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Heretics of the Church and Recurring Heresies.

Joachim da Fiori and the Eternal Gospel.

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Joachim is an interesting character in his own person, but he is very much more interesting on account of the surprising influences which flowed out of his now nearly forgotten books after he himself had 'fallen on sleep.' He is hardly less interesting historically for the sudden revelation which was made through him of subterranean streams of life and thought that had disappeared centuries earlier and unexpectedly emerge in his writings. He was a contemporary of Amaury of Bene. Amaury's primary source of influence was undoubtedly the writings of John Scotus Erigena, but there is in evidence in him a secondary strain of thought which shows decided kinship to the main ideas of Joachim. They both stand for the direct reign of God in the hearts of men through the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is more than probable that Amaury had important contacts with the 'liberal' teachings which were disseminated from the School of Chartres especially by its most famous teacher, Gilbert de la Porrée. But it looks as though the faith and expectations of the Montanists had burst into the stream of thought of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

Joachim, who exhibits many of the same tendencies as Amaury, came on the scene shortly after a remarkable group of famous heretics, Arnold of Brescia, Peter of Bruys, and Henry of Lausanne. There are some slight similarities of thought with them to be found in the writings of Joachim, but what is much more in evidence is the fact that he has tapped much older streams of thought. His affiliations were not directly with John Scotus Erigena as Amaury's were, nor with Peter Abelard, as were those of the group of heretics who slightly preceded him in time. Joachim belongs in the order of the 'prophets.' His ideals and aspirations are in essential matters like those of the Montanists in the third century. He is in pronounced opposition toward ecclesiastics. He is tired of bishops and priests. He is eager for a new dispensation in which the Spirit will be the direct and immediate Guide of the Church, with a new type of 'prophet' as his organ of revelation. We have in Joachim an enthusiast, a dreamer of dreams, a builder of new Jerusalems, or, as Renan expressed it, a person with 'a great instinct for the future.'

Joachim was born at Celico, near Cosenza, in the province of Calabria, in 1131. Calabria is in the toe of the boot of Italy, where the intellectual environment was very unlike that in any other part of Italy. It was half Greek in population at the time, and the ideas of Greek Christianity were as familiar there as were those of the Western Church, and there were, too, many hidden streams of heretical thought flowing through these out-of-the-way valleys of this volcanic district. As a youth Joachim received a good education, and while still 'a youth of angelic countenance' he became a page in a ducal court of Calabria where he heard much of the crusades and caught the spirit of adventure which was in the air.

The great epoch of his life was a visit to the Holy Land. A terrible epidemic was ravaging Constantinople when he reached that city. Death threatened every visitor who entered it. Here Joachim sent back his escort, and with one companion as an attendant went on afoot as a pilgrim. On Mount Tabor, which he believed was the scene of the Transfiguration, he had a remarkable mystical experience in which he had a vision of Christ and a call to His 'way of life.' On the night of the Resurrection he had another mystical experience when a great light enveloped him and invaded his inner being. This experience, he felt, in some mysterious way revealed to him the complete accord of the Old Testament with the New. A third experience appears to have occurred to him when he was almost dying of thirst crossing a desert. He had a vision here of a man standing by a river of oil and a voice said, 'Drink of this stream.' He was impressed with the idea that this stream of oil of which he was to drink stood for the Scriptures. These experiences in the East settled his destiny. He resolved to give up for ever the glory of the Court and become a herald of the Cross. He vowed to follow Christ and to set forth to the world the new meaning of the Scriptures which he believed had been revealed to him in his draught of 'the river of oil.'

On his return to Italy he entered a Cistercian monastery at Sambucina and there took up a long and searching study of the Scriptures. It is probable that he had already got his vision of 'the new

age' before he began his studies at Sambucina. In fact, the 'vision' of the fresh meaning of the Scriptures was almost certainly due to the surging up within him of ideas which he had hit upon either before his journey or while he was on his travels. Students of mysticism are quite familiar with the way that ideas silently gestated in 'the deep well of unconsciousness' suddenly burst into consciousness in moments of high emotion and feel as though they were divine communications. In any case, however originated, these 'new discoveries' seemed to Joachim to be plainly taught and verified in Scripture, and he believed that he found in the 'prophets' of the Old Testament the ideas which in reality he brought in his own mind to them.

After some years of quiet meditation and study at Sambucina, Joachim felt impelled to go out into the world as a lay-preacher, which was a prevalent fashion of the times, though it was jealously watched by the ordained authorities of the Church and apt to be suppressed. Joachim began to preach in the vulgar tongue, and he made the proclamation of 'a new age' the central feature of his message to the people who came to hear him. He was very soon stopped by official prohibition, and he conformed to the demands of authority to the extent of entering the Cistercian Monastery at Corazzo, where he was duly ordained. Meantime the fervour of preaching had waned in him, and the tendency to meditate and study had grown upon him. The mystical strain in him came more and more to dominate his life, and when against his will he was chosen Abbot of the convent, he fled from the scene and endeavoured to escape 'the heavy and weary weight' of administration. He was brought back and was plunged into the tangle of business and affairs which he loathed. Finally, in 1181, he secured a release from the Pope, threw off the disagreeable duties for which he was not fitted, and became a solitary hermit. With 'knees of adoration' he prayed almost without ceasing, purified his life, had ecstasies and visions, and matured his prophetic message of the new age of the Holy Spirit. He began the writing of his prophetical books while he was living in the Abbey of Casamari during the years 1183–4. He had at this time a devoted young monk named Lucas, who acted as his secretary and did the actual writing for him. During the last period of his life he founded a stricter branch of the Cistercian Order, 'amid the very cold Alps,' in a hermitage at Fiori, and here at last with brethren of harmonious spirit he consented to be their Abbot. The new Order received the approval of Pope Celestine III., and in this last quiet retreat, surrounded by monks to his liking, Joachim brought into final shape the books which were the bearers of his prophetic ideas. They were tentatively approved by Urban III. and Clement III. He submitted them to Pope Innocent III. for final examination, but Joachim died in 1202, before judgment was passed upon them.

Joachim, even before his death, acquired the reputation of being a 'saint,' and he was believed far and wide to possess the afflatus necessary for the mission of a 'prophet.' He slowly outgrew the piety of solitude and caught a passion of love for suffering humanity. Gebhart says of Joachim that 'his simplicity and charity (love) were admirable: he warmed on his bosom the heads of the dying. In the winter that preceded his own death, when famine was raging in Calabria and Sicily, he gave his last garments to the poor; he washed with his own hands the floor of the infirmary; he saved the towns (of the region) from the ferocious brutality of Henry VI.; he bent over every bed of suffering without troubling himself about the sufferer's religion.'[1]

The three books which Joachim left behind as his legacy were (1) *Harmony of the Old and New Testaments*, (2) *The Psalter with Ten Strings*, and (3) *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. The second book in the above list contains a recital of a voyage to the world beyond death in the invisible realm, which is a mild forerunner of Dante's vision. It is a well-known fact that Dante highly appreciated Joachim and put him in his *Paradiso* as a great paladin 'endowed with prophetic spirit.'[2] It has even been suggested that in Dante's poem, Beatrice is a symbol of the Church of 'the new age.' Joachim's disciples continued his unfinished work and added material supplement to the short list of genuine books by Joachim. The most important of the additions is the *Commentary on Jeremiah*. This book, as Renan says, lacks the restraint and sobriety which characterize the three authentic books of the Calabrian prophet. It further bears plain marks of later date, though it was dedicated to Henry VI., who died in 1197, to give it the appearance of being written by Joachim. Its date is probably shortly before the middle of the thirteenth century, and it is undoubtedly the work of Franciscan 'Spirituals' who saw in Joachim the John the Baptist of their movement. This work of producing books in the name of Joachim con-

[1] *Mystics and Heretics in Italy at the End of the Middle Ages*, 84.

[2] *Paradiso*, xii. 140.

tinued with much vigour for many years. There are 'Commentaries,' in his name, on Isaiah, on Ezekiel, on Daniel, and on the Minor Prophets. There is a treatise entitled *De oneribus prophetarum.* Another important treatise appeared in 1356, entitled *De ultima aetate ecclesiae,* which for a time was attributed to John Wyclif, but which was no doubt from the pen of Joachimite Franciscans. There are even Commentaries on Merlin and on the Sibyl, all attributed to Joachim! All these books are examples of 'tendency' writing. They contain specific and detailed accounts of events that have already happened, but it is 'assumed' in the books that they were written by Joachim, and that therefore they were marvellous instances of his powers of 'prophecy.'

We have in this Calabrian prophet a remarkable instance of the way certain kindling lives prolong themselves and seem to be more completely 'alive' after they are dead than they were when they were walking about under the glimpses of the moon. The line where Joachim ends and where his successors begin cannot be drawn with exact certainty. He himself undoubtedly used the phrase, 'The Eternal Gospel,' for the new epoch which he foretold. He suggested, as the Montanists had done, three 'dispensations,' that of the Father, that of the Son, and the final consummation in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. He revived the symbolism of the nettle, the rose, and the lily to mark the three ages. The first dispensation was brass, the second silver, the third gold; the first was starlight, the second dawn, the third full daylight; the first was water, the second wine, the third oil. He considered the Church to be only the moving tent which would finally give place to the permanent spiritual House builded by God and to be as eternal as God Himself. He thought of the Church as Hagar in the wilderness to be superseded by the Church of the Spirit symbolized by Sarah, the true bride. He called the Christianity of his day *legal, literal, external,* and he forecast a purified and spiritual Christianity which would succeed the old and inadequate forms. He prophesied that the Latin and Greek Christians would be united into a single spiritual family in the New Era, and he expected the conversion of the Jews and the fulfilment of St. Paul's hopes.

Brother Salimbene, who was born in 1221, and who wrote the most remarkable autobiography of the Middle Ages, was a devoted Joachimite in his early years, and became disillusioned only after the 'prophecies' failed to come true in the crisis year of 1260. Speaking of Joachim's three stages, Salimbene says that he 'divided the world into a threefold state; in the first state the Father worked in mystery through the patriarchs and sons of the prophets, although the works of the Trinity are indivisible. In the second state the Son worked through the Apostles and other Apostolic men; of which state He saith, "My Father worketh until now, and I work." In the third state the Holy Ghost shall work through *the religious.*'[1] In other words, the first state of the Church was taught by the Father through the Old Testament; the second by the Son through the New Testament; the third state (which may be said in one sense to have begun with St. Benedict) shall be taught by the Holy Spirit. Not that the Old and New Testaments shall be abrogated, or that a new Bible shall be revealed, but that men's eyes shall be opened by the Spirit to see a new revelation in the time-honoured Scriptures—an Eternal Gospel proceeding from the Old and New Testament as its Author proceeds from the Father and the Son.' Salimbene says that Joachim himself fixed the date 1260 for the beginning of the New Era, and there is no doubt that he did suggest that date, though it would certainly be much more natural to suppose that the specific date became fixed in the later spurious writings, and in the period of widespread unrest and expectation.

The later glowing fervid disciples of Joachim greatly intensified his quiet and restrained hopes. They felt sure that they could already catch whiffs of the smell of the lily. They grew harsher in their accounts of the Church of Hagar, and more violent in their prophecies of its doom. The apocalyptic note became louder, the crisis more imminent, and the dawn of the great epoch close at hand. Suddenly in 1254 there appeared in Paris a book which plainly revealed to the authorities of the Church the grave dangers which were concealed in this Joachimite literature. If it had not been for this new stage in the Joachimite literature, the Calabrian prophet might have slept in peace with his fathers. He had been 'an adventurous exegete,' but he had not showed the spirit of sedition. He counted Popes among his friends. His mysticism was restrained, his spirit was gentle, his tact was fine. One thing, to be sure, had been publicly condemned in his writing, and that was his attack on Peter Lombard, who was a pillar of the Schools and so of the Church. It is a fact to

[1] Quoted from Salimbene's Chronicle translated by G. G. Coulton in his book *From St. Francis to Dante,* 151. The paragraph which follows the quotation is Dr. Coulton's comment.

be noted that St. Thomas Aquinas more than once controverts Joachim's opinions, as he does those of many of his forerunners. His most important criticism bears upon Joachim's interpretation of the Trinity (*Summa*, i. xxxix). This interpretation of the Trinity was furthermore singled out for condemnation at the Lateran Council of 1215. St. Thomas further contended that Joachim, while he was a pious and godly man, did not possess the gift of prophecy, since the Holy Spirit had communicated to the Apostles all that was necessary for eternal salvation, and hence there can be no new revelation of truth (*Summa*, i., ii. 2. 106, A 4). His speculation, however, about the three ages with their nettles and roses and lilies caused no serious disturbance, and even the reference to the figure of 'the scarlet woman' passed the censor.

This new book, of 1254, however, was another matter. It produced an explosion. It shook the authorities of the Church wide awake. The reason for the sudden upheaval was the state of strain and crisis existing at the time in the Franciscan Order between those who composed the party of conformity to the 'softened' regulations in reference to poverty, and, on the other hand, those who formed the party of strict observance of the original rule of St. Francis. The slow transformation of the Order had in the main been the work of Brother Elias and Cardinal Ugolini, who later, in 1227, became Pope as Gregory IX. The changes were from the first resisted by a small, intimate group of Francis' disciples who were determined to maintain what they believed to be the Apostolic purity of the life of poverty. Brother Elias became Vicar-General first in 1221, and held this position until 1227, when John Parenti was elected Minister-General. Elias succeeded him in this office in 1232, and held the headship until his 'fall' in 1239. Albert of Pisa, Aymon, and Crescentius were General Ministers in turn after him for short periods. The tendency of the Ministers-General during the twenty-one years after St. Francis' death had been in the direction of conformity to the ideas of the Vatican, and they had seemed to the 'spiritual Franciscans,' or 'Zealots,' as the members of the stricter party were called, to be moving away from the original ideals of their holy founder. At length, though late, a man after the heart of the 'spirituals' was raised to the headship of the Order, John Burali, or Borreli, usually called John of Parma. This was in the year 1247.

John of Parma, who now becomes an important figure in the story of Joachim, was born in 1208. He entered the Franciscan Order in 1233. He became a distinguished scholar in the University of Paris, a master of logic, a great theologian, an eloquent preacher, an excellent writer, a beautiful soul. Salimbene says that John of Parma 'was full of God's grace and wisdom. His face was like an angel's face, gracious and full of cheer. He was a mirror and example to all that beheld him. His whole life was full of honour and saintliness and perfect manners.' In fact, for Salimbene, he was a superlative man, with all known virtues shining in him. The only complaint the 'Spirituals' had at the time of his election was expressed in the words: 'Thou hast come late!'

It was in the Generalate of John of Parma, near its end, that the disturbing book on 'the Eternal Gospel' appeared in Paris, and it was at first believed by some to be written by the Minister-General himself. He was plainly in sympathy with the ideas of Joachim, and he deeply cherished the beautiful dream of St. Francis. The wonderful story of *The Three Companions* was probably composed in these happy years, and therefore what could be more natural than that this 'perfect man' and skilled writer should produce a book which fused together the ideals of St. Francis with the glowing hopes of the revered prophet? But as an actual historical fact, it was not John of Parma who wrote it, it was a young friend of his, a scholar in the University of Paris, by the name of Gerard of Borgo san Donnino. He had been appointed a lector of theology in the University about 1250. He was saturated with the expectations of Joachim and his later disciples, and he pushed these expectations to an extreme limit. Salimbene has given a friendly sketch of Gerard, though, possessed as he was of a deep-seated fear that he himself might be drawn into the net which had been spread to catch the dangerous advocates of the Eternal Gospel, he burned his copy of the book and urged caution upon those connected with it. Of Gerard he said: 'he was friendly, courteous, liberal, religious, honest, modest, well-mannered, temperate in word and food and drink and raiment, helpful with all humility and gentleness,' though after all this praise Salimbene adds: 'yet his waywardness in his own opinion brought all these good things to nought.'[1]

There was no book of Joachim's with the title 'Eternal Gospel,' though he had used the phrase, nor was there any such book among the spurious writings. What Gerard did was to take the best known of Joachim's writings and edit them, with introduction and notes, and entitle the whole work

[1] Coulton, *op. cit.* 161.

Introductorium in Evangelium aeternum. This is the explosive book of 1254. Gerard's *Introduction to the Eternal Gospel* was condemned by the Commission appointed by the Pope to examine it. The Commission sat at Anagni and made its Report in 1256. The book itself was suppressed, and only the extracts singled out by Gerard's accusers, the Paris Masters, have come down to us. These extracts are full of prejudice and inaccuracy, and concern the errors of Joachim as definitely as they do those of Gerard, though the blow fell in all its violence upon the latter and his friends, and in the end Joachim's reputation did not suffer very much. What Gerard claimed was that Joachim had supplied the *key* to the Holy Scriptures, and with that key any one possessed of mystical intelligence could now extract from the Old and New Testaments their eternal meaning—namely, the gospel of the Spirit.

The three epochs were in the *Introduction* somewhat more sharply specified and defined, and St. Francis is indicated as the new Messiah of the third epoch. The first epoch had Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as its three great Figures, and the third of these patriarchs had *twelve* sons. The second epoch had its three great Figures, Zechariah, John the Baptist and Christ, the God-Man, and He had twelve Apostles. So, too, the third epoch will have its three great Figures, the first a man clothed in white linen which signifies Joachim, the second an angel with a sharp sickle, and the third another angel having in his hand the 'sign' of the living God. There is some doubt as to the identity of the 'angel' with the sickle, perhaps St. Dominic is meant, but there is no doubt at all as to who is meant by the third 'angel' with the marks of the living God in his hand. It is Saint Francis, and he, like the other two great Figures, had *twelve* Brothers Minor chosen to carry on his mission.

The *active life* of the second dispensation continued, the book declared, unabated until the time of Joachim. But its power was exhausted. It had become a useless creaturely effort. Joachim introduced a new stage of *contemplative life*, and the spiritual followers of Francis are to carry that way of life to its full glory. In the second dispensation the Scriptures have been read and interpreted in a *literal* sense; under the new order they will be read in a spiritual sense, and the Spirit himself will be the living Interpreter of them. Gerard plainly indicated the year 1260, six years from the date of his book, as the time when the era of the Eternal Gospel would begin. And it was indicated, just as certainly, that the spiritual Franciscans are to be the chosen exponents of the new age of the Spirit.

The excitement and furor which burst forth in Paris among the leaders of the regular Order of the Friars and among the scholars were violent and unrestrained. Even in Chaucer's day the memory of the storm was still vivid. *The Romance of the Rose* tells the story thus:

> A thousande and two hundred yere
> Five-and-fifte, ferther ne nere,
> Broughten a boke with sorie grace,
> To yeven ensample in common place,—
> That sayed thus, though it was fable,
> *This is the Gospell pardurable*
> *That fro the Holie Ghost is sent.*
> Well were it worthy to be ybrent.

The storm which broke out at this crisis swept all the persons in any way responsible for the offensive book into public condemnation. The first to suffer was Gerard, the author of the book. Salimbene pleaded with him to recant and save himself, but he had evidently sincerely and devoutly believed that he had been divinely guided in his prophetic utterances, and he stoutly stood for what he had written and took the consequences. His book was burned. He was sent back in disgrace to his home in Sicily and was condemned to perpetual imprisonment for life.

The disaster carried down the noble and beautiful character who was at the time the visible head of the Franciscan Order, the saintly John of Parma. John was an intimate friend of Gerard; he probably quietly sympathized with his position, he certainly was on the side of the spiritual Franciscans, and in the eyes of the main body of the Friars he was 'compromised' by the publication of 'the Eternal Gospel.' He resigned his position, probably encouraged by the Pope to take this course, though Salimbene maintained that he took it of his own free will. He was in any case generously asked to name his successor, and he proposed Bonaventura, saint and scholar, but not lover of 'spiritual Franciscans.' John of Parma retired to the Hermitage at Greccio, where St. Francis had celebrated Christmas with an image of the Christ-Child in the manger. Here John lived in voluntary retirement and in solitude. He was later accused of Joachimism and had a canonical trial at Città della Pieve. The real gravamen of the process against him was undoubtedly John's attachment to strict observance after the manner of the Zealots and his affection for the 'spirituals.' He was acquitted of the charges and returned in peace to Greccio. He had widespread devotion as a saintly man, and many legends

gathered about his name. In 1285 he had a visit from Ubertino da Casale, the famous Zealot who wrote the *Arbor Vitae Crucifixae* in which he vividly told the story of his visit to John, and pictured him as a devoted Joachimite, still expecting the coming of the new age and still faithful to the ideal vision. Near the end of his life John endeavoured to make a journey to Greece in order to promote the union of the Greek and Latin Churches, but he died on the way, in the Marches of Ancona, in 1285. He was beatified by the Church in 1777.

For many years following these events in the life of John of Parma, Joachim continued to hold sway over kindred minds to his own. He exerted a powerful influence on Angelo da Clareno, Peter John Olivi, and Ubertino da Casale, the leaders of various parties of 'spiritual Franciscans.' He was a dominant force in creating the 'Flagellants,' 'the Brethren of the free Spirit,' the heretical Beguines, and the sect of 'the Apostles.' He exercised a kind of spell on the famous Colà di Rienzi. The three epochs of history specified by the German philosopher Schelling revived in quite modern times the three stages of the Calabrian prophet. Even 'the new smell' which George Fox perceived in 'the whole creation' *may* be a reference to 'the smell of the lily' in the Age of the Holy Spirit.[1]

[1] Since writing this article I have discovered the monumental work on Joachim by Ernesto Buonaiuti of Rome. It is written in Latin and is entitled *Tractatus super Quatuor Evangelia di Joachim da Fiori*. It will no doubt, in the light of this piece of historical research, be necessary to recast some of the legends and traditions which envelop this interesting 'prophet,' and it will be found that the apocalyptic stream in the Middle Ages was greater and deeper than we supposed.

Literature.

THE TEACHING OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

Professor W. F. Lofthouse, D.D., of Handsworth College, Birmingham, has written a stimulating book on the teaching of the Fourth Gospel, *The Father and the Son* (S.C.M.; 7s. 6d. net), in which he analyses the Evangelist's central interest and message. This is defined as 'his special conception of fatherhood and sonship, as something to be seen and known only in the relations between Him who is called the Father in the pages of the Gospel, and Him who is called the Son.'

The contention of Professor Lofthouse is that a comparison of the Fourth Gospel with the rest of the New Testament documents 'makes it probable that this specific form of the doctrine (of the Fatherhood of God) is the centre of the actual teaching of Jesus, and has been reproduced in its original purity in the Fourth Gospel.' Among the subjects treated are the Sonship of Christ, His Perfect Manhood, the Atonement, Sin, the Holy Spirit, God's Fatherly Rule, and Love. The detailed argument, which involves a careful comparison with the teaching of other New Testament writings, and in particular with that of St. Paul, must be read to be appreciated. Here we can only say that rarely has the discussion been carried out with such fulness, and perhaps never with such convincing power.

Excellent as the book is in this respect, it contains views which, to say the least, are of a very challenging order. We entirely agree with Professor Lofthouse when he says that Jesus thought of Fatherhood in God 'as something which was there for men to take advantage of; as something which could not have free scope in Him till a corresponding sonship had come about in them' (p. 29). But is it necessary, in presenting this truth, to tone down and explain away the Synoptic passages which speak of God as 'your Father' and 'your Father which is in heaven,' or to emasculate the teaching of the Parable of the Prodigal Son? If this is involved in the view that God is the Father of men only as they come to Him through Jesus, it seems a very heavy price to pay. The price, however, has to be paid if due allowance is not made for the fact that the Fourth Gospel presents the ideas of Fatherhood and Sonship mainly in relation to 'believers,' with the result that other aspects, found in the Synoptics, fall out of focus.

The attitude of Professor Lofthouse to the Creeds is critical, but we doubt if he escapes the perils of inadequate expression when he seeks to present the Divinity of Christ in purely ethical terms. His account of the Atonement also does not appear to be much more than a doctrine of revelation. 'What changes me,' he says, 'is the