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## Concepts, Senses and Interpretations in the Works of Joachim of Fiore Regarding the Lombardian Critique of the Doctrine of the Trinity\*\*

**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to examine 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 by means of his works such as *Psalterium decem cordarum*, *Tractatus in expositionem vite et regule beati Benedicti* and to correlate them to the possible arguments presented in the decree of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 that condemned a certain work of Joachim of Fiore now lost. The article compares the two methods of interpretation, the dialectical one of Peter the Lombard influenced by Abelard and Anselm, and the symbolical-analogical one of Joachim of Fiore very similar to the approach of Roscelin of Compiègne. The critique, the debates, the condemnations and rehabilitations remain a mark of the way in which the history and philosophy of ideas have shaped the Western way of thinking until the modern times.

**Keywords:** Joachim of Fiore; Roscelin of Compiègne; *res*; Peter the Lombard; doctrine of the Trinity; Fourth Lateran Council; medieval philosophy.

The controversy of Joachim of Fiore's critique to the interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity exposed by Peter the Lombard in the first book of the *Sentences* may be better understood if one deepens the research of the primary sources that may shed light over this issue. The passage that may have led to the critical observation done by Joachim of Fiore regarding the fact that Peter the Lombard has transformed the Trinity into a *quaternity* is the following one that contains the concept *res: ita tres res dicimus, ut eisdem esse unam quandam summam rem confiteamur* (*Sententiae*, I dist., 25, c. 2, §5, p. 194) and *cum enim una et summa quaedam res sit divina essentia [...]* (*Ibidem*, I dist., 5, c. 1, §6, p. 82). The word *res* as to express the essence makes Joachim think of a *quaternitas* as he cannot conceive that the ontological condition of the divine essence can be understood as a *res*, that is as a

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singular aspect and it would compromise in this sense the internal relationships of the Trinity. The essence of the Trinity is not understood as being a real and proper unity, but more like a collective one by means of similitude. The word *res* cannot express a collective noun because it refers to a singular and particular aspect as an individual, for example a singular human being and not the community where he lives. In the first book of the *Psalterium decem cordarum* (Florensis 2009, 34), Joachim defines the unity of divine essence of the three Persons as a synthesis of a plurality, it has to be understood in a relational and symbolical manner, and not as a “prisoner” of the logical concept of singularity and individuality:

*Ad aliquid ergo dicta est trinitas, ad aliquid unitas: trinitas ad vitandam singularitatem persone, unitas ad cavendam unius divisionem substantie. Aliud enim portat unitas, aliud singularitas, aliud pluralitas. Unitas ut iam dixi, de communione plurium dicta est, non de una tantam persona, quia ubi singularitas est, unitas esse non potest.*

As a resume, the passage expresses the following ideas: Trinity is to be understood in order to avoid the singularity of persons, unity to escape the division of one’s substance. Unity is about a communion of many, not of one person alone, as a singularity it cannot represent a unity.

If Peter the Lombard, follows a dialectical key of interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity proposed earlier in another dispute between Abelard and Roscelin (Mews 1997, 347-364), Joachim uses in his texts analogies and symbolical understandings of the concepts he chooses to define. Same words are used and understood in different manners and the critique evolves around the meaning of one word; a conflict of interpretations between two different ways of approaching an idea that led to a different understanding of a doctrine. Can one speak about a limit of interpretation as well? One should be aware that a limit of interpretation easily may hide a manipulation of an interpretation that directs the sense of a word towards the desired approach of a subject.

In the paper *L’ordine dell’aldilà nel pensiero di Gioacchino da Fiore* presented at the 9° Congresso Internazionale di Studi Gioachimiti, 19-21 settembre 2019 in San Giovanni in Fiore, professor Alessandro Ghisalberti from the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano has discussed exactly the resemblance between the two terminological disputes: Roscelin-Abelard, Joachim of Fiore-Peter the Lombard. The dispute from the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century between the dialectics and anti-dialectics as it was later called by different scholars follows the distinction between three types of order and hierarchies: *ordo idearum*, *ordo verborum*, *ordo rerum*. The ideas in this case are considered to be the archetypes of the divine mind mediated by the Logos that reflect in the words, especially in the words of the revelation. In this sense, as Professor Ghisalberti notices, one may assert a plenary correspondence between the order of the ideas (*ordo idearum*) and the order of the

words (*ordo verborum*) that is strictly connected to the order of things (*ordo rerum*). The order of things expresses a stable order as long as it is linked to experience and senses, logics and ontology are disconnected and the language of sciences does not ensure that one understands in an objective manner the real nature of things. These are the main ideas exposed by Roscelin in fragments of his writings gathered from different authors that have criticized him and from his remaining epistle to Abelard. The point where the tendency of interpretation seems to be similar between Joachim and Roscelin is to find the correct words to define the Trinity, one God in three Persons, without the fact that the individuality of persons may destroy the unity of essence. One essence and three individual persons is a difficult idea to accept according to a dialectical vocabulary and only revelation through means of symbolism and analogies may step in to shed some light into the matter.

In the article about Roscelin of Compiègne from the *Enciclopedia Filosofica*, Giulio d'Onofrio (2006, 9836-9839) observes that Roscelin considers scientific language merely as a convention invented by men in order to describe and understand in a practical manner the unpredictable aspects from the created universe as marks of absolute divine freedom. The problem in this case is the fact that Roscelin rejects the instruments of the liberal arts as being able to create adequately intellectual objects that correspond to the theological reality of the Trinitarian mystery. The gap between the world and order of things and the world and order of ideas remains for Roscelin insurmountable, especially when it comes to discussions referring to the Trinity and the Incarnation. He does not want to introduce a conceptual distinction to define the way in which there are three Persons of the Trinity and, in the same sense, the substances as the doctrine understands it, because speaking of a substantial unity in the case of God in the same way as different finite sciences speak about created things, would lead to two different situations for the human intellect: to consider the divine Persons as distinctive *res* or to admit that if they are a unique one *res* would mean, for example, to acknowledge that the Father and the Holy Spirit also took part in the Incarnation of the Son. Different Persons do not have to imply the existence of different identities is the assertion of Roscelin and if faith does not establish the truth, because the truth transcends it, at least it should not assert what is false when interpreting the revelation.

Peter the Lombard follows the hermeneutical line of Anselm and Abelard opposed to the ideas expressed by Roscelin in his *Epistola ad Abaelardum* (Roscelin 1845-55, vol. CLXXVIII; col. 357C-372A) in understanding the unity of the divine essence and using the word *res* in the above mentioned passage from the *Sentences*. The use of the expression *quaedam summa res* and the word *res* to define the essence recalls the *quaternitas* as *res* is understood here as a singular, individual aspect. Joachim understands to interpret the

word *res* differently, more close to the sense given by Roscelin to the word as one may observe by reading the passage of the article discussing the condemnation of Joachim, and this is what brought him in fact the condemnation of the Lateran Council from 1215 (Alberigo *et al* 1991, 231-233):

*Damnatus ergo et reprobamus libellum seu tractatum, quem Abbas Joachim edidit contra Magistrum Petrum Lombardum, de unitate seu essentia Trinitatis, appellans ipsum haereticum et insanum pro eo, quod in suis dixit Sententiis: "Quoniam quaedam summa res est Pater, et Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus, et illa non est generans, neque genita, neque procedens". Unde asserit, quod ille non tam Trinitatem, quam quaternitatem astruebat in Deo, videlicet tres personas, et illam communem essentiam quasi quartam; manifeste protestans, quod nulla res est, quae sit Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus; nec est essentia, nec substantia nec natura: quamvis concedat, quod Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus sunt una essentia, una substantia unaque natura. Verum unitatem huiusmodi non veram et propriam, sed quasi collectivam et similitudinariam esse fatetur, quemadmodum dicuntur multi homines unus populus, et multi fideles una Ecclesia [...]. Non enim (ut ait) fideles Christi sunt unum, i. e. quaedam una res, quae communis sit omnibus, sed hoc modo sunt unum, id est una Ecclesia, propter catholicae fidei unitatem, et tandem unum regnum, propter unionem indissolubilis caritatis quemadmodum in canonica Joannis Apostoli epistola legitur Quia "tres sunt, qui testimonium dant in caelo, Pater, et Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus: et hi tres unum sunt" (1 Jo 5, 7), statimque subiungitur: "Et tres sunt, qui testimonium dant in terra: Spiritus, aqua et sanguis et hi tres unum sunt" (1 Jo 5, 8), sicut in quibusdam codicibus invenitur.*

*Nos autem, sacro approbante Concilio, credimus et confitemur cum Petro Lombardo, quod una quaedam summa res est, incomprehensibilis quidem et ineffabilis, quae veraciter est Pater, et Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus; tres simul personae, ac singillatim quaelibet earundem: et ideo in Deo solummodo Trinitas est, non quaternitas quia quaelibet trium personarum est illa res, videlicet substantia, essentia seu natura divina: quae sola est universorum principium, praeter quod aliud inveniri non potest: et illa res non est generans, neque genita, nec procedens, sed est Pater, qui generat, et Filius, qui gignitur, et Spiritus Sanctus, qui procedit: ut distinctiones sint in personis, et unitas in natura.*

*Licet igitur "alius sit Pater, alius Filius, alius Spiritus Sanctus, non tamen aliud": sed id quod est Pater, est Filius et Spiritus Sanctus idem omnino ut secundum orthodoxam et catholicam fidem consubstantiales esse credantur. Pater enim ab aeterno Filium generando, suam substantiam ei dedit [...]. Ac dici non potest, quod partem substantiae suae illi dederit, et partem ipse sibi retinuerit, cum substantia Patris indivisibilis sit, utpote simplex omnino sed nec dici potest, quod Pater in Filium transtulerit suam substantiam generando, quasi sic dederit eam Filio, quod non retinuerit ipsam sibi alioquin desiisset esse substantia. Patet ergo, quod sine ulla diminutione Filius nascendo substantiam Patris accepit, et ita Pater et Filius habent eandem substantiam: et sic eadem res est Pater et Filius. nec non et Spiritus Sanctus ab utroque procedens.[...]*

*Si quis igitur sententiam vel doctrinam praefati Ioachim in hac parte defendere vel approbare praesumpserit, tamquam haereticus ab omnibus confutetur.*

This passage is highlighting the fact that Joachim does not accept an ontological status similar to the one of *res* for the divine essence, because this would attempt to the nature of the relationships of the Trinitarian

persons. *Ordo idearum* cannot coincide with the *ordo verborum* and the *ordo rerum* in the way that one understands the created world and its order. If *res*, according to the logical interpretation, can be applied only to singular aspects, the divine essence becomes a singular aspect apart from the three Persons of the Trinity thus transforming itself into a *quaternitas*. This is the hermeneutical critique that Joachim of Fiore sustains to the arguments and definitions of the Trinity proposed by Peter the Lombard following the line of Anselm and Abelard. The unity proposed as definition by Joachim is to be understood as a collective unity by means of similitude as the analogy of the believers in Christ who represent a unity for the catholic faith. The unity exposed by the Fourth Lateran Council along with Peter the Lombard asserts that each of the three divine Persons represents a substance or essence or nature that does neither generate nor proceed and isn't generated, only the Father generates, only the Son is generated, and only the Holy Ghost proceeds. The actions distinguish the Persons; the unity is given by the nature or the substance of the Persons (Potestà 2017, 203). Although the Council of 1215 condemns this particular treaty and the interpretation against Peter the Lombard, the memory of Joachim of Fiore, his other works and the Abbey he has founded remain very highly esteemed and appreciated also due to the fact that by means of a letter, the Abbot himself has offered his works to be analyzed and corrected by the Church. Joachim is not considered a heretic, only this idea has been condemned as such, the article of the second canon ends by saying that only if a person intends to maintain and spread the condemned doctrine he should be considered a heretic and therefore rejected as such by the Catholic Church.

In 1220 pope Honorius III announces through a bulla that the Abbot Joachim is a catholic man and not a heretic as it could have been understood by the fact that the treaty published by Joachim against Peter the Lombard has been condemned at the Lateran Council in 1215. The bulla wants to clarify the many public rumors that have been spread on this occasion exaggerating the fact that neither the treaty nor the exposed doctrine has been considered as heretic, but the Abbot himself. The falsity of the rumors has caused much distress among clerics and laics who followed the Abbot making them renounce the tranquility of contemplation and rebel against the rules of the Order founded by Joachim of Fiore. The bulla continues by expressing the will of Joachim exposed in the letter he personally wrote through which he gave all his works to be corrected and analyzed by the Church and declared himself a true member of the Roman-Catholic Church. The purpose of the bulla is clearly once more stated at the ending of the document, Joachim is a catholic man and the religious institution (the abbey and the order) that he has founded in Calabria is valid, any other person considering the facts differently and spreading more false aspects on the matter will be punished.

After an insight meant to shed more light on the matter of the critique made by Joachim of Fiore to Peter the Lombard and the consequences that the Abbot had to suffer from this critique I would like to refer to a passage present in one of his works, namely *Tractatus in expositionem vite et regule beati Benedicti* from the folio 145ra, cod. 322 present at the Biblioteca Antoniana in Padova. The fragment is the only remaining explicit proof that Joachim had personally criticized and attacked Peter the Lombard:

[...] *abolita primo impietate Sabellii, qui personas negavit, secundo pravitate Arrii, qui unitatem scidit, tertio blasphemia Petri, qui unitatem a Trinitate dividens quaternitatem inducit.*

What is even more interesting in this passage is the marginal note of the folio to the word *Petri* and the above added corrections on a few words of the phrase. Peter's name is marked in a square with the above added word *illorum*, *dividens* is transformed into *dividentes* and *inducit* into *inducunt* by correcting only the endings of the words. The corrections are explained by the marginal note where one may read: *hoc iuxta Later(anense) concilium corrigendum*. In this sense, the correction renders the attacked person anonymous, but the attack or the critique remains present. The reader is not facing a correction but an alternative reading version (Patschovsky 2012, 13).

In fact, the event of the critique made by Joachim of Fiore to Peter the Lombard, the condemnation of his lost treaty and the rehabilitation of his memory done by Pope Honorius III, the debate between Roscelin and Abelard around the understanding of the word *res* are all proofs that the history of ideas is a vivid mechanism of interpretations and senses. The way, in which one understands to interpret a concept, the method that one uses in ones interpretations opens multiple perspectives of approval and admiration or of critique and rejection. These perspectives are in a continuous evolution, the ideas in philosophy and history are not isolated aspects that cannot evolve or change is the thing made clear by the abovementioned authors. Men, scientists, writers of an era prefer a certain method; an interpretation of a certain concept that is valid for that era and that can be proved insufficient for the following ones to come because they cannot be universally applied in all the fields of human understanding. Joachim of Fiore understood this flexibility (that is not equal to relativity) of history, ideas and eras in all the interpretations present in his works. A further proof in this sense is even more his testament letter that allowed the Church to correct his ideas in order for them to be adapted to the proper conditions of that present time. His rehabilitation five years after the condemnation of the treaty made at the Fourth Lateran Council marks once again the vivid mechanism of interpretations and ideas. A debate is reshaped by a critique, a

condemnation by rehabilitation. The history of mankind may be understood, by means of analogy and similitude, in observing the evolution of one person and the multiple events that happen to that person along his/hers lifetime. The inheritance of Joachim of Fiore remains a lesson of the normality represented by the fluidity of history and ideas that are not given once and for all. The fact of understanding and accepting this lesson represents the key of salvation and perfection offered by Joachim of Fiore. And through this key, through this way his words are still vivid to us as they were for the people who followed him or disapproved with him in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

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