As mentioned above, Augustine’s influence regarding the impossibility of predicting the date of the end as well as the recommendation to not enquire about such matters is of utmost importance to understanding the reason why there are not many examples of predictive prophecy during the following centuries. In fact, during the period between 500 and 1000, what we have is an enormous expansion of the so-called imperial apocalypticism. Nevertheless, we cannot affirm that there are no interpretations at all within the Church of the period of the end. That would be a mistake.

Most of the works of this period concerning the theories of the end of time have to be classified as either pessimistic or optimistic interpretations. The first type based its expectations on the effect caused by the persecution led by the antichrist and the effects of the Last Judgement. Therefore, fear and its subsequent establishment among Christians became one of the most important vectors of this type of theorization. On the other hand, optimistic interpretations were based on the hope for a 1000-year reign of Christ and the saints, as described in Revelation 20:1–6. It was in this particular context that the legend of the Last Emperor as the one supposed to save Christianity from the antichrist’s persecution gained weight and importance.

Joachim of Fiore (c.1135–1202) is commonly known by the epithet of the “Calabrian Abbot.” As many scholars would agree, Joachim is probably one of the most important apocalyptic writers of the Middle Ages, if not one of the most influential in the centuries to follow. However, Joachim of Fiore is also an important name to remember when analysing the theories concerning historical periodization and its connection with the Church’s orthodoxy. In fact, and as M. Reeves underlines, Joachim’s concept of history has its origins within the Judeo-Christian milieu. Therefore, his philosophy of history is linear,

1 Potestà, “Radical Apocalyptic Movements in the Late Middle Ages.”
from creation until the end, although we cannot say that it does not include any cyclical features. As this scholar writes, “Joachim combined precisely the annually returning order of the Church’s liturgy with the onward march of history towards it final Pentecost.” Joachim of Fiore’s work additionally represents an answer to many questions raised by the belief in the coming of a Last Emperor before the release of the antichrist and the beginning of the millennium supposed to anticipate the Last Judgement and, consequently, the establishment of a new age, the one of the kingdom of God.

The works produced by Joachim of Fiore require a deeper level of analysis than we can attain at this moment. Nevertheless, his work is important in several aspects for our line of research. If on the one hand we have to understand Joachim as one of the most important theorists after the failed attempt of a Church reform undertaken by Gregory VII, then on the other hand, Joachim follows in a certain measure the reformation principles when he returns the leading role during the end to the Church, contradicting in such a way the theorists of the Imperium.

Joachim is one of the strongest promoters of the theory of the Pater Angelicus, which transfers to the person of the pope the leading role during the period that would anticipate the coming of the antichrist. In this fashion, Joachim relegates the emperor to the role of an observer, a simple courtier at the papacy court. Therefore, the importance of his work in the reestablishment of the Church’s supremacy is fundamental.

Joachim’s work, especially when concerning his interpretation of the role of history, does not follow Augustine’s principles. According to Joachim, the end of time would take place within history and not beyond it, as Augustine had previously defined. Joachim built a particular theory of the course of history based on both the septets and the triads. In this way, he agreed with Augustine when he mentioned the existence of seven periods, but he innovated when he inserted a description of history based on the Holy Trinity. This Trinitarian scheme is one of the most important aspects of his work, as we will observe later.

---


3 Ibid., p. 270.