Saladinus, qui in presenti opprimit ecclesiam Dei, et eam cum sepulcro Domini, et sancta civitate Jerusalem, et cum terra in qua steterunt pedes Domini, occupatam detinet; sed ipse in proximo perdet illiam.' Tunc interrogavit eum rex Angliae, 'Quando erit hoc?' Cui Joachim respondit, 'Quando septem anni elapsi sunt a die captionis Jerusalem.' Tunc ait rex Angliae, 'Ergo quare venimus huc tam cito?' Cui Johachim respondit; 'Adventus tuus valde necessarius est, quia Dominus dabit tibi victoriam de inimicis suis, et exaltabit nomen tuum super omnes principes terrae.'

⁴³ "Vita beati Joachimi abbatis," 538; Trans. McGinn, *Calabrian Abbot*, 27–28. "... hic est' inquit 'abbas Joachim, qui dudum cuncta nobis tam adversa, que precesserunt, quam prospera, que cernitis, prophetavit.'

revelation?” (*an ex prophetia, an conjectura, seu revelatione*)⁴⁴ Joachim supposedly replied that he:

had neither prophecy, nor conjecture nor revelation about such matters. “But,” he said, “the God who once gave the spirit of prophecy to the prophets has given me the spirit of understanding, so that in God’s Spirit I very clearly understand all the mysteries of Holy Scripture, just as the holy prophets understood who once wrote it down in God’s Spirit.”⁴⁵

The choices that Adam offered, as has been seen, were derived from Augustine’s writings on prophecy, visions, and guidelines for Scriptural exegesis. Since Adam and Joachim’s thinking about prophecy was situated in this Augustinian heritage, Joachim’s reply must have been surprising, for he was suggesting a new category outside of those defined by Augustine.

To help frame Joachim’s thinking and how he came to such an answer, it will be helpful to survey some of the developments that had occurred between Augustine and Joachim. We can start by considering *prophetia* and *revelatione*, since the two, according to Augustine’s vision theory, were closely related. Examples of prophets from the early Middle Ages were available in saints’ lives, such as in Gregory the Great’s (d. 604) *Dialogues*. In the *vita* of Saint Benedict, for example, Gregory writes: “among other miracles which the man of God did, he began also to be famous for the spirit of prophecy: as to foretell what was to happen, and to relate unto them that were present, such things as were done in absence.”⁴⁶ Benedict is portrayed as making a number of prophecies, all of relatively small importance: His gift for prophecy was especially useful in uncovering the deeds of misbehaving monks (chapters 12, 18, 19) and he used prophecy to

⁴⁴ Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon Anglicanum*. “...an ex prophetia, an conjectura, seu revelatione?”

⁴⁵ Ibid.; Trans. McGinn, *Calabrian Abbot*, 29. “Se neque prophetiam, neque conjecturam, neque revelationem de his habere. Sed Deus, inquit, Qui olim dedit prophetis spiritum prophetiae, mihi dedit spiritum intelligentiae, ut in Dei spiritu omnia mysteria sacrae Scripturae clarissime intelligam, sicut sancti prophetae intellexerunt qui eam olim in Dei spiritu ediderunt.”

⁴⁶ Gregory the Great, *St Gregory the Great: Dialogues*, trans. Odo John Zimmerman (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), Book Two, the Life of Saint Benedict, chapter 12.

admonish a king by foretelling the ruler's demise (chapter 15). Among a number of other occurrences, Gregory also credits Benedict with foretelling through prophecy the time of his own death (chapter 37).

In Book III of the *Dialogues* Gregory attributes a similar type of prophecy to multiple saints, a type of prophecy that was frequently be found in medieval hagiography, where saints are described as possessing limited prophetic powers that allowed them to predict or otherwise be cognizant of events that affected their own lives or immediate situation.⁴⁷ Most commonly, saints endowed with this gift were portrayed as prophesying about the time and circumstances of their own deaths.

Gregory and others' recounting of saintly prophecy should not be seen to represent opposition towards Augustine's attitudes about post-apostolic prophecy. In fact, Augustine himself was tolerant of this sort of limited, non-apocalyptic prophecy, as demonstrated by his account of the prophet who consulted Theodosius. Benedict's revelations or those of Gregory's other saints were usually not about matters of importance to the whole Church, nor did they foretell the end of the world. Rather, this limited form of saintly prophecy, included as it usually was alongside the attribution of other miracles and signs, functioned more as a means to demonstrate a holy individual's sanctity than to broadcast any new revelations. Furthermore, in Gregory's writings and for most medieval hagiographers the attribution of saintly prophecy seems always to have been applied posthumously; therefore, this seems not so much a practiced form of prophecy as it was a formalized way to describe saints, and therefore was not the sort of practiced prophecy that Adam and Joachim were discussing.

⁴⁷ Bernard McGinn, "Prophetic Power in Early Medieval Christianity," *Cristianesimo Nella Storia* 17 (1996): 266–68 disusses Columba as an example of this sort of prophet.

As for public prophecy that sought to intervene in the affairs of the Church, Bernard McGinn concludes that from 400 to about 1100 it was assumed that the role of the prophet had been subsumed in the hierarchical ministries of the Church.⁴⁸ Further, Augustine's skepticism about contemporary prophets such as the Montanists and his suspicions of millenarian expectations continued to be influential and throughout the early Middle Ages these views largely prevented the appearance or acceptance of prophets, and especially apocalyptic prophets. There are mentions of prophets in the early Middle Ages, but they are rare and the prophets they describe encountered significant opposition from the Church. Thiota, for example, was a woman from ninth-century Mainz who claimed to be a prophet, to know things "known to God alone," including the date for the end of the world. Thiota was soon arrested and tried by the archbishop, and after she admitted she had made the whole thing up was publicly whipped.⁴⁹

This began to change in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. McGinn as well as John Van Engen and others have argued that developments in the Church associated with the Gregorian Reform and Investiture Contest led to new ways of thinking about the apocalypse. Specifically, reformers increasingly characterized their struggle using apocalyptic rhetoric that they applied to persons and events in their own time. Initially this was just rhetoric rather than belief that the apocalypse was imminent, but as reform efforts were seen to have failed to produce the results its proponents expected, rhetoric gradually developed into more pronounced thinking about the apocalypse as a near term (if perhaps still not imminent) reality.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ McGinn, "'Trumpets of the Mysteries of God': Prophetesses in Late Medieval Christianity," 126.

⁴⁹ Timothy Reuter, *The Annals of Fulda: Ninth-Century Histories* (Manchester University Press, 1992), 38; Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Dissent and Reform in the Early Middle Ages*, Publications of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 111–13; McGinn, "'Trumpets of the Mysteries of God': Prophetesses in Late Medieval Christianity," 126.

⁵⁰ Bernard McGinn et al., eds., "Apocalypticism and Church Reform: 1100-1500," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 2 (New York: Continuum, 1998), 74–109. John Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1983), 32ff discusses the reformers' increasingly apocalyptic rhetoric as a factor that led Rupert of Deutz's generation to move beyond Tyconian

By the mid-twelfth century these reform currents helped to create circumstances that allowed for at least two successful occurrences of practiced visionary prophecy: Hildegard of Bingen and Elisabeth of Schönau. These German nuns each claimed (and were largely approved in these claims by the Church) to experience direct revelations from God through visions and voices. Speaking with the voice of God they warned about the need for the clergy to reform its behaviors, the growth of heresies, and resolving the schism of 1159-1179 – and how future tribulations would befall the Church if these matters were not addressed.

Joachim, however, stated in his response to Adam that he was not a prophet, and indeed, he did not claim to speak as a mouthpiece for God as did Hildegard and Elisabeth. (Because Hildegard and Elisabeth represent a different sort of practiced prophecy they will be discussed in the context of other visionary prophets in chapter four) Although Joachim's apocalypticism can be seen to have been influenced by similar developments related to the Gregorian Reform,⁵¹ in his reply to Adam it is clear that Joachim agreed with Augustine that visionary prophecy (*prophetia*) was a gift of the spirit confined or mostly confined to the past.

As for *conjectura*, the other choice Adam offered to Joachim, there is a similar situation as prophecy: early medieval adherence to Augustinian guidelines was interrupted in the twelfth century, also as a result of developments associated with the Gregorian Reform and Investiture Contest.⁵² It will be recalled that Augustine criticized attempts to speculate too precisely about the apocalyptic future and, appropriating Tyconius' methodology, Augustine advocated an exegetical approach that avoided literal interpretations or that used of apocalyptic Scriptures to understand details about the present or future. To varying degrees, several German monastic

interpretations and regard the Apocalypse as relating to present-day figures. Other historians such as Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, "Prophecy and Suspicion: Closet Radicalism, Reformist Politics, and the Vogue for Hildegardiana in Ricardian England," *Speculum* 75, no. 2 (2000): 318–41 have come to similar conclusions.

⁵¹ McGinn et al., "Apocalypticism and Church Reform: 1100-1500," 276–78.

⁵² Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, 32ff.

writers of the late eleventh to mid-twelfth centuries challenged these limits, including: Rupert of Deutz (c. 1070-1129), Honorius of Autun (1080-1154), Anselm of Havelberg (c. 1100-1158), Otto of Freising (c. 1144-1158), and Gerhoh of Reichersberg (1093-1169).⁵³

Rupert of Deutz's exegesis provides some examples for how apocalyptic symbols began to be interpreted as having specific reference to the current day.⁵⁴ In his poem *The Calamities of the Church of Liege* (c. 1095), for instance, the "great red dragon" of Apocalypse 12: 3, which Augustinian tradition understood to refer generally to the Devil and his persecutions, Rupert saw as Emperor Henry IV (1050-1106).⁵⁵ The third part of the stars cast down by the tail of the dragon (Apoc. 12:4), which had been interpreted as referring to all pagans, Jews, and false Christians, Rupert saw to mean actual simoniacs and heretics recently cast out of the Church.⁵⁶

Beyond examining just the past and present, Rupert also looked to the future, and attempted to utilize the Scriptures as a guide.⁵⁷ Augustinian readings regarded the Apocalypse as referring only to the New Testament Church, but Rupert interpreted the Apocalypse to stand for the entire history of the Church, starting with the Old Testament. This approach allowed him to utilize the Apocalypse as a guide to past, present, and future. The seven trumpets, and the seven angels bringing plagues, for example, Rupert saw as predicting a series of seven judgments, beginning in the Old Testament but stretching into the New Testament as well as the future.⁵⁸

⁵³ Johannes Fried, "Awaiting the Last Days ... Myth and Disenchantment," in *Apocalyptic Time*, ed. Albert I. Baumgarten (Brill, 2001), 283–304.

⁵⁴ Rupert of Deutz, *Carmina Exulis de Calamitatibus Ecclesiae Leodiensis*, vol. 3, Monumenta Germaniae Historica Libelli de Lite (Munich), 3:636ff; An excerpt is translated in McGinn, *Calabrian Abbot*, 98; For discussion of the poem and interpretation see, Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, 30–35.

⁵⁵ Rupert of Deutz, *Carmina*, for instance 1.1, 3.35-36, 12.22.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 1.2-4, 9, 13-16.

⁵⁷ Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, 275–82.

⁵⁸ Rupert of Deutz, *In Apocalypsim*, ed. J.-P. Migne, vol. 169, Patrologia Latina, 1854, 3; Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, 280.

Joachim of Fiore's exegesis similarly challenged the limitations set by Augustine, and some of his methods and conclusions were anticipated by Rupert of Deutz and the other German writers. Joachim's exegetical approach has been well-studied elsewhere, but a vastly-simplified summary will show how he too read apocalyptic Scriptures differently from Augustine.⁵⁹ Three major interpretive insights characterize Joachim's methodology. The first, appearing in his writing of the late 1170s but most fully expressed in his *Liber de concordia* (1183-84, finished in 1196), was his "concordance of the Testaments" linking the Old and New Testaments. Unlike prior typology, which read Old Testaments passages as prefiguring general types and fulfilled in the New, Joachim regarded the Old Testament as a detailed guide for the New Testament. Not only did he determine that complex patterns existed between the Testaments, but he also felt these patterns could be extended to understand the present and to predict the future. To understand the complexities of the concordances, however, necessitated more than just a literal reading. It also required deeper spiritual understanding (*spiritualis intelligentia* or *spiritualis intellectus*) of the texts that was only achievable through long study, prayer, and contemplation that sought guidance and inspiration from the Holy Spirit.

Joachim's method of concordances involved a complex arrangement of paired connections that he represented using an image of two symmetrical trees: one represented the time of Adam to Christ and the other, beginning with Oziah (a king of Judah), extended to the second coming of Christ.⁶⁰ Joachim reasoned that the symmetrical trees also had symmetrical temporal dimensions according to generations. From Adam to Christ were sixty-three generations and

⁵⁹ Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*; McGinn, *Calabrian Abbot*; Robert E. Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham: Medieval Millenarians and the Jews*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), especially chapter one.

⁶⁰ Robert E. Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham: Medieval Millenarians and the Jews*, The Middle Ages series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 12-14. Although the second tree represents the New Testament, Joachim begins it with Oziah since he felt the gospel was already preached in a certain manner by Isaiah, who lived in the time of Oziah.

from Oziah to the second coming of Christ would also be sixty-three generations; from Oziah to Christ were forty-two generations and so would the time between Christ's first and second coming (with the pattern extending to other parallel sets). Joachim calculated the years of Old Testament generations according to actual lifetimes and he calculated each New Testament generation as thirty years – Christ's age when he began teaching and producing "spiritual" generations. By this reckoning Joachim calculated the fortieth New Testament generation would end in 1200 and the "consummation of the ages" (two generations later) in 1260.

To gain further insight into the future, Joachim applied a similar methodology to his reading of the Apocalypse. Various patristic and medieval exegetes supposed that the Apocalypse consisted of seven visions (the opening of seven seals) that in some general way foretold the future of the Church. Traditionally, these visions were understood in terms of seven tribulations or persecutions, which Joachim approached using his more precise concordance method. Much like the conjecturers Augustine had once criticized, Joachim aligned seven persecutions of the Jews with seven corresponding persecutions of the Christian Church. Following the first four tribulations he felt had already occurred, Joachim matched the remaining three with the last Jewish persecutions, thereby supplying himself with a means to work out further details about the end of time and points in between. When Joachim applied this method to the Apocalypse he managed to confirm predictions he had made from his concordance of the Testaments.⁶¹

In addition to his methodology of the concordances Joachim devised a complementary three-fold theory of statuses based on the persons of the Holy Trinity. According to this schema, the first era, or status, was that of God the Father, followed, since the Incarnation, by the Son. The final status of the Holy Spirit overlapped with the status of the Son but was still to come in

⁶¹ Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham*, 15.

its fullness. Proceeding from the statuses of the Father and of the Son, the final status was to be the Holy Spirit's fullest working on and through the Church.⁶² Joachim developed his statuses schema most fully in *Psalterium decem chordarum*, but in *Expositio Apocalypsim* he also developed a millennialist position that foretold an earthly Sabbath preceding the end of time that corresponded to his status of the Holy Spirit.⁶³

1.2.3 Joachim's Response: *spiritualis intelligentia*

To return to Adam of Persigny's question and Joachim's response, Joachim said that his predictions were neither *prophetia* nor *revelatio* nor were they *conjectura*. Joachim might have claimed *prophetia* or *revelatio* since Hildegard of Bingen and Elisabeth of Schönau had successfully claimed such gifts less than fifty years before, but he did not. Even though Joachim believed he had experienced divine visions he did not believe this made him a prophet and he agreed with Augustine that prophecy was a way that God communicated with humans primarily or only in the past. Furthermore, Joachim was clearly an exegete and his thinking about the future was largely a result of his detailed studies of the Scriptures. But Joachim believed his understanding to be more than just the workings of human intelligence or his own deduction. Rather, Joachim said that:

God who once gave the spirit of prophecy to the prophets has given me the spirit of understanding, so that in God's Spirit I very clearly understand all the mysteries of Holy Scripture, just as the holy prophets understood who once wrote it down in God's Spirit.⁶⁴

⁶² Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 17–20.

⁶³ Robert E. Lerner, "Joachim of Fiore's Breakthrough to Chiliasm," *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 6 (1985): 489–512.

⁶⁴ Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon Anglicanum*, "Se neque prophetiam, neque conjecturam, neque revelationem de his habere. Sed Deus, inquit, Qui olim dedit prophetis spiritum prophetiae, mihi dedit spiritum intelligentiae, ut in Dei spiritu omnia mysteria sacrae Scripturae clarissime intelligam, sicut sancti prophetae intellexerunt qui eam olim in Dei spiritu ediderunt."

Although Joachim recognized, and it seems, for the most part agreed with the Augustinian categories of prophecy, he did not think they described his experience or his understanding for how God spoke with human beings in the modern age.

Part of the explanation for Joachim's understanding of his spiritual gifts can be found in his theories of history. Indeed, the two were closely connected: not only did he arrive at his theories of history as a result of his gifts but these theories also helped explain for him what he had experienced and how he had gained that understanding. Of particular importance in explaining his understanding of his spiritual gifts was his theory about the three statuses, which provided him with his most significant idea about the future as well as an explanation for his conception of prophecy.

According to Joachim's theory of the three statuses, as has been discussed, the current status was that of the Son. In the present the Holy Spirit would remain hidden, and the status of the Son was entrusted to ordained clerics and the hierarchy of the Church who were charged with the preserving and proclaiming the gospel. During the second status the third was already being prepared by the *Ordo monachorum*, beginning with Saint Benedict. When the third status fully appeared, however, Joachim predicted that a new and higher monastic order of "spiritual men" (*virī spirituales*) would arise. They would be persecuted by Antichrist and the forces of evil, but they would overcome and in their victory help to guide the Church in an era of peaceful contemplation until the end of time. This third status, of the Holy Spirit, would make full the promise of the Son, and the Holy Spirit would be poured out on spiritual men who would be granted an inspired spiritual understanding of the Scriptures. Joachim believed that these men,

endowed with a spiritual understanding of the Scriptures, would lead a transformed Church to a higher form of monastic existence.⁶⁵

Joachim believed that he had experienced a foretaste of this new gift of inspired exegesis or *spiritualis intelligentia*. His approach to reading the Bible was one in which the exegete began with the literal reading but progressed to seek full awareness and contemplation of the spiritual truths contained deep within. The Scriptures were not just about the past, however, but when properly understood they provided a guide to the present and future as well.

Joachim understood spiritual understanding to be a gift from God but unlike *prophetia*, which assigns the prophet a passive role as mouthpiece for God, *spiritualis intelligentia* was a gift that involved partially active participation of man with God. If not fully attainable by one's own efforts, it was at least something a hopeful recipient could prepare himself to receive and once granted, cultivate. In this effort, however, there could be no short cuts, at least prior to the full pouring out of the Holy Spirit to come during the third status. Thus, it was necessary to prepare oneself through long study, and especially through contemplation and prayer. Only then would one be capable of receiving the gift. Spiritual understanding provided knowledge that went beyond the letter of the Scriptures, but the letter was both a gateway as well as a boundary to be crossed on the way toward true understanding. Once this boundary was passed, the Holy Spirit illuminated the recipient with an awareness of the true meaning of Scriptures and provided him the insight and ability to correctly interpret the spiritual mysteries contained within the holy texts.⁶⁶ For Joachim, his moments of insight came as the result of momentary visionary experiences.

⁶⁵ Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 19–21.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

Joachim's first vision may have occurred early in his career, before he became a monk and while he was in the Holy Land. Accounts of this early vision come from later biographies and may therefore be legendary.⁶⁷ Joachim does, however, describe two visionary experiences in his authentic writings. The first of these probably occurred in 1183, at Easter, while he was staying at Casamari. Joachim recounted that, about a year prior, he had been struggling to understand a certain passage of the Apocalypse. Encountering great difficulty, as if "the stone that closed the tomb opposed me," Joachim moved on to other things. On the eve of the following Easter, however, he was awakened from sleep, about midnight, and began meditating. He tells us, "about the middle of the night's silence, as I think, the hour when it is thought that our Lion of the tribe of Judah rose from the dead, as I was meditating, suddenly something of the fullness of this book and of the entire harmony of the Old and New Testaments was perceived with clarity of understanding in my mind's eye."⁶⁸

In some ways this account is similar to how a *propheta* might receive a vision. Like a prophet receiving revelation without seeking it, Joachim also did not ask for his first vision, for he had left behind the passage in question a year before. Without knowing it he had been preparing himself, through study and prayer, but only at a time chosen by the Holy Spirit was Joachim granted insight and understanding concerning the passage that had eluded him. Moreover, Joachim received his vision while in an awakened state and knowledge was imparted

⁶⁷ "Vita beati Joachimi abbatis," 529.

⁶⁸ Joachim of Fiore, *Expositio in Apocalypsim.*, f. 39r-v. Translated by McGuin, *Calabrian Abbot*, 21-22. "Et enim cum decursis precedentibus libri huius capitulis pervenire ad locum istum tantam fateor difficultatem, et quasi preter solitum perpessus sum angustias intellectus ut sentiens oppositum mihi lapidem ab ostio monumenti...Cumque me occupatum in multis hoc ipsum oblivio procul duceret; factum est verso anni circulo diem adesse paschalem, mihique circa horam matutinam excitato a somno aliquid in libro isto meditati occurrere pro quo confisus de dono Dei audacior factus sum ad scribendum...et enim cum nonnulla iam capere, et maiora adhuc sacramenta nescirem, quasi quedam pugna gerebatur in mente mea...Cum ergo in supra scripta nocte simile aliquid contigisset. Circa medium (ut opinor) noctis silentium et horam qua leo noster de tribu Iuda resurrexisse extimatur a mortuis, subito mihi meditati aliquid quadam mentis oculis intelligentie claritate percepta de plenitudine libri huius et tota veteris ac novi testamenti concordia. Revelatio facta est, et nec sic recordatus sum suprascripti capituli..."

to him directly to his “mind’s eye” – recalling Augustine’s theories of ecstasy and spiritual or intellectual vision. But unlike traditional prophecy, Joachim’s vision did not instantaneously reveal to him the totality or fullness of that knowledge. Instead, he was granted the necessary insight but was left to deduce the fuller implications by his continued exegetical labors, prayer, and contemplation.

Joachim’s second vision took place at Pentecost, also in 1183. Again, with the faculties of his mind having reached an impasse in understanding a mystery of faith – this time concerning the Trinity – Joachim turned to prayer:

When that happened I prayed with all my might. I was very frightened and was moved to call on the Holy Spirit whose feast day it was to deign to show me the holy mystery of the Trinity. The Lord has promised us that the whole understanding of truth is to be found in the Trinity. I repeated this and I began to pray the Psalms to complete the number I had intended. At this moment without delay the shape of a ten-stringed psaltery appeared in my mind. The mystery of the Holy Trinity shone so brightly and clearly in it that I was at once impelled to cry out, “What God is as great as our God? (Ps 77:13)”⁶⁹

As at the Easter vision, the Holy Spirit supplied Joachim an answer to his doubts and difficulties by granting him insight. Again, the knowledge Joachim gained was partial and would require further study and contemplation to work out the details. Unlike Joachim’s first visionary encounter, however, this time the experience was not so passive. He had already experienced a taste of the gift of understanding and now Joachim actively sought it. Here was a significant difference from *prophetia*, for in *prophetia* the granting of revelation was wholly according to the will of God, and not something the recipient could seek.

⁶⁹ Joachim of Fiore, *Psalterium decem cordarum*, 9-10. Translated by McGuin, *Calabrian Abbot*, 22. “Interea cum ingrederer oratorium et adorarem omnipotentem Deum coram sancto altari, accidit in me velut hesitatio quedam de fide Trinitatis acsi difficile esset intellectu vel fide etiam omnes personas unum Deum et unum Deum omnes personas. Quod cum accideret oravi valde, et conterritus vehementer compulsus sum invocare Spiritum Sanctum cuius sacra solemnitas presens erat ut ipse mihi dignaretur ostendere sacrum mysterium Trinitatis, in quo nobis promissa est a Domino omnis notitia veritatis. Hec dicens cepi psallere ut ad propositum numerum pervenirem. Nec mora occurrit animo modo forma Psalterii decachordi et in ipsa tam lucidum et apertum sacre mysterium Trinitatis ut protinus compellerer clamare: Quis Deus magnus sicut Deus noster?”

There was some precedent for Joachim's conception of inspired exegesis. Rupert of Deutz, who likewise interpreted the Scriptures in ways that anticipated some of Joachim's methods, also claimed a type of visionary or inspired exegesis. In Rupert's case, his claims to receive visions came as he was being criticized for doctrinal novelties. Initially Rupert defended himself by more conventional means.⁷⁰ Eventually, however, Rupert explained that his novelties were mandated and approved because of supernatural visions that told him so.

Rupert's visionary defense appears in his *Commentary on Matthew*, where he explains that he had written "so copiously" on matters already addressed by the Fathers because a series of miraculous experiences compelled him to do so.⁷¹ He writes that the first occurred early in his career (ca. 1100-1108) as he was contemplating the priesthood but humility, he says, and fear that others would object to his visions had kept him from telling others.⁷² Eventually, Rupert says, he was compelled to explain.⁷³ Rupert's account tells of a vision in which three persons, that he later understood to represent the Trinity, raised him atop a large open book and God the Father, pointing to the reliquaries of the saints told him, "Hence, you will be better than they."⁷⁴ In another he found himself in the presence of a crucifix, Christ himself looking at him with open eyes. Rupert describes being lifted up into an embrace with the Lord, Christ kissing him deeply

⁷⁰ In certain instances when Rupert was accused of doctrinal novelties he pointed to patristic authorities that supported his position, but when none were available, Rupert explained that his teachings were justified because his were "more useful" and that his positions were nonetheless consistent with Scripture, the true and ultimate basis of the faith. For instance, from a letter Rupert wrote to Pope Honorius II in 1128/1129: "it always was and would be permitted for anyone to say, within the bounds of faith, whatever he himself thought or perceived in interpreting Scripture," and in his *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, "[it was permitted to him to] turn over the field of Scripture with the ploughshare of his own genius." On these and similar responses that Rupert made in defense against his critics, see Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, especially 345-349.

⁷¹ Rupert of Deutz, *De gloria et honore Filii hominis super Matthaem*, ed. R Haacke, vol. 29, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis*.

⁷² Rupert of Deutz, *Super quaedam capitula regulae Benedicti*, ed. J.-P. Migne, vol. 170, *Patrologia Latina*, 170: 497-498.

⁷³ Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, 350-352.

⁷⁴ Rupert of Deutz, *Super Matthaem* 372, cited and translated by Robert E. Lerner, "Ecstatic Dissent," *Speculum* 67, no. 1 (1992): 33-57, 37.

on the mouth. The experience convinced him not only that was he worthy of ordination, but also that he had been chosen to understand mysteries and perceive doctrine “considerably better than the Fathers.”⁷⁵ From this point forward he began to write, assisted, he felt, by the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit, his understanding of the Scriptures endowed by charismatic grace. He felt compelled as by divine mandate, so that (as he wrote) even had he wished to, he could not be silent.

Joachim and Rupert are the first of several representatives whom Robert Lerner describes as having employed the “ecstasy defense.”⁷⁶ As Joachim and Rupert arrived at Scriptural interpretations that did not agree with tradition and caused them to advocate teachings unlike the Church Fathers’, each were anxious about criticism. But they were confident that their conclusions were correct and justified because, as they came to believe, their views were inspired by God. They explained that momentary visionary experiences had either mandated their studies or provided them with insight into the deeper meaning of the Scriptures and, especially in the case of Joachim, these insights allowed them to deduce further details, including about Antichrist and the last ages of history.

The situation is not hard to imagine. Joachim and Rupert were both what Jean Leclercq described as “contemplative monastic theologians.”⁷⁷ Exegetes oriented towards contemplation, Joachim and Rupert read the Scriptures according to *lectio divina*, studied, contemplated, and prayed over the texts, formulating new ideas and new interpretations. Drawing ever nearer to God through periods of intense meditation, each in his own way may have begun to consider that these interpretations might not be his alone, but that the Spirit who had inspired the authors of

⁷⁵ Rupert of Deutz, *Super Matthaem* 383 and 373, cited and translated by Lerner, “Ecstatic Dissent,” 37.

⁷⁶ Robert E. Lerner, “Ecstatic Dissent,” *Speculum* 67, no. 1 (1992): 33–57. Arnold of Villanova is another of Lerner’s examples, and Lerner also mentions John of Rupescissa.

⁷⁷ Jean Leclercq, “The Renewal of Theology,” in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable (Cambridge, Mass, 1982), 68–87.

Scripture was also directing his own understanding.⁷⁸ These visions, therefore, confirmed for them that their ideas were inspired and true and this realization emboldened them to continue in their efforts. Finally offering their explanations as a justification for their interpretations, the two monks also hoped that it might serve to promote a favorable reception and interest by others – despite Augustinian prejudices against practiced prophecy or detailed conjecture.

It is uncertain and perhaps unlikely that Joachim knew of Rupert. Manuscripts of Rupert of Deutz' writings are numerous in German monastic libraries but he was not well known outside German-speaking areas or beyond his lifetime, and thus his influence was limited.⁷⁹ Joachim, however, became very well known. As he expanded on his ideas to produce an entire scheme for the unfolding of history, he also proposed a new conception of prophecy that was closely connected to his eschatological views. As a result Joachim became the center of debates about prophecy for the next two hundred and fifty years.

An alternative conception of prophecy that regarded the prophet as a mouthpiece or conduit for God also carried with it the assumption that no amount of human effort could cause prophecy and no amount of preparation, either through study or prayer or good works, could guarantee that a person would be chosen as a prophet. According to such a conception, study and learning were considered an impediment to true prophecy since learning might interfere with the divine communication. In Joachim's conception of spiritual understanding, however, a much more positive role was granted to learning, or at least contemplative study. Joachim regarded exegetical study, far from being an impediment, as a necessary preparation both for attaining and utilizing spiritual insight.⁸⁰ According to Joachim's conception far greater opportunities might

⁷⁸ Lerner, "Ecstatic Dissent," 37 offers a similar conclusion.

⁷⁹ Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, 5–6.

⁸⁰ Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 16–17.

exist for a learned man to seek divinely-inspired understanding and to claim to represent God's purpose to the Church. Joachim's conception of *spiritualis intelligentia* allowed for speculation previously regarded as *conjectura* to be endowed with the same essential authority as *prophetia*, as long as it was understood to be inspired. Joachim's conception of spiritual intelligence therefore proposed a new, third avenue for prophetic knowledge and understanding outside the traditional Augustinian categories. Especially by placing *spiritualis intelligentia* within his theories of the progressive stages of history, Joachim conceived of this third category of *spiritualis intelligentia* to replace both *prophetia* and *conjectura* as the highest means through which God now communicated with humans.

1.2.4 The Reception of *spiritualis intelligentia* Among Joachim's Contemporaries

Among Joachim's contemporaries there was curiosity about the apocalyptic future but there were also perceived guidelines surrounding speculation about the future that was too detailed. It seems, therefore, that Joachim's predictions, and especially his forecast that Antichrist would come in 1260, might have been controversial. As Christ had said, "Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone" (Mt 24:36) and also, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has placed in his own power" (Acts 1:7).

Joachim proposed an alternative to the Augustinian categories but he thought in Augustinian terms and had to fit his conception within certain sets of assumptions. To counter potential charges that he was seeking to know too much, Joachim insisted that knowledge of the date of Antichrist's arrival did not indicate knowledge of the precise date of the End since, as was

commonplace in medieval exegesis, Joachim believed that there would be an undetermined time between the coming of Antichrist and the End. Potentially more controversial was Joachim's modified millennialism, which placed him at odds with Augustine and a long tradition that rejected millennialist views. It seems that Joachim was himself troubled by this conclusion as he worked toward it, but his confidence was bolstered by receiving a revelation of the truth. Additionally, and perhaps in an effort to avoid being seen as making too firm a prediction about the period, Joachim divided the last time into six "little ages."⁸¹

We know of a few critics of Joachim during his lifetime. In 1188 Joachim's monastery was finally accepted for a union he had long sought with the Cistercian Order. But in 1189 he suddenly changed course and began founding new monasteries of his own and eventually a new order.⁸² These decisions caused a rift with some Cistercians and turned a number of them against him, and in 1192 the General Chapter of the Cistercian Order condemned Joachim as a fugitive. This turn in relations with the Cistercians may also have led to the attack made against Joachim by Geoffrey of Auxerre, a Cistercian who was a friend and former secretary to Bernard of Clairvaux. In a sermon from about 1195 Geoffrey characterizes Joachim's doctrines as "Judaistic" and charges him with being a baptized Jew.⁸³ Further, Geoffrey laments that Joachim spreads errors, based not on true revelation but on supposed insights into Scripture. Geoffrey clearly disagrees with those who considered Joachim a prophet, and his accusation of "supposed insights into Scripture" may indicate Geoffrey may have been one of the first readers to recognize the nature of Joachim's teaching about *spiritualis intelligentia*.

⁸¹ Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham*, 17.

⁸² This new order, the Congregation of Fiore, was officially approved in 1196 by Pope Celestine III (1191-1198) and eventually grew to about 40 houses.

⁸³ *Studia Anselmiana*, xxxi (Rome, 1953), cited by Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 14-15; Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham* discusses Geoffrey's attack and especially his charge that Joachim was a baptized Jew, 24-29. The medieval accusation of "Judaistic" doctrines implied an overly literal interpretation of the Bible.

Despite this instance of discord, and the potential for controversy over the nature of his teachings, Joachim enjoyed a mostly positive reception during his lifetime. But how did his contemporaries understand the nature of his predictive powers? Especially as he was becoming known in the 1180s and 1190s, he was regarded as either a prophet or an exegete who conjectured about the future, and Adam of Persigny was confused enough to ask him directly. This confusion is not hard to imagine. On the one hand, Joachim wrote as an exegete. Anyone who read his work would have recognized it as the product of long and tireless study, and Joachim himself wrote about his labors. His work as an exegete also would have been obvious to those closest to him, since he dictated to scribes before revising what they had put down. That it took him years to fully complete his major works might be another reason to consider him a conjecturer: If one were a prophet in direct communication from God, why did it take him so long to complete the transmission? Why were multiple drafts required?

On the other hand, Joachim's detailed predictions were much more precise than many exegetes' and thus may have seemed like prophecy to many. Crucially, Joachim also described his supernatural revelations, which likewise might have signaled to readers that he was a prophet. People knew the stories of Biblical prophets and saints, and therefore accounts of visions would have been far more familiar than complex exegetical theories; the idea of a visionary prophet also would have been easier to grasp and more recognizable than Joachim's conception of inspired exegesis. This would be especially true of those who had not actually read Joachim's writings but learned of him by reputation, and it should be noted that Joachim's reputation, in many cases, seems to have spread more quickly than his finished works.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ See above, p. 29. Richard the Lion-Heart, for instance sought out Joachim based on his reputation as a prophet in 1191. By this time only *Psalterium decem chordarum* (1186) had been completed.

Although it was possible to grasp the nature of Joachim's teaching about spiritual intelligence from his main writings, many contemporaries did not and mistakenly viewed him as an exegete or a prophet. This situation continued – for instance, a chronicle by Sicard, bishop of Cremona who wrote between 1200 and 1215, describes Joachim as having the gift of prophecy.⁸⁵ But following the interview with Adam of Persigny, and as Joachim's writings continued to be studied, his readers increasingly understood what he had meant. Robert of Auxerre, for example, writing before 1215, seems to credit Joachim with both prophecy and spiritual intelligence, but the attribution of the gift of prophecy may be mainly a reflection of Joachim's reputation. Certainly Robert's careful description of Joachim's concordances has little to do with prophecy as it had generally been understood.⁸⁶ In any case, William of Auvergne's (d. 1249) *De virtutibus* portrays Joachim as saying he possessed the gift of understanding, which "greatly resembles the spirit of the Prophets" but is not; rather, it is the "gift of spiritual intelligence."⁸⁷

At the same time as Joachim was beginning to be better understood, other developments were occurring which began to affect his reputation in a different way. In particular, Joachim's thought on the Trinity and objections he raised against Peter Lombard's views generated controversy that resulted in the Fourth Lateran Council posthumously condemning Joachim's

⁸⁵ (under the year 1197): "His temporibus quidam extitit Ioachim Appulus abbas, qui spiritum habuit prophetandi, et prophetavit de morte imperatoris Henrici et futura desolatione Siculi regni et defectu Romani imperii." MGH Scriptores, xxi. 175.

⁸⁶ (under the year 1186): "Per hos dies venit ex Calabria partibus ad Urbanum papam Verone morantem quidam abbas nomine Joachim, de quo ferebant, quia cum prius non plurimum didicisset, divinitus acceperit intelligentie donum, adeo ut facunde diserteque enodaret difficultates quaslibet scripturarum. Hic itaque dicebat, quedam Apocalypsis mysteria hactenus latuisse, sed modo per eum clarescere in spiritu *prophetiae*, sicut ex opusculo quod conscripsit legentibus liquet." After which follows a lengthy accounting of Joachim's concordances. MGH Scriptores xxvi. 148-149.

⁸⁷ "Debes etiam scire, quia istud donum, scilicet donum intellectus, tantae claritatis est et acuminis in quibusdam, ut valde assimiletur spiritui *Prophetiae*, qualem crediderunt nonnulli fuisse in Abbate Joachim et ipsemet de seipso dixisse dictu, quia non erat ei datus spiritus *Prophetiae*, sed spiritus intelligentiae. Si quis autem inspexerit libros eius, quos scripsit super Apocalypsim et super concordiam duorum Testamentorum, mirabitur donum intellectus in eo." William of Auvergne, *De Virtutibus*, (Venice, 1591), 147.

position in 1215.⁸⁸ The council fathers took care to preserve the reputation of the monastery of Fiore and took efforts to protect Joachim's reputation, were careful not to label him a heretic, and made it known that he had faithfully submitted his writings to the authority of the Church. In 1220 Pope Honorius II ordered that it publicly be declared throughout Calabria that Joachim was not a heretic and that he had always been a faithful Catholic. Still, the condemnation tarnished Joachim's reputation, meaning that the full implications of his work were not to be realized for several more decades.

Although the Lateran Council's decree appears to be directed at a writing of Joachim's that is now lost, Joachim's views in this work can be determined from his other writings.⁸⁹ In his commentary on Gregory the Great's *Life of Saint Benedict* (1187), for example, Joachim places Peter Lombard's errors alongside the Trinitarian heresies of Arius and Sabelius.⁹⁰ Joachim's immediate objection was Peter's statement in the *Sentences* that "the divine essence is a single supreme something" as well as his corollary opinion, based on the principles of logic, that essence cannot generate essence. According to Joachim, Peter's view divided the Trinity in such a way as to create a "quaternary."⁹¹ The idea that the divine essence could not generate essence also ran counter to Joachim's reading of Augustine, but more crucial for Joachim was the fact that Peter Lombard's conception implied that the Trinity was static. Peter's teachings therefore represented a threat to the Joachim's entire conception of history, with its ages corresponding to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with each proceeding from the other in ways similar to how he understood the Trinity.

⁸⁸ Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (St. Louis: Herder, 1957), 170-172.

⁸⁹ The council refers to Joachim's *De Unitate seu essentia Trinitatis*.

⁹⁰ Joachim, *De vita Sancti Benedicti*, C. Baraut (ed.) "Un Tratado Inedito de Joaquin de Fiore," *Analecta Sacra Tarraconensia* 24 (1951), 33-122.

⁹¹ *Sentences* I, I, dist. 5. See, for instance McGinn, *Calabrian Abbot*, 165-168. Marcia Colish, *Peter Lombard*, 1994, 246.

Joachim's opposition to Peter Lombard can also be seen as an expression of Joachim's general distaste for the schoolmen's preference for logic over what Joachim regarded as the plain meaning of patristic authorities and his view that philosophers used the "cunning of dialectical art" to attack the faith. Moreover, Joachim may have regarded the masters as potential opponents in the coming struggle faced by the spiritual men in the Church, for he compares the *scholastica doctrina* to the water at Cana that must be turned into the wine of *intellectus spiritualis* in order to learn the true meaning.⁹²

Certainly, the Parisian schoolmen objected to the attacks on Peter Lombard, as evidenced by their reaction as carried out by Lateran Council. But apart from William of Auvergne, who treated Joachim positively, there is also evidence that some masters objected to Joachim's predictive activities as well. This evidence can be seen in a criticism made against Joachim in the 1180s by Peter the Chanter, one of the foremost masters at Paris at the time.⁹³ Although Peter's critique of Joachim is short and not particularly detailed, he accurately describes Joachim's method of comparing the states of the Church prior to Christ with the states and events after in order to predict the coming of the Antichrist. Peter attacks this method as "useless and unsuitable," and his criticism calls to mind Augustine's ridiculing of a similar attempt to count the Egyptian plagues as a means for predicting the future. Peter the Chanter's treatise is just one piece of evidence, but Joachim's criticisms of the masters' approach to theology, his attack on Peter Lombard, and the Lateran condemnation (presided over by a Paris-trained pope, Innocent

⁹² Robert E. Lerner, "Joachim and the Scholastics," in *Giacchino da Fiore tra Bernardo di Clairvaux e Innocenzo III*, ed. R. Rusconi (Rome, 2001). Also Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, McGinn, *Calabrian Abbot*, 166-167. Relevant sections from Joachim are Expositio f.87vb, f. 115ra, Psalterium 295, and Tractatus super quatuor Evangelica, 195-197 and 277, 296-297.

⁹³ Lerner, "Joachim and the Scholastics." Lerner's dating of this treatise to the 1180s means at least an outline of Joachim's thought and approach were known in Parisian circles prior to the publication of his first major work to exhibit this methodology, the *Condordia*, almost certainly published after 1196. This information therefore must have passed either through word of mouth or through the Abbot's early *De prophetia ignota*, published in 1184 or shortly thereafter. On Peter the Chanter more generally, see John Baldwin, *Masters, Princes, and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and his Circle* (Princeton, 1970).

III), when taken together, suggest a situation that might be characterized in terms of party alignment. By virtue of his criticism of Peter Lombard and stance against the theological methods used in the schools, Joachim made himself an easily identifiable representative of the opposition.

Another connection between Joachim, the Lateran Council, and the Parisian schoolmen concerns the Amaurians, who were condemned at the Lateran council in the same session that condemned Joachim's views on Peter Lombard. The Amaurians were a sect whose doctrines developed in Paris during the first decade of the thirteenth century. They formed around the pantheistic teachings of Amaury of Bene (d. 1204) who was a lecturer in logic and theology at the University of Paris and a group of followers (all clerics) were tried and burned in 1209. In addition to a variety of heretical teachings, Amaury and his followers may have been attracted to Joachim's thought concerning the three ages and some of his followers seem to have claimed to be prophets.⁹⁴

Cardinal Robert of Courson, an opponent of the Amaurians and likely instigator of the Lateran proceedings against the group, had spent his formative years in the circle of Peter the Chanter and therefore may have been familiar with Peter's criticism of Joachim.⁹⁵ Thus, Robert may have recognized similarities between Joachim and the Amaurians. In addition to Joachim's attack on Peter Lombard, any perceived connection to the Amaurians would have increased suspicion concerning Joachim's views and if Robert did play a role in the condemnation of the Amaurians it could add additional explanation for Joachim's censure by the same session of the council.

⁹⁴ Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 473; Lerner, "Ecstatic Dissent," 55–56; J. M. M. H. Thijssen, "Master Amalric and the Amalricians: Inquisitorial Procedure and the Suppression of Heresy at the University of Paris," *Speculum* 71, no. 1 (1996): 43–65.

⁹⁵ John W. Baldwin, *Masters, Princes, and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and His Circle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

The 1215 decree provided the supporters of Peter Lombard with a significant victory, and despite efforts by the council and Honorius III to protect Joachim's reputation, the decision undoubtedly placed a cloud of suspicion over his prophetic ideas and certainly put his supporters on the defensive.⁹⁶ Thus, with the 1215 Lateran victory in hand, and with Joachim's influence seemingly on the decline, the masters of the schools may have felt less of a need to counter or even address the Joachim's thought on prophecy. Outside of William of Auvergne's *De virtutibus*, the next known Scholastic interactions with Joachim's ideas in fact do not appear until the 1230s, and until the later 1230s these mainly related to his Trinitarian thought. It was during this same period that scholastic thinkers increasingly turned their own attention to the topic of prophecy.

⁹⁶ Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 33–36.

Chapter 2 Prophecy in the Schools

Even as Joachim's world of monastic theology was at its height in the twelfth century, an alternative approach to studying the Scriptures and theology was developing.¹ Although the boundaries separating monastic theology and this new approach, now frequently referred to as scholasticism, were not as defined as historians sometimes suppose, there were differences that affected how monks and masters thought about prophecy. In contrast to the monks' desire for spiritual enlightenment and experiential contact with the word of God, those in the schools were more likely to seek knowledge out of a desire for intellectual enlightenment or academic advancement or to prepare themselves for work in administrative positions of the growing ecclesiastical bureaucracy.² To advance these objectives the new masters employed new approaches to resolve contradictions, define terminology, and extend discussion to parallels by means of inference. This new approach was centered in the schools rather than the cloister, and its masters used the tools of philology and dialectic to harmonize seemingly contradictory authorities and advance knowledge. Instead of writing for spiritual edification, the schoolmen formulated their positions for the lecture room, for expounding in public disputation, and against challenges from rival masters.

¹ Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and The Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, 3rd edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982).

² Baldwin, *Masters, Princes, and Merchants*; C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950-1200*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

During the thirteenth century, especially, thought on prophecy developed in close connection with two significant forces that affected religious and intellectual life during the Middle Ages: the universities and the mendicant orders. Within the universities, theologians struggled to understand the Biblical phenomena of prophecy. Outside the universities, Franciscans took increasing interest in contemporary, lived, and speculative prophecy – interests that, by the end of the century would reach associated lay groups such as the Beguins. At times the developments within the mendicant and university orbits occurred independently and in relative isolation from one another. However, because the history of the mendicants was coterminous with that of the schools, at various instances the two were interrelated. Sometimes this confluence promoted creativity and novelty; at others it led to controversy and conflict.

As the methods of the schools reached maturity in the thirteenth century previous ideas about prophecy were subjected to new types of analysis. Many of these questioned were prompted by the arrival of newly translated Aristotelian works, the recovery of which helped to create new intellectual frameworks that encouraged existing issues to be reexamined and new sets of questions to be explored. As Aristotelian influence in the schools grew, a variety of new questions was asked about prophecy, for instance: how future contingent knowledge affects free will, or whether prophecy involves *visio in speculo*. Of particular importance, especially for how these masters regarded practiced expressions of prophecy, were discussions about whether or not prophecy is a *habitus*.

Some of these discussions took place without any obvious reference to Joachim of Fiore. Indeed, Joachim's popularity declined following the 1215 condemnation of his teachings on the Trinity. From the 1240s, however, interest in Joachim reemerged – first among Franciscans, especially, and then in the 1250s when certain Joachites caused significant controversy. From

about the middle of the thirteenth century onward, the influence of Joachimism was such that it could not be ignored. Nearly anyone writing on the topic felt compelled to contend with Joachim in some way, if only to dismiss him, and even if Joachim's thought had little bearing on one's thinking about prophecy.

2.1 Gilbert of Poitiers: An Early Schoolman on Prophecy

The beginnings of a schools' approach to thinking about prophecy in the Middle Ages can be seen in the *Commentary on the Psalms* by Gilbert of Poitiers (ca 1075 - 1154).³ At first glance, prophecy might seem a strange subject to take up in a commentary to the Psalms, a collection of the poetry of a historical figure, David, in praise of God. But for medieval readers, an important aspect of the Psalms were precisely their prophetic character. David's verses were understood as foretelling the appearance of Christ, His life and Passion, and the coming of the Christian Church.

Completed in its essentials by 1117, Gilbert's commentary utilized the Biblical text as a source for answering specific pastoral and theological questions. Theresa Gross-Diaz's study of this commentary demonstrates that a crucial difference between Gilbert's commentary and prior examples was that Gilbert wrote his commentary to be a teaching text, suitable for use in the lecture room. In making the study of the Psalms applicable to a schoolroom curriculum Gilbert appropriated a number of teaching tools and methods from the more developed secular disciplines, such as the liberal arts, philosophy, and law. In particular, Gilbert employed scholarly apparatuses that allowed him to categorize and delineate structures and themes that presented him with means to explore certain questions brought out by the text.

³ Theresa Gross-Diaz, *The Psalms Commentary of Gilbert of Poitiers: From Lectio Divina to the Lecture Room*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 68 (Leiden: Brill, 1996). History 68 (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

In his commentary on individual Psalms, Gilbert draws significantly on the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* by Augustine and Cassiodorus' *Expositio Psalmorum*, the latter of which was the only complete extant Psalms commentary written by a Western Father in Latin. For Gilbert, Cassiodorus was a particularly important source when it came to prophecy and the Psalms because Cassiodorus (c. 490-c.590) had prefaced his own commentary with a prologue that is essentially a treatise devoted to the topic of prophecy. Cassiodorus' prologue opens by defining prophecy as "the divine breath which proclaims with unshakeable truth the outcome of events through the deeds or words of certain persons."⁴ Cassiodorus then lists and describes various manifestations of prophecy (usually Biblical examples) followed by a series of brief theological reflections on matters such as prophecy being a gift of the Holy Spirit (who could give it or take it away from the prophet as He willed) or that prophecy pertains to knowledge about the past and present as well as the future.⁵

Gilbert's commentary is characterized by his efforts to classify and organize the Biblical text as well the material from his other sources in an analytical manner. This approach allows Gilbert to reconceptualize certain aspects of Cassiodorus' explanation of prophecy, reorder its original formulation to create a more satisfactory definition, and impose greater structure to Cassiodorus' listing of the forms of prophecy. Moreover, Gilbert's consideration of several questions about the character of the prophet and the nature of prophetic language leads him to different conclusions from Cassiodorus. In particular, Gilbert utilizes his discussion of the prophetic character of the Psalms in order to bring up and propose solutions for questions concerning the authorship and authority of the text.

⁴ "Prophetia est aspiratio divina quae eventus rerum aut per facta aut per dicta quorundam immobili veritate pronuntiat," *Expositio Psalmorum praefatio*, cap. I. Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, Patrologia Latina 70 (Brepols, 1848); Trans. *Explanation of the Psalms*, ed. Walter J. Burghardt and Thomas Comerford Lawler, trans. P. G. Walsh (New York, N.Y: Paulist Press, 1990).

⁵ Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, 1990, 27–28.

At the time of the commentary's composition Gilbert was a mature student in his early forties.⁶ He had been at Laon for a number of years and was making the transition to becoming a lecturer and master himself. By this time in his career he had completed elementary studies and then philosophy, gone on to more advanced work in the liberal arts with the renowned grammarian Bernard at Chartres, and next to Laon where he studied the Bible and theology under Anselm, widely regarded as the foremost theologian of his day. Teaching at Laon was conservative in some ways: In particular Anselm was suspicious of using dialectic to answer questions covered (or prudently left alone) by the Fathers, but Laon was also known for certain innovations in its teaching methods.⁷ Among the pedagogical tools employed or developed at Laon, the best known was its project to compile glosses for every book of the Bible. According to Gross-Diaz, however, Gilbert's Psalms commentary was at least as important for promoting advanced Biblical scholarship and for helping establish important foundations for theology as an academic discipline.

Gross-Diaz argues that Gilbert's principal achievement was to appropriate certain methods and approaches common in the profane arts and to apply them to the Psalter. For example, Gilbert employed a *cum textu* format wherein his commentary is presented alongside the complete Biblical text.⁸ This allowed Gilbert an opportunity to offer multiple modes of interpretation and to comment on alternative textual variants alongside the main text. It also provided room for marginal references – which functioned much like modern footnotes. The commentary features a cross-indexing apparatus that facilitated searchability and allowed alternative orderings of Biblical passages to be considered. The cross index also provided a

⁶ On Gilbert's career see, Gross-Diaz, *Psalms Commentary of Gilbert of Poitiers*, 1–24.

⁷ Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 3d ed. (rev.) (Oxford [Oxfordshire]: Blackwell, 1983), 49.

⁸ Gross-Diaz, *Psalms Commentary of Gilbert of Poitiers*, 35–51.

means for easily considering certain groupings of Psalms together, for instance by category – all while preserving the integrity and received order of the original text.⁹

The *cum textu* text arrangement and cross-indexing each facilitated Gilbert's discussion of prophecy, but perhaps the most important feature affecting his treatment of prophecy was his use of the *accessus*.¹⁰ Literally a "means of approach," the *accessus* is a highly-structured introductory preface or prologue. The *accessus*-prologue had been a common feature of academic writing since Late Antiquity. It was most prevalent in the liberal arts, where it had been utilized since Carolingian times, and by the beginning of the twelfth century it had made its way into legal and medical commentaries as well. Prior to Gilbert there was some precedent for employing such prologues when commenting on theological texts – Cassiodorus himself is one early example – but these applications were fairly basic and were usually poorly organized and repetitious. Gilbert's innovation, along with others in his environment (such as Peter Abelard), was to draw from his background in the liberal arts and to adapt and apply the more advanced forms of the *accessus* to his study of a Biblical text. In particular, Gilbert's use of the *accessus*-prologue allowed him to mine the vast array of technical information, explanations, questions and observations found among the various Patristic and Carolingian commentators and to assemble and arrange them into a tightly organized presentation of the material he was most interested in discussing and teaching.

⁹ Ibid., 51–65.

¹⁰ Ibid., 66–96. On medieval developments related to the *accessus* see also (as cited by Gross-Diaz) : Edwin A. Quain, "The Medieval *Accessus ad auctores*," *Traditio* 3 (1945), 215-264; R.B.C. Huygens, "Notes sur le *Dialogus super Auctores* de Conrad de Hirsau et le *Commentaire sur Theodule* de Bernard d'Utrecht," *Latomus* 13 (1954), 420-428; ed., *Conrad de Hirsau, Dialogus super auctores*, Collection Latomus 17 (Brussels, 1955); R.W. Hunt, "the Introductions to the 'Artes' in the Twelfth Century," *Studia medievalia in honorem... Raymundi Joesphi Martin* (Bruges, 1948), 85-112; A.J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship* (Philadelphia, 1984, repr 2009), esp. 9-72.

Gilbert's adapted *accessus* separates the elements of the text allowing them to be easily studied in a systematized manner according to topic. In the Psalms commentary these topics consist of the following headings: *materia* (subject matter), *modus* (mode of proceeding), *intentio* (purpose of the work), *titulus libri* (title of the book), *genus prophetiae* (type of prophecy), *nominus libri* (name of the book), *numerus psalmorum* (number of the psalms), and *ordo* (order).¹¹ The headings of *materia*, *modus*, *finis* (which Gilbert uses alternatively for intention), and *titulus* are each taken directly from Gilbert's liberal arts model.

Under *materia*, or the subject for the Psalms, Gilbert starts with the position that the Psalms' subject matter is "the whole Christ, head and members,"¹² which is an opinion found in both Cassiodorus and Augustine. Although other books of the Old Testament speak of Christ, according to Gilbert none does so clearly as the Psalms, which he states "prophesied richly, concisely, and openly."¹³ Here Gilbert makes a digression to allow himself an opportunity to expand his discussion beyond Cassiodorus. Gilbert explains that because the primary subject of the Psalms is prophecy its author is a prophet. Just as the words of the Psalms are directed toward prophecy, so too are the actions and life of the prophet who wrote them.

For the Psalms' prophecies to be properly understood, therefore, the exegete must read the words within their intended authorial and historical contexts. What Gilbert meant, as Gross-Diaz helpfully explains, is that David is a prophet so his words need to be understood as prophecies. When the Psalms say "the heavens announce the glory of God" for instance, Gilbert is able to understand this as the star that announced the birth of Christ at Bethlehem.¹⁴ Gilbert's digression

¹¹ Ibid., 79. Several of these can be fairly close in meaning: For example, *Titulus libri*, which Gilbert says is "*liber hymnorum*," and *Nominus libri*, which Gilbert gives as "*psalterium*" are fairly similar, with only subtle differences.

¹² "Christus integer caput cum membris est materia huius libri.

¹³ "plura, breviter et aperte prophetavit"

¹⁴ Gross-Diaz, *Psalms Commentary of Gilbert of Poitiers*, 81–82.

here allows him to draw upon a view being expressed elsewhere in the schools that Hugh of Saint-Victor (1096-1141) also held, which recognized certain limits of human language and required the reader to look beyond just the literal or the form of the words.¹⁵ Such an approach leads the exegete to seek a historical truth, which in this sense is the author's original intention apart from the form of the words.

Gilbert continues his *accessus* by devising a new heading, the *genus prophetiae*, or "type of prophecy."¹⁶ In creating this heading Gilbert provides himself the opportunity to expound more fully on the meaning of prophecy, the forms that prophecy might take, and the ways in which prophecy lends authority to the Psalter. Gilbert begins by considering Cassiodorus' definition of prophecy. Cassiodorus' original formulation states: "Prophecy is the divine breath (*aspiratio*) which proclaims with unshakable truth the outcome of events through the deeds or words of certain persons."¹⁷ But in Gilbert's prologue he follows the Carolingian commentator Remigius in substituting *inspiratio* for Cassiodorus' original *aspiratio*. Although Gilbert does not explain this choice, in doing so he directs his reader away from a sense that prophet is merely a mouthpiece through which the Holy Spirit "breathes" and toward a sense that he is a human author is inspired by God. This word choice also seems to reflect Gilbert's thinking that some human elements could play a role in prophecy and in particular it prepares the reader to see the divine purpose at work in the historical life and actions of David.

¹⁵ Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Adnotationes in Pentateuchon*, ed. J.-P. Migne, vol. 175, *Patrologia Latina* (Paris, 1879), cited by Gillian Rosemary Evans, *The Language and Logic of the Bible: The Earlier Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 69.

¹⁶ Gross-Diaz, *Psalms Commentary of Gilbert of Poitiers*, 87.

¹⁷ Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, 1848; Transl. Walsh, *Explanation of the Psalms*, 1990. "Prophetia est aspiratio divina quae eventus rerum aut per facta aut per dicta quorundam immobile veritate pronuntiat." In other medieval texts, the beginning of Cassiodorus statement was sometimes also rendered: "Prophetia est inspiratio vel revelatio divina..."

As Gilbert imposes a more logical structure upon Cassiodorus' presentation he also smooths over a seeming deficiency in the original formulation. Cassiodorus' definition stated that prophecy came about through "deeds or words" coming from heaven. Taken as a simple, one-line definition, this might imply that Cassiodorus here excluded the "highest kind" of prophecy, or Augustine's intellectual vision. Cassiodorus did not deny this type of inspiration, and in fact it is the sort he attributed to David in his authorship of the Psalms. To account for this shortcoming, and to "correct" Cassiodorus, Gilbert simply omits the limiting phrase and considers words and deeds somewhat further along in his analysis, where it would not interfere with the basic definition of prophecy.¹⁸

Similarly, Gilbert reorganizes and categorizes Cassiodorus' many manifestations of prophecy, placing each within a neat classification according to species, which is lacking in Cassiodorus. Gilbert's first type is prophecy performed by words or deeds, that is, actually or "manifestly." Then there is prophecy received, or perceived, by vision or in dreams. Finally there is the highest form of prophecy, as David himself had experienced it, with the Holy Spirit illuminating the prophet directly, or "inwardly."¹⁹ Gilbert's reorganization shows that he is obviously thinking of Augustine's categories of visions since Gilbert reorders and groups the examples according to bodily, spiritual, and intellectual manifestations.

At this point Gilbert digresses from his reliance on Cassiodorus, and addresses an issue not fully considered by his authoritative source. Here Gilbert states that prophecy may not only be *in bonis* but that it also could be *in malis*. That is, in addition to prophecy flowing from the pure and good prophet, Gilbert argued that God might also utilize someone who was wicked (or at least pagan) to serve as his intermediary. To illustrate his point, Gilbert offers the examples of

¹⁸ Gross-Diaz, *Psalms Commentary of Gilbert of Poitiers*, 88.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

Balaam, Caiaphas, the Sybil, and certain “infidel philosophers” as prophets. Gross-Diaz speculates that Gilbert’s choice of this particular grouping suggests that Gilbert believed that God might provide whomever He wishes with divine inspiration. Given that this was an introduction to his commentary on the Psalms, she also concludes that Gilbert’s digression may have been a means of preparing his readers to expect prophecies to continue to flow from King David even during his less edifying moments.²⁰

Later in Gilbert’s *accessus* he moves on to the difficult issue of authorship.²¹ Previously in his text Gilbert had avoided this question by referring to the author simply as “the prophet.” But now that he has addressed the nature and forms of prophecy, Gilbert is better prepared to handle the matter. He can now explain that the true author of the Psalter (and the true author of all prophecy) must be regarded not as any single human or even multiple writers, but rather its true author is God in the person of the Holy Spirit. Cassiodorus had also understood the true author of prophecy to be God, but, as Gross-Diaz explains, the real issue for Gilbert concerns the role of the human writer and whether the language of the Psalms is from God or man.

Gilbert and Cassiodorus agreed that human language was deficient to explain divine truth. To Cassiodorus, however, the rhetorical devices of Scripture were themselves crafted by God, and so to he considered the expressed language of prophecy to be from God as well.²² Gilbert, on the other hand, believed that God gave prophecy directly to the prophet but without providing the prophet with any special means to communicate those revelations. Although the prophet might be aided by the Holy Spirit in his expression, and the two might work in close accord, for the most part the prophet had to rely on his own best compositional and rhetorical skills. To Gilbert,

²⁰ Ibid., 88–89.

²¹ Ibid., 89–91.

²² Ibid., 90.

the language by which a prophet communicates is ultimately his own and is therefore limited by the imperfections of human expression. Unable to describe the divine adequately, finite human language has no other option than to resort to signifying things figuratively and metaphorically.

Interpreters, therefore, must approach prophecy fully aware of the structure and features of language in order to get at the true layer of meaning that lies beneath. In what becomes a recurring issue in the history of prophecy, especially in the late fourteenth century when prophets' confessors transcribed and edited the revelations of their prophets, Gilbert regards the prophet not as a fully passive conduit or mouthpiece but as a partially active participant and mediator in creating the prophetic message as it is formulated and delivered. To fully and truly understand prophecy, therefore, Gilbert's view requires that a prophet be read with an appreciation of the historical context of its human author, for the prophet's role in creating the message means that his life and character have become intermixed with the prophecy itself. The prophet's means of expression was not so much part of the prophecy as it was an impediment standing in the way of true understanding.

Gilbert's thought on prophecy as expressed in the Psalms commentary was influential for being the first scholastic exegesis of the Psalter. Peter Lombard's commentary, which soon after became the standard commentary used in the schools, borrows heavily from Gilbert's work and on prophecy does little to advance Gilbert's work. Gilbert's prologue, which contains the material on prophecy, began to circulate apart from the Gilbert's commentary and soon began to be attached as an introduction for other Psalms commentaries.²³ Very different in character from hortatory or devotional commentaries from monastic environments, Gilbert's commentary begins to develop theological *quaestiones* from the text, and in form and content it allows for various

²³ Ibid., 29.

topics to be explored in ways they had not previously been.²⁴ In particular, Gilbert's rearrangement of Cassiodorus' definition and examples of prophecy both illustrated and reasserted the importance of Augustine's theory of visions; furthermore, Gilbert's discussion of prophetic authorship anticipates issues that would resurface, especially in the fourteenth century.

2.2 Early Thirteenth Century Aristotelian Concepts

Gilbert of Poitiers addressed the subject of prophecy as part of a Psalms commentary but by the early thirteenth century prophecy was being treated as its own topic in the schools. From about 1220 to 1235, especially, a group of prominent masters including William of Auxerre, Philip the Chancellor, and Hugh of Saint-Cher took up various *quaestiones* on the topic.²⁵ In general, these schoolmen approached the subject from Augustinian assumptions and based their investigations on Scriptural examples of prophecy. These Parisian masters appear uninterested in achieving personal prophetic experience but instead they employ a dialectical approach, seek to answer difficult or unresolved *quaestiones disputatae*, and further understand the gift of prophecy according to the rules of logic, classification, and categorization. Common points of departure were Cassiodorus' definition and explanation of prophecy, Augustine's taxonomy of the three types of visions, and Gregory the Great's view that prophecy could pertain to past and present as well as to the future. A key factor separating these thinkers from Gilbert of Poitiers was the increased availability of Aristotelian texts made available to them by through

²⁴ Marcia L. Colish, *Peter Lombard* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 168.

²⁵ William of Auxerre, *Summa aurea*; Philip the Chancellor, *Summa de bono* (ed. N. Wicki; Bern: Francke, 1985); Hugh of Saint-Cher, "De prophetia," cod. Douai 434, Q418, ed. Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Théorie De La Prophétie Et Philosophie De La Connaissance Aux Environs De 1230: La Contribution D'hugues De Saint-Cher (ms. Douai 434, Question 481)* (Leuven: Spicilegium sacrum Lovaniense, 1977). On these early thirteenth century *De prophetia* treatises see the introduction to the edition of Hugh of Saint-Cher in Torrell, Torrell, *Théorie De La Prophétie Et Philosophie De La Connaissance Aux Environs De 1230* and the collected articles in Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Recherches Sur La Théorie De La Prophétie Au Moyen Âge, XIIe-XIVe Siècles: Études Et Textes* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1992). Alexander of Hales also wrote *de prophetia*, but was silent on the *habitus* question.

translations into Latin starting at the end of the twelfth century. These texts introduced concepts and frameworks for classifying and analyzing information that suggested new sets of questions and encouraged the reexamination of existing issues.

Of particular importance was the application of the concept of *habitus*, drawn from Aristotle's writings on psychology and on ethics. *Habitus* describes a state or abiding quality of the soul that is brought from potentiality to actuality through repeated action. Moral virtue, for instance, is a *habitus*. All human souls have a natural capacity or potential for virtue, but only some are able to actualize it. Virtue, therefore, is not an innate or natural actual power, for if it were all men would be virtuous. Nor is virtue a *passio*. *Passio* refers to momentary or transitive qualities, and in a more narrow sense it describes the feelings, urges, or passions that compel people to perform certain actions. Since these affective qualities are passing, sometimes causing one to act rightly and at other times wrongly, virtue cannot be a *passio*. Rather, virtue is an abiding state of character, a *habitus* that one acquires, usually through practice. Once gained, a *habitus* is not easily changed nor does it easily go away. Through continuous exposure and repetition, a particular character becomes an almost permanent feature of the soul, nearly a "second nature."²⁶

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* contains the most developed articulation of his thought on *habitus*. Although a Latin translation of the *Ethics* did not become available until the 1240s, elements of Aristotle's philosophy of the mind were known in the twelfth century from the *Logica vetus*, and the writings of Cicero and Boethius. From these sources, twelfth century schoolmen succeeded in reconstructing a working understanding of *habitus*, which they

²⁶ For example, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098b33ff. For the concept of *habitus* in medieval usage see, especially Cary J. Nederman, "Nature, Ethics, and the Doctrine of 'Habitus': Aristotelian Moral Psychology in the Twelfth Century," *Traditio* 45 (1989): 87–110 and Marcia L. Colish, "*Habitus*" Revisited: A Reply to Cary Nederman," *Traditio* 48 (1993): 77–92.

attempted to apply in their study of various topics. Abelard, for example, utilized his own understanding of the Aristotelian concept to describe both virtue and charity. In these examples Abelard employs the concept to separate innate abilities from acquired ones and also uses it to establish a hierarchy of qualities. For example, Abelard applies the concept of *habitus* to classify different levels of charity. “Perfect charity,” that is, constant love of God, is not easily changed no matter the circumstance and is a *habitus* because it is a settled state. “Imperfect charity,” on the other hand, is still commendable but it is not a *habitus* because it is fleeting. For instance, if one dies believing that one would love God despite any potential danger then one merits salvation. However, if torture might in fact have led that same person to deny God, the person’s charity is not a virtue but an imperfect quality, and it has not been made a truly settled state through inhabitation.²⁷

With greater relevance for the subject of prophecy, the concept of *habitus* could also be employed to understand God-given graces. Alan of Lille (1128-c. 1202), for instance, uses the concept as he attempted to understand the nature of baptism in *De virtutibus et de vitiis et de donis Spiritus Sancti* (ca. 1170-1180).²⁸ The merits of baptism might not seem to be a practiced quality, especially for an infant, but according to Alan the grace of baptism should be considered a *habitus* because it is an infused grace that imparts a latent capacity for virtue. In an infant this capacity is present, but not yet active.

Masters writing about prophecy in the 1220s and 1230s benefited from the recent availability of a translation of Aristotle’s *De anima*, as well as additional Arab commentaries that

²⁷ On Abelard’s understanding of *habitus*, see Nederman, “Nature, Ethics, and the Doctrine of ‘*Habitus*’,” 94-98 and John Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), especially 284-287 for Abelard’s understanding of virtue and 296-297 for Abelard’s understanding of charity.

²⁸ Alan of Lille, *De virtutibus et vitiis et de donis Spiritus sancti*, ed. O Lottin, vol. VI, *Psychologie et Morale* (1960), VI, 45-90.

added further material for understanding the concept of *habitus*.²⁹ William of Auxerre, a secular master at Paris writing around 1220-25, may have been the first to comment on whether prophecy was a *habitus*. In *Summa aurea* William seems to consider the question obvious, for without much elaboration he states that prophecy is a *habitus* of the intellect by which the soul is able to know or understand that which is revealed to it by God.³⁰ Writing at about the same time, Philip the Chancellor likewise sees prophecy as a *habitus*. Philip considers prophecy as a disposition or state of the intellect, in the sense that the ability to prophesy continues or is left behind in the prophet as a result of having prophesied.³¹

Hugh of Saint-Cher, a master at Paris who became a Dominican in 1225, took an opposing position about prophecy being a *habitus*.³² Hugh regards prophecy as a quality, but neither as fully natural nor as a fully transitory one. While this middle ground might point to *habitus*, Hugh nonetheless states that prophecy is not, properly speaking, a *habitus*. For Hugh, prophecy is something communicated by God that passes to and through the prophet. It is not a natural ability nor is it something conditioned or made possible by any permanent or practiced aspect of the prophet's character or intellect. A key point for Hugh is that a *habitus* is something not easily changed or lost. From numerous Biblical examples, however, it would seem that prophecy is not a permanent characteristic and it can often be withheld by the Holy Spirit.

²⁹ *De anima* was translated into Latin by James of Venice about the middle of late twelfth century and received its first European commentaries in the 1240s. Simo Knuuttila, Pekka Kärkkäinen, and Simo Knuuttila, eds., "Aristotle's Theory of Perception and Medieval Aristotelianism," in *Theories of Perception in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 8.

³⁰ "Quarto modo dicitur prophetia donum prophetia, scilicet habitus mentis qua cognoscit anima res quae aperte sibi ostenduntur a Deo." William of Auxerre, *Summa aurea* xlvi (Sentences Bk 2, VI).

³¹ "Prophetia est tam nomen habitus quam nomen actus sive habilitatis et promptitudinis. Et potest contingere quod licet remaneat habitus, non tamen remaneat prophetia sub ratione promptitudinis vel actus." and "Quantum ad habitum (est prophetia) in vi intellectiva." Philip the Chancellor, *De prophetia*.

³² Hugh of Saint-Cher, "*De prophetia*," cod. Douai 434, Q418, ed. Torrell, *Théorie De La Prophétie Et Philosophie De La Connaissance Aux Environs De 1230*. Torrell discusses Hugh's views on *habitus* in his introduction, 243-248.

In partial agreement with Philip the Chancellor, Hugh admits that by receiving God's revelation the prophet becomes more capable, at least at that time, of knowing that he received the message and understanding its meaning, and in this way he concedes that a certain habit (*quidam habitus*) might be produced. Still, according to Hugh prophecy is not a *habitus*; but rather, this increased ability to understand is a temporary residue or consequence of being filled by the divine communication. Prophecy is an act but one that does not create a habit. Instead, it belongs more to the category of a charism or *gratia*, that being a spiritual gift given or subtracted entirely by the will of God.

The Parisian masters of the 1220s and 1230s conducted their discussions on prophecy without any obvious reference to Joachim. In the 1240s, however, interest in Joachim's exegetical and prophetic ideas increased, and as we will see the question of whether prophecy was a *habitus* was at least an associated factor for how theologians reacted to Joachim and his conception of prophecy. It will be recalled that Joachim believed he had been granted supernatural insights from God but that he, using his own deductive skills as he studied the Scriptures, formulated these into prophecies about the future. He therefore believed he was stimulated by God but that his own efforts and cultivated skill also helped to produce his knowledge and understanding. Thus, in the terminology of the Aristotelian masters, Joachim's conception of prophecy (or more precisely, *spiritualis intelligentia*) would seem to be a *habitus*.

In the next section mid-thirteenth century reactions to Joachim will be discussed. Initially, there was a certain level of enthusiasm in both of the Dominican and Franciscan Orders because Joachim's predictions were thought to foretell two new orders of spiritual men to renew the Church, a prediction that many understood to be fulfilled by the coming of Saints Dominic and

Francis.³³ Enthusiasm for Joachim, however, was short-lived among Dominicans. The influence of Hugh of Saint-Cher, and particularly his view that prophecy was not a *habitus*, should be considered a factor in this development. Hugh would later exercise an advisory role in a papal judgment directed against a follower of Joachim, and he wrote an Apocalypse commentary that criticized Joachim's ideas as dangerous speculations.³⁴ Especially as several of Hugh's positions on prophecy were later taken up by Aquinas, the idea that prophecy is not a *habitus* was influential among Dominican theologians, thus leaving little room to accept Joachim's conception of prophecy.

The Franciscans were generally more tolerant of Joachite views of prophecy and indeed groups within the Franciscan Order were enthusiastic advocates of his thinking. In part this can be attributed to there being no precedent in Franciscan theology for denying that prophecy was *habitus*. Alexander of Hales, who can be seen as Hugh of Saint-Cher's Franciscan counterpart in the first quarter of the thirteenth century wrote a treatise *De prophetia*, but he was silent about the *habitus* question. This absence of an established Franciscan position when Joachimism reemerged in the 1240s and 1250s meant that Franciscan theologians had more freedom to consider Joachim a type of prophet. There were Franciscans who rejected Joachim, but there was also a significant group that accepted his views, and it is primarily within the Franciscan Order that Joachite ideas would continue to develop during the middle and later decades of the thirteenth century.

³³ In 1255, for example, Humbert Romans, General of the Dominicans, along with the Franciscan General, John of Parma, issued a joint letter promoting their respective orders. Although there is no direct reference to Joachim in the letter, it uses language clearly derived from Joachim's predictions about the appearance of spiritual men. See Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 146ff.

³⁴ Hugh was one of three cardinals appointed to examine Gerard of Borgo San Donnino's *Evangelium aeternum* in 1254. See below, p. 74. Moreover, in his Apocalypse commentary citing Joachim, Hugh wished to "counter rash and dangerous speculations on the Last Things." On Hugh's Apocalypse commentary see: Beryl Smalley, *The Gospels in the Schools, C. 1100-C. 1280*, History Series 41 (London, U.K. ; Ronceverte, W. Va., U.S.A: Hambledon Press, 1985), 138–39; Robert E. Lerner, "Refreshment of the Saints: The Time After Antichrist as a Station for Earthly Progress in Medieval Thought," *Traditio* 32 (January 1976): 121.

2.3 Revival of Joachimism and the Scholastic Response

Although Joachim's reputation suffered as a result of the 1215 condemnation of his Trinitarian thought, the council fathers had been careful to preserve his reputation and moreover praised and specifically exempted from blame the monastic order he had founded. It is from this Florentine order, which numbered about forty houses in southern Italy at its height in the early 1230s, that Joachim's influence began to spread. From his community, as well as from friendly Cistercian establishments, Joachimism soon began to spread through contact with Franciscans in southern Italy, Sicily, and especially Naples.³⁵

Arising from new interest in Joachim there appeared several new pseudepigraphal commentaries that contemporaries attributed to him. Chief among these was the *Super Hieremiam*, written in southern Italy certainly before 1248 and probably before 1243. Actual authorship seems to have come either from a Florentine or a Cistercian environment, although Franciscan authorship has also been suggested.³⁶ Whoever the author or authors, the commentary is noteworthy for proclaiming the arrival of two new orders of spiritual men (*spirituales viri*) and describes them in a way that many interpreted as being fulfilled by the Franciscans and Dominicans. The commentary laments the state of the Church, charging the hierarchy with seeking material wealth at great spiritual cost. Only the few *spirituales* are described as upright, but they are unsupported and even persecuted by men in authority in the Church. Despite opposition from the hierarchy and evils brought about by both the empire and the Muslims, this

³⁵ E. Randolph Daniel, "A Re-Examination of the Origins of Franciscan Joachimism," *Speculum* 43, no. 4 (October 1968): 671.

³⁶ Robert Moynihan, "The Development of the Pseudo-Joachim Commentary *Super Hieremiam*: New Manuscript Evidence," *Mélanges de l'école Française de Rome. Moyen-Age, Temps Modernes* 98, no. 1 (1986): 109–42.

group of spiritual men will persevere and from them the Church will enjoy a rebirth, growing in faith and eventually converting the Greeks, Jews, and infidels.³⁷

Among the earliest known Joachites within the Franciscan Order were Hugh of Digne, Gerard of Borgo San Donnino, and John of Parma. Salimbene was another Franciscan Joachite, whose *Chronica* is one of the principal sources for documenting Joachimism's spread among the poor friars.³⁸ Of these, Hugh of Digne may have been the earliest, becoming a Joachite sometime in the mid-1240s.³⁹ Although he disclaimed any visionary prophetic ability for himself (preferring exegetical speculation or making secondary predictions through the prophecies of others), his sister Douceline claimed to experience visions.⁴⁰ John of Parma, who was elected Minister General of the Franciscans in 1247, may have been influenced by Joachite ideas by 1245, but the evidence does not become firm until 1255. Gerard of Borgo San Donnino was a Joachite by 1247.⁴¹ The Joachimism of these early Franciscan proponents brought them friends as well as opponents, both within and from outside the Franciscan Order. Hugh of Digne's interest in Joachim seems, in part, to have connected him to English Franciscans Robert Grosseteste and Adam Marsh. It also seems to have been a primary factor in his friendship with John of Parma.⁴² By 1247 Salimbene was being cautioned that Joachimism was a bad influence,

³⁷ David Burr, *Olivi's Peaceable Kingdom: A Reading of the Apocalypse Commentary* (Univ of Pennsylvania Pr, November 1993), 5-7.

³⁸ Salimbene of Adam, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*, ed. Joseph L Baird, Giuseppe Baglivi, and John Robert Kane (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1986). See also Burr, *Olivi's Peaceable Kingdom*, 4-21; and Daniel, "A Re-Examination of the Origins of Franciscan Joachitism."

³⁹ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century After Saint Francis* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 23; Daniel, "A Re-Examination of the Origins of Franciscan Joachitism."

⁴⁰ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 92.

⁴¹ For dating of early Joachites, see Daniel, "A Re-Examination of the Origins of Franciscan Joachitism."

⁴² David Burr, *Olivi's Peaceable Kingdom: A Reading of the Apocalypse Commentary* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 7-8. Burr, *Olivi's Peaceable Kingdom*, 7-8.

for it “stirred up” the brethren, and Hugh of Digne’s Joachimism brought about opposition from the Dominican Peter of Apulia.⁴³

Preaching, academic appointment, or administrative duty variously brought each of these Joachite Franciscans to Paris during the late 1240s and early 1250s. Paris in the 1250s was an environment of increasing inter-mendicant and academic hostilities, expressed as rivalry between Franciscans and Dominicans and between secular masters and the mendicants as they competed for university chairs and privileges. Although the mendicant orders were initially welcomed at the University of Paris, several factors led to a souring of relations with the secular masters. To begin with, the mendicants had their own corporate aims and interests that which were frequently at odds with the seculars. In 1253, for instance, when the university went on strike in response to the beatings of several students by the night watch, the friars refused to join their secular colleagues, much as they had refused to join an earlier strike in 1229. Not only was this behavior regarded as a lack of collegiality, but even before the 1253 strike the seculars felt threatened by the rapid advance of the friars, who had already gained one-third of the chairs of theology. Once the strike ended the seculars banned the friars from the university until they would agree to take an oath to obey university decrees and also to accept a statute limiting the religious orders to one chair each. The mendicant orders each appealed to the pope, who ruled that they be reinstated, but the seculars refused to obey the papal order on the grounds that it infringed upon their autonomy.⁴⁴

In the charged environment of the mendicant-secular rivalry the publication of Gerard of Borgo San Donnino’s *Evangelium aeternum* in 1254 became a particular point of controversy

⁴³ Salimbene of Adam, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*, 231–32.

⁴⁴ Edward Tracy Brett, *Humbert of Romans: His Life and Views of Thirteenth-Century Society* (PIMS, 1984), 16–20; G. Geltner, “William of St. Amour’s *De Periculis Novissimorum Temporum*: A False Start to Medieval Antifraternalism,” in *Defenders and Critics of Franciscan Life: Essays in Honor of John V. Fleming*, ed. Michael Cusato and G. Geltner, *The Medieval Franciscans* 6 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 127–43.

and through it prophecy itself became a part of the controversy. Gerard's original work has been lost, but its essentials can be pieced together from the various excerpts cited by its opponents.⁴⁵ The work combined Joachim's major writings with glosses and an introductory essay by Gerard. Of particular note in Gerard's introduction were: that the eternal gospel (which is the same as Joachim's doctrine) excels the doctrine of Christ and both Testaments of the Bible; that the New Testament will be superseded by this eternal gospel; that the New Testament will remain only until the year 1260; and that only those who travel about barefoot are considered fit to teach this new gospel and to instruct in spiritual matters. In effect, Gerard was arguing that the current order of the Church would soon be overturned, to be replaced by a new order of "spiritual men" who possessed special gifts for interpreting both the Scriptures as well as the future.⁴⁶

The timing of Gerard's treatise could not have been worse. It provided a ready and easy weapon for the secular masters, who seized the opportunity to demonstrate that their rivals were influenced by heresy and presented a radical threat to the established order of the Church. Led by William of St. Amour, a group of Parisian schoolmen excerpted the most inflammatory passages and presented their evidence to the bishop of Paris who forwarded the matter to Rome. Pope Alexander IV appointed a commission of three cardinals (the "Anagni Commission") – including, notably, Hugh of Saint-Cher, that found Gerard's introduction to be full of "errors and foolishness" and concluded that it had gone far beyond the original doctrines of Joachim.⁴⁷ As a result, Alexander condemned the *Evangelium aeternum* in 1255 and Gerard of Borgo San Donnino was imprisoned (where he remained until his death in 1276). Having been Cardinal

⁴⁵ Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 59–70.

⁴⁶ Brett, *Humbert of Romans*, 20–40.

⁴⁷ On this commission, see Heinrich Denifle and Emile Chatelain, eds., *Chartularium Universitatis parisiensis* (Paris: Ex typis fratrum Delalain, 1889), 1: no. 243, p. 272–276. For the text produced by the commission, see Heinrich Denifle, ed., *Protocoll Der Commission Zu Anagni*, Archiv Fur Literatur- Und Kirchengeschichte Des Mittelalters (Berlin, 1885), 99–142.

Protector of the Franciscan Order, however, the pope took steps to preserve the reputation of the Franciscans. Joachim and his genuine teachings were spared as well. Nonetheless, the controversy refused to die down. In 1257 John of Parma, suspected for a while of having written *Evangelium aeternum* himself, resigned his position as Franciscan Minister General under pressure and retired to the Hermitage of Greccio near Rieti. In 1263 there came another condemnation, this time from a provincial synod at Arles. Whereas the pope's 1255 Anagni Commission had largely spared Joachim, the Arles synod specifically condemned Joachim's entire "pernicious doctrine" on the three statuses as well as Joachim's writings that contained these teachings.⁴⁸

These factors created a complicated environment for thinkers of the 1250s and following in which to address conceptions of prophecy. They took a number of positions along a spectrum ranging from a defense of the traditional categories to an all-out embrace of Joachim's reconfiguration. Franciscan David of Augsburg, for instance, had little use for contemporary prophecy or apocalyptic speculation. In his *De exterioris et interioris hominis compositione secundum triplicem statum incipientium, proficientium et perfectorum*, usually dated to about 1250, David warns (and calls to mind Augustine's warnings) that one can easily be deceived by evil spirits or by one's own false opinion into believing that one has received a vision. David complains that many serious and devout men have believed such claims more than they should and as a result spread many false prophecies about the advent of Antichrist, signs of oncoming

⁴⁸ Florentius, newly appointed bishop of Arles in 1262, had been the prosecutor at Anagni (Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham*, 148 n. 9.). It is important to note that at Arles too it was the "*Joachitici*" who are named, not the Abbot himself (Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, p. 61 n 3). Although only a provincial synod, not carrying the weight of a pronouncement from Rome, its condemnation was nonetheless damaging. Not only were Joachim's writings on the Trinity defined as error, but now his exegetical and prophetic writings began to be included on heresy lists as well.

judgment, the persecution of the Church and other such things.⁴⁹ Another Franciscan, Thomas of Pavia, took a calmer but still critical approach.⁵⁰ Still others continued to circulate prophecies and to exhibit enthusiasm for Joachim's views of history and his conception of prophecy although as a result of scandal they seem to have gotten a bit more cautious or at least more precise, for example increasingly evoking Joachim's genuine works rather than any of the pseudo-Joachite writings.

Lines of thought on prophecy, especially as they relate to Joachim's innovations, become better established in the writings of Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure. With Aquinas a characteristic Dominican position regarding prophecy takes shape, in which Joachimism is rejected both for its eschatological conclusions and its particular conception prophetic knowledge. Instead, Aquinas can be seen to have defended and reasserted the categories of *conjectura* and *prophetia* as defined by Augustine, and to further define elements of these categories in accordance with Aristotelian categories and the language of the schools.

Bonaventure was more open to Joachite positions, and without rejecting Augustinian views on prophecy he nevertheless added to them by appropriating certain aspects of Joachimism into his understanding. While not a Joachite, at least in the sense of Joachim's more radical interpreters, Bonaventure accepted many aspects of Joachim's approach to interpreting the Scriptures and his theory of history, especially concerning a progressive increase in spiritual understanding and its eschatological implications. Moreover, Bonaventure joined these views to his conception of Saint Francis, whose appearance Bonaventure understood as inaugurating the final age of the Church. Bonaventure cannot be seen to have created a Franciscan conception of prophecy in the same manner as Aquinas did for the Dominicans, however, Bonaventure's

⁴⁹ On David of Augsburg see, especially Wendy Love Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits: Assessing Visions and Visionaries in the Late Middle Ages* (Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 55-59 and Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 53.

⁵⁰ Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 53 and 185-186.

thought on prophecy is frequently implicit rather than directly stated (since he did not write much that directly addressed theories of prophecy), nor did all Franciscans accept his views. Nonetheless, Bonaventure's endorsement created a certain legitimacy (or at least tolerance) for some Joachite positions and provided precedent for later Franciscan thinkers to entertain and further develop such ideas.

2.4 Thomas Aquinas: An Aristotelian Reading of Prophecy

Aquinas addressed questions of prophecy several times, from his commentary on the Sentences in 1256 to the *Summa Theologica* of 1265-1274, where he gave the topic his most developed treatment.⁵¹ On prophecy itself, Aquinas takes mostly Augustinian views and advances them using the tools and approach of the schools as he systematizes and harmonizes Christian authorities within a framework of Aristotelian terms and categories. Aquinas also develops further a number of earlier points established by Hugh of Saint-Cher, for instance on *habitus*. Although he discusses Joachim and questions on prophecy at various points throughout these writings, Aquinas usually does not treat Joachim in the same sections where he discusses the concept of prophecy. His conception of prophecy contains no room for Joachimism, not even to refute Joachim as a false prophet. Instead, Aquinas considers Joachim an exegete who engaged in conjecture, and he addresses his thought in this manner.

2.4.1 Aquinas' Opposition to Joachimism

Aquinas' first known writing on prophecy, the fourth book of his *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum* (1256), is a comment on Joachite thought and the controversy surrounding it. Here

⁵¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum* (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1929); Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (New York: Benzinger Bros, 1947).

Aquinas discusses the error of those who claimed to be able to predict the end of the world. At first, Aquinas names neither Joachim nor his followers as holding these errors, but his references are clear enough to assume that he has in mind the commotion surrounding Gerard of Borgo San Donnino.⁵² In another passage of the same work he does name Joachim and gives his opinion concerning the predictions that were then being circulated under Joachim's name. Aquinas refutes claims that point-for-point comparisons can be made between the Old and New Testaments. He believes that all the figures of the Old Testament do find fulfillment in Christ but only in a general or allegorical manner. Aquinas condemns those who attempt to locate more specific concordances, citing Augustine's familiar example of those who had compared the ten plagues of Exodus with the ten persecutions of the early Church. Aquinas finds Joachim to have fallen into the same sort of error, for he writes: "And the same seems true about the sayings of the Abbot Joachim who predicted some truths about future events through such conjectures, and was deceived by others."⁵³

In opposing Joachim, not only does Aquinas agree with Augustine about the possibilities and limits of exegetical prediction, but he can also be seen to take Augustine's position regarding the categories of future prediction. Joachim's predictions are seen to be neither true nor false prophecy – for they are not prophecy at all. This is much as Joachim himself had claimed. But unlike Joachim, Aquinas calls these predictions conjecture, and in the same manner as Augustine Aquinas states that conjecture can sometimes hit upon the truth while at other times it can be

⁵² Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum Super Libros Sententiarum* (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1929), d. 43, q. 1, a. 3. One of Aquinas' arguments surrounds the use of 1260 in these predictions; another concerns the predictive use of concordances between the Old and New Testaments. Both were hallmarks of Joachite prediction. Bernard McGinn, "The Abbot and the Doctors: Scholastic Reactions to the Radical Eschatology of Joachim of Fiore," *Church History* 40, no. 1 (1971): 37–38. McGinn's article is reprinted as chapter seven of McGinn, *The Calabrian Abbot: Joachim of Fiore in the History of Western Thought* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985).

⁵³ Aquinas, *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum*, d. 43, q. 1, a. 3. Translated by McGinn, *The Calabrian Abbot*, 210. "Et similiter vedetur esse de dictis Abbatis Joachim, qui per tales conjecturas de futuris aliqua vera praedixit, et in aliquibus deceptus fuit."

wrong. Aquinas notes that Joachim had understood some things truly and had predicted some events accurately, perhaps in an attempt to safeguard Joachim's prediction about the two orders – which at the time continued to serve as mendicant propaganda against their detractors.

It was in the specific context of defending the mendicants that Aquinas next approached the topic of Joachim. In late 1256, in *Contra impugnantes Dei cultum et religionem*, Aquinas refuted William of St. Amour's charges that the mendicants were forerunners of the Antichrist.⁵⁴ Aquinas directed his criticisms at the secular masters as well as the extreme views of Gerard of Borgo San Donnino: Aquinas adopted a generally anti-apocalyptic tone, argued against the idea that the era of the Antichrist was at hand, and specifically refuted the idea that the mendicants could be said to be his heralds. In this treatise Aquinas again names Joachim, and it becomes clear that Aquinas had some knowledge of Joachim's genuine writings. Here, and in later texts that show he probably read the protocol of the Anagni commission (which had condemned Gerard of Borgo San Donnino but defended Joachim), Aquinas indicates that, however dangerous he regarded Joachim's genuine views as being, he realized that his followers had gone far beyond them.

Aquinas continued to criticize Joachimism in similar ways in several of his later works, including some more specific attacks on Joachim's particular exegetical doctrines. From Aquinas' later work it is also clear that Joachim's attacks on Peter Lombard had not been forgotten and remained an element in how scholastic thinkers, whether mendicant or secular, encountered him. Aquinas outlines Joachim's Trinitarian views and recounts the Fourth Lateran decree that had condemned them. These comments reveal what Aquinas regarded as a principal failing of Joachim: his non-scholastic mode of thinking and failure to understand what he was

⁵⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Contra impugnantes Dei cultum et religionem* (Rome: St. Aquinas foundation, 1970), 5, 5.

criticizing. “Joachim the abbot of the monastery of Fiore, not really grasping the words of the aforesaid master, since he was uninstructed in the subtle dogmas of the faith, held that the doctrine of Master Peter was heretical.”⁵⁵

Taken together from his various writings, Aquinas rejects nearly every aspect of Joachim’s thought, both in the content of his predictions and his proposed methodology of prophecy. He countered Joachim’s exegetical method of predicting based on types and concordances, attacked his Trinitarian views, and rejected the concept of three ages or *status* of history. Still, he remained sensitive to the political environment and the utility that some Joachite views continued to offer the mendicant cause, admitted that Joachim’s predictions might prove correct, and pointed out that more radical Joachites had distorted Joachim’s original intent. Joachim and his followers clearly disturbed Aquinas and attracted considerable attention, but Aquinas regarded Joachim not as a prophet (or even false prophet) to be countered but rather as an exegete whose conjectures relied on mistaken principles. For this reason rarely does Aquinas devote any space to Joachim when writing about prophecy, and Aquinas’ writing on prophecy itself takes up considerably more space than anything he has to say about Joachim.

2.4.2 Aquinas on Prophecy

Aquinas discusses prophets and prophecies in many of his writings, especially in his Biblical commentaries. His theoretical writings on the concept of prophecy, however, are primarily contained in two works: the *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* (1256-59) and the *Summa*

⁵⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *In Decretalem secundum Expositio*, vol. XVI, Opera Omnia (Parma), 308. Translated by McGinn, *Calabrian Abbot* 211. “Joachim autem Abbas Florentis monasterii non bene capiens verba Magistri praedicti, utpote in subtilibus fidei dogmatibus rudis, praedictam Magistri Petri doctrinam haeticam reputavit...”

Theologica (1265-73, sections on prophecy ca. 1268-72).⁵⁶ The twelfth of twenty-nine questions addressed in *De veritate* is devoted to prophecy, containing twelve articles to be explored. The *Summa* contains four questions on prophecy (prophecy itself, its cause, its mode, and its divisions), covering a total of twenty-two articles directly related to prophecy. *De veritate*'s treatment of prophecy is about fifty percent longer than that in the *Summa* and covers fourteen articles. Much of the difference in length comes from *De veritate*'s more extensive discussion of difficulties and contrary points of view whereas the later *Summa* is more concise. Although they discuss the subject somewhat differently, both discuss a number of the same topics. These include: whether prophecy is a *habitus*, if the prophet sees into the mirror of eternity (or God's essence), whether prophecy is natural, whether a certain disposition is required in the prophet, what are the grades and divisions of prophecy, whether Moses was the greatest of prophets, and what is the nature of rapture (or ecstasy). The *Summa* also gives special consideration to questions of whether prophecy can come from demons and whether prophecy has increased through time, questions that are absent in *De veritate*.

In each of these works Aquinas demonstrates greater knowledge and familiarity with Aristotle than had been the case with those writing during the 1220s and 1230s. There are several reasons for this. In the first place, Aristotelian studies had progressed significantly between the early decades of the century and when Aquinas was active. Although a 1210 provincial synod had forbidden the Parisian arts faculty from reading Aristotle's natural philosophy, the restriction was largely ignored, and the schoolmen continued to push ahead in their use and understanding of Aristotle.⁵⁷ By the 1250s the situation had progressed so far that it was expected that any serious scholar would utilize Aristotelian terms and categories. In particular significant advances

⁵⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, trans. James V McGlynn, S.J. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953), q. 12; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2a, 2ae, q. 171-175.

⁵⁷ Thijssen, "Master Amalric and the Amalricians," 43-44.

in Aristotelian synthesis were brought about Albert the Great, who had been Aquinas' teacher. Aquinas also benefited from greater availability of Aristotle in Latin translation – especially the *Nicomachean Ethics* (translated by Robert Grosseteste d. 1253), which had particular relevance for working through certain questions related to prophecy.

Aristotle and his Arab commentators provide Aquinas with many of the questions to be asked and serve as a guide as he works towards his solutions. Aquinas' thought on prophecy, however, is not simply a matter of translating traditional Christian thinking into Aristotelian terms. When possible, Aquinas utilizes Aristotelian categories to support or explain aspects of the traditional view; but when the approach does not fit Aquinas is just as prepared to introduce nuances into Aristotle, to go beyond him, or to rely on other authorities (Scripture, Augustine, Gregory the Great, for example) who can better assist him in his work.

Such was the case when Aquinas took up the issue of whether prophecy should be considered a *habitus*. Aquinas considered the question an important one, for it is the first article on prophecy in *De veritate*. In the *Summa* it is the second article, following an introductory article which established that prophecy pertains chiefly to knowledge (and thus the intellect) and secondarily to speech. In both treatises Aquinas argues that prophecy is not a *habitus*; instead, it should be regarded as a passion or transitory impression the prophet receives rather than an abiding character. A key element of Aquinas' argument is his understanding of *habitus*, for which he utilizes Averroes' commentary on *De anima*, where *habitus* is described as “that by which one performs an activity when he wants to.”⁵⁸ Citing Elisha in the fourth Book of Kings (3:14,15) as one example, however, Aquinas points out that prophets cannot call on prophecy by

⁵⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Bros, 1947), 1a, 2ae, q. 51. “...habitus est quo quis quando vult operatur.”

command.⁵⁹ Further, utilizing Aristotle's explanation from the *Categories* that a *habitus* is a "quality that is hard to change" (*habitus est qualitas difficile mobilis*), Aquinas finds that prophecy does not meet this definition. From the Gloss on Amos (7:4), and also from Gregory the Great, for example, he knows that the gift of prophecy does change: prophecy it is not given to prophets at all times, sometimes the spirit of prophecy fails the prophets or is withheld, and prophecy is not always at the service of their minds. Therefore, Aquinas reasons, prophecy is not a *habitus*.⁶⁰

It will be recalled that Hugh of Saint-Cher had employed a similar set of arguments to argue that prophecy is not a *habitus*. In explaining what prophecy is, however, Aquinas moves beyond Hugh. To do so he compares prophecy to the related concepts of sight and light. He begins from Biblical evidence that states that prophecy is called sight and that the prophet is called "seer." Prophecy is a special type of sight, being sight or knowledge of things that are far removed from man's knowledge and surpass natural reason. As a kind of knowledge, and especially revealed knowledge, prophecy is also a type of light, for "all that is made manifest is light." (Ephesians 5:13)

Just as material sight is made manifest through material light, so too intellectual sight is made manifest through intellectual light. In the example of material light, light that emanates from the sun is an abiding quality of the Sun. It originates from the Sun and remains as a form in the Sun. In this way the Sun possesses light in the manner of a *habitus*. But light from the Sun can also exist in the air. In the air light exists as a transient impression since air does not possess or retain the light in itself but only receives it by being placed in the path of the shining body. In the case of intellectual light, prophecy pertains to a higher, supernatural knowledge. This

⁵⁹ Ibid., 2a, 2ae q. 171 art 2.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 2a, 2ae q. 171 art 2.

intellectual light is granted to the prophet in complete form and perfects the intellect so that both the first principles and all that can be known by that light are given directly by God.⁶¹

Therefore, Aquinas reasons, God Himself is the principle of the supernatural light and the source of all that is manifest by the light of prophecy. The prophetic light shining from God can exist in the soul of the prophet but only as a transient impression, just as sunlight passes through air. Thus, prophecy is a passion, or transient impression, given by God to the prophet. This is why the prophetic light only remains in the mind of the prophet when it is actually being divinely inspired, just as light remains in the air only when the sun is shining.⁶²

In coming to his position that prophecy is not a *habitus* Aquinas has to confront an apparent difficulty, for another way of reading Aristotle might seem to support the opposite view. This alternative approach stems from a passage in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, cited by Aquinas, that states that “there are three things in the soul: power, passion, and habit.”⁶³ According to one way of arguing from this passage, prophecy would seem to be a habit. Prophecy cannot be a power, for then it would be in all men since powers of the soul are common to all men; nor can prophecy be a passion since the passions belong to the sensitive or appetitive faculty and prophecy pertains principally to knowledge – a point Aquinas had already established. Therefore, according to this reading, and by process of elimination, prophecy might seem to be a habit.

To this objection that prophecy is not a *habitus* Aquinas offers a surprising reply. Aquinas argues that what Aristotle is saying here does not apply to prophecy. Aquinas states that the division of the soul offered by the Philosopher is not meant to comprehend all that is in the soul,

⁶¹ Ibid., 2a, 2ae, q. 171 art. 2.

⁶² Ibid., 2a, 2ae, q. 171 art. 2.

⁶³ In the *Summa* Aquinas presents his argument by beginning with the position that prophecy is a habit, before giving the contrary argument and presenting his position. In the earlier *De veritate* Aquinas presents his argument in the opposite order, first giving the positions against the view that prophecy is a habit, explaining his view, and then countering each argument of the opposite view.

but instead refers only to the principles of moral actions, which Aquinas points out should be clear from Aristotle's own examples.⁶⁴ Prophecy, however, says Aquinas, is not a moral matter. It is an act of the mind (which Aquinas has already demonstrated).⁶⁵ In this context prophecy can be reduced to a passion, as long as passion is understood to refer to any kind of receiving. Aristotle himself had suggested this, for in *De anima* he says that "to understand is, in a way, to be passive." Aquinas therefore reasons that, as in natural knowledge the possible intellect is passive to the light of the active intellect, so too in prophetic knowledge human intellect is passive to the active divine light.⁶⁶

Other aspects of Aquinas' thought on prophecy, especially the potential for demonic illusion and his thinking about rapture/ecstasy will be discussed later, especially in chapter four as they affected later debates about practicing prophets. For the debate about Joachim, and whether inspired exegesis should be considered a type of prophecy, Aquinas' position on *habitus* is the best explanation for why he rejects Joachim and does not consider *spiritualis intelligentia* (as Joachim formulates it) to be prophecy. For Aquinas, prophecy is a gift given entirely by God. One cannot earn it or achieve it, nor can one keep it by his own will. Prophecy is a type of knowledge but it is not an active function of human intellect. Rather, it is passive (and transitory) reception of divine communication and understanding.

2.5 Bonaventure: Theory and Practice

Compared to Aquinas, the Franciscan Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (c. 1221-1274) was more amenable to Joachim's viewpoint, and his writings demonstrate a certain affinity for Joachim's

⁶⁴ Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, 2a, 2ae, q. 171 art. 2.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 2a, 2ae, q. 171 art. 1.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 2a, 2ae, q. 171 art. 2.

opinions on exegesis, the theology of history, and eschatology.⁶⁷ In particular, Bonaventure's views are shaped by a similar conception of the spiritual meaning of Scripture and a belief that this type of understanding was an important element in God's plan for the future. While he was not a Joachite – at least in the sense of Joachim's radical thirteenth- and fourteenth- century admirers – Bonaventure nonetheless came to embrace a number of ideas remarkably similar to Joachim's original formulations while at the same time opposing the more extreme Joachite interpretations then causing trouble for his order.⁶⁸

Prior to the 1254-1257 crisis leading to his election as minister general of the Franciscan Order there is little evidence that Bonaventure was particularly interested in Joachim's exegetical or apocalyptic ideas. His *Commentarium in Libros Sententiarum* (ca. 1250-1252), for example, shows no awareness of the Joachim's thought on these matters although in it he explicitly criticizes Joachim's Trinitarian doctrine.⁶⁹ After he became minister general Bonaventure's interest in Joachim as well as prophecy increased, but, unfortunately, administrative duties kept him from writing as much as we might hope directly addressed the topic of prophecy, especially from a conceptual standpoint.

From what he did write, however, it is possible to infer much about Bonaventure's conception of prophecy. Joseph Ratzinger's study of Bonaventure's theology of history, and Bernard McGinn's, E. Randolph Daniel's, and David Burr's investigations of Bonaventure's

⁶⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, trans. Zachary Hayes (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971) and McGinn, *Calabrian Abbot*.

⁶⁸ Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 179-181, describes Bonaventure in his attitudes towards Joachite ideas as being intellectually opposed to the dangers of Joachim's system yet emotionally drawn to a the coming of a period of spiritual illumination and the full revelation of the meaning of Scripture. She comes to the conclusion that "St. Bonaventura was a Joachite malgré lui."

⁶⁹ McGinn, *Calabrian Abbot*, 213. That Bonaventure would object to Joachim's views on the Trinity, and especially the Abbot's criticism of Peter Lombard should be of no surprise. Although he had entered the Franciscan Order in 1243, Bonaventure seems to have been drawn into the Order through his reverence for Alexander of Hales. Especially at this early stage in his career his thought was shaped more by the attitudes and assumptions of the Schoolmen than by the spiritual fervor characteristic of the early Franciscans.

eschatology have established the strong influence of Joachim's apocalyptic thinking on Bonaventure, and their insights assist in the effort to draw out Bonaventure's thought on the nature of prophecy.⁷⁰ Many of these insights are derived from the *Collationes de Hexaemeron*, an unfinished series of lectures Bonaventure gave in 1273 that include Bonaventure's thinking at that time about the nature of Scriptural revelation, the eschatological future, and the role of Saint Francis in the history of salvation. Because Bonaventure believed that Francis possessed the gift of prophecy, his earlier *Legenda maior* of the saint provides additional material for constructing Bonaventure's conception. Thomas Renna's remarks in an article on the *vitae* of Thomas Celano and Bonaventure point to the presence of *habitus* in Bonaventure's Francis and conclusions of a recent article by Daniel Horan overlap with several of the findings made here about prophecy in the *Legenda*.⁷¹

An anonymous *De prophetia* treatise (MS Assisi 186) that Jean Pierre Torrell cautiously attributes to Bonaventure may reveal additional insights about Bonaventure's thinking about prophecy beyond what the *Legenda maior* and *Collationes in Hexaemeron* illustrate.⁷² Probably written around 1250, and like Bonaventure's *Commentarium in Libros Sententiarum*, MS Assisi 186 shows no obvious influence or knowledge of Joachim's thought on prophecy. The *quaestiones disputatae* of MS Assisi 186 represent another entry in the spirit of the various *De*

⁷⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, trans. Zachary Hayes (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971); McGinn, "The Abbot and the Doctors"; E. Randolph Daniel, "St. Bonaventura's Debt to Joachim," *Mediaevalia et Humanistica* 11 (1982): 61–75; David Burr, "Bonaventure, Olivi, and Franciscan Eschatology," *Collectanea Franciscana*, no. 53 (1983): 23–40.

⁷¹ Thomas Renna, "St. Francis as Prophet in Celano and Bonaventure," *Michigan Academician* 33, no. 4 (2000): 321–32; Daniel Horan, "Bonaventure's Theology of Prophecy in the *Legenda Maior*: Sources and Interpretation," *Antonianum*, no. LXXXIX (2014): 43–78. A principal difference here is the suggestion, following Renna, that Bonaventure's conception of Francis' prophetic gifts can be understood in relation to Bonaventure's apparent view that prophecy is a *habitus*.

⁷² JP Torrell "Un 'De Prophetia' de Saint Bonaventure?", in Torrell, *Recherches Sur La Théorie De La Prophétie Au Moyen Âge*, 266–272 discusses the issues surrounding the authorship of this treatise, and comes to the position that while not conclusive, textual evidence favors it being written by Bonaventure, early in his career, likely sometime prior to his commentary on the *Sentences*.

prophetia treatises written during the 1220s and following, applying Aristotelian concepts to questions on prophecy. In some ways unexceptional, for it is fairly derivative of similar treatises, MS Assisi 186 treatise becomes more remarkable considering its arguments supporting the view that prophecy is a *habitus*.⁷³ Not too much emphasis should be placed on the importance of this treatise because it is impossible to know conclusively whether it was written by Bonaventure. However, when read in the current context, the material on *habitus* not only adds further support for Torrell's attribution to Bonaventure, but if it is in fact by Bonaventure this treatise provides additional insight into his later views about prophecy, especially as they relate to Joachim of Fiore and inspired exegesis.

2.5.1 An Aristotelian *De prophetia* Treatise, Possibly by Bonaventure

MS Assisi 186 contains seventy-three questions. The treatise is clearly in draft form, with some questions left uncompleted and certain parts left out of their proper order. Possibly written by Bonaventure in preparation for his commentary on the *Sentences* (ca. 1250-1252), the manuscript considers a number of *quaestiones* that do not appear in the later commentary.⁷⁴ Of these are sixteen that concern prophecy, with the first of these taking the position that prophecy is a *habitus*. MS Assisi 186 may know Hugh of Saint-Cher's *quaestio*, for like Hugh, MS Assisi 186 opens its discussion with the same statement from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* about there being three things in the soul: power, passion, and *habitus*. Unlike Hugh (or Aquinas later), however, MS Assisi 186's author reasons that prophecy does involve *habitus*, and, while its

⁷³ JP Torrell "Un 'De Prophetia' de Saint Bonaventure?" in Torrell, *Recherches Sur La Théorie De La Prophétie Au Moyen Âge*, 257-260.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 252.

thinking seems to be along similar lines to William's and Philip's, MS Assisi 186 offers a more substantial argument.

To arrive at the position that prophecy is a *habitus*, MS Assisi 186 distinguishes between *donum prophetie* and *prophetia* and understands the relationship between the reception of revelation, the granting of prophetic knowledge, and the prophet's announcement in a somewhat different manner from either Hugh of Saint-Cher or Aquinas. MS Assisi 186 describes *donum prophetie* as the empowering of one's nature to understand what one has been shown, and *prophetia* refers to the actual illumination of the mind, or the thing revealed.⁷⁵ Similar to how the types of visions could be present in different combinations, some men are shown a revelation but are not given a gift of prophetic understanding of what they have seen. Others receive both illumined revelation (*prophetia*) and inspired understanding of what they saw (*donum prophetie*), while others are not themselves recipients of the revelation but possess inspired understanding (*donum prophetie*) of what has been shown to others.⁷⁶

MS Assisi 186 describes *donum prophetie* as *habitus primus* and *prophetia* as *habitus secundus*. Both are infused rather than innate habits that reside in the prophet as remnants from their experience of revelation or inspiration.⁷⁷ The *habitus* involved here refers not to inspiration or revelation themselves – those are given by God and are dependent on His will. However, the

⁷⁵ Ibid., 257.

⁷⁶ To illustrate his point, MS 186 uses Isaiah as an example. Simply to see that a virgin would conceive would not in itself be a gift of prophecy if the revelation was not accompanied by understanding. Because Isaiah was granted understanding of what he had been shown, this was prophecy.

⁷⁷ It should be noted that Hugh and Aquinas conceded that receiving prophecy might leave some small remnant, which was something akin to a *habitus* that prepared the prophet to more easily receive additional inspiration. Hugh refers to this as *quasi habitus*, by which he means that once the vision is over the prophet knows what he saw, but this is the effect of prophecy, not prophecy itself. Aquinas described it using the examples of a sad man being more prone to additional bouts of sadness, or water, once warmed being more easily warmed again. Whatever habitual remnant was left behind, however, neither Hugh nor Aquinas understood this as making prophecy itself a habit. Albert the Great also accepted the idea that a limited *quasi habitus* existed in prophecy. *De somno et vigilia*, 1, 3 in *Opera omnia* (Paris: Vivès, 1890-95), 9:181, cited by David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century After Saint Francis* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 83 n. 44.

inspiration left behind as a remnant is something the prophet can call upon whenever he wishes in order to carry out his prophetic responsibilities or to relate the meaning of the revelation to others.

Thus, a crucial element for the author of MS Assisi 186 is an ability of the prophet to access the prophetic knowledge imparted by the particular inspiration at any time – which the author considers a facet of the original inspiration. The ability of the prophet to call this imparted knowledge whenever he wishes is key to the author’s position that prophecy is a *habitus*, and to emphasize his point he uses the phrase *quotiescumque vult* (or *vellet*) twice in short succession. This repetition is clearly intentional since the possession of a *habitus* requires that one can use one’s habitual ability as often or whenever one wishes.⁷⁸

It will be recalled that Hugh of Saint-Cher (and later Aquinas) cited Biblical evidence that suggested prophets could not call upon revelation or inspiration whenever they wished or by their own will. The author of MS Assisi 186 agrees on this point, and he also agrees that revelation and inspiration are graces granted by God and not within the prophets’ own power. For Hugh and Aquinas, reception of prophetic knowledge was the essential character of prophecy, and true prophecy existed only in this moment. By expanding the definition of prophecy to include the prophet’s later recall and access to this knowledge, however, MS Assisi 186 allows for defining this recall to be as much true prophecy as the original inspiration.

Given the differences between MS Assisi 186’s view on *habitus* and that of Hugh of Saint-Cher or Aquinas, it is not hard to see how the two positions might influence divergent views of Joachim of Fiore or of his doctrine of spiritual intelligence. Joachim had claimed instances of divine inspiration, but in Joachim’s own words the details of his conclusions came from his later

⁷⁸ JP Torrell “Un ’De Prophetia’ de Saint Bonaventure?” 258.

contemplation and study based on these insights. For Hugh or Aquinas, or anyone else who did not accept that prophecy was a *habitus*, a prophet's ongoing understanding or later conclusions that went beyond what was revealed during the spark of divine inspiration could not be prophecy but instead would be conjecture. From the position that MS Assisi 186 takes about *habitus*, however, it was possible for a prophet's speculations or efforts to understand his revelation to be considered prophecy because his *habitus* infused an ability to prophetically recall his instance of inspiration. Whether MS Assisi 186 was written by Bonaventure or not, the position it takes on *habitus* illustrates a way of thinking that helps to explain Bonaventure (or others') attraction to Joachim's ideas as well as the ways that Bonaventure extended those ideas to allow for a prophetic understanding of the Scriptures that did not require individual revelatory insight.

2.5.2 Bonaventure's Relationship to Franciscan Joachimism

After the 1254 publication of Gerard of Borgo San Donnino's *Evangelium aeternum*, its 1255 condemnation and the ensuing fallout Bonaventure was inevitably thrust into the middle of controversy. John of Parma, minister general of the Order since 1247, was a moderate Joachite and until the commotion was generally regarded as a voice of reason who tried to mediate between the majority of Franciscans and the rigorist, "Spiritual" faction that was beginning to take shape.⁷⁹ Unfortunately for John of Parma, his Joachimism associated him too closely with Gerard of Borgo San Donnino, and in 1257 (possibly at the pope's urging) John resigned. He recommended that Bonaventure replace him and soon after Bonaventure was elected.

⁷⁹ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 11ff proposes that early Franciscan Joachites during the 1240s should be considered "proto-spirituals" since they do not form into a more cohesive and identifiable faction until several decades later.

Bonaventure's first priority as minister general was to preserve the Order against internal and external forces. Radical Joachimism was central to both internal and external controversies: Joachite ideas influenced the growing Spiritual wing that agitated for reforms based on apostolic and strict adherence to the Rule (which its members combined with apocalyptic fervor); moreover, the scandal surrounding Gerard of Borgo San Donnino provided easy ammunition for opponents in the secular-mendicant contest originating in Paris. To heal the rifts that had developed within the order and to stem the tide of external criticism Bonaventure had to contain the radical Joachites. Certain aspects of Joachimism, however, appealed to Bonaventure and elements of Joachim's thinking influenced Bonaventure as he constructed his own understanding of history, with special significance assigned to Saint Francis and the Franciscan Order in God's unfolding plans for the Church.

Bonaventure spent much of his career as minister general (1257-1274) preoccupied with leadership responsibilities, administrative duties, and writing in service of the Order. Although he would return to writing of a more academic character for a time following his return to Paris, from about 1266 to 1273, outside of this relatively brief window he had little time to devote to academic writing. It is no surprise, therefore, that Bonaventure wrote little during this period that addressed prophecy from a conceptual standpoint.

From several of Bonaventure's writings, however, his views on a concept of prophecy can be inferred. Of particular importance was the *Legenda maior*, completed by Bonaventure by 1262.⁸⁰ The work was intended as a new official biography of Saint Francis, meant to replace all other biographies then circulating. The *Legenda maior* was both an attempt at reconciliation with

⁸⁰ Bonaventure, *Legenda maior sancti Francisci*, vol. VIII, Opera Omnia, (Quaracchi, 1898), translated in Bonaventure, *Bonaventure*, trans. Ewert H. Cousins (Paulist Press, 1978), 178ff. For a recent interpretation Bonaventure's theology of prophecy in the *Legenda*, see Horan, "Bonaventure's Theology of Prophecy in the *Legenda Maior*: Sources and Interpretation."

the Order's more extreme elements as well as an effort to wrest control from them of the image of Francis.⁸¹

The *Legenda maior* shares many characteristics with the earlier lives of Francis as well as with hagiographical treatments of other saints, and the conception of *prophetia* that emerges is in many ways traditional and conventional. As with previous saints in hagiographic literature, Bonaventure's Francis is endowed by the Holy Spirit with the gift of prophecy, allowing him to know things outside of what could be known by normal understanding and also to foretell the future. On various occasions Francis is portrayed as knowing through prophecy that a person's death was approaching, and in other cases the innermost secrets of men (often misbehaving postulants or unruly rulers) were revealed to him – common tropes in hagiographical literature.⁸² Although Francis' use of his gift to stimulate conversion and repentance is emphasized more than many other portrayals of saintly prophecy,⁸³ abilities demonstrate his closeness to God and the holiness of his life. And while he is not overly technical in explaining the manner in which Francis received his prophetic knowledge, Bonaventure's portrayal of direct, revealed knowledge fits well within traditional norms for how prophecy was usually understood.

Thus, in certain ways Bonaventure's Francis is portrayed according to conventional models of saintly prophecy. But Bonaventure expands upon this model in ways that reflect the influence of Joachim. Bonaventure assigns apocalyptic significance to Francis, for example, and places Francis' gift of prophecy into the context of God's entire plan of history. Francis is presented as

⁸¹ About this same time Bonaventure wrote another life of Francis, the *Legenda minor*, as a shorter work intended primarily for liturgical use. Bonaventure's lives of Francis were based on previous lives written by Thomas of Celano and Julian of Speyer as well as upon oral tradition. For a comparison of Bonaventure's *vitae* with those of Thomas of Celano, see Thomas Renna, "St. Francis as Prophet in Celano and Bonaventure," *Michigan Academician* 33, no. 4 (2000): 321–332.

⁸² See, for example, Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 161–65.

⁸³ Renna, "St. Francis as Prophet in Celano and Bonaventure."

a central figure in this plan and his prophetic calling makes him the herald of the Last Age. In the prologue of the *Legenda* Bonaventure identifies Francis with the angel of the sixth seal (Apoc 6:12) and places him third in the line of great prophets after David and Saint Peter.⁸⁴ Daniel Horan points out that Bonaventure also draws upon episodes in Francis' life that resemble those in the lives of other prophets such as Daniel, Ezekiel, Moses and Elijah.⁸⁵ Furthermore, in chapter four, Bonaventure writes that Francis is "like another Elijah" and leader of "spiritual men," both clear allusions to Joachim's prophecies.⁸⁶ The *Legenda* portrays Francis, marked spiritually by his prophetic gifts and physically by the stigmata,⁸⁷ as a beacon for this new order of spiritual men, preparing the way for Christ's return; and his prophetic gifts are both a sign and a guide for how the Church is to live out God's plan.

Bonaventure's image of Francis further relates to Joachim's vision of history through a conception of spiritual understanding present in the *Legenda*. At the beginning of book eleven Bonaventure portrays Francis as possessing an ability to understand and expound on the deepest mysteries of Scripture without having studied.⁸⁸ The beginning of chapter eleven of the *Legenda* explains Francis' gift:

Unto such a tranquility of mind had his unwearied zeal for prayer and continuous practice of virtue brought the man of God that—albeit he had no instruction or learning in the sacred writings—yet, illumined by the beams of eternal light, he searched the deep things of the Scriptures with marvelous intellectual discernment. For his genius, pure from all stain, penetrated into the hidden places of the mysteries,

⁸⁴ Bonaventure, *Legenda Maior Sancti Francisci*, vol. VIII, Opera Omnia (Quaracchi, 1898), prologue.1-2; 11.14.

⁸⁵ Horan, "Bonaventure's Theology of Prophecy in the *Legenda Maior*: Sources and Interpretation," 70.

⁸⁶ Bonaventure, *Legenda Maior Sancti Francisci*, 4.4.

⁸⁷ Renna, "St. Francis as Prophet in Celano and Bonaventure."

⁸⁸ Bonaventure, *Legenda Maior Sancti Francisci*, 11.1. Bonaventure, *Legenda maior sancti Francisci*, 12.1 Although the idea of spiritual understanding was completely foreign to hagiographical portrayals of other saintly prophets, for Bonaventure it is a key element in Francis' eschatological significance. Neither was Bonaventure the first to ascribe this gift to Francis – for Thomas of Celano in his *vitae* of the saint had also described Francis' ability to understand and expound on the mysteries of Scripture without having studied. See Renna, "St. Francis as prophet in Celano and Bonaventure."

and, where the learning of a theologian tarrieth without, the feelings of the lover led him in. At times he would read in the sacred books, and whatsoever had once been presented unto his mind became indelibly imprinted on his memory...⁸⁹

Bonaventure's Francis is thus understood to possess a type of spiritual perception that allows Francis to understand Biblical passages with a degree of theological depth that astounds a certain "doctor of sacred theology."⁹⁰ According to Bonaventure, Francis' understanding made clear to him the hidden and true meaning of divine wisdom, and this ability was granted to him by the Holy Spirit.

Joachim's inspired exegesis consisted of momentary visionary enlightenment from which he derived further meaning by his own human deduction and contemplation. Bonaventure's Francis, however, possesses from God a nearly innate ability to understand the deepest meanings of Scripture without study. Francis thus experiences the full outpouring of the spirit, and thus his own study is unnecessary. Bonaventure's understanding of Francis also calls to mind MS Assisi 186's discussion of *donum prophetie* and *prophetia*. In MS Assisi 186 *donum prophetie* refers to prophetic understanding and *prophetia* refers to revelation. Francis can be seen to possess *donum prophetie* (*spiritus prophetia* in the *Legenda*), which gives him the ability to understand the deepest mysteries of Scripture. As with *donum prophetie*, which the author of MS Assisi 186 describes as a *habitus*, Francis is portrayed as possessing this gift "in his heart," and seemingly from the text he is able to call upon this ability whenever he wishes.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ibid., 11.1; Trans. Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis of Assisi*, trans. E. Gurney Salter (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1904). "Ad tantam autem mentis serenitatem indefessum orationis studium cum continua exercitatione virtutum virum Dei perduxerat, ut, quamvis non habuerit sacrarum litterarum peritiam per doctrinam, aeternae tamen lucis irradiatus fulgoribus, Scripturarum profunda miro intellectus scrutaretur acumine. Penetrabat enim ab omni labe purum ingenium mysteriorum abscondita, et ubi magistralis scientia foris stat, affectus introibat amantis. Legebat quandoque in libris sacris, et quod animo semel iniecerat, tenaciter imprimebat memoriae..."

⁹⁰ Bonaventure, *Legenda Maior Sancti Francisci*, 11.2.

⁹¹ Ibid., 11.1-2.

In the *Legenda*, Bonaventure's portrayal of Francis reveals a vision of history and views on prophecy and spiritual intelligence influenced by aspects of Joachim's thought. These views are developed further in the *Collationes in Hexaemeron*, a series of sermons or lectures Bonaventure delivered to the Franciscan community at Paris between Easter and Pentecost of 1273, eleven years after publishing the *Legenda maior*.⁹² Corresponding to the days of creation, the *Collationes in Hexaemeron* set out to present the "visions" of God as they were contained in the order of creation. Unfortunately, Bonaventure broke off his set of lectures upon his elevation to the cardinalate, and the work was left unfinished – a particularly regrettable situation as it seems he was about to provide a full discussion on the topic of prophecy.⁹³ Nonetheless, from the sections that were completed Bonaventure's understanding of the senses for reading the Bible is clear as is his thought about God's unfolding plan of history, and from these one can infer aspects of his thought on prophecy.⁹⁴

As in the *Legenda*, the *Collationes in Hexaemeron* indicate that Bonaventure held positions reminiscent of Joachim's approach to exegesis, especially the idea that the Scriptures could be used to understand the future. According to Cassiodorus' definition, prophecy is *revelatio* or *inspiratio*. Bonaventure uses the same terms to discuss Scripture, and he says that not only are the Scriptures inspired revelation but they offer inspiration and a type of revelation to the reader if the exegete interprets the text according to the spiritual rather than the literal sense.⁹⁵

⁹² Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaemeron et Bonaventuriana quaedam selecta*, ed. Marie Ferdinand Delorme, vol. VIII, Bibliotheca Franciscana Scholastici Medii Aevi (Quaracchi, 1934).

⁹³ The secretary recording the *Collationes* expresses considerable dismay at this omission: "But alas, alas, alas, as a higher state and an excess of life came upon the lord and master, the visions did not receive their completion." Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaemeron et Bonaventuriana quaedam selecta*, 275 translated by McGinn, *Calabrian Abbot*, 215.

⁹⁴ The principal study on Bonaventure's conception of history as expressed in the *Collationes in Hexaemeron* is Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*.

⁹⁵ Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaemeron et Bonaventuriana quaedam selecta* II 19, p 339b. See Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 62ff.

Bonaventure explains that the Scriptures are the source of true knowledge, and, while the Scriptures are themselves closed, understanding of them will continue to unfold and grow in time.⁹⁶

The Scriptures describes the past and present, but for Bonaventure their ultimate purpose is to point toward the future. These Scriptural revelations about the future are partly accessible through exegesis, and according to Bonaventure there were three levels of exegesis that serve to unlock the greater meaning contained within and provide inspired understanding.⁹⁷ The first is *spiritualis intelligentia*, a term Bonaventure here utilizes to mean a reading past the literal sense to the allegorical, tropological, or anagogical meanings. Closely related is a second type of exegesis, the *figurae sacramentales*, by which Scripture is seen to speak of both Christ and Anti-Christ throughout all its books. Third is the *multiformes theoriae*, which Bonaventure describes in terms of a number of “seeds.” From a single seed an entire forest can grow, and in turn the forest brings forth additional seeds. Only to God in His knowledge are these innumerable seeds known. Conjecture allows an exegete to access some of these deeper meanings but to truly understand the fullest and truest meanings requires a gift of inspiration from the Holy Spirit.⁹⁸

For Bonaventure, knowledge of history and awareness of its meaning arise in the interplay between the Old and the New Testament, which in Bonaventure’s conception is very similar to Joachim’s concordance theory.⁹⁹ What Scripture tells us about the past increases our understanding of the present and, more important in Bonaventure’s view, provides a window to the future. Awareness of these concordances arises and increases through time, so what was not

⁹⁶ Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaameron et Bonaventuriana quaedam selecta* III 24, p 347a. See Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 66-71 and 83-84.

⁹⁷ Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaameron et Bonaventuriana quaedam selecta* XIII 2, described by Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 7-8.

⁹⁸ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 70-71.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10-19.

possible for the Fathers to understand because of their relative position in history may be more easily known to exegetes in the present. Although similar to Joachim's original formulation, Bonaventure's views differed from those of the more radical Joachites, especially in their ideas about the progression of the Scriptures. Gerard of Borgo San Donnino had regarded the writings of Joachim as a new and eternal Gospel that superseded the New Testament. This position was condemned by the Church, and Bonaventure rejected it too. To Bonaventure, the New Testament is already the eternal Gospel and covenant, and for him there was to be no new Gospel but rather an unfolding and developing understanding of the New Testament, particularly as the Church entered the final stage of the sixth age.¹⁰⁰

Expanding on a position already present in the *Legenda maior*, the *Collationes in Hexaemeron* places Saint Francis in a critical and unique position within God's eschatological plan. As with many Franciscans, Bonaventure believed that Joachim had correctly predicted both Francis' and Dominic's coming and their special historical place. In the *Collationes* Bonaventure designates Francis as both a new John the Baptist and a new Elijah, and Dominic as a new Enoch.¹⁰¹ Moreover, Joachim had predicted the coming of an "angel with the seal of the living God" and that this "angel" would found a new order to lead the *ecclesia contemplativa* of the sixth age into the Sabbath Rest of the seventh. Bonaventure accepted much of this view and believed that Francis was, in fact, this figure and, inspired by him, a new order of the final age would be founded.¹⁰² Francis was given the gift of prophecy as a sign of his position and as a means to carry out his mission, but he was also endowed with inspired knowledge of the true meaning of the Scriptures – that is, with spiritual intelligence. Not only was spiritual intelligence

¹⁰⁰ Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaemeron et Bonaventuriana quaedam selecta*, XVI, 2.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., XV, 28 " . . . Elijah must come; he will restore all things again (he will restore the state of the *ecclesia primitiva*); with him Enoch will also come. But the Beast will overcome the two witnesses." Translated in Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 33.

¹⁰² Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 31ff.

a gift possessed by Francis himself, according to the *Legenda*, but now, made more explicit in the *Collationes Hexaemeron*'s later formulation, it was also a gift to be shared by the members of Francis' future contemplative order.¹⁰³

In comparing the thought of Bonaventure and Aquinas it is commonplace to describe Aquinas as "Aristotelian" and Bonaventure as "Augustinian."¹⁰⁴ At least on prophecy, however, Aquinas was in many ways the closer of the two to Augustine. Aquinas' thought and approach were influenced and shaped by Aristotelian terms and categories, but he employs them to give greater definition and support to positions originating from the thought of Augustine. Like Augustine, Aquinas does not seem to have been interested in contemporary prophecy. When faced with modern-day examples, such as Joachim, Aquinas was critical much as Augustine had been with the Montanists, and both Aquinas and Augustine rejected attempts to use concordances between the Old and New Testaments as a means to predict details about the future. Aquinas, moreover, did not believe that revelation and prophecy would increase in the future but instead he believed it to be primarily located in the past: he considered Moses to be the greatest prophet and throughout the ages of the Church (before the law, under the law, and under grace) Aquinas considered the earliest era within each age to have possessed the highest degree of prophecy.¹⁰⁵

Bonaventure took a different position on many of these same issues and held a conception of prophecy that seems to owe more to Joachim of Fiore than Augustine. In particular, Bonaventure

¹⁰³ According to Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 46-55, Bonaventure did not see a present Franciscan Order as this new contemplative order, but rather the present Order it prepared the way for its coming in the seventh age.

¹⁰⁴ Étienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, trans. Illtyd Trethowan and F. J. Sheed (New York: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1965), 445; Fernand van Steenberghen, *Aristotle in the West: The Origins of Latin Aristotelianism* (Louvain: E. Nauwelaerts, 1955), 159-162.

¹⁰⁵ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2a, 2ae q. 174 art 4 and 6.

advocated a position where certain approaches to reading Scripture could predict the future, especially when such readings were aided by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, as history progressed, Bonaventure believed, the Holy Spirit would increasingly provide this gift of understanding to the Church, giving it deeper understanding of the meaning of the Scriptures and the future. Prophecy, especially in the figure of Saint Francis, was of crucial importance in Bonaventure's scenario.

Aquinas (along with Hugh of Saint-Cher) helped to establish what can be regarded as a characteristic Dominican view on prophecy, or at least that is what it became. Even more so, Bonaventure's thought offered a position on prophecy that was primarily Franciscan in orientation. Largely extending from these two positions, debate over the nature of prophecy continued through the thirteenth and into the fourteenth century, with new developments further shaping the rival conceptions. Central to these developments was the Franciscan theologian Peter John Olivi, who came to be regarded as a representative of the growing "Spiritual" wing within the Franciscan Order. Building on Bonaventure's views after Bonaventure's death, Olivi extended some of these ideas, further embracing Joachimism while at the same time seeking to justify his position through a variety of scholastic treatises and exegetical works.

Chapter 3 The Spiritual Moment

Due in large part to Bonaventure, conceptions of prophecy that included inspired exegesis or *spiritualis intelligentia* continued to find a hearing especially among Franciscans, and in their Bonaventuran form certain Joachite ideas (especially concerning Francis' eschatological importance) became part of the Order's official biography of its founder. Despite Bonaventure's influence, however, the fortunes of Joachite conceptions of prophecy remained precarious, particularly among academic writers, and while in his *Collationes in Hexaemeron* Bonaventure may have been moving toward a more scholastic articulation of prophecy in Joachite terms, this work was left unfinished, and the full implications of Bonaventure's thought on prophecy therefore remained implicit rather than fully developed. Thus, at the end of the 1270s there had yet to be produced a full defense or articulation of *intelligentia spiritualis* in the manner of the schoolmen. The tenuous status of Joachite conceptions, even among Franciscan thinkers, is attested to by David Burr's investigation of six Franciscan Biblical commentaries, written in the 1280s and 1290s, that reveals that many treated such ideas with polite respect instead of approval or acceptance.¹

¹ These exegetes usually included Joachim among the *auctoritates* they listed in their introductions or else cited him in support of the meaning of a particular word or passage. None, however, cite him prominently nor utilize any of his major ideas in their own formulations. When coming to passages that would seem to call out for a discussion of Joachite interpretations, one often finds instead that these exegetes simply chose to politely ignore him. In a similar manner, they tend to pass over Bonaventure as well. In particular they disregarded Bonaventure's specific periodization of ages and while they assigned eschatological significance to Saint Francis, they avoided making any literal identification of Francis with the angel of Revelation 7:2. See Burr, *Olivi's Peaceable Kingdom*, 44–54.

Against this trend, Franciscan Peter John Olivi (1248-1298) employed the concepts and methods of the schools to articulate an explanation and defense of Joachite ideas and in doing so made explicit what had been implicit in Bonaventure. As had Joachim, Olivi regarded *intelligentia spiritualis* to be the modern-day successor of *prophetia*. Unlike Joachim, who claimed he did not possess *prophetia* and had described *spiritualis intelligentia* as a third category for making predictions, Olivi was more willing to characterize the two categories as essentially similar as he drew comparisons to Biblical prophecy.

Olivi and those, both learned and uneducated, who took up his ideas in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century also combined a Joachite theology of history with a desire for radical reform in the areas of apostolic poverty and observance of the Rule of Saint Francis. Olivi likewise regarded strict observance of the Rule as a means to approach the ideal apostolic life. For Olivi and those who thought like him these matters held apocalyptic significance, for in them they saw the Church's preparation for the Last Age and the final return of Christ.

Because Joachite conceptions of prophecy became associated with the *usus pauper* controversy and Spiritual Franciscans' agitations for radical reform, the Church came to treat expressions of *spiritualis intelligentia* with increasing hostility. Indeed, as the Church condemned Olivi and persecuted the Spiritual Franciscans for their radical agenda of reform, prophecy in general came to be viewed with suspicion. Outside of the immediate context of the crisis with the Spirituals, however, a certain degree of ambivalence seems to have surrounded prophecy, even for prophecy that was expressed as *spiritualis intelligentia*. Thus it is not easy to separate the Church's disdain for the Spirituals from its views on prophecy during these years since prophecy was usually practiced by those who had at least some connection to the Spirituals.

This chapter will also explore Olivi's role in the transmission of Joachite ideas and conceptions of prophecy to others, both during his lifetime and through his posthumous influence. Especially after he died, Olivi's previous connections with the Spirituals assured diffusion of many of these ideas about prophecy among their sympathizers, including to groups of pious laymen and laywomen, who took them up but also modified them according to their own assumptions about the nature of prophecy. Thus Olivi's less educated lay enthusiasts recast Joachite predictions into their own conceptions of *prophetia* rather than *intelligentia spiritualis*. Here too it is difficult to gauge the Church's attitudes toward prophecy. Although the Church uniformly condemned these lay people for their beliefs and expressions of prophecy, the extension of Olivi's ideas about prophecy to the laity was accompanied by the other elements of the Spirituals' program.

The influence of Joachite and Olivian thought also extended to more educated followers, including Arnold of Villanova – who was a layman, but an elite and highly educated one – and to the Franciscan John of Rupescissa. Unlike less educated followers of the Spirituals, Arnold of Villanova and John of Rupescissa self-consciously utilized the concept of *intelligentia spiritualis* to make predictions about the apocalyptic future. With Arnold and Rupescissa the reaction of the Church was somewhat more ambivalent, for while they were both associated with Spiritual Franciscans, each was active outside the time when the Church's persecution of the Spirituals was most severe. Arnold, whose prophesying preceded the main persecutions, was jailed more than once on account of his predictive writings but was quickly released each time and ended his life in service to the pope. Rupescissa began prophesying near the end of the persecutions and was imprisoned for the last twenty years of his life. But for much of that time Rupescissa was

allowed and even encouraged to continue prophesying, he was supplied with writing materials, and cardinals visited with him in his cell to hear his prophecies.

3.1 Peter John Olivi: A Scholastic Joachite?

Peter John Olivi's biography and thought have been well-studied, especially by David Burr.² Born in the Languedoc region of southern France, Olivi entered the Franciscan order at the age of twelve, one year younger than youths were normally admitted. After early education in Serignan, Olivi went on to study at Paris sometime in the mid-1260s, where he encountered a way of reading the Bible, the *Sentences*, and other texts in a manner very similar to how Bonaventure or Aquinas approached them. While Olivi would later object to certain forms of Aristotelianism that he regarded as subverting Christian faith, his academic background was rooted in Aristotelian philosophy. He would remain a committed scholastic theologian, and throughout his career he would cite Aristotle as an authority, even as he recognized the limits of such an approach for understanding various aspects of Christian doctrine.³

It is uncertain whether Olivi finished his baccalaureate, but it is clear that he did not become a master. This may have been due to suspicions about his orthodoxy, for he faced several accusations in the 1270s, especially, it seems, over unspecified opinions about the Virgin Mary and an assortment of other theological doctrines.⁴ In the 1280s Olivi continued to elicit controversy, particularly as a result of his role in Franciscan debates over poverty. Central to this

² For instance: Burr, *Olivi's Peaceable Kingdom*; David Burr, *Olivi and Franciscan Poverty: The Origins of Usus Pauper Controversy*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989).

³ David Burr, *The Persecution of Peter Olivi*, vol. 66, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society: New Series (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1976), 25–30; David Burr, "The Apocalyptic Element in Olivi's Critique of Aristotle," *Church History* 40, no. 1 (March 1971): 15–29.

⁴ Burr, *The Persecution of Peter Olivi*.

debate was the issue of whether the vow of poverty implied not just the renunciation of ownership but also *usus pauper*, or “poor use.”⁵ Most agreed that actual ownership of property was forbidden to Franciscans but that certain goods would still be required for the necessities of life or for a friar to carry out his particular office (especially, for instance, if he was a bishop). To account for this, ownership of such goods was assigned to the Holy See, and the friar was permitted “poor use.” Nicholas III’s 1279 bull *Exiit qui seminat* (whose preparers had consulted Olivi’s opinion) confirmed this idea, but the debate remained unsettled. Olivi, in particular, argued that poor use should be limited only to what was necessary and that adhering to this principle was a necessary part of the vow. The problem with this view, at least in the eyes of Olivi’s opponents, was that it was too vague. How would one know precisely what was “necessary” and what was not? This was a serious matter because breaking a vow involved mortal sin.⁶

In 1283 Olivi was the subject of an examination that resulted in his censure. Although his position on *usus pauper* contributed, the immediate cause for the trouble seems to have been a protracted conflict between Olivi and another lector over a variety of issues, especially certain points of philosophy and theology.⁷ He had to defend himself again several times from 1283 to 1285 but in 1287 a General Chapter at Montpellier ruled in his favor. Olivi’s reputation was sufficiently rehabilitated that his Franciscan superiors assigned him a teaching position at Florence from 1287 to 1289 and then at Montpellier before he was transferred to Narbonne around 1292, where he remained until his death. Although Olivi’s support of rigorist positions on the Franciscan rule, and poverty in particular, remained matters of controversy during his life, his

⁵ Burr, *Olivi and Franciscan Poverty*.

⁶ At least at the outset of this debate many of Olivi’s opponents did not deny that *usus pauper* implied limits, but unlike Olivi they denied that one was bound to poor use in such a way that breaking it incurred mortal sin.

⁷ Burr, *Olivi’s Peaceable Kingdom*, 64.

eschatology and views on prophetic knowledge – present throughout many of his writings – nonetheless do not seem to have elicited any great alarm, at least not before his death in 1298.

While Olivi's formative years found him in Paris at the same time as a number of illustrious thinkers, it was Bonaventure who exerted the greatest influence. At Paris a young Olivi heard Bonaventure on several occasions. Olivi tells us that he was present at the delivery of the *Collationes de septem donis spiritus sancti* in 1268 (not to be confused with the later *Collationes in Hexaemeron*).⁸ Olivi may have been in the audience at a 1266 general chapter meeting as well. Bonaventure's passing through Paris at different times, moreover, would have provided additional opportunities for Olivi to hear him, enough for Olivi to state that he had listened to Bonaventure "often."⁹

Olivi was impressed by Bonaventure's eschatology and came to share Bonaventure's view that the Franciscan Order occupied a central role in God's apocalyptic plan. Olivi says he heard Bonaventure preach at Paris that "through a revelation that is clear and worthy of faith" it had been established that Saint Francis was the angel of the sixth seal, Olivi developed in his own writings a position that the appearance of Francis had inaugurated a new age in history.¹⁰ In this new age, Olivi advocated the familiar Joachite position that a new order of contemplatives would appear. Guided by spiritual intelligence and a greater awareness of the true meaning of the Scriptures, these new men would lead the Church in a return to apostolic perfection, thereby preparing the world for the final return of Christ.

⁸ Peter John Olivi, "'*Quaestiones de perfectione evangelica*'" in Peter John Olivi, "'*Quaestiones de Perfectione Evangelica*'" in Peter Olivi: On Poverty and Revenue," ed. David Burr and David Flood, *Franciscan Studies* 40 (1980): 47.

⁹ Burr, *Olivi's Peaceable Kingdom*, 63–64.

¹⁰ Peter John Olivi, "Tractatus de Usu Paupere," in *De Usu Paupere: The Quaestio and the Tractatus* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1992), 138. Burr, *Olivi's Peaceable Kingdom*, 63.

3.1.1 Olivi's Synthesis of Joachimism with Scholastic Thought

While Olivi's Joachite eschatology is present and developed across a range of his works, the fullest articulations of his views on prophecy itself are found in two Biblical commentaries: the *Lectura super Isaiam* and the *Lectura super Apocalypsim*.¹¹ The prologue to *Lectura super Isaiam*, written early in his career, perhaps about 1280, is Olivi's closest equivalent to a scholastic *De prophetia* treatise.¹² In it Olivi addressed a number of the same questions covered by earlier writers of the genre while at the same time exploring additional questions brought about by his Joachite conception of history. *Lectura super Apocalypsim* (1298), completed in the final year of his life, contains no explicit discussion of the nature of prophecy in general but is nonetheless Olivi's final and fullest statement of his view of history, applied to the book of the Bible that had the greatest significance for these positions.

In *Lectura super Isaiam* Olivi begins by addressing the question of whether prophets saw into the "mirror of eternity" (*speculum aeternitatis*). Olivi held that the prophet did not see into the *speculum aeternitatis*. Prophetic insight and certainty, therefore, do not come from looking into the mirror of eternity; but rather, Olivi suggests, they come from a change that occurs in the prophet's mind. Thus, Olivi opens with the *speculum aeternitatis* discussion primarily as a platform for entering into questions that are more in his interests and align with his conception of

¹¹ Peter John Olivi, "Lectura Super Isaiam," in *Peter of John Olivi on the Bible*, ed. David Flood and Gedeon Gal (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1997); Peter John Olivi, "Lectura Super Apocalypsim," in *Peter John Olivi: Prophet of the Year 2000*, by Warren Lewis (Ph.D. diss., Tübingen, 1972). Olivi's early commentaries, for instance on Matthew and Job, also drew heavily on Joachim's work and historical schema. The Isaiah and Apocalypse commentaries, however, most clearly discuss the concept of prophecy. On Olivi's Matthew commentary see Kevin J. Madigan, "The History of Thirteenth-Century Biblical Exegesis," *Oliviana. Mouvements et Dissidences Spirituels XIIIe-XIVe Siècles*, no. 1 (February 24, 2003), <http://oliviana.revues.org/10>. (which does not include an edition of the text); on his Job commentary see the edition by Peter John Olivi, *Petrus Iohannis Olivi Postilla Super Iob*, ed. Alain Boureau, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 275 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015).

¹² David Burr, "Olivi on Prophecy," *Lo Statuto Della Profezia Nel Medioevo*, *Cristianesimo nella storia*, 17, no. 2 (1996): 379. On the dating of the commentary, see Burr, *Olivi and Franciscan Poverty*, 55 n. 36.

prophecy. These include his discussion of Augustine's theory of visions, whether prophecy should be considered a *habitus*, and the role of contemplation in prophecy.

Olivi agreed with previous interpreters that revelation could be communicated to the prophet in a variety of ways, and a common starting point for understanding the variety of prophetic experience was Augustine's theory on visions. Echoing Augustine's formulation, Olivi explains how prophetic revelation might be granted through one (or in combination) of three ways: corporeally, through imaginary vision, or through revelation imparted directly by God to the mind of prophet. Certain prophets experienced visions of one sort or the other, while others experienced more than one type. As had been the case with Balaam, Olivi considered the possibility that even evil men might be granted prophetic visions, particularly of the corporeal or imaginary kind. For Olivi, it was also possible that, having received such a vision, the prophet might not always be certain that it was granted by God, or the prophet might also not know what was meant by the revelation. As another case of this sort of prophecy, Olivi utilizes the familiar examples of Nebuchadnezzar as well as the pharaoh whose dream Joseph had interpreted.¹³

While Olivi considered corporeal and imaginary visions to constitute true prophecy, it was Augustine's third category of visions, the intellectual vision that God imprints directly on the mind of the prophet, that Olivi (as others) regarded as the more perfect example of prophecy. Not only did this type of prophecy exist when God communicated prophetic vision directly to the intellect, but moreover Olivi believed this highest form of prophecy was often also accompanied by God actually effecting a change to the prophet's mind. Such a change enabled understanding and certitude, even for such things as could not be proven by human reasoning, "For," as Olivi writes, "when the mind is altered in the highest, most intense, and liveliest way by God, one

¹³ Olivi, "Lectura Super Isaiaam," 195. Olivi also includes Daniel and John the Divine as prophets who did not always understand the meaning of what was revealed to them. Even Mary's Annunciation was not explained to her in its spiritual sense.

cannot doubt that the alteration is caused by God, and consequently one understands through a most certain sense or taste (*gustus*) that what is said or shown is infallibly true.”¹⁴

Burr points out that Olivi’s term *gustus* reveals that his conception of prophecy was closely related to his understanding of contemplation.¹⁵ In *Quaestiones de perfectione evangelica* (1279) Olivi had described contemplation as the means through which we achieve our ultimate end, wherein we are brought to knowledge and love of God. Love brought about through contemplation carries with it vision and an intimacy and union with God. In explaining contemplation, Olivi also argues for the superiority of the contemplative life over the active. Through contemplation, we achieve our ultimate end of love of God immediately, he claimed, whereas through the active life we are only disposed to achieving it. This qualification does not mean that Olivi rejects the active life: since Olivi believes that love for God also leads one to action as well as contemplation, and, further, because no one possesses enough spiritual stamina to be fully devoted to the contemplative life.

An aspect of the active life that Olivi considers valuable is Christian study, which when properly oriented can aid in achieving contemplative love of God and which can be a useful temporary pursuit when one cannot sustain fervent contemplation. Biblical study can help free the mind from worldly concerns and, more important, study of the Bible and auxiliary disciplines in the service of Biblical study (Olivi specifies grammar and logic) can promote cognition that leads one to, and is fulfilled by, love in the contemplative life. According to Olivi, only those

¹⁴ Ibid. “Quando enim mens altissime et intimissime [alt MS: intentissime] et vivacissime immutatur a deo non potest dubitare illam immutationem esse a deo ac per consequens et illa que sibi tunc ostenduntur vel dicuntur quodam certissimo sensu vel gustu sentit esse a deo, et eo ipso est certissima quod illa infallibiliter sunt vera. Ex secundo vero sumit hoc modo certitudinem, in ipsa visione seu allocutione et in ipsa re prout est obiectum talis revaluationis sentit aliquando mens prophetica quandam [alt MS: quodam] gustum [alt MS adds: veritatis et] divinitatis aut cuiusdam divinissimmi ordinis in quo quodam infallibile [alt MS: ineffabile] divine sapientie homo apprehendit esse ita quod non potest dubitare quin illud quod videt sit verissimum et divinissimum et tamen cum hoc bene videt quod nullo modo possit illud probare per rationem humanam.”

¹⁵ Burr, “Olivi on Prophecy,” 381.

types of study that are properly oriented toward God are beneficial; those that are not useful for study of the Scriptures he considered to be harmful.¹⁶

In his Isaiah commentary (c. 1280) Olivi continued to assume positions on prophecy's relationship to both contemplation and study that diverged from those of certain schoolmen. Aquinas, for instance, considered prophecy to reside primarily within the realm of received knowledge. As Burr notes, Aquinas considered contemplation in his own Isaiah commentary but only to distinguish it from prophecy. Olivi, too, considered prophecy to be related to knowledge but he also considered it to have affective and deductive aspects.¹⁷ For Olivi, prophecy was not just a type of knowledge but it could also be a type of experience by which "God Himself, His truth and His sweetness are tasted (*gustus*)."¹⁸ Moreover, because Olivi's viewed contemplation as being linked to or even to be enhanced by study, he also favored the idea that a prophet could deduce prophetic conclusions from inspired insight. Alternative conceptions regarded learning and study as impediments to receiving divine revelation because human understanding might interfere with or alter God's word. In contrast, Olivi considered a more positive role for study and adopted Joachim's position that study, when properly directed, could prepare one's soul to receive spiritual understanding and insight.

In developing this conception of prophecy Olivi was aware that actual instances of prophecy were varied. This is the case with certain Biblical examples of prophecy such as Balaam, to whom God granted prophetic vision without *gustus*.¹⁹ Olivi extended his explanation beyond Biblical examples to contemporary ones as well. He writes that "a very holy person" once told

¹⁶ David Burr, "Petrus Ioannis Olivi and the Philosophers," *Franciscan Studies* 31 (1971): 41–71, 2ff.

¹⁷ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 85 n. 49.

¹⁸ Olivi, "Lectura Super Isaiam", BN53r, PU14vb: "Nec per hoc nego quin tunc vere Deus ipse et eius veritas et suavitas gustetur. Sed quod non attingitur per immediatam visionem creati speculi mediationem."

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

him that prophetic revelation was first given to her with *gustus* but later instances came without *gustus* and “in an intellectual way.” Similarly, the degree of certitude about the divine origin of prophetic vision or full understanding of its meaning might vary among prophets, and it might also vary for one prophet from vision to vision. Sometimes the prophet is sure of the divine origin; at others the assurance might be limited and incomplete. Here Olivi refers to the often-cited examples of Nebuchadnezzar and the pharaoh. Uniquely, he also states that even Daniel and John the Divine did not always understand the meaning of all that had been revealed to them.²⁰ Even the Virgin Mary at the Annunciation knew that the angel was divinely sent and that she would give birth to the son of God, but she did not know if she would do so in a spiritual or carnal way. In other cases God intends a vision to have multiple meanings, but the prophet himself or herself might know only some of them.²¹

To explain how the prophet comes to understand these things, Olivi recognizes several possibilities. First, prophetic knowledge can involve simple reception of words or visions. Olivi accepts this type of prophecy although he is not particularly interested in explaining it. As Burr explains, Olivi was far more interested in the possibility that a habitual disposition might enable prophetic understanding, and this is a topic that Olivi considers at greater length. The question of whether prophecy should be understood as a *habitus*, that is, a habitual or deeply ingrained disposition of the mind or ability, was an issue discussed in various *De prophetia* treatises. As will be recalled, William of Auxerre and Philip the Chancellor regarded prophecy in this way and Bonaventure may also have considered prophecy to be a *habitus*. Hugh of St. Cher took the opposite view and Aquinas was the most famous proponent of this idea, holding that prophecy was not a permanent ability and that the prophet was not free to prophesy according to his own

²⁰ Olivi, “Lectura Super Isaiaam”, BN53r-v, PU14vb-ra.

²¹ Ibid., BN53v, PU15ra-rb.

will. In the prologue to his Isaiah commentary Olivi takes the position that prophecy ought to be considered a *habitus*.²²

Olivi states that first, *habitus* might involve preparation of the intellect and, second, that it might involve habitual wisdom or knowledge which could lead to habitual understanding of a truth.²³ For the first type of habitual disposition Olivi offers the example of Daniel and his ability to interpret dreams and visions, for he had been granted “a certain intellectual acumen and affective vivacity for the purpose of examining dreams easily and profoundly, so that he could discover whether they were from God and what they meant.” To illustrate the second types of habitual disposition Olivi again uses Daniel, but he includes Joachim as well:

[Daniel enjoyed]...a habitual wisdom or knowledge concerning the general laws of divine providence, according to which God rules all things, especially human events. Through this knowledge Daniel judged dreams, just as we use general principles to judge particular conclusions. And in this way Joachim, in his *Liber de concordia* and *Expositio Apocalypsim*, says he suddenly received the entire concordance of the Old and New Testaments in the form of some general rules from which, by deduction, he later deduced certain things, some of which (it seemed to him) he considered himself to know as certain conclusions, while he saw others only as probable conjectures which might be erroneous. It is just the same with the natural light of intellect joined to us from the beginning of our condition. Through it, without any argumentation, we know first principles, and from these we infer some conclusions necessarily, others only probably. In the latter case we are capable of error, yet it does not thereby follow that the light itself is not from God, or that what is indicated by it is in itself false. I say this because there are those who wish to conclude that Joachim’s whole understanding was from the devil or by conjecture of the human imagination, because in certain particulars what he said was merely opinion and occasionally perhaps even false.²⁴

²² Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 82–83.

²³ Olivi discusses a third way that prophecy pertained to a habitual characteristic, of the prophet’s faith that leads the prophet to unquestioning belief that the thing prophesied will occur or is already true. This relates to Olivi’s thought on future contingents, which is beyond the scope of the present study.

²⁴ Olivi, “Lectura Super Isaiaim”, 197–198; trans. Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 83. “Habitudo vero qui ad hoc valet triplicis generis esse potest. Aut enim dicit solam exaccutionem et clarificationem aciei ipsius intellectus. Sicut enim alibi ostendi quidam habitus sunt in intellectu qui non dicunt nisi quandam habitualem exaccutionem et clarificationem ipsius intellectus, aut dicit aliquam scientiam habitualem, ita quod datur homini habitualis intelligentia alicuius veritatis, aut dicit adhesionem habitualem per modum fidei adherentem, utpote quod homo habet firmissimam estimationem et credulitatem quod ita sit aut erit. Et hoc ut credo est unum de his que generalius et magis continue certificant mentes prophetarum. Unde et hoc est

Burr contends that Olivi, by associating Joachim with Daniel, is making a case that Joachim is a prophet.²⁵ Habitual wisdom concerning the laws of divine providence allowed Daniel to understand dreams. Likewise Joachim was granted habitual knowledge about the entire concordance of the Old and New Testaments, which allowed him to derive understanding of the meaning of the Scriptures.

According to Olivi, Joachim's predictions that did not come true did not discredit him as a prophet, nor, as he says some charged, did Joachim's mistakes indicate that his whole understanding was conjecture or demonic deceit. In a passage from the Apocalypse commentary (1298) that more fully develops this point from the Isaiah commentary, Olivi discusses Joachim's mistaken opinion that the fifth period would end in the year 1200:

on this and similar matters Joachim was offering opinions, not making assertions. For just as, through the natural light of our intellects, we know some things unquestionably as first principles, know others as conclusions necessarily deduced from these principles, and hold still others only as opinions formed on the basis of probable argument; and in the latter case we are often wrong, yet the concreated light granted to us is not on that account false, nor are we incorrect insofar as we recognize that our opinions are not infallible; thus the light given freely to us through revelation knows certain things as first and unquestionable revealed principles, knows others as

magis commune bonis et malis prophetis. Medius autem modus circa contingentia aut super intellectualia, que rationibus sillogisticis probari non possunt, non credo quod habeat rationem scientie vel intelligentie nisi iuxta modum in principio huius positionis premissum. Et ille modus fundatur in fide, sicut flos vel fructus in arbore vel radice. Primum habitum credo quod habebat Daniel quando dicitur quod dederat ei Deus intelligentiam sompniorum et visionum. Erat enim sibi datum quoddam clarum accumen in intellectu, et quedam vivacitas in affectu ad faciliter et profunde examinanda sompnia, an essent a bono spiritu vel non, et an hoc vel illud significarent. Estimo etiam quod data ert ei aliqua habitualis scientia seu sapientia generalium legum seu regularum divine providentie, secundum quas regit omnia et specialiter humana secundaum quas iudicabat de somniis illis, sicut suo modo per principia univesalia iudicamus de particularibus conclusionibus. Et hoc modo Ioachim, in libro de concordia et in expositione Apocalypsis, dicit se subito accepisse totam concordiam veteris et novi testamenti quantum ad quasdam generales regulas, ex quibus ipse postmodum aliqua quasi argumentando deducit, et ut sibi videtur, aliquando sic quod ex hoc extimat se habere certam intlligentiam conclusionis sic deducte, aliquando vero non nisi probabilem coniecturam in qua plerumque potuiit falli. Et est simile in naturali lumine intellectus nobis ab inicio nostre conditionis iuncto. Per illud enim sine aliqua argumentatione apprehendemus et scimus prima principia, et deinde aliqua conclusiones necessario inferimus per illa, aliquas vero solum probabiliter. Et in his plerumque fallimur. Non tamen ex hoc sequitur quod lumen illud non sit a Deo aut quod tota intelligentia Ioachim fuerit a dyabolo vel a coniectura spiritus humani, quia in quibusdam particularibus loquitur opinabiliter et forte aliquando fallibiliter.”

²⁵ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 86.

conclusions necessarily deduced from those principles, and holds certain views merely as probable and conjectural opinions formed on the basis of these. This is what seems to have occurred in the case of the knowledge of Scripture and the concordance of New and Old Testaments given by revelation to the Abbot Joachim, as he himself asserts.²⁶

Olivi employs the principles of logic to maintain that Joachim remained a prophet despite his mistaken opinions and that his errors in no way invalidate what he knows through prophecy. Such inaccuracies, Olivi states, were derived from probable conjecture and can therefore be false. First principles revealed to Joachim – his concordance of the Testaments and spiritual understanding of the Scriptures – are unquestionably true, however, because they came from God; also true are Joachim’s necessary conclusions because they are the result of his habitual prophetic disposition.

In these passages Olivi does not offer a solution for determining which opinions are necessary conclusions and which are only probable except to imply that the prophet knows the difference. But Olivi’s conception of prophecy does not require a prophet to be infallible in every prediction or interpretation he makes. Cassiodorus’ definition, which in its original formulation described prophecy as the “breath (*aspiratio*) of God” represents a conception of prophecy that assumes the prophet to be a passive mouthpiece. In contrast, Olivi’s conception (and Joachim’s) allows a prophet to assume a much more active role in expressing, formulating, and interpreting revelation. In some ways this idea was anticipated by Gilbert of Poitiers’ considerations of prophetic authorship or his substitution (and others’) of *inspiratio* for Cassiodorus’ *aspiratio*. But

²⁶ Olivi, “Lectura super Apocalypsim,” 395-96, translated in Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 81. “Super quo et consimilibus advertendum quod ipse plura dicit non assertorie sed opinative. Sicut enim ex naturali lumine intellectus nostri quedam scimus indubitabiliter ut prima principia, quedam vero ut conclusiones ex ipsis necessario deductas, quedam vero nescimus sed solum opinamur per probabiles rationes et in hoc tertio sepe fallimur pro quanto opiniones nostras scimus non esse sententias infallibiles; sic lumen per gratuitam revelationem datum quedam scit ut prima et indubitabilia principia revelata, quedam vero ut conclusiones ex ipsis necessariodeducta; quedam vero ex utrisque solum probabiliter et conjecturaliter opinatur; et sic videtur fuisse in intelligentia scripturarum et concordie novi et veteris testamenti per revelationem abbati Joachim, ut ipsemet asserit, data.”

Joachim's conception significantly expands and more confidently asserts a human role in prophetic activity. Olivi, moreover, applied Aristotelian concepts to support and defend this way of thinking: he employed the concept of *habitus* to associate the practice of *intelligentia spiritualis* with a Biblical model of prophecy and the rules of logic to explain the occasional deficiencies that human failings introduced.

A particular consequence of the idea of the prophet as a mouthpiece or conduit is that it could serve as a barrier for educated prophets because their learning might be seen as an impediment to unadulterated divine communication. In contrast, Joachim's and Olivi's model of inspired exegesis and spiritual understanding provides an avenue for learned men to practice prophecy. Indeed, portrayals of Saint Francis notwithstanding, the actual practice of inspired exegesis nearly requires the prophet to be educated.

In reply to Adam of Persigny's question Joachim said he was not a prophet. Olivi, however, seems to think that he was, and he considers Joachim to be as much a prophet as Daniel. Olivi regarded Joachim's initial insights as given by revelation. By immersing himself in study, prayer, and contemplation, Joachim prepared himself and cultivated a *habitus* that allowed him not only receive these revelations but also to understand and apply them in his own thinking, sometimes with prophetic certainty. In *Lectura super Apocalypsim* Olivi more directly describes Joachim as a prophet. When discussing when the sixth period of the Church began, Olivi states the new age had "a certain prophetic beginning" in the "revelation accorded to the Abbot Joachim and perhaps to certain others of his time."²⁷ As Burr summarizes Olivi's view: "The spirit that inspired the prophets to write the Bible also inspired Joachim to interpret it, and did so not by dictating the significance of specific passages, but by equipping Joachim with general rules of

²⁷ Olivi, "Lectura super Apocalypsim," 395-96.

interpretation, just as it once equipped Daniel with the general rules of divine providence, which allowed him to predict the future.”²⁸

3.1.2 Papal Condemnation of Olivi and Suppression of the Spiritual Franciscans

Although Olivi’s eschatological thought and advocacy of Joachite positions are present in numerous works written throughout his career, at least during his lifetime his views on such matters provoked little criticism or even notice by Church authorities. As has been mentioned, it was the issue of poverty that most made Olivi an object of controversy during his career. Olivi was often cautious how he expressed himself on *usus pauper*, and at times he wrote against more radical proponents. As a result he experienced periods of both favor and disfavor during his life from the hierarchy of Church and his religious superiors. Soon after his death in 1298, however, Olivi and his writings came under renewed suspicion, and a series of censures and condemnations were issued in the first few decades of the fourteenth century.

These condemnations of Olivi largely focused on his teachings on poverty, but they extended to his apocalyptic thought as well and especially as Olivi’s ideas about prophecy became associated with the Spiritual movement taking shape in the Franciscan Order. Although Spiritual views can be seen as originating with Hugh of Digne and similarly-minded Franciscans of the 1240s, and they elicited opposition as part of the *Evangelium aeternum* controversy of the 1250s, the Spiritual Franciscans began to coalesce as an identifiable faction within the Franciscan Order beginning in the 1270s. In particular, the emerging Spiritual movement advocated strict observance of poverty and sought reforms based on this ideal. They also attributed apocalyptic significance to their cause and frequently placed their struggle within a

²⁸ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 86.

context of Joachite views of history and the succession of ages in the Church. Thus, while poverty would remain the primary issue of dispute, as the Spirituals increasingly joined their cause with Joachite views on history and prophecy Franciscan and papal authorities criticized their Joachite views as well. Episodes of persecution alternated with attempts at compromise from the 1270s to the 1290s. In 1290 the first Franciscan pope, Nicholas IV, ordered an inquisition to be carried out by a Franciscan inquisitor. Although several brothers were punished for sowing schism, Olivi was spared, but not before having to explain himself before a general chapter concerning the degree to which he held *usus pauper* to be part of the vow.²⁹

After his death in 1298, the first actual condemnation to include elements of his eschatology (although *usus pauper* remained a primary issue) occurred at the Franciscan General Chapter meeting in Lyons in 1299. Part of the explanation of why Olivi's eschatological positions escaped notice until after his death may be that his Apocalypse commentary was finished only at the end of his life. While similar views were present throughout his writings, they are given their fullest expression in his commentary, at a time when the Church was beginning to recognize the implications of the Spirituals' apocalyptic views. Despite these factors, the immediate cause for the investigation of Olivi appears to have been the realization that lay people were beginning to revere Olivi as a saint, for the condemnation sought to dissolve "the sect of Brother Peter John."³⁰ The Lyons meeting condemned Olivi's teachings generally, gathered and burned his writings, and declared possession of his books an excommunicable offense. Visitations were ordered for southern France to determine the spread of these errors and correct them.

The formula for abjuration from Lyons condemns those who follow Olivi's teachings on poverty, accept his position about the wound in Christ's side, and venerate those who are not

²⁹ Ibid., 67–68.

³⁰ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 88.

officially canonized. Of these, the wound in Christ's side is most relevant for the purposes of this study since it seems to refer to Olivi's interest in prophecy. Olivi had recognized that the Gospels clearly state that Christ died before being pierced in the side with the lance. However, he says he had heard from a certain female lay visionary that Christ was in fact still alive when struck in the side. As a result of this conversation, Olivi seems to have been willing to consider this alternative, and he investigated ways to harmonize the Gospel account with what had been revealed to his visionary source.³¹ Olivi's speculation about Christ's wound came up again at the Council of Vienne, as well as during later prosecutions of Beguins. What is important about this matter of the wound is that, if Olivi was seen to be a proponent of a reading so plainly divergent from the orthodox understanding of this passage, this called into question Olivi's orthodoxy on other matters – especially those related to or derived from visionary testimony.³²

Another provincial council of the same year, presided over by the Bishop of Narbonne at Béziers, passed a general resolution against “certain learned men and members of an established religious group” who were preaching to the laity that Antichrist was present and that the end of the world was near. No one was specified by name, but the resolution seems to be referring to Spirituals probably associated with Olivi. Not long after the 1299 condemnations, Olivi's Apocalypse commentary received particular scrutiny when Pope Boniface VIII requested that Giles of Rome refute the treatise. Although the date of Giles' refutation is not known and any text he produced is lost, since Boniface died in 1303 this request must have come sometime prior to that year.³³

³¹ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 154. Olivi does not specifically identify the woman.

³² Wendy Love Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits: Assessing Visions and Visionaries in the Late Middle Ages* (Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 64–65.

³³ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 375 n. 33.

Controversy continued and in 1308 Pope Clement V called for a council, in part to decide the orthodoxy of the Spirituals. Apart from the poverty question, the Council of Vienne (1311-1312) addressed several matters relating to prophecy. Although the council's decrees do not name Olivi, David Burr has argued convincingly that Olivi is the main subject for these questions at the council.³⁴ As has been discussed, Olivi's opinion about Christ's wounds was one issue. Another was that Olivi was said to have professed "false and fantastic prophecies concerning the Church" especially in his Apocalypse commentary. On the first question, the council ruled that Christ was already dead when pierced by the lance. The reason Olivi was not named in the council decree may be because in his writings he had technically presented this as an open question. On the second question, the Council did not even address the original charge. Burr suggests that this was because Pope Clement desired to create a settlement with the Spirituals and heal the rift between the Franciscan factions.³⁵

Any such settlement, however, was short lived. Groups of Tuscan Spirituals forcibly took over Franciscan houses in Arezzo, Asciano, and Carmignano in 1312 and similar takeovers soon occurred in southern France.³⁶ Soon after Clement died in 1314 John XXII was elected pope and, following a short period when supporters from both sides attempted to enlist his support, in 1317 John acted against the Spirituals, issuing a series of bulls against them and opening a period of persecution that was to last throughout the 1320s.

In 1318 John XXII's bull *Gloriosam ecclesiam* charged the Spirituals with holding that the promise of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled in them rather than in the Apostles at Pentecost, and

³⁴ Ibid., 156, bases his opinion on Olivi being named in another decree from the council issued on the same day (about poverty) and the close parallels between Olivi's teachings and those specified in the decree. The larger issues of concern for Clement at the Council of Vienne, of course, were the matters of Boniface VIII and the Templars.

³⁵ Ibid., 135ff.

³⁶ Ibid., 162.

therefore that the true gospel had been revealed to them alone. In this way John not only condemned the Spirituals' agitations for reform but also attacked their conception of prophecy – namely, that spiritual understanding would be given to them by the Holy Spirit. *Gloriosam ecclesiam* does not engage these ideas on their merits. Instead, it states these and their other ideas are “partly heretical, partly insane, and partly fabulous,” and rather than specifically refute them it states that such positions hold no reason or authority and that these beliefs stand as their own refutation.³⁷

At about the same time as *Gloriosam ecclesiam* was issued in 1318, Pope John began a process against Olivi's Apocalypse commentary. Initially, this process resulted in a report by a single theologian, extracting 84 passages from Olivi's commentary and offering opinions on each, most of which the theologian found to be in error, or to be of rash judgment, or to hold heretical notions. Patrick Nold tentatively identifies this theologian as the Augustinian hermit Gregory of Lucca.³⁸ John also entrusted Niccolo da Prato, cardinal bishop of Ostia, with the work of investigating Olivi's Apocalypse commentary. The cardinal responded by assembling a commission of eight theologians, including two Franciscans. The commission produced a report similar to Gregory's, but it commented on 60 extracts from the Apocalypse commentary instead of 84. As this commission was completing its work, the Franciscans order held its own general chapter meeting, using the opportunity to issue its own condemnation of Olivi's works.³⁹

³⁷ Burr, *Olivi's Peaceable Kingdom*, 203.

³⁸ Patrick Nold, “New Annotations of Pope John XXII and the Process against Peter of John Olivi's *Lectura Super Apocalipsim*,” *Oliviana. Mouvements et Dissidences Spirituels XIIIe-XIVe Siècles*, no. 4 (December 2012).

³⁹ Leo Amorós, “Series Condemnationum et Processum Contra Doctrinam et Sequaces Petri Ioannis Olivi,” *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 24 (1931): 495–512.

Likewise, theologians were at work condemning a Catalan apocalyptic work that seems to have been based on Olivi's.⁴⁰

As with *Gloriosam ecclesiam*, the reports of Gregory of Lucca and Cardinal Niccolo's commission censured the view that the Holy Spirit had revealed itself in a special way to the Spirituals. As in the papal bull, the commission of eight derided these views as "simply heretical, ridiculous, and insane."⁴¹ Both reports also found erroneous a number of Olivi's conclusions concerning the progression of ages, the superiority of the third age, and the notion that these later periods would enjoy greater knowledge and virtue than the time of the Apostles. From a manuscript of Gregory of Lucca's report, which contains marginal notes and annotations in the pope's own hand, it is clear that John XXII agreed with these assessments. Throughout the manuscript, John makes notes, indicating here and there agreement with his theologian's conclusions, sometimes simply by repeating Gregory's words - "erroneous," "temerarious," "blasphemous," and "heretical" - or otherwise marking Gregory's comments. For other passages John provides longer notes offering more substantial commentary. These notes show that John rejected Olivi's views that the fifth and sixth periods of the Church are superior to the first age of the Apostles, that the Holy Spirit will reveal greater truths to spiritual men of these later ages, and that the Church will degrade to a "carnal" state to be replaced by a new "spiritual" state.⁴²

The inquiries of 1318-1319 did not result in immediate papal condemnation of Olivi's works. In 1322 John declared that he would reserve judgment on Olivi for himself, although his

⁴⁰ Burr, *Olivi's Peaceable Kingdom*, 206-213.

⁴¹ Joseph Koch, "Der Prozess Gegen Die Postille Olivis Zur Apocalypse," *Recherches de Theologie Ancienne et Medievale* 5 (1933): 304. Translated by Burr, *Olivi's Peaceable Kingdom*, 207.

⁴² Nold, "New Annotations of Pope John XXII and the Process against Peter of John Olivi's *Lectura super Apocalypsim*."

full decision did not actually come until 1326, twenty-eight years after Olivi's death.⁴³ It seems that John objected to many of Olivi's prophetic ideas and especially his ideas about an opening of the Holy Spirit in the last days. But given his delay in officially condemning them, how important did he consider them? If John's positions on prophecy were merely an aspect of his larger dispute with the Spiritual Franciscans, did John consider them as crucial matters of doctrine outside of the prosecution of the Spirituals? Would he have condemned such positions if they had not been seen to be connected to the Spiritual Franciscans' stand on poverty? Although further evidence (such as the actual text of John's 1326 condemnation, which is not extant) that might help to definitively answer this question is lacking, it is at least plausible that the answer to these questions is "no" and that Olivi's theology of history, on its own, would not have seemed a pressing matter or particularly noxious doctrine.

Moreover, while association with the Spirituals certainly damaged the reputation of such views, it does not appear that negative judgment about these views was conclusive. Evidence for this conclusion can be seen in the reception of an Apocalypse commentary written by the Franciscan Henry of Cossey in 1333. Whereas other mainline Franciscan commentaries written between 1319 and 1333 had taken relatively safe paths and avoided many (but not all) of the more daring exegetical elements seemingly condemned with Olivi, Henry returns to a more Olivian approach concerning the concordances of Testaments and the growth of *spiritualis*

⁴³ To explain the pope's delay, Koch, "Der Prozess gegen die Postille Olivis zur Apocalypse" argued that these processes against Olivi, as well as processes against Spiritual ideals of poverty, were actually individual weapons employed by John XXII in a broader assault against the Spiritual Franciscans. According to Koch, by 1319 it might have seemed to John that sufficient progress was already being made against the spirituals, and thus the process against Olivi could wait. Subsequent scholars have criticized aspects of this view, but more recently Burr, *Olivi's Peaceable Kingdom*, 244-247 has suggested that its basic conclusions are at least plausible. Similarly hypothesizing that the process against Olivi could have been a flanking action against the spirituals and their position on poverty, Burr suggests that John's interest in Olivi waned as the Spirituals were on the retreat. Burr further surmises that once it became clear to John that the Spirituals were receiving renewed secular protection, especially from Ludwig the Bavarian, John acted against Olivi in an effort to demonstrate to such supporters that those they were defending were not merely challenging the authority of the pope, but in fact they were heretics as well.

intelligentia in the sixth period.⁴⁴ Despite such positions, Henry's commentary does not appear to have received criticism or condemnation. Part of the reason may be that Henry was a master at Cambridge and thus safely distant from the trouble with the Spirituals, but it also may be that Henry's commentary, despite certain Olivian positions, was not seen to support radical views on poverty.

It is difficult to separate Pope John XXII's views about prophecy from the Church's opposition to the content of the Spirituals' prophecies. John was not wholly opposed to the idea of prophets, since he sought a new process for the canonization of Hildegard of Bingen, who was best known for her prophecies.⁴⁵ John's delay in condemning Olivi and Henry of Cossey's commentary provide at least some indications that Church authorities were not absolutely opposed to the idea of *intellectus spiritualis* as a category of prophecy. Further evidence that papal condemnation of Olivi's Joachite views might have been conditional or merely an expedient tactic limited to the immediate controversy with the Spirituals can be seen in the later case of John of Rupescissa, who will be discussed below.

3.2 Prophecy Among the Learned and the Unlearned

It is clear from the Church condemnations of Olivi that he was thought to be influential among groups of laity. In this next section Olivi's influence on the prophetic thinking and practice of certain lay men and women in the early fourteenth century will be discussed, particularly his influence on Beguins and Third Order Franciscans in southern France, Italy, and

⁴⁴ The commentaries of Pierre Auriol (1319), Nicholas of Lyre (1329), and Poncio Carbonnel (1329?), for example take a safer approach and avoid many Olivian and Joachite interpretations and viewpoints. On these, and Henry of Cossey, see Burr, *Olivi's Peaceable Kingdom*, 247-261.

⁴⁵ George Ferzoco, "The Canonization and Doctorization of Hildegard of Bingen," in *A Companion to Hildegard of Bingen*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle, Debra L. Stoudt, and George Ferzoco, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 45 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 308.

Catalonia. The terms *béguin* or in Italian *bizocco* were used to describe various groups of laypersons who lived as if they were members of a religious order.⁴⁶ Some of them were Third Order Franciscans; others lived without a Rule. Not educated but, as practitioners of exceptional pious practices and religious devotion, not quite common folk either, the Beguins and Third Order Franciscans were nonetheless lower down the social stratum than most Spiritual Franciscan friars, and their enthusiasm for Joachite prophetic ideas is an important example of how the less educated encountered notions of prophecy.

Although Olivi spent time and preached in Florence, in Italy Joachite ideas were largely conveyed to the laity via the preaching activity of his intellectual disciples, especially the Spiritual Franciscans Ubertino of Casale and Angelo Clareno. In Catalonia, the transmission of these ideas came primarily as a result of the activities of Arnold of Villanova, a lay physician, diplomat, and eschatological writer influenced by Joachite ideas. An educated man, Arnold of Villanova eventually came to believe that he himself had been granted the gift of *spiritualis intelligentia*. Much like Joachim of Fiore, Arnold of Villanova claimed that visionary insights guided his Scriptural studies about Antichrist and the Last Days.

In Olivi's native Languedoc, however, his own influence was more direct and the content of what was conveyed can be detected with greater certainty. Here, through his preaching and other personal interactions, including his seeking out of lay visionaries, Olivi conveyed some of his thought directly. Following his death, this influence increased as many, particularly in Narbonne, began to revere Olivi not only as a prophet but as a saint. Based on oral tradition and through his

⁴⁶ Olivi himself uses this term. In a letter of 1295 he remarked that Charles of Naples might be worried that if Olivi tutored his sons that he would be seen to "begiunize" them. Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 92. For a fuller discussion of those labeled *Beguins*, especially in southern France and Italy, see Louisa A. Burnham, *So Louisa A. Burnham, So Great a Light, So Great a Smoke: The Beguin Heretics of Languedoc* (Ithaca, NY, USA: Cornell University Press, 2008), 30–35. "Beguine" is usually the English term to describe these groups in Languedoc, Italy, and Catalonia as opposed to "beguine," the term most often employed to describe female members within similar groups in Flanders and Germany – "beghard" is the term for male members within these northern congregations.

works that had been translated into the vernacular, these Beguins became enthusiastic supporters of Spiritual views on poverty and reform of the Church.⁴⁷ They were also attracted to the apocalyptic scenario envisioned by Joachim and Olivi, stimulating at least one Beguin to claim the gift of prophecy herself. The Church's persecution of the Spirituals also extended to Olivi's lay disciples. The ensuing inquisitorial proceedings and testimony given by these laity show how Olivian and Joachite ideas concerning prophecy had been diffused to these men and women. Their testimony demonstrates either that, unlike Arnold of Villanova, these less learned laypersons misunderstood notions of *spiritualis intelligentia* or else that this conception of prophecy was incompatible with their experiences for they tended to recast or reformulate Joachite predictions according to conceptions of *prophetia*, or directly conveyed revelation.

3.2.1 Prophecy and the Beguins

Soon after Olivi's death in 1298 Church officials began to take action against his lay followers, but the involvement of Spiritual Franciscans with the laity, and especially those who came to be known as Beguins, began decades earlier. Generally speaking, the Beguins were attracted to the ideals of apostolic piety through the preaching of Spiritual Franciscans in southern France, Italy, and Catalonia, and by the mid-thirteenth century were being exposed to Spiritual views on poverty as well as Joachite apocalyptic expectations and prophecy and the language of spiritual intelligence. Hugh of Digne's sister Douceline, an early Beguin visionary, is known to have maintained connections with her brother as well as with various other

⁴⁷ On a Catalan compendium of material taken from Olivi's Apocalypse commentary, see Koch, "Der Prozess Gegen Die Postille Olivis Zur Apocalypse," 305; For a Latin compendium of extracts from the vernacular edition, see Jose Pou y Martí, *Visionarios, Beguinos Y Fraticelos Catalanes (siglos Xiii-Xv)* (Instituto de Cultura "Juan Gil-Albert" Diputacion Provincial de Alicante, 1996), 483–512. Citations from Robert E. Lerner, "The Medieval Return to the Thousand-Year Sabbath," in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Kenneth Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), 51–71, 65 n. 50.

Franciscans. Rixende, another female lay visionary prosecuted in 1288, was probably also associated with the Spirituals, perhaps with Olivi specifically.⁴⁸ In Italy, the Spiritual Franciscan Ubertino da Casale attracted lay female visionaries to his circle, and somewhat later another important member of the movement, Angelo Clareno, included a variety of laypersons in his group.⁴⁹

Olivi, in particular, seems to have attracted a significant lay following in and around Narbonne. Not only did the laity gather to hear his preaching, but Olivi's interest in visions also led him to seek out and maintain connections with lay visionaries, both men and women.⁵⁰ Lay enthusiasm for Olivi in Narbonne only increased after his death, and a cult appears to have grown around his grave. Olivi's posthumous reputation was not limited to Narbonne, for his grave also became a pilgrimage destination for followers from neighboring locations.⁵¹ As noted above, the growth of this unauthorized cult may be what first caused Church authorities to catch on to the implications of Olivi's apocalyptic views, and in 1299 a Franciscan General Chapter meeting in Lyons outlawed Olivi's writings and ordered visitations in order to dissolve his sect. Soon after, a provincial council held at Béziers lamented that some learned men and members of an established religious group had been preaching to *beguini seu beguinae* that the end of the world was near and that the time of the Antichrist was nigh or perhaps had already arrived.

Although greater detail about the "sect of Brother Peter John" is available only from inquisitorial records of the 1320s, enough evidence exists from this earlier period to show that Olivi's writings were being read and revered. Paul of Venice, for instance, around 1300,

⁴⁸ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 91.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁵⁰ David Burr, "Olivi, Apocalyptic Expectation, and Visionary Experience," *Traditio* 41 (January 1, 1985): 273–288, 279.

⁵¹ See, for instance, Na Prous Boneta, who would later testify that as a girl she had made the pilgrimage with her family. William May, ed., "The Confession of Prous Boneta, Heretic and Heresiarch," in John H. Mundy et al., eds. *Essays in Medieval Life and Thought* (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1965), 10–11.

describes a certain Matthew of Bouzigues from Provence who with five men and thirteen women traveled to Rome carrying some of Olivi's books. Matthew seems to have been a proponent of Olivi's views on poverty, as well as of some of his more prophetic ideas. While at Rome, this group clandestinely elected Matthew pope in Saint Peter's before fleeing for Greece.⁵² Likewise, Angelo Clareno tells us that in 1301 Jerome of Catalonia arrived in Greece with several women carrying some books that had been sent to the group by Olivi.⁵³ In several devotional treatises popular in southern French and Catalan lay circles, moreover, visionary experiences were discussed, as were apocalyptic ideas, although these items were addressed with a certain degree of caution.⁵⁴ While Olivi's Apocalypse commentary is not explicitly evident in such sources, it will be recalled that by 1303 Boniface VIII considered it troubling enough to have Giles of Rome refute it. If it had attracted the attention of Boniface, it seems reasonable to suppose that it may also have spread widely enough that the Beguins would have been aware of it as well by this point.

When it came to conceptions of prophecy, numerous ideas are evident in the testimony of those tried or questioned about their allegiance to Spiritual ideas. The proceedings in southern France, beginning around 1323, were conducted in part by the inquisitor Bernard Gui, who in 1323 or 1324 provided a summary of Beguin views and his own reflections on the situation.⁵⁵ Gui writes that laypersons espousing errors connected with Olivi's thought began to be seen in

⁵² Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 92-93. Paul of Venice describes this in both his *Historia satirica* and his *Chronologia magna*. See Girolamo Golubovich, *Biblioteca bio-bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell'oriente francescano* (Quaracchi: College of Saint Bonaventure, 1906-48), 2:80-81, 96-97.

⁵³ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 93. See Angelo Clareno, *Opera: I. Epistole*, (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1980), 247-248.

⁵⁴ Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 93-94. See also, appendix to Raoul Manselli, *Spirituali e beghini in Provenza*, (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1959).

⁵⁵ Bernard Gui, *Practica inquisitionis heretice pravitatis*, ed. Célestin Douais (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1886). The *Practica's* sections concerning the beguins are translated by David Burr on his website at: Bernard Gui, "Bernard Gui: Inquisitor's Manual," http://www.history.vt.edu/Burr/heresy/beguins/Gui_beguins.html. (accessesed 6/2014)

this area around the year 1315 although they were suspected even earlier. From 1315, he tells us, Beguin followers of both sexes were seized in the areas of Narbonne, Toulouse, and Catalonia, where many were judged heretical and burned. From 1317 onward, other heretics were also found in Béziers, in the diocese of Agde, at Lodève, around Lunel in the diocese Maguelonne, and at Carcassonne.⁵⁶

Gui relates that the Beguins took their errors partly from the books and other writings of Olivi, especially from his commentary on the Apocalypse, as well as treatises on poverty and other writings that they attributed to him, all or most of which they possessed both in Latin and in vernacular translations. These Beguins believed that Olivi possessed certain and detailed knowledge that he gained through revelation, that he admitted the nature of this knowledge on his deathbed, and that this and other teachings that he had imparted to his close followers were preserved in oral tradition. To these sources were things added more recently by Olivi's close associates and also some items that those questioned said they had deduced themselves. Before describing the nature of the Beguins' errors, Gui pauses to point out that their late patriarch, Olivi, was himself in error. Here Gui cites the 1318-1319 examination of Olivi's Apocalypse commentary by the Niccolo commission, which he says found his book "to contain many articles considered heretical, as well as many others containing falsity, intolerable error, temerity, or prediction of uncertain future events."⁵⁷

Turning to their beliefs, Gui states that the Beguins he encountered believed, among other things, that an understanding of the truth of Christ and the Apocalypse was revealed to Olivi in a singular way, after which Gui recounts their understanding of a detailed, if somewhat mistaken, version of Joachim's progression of the ages, the destruction of the carnal Church and its

⁵⁶ Bernard Gui, "Inquisitor's Manual," section 1.

⁵⁷ Ibid., section 2.

replacement by a spiritual Church led by spiritual men.⁵⁸ Such ideas align with many aspects of the standard Spiritual scenario and utilize familiar Joachite ideas and language relating to knowledge and predictions made through spiritual intelligence. The Beguins did not, however, characterize Olivi's understanding as *intelligentia spiritualis*. Rather, they considered him a prophet whose knowledge was the result of instantaneous and fully imparted revelation. One indication of this belief comes from Gui's account that certain Beguins read from or had read to them a small book called *The Passing of the Holy Father* (the text of which Gui included at the end of his report). This work purports to record the final moments in the life of Olivi, who on his deathbed was said to have stated that "all of his knowledge had been infused in him by God, and that in the church at Paris at the third hour he had suddenly been illumined by the Lord Jesus Christ."⁵⁹

Gui's summary report finds support in and takes additional information from the recorded testimony of the accused. The testimony of Pierre Tort, a Third Order Franciscan who was probably tried in 1322 and sentenced to perpetual imprisonment, provides insight into certain Beguin beliefs and especially how those beliefs were perceived by Gui.⁶⁰ On most matters, with the interesting addition of Christ being alive when struck with the lance (since this was an error specific to Olivi), Pierre holds to many of the errors Gui attributed to the Beguins, in some cases going even further than Gui's summary of their beliefs. For instance, Pierre testified that the friars and Beguins who had been burned as heretics had been unjustly condemned and that he considered them to be holy martyrs. Those who imposed or consented to these executions had made themselves heretics for their role. A future spiritual Church would overcome the current

⁵⁸ Ibid., section 3.

⁵⁹ Ibid., section 12.

⁶⁰ Pierre Tort's testimony is in Philippus Limborch, *Historia Inquisitionis Cui Subjungitur Liber Sententiarum Inquisitionis Tholosanae* (Amsterdam: Henricus Wetstenius, 1692), 325–32.

carnal one, and this future spiritual Church would recognize the martyrs with feast days. On this matter Pierre avoids accusing John XXII of wrongdoing, instead blaming the inquisitors. At another point in his testimony, however, as he began to expand on his beliefs about what he heard predicted concerning the end of the world, he names Pope John as the mystical Antichrist and says that the great Antichrist will arrive while John is still pope.⁶¹

Besides these as well as other matters concerning poverty and the holy nature of the Franciscan rule, Pierre also testifies about Olivi. One of the few literate Beguins to be questioned, he recounts that he had read many of Olivi's writings in the vernacular and that he had read the Apocalypse commentary frequently. He recalls how he had heard someone preach in Narbonne that Olivi and all of his writings were correct and in accord with Catholic teachings. Repeating an item that had been stated in several other confessions, and highlighting the inconclusive judgments on Olivi at the Council of Vienne, Pierre explained how the council found Olivi to be free of error, except for five questionable matters, which he said the pope had nonetheless not declared erroneous. On Olivi's teachings Pierre went further still:

[Pierre] also said he had heard in sermons by Friars Minor at Narbonne during the feast of Friar Petrus Iohannis that his doctrine and writings were more necessary to the Church of this final time than those of any other holy doctor except the apostles and evangelists, because, as he said, more had been revealed to Friar Petrus Iohannis than to any other holy doctor about what would happen toward the end of the world. The whole world would be in darkness and ignorance of the truth, especially regarding this modern age, were it not for Friar Petrus Iohannis and his writings.⁶²

Here Pierre describes Olivi not as an enlightened exegete but as a prophet to whom truth was revealed. A further indication of this belief comes from Pierre's version of the story of Olivi's last moments:

⁶¹ The idea of multiple antichrists was common in medieval apocalyptic texts. Olivi, for example, accounted for "mystical," "great," and "last" antichrists. See Burr, *Olivi's Peaceable Kingdom*, 132–56; Robert E. Lerner, "Antichrists and Antichrist in Joachim of Fiore," *Speculum* 60, no. 3 (July 1, 1985): 553–70.

⁶² Limborch, *Liber sententiarum*, 331–332. Translated in Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 225.

...just before he died Olivi called the friars minor together and told them that while he was in Paris, at the moment when he was washing his hands to administer the Eucharist to a certain priest, the entire truth concerning the gospel and Christ's life was revealed to him, and that all his writings were true and had been revealed to him, and that he had put nothing in his writings on his own, but had written only what had been revealed to him by God.⁶³

To Pierre Tort's mind, Olivi was not just a scholarly exegete, nor was he even someone who received an inspired gift for understanding. Rather, he was a prophet. The entire truth of the faith was miraculously revealed to Olivi; his writings, Pierre says, contain nothing of his own but instead are the words of God.

Na Prous Boneta, an accused Beguin, who testified that she had visited Olivi's tomb as a girl, not only considered Olivi to be a prophet but also claimed to be one herself.⁶⁴ A resident of Montpellier, Prous was brought to the prison at Carcassonne on suspicion of heresy and interrogated by the inquisition beginning in the summer of 1325. Prous had been hiding fugitive Spiritual Franciscans and Beguins in their home, including her sister and another woman who had been arrested along with Prous. During her questioning Prous showed herself to be both remarkably open about her views and quite unrepentant. As with Pierre Tort, she understood Olivi to be the angel of Revelation 10:1. Along with Tort and other Beguins Prous also regarded Olivi as a prophet, and she elevated his writings practically to the level of the Scriptures themselves. Olivi's writings, the Apocalypse commentary in particular, she states, had been dictated by the Holy Spirit and must be believed to be saved. The forces of evil, among whom she identifies John XXII and (interestingly) Thomas Aquinas, she holds as having attacked

⁶³ Limborch, *Liber sententiarum*, 329. Translated in Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 225-226.

⁶⁴ On Prous, see Burnham, *So Great a Light, So Great a Smoke*, 140-161 and Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 230-236. The text of Prous' testimony is found in Paris Bibl. nat., Collection Doat, tome 27, ff. 51v-79v. It was edited by May, "Confession of Prous Boneta, Heretic and Heresiarch," in John Mundy et. al., eds., *Essays in Medieval Life and Thought* (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1965). The text of her sentence is in Doat 27:95r-96v. English translation by David Burr is available at his website: David Burr, trans., "Na Prous Boneta," <http://www.history.vt.edu/Burr/heresy/beguins/Prous.html>. (accessed 6-2015); Prous' sentence, Doat 27, fol. 95r-96v, is published in Henry Charles Lea, *History of the Inquisition*, 3:653-654.

Olivi's works unjustly, and in doing so they became Cain to Olivi's Abel. She has particular disdain for John, whom she identifies not only with Cain but also with Adam, Caiaphas, Simon Magus, Herod, and Lucifer. Indeed, according to Prous, Pope John is Antichrist himself.⁶⁵

As striking as are her elevation of Olivi and her attacks on his opponents, her explanation for how she came to this knowledge is even more remarkable. God, she tells us, through Christ, had told her all of these things. Beginning in 1321, if not before, Prous claimed, Christ spoke to her. He told her that when she had made a vow of virginity (which she had made nine months prior to Olivi's feast day) she had been conceived in the spirit, in something of a replaying of the immaculate conception, for all her sins had been forgiven, just as Mary's had been in Elizabeth's womb. Having been conceived in the spirit nine months earlier, on Olivi's feast day, Christ told her, Prous had been born spiritually.⁶⁶

Prous continued to have a special relationship with Christ, and He continued to speak to her and through her. At Mass on Good Friday in 1321, she states, she was transported to the first heaven and saw God's divinity. Such experiences continued for the next few days, during which she received understanding about the entire Trinity.⁶⁷ Probably reflecting what she had heard preached about the Age of the Holy Spirit, Prous claimed to enjoy a special relationship with the Holy Spirit. She claims that, as Mary had been the donatrix of her son Christ, Prous had been made donatrix of the Holy Spirit. As John the Baptist had served as a herald for the coming of the Son, Prous heralded the coming of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁸ In this special role, Prous sees herself as

⁶⁵ May, "Confession of Prous Boneta," 24.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 7, 10.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 11.

the woman who destroys the serpent (Revelation 12). The same Spirit given to Peter Olivi is given to her, and this Spirit will govern the Church.⁶⁹

Those around Prous had heard her claims, and, while it seems that many regarded her as being what she claimed, others were not sure. Some of those questioned were willing to agree that Prous was a heretic and to reject her claims, but it is difficult to tell how many of these did so only in an effort to save themselves. Prous' own sister, Alisseta Boneta, however, provides more information. She wrestled with some of the same concerns that seem to have occupied the minds of the more sophisticated, especially the question of determining whether someone truly enjoyed divine inspiration. Even if one came to the opinion that the inspiration was not divine, how could one be fully sure, and did one dare to be wrong?

Alisseta testified that, after meditating on what Prous had told her, she considered the fact that God could do all things.⁷⁰ Therefore, God could have endowed her sister with these gifts, so she began to believe that what Prous said was good and true and truly given by God. Later, doubts entered her mind, and she began to believe instead that this was all an illusion and the work of the devil. In the end, however, she was unable to decide. She stated that she would not dare to say definitely that demonic inspiration was behind her sister's declarations since, if she was wrong, she feared God's judgment. The inquisitor's representative explained to her that what she heard from her sister was in fact "erroneous, heretical, against the faith and Holy Roman Church, and the work of the devil" and he asked, ordered, and pleaded with her to reject her sister and consider her a heretic. Still, she remained stubborn for around a year, holding to her claim that she could not condemn her sister since she did not have knowledge of God's

⁶⁹ Ibid., 20 and 22.

⁷⁰ Alisseta's testimony is in Collection Doat 27, ff. 26r-30r and is translated by David Burr at his website David Burr, trans., "Alisseta Boneta, Sister of Na Prous Boneta," http://www.history.vt.edu/Burr/heresy/beguins/Alisseta_Boneta.html (accessed 6/2015).

judgments. Finally, in 1328 Aliseta gave in to the inquisitor's demands that she abjure all that her sister had taught. Nonetheless she seems to have remained uncertain about the true status of her sister.

Joachites believed in a future outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Even for those, such as these Beguins, who were enthusiastic about this possibility, however, divine inspiration was still regarded as a rare occurrence, especially in the current age. If Aliseta's attitude about her sister can be considered characteristic of others' views, it seems they did not regard many to yet possess these gifts and there was some circumspection about those who claimed them. These gifts, moreover, appear to have been most frequently attributed to others rather than claimed by individuals for themselves. Believing that Joachim, Saint Francis, or even Olivi enjoyed such a gift was one thing, but regarding a neighbor as possessing it was something else, and claiming the gift of prophecy for oneself was quite another matter altogether.

3.2.2 Arnold of Villanova: Prophecy and the Learned Layman

Arnold of Villanova (d. 1311) provides an example of an educated layman who was influenced by Joachite thinking.⁷¹ Although Arnold was neither a Spiritual Franciscan nor a Beguin, he became closely associated with both. Possibly having crossed paths with Olivi in Montpellier in the 1290s (they were both there at about the same time), Arnold came to espouse Joachite views in his own writings.⁷² Educated, with some training in theology, and of higher

⁷¹ On Arnold of Villanova's life see, especially, Harold Lee, Marjorie Reeves, and Giulio Silano, *Western Mediterranean Prophecy: The School of Joachim of Fiore and Fourteenth-Century Breviloquium* (Toronto, Ont., Canada: Pontifical Inst of Medieval, 1989), 27–46 and Lerner, "Ecstatic Dissent," at 42–46.

⁷² The degree to which Arnold was influenced by Olivi is not clear, and Arnold appears to have become interested in eschatological prophecy apart from Olivi. The earliest evidence that Arnold directly drew on a work of Olivi comes from 1302. See Robert E. Lerner, "Writing and Resistance Among Beguins," in *Heresy and Literacy, 1000–1530*, ed. Peter Biller and Anne Hudson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 186–204, 192 n. 18.

status (he was a physician to popes and advisor to kings), Arnold may have been among the best prepared laymen to study the Scriptures. Still, being a layman presented him with challenges when it came to his prophetic writing. Initially, Arnold presented his predictions as conjectural exegesis, but his justifications for detailed exegetical speculation did not gain acceptance. As he encountered increasing opposition for his writings, Arnold began to make claims that revelatory insights had informed his predictions and understanding of history. Robert Lerner characterizes Arnold of Villanova as adopting the “ecstasy defense,” in a similar manner to Rupert of Deutz and Joachim of Fiore.⁷³ Like the Beguins of Narbonne, Joachite thought compelled Arnold of Villanova to believe that God revealed to him important truths. Unlike the Beguins, however, the more educated Arnold eventually came to believe that he possessed the gift of *spiritualis intelligentia*.

Arnold had learned both Arabic and Latin as a youth, and he took courses in the liberal arts and theology in the schools of the Dominicans before going on to study medicine at Montpellier in the early 1260s. After taking minor orders, he became a master of medicine and married the daughter of a Montpellier merchant, with whom he had a child. By 1281 Arnold had become physician to Peter II of Aragon, during which period of service he also began Hebrew studies under a Dominican teacher. Following the death of Peter II, Arnold served three succeeding kings as physician, alchemist, and diplomat, as well as a political and spiritual advisor. In 1289 he began a professorship in the school of medicine at Montpellier and his reputation as a physician would help to bring him into contact with the papal curia, where he would eventually attend to the health of three popes: Boniface VIII, Benedict XI, and Clement V.

⁷³ Lerner, “Ecstatic Dissent.”

Arnold also managed to find time to become something of an amateur Scriptural scholar. In particular, his Biblical interests revolved around the coming of the Antichrist and the playing out of the events of the Last Times. Between about 1288 and 1298 he wrote three major treatises concerning these topics: *De tempore adventus Antichristi* (ca. 1288 - ca. 1290), *Introductio in librum Ioachim de semine scripturarum* (1292), and *Allocutio super significatione nominis Tetragrammaton* (1292).⁷⁴ Of primary importance, and seemingly his initial motivation to write, was Arnold's belief that in reading the Book of Daniel he had been able to work out a precise dating for the appearance of Antichrist, the coming of whom he calculated to the year 1365.

De tempore adventus Antichristi was probably written sometime between 1288 and 1290 and seems to have coincided with the beginning of Arnold's involvement with the Spirituals and Beguins. Arnold may have encountered the thought of Olivi at this time, for he began his professorship at Montpellier in 1289, the same year that Olivi joined the *studium generale* of that city. Although Arnold does not mention Joachim by name in *De tempore* – perhaps deliberately so – there is clear Joachite influence in his work. The treatise is primarily based on Arnold's reading of the Book of Daniel, which he approached through numerology as well as through a system of concordances. In his treatise, Arnold set out first to describe how the text of Daniel related to and explained events of the New Testament, after which he used a similar means to forecast the future.

⁷⁴ Arnold of Villanova, *De tempore adventus Antichristi*, ed. Joseph Perarnau in "El textu primitiu del 'De mysterio cymbalorum ecclesiae' d'Arnau de Vilanova," in *Arxiu de textos catalans antics*, vol. 7/8 (Rome, 1988), 7–169, 7-169. Arnold of Villanova, "Introductio in librum Ioachim de semine scripturarum," in *La Religiosita d'Arnaldo di Villanova*, ed. Raoul Manselli (Rome, 1951), 43–59, Arnold of Villanova, "Allocutio super significatione nominis Tetragrammaton," in *Sefarad*, ed. Joaquin Carreras y Artau, 7 (1947), 75–105. Also Arnold of Villanova, *Arnaldi de Villanova Introductio in librum (Ioachim), De semine scripturarum, Allocutio super significatione nominis Tetragrammaton*, ed. Joseph Perarnau, *Corpus Scriptorum Cataloniae*, Series A: Scriptores, Arnaldi de Villanova Opera Theologica Omnia, 3 (Barcelona: Barcelona Institut d'Estudis Catalans Facultat de Teologia de Catalunya, 2001).

Apart from his predictive methodology and conclusions, Arnold's *De tempore* also contains a discussion of the appropriateness and even the necessity of making conjectural predictions about the Last Times. In this first treatise Arnold presented his conclusions as being simply those of an exegete. Absent are any claims of revelatory experience or supernatural assistance, and it is clear that at this point Arnold considered his predictions to exist within the traditional category of conjecture – that is, prediction based solely on the study of Scripture through human intelligence and reason. In laying out his case, Arnold summarizes the traditional arguments against making such predictions, which he recognizes to be based on a particular reading of Augustine that finds it “not expedient for the faithful that they should know the time of the persecution of Antichrist.”⁷⁵ But Arnold argued that this reading of Augustine was mistaken as were certain interpretations of Christ's statement to the disciples about the impropriety of seeking to know about the Last Days.⁷⁶ Arnold says that Christ's words in Acts were not concerned with the coming of Antichrist, who would appear before the end of the last age, and instead Christ's restriction referred only to the “consummation of the age, and the final conversion of the Jews to Christ.”⁷⁷ Since Augustine, he continued, could not have been wrong, he too must therefore be understood as having referred to the end of the age rather than to the advent of Antichrist. As for Augustine's assertion that such calculations were not possible by human effort, Arnold was in general agreement. But Arnold held that this only meant such calculations were impossible for human effort alone, unaided by God. This did not preclude God from assisting in the effort, and he argued that God had revealed the Scriptures in order to

⁷⁵ Lee, Reeves, and Silano, *Western Mediterranean Prophecy*, 32 citing the extract of Arnold's *De tempore* included by Heinrich Finke, *Aus Den Tagen Bonifaz VIII* (Munster, 1902), CXXIX-CLIX, at CXLI. “Set obiciunt asserentes, quod Augustinus XVIII de civitate Dei dicit non expedire fidelibus, quod presciant tempus persecutionis Antichristi.”

⁷⁶ Harold Lee, “Scrutamini Scripturas: Joachite Themes and Figurae in the Early Religious Writing of Arnold of Vilanova,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 37 (1974): 33–56, 40–41.

⁷⁷ Finke, *Aus Den Tagen Bonifaz VIII*, CXLII.

provide a means for people to carry out this effort. According to Arnold the Scriptures themselves offered precise calculations, and as long as one avoided making predictions about the very end of time, he argued, it was licit to speculate details about Antichrist.

Throughout *De tempore* Arnold asserts the need to study the Scriptures in this way. In fact, he considers efforts to restrict the study of the Bible to contradict commandments contained in the Scriptures themselves: “For since God says through John, ‘Study the Scriptures,’ and, the above exposition, as it is Catholic, pertains to the examination of Holy Scripture . . . it follows that whoever forbids the study of Catholic matters to the faithful, puts himself in direct opposition to divine admonition and to the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁸ Bringing the discussion back to material at the heart of his own work, Arnold points out that Christ himself had quoted Daniel on the coming of Antichrist. Therefore, this must indicate that what was contained in the Scriptures was intended by God to be understood by men, and what God had revealed had been provided in order to guide the faithful in their proper direction.

Arnold’s second major work of the 1290s, *Introductio in Librum Ioachim de Semine Scripturarum* (1292), continues his predictions by making calculations concerning the Second Coming and the end of history. Utilizing the same methodology as in *De tempore*, Arnold adds figural exegesis that combines Platonic elements and Pythagorean mathematics with Joachite prophecy and numerology. Arnold’s third work, *Allocutio super Significatione Nominis Tetragrammaton* (1292), applies a similar approach to the letters of the Hebrew and Latin Tetragrammata, which are figures for the Trinity. As with the previous two works, Arnold’s

⁷⁸ Ibid., CXLVI. “Nam cum dominus inquit per Joa(annem): ‘Scrutamini scripturas, et predicta expositio, cum sit catholica, pertineat ad scrutinium divine scripture, nam fidelibus aperit viam vel ianuam ingrediendi catholice ad intellectum multiplicem sacrorum eloquiorum, constat, quod, qui eam interdicat fidelibus et abducit a studio catholicorum, directe contrariatur divine monitioni et sancto spiritui se opponit.”

analysis predicts spiritual crisis in the fourteenth century leading to a sequence of events that ends with the Last Times.⁷⁹

Despite Arnold's assertions that such predictions were licit and proper, he must have felt some trepidation about making his interpretations public, for he kept these treatises mainly to himself for about a decade. He seems to have recognized that it would have been risky for a layman to come forward with such novel ideas. In 1300, however, Arnold went to Paris while on a diplomatic mission for the king of Aragon. Perhaps because he could not resist the opportunity presented by many of Europe's most prominent theological minds he decided to take the chance and see whether the theologians there might approve of his exegetical work. Unfortunately for Arnold, they did not, for, immediately after presenting *De tempore* publicly before the masters of the Sorbonne, he was accused of being an enemy of the faith.

Arnold spent only a day in jail on this occasion and his release was secured by one of King James' officials but his work was judged by the Parisian theologians "not as erroneous, but as rash," and he was forced to excise a list of passages from his treatise. Upon his release and return to Spain, however, Arnold withdrew his revocation and appealed to Rome, claiming that his admission had been illegally coerced. The appeal was heard in Rome in 1301 while Arnold was there on another diplomatic mission, but the result was the same. The Paris verdict was upheld and Arnold was ordered to recant the same passages. At this point Arnold benefited from a stroke of good fortune, for Pope Boniface VIII was at that time stricken with painful kidney stones. Boniface was not a likely supporter of someone with Joachite tendencies, for it was about this time that he had ordered Giles of Rome to refute Olivi's Apocalypse commentary.⁸⁰ Still, Boniface was in physical pain and, notwithstanding Arnold's unorthodox readings of Scripture,

⁷⁹ Lee, Reeves, and Silano, *Western Mediterranean Prophecy*, 34-36.

⁸⁰ Lerner, "Ecstatic Dissent," 43.

he was a skilled physician. So Arnold was called upon to care for the ailing pontiff. Arnold's treatment worked and, having been relieved of his pain, a grateful Boniface extended to his doctor the opportunity to write a new treatise. Arnold's new work contained the same positions as his original, but this time he secured papal approval, and soon after Arnold returned home.

Although Arnold had left Rome in 1301 with at least the reluctant blessing of the pope, circumstances would soon change again, creating a situation of renewed and increasing danger for him. Boniface had been engaged in a long-running dispute with France, and in 1303 Philip the Fair's lawyers escalated matters by indicting the pope for heresy. Among the various accusations was the charge that Boniface had allowed Arnold to write a treatise containing the same heretical teachings (or, as the lawyers said, "smacking of heresy") which had twice earlier been condemned, including once by Boniface himself. Although these charges were aimed primarily at Boniface, they constituted a dangerous situation for Arnold as well, for in their phrasing they portrayed Arnold as having relapsed into heresy – a capital offense. As long as Boniface could protect him, Arnold was safe, but when the pope died in October 1303 he became vulnerable again. In an attempt to shore up his position with the new pope, Arnold sought to meet with Benedict XI in the spring of 1304. Benedict, however, was hostile and ordered his arrest. As before, Arnold benefited from a stroke of good fortune, for Benedict died before a trial could begin and, again, Arnold was released. His position remained uncertain in the papal interregnum that lasted until June 1305, but after the election of Clement V Arnold could feel safe again since the new pope was his friend.⁸¹

Like Joachim of Fiore and especially Rupert of Deutz, who employed the "ecstasy defense" when pressured, Arnold of Villanova began to change how he characterized the source of his

⁸¹ Lerner, "Ecstatic Dissent," 43-44.

knowledge as he encountered trouble.⁸² It will be recalled that in Arnold's first treatises on the coming of Antichrist, he did not claim revelatory insight but instead defended his work as exegetical conjecture. Moreover, when admonished by theologians at his first trial for acting as "a prophet in a watchtower," Arnold said he was not a prophet: "It is not contained in my work that I sat or sit in a watchtower, but only that the watchmen of Christ's Church must answer their adversaries rightly."⁸³

In 1302, however, Arnold addressed a letter to Boniface VIII along with a new treatise, *Philosophia catholica*, where Arnold explains that a vision had compelled him to write this new treatise. Arnold tells the pope that he had been sitting alone in a chapel when he saw vision of a message in bold letters that read, "Sit quickly and write" (Luke 16:6).⁸⁴ Doing as he was instructed he suddenly found himself writing "with incredible speed" and the treatise he was sending with his letter was the result. Given the circumstances of its composition, Arnold implored the pope to accept the treatise "on his own part and that of the celestial lamb."⁸⁵

Although Arnold's treatises of the 1290s were clearly written with an awareness and appreciation of Joachite doctrines, his work of that period was principally concerned with the coming of Antichrist, and Spiritual ideas were among several diverse elements from which he drew in this pursuit. His experiences in Paris and Rome, however, seem to have led him toward identifying more closely with the Spiritual cause, and following his exit from Rome he began to establish contacts with both Spiritual Franciscans and Beguins. Through these ties Arnold began to move beyond his initial interest in Antichrist, taking up an appreciation for the Spirituals'

⁸² Ibid., 42-46.

⁸³ Lerner, "Ecstatic Dissent," 44, citing Arnold's letter of October 12, 1300 in *Denifle and Chatelain, Chartularium Universitatis parisiensis*, 87-90, at 80.

⁸⁴ Compare with Augustine's famous account in the *Confessions* 8:12 when he heard a voice chanting "Take up and read! Take up and read!" (*Tolle, lege! Tolle, lege!*), after which Augustine opened up the Bible to read the first chapter he should find, leading him to Paul's Letter to the Romans.

⁸⁵ The letter is edited by Finke, *Aus Den Tagen Bonifaz VIII CLX-CLXII*.

broader apocalyptic views as well as their positions on poverty and the need for immediate reforms. In particular, Arnold's exposure to the Spirituals brought him into greater contact with their notions of spiritual intelligence and the ages of the Church.

Following the death of Boniface, Arnold attempted to secure his position with the new pope, Benedict XI, who Arnold suspected would be hostile to his views. In these efforts, Arnold once again claimed a divine mandate. In an exculpatory treatise, probably written in 1304 with the intent of gaining favor with the pontiff, Arnold recalled the circumstances surrounding the writing of his first work on Antichrist.⁸⁶ He explains that he had been lying in bed when he heard a voice say to him, "Arise, and write." Thinking that the voice was just the result of some bodily disturbance caused by his spleen, he shifted positions, but again he heard the voice, and this time it was accompanied by a heavy blow to his chest. The blow was strong enough to make him sit up and look around for blood. Thinking that he might be struck again if he did not do as the voice commanded, he arose and in a state of exaltation began writing his treatise. Arnold recalls that he was reticent to make it public until the night of his arrest in Paris, when again he was visited by a voice. This time the voice told him repeatedly, "Wicked servant, why do you hide the coin of your Lord?" which convinced him that it was the will of God that he make the work known.

Before he was arrested again in 1304 Arnold wrote another letter to the pope to accompany yet another Antichrist treatise. In this letter Arnold recalled how additional miracles had surrounded this writing.⁸⁷ Looking back at the time when he had served as Boniface VIII's physician, Arnold explained how he had set up a study in a castle chapel near Anagni. This was soon after the condemnation of his first treatise and, as he was concerned by this and because he

⁸⁶ *Responsio obiectionibus*, edited in part by Batllori, "Dos nous escrits," 57-70, at 60-61.

⁸⁷ Finke, *Aus Den Tagen Bonifaz VIII*, CLXXVII-CXCII, at CLXXIX-CLXXXI.

did not wish to antagonize the pope, he prayed for guidance each time he entered the chapel. Soon, Arnold found his prayers being answered, for day after day while kneeling before the altar he began to hear a voice saying, “Write quickly.” Thinking he was perhaps being deceived, he opened a Bible to a random page to see if it might offer a message. The page he turned to was from the Gospel of Luke, and he came upon a passage, written in larger words than the rest, which read, “Sit down quickly, and write fifty” (Luke 16:6). Taking this as a sign, he began writing “with miraculous speed.”

These were not the only accounts that Arnold told of miracles accompanying his writing, but they are enough to see what was happening. Arnold’s original manner of making predictions within the category of conjecture and through exegesis based solely on the devices of human intelligence was not having the effect he desired, and his arguments for expanding the boundaries of what was allowable through these modes of expression did not gain acceptance. That Arnold only later claimed supernatural privilege for work that originally carried no such claims might suggest that he was insincere or making up a defense. Arnold’s changing defense does not indicate, however, that he was anything less than genuine. A simpler explanation is that Arnold believed he had received a divine mandate for his work but that it took him a while to understand this. He clearly felt compelled to write repeatedly on these matters, and he must have believed that his discoveries and his desire to make predictions about the future were for a reason. It is likely that Arnold’s increasing exposure to Joachite ideas, including a greater appreciation for the concept of spiritual intelligence helped to provide him with an explanation for what he was experiencing, and as he came upon these ideas he fit his past experiences into this way of thinking.

3.2.3 John of Rupescissa and Prophecy's Association with the Spiritual Franciscans

Arnold of Villanova died in 1311 while on a voyage presumably to attend to the health of the pope.⁸⁸ During his lifetime he was imprisoned at least twice for his writings but both times his patron James of Aragon secured his release. Moreover, Arnold's medical expertise was apparently so great that popes were willing to overlook his prophetic side projects, and his orthodoxy was never so much in question that they chose to disassociate themselves from him. Perhaps the best explanation for why Arnold escaped full condemnation, however, was that his association with the Spiritual Franciscans predated the pontificate of Pope John XXII, when prophetic behaviors such as Arnold's were more likely to be condemned. Indeed, Arnold's apocalyptic writings were posthumously condemned by the vicar of the archbishop of Tarragona in 1316, in particular because they were being read in the vernacular and being taken up by the laity.⁸⁹

John's XXII's campaign against the Spiritual Franciscans and their lay sympathizers took his entire pontificate but was largely successful, and John's gains were followed up and secured by his successor Benedict XII (Jacques Fournier, d. 1342), who had previously been an inquisitor against the Spirituals. Sporadic inquisitions and trials continued past Benedict's pontificate but by mid-century the threat of the Spirituals was mostly contained and the problem was not as pressing. The life of another prophetic figure, the Franciscan John of Rupescissa (d. 1366), coincides with both this period of persecution and the eventual easing of tensions.

⁸⁸ Lee, Reeves, and Silano, *Western Mediterranean Prophecy*, 43.

⁸⁹ An edition of the condemnation appears in Francesco Santi, "Gli 'Scripta Spirituality' di Arnau de Vilanova," *Studia mediaevali* 3rd series, 26:2 for 1985 (1986), 977-1014, at 1006-1010.

John of Rupescissa (or Roquetaillade) was born at Marcolès near Aurillac about 1310. He studied at the university at Toulouse and entered the Franciscan Order there in 1322.⁹⁰ During the persecution under John XXII the Beguins of the area increasingly went into hiding, but it seems probable that Rupescissa came into contact with them at Toulouse. In 1335 or 1336 he became convinced that an experience three years earlier had in fact been an occurrence of divine inspiration, and from this point forward he began writing works of apocalyptic speculation while also becoming a student and collector of just about any prophetic writings he could get his hands on.

Rupescissa insisted that his knowledge was gained through visionary insights. He claimed that one such episode had taken place in 1332, when he had dreamed about the birth of an eastern Antichrist in Zaycon (also Zayton or Zhangzhou, China, site of a small Franciscan community).⁹¹ According to his later account, he kept silent about this dream because he had never heard of Zaycon and did not wish to make public an experience that might have been a delusion. In 1335 or 1336, however, he came upon some letters from a Franciscan in China who called himself “bishop of Zaycon.” Immediately “seized by ecstasy” because he now understood that his earlier dream had been divinely inspired, he decided that God had wished him proclaim all that had been revealed, and after he did so all his brothers “marveled with him” about what had been made known.

⁹⁰ On John of Rupescissa, see Jeanne Bignami-Odier, *Études sur Jean de Roquetaillade (Johannes de Rupescissa)* (Paris: Vrin, 1952) the introduction to John of Rupescissa, *Johannes de Rupescissa: Liber secretorum eventuum*, ed. Robert E. Lerner and Christine Morerod-Fattebert (Fribourg: Éditions universitaires, 1994) and Leah DeVun, *Prophecy, Alchemy, and the End of Time: John of Rupecissa in the Late Middle Ages* (Columbia University Press, 2009).

⁹¹ *Liber osstensor*, MS Vat. Rossiano 753, f. 55r, cited by Lerner, introduction to John of Rupescissa, *Liber secretorum*, 24.

The *Liber secretorum* reports three more legitimizing visionary experiences, or “intellections.”⁹² The one to which he assigns the greatest importance he describes as having happened in the summer of 1345, while he was enduring terrible conditions in a Franciscan convent prison. In chains in his cell for over 100 days and surrounded by filth, Rupescissa had reached a point of desperation at his plight, not understanding why he had to experience such extreme suffering. Then, on the feast of James the Apostle, while he was praying, “suddenly, in an instant” he sensed God’s presence and he felt as though he had been swept away into “the sweetness of the glory of paradise.” As St. Peter once did, so too did Rupescissa shout out, “Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man” (Luke 5:8). And then, he says, “in a twinkling of an eye,” his “understanding (*intellectus*) was opened” and he was able to see clearly Scripture’s hidden meaning concerning the secrets of the future. He became aware too, of the reasons for his sufferings, for they were the price of his calling “to reveal Antichrist to the world.”⁹³

The *Liber secretorum* reports an earlier visionary experience that happened while he was at Aurillac in or around 1340. Rupescissa says that, when he was in the Franciscan cloister there, on the day of the Virgin’s Nativity and while he was chanting the Te Deum, he came to a clear understanding (*intellectus*) through a miraculous flash of insight that the Book of Daniel revealed that the Antichrist would reign openly between 1366 and the end of 1369.⁹⁴ The third experience related in the *Liber secretorum* occurred in Toulouse, in the late summer of 1346. He had at this time been released from his first period of imprisonment, only to be arrested again, and in his

⁹² John of Rupescissa, *Johannes de Rupescissa: Liber Secretorum Eventuum*, ed. Robert E. Lerner and Christine Morerod-Fattebert (Fribourg: Éditions universitaires, 1994), Lerner’s “Historical Introduction” 50 n 81.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 147-149.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

second period in prison he had another supernatural experience. Again he felt the divine presence over him, and this time he foresaw in more detail the scandals that would afflict the Church.⁹⁵

Although these are the three experiences he recounted in the *Liber secretorum*, they would not be his last. While in prison in 1349 he saw an angel who predicted his freedom in two weeks. Undeterred by the failure of this vision, in 1355 he foresaw through divine insight the capture of John the Good at Poitiers (which did come true).⁹⁶ In recounting the divine source for his insights and predictions as part of the treatise that had been demanded of him during his trial at Avignon, Rupescissa explained that it was up to his judge to decide “whether God almighty Himself [had] opened his intelligence,” or “whether [he had been] deceived by an unclean spirit.”⁹⁷ Rupescissa was determined to show that the former was the case and that he had been granted the gift of spiritual intelligence, as demonstrated by his supernatural experiences. This, however, was different from prophecy, for Rupescissa emphatically maintained that he was “not a prophet.”⁹⁸

Church officials were not quite sure what to do with Rupescissa. His troubles began when his Franciscan superior locked him up in the convent’s prison, on account of his predictions on such matters as the birth of an “eastern Antichrist” and his claims to have received such knowledge through dreams or prophetic seizures.⁹⁹ He was then transferred to the prisons of other Franciscan cloisters, where he remained a prisoner from 1344 to 1346. In the summer of

⁹⁵ Ibid., 53, 148.

⁹⁶ Bignami-Odier, *Études sur Jean de Roquetaillade (Johannes de Rupescissa)*, 20 (79) and *Vade mecum*, int 6, ed. Brown.

⁹⁷ John of Rupescissa, *Liber secretorum*, 146. “Hec ergo, reverendissime pater et domine, sunt per me de futuris eventibus in carceribus intellecta, summatim breviata et collective perscripta; que secundum iussum Vestre Dominationis descripsi ut per culmen vestre divinalis sapientie et perfecti vestri digni theologica magisterii iudicaretur utrum Deus omnipotens ipse sit, qui michi aperuit intellectum ut intelligerem memoratum archanum oraculum, aut si deceptus fui per spiritum immundum.”

⁹⁸ Ibid., 149, 151.

⁹⁹ On Rupescissa’s incarcerations see Lerner, “Historical Introduction,” *Liber Secretorum*, 15–88.

1346 he was tried for heresy by a Dominican inquisitor. At this point he was either acquitted or pardoned with a light punishment, but the Franciscan superior who had originally imprisoned him arrested him again and Rupescissa began another tour through the Franciscan penal system. While being transferred to another Franciscan prison in 1349 he convinced his captor to take him instead to Avignon so that he could plead his case there.

His trial began on October 1349. The official in charge of his case, Cardinal Guillaume Court, had earlier assisted Bishop Jacques Fournier in heresy trials at Pamiers. As part of his investigation, the cardinal ordered Rupescissa to write a treatise defending his views; the resulting *Liber secretorum eventuum* was completed in November. A full and unapologetic statement of his apocalyptic beliefs, the treatise probably contained enough to convict him, but instead Rupescissa was acquitted after a year spent in prison at Avignon. Yet again he was immediately rearrested. His case was never fully tried again but he spent nearly the rest of his life in the papal prison, until 1365 when nearly at death he was released to spend his last days in a Franciscan infirmary.

During his years of incarceration at Avignon, Rupescissa was not only allowed to write, but he seems to have been encouraged by his captors to do so. He was provided with writing materials, books, and news of current events. He wrote copiously, and, in addition to his *Liber secretorum*, from 1349 until about 1360 he wrote numerous other books and tracts, including his most circulated work, the *Vade mecum in tribulacione* of 1356. Not only was he permitted to write, but visitors were allowed to come to him with specific questions or requests to interpret prophecies they had come across. Members of the curia as well as cardinals passing through

sought his predictive expertise and his predictions were reported widely by chroniclers such as Jean le Bel, Henry of Rebdorf, and Jean Froissart.¹⁰⁰

To what should Rupescissa's strange status be attributed? For one thing, circumstances had changed from the days of John XII's persecutions of the Spirituals. The persecutions were recent enough for Rupescissa to be imprisoned; eventually, however, those troubles may have seemed more distant. But during his imprisonment other Spiritual Franciscans were tried and condemned to death at Avignon, and Rupescissa feared the same fate for himself.¹⁰¹ Here it seems that the particular content of Rupescissa's predictions may have helped him. Whereas many Spirituals were attacking the Church of the current day, calling it the Whore of Babylon, and naming John XXII as Antichrist, Rupescissa instead spoke of a more general battle between the carnal and spiritual Churches. Such forecasts did not necessitate identifying the present day Church as a force of evil but instead allowed representatives of the current order to see themselves among the good. Moreover, rather than naming the pope as Antichrist, Rupescissa identified certain secular powers as the dreaded figure. So, despite risky teachings, especially when any prophet was suspect, Rupescissa may not have seemed an immediate threat to papal authorities.

John of Rupescissa's circumstances allowed him to defend his prophesying with at least relative success. Of course, he spent the last twenty years of his life in prison but he survived and eventually lived as something like an imprisoned celebrity. His long incarceration separated him from the context of the Spiritual Franciscans and the content of his predictions was not as threatening to the Church. With Rupescissa, therefore, it seems that many in Church were returning to a sort of cautious ambivalence towards prophecy. Especially in the uncertain

¹⁰⁰ DeVun, *Prophecy, Alchemy, and the End of Time*, 30. Froissart, for instance believed John of Rupescissa had predicted the Hundred Years War. Ed. Jean Buchon, *Les Chroniques de Sire Jean Froissart* (Paris, 1835) 1: 428.

¹⁰¹ Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham*, 76.

environment of war, plague, and a displaced papacy, there was a growing desire to find certainty and divine guidance.¹⁰² Such uncertainty, perhaps, explains the curiosity surrounding Avignon's imprisoned prophet. Doubts about prophecy caused suspicion and fear of being deceived by false prophets, but there was also fear that a true prophet might be mistakenly ignored, since that would be to ignore the voice of God. Aliseta Boneta had the same sort of doubts about her sister Prous. Aliseta was not sure if her sister was a prophet or not but she feared to wrongfully condemn her because that might incur the wrath of God. So too, it seems Rupescissa's captors were unsure if he was really a prophet, but they were willing to listen just in case he was telling the truth.

¹⁰² Robert E. Lerner, "The Black Death and Western European Eschatological Mentalities," *The American Historical Review* 86, no. 3 (June 1981): 533–52; Michael D. Bailey, "From Sorcery to Witchcraft: Clerical Conceptions of Magic in the Later Middle Ages," *Speculum* 76, no. 4 (October 2001): 960–90.

Chapter 4 The Democratization of Prophecy: Laity, Visions, and the Problem of Demons

With the decline of the Spiritual Franciscans by the mid-fourteenth century, theories of prophecy had to deal with new kinds of prophets. Those under discussion, both Spiritual Franciscans and those inspired by them, had modeled themselves after Joachim, extracting often apocalyptic predictions from a systematic and (so they felt) inspired reading of Scripture. One does see occasional examples of this practice continuing, as with Frederick of Brunswick (active 1380s-1392) and Wilhelmus de Hildernissem (active c. 1411).¹ The crisis brought about by the Schism (1378-1417), moreover, prompted new interest in the writings of Joachim, Arnold of Villanova, and John of Rupescissa. Although they remained controversial, each made predictions that seemed to correctly foretell the divisions in the Church, leading even readers without Spiritual allegiances to wonder if they were prophets who had foretold the disaster.² For the same reason the *Liber de magnis tribulationibus*, a text supposedly written by Calabrian hermit “Telesphorus of Cosenza,” who may or may not have been a real person, also attracted widespread attention.³

¹ On Frederick of Brunswick, a Joachite Franciscan active in the late 1380s and early 1390s, see Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham*, 89–100. On Wilhelmus de Hildernissem, a leader of sect known as *homines intelligentiae* (men of intelligence) who held to elements of Joachite apocalypticism, see Smoller, Laura Ackerman, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly, 1350-1420* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 116.

² Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 178–85.

³ The *Liber de magnis tribulationibus* was originally composed by Calabrian Spirituals between 1356 and 1365 and between 1378 and 1386 was updated to fit the events of the Schism. On Telesphorus' *Liber*, and its dating, see Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination With Evil* (Columbia University Press, 1999), 177–78.; for contemporary reactions to the text see, Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417*, 187–95.

Among most living prophets, however, there was a return to a visions and voices model of *prophetia*. Rather than regarding themselves as inspired exegetes, these men and women understood and presented themselves as passive channels or conduits to whom God or other heavenly beings transmitted divine revelation, directly and fully imparting prophetic knowledge. These new prophets disclaimed or minimized their own roles and stressed that they were speaking as mere mouthpieces for God. Several, in fact, employed vivid metaphorical language of liquids pouring through conduits or filling vessels, of flame in a furnace, or of musical instruments to convey their role as passive intermediaries.⁴ The Dominican preacher Vincent Ferrer (1350-1419) certainly understood the distinction between *spiritualis intelligentia* and *prophetia*, for he was an exegete whose eschatology reflected certain Joachite leanings.⁵ Still, he claimed no supernatural inspiration for his exegesis and when he did experience revelation he presented it in terms of a vision experience of directly-imparted knowledge according to the expectations of *prophetia*.⁶

There are at least two explanations for this change from *spiritualis intelligentia* to *prophetia*. In the first place, the Church's opposition to the Spiritual Franciscans had largely discredited the practice of inspired exegesis. The few stalwart supporters who remained, such as Frederick of Brunswick and Wilhelmus de Hildernisse, attracted only small followings that were quickly

⁴ Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 53–54 cites numerous instances of metaphorical language that Bridget of Sweden uses to convey her intermediary role as a vessel or conduit. Catherine of Siena, too, as in the *Dialogue* 89 uses similar language: the “vessel of her heart is filled with the sea that is my very self [that is, God], the most high eternal Godhead.” (trans. Noffke) Margery Kempe uses the imagery of her being filled with the Lord, as food filling her soul. Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. Anthony Bale (Oxford University Press, 2015), 41.

⁵ For Vincent's Joachimism, see Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 171–73.

⁶ Vincent Ferrer, Letter to Benedict XIII of 1412, *Notes et Documents de L'histoire de Saint Vincent Ferrier*, ed. Pierre Henri Fages (Paris: A. Picard, 1909), 213–24. From this letter it may be possible to read Vincent's claim of being given “the authority of the divine Scriptures as he had given John the Baptist” as a possible nod to inspired exegesis, but such a reading is not at all obvious, and there seem to be no other indications from his writings that he was claiming his exegesis to be inspired. In this same passage Vincent states that God had given him signs as he had once given Moses, and along with the authority of Scripture, was provided to help him in his preaching mission.

put down by Church authorities.⁷ It seems that interest in the inspired exegesis of a safely dead or a mysterious pseudonymous author was one thing, especially when the predictions in these texts were seen as already proven accurate. For living prophets who might have to defend their claims or answer criticisms, however, and unless one was a committed Joachite, *intelligentia spiritualis* was no longer a likely means of revelatory insight. Inspired exegesis also implied a certain level of Scriptural learning, or status as a cleric, since this conception of inspiration assumed that exegetical study and deductive interpretation accompanied and followed supernatural insight. Very few late fourteenth-century prophets about whom much is known, however, possessed sufficient education or status to support such a claim, and, for those who did, their learning meant they knew that inspired exegesis was discredited.⁸ The majority of the new prophets of the late fourteenth century, however, were not learned in Scripture. Thus, inspired exegesis would not have corresponded to their experience. Even for uneducated followers of the Spirituals, lack of exegetical training could result in claiming *prophetia* over *intelligentia spiritualis*.⁹

Not only did they profess a different type of inspiration, the most important prophets of the later fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries were also very different types of people from those who came before. The majority were less-educated laity, and frequently women, whose experiences compelled them to enter religious or quasi-religious life. In contrast to those

⁷ Frederick of Brunswick and his followers, for example were condemned in 1392. See Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham*. Wilhelmus de Hildernissem was tried and condemned by Pierre d'Ailly in 1411. See Smoller, Laura Ackerman, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly, 1350-1420*, 116.

⁸ Vincent Ferrer has already been mentioned as an educated visionary who did not claim inspired exegesis. Pedro of Aragon might also qualify. An *infante* of the Aragonese royal family, Pedro was an educated man, and his close ties with the Franciscans (he eventually joined them) suggest he would have been aware of the concept of spiritual intelligence. Nonetheless, Pedro understood and presented his visions as *prophetia*. Below, p 158 n. 21.

⁹ Na Prous Boneta, in the early fourteenth century, provides an illustrative example in support of this reasoning. Although she was an advocate of Spiritual teachings, she lacked Scriptural learning and training, and she was also a lay woman. Probably for these reasons she claimed prophecy rather than inspired exegesis. See above, p. 129.

associated with the Spirituals, they were less ideologically homogeneous and, at least initially, less overtly concerned with the arrival of the millennium. Moved by visions (auditory and visual) they prophesied against the ills of the contemporary Church as well as European society more generally. Visionary prophets, including women, existed earlier, but as the messages delivered by these new prophets were frequently directed at a papacy that was first resident in Avignon and then divided among multiple claimants during the Schism, these new prophets could not be ignored, especially when they might prove advantageous to those in power. But these prophecies also posed new problems for theologians: In particular, were these messages from divine sources, as their recipients claimed, or were they simply delusions or, worse, deceptions worked by demons or the devil?

Late medieval developments in lay piety leading up to the prophets of the fourteenth century have received a lot of scholarly attention. Historians of medieval sanctity such as André Vauchez, Donald Weinstein and Rudolf Bell, and Richard Kieckhefer, have shown how late medieval concepts of piety and holiness expanded to allow greater space for lay and especially lay female expressions of saintliness.¹⁰ Complementing these studies, Carolyn Bynum Walker and Bernard McGinn have investigated how cultivated visionary experience, once the exclusive domain of monastics, moved out of the cloister beginning in the thirteenth century and increasingly became a part of the religious practice of pious lay and semi-lay individuals.¹¹ Peter Dinzelbacher's work on visions, moreover, posits a shift, beginning in the twelfth century, when

¹⁰ André Vauchez, *La Sainteté En Occident Aux Derniers Siècles Du Moyen Age (1198-1431)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1981) translated as ; *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000 - 1700* (London; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Mileu*.

¹¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, "Religious Women in the Later Middle Ages," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987), 121–39; Bernard McGinn, "The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism," *Church History* 65, no. 2 (June 1996): 197–219.

visions changed from primarily representing journeys of spiritual transport (mostly experienced by men) to more personal, repeatable encounters with heavenly beings (more commonly experienced by women).¹² During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries these visions usually accompanied efforts to accomplish individual spiritual union with God, and their literary function was to demonstrate the visionary's holiness.¹³ In the fourteenth century, however, visions increasingly found expression as prophecy. This can be seen as a further development in medieval visionary tendencies – as pious lay people drew upon assumptions about the nature of holiness and interacted with or were influenced by conceptions of prophecy that originated among theologians, their visions increasingly took on a public and prophetic character in response to the crises of their time.

Despite the variety of social backgrounds and geographical regions, the prophets of the later fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries shared several experiences in common, and reports about prophecies and the experiences of the prophets are useful for telling us what the laity and lower clergy expected prophecies to look like. A first common experience, since they were lay persons, was the crucial role of the prophets' confessors both for recording (and publicizing) their experiences and for educating them in how the Church understood their experience. In particular, the usually university-educated confessors instructed their prophets in vision and prophecy theory or otherwise guided them or helped them to understand their experiences in ways that corresponded to the Church's expectations and aligned with learned theories about prophecy.

Second, as many of the prophets were women, they were confronted by a set of issues resulting especially from the synthesis of thirteenth-century Aristotelian thought that called into question their suitability as prophets. Here too, their confessors played a crucial role, through

¹² Dinzelbacher, *Vision Und Visionsliteratur Im Mittelalter*.

¹³ Veerle Fraeters, "Visio/Vision," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 187.

instruction and by arguing the theological case and circumstances by which God would choose to communicate with a woman. Confessors guided these women's behaviors to comply with the Church's expectations for proper female religious expression or else interpreted and presented them as such. The confessor-prophet relationship also itself afforded opportunities for the prophet to demonstrate her adherence to these conditions.

An issue of particular significance, addressed by theologians and informing most fourteenth-century discussions of prophecy, were fears that demonic illusions might be masquerading as genuine prophecy. Augustine, not surprisingly, had already addressed this possibility but Alain Boureau has shown how Augustine's analytical framework was systematized and modernized by thirteenth-century theologians. William of Auvergne and especially Thomas Aquinas speculated about how demons might foretell the future and by deception imitate prophecy.¹⁴ Despite demons' maleficent intent, Aquinas believed that God constrained their powers, but several Franciscan theologians, and Olivi in particular, theorized that demons possessed greater freedom to act and cause harm than Aquinas had thought.¹⁵ In the early fourteenth century, heightened concerns about the activities of demons led John XXII to suspect that sorcery, magic, and astrology represented human alliances with the devil, and that these practices were used to harm others or predict the future.¹⁶ Though references to demons were noticeably absent in John XXII's proceedings against Spiritual Franciscans and Beguins, the central issues surrounding prophecy later in the century flowed from these concerns: granted that the experiences of the

¹⁴ Alain Boureau, *Satan the Heretic*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). On William of Auvergne, see, especially Thomas B. de Mayo, *The Demonology of William of Auvergne: By Fire and Sword* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2007). Aquinas describes demons' abilities in appearing to prophesy in *Summa theologiae*, 2a, 2ae, q. 172 art 5-6.

¹⁵ Boureau, *Satan the Heretic*, 101.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

prophets were as they described, how could one know whether the visions seen and the voices heard were the work of divine or diabolical powers?

For many observers, events of the Schism vindicated certain forecasters who seemed to predict the disaster; but the Scriptures also warned that in the Last Days many false prophets would appear, and thus the proliferation of prophetic claims in this time of division and crisis also prompted anxiety and suspicion. Although the Bible, Church Fathers, and saints' *vitae* offered various guidelines for distinguishing true from false prophecy, many reasoned that demons also knew these guidelines and could mimic them as they attempted to deceive. Furthermore, in more normal times recourse to hierarchical authority might have provided a means to evaluate contested prophets. The Schism, however, largely removed this option. A divided hierarchy was no longer a reliable or agreed upon source of authority, and as there were anxieties about false prophets so too were there concerns about false prelates. Thus, new means to judge the merits of prophecy were in order.

In the late fourteenth century there were several types of response to these questions. Eventually, as will be shown in chapter five, university theologians responded by producing the first systematic treatises on *discretio spirituum* (discernment of spirits), beginning in the 1380s. But prophets and especially their confessors were also anxious to demonstrate that they were directed by good rather than evil spirits. As confessors sought to illustrate the particular merits of their prophets, they also articulated their thoughts about proper theoretical bases for evaluating them. Some, such as Alfonso of Jaén and Raymond de Sabanac, wrote discernment treatises to preface editions of their prophets' revelatory accounts. Others, like Raymond of Capua, approached the topic less systematically but still discussed these concepts within their accounts of the prophets. The prophets themselves discussed discernment, in their own words or through

their revelations, sometimes speaking explicitly about how to tell good spirits from bad. More frequently the prophets insisted that they themselves possessed special abilities for distinguishing between spirits.

This chapter will examine each of these major issues related to conceptions of prophecy that took shape in the later fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries and how the prophets and their confessors both shaped and attempted to respond to them. Bridget of Sweden provides an advantageous point of departure since each of the main elements contributing to this synthesis finds significant expression in her writings or writings about her. Not only were these topics considered by her confessors, but they were also discussed by her voices. One of the earliest and best known among this group of late fourteenth-century prophets, she also generated a significant amount of contemporary attention, discussion, and emulation.

4.1 Prophets, Their Confessors, and the Alignment of Practice with Theory

The earliest and most prominent of the new prophets of the late fourteenth century was Bridget of Sweden (ca. 1303-1373).¹⁷ Born into Swedish nobility, Bridget married Ulf Gudmarsson, who would become a member of the Swedish king's council, and Bridget herself became a lady-in-waiting to the queen in 1335. Bridget and Ulf were married for twenty-eight years, and had eight children, six of whom survived infancy. After the death of her youngest son, and then the illness and death of her husband (in 1344 or 1346), Bridget received a series of visions that God wished to be known to the world through her. Although she had supposedly received periodic visions from the time she was a young girl, the now widowed Bridget

¹⁷ The best biographical study is Bridget Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK ; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1999). On Bridget's visions and prophecy, in particular, see especially Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*.

reportedly heard God from a cloud tell her that she would become Christ's bride and a channel of the Holy Spirit, and for the rest of her life Bridget continued to receive frequent visions and revelations from God or other supernatural agents.¹⁸ Often the meaning of her visions was obvious, but when interpretation was required the voices themselves usually explained the meaning, all of which she wrote down or dictated in detail. They were then translated into Latin and commented on by a series of male confessors.

Bridget's visions became known through the efforts of her confessors and public pronouncements that she herself made in Sweden and Rome, and as she drew further attention by establishing a religious order (the first to be founded by a woman), debates provoked by her experiences anticipated the reception of prophets for the next 150 years. Many willingly accepted her claims of divine inspiration. Such was the outcome, for example, of an assembly of Swedish bishops and theologians to whom she submitted her revelations around 1346: according to a passage from the first chapter of the Bridgettine Rule, probably authored by Bridget's confessor Alfonso of Jaén, these experts confirmed and verified that her revelations had been sent by the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ But there were also skeptics who saw her as deluded or insane, arguing that her visions were phantasms caused by her extreme ascetic practices or that she was deceived by demons.²⁰

Bridget would turn out to be only the first of a long line of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century laypeople, often lacking advanced education, who found themselves inspired to criticize contemporary society and warn against the consequences that would follow from failure to

¹⁸ Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones Extravagantes*, ed. Lennart Hollman, Samlingar Utgivna Av Svenska Fornskrift-Sällskapet 2 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri, 1956), 92.

¹⁹ Birgitta of Sweden, *Opera Minora* Vol 1: *Regula Saluatoris*, ed. Sten Eklund, Samlingar Utgivna Av Svenska Fornskrift-Sällskapet, Ser. 2, Latinska skrifter 8:1 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksellss, 1975), 1.8-10. On the Swedish examination of Bridget's revelations and Bishop Hemming's communications with the pope and the kings of England and France, see Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 79-82.

²⁰ See below, p. 181.

reform. Like Bridget, Pedro of Aragon (1305-1381), the fourth son of King Jaime II of Aragon, first received visions as a layman in his forties and shortly after being widowed.²¹ Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), from a wealthy and politically active family of dyers, merchants, and notaries, was younger when she first received visions – according to her *vita*, she received her first vision at the age of six – and she was still living at home as a young woman when her mystical encounter of being wed to Christ came shortly after her father’s death in 1368.²² Later prophets arose from even more modest situations. Constance de Rabastens (active 1384-1386), for example, was a widowed laywoman from a small town between Albi and Toulouse when she began to have visions between 1384 and 1386.²³ Marie Robine (d. 1399) had lived as a recluse at the cemetery of Saint-Michel in Avignon for nearly ten years by the late 1390s when she began to experience revelations that her confessor judged important enough to record.²⁴ This list is by no means exhaustive and could easily be extended with additional names, some of whom, such as Dorothea of Montau (1347-1394), Ermine de Reims (d. 1396), and Margery Kemp (c. 1373-1438), left sufficient documentation to attract the attention of modern scholars.²⁵

²¹ On Pedro and his prophecies see Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417*. Pedro’s visions compelled him to join the Franciscan Order.

²² Francis Thomas Luongo, *The Sainly Politics of Catherine of Siena* (Cornell University Press, 2006), 29–30. The account of Catherine’s mystical marriage is recorded by Raymond of Capua, *Vita S. Catharina Senensis*, *Acta Sanctorum*, III Aprilis, Dies 30 (Antwerp, 1675). (henceforth abbreviated as *Legenda maior*). Catherine’s wedding ring is also alluded to in Epistola 39, To Joanna, Queen of Naples, in Catherine of Siena, *Epistolario Di Santa Caterina Da Siena*, ed. Eugenio Dupré Theseider (Rome: R. Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1940). For Catherine’s letters I have primarily used Noffke’s translated volumes.

²³ Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, “Constance De Rabastens: Politics and Visionary Experience in the Time of the Great Schism,” *Mystics Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (December 1999): 147–68.; Raymond de Sabanac and Simone Zancchi, *Two Women of the Great Schism: The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens and Life of the Blessed Ursulina of Parma*, trans. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Bruce L Venarde, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 3* (Toronto: Center for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2010).

²⁴ Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417*, 81–85.

²⁵ On Dorothea of Montau, see especially Dyan Elliott, “Authorizing a Life: The Collaboration of Dorothea of Montau and John Marienwerder,” in *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, ed. Catherine M Mooney (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 168–91.; and, John Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 170–92. Ermine de Reims has recently been studied by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The*

Much of what is known about these prophets comes from their confessors, and contemporaries came to know about these prophets mostly through them as well. For these prophets a confessor was not just the priest who administered the sacrament, but he was also a spiritual director. The visionary and confessor interacted regularly, allowing the confessor to hear confession, give advice, and provide instruction. Many Catholics from the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries would be familiar with this type of confessor as spiritual director, and certain monastics and royals had them from at least the twelfth century, but this type of arrangement was relatively new for more ordinary laypersons in the fourteenth century.²⁶ In the case of visionaries, especially, these relationships could be very close. Confessors often traveled with the prophet, sometimes managed her household, and even supervised her day-to-day affairs. Crucially, the confessor usually also transcribed the prophet's dictated accounts of her visions, delivered them to their intended recipients, and sometimes provided for a wider readership by arranging them into editions.

Late medieval confessor-penitent relationships have attracted substantial scholarly attention, especially over the past two decades as historians have explored the complex dynamics between pious women and their male confessors or spiritual advisors, both inside and out of the cloister.²⁷ In particular, earlier work that focused on aspects of male repression and control of female

Strange Case of Ermine de Reims: A Medieval Woman Between Demons and Saints (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015). *The Book of Margery Kempe* was only discovered in 1934, but studies of Margery Kempe are now numerous. Useful starting points are A. E. Goodman, *Margery Kempe: And Her World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); John Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis, eds., *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004).

²⁶ Jodi Bilinkoff, *Related Lives: Confessors and Their Female Penitents, 1450-1750* (Cornell University Press, 2005).

²⁷ For example, Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*; John Coakley, "Friars as Confidants of Holy Women in Medieval Dominican Hagiography," in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Tímea Szell (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 226–46; Catherine M. Mooney, ed., *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 71–98.

spiritual expression has been challenged by recent studies, often centered on visionary women, which tend to regard such relationships as gender-conditioned partnerships. These partnerships involved mutual benefits. Visionary women offered the male cleric things he did not have but desired, for example, direct access to the divine or increased status by his association with her should she gain a reputation for holiness. In return, in addition to providing frequent access to the sacraments, spiritual direction and instruction, he recorded, translated and publicized her revelations, and he could also offer verification and legitimization. Recent studies have not, however, done away with considerations of power or control. Indeed, medieval attitudes towards the sexes stipulated that women were expected to be subservient and obedient to their confessor's authority. But these historians have shown how power was frequently negotiated and, paradoxically, how through voluntary submission these women were empowered and gained authority because their compliance allowed others to view them as speaking for God.²⁸

Historians and literary scholars have not abandoned efforts to find in women's writing their genuine words or information about their actual lives. Recent studies of women's writings, however, are now conducted with greater consciousness that these texts represent a collaborative effort between the women and their male scribes, editors, and translators.²⁹ Studies of revelatory

²⁸ See especially, Janette Dillon, "Holy Women and Their Confessors or Confessors and Their Holy Women: Margery Kempe and Continental Tradition," in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England*, ed. Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996), 115–40; Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 1999), 89; Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 112–20.

²⁹ In addition to several of the works listed above which discuss these matters more broadly, the writings of Bridget of Sweden and Margery Kempe, in particular have provoked much study. See for instance on Bridget: Hans Aili, "Alfonso's Editorial Work in the Liber Ad Reges: A Pitfall for Vernacular Translators?," in *The Translation of the Works of St Birgitta of Sweden into the Medieval European Vernaculars*, ed. Bridget Morris and V. O'Mara (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 25–42; Roger Ellis, "The Divine Message and the Its Human Agents: St Birgitta and Her Editors," in *Studies in St. Birgitta and the Brigittine Order*, ed. James Hogg, vol. 1, *Analecta Cartusiana*, 35:19 (Salzburg: Inst. f. Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1993), 209–33; Albert Ryle Kezel, "Translator's Forward," in *Bridget of Sweden: Life and Selected Revelations* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 59–66. And on Margery: Felicity Riddy, "Text and Self in the Book of Margery Kempe," in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 435–53; Nicholas Watson, "The Making

writings, in particular, suggest these works were produced through a dialogue in which the visionary woman usually dictated (generally in the vernacular) her vision to her scribe, who translated it into Latin and then read it back to her with clarifying questions and remarks. Most historians regard this exchange as preserving the original intent of the prophet's account and even a considerable amount of her language but also that they could be influenced, edited, or otherwise altered through the confessor's mediating function. In this process, frequently repeated, the prophet could achieve greater understanding of what her confessor (and therefore the Church) expected, and further she might ask questions to increase or alter her own understanding of what she was experiencing. The confessor might gain insight from this interaction too, for confessors sometimes asked their prophets to intercede for them, even on points of theology or doctrine.³⁰

We have sufficient information about the prophets' confessors to see that most were well educated, usually in theology. They were frequently men of medium to higher position, and they are often described as possessing particular skills or experience in guiding visionaries, writing about them, or in evaluating their visions. Bridget of Sweden had at least four confessors: Her primary confessor in Sweden was Master Mathias Ovidsson (c. 1300-c.1350), canon of Linköping cathedral and a *magister in sacra pagina* who had been educated at Paris. Master Mathias wrote an influential commentary on the Apocalypse, several Aristotelian treatises, and

of the Book of Margery Kempe,” in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 395–434; Nicholas Watson and Felicity Riddy, “Afterwords,” in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 454–58; Barry Windeatt, “‘I Use but Comownycacyon and Good Wordys’: Teaching and the Book of Margery Kempe,” in *Approaching Medieval English Anchoritic and Mystical Texts*, ed. Dee Dyas, Valerie Edden, and Roger Ellis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 115–30.

³⁰ A few examples from Bridget of Sweden include her being asked by her confessors to ask God's guidance on the composition of a liturgical setting, an exorcism formula, and answers to difficult exegetical questions.

an anthology of *exempla* for preachers.³¹ Prior Peter Olafson of Alvastra (c. 1307-1390) and Master Peter Olafson of Skännige (d. 1378), the latter a secular priest who was warden of an alms house at Skännige, both accompanied her to Rome.³² At Rome, retired archbishop Alfonso of Jaén (c. 1330-1388) became another of Bridget's confessors.³³ Although the full credentials for all her confessors are not known, the learning of each was sufficient that they were able to write about theological issues relating to Bridget, especially as they attempted to verify her visions and advance her canonization.

Some confessors, Alfonso of Jaén in particular, seem to have gained recognition as specialists in dealing with prophets. Upon Bridget's death the pope sent him to interview Catherine of Siena about her prophecies, and Alfonso also served as a confessor for Chiara Gambacorta and Katherine of Sweden (Bridget's daughter). Catherine's best known confessor was Raymond of Capua (c. 1330-1399), who would eventually become master general of the Dominican Order. Probably educated at Bologna, he had been rector of a convent of Dominican nuns and authored a *vita* of Agnes of Montepulciano (d. 1317) before being assigned to Catherine.³⁴ John Marienwerder (d. 1417) was a canon law professor at the University of Prague before becoming Dorothea of Montau's confessor, and Margery Kempe sought confessors who were bachelors of theology or doctors of divinity.³⁵ Even prophets of very modest background

³¹ Bridget Morris, "General Introduction," *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden, Volume 1: Liber Caelestis, Books I-III*, ed. Bridget Morris, trans. Denis Searby (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 12–13.

³² Bridget Morris, "General Introduction," *ibid.*, 13–14.

³³ Arne Jönsson, *Alfonso of Jaén: His Life and Works with Critical Editions of the Epistola Solitarii, the Informaciones and the Epistola Serui Christi*, ed. Arne Jönsson (Lund, Sweden: Lund University Press, 1989); Eric Colledge, "Epistola Solitarii Ad Reges: Alphonse of Pecha as Organizer of Birgittine and Urbanist Propaganda," *Mediaeval Studies* 18, no. 1 (1956): 19–49.

³⁴ Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*, 171–72.

³⁵ On John Marienwerder, see Elliott, "Authorizing a Life: The Collaboration of Dorothea of Montau and John Marienwerder." For Margery of Kempe's confessors, see Dillon, "Holy Women and Their Confessors or Confessors and Their Holy Women: Margery Kempe and Continental Tradition."

such as Constance de Rabastens were attached to able confessors: hers, Raymond de Sabanac, had probably been a law professor at the University of Toulouse and was conversant in the relevant theology.³⁶

Historians have taken interest in the confessors' editorial roles and the processes that created these texts, but these were also a matter of interest for the prophets and their confessors. It was commonplace for prophets describe their revelations or to be portrayed as receiving direct communication from God. Constance de Rabastens, for example, in a letter to the inquisitor of Toulouse that she probably dictated to her son, states that God told her, "And you are not the one who is speaking, but it is the Holy Spirit that speaks in you."³⁷ Other prophetic accounts, however, were more nuanced and spoke not only to an editorial role for the prophet but also to one for the confessors, even assigning the confessor a divinely-mandated function, itself endowed by grace that cooperated with the prophet's supernatural gifts.

Bridget of Sweden's revelations, for instance, are promoted and portrayed as direct communications from God, but at times Bridget describes for herself a role in editing and reformulating what she saw and heard. Bridget believes this is justified, however, for as Christ tells her:

My spirit sometimes leaves my elect to themselves, so they ... may examine and ponder my words in their heart and after much reflection set them forth more clearly and bring forth better [formulations]. Your heart is not always fit and burning for bringing forth and writing those things, which you perceive, but sometimes you turn them over and over again in your mind, sometimes you write and rewrite those things, until you come to the proper sense of my words. In the same way my spirit ascended and descended with the evangelists and doctors. Sometimes they stated something that needed to be revised, sometimes something that needed to be

³⁶ Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "Constance De Rabastens," 149.

³⁷ Letter 1 of Constance de Rabastens, transl. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski in Sabanac and Zancacchi, *Two Women of the Great Schism*.

retracted Nevertheless, all my evangelists received words, which they spoke and wrote, from my spirit through infusion.³⁸

In this same revelation, Christ describes the role of Bridget's confessors in this process:

I am like a carpenter, who cuts wood in the forest, carries it home, and then carves a beautiful image, and decorates it with colors and lineaments. When his friends see that the image could be decorated with still more beautiful hues, they also add their colors by painting on it. So I, God, have cut my words from my divine forest, and placed them in your heart. Truly, my friends rendered them into books in accordance with the grace given to them and colored and decorated them.³⁹

Such explanations serve to recognize and legitimize the editorial process applied to Bridget's revelations. Indeed, Christ commands Bridget to turn over her writings to her confessors so that they, aided by His grace, might clarify the language, verify their orthodoxy, and revise the formulation of their final form.⁴⁰

Apparently, such editorial action was not seen to negate the divine nature of revelation. Neither was this a new idea, for scholars such as A.J. Minnis have shown how medieval commentators from the twelfth century onward increasingly considered the human and divine *auctores* of Scripture separately, with the former regarded as the secondary efficient causes of the text and apart from God, who was considered the primary efficient cause.⁴¹ Gilbert of Poitiers, for instance, had theorized a similar view in his commentary on the Psalms – and he

³⁸ Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones Extravagantes*, 49.5-7: "Quia spiritus meus dimittit quandoque electos meos sibi ipsis, vt ipsi...diudicent et discuciant verba mea in corde suo et post multos cogitatus exponant clarius et eliciant meliora. Nam sicut cor tuum non semper est capax et feruidum ad proferendum et scribendum illa, que sentis, sed nunc voluis et reuoluis ea in animo tuo, nunc scribis et rescribis illa, donec venis ad proprium sensum verborum meorum, sic spiritus meus cum euangelistis et doctoribus ascendebat et descendebat, quia nunc ponebant aliqua emendanda, nunc aliqua retractanda ... Attamen omnes euangeliste mei a spiritu meo per infusionem habuerunt verba, que loquebantur et scripserunt."; trans. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 73.

³⁹ Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones Extravagantes*, 49.1-3: "Ego sum similis carpentario, qui prescindens ligna de silua deportat in domum et inde fabricat ymaginem pulchram et ornat eam coloribus et liniamentis. Cuius amici videntes ymaginem, quod adhuc pulchrioribus coloribus ornari posset, apposuerunt et ipsi colores suos depingendo super eam. Sic ego Deus prescidi de silua deitatis mee verba mea, que posui in cor tuum. Amici vero mei redegerunt ea in libros secundum gratiam eis datam et colorauerunt et ornauerunt illa."; trans. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 32.

⁴⁰ Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones Extravagantes*, 45, cited by; Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 32.

⁴¹ A.J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, Second Edition (University Park, PA: Univ of Pennsylvania Press, 1984, repr. 2009).

considered the Psalms as directly inspired even as the human writer reformulated their expression.⁴² Moreover, medieval ideas about the attribution of credit among human writers could also be looser and more flexible than modern conceptions of authorship, allowing for the work of editors and collaborators to be silently absorbed and the composite text considered the product of a single *auctor*.⁴³

Bridget's revelations addressing her or her confessors' active role in editing God's words, like most of her revelations, were initially dictated to one of her Swedish confessors. Alfonso of Jaén, however, the confessor most responsible for compiling Bridget's revelations after her death and in support of her canonization, seems to have been less comfortable recognizing such human editorial functions. In his own writings, for instance, he downplays his role and emphasizes that Bridget's revelations came directly from God, and in the edition of the *Revelations* that he collated he omitted Bridget's revelation sanctioning the confessor-secretaries' editorial function. Perhaps he considered his editorial role inconsequential, and some manuscripts of the *Revelations* include annotations offering the suggestion that he had rejected this passage in order to avoid the appearance of arrogance.⁴⁴ It is also possible, however, that he was concerned that an admission of too much human participation in the formulation of the *Revelations* might threaten acceptance of Bridget's status as a direct conduit of God. The question must be left unanswered, but it is suggestive that these passages were discovered in Alfonso's papers following his death, only after which did they begin to be included in editions of the *Revelaciones*.

⁴² See above, p. 63.

⁴³ Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, for example 100ff.

⁴⁴ Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 32–33.

For purposes here, the most important aspect of the confessor-prophet relationship is the role it played in bringing the expression of practiced prophecy into closer alignment with learned theories. At times it may be speculated how the prophets themselves assimilated certain learned understandings or even made their own contributions to thinking about prophecy. But the objective here is not to recover the prophet's "authentic" voice nor to determine what the prophets actually did or thought. Certain writings might indicate a prophets' own thinking or actions more than others, but ultimately these accounts were motivated by the influence of a confessor or their presentation was a product of his role in shaping these texts.

Instead, the investigation of these prophetic writings will show how portrayals of these prophets' words and actions helped to create a synthesis which by the end of fourteenth century was largely responsible for producing a common conception of prophecy that in its essentials was broadly accepted. In particular, this synthesis emphasized the classification of visions into Augustinian categories, offered theological justifications for female prophecy and formulated expectations for prophetic behaviors, and attempted to address concerns about possible demonic deception. These portrayals were created in collaboration with the prophets, but the end product was issued by learned clerics who successfully communicated these ideas as a normative expression of practiced prophecy, both to other clerics and to a wider reading and hearing public.

4.2 The Categories of Prophetic Vision

The nature of visions did not much figure in debates about Joachim of Fiore or the Spirituals. But as the prophets of the second half of the fourteenth century expressed their inspiration according to expectations of *prophetia* –directly communicated visions– many also exhibited or were represented as exhibiting varying degrees of knowledge about Augustine's

categories of prophetic vision. Some of this information could have been derived from stories and accounts of the saints, such as Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, which present visions in terms generally consonant with Augustine's understanding.⁴⁵ Many fourteenth century prophets' descriptions of their visions, however, express greater theological sophistication than could be inferred from such stories, and, given their lack of formal theological training, this indicates a significant role for their confessors.

When reporting their prophets' experiences confessors often related their visions to theological concepts in their commentaries or through the accounts and *vitae* they produced. Most remarkable are prophets' revelations that recount heavenly voices themselves discussing the nature of visions in detailed theoretical terms, at times even explaining to the prophet (and to readers) how a vision that might not seem to fit a preferred category actually does. Evidently, the confessors were guiding their prophets' understanding and instructing them in these ideas. Furthermore, as texts guided, edited, or produced by these confessors were read, especially by other would-be prophets and their confessors, the theology of visions was further disseminated. With the revelations themselves confirming them, these ideas increasingly became a key component in thinking about prophecy as expressed by practitioners.

It will be recalled that Augustine's conception of vision allowed for three hierarchically-ascending categories: corporeal, spiritual or imaginative, and intellectual.⁴⁶ Corporeal vision sees

⁴⁵ Voragine's *Golden Legend* (*Legenda Aurea*) was widely available in vernacular translations or vernacular compilations, and is known to have been possessed by many of the prophets, or was read to them. According to testimony at the canonization of Bridget of Sweden, for instance, she owned a Swedish legendary drawn primarily from Voragine; see Isak Collijn, ed., *Acta et Processus Canonizationis Beate Birgittae*, vol. 1, Svenska Fornskriftsällskapet and Kungl 2 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksellss, 1924), 66, 78, cited by Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 57. Margery Kempe knew at least some of the Golden Legend stories as well; see Madeleine Jeay and Kathleen Garay, "'To Promote God's Praise and Her Neighbour's Salvation': Strategies of Authorship and Readership among Mystic Women in the Later Middle Ages," in *Women Writing Back / Writing Women Back: Transnational Perspectives from the Late Middle Ages to the Dawn of the Modern Era*, ed. Anke Gilleir, Alicia A. Montoya, and Suzanna van Dijk (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 39–40.

⁴⁶ See above, p. 17ff.

external, physical images, as through the eyes. Spiritual vision sees images or likenesses of corporeal things within the mind. Either intellectual vision refers to the direct illumination of the mind, of non-corporeal things that have no image (such as abstract concepts like love or God), or else intellectual vision directly communicates understanding of corporeal likenesses seen through spiritual vision. According to Augustine, corporeal visions are fallible and open to error, whereas intellectual vision is always infallible. Spiritual visions, on the other hand, occupy an ambiguous middle ground. When accompanied by intellectual vision they are infallible, and even alone spiritual visions can represent true visions, as in the Biblical visions of Ezekiel or in Revelation; conversely, they may produce illusions and are a space for demonic deception.

To describe the manner in which spiritual and intellectual visions are received by the seer, Augustine uses the terms *extasis* or *excessus mentis*, an ecstatic or rapt state in which the recipient of the vision is lifted up and separated from his or her physical senses.⁴⁷ Augustine's conception of ecstasy was frequently commented upon by theologians throughout the Middle Ages, and descriptions of ecstatic separation from one's senses were commonly associated with visionary saints, including accounts in the *Golden Legend*.⁴⁸ This having become the expectation for how prophecy was received, the prophets of the fourteenth century frequently present themselves as receiving visions in this manner, or were presented as so.

Catherine of Siena's multi-day raptures of being wed to Christ and experiencing mystical "death" are among the most famous examples of ecstasy. These accounts come mainly from the

⁴⁷ Augustine, *De genesi*, 12.12.25. "When the attention of the mind is wholly turned away and withdrawn from the bodily senses, it is called ecstasy." (trans. John Hammond Taylor, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (New York, NY: Newman Press, 1982).

⁴⁸ *Golden Legend* stories featuring ecstasy include: Saint Anthony, Ephrem in the story of Saint Basil, Saint Dominic, men and women experiencing ecstatic visions in the story of Saint Augustine, and Saint Francis. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vols. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012). For thirteenth century theology on ecstasy, see below, p. 173.

Legenda maior, written by Raymond of Capua, who reports witness accounts of Catherine in trance-like states, when she is unresponsive to physical stimuli. Raymond adds that he himself witnessed her “*raptum a sensibus*” and explains that her soul was separated from her body when she “saw the secret things of God.”⁴⁹ It should be noted, as Karen Scott has taken the lead in exploring, that Catherine rarely presented herself using so vivid accounts of ecstatic visions as in Raymond’s *Legenda*. Instead, in her dictated letters she makes occasional reference or allusion to visionary experience but prefers to speak using her own skills of persuasion, and her most “mystical” treatise, the *Dialogue*, is not so much a typical vision as a spoken dialogue between God and her soul.⁵⁰ This changes near the end of her life, however, when in despair at the Schism and enduring a prolonged fast, Catherine provides a dramatic and emotional vision account of offering her life to God.⁵¹ But for the most part, Catherine’s reputation as an ecstatic visionary was accomplished through Raymond’s efforts to shape her image to conform to conventional expectations.

Other prophets and their confessors utilized the language of ecstasy and rapture more expressly to indicate that their visions were of a divine nature. Constance de Rabastens, for example, frequently tells of being in an ecstatic, “ravished” (*en ravissement*) state while hearing her voices; similarly, ecstasy is described in the experiences or accounts of Margery of Kempe, Julian of Norwich, Colette de Corbie, and Francesca Romana, among others.⁵² Most ecstatic visions were reported by women, but men could experience them, too. Vincent Ferrer, for

⁴⁹ Raymond of Capua, *Legenda Maior*, 2.7.18: “*raptum a sensibus*” and 2.7.213: “...quod anima fuit totaliter a corpore separata ... vidique arcana Dei...”; trans. *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, trans. Conleth Kearns (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1980).

⁵⁰ Karen Scott, “St. Catherine of Siena, ‘Apostola,’” *Church History* 61, no. 1 (March 1992): 34–46.

⁵¹ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, trans. Suzanne Noffke, vol. IV (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), T371; see also, Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417*, 54.

⁵² Raymond de Sabanac, *The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens* in Sabanac and Zanicchi, *Two Women of the Great Schism*, 35–74.

instance, recounts the report of two Franciscan novices who were visibly rapt in ecstasy when it was revealed to them that Antichrist was born.⁵³

The *Revelations* of Bridget of Sweden helped provide contemporaries further substance for what was meant by ecstasy, and because she was revered by other prophets who emulated her, including Margery Kempe and Dorothea of Montau, Bridget's example was especially important. Many revelations are prefaced by stating she was "in spirit," "in ecstasy," "rapt in spirit," or "suspended in a rapture of contemplation." While these are mostly formulaic statements, and perhaps editorial emendations or added by scribal observers, other passages provide further explanation for the reader and may also indicate that Bridget possessed a certain degree of understanding about the meaning of ecstasy. A particular revelation, this time expressed by Bridget in the first person, has her exclaim:

O God most loving and sweetest of all! What you have done for me is wonderful for all those who hear of it. Whenever you please, you put my body to sleep—yet not with a bodily sleep but with a spiritual rest. Then you rouse my soul to life as though from sleep so that I hear and feel in a spiritual way.⁵⁴

Here Bridget explains that her visions occur while her physical senses are suspended, and her soul is raised up out of itself in order to see, hear, and feel spiritually. Moreover, Bridget stresses that her visions do not occur while she sleeps thus also reflecting a sensitivity to theological suspicions about dreams, repeated in another revelation when Christ warns her to be cautious

⁵³ Vincent Ferrer, Letter to Benedict XIII of 1412, in *Notes et Documents de L'histoire de Saint Vincent Ferrier*, 213–24.

⁵⁴ Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones*, Book IV, ed. Hans Aili, Kungl. Vitterhets Historie Och Antikvitets Akademien (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksellss, 1992), 4.77.3-4: "O, carissime Deus et omnium dilectissime! Mirabile omnibus audientibus est illud, quod tu fecisti mecum. Nam quando placet tibi, tunc sopis corpus meum, non tamen cum sopore corporali sed quiete spirituali. Animam autem meam tunc quasi a sompno excitas ad videndum et audiendum atque senciendum spiritualiter." Trans. in *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden, Volume 2: Liber Caelestis, Books IV-V*, ed. Bridget Morris, trans. Denis Searby, vol. 2 (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

about visions communicated through dreams.⁵⁵ Bridget's confessors probably warned her to be cautious about dreams, too, for they were cognizant of this difficulty. For example, in his *Epistola* that accompanied many editions of the Bridget's *Revelaciones*, Alfonso of Jaén insists that Bridget's visions were not dreams, discusses the threat of demonic visions in dreams, and points out the extreme difficulty that dreams present for the discernment of spirits.⁵⁶

Simply presenting prophecy as ecstasy did not guarantee its acceptance. Not all ecstasies were considered divine, for it was believed that demons could produce ecstatic experiences. In the thirteenth century, especially, theologians such as William of Auvergne, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure explored these possibilities, drawing from Augustine's position that spiritual vision was a place for evil as well as good angels to communicate with humans. William of Auvergne held that illness or an unsound mind could produce effects that seemed like ecstasy and that demons could simulate ecstatic states nearly impossible to distinguish from divine rapture.⁵⁷ Aquinas, moreover, maintained that rapture was necessary to receive spiritual vision (though not required for intellectual vision), although he too pointed to physical and mental infirmity or demonic possession as alternative causes for such trances.⁵⁸ Bonaventure regarded ecstasy as a primary facet of Francis' contemplation and knowledge of God, and his differentiation of levels of ecstasy and rapture placed rapture as the highest of seven levels of

⁵⁵ Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones*, *Book IV*, 4.38.2. On medieval misgivings about dreams, see Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), especially chapters 4 and 5.

⁵⁶ Alfonso of Jaén, "Epistola Solitarii," in *Alfonso of Jaén: His Life and Works with Critical Editions of the Epistola Solitarii, the Informaciones and the Epistola Serui Christi*, ed. Arne Jönsson (Lund, Sweden: Lund University Press, 1989), chapter 5; See also Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, 88 and 102-103; Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 64-65.

⁵⁷ William of Auvergne, "De Universo," in *Opera Omnia* (Paris: A. Pralard, 1674), pt. 2,3 c.13. Cited by Dyan Elliott, "The Physiology of Rapture and Female Spirituality," in *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body*, ed. Peter Biller and A.J. Minnis, *York Studies in Medieval Theology*, I (Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1997), 147.

⁵⁸ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2a 2ae, q. 173 discusses rapture with particular reference to prophetic vision and 2a 2ae, q. 175 addresses rapture more generally.

intellectual vision.⁵⁹ Elsewhere, however, Bonaventure was cautious about visions because of their potential to deceive, believing them “more to be feared than desired.”⁶⁰

Prophets and their confessors responded to this dilemma by explicitly offering evidence that their visions were truly divine. Alfonso of Jaén, for example, wrote at length about the nature of Bridget’s visions, and specifically commented about how they corresponded to Augustine’s categories. In the preface to an edition of Bridget’s *Revelaciones* intended for the kings of Europe (and presumably their ecclesiastical advisors) Alfonso writes:

...she said that her whole conscience and intelligence were enlightened and filled with spiritual understanding in that ecstatic rapture. While Christ was speaking, moreover, the Rule of the Savior as well as the entire Book of Questions and much else besides were instilled in her mind through a supernatural influx of intellectual light. It is thereby clearly demonstrated to us that she was at those moments rapt in ecstasy, her mind and understanding being divinely enlightened and illuminated by means of a supernatural intellectual vision. You should understand that the devil can in no way impart such an enlightenment or illumination to another person’s mind, because a soul can never be deceived by a demon in an intellectual vision, as will be made more evident below through the quotations from Augustine and Thomas of Aquinas; all the doctors of the Church are in agreement about this. Furthermore, when she was in the state of ecstatic rapture, she states that God’s Son or the Virgin Mary or some angel or saint spoke to her the words that are contained in the Heavenly Book as well as practically throughout the following book. We can thereby clearly gather from this that God in his mercy deigned to enlighten our consciences through the words of his teaching for the lady’s beneficial guidance and for our own and wished, through this lady, to give us instructions about his mysterious will, about the future and about other holy teachings by means of a divine, internal locution in an intellectual vision.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaemeron et Bonaventuriana Quaedam Selecta*, ed. Marie Ferdinand Delorme, vol. VIII, Bibliotheca Franciscana Scholastici Medii Aevi (Quaracchi, 1934), iii.24 and iii.30 places rapture at the top of his hierarchy of six levels of intellectual vision. Cited by Elliott, “The Physiology of Rapture and Female Spirituality,” 143.

⁶⁰ Bonaventure, *Sententiae* dist. 9, art. I, q. 6, as cited by Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism: 1200-1350*, vol. 3, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 111.

⁶¹ Alfonso of Jaén, “Epistola Solitarii”, 5.33-39: “Quando autem ipsa dixit, vt supra habetur, quod tota consciencia et intelligencia eius in illo raptu extasis replebatur et illuminabatur quodam intellectu spirituali et quod in momento erant, Christo loquente, infusa in intellectu eius multa, vt scilicet tota Regula Saluatoris et Liber Questionum et multa alia per quendam influxum luminis intellectualis supernaturalis, ecce quod per hoc clare ostenditur nobis, quod ipsa tunc stabat rapta in illo extasi, et tunc illuminabatur et illustrabatur mens et intelligencia eius diuinitus per supernaturalem, intellectualem visionem. Et scias, quod hanc

Here we can see Alfonso explaining to readers of the *Revelations* that what had been revealed to Bridget should be trusted, for it complied, in accord with learned expectation, with true vision. Through ecstatic rapture, he says, Bridget was granted spiritual understanding by means of a supernatural light. Her mind was further enlightened by supernatural intellectual vision, the highest level, and because of this her visions should be regarded as true and impervious to demonic deception. As has been discussed, in her *Revelations* Bridget insisted that her visions were not the product of dreams. Further aligning her revelations with the thinking of her confessors, and explaining the spiritual nature of what she saw, Christ tells Bridget, “I opened spiritual eyes for you, so that you might see spiritual things; I opened your ears, so that you might hear what is from the spirit,” and also relating to her that she sees “spiritually...not with the eyes of the body, but of the heart.”⁶²

A similar pairing of an explication of the content with a prophet’s visionary accounts can be found in the case of Catherine of Siena. In her *Dialogue*, dictated to one of her scribes in 1370, God explains the nature of bodily perception, spiritual perception, and the intellect. Expressed throughout the *Dialogue*, the phrase “eye of the intellect” (*occhio dell’intelletto*) is employed to describe the place where true knowledge is received, free of deception. The meaning of “eye of

illuminacionem seu ilustracionem mentis dyabolus nullatenus potest infundere alicui, quia in visione intellectuali numquam potest anima illudi a demone, vt infra clarius patebit per Augustinum et Thomam de Aquino, et in hoc omnes doctores concordant. Cum eciam ipsa dicit, quod, in illo raptu seu extasi ea existente, fillius Dei vel virgo Maria vel aliquis angelus vel sanctus sibi loquebantur ea, que supra in Libro Celesti continentur et infra in presenti libro quasi per totum, tunc per hoc clare colligimus, quod ipse miserator Deus ad ipsius domine et nostram vtilem direccionem consciencias nostras per verba doctrine sue dignatus est illustrare, et quod de secretis misteriiis suis ac de rebus futuris et aliis documentis sanctissimis sua quadam diuina, interna locucione per intellectualem visionem instruere nos per ipsam dominam voluit et docere.” Trans. in Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden, Volume 4: The Heavenly Emperor’s Book to Kings, The Rule, and Minor Works*, ed. Bridget Morris, trans. Denis Searby (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁶² Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones, Book II* (Lübeck: Ghotan, 1492), 2.10.38: “Ego quippe aperui tibi oculos spirituales, ut videas spiritualia, aperui aures, ut audias, que spiritus sunt.”; Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones Extravagantes*, 82.13: “non oculis carnis sed cordis.” Each trans. in Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 65–66. Augustine had similarly discussed seeing spiritual images with the eyes of the spirit in Augustine, *De genesi*, 12.2–12.

the intellect” is most fully explained when God describes the nature of the Sacrament of the Eucharist:

...as I revealed to you, if you remember well, almost in the beginning of your life; and not so much at first through the eye of your intellect as through your bodily eye, although the light being so great your bodily eyes lost their vision, and only the sight of the eye of your intellect remained....The eye of the intellect had the true vision, using the pupil of the holy faith, for this eye should be your principal means of vision, inasmuch as it cannot be deceived.... The perceptions of the body are deluded, but not those of the soul, for she is illuminated and assured in her own perceptions...⁶³

Similarly, “eye of the intellect” or “mind’s eye” are terms that Catherine utilizes throughout her letters to denote a higher understanding than what is possible through the senses of the body.⁶⁴

Later, Catherine’s confessor Raymond relates Catherine’s account of another conversation with God:

“... for I will give you a mouth and a wisdom that none shall be able to resist. I will bring you before Pontiffs and the Rulers of Churches and of the Christian people, in order that I may do as is my way, and use what is weak to put to shame the pride of the strong.” Here and with suchlike words, (continued Catherine), he kept speaking in a purely spiritual or intellectual vision to my soul, suddenly, in some mysterious way, I know not how, my soul found itself back in the body once more.⁶⁵

⁶³ Catherine of Siena, *Il Dialogo: Dialogo Della Divina Provvidenza Ovvero Libro Della Divina Dottrina*, ed. Giuliana Cavallini, 2nd ed. (Siena: Cantagalli, 1995), 111. For this passage I have used the translation of *The Dialogue of the Seraphic Virgin Catherine of Siena*, trans. Algar Thorold (London: Paul Kegan, 1907), pp. 141-143. A more recent translation is available, *Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue*, trans. Suzanne Noffke (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), but Thorold’s translation is more literal and in this case better conveys the sense of visionary understanding.”... Sí come ben ti ricorda che, quasi nel principio della vita tua, Io ti manifestai. E non tanto con l’occhio de l’intellecto, ma con l’occhio del corpo, bene che, per lo lume grande, l’occhio del corpo tuo perdé il vedere e rimase solo il vedere a l’occhio de l’intellecto...A l’occhio de l’intellecto con la pupilla della sanctissima fede; sí che nell’occhio de l’intellecto debba essere il principale vedere, però che egli non può essere ingannato...Sí che vedi che ’ sentimenti del corpo sonno ingannati, ma none il sentimento de l’anima: anco n’è chiarificata e certificata in se medesima, perché l’occhio de l’intellecto l’ha veduto con la pupilla del lume della sanctissima fede...”

⁶⁴ For example, Catherine’s letters: T122/G304, T134/G135, T141/G59/DT38, T272/G90. (for these I have consulted the volumes translated by Noffke).

⁶⁵ Raymond of Capua, *Legenda Maior*, 2.7.216: “ego enim tibi dabo os et sapientiam, cui nullus resistere poterit. Adducam etiam te coram Pontificibus et Rectoribus Ecclesiarum ac populi Christiani, ut consueto meo modo, per infirma fortioram confundam superbiam. Haec et similia dum spiritaliter sive intellectualiter loqueretur animae meae, modo (quem ignore) imperceptibili, se invenit subito reductam ad corpus.”; Trans. by Conleth *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*.

As with Alfonso's commentaries, Raymond supports and adds greater theological weight to Catherine's accounts, which themselves were informed by Raymond or her other scribes or confessors. Instead of "eye of the intellect," Raymond chooses to present Catherine as using the more theologically precise terms of spiritual and intellectual vision (while her soul is separated from her body) to convey her status as a true prophet.

As the confessors guided their prophets in a correct understanding of the nature of visions, they also had to help the prophets understand how their experiences – of hearing, seeing, and speaking to what they often perceived as physical manifestations of heavenly bodies, could be harmonized with theories of non-material spiritual and intellectual vision. Not only was this important for the prophet's understanding, but it was crucial if the vision was to gain acceptance, for if they were incorrectly described critics might contend that these visions were corporeal in nature, and such visions were considered especially dubious because of the high potential for demonic deception.

Such instruction can be detected especially in the case of Bridget of Sweden, who is presented as being troubled that her visions sometimes seemed as if they were corporeal. Reassuring her (and the reader) about the true nature of her visions, Christ tells Bridget that "spiritual things appear to you as if they were corporeal. Angels and souls appear to you in the likeness of human beings....Demons appear to you...in forms of animals and other creatures....Spiritual words even are spoken to you with a similitude."⁶⁶ Christ tells her that it is not possible for a mortal being to see spiritual things just as they are due to the limited capacity of the human body and mind. As He explains:

⁶⁶ Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones, Book II*, 2.18.4-7: "Ideo videntur tibi sprituali quasi corporalia. Angeli et anime videntur tibi in similitudine hominum, qui habent vitam et animam....Demones videntur tibi...ut in forma animalium vel aliarum creaturarum....Spiritualia vero verba cum similitudine tibi dicuntur."; Trans. in Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 66.

The vision that you see does not appear to you just as it is. For if you would see the spiritual beauty of the angels and the souls of the saints, your body would not be sufficient for seeing it, but would burst like a corrupt and rotten vessel because of the joy of your soul from the vision. If, on the other hand, you would see demons just as they are, either you would live with much pain or you would die suddenly because of the frightful sight of them. Therefore spiritual things appear to you as if they were corporeal.⁶⁷

Of course, direct intellectual illumination apart from any bodily likenesses was a possibility considered by theologians, but that is not how Bridget experienced vision. Instead, Christ relates the nature of Bridget's experience to her prophetic calling when He tells her that such corporeal similitudes were necessary in order for her to convey the meaning of her revelations to others. Elsewhere the Virgin Mary tells Bridget that Ezekiel similarly saw spiritual realities by means of corporeal similitudes in order to more easily instruct others.⁶⁸

The idea that spiritual or intellectual vision might accompany or require the assistance of corporeal similitudes echoes medieval theology, and both Aquinas and Augustine had assigned the greatest level of prophecy to Biblical figures who experienced such multi-faceted revelations.⁶⁹ Drawing from this thinking, Alfonso argues that Bridget's prophecy is similar, for according to him:

she had from God the most extraordinary grace of the spirit of prophecy through the internal locution of God and through spiritual and intellectual vision, divinely and

⁶⁷ Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones, Book II*, 2.18.2-3: "Visio, quam vides, non tibi videtur, sicut est. Si enim videres spiritualement pulchritudinem angelorum et animarum sanctarum, corpus tuum non sufficeret videre sed rumperetur quasi vas corruptum et putridum propter gaudium anime ex visione. Si autem videres demones, sicut sunt, aut viueres cum nimio dolore aut moreris per subitanam mortem propter terribilem visionem eorum."; Transl. in Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 68.

⁶⁸ Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones Extravagantes*, 39.12-14: "Item mater Dei: "Scito eciam, quod prophete preceptum fuit ostendere populo ingrato descripciones templi destructi, quas vidit in spirituali visione, non quia in celo erant corporaliter, sed quia per corporalia intelliguntur spiritualia, vt populus inobediens cognosceret ingratitudinem suam et resipiscens a malis suis prepararet se ad percipiendam promissionem Dei.". Cited by Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 68.

⁶⁹ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 2a 2ae, q. 173 art 4 defined the greatest prophet as one who sees corporeal likenesses spiritually but understands them through direct infusion in the mind from intellectual vision. For Aquinas, Moses was the exemplar of this type of greatest prophet. Augustine, *De genesi*, 12.9 had maintained, for similar reasons, that the greatest prophet was Daniel, who received revelation of the content as well as the true meaning of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

freely given to her, for true and proper prophecy and revelation and also knowledge of doctrine are caused by spiritual or imaginary vision of other bodies or of images, entering then on that occasion by a divine inpouring of intellectual light and supernatural truth, as is clear from aforementioned ways and sentiments by which she saw visions, and from the statements of Augustine in Book 12, *Super Genesim ad Litteram*, where the text is clear about this. Corporeal images were formed in her spirit and almost always an understanding of them was divinely revealed in her mind. Indeed I boldly say...that this degree of prophecy, divinely and freely given to her, is judged higher among all other degrees of prophecy, when, namely, the prophet not only sees images of words and deeds, but also sees while awake someone conversing and demonstrating something to her.⁷⁰

In a manner similar to how Raymond of Capua had explained Catherine's revelations by giving greater theological precision to her accounts, Alfonso thus explains the diversity of Bridget's visions. Even those that seem corporeal (and thus at the lowest end of the spectrum) are only a means made necessary by human nature to convey the highest type of intellectual infusion.

4.3 Gender and Conceptions of Prophecy

Because many fourteenth-century prophets were women, they and their confessors needed to defend against doubts that God would not speak to a woman; it was also important that they align prophetic practice and behaviors with the Church's expectations about proper female religious expression. There were some medieval precedents for how the prophets and their confessors might respond to these challenges. In the twelfth century, Hildegard of Bingen (1098-

⁷⁰ Alfonso of Jaén, "Epistola Solitarii", 5.58-63: "quod ipsa habuit a Deo singularissimam gratiam spiritus propheticæ per internam Dei locutionem et per spiritualem et intellectualem visionem, ei diuinitus gratis datam, quia vera et propria propheticæ et reuelacio ac sciencia et doctrina causantur ex visione spirituali seu ymaginaria aliquorum corporum seu signorum accedente tunc ibi influxu luminis intellectualis et supernaturalis veritatis diuine, vt patet ex modis et sentimentis supradictis, quibus ipsa visiones videbat, et ex dictis Augustini in libro XII Super Genesim ad Litteram, vbi est textus clarus de hoc, quia ymagines corporales in spiritu eius expresse sunt et quasi semper earum intellectus diuinitus reuelatus in mente. Immo audacter dico secundum beatum Thomam de Aquino in secunda secunde, questione CLXXIII et secundum alios doctores, quod iste gradus propheticæ isti beate domine diuinitus gratis datus inter omnes alios gradus propheticæ aliorum iudicatur, quando scilicet propheta non solum videt signa verborum vel factorum sed etiam videt vigilando aliquem sibi colloquentem aut aliquid demonstrantem." Trans by Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 70-71.

1179) and Elisabeth of Schönau (c. 1129-1165) maintained that through visions God had directly revealed to them important warnings: about the need for the clergy to reform its behaviors, the growth of heresies, and resolving the schism of 1159-1179 – and how future tribulations would befall the Church if these matters were not addressed.⁷¹

In their day, the prophecies of these women attracted the favor of important churchmen and their fame was widespread. Enthusiasm for public female prophecy, however, was short-lived. Despite an anthology and abridgement of Hildegard's prophecies assembled in the 1220s, in part to combat what its compiler regarded as the "pseudo-prophecies" of Joachim, public prophecy as practiced in the thirteenth century was primarily expressed and thought about in Joachite terms.⁷² Female manifestations of prophecy, moreover, were increasingly relegated to more private, personal expressions.⁷³ Hildegard's popularity, especially, would increase again in the late fourteenth century, as new readers rediscovered her as a prophet of the Schism, but in the meantime, and apart from a few instances when she was used for anti-mendicant propaganda, Hildegard (and Elisabeth) faded somewhat from view.⁷⁴

⁷¹ On Hildegard, see for instance, the essays included in Beverly Mayne Kienzle, Debra L. Stoudt, and George Ferzoco, eds., *A Companion to Hildegard of Bingen*, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 45 (Leiden: Brill, 2013); and Barbara Newman, ed., *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). In addition to Newman's various works on or touching Hildegard's thought and expression, particularly useful for her treatment of Hildegard and vision is Barbara Newman, "Hildegard of Bingen: Visions and Validation," *Church History* 54, no. 2 (1985): 163–75. See also, Bernard McGinn, "Hildegard of Bingen as Visionary and Exegete," in *Hildegard von Bingen in Ihrem Historischen Umfeld*, by A. Reverchon (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2000), 327–33. The standard biographical history of Elisabeth of Schönau is Anne L. Clark, *Elisabeth of Schönau: A Twelfth-Century Visionary*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

⁷² The 1220s anthology is the *Speculum futurorum temporum sive Pentachronon* by Gebeno of Erbach, who was abbot of the Cistercian abbey at Erbach. See, Charles Michael Czarski, *The Prophecies of St. Hildegard of Bingen* (PhD diss.: University of Kentucky, 1983), 181.

⁷³ McGinn, "The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism"; Fraeters, "Visio/Vision."

⁷⁴ Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, "Hildegard of Bingen and Anti-Mendicant Propaganda," *Traditio* 43 (1987): 386–99. Michael Embach, "Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179): A History of Reception," in *A Companion to Hildegard of Bingen*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle, Debra L. Stoudt, and George Ferzoco, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 45 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 273–304; Barbara Newman, "Hildegard and Her Hagiographers: The Remaking of Female Sainthood," in *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, ed. Catherine M. Mooney (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 16–34;

Hildegard and Elisabeth faced skepticism related to their gender, although to a lesser degree than their fourteenth-century counterparts.⁷⁵ Still, they had to address criticisms and doubts, and further they can be seen as expressing their prophetic gifts in ways conditioned by the fact that they were women. Several of these issues were rooted in a Biblical understanding that was ambivalent about female prophecy. On the one hand, there were numerous Biblical examples of female prophets, especially in the Old Testament, and 1 Corinthians 11:5 implies the possibility of female prophecy when Paul says that women who prophesy should cover their heads. At the same time, the Bible often portrays women as the weaker sex, for instance, 1 Peter 3:7 (women are “the weaker vessel”). Eve’s sin and subsequent curse (“and he shall rule you,” Gen 3:16) also indicated that women should be subservient to men. There were also Biblical stipulations against women exercising authority, specifically religious authority, over men. Paul, for instance forbids them from speaking in churches (1 Cor 14:34); elsewhere he states that women should refrain from teaching in public or assuming authority over men (1 Tim 2:12).

Hildegard and Elisabeth pointed to other Scriptures they felt justified belief that God would speak to a woman. In particular, they cited or referenced Biblical examples of female prophets as well as Paul’s statement that “the foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the strong.” (1 Cor 1:27) Raised in convents from an early age, Hildegard and Elisabeth possessed greater training and instruction than most twelfth-century women, but each cultivated an image

Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, “Hildegard and the Male Reader: A Study in Insular Reception,” in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England*, ed. Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996), 1–18. On Elisabeth of Schönau’s reception, see especially, Clark, *Elisabeth of Schönau*, 45–49, 137–142, 191.

⁷⁵ There is little direct evidence for these criticisms, perhaps due to these two women receiving support and legitimization from Bernard of Clairvaux and Pope Eugenius III, in the case of Hildegard, and the abbots of Schönau, in the case of Elisabeth. Hildegard, however, refers to them in several places in her writings. Newman, “Hildegard of Bingen: Visions and Validation,” 171.

of being unlearned, and further insisted that their weakness and frailty indicated that the revelations they received were the words of God rather than their own.⁷⁶

Concerning whether it was proper for a woman to speak from a position of authority, Hildegard, in particular, made the point forcefully that she was justified to preach and write for the public. Speaking in the voice of God, she wrote that it was God's voice and God's authority, and not that of a woman who spoke, and she warned of dire consequences for anyone who refused to listen.⁷⁷ Although Hildegard, especially, sometimes preached in public, and both Hildegard and Elisabeth wrote works intended to be read by others, they were also cloistered nuns. This, in addition to the divine authority they claimed, might have eased concerns that they were transgressing boundaries since they were thus contained within an established structure of ecclesiastical authority. And, they were authorized and legitimized by powerful male ecclesiastical authorities, which may help to explain why few voices of opposition to them can be found in the surviving sources.

After Hildegard and Elisabeth, and prior to the fourteenth century, there would be other female prophets, but they attracted neither widespread attention nor particular notice from the higher levels of the Church. Most of these women prophesied about noncontroversial matters such as advocating good morals and pious behavior or engaged in the limited and personal prophecy typical of hagiographical writings intended to demonstrate their sanctity. These were

⁷⁶ Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (University of California Press, 1987), chapter one.

⁷⁷ For instance, Hildegard of Bingen, *Hildegardis Scivias*, ed. Adelgundis Führkötter and Angela Carlevaris, vol. 43 and 43A, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1978). 3.13.16, trans. Newman, "Hildegard of Bingen: Visions and Validation," 171.: "As for anyone who rejects the mystical words of this book, I the Lord will stretch forth my bow against him and pierce him with the arrows of my quiver, I will cast his crown from his head, and I will make him like those who fell upon Horeb when they murmured against me. But as for anyone who curses this prophecy, let that curse which Isaac uttered come upon him."

matters that did not presume to put such women in positions of power or threaten the authority of men and were mostly of a private nature rather than public prophecy.

Not all doubts about fourteenth-century female prophets focused on their gender, but frequently they did. The range of objections represented a standard set of concerns, usually related to ideas about female weakness and inferiority, or were protestations that these women violated conceptions of authority or the established order. There is no direct evidence for many of the criticisms, either because they were expressed verbally or because their documentation has been lost, but their general tenor can be inferred from arguments that were made in response. In particular, documents from the 1373-1391 canonization process of Bridget of Sweden, one of only two of these female prophets to be made a saint (the other, Catherine of Siena, would be canonized in 1461), illustrate a variety of contemporary objections.⁷⁸ Doubts about these prophets can also be deduced from the prophets' *vitae*, such as those for Catherine of Siena and Ursulina of Parma. Furthermore, the prophets' revelations themselves allow us to detect strategies that these women and their confessors employed to demonstrate that it was proper to consider them as conduits for God. Owing to their volume, and to the level of her confessors' likely guidance on such matters, Bridget of Sweden's *Revelations* are among best of these sources, although others such as *The Book of Margery Kempe* and the *Revelations* of Constance de Rabastens provide additional insights.

Some critics simply refused to believe that God would speak to a woman. One, a Dominican friar, among those on Cyprus who criticized Bridget during her trip to the Holy Land, believed that God no longer spoke to humans, but if God did the cleric doubted that God would speak to

⁷⁸ Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, chapter five.

an “ignorant little woman;” he also considered Bridget to be mentally unstable.⁷⁹ Likewise, an unidentified master from Perugia argued that Christ never would have appeared or revealed himself to a woman.⁸⁰ Relating to beliefs about women’s passionate and carnal natures, and to their inability to control them, were charges that these women’s ecstatic experiences were in fact delusions caused by excessive fasting or sleep deprivation. A common set of criticisms, they are recounted by Bridget in her *Revelations*, and by Raymond of Capua in the *Legenda* of Catherine of Siena, among others.⁸¹

Notions of female weakness and susceptibility to the passions also prompted suspicions that these women might be deceived by demons. As observed earlier, William of Auvergne and Thomas Aquinas theorized that ecstasy, or at least something resembling ecstasy, could be caused by demons.⁸² Women, because of their “open” porous physiologies and passion-driven psyches, were considered especially prone to this type of false ecstasy and demonic illusion. One of Bridget’s confessors, for instance, recounted how he had initially suspected that her visions came from demons.⁸³ Of course, stories like this may have been a device allowing him to explain how he came to see her visions as coming from a good spirit. Nonetheless, this story, others like it, and numerous appearances of demons in revelatory texts and commentaries indicate that

⁷⁹ Collijn, *Acta et Processus*, 1:390 (testimony of Alfonso of Jaen). Cited by Morris, *St Birgitta of Sweden*, 129. Another, Brother Paul of Alvastra, believed Bridget to be insane. Collijn, *Acta et Processus*, 1:488 (testimony of Prior Peter). Cited by Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 145.

⁸⁰ The charges of the Perugian master are lost, but can be inferred from the detailed counter-arguments of Adam Easton, “*Defensorium Sanctae Birgittae*,” in *Adam Easton’s Defense of St Birgitta from Bodleian MS Hamilton 7 Oxford University*, ed. and trans. James Alan Schmidtke (PhD diss.: Duke University, 1971).

⁸¹ For Bridget’s account of a knight that charged her with excessive fasting and sleep deprivation, see Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones, Book IV*. 4.113.addicio. Raymond of Capua informs us of Catherine’s critics in *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 167–77. On female religiosity and its relationship to food more generally see especially Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (University of California Press, 1987). Another example is Margery Kempe. Apart from extravagant public weeping Margery was also known for vacillating between ascetic practices, which gained her critics, see Voaden, *God’s Words, Women’s Voices*, 146.

⁸² See above, p.173.

⁸³ The confessor is Prior Peter. His initial doubts are mentioned in the context of Bridget’s visions at *Revelaciones Extravagantes*, 48 and; his own testimony at *Acta et Processus*, 510-511.

demons were a very common concern. Apart from demonic illusion and trickery, there are accusations of sorcery, which implies greater complicity.⁸⁴ Knights jealous at Bridget's influence with the king and unnamed inhabitants in Rome imputed sorcery, Catherine of Siena and Ursulina of Parma (among others) were at one time or another accused of sorcery as well, and in the example of Ermine de Reims near the end of the fourteenth century elements of a developing conception of witchcraft can be adduced.⁸⁵

Another set of objections viewed these women as violating gender norms or as challenging authoritative structures. Bridget and Margery Kempe are each recorded as being told it would be better for them to spin wool like other women than to prophesy or speak about the Scriptures.⁸⁶ The aforementioned Perugian master was particularly aggravated by his view that Bridget violated Biblical restrictions against women teaching publicly or speaking in Church.⁸⁷ Other detractors were offended not so much that these were women *per se* as that they were women who operated outside of the cloister – or, as Thomas Luongo puts it, “violating the gendered boundaries of social space.”⁸⁸ Thus, a Swedish monk objected to Bridget living in the vicinity of the male cloister; another refused to believe that God would reveal Himself to a woman who had not taken vows; and similar charges, relayed by Raymond of Capua, suspected Catherine of self-glorification for refusing to remain in a religious cell.⁸⁹ Such objections meant that women prophets, their confessors, and theologians sympathetic to the possibility that God would speak

⁸⁴ This issue is discussed in greater detail below, p. 200-204.

⁸⁵ On Catherine being accused of sorcery, see Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 196; The Life of Blessed Ursulina of Parma, Sabanac and Zancchi, *Two Women of the Great Schism*, 95; Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*.

⁸⁶ Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones*, Book IV, 4.124.2; Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 1.53.

⁸⁷ Easton, “*Defensorium Sanctae Birgittae*.”

⁸⁸ Luongo, *The Saintly Politics of Catherine of Siena*, 23.

⁸⁹ Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones Extravagantes*, 55; Birgitta of Sweden, *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden, Volume 3: Liber Caelestis VI-VII*, ed. Bridget Morris, trans. Denis Searby, vol. 3 (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6.90. Raymond of Capua, *Legenda Maior*, 365.

to women had to promote an understanding of prophecy that countered these objections. Fundamentally, they had to prove, through theological argument in the case of the theologians or, in the case of the prophets, through their words and actions, two main points. They needed to convince doubters that female weakness did not bar women from receiving prophecy but that female natures actually allowed women to act as divine conduits and vehicles for salvation. And, they needed to demonstrate that their calling as female prophets did not subvert established structures of authority but rather allowed divine authority to be heard.

Sahlin's examination of Bridget of Sweden and her supporters' finds several types of response to these issues, and similar responses were given in the cases of various other prophets.⁹⁰ The most common (or at least a common starting point) was recourse to the weak confounding the strong argument drawn from Corinthians. Such was a revelation from the Virgin Mary to Bridget, to be delivered to her confessor who initially doubted her that visions were genuine:

You should know with the greatest certainty that I wish to do a great work through my words, which you will write from the mouth of a woman, by which the powerful will be humbled and the wise silenced. Do not believe that these very words, which this woman speaks to you, proceed from an evil spirit.⁹¹

Similar weak confounding the strong justifications can be found for nearly every prophet. Just a few examples: Raymond of Capua refers to it in support of Catherine; it is employed in the writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe; and Jean Gerson considered (at least

⁹⁰ Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, chapter six.

⁹¹ Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones Extravagantes* 48.12-13, trans. in Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 138. "Et scias pro certissimo, quia tale opus facere volo per verba mea, que tu scribes ab ore istius mulieris, unde potentes humiliabuntur et spaiantes obmutescent. Nec credas a maligno spiritu ipsa verba procedere, que hec mulier tibi loquetur..."

initially) Ermine de Reims a “powerful example of [this] apostolic truth.”⁹² At Bridget’s canonization proceedings, too, it was a justification advanced by Bridget’s confessor Alfonso of Jaén, Archbishop Birger Gregersson of Uppsala (d. 1383) and Bishop Nils Hermansson of Linköping (d. 1391), as well as others who included it but not as prominently.⁹³ Alfonso, Gregersson, and Hermansson each further compares Bridget with Biblical examples of the unlearned, the lowly, or women who received visions and advised kings. While they consider her weak because she is a woman, and list female Biblical precedents, it is not necessarily that Bridget is a woman but that she is weak that suits their point. Thus both Alfonso and Gregersson emphasized comparison of Bridget to male prophets in the Bible, and especially Moses, about whom Bridget’s revelations speak frequently as well.⁹⁴

In revelatory accounts and representations of female prophets gender-specific metaphors are frequently employed to describe prophets’ relationship to Christ and roles as prophets. Arguments of the weak confounding the strong can be seen as an example of a theological idea being conveyed to and assumed by the prophets; conversely, the prophets’ use of gender-specific metaphors, and especially their application of those metaphors to their own experiences and assumptions, are occasions when prophets may have influenced or inspired the theologians. The theologians knew existing visionary motifs, such as mystical marriage to Christ or spiritual motherhood. But even for laywomen visionaries these were mostly expressions of holiness or efforts to attain individual, interior communion with God.⁹⁵ Earlier examples, moreover, often

⁹² For example, Raymond of Capua, *Legenda Maior*, 1.3.334. When first asked to give his opinion, Jean Gerson *Early Letters*, 244-249, cautiously accepted her as an authentic prophet. Twenty years later, however, Gerson reversed his position and argued that she was a deceiver. See below, p. 222.

⁹³ Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 173–83.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 74–77.

⁹⁵ McGinn, “The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism”; Fraeters, “Visio/Vision.”

concerned the experience of contemplative cloistered nuns.⁹⁶ Many fourteenth-century female prophets, however, were laywomen who had actually been wives or mothers, and their domestic experiences seem to have caused several to consider these spiritual roles in a different manner, especially when they (along with their theologians) adapted and translated their understandings of these experiences to a more active prophetic calling.

Among the earlier prophets of the later fourteenth century, Catherine of Siena and Bridget of Sweden each claimed some role as a bride of Christ. Raymond of Capua's account of Catherine's mystical marriage shows how he related this role to her prophetic calling.⁹⁷ He explains that marriage to Christ guaranteed Catherine an unfaltering faith and conferred on her a special grace that would strengthen her in the face of difficulties – including “her sex as a woman” – so that she could save souls. In some ways Raymond's explanation recalls earlier mystical marriages because of the individual grace he describes, but instead of being focused solely on Catherine's spiritual well-being, Raymond also relates this grace as enabling her to save many souls and to instruct the Church.

Unlike Catherine, Bridget was a woman who had actually been married, and her revelations demonstrate a conception of spiritual betrothal that is even further removed from earlier examples. To Bridget, being married to Christ and Him calling her His “bride” indicated a relationship of submissive partnership, in which it became her duty to assist Him in his work of saving souls.⁹⁸ Bridget was also a mother, and maternal imagery and roles are ascribed to her in

⁹⁶ On maternal metaphors as expressions of female visionary experience in a fourteenth-century Dominican convent, see Rosemary Hale, “Imitatio Mariae: Motherhood Motifs in Devotional Memoirs,” *Mystics Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1990): 193–203.

⁹⁷ Raymond of Capua, *Legenda Maior*, 1.12.114–117.

⁹⁸ In a passage that reflects on the nature this relationship, Christ recounts for Bridget a parable of a farmer and his wife caring for their sheep. When the farmer's hired shepherd fails to properly watch over the sheep, the flock becomes threatened by wild animals who seek to devour them. The hired shepherd represents inattentive clergy in the Church, the farmer Christ, Bridget is his wife, and the sheep the faithful. Once the farmer discovers his shepherd's neglect he cries out to his wife, who helps him gather the sheep, and together

her visions. Christ tells Bridget that she will bear for Him many “spiritual children” whom He expects her to nourish in their spiritual welfare, again indicating that this relationship is not only for Bridget’s benefit but for all the Church.

Bridget’s experience as an earthly mother and her new role as a spiritual one also relates to her identification with the Virgin Mary. Bridget believed Mary had assisted her through a life-threatening childbirth, and as a prophet Bridget had numerous visions of Mary, who apart from teaching and revealing to Bridget spiritual things also consoled her, a mother to a mother, about her guilt in leaving her children behind in Sweden. Mary also interceded for the soul of Bridget’s deceased son Karl.⁹⁹ In fact, Mary appears in approximately one-third of the *Revelaciones*, more than any other supernatural voice besides Christ.¹⁰⁰ Related to Bridget’s identification with Mary, her visions find her mystically witnessing Christ’s birth and the Crucifixion – experiences that could be both spiritual or even physical in nature.¹⁰¹ Such physical manifestations are most evident in Bridget’s experience of a “mystical” pregnancy, recounted in *Revelation* 6.88, where Bridget tells of experiencing physical movement in her uterus.

Bridget’s gender-specific spiritual roles and experiences inspired other prophets who had been married or mothers.¹⁰² Dorothea of Montau, for example, a widowed mother of eight, experienced a spiritual pregnancy with physical symptoms nearly identical to Bridget’s as she

the couple lift them up and carry them back to safety. See, Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones, Book I with Magister Mathias’ Prologue*, ed. Carl-Gustaf Undhagen (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksellss, 1978), 1.59.20-21. Cited by Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 51-52.

⁹⁹ Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones Extravagantes*, 63.3-4; Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones, Book VII*, ed. Birger Bergh (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksellss, 1967), 7.13; cited by Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 80 and 22, respectively.

¹⁰⁰ Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 79.

¹⁰¹ *Revelations*, 7.15 (Searby) As for instance when she describes feeling Mary’s sorrow in detailed terms of almost physical pain during the Crucifixion vision 7.15-16, 1.10, 1.27, 4.70 (crucifixion) / nativity 7.21-25

¹⁰² To this number other widows or widowed mothers can be added, such as Constance de Rabestens, Ermine de Reims, and Francesca Romana. Widowed parent prophets were most frequently women, but Pedro of Aragon’s was a father whose prophetic career also began shortly after his wife died.

observed the body of the recently deceased Bridget in Danzig.¹⁰³ Likewise, Margery Kempe, a mother of fourteen children, had visions of herself participating at the birth and crucifixion of Christ.¹⁰⁴ Margery also described herself as spiritually married to Christ. *The Book of Margery Kempe* recounts how she had fashioned a ring that she wore around her neck, calling it her “precious wedding ring to Jesus Christ.”¹⁰⁵

As Raymond’s account of Catherine’s spiritual marriage to Christ and Bridget’s revelations exemplifies, existing motifs of mostly contemplative female visionary experience could be recast by prophets and their confessors and reinterpreted as expressions of active prophetic vocations. Such gender-specific understandings find additional reference and further development in the thinking of other theologians, especially in the context of Bridget of Sweden’s canonization process. For example, Nils Hermansson (d. 1391), bishop of Linköping and theologian, closely associates Bridget with the Virgin Mary in a liturgical office he wrote anticipating the canonization.¹⁰⁶

Hermansson identifies Bridget with Mary, usually understood to be the woman clothed in the sun in Apoc 12:1, when he writes that Bridget was clothed with “Christ, the sun, through works of piety...shines in the light of heaven, writing the mysteries of Christ. She is the messenger of the word of God, so that people would repent.”¹⁰⁷ Bridget is further associated with Mary when Hermansson compares Bridget to familiar Marian images of a rose, a star, and a vessel of grace;

¹⁰³ John Marienwerder, “Aus Dem Septililium Venerabilis Domine Dorothee,” in *Scriptores Rerum Prussicarum: Die Geschichtsquellen Der Preussischen Vorzeit*, ed. Max Töppen, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1863), 365.

¹⁰⁴ Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*. chapters 6, 28.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. chapter 31.

¹⁰⁶ Nicolaus Hermanni, “Rosa Rorans: Ett Birgitta-Officium,” in *Meddelanden Från Det Litteraturhistoriska Seminariet I Lund*, 2 (Lund, 1893), 29–53; References and translations of this text come from the citations of Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 180–83, who draws upon the insights of ; Alf Härdelin, *Kult, Kultur, Och Kontemplation: Studier I Medeltida Svenskt Kyrkoliv*, Opuscula Selecta II (Skellefteå: Artos, 1998), 274–93.

¹⁰⁷ Hermanni, “Rosa Rorans: Ett Birgitta-Officium”, 37: “...Christum solem induit per pietatis opera, ...Celesti luce radiat scribens Christi misteria; ut populus peniteat, est verbi dei nuncia.”

he also writes that Bridget crushed the head of the enemy (an allusion to Mary crushing the head of the serpent); and moreover, the music is from a Marian sequence and the readings emphasize Mary's revelations to Bridget.¹⁰⁸ Hermansson's comparison of Mary and Bridget as instruments for making the Word of God known to man continues when he writes, "He, who covered himself with the flesh in the inner chamber of the Virgin, described mysteries with the pen of the bride."¹⁰⁹ As Alf Härdelin points out, the use of rhyming parallels emphasizes the connection between these two women: *In virginali thalamo, qui se carne precinxit, in huius sponse calamo mysteria depinxit.*¹¹⁰ Not only does God use these meek women to confound the strong;¹¹¹ but He also uses them as vessels for his Word. Just as Mary's womb bore Christ as the Word of God so too does Hermansson regard Bridget as a vessel for bringing forth God's Word in the present.

A theologian who took a different approach was Adam Easton (d. 1397), an Oxford-educated Benedictine monk and cardinal, who sent his *Defensorium Sanctae Birgittae* to Pope Boniface IX sometime around 1389.¹¹² In this treatise, Easton affirms that Bridget was inspired by God, possessed the spirit of prophecy (*spiritus propheticus*), and was free from delusion or demonic illusion.¹¹³ Easton's treatise is primarily a refutation of an unnamed Perugian master who had written against Bridget claiming that her Rule and revelatory writings were not divinely inspired. Although the Perugian's original text is lost, its main criticisms can be summarized from Easton's quotations: it criticized Bridget's linguistic style as crude and defective, attacked

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 35, 52. The allusion is to Genesis 3:15.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 37.

¹¹⁰ Härdelin, *Kult, Kultur, Och Kontemplation: Studier I Medeltida Svenskt Kyrkoliv*; cited by Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 182.

¹¹¹ Hermanni, "Rosa Rorans: Ett Birgitta-Officium," 37.

¹¹² Easton, "*Defensorium Sanctae Birgittae*." Easton believed that Saint Bridget miraculously interceded for him and had saved him from death when he was imprisoned on suspicion of plotting against Pope Urban VI (d. 1389). Adam Easton, *Epistola domini cardinalis ad abbatissam et conventum*, 24-25 (Letter from February 9, 1390).

¹¹³ Ibid., 197-99.

specific doctrinal teachings present in her revelations (many about Mary), and doubted that Christ revealed anything to Bridget since “the apostle does not permit [women] to speak in church.”¹¹⁴ In his response Easton devotes considerable space to detailed, point-for-point refutations of the Perugian’s criticisms of Bridget’s doctrinal orthodoxy, as well as commendations of her virtue and devotion, and at several places Easton specifically counters the conclusion that Christ would not speak to a woman.

Like Hermansson, Easton relates Bridget to a Biblical Mary, but this time to Mary Magdalene. Not only does Easton find in Mary Magdalene conditions in which women can teach religious matters, but he also relates female prophecy to salvation history. Easton agrees that Paul had forbidden women to teach in church, which Easton agrees is due to women’s naturally weak physical condition and intellect.¹¹⁵ But this does not mean that women cannot be prophets, and Easton cites various New Testament texts that seem to support female prophecy and examples of female prophets from the Bible and early Church.¹¹⁶ To further his argument Easton cites Aquinas, who had written that it was permitted for women to give individual instruction or to teach privately, and, through Aquinas, Ambrose, who explains that Mary Magdalen proclaimed to the disciples her witness of the resurrection.¹¹⁷ Similarly, Easton argues, Bridget did not teach publicly but only taught her Rule privately, to her community of nuns.¹¹⁸ Although Easton is only commenting about the Rule here, it is not hard to see how his reasoning could be extended to allow Bridget to convey revelations privately to her confessor or other

¹¹⁴ Easton, “*Defensorium Sanctae Birgittae*”, 185.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 186.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 187–89. Easton refers to Paul’s instructions that female prophets cover their heads in church as implicit approval of female prophets, that Philip had four daughter who prophesied, and that Deborah, and Saints Agnes, Agatha, and Cecilia all prophesied.

¹¹⁷ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3a q. 55 art 1; Easton, “*Defensorium Sanctae Birgittae*,” 185.

¹¹⁸ Especially because the primary audience for the Rule are other women, nuns who are “feeble in intellect...and weaker,” Easton concludes that her uncultivated linguistic style is wholly suitable and appropriate. Easton, “*Defensorium Sanctae Birgittae*,” 181–82.

individuals. Thus, Easton reasons that restrictions against women teaching in church do not preclude female prophecy.

Easton's quotation of Aquinas continues: "But Christ appeared to the woman first, for this reason, that as a woman was first to bring the source of death to man, so she might be the first to announce the dawn of Christ's glorious resurrection."¹¹⁹ And citing Cyril's *Commentary on John*, as quoted by Aquinas:

Woman, who formerly was the minister of death, is the first to see and proclaim the adorable mystery of the resurrection; thus womankind has procured absolution from ignominy and removal of the curse. Hereby, moreover, it is shown, so far as the state of glory is concerned, that the female sex shall suffer no hurt; but if women burn with greater charity, they shall also attain greater glory from the divine vision; because the women whose love for our Lord was more persistent – so much so that 'when even the disciples withdrew' from the sepulcher 'they did not depart,' – were the first to see him rising in glory.¹²⁰

Immediately following this passage Easton asks, "How could this adversary [the Perugian master] dare to say this about the rule; that it is not probable that Christ proclaimed it to the devout lady Bridget and that he was not able to publish it by a woman?"¹²¹

Later in the treatise Easton recalls these passages when he explains why Christ chose to speak to Bridget when He did not give Benedict, Basil, or Francis their rules by revelation (as the Perugian master argued). Here, Easton reasons that although the apostles were in company with Christ He nonetheless appeared at the resurrection to Mary Magdalene. So too with Bridget, "just as the evil teaching came by a woman, so the rule for good living would come to others by a woman."¹²² By proclaiming the resurrection, Mary Magdalen helped to reverse the evil brought by Eve. Thus, Christ did speak to women. Easton further cites Augustine's warning not to judge

¹¹⁹ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 3a q. 55 art 1.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 3a q. 55 art 1.

¹²¹ Easton, "*Defensorium Sanctae Birgittae*," 188.

¹²² Ibid., 196.

the ways of God and “whom he draws, and...whom he draws not” and ends this passage by reference to Matthew 11:25: “Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them to the little ones.”¹²³

So far, the role of gender and how gender affected theological arguments justifying the possibility of female prophecy have been investigated. Ideas about gender also influenced thinking about prophets’ behaviors and comportment that both reflected and contributed to ongoing conceptions of prophecy. In the revelatory accounts, *vitae*, and canonization proceedings the prophets, their confessors and supporters frequently pointed to specifically feminine virtues (as they saw them) as signs that these prophets were of God. In particular, Sahlin’s investigations of how Bridget of Sweden’s behaviors were portrayed show that Bridget’s submission, obedience, and humility were consistently emphasized by supporters to demonstrate that she was a true prophet.¹²⁴ Bridget is represented as possessing these qualities in nearly heroic fashion, gaining her support, and even in the face of derision her virtues are portrayed as allowing her to win over her detractors.

Bridget and her supporters, of course, were drawing upon existing ideas about female holiness. But while most previous conceptions of female holiness were focused on inward contemplative piety, Bridget turned her compliance with expectations about female virtues into support for an active prophetic vocation. In particular, her voluntary submissiveness indicated her acceptance of male ecclesiastical authority, especially as represented by her confessor, and her passivity aligned with the perception that she was a passive conduit for divine communication. As Sahlin writes, “Later-medieval ecclesiastical leaders emphasized willing obedience and submission to clerical superiors as principal features of a virtuous life, particularly

¹²³ Ibid., 196–97.

¹²⁴ Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, chapter 4; Sahlin, “Submission, Role Reversals, and Partnerships: Birgitta and Her Clerical Associates,” *Birgittiana*, no. 3 (1997): 9–41.

for women, and considered this behavior to be a sign of genuine, divinely-inspired visions.”¹²⁵ Complying with expectations about female behaviors allowed contemporaries to take her seriously as a prophet, and thus Bridget’s submissiveness and meekness, paradoxically, provided her with authority in a way that directly claiming that authority could not.

Bridget continued to elicit skepticism from some theologians, but her portrayals were mostly successful in securing her reception as a prophet and she became a model for female prophetic comportment. Especially after her canonization and as her *vitae* and revelations were widely read other women were guided by their confessors to attempt to emulate her example. Their virtues but also their devotion to confessors were considered crucial, and those such as Dorothea of Montau and Ermine de Reims are portrayed as receiving revelations that explicitly stressed the importance of their obedience to confessors.¹²⁶

Even those who had difficulty living up to this ideal made efforts made to construct their image to correspond to the expectations set by Bridget. For example, Rosalyn Voaden’s comparison of Bridget and Margery Kempe shows that Margery’s inconsistent submission to her confessors caused her considerably more difficulties than Bridget.¹²⁷ Voaden argues that despite her argumentative and sometimes defiant personality Margery (and at least certain confessors) nonetheless sought to construct herself as obedient and meek. This preserved at least an

¹²⁵ Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 117.

¹²⁶ Elliott, “Authorizing a Life: The Collaboration of Dorothea of Montau and John Marienwerder”; Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 93. Dorothea and Ermine can be regarded as examples who with their confessors successfully followed Bridget’s lead. Dorothea would not be made a saint officially until 1976, but her cause was first presented just ten years after her death in 1404. Although he would later reverse his position, Jean Gerson initially considered Ermine to be a genuine prophet. On Dorothea’s canonization and the causes for its delay, see Ute Stargardt, “The Political and Social Backgrounds of the Canonization of Dorothea von Montau,” *Mystics Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (1985): 107–22. Gerson’s letter in support of Ermine de Reims can be found Jean Gerson, *Jean Gerson: Early Works*, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 244–49.

¹²⁷ Voaden, *God’s Words, Women’s Voices*, 73–154. Although Margery Kempe is the object of considerable modern scholarship, *The Book of Margery Kempe* had very restricted medieval circulation and no cult ever developed.

ambiguous reception and ultimately kept her out of trouble, but the inconsistencies between her behaviors and the ideal also kept her from gaining more widespread support.¹²⁸ Margery might have done better if she had more skilled confessors, as Catherine of Siena did. From the letters of Catherine, it seems that for her obedience and submission to a confessor were not significant concerns. Nonetheless, Raymond of Capua carefully constructed and reshaped her posthumous image to highlight virtues such as patience and humility and along with his portrayal of himself as an authorizing confessor helped to create a popular representation more in line with expectations.¹²⁹

Apart from guiding and reporting prophets' behavior and virtues, confessors also served as witnesses to the prophets' supernatural virtues. He observed and tested her physical state during periods of ecstasy, confirmed miracles as with the spiritual pregnancies of Bridget of Sweden and Dorothea of Montau, or in the case of Ermine de Reims, he verified her injuries or the accounts of others who heard auditory evidence of Ermine's struggles with demons. Through these functions the confessor helped legitimize the prophet, not only for the visionary herself in times of self-doubt, but especially to outside audiences in their writings or by serving as an emissary to others.

A particular manifestation of male advocacy that also became a component of portrayals of female prophecy was male visionary witness, or supernatural signs granted to men that might support the claims of female prophets. With few exceptions (Pedro of Aragon being one of

¹²⁸ Constance de Rabastens can be added as another example of a prophet whose independence and failure to maintain a supportive relationship with her confessor brought her difficulties. As her visions about the Schism became too troublesome for local religious authorities (who supported the rival pope) her confessor began to doubt her and eventually decided to stop writing for her. Undeterred, and without his approval Constance (probably using her son as a scribe) began sending visionary letters directly to the inquisitor, resulting in imprisonment and an unknown fate. Constance's revelations and letters to the inquisitor are in Sabanac and Zanicchi, *Two Women of the Great Schism*; see also Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "Constance De Rabastens."

¹²⁹ See especially Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*, chapter nine; Scott, "St. Catherine of Siena, 'Apostola.'"

them), living men in the fourteenth century were not often presented as prophets. Perceptions about learning and education, attitudes about male strength, and Aristotelian ideas about male rationality and “closed” physiologies (in opposition to female “openness”) can all be seen as barriers for men to be regarded as prophets. But momentary visions were possible, and frequently supporters of prophets pointed to male supernatural experience to support the status of female prophets.

Male visionary testimony was recounted in the canonization process of Bridget of Sweden, when one of her confessors, Prior Peter Olafson (we are told) initially suspected that her visions were an illusion of the devil.¹³⁰ As a result he decided not to record Bridget’s visions, but almost immediately, the account continues, Peter was struck by an invisible blow that rendered him nearly paralyzed. Fearing death and realizing that this was a sign from God, Peter agreed to translate the revelations and was immediately healed. Two other examples describe monks (not Bridget’s confessors) whose doubts about her were cured by visions. Each sees a vision that includes conduit metaphors similar to Bridget’s revelations: one saw a fire from heaven descending upon Bridget and emitting flames from her mouth; the other saw Bridget elevated above the earth with water streaming from her mouth.¹³¹

Another example, this time reported by Raymond of Capua, explains how his doubts about her were removed when he saw Catherine’s face miraculously transform into that of God the Father; in another she is portrayed as miraculously interceding for two distant friars praying for help as they were being robbed.¹³² Likewise, the *Revelations* of Constance de Rabastens relate that Raymond de Sabanac, having prayed for a sign to ease his doubts about Constance, was

¹³⁰ Collijn, *Acta et Processus*, 510-511.

¹³¹ Accounts of the first monk’s vision are given at *ibid.*, 503; and *Revelaciones*, *Book VII*, 6.30.declaracio 36-38. The second monk’s accounts are in *Acta et Processus*, 82, 275, 545, and 620; and *Revelaciones Extravagantes*, 55.4.

¹³² Raymond of Capua, *Legenda Maior*, 1.9.90 and 2.10.281-283.

answered on two occasions by being struck with an illness in which God temporarily obscured his eyesight.¹³³ Citing a vision to verify another's contested visionary status may seem a strange standard of evidence, but, when the visionary was a learned man of repute who claimed only occasional or limited vision, it seems such visionary testimony was not subject to the same scrutiny as a prophet, especially when the prophet was a woman.

Like theological justifications that embraced feminine attributes, the most successful female prophets also embraced feminine behaviors. Such behaviors, while emphasizing meekness and passivity, nonetheless served to secure positions of power and authority on account of the Biblical principle that God often choose the weak and humble over the strong and proud. Especially through successful portrayals of this sort, female virtues of submission, humility and meekness increasingly became an established characteristic of practiced female prophecy. Even when a prophet's actual personality may not have matched the ideal (as in the case of Margery Kempe), she or her confessor usually recognized the principle and at least attempted the appearance of compliance. In helping to create this conception of female prophecy confessors were crucial: As narrators they were in a position to shape accounts of their prophets' virtues and to popularize the prophets' compliance with these expectations; as dispensers of penance and as spiritual advisors they were also in a position to direct the prophets' behavior and to correct them when they transgressed these expectations.

4.4 Demons and Discernment of Spirits as a Spiritual Gift

The issue of demons has been in the background, and frequently in the foreground, for much of this chapter. A fundamental problem posed by all these prophets was what to make of their

¹³³ Revelations 21 and 22 tell of the illness. Revelation 56 is the sign of obscured eyesight. Sabanac and Zancchi, *Two Women of the Great Schism*.

experiences: were they, as they seemed to the recipients, divine in origin, or did they draw on the devil's power to deceive? Aquinas had expanded on Augustine's discussion of the possibility that demons of some kind could be the source of visions, though he thought that their ability to deceive or do widespread harm would be largely contained by the power of God. Olivi had been less certain that these restraints would be sufficient, though, and by the mid-fourteenth century it had become an increasing fear that demons were at work in the affairs of the world, particularly by making themselves appear as angels of light.

The prophets and their confessors were themselves worried that demons rather than God might be the source of their visions. Bridget of Sweden's *Revelations* describe demonic attempts to deceive her, for example, when demons tried to convince her that the Eucharist was not really Christ's body and blood.¹³⁴ Demons also tried to distract Dorothea of Montau from prayer and to persuade her to stop performing good works.¹³⁵ Raymond of Capua describes Catherine of Siena being tempted by demons who tried to convince her to take a husband and have a family, tried to seduce her with obscene poses, and argued that her suffering and ascetic practices were useless.¹³⁶ In each case these prophets are said to have withstood their tempters: Bridget is usually given guidance by an angel or Mary, and Christ Himself debates the demon about the real presence in the Eucharist; Dorothea's confessor writes that God protected her from giving up prayer or good deeds; similarly, Catherine ignored the demons and concentrated on her prayers before matter-of-factly telling the demons that her suffering was a source of strength and delight, after which the demons disappeared.

¹³⁴ Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones*, Book IV, 4.61 and 4.63; Cited by Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 130.

¹³⁵ Marienwerder, "Aus Dem Septililium Venerabilis Domine Dorothee"; Cited by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 85–86.

¹³⁶ Raymond of Capua, *Legenda Maior*, 1.12.103 and following.

These accounts of demonic assaults surely represented actual fears, but their portrayals served a legitimizing function as well by providing the prophets with opportunities to demonstrate their faith in God, their humility, or how good spirits protected and guided them. As numerous scholars have remarked, accounts such as these fit into an expectation that genuine prophets would, in fact, be tested by evil spirits.¹³⁷ This expectation also usually required the prophet to express initial doubt about his or her calling, to suspect that the vision might actually be an illusion, and usually to report this to the confessor. This crisis of conscience would then be followed by some combination of divine verification or a confessor's reassurance that convinced the prophet that the spirits were good. The performance of this struggle, deliberation, and resolution signaled to observers that the prophet possessed humility and, moreover, that the prophet did not vainly seek visions. Furthermore, since demons represented a higher order of intelligence, demonic attention could possibly confirm that a prophet was truly favored by God since the demons' unceasing efforts to corrupt such an individual might indicate their recognition of that person's holiness, like the temptation of St. Anthony or the Devil's temptations of Christ because the Devil recognized Him as the Son of God.¹³⁸

For Augustine and Aquinas demons were evil forces but their ability to do harm was largely contained by God.¹³⁹ Especially in earlier examples of demonic interaction it was usually the

¹³⁷ For example: Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 117–18; Catherine M Mooney, "The Authorial Role of Brother A. In the Composition of Angela of Foligno's Revelations," in *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*, ed. E. Ann Matter and John Coakley (Philadelphia: Univ of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 46–49; André Vauchez, "Female Prophets, Visionaries, and Mystics," in *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Daniel E. Bornstein, trans. Margery J. Schneider (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 222; Clarissa Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), 120–28.

¹³⁸ Luke 41-13 and Matthew 4:1-11. The story of St. Anthony's temptations are included in Voragine's *Golden Legend*. In the modern translation by Granger, see *The Golden Legend*, 93–95.

¹³⁹ There are important differences between Augustine and Aquinas. For instance, Aquinas understands demons to possess a superior intelligence and to have more autonomous will than Augustine ascribes, but the important similarity here is the ultimate limits they place on demons' ability to do harm. It should also be mentioned that while Augustine's devil was usually fairly powerless, Augustine stipulated that in the last

foolish or corrupt who are actually duped by demons and most others are protected from real harm.¹⁴⁰ At other times charges of demonic illusion appear to be convenient means to discredit a prophet who advocates an opposing view. Some of the accusations against Bridget appear this way, such as those directed by knights jealous of her influence with the king. Similarly, opponents of Pedro of Aragon's Schism prophecies suggested that he might have been led into error by demons (Pedro is also an indication that men as well as women could be suspected of demonic illusion).¹⁴¹

Views drawn from Augustine and Aquinas would continue to influence thinking, but increasingly, by the later 1390s, newer ideas that assumed greater power for demons, and thus greater danger, start to be seen in certain prophets. In part, this development can be understood to be part of broad cultural and intellectual changes articulated by Alain Boureau, Richard Kieckhefer, and Michael Bailey.¹⁴² In the prophets these developments, however, should be regarded as a particular consequence of confessors transmitting these ideas and their anxieties to and through the prophets whom they guided and instructed.

Thus, beginning in the later 1390s demonic interactions with prophets start to become much more severe, threatening, and graphically represented. Instead of debating with prophets, demons now mixed deception with more direct attacks, attempting to terrorize as well as deceive. For example, after Francesca Romana uncovered a disguised demon attempting to deceive her the

days the bounds of Satan would be loosed. For a discussion of these respective views about demons in the context of Ermine de Reims, see Fabián Alejandro Campagne, "Demonology at a Crossroads: The Visions of Ermine de Reims and the Image of the Devil on the Eve of the Great European Witch-Hunt," *Church History* 80, no. 3 (September 2011): 496.

¹⁴⁰ Michael D. Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe: A Concise History from Antiquity to the Present* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 55–56; Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 130, cites two examples in Bridget's revelations of these sort: a king who thinks he is a messianic emperor, a heretical group who follows a sorceress.

¹⁴¹ Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 141–48.

¹⁴² Boureau, *Satan the Heretic*; Richard Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials: Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300-1500* (University of California Press, 1976); Bailey, "From Sorcery to Witchcraft."

demon reportedly transformed into a dragon and tried to throw her off a balcony.¹⁴³ A demon tried to strangle Julian of Norwich (c. 1342-c.1416).¹⁴⁴ Assaults could also be of a sexual nature. Demons engaged in sexual display in front of Francesca Roman and showed Margery Kempe visions of a selection of male genitals from which she was supposed to choose.¹⁴⁵

Things were likely the worst for Ermine de Reims, a widowed peasant woman who in the last ten months of her life received both heavenly visions as well as almost nightly demonic assaults. Attacked both physically and sexually, Ermine was reportedly punched, kicked, and thrown, sustaining injuries from her encounters, as demons assaulted her in her bed, attempted to get beneath her clothes, and tried to titillate her with graphic sexual displays. Demons even appear as beasts and lizards, biting her and nearly blinding her. Apart from efforts to intimidate or coerce, at other times demons tried to seduce her under the illusion of a handsome young man, or else the demons took the form of her confessor or other people she knew, or of saints to present bad advice as if it were good.¹⁴⁶ So prevalent were these demonic episodes that her confessor, unlike most others who set out to write heavenly books, declares that the purpose of his is to warn Christians about the many ways demons try to deceive.¹⁴⁷

According to Fabián Alejandro Campagne, Ermine's experience illustrates tension and overlap between Augustine and Aquinas' views of demonic power with a newer, more radical demonology that Boureau has identified taking particular shape in the fourteenth century.¹⁴⁸ In some places in the text, for example, Ermine's visions indicate limits being placed on demons.

¹⁴³ Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 112, 131.

¹⁴⁴ Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, ed. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 636–38.

¹⁴⁵ Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 112, 131.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, chapter 4.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, appendix includes selections from Jean le Graveur's *The Visions of Ermine de Reims*. Graveur's preface states "And in order to uncover his [the Devil's] cleverness and deception, I poor and unworthy sinner..."

¹⁴⁸ Campagne, "Demonology at a Crossroads."

At one point she tells the demons: “You cannot do me more harm than what God allows you. If He wants you to beat me, do it. If He wants you to kill me, do it...”¹⁴⁹ Also, the demons assaulting Ermine always fail. At the same time, however, Campagne draws attention to elements of a new conception of demons that anticipate ideas later to develop into witchcraft: although Graveur insists that the demons lack physical bodies they can produce real effects in the material world; elements of a pact are alluded to when demons offer Ermine money or fame in return for homage; demonic “sacraments” are described; and Ermine is transported a great distance by her demon to a place where she is surrounded by demons in human form, as in the later aerial flight and the Witches’ Sabbath.

Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski’s study of Ermine de Reims brings Campagne’s analysis further and finds additional elements of witchcraft that would be well known to a later period, such as the highly sexualized nature of demonic interactions and animal familiars that can be detected or at least foreshadowed in Graveur’s characterizations of Ermine.¹⁵⁰ A particular contribution from Blumenfeld-Kosinski is her argument that confessor Jean le Graveur can be seen as carefully constructing a representation of Ermine’s experiences to steer perception away and deflect potential implications that she was a witch.¹⁵¹ Likewise, it seems that Graveur may have transferred some of his knowledge and anxieties onto Ermine even as he attempted to protect her from these suspicions. Certainly, Ermine may have picked up on some of growing ideas about witchcraft and demons on her own, but Graveur was Ermine’s confessor for several years prior to the beginning of her visions during which time she could have assimilated some of his thinking into her own.

¹⁴⁹ *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 192: “vous nes pouvez me faire que ce que Dieu veut, s’Il veut qu vous me battiez, battez-mois et s’Il veut que vous me tuez, tuez moi...”

¹⁵⁰ Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, especially chapter two.

Earlier suspicions about demonic deception were often expressed in terms of victimization rather than charges of complicity. Bridget of Sweden (and others) were accused of being a *phitonissa* (“sorceress” or “witch”), but scholars disagree whether the term had yet taken on the connotation of “witch” or should be understood to refer to a false seer or a false prophet.¹⁵² In any case, Ermine de Reims’ example indicates that by the mid-1390s these ideas were beginning to form and that concepts of prophecy were beginning to overlap, or at least had the potential to overlap, with this way of thinking. As this development occurred, and as demons came to be seen as a greater danger and threat, not just to individuals, but to the Church and society as a whole, this meant that a false prophet who was deceived or possibly deceived by a demon became a much greater threat as well.

With so many prophets offering potential solutions to the Schism, but also with so much uncertainty about the nature of their inspiration, it thus became increasingly critical for the Church to separate true prophets from false, and for confessors it became more and more urgent to demonstrate that their prophets were not among the latter. Therefore, in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries increased attention was given to *discretio spirituum*, or the discernment of spirits. The discernment of spirits had a long in history in Christian thinking, first occurring in Paul’s same letter to the Corinthians where he had described prophecy as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Here Paul also listed the discernment of spirits, thus establishing the idea that discernment was another supernatural gifts.¹⁵³

Augustine also considered discernment of spirits to be a gift of the Holy Spirit, which he believed his mother Monica possessed, and in *De genesii* he wrote that he knew of no other way

¹⁵² Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 159 translates this as “witch.”; Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 131, however, maintains that the term should be understood to mean something more akin to “false seer” or “false prophet.”

¹⁵³ 1 Cor 12:10. “To another [is given by the Spirit], the working of miracles; to another, prophecy, to another the discerning of spirits; to another diverse kinds of tongues...”

for distinguishing spirits except by the gift that Paul had mentioned.¹⁵⁴ Nonetheless, various reasoned criteria for telling if a spirit was good or bad were scattered among writings produced in the early Church and Middle Ages. From the Desert Fathers, for instance, it was known that good spirits would initially provoke the fear of God before turning to comfort whereas evil spirits will initially tempt and entice before terrorizing their victim. Thinkers from Gregory the Great to thirteenth- and fourteenth-century schoolmen, moreover, supplied an assortment of other characteristics of true and false prophecy that might be utilized in these efforts.¹⁵⁵

The revelatory writings, *vitae*, and other accounts of the fourteenth-century prophets functioned as types of implicit discernment arguments. Several confessors, however, wrote more explicitly about *discretio spirituum*, as they offered a set of markers that might identify a true prophet and convince readers that the prophet each advocated was genuine. Alfonso of Jaén's *Epistola solitarii ad reges*, written around 1376 as a preface to an edition of Bridget's *Revelations*, is the most extensive example.¹⁵⁶ Alfonso's treatise begins by recounting Bridget's virtues and then discusses the nature of visions and how Bridget's were spiritual or intellectual. After discussing several patristic and scholastic authorities that support his survey of Bridget's qualities and visions, he then proposes seven criteria which if found in the affirmative indicate a person to be inspired by a good spirit: humility and obedience, sweetness of visionary experience, supernatural light, truth of the prophecy and good morals, good fruits of the prophecy, a good end, and (if the prophet were also a saint) miracles after death.

¹⁵⁴ Augustine, *De genesi*, 12.13.18.

¹⁵⁵ Efforts to arrive at systematic criteria and methods for discerning spirits do not develop until the end of the fourteenth century, and the full effect of these developments on conceptions of prophecy will be explored in the next chapter. Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 1–123, surveys the earlier history of the elements that would eventually contribute to such thinking.

¹⁵⁶ Alfonso of Jaén, "Epistola Solitarii."

Other confessors, such as Raymond de Sabanac, prefaced revelation collections with similar treatises whereas some, like Jean le Graveur, interjected their opinions on discernment into their prophets' *vitae* or revelatory accounts. In one way or another many prophets' confessors offered discernment rationales as they advocated for their prophets. Beginning in the 1380s, especially, confessors began to employ a fairly standard set of criteria when discussing discernment, and their role as discerners became an expected part of their function.

As with the writing of revelatory texts and the construction of the prophets' representations, discernment was a collaborative partnership of confessor and prophet. Thus, the writings by the prophets or accounts of their revelations also contain fairly explicit discussions about discernment. Bridget of Sweden and Catherine of Siena, for example, are portrayed as having fairly theoretical discussions with their heavenly voices, or their voices directly answer concerns and give advice on how to distinguish spirits. For instance, a number of passages from Bridget's *Revelaciones* discuss discernment in terms drawn from the *Vita Antonii* as they describe evil spirits as initially instilling joy but leaving the hearer in terror and despair. Good spirits, on the other hand, are encountered first with fear (as in the fear of God) but eventually result in great happiness and comfort; moreover, evil spirits encourage pride and worldly comforts and desires, whereas good spirits only promote spiritual virtues.¹⁵⁷ In Raymond of Capua's retelling of Catherine's discussion with Christ after she has been tempted by demons, Christ gives her this same basic advice, and Catherine hears it in her *Dialogue* as well.¹⁵⁸

More significant than this type of advice, Bridget and Catherine are also portrayed as possessing a special personal ability for discernment that is the result of supernatural endowment – that is to say, more akin to *discretio spirituum* in the manner of which Paul or Augustine spoke.

¹⁵⁷ Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones*, Book IV, 4.23.

¹⁵⁸ Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones*, 1.4. Catherine of Siena, *Dialogo* 71, 185, cited by Anderson *The Discernment of Spirits*, 128 and 153, respectively.

Bridget, for example, is portrayed as possessing this gift on account of her status as Bride of Christ, her identification with the Virgin Mary, and her calling as a true prophet. Various, Christ or the Virgin Mary tells Bridget that they give her the ability to discern the source of her visions and that they will protect her – and according to the revelation accounts they frequently do. Moreover, Christ tells Bridget, “You will indeed be my spouse and my channel ... and my spirit will remain with you until death.”¹⁵⁹ He tells her that, because of her love of God, He protects her, and “it is impossible for the devil to approach you....”¹⁶⁰ Elsewhere Christ explains, “True prophets who desire nothing but God and want to speak only the word of God on God’s account, these cannot be deceived, because they love and speak words of truth.”¹⁶¹ Thus, she is presented as possessing an infallible ability to discern the source of her prophecy specifically because she is a prophet; the two gifts are coordinated spiritual gifts.

Catherine’s special relationship with Christ and the deep humility, virtuous life, and prudence this relationship provides her are portrayed as endowing her with an unshakable ability to discern spirits and to remain free from being deceived. Wendy Love Anderson’s examination shows that Catherine’s position on this topic remains constant from her early letters through to her *Dialogo*, and that this view is expressed numerous times in both.¹⁶² For Catherine, self-knowledge, a theme that she discusses throughout her writings, is closely associated with her ability to discern spirits.¹⁶³ In a passage from the *Dialogo*, for instance, Christ tells Catherine, that she

should be discerning in her penance ... [for] being done without discerning light of the knowledge of oneself and of my goodness, it would fall short of my truth. It would be undiscerning, not loving what I most love and not hating what I most hate.

¹⁵⁹ Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones Extravagantes*, 47. Trans. Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 133.

¹⁶⁰ Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones*, 1.4. trans. Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 128.

¹⁶¹ Birgitta of Sweden, *Revelaciones*, Book IV, 4.38; trans., Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 129.

¹⁶² Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 148–57.

¹⁶³ Thomas McDermott, *Catherine of Siena: Spiritual Development in Her Life and Teaching* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2008), 117–31.

For discernment is nothing else but the true knowledge a soul ought to have of herself and of me, and through this knowledge she finds her roots.¹⁶⁴

Elsewhere Christ relates discernment to the light of truth when he says,

Discernment is that light which dissolves all darkness, dissipates ignorance, and seasons every virtue and virtuous deed. It has a prudence that cannot be deceived Discernment's truly humble prudence evades every devilish and creaturely snare, and with unarmed hand – that is, through suffering – it overcomes the devil and the flesh.¹⁶⁵

This light of truth allows Catherine to see through darkness. It is a personal ability, but it is not an ability that Catherine possesses of her own skill. Rather, it comes from Christ and her faith in Him. As she says in an earlier letter, "... I have no doubt that if I am nailed fast with him in love and in deep humility, the devil will have no power over me. And this is not because of my own powers but because of the power of Christ crucified."¹⁶⁶

Anderson points out that Catherine's understanding of discernment is not the same as a charism (that is, an extraordinary spiritual grace) but is more similar to simple monastic discernment.¹⁶⁷ At least for purposes here, however, what is more important when considering how these passages would be read is that Catherine, like Bridget, represents her gift as a special personal ability. For Bridget the gift of discernment is directly correlated with her gift of prophecy. While Catherine's ability to discern is an aspect of her faith in Christ, that faith is represented as a very special, divinely-guaranteed faith, which Raymond of Capua's *vita* represented and popularized to be a result of her mystical marriage. For most medieval readers, little distinction was made between Catherine as presented by Raymond and the Catherine many modern have found in her letters and *Dialogue*. Therefore, Catherine's ability to discern would seem very much like Bridget's spiritual gift.

¹⁶⁴ *Dialogo*, 9, trans. by Noffke and cited by Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 151–52.

¹⁶⁵ *Dialogo*, 11, 36 trans. by Noffke and cited by Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 152.

¹⁶⁶ Letter 29 (MT letter 92), trans. Noffke.

¹⁶⁷ Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 153.

For the prophets and their confessors discernment seems to have operated as a complementary partnership, much as that partnership worked to create the final revelatory texts or guided the practice and representations of the prophets. Through each of these aspects of partnership between the confessor and prophet, the practice of prophecy came into essential agreement with prophecy theory to a degree that previously had not occurred. This was especially true when it came to modes of prophetic reception, understandings about visions, and thinking about demons. Female prophecy remained controversial, but viable theological justifications and a model for acceptable female prophecy had been proposed, and these rested on agreed upon assumptions about the nature of women.

Chapter 5 The Failure of the Fourteenth-Century Synthesis: Joan of Arc, Savonarola, and the Fifth Lateran Council

In the last decades of the fourteenth century and into the fifteenth, suspicions about individual prophets, fears about demons, and concerns about social and political disorder coexisted with beliefs about the possibilities of extra-Biblical revelation and a desire (or trepidation) that genuine prophecy not be overlooked or disregarded. In particular, as the Schism dragged on and the number of people claiming to be prophets grew (with some supporting rival popes), the idea that a confessor's verification was sufficient or that a prophet could judge the truth of his or her own prophecies was increasingly called into question. In response to these questions, theologians in the universities who possessed the necessary training and experience to carry out the task sought ways to base discernment on objective criteria rather than the prophets' personal experiences or what the theologians considered the biased assessments of their confessors. But the problem was ultimately unresolvable. In attempting to address these issues the theologians were confronted by an assortment of theoretical uncertainties and conflicting opinions that could not be reconciled and, further, attributed powers to the devil that were almost impossible to contend with. Instead of alleviating the uncertainty that surrounded prophets and prophecy, in several ways the theologians magnified it.

Therefore, just as late medieval thinkers (and prophets) were reaching consensus about the nature of prophecy and its essential features, they also established a system of evaluation that proved unable to achieve similar consensus about who was or was not a genuine prophet. There

was still general agreement about what prophecy was and how it operated; the difficulty was to decide which individuals fit this criteria, at least in a way that seemed objective or was able to achieve lasting consensus or avoid significant controversy. Two well known prophets from the fifteenth century— Joan of Arc and Savonarola – will serve as case studies, to illustrate both how the conception of prophecy was represented by two very different individuals and especially how the theologians’ methods of discernment failed to produce consensus when applied.

5.1 The University Theologians and Discernment as a Method

Given the importance placed on the discernment of spirits by those closest to the practice of prophecy – the prophets themselves and their confessors – it is not surprising to see the issue taken up by theologians in the universities as a theoretical problem. For them, unlike the prophets themselves, the argument from personal experience could not apply. The question, rather, was how an outside observer could judge the authentic source of a vision. In some ways the issue was anticipated by Henry of Friemar (c. 1245-1340) earlier in the fourteenth century, but Henry does not use the phrase *discretio spirituum* and his work is directed more toward an individual’s discernment of virtue than the discernment of spirits.¹ Beginning in the mid-1380s, however, university theologians Pierre d’Ailly (1351-1420) and Henry of Langenstein (c. 1325-1397) wrote the first significant treatises to address the discernment of spirits in a systematic fashion, with important additional contributions coming from their mutual pupil Jean Gerson (1363-1429) in the first decades of the fifteenth century.

¹ Henry of Friemar (c. 1245-1340) wrote *De quattuor instinctibus* probably during the first decade of the fourteenth century. *De quattuor instinctibus* discusses the divine, angelic, diabolic, and natural instincts and guides the reader in determining the signs of these instincts. See, Ibid., 82–90; Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), 216–17; Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 257–60.

Apart from a translation of two of Jean Gerson's discernment treatises in a dissertation from 1959, the topic of late medieval discernment of spirits received only occasional notice from historians during much of the twentieth century.² Since the 1990s, however, the topic has attracted greater interest, and since 2003 the discernment treatises of d'Ailly, Langenstein, and Gerson have been focal points for three-book length studies on the development of these ideas.³ The first two, by Nancy Caciola and Dyan Elliot, explore important connections between these writings on discernment and medieval views about women. Their examinations have shown how developments that coalesced in discernment writings were correlated with similar developments taking shape in ideas about possession and exorcism (Caciola) and inquisitorial ways of thinking (Elliot).

Caciola approached discernment as part of a broader study of possession by spirits. She finds that ideas about female physiology and psychology, such as women's "porous" nature and notions that women had less firmly established "identities" than men, promoted ideas that women – especially those who exhibited exceptional religious behaviors – might be possessed, either by good or evil spirits.⁴ She examines early fifteenth-century exorcism manuals and through them finds that male clerics more often ascribed possession to demonic forces. She reasons that this is a result of precedents in the Bible; unlike demonic possession, however, angelic possession was a newer, and less frequently expressed idea.⁵ Caciola argues that during the era of the Schism these same tendencies to regard exceptional behaviors as demonic in origin

² Jean Gerson, *The Concept of Discretio Spirituum in John Gerson's "De Probatione Spirituum" and "De Distinctione Verarum Visionum A Falsis,"* trans. Paschal Boland OSB (PhD diss., Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1959).

³ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*; Elliott, *Proving Woman*; Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*.

⁴ Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 179ff.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 225–73.

carried over to theological discernment treatises as these thinkers attempted to understand the proliferation of female prophets.

Elliott's investigation looks at these discernment treatises from a different perspective and considers the formation of an inquisitorial culture, which she closely associates with efforts to formulate methods of proof in the schools, as a primary factor in generating thought about discernment. She notices that these criteria for investigating, disputing, and demonstrating proof were often predisposed toward condemnation and, further, that this approach often invited further disagreement or the opening of new questions due to the nature of academic disputation.⁶ As she writes about the nature of scholastic reasoning, "Every positive proposition is advanced on the back of its negative counterpart. This antiphonal structure to scholastic argument imbued it with a tacit potential for reversal."⁷ Like Caciola, Elliott argues that the gender of many prophets was a primary factor contributing to the development of theories of discernment and that late medieval university discernment arose in part from the desire of male clerics to create mechanisms of control over female religious expressions that they deemed suspect.⁸

Wendy Love Anderson's study of these discernment treatises both complements and challenges aspects of Caciola's and Elliott's studies by arguing that attitudes toward gender were present but less important than concerns about authority or questions about who possessed the proper skill and disposition to judge spirits.⁹ One of Anderson's primary conclusions is that d'Ailly, Langenstein, and Gerson effected a more definitive transition away from views that held discernment to be an ability possessed by prophets (as the prophets themselves believed) and

⁶ Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 177ff.

⁷ Dyan Elliott, "Seeing Double: John Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc," *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 1 (February 2002): 27.

⁸ Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 265–67.

⁹ Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*.

towards an advocacy for new standards for evaluation that the theologians provided and that the theologians would be responsible for applying.¹⁰

Although these treatises varied in detail, in general they agreed on three broad criteria to use when approaching claims of supernatural inspiration: The first required independently verifiable signs, such as miracles or the outcome of what was prophesied. The second was investigations into the character and behaviors of the prophet to determine whether these indicated that the prophet was directed by a good or evil spirit. The third was evaluation of a prophet's emotional responses to the presence of the spirit since it was believed that good spirits elicited a different type of response from evil spirits. Gerson, in particular, offered a neat summation of questions (in rhyming couplet, no less) that an examiner should consider when evaluating a person's spirits: "To whom is the revelation made? What does it contain and say? Why is it said to have happened? To whom was it presented for advice? From whom and from whence did the revelation come?"¹¹

D'Ailly, Langenstein, and Gerson each maintained that the Scriptures offer no simple or fail-safe proofs to discern spirits. Nonetheless, they considered the task of distinguishing spirits and especially identifying false prophets to be extremely important because false prophets could mislead the Church and ruin souls. In two works from the 1380s D'Ailly finds that Scripture does provide sufficient guidance to at least infer a spirit's nature or efficient cause by analyzing its final, formal, or material causes.¹² For instance, false prophets aspire to material gain whereas

¹⁰ Ibid., 158.

¹¹ Gerson, *De probatione*, in Glorieux, 9:180: "Tu quis, quid, quare, cui, qualiter, unde require. Quis est cui fit revelatio. Quid ipsa continet et loquitur. Quare fieri dicitur. Cui pro consilio detergitur. Qualiter venere et unde venire reperitur." Trans. Bolland.

¹² Pierre d'Ailly, *De arte cognoscendi falsos prophetas* and *De falsis prophetis* were published together as *De falsis prophetis* I and II. The two treatises survive in only one manuscript, Paris BN Lat. 3122. They are printed in Louis Ellies du Pin, *Joannes Gersonii Opera Omnia* (Antwerp: Sumptibus Societatis, 1706; repr. Hildesheim, NY: Olms, 1987), 1.489-604.

true ones do not (final cause); true prophecy is certain while false is conjectural (formal cause); and true prophets do not speak falsely (material cause).¹³ According to d'Ailly's view, knowledge derived from this approach is not certain, only "probable and conjectural teaching," but it is the only possible approach.¹⁴

Henry of Langenstein's *De discretione* (1383) likewise offers mostly theoretical guidance.¹⁵ Langenstein organizes visions according to sixteen categories that he divides and subdivides according to natural and supernatural visions, both good and evil. Langenstein further suggests that reference to affinities can be employed to evaluate a prophecy's nature. Thus, evil spirits are aligned with images such as scorpions and serpents whereas good spirits express themselves through images such as doves, clouds, fire, or the sun.¹⁶ Interior signs expressed by the prophet must also be considered. Drawing from the well-known advice of the Desert Fathers, Langenstein explains that evil spirits initially evoke a false sense of security and comfort that is followed by terror whereas the Holy Spirit first elicits fear (the fear of God) before giving way to feelings of great sweetness, agreement, modesty, and humility.¹⁷ According to Langenstein, the behaviors of a prophet might also indicate the source of his or her vision. Love of God, willingness to die, fearing nothing but God, loving one's enemies, showing sorrow for one's sins, and expressing joy at hearing God's word are all possible signs of a good spirit.¹⁸ Reflecting his

¹³ Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 164.

¹⁴ D'Ailly, *De arte cognoscendi*, 578: "non est ars evidens tradita, sed solum doctrina probabilis, et conjecturativa."

¹⁵ Langenstein's treatise exists in about eighty manuscript copies, more than any single treatise on discernment by either d'Ailly or Gerson. The critical edition is Henry of Langenstein, "*De Discretione Spirituum*" as "*Unterscheidung Der Geister*," *Lateinisch and Deutsch: Texte Und Untersuchungen Zu Übersetzungsliteratur Aus Der Wiener Schule*, ed. Thomas Hohmann (Munich: Artemis Verlag, 1997).

¹⁶ Ibid., 64; Cited by Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 172–73.

¹⁷ Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 172.

¹⁸ Henry of Langenstein, *De Discretione Spirituum*, 62; Cited by Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 173.

emphasis on reason and belief that God favors the rational, Langenstein also points out that prophets and prophecy that seem irrational indicate demonic illusion.¹⁹

Like d'Ailly and Langenstein, Gerson first approached the discernment of spirits as a largely theoretical problem. But, as Wendy Love Anderson states, “as the Schism wore on and as the struggle to reunify the Church continued, Gerson would begin to see the need for practical as well as theoretical guidance on *discretio spirituum*.”²⁰ Gerson attempted to resolve the problem of discernment over the course of more than thirty years, in three major works, *De distinctione verarum visionum a falsis* (1401-1402), *De probatione spirituum* (1415), and *De examinatione doctrinarum* (1423), as well as various minor works ending with *Super facto puellae* (on Joan of Arc and written in 1429, only a few months prior to his death).

In these writings Gerson offers theoretical guidance, as did d'Ailly and Langenstein, but he also offers more practical advice, explaining how he had applied these questions to real examples he had encountered or heard about: for example, a woman visionary in Arras known for extreme fasting (followed by bulimic overeating). Gerson explains how he questioned this woman and determined that she engaged in these practices out of pride, had refused the good counsel of a pastor, and lacked the humility of someone inspired by a good spirit.²¹ Gerson also tells of a learned man whose voices told him he would be pope, then Antichrist, then Antichrist's precursor. In the end he was nearly driven to suicide to avoid becoming Antichrist but God brought him to a saner state of mind.²² Other examples are included throughout his writings to illustrate his theoretical points.

¹⁹ Henry of Langenstein, *De Discretione Spirituum*, 64 and 108; Cited by Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 173.

²⁰ Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 189.

²¹ Gerson, *De distinctione verarum revaluationum a falsis*, in Glorieux, 3:42-43.

²² Gerson, *De distinctione verarum revaluationum a falsis*; McGuire, *Jean Gerson: Early Works*, 336-337.

Gerson assigns importance to miracles but says miracles can be performed by God through an evil spirit (albeit for good purposes), so to determine whether a person is led by a good spirit requires further testing and examination. To accomplish this type of investigation Gerson offers an analogy that both introduces and concludes *De distinctione verarum revaluationum a falsis*. Comparing the discernment of spirits to a spiritual moneychanger, Gerson discusses how the discernment must prove the authenticity of the spirit just as a moneychanger does with a coin. Continuing the analogy, Gerson proposes five metallurgical criteria that correspond to tests of virtue the spiritual coin must pass:

The result of all that we have here said is that the coin of divine revelation is to be examined. It must be seen whether it has the weight of humility without the vanity of curiosity and pride; if it contains the flexibility of discretion without superstitious stubbornness and lack of receptivity to advice; if it manifests the durability of patience in adversity, without any complaint or false imitation; if it shows the form of truth without mendacity or any undue attachment; if it has the bright and sincere color of divine love without the contamination or filth of carnality.²³

Gerson recommends that the discernment employ each of these guidelines as he examines the behaviors and morals of the prophets and how they express their visionary experiences.

D'Ailly, Langenstein, and Gerson agreed that discernment must be carried out by trained theologians knowledgeable and experienced in examining such matters. Since no simple, fail-safe tests for discernment are possible, and because so many of the criteria are ambiguous, theologians seemed best equipped to navigate these troubled waters. In particular, guidelines such as d'Ailly's based on Aristotle's four causes or Langenstein's emphasis on rational methods of investigation required a highly trained theologian. Moreover, these writers considered theologians to be objective evaluators, in contrast to the prophets' supporters. Gerson, in

²³ Gerson, *De distinctione verarum revaluationum a falsis*, in Glorieux, 3:56; trans. McGuire, *Jean Gerson: Early Works*, 363.

particular, expressed suspicion about the partiality and motivations of certain prophets' confessors.²⁴

Although they sought to assign responsibility for discerning spirits to theologians and away from the prophets and their confessors, the university writers on discernment were nonetheless unable to alleviate the uncertainty that surrounded prophecy and in certain crucial ways they magnified it. Indeed, even as readers of these treatises found rules and guidelines for discerning spirits they were also confronted by underlying doubts and uncertainties, many of which were expressed by the treatises' writers themselves. D'Ailly's writings on prophecy, for instance, are characterized by ambiguity and doubt, and the term *dubitatio* is frequently employed throughout his texts.²⁵ Especially in the mostly theoretical treatments offered by both d'Ailly and Langenstein, each time they presented a sign or indicator of one type of spirit or another they almost immediately qualified their advice by presenting possible exceptions or contrary examples.

D'Ailly, for example, pointed out that while outward signs of a prophet's good morals or faith should be examined they did not provide certain evidence since Scripture included examples of immoral men who were prophets and, furthermore, that prophecy pertained to the intellect rather than the will but virtuous behavior was perfected by the will rather than the intellect.²⁶ Demons presented particular difficulty because, as d'Ailly relates, demons can create illusions often indistinguishable from angelic visions, they can create what seem to be miracles, and they can

²⁴ Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 206–7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

²⁶ D'Ailly, *De falsis prophetis*, 502. Anderson, *Discernment of Spirits*, 168.

predict accurately.²⁷ Langenstein also warns against demonic illusion since demons not only mimic divine visions, but they can also make use of the natural spirits to deceive humans.²⁸

Thus, Langenstein determines that a final indicator of a spirit's nature, especially for difficult cases, is found by testing a spirit's outcome, "for an outcome shows in many ways what an origin was hiding."²⁹ Gerson made a similar recommendation. Elsewhere, however, Gerson indicates that awaiting results may still not be a sufficient means for an examiner to achieve certainty.³⁰ Thus, in addition to knowledge and theological training, Gerson stressed that the examiner should also possess experience. At times he describes this experience as being gained from assessing other visionaries. At other times, however, Gerson seems to mean experiential knowledge gained through special insight from God. As he put it, "A person senses a difference between true revelations and deceptive illusions through a certain intimate taste (*sapore*) and experiential illumination."³¹ Furthermore, Gerson says that the examiner must cling to God and raise his sights up to God to avoid being fooled or fooling himself.³² Anderson suggests that Gerson can be seen to move toward a view (especially in his later writings) that the discerning theologian must possess, in addition to learned knowledge, a spiritual grace for discernment similar to the personal gift for discernment that prophets like Bridget of Sweden and Catherine of Siena themselves claimed to possess.³³ By his appeal to experience Gerson seems more aware than d'Ailly and Langenstein of the problem presented by the discernment criteria they proposed.

²⁷ D'Ailly, *De falsis prophetis.*, 576-577.

²⁸ Henry of Langenstein, *De Discretione Spirituum*, 54. "Quartus spiritus angelicus malignus, qui saepe utitu praecedentibus duodecim spiritibus tamquam instrumentus ad perversionem et perditionem hominis."

²⁹ Ibid., 62; Trans. by Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*. "Exitus enim multotiens manifestat, quod ergo occultabat. Qui ergo motus suos ex origine iudicare non potest, finem investiget et consummationem."

³⁰ For instance, Gerson, *De distinctione verarum revelationum a falsis*, in trans. McGuire, 363.

³¹ Gerson, *De distinctione*, 3:48; trans. Anderson, 195: "Agit equidem ut sapore quodam intimo et illuminatione quadam experimentaliter sentiat homo differentiam inter veras revelationes et deceptorias illusiones."

³² Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 210-11.

³³ Ibid., 195.

Given the complexities and ambiguities of the indicators, objective verification was extremely difficult to accomplish and thus Gerson suggested that theologian examiners seek experience and even a special grace from God to carry out their task. In practice, however, Gerson's proposed solution only deflected the problem of evaluating the personal experience of prophets; in Gerson's scenario one also had to evaluate the personal experience and merits of the theologian evaluator.³⁴

Doubts about prophecy and difficulties in evaluating prophecy can be seen in the search by these theologians for prophets who had foreseen the Schism. D'Ailly and Langenstein, for instance, each believed that earlier prophets had predicted the divisions in the Church. D'Ailly's writings implied that he believed Joachim and Hildegard of Bingen were prophets who had predicted the disaster.³⁵ Langenstein, likewise, was interested in the Sibyls, Hildegard, and Joachim, and he considered Arnold of Villanova (like Hildegard) to have foretold the Schism.³⁶ D'Ailly, in particular, studied these prophets of the past to better understand what they had to say about the Schism and, he hoped, to draw insights about a solution; but, as the Schism drew longer and as so many false prophets (as it seemed to him) appeared, he gradually lost confidence in the possibility that prophecy offered a solution. As Laura Smoller's study of d'Ailly demonstrates, frustration about papal divisions and uncertainty about contemporary prophecy eventually compelled him to look elsewhere for a resolution to the crisis they predicted. He was especially critical of the flagellants who followed Vincent Ferrer's preaching

³⁴ Ibid., 210–11 makes a similar point, although in relation to Gerson's apparent suggestion in his later works that someone outside the hierarchy might possess a gift for discernment.

³⁵ Smoller, Laura Ackerman, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly, 1350-1420*, 99.

³⁶ Smoller, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly, 1350-1420*, 118. Langenstein considered Joachim an exegete rather than a prophet, but Langenstein wrote and preached about Joachim mostly in a favorable manner.

mission, and he also attacked apocalyptic preachers.³⁷ Smoller finds that by the second decade of the fifteenth century d'Ailly regarded apocalyptic views derived from prophecy as creating an impediment to resolving the Schism because he felt they promoted a sense of despair or a determinism that prevented the parties from effectively working towards a solution.³⁸ Eventually, d'Ailly abandoned his study of prophecy in favor of astrology, concluding that the coming of Antichrist was not imminent. Indeed, in his sermon at the opening session of the Council of Constance, d'Ailly joyfully announced that he had arrived at a new date for the appearance of Antichrist. Through astrology and Scriptural exegesis he had determined by “plausible conjecture and likely indication” that this would not occur until 1789, that there was time for the council fathers to resolve the Schism, and the Church would survive for many years to come.³⁹

Langenstein's assessment of modern prophets was more resolute. In the 1392 *Invectiva or Liber contra vaticinia Telesphori* he attacked the work of Telesphorus, charging its author with “predicting” events that had already occurred, and he was highly critical of false prophecy derived from exegesis.⁴⁰ In the same work, through his story of Wilhelm, a monk of holy reputation whom he claims to have met, Langenstein relates Wilhelm's dismay as he unsuccessfully anticipated an end to the Schism. First by vision, and then by exegesis, Wilhelm made predictions, but as each date passed without a resolution Wilhelm eventually went mad.

³⁷ Laura Ackerman Smoller, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly, 1350-1420* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 116-118.

³⁸ D'Ailly was especially critical of the flagellants who followed Vincent Ferrer's preaching mission, and he also attacked contemporary Joachite preachers for their apocalyptic beliefs. Smoller, Laura Ackerman, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly, 1350-1420*, 116-18.

³⁹ Pierre d'Ailly, *Concordantia astronomie cum hystorica narratione*, chap. 61, fol. [d8r]: “Nam licet de adventus sui determinato tempore vel momento haberi non possit humanitus certitudo sicut alibi declaravimus tamen indeterminate loquendo quod circa illa tempora venturus sit potest haberi probabilis coniectura et verisimilis suspicio per astronomica iudicia.” Cited by Smoller, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly, 1350-1420*, 202 n. 100.

⁴⁰ The *Invectiva or Liber contra vaticinia Telesphori* is printed in H. Pez, *Thesaurus anecdotorum novissimis* (Augsburg, 1721), 1:2:505-564. See Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 425-27.

God, Langenstein tells the reader, punishes those who are overly curious or presumptuous and allows even the well intentioned to be deceived.

Gerson also encountered modern prophets. He mentions a number of these in his writings, mostly as unnamed examples to illustrate his process of discernment. His experiences with prophets whom he named or whose identities can be deduced, however, help to demonstrate the difficulties that even he experienced in evaluating their claims. The first of these was Ermine de Reims, who may have provided Gerson the occasion to write his first treatise on discernment in 1401 when a monk of the abbey of Saint-Denis at Reims sent a *vita* of Ermine to Gerson and solicited his opinion. Gerson's brief reply, the *Judicium de vie de Sainte Ermine*, offers a cautiously positive assessment. Gerson finds that Ermine's reported visions and way of life do not seem to contradict the "truth of faith" and further that her virtues of humility, firm faith, and prudent simplicity assisted her in her battles against demons.⁴¹ Nonetheless, Gerson's hedges his assessment with various escape clauses and, further, he urges the monk who sent the request to restrict access to Ermine's *vita* so that those with limited learning or insecure faith could not read it. Gerson's caution indicates his uncertainty and anticipates his later thinking for by 1423 he had changed his mind about Ermine. In *De examinatione doctrinarum* (1423) he briefly mentions that he had almost been seduced into believing her account. Gerson does not explain why he reversed his judgment about Ermine, but he says that God's help had kept him from more fully approving of her and now he realized that Ermine was not a true prophet but instead had been complicit with demons and had deceived those around her.⁴²

⁴¹ Gerson, *Judicium de vie de Sainte Ermine*, in Claude Arnaud-Gillet, ed., *Entre Dieu et Satan: les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (+1396)* (Florence: SISMEL, 1997), 171–73.

⁴² Gerson, *De examinatione doctrinarum*, in Glorieux, 9:474–5, at 9:475. "Fui pridem, fateor, per relationes aliquorum magnae merito reputatione, proximus seductioni de quadam Hermina, Remensi, nisi modum responsionis propriae, Deo volente, temperassem."

Gerson's misgivings about modern prophets are most apparent in his views about Bridget of Sweden. Bridget had already been canonized a saint in 1391, but the vagaries of the Schism led her supporters to seek confirmation on two other occasions, including the Council of Constance in 1415. At Constance Gerson expressed skepticism about Bridget's visions, and in *De probatione spirituum*, which he presented at the council, he complains that theologians had not adequately studied Bridget's visions prior to the decision to canonize her and that he had many reservations about her case. In general, Gerson urges extreme caution about the young and women, who he says can easily be led astray.⁴³ About Bridget in particular Gerson seems to think she suffered from an overactive imagination, and he is especially suspicious about her claims that Jesus, Mary and other saints spoke to her with such frequency and familiarity.⁴⁴ Gerson does not directly challenge Bridget's sanctity nor does he wish the council to invalidate her revelations, for to do so, he says, would risk bringing scandal since so many already considered them authentic and she had already been canonized. He does, however, urge restraint and recommends the council not give the *Revelations* any further approval or authority.

The real problem, it seems, was that Bridget's revelations seemed to support the Roman popes. Indeed, many learned appraisals of Schism prophets such as Bridget of Sweden, Pedro of Aragon and others often broke along such political lines.⁴⁵ The reception of Pedro of Aragon's prophecies is another case in point. In 1365 Pedro received a series of visions that urged the pope

⁴³ Gerson, *De probatione spirituum*, in Glorieux 9:180; trans. Boland: "Quaeritur ergo si persona sit novitia in zelo Dei, quia novitius fervor cito falitur si regente caruerit; praesertim in adolescentibus et foeminis, quarum est ardor nimius, avidus, varius, effrenis, ideo suspectus."

⁴⁴ Ibid, 9:179.

⁴⁵ Henry of Langenstein's recommendation in his *Concilium pacis* that Bridget of Sweden not be presented for canonization is one of the few potential exceptions that I am aware of. Henry supported the Roman line of popes, and Bridget's revelations were of most help to his side. Nonetheless, Henry complained that there were already enough saints and feast days. Therefore, his recommendation may not have been a direct criticism of her so much as a possible attempt at compromise, since at the same time he recommended that a candidate from the Avignon party (Charles of Blois) also not be presented for canonization. Henry of Langenstein, *Concilium pacis de unione et reformatione ecclesiae in concilio universali quarendae*, in Dupin, *Joannis Gersonii Opera*, 2:839. See also, Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 286.

to return to Rome. Pedro's revelations were well received by the pope, whose theologians found nothing in them contrary to Scriptures. Furthermore, the theologian and inquisitor Nicholas Eymerich was among those who found no error in Pedro's' 1365 revelations. In 1379, however, after the Schism had begun, Pedro received new revelations that recognized Urban as the true pope and Clement as a false one. Eymerich, who now supported Clement's claim, voiced objection to the 1379 revelations and further argued that prophetic claims should not be used to determine the true pope and that Christ himself had rejected such visionaries.⁴⁶

For Gerson as well, the criteria of discernment were malleable enough that his political allegiances seem to have been at least a contributing factor in his assessment of prophets. Not only was he critical of Bridget at the Council of Constance, but in *De examinatione doctrinarum* (1423) he seems to allude negatively to Bridget of Sweden, Pedro of Aragon, and Catherine of Siena (whose prophecies each benefitted the Roman popes) when he recounts his imagining of the deathbed scene of Gregory XI. All three prophets had advised the pope to return to Rome, they said, by the command of God. Soon after Gregory complied and did go to Rome, however, he died and thereafter the split papal election began the Great Schism – a consequence Gerson seems to blame on these prophets. According to Gerson, the dying and broken pope regretted his move to Rome and lamented that he had allowed himself to be “seduced” by the prophets' bad

⁴⁶ Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417*, 57. Nicholas Eymerich's tract is in Heinrich Finke, “Drei spanische Publizisten aus den Anfängen des grossen Schismas: Matthäus Clementis, Nikolaus Eymerich, der hl. Vicente Ferrer,” in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kulturgeschichte Spaniens*, vol. 1,1 (Munster: Aschendorff, 1928), 174–195, 183-187. Similarly, a 1380 examination of Pedro's revelations ordered by the king of Aragon resulted in a split decision according to which pope the examiners supported: those who advocated for the Roman pope ruled that Pedro's visions were from God; those in favor of the pope at Avignon suggested (politely, since Pedro was nephew to the king) that demons may have deceived him. The findings of the 1380 examination are recorded in the *Informatio* in Pou y Martí, *Visionarios, Beguinos Y Fraticelos Catalanes (Siglos Xiii-Xv)*; See Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 141–48 who reviews the commission findings.

advice.⁴⁷ In contrast, Gerson initially favored the prophetic claims of Ermine de Reims – who prophesied in favor of the Avignon line – and it was only after the Schism was resolved that he turned against her. Furthermore, as will be discussed below, Gerson supported the prophetic claims of Joan of Arc, whose victories coincided with Gerson’s political allegiances in the Hundred Years War.

5.2 Joan of Arc

Most scholarly accounts of Joan of Arc’s examinations and trials have focused on the obvious influence of political motivations in both French and Anglo-Burgundian assessments of Joan. Deborah Fraioli, however, has taken the lead in recognizing that considerations of *discretio spirituum* also shaped the debates about Joan, especially through her examination of assessments of Joan made prior to her capture and condemnation. Augmented by Dyan Elliot’s article on Jean Gerson’s assessment of Joan, Fraioli’s analysis demonstrates that contemporaries held much more nuanced views about Joan than is often assumed and that, while the French, in particular, were uncertain and highly skeptical prior to Orléans, after her victory they employed discernment criteria to support her claims.⁴⁸ A reading of Joan’s trial documents, those of both the condemnation and the nullification proceedings, further supports this view, and it becomes clear that the political determinism many historians have seen in Joan’s case was, in part, a consequence of their thinking about discernment. Not only was the theology more developed

⁴⁷ Gerson, *De examinatione*, in Glorieux, 9:469-470: “Experti pluries loquimur, et Gregorius XI papa testis fuit idoneus, sed tardus nimis. Hic positus in extremis, habens in manibus sacrum Christi corpus, protestatus est coram omnibus ut caverent ab hominibus, tam viris quam mulieribus, sub specie religionis visiones loquentibus sui capitis; quia per tales seductus esset, dimisso suorum rationabili consilio, ut se et Ecclesiam ad discrimen schismatis tunc imminentis traxerit, nisi misericors provideret sponsus Ecclesiae Jesus; quod horrendus usque adhuc nimis heu patefecit eventus.” For those who interpret Gerson to be referring to Bridget, Catherine, or Pedro see: Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417*, 34; Elliott, *Proving Woman*, 284.

⁴⁸ Deborah A. Fraioli, *Joan of Arc: The Early Debate* (Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2000); Elliott, “Seeing Double.”

than it had been during Bridget of Sweden's canonization proceedings, which indeed had taken place before Gerson had written his important works on the subject.⁴⁹ But the debate itself lasted over thirty years, during which the theory of *discretio spiritum* was invoked by Joan's supporters as well as her opponents. The evidence left by these debates shows how the theory, even when applied to the same set of facts, was so malleable that it could arrive at completely contradictory conclusions depending on who was doing the evaluation.

Born to a peasant family in Domrémy in northern France around 1412, Joan first appears in the historical record in May 1428 when she petitioned the captain of the royal garrison at Vaucouleurs to provide her an escort to travel to the king.⁵⁰ Joan insisted she been sent by God to defeat the English and deliver France to Charles of Valois, whom she regarded as the rightful heir to the crown. The captain mocked and then tried to ignore the sixteen-year-old girl but by February 1429 she convinced him to grant the escort, and in early March she arrived at Chinon where the dauphin was staying with his court. At Chinon, Joan's claims that she was sent by God to deliver France were again ridiculed at first, but after a time she gained an audience with Charles. The details are unclear and have long been a subject of speculation, but Joan apparently revealed to the dauphin a secret only he knew that caused him to take her claims more seriously. For three weeks Charles' advisors questioned Joan and sought the opinions of several outside jurists and theologians.

⁴⁹ As has been discussed, Gerson offered his opinion on Bridget at the Council of Constance in 1415, but by then Bridget had already been declared a saint, and as Gerson himself advised, a full consideration of *discretio spirituum* (beyond what Gerson had already offered) that might discredit Bridget and bring scandal was something to avoid.

⁵⁰ The biography of Joan of Arc is well known. See, for instance Régine Pernoud and Marie-Véronique Clin, *Joan of Arc: Her Story*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler, trans. Jeremy duQuesnay Adams (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998); or the introduction to Daniel Hobbins, trans., *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2005).

This initial reception of Joan by the French court is documented by the correspondence (now known only through a seventeenth-century summary) between Jean Girard, royal advisor at Chinon, and Jacques Gelu, jurist and archbishop of Embrun, whose advice Girard was requesting.⁵¹ Though the signs produced by Joan were persuasive they were clearly not seen as definitive, for Charles and his advisors proceeded as the theology of *discretion spiritum* recommended, questioning Joan about her faith and virtues, and by soliciting outside advice from experts such as Gelu. Gelu's second letter, written directly to the dauphin, laid out a double-edged set of risks. On one hand, he cautioned against placing too much trust in a young girl who might easily be deceived or deluded (calling to mind Gerson's concerns about female prophets).⁵² He also warned that France might appear foolish if it put its support behind a prophet who turned out to be false.⁵³ On the other hand, Gelu explained that it was dangerous to reject a true prophet, for to do so would be to deny God's assistance. Leading armies was not a normal station for a teenage girl, but he writes that God could make a woman a conqueror even over another Christian nation -- if that nation, like England, had transgressed divine, natural, and civil law.⁵⁴ Gelu thus advised caution, and he recommended that judgment or any definitive action be reserved until a fuller examination by experts could be conducted.⁵⁵

Additional evidence for the earliest French response to Joan comes from the treatise *De quadam puella* that comes to us without attribution but was evidently written by another French

⁵¹ The correspondence between Girard and Gelu does not survive except through summaries written by Marcellin Fornier between 1626-1643 and published in Marcellin Fornier, *Histoire générale des Alpes-Maritimes et Cottienes*, 3 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1890), 2:312ff; On Fornier's summaries and Gelu's educational preparation at the universities of Paris and Orléans, see Fraioli, *Joan of Arc*, 16–17.

⁵² Fornier, *Histoire*, 2:314.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2:314. On this point Gelu reminded the dauphin that France had gained a reputation for too easily falling prey to false visionaries, although he does not provide any examples.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:314, 316.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:314.

ecclesiastic.⁵⁶ *De quadam puella* demonstrates how, even at this early stage, the main theological issues that informed eventual French acceptance of her claims were already being discussed, as indeed were many of the issues that her Anglo-Burgundian judges would use to justify her condemnation. The treatise begins by recounting what had been reported to him about Joan's claim that she was sent by God and that she had produced initial supernatural signs. He makes introductory remarks about her background and reported character, noting her youth and status as a daughter of a shepherd, that she lives chastely, is devoted to God, and prohibits murder and plundering. Then he describes Joan's male attributes in some detail, such as her commanding nature when she is on horseback, although he takes special care to point out that once she descends from her mount she assumes "her usual feminine manners, [and] she becomes extremely naive, inexperienced in secular manners, like a defenseless lamb."⁵⁷

Based on these reports, *De quadam puella* continues by suggesting twelve propositions, or questions, that examiners should consider and closely investigate, offering six that would seem to affirm that Joan was sent by God and six that would support the opposite conclusion. Joan's apparent virtue and faith, which might support her divine calling, as well as her signs, which likewise might be evidence of prophecy, are discussed. The writer explains that outward appearances and apparent signs need to be considered, but neither is a certain indicator since virtue can be feigned and demons can produce illusions of signs or accurate predictions.⁵⁸ Only by close examination can learned men with experience in such matters determine the truth. In this regard the author reasons that, beyond examining Joan herself, the best argument in her

⁵⁶ In Jules Quicherat, ed., *Le Procès de réhabilitation de Jeanne d'Arc dite la Pucelle*, 5 vols. (Paris: Société de l'Histoire de France, 1841), 3:411-421. I have used the translation of H.G. Francq in "Jean Gerson's Theological Treatise and Other Memoirs in Defense of Joan of Arc," *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa* 41 (1971): 58-80 which is in the appendix of Fraioli, *Joan of Arc*, 199-205.

⁵⁷ "De quadam puella," in *Joan of Arc: The Early Debate*, trans. H.G. Francq (Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2000), 199.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 203-204.

favor would concern not just her own character but especially the virtues and actions she inspired in others. A false prophet might fake virtue, but, since the purpose of evil spirits is to produce malice and discord, if those whom Joan influences act uprightly and do good then this cannot be the result of an evil spirit.⁵⁹

While such reasoning about appearances and signs might be applied to any prophet, more particular to Joan's case were her sex and youth; whether God might favor one Christian nation against another; and Joan's taking up male dress and behaviors. Invoking the Pauline idea that God uses the weak to confound the strong, and citing the Biblical women Deborah, Hester, and Judith as well as the youths Daniel and David, *De quadam puella* argues that women and those “of the age of innocence” can be prophets or God’s tools for salvation, thus offering one of the strongest supports for Joan's case.⁶⁰ Concerning God's direct involvement in nations, however, the author's assessment is mostly negative: temporal happiness does not imply God's favor, and, because God opposes attachment to temporal things, this might even be a negative sign. On this point, however, the author provides a single exception: “Yet in the Old Testament, as long as the celebrated people were servants of God, they had in exchange such temporal goods” -- and thus the merits of France and England, as much as Joan’s, need to be considered.⁶¹

On Joan’s male dress and behavior *De quadam puella* exposes the most damaging potential arguments against her. Although the treatise's opening had been careful to repeat reports that Joan resumed female nature and modesty when not on horseback or leading men, the treatise also cites the prohibition against women wearing men's clothes of Deuteronomy 22:5 and Paul's injunction against women shaving their heads like men (Cor 11:6). Here the author finds that if

⁵⁹ Ibid., 200, 202.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 201–202.

⁶¹ Ibid., 204.

Joan's behavior was found to be contrary to these injunctions (he does not specify what this means) that would suggest indecency and bring both her moral character and status as a true prophet into question.⁶²

Following the initial discussions at Chinon, of which *De quadam puella* was a part, the dauphin Charles ordered a formal examination of Joan that took place at Poitiers. Presided over by the archbishop of Rheims and chancellor of France, Regnault de Chartres, the Poitiers panel was comprised of approximately eighteen commissioners that included some of the most prominent theologians and jurists in non-occupied France.⁶³ Outside of a published conclusion of the commission findings no documentary evidence of the proceedings exists, but from the conclusions as well as outside testimony we know that the Poitiers examiners spent three weeks of their own questioning Joan.⁶⁴ In the *Poitiers Conclusions* published to report the examination's findings, the commissioners state that the requirements for testing spirits rested on two tests: first, testing by human means, that is by inquiring into her life, intentions, behavior, and faith; and second, by a divine sign, either from "divine works or hope from heaven."⁶⁵ As the theologians and jurists attempted to apply multifaceted and theoretical criteria to this real and very pressing concern (since the fate of France potentially depended on their decision), the commissioners were faced with a problem: they did not have enough information to satisfy both tests. Working with what they had, the examiners questioned Joan and apparently others who knew her, mostly about her life and faith. Based on their investigation and that at Chinon, the commissioners cautiously conclude that they found in her "no evil, only goodness, humility,

⁶² Ibid., 204–205.

⁶³ Fraioli, *Joan of Arc*, 47–48.

⁶⁴ "Poitiers Conclusions," in *Joan of Arc: The Early Debate*, trans. Deborah A. Fraioli (Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2000), 206–7. On the disappearance of any further documentation from the Poitiers examination see Charles T Wood, "Joan of Arc's Mission and the Lost Record of Her Interrogation at Poitiers," in *Fresh Verdicts on Joan of Arc*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Charles T Wood (New York: Garland Pub, 1996), 19–29.

⁶⁵ "Poitiers Conclusions," 206.

virginity, piety, honesty, and simplicity; and of her birth and life marvelous things are related as true.”⁶⁶ Though the signs she had produced at Chinon were insufficiently miraculous to confirm all of her claims, they did recommend that the dauphin supply Joan with men-at-arms and that he not prevent her from going to Orléans since “doubting her or dismissing her without appearance of evil would be to repel the Holy Spirit, and render one unworthy of the aid of God.”⁶⁷ Whether she was truly sent by God, however, was left as an open question to be confirmed if she fulfilled the requested divine sign, which Joan apparently claimed she would provide by delivering Orléans.

For many French at least, Joan's victory at Orléans soon after provided the required miracle, and her successive military victories and the coronation of the dauphin as king further confirmed that she was, in fact, sent by God. In French texts that followed, earlier doubts, suspicions, and hedging faded away, to be replaced by more confident affirmations meant to celebrate and especially to defend Joan against her English and Burgundian critics. Having now committed to Joan, Frenchmen writing after Orléans, including theologians and even poets, continued to cite and utilize *discretio spirituum*, but, instead of these concepts providing reasons for doubt, they now served as proofs against the English or as means to defend Joan. Two of the most important examples of this type of redeployment of discernment are the *Super facto puellae et credulitate sibi praestanda*, by Jean Gerson and the *De puella aurelianensi dissertatio*, by Jacques Gelu.

Although various works on Joan have been attributed to Jean Gerson since the fifteenth century, the only work on her that can accurately be assigned to Gerson was the *Super facto puellae et credulitate sibi praestanda*.⁶⁸ Among the most popular and most influential of the

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Daniel Hobbins, “Jean Gerson’s Authentic Tract on Joan of Arc: *Super facto puellae et credulitate sibi praestanda* (14 May 1429),” *Mediaeval Studies* 67, no. 1 (2005): 99–155. See also, Sean Field, “A New

contemporary tracts written on Joan, Gerson's *Super facto puella* was written hastily in May 1429. Indeed, he completed the first two of the treatise's three sections only six days after Joan's victory at Orléans.⁶⁹ Apparently the events at Orléans motivated Gerson to write about Joan but he does not refer to Orléans as the required miracle to demonstrate her inspiration. Instead he seems to consider Joan's ability to answer skeptics at Poitiers a miracle, which he compares to St. Catherine of Alexandria's refutation of the philosophers.⁷⁰

Gerson opens his treatise with a brief discussion about probabilities rather than absolute certainty being the subject of discernment and the two sections that follow argue that it is reasonable that Joan was sent by God. Gerson does not attempt conclusively to prove that Joan was sent by God; rather he argues that, since nothing improper could be found in her, there was no reason to disbelieve her claims. Gerson finds nothing damning about Joan's faith, morals, or actions, and neither, he says, was she known to practice sorcery or fraud. Moreover, Gerson finds that Joan inspired the king, her army, and the clergy to pious behavior – an additional indication that she was inspired by good spirits.⁷¹

For Gerson, an additional point of support was that Joan successfully carried out a mission on behalf of a legitimate king.⁷² The English, of course, would have contested that conclusion, but for Gerson all signs pointed to the likelihood that Joan was inspired by a good rather than an

English Translation of Jean Gerson's Authentic Tract on Joan of Arc, *About the Feat of the Maid, and the Faith That Should Be Placed in Her*," *Magistra* 18, no. 2 (2012): 36–54. Field's translation has been followed here. The Latin text of *Super facto* can be found in Quicherat, *Le Procès de réhabilitation de Jeanne d'Arc dite la Pucelle*, 3:298-306.

⁶⁹ Field, "A New English Translation of Jean Gerson's Authentic Tract on Joan of Arc, About the Feat of the Maid, and the Faith That Should Be Placed in Her," 38.

⁷⁰ Jean Gerson, *Super puellae* in "A New English Translation of Jean Gerson's Authentic Tract on Joan of Arc, About the Feat of the Maid, and the Faith That Should Be Placed in Her," trans. Sean Field, 51. Gerson does not relate St. Catherine to Joan's voices, for he does not discuss the nature of her voices at all, but it should be noted that in her later trial at Rouen, when pressed, Joan claimed that St. Catherine was one of the voices that spoke to her. Could it be that Gerson is referring to something from the now lost record of the Poitiers examination, assuming he had access to those documents?

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 49.

evil spirit. Drawing on the idea that God uses the weak to confound the strong, Gerson describes Joan as a young girl and virgin who frightens and defeats the enemy with the aid of angels.⁷³ Somewhat cautiously, Gerson adds that, even if Joan might encounter failures, this would not mean that her original mission was not divinely mandated, since it was possible for God, for a multitude of reasons, to withdraw his support and inspiration even from true prophets.⁷⁴ It will be recalled that Gerson had hedged in his initial approval of Ermine de Reims so he could change his mind about her; with Joan, however, his hedging is intended to defend his favorable assessment should later events cast doubt.

Between a few days and two months⁷⁵ after Gerson wrote *Super facto puella*'s first two sections, Gerson wrote a third section that addresses Joan's male attire. Some manuscripts include all three sections; in others, the important third section was disseminated by itself.⁷⁶ Against accusations that Joan's choice in clothing was in violation of Deuteronomy, Gerson states that Old Testament laws have no literal force unless they are explicitly reissued by the Christian Church. According to Gerson, Old Testament laws such as Deuteronomy 22:5 continue to have moral force, but it is the sense rather than the letter that should be considered. In Joan's case, she had been chosen by God to fulfill a masculine, military role, and therefore it was not forbidden that she wear masculine clothing. In a similar manner, Gerson reasoned that Joan's haircut, in apparent contradiction to the Apostle Paul's injunction, was likewise justified.⁷⁷

Why did Gerson write in support of Joan when he had previously criticized other prophets, especially Bridget of Sweden? Sean Field, following more general points made by Wendy Love

⁷³ Ibid., 50.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 51–52.

⁷⁵ Since Gerson died in July 1429.

⁷⁶ Field, "A New English Translation of Jean Gerson's Authentic Tract on Joan of Arc, About the Feat of the Maid, and the Faith That Should Be Placed in Her," 40.

⁷⁷ Gerson, "*Super Facto Puellae*," 52–53.

Anderson, Nancy Caciola, and Dyan Elliott, points out that Gerson's suspicions about female prophets were in part based in his criticisms of "immoderate" behaviors such as exaggerated ecstasies and excessive fasting. Joan exhibited none of these behaviors, and Gerson makes a point to describe her modesty and humility.⁷⁸ Furthermore, Joan's actions advanced political outcomes dear to Gerson, unlike Bridget's prophecies that supported the Roman line of popes against Gerson's favored Avignon popes.

The victory at Orléans also persuaded Jacques Gelu to abandon his doubts about Joan. Writing again to the dauphin after Orléans but before the coronation at Rheims, Gelu produced a treatise *De puella aurelianesnsi dissertatio* (henceforth *Dissertatio*) that is much more expansive in its defense of Joan than Gerson's.⁷⁹ At the outset of his text, Gelu admits his earlier doubts and explains that what he sees as a miraculous series of events has led him to write about Joan again, both to affirm his newfound support for Joan and also to offer a defense against the arguments of Joan's English and Burgundian critics, some of which he seems to have heard and others he seems to be anticipating. Gelu's *Dissertatio* confronts the key question, "Are we able to know, and by what means, when works come from God or are whether they are the product of diabolical arts?" to which Gelu responds first by considering its difficulty.⁸⁰ We perceive through the senses, he writes, but the senses are not reliable, and a false prophet can feign every outward appearance of a true prophet.

Gelu bases his belief that Joan's works have, in fact, come from God, on several key factors. The first was the conclusions of the Poitiers examination: Gelu had recommended such an expert

⁷⁸ Field, "A New English Translation of Jean Gerson's Authentic Tract on Joan of Arc, About the Feat of the Maid, and the Faith That Should Be Placed in Her," 43–45.

⁷⁹ Jacques Gelu, *Dissertatio*, in *Mémoires et Consultations En Faveur de Jeanne d'Arc Par Les Juges Du Procès de Réhabilitation, D'après Les Manuscrits Authentiques, publiés Pour La Première Fois*, ed. Pierre Lanéry d'Arc (Paris, 1889), 1: 39–52.

⁸⁰ Gelu, "*Dissertatio*," 585.

examination, it had occurred, and the commission of learned and serious men had found no evil in Joan. The Poitiers conclusions were further supported by the passage of time, for, as Gelu reasoned, time can help to shine the light of truth on matters. Even well-disguised evil cannot stay hidden long, and given time it will eventually manifest itself. Since Joan had been known and observed for several months, if there was anything bad in her it would have become apparent.⁸¹ The final, and perhaps most decisive factor for Gelu was Joan's miraculous victory at Orléans, which seems to have finally convinced him of the divine character of her mission.⁸²

Now that he had come around to supporting Joan, much of the remainder of Gelu's treatise is focused on explaining his new position on earlier questions that had prompted his doubts; he also defends current accusations against Joan or anticipates them. For example, Gelu had been most concerned that Joan's sex and humble background made her susceptible to illusion. Now he sees Joan's success as a wondrous example of God using a simple and weak girl to confound the prideful and arrogant English.⁸³ Against the charge that Joan's mission remains incomplete (since Charles had yet to be crowned), when opponents argue or might argue that divine intervention should produce its results more quickly, Gelu counters that God can take however long He wishes and furthermore it is futile for human beings to attempt to understand such divine mysteries.⁸⁴ From his Chinon correspondence Gelu repeats his view that in certain circumstances it is possible for God to assist one Christian nation over another, a position he supports by describing France's merit and its sufferings from English transgressions of human and divine law.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Ibid., 590.

⁸² Fraioli, *Joan of Arc*, 87 makes this assertion based on various implied references throughout the treatise.

⁸³ Gelu, "*Dissertatio*," 571.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 577.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 572–573.

Gelu devotes considerable attention to what he seems to have considered the most assailable aspect of Joan's claims – her male dress and male behaviors – and he addresses the issue in ways similar to Gerson. Gelu begins by explaining that her male clothing and behaviors can be understood as a means by which God uses the weak to confound the strong or proud, and, in particular, Gelu suggests that God had ordained Joan's choice in clothing to further humble and demoralize the English forces.⁸⁶ Against those who point to Biblical restrictions against women wearing male clothing or a male hair cut, Gelu's arguments parallel Gerson's. Drawing upon Thomas Aquinas and Gerson's writings elsewhere, Gelu contrasts written law with the living law (*lex animata*), and maintains that the intention of the law trumps its letter. The intention of these laws, he says, is to prevent women from acting in roles improper to the female sex. Joan's roles as prophet and military commander, however, are ordained by God, and whatever God ordains must, he says, by definition be proper. Moreover, even as Joan carried out her military functions Gelu points to her modesty and decency as proofs that she was only acting in a warlike manner when necessary and in all other ways she behaved as a "virginal young girl" should.⁸⁷ In a further argument concerning Joan's dress, Gelu again draws upon Aquinas, who had reasoned that dress should correspond to function. Because Joan fights as a man and leads men, it was thus justified that she dress as one.⁸⁸

While French theologians were solidifying their arguments in favor of Joan after Orléans, the English and Burgundians were beginning to formulate their own arguments against Joan. Evidence for most early Anglo-Burgundian criticism of Joan prior to her condemnation comes from French responses or implied responses, but a treatise written in late 1429 or early 1430 by

⁸⁶ Ibid., 583.

⁸⁷ Gelu, "*Dissertatio*", 582-583, 591.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 584.

an unnamed Burgundian cleric in Paris survives. The treatise of the Burgundian cleric (hereafter *Reply*) is untitled and its pointed allusions and direct quotations indicate that it was primarily written as a reply to Gerson's *Super facto puellae*.⁸⁹ Valois and Fraioli assume that author was a canon lawyer based on the treatise's use of arguments drawn from canon law, which is a reasonable assumption since the *Reply*'s is based around seven main objections that rely on arguments from both canon law and theology to refute Joan's claim to be sent by God.⁹⁰ Six of these seven objections seize upon weak points or reverse arguments that had been previously defended or anticipated by Joan's supporters. In this way the *Reply* anticipates some of the strategy and many of the same accusations that would be made during Joan's trial at Rouen; it also provides possible explanations for the reasoning behind those charges that is often lacking in the trial documents.

The author of the *Reply* begins, as might be expected from a canon lawyer (especially a hostile one), by faulting the French for what he sees as procedural errors. In particular, he criticizes the Poitiers examination for issuing its recommendation prior to receiving the required proofs necessary for a positive verdict – specifically, the presence of a miracle or clear Scriptural evidence supporting Joan. Second, the author takes great offense to Joan's male dress and rejects French arguments that the law expressed by Deuteronomy no longer has force. He cites canon law, and Gratian's *Decretals*, in particular, to indicate that this prohibition remains in effect, and if Joan were truly sent by God, he reasons, then she would not act in contradiction to this law.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Noël Valois, ed., "Un nouveau témoignage sur Jeanne d'Arc Réponse d'un clerc parisien à l'apologie de la Pucelle par Gerson (1429)," in *Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de France* (Paris: Impr. de Daupeley-Gouverneur, 1907), 161–79.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 166; Fraioli, *Joan of Arc*, 164.

⁹¹ Valois, "Réponse d'un clerc parisien," 176. The cleric cites Gratian's decretal *Si qua mulier*, distinction 30. For this decretal see, Gratian, *Decretum Corpus iuris canonici*, Emil Friedberg, ed., vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1879; repr. Graz, 1959), D. 30 c. 6: "Si qua mulier suo proposito utile iudicans, ut virili veste utatur, propter hoc viri habitum imitetur, anathema sit."

Anyone who argues otherwise, he writes, is cunning and devious.⁹² Focusing on another contestable issue, the author of the *Reply* contends that God does not intervene on behalf of one Christian nation over another, and especially not against the English for, from his point of view, England has a just claim on the occupied French territories. In his eyes, therefore, Joan is a warmonger and threat to peace among Christian kingdoms, and therefore her inspiration cannot be from God.⁹³

The *Reply*'s fourth objection is made in response to Joan's September 8, 1429 attack on Paris, during the observance of the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin. Not only does the author of the *Reply* deem Joan's attack an outrageous violation and desecration of a holy day, but the resulting French defeat further indicates that she was doing the devil's work rather God's.⁹⁴ Since most French texts defending Joan predated this battle, they could not have considered or defended this aspect of her actions, making this the only accusation in the *Reply* not previously treated in any way by French writers.⁹⁵ Whereas the *Reply*'s first three objections paint Joan as a false prophet or at least indicate that it is mistaken to believe that she is a true one, her leading a failed attack on a holy day brings the accusation that Joan is specifically and deliberately carrying out the devil's work. Joan's failure at Paris also leads into the *Reply*'s fifth charge, that Joan lied about her predictions, that Orléans was no proof, and that her larger promises to deliver all of France to Charles were false.⁹⁶ Thus, the *Reply* says, Joan "was not conducted by the

⁹² Valois, "Réponse d'un clerc parisien," 176.

⁹³ Ibid., 176–177.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 177.

⁹⁵ Fraioli, *Joan of Arc*, 168.

⁹⁶ Here the cleric takes advantage of Gerson's failure in *Super facto puellae* to describe Orleans as the miracle attesting to Joan's validity. Had Gerson claimed that Orleans was the necessary miracle, it might have been possible to rationalize Joan's later failings as merely an example of the Holy Spirit withdrawing from one who previously had been a true prophet, a rationalization that Gerson had prepared in his treatise. Instead, by an allusion to St. Catherine of Alexandria "converting the philosophers," Gerson had indicated that he considered Joan's miracle to be convincing skeptics at Poitiers. Considering the inadequacy of this proof in

blessed spirit of truth, from which all truth proceeds, but by the devil, the father of lies, whose deeds she strives to accomplish.”⁹⁷

The sixth point, which is presented as the most serious (*gravissimum*), is the charge that Joan inspires idolatry. Whereas French writers understood popular sentiment and honors given to Joan as a sign that she inspired piety and that such renown was a recognition of her manifest holiness, the *Reply* reverses this idea to accuse Joan of encouraging veneration, as if she were already a saint, which was contrary to canon law.⁹⁸ Thus the author of the *Reply* sternly disapproves of reports he has heard that children offered candles to Joan, and in his seventh and final objection he interprets an aspect of these reports – that Joan placed three drops of wax from a candle on children’s heads – as signs of sorcery, or as he writes “spells complicated by heresy.”⁹⁹

In January 1431 Joan’s trial began before an ecclesiastical court at Rouen. It was conducted by Burgundian jurists and theologians aligned with the English.¹⁰⁰ In total 131 “assessors” participated, all but eight of them French Burgundians. Joan was a prisoner of war but also accused of heresy, and thus jurisdiction for the trial was assigned to Pierre Cauchon the bishop of Beauvais, where Joan was captured, and the inquisitor of France, Jean Graverent – who had other commitments and appointed Jean Le Maistre in his place. Cauchon held the licentiate in decretals and had also studied theology for six years, all at the University of Paris, and Graverent was a bachelor of theology. Cauchon, especially, as a canon lawyer and sensitive to the attention the case would draw, was careful to document at least the appearance of proper trial procedure.

the eyes of the Parisien cleric, especially in light of his other objections, the cleric was able to claim that Joan had produced no miracles. On this point, see *Ibid.*, 169.

⁹⁷ Valois, “Réponse d’un cleric parisien,” 177.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 179. “...sortilegium involutum heresi...”

¹⁰⁰ On the make up of the assessors, and for background on Cauchon especially, see the introductory essay in Hobbins, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*.

Since this was mostly a heresy case that hinged on the theological criteria of *discretio spirituum*, Joan's accusers also consulted numerous theologians (who were of course allied with the Anglo-Burgundian side). Of the judges' fifteen assistants whom Charles de Beaurepaire considers to have been the most important, thirteen had theology backgrounds and two were educated in canon law.¹⁰¹ Many of the relevant issues to be decided, as has been discussed, had in large part already been considered by both French and English writers, each having come to opposing conclusions according to his nationality.

A new factor in the trial, or at least an opportunity not previously afforded to the English opposition, was possession of Joan and the chance to question her directly. The judges took advantage of the opportunity: in accusing Joan of a wide assortment of crimes, they sought to condemn her either on matters already considered or else on new charges. As will be discussed more fully below, the judges also benefited from or took advantage of Joan's limited understanding about certain religious doctrines, and especially her apparent ignorance of the subtleties of prophecy theory (especially the nature of visions); they also employed various forms of intimidation and the threat of torture as they attempted to coax from her incriminating testimony.

Based on preliminary investigation into Joan's background and character, including the gathering of testimony from those in her village who knew her, and preparatory questioning of Joan that lasted more than a month, seventy articles of accusation were drawn up by the end of January, although there would be another two months of questions before the accusations were read to Joan. These seventy articles comprise several categories of charges, which were summarized in a paragraph preceding the list of charges and can be grouped as follows: that Joan

¹⁰¹ Karen Sullivan, *The Interrogation of Joan of Arc*, Medieval Cultures (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 4.

was 1) a “sorceress, diviner, false prophetess, conjurer of evil spirits, superstitious, entangled in and practicing the magic arts...” 2) “evil-thinking in the Catholic faith, schismatic, doubting and misled in the article ‘One holy Church,’ and other articles of faith...” 3) “...sacrilegious, idolatrous...permitting herself to...be worshiped and adored...giving her hands and garments to be kissed, usurping divine honor and adoration...” 4) “a disturber of the peace...inciting wars, cruelly thirsting for human blood and encourages its shedding...seductress of princes and peoples..” 5) “wholly forsaking the decency and reserve of her sex...[having] taken the disgraceful clothing and state of armed men...”¹⁰² For these reasons the judges charged Joan with heresy, read to her the seventy articles along with reference to her testimony from the preparatory questioning that touched upon the articles, and recorded her responses. To each, Joan either denied the accusation, responded that she had already answered the charge during earlier questioning, or admitted to some mostly innocuous aspect of the charge while maintaining her innocence of the more damning element or elements.

Following the reading of the seventy articles, which took a week, Cauchon decided to revise and condense the charges into twelve articles, and these were sent to experts in theology and canon law at Paris and elsewhere requesting their advice about judgment. The twelve articles streamlined the charges and focused the case against Joan on a smaller subset of themes representing what the judges seem to have considered their strongest accusations. They also omitted Joan’s denials and explanations. In particular, most of the original charges related to sorcery and witchcraft were reduced or removed, including the more fanciful accusations that Joan danced around a fairy tree, carried a magical mandrake, or put spells on her ring. Similarly, charges of prostitution or sexual impropriety were eliminated. Instead, the judges built their case

¹⁰² Hobbins, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 123–124.

primarily around Joan's voices and her cross-dressing, her leap from the tower of the Beaurevoir castle, leaving home without her parents' consent, her dictating letters and carrying a banner with the sign "Jhesus Maria," and her refusal to submit to the Church Militant if what it demanded conflicted with what she believed God had commanded or revealed to her.¹⁰³

For at least two categories contained in the revised articles, those pertaining to her voices and her understanding of the Church Militant, the judges used Joan's lack of learning and understanding about prophetic concepts against her. Most crucially, the judges' repetitive and suggestive questioning eventually compelled Joan to describe her voices as coming from Saints Gabriel, Michael, Catherine of Alexandria, and Margaret, who Joan said spoke to her, revealed the future, and interceded to help convince the dauphin to provide her an army. Whereas Joan had originally and persistently characterized her voices as coming directly from God, when she altered her explanation to include these saints it opened the way to charges that these were demonic spirits in disguise.¹⁰⁴ This proved even more damning as Joan's questioning dragged on and she eventually responded by describing her voices in further detail – not, however, in nuanced terms that could be interpreted as similitudes of spiritual or intellectual vision but rather in more corporeal terms of physically seeing, hearing, touching, conversing, and occupying material space.

With her voices understood (or able to be characterized) by her judges as corporeal visions, the judges were able to characterize Joan's acts of reverence to her voices as indications of idolatry and diabolism rather than holy veneration. Critically, the voices' insistence that Joan wear men's clothing thus became further evidence of malfeasance and presented an outward sign of the voices' wickedness and desire to upset order. Furthermore, if they were considered as

¹⁰³ On the judges' focusing or "framing" their case, see Susan Schibanoff, "True Lies: Transvestism and Idolatry in the Trial of Joan of Arc," *Fresh Verdicts on Joan of Arc*, at 32-38.

¹⁰⁴ Sullivan, *The Interrogation of Joan of Arc*, chapter 2.

corporeal visions, Joan's ability to foretell the future and produce apparent signs could be interpreted as demonic illusions, and her war against the English the devil's attempt to foment war and destroy Christian society. As Joan's cross-dressing was linked to evil intent in her voices, so too was her leap from the tower at their command, which her judges reasoned was either attempted suicide or else presumption that her voices possessed the power to save her – both of which were sins if the voices were considered evil rather than good spirits. Similarly, her voices compelled her to break a commandment when they told her to leave home without her parents' consent, and her use of "Jhesus Maria" in service of unjust war became blasphemy. Concerning the Church Militant and what she would do if what her voices commanded conflicted with its demands, Joan seems to have confused the Church Militant with her accusers themselves, for she said she would obey her revelations and the Church, unless by the "Church" her accusers meant themselves, whom she refused to obey against her revelations.¹⁰⁵

Responses to the summons for advice, most crucially from the University of Paris, returned recommendations for a guilty verdict: Joan was an idolater, a blasphemer, and a heretic, her voices were false and probably demonic, and they led Joan into error and sin.¹⁰⁶ On May 23, the court read to Joan an accounting of her crimes and errors and advised her to "abandon her errors, to mend her ways, and submit to the correction and decision of our Holy Mother Church."¹⁰⁷ As the bishop began to deliver the final sentence Joan interrupted, said she wished to hold to all that the Church had decided, and that since the clergy had declared her visions false she would no

¹⁰⁵ Some testimony from Joan seems to say that she would refuse even the pope's commands if they were contrary to her revelations, although it is not clear that she believed such a situation could arise. On this and the larger issues involved see Jane Marie Pinzno, "Joan of Arc and *Lex Privata*: A Spirit of Freedom in the Law," in *Joan of Arc and Spirituality*, ed. Ann W Astell and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 85–109.

¹⁰⁶ The responses from the University of Paris are summarized in the trial proceedings, Hobbins, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 181–187. Other responses are given or summarized at 162ff.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 184.

longer uphold them and submit entirely to the judges. She then read a prepared abjuration detailing her crimes and a recantation that admitted that her visions were falsely pretended and that she wore indecent clothing and hair, presumptuously bore arms, encouraged sedition, committed idolatry, and adored and invoked evil spirits.¹⁰⁸

As a result of her abjuration the court lifted Joan's excommunication and sentenced her to perpetual imprisonment. She accepted women's clothing at once and allowed her hair to be shaven off. Several days later, however, the trial documents relate that Joan was found in her cell, again wearing men's clothing. Because she had resumed the outward sign of her heresy and idolatry, her judges asked if her voices had told her to resume such attire, to which she answered that they had and further that her entire recantation had been false and made under fear of death. She said she would take women's clothing again if the judges wished but that she would not deny her voices or refuse to believe that God had sent her. Thus judging her to have relapsed into heresy, the court turned her over to the secular arm, and on May 30 she was burned at the stake.

During Joan's trial and for years following her execution Charles VII said nothing in public about her, but in 1450, following successes in the Hundred Years War that set France on a path to regaining its possessions from the English, the French king initiated an inquest into the trial. Because Joan was so closely involved in Charles' coronation, it was important for his claims of legitimacy that his ascension not be associated with a condemned heretic. Eventually, in 1455 Pope Calixtus III authorized a formal retrial that resulted in July 1456 in the nullification of the original trial verdict. This final phase of the history of Joan's medieval evaluation need not occupy much discussion here except to say that, just as Joan's condemnation trial demonstrated how the same criteria the French had interpreted in support of Joan could be used to condemn

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 192–193.

her, the testimony gathered by the nullification process shows how easily they might be reversed again.¹⁰⁹

Through multiple questionings of those who knew Joan or had been involved in her original trial but were now supportive of Charles, testimonies recalled the events that had occurred nearly twenty-five years earlier. Cauchon, now dead, was described as a partial judge whose desire to convict Joan unfairly condemned her, and multiple violations of trial procedure were recalled. With few exceptions, those questioned said they believed that Joan was sent by God, or believed it probable, and those few who expressed any doubts about this said that they nonetheless did not believe her to be a heretic.

Among the theologians consulted during the nullification process, the opinion given by Elie de Bourdeilles, bishop of Périgueux (1438-1468), has been explored by Jane Marie Pinzino.¹¹⁰ Pinzino's study demonstrates that Bourdeilles' conclusions were essentially similar to earlier French assessments but specifically responded to new elements brought about by the condemnation trial. Of particular note in Bourdeilles' opinion are his views that justify Joan's description of her voices in relation to Augustine's theory of visions – a matter that earlier French writers had not discussed. Here again it is evident that even a seemingly well-defined matter such as vision theory could be argued to opposing conclusions when applied to actual cases.

¹⁰⁹ T. Douglas Murray, trans., "Jeanne d'Arc, Maid of Orleans: Deliverer of France: Being the Story of Her Life, Her Achievements, and Her Death, as Attested on Oath and Set Forth in the Original Documents," *St. Joan of Arc's Trial of Nullification*, 1903, <http://www.stjoan-center.com/Trials/#nullification>.

¹¹⁰ Jane Marie Pinzino, "Speaking of Angels: A Fifteenth-Century Bishop in Defense of Joan of Arc's Mystical Voices," in *Fresh Verdicts on Joan of Arc*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Charles T Wood (New York: Garland Pub, 1996), 161–76. Elie de Bourdeilles' treatise on Joan is found in Pierre Duparc, ed., *Procès En Nullité de La Condamnation de Jeanne d'Arc*, vol. 5, 5 vols. (Paris, 1977).

At times Joan had described what she heard as disembodied voices, direct from God, which Bourdeilles compares favorably to Biblical examples.¹¹¹ But at other times Joan described her voices as originating from physical and bodily forms, which the condemnation trial had both compelled and seized upon as evidence of their demonic source. In contrast, Bourdeilles argues that it is possible for angels and saints, although incorporeal, to appear as if they are in physical form. Echoing Bridget of Sweden's *Revelations*, and directly citing Augustine in *De trinitate*, Bourdeilles explains that this happens because human beings must acquire knowledge through the senses and that angels normally cannot be perceived apart from the illusion of a bodily form.¹¹²

Bourdeilles admits that demons might also appear in the form of angels, and therefore anyone who experiences an apparition must proceed with caution and pray to God for the power to discern the source of the spirit; but, he says, the Scriptures promise that one who prays steadfastly will not be deceived.¹¹³ Because Joan, moreover, exhibited a life of prayer, virtue, and virginity, Bourdeilles argues that she demonstrated nothing contrary to authentic divine revelation. Supporting this conclusion, Bourdeilles adds a series of additional proofs: that Joan's "frail sex," young age, and rural background exemplify the weak confounding the strong, and that it is difficult to believe that someone like her would have enjoyed military success without divine aid; that her visions were accompanied by light and that they first prompted fear and then comfort point to good rather than evil spirits; and that her mission was the deliverance of France

¹¹¹ Duparc, *Procès En Nullité de La Condamnation de Jeanne d'Arc*, 2.48.

¹¹² Ibid, 2.47.

¹¹³ Ibid, 2.50 citing John 16:23 ("If you ask the Father any thing in my name, He will give it to you.").

(which had now occurred), which indicates divine origin since only good spirits conduct God's work of liberation.¹¹⁴

Based on such theological opinions, questioning of witnesses, and investigation of the trial procedures, the nullification proceeding's official decision declared the condemnation void. But it did not declare on the matter of Joan's voices except to state that it was possible for God to speak to and employ the weak and lowly.¹¹⁵ Instead, the nullification was based on what it found to be the judges' partiality (especially Cauchon's) and their lack of character and discretion; the nullification was also based on what it found to be the original trial's improper processes. Thus, the merits of Cauchon and how he conducted the proceedings were more on "trial" during the nullification proceedings than was Joan herself. By nullifying the Rouen decision, however, and by recording testimony favorable to Joan (focused on her outward character) and the theological opinions it solicited, the nullification implicitly vindicated her and suggested the possibility that her voices were genuine.

5.2.1 Joan of Arc and the Conception of Prophecy

For most prophets of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, especially female prophets, it is difficult to uncover what they personally believed because their close relationships with confessors mediated the expressions of their behaviors and revelations. It is difficult to separate the prophet from the confessor in these cases, especially because the prophets are usually portrayed in a way intended to demonstrate that they were in accord with the confessors' expectations about prophecy. Thus, attempting to understand how well or how deeply individual

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 2.63.

¹¹⁵ T. Douglas Murray, trans., "Jeanne d'Arc, Maid of Orleans: Deliverer of France: Being the Story of Her Life, Her Achievements, and Her Death, as Attested on Oath and Set Forth in the Original Documents," *Concluding Document: Sentence of Rehabilitation*, 1903, <http://www.stjoan-center.com/Trials/null13.html>.

prophets personally understood these theories has not been a focus of this discussion thus far; rather it is the conception of prophecy that emerges from these partnered relationships that has been of most interest.

With Joan of Arc, however, it becomes possible to detect certain elements of her own thinking about prophecy. Joan, of course, did not write for herself and what we know about her words and behaviors was still mediated by learned men who asked her their questions and recorded her responses or reported her actions. Ultimately, when we read Joan we are therefore still reading the writings of learned men. But that these documents were trial records, that her multiple examinations provide a type of cross-reference of her responses, and especially that both friendly and hostile sources record Joan as saying things or doing things that do not always correspond to learned expectations allow certain elements of her individual beliefs to stand out.

It is also significant that Joan appeared at Chinon without previously being directed by a confessor who might have helped guide her thinking. While she was eventually assigned a confessor, it is not apparent that her thinking about her voices changed substantially as a result.¹¹⁶ It might also be argued that French questioners at Chinon or Poitiers guided her, either deliberately or else by asking suggestive questions that informed her about their expectations. Indeed, it is likely that Joan's association with these theologians did affect her understanding about prophecy (some instances of which will be covered below). Furthermore, Joan's relationship with her interrogators was also a type of collaboration, in certain ways similar to the collaboration with a confessor. But unlike other prophets and their confessors, the relationship

¹¹⁶ Although the Augustinian friar Jean Pasquerel was supplied to Joan as a confessor, the two only became acquainted at Tours, after Joan had already appeared to the king and the Poitiers theologians. In Joan's initial presentation of her visions and evaluation she had no benefit of a confessor's counsel. Pasquerel accompanied Joan on her military campaigns but it is difficult to say how much he instructed her. Pasquerel's relationship with Joan ended with her capture by Burgundian forces and thus he was not present with her during her trial and condemnation, although he did testify on her behalf at the later rehabilitation proceedings. See, for instance, Régine Pernoud, *Joan of Arc by Herself and Her Witnesses* (New York: Stein and Day, 1982), 59.

between Joan and her questioners was more often one of opposition than of cooperation. As Karen Sullivan points out:

The transcripts of Joan's trials show that the clerics interrogated Joan because they shared assumptions...common to the scholastics, inquisitors, and confessors of the time, yet they also show that Joan resisted these interrogations because she did not share the assumptions of this clerical cast....The conflicts concerned not so much differences between the clerics' and Joan's will as differences between their perceptions.¹¹⁷

At times Joan can be seen to have coordinated her responses, guided by or in an attempt to meet the expectations of her clerical questioners. But at others she resists, offers contrary replies, or does not seem to understand what her interlocutors were asking. Even though these points of resistance and misunderstanding are themselves shaped by the assumptions of her interrogators, it is these points of dissonance that indicate certain elements of Joan's thinking that stand out as her own.

If documents produced by Joan's questioners, and especially her trial documents from Rouen, are to be used as sources to determine Joan's beliefs about prophecy their reliability as historical evidence must be considered. The outcome of Joan's trial, of course, was determined before it began and the trial was produced to justify the desired outcome. Most scholars, however, believe that despite these conditions the recordings of the trial are generably reliable. Daniel Hobbins, for example, addresses this question in the introduction to his translation of the trial.¹¹⁸ Hobbins admits that there are certain passages that appear to have been tampered with or embellished, and he agrees with scholars who explore the problems of mediation and

¹¹⁷ Sullivan, *The Interrogation of Joan of Arc*, xxiii.

¹¹⁸ Hobbins, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 7–13.

selection.¹¹⁹ Nonetheless, on the basis of his comparison of the trial text with transcripts from the nullification trial (both in comparing testimonies and in evaluating what testifiers said about the earlier proceeding), his analysis of the procedural apparatus, and by comparing the Latin text with the original French minutes, Hobbins concludes that the trial documents are reliable.

Both the trial records as well as earlier French sources allow us to detect elements of Joan's thinking on prophecy, especially on the nature of her voices, demons, and expectations about proper female prophetic behavior. Points of difference between her views and her learned hearers' provide most of the evidence for what Joan probably thought and these differences were significant enough to provide her accusers reason to condemn her. Joan's thinking on prophecy, however, was at the same time close enough to learned conceptions that French theologians were able to see her or portray her as a genuine prophet.

Joan's primary understanding of her prophetic voices was expressed by her straightforward claim that she heard a voice, that it was from God, and thus that she had been sent by God. This is how Joan is portrayed as having presented herself to Charles VII and his theologians, it is how her mission is characterized in the *Lettre aux Anglais* which she supposedly dictated as a call to war, and it is how she understood her calling as she answered her accusers at Rouen before eventually expanding her explanation to include angelic and saintly intermediaries.¹²⁰ Joan's portrayal in French sources usually exhibits no reference to Augustine's theory of visions. Instead, and beyond stating that her voices came "from God" or that they were accompanied by a

¹¹⁹ For instance Sullivan, *The Interrogation of Joan of Arc*, xvi-xviii; John Arnold, "Inquisition, Texts and Discourse," in *Texts and the Repression of Medieval Heresy*, ed. Caterina Bruschi and Peter Biller, York Studies in Medieval Theology 4 (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK : Rochester, NY: York Medieval Press ; Boydell & Brewer, 2003), 63; Susan Schibinoff, "True Lies: Tranvestism and Idolatry in the Trial of Joan of Arc," in *Fresh Verdicts on Joan of Arc*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Charles T Wood (New York: Garland Pub, 1996), 31-60; Kelly De Vries, "A Woman as Leader of Men: Joan of Arc's Military Career," in *Fresh Verdicts on Joan of Arc*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Charles T Wood (New York: Garland Pub, 1996), 3-18.

¹²⁰ The *Lettre aux Anglais* is printed in Appendix III of Fraioli, *Joan of Arc*, 208.

light, she usually did not specify or speculate further, and it seems it did not occur to her to wonder about the exact nature of her voices or where they originated.

Joan's French theologians, as we have seen, do not indicate that they had particular difficulties with how Joan described her voices; in fact, they hardly discuss voices at all. Rather, these French writers usually describe Joan's voices much as she did: that she was sent by God or that she claims to have been sent by God. Instead of ruminating over the nature of her contact with God, they usually focus on other aspects of her case that might determine her inspiration, such as her comportment, her actions, or the merits of her mission. If Joan had gone into further detail about her voices with her French examiners at Chinon or Poitiers the French sources do not reveal this, although an intriguing possibility has been suggested that that French sources might possibly have suppressed this information.¹²¹ But, at least as early French theologians presented Joan, they were able to reconcile her descriptions with their expectations or simply pass over them, and for later theologians, as with Bourdeilles in the consultation he offered at the nullification trial he specifically reconciled Joan's voices with his understanding of Augustinian vision theory.

The nature of Joan's voices was, however, a significant issue during her trial at Rouen. It is well known that during her trial Joan eventually described her voices as coming from the Archangels Saints Michael and Gabriel, St Catherine of Alexandria, and St Margaret. To help explain this apparent change in Joan's attribution of her voices, scholars such as Karen Sullivan and Deborah Fraioli have pointed out that Joan's identification with these figures appears to

¹²¹ Wood, "Joan of Arc's Mission and the Lost Record of Her Interrogation at Poitiers." Also, that Jean Gerson's treatise on Joan compares her to St Catherine, whom Joan later identifies as one of her voices, is suggestive that Joan may have said something about St Catherine at Poitiers, but it should not be seen as proof because St Catherine was particularly revered in France and especially in Joan's region.

have arisen only or primarily as a result of her accusers' persistent questioning.¹²² In contrast to prophets such as Bridget of Sweden or Catherine of Siena, who knew how to describe their experiences in terms consistent with Augustinian theory, Joan seems to have been unaware of the three types of visions and made no attempt to describe her prophecy according to these terms. In her condemnation trial, as her accusers repeatedly questioned her about the precise source and nature of her voices, Joan does not appear to have understood what her questioners were after and her responses indicate no understanding of Augustine's vision theory. In her responses to probing questions about her visions, Joan progressed from claiming that her voices came directly from God, to evasion and refusing to answer by saying she had already given her reply or that she had to await permission from her voices to say more, to eventually saying the voices came from the three heavenly intermediaries, before giving greater details about how she had seen and experienced them.¹²³

As Karen Sullivan's analysis suggests, Joan's changing answers do not mean that Joan was making things up as she went or was merely attempting to satisfy her judges after initially stonewalling them. Rather, Sullivan speculates that Joan's assumptions differed so much from her inquisitors' that these questions about the precise nature of her voices had never occurred to her and were not how she thought about prophecy. Eventually, as her judges repeatedly asked her about the voices, their identities, if she could see them, if they had bodies, etc., the interrogation may have influenced a development in Joan's understanding that prompted her to recast her answers within a framework that better aligned with the expectations of her questioners. It should, however, be noted (as Sullivan points out) that Joan's accusers did not

¹²² Karen Sullivan, "I Do Not Name to You the Voice of St. Michael: The Identification of Joan of Arc's Voices," *Fresh Verdicts on Joan of Arc* and Sullivan, *The Interrogation of Joan of Arc*, chapter 2. Also, Deborah Fraioli, *Joan of Arc: The Early Debate*, 196-197.

¹²³ Sullivan, *Interrogation of Joan of Arc*, especially 26-27.

suggest any of the particular saints whom Joan identified or even that there was more than one voice – these were additions apparently made by Joan. As Sullivan theorizes, the questioning caused Joan to “collaborate” with her accusers to construct such precise identifications.¹²⁴ As Joan eventually came to explain her voices as coming from these saints, however, her explanations still provide no evidence that she came to possess anything approaching detailed awareness or understanding of the three categories of visions. This is particularly evident from Joan’s responses to her judges’ questions about whether her voices were of a corporeal nature, if they had actual heads or hair, and similar questions. The judges seem to suggest that visions should not be corporeal but Joan, apparently lacking any understanding of this expectation, insists on describing them in a manner that sounds to the theologians as though she is describing physical beings.¹²⁵

Joan and her accusers seem also to have thought differently about demons. When asked whether her voices might be the result of demonic deceit or how she knows they are not, Joan answers simply that they are not and that she would know if they were. It is not apparent that Joan felt the same fear about demons as her questioners. She does describe experiencing fear when she first heard her voices, when she was thirteen, and that this fear changed to comfort, but apart from this Joan expresses little awareness of the discernment of spirits. The contrast between Joan’s thinking on demons and that of her inquisitors is perhaps most evident in the matter of the Fairy Tree, which was a large tree in her village that girls danced around and on which they hung garlands. Some villagers testified that fairies used to frequent the tree but not since the Gospel of John was read there. To the inquisitors these fairies seemed to be demons, but Joan, not recognizing this connection, says she does not know what to believe about the

¹²⁴ Ibid., chapter 2.

¹²⁵ For instance Hobbins, *The Trial of Joan of Arc* 73-76; Sullivan, *The Interrogation of Joan of Arc*, chapter 2.

fairies and that she has never seen them but admits that she may have danced there as a child. Although Joan condemns witchcraft elsewhere, by not rejecting her villagers' beliefs about the tree and by not sufficiently distancing herself from these beliefs she unwittingly gives evidence to the judges of past diabolical activity.¹²⁶

Rather than concern herself about the specific nature of her voices, Joan appears to have been more occupied with immediately carrying out what they commanded and in comporting herself in a way that best allowed her to carry out this mission. These aims caused her to operate differently and even transgress certain standards and expectations with which her prophetic contemporaries, especially female prophets, were expected to comply. Whereas most female prophets carefully maintained behaviors and comportment that signaled submissiveness, Joan was more assertive, impatient at deliberation, and insistent that those in authority listen to her. Yet, in her determined focus on her divine mission she seems to have maintained adherence to a conception of prophecy based on obedience to the will of God.

Closely related to her military behaviors was her male dress, which would be one of the most controversial and contentious issues concerning her behavior. Here it can be said that this was also a decision Joan seems to have made in alignment with her understanding of God's calling and her obedience to what she believed God had commanded. To function as a military leader, male military dress was certainly the most practical, and contemporary defenders of Joan justified her apparel partially in reference to the pragmatic nature of such a choice. Concerning Joan's continued adoption of male clothing after her capture, later defenders at the nullification trial also cited the usefulness of such clothing in preserving her virtue because it made rape more difficult. Joan's own explanation, however, did not rely on such justifications. Instead, as she

¹²⁶ Hobbins, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 62, 110, 114, 126-127, 157; Sullivan, *The Interrogation of Joan of Arc*, chapter 1.

described it, her decision to wear male clothing was a simple one: God had commanded it, so she complied. Aside from explaining that her attire was God's command, Joan spent little time explaining or attempting to further justify her decision by recourse to the functional benefits -- either for military purpose, or as a means to protect her virginity.¹²⁷

As with the nature of her voices, the controversy surrounding her clothing was something that appears to have caught Joan unawares, even as it was major issue in the minds of her evaluators, both French and English. Early in her trial Joan stated that "clothing is a small matter, one of the least" and that she could not recall if this was something Charles or the Poitiers examination had even bother to ask her about.¹²⁸ Despite such statements, for Joan it seems male clothing was actually very important although for different reasons from those held by the theologians. During the trial, Joan was offered multiple opportunities to return to female dress, but only after prolonged pressure did she comply, and shortly thereafter she returned to male clothing, which provided the court with evidence it needed to condemn and execute her. If she had simply accepted women's clothing when offered this might have justified her earlier decision to wear male clothing as a pragmatic decision related to her military command and would have made her accusers' task more difficult. For Joan, however, her attire had been commanded by God and she did not question why. Since her voices had not told her to cease wearing men's clothing, for her to change to women's clothing without her voices telling her to do so would to her be a violation of her obedience to God.

In its simplicity Joan's conception of prophecy could be interpreted (or manipulated) as false prophecy, especially when a learned interrogator pressed her on the details. In many ways, however, Joan's conception of prophecy could be seen to be compatible with that of the learned

¹²⁷ For instance Hobbins, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 66-67, 78-79, 93-94, 105-106, 129-130, 137.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

clerics. Joan was a simple and weak human whom God chose to confound the strong. He spoke directly to her and she attempted to be obedient to what the voices told her to do, even if this meant intervening in the affairs of powerful men or dressing as a man. In all these characteristics Joan's conception of prophecy, as simple as it was, and despite her non-conformity to established ideals, could therefore still be aligned with learned ideas – especially to theologians inclined to regard her unlikely military successes as the good and miraculous workings of God.

5.3 Savonarola

Apart from Joan of Arc the best known prophetic figure of the fifteenth century was Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498). Joan and Savonarola both claimed inspiration from God, both attracted loyal followings as well as fierce critics, and both were executed as heretics. Both provoked debate long after their deaths; and Savonarola, especially, inspired a continued following and imitators. But whereas Joan was an illiterate and uneducated peasant, Savonarola was a highly educated Dominican friar who defended himself according to an expert's understanding of learned theories of prophecy and the discernment of spirits. In the end, however, Savonarola's coordination of his prophetic practice with learned theories of prophecy made little difference and both he and Joan encountered similar fates.

Another factor distinguishing Savonarola from Joan of Arc was that by Savonarola's time the printing press was available as a means to communicate prophecies or propaganda by or about prophets. As noted by Lauro Martines, Savonarola himself was an expert in these uses of the printing press – to a degree unparalleled until Martin Luther.¹²⁹ The printing press provided

¹²⁹ Lauro Martines, *Fire in the City: Savonarola and the Struggle for the Soul of Renaissance Florence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 86-88. According to Martines: "Not until Luther, in the early 1520s,

Savonarola with a means to broadcast his views and predictions through numerous letters, sermons, and doctrinal tracts; through the press he communicated to potential supporters, defended himself against critics, and attacked his opponents. Access to the press and the ability of print to rapidly disseminate such information presented challenges to traditional mechanisms of religious authority and must have heightened the alarm of Savonarola's opponents, almost certainly increasing the threat they perceived him (or his example) to be. Indeed, whereas Joan of Arc's case provoked significant debate among churchmen it was Savonarola and continued fallout in the years following his death that eventually led the Church, at the Fifth Lateran Council, to take more definitive steps in response to the issues and larger questions concerning prophets and prophecy.

Savonarola was born at Ferrara in 1452, and as a youth was educated by his grandfather, who was a successful physician and teacher at the University of Padua.¹³⁰ After his grandfather's death Girolamo earned the Master of Arts and began studying theology before eventually entering the Dominican Order at Bologna in 1475 at the age of twenty-three, where he took up studies in theology. In 1479 or 1480 he was elected to the office of lecturer at the Convent of San

would a member of the regular clergy come forth to exploit the resources of print so effectively as Savonarola." Martines also points out that Savonarola was in fact the most published writer in Italy at the end of the 15th century, and by a significant margin: Savonarola's 108 items (incunables) printed in Florence alone far outnumbered those of Florence's best known poets Luigi Pulci (with eighteen) and Dante (with ten). Savonarola's printed output began in earnest between 1490 and 91 when he criticized rich laity and clergy, and then began another flurry of production in 1494 and 1495 when he pushed into politics. These publications gained him enemies that Savonarola responded to with defenses. First editions and reprintings of select sermons, individual letters (including the open letter, a genre that Martines remarks Savonarola nearly seems to have invented), and his doctrinal works proliferated. A few of the most important of these Savonarola translated from Latin into Italian himself; others were translated by his followers.

¹³⁰ Roberto Ridolfi, *The Life of Girolamo Savonarola*, trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Routledge and Paul, 1959) remains useful for its biographical details although in many areas of interpretation it is surpassed by Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence; Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970) and Weinstein's *Savonarola: The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Prophet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Lauro Martines, *Fire in the City: Savonarola and the Struggle for Renaissance Florence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) is excellent for the crucial period 1494-1498.

Marco in Florence. In 1486 Savonarola was sent on a preaching mission to northern Italy before the request of Lorenzo de' Medici resulted in his transfer back to Florence in 1490.

Even before Savonarola entered the Dominican Order he was interested in Church reform and the apocalyptic, as his early poems and letters attest, and during his early years of preaching his sermons are characterized by apocalyptic warnings. Through his preaching and predictions, which increasingly began to sound more like prophecy than exegetical speculations, Savonarola gained influence and a popular following in Florence. By 1491 or 1492 Savonarola was expressing his apocalyptic preaching and criticisms against immorality and corruption in the Church more clearly as prophecy and he began to give accounts of visions and revelations. While specific dates cannot be determined, Donald Weinstein considers it plausible that in 1492 Savonarola preached about a vision of a sword of the Lord poised over the earth and that a “new Cyrus” would soon arrive as a scourge to punish the cities of Italy. Furthermore, in 1493 Savonarola preached to a packed congregation that a great “flood” that would soon come to wipe out the vices in the cities of Italy and that foreign soldiers would occupy their fortresses.¹³¹

In the fall of 1494 Savonarola's prediction appeared to come true when King Charles VIII of France arrived near Florence with an invading army that had recently sacked the fortress town of Fivizzano in Tuscany. But his first assaults on Florence-held fortresses at Sarzanello and Sarzan failed, so Charles paused for diplomacy. The invasion confirmed for many Florentines that Savonarola was a prophet (and probably helped confirm this for Savonarola as well), and the Signoria selected him with several others to meet the king. Savonarola reportedly told the king that he was a prophet of God and that God intended the king to be a reformer of the Church. After a series of negotiations and Florentine concessions Charles departed, the Medici were

¹³¹ Weinstein, *Savonarola: The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Prophet*, 94–96, 103–4.

deposed, and Florence established itself an independent republican city state. Savonarola's popularity and status as a prophet was further confirmed to many, and a group of supporters formed around him who became known as the Piagnoni ("wailers"). The politically active Piagnoni formed what was essentially a political party (known as the Frateschi) that used its power to enact various reforms, sumptuary laws, and a general crackdown on immorality, all directed by Savonarola. For a time Florence became a theocratic state united by the idea that it was a New Jerusalem, at the center of God's plans for a kingdom of Heaven on Earth, and that Savonarola was its prophet.¹³²

5.3.1 Savonarola's Conception of Prophecy

Unlike Joan of Arc or other prophets who were women or came from lay backgrounds, Savonarola had studied the Scriptures, philosophy, and Thomistic theology extensively, making him perhaps the most educated prophet of the Middle Ages. Savonarola's thinking on prophecy is evident in various letters and sermons but his first writing to give extended discussion to the topic was the *Compendium revelationum* that he began writing during the spring of 1495.¹³³ This work was originally intended to answer his critics within Florence, but in the summer of 1495 the Borgia pope, Pope Alexander VI (1431-1503), angered by Florence's refusal to join his Holy League against Charles VIII, summoned Savonarola to Rome to explain his prophecies. In reply, Savonarola plead ill health and preoccupation with duties in Florence but promised instead to

¹³² Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence; Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance*, 159–84.

¹³³ Girolamo Savonarola, *Compendio di Rivelazioni e Dialogus de veritate prophetica*, ed. Angela Crucitti (Rome: A. Berlardetti, 1974); Translated as *Compendium Revelationum*, in *Apocalyptic Spirituality: Treatises and Letters of Lactantius, Adso of Montier-En-Der, Joachim of Fiore, the Franciscan Spirituals, Savonarola*, ed. and trans. Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 192–276.

send his *Compendium*, which soon thereafter was published in both Italian and Latin, and ran through eight editions in less than a year.¹³⁴

An expanded version of earlier sermons, the *Compendium* is a lengthy treatise divided into three sections of unequal length: Savonarola begins the work with an introduction that provides his theoretical explanation of prophecy; this is followed by accounts of a series of Savonarola's revelations and predictions that the Church and Italy must endure a scourge in preparation for a great renewal and kingdom of God on Earth centered in Florence; after which Savonarola relates the account of an allegorical journey (that could be read either as a transport vision or homiletic device) to Heaven, where just outside the gates of Heaven he engages in debate with a Tempter and defends the particulars about his claim to be a prophet of God. The *Compendium* consistently quotes or refers to the thought of Aquinas, and Savonarola's conception of prophecy closely follow Aquinas' *quaestiones* on prophecy from the *Summa theologiae*. Thus Savonarola begins his definition of a prophet in the introduction as someone who "sees things that are beyond the natural knowledge of every creature, even though by means of the light of prophecy he also sees many other things that are not beyond human knowledge."¹³⁵ Savonarola next discusses future contingent acts as a defining aspect of prophecy. According to Savonarola, God alone knows future contingents and these cannot be known by natural knowledge, by divining, or by astrology. Thus, someone who knows future contingents (such as Savonarola) can only have received them through direct revelation from God. Following his discussion of future contingents Savonarola explains that prophecy is an infused light from God and he describes Augustine's three types of vision, after which he states, "In these three ways, sometimes one and sometimes

¹³⁴ Bernard McGinn, ed., *Apocalyptic Spirituality: Treatises and Letters of Lactantius, Adso of Montier-En-Der, Joachim of Fiore, the Franciscan Spirituals, Savonarola*, trans. Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 188; Ridolfi, *The Life of Girolamo Savonarola*, 130ff.

¹³⁵ Savonarola, "*Compendium Revelationum*," 193; Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2a, 2ae, q. 171.

the other, I have grasped and known future events. In whichever way these matters came to me I have always grasped them as completely true and certain through that light's illumination."¹³⁶

Savonarola proceeds to explain that he had been receiving revelations from God for some time but at first he had kept this secret. "In those first years," he writes,

I used to predict coming events only by means of scripture, rational arguments, and various parables, due to the lack of readiness in the people. Then I began to hint that I had knowledge of future events by another light than the understanding of scripture alone. Finally, I began to disclose it still more clearly, now making known the words divinely revealed to me frankly and exactly.¹³⁷

He says he delayed to admit that his predictions came from prophecy because he feared rejection and mockery. Eventually, however, Savonarola says, God compelled him to reveal himself as a prophet when it became necessary for his hearers to properly understand him.¹³⁸

After recounting various revelations and predictions that he made (usually from the pulpit), Savonarola returns to additional theoretical discussion through the device of debate with a "Tempter" (who represents human wisdom as opposed to Savonarola's prophetic claims, and, of course, reveals himself to be the devil). The dialogue allows Savonarola to address various details and a wide variety of objections that had been raised against prophets generally or specifically against him.¹³⁹ The Tempter's first several questions allege that Savonarola is confused, uses astrology to make his predictions, or else is led by an evil spirit and, further, that Christ no longer spoke to humans after his Ascension. Savonarola answers each of these questions in turn and he gives special effort to condemning astrologers and diviners. Then he provides a comprehensive answer, explaining his understanding (and experience) of the discernment of spirits:

¹³⁶ Savonarola, "*Compendium Revelationum*," 194.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 212–41.

I have been through the sacred Scriptures and the lives and teachings of the saints from beginning to end and thus I understand well enough all the marks of diabolical as well as divine apparitions. I grasp how much they differ not only on this basis but also from experience. For a long time I have known that my visions could in no way have come from the devil, particularly because the things I understood and foretold were much more certain to me than the first principles of the sciences were for philosophers. It is clear that a light of such certainty cannot have come from the devil. Furthermore, even the devil cannot know future contingents.¹⁴⁰

Savonarola continues his defense and explains that his predictions have never been proven false even in the smallest details. Furthermore, he says that his prophecies should be judged by their fruit: he has only inspired piety and a good life among his followers in Florence and the number of his followers continually increases. He says the works of the devil produce evil fruit so his cannot be the devil's works; and, moreover, men who are known to be evil attack him – and it is well known that the servants of the devil attack the good. As for whether Christ continues to speak to men, Savonarola refers to various saints, including Francis, as proof that He does.¹⁴¹

Throughout his lengthy question-and-answer dialogue Savonarola demonstrates a nearly comprehensive understanding of learned concepts of prophecy and the discernment of spirits. His interlocutor even brings up a question about the decretal *Cum ex iniuncto*, a little utilized canon very rarely cited in discussions about on prophecy.¹⁴² The decretal, originally issued as a letter by Pope Innocent III to the bishop of Metz in 1199, was directed against unauthorized translations of Scripture and unlicensed preaching. As part of its solution for unlicensed preaching *Cum ex iniuncto* requires that anyone who feels compelled to preach because he believes he possesses an “invisible mission” from God must prove that mission by the working of a miracle or special testimony from the Scriptures.¹⁴³ Against the Tempter's charge that

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 215–16.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 217–18.

¹⁴² Ibid., 223–24.

¹⁴³ Innocent III, “*Cum ex iniuncto*,” in *Die Register Innocenz' III*, ed. Othmar Hagender (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie, 1979), 2:271; E Friedberg, ed., *Corpus Iuris Canonici* (Leipzig: Bernhard

Savonarola does not produce miracles Savonarola answers by naming Biblical prophets who had not and, further, he maintains that nothing he predicted contradicts Scripture. Furthermore, and most significantly, Savonarola reasons that the canon was directed against unlicensed preachers; Savonarola, on the other hand, was properly approved to preach by his religious superior.

In his dialogue with the Tempter Savonarola does not directly discuss distinctions between *prophetia* and *spiritualis intelligentia*. By the 1490s *spiritualis intelligentia* was probably not a pressing concern since the Spiritual Franciscans were a distant memory, but Savonarola knew the rarely invoked *Cum ex iniuncto* and he seems to have thoroughly considered any potential objections that might be raised against him. With this in mind, the *Compendium* indicates that he probably did understand *spiritualis intelligentia* and that this was a point an opponent might potentially use against him because of his earlier predictions based on exegetical speculation. Thus his efforts at the outset of the *Compendium* to explain that his earlier predictions were in fact the result of revelation but he was not yet prepared to reveal that he was a prophet. Further support for this idea is suggested when Savonarola's Tempter accuses him of lifting his predictions from the revelations of Saint Bridget or Joachim of Fiore and others. Savonarola replies to this charge that he had never read Bridget and that he had only passing familiarity with Joachim. Savonarola says he hardly reads anything besides the Old and New Testaments, and, while he neither approves nor condemns noncanonical prophets like Bridget and Joachim, his prophecies, he says, come only from God.¹⁴⁴

Tauchnitz, 1879), 2:784-787; Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 48-51 discusses *Cum ex iniuncto* and the relatively little attention it garnered; See also Lerner, "Ecstatic Dissent", 46 n. 48.

¹⁴⁴ Savonarola, "*Compendium Revelationum*," 221-22.

5.3.2 Savonarola's Opponents and Condemnation

Savonarola's preaching on reform and his prophecies, including his vision that Florence was to be a New Jerusalem at the center of God's plans for a new age, helped earn him a following among the populace as well as the support of a number of Florence's intellectual elite. Many were humanists and philosophers drawn from the circle of Marsilio Ficino, who himself was deeply interested in both prophecy and religious renewal. Ficino's theories on prophecy stemmed from a Neoplatonic syncretism that attempted to harmonize the doctrines of the Christian religion with pagan philosophy, astrology, and divination. A full analysis of Ficino's theories is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but a brief (and simplified) summary will help to contextualize Savonarola's reception by Ficino and men in Ficino's circle.

According to Ficino, prophecy is a result of human interaction with *daimones* – angelic beings who mediate between God and man.¹⁴⁵ Unlike Augustine, who considered the *daimones* who interacted with pagans to be evil demons, Ficino believed *daimones* could be good or evil. In his reading of Neoplatonist writers such as Iamblichus and Porphyry, Ficino found that *daimones* mediated divine mysteries and inspired men by communicating with human souls; in turn human souls could communicate with the divine through these same interactions. In a Neoplatonic cosmos *daimones* operated within a hierarchy of connected celestial spheres ascending to God (or the One). According to this view, physical and higher realities are

¹⁴⁵ The following summary of Ficino's conception of prophecy is drawn primarily from Maude Vanhaelen, "Ficino's Commentary on St Paul's *First Epistle to the Romans* (1497): An Anti-Savonarolan Reading of Vision and Prophecy," in *The Rebirth of Platonic Theology: Proceedings of a Conference Held at the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies (Villa I Tatti) and the Istituto Nazionale Di Studi Sul Rinascimento (Florence, 26-27 April 2007)*, ed. James Hankins and Fabrizio Meroi, Villa I Tatti: The Harvard Center for Italian Renaissance Studies 30, 2013, 205–34; James Hankins, "Ficino, Avicenna and the Occult Powers of the Rational Soul," in *Tra Antica Sapienza E Filosofia Naturale: La Magia nell'Europa Moderna*, ed. Fabrizio Meroi and Elisabetta Scapparone (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2007), 35–52; and Christopher S. Celenza, "Late Antiquity and Florentine Platonism: The 'Post-Plotinian' Ficino," in *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, ed. Michael J. B. Allen, Valery Rees, and Martin Davies (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002), 71–98.

connected through various sympathies and dependencies that a human soul can access and itself ascend by harmonizing one's soul according to natural and spiritual affinities and through intellectual pursuit and discipline. Sometimes the soul has no control over its ability to tell the future, as in dreams.¹⁴⁶ At others, however, and in contrast to Savonarola's Thomistic view that prophecy is a passive reception of inspiration according to the will of God alone, Ficino maintained that human beings might actively seek this inspiration and make contact with *daimones* through rituals of purification, magic, and incantations, that utilized the affinities or employed knowledge derived from certain types of astrology.¹⁴⁷ Ficino believed that he himself had experienced prophecy in this way in 1478 as an effect of his contact with the relics of St Peter.¹⁴⁸

For Ficino, ritual preparation protects men from the deception of evil *daimones* and insures that inspiration is for the good. Ficino saw no contradiction between these ideas and the Christian religion. On the contrary, he believed that an ancient theology (*prisca theologia*) was granted by God to the pagans to prepare the world for the coming of Christ. Ficino reasoned that embedded in this *prisca theologia*, in the teachings of Neoplatonism, Hermetism, pagan oracles and other ancient philosophies, was hidden knowledge that, if understood and studied, could assist the Christian who wishes to ascend the spiritual order of being and knowledge. Ficino thus compares pagan rituals of purification to Christian prayer and fasting; says that pagans had experienced ecstasies similar to Paul's that allowed them to predict the future; and relates the fire that transported Paul and Elias to heaven to the fire described by the Magi and the Platonists.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Celenza, "Late Antiquity and Florentine Platonism: The 'Post-Plotinian' Ficino," 90–91.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.; Vanhaelen, "Ficino's Commentary on St Paul's *First Epistle to the Romans* (1497): An Anti-Savonarolan Reading of Vision and Prophecy," 216–17.

¹⁴⁸ Celenza, "Late Antiquity and Florentine Platonism: The 'Post-Plotinian' Ficino," 89–91.

¹⁴⁹ Vanhaelen, "Ficino's Commentary on St Paul's *First Epistle to the Romans* (1497): An Anti-Savonarolan Reading of Vision and Prophecy," 214–15.

Ficino's views on prophecy corresponded with his hopes for moral and spiritual renovation and, at least before 1495, he and many in his circle enthusiastically greeted Savonarola's preaching for reform and believed Savonarola to be a prophet.¹⁵⁰ Savonarola too, despite a radically different theological perspective, seems for a time to have respected Ficino and admitted, at least at one time, a certain degree of interest in Plato.¹⁵¹ By the end of 1494, however, their common cause and mutual respect seem to have turned to mutual animosity. In a letter Ficino wrote that year he explains that false prophets can be identified from true prophets because they are bad men who lie to themselves, imagine false images, and act like people who are ill, or insane. Although Ficino does not name Savonarola in the letter it is clear from the context he is writing about Savonarola, and Ficino's 1498 *Apologia contra Savonarolam* confirms that late 1494 was the time when he had changed his mind about the Dominican friar.¹⁵² By the time of the *Apologia*, written shortly following after Savonarola's execution, Ficino does name Savonarola and calls him "Antichrist...the greatest of hypocrites" whose pride and other vices caused him to mix lies with prophecies to deceive the people.¹⁵³

In 1494, as Ficino was beginning to sour on him, Savonarola was also making veiled attacks against Ficino. In a sermon *On Haggai*, for example, Savonarola criticizes those "who frequent the houses and meetings of great men as their satellites and adulators, do not praise the true and living God but are quicker to praise vain things, such as astrologers and poets and philosophers

¹⁵⁰ In a letter from December 12, 1494 Ficino writes that Savonarola is "God's chosen" and a "man of sanctity and wisdom"; and also in his *Apologia contra Savonarolam* from 1498 Ficino says he had once supported Savonarola and considered him a prophet.

¹⁵¹ Mark Jurdjevic, "Prophets and Politicians: Marsilio Ficino, Savonarola and the Valori Family," *Past & Present*, no. 183 (May 2004): 63.

¹⁵² Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence; Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance*, 185–92.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 186; "Apologia Marsilii Ficini pro multis Florentinis ab Antichristo Hieronymo Ferrariense hypocritarum summo deceptis ad Collegium Cardinalium," Marsilio Ficino, *Supplementum Ficinianum: Marsilii Ficini Florentini Philosophi Platonici*, ed. Paul Oskar Kristeller, vol. 2 (Florence: Olschki, 1937), 76–79.

and others of this kind, and hold them almost as their gods.”¹⁵⁴ Similarly, Savonarola attacked astrology and divination, both in the *Compendium revelatorum* as well as by his insistence that future contingents come not through these sources but only through revelation from God – each criticisms that could be regarded as pointing to Ficino and his theology.

Divergent theologies, opinions about pagan philosophy and astrology, and rival theories on prophecy were certainly factors in the break in relations between Ficino and Savonarola, but political friction and competition for patronage seem to have been significant factors as well. Mark Jurdjevic’s analysis of Ficino’s and Savonarola’s competing interests, especially relative to the political fortunes of the Medici family and their competition for favor from Florence’s second most powerful family, the Valori, suggests that these interests were important factors in their falling out in 1494. Jurdjevic’s interpretation also helps to explain why Ficino’s attacks only became explicit after Savonarola’s execution: the Valori were politically supportive of Savonarola’s party, and Ficino depended on Valori patronage.¹⁵⁵

Animosity and competition between Ficino and Savonarola motivated some within Ficino’s circle to turn against Savonarola, such as Ugolino Verino and Giovanni Francesco Poggio Bracciolini – who accused Savonarola of being a false prophet and “another Antichrist.”¹⁵⁶ But Savonarola also drew support from men within Ficino’s circle, some of whom remained devoted to both men, even linking the two in their writings. Giovanni Nesi, for instance, remained devoted to Ficinian Platonism and conceived of Savonarola and his prophetic gifts within this framework. Nesi’s *Oraculum de novo saeculo*, written as an oracular dream filled with

¹⁵⁴ Vanhaelen, “Ficino’s Commentary on St Paul’s *First Epistle to the Romans* (1497): An Anti-Savonarolan Reading of Vision and Prophecy,” 213; The sermon, *Predica sopra Aggeo*, XI in Girolamo Savonarola, *Edizione nazionale delle opere di Girolamo Savonarola. con il*, ed. Luigi Firpo (Roma: A. Belardetti, 1965), 182 was given on December 12, 1494.

¹⁵⁵ Jurdjevic, “Prophets and Politicians.”

¹⁵⁶ Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence; Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance*, 228–29, 239.

astrological, Hermetic, and Neopythagorean symbolism, imagines Savonarola standing on the moon waving a wand while rays from the sun struck his head and a cupbearer swabbed his tongue with the nectar of divine words.¹⁵⁷ For Nesi, Savonarola becomes the Hermetic ideal who has both received and commands the powers of prophecy and who announces the hoped-for millennium that merges Christian ideas of a city of God on Earth with an idealized Platonic republic populated by of enlightened and virtuous citizens.¹⁵⁸

Others associated with Ficino or Ficino's circle, such as Girolamo Benivieni and Gianfrancesco Pico were converted to Savonarola in ways that caused them to break with Platonist and Hermetic ideas about prophecy.¹⁵⁹ Instead of wand-waving men on the moon, Benivieni and Pico advocated a Thomist conception of passive, God-given inspiration. Benivieni became one of Savonarola's chief propagandists, writing poems and songs celebrating Florence as the new city of God; Pico became one of Savonarola's most ardent defenders, answering nearly every attack with a letter or treatise of his own and after Savonarola's death Pico wrote a *vita* defending the friar's memory.¹⁶⁰

Besides the controversy with those in Ficino's circle, there were numerous other attacks and criticisms against Savonarola's claims of prophecy, intermixed with religious rivalries and Florentine and papal politics. Multiple friars from the rival Franciscan Order, for example, produced tracts or preached against him.¹⁶¹ Although a few Franciscans accepted Savonarola's visions, it seems most did not, and it was a Franciscan preacher who challenged one of

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 194–97.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 192–204; On Nesi's application of Ficinian Neoplatonism and Savonarolan apocalypticism to Pythagorean wisdom see Christopher S. Celenza, *Piety and Pythagoras in Renaissance Florence: The Symbolum Nesianum* (Brill, 2001).

¹⁵⁹ Gianfrancesco Pico's uncle, Giovanni Pico was more directly associated with Ficino; the nephew Gianfrancesco was a disciple of his uncle.

¹⁶⁰ Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence; Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance*, 216–26, 241–42.

¹⁶¹ Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence; Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance*, especially 227–246.

Savonarola's Dominican associates to the trial by fire that ultimately resulted in Savonarola's death. The attacks from Franciscans and other religious men (including a hermit and anchorite from nearby Vallombrosa) variously criticized Savonarola's apocalypticism, charged that he was a false prophet, inspired by the devil, led to deceit by his pride, or insisted that prophecy had ceased to be communicated to men – but none of these criticisms expresses a level of theological depth or attention to *discretio spirituum* comparable to that seen during the evaluations of Joan of Arc. Others – mostly non-religious – were offended by Savonarola's political influence and sumptuary laws, distressed by taxation, or frustrated by economic conditions as the new republic struggled. Many complained that Savonarola was a foreigner from Ferrara who had brought civil discord and other misfortune by falsely claiming to be led by God when he must instead have been inspired by demons.¹⁶²

For all the controversy within Florence, Savonarola's most dangerous opponent was Pope Alexander VI. Alexander seems to have tolerated Savonarola's preaching against corruption in Curia, but he could not accept Florence's decision to join the Holy League against Charles VIII. Following the pope's summons and Savonarola's diplomatic refusal to come to Rome in 1495 relations with the pope became progressively worse: In September 1495 Alexander suspended Savonarola from preaching; Savonarola obeyed until the following spring but then resumed preaching; finally, after a series of unproductive letter exchanges and failed negotiations the pope excommunicated Savonarola in May 1497.¹⁶³

During the dispute with the pope Savonarola wrote another lengthy self-defense of his prophecies, *De veritate prophetica dyalogus* (henceforth *Dialogue*), begun in the summer of

¹⁶² Ibid., especially 227-246.

¹⁶³ Girolamo Savonarola, *Apologetic Writings*, ed. and trans. M. Michèle Mulchahey, I Tatti Renaissance Library 68 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2015); Girolamo Savonarola, *Selected writings of Girolamo Savonarola religion and politics, 1490-1498*, ed. and trans. Anne Borelli, Maria C Pastore Passaro, and Donald Beebe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

1497 and printed in the spring of 1498 near the time of his arrest.¹⁶⁴ Similar in content to the 1495 *Compendium revelatorum*, the *Dialogue* takes the form of a conversation between Savonarola and the personified Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit. As in the *Compendium*, Savonarola discusses his conception of prophecy according to a thorough recounting of Thomist theology and he provides a detailed defense of his claims according to *discretio spirituum*. He also argues that he is not a willing prophet but that God chose him to prophesy the need for reform; and, further, he updates his earlier responses against critics to include more recent events in Florence that he believes prove the truth of his predictions.

Savonarola's arguments were of little effect and threat of papal interdict gave his Florentine enemies reason to increase their opposition. Matters came to a head in the spring of 1498 when a rival Franciscan preacher challenged a Savonarolan Dominican to a trial by fire to settle the controversy surrounding Savonarola's excommunication and to prove if he was truly a prophet of God. Without consulting Savonarola the Dominican accepted the challenge and Savonarola had little choice but to concede to allowing the ordeal. Following lengthy delays on the day of the proposed event, however, it was aborted on account of a rainstorm. A displeased mob responded by attacking Savonarola's convent and seizing him, after which they turned him over to the civil government. Over the course of about six weeks Savonarola was tried, interrogated, and tortured, first by civil authorities and then by papal officials. Savonarola confessed that he was a false prophet, was found guilty of heresy and schism, and was executed on May 23, 1498.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Girolamo Savonarola, "De veritate prophetica dyalogus," in *Apologetic writings*, ed. and trans. M. Michèle Mulchahey, I Tatti Renaissance Library 68 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2015), 112–350.

¹⁶⁵ Weinstein, *Savonarola: The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Prophet*, 266-276 for the trial by fire; 277-297 for trial and execution.

During the debates about Savonarola's prophecies against those in the Ficinian circle, his quarrels with rival religious and political opponents, and even in the exchange of letters with the pope, *discretio spirituum* criteria were rarely cited by opponents and no examinations such as Joan of Arc's were ever conducted. In fact, apart from controversy with Ficino and advocates of Neoplatonic conceptions of prophecy, Savonarola seems to be the only participant in these debates interested in discussing theories of prophecy in any depth. With his other opponents, and apart from the most basic references they make to these ideas, Savonarola is nearly alone in describing or applying the criteria of *discretio spirituum* – perhaps because he seems to have possessed a better understanding of these ideas than any of his opponents and because his prophetic practices and expression were so closely coordinated with these theories.

Even during his imprisonment and trial Savonarola's inquisitors and interrogators did not question him according to the concepts of *discretio spirituum*. As Weinstein describes:

Neither Savonarola's life as a Dominican friar nor his doctrinal views really interested his interrogators. Considering that he was convicted for 'heresy, schism, and preaching innovation,' these may seem surprising omissions, but the commissioners saw their task as political, not theological. Their aim was to demonstrate that Savonarola was an imposter who had concealed his ambitions for power and fame behind a mask of feigned prophecy and had consistently manipulated the new republican government for his own ends.¹⁶⁶

Instead of asking about the nature of his visions, questioners interrogated Savonarola to try to extract information about his co-conspirators. To achieve a guilty verdict for the stated crimes of heresy and schism they employed torture – the strappado – and under torture Savonarola confessed to a series of crimes, including that he had lied about his divine inspiration, that his visions were fabrications, and that signs – such as the name “Jesu” miraculously written on his chest by a crucifix – never happened.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 278.

Between bouts of torture or threats of torture Savonarola confessed, recanted his confession, and then confessed again to certain crimes in repeated cycles. Most historians have assumed, due to the partiality of the inquisitors, their use of torture, and probable tampering with the documents, that Savonarola's trial texts provide little information about what he really said. Weinstein, however, observes that the tampering appears to be mostly embellishments for greater effect and that little in the written confessions about prophecy can be identified as tampering.¹⁶⁷

Furthermore, Weinstein makes the insightful observation that Savonarola confessed to some crimes – including prophetic fraud – but about other charges, even under torture, he refused to confess. For instance, he refused to admit that he had unlawfully interfered in Florentine government or that he had brokered secret meetings to secure leadership positions for those he favored. Nor would he admit that he had conspired with foreign governments or with anyone in the Curia (Pope Alexander was looking for traitors). Thus Weinstein asks: Why did Savonarola admit guilt on certain matters – especially his prophetic inspiration – when he refused to do so on these other charges, even under similar torture?¹⁶⁸

Weinstein speculates that Savonarola's capture, the aborted trial by fire, the assault on his convent and other disasters of the recent months caused Savonarola himself to doubt the source of his prophetic inspiration and to worry that he was not really chosen by God but that pride, worldly ambition and his own sins had caused him to delude himself.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, Savonarola's written confession, lends some support to Weinstein's speculative view by admitting to pride: "All that I did or planned to do was in the interest of winning enduring fame, now and in the

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 284.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 283–84.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 284–86.

future, and to have such standing in the city of Florence that nothing of great importance be done unless I wished it.”¹⁷⁰

We can perhaps also see in Savonarola’s confession the uncertainty implicit in the theological discernment criteria that Savonarola knew so well. More than any of his opponents Savonarola seems to have understood learned theories on prophecy that had been developed by Augustine, Aquinas, and others and that had contributed to the discernment writings of d’Ailly, Langenstein, and Gerson. Savonarola claimed he possessed experience about discernment (as Gerson, at times, argued was necessary) but a reading of the argumentation and defenses in his writings suggests that he relied primarily on intellectual criteria to solidify in his mind that his prophecies were genuine. Now, under duress and demoralized at his capture and the likelihood that he would be executed, Savonarola quite possibly considered the criteria anew and reasoned that the criteria he had once used to prove he was a prophet should now be reversed and that the opposite conclusion might be true.

5.4 The Fifth Lateran Council Decree on Preaching and Prophecy

As was the case following Joan of Arc’s trial and execution, Savonarola’s condemnation and death did not resolve the debate about his claims to be a prophet. In the weeks leading up to and following the execution, Savonarola’s Florentine enemies did their best to quell the remaining Piagnoni. The most prominent allies and associates of Savonarola were imprisoned, banished, or fined; Savonarola’s writings were outlawed, collected, and destroyed; it was forbidden to discuss his teachings or even to utter the word “Piagnone.” Furthermore, the Dominican convents in Florence were forbidden to conduct ceremonies to honor Savonarola or the two other friars

¹⁷⁰ *I processi* 21 (first processo). Cited by Weinstein, *Savonarola: The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Prophet*, 286.

executed with him, and the friars were even barred from singing Savonarola's favorite Psalm.¹⁷¹ Marsilio Ficino now openly attacked Savonarola, and in a tract addressed to the College of Cardinals he explained that he and others in Florence had been misled by the dead friar, who had been assisted by demons, was a servant of Antichrist, and mixed lies with true prophecies in order to deceive.¹⁷²

Despite the efforts to suppress them or further defame Savonarola, the Piagnone kept their movement alive.¹⁷³ They preserved Savonarola's memory, now as a martyr, first behind closed doors; but as sentences of banishment ran their course the exiles returned, began to rebuild their influence, and even reclaimed some of their political position in the city. In 1501 Gianfrancesco Pico wrote in defense of a follower of Savonarola and around this time he may also have begun writing a *Vita* of Savonarola as he advocated Savonarolan interests at both Florence and Rome.¹⁷⁴ Savonarola's prophetic legacy also continued and seems even to have expanded, as a number of apocalyptic preachers and prophets appeared in Florence. In all, at least eleven prophets were active at various times in Florence between 1498 and 1516. Most were men, usually religious, who preached and prophesied in support of Piagnone objectives, although there were several women prophets (usually Dominican tertiaries), and at least one, Domenica Narducci, was a former Savonarolan who eventually prophesied against the Piagnone. Several of these prophets were tried and imprisoned or exiled, others recanted, and Pietro Bernardino – the prophet in whose support Pico wrote – was burned as a heretic in 1502. These preachers told of revelations or interpretations they derived from Scripture that blended Joachite and Savonarolan

¹⁷¹ Weinstein, *Savonarola: The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Prophet*, 298.

¹⁷² "Apologia Marsilii Ficini pro multis florentinis ab antichristo Hieronymo Ferrariense, hypocritarum summo deceptis: ad Collegium Cardinalium," *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 2:76–79.

¹⁷³ The best work on the Piagnone, especially following Savonarola's death, is Lorenzo Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation the Savonarolan Movement in Florence, 1494-1545* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

¹⁷⁴ Charles B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola (1469–1533) and His Critique of Aristotle* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), 16.

themes of reform with apocalypticism and millennialist scenarios of Angelic Popes or that saw Florence as the New Jerusalem; some of the prophets claimed that Savonarola himself had appeared to them in visions and revealed to them such mysteries.¹⁷⁵

Currents of prophecy flowed both in and out of Florence: in 1502 a Bosnian Franciscan bishop known in Italy as Giorgio Benigno Salviati (c. 1448-1520), who was an admirer of Savonarola, sent to contacts in Florence excerpts of the prophecies of Salviati's fellow Franciscan Amadeus of Portugal (1420-1482). Amadeus' prophecies were similar to Savonarola's and added further source material for the preachers to draw upon. Beyond Savonarola's Dominican San Marco convent, interest in these prophecies also took root in Florentine Franciscan and Camaldolese communities, as well as a convent of Augustinian nuns; and, especially through their networks of monastic houses, prophecies and Savonarola's and Amadeus' apocalypticism spread to other Italian cities.¹⁷⁶

The agitations of Piagnone prophets in Florence only increased after the Medici, led by Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici (1475-1521), reasserted control of the city in 1512. A short time later Giovanni was elected Pope Leo X, effectively making Florence an extension of the Papal States, effectively also transforming the Florentine problem with prophets into a papal one. Between 1513 and 1516 Leo X had to act against three different Florentine prophets,¹⁷⁷ leading him eventually to plan a synod where Savonarola's writings could be condemned and the

¹⁷⁵ Minnich, "Prophecy and the Fifth Lateran," 75–78; Weinstein, *Savonarola: The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Prophet*, 301-302, 208-310; Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation the Savonarolan Movement in Florence, 1494-1545*, 198–206.

¹⁷⁶ Minnich, "Prophecy and the Fifth Lateran," 75–76; Bowd, *Reform Before the Reformation*, 184–86; Tamar Herzig, *Savonarola's Women: Visions and Reform in Renaissance Italy* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 248ff; On several prophetic preachers, mostly Augustinian hermits from Verona, preaching in Venice and other cities around this same time see Ottavia Niccoli, *Prophecy and People in Renaissance Italy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), 98–103.

¹⁷⁷ On these three prophets and Leo X's activities against them, see Minnich, "Prophecy and the Fifth Lateran," 75–80.

activities of other prophets discredited. Yet preparations for the synod did not go well. The Florentine archdiocesan vicar, to whom Leo had delegated the task of gathering materials to present to the synod, sought the opinion of various theologians only to have several respond in ways that tended to vindicate rather than condemn Savonarola. Lay theologian Gasparo Contarini (1483-1542), for example, found no fault in Savonarola and reasoned that he had been correct about the need for reform, that God sometimes did intervene, and that he was right to disobey Alexander VI's excommunication. Gianfrancesco Pico was also consulted and predictably supported the friar's teachings, as did three Dominican theologians whose opinions were solicited.¹⁷⁸ The vicar's choice of theologians leads one to wonder where he placed his loyalties, but in any case these responses seem to have caused Leo X to postpone the synod. When the synod did meet, in 1517, it made no mention of Savonarola and instead condemned the writings of Francesco da Meleto, a prophet who had once spent three months as a guest of Leo X's in Rome.¹⁷⁹ Although Leo X's efforts to direct the Florentine synod against Savonarola failed, the arrival in Rome of another prophet in 1516, a certain friar Bonaventura who claimed to be the Angelic Pope, seems to have convinced Leo X of the need for legislation that could more generally be applied to prophets. He requested this legislation from the Fifth Lateran Council's eleventh session, which he had convened in 1516.¹⁸⁰

Nelson Minnich's research on the Council and his analysis of the promulgation of its decree on prophecy, as well as Stephen Bowd's study of reform efforts both at and surrounding the council, illustrate the widespread enthusiasm for prophecy among the Council Fathers as well as

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 79–80.

¹⁷⁹ Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum, nova et amplissima collectio*, cols. 269E, 273E-274B; Richard C Trexler, *Synodal Law in Florence and Fiesole, 1306-1518*, Studi E Testi 268 (Vatican City: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1971), 3-4, 10-13, 112, 132-135; For more on Meleto, see Bowd, *Reform Before the Reformation*, 182, 197-198.

¹⁸⁰ Minnich, "Prophecy and the Fifth Lateran," 80; On Bonaventura see Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, 262 n. 4, 438, 448.

how various individual participants might advocate for certain prophets or prophecies while at times condemning others. The Council itself began with a prophetic call for reform. Cardinal Giles of Viterbo (1472-1532), the respected master general of the Augustinian Hermits and student of various types of prophecy and prophets (including Joachim of Fiore, Ficino's Neoplatonist ideas, and the Hebrew Kabbalah), had opened the council in 1512 with a sermon that reminded listeners that he had preached throughout Italy for the past twenty years on John's Apocalypse. His oration continued by pointing to the final fulfillment to come of Old Testament prophecies and noting that recent portents and disasters were warnings from God but asserting that this Council would reform the Church, end wars, and restore peace – all, he said, as had been foretold in the Apocalypse.¹⁸¹ Also closely associated with the Council were Vincenzo Querini and Paolo Giustiniani, two Florentine Camaldolese hermits who had written the influential *Libellus ad Leonem X* as a reform proposal to the Pope that explained their view that Leo X was called to reform the Church, convert Jews, Muslims, and idolaters, and spread a unified Christian empire over the world – evoking obvious Joachite and Savonarolan themes.¹⁸²

Among the Council Fathers most active in the Congregation of Faith who probably had a hand in drafting the 1516 decree on prophecy, Minnich's research finds that a majority were favorably inclined towards a role for prophecy directing the Church, and several had at one time or another expressed particular support of one or a number of recent prophets. Giles of Viterbo probably contributed to the decree, as did Cardinal Salviati (who had sent the prophecies of

¹⁸¹ Minnich, "Prophecy and the Fifth Lateran," 67; The standard study on Giles of Viterbo, his thinking on prophecy, eschatology, and reform is John W O'Malley, *Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform: A Study in Renaissance Thought* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968).

¹⁸² Bowd, *Reform Before the Reformation*, especially 136ff; The Latin text is in Paolo Giustiniani and Pietro Quirini, *Libellus Ad Leonem X*, ed. J.B. Mittarelli and A. Costadoni, vol. 9, *Annales Camaldulenses* (Venice, 1775); And an English translation is available at "Paolo Giustiniani and Pietro Quirini: *Libellus* to Pope Leo X (English Translation)," trans. Stephen M Beall, accessed December 5, 2015, https://www.academia.edu/3614630/Paolo_Giustiniani_and_Pietro_Quirini_Libellus_to_Pope_Leo_X_English_Translation_.

Amadeus of Portugal to Florence), the Spanish Cardinal Bernardino López Carvajal (another advocate of Amadeus), and the Dutchman Paulus van Middelburg (1445-1533) who was known for his predictions based on the movement of the stars.¹⁸³

Minnich concludes that Dominican Master General Thomas de Vio Cajetan (1469-1534) may have been the most influential member of the group that drafted the decree. Cajetan's advocacy of prophecy was not uniform: he explicitly rejected the claims of Amadeus because Cajetan believed he had introduced new doctrines, and he implicitly criticized the prophet who had been burned in Florence in 1515;¹⁸⁴ likewise, Cajetan was especially critical of so-called prophets who used their fame for their own gain – especially those who were reputed to seduce women by claiming such acts were not sinful.¹⁸⁵ Cajetan was, however, committed to protecting the reputation of Savonarola, such that schismatic cardinals had attempted to gain his support for their Council of Pisa in exchange for an offer to canonize Savonarola.¹⁸⁶ In 1512 Cajetan had discussed prophecy in a sermon he delivered before the second session of the Council. He said that Rome was the New Jerusalem described in Apocalypse 21; numbered among its population are prophets and it enjoys the gifts of prophecy, revelations, divine illumination, and the protection of angels.¹⁸⁷ About the time of the eleventh session, the one that addressed prophecy, Cajetan was also working on a commentary on Aquinas' sections on prophecy in the *Summa*: in his commentary Cajetan closely follows Aquinas' teachings, but seems to go somewhat beyond

¹⁸³ Minnich, "Prophecy and the Fifth Lateran," 81–84.

¹⁸⁴ Thomas de Vio Cajetan, *Sancti Thomas Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Opera Omnia Iussu Impensaque Leonis XIII P.M. Edita 9: Secunda Secundae Summae Theologiae...cum Commentariis Thomae de Vio Caietani Ordinis Praedicatorum S.R.E. Cardinalis* (Rome, 1897), 400; Cited by Minnich, "Prophecy and the Fifth Lateran," 74.

¹⁸⁵ Thomas de Vio Cajetan, *Sancti Thomas Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Opera Omnia Iussu Impensaque Leonis XIII P.M. Edita 9: Secunda Secundae Summae Theologiae...cum Commentariis Thomae de Vio Caietani Ordinis Praedicatorum S.R.E. Cardinalis*, 400–401; Minnich, "Prophecy and the Fifth Lateran," 74–75.

¹⁸⁶ Ridolfi, *The Life of Girolamo Savonarola*, 295–96.

¹⁸⁷ Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum, nova et amplissima collectio*, cols. 720E-721A.

them by more emphatically stating that God chooses to give revelation to the Church in each period of history and that continued prophecy is part of the divine plan.¹⁸⁸

With the number of churchmen in the drafting congregation so favorably inclined towards prophecy and especially with advocates like Cajetan committed to protecting Savonarola's reputation, Leo X could not hope to condemn Savonarola. From that perspective, therefore, the Lateran decree on prophecy had to be a compromise document. Issued in its final form on December 19, 1516, the decree *Supernae majestatis praesidio* frames the issue of prophecy within the context of preaching. It begins by outlining the proper purpose of preaching, which is of "first importance" and meant to conform to the teachings of the holy fathers and according to the example of the apostles to propagate the faith far and wide. The decree continues that it has become known that some preachers do not attend to this mission, that there are false prophets and those who preach not according to the doctors of the Church but according to their own private interpretations; these preachers claim they are guided by the Holy Spirit and supported by alleged miracles. These preachers, the decree continues, lead the simple into error, cause scandal, and ruin souls with their new and false prophecies; furthermore, they attack prelates of the Church and even popes.¹⁸⁹

To correct these abuses the Council decree resolves that no one normally possessing a right to preach would be allowed to do so without first being examined and approved by his superior. If he is found to be of sound qualifications he may be approved but is required to carry a letter of commendation as proof wherever he preaches. All preaching is to be done in accordance with the

¹⁸⁸ Thomas de Vio Cajetan, *Sancti Thomas Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Opera Omnia Iussu Impensaque Leonis XIII P.M. Edita 9: Secunda Secundae Summae Theologiae...cum Commentariis Thomae de Vio Caietani Ordinis Praedicatorum S.R.E. Cardinalis*, 366ff; For comparison see Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2a, 2ae, q. 174 a. 6.

¹⁸⁹ Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum, nova et amplissima collectio*, cols. 944A-947E; Giuseppe Alberigo, J. A. Dossetti, and Periclis-Petros Ioannou, eds., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, trans. Norman P Tanner (London; Washington (D.C.): Sheed and Ward ; Georgetown University press, 1990), 605ff.

Scriptures as interpreted by the Church and by approved commentators. Turning specifically to prophecy, the decree states that no one may preach or declare a “fixed time for future evils, the coming of Antichrist, or the precise day of Judgment....[T]hey are not to keep on preaching some future events based on the sacred writings, nor presume to declare that they know them from the Holy Spirit or from divine revelation” but rather they are to proclaim the Gospel. The decree says that it does not wish to deny prophecy, as to do so would be a wrong done to the Holy Spirit. But “the spirits have to be tested to see whether they come from God.” Therefore, the decree states, if anyone believes the Lord has revealed something to him by inspiration, about some future events or anything else revealed, he must submit his claim directly to the Holy See for judgment and approval before he is allowed to publish or preach what has been revealed. In the event that this is impossible to do without danger or delay or if some pressing need suggests action, then, the decrees says, it is permissible that judgment be made by the local ordinary with three or four of his knowledgeable men to carefully examine the matter before granting permission. The Fifth Lateran decree thus admits both the possibility and utility of prophecy but it also recognizes abuses and attempts to correct them.

Apart from well-worn restrictions against making too detailed predictions about the Last Days or requiring preaching in accord with Scripture, the decree has little to say about how to distinguish between true and false prophets. In this, it essentially admits that the method of discernment of spirits as established by Gerson and his colleagues had failed – which, given the examples of Joan of Arc and Savonarola, it had. The theoretical criteria remained valid, however, and pope or bishop might still (and probably would) employ these criteria in his own evaluation and approval of an alleged prophet. The university method of discernment, however, was essentially based on a disputative and dialectic process. It is not dialectic in the sense that there

are two debating parties; instead it is based on a dialectical style of inquiry and thus it opens itself up to counter arguments, or to opponents taking contrary positions. And since, by their nature, the markers of prophecy are already ambiguous because divine revelation cannot be directly observed and also because of the possibility of demonic duplicity, this creates real problems when attempting to arrive at a definitive conclusion. The Fifth Lateran process for approving prophets, however, is based on authority, which in theory should be more definitive. Furthermore, the discernment method of Gerson assumes that a prophet will be evaluated after he or she has acted as a prophet, and the method is based most closely on inquisitorial process or canonization examination – procedures intended to evaluate the evidence either after an alleged crime has taken place or a saintly life has been lived. By this measure, however, a disruptive prophet may already have caused harm or else have produced enough evidence to confuse a discernment evaluation. The Fifth Lateran, in contrast, attempts to establish a process of approval, control, and limitation rather than evaluation. It therefore makes prophecy a matter of deciding individual cases according to the structures (and agendas) of hierarchical authority rather than a disputative application of theological criteria.

Conclusion

The conceptualization of prophecy in the Middle Ages evolved over time, in part due to shifting intellectual currents such as the revival of Aristotle and the growing preoccupation with the role of demons, and in part in interaction with prophecy as it was practiced. Two broad arcs of development occurred in the evolution of medieval thinking about prophecy. The first begins with Joachim of Fiore, who both theorized and practiced a new way of thinking about prophecy, as inspired exegesis, that challenged the existing categories of understanding. The second arc begins with the decline of this type of prophecy and the emergence of concerns about the possible role of demons as a source of apparently prophetic vision, and accordingly, greatly increased attention on the part of both prophets and theologians in determining which was which. By examining a longer history of conceptualizations of prophecy, and by seeking a synthetic understanding of how medieval thinking about prophecy and its practice interrelated, this dissertation has proposed both structures and explanations for these developments.

Several generations of scholars have made this sort of analysis possible and much work has been done on prophets, focused especially on the apocalyptic content of their prophecies, their role in religious movements, and the ways prophets illustrate certain attitudes prevalent in medieval culture, such as perceptions about gender. Through this type of work, scholars have also begun to articulate certain aspects of how these prophets and their hearers understood prophecy itself, as a concept, and these have provided key contributions to this dissertation. Marjorie Reeves, for example, was among the first historians to give attention to Joachim of

Fiore's belief that he was not a prophet but had received the gift of *spiritualis intelligentia*, and Robert Lerner has recognized that Joachim's manner of inspired exegesis prophecy resonated with several other prophets both before and after him. Jean Pierre Torrell's studies of treatises *de prophetia* have examined, within the confines of the schools and academic discourse, how medieval scholastic thinkers debated theological ideas and, in particular, how certain theologians in the first half of the thirteenth century differed over the proposition that prophecy was a *habitus*. Joseph Ratzinger, Bernard McGinn, Daniel Horan, and Thomas Renna have studied Bonaventure's eschatology and have begun to connect it to certain ideas, implicit in Bonaventure's thinking, about the nature of prophecy. David Burr's work on Peter John Olivi's thinking about prophecy discusses his position on *habitus* and generally connects Olivi's theories about prophecy with his association with the Spiritual Franciscans.

My approach has been to look beyond individual prophets to the conceptions of prophecy implicit in the activities of the prophets and often explicit in the debates that surrounded them. Joachim's proposal of a third category for prophetic knowledge challenged existing Augustinian categories, and acceptance or denial of Joachim's proposal (at least among theologians) was often conditioned by one's opinion of whether prophecy was a *habitus*. Opinions about Joachite conceptions of prophecy were also influenced by intellectual and ecclesiological struggles that involved new ways of approaching theological concepts in the schools, mendicant controversies, and Franciscans' efforts to construct their identity within a framework of progressive eschatological views. That the Church rejected the apocalyptic reforms and agitations of the Spiritual Franciscans is well known. What have been less explored are the ways this controversy influenced the Church's receptivity to the possibility of prophecy generally and inspired exegesis specifically, and whether it was possible for theologians to accept the idea of *spiritualis*

intelligentia. The Church's relatively ambivalent responses to Arnold of Villanova and even John of Rupescissa (eventually) at least suggests the possibility for accommodation although, as seems to have happened, association with the Spirituals discredited the idea enough to limit those who might have wished to prophesy in this way.

As it pertains to the second broad arc of developments, this dissertation has built upon the work of historians such as Claire Sahlin and Rosalynn Voaden, who have studied aspects of how confessor-prophet relationships conditioned the expression of fourteenth-century prophecy and also scholars such as Nancy Caciola and Dyan Elliott who examined issues surrounding women prophets, including theological arguments for and against female prophecy. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, in particular, has complemented these scholars' analyses of the ascendant fear of demons; and Caciola, Elliott, and Wendy Love Anderson have given special attention to the discernment of spirits. In particular, it is here argued that the confessor-prophet relationship was crucial in aligning key aspects of prophecy theory with the practices and expressions of the prophets they guided. Among the most significant areas that came into essential congruence as a result of these confessor-prophet partnerships were prophetic expression of visions, expectations and justifications for female prophecy, and an appreciation for threats posed by demons. Although the confessors began to frame the presentation of their prophets according to emerging ideas about the discernment of spirits, it was the university theologians who, in response to the growing number of practicing prophets and their doubts about them, attempted to construct a rational method based on objective criteria that experts such as themselves might use to evaluate prophetic claims.

Increasingly, theologians writing about theories of discernment expressed uncertainties and doubts about the criteria they explored, usually related to the idea that demons could mimic the

markers of divine inspiration. To account for this difficulty, authors such as Gerson – especially in his later writings – suggested that theologians tasked with discerning spirits might themselves require special guidance from the Holy Spirit. Many readers of these discernment treatises, however, seem to have overlooked or at least underestimated such warnings, and instead treated these writings nearly as practical source texts or guidebooks containing guidelines and observable criteria they might apply to actual cases. The case studies of Joan of Arc and Savonarola demonstrate that such efforts both to construct and apply objective criteria failed: with Joan of Arc these criteria were fully applied but resulted in conflicting conclusions ultimately determined by political biases and partiality; in the case of Savonarola methods of examination based on discernment criteria failed even to be employed, except by Savonarola himself – whose expert understanding did nothing to save him.

This dissertation ends much where it began, with the Fifth Lateran decree on prophecy that stimulated the beginning of this dissertation. At the time of the Fifth Lateran council there was both significant interest and substantial uncertainty surrounding prophecy, even among many of the participants at the council. Furthermore, new conceptions of prophecy were developing. Renaissance syncretism, natural magic, and astrology overlapped with and challenged the conception of prophecy that had taken shape at the end of the fourteenth century, as represented by prophets such as Joan of Arc or Savonarola. If this study were extended, the influence of these conceptions of prophecy might constitute a third arc of developments. The Fifth Lateran, however, declined to decide on any of these matters, and in a sense it attempted to resolve the problem of prophecy by recognizing that it was an unresolvable problem. The decree does not provide doctrinal criteria for what is or what is not prophecy or how it should be understood; neither does it attempt to suppress or curb prophetic thinking – in fact, the decree affirms the

positive value that prophecy can provide to the Church. Rather, the Fifth Lateran decree attempts to rein in the most disruptive prophets and to reserve to its own authority the means for controlling and limiting prophets and their prophecies, thereby also attempting to exert control over its conceptualization.

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