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An Identity-Seeking Model of Approaching Tradition: Joachim of Fiore and the Lombardian Critique **

Abstract: The aim of this article is to analyze the way in which Joachim of Fiore approaches the doctrine of the Trinity present in the first book of the *Sentences* of Peter the Lombard and the consequences that the critique made by the Abbot will have upon the further understanding of the history of ideas regarding versions of biblical exegesis (allegorical, symbolical or institutional, literal) and the doctrine of salvation. Concepts such as quaternity and similitude are put into discussion while the article focuses on developing a correct understanding of the three statuses and the two *tempora* through which Joachim of Fiore divides history in order to better highlight the evolution of the idea of salvation and how this concept operates in Christianity. An analysis of the three images (the tree of the two *tempora*; the tree of the Trinity; the Trinitarian circles) present in Joachim's *Liber figurarum* has the purpose of detailing the figurative thought and understanding of the Scripture realized by the Abbot in his own very unique manner.

Keywords: Joachim of Fiore; tradition; *Sentences*; Peter the Lombard; doctrine of the Trinity; medieval philosophy.

Reading the *Four Books of Sentences* that Peter the Lombard wrote around 1150, Joachim of Fiore must have stopped his attention especially on the first book that speaks about the Mystery of the Trinity. He must not have been very pleased about what he found regarding the doctrine of the Trinity that Peter synthesized in this work and decided to express his opinion on the matter in what it shall be known as the *Liber Figurarum* in which he illustrated two unique anti-Lombard figures. The images will be later known as the figure of the Trinitarian Circles and the figure of the Trinitarian Tree. These figures had no other intention than the one to demonstrate the criticism regarding Peter the Lombard's Trinitarian views in the *Sentences* and to show what he thought to be the authentic approach of the relationships between the Persons of the Trinity. Joachim does not only reject the approach of

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** **Acknowledgement:** This work was supported by a grant of Ministry of Research and Innovation, CNCS - UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.1-PD-2016-0436, within PNCDI III.

Lombardus through the work that he wrote, but also offers his own interpretation that he considers to be the authentic one in discussing the problem of intra-Trinitarian relationships. Joachim considered that the Lombard had proposed in his work an understanding of the Trinity that would lead to a heretical concept of *quaternity* instead of trinity, a concept that may define a fourth part of the Godhead. Instead of this approach, Joachim will propose a conception of the Trinal *essentia* as opposed to a *quaternitas* that might have emerged from Peter the Lombard's texts. Why is it important to shed light on this critique that determined the debate regarding the doctrine of the Trinity?

The importance of reaching an accurate and informed perspective on the aforementioned approach is from a cultural and scientific point of view crucial. Mainly because the *Sentences* represented for years the main source of theological teachings and lectures in medieval universities: a commentary on the *Sentences* was required of every master of theology, and was part of the examination system. At the end of lectures on the Lombard's work, a student could apply for bachelor status within the theology faculty. The importance of the *Sentences* to medieval theology and philosophy lies to a significant extent in the overall framework they provide to theological and philosophical discussion. The doctors of the Church that have substantiated the doctrines wrote *Commentaries* on the *Sentences*; authors like Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, William of Ockham have used the definitions and interpretations that Peter the Lombard arranged in his four books of the *Sentences*. If their primary source besides the Gospels and the works of the Fathers of the Church is corrupted by heretical opinions on the fundamental dogma of the Christian Church, the Trinitarian dogma that is, then the entire Christianity faces a serious and difficult problem to surpass regarding its faith and fundamental beliefs. This is also what Joachim of Fiore may have firstly thought when trying to discuss the lombardian approach and presented his critique. In this sense, it is imperious that a proper research should be conducted in this direction in order to discover whether da Fiore's critique to the Lombard's approach on the Trinity is really valid or not.

One of the difficult issues is to clarify whether this position has been maintained by Joachim throughout his entire work and whether his critique may be observed in his later works as well. The current approach regarding this aspect expressed by Harold Lee in "The Anti-Lombard Figures of Joachim of Fiore: A Reinterpretation" (1980, 130-131) is that the anti-Lombard position presented by the Abbot represents merely an early and not entirely successful attempt of da Fiore to represent the complexity of the Trinal relationships. Joachim saw in Lombard's *Sentences*, as Lee (1980, 133) argues, *a serious threat to his own views on the Trinity, and began a controversy which was ultimately to cause a confrontation between supporters of the two men at the Lateran Council of 1215*, at which time da Fiore's views on the Trinity were already considered to be heretical. In this sense, his approach referred to the fact that there exists a single divine

essentia of the Three Persons, and that, notionally speaking, divine essence could not beget divine essence; the Father could not beget the Son, for in a metaphysical understanding of the problem, both existed simultaneously as a unity of divine being. As the Father could not be separated from His divine attributes like wisdom or power, which were not beget from His divine essence, so He did not beget the divine essence of the Son (Lee 1980, 133). When speaking about the Trinity one must not imply any distinction with respect to divine essence, is what Joachim of Fiore emphasizes, or else one may speak about a quaternity of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and the Divine Essence or Substance.

An element of difficulty regarding a proper analysis of the exposed issue is that Joachim's treatise *De unitate et essentiae Trinitatis* in which he expressed his arguments defined as a significant attack on Lombard's Trinitarian views is now lost. The work may only be observed by analyzing fragments present in the decree of the Lateran Council of 1215 (Mansi 1758-1798, 981-983) and in the Protocol of Anagni (Denifle and Ehrle 1885, 49-142). The Decree of the fourth Lateran Council held in Rome in the year of 1215 had as main themes of discussion aspects such as transubstantiation, the papal primacy and the behavior of clerics. The second canon speaks about the condemnation as heretics of the doctrines of Joachim of Fiore and Amalric of Bena. The doctrine of Amalric of Bena has been earlier condemned by the University of Paris in 1204 (the act of condemnation being ratified by Pope Innocent III) because it would have asserted a form of pantheism and the apocatastasis. The Protocol of Anagni was conceived by a papal committee at the initiative of Pope Alexander IV and had the main purpose to establish the future of the Franciscan Order and the theology that the Order must adopt. This aspect is necessary due to the event at the University of Paris in which William of Saint-Amour produces an ecclesiological dispute regarding the Mendicants Order by writing the work *De periculis novissimorum temporum*. The work will be condemned by the pope in Anagni at the date of October 5th 1256. Earlier, in 1254, Gerardo di Borgo San Donnino wrote an Introduction at the Eternal Gospel that represents merely an interpretation and a summary of Joachim's writings regarding the book of *Revelation* and what is assumed to be a Commentary to Jeremiah falsely attributed to da Fiore containing a rough critique of papacy and of the imperial power of the time. Gerardo asserts that the Church of the second Status of History will be destroyed along with the Scripture and the traditional doctrine, all of them being replaced by the writings of Joachim of Fiore. The Protocol of Anagni condemns the work of Gerardo and this condemnation has the effect of producing a fracture between the ecclesiastic hierarchy and the Franciscan followers of the Abbot (Collins 2002, 121-123).

Joachim also charged Peter the Lombard that he might have introduced an erroneous concept of *similitudo* of the Three Persons and did not explicitly

presented the separateness of the Trinity (Ottaviano 1934, 83-84). A limitation and research difficulty occur in analyzing this argument due to the fact that it has not been clearly stated whether this work *Liber Contra Lombardum* is really authentic and may be attributed to da Fiore himself. An accurate research imposes upon establishing the correct link between Joachim and this treatise in order to validate its authenticity, because another scholar, that is, F. Foberti (1934, 98) in his *Gioacchino da Fiore*, claimed that the *De unitate...* was a Cistercian forgery (claim that has not been supported by other scholars) and that the *Liber contra Lombardum* is not by da Fiore at all, but represents actually an earliest version of the pseudo-Joachite works dating from approximately 1235. Another difficulty of the issue is to compare the two approaches that seem to be, at a first glance, very different from each other: Joachim has a more figural approach to Biblical exegesis, and especially of the *Revelation*, whereas Peter is more dialectical when interpreting the Scriptures.

The limitations of current approaches regarding the issue are also present due to certain disagreements that still exist among scholars about the weight that should be accorded to various patterns (the dominant patterns are of twos and threes, of sevens and twelves and everyone who reads just but a single work of the Abbot of Fiore may find interesting aspects regarding numerology and the symbolic of numbers) that illustrate Joachim's peculiar theory of Scripture. This aspect represents a major source of the differing judgements on the abbot's theology of the Trinity and of history (McGinn 1971, 32). In this sense, a successful approach has been made by A. Crocco (1955, 192-196; 1957, 218-232) when clarifying some of the problems connected with Joachim's Trinitarian theology such as the influence of the Greek theology or of the School of Gilbert of Poitiers and establishing that da Fiore's theology represents a reworking of traditional Latin sources with the presence of some additions that are not untypical of other twelfth century Trinitarian theories. Opinion also asserted by M.-D. Chenu (1947, 167) in discussing the influence of the Greek Fathers on the Abbot's understanding of the Trinity. Nevertheless, this perspective has to be updated in the lights of newer texts discoveries in order to adequately define whether Joachim indeed had a conscious reaction against the Scholastic application of logical categories and distinctions to theology when preferring a more archaic and symbolic approach of the Scripture and displaying a not so profound, but correct, knowledge of the Fathers.

Bernard McGinn considers that Joachim's accusation that Peter the Lombard has destroyed the Trinity by making the divine essence really distinct from three persons results from a misunderstanding of the terminology and context of Lombard's thought: he clearly intermingled what would be later distinguished as *procession* and *mission* speaking from a traditionalist point of view against new theological trends from a not very well informed position (McGinn 1971, 33). This also might represent a limited approach and as a

researcher, I could not just consider or take for granted the fact that Joachim did not know or simply did not accept theological terminology when defining his doctrine. I am pretty sure that a rigorous text analysis, when this is possible, might elucidate the aspects and shed more light into the real theological views of Joachim of Fiore due to possible new texts that have been discovered in the later years and that not have been properly studied until this moment.

Fiona Robb (1997, 27-32) argues that the dispute between da Fiore and Petrus Lombardus must be analyzed both on the level of method and on that of doctrine in order to have a better view on the arguments about the orthodoxy of Joachim's Trinitarian thought. A number of textual studies comparing the Abbot's extant work with the report in the decree have reached the conclusion that Joachim's theory and application of analogy were generally beyond reproach and did not deserve the severe treatment they received after the Lateran decree.

E. Randolph Daniel (1980, 473-478) emphasizes the fact that although traditional views regarding Joachim's declared heretical doctrine of the Trinity were substantially surpassed by Marjorie Reeves and Beatrice Hirsch-Reich when studying the *Liber figurarum*, the division of history operated by the Abbot into two *tempora* (from Adam to Christ and from Christ to the end of history) also and not only the well-known three *status* or eras (of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit) has not yet been properly studied although it plays a major role in Joachim's understanding of history and therefore, of the Trinitarian doctrine. The two divisions seem to be simultaneously irreconcilable and one has to decipher the accurate meaning of the twofold pattern maybe as *institutional* and the threefold one as *mystical*, but this aspect has to be further studied and researched in order to have a clear view on the matter. For a better understanding of the way in which Joachim interprets the Scripture and understands the doctrine of the Trinity, for the way in which he builds his theory regarding the eras and the statuses of history it is of most relevance to analyze a few images extracted from the *Liber figurarum*, the Tree of the Two Tempora, the Tree of the Trinity, and the Trinitarian Circles.

The image of the Tree (see Figure 1) representing the two eras show, as one may observe in the image below, starting from the lower part up above, the institutions and the persons implied in the history of salvation: from Adam to Jesus Christ one may identify the time of the Old Testament that coincides with the era of the Father. From the first coming of Christ until the end of history it is represented the time of the New Testament, a time made of the era of the Son and of the final era of the Holy Spirit. The face of Christ dominates the center (the First Coming and the Incarnation-Death-Resurrection as the time of salvation and restoration of man) and the upper plan of the Tree of history (the Second Coming-the Universal Resurrection-the Final Judgement). In the lower part of the tree are

symmetrically represented according to the historical-biblical information the 12 tribes of Israel (ten branches where there are written the names of the tribes starting from the patriarch Jacob and two branches from the figure of the prophet Hosea). In the upper part of the image one may discover the 12 Christian churches starting from the image of Christ. Along the body of the tree there are the 63 generations present in the era of the Father ending with Christ, generations divided in three groups of: from Adam to Isaac, from Jacob to Amaziah, from Hosea to Christ. The 63 generations from the era of the Son starting with Hosea are divided in three groups of 21 and one may observe that during these 21 generations the final part of the era of the Father and the initial one of the era of the Son are contemporaneously intermingled. A particular aspect of this image is that the era of the Holy Ghost is not depicted. This era is only prefigured through a verse that reminds the time when Prophet Elijah will come back on the face of the Earth as a way of renewing the Church (in the upper part of the Tree- in the left side of the image). Because only the Father knows the time and the events that will happen in that time, Joachim chooses not to illustrate them.

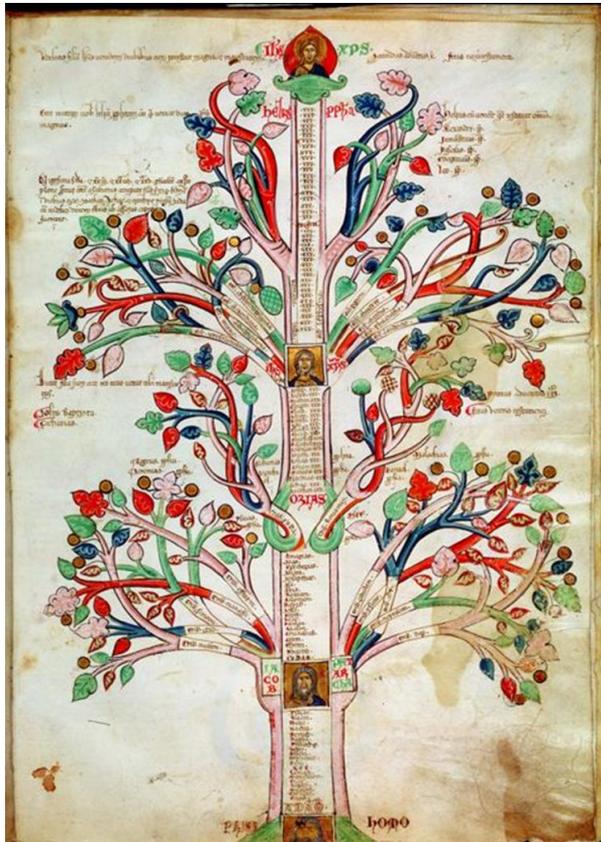


Figure 1. The Tree of the Two Tempora
(Source https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liber_Figurarum)

In the image of the Trinitarian Tree (see Figure 2) one may identify the vertical evolution of history as a mark of rectitude and three circles as an instantiation of the three Divine Persons, and, of course, of the three temporal status. The Three starts from Noah and it is formed through the mixture of two branches as a mark of history generated by two of his three sons, Shem and Japheth, the third branch, that of Ham, remains dry, without evolving. During the era of the Father (the first circle at the ground of the tree) if the two branches have less leaves, the one of Shem has more. At the beginning of the era of the Son (the second circle) the branch of Shem becomes the Judaic people, and the one of Japheth becomes the Pagan or Gentile people. During this status the Pagan people assimilates Christianity and earns more leaves than the Judaic one that rejects Christ. The era of the Holy Ghost (the third circle of the upper part of the image) shows that the two people are blossoming together because the Jewish people will also convert to Christianity. The abundancy of fruits, leaves, and flowers, the diversity of colors present at this level symbolize the glory, the triumph of the universal Church in the era of the Holy Spirit. In the image one may also find three medallions present at the base of each circle. They represent Noah (the first one bellow) as a symbol of the Father, the other Christ and a dove as the Holy Ghost.



Figure 2. The Trinitarian Tree

(Source: https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liber_Figurarum)

The most representative image for the doctrine of the Trinity remains the one of the Trinitarian Circles (see Figure 3). The image of the Trinity is the one that dominates the time of the two Testaments, the entire course of the history of salvation. The first circle expresses the status of the Father, the second the one of the Son, the third the one of the Holy Ghost (the different colors of the circles symbolize the Trinity of the Persons itself: green the Father Creator of nature, blue the Son that has come down on earth from Heaven, red the Holy Ghost who is love). The unity of the divine substance is indicated by the oval middle in the conjoint center of the three circles. The intra-Trinitarian relations are delimited by the intersection of the circumferences and by the succession of letters present inside them (the name of God, the Tetragrammaton IEUE in this case): **I** (Father)-**E** (Holy Ghost)-**U** (Son)-**E** (Holy Ghost). The Holy Ghost comes also from the Father (**IE**), as from the Son (**UE**). **I** - the God of Abraham, the first time of the law through Moses; **E** - the God of Isaac, the time of the Gospel and the law, Elijah; **U** - the beginning of the time of the typical intellect, the fulfillment of the Gospel, John the Baptist; **E** - the God of Jacob, the beginning of the time of the anagogic intellect, the time of the intelligence of the Gospel, Elijah.

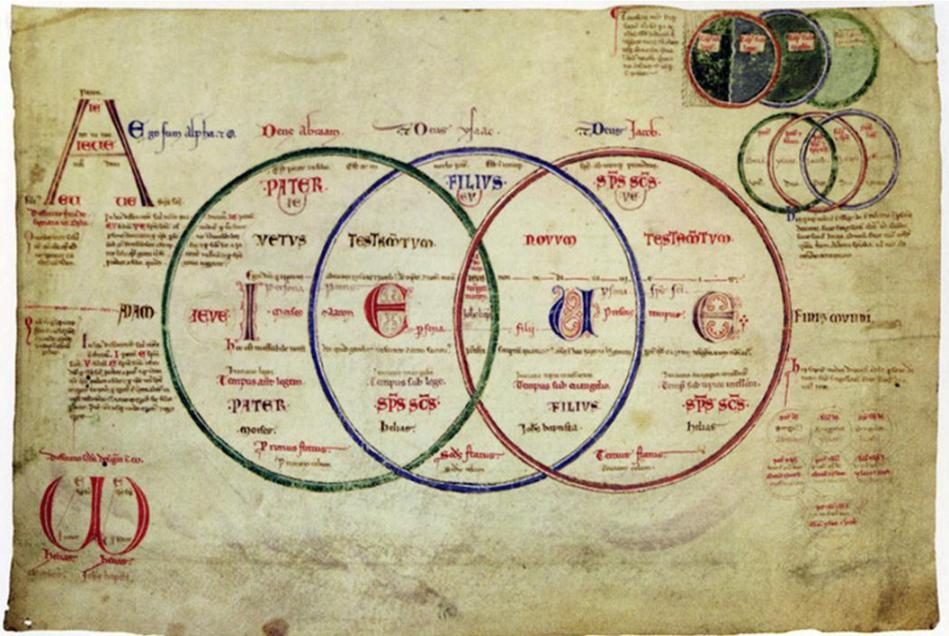


Figure 3. The Trinitarian Circles
(Source: https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liber_Figurarum)

In the image, on the lateral sides, one may also observe the Greek characters *alpha* and *omega* as capital letters and a few series of smaller circles.

Alpha illustrates the way in which the two Persons, the Son and the Holy Ghost, come from the One, the Father (in the center it is written “Trinity - one single God”). *Omega* shows how One, the Spirit, comes from two, the Father and the Son. The smaller circles indicate periods in the history of salvation according to the four steps of spiritual evolution (the time when the law was received, the time when the law had to be obeyed, the time when the Gospel had to be obeyed, the time of the typical intellect); then the lower circles show five ways through which one can understand the intra-Trinitarian relations and seven ways through which they can be defined in all possible combinations.

This might seem a rather interesting challenge when one discusses Joachim’s critique on the Lombard’s doctrine of the Trinity as a threat to the possibility of salvation operated by Christ according to the doctrine as it has been formulated following Lombardus’ rationale writings, a decision that was to shape the perception of twelfth-century Trinitarian debates until modern times.

Also an outstanding analysis of the issue has been made by Peter Gemeinhardt (2012, 16-27) who proposes to re-discuss some striking features of the abbot’s Trinitarian thought in order to shed new light on the debate and Joachim’s condemnation in 1215. The idea is that the controverted writings of Joachim have to be interpreted as resulting from spiritual experience shared to others through means of analogies and allegories and not from intellectual effort and this clearly reshapes the way in which the notion *similitudo* was defined by da Fiore.

As Gian Luca Potestà (2004, 56-67), da Fiore decided to defend himself by counter-attacking and moving the conflict to a different terrain from the one on which he had been attacked, from hermeneutics to the theology of Trinity; but after a proper reading of the work *Psalterium decem chordarum* in which Lombardus is never explicitly named and attacked by Joachim as it had been supposed in the lost work (*De unitate ...*) and only the accepted doctrine attributed to him is merely discussed, one discovers by confronting the text of the Lateran Council that the authors of the decree interpreted the treatise in a more extreme sense than it was intended and that they actually manipulated their source to fit their desired frame.

Reviewing the aforementioned issues it is evident that the topic arises many questions about the real critique expressed by Joachim of Fiore on Peter the Lombard’s doctrine of Trinity. Its consequences on the discussion about tradition and creating one’s own auctorial identity by approaching tradition in a critique manner are scientifically motivating and of most importance for the entire academia community interested in the history of ideas, medieval philosophy and Christian theology.

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