Inspiration and Authority in the Middle Ages

Prophets and their Critics from Scholasticism to Humanism

BRIAN FITZGERALD

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IN THE MIDDLE AGES

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Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation, ed. J. Quasten and J. C. Plumpe (1946–)
AFH	*Archivum franciscanum historicum*
AHDLMA	*Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age*
BML	Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana
BnF	Bibliothèque nationale de France
Borgnet	Albert the Great, *Opera omnia*, ed. A. Borgnet, 38 vols (Paris 1890–9)
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis (Turnhout, 1967–)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina (Turnhout, 1954–)
CHLC	*The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 2: *The Middle Ages*, ed. A. J. Minnis and I. R. Johnson (Cambridge, 2005)
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vienna, 1866–)
De civ.	Augustine, *De civitate dei*
De doct.	Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*
De Gen. litt.	Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*
Geyer	Albert the Great, *Opera omnia*, ed. B. Geyer et al., 37 vols (Münster 1951–)
HR	*Historiarum Rolandini, [etc.], Albertini Mussati, de gestis Henrici VII. Caes. & alia eiusdem opera* (Venice, 1635)
IMU	*Italia medioevale e umanistica*
In Hiez.	Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Hiezechihelem prophetam*
Leonine	Thomas Aquinas, *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII edita*, 26 vols (Rome, 1882–)
MEFRMA	*Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Moyen Age—temps modernes*
MLTC	*Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c.1100–c.1375: The Commentary Tradition*, ed. A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott (Oxford, 1991)
MOPH	*Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum historica*, ed. Institutum Historicum Fratrum Praedicatorum, 26 vols (Louvain/Rome/Paris, 1896–)
OOB	*S. Bonaventurae opera omnia*, ed. P. Bernardini, 10 vols (Quaracchi, 1882–1902)
Opusc. theo.	Thomas Aquinas, *Opuscula theologica*, ed. R. Verardo and R. Spiazzi, 2 vols (Turin, 1954)
Parma	Thomas Aquinas, *Opera omnia*, 25 vols (Parma, 1852–73)
PL	Patrologia Latina, ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 vols (Paris, 1844–64)
RRTC	*Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. R. L. Benson, G. Constable, and C. Lanham (Oxford, 1982)

SBO	*Sancti Bernardi opera*, ed. J. Leclercq et al., 9 vols (Rome, 1957–74)
SC	Sources chrétiennes (Paris, 1941–)
SCG	Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*
SEP	Thomas Aquinas, *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. R. Cai, 2 vols, 8th edn (Turin, 1953)
SRG	Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum
ST	Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*
Super Sent.	Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi episcopi Parisiensis*
TRHS	*Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*

Notes on Sources

I have followed the orthography of my sources, with two exceptions: in Latin words, I have generally used 'i' instead of 'j', and I have used 'v' for consonantal 'u'. I have also inserted modern punctuation and expanded manuscript abbreviations.

When I provide Latin words and phrases within the body of the text, I normally use italics when I am not reproducing the original exactly (for instance when the original word is in the accusative case and I provide the nominative) or to highlight central words or concepts. I use quotation marks for longer extracts or less common phrases, particularly when I am reproducing the original exactly.

When citing from a large series such as the Patrologia Latina, I have listed volumes in Arabic numerals. When citing from a single work divided into a few volumes, I use lower-case Roman numerals.

I refer to the titles of biblical books by the Vulgate name, for instance 1 Kings rather than 1 Samuel. All Vulgate references rely on R. Weber (ed.), *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgata versionem*, 4th edn (Stuttgart, 1994).

Introduction

Prophecy's place as a defining feature of the religious culture of the Latin Middle Ages has been clear for some time. The mid-twentieth-century historian Marjorie Reeves wrote that 'only when intelligent and educated men ceased to take prophecy seriously' did the Middle Ages truly end.[1] During the medieval period a belief flourished that important events, even those unfolding in the present moment, had been and could be foretold, whether by the Bible or by special visionaries. Reeves had in mind particularly the legacy of the twelfth-century abbot Joachim of Fiore, whose predictions of an impending new and final age of the Holy Spirit gave distinct historical shape to the future.

Important as Joachim's legacy was, however, when we look closely at what medieval people took seriously as prophecy and at those whom they accorded special authority as prophets, another story begins to emerge in which prophecy takes on new significance in surprising ways. To comprehend this story, we must expand our understanding of prophecy beyond the notion of predictions or gnomic utterances, which the word often evokes today. When we do so, we see that 'prophecy' in the Middle Ages actually had a multitude of meanings and that this very multiplicity played a crucial role in some of the most important religious and cultural developments of the time.

We can get a sense of the wide range of meanings prophecy had by considering the popular mid-thirteenth-century dictionary written by William Brito, an English Franciscan living in Paris. Drawing from scriptural examples, Brito gives the following meanings for *prophetare*, 'to prophesy': prediction, historiography, reporting what is happening somewhere else, reciting other prophecies, singing praise to God, teaching,

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[1] *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1969), p. 508.

being a spokesperson, and prefiguring events by one's actions.[2] Those who theorized about prophecy were well aware of the difficulties this wide semantic field produced: 'under the name of "prophetic light" lie equivocations', wrote the thirteenth-century theologian Peter John Olivi.[3]

This book chronicles the attempts of medieval thinkers from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries to wrestle with the ambiguities of prophecy. During this period, the nature and implications of prophetic inspiration became a major area of contention, especially when scholastic theologians, with their particular techniques and standards of rationality, sought to make systematic sense of inspired speech and knowledge.[4] Why do such attempts matter? They matter in large part because prophecy was a crucial—if not *the* crucial—locus of debates over sacred authority in the medieval Church. 'Authority' or *auctoritas* means here both legitimate justification for one's social role and, in a larger sense, the claim for one's words to be trusted.[5] The exemplary Old Testament prophets were authoritative insofar as their words came from God. What, then, of the other types of prophecy Brito listed? Did they likewise derive from God a sacred authority?[6]

To answer these questions required significant epistemological considerations. If prophecy did not only mean prediction, one had to explain the 'equivocations' of prophecy, and to unravel the different types of words and acts given the same name. Many of the descriptions used in the Middle Ages for prophecy would fall today under the heading of 'inspiration', a word with its own array of definitions, describing influences both divine and natural. Medieval writers, too, used *inspiratio* in a range of

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[2] *Summa Britonis*, ed. L. W. Daly and B. A. Daly, ii (Padua, 1975), p. 604: 'futura predicere', 'preterita narrare', 'facta absens nuntiare', 'prophetias recitare', 'laudes deo canere', 'docere', 'prolocutoris officium exercere', 'prefigurare'.

[3] *Quodlibeta* (Venice, 1509) I.13, fol. 5v: 'sub nomine luminis prophetici latent equivocationes'.

[4] I use the term 'scholastic' as a synonym for 'academic', and also to describe thinkers of this era who sought a 'scientific and rational penetration of the faith' according to their conception of scientific rigour. See U. G. Leinsle, *Introduction to Scholastic Theology*, trans. M. Miller (Washington, DC, 2010), pp. 2, 10–11.

[5] See E. Marmursztejn, *L'Autorité des maîtres* (Paris, 2007), pp. 10–27; and M.-D. Chenu, *Towards Understanding St Thomas*, trans. A. M. Landry and D. Hughes (Chicago, 1964), pp. 129ff. Thus, *auctoritas* is not identical with the wielding of power (*potestas*), though there was certainly overlap. I am not examining the strict sense of theological *auctoritas*, i.e. the criteria for determining which texts became formally part of scholastic commentary tradition: see A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, 2nd edn (Philadelphia, PA, 2010), pp. 10–15.

[6] By 'sacred', I intend a general definition such as Glenn Olsen's: the sacred professes 'God-connectedness', while the 'secular' is 'an area of life capable of being understood in its own right'. See 'Cultural Dynamics: Secularization and Sacralization', in Wethersfield Institute (ed.), *Christianity and Western Civilization* (San Francisco, 1995), pp. 100–1.

contexts, though generally the word meant the inner manner by which God made something known.[7] Yet 'prophecy' remained the model for understanding such revelations and asserting their importance. Did all these varieties of prophecy deserve equal credence? Were they all forms of the same inspiration, or was 'prophecy' in fact a misleading label? Medieval academic rationality faced serious difficulties in confronting a phenomenon of religious experience exceedingly hard to categorize.[8]

Discussions of prophecy were also deeply bound up with medieval conceptions of *texts*, of genres of writing and the structures of knowledge that underlie them. Medieval readers accepted the authority of a text differently according to its genre. But medieval literary genres were imbued with a fluidity akin to that of prophecy itself. The shifting relationship, therefore, of rhetoric, history, and poetry throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries affected greatly the sorts of truth claims medieval writers could make.[9] This in turn influenced the types of texts people were willing to recognize as inspired.

Medieval answers to questions about prophecy required, furthermore, serious reflection on the Church's place in history. What relationship did the inspiration seen in the scriptural past have to the Church of the present, a Church which claimed to be guided by the Holy Spirit in its teaching capacity?[10] A standard medieval method of comparing past and present was typology, seeing similar figures or institutions recapitulated over time.[11] According to Christian thinkers, the primary role of prophets in the Bible was the prediction of Christ's coming. With the Incarnation, however, there had been a distinct historical shift. Did past models of prophecy, then, have any present relevance? What would revelation or

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[7] Y. Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, trans. M. Naseby and T. Rainborough (London, 1966), pp. 128–9.

[8] Rather than imposing my own distinctions on the fluid terms of the medieval debate, I use 'prophecy' and 'inspiration' without strict differentiation, except when highlighting significant distinctions found in the sources, or contexts in which 'inspiration' was not described as 'prophetic'. Some modern theologians have attempted to separate inspiration and prophecy by emphasizing, e.g., a prophet's awareness of the divine impulse, but this is a distinction not made by medieval theologians. See L. Alonso-Schökel, 'Inspiration', in K. Rahner et al. (eds), *Sacramentum Mundi*, iii (New York, 1968), p. 147. For a recent reminder of the importance of the relationship between rationality and religion, see D. d'Avray, *Medieval Religious Rationalities* (Cambridge, 2010).

[9] M. S. Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History, 400–1500* (Manchester, 2011), ch. 4.

[10] For the medieval understanding of the Spirit's role in the life of the Church, see Congar, *Tradition*, pp. 130–7.

[11] H.-W. Goetz, 'The Concept of Time in the Historiography of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', in G. Althoff et al. (eds), *Medieval Concepts of the Past* (Washington, DC, 2002), p. 164.

inspiration in the current age look like? How would one determine that inspiration's authenticity or authority?[12]

The stakes for these questions were high. If 'prophecy' was everything William Brito said it was, then it could be claimed—and indeed at various points *was* claimed—by preachers, teachers, mystics, and even writers of apparently secular works of history or poetry. Theologians had to respond to powerful assertions of divine inspiration and prophetic authority. Some of these assertions were external to Christendom, embodied particularly in the growing confrontations with Islam and its own prophet. More immediately of concern, however, for most Catholic theologians of this period were claims which they viewed as internal challenges to the unity of the Church and its institutional structures.

But when scholastic thinkers sought to understand prophecy and to determine the boundaries of sacred texts and sacred authority, they were reflecting at the same time on their own growing role as the intellectual power of Christian society—a power referred to as *studium*. The role of *studium*, of those who have been called 'medieval intellectuals',[13] was distinct from—though often intertwined with—the authority of a second social and ecclesiastical element: the sacramental priesthood and the hierarchy of bishops, known as *sacerdotium*.[14] Theoretical discussions of prophecy therefore help reveal the self-conception of medieval theologians.

Significantly, many defenders of institutional unity also claimed the mantle of the prophet. While keeping other challenges at bay, theologians began legitimating a moderate form of inspiration that justified their own *studium* through ordinary activities such as teaching and preaching, activities which were often grouped under the name of 'prophecy'. These non-predictive prophetic practices fostered new understandings of the relationship between inspiration and authority. My argument is that, as theologians attempted to determine the limits of prophetic privilege, and to shape prophecy for their own purposes, they actually opened space for claims of divine insight to proliferate in those ordinary functions, and in a way that went beyond their control. This proliferation, as part of a broad stream of inspiration, is the central thread of this book.

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[12] These questions still occupy contemporary theologians. Consider the Second Vatican Council's debate over whether revelation had closed with the apostles, discussed in N. C. Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 3–6, 17–18, 204–5.

[13] See J. Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, trans. T. Fagan (Cambridge, MA, 1993); and A. Boureau, 'Intellectuals in the Middle Ages, 1957–95', in M. Rubin (ed.), *The Work of Jacques Le Goff and the Challenges of Medieval History* (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 145–55.

[14] *Studium* and *sacerdotium* were part of what by the thirteenth century was a standard division of powers, the third of which was political—*regnum*: H. Grundmann, 'Sacerdotium – Regnum – Studium: Zur Wertung der Wissenschaft im 13. Jahrhundert', in *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 34 (1951–52), pp. 5–21.

II.

The relationship of sacred to secular, the nature of religious inspiration, and of the claims to authority that flow from it—all these are still relevant issues, but modern scholars have only lately come to recognize the importance of medieval prophecy for understanding them more deeply. Marjorie Reeves's and Robert Lerner's studies of predictive or apocalyptic prophecy helped to reveal its considerable role in the Middle Ages,[15] but despite (or perhaps because of) prophecy's centrality, scholars of medieval intellectual and cultural history have yet to document comprehensively its complexities, or medieval thinkers' attempts to confront those complexities.[16] The significance of Joachim of Fiore's eschatological prophecy has been well established, yet the crowning of Joachim as a paradigmatic prophetic figure has also thrown into shadow a great deal of what was considered prophecy in the Middle Ages. Indifference to the future mattered as much as fascination with it.

Historians of medieval sanctity have been among the most attentive to the implications of prophecy's variety.[17] Claudio Leonardi in particular has emphasized that the fluidity of prophetic categories could serve to break down traditional polarizations such as 'popular' and 'official' sanctity.[18] Nonetheless, Leonardi sees prophecy as 'critical of power', a definition rooted in Max Weber's model of the prophet as an extraordinary individual whose charismatic leadership is ultimately turned by priests into institutional routine, a model which usually places the 'prophetic' on the side of the reformer in opposition to established ways.[19] Yet, prophecy

[15] Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*; Lerner, *The Powers of Prophecy* (Berkeley, CA, 1983).

[16] Thus, Bertrand Taithe and Tim Thornton acknowledge medieval prophecy's 'multifarious' meanings but focus on political prediction: 'The Language of History: Past and Future in Prophecy', in B. Taithe and T. Thornton (eds), *Prophecy: The Power of Inspired Language in History, 1300–2000* (Stroud, 1997), pp. 1–2. Political prophecy is also the subject of L. Coote (ed.), *Prophecy and Public Affairs in Later Medieval England* (York, 2000).

[17] e.g., in André Vauchez's *Saints, prophètes et visionnaires* (Paris, 1999).

[18] C. Leonardi, 'Committenze agiografiche nel Trecento', in V. Moleta (ed.), *Patronage and Public in the Trecento* (Florence, 1986), p. 38. Leonardi considers this binary to be a weakness in Vauchez's account. Some literary scholars of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries have also explored discourse where the prophet does not predict but rather speaks on God's behalf: D. Watt, *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, 1997); and M. Bose, 'Complaint, Prophecy, and Pastoral Care in the Fifteenth Century: Thomas Gascoigne's *Liber Veritatum*', in C. Gunn and C. Innes-Parker (eds), *Texts and Traditions of Medieval Pastoral Care* (Woodbridge, 2009), pp. 149–62.

[19] 'Committenze agiografiche', p. 38. Leonardi's focus is on 'political' prophecy, by which he means inspired saints such as Catherine of Siena seeking to effect practical action.

became the common currency for all sorts of theoretically opposed categories: not only 'official' and 'popular', or 'intellectual' and 'mystic', but also 'institutional' and 'reformist'. Not all medieval prophets were critical of power.

Prophecy was indeed a common currency, but this also led to arguments which could pit competing groups against each other, often in unequal ways. Controversies, for instance, over women as preachers, prophets, and priests emerged during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries precisely because the parameters of sacramental, revelatory, and intellectual power were up for debate.[20] Although the focus of my study is not specifically on debates about gender, I draw on them where they inform more general discussions of inspiration and authority. There are also ways in which the wider transformations described in this book can provide context for those controversies. Wendy Anderson has already pointed towards at least one area where this may be useful: the 'discernment of spirits', part of a process used by theologians to assess the sanctity of allegedly inspired women.[21] As Anderson has recently insisted, the central issue in debates about discernment of spirits is not gender per se but authority.[22] Understanding how the parameters of sacred authority developed thus becomes crucial.

<h2 style="text-align:center">III.</h2>

This book begins with the early twelfth century and ends with the early fourteenth. This diachronic approach is necessary to understand crucial

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For Weber's account, see *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. E. Fischoff (Boston, 1963), chs. 4–5. The Weberian usage of 'prophetic' can also be seen in, e.g., John O'Malley's archetypal 'prophetic culture', 'the culture of alienation, of protest': *Four Cultures of the West* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), pp. 6–7.

[20] See J. Coakley, 'Women's Textual Authority and the Collaboration of Clerics', in A. J. Minnis and R. Voaden (eds), *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, c.1100–c.1500* (Turnhout, 2010), p. 83; and A. J. Minnis, '*De impedimento sexus*: Women's Bodies and Medieval Impediments to Female Ordination', in P. Biller and A. J. Minnis (eds), *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body* (Rochester, NY, 1997), pp. 109–39.

[21] Important works on the topic include D. Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ, 2004), and N. Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 2003).

[22] *The Discernment of Spirits: Assessing Visions and Visionaries in the Late Middle Ages* (Tübingen, 2011), pp. 5–7. Anderson is critical, for instance, of Caciola's approach in *Discerning Spirits*, with its focus on a 'practice of institutional mistrust' (p. 1), and of both Elliott and Caciola for assuming that any discussion of 'discernment' relates to the repression of women, when in fact 'discernment' was used with regard to men as well.

aspects of change (and stasis) within notions of prophetic inspiration, particularly because so much reflection on prophecy occurs in works of exegesis or scholastic treatises, where subtle variations may reveal their full implications only gradually. At the same time, I integrate close readings of influential texts with attention to wider contemporaneous social and cultural developments.[23] My argument, furthermore, depends on the diffusion of ideas beyond a small spectrum of learned thinkers, and so I also highlight less academic sources that helped this transmission. I am not setting out, however, to document *all* serious reflections on prophecy at the time; their number is vast. But I will draw out particular threads which reveal some of the most important effects of this period's debates over inspiration.

There are several reasons for beginning with the twelfth century. First of all, the late fourteenth century has become a focal point for scholarly examinations of prophecy,[24] but this has also obscured the complexity of medieval inspiration. The fourteenth century is when debates about divine revelation became more explicitly gendered and more closely bound up with concerns about demonic influence.[25] By looking first to the twelfth century, a more varied story of prophecy and inspiration can be considered: which paths were taken, and, just as significantly, which were not, which elements were combined, and which were not. The twelfth century was the beginning of real theological interest in and reflection on prophecy, for reasons discussed later in this Introduction. Accompanying this interest was a growth in historical consciousness and an expanding interest in discerning the lineaments of sacred (and secular) history.[26] At the same time, the discipline of academic theology was emerging, as was greater

[23] In particular, I am guided by Caroline Walker Bynum's insight that scholastic discussions, rather than debates in the abstract, are often attempts to find pragmatic solutions to pressing issues: *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York, 1995), p. 137.

[24] e.g. for Elliott (*Proving Woman*), Caciola (*Discerning Spirits*), Leonardi ('Committenze agiografiche'), and Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. J. Birrell (New York, 1997).

[25] Anderson argues that scholarly discussions of discernment of spirits proceed from flawed assumptions that the concept is the same from the patristic period onward; to begin with the fourteenth century, she says, conceals 'multiplicity': *Discernment*, pp. 5–11. On prophecy and the demonic, see A. Boureau, *Satan the Heretic*, trans. T. Fagan (Chicago, 2006).

[26] On twelfth-century historical awareness, see P. Classen, '*Res Gestae*, Universal History, Apocalypse', in *RRTC*, pp. 387–417.

[27] On theology in the twelfth century, see G. R. Evans, *Old Arts and New Theology* (Oxford, 1980); on proofs of sanctity, see A. Kleinberg, 'Proving Saints: Selection and Authentication of Saints in the Later Middle Ages', *Viator*, 20 (1989), pp. 188–9; on miracles, see B. Ward, 'Miracles in the Middle Ages', in G. Twelftree (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 155–6.

concern during canonization processes for a proper assessment of sanctity and the distinctions between natural and miraculous influences.[27]

The first two chapters of this book rely on close readings of key texts to make the case for a conception of prophecy in the twelfth century laden with tensions. In Chapter One, I focus on the influential theologian Hugh of St Victor, a canon regular at the Abbey of St Victor in Paris who bridged the monastic and scholastic worlds. I argue that Hugh broadened and naturalized the prophetic model, closely linking prophecy with both general historical awareness and contemplative experience. Chapter Two examines developments within the tradition of scholastic biblical exegesis. In this regard, the vast number of medieval commentaries on the prophetic books of the Old Testament are valuable sources, and I refer to many of them throughout the book, but in this chapter, I focus on the Psalms, a *locus classicus* for discussions of non-apocalyptic prophetic knowledge. Beginning with the commentaries of twelfth-century theologians Gilbert of Poitiers and Peter Lombard, I emphasize two important elements that developed over the course of that century and the next: first, an attentiveness to the 'literary' qualities of prophetic and sacred language, and secondly, the appropriation by professional exegetes of the sacred authority of the interpreted texts.

The issues raised by twelfth-century enquiry were the subject of thirteenth-century attempts at resolution. Full-fledged treatises devoted exclusively to prophecy emerged in that century, treatises which sharpened key definitions and drew more clearly the lines of debate. The dangers associated with unauthorized claims of inspiration also began to take more serious form, giving greater urgency to theoretical reflections. Chapters Three and Four examine these theoretical treatises and their relationship to wider cultural manifestations of prophetic inspiration. I highlight the polemical nature of many treatises by examining how arguments about prophecy that developed in opposition to Islam were also used to confront the challenge of apocalyptic or eschatological prophecy as promoted by the heirs of Joachim of Fiore, including Franciscans such as Peter John Olivi who saw signs of an impending new age of history that would transform the institutional Church. As a result, the formation of a distinctive Dominican tradition of theorizing about prophecy comes to the fore, with examinations of Hugh of St Cher, Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas. This tradition relied on assumptions shared by many non-Dominicans, but the Dominicans increasingly became the guarantors of ecclesiastical orthodoxy and were thus invested in determining what boundaries could be put around sacred authority and supernatural inspiration without excluding the Holy Spirit from the contemporary Church. At the same time, Dominican discussions of preaching or theological understanding as contemporary manifestations of prophecy raised

questions about the relationship between natural and supernatural gifts. In the end, I argue, Dominican dismissals of predictive prophecy tamed inspiration in an attempt to weaken its challenges, but in doing so, they naturalized and diffused prophecy, making it much more difficult to say who was inspired and who was not.

The book concludes with the early fourteenth century for two main reasons. The first is that the rest of that century saw the rise of a distinct and dominant prophetic current via visionary mystics. This current is by no means unimportant, and it has been well treated by scholars.[28] What is missing is a perspective that sees the rise of mystics as but one among several forms of non-predictive, non-apocalyptic prophecy. These alternative forms are the particular focus of my study, and I show how they continued to be shaped by reactions to perceived threats from Joachimism. Before Pope John XXII's crackdown in the 1320s, Joachimism was markedly potent, so I am concerned to trace how theologians—up to the time of the early Avignon papacy—worked to reshape prophecy in light of that challenge.

The second reason for ending in the early fourteenth century is because those years reveal the emergence of an important alternative form of non-apocalyptic prophecy, that of the humanist poet. In 1315 and 1316, the Paduan diplomat, historian, and poet Albertino Mussato (1261–1329) engaged in a polemical exchange with a local Dominican theologian over the sacred nature of poetry. A series of such defences of 'poetic theology' followed over the course of the century, involving Francis Petrarch (1304–74), Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–75), and Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406), all of whom spoke of poetry as inspired writing. The criticism, especially from scholastic quarters, that resulted from this elevation of poetry is one sign of the overlap of two attempts—theological and poetic—to clarify the nature of inspiration. The Paduan beginnings of this conflict reveal confusion about the relationship between scriptural or contemporary prophet and Christian poet. Were prophetic inspiration and literary inspiration the same thing?

By setting the origins of these 'humanist/scholastic' debates in relation to prophecy, I thus intend to connect theological considerations of inspiration to new assertions of prophetic authority that came from outside clerical or theological milieux. I look to poets rather than to mystics as one of the channels revealing a transformation of prophecy, not because mystics are irrelevant to this transformation but because I wish to

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[28] e.g. B. McGinn, *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism (1350–1500)* (New York, 2012); Vauchez, *Saints*, pp. 125–48, 162–74, 199–219; Leonardi, 'Committenze agiografiche', pp. 37–58.

emphasize that humanist scholars and poets were party to the same developments in medieval religious culture as theologians and visionaries.

Renaissance historians have examined these debates from the perspective of later trends, either as part of the reconciliation of classical and Christian culture or as the beginning of a split between scholastic and humanist principles that played out over the next two centuries regarding education and Christian formation.[29] Alastair Minnis, on the other hand, investigating from the other side, i.e. from earlier trends, has shown how these debates, rather than being solely dependent on the revival of classical ideas, emerge out of twelfth- and thirteenth-century literary theory.[30] Minnis has emphasized the connections between scholastic and humanist ideas, and the convergence of ways of reading sacred texts with ways of reading secular ones.[31] For Minnis, Aristotelian theories of causation and a focus on the literal sense of Scripture helped medieval thinkers pay attention to the role of the human author as an authoritative contributor to the sacred text.[32]

Minnis's ideas, while very useful in showing how to bridge the scholastic/humanist divide, are not sufficient to explain all aspects of the rise of humanist 'poetic theology' and its arguments for prophetic authority. Prophecy's strong connection to historical insight means that the dialogue between history and poetry, which persisted throughout the Middle Ages, needs to be brought more clearly into view.[33] In addition, prophecy's ties to sanctity and visions suggest the centrality of a broad stream of inspiration, that is, the diffusion of prophetic authority among a wide range of activities, which is a theme largely absent from Minnis's analysis of

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[29] For discussion from the first perspective, see R. Witt, 'Coluccio Salutati and the Conception of the *Poeta Theologus* in the Fourteenth Century', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 30 (1977), pp. 538–63; C. Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought* (London, 1970), pp. 683–721, and *The Poet as Philosopher: Petrarch and the Formation of Renaissance Consciousness* (New Haven, CT, 1979), pp. 90–113. For the second perspective, see E. Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation* (Cambridge, MA, 1995).

[30] *Authorship*, esp. pp. 211ff.   [31] *MLTC*, pp. 6–11.

[32] *Authorship*, pp. 28, 38–9, 75–82. Some of Minnis's arguments have in recent years faced challenges, though none that undermine his basic thesis. Christopher Ocker questions the firm link between literal exegesis and enhanced respect for human authorship: *Biblical Poetics Before Humanism and Reformation* (Cambridge, 2002), esp. p. 141 (to which Minnis responds in *Authorship*, p. xiii); Deborah Goodwin challenges the privileged place of the literal sense in the thirteenth century: 'Herbert of Bosham and the Horizons of Twelfth-Century Exegesis', *Traditio*, 58 (2003), pp. 138–41.

[33] See Kempshall's insistence on this continuous dialogue: *Rhetoric*, p. 550.

[34] Absent from my own analysis is Dante, whose *Commedia* certainly contributed to Italian lay confidence in the theological relevance of poetry (Minnis, *Authorship*, pp. 214–16), and who conceived of his own work in prophetic terms. Nonetheless, Dante did not explicitly engage in a 'humanist' defence of poetry, and Mussato undertook

humanist theory. The significance of this stream is a crucial strand of the story this book tells.[34]

My final two chapters therefore work in tandem to reveal how prophecy was reinterpreted at the beginning of the fourteenth century, particularly in the developing humanist milieux of Avignon and Padua. Chapter Five examines the writings of Nicholas Trevet, the English Dominican whose work was influential both at the new centre of power in papal Avignon and in early Italian humanist circles during the height of turmoil over radical Franciscans. Trevet was suspicious of predictive claims, and he combined this suspicion with an attentiveness to prophetic language and philosophical discernment of the workings of time. His model of prophecy had affinities with literary talent and intellectual ability and was indicative of trends within both the Dominican Order and the Avignon court.

In Chapter Six, I examine the work of Albertino Mussato, who shared many of Trevet's views on the nature and purview of prophetic inspiration. Mussato turned away from a predictive, apocalyptic understanding of prophecy and saw the workings of the Spirit in philosophical poetry, which combined harmonious expression with ethical import. Yet unlike Trevet, Mussato was a layman, and he staked his claim to prophetic status in opposition to much of scholastic and clerical custom. Mussato thus became involved in a polemical exchange with a local Dominican more concerned with articulating limits than with furthering the implications of work such as Trevet's. By insisting that the complicated manner in which multiple strands of the medieval prophetic tradition intertwined.

IV.

Long before this period, the classical and patristic eras had established certain fundamental parameters for understanding prophecy and inspiration. Of great importance was the ambiguous term *vates*, which the classical world left to its medieval inheritors. Roman authors used this word to describe those who prophesied like the sibyls, that is, those who made predictions and who had a priestly role, as mediators between divine

his defence independently of Dante. Dante was a more important figure for succeeding generations of humanists, as part of a larger, 'gradual process' drawing together sacred and secular literature: see *MLTC*, pp. 386–7.

[35] e.g. Vergil, *Aeneid*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969) III.358, 712; VI.12.

and human.[35] But, as Cicero pointed out, Democritus and Plato had spoken of poets having the same divine inspiration as the prophetic *vates*, an inspiration that often took the form of *furor* or frenzy.[36] Other Roman writers accepted this connection between poets and prophets, but not all took on the notion of frenzied inspiration: Horace's *Ars poetica*, in an influential description of a poet (*vates*), insisted instead upon craftsmanship and diligent learning.[37] For Horace, the *vates* had a role similar to the classical orator who used wisdom (*sapientia*) to civilize people through eloquence; such wisdom came from contemplation of the divine (*res divinae*) according to Quintilian.[38] On the other hand, Macrobius' early fifth-century discussion of veiled language in philosophy and prophetic dreams (*visiones*) left a different legacy: the *vates* used obscure speech for fear the crowds would distort the divine mysteries, or because he had special knowledge of future time.[39]

Medieval encyclopaedists absorbed these different strands without clear distinctions: Isidore of Seville (d.636), for instance, enshrined the multiple meanings of *vates* in his *Etymologies*, using it in the sections *De poetis*, *De prophetis*, and *De clericis*.[40] This threefold association—an intersection of inspired vision, structured speech, and sacred power—was a remnant of the ancient world, but when Peter Lombard repeated the connection while discussing the *vates* in his influential twelfth-century *Book of Sentences*, its enduring significance as a source of reflection on those three elements became clear.[41]

The writers of the patristic period sought to reconcile the association between priesthood, poetry, and prophecy with the Christian scriptural inheritance, while simultaneously determining the relationship between the Old Testament—with its own prominent prophets—and the life of Christ and his Church. Jerome's scriptural commentaries played an important role in this process, a role I will turn to throughout this book. But I want to highlight here the influence of a patristic concept, one which

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[36] *De divinatione*, ed. W. A. Falconer (Cambridge, MA, 1923) I.36.80.

[37] *Ars poetica*, ed. E. C. Wickham and H. W. Garrod, in *Opera*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1901), ll. 295–309.

[38] *Ars poetica*, ll. 391–407; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, ed. M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1970) XII.2.20–21. Horace described the *vates* as 'sacred' in *Odes*, ed. Wickham and Garrod, in *Opera*, IV.9.28.

[39] *Commentarius in Somnium Scipionis*, ed. J. Willis (Leipzig, 1970) I.2–3, 7.

[40] *Etymologiae*, ed. W. M. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911) VII.8.1, 12.15; VIII.7.3.

[41] For Peter, the meaning of 'vates' is 'multiplex', referring sometimes to priest (*sacerdos*), sometimes to prophet (*propheta*), sometimes to poet (*poeta*): *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae*, ed. Collegium S. Bonaventurae (Grottaferrata, 1971) IV.d24.18. This particular persistence of 'vates' reveals the wisdom of John Fleming's description of the Latin language as a 'conservative element' in the Middle Ages: 'the cultural implications of its conservatism are nearly immeasurable'. See 'Muses of the Monastery', *Speculum*, 78 (2003), p. 1082.

greatly encouraged the expansion of prophecy beyond the notion of predictive vision. This concept set forth that the best prophet was not the one most susceptible to visions, but rather the one who most deeply understood those visions. Augustine articulated this in a discussion of inspiration, declaring that there are three types of visions: corporeal, spiritual, and intellectual.[42] 'Corporeal' is what the eyes physically see, 'spiritual' is a *mental* awareness of images, and 'intellectual' is the comprehension and interpretation of what has been seen by either mind or eye. The best prophecy, for Augustine, is based on the third type of vision—on understanding—so that in Genesis, for example, Joseph, who saw no images himself, was a greater prophet than Pharaoh, since Joseph understood and interpreted what Pharaoh's dreams meant.[43]

Significantly, Augustine then applied this idea to historical experience. A prophet's true role, regardless of special vision or mission, was to discern God's plan in history, to see the hidden meanings and connections of words and events, and to shape them into a coherent narrative of *sacred* history, which for Augustine was the story told in Scripture. Prophecy, therefore, was the writing of sacred history (*sacra historia*), which Augustine also calls 'prophetic history' (*prophetica historia*).[44] 'Prophetic history' sounds like an oxymoron, a strange combination of the future and the past, but for Augustine prophecy did not necessarily mean prediction: Moses' narrative about Creation in Genesis, for instance, was an important prophetic statement about the *past* because it revealed God's saving work in time. If prophecy, then, was the writing of Scripture, *all* biblical authors were in this sense prophets: through inspiration, they saw the hidden rational plan, or *ratio*, of history, and then created their narratives, or chose the right words, so as to reveal this *ratio*. What they wrote became

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[42] *De Genesi ad litteram*, ed. J. Zycha, CSEL 28/1 (Vienna, 1894) XII.7, p. 388: 'corporale'; 'spiritale'; 'intellectuale'. Augustine's system is summarized for reference in my Appendix.

[43] *De Gen. litt.* XII.9. Throughout this book, I recognize the difficulties—and yet the necessity—of translating medieval terms of cognition. I do not intend to equate 'intellect' with 'mind', since the mind, for Augustine as well as for scholastic thinkers, comprised intellect, will, and memory. On *intellectus* in the Middle Ages, see É. H. Wéber, 'Intellect', in *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, ed. A. Vauchez et al., i (Chicago, 2000), p. 729: '[*intellectus* is] firstly the content of the operation of knowledge and then the supreme faculty or power of knowledge in man. The meaning of faculty and that of object of intellection are often indissociable'. But see also the warnings of Katherine Tachau, 'Approaching Medieval Scholars' Treatment of Cognition', in M. C. Pacheco and J. F. Meirinhos (eds), *Intellect and Imagination in Medieval Philosophy*, i (Turnhout, 2006), pp. 1–8.

[44] *De civitate dei*, ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb, CCSL 47–8 (Turnhout, 1955) XVI.2, p. 501.

[45] R. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine* (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 13–14. Markus notes that Augustine's distinction between sacred and secular is

sacred history, as opposed to secular history, which has no underlying *ratio*.[45] Prophets had, in Robert Markus's words, the 'principle of selection',[46] the ability to choose from the flood of historical experience and create statements pointing to the hidden narrative of salvation, the true expression of divine eloquence (*divina eloquentia*).[47]

Even with prophetic selection, Augustine believed that this scriptural narrative was difficult to comprehend—it consisted of 'obscure secrets' (*opaca secreta*).[48] Augustine was yet more insistent on the difficulties of reading non-scriptural history: a discernible sacred narrative had ended with Christ. Until the end of time, there would be no more prophets to integrate the confusion of historical events into a total interpretation. In Markus's words, 'There is no sacred history *of* the last age: there is only a gap for it *in* the sacred history'.[49] God's saving work essentially finished with the work of Christ, when the world entered into its Sixth Age, an age which would endure till the Last Judgement.[50] One should not look for prophets now.

But when other patristic thinkers turned to St Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, they found an alternative model to Augustine's, one which focused less on specific epistemological content and the narrative of sacred history and more on ecclesiastical function. This functional emphasis helped to suggest one way in which prophecy might in fact continue. Paul's letter to the Corinthians describes the gifts of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon the early Church for its guidance; one of these gifts is prophecy, the revelation of hidden mysteries to others.[51] The prophetic role thus involved teaching the faithful. Faced with both Augustine's and Paul's models, Cassiodorus, in his sixth-century commentary on the Psalms, tied Augustine's notion of intellectual prophecy to the Pauline model of post-Incarnation prophecy. Cassiodorus noted that the purpose of a prophet was to build up the Church by bringing forth hidden and unknown things (*res incognitae*).[52] This prophetic gift therefore included exegetical capabilities: 'those who have been granted the ability to

not a judgement about certain events being more holy than others, but rather about a particular narrative *interpretation* of events revealing a sacred meaning.

[46] *Saeculum*, p. 17.
[47] Cf. Augustine, *Epistulae*, ed. A. Goldbacher, CSEL 34/2 (Vienna, 1898) 102.6.33.
[48] *Confessiones*, ed. J. J. O'Donnell, i (Oxford, 1992) XI.2.3, p. 149.
[49] *Saeculum*, p. 23.
[50] Augustine, *De catechizandis rudibus*, ed. I. B. Bauer, CCSL 46 (Turnhout, 1969) XXII, pp. 163–4. The first five ages divide the period from Creation to Christ. Augustine resisted interpreting the Book of Revelation as speaking about events *within* history: *De civ.* XVIII.52, XX.7.
[51] 1 Cor. 12, 14.
[52] *Expositio Psalmorum*, ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL 97 (Turnhout, 1958), praef.1, p. 9.

understand well and to interpret the divine Scriptures are obviously not excluded from the gift of prophecy'.[53] To understand prophetic writing, in other words, one should be prophetically inspired oneself.

Gregory the Great (540–604) made decisive additions to the patristic storehouse of reflections on this theme. Recognizing, as Augustine did, the role that prophetic inspiration had in creating all of Scripture, Gregory stated that prophecy was concerned not with the future alone, but rather with all times—past, present, and future.[54] Non-predictive prophecy was ultimately aimed at revealing reality ('ostendit quod est'), a reality hidden (*occulta*) from normal sight and brought forth through inspired vision.[55] Gregory was particularly interested in moral or tropological readings of Scripture, so he emphasized that the narration of what has been done (*res gestae*), the deeds of scriptural history, is also the narration of what *should* be done (*res gerendae*).[56] History needed an interpreter of its ethical meaning. If, as Cassiodorus showed, prophecy included the interpretation of scriptural texts and their *res gestae*, it was not a great leap for Gregory to claim the prophetic mantle for preachers and for bishops, that is, for those who explicated texts and their *res gerendae* for the guidance and salvation of their flock.[57] These new prophets spoke about what should be done in the present by looking to the future (the joys of heaven) with foresight, a foresight used for moral guidance.[58] Preachers could also adopt the admonitory tone (*prophetia comminationis*) seen in prophetic texts like Jeremiah.[59] The preaching and teaching function of prophecy thus

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[53] *Expositio Psalmorum*, p. 9: 'facultas bene intelligendi vel interpretandi scripturas divinas, a munere prophetiae non videntur excepti'; trans., P. G. Walsh, *Explanation of the Psalms*, ACW 51 (New York, 1990), p. 28.

[54] *Homiliae in Hiezechihelem prophetam*, ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL 142 (Turnhout, 1971) I.1, p. 5: 'Prophetia tempora tria sunt, scilicet praeteritum, praesens, et futurum'. Gregory's examples were: for the past, Moses writing of Creation; for the present, preaching in the early Church as described by Paul; and for the future, Isaiah's prediction of the virgin birth.

[55] *In Hiez.* I.1, p. 5.

[56] *Homiliae in Evangelia*, ed. R. Étaix, CCSL 141 (Turnhout, 1999) II.21.2 p. 174: 'res gesta aliquid . . . signat gerendum'. Cf. Hilary of Poitiers's fourth-century *Tractatus super Psalmos*, ed. J. Doignon, CCSL 61 (Turnhout, 1997) 62.4, p. 207: 'The knowledge of prophecy is to remember deeds (*gesta*) for the sake of what should be done (*pro gerendis*)'.

[57] *In Evangelia* II.30.7; and *In I Regum*, ed. P. Verbraken, CCSL 144 (Turnhout, 1963) IV.1.

[58] *In Hiez.* XI.4.

[59] Cf. the admonitions throughout Book III of Gregory's *Regula pastoralis*, ed. F. Rommel, SC 381–2 (Paris, 1992).

[60] Gregory called the episcopacy both the order of preachers (*ordo praedicatorum*) and the order of teachers (*ordo doctorum*): e.g. *In I Regum* III.14–16, 27–30. See also Congar, 'Theologians and the Magisterium in the West: From the Gregorian Reform to the Council

continued in the ongoing pilgrim life of the Church, under the guidance of the episcopacy.[60]

Gregory was not alone among early medieval thinkers in emphasizing the moral relevance of understanding time's movement. His contemporary, Boethius, provided a particularly crucial example in the *Consolation of Philosophy*: if one avoided, as Augustine urged, attempts to write sacred history about the present day, one could still hope to deal with the actual experience of time and to gain insight into the vicissitudes of fortune for oneself. The *Consolation* suggested that one purpose of discerning the workings of time was to find—and offer to others—consolation, a way of bearing up against apparent misfortune in the present by learning how to know one's true end.[61] Predictive prophecy, to be sure, still made appearances in the early Middle Ages, but its focus was usually on political power or particular personal events. More frequently, as with Gregory's preachers, holy men and women used inspired understanding for the purpose of offering moral guidance in the present.[62]

Gregory's concepts were influential, yet his promotion of bishops as contemporary prophets raised questions which lingered beneath the surface, and which were finally taken up with increasing intensity in the twelfth century. A major reason for this was the structural changes Latin Christianity underwent beginning with the eleventh-century reform movements associated with Pope Gregory VII.[63] Reformers sought to separate clergy from the rest of society by sharply delineating priestly functions, and to call ecclesiastical officeholders to a greater apostolic life.[64] As the Roman Church reformed and formalized its powers, the nature of those powers came under greater scrutiny. An ordained cleric's potency as a channel for the grace of the sacraments was generally accepted. But reformist impulses also promoted an apostolic way of life

of Trent', *Chicago Studies*, 17 (1978), p. 211, who notes that *praedicare* could mean 'the total and absolute proclamation of the faith'. Echoes of Gregory can still be heard in Catholic theologians: 'The prophet is someone who tells the truth on the strength of his contact with God—the truth for today, which also, naturally, sheds light on the future', J. Ratzinger, foreword in Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, p. vii.

[61] Cf. *De consolatione philosophiae*, ed. L. Bieler (Turnhout, 1984) I.p6.

[62] B. McGinn, 'Prophetic Power in Early Medieval Christianity', *Cristianesimo nella storia*, 17 (1996), pp. 261–7.

[63] Colin Morris notes that the 'Gregorian Reform' was actually 'a series of overlapping initiatives' that emerged *c.*1050 'operating at a number of different levels' across Europe: *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050 to 1250* (New York, 1989), p. 82.

[64] Morris, *Papal Monarchy*, pp. 99–100; G. Tellenbach, *The Church in Western Europe from the Tenth to the Early Twelfth Century*, trans. T. Reuter (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 157–84, 320.

[65] St Norbert of Xanten is but one example of a twelfth-century adherent to this *vita apostolica*. See H. Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, trans. S. Rowan