

so doing he has given us at the same time a stairway up to heaven. Perhaps our hands are stained with blood, or else we have made them filthy by taking bribes instead of flinging them from us. If, then, we do not want our gift spurned, let us offer whatever trifle we wish to give him through Mary's hands, those hands that are so dear to him, that are always welcome to his sight. They are whiter than any lily, and the lover of lilies will not complain of anything that it was not found among the lilies if he finds it in Mary's hands.



JOACHIM OF FLORA AND 'THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL'

H. G. BUDGE

THE Abbot Joachim, who founded the Abbey of Flora among the mountains of Calabria in 1189, is one of the most original and interesting figures of the Middle Ages. He was famous in his own generation for his prophetic vision and saintly life, and was a source of inspiration to his followers for two hundred years. Dante assigns him a place with the great teachers of the thirteenth century, in his *Paradiso*, where Saint Bonaventure points out the shining spirit at his side as:

'Calabria's Abbot, Joachim, endow'd
with soul prophetic.'

The great Florentine had lost his faith in Papal and Imperial powers to enlighten the darkness of those times, and may well have embraced Joachim's hope of a spiritual renewal of Christendom by a sudden illumination of the divine purpose in history.

Joachim's influence spread through Italy and beyond in the latter part of the twelfth century. Eminent persons sought his counsel. When King Richard I was at Messina during the Third Crusade, he sent for the sage to discourse with him on the mysteries of the future. Joachim was no respecter of persons, as witness the fact that on one occasion he rebuked the Emperor Barbarossa

for worldliness; and when the Empress Constance of Sicily commanded his presence so that he might hear her confession, he refused to listen to her until she was seated on the floor like any ordinary penitent. The Empress declared that the authority of an apostle had been in the Abbot.

Joachim was born at Celice in Calabria about 1132 and was educated by the Greek monks of St Basil, monasteries of this Order being scattered about the southern region of Italy. These monks owed allegiance to Rome, but kept to the Greek liturgy which enshrined the mystical wisdom of the Byzantine Church. Calabria was a link between the Western and Eastern Empires. Islam was not far away; and Sicily was the home of many races differing in religion, language and culture, successfully united by the Norman King Roger II who, by adopting methods of toleration, had formed of these divers elements a rich, varied and prosperous society. Joachim's father had held an official position at the Sicilian Court; and here his son spent many of the formative years of his life, probably expecting a high worldly career.

Unfortunately there is no record of his years spent in this cosmopolitan atmosphere, which, we surmise, must have made a deep impression on his young and sensitive mind.

We hear of his being in Constantinople in 1158 during some great calamity (plague is suggested) that so shocked the young man that he gave away his fine clothes and possessions and with only one attendant set off, on foot, for the Holy Land, desiring to see the tomb of the Saviour. While in the desert he nearly died, but was nursed back to health by the Saracens, with whose children he made friends.

Reaching Jerusalem, he spent Lent on Mount Tabor alone, in fasting and contemplation, and there on the night before Easter Day he had the revelation of which he wrote later: 'To me, Joachim, about the midst of the silent night at the hour in which our Lion of the Tribe of Judah is believed to have risen from the dead, a brightness of understanding suddenly shone upon the eyes of my mind and a revelation was made concerning the whole agreement of the Old and New Testaments that I had perceived.'

After this supremely important event, we have intermittent glimpses only of him for ten years. We hear that he returned to Calabria—by way of Sicily, and then stayed for a time at a Cistercian convent, but was unable then to subscribe to the Rule of

the Order. He would stray outside the walls to preach to the poor, giving them his clothes, and wandering half-clad in the cold Calabrian mountains, until he seems to have become completely indifferent to physical discomfort, while absorbed in—and still, no doubt, amazed at—the new revelation he had received.

Again we lose sight of him until, in 1168, he entered the Cistercian Abbey of Corazzo and was ordained priest. There he gave himself up to the study of the Bible in the light of his revelation. Later the monks insisted on his becoming their Abbot, although against his will, for the duties of that position left him no time for study; but in 1181, Pope Lucius III released him from this burden and gave him permission to live in any Cistercian house favourable for his work.

The most intimate view we have of Joachim comes from the pen of Luke, Archbishop of Cosenza, who as a young man was a monk at the monastery of Casamare, where in 1183 the prophet was an honoured guest of the Abbot. Luke writes of his first impression of him: 'I marvelled that a man of such reputation and so efficacious in his speech should be wearing such old and debased clothes . . . but I heard afterwards that all through his life he cared nothing for the vileness of his dress.' Yet Luke soon became Joachim's devoted secretary, sitting at his feet day and night diligently taking down his words. He describes the seer's devotion at Mass, when his 'dead leaf face' would be all aglow with angelic fervour at the elevation of the Host; and sometimes Luke saw him kneeling in ecstasy with hands and eyes raised as though he saw Christ face to face and was speaking to him.

When Joachim left Casamare, the faithful Luke went with him to the hermitage of Pietrelata and accompanied him later on his journeys. He tells us that the authority of the Abbot was great among men of the world, and his presence was considered a greater protection for a city than a mighty army. Joachim used his influence in the cause of peace. When the Emperor Henry VI—the ruthless son of Barbarossa—was subduing Southern Italy, the Abbot entered his camp and persuaded him to spare the towns of Calabria.

Italy was then divided against herself by the struggle between Pope and Emperor for supreme authority in Christendom, and by the powerful and contentious communes of the North; while Rome was torn by political factions. Yet the doughty Abbot

moved about fearlessly, constantly denouncing the evils which he thought foreshadowed the coming of Anti-Christ. He inspired awe and respect in the populace, for all knew that he asked nothing for himself and desired only that his message of pure evangelic love might be heard.

In 1195 we find him in Rome with the Abbot of a French Cistercian monastery. They discussed the question of Joachim's prophecy in front of the Curia; Joachim maintaining that his gift of prophecy was a revelation of God. Thinking that some Cistercians had become preoccupied with worldly affairs, Joachim founded a more austere branch of the Order and made the head Abbey, Flora, his headquarters for the rest of his life, and it was here that he completed his three works.

In 1200 he wrote a literary testament to the monks who would have charge of his works after his death. In this he writes: 'These books were written in obedience to the command of Pope Lucius III, and they met with the approval of Popes Urban III and Clement III. Yet, although I am unconscious of it, there may be things in them that need correction', and he enjoins on the Abbots to send them as quickly as possible to the Holy See for examination, for 'I am ever ready to accept what the Papal See shall decree and never to defend my own opinions against the holy faith . . . believing that although for awhile it may be tossed by storms, it will not fail even to the consummation of the world.'

Joachim's fame as a prophet rests on his interpretation of the Scriptures as the record of a gradual spiritual development of mankind in history to be perfected in a future age—the Third Kingdom—in fulfilment of the Apocalyptic hope. In this vision of spiritual progress—which, he claimed, had come to him as a revelation—he saw three epochs: the Age of the Father—in the Old Testament; the Age of the Son—in the New Testament; and the Age of the Holy Spirit—in a future dispensation.

'In the first', he says, 'men lived in fear as under the Law; in the second they live in faith, by the new Covenant; and in the third they will burn with love.' In the third epoch the 'spiritual movers of men' will preach the Everlasting Gospel. 'What is this Gospel?' he asks, and explains: 'It is that of which St John speaks in the Apocalypse: "I saw an angel of God flying in the midst of Heaven and to him was given the everlasting gospel." This gospel proceeds from the Gospel of Christ. For "the letter killeth but the

spirit quickeneth". Truth itself saith: "when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth." This, then, is the work that the Holy Spirit will work in us. He will lift our minds to heavenly desires—for as God, when and as he wills, he can transform our hearts from carnal desires to the love of heavenly things, so that, in some way, we shall begin to be other men.'

In the above passage Joachim has shown that the Everlasting Gospel will not supersede the Gospel of Christ, but as he has stated elsewhere, it cannot be drawn up in writing like the Scriptures. Yet to receive it the teaching of Christ must first be assimilated. Daring as was his thinking, Joachim had a deep reverence for tradition, believing that 'knowledge of the past is the key to the future' and 'each new age comprehends the past in itself'. He found confirmation of his 'revelation' in the symbolism of the Scriptures. 'There is nothing durable on earth', he wrote, 'but so long as we look through a glass darkly we must cling to symbols.'

His theory is embodied in three works: *The Exposition of the Apocalypse*, *The Concordance of the Old and New Testaments*, and *The Psaltery of Ten Strings*. All three works contain the theory of the Three Dispensations, developed from the symbolism in the Bible. The mysticism that pervades them links Joachim with the early Cistercians, and with the great Syrian mystic, Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, who so profoundly influenced the Middle Ages. Although the idea of three Dispensations in history occurs in the writings of St Augustine and of earlier writers, Joachim carried the theme further by his prophecy that in the Third Age, the Kingdom of God would be realized on earth, and in time, by the intervention of the Holy Spirit.

It was this exhilarating thought that brought to so many whose efforts seemed fruitless at that time, 'hope, expectation, and desire', and 'something ever more about to be'.

Joachim has been called 'the spiritual son of St Bernard of Clairvaux', traces of whose influence are to be found in his writings. He had in common with the Saint—'our Bernard', as he called him—a distrust of the purely rationalist movement of his age, and a strong ethical bias in his teaching. Like St Bernard, he hated heresy and worked for the unity of the Church. On the other hand, although he was obedient to the Pope and orthodox in his observance of the Faith, there was a revolutionary strain in him (of which he seems to have been unconscious) which lent

support to the social reformers, notably the Franciscan 'Spirituals' of the thirteenth century. Joachim was a visionary struggling to convey spiritual meanings that lie beyond the usages of grammar and the power of words. As a consequence, confusion arose when his sayings were torn from their context.

As a mystic he was unusual in seeing the spiritual destiny of the individual, in relation to that of the whole of Christendom, and of all mankind. He was the precursor of St Francis of Assisi and foretold the coming of the two new Orders who 'would live not according to ordinary monastic life but in apostolic poverty among the people'. These would be the regenerators and spiritual movers of men in a new age. Not unnaturally, the followers of St Francis and St Dominic saw in this prophecy an assurance of their spiritual leadership in the third epoch; while the seer's vision of 'the angelic man' led the Franciscans to identify their founder with the Angel of the Everlasting Gospel.

Happily for Joachim, he did not live to know of the controversy that arose around his name, nor of the spurious works fathered on him in the thirteenth century. He died in ecstasy at Flora in 1202. In Calabrian churches they sang for a long time an antiphon in honour of the great prophet, of whom Isaias might have written: 'Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty and behold the land that is very far off.'



POINT OF VIEW

The Apostle as Poet: An Objection

MICHAEL SHAYER

THERE are two ways of receiving Fr Pepler's article. The first is *contextually*: a man is writing in a certain intellectual tradition, writing for others like-minded, and his remarks should be interpreted by the effect they were designed to have on that audience. With this first I am not concerned (though I am not hostile to the design); the second is *abstractly*—Is it true?—and it is in this way that I wish to comment on it. Examine carefully the description he gives, in his first paragraph, of