

The Learned Shall Understand: Prophecy, Authority, and the University in the Case of  
Arnold of Villanova and His Critics

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## **ABSTRACT**

Spencer Scott: *The Learned Shall Understand: Prophecy, Authority, and the University in the Case of Arnold of Villanova and His Critics*  
(Under the direction of Brett Whalen)

In the year 1300 the Catalan physician Arnold of Villanova caused a controversy at the University of Paris when he presented his predictions about the advent of the Antichrist to the theology faculty. Arnold's attempt to interpret Scripture and publicly announce his conclusions challenged the scholastic theologians' conception of their own authority to educate the public in religious matters. However, prophecy proved to be as controversial among theologians as it was between theologians and non-specialists. Arnold's most prominent critics, the Dominican theologian John of Paris and the secular theologian Henry of Harclay offered significantly different alternatives to Arnold's prophetic vision. Just as with Arnold's claims, these views were tied to the public authority of theologians. These differences demonstrate that the authority of the theologian was not only challenged by outsiders such as Arnold of Villanova, but also contested internally between secular and mendicant clergy.

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## INTRODUCTION

The scholastic theologian is among the most familiar figures in medieval historiography. The schoolmen, with their passion for hypothetical questions and the exacting logic required to answer them, have been a hallmark of the Middle Ages ever since Petrarch first conceived of an epoch in between himself and antiquity. Indeed, the institutionalization of knowledge in growing urban centers and its' culmination in the university and the granting of formal degrees through which one could be recognized as a trained professional in a specific discipline such as theology is usually taken by contemporary scholars to be the defining intellectual development of the central and later Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> Not only contemporary scholars, but also the scholastic theologians themselves tended to view their profession as having an essential role in the wider society as “the summit of a hierarchy of learning with an obligation to respond to the needs of the whole Christian community.”<sup>2</sup> By the thirteenth century (c. 1281), the authority of the institution of the university over learning was established enough for Alexander of Roes to write that “by these three, namely the priesthood, the empire, and the university, the holy Catholic church is spiritually sustained, increased, and ruled as by three virtues.”<sup>3</sup> However they saw themselves, and however synonymous they would become with their own time, university

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<sup>1</sup> See *Learning Institutionalized: Teaching in the Medieval University*, ed. John Van Engen (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Ian P. Wei, “The Self-Image of the Masters of Theology at the University of Paris in the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 46, no. 3 (July 1995): 431.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander of Roes, *De translatione imperii*, ed. H. Grundmann (Leipzig, 1927), 27; translation in Gordon Leff, *Paris and Oxford Universities in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: An Institutional and Intellectual History* (Huntington, NY: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1975), 3.

theologians did not go unchallenged by their contemporaries. They had to contend with rival claimants to knowledge of divine things and the authority that such knowledge bestowed.

One such rival was the Catalan physician Arnold of Villanova (c.1240-1311). Arnold's claim that he had discovered the date of the Antichrist's appearance from his own reading of the Book of Daniel, which he presented to the theology faculty of the University of Paris in 1300, challenged professional theologians with its vision of the authority of the inspired amateur to interpret Scripture and educate the public in religious matters. According to Arnold, prophetic insight came from the individual's reading of Scripture, no institutions or advanced degree required. This vision was so disturbing to the Paris theology faculty that they accused Arnold of heresy and had him arrested. The Catalan physician appealed his case to Rome and was able to avoid condemnation after using his medical skills to treat the ill Pope Boniface VIII. Having escaped the worst of the wrath of the Paris masters, Arnold spent the remainder of his career writing in defense of his apocalyptic claims.<sup>4</sup> His adversaries also wrote against them.

Scholarly consensus has identified the prolific and controversial Dominican John of Paris (c.1240-1306) and Henry of Harclay (1270-1317), a secular cleric and the chancellor of Oxford, as the two most important theologians to respond to Arnold's prophetic claims, John in his *Tractatus de Antichristo* (1300) and Henry in his *Quaestiones Ordinariae* (c. 1312).<sup>5</sup> While these two scholastics both reasserted the authority of academically trained theologians, they did so in significantly different ways. By the early fourteenth century apocalypticism was the subject of

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<sup>4</sup> Brett Whalen, *Dominion of God: Christendom and Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 212-14.

<sup>5</sup> Majorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 315; Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 167; Anna Milne-Tavendale, "John of Paris and the Apocalypse: The Boundaries of Dominican Scholastic Identity," in *John of Paris: Beyond Royal and Papal Power*, ed. Chris Jones (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2015), 145.

much debate due to the increasing popularity of opinions that diverged from the teaching of the traditional theological authority of the Latin West, Saint Augustine, that no prophecy could reveal the date of the end times, resulting in a spectrum of possible eschatological opinions. John of Paris is usually portrayed by scholars of medieval apocalypticism as a moderate on the question of prophecy, rejecting Arnold's exegesis but not ruling out entirely the possibility of gaining some knowledge of the end of the world. Henry of Harclay, on the other hand, was a hardline Augustinian, denying that there could be any knowledge of the date of the advent of the Antichrist.<sup>6</sup>

These differences between John and Henry reveal divergent concepts of religious knowledge and public authority not only between Arnold and the theologians, but among the theologians themselves. A comparison of these three texts reveals not only a university system challenged from the outside by Arnold's claim to be able to access and disseminate religious knowledge without a formal degree in theology, but also that there was no consensus among scholastic theologians on how to formulate a specific articulation of their authority. Ultimately, this lack of consensus derived from the controversies between mendicant and secular clergy that characterized theology faculties in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in which the established secular masters of the university quarreled with the upstart Dominicans and Franciscans who wished to create separate schools for their orders within the university while still enjoying the benefits of full university membership. Differences of opinion on the university's internal organization resulted in differences of opinion on how to portray the authority of the university theologian in the wider society.

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<sup>6</sup> Reeves, 315.

Most scholarship on this controversy does not focus on the question of the authority of the university over eschatological knowledge. Rather, most histories of medieval apocalypticism discuss Arnold, John, Henry, and the differences between them as developments in the theological controversy ignited by the apocalyptic speculations of the Cistercian abbot Joachim of Fiore in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, without much analysis of the university context. The secular-mendicant controversy also features prominently in these histories, as both secular clerics and mendicants made use of apocalyptic prophecies in their polemics against each other, but again the university as an institution and its authority are not in the foreground of the scholarship.<sup>7</sup>

The public authority of the university as an institution has attracted the interest of some recent scholarship, however. Daniel Hobbins, in *Authorship and Publicity Before Print: Jean Gerson and the Transformation of Late Medieval Learning*, argues that the development of the *tractatus* as a theological genre reflects the growth of a reading public before the invention of the printing press, but Arnold's *Tractatus* is not discussed in any depth.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Ian Wei, in *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Paris: Theologians and the University c. 1100-1330*, examines how university theologians attempted to exert their authority over public matters such as marriage and economic morality. Wei devotes an entire chapter to challenges to theological authority from mystics like Meister Eckhart and poets such as Jean de Meun, but does not include Arnold in his analysis.<sup>9</sup> Alex Novikoff, in *The Medieval Culture of Disputation: Pedagogy, Practice, and Performance*, argues that the intellectual culture of the universities,

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<sup>7</sup> Reeves, 315; McGinn, 167; Whalen, 212-14.

<sup>8</sup>Daniel Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity before Print: Jean Gerson and the Transformation of Late Medieval Learning* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Ian P. Wei, *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Paris: Theologians and the University c. 1100-1330* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 356-414.



exemplified by the practice of public disputations, was not strictly academic but always concerned with educating the wider society, but does not discuss challengers or alternatives to this culture of disputation.<sup>10</sup> Despite the dramatic nature of Arnold's challenge to university authority, the controversy surrounding the would-be prophet has not received much attention in recent scholarship that examines the public authority of medieval universities. An examination of the controversy over Arnold of Villanova's prediction of the coming of the Antichrist in the terms of publicity and authority that these scholars develop expands on this scholarship and the three rival accounts of public authority that Arnold and his critics generated provide a fuller understanding of the role of the scholastic theologian in medieval society and how that role could be contested.

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<sup>10</sup> Alex Novikoff, *The Medieval Culture of Disputation: Pedagogy, Practice, and Performance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

## CHAPTER ONE: ARNOLD OF VILLANOVA

While his lack of a degree in theology would cause controversy, Arnold of Villanova did not lack for formal education. He completed an Arts degree and subsequently became a Master of Medicine at Montpellier in the 1260s. By 1280 he was a court physician in Aragon but continued his education by learning Arabic and attending a Dominican school in Barcelona (without completing any formal degree). In 1289 or 1290 Arnold's reputation as a physician was substantial enough for him to return to Montpellier as a professor of medicine, a position he held until 1300, when he resigned in order to return to the service of King James II of Aragon, and it was as a representative of James II that he came to Paris in 1300 to settle a border dispute between France and Aragon. By this time the Catalan physician had become a prolific writer of both medical and spiritual texts,<sup>11</sup> and he took this opportunity to present his *Tractatus de tempore adventus Antichristi*, which he had begun work on as early as 1288, to the renowned theology faculty of the University of Paris.<sup>12</sup>

The vision of eschatological knowledge and scriptural exegesis that Arnold advances in this tract elevates prophets over theologians in public importance. The opening lines are a quote from the Book of Jeremiah; "I have set watchmen over you. Listen to the voice of the trumpet."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For Arnold's bibliography, see Michael McVaugh, "Arnald of Vilanova," in *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, i (New York, 1970), 289-91.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Ziegler, *Medicine and Religion c. 1300: The Case of Arnau de Vilanova* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 21-5; for the dating of Arnold's journey to Paris, see Michael McVaugh, "Arnaud de Vilanova and Paris: One Embassy or Two?" *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et litteraire du moyen age* 73 (2006): 29-42.

<sup>13</sup> Jer. 6: 17: Arnold of Villanova, *Tractatus de tempore adventus Antichristi*, in "El text primitiu del De mysterio cymbalorum ecclesiae d'Arnau de Vilanova. En apèndix, el seu Tractatus de tempore adventus Antichristi," ed. J.

This image of prophets as watchmen, public officials charged with warning their city of impending danger, dominates Arnold's understanding of how knowledge of the apocalypse could be obtained and who could obtain it. Indeed this concept is so crucial that Arnold writes that all Christian society is divided between watchmen (*speculatores*) and those who listen to their warnings (*auditores*).<sup>14</sup> The source of the watchmen's knowledge of the calamities of the end times was Scripture, which Arnold describes as the "watchtower of the Lord" (*specula Domini*).<sup>15</sup> This knowledge is not mediated by any institution, and while Arnold acknowledges that it would be fitting (*licet*) for watchmen to be drawn from the ranks of the clergy, this was not a necessary precondition, for "it is known that whoever among the faithful people investigates sacred eloquence are watchmen of the Lord for the people in their own way. For through the tranquility of meditation and study they sit in His watchtower, contemplating the future."<sup>16</sup> The only criterion Arnold sets for access to eschatological knowledge is faith and the ability to read the Christian Scriptures. For this reason, Gordon Leff, in his study of the universities of Paris and Oxford, identifies the Catalan physician as a proponent of individual learning as opposed to the institutionalized "higher education" of the universities.<sup>17</sup>

While academic credentials, or even membership in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, are not prerequisites to prophetic insight for Arnold, he does insist on the importance of personal

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Perarnau i Espelt, *Arxiu de textos catalans antics*, 7-8 (1988-9), 134. 1: 'Constitui super vos speculatores. Audite vocem tube.'

<sup>14</sup> Arnold of Villanova, 135. 39-46.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 136. 85.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 136. 94-6: "patet quod in populo fideli quicumque scrutantur sacra eloquia speculatores Domini sunt ad populum suo modo. Nam per tranquillitatem meditationis et studii sedent supra speculam eius, contemplantes futura."

<sup>17</sup> Gordon Leff, *Paris and Oxford Universities in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: An Institutional and Intellectual History* (Huntington, NY: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1975), 3-4.

holiness in acquiring the understanding needed to be a watchman. He writes that “the eternal goods are spiritual and are perceived only by the spirit or the intellect. Hence, the understanding of those who are not elevated beyond sensuality, just like the brutes, are not able to be affected by the spiritual.”<sup>18</sup> It was the moral disposition of the watchmen that allowed them to sit in the watchtower of the Lord and gain knowledge of the future from Scripture. Watchmen not only had to be elevated beyond the sensual themselves, but they also had to reach those mired in sensuality with their spiritual message. Only the “voice of terror” (*vox terroris*) could reach such people, that is, the announcement of the impending advent of the Antichrist.<sup>19</sup> Arnold’s program was most basically one of moral reform predicated on the fear and repentance that the Antichrist’s imminent arrival would inspire in those who “fixed their tents in the fields of this world.”<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the text, Arnold insists that the knowledge of the Antichrist’s appearance and the authority to make this knowledge public could come only from divine revelation. According to Arnold, the watchmen ought to respond to questions about their authority by saying “for the effect of terror: because sitting upon the watchtower we see and understand with such clarity.”<sup>21</sup> Almost any source of knowledge other than the watchtower of Scripture is suspect for Arnold, who condemns “false prophets” (*mendaces prophete*) who attempt to discern the future “through

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<sup>18</sup> Arnold of Villanova, 136. 118-120: “Eterna vero bona spiritualia sunt et solo spiritu vel intellectu percipiuntur. Unde, quorum cognition non elevatur ultra sensualitatem, velut in brutis, nunquam ad spiritualia possunt affici.”

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 138. 169.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 141. 317-18: “qui tentoria sua finxerunt in pratis seculi huius”

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 142. 365-66: “ad efficaciam terroris: Quia sedentes supra speculam istud intuitu claro cognoscimus et videmus.”

the industry of human understanding” (*per industriam humane cognitionis*).<sup>22</sup> True prophets, the watchmen, by contrast,

just as the sons of light, are supported only by divine revelation, either in a particular manner, which deigns to make its servants according to the dispensation of the many shaped grace of the Holy Spirit, or in a universal manner, which, for the direction and control of the whole Church, it made to be written through its elect. For God, who cherished his Church with such love, just as a most gracious spouse, that He unites her nature to himself and . . . among other gifts of love this has been one: namely, to reveal the future for the warning of the same.<sup>23</sup>

God speaks directly to morally upright prophets, either through direct revelation to the individual or generally through Scripture, and these prophets have the duty and authority to transmit these revelations to the entire Church. In this schema, scholastic learning was mere human industry, with no privileged relationship to eschatological knowledge or public authority in Christendom.

Arnold does not elaborate on the distinction between particular revelation and the universal revelation of Scripture. There is no claim to direct divine inspiration in the *Tractatus de tempore adventus Antichristi*, but in many of his later writings, beginning with a letter to Boniface VIII prefacing his *Ars philosophiae catholicae* in 1302, Arnold would claim that his apocalyptic writings had been instigated by mystical experiences.<sup>24</sup> Robert Lerner has suggested, without questioning Arnold’s sincerity, that the Catalan physician began to invoke these visions only when it had become clear that exegesis alone would not persuade his critics. Lerner identifies this “ecstasy defense” as a common response to accusations of heresy by exegetes who

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 143. 395-96, 398.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 407-15: “Speculatores autem ecclesie, tanquam filii lucis, tantum innituntur revelationi divine, sive particulari, quam dignatur facere servis suis secundum dispensationem multiformis gratie Spiritus Sancti, sive universali, quam ad directionem et regimen totius ecclesie scribi fecit per suos electos. Deus enim qui ecclesiam suam, velut sponsam gratissimam, tanta dilectione amplexus est . . . inter cetera munera dilectionis hoc fuit unum, scilicet eidem ad cautelam revelare futura.”

<sup>24</sup> Ziegler, 116-17; Robert Lerner, “Ecstatic Dissent,” *Speculum* 67 no. 1 (Jan. 1992), 44-6.

pushed the boundaries of traditional interpretations of Scripture.<sup>25</sup> Joseph Ziegler has suggested an alternative interpretation, that Arnold's turn to direct revelation was "a continuation of his belief that medical knowledge could be the product of divine revelation."<sup>26</sup> We will have the opportunity to examine the relationship between Arnold's theory of medicine and his apocalyptic thought in more depth at a later point, but either way, Arnold asserts that authority to educate the public about the end times came through revelation, either through personal mystical experience or personal reading of scripture, or both.

The immediate authority of Arnold's watchmen to preach about the impending tribulations was a stark contrast to the predominant view of the sources of the content of preaching among the Paris theologians. Ian Wei has shown that they considered their own work to be essential to determining what ought to be preached to the faithful. Prominent theologians like Thomas Aquinas and Henry of Ghent argued that theologians are superior to ordinary prelates, those who directly cared for souls, in the way that architects are superior to the workers who build buildings. The blueprints for preaching were to be drawn up by academic theologians.<sup>27</sup> Wei notes that this authority "did not always fit with the ordinary jurisdictional structures of the church," as it was located in the university rather than apparatus of ecclesiastical administration.<sup>28</sup> By positing a source of the content of preaching and the authority to preach that had nothing to do with the institution of the university, Arnold was undermining what the Paris

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<sup>25</sup> Lerner, "Ecstatic Dissent," 33-4, 42.

<sup>26</sup> Ziegler, 117.

<sup>27</sup> Wei, *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Paris: Theologians and the University c. 1100-1300*, 174-79.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

theologians saw as the foundation of their authority. For Arnold, individual revelation trumped academic training in the hierarchy of knowledge and authority.

As Arnold understood it, that revelation pointed him toward the Book of Daniel for certain knowledge of the advent of Antichrist. Citing Christ's reference to Daniel 12 in Matthew 24: 16, he identified Daniel 12:11 as a the key biblical prophecy of the Antichrist: "from the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished, and the horrible abomination is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days."<sup>29</sup> Arnold understands the abolition of the daily sacrifice to refer to the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem by the Roman Empire. Applying the interpretative scheme of Ezekiel 4:6, "I have given you a day for a year," he concludes that the abomination, the Antichrist, will arrive twelve thousand and ninety years after the end of Jewish sacrifice in Jerusalem. However, Arnold offers two different dates, 1366 and 1376, as he was unsure that the sacrifice had ceased immediately after the destruction of the Temple.<sup>30</sup> This was the message that Arnold hoped the watchmen would use to frighten worldly people into repentance. The date of the appearance of the Antichrist, however, was not identical with the end of the world. Arnold predicts a time of tranquility in between the persecutions of the Antichrist and the second coming of Christ and the last judgement in which the entire world would convert to Christianity, the blessings of which would be enjoyed by those who had heeded the warnings of the watchmen and preserved through the tribulations of the Antichrist's reign.<sup>31</sup>

No matter how much he insisted on the importance of unmediated revelation, Arnold's vision of the final stages of history owed much to previous apocalyptic thought. Like most

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<sup>29</sup> Arnold of Villanova, 147. 552-560.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 147-50.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 152.

eschatological speculation in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the influence of Joachim of Fiore is apparent in the *Tractatus de tempore adventu Antichristi*. Arnold's sequence of the tribulations of the Antichrist's reign followed by an age of peace before the last judgement closely follows the millenarianism of the twelfth-century Cistercian abbot.<sup>32</sup> Joachim's division of history into three ages, those of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, with the age of the Holy Spirit following the persecution of the Church by the Antichrist and preceding the ultimate culmination of history and the last judgement was a unique and highly influential development in medieval Christian eschatology,<sup>33</sup> but it was not the only influence on Arnold's eschatology. Much recent scholarship has shown that Joachite apocalyptic speculation led to an increased interest in Jewish messianic thought among Christian intellectuals.<sup>34</sup> This dialogue was not always irenic. Maurice Kriegel argues that Arnold's project was "stimulated by his confrontation with messianic notions widespread among kabbalists" in his native Catalonia, specifically their identification of Daniel 12 as a prophecy of the messianic times.<sup>35</sup> Arnold substituted the Christian Antichrist for the Jewish messiah, writing in his second apocalyptic treatise *De mysterio cymbalorum* that it was necessary for Christians to counter Jewish interpretations of the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible with their own.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Reeves, 314-15.

<sup>33</sup> McGinn, 135-42; Whalen, 100-24.

<sup>34</sup> For a summary of this scholarship, see Maurice Kriegel, "The Reckonings of Nahmanides and Arnold of Villanova: On the Early Contacts between Christian Millenarianism and Jewish Messianism," *Jewish History* 26, no. 1-2 (May 2012): 17-18.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 21; Arnold of Villanova, *De mysterio cymbalorum ecclesiae*, in "El text primitiu del De mysterio cymbalorum ecclesiae d'Arnau de Vilanova. En apèndix, el seu Tractatus de tempore adventus Antichristi," ed. J. Perarnau i Espelt, *Arxiu de textos catalans antics*, 7-8 (1988-9), 97-8. 846-57.



The development of Joachite thought gave rise not only to disputes between Christians and Jews, but also to disputes among Christians. Joachim had taught that the age of the Holy Spirit would be inaugurated by spiritual men (*virii spirituales*) and many in the new mendicant orders had understood this to be a prophecy of their religious movements. One thirteenth century Franciscan, Gerard of Borgo San Donnino, was so taken by the connection between Joachim's prophecies and his order that in 1254 he claimed that the third age would begin in 1260 and that this new age would see the establishment of the Eternal Gospel, with the mendicant way of life replacing the organization of the Church of the second age. Gerard was condemned by the authorities whose imminent demise he had predicted and was imprisoned for the remainder of his life. The Scandal of the Eternal Gospel, as the incident came to be known, cast all subsequent Joachite thought in a potentially subversive light.<sup>37</sup>

It also provided ammunition to the enemies of the mendicant orders, many of whom were secular clerics at the University of Paris who resented the Franciscan and Dominican newcomers' presence in the university. One such cleric was William of Saint-Amour, who claimed in his writings that the mendicant orders were a sign of the end times not because they were the spiritual men foreseen by Joachim of Fiore, but because they were false prophets and the servants of the Antichrist.<sup>38</sup> The ecclesiastical hierarchy condemned William just as it had Gerard, but the tensions between seculars and mendicants in the University of Paris persisted. Therefore, by inserting himself into eschatological speculation at the University of Paris Arnold of Villanova was raising a subject that was highly sensitive both for the Paris theologians, secular or mendicant, in addition to being subject to the scrutiny of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

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<sup>37</sup> McGinn, 157-59; Whalen, 180-86.

<sup>38</sup> Whalen, 184-85.

Arnold was clear that the abolition of existing Church structures was not the goal of his prophetic project, writing that course of events that would precede the Last Judgement would include the Greek Church returning to communion with the pope.<sup>39</sup> Even so, in light of the condemnations of Gerard of Borgo San Donnino and William of Saint-Amour any claim to have discerned the imminent arrival of the Antichrist would have provoked strong reactions in late-thirteenth and fourteenth century Paris.

It is not surprising then that Arnold anticipated objections to his calculations in the *Tractatus de tempore adventus Antichristi*. In the text itself he discusses an objection arising from the same chapter of Daniel from which he had deduced the date of the coming of the Antichrist. The source of this objection was a combination of Daniel 12:4 and 12:9: “Go Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed. Many will pass over and knowledge will be manifold.” Arnold insists that “the words are shut up and sealed” does not mean that the significance of the prophecies of Daniel are completely inscrutable, as subsequent verse (Dan 12:10) states that “the wicked shall not understand” and “the learned, nevertheless, shall understand.”<sup>40</sup> It was only the wicked then, for whom the words were sealed. The learned could gain certain knowledge of the future from the Book of Daniel. Arnold understood the term learned in a fairly broad sense, writing that “the faithful with such mildness and not with presumption but with devotion and humility approaching sacred eloquence are taught to understand the truth. For God is he who teaches the meek his ways, just as it says in the Psalm (Ps 24:9).”<sup>41</sup> Just as with the watchmen,

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<sup>39</sup> Arnold of Villanova, 152. 770-73.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 151. 730-45.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 151. 746-48: “Fideles autem mansueti tantum et non presumptuose sed cum devotione et humilitate accedentes ad sacra eloquia docentur intelligere veritatem. Nam Deus est qui docet mites vias suas, ut ait Psalmista (Ps XXIV, 9).”

the qualifications for being counted among the learned were simply faith and access to the scriptures, not a formal theology degree.

Robert Lerner has identified these verses of Daniel as the basis for “a medieval idea of progress that offered a rationale for the contravention of authority.”<sup>42</sup> The pivotal figure in the development of this interpretation was Joachim of Fiore, who understood the promise that “knowledge will be manifold” to mean that the understanding of the faith would steadily increase as the world drew closer to its consummation.<sup>43</sup> Older understandings of Scripture, including those widely accepted among scholastic theologians, could therefore be superseded as this process unfolded. Arnold put this idea of exegetical progress into practice, arguing that Acts 1:7, in which Christ tells the Apostles “it is not for you to know the times or date the Father has set by his own authority” in response to a question about the end times, had been misinterpreted by those who claimed that it forbade any attempt to calculate the date of the appearance of Antichrist. Rather, it was only speculation about the date of the Last Judgement, not any of the events preceding it, that this passage was forbidding. Likewise, St. Augustine, who was often cited by those opposed to apocalyptic prophecies, had been misunderstood. The bishop of Hippo had not meant to condemn all attempts to calculate the dates of certain prophesied events, but only those based on “human industry” (*humanam industriam*).<sup>44</sup> Once again, for Arnold apocalyptic speculation was licit as long as it preceded from divine revelation instead of human effort.

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<sup>42</sup> Robert Lerner, “*Pertransibunt Plurimi*: Reading Daniel to Transgress Authority,” in *Knowledge, Discipline, and Power in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honor of David Luscombe*, ed. Joseph Canning, Edmund King, and Martial Staub (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011), 8.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>44</sup> Arnold of Villanova, 157-58. 1002-1045.

The Catalan physician was especially concerned about the intervention of natural philosophy in eschatological thought, writing that some astronomers had claimed that the world could not end until the heavenly spheres had completed a series of motions that would take no less than thirty-six thousand years. According to Arnold, “they ought to know that God in his wisdom and power was not hindered by natural causes, but just as the creation of the world was accomplished supernaturally, the consummation of this world will also be accomplished supernaturally.”<sup>45</sup> Trying to determine anything about the apocalypse or the Antichrist from astronomy was like trying to determine the dates of eclipses from “the observations of sailors or farmers” (*observantias nautarum vel agricolarum*).<sup>46</sup> Divinely revealed prophecy was simply a higher kind of knowledge from any human learning and not dependent on any of the disciplines beneath it. Arnold counted scholastic theology among these lesser forms of knowledge, warning against “the prideful doctors and masters, about whom Scripture testifies that God blinded them for their malice and they did not know the sacraments of God, because, in those who are dominated by the flame of knowledge, the building of charity is banished.”<sup>47</sup>

Joseph Ziegler argues that this preference for revelation over academic theology had its roots in Arnold’s medical profession. According to Ziegler,

like theologians, physicians saw themselves bound by the authorities of their science. But in the case of physicians this tie was somewhat looser. They not only accepted that authorities could err, but also the conviction that the *moderni* could add to what the ancients had created. Furthermore, they were convinced that experience, observation, and

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 153. 810-13: “debent scire quod suam potentiam et sapientiam Deus non alligavit naturalibus causis, sed sicut in productione mundi fuit supernaturaliter operatus, sic et in consummatione huius seculi supernaturaliter operabitur.”

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 153. 845.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 164. 1311-14: “tumidis doctoribus vel magistris, de quibus Scriptura testator (cf. Sap II, 21) quod excecavit eos mailitia eorum et nescierunt sacramenta Dei, quoniam, in quibus inflans scientia dominatur, caritas edificans exulat.”

rational scrutiny were the final tests of the validity of a medical theory, not the identity of its author.<sup>48</sup>

In Arnold's medical writings, the experience and observations of individual physicians treating individual patients, rather than abstract principles gained from authoritative texts, is the ultimate authority in prescribing treatment.<sup>49</sup> In the same way then, for Arnold the individual experience of revelation, either through reading Scripture or mystical experience, takes precedence over the authoritative opinions of masters of theology. Therefore, in defense of his treatise Arnold writes that

if nevertheless it happens that the aforementioned theologians deem this little work unworthy for this reason, because it is not written or compiled by a man of notable authority, they ought to recall that the wise man admonishes [us] to attend to what is said, not who advances it, lest they seem similar to that one who considers the ink of the writing rather than its essence and significance. And also, that "the Spirit is able to blow wherever it wills" (John 3:8) and that He who, when He wills, makes mute animals speak true and useful things, like Balaam's ass, is able to teach the truth to little people, so that they might offer it for His glory.<sup>50</sup>

The aforementioned theologians were not impressed. Indeed, they found Arnold's views so troubling that they used their influence with the chancellor of the university and the bishop of Paris to have the Catalan physician arrested, charged him with heresy, and forced him to recant his claims.<sup>51</sup> As Arnold had come to Paris as an emissary of the king of Aragon, his diplomatic

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<sup>48</sup> Ziegler, 128.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 126-27; for more on Arnold's thought in the context of medieval medicine, see Leah DeVun, *Prophecy, Alchemy, and the End of Time: John of Rupescissa in the Late Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 22, 71-2; Zachary Matus, *Franciscans and the Elixir of Life: Religion and Science in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 122-24.

<sup>50</sup> Arnold of Villanova, 164. 1299-1306: "Si tamen, ut fertur, predicti theologi propterea indignantur isti opusculo quoniam non est scriptum vel compilatum ab homine auctoritatis notabilis, debent recolere quod sapiens monet attendere quid dicitur, non quis profert, ne similes videantur illi, qui potius incaustum scriptum quam vim et significationem eius considerat. Et iterum, quod "spiritus potest spirare ubicumque voluerit" (cf. Io III, 8) et quod illi qui, cum vult, etiam muta facit animalia, vera et utilia loqui, ut asinam Balaam (cf. Num XXII, 28), potest parvulos de veritate instruere, ut proferant ipsam ad laudem eius."

<sup>51</sup> Ziegler, 26-27; Clifford R. Blackman, "The Reception of Arnau de Vilanova's Religious Ideas," in *Christendom and its Discontents*, ed. Scott Waugh and Peter Diehl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 115-16.

contacts ensured his swift release and he immediately appealed his case to Pope Boniface VIII. Fortunately for Arnold, the aged pontiff was suffering from kidney stones and sent for the renowned physician. Arnold's successful treatments left a positive impression on Boniface, as he did not uphold the Paris theologians' condemnation, although he did not endorse his doctor's apocalyptic predictions either. This was not the end of the controversy, however. After his escape from the wrath of the theology faculty, Arnold continued to write in defense of his ideas. He increasingly included calls for the moral reform of the clergy in his spiritual writings and became associated with the controversial Spiritual Franciscans. Boniface's successor Benedict XI seemed more hostile to Arnold's eschatology than his predecessor, but his sudden death in 1304 (blamed by some in the curia on Arnold, who was still the papal physician) prevented any formal condemnation. The new pope, Clement V, was indifferent to Arnold's apocalyptic enthusiasm, leaving him free for the remainder of his life.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Blackman, 116-17; *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, vol. II, ed. Heinrich Denifle and Emile Chatelain (Paris, 1891-99), no. 616.

## CHAPTER TWO: JOHN OF PARIS

It is hardly surprising that a writer as perpetually controversial as Arnold of Villanova would elicit written responses from his critics. One of them, the French Dominican theologian John of Paris, wrote his response to Arnold in the same year that the Catalan physician presented his tract to the Paris masters, 1300. In his *Tractatus de Antichristo* the French Dominican addressed the issues raised by Arnold in what the text's translator, Sarah Beth Peters Clark, describes as the "typical scholastic fashion," a carefully structured examination of a wide variety of authorities on the end times.<sup>53</sup> This typically scholastic response came from a writer whose intellectual development had been entirely formed by the University of Paris. Biographical details for John's early life are scarce; it is not even clear whether he joined the Order of Preachers before or after receiving his bachelor of arts, but it is clear that by 1300 he had gained a substantial reputation as a lecturer and preacher at St. Jacques, the Dominican convent attached to the University of Paris. In spite of this success, John was not a fully-fledged Master of Theology when he wrote his *Tractatus de Antichristo*. Some scholars have speculated that his admission into the theology faculty was postponed on account of controversy surrounding his views on the Eucharist, which the French Dominican was still defending from censure at the time of his death in 1306.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Sarah Beth Peters Clark, "Introduction," in "The *Tractatus de Antichristo* of John of Paris: A Critical Edition, Translation, and Commentary," ed. and trans. Sara Beth Peters Clark (unpublished doctoral dissertation: Cornell University, 1981), 14.

<sup>54</sup> Chris Jones, "John of Paris: Through a Glass, Darkly?" in *John of Paris: Beyond Royal and Papal Power*, ed. Chris Jones (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2015), 1-3; Frederick J. Roensch, *Early Thomistic School* (Dubuque, IA: The Priory Press, 1964), 99-100.

This controversy did not prevent John of Paris from producing a “considerably versatile” body of literature, much of it dedicated to defending the more controversial teachings of his order’s most famous theologian, Thomas Aquinas.<sup>55</sup> He was ultimately accepted into the Paris theology faculty in 1304. Of John of Paris’ many works, the one that has drawn the most scholarly attention is his *De potestate regia et papali*, a moderately pro-royalist treatise written during the conflict between Boniface VIII and King Philip IV. John’s intervention in this controversy provides one of the few definite dates in his biography, on June 26, 1303, when he, along with most of his fellow university theologians, signed a petition calling for the pope to be tried before a general council for his alleged crimes.<sup>56</sup> One of the charges that Philip’s lawyers had produced against Boniface was that he “restored or even approved of a book by Master Arnold of Villanova, physician, which contains heresy, or smacks of it, the said book having been reproved, condemned, and burned by the bishop of Paris and the masters of the theology faculty of Paris.”<sup>57</sup> Arnold’s challenge to the authority of the scholastic theologians was easily absorbed into a much larger debate about the distribution of authority in Christendom, one in which John of Paris also took part. It is for this reason that Clark argues that John’s intervention in the controversy provoked by Arnold is “a work which reflects not so much its author’s fascination with eschatological speculation as his involvement in contemporary political issues and his penchant for controversy.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Roensch, 103. For a complete list of the works of John of Paris see Roensch 101-03.

<sup>56</sup> *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, vol. II, ed. Heinrich Denifle and Emile Chatelain (Paris, 1891-99), no. 634, 101-02; Clark, 5; Jones, 3; Roensch, 99-100.

<sup>57</sup> *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, vol. II, ed. Heinrich Denifle and Emile Chatelain (Paris, 1891-99), 90; translated in Lerner, “Ecstatic Dissent,” 43.

<sup>58</sup> Clark, 7.



John's choice of genre also reflects a particular interest in political and public issues. The French Dominican wrote a *tractatus* on the Antichrist, just as Arnold had done. Daniel Hobbins argues that the increasing popularity of the *tractatus* (usually translated as "tract") as a genre of academic writing in the late medieval period "testifies to the public nature of theology in this period," as "it permitted an author to treat a current, popular topic in a form easily distributed to a nonacademic audience."<sup>59</sup> According to Hobbins, the growth of the tract's popularity and the development of the notion of publicity that accompanied it were instigated by events like the Black Death in 1347 and 1348 and the Great Schism in 1378, crises which required a public response from intellectuals. The culmination of this shift in intellectual activity was the work of Jean Gerson, the chancellor of the University of Paris in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, who encouraged theologians to write tracts, and whom Hobbins identifies as Europe's first public intellectual.<sup>60</sup> However, the use of the tract by both Arnold and John in a debate about the sources of eschatological knowledge and the authority to distribute that knowledge to the public several decades before the Black Death and the Great Schism suggests that the development of late medieval publicity has a somewhat longer history than Hobbins identified.

John engages the issues of public authority that Arnold's claims raised from the opening lines of his tract, citing the same twelfth chapter of Daniel that was so crucial to Arnold's argument. He writes that "according to the testimony of the angel making the revelation to Daniel: many shall pass over, and knowledge, that is, interpretation, shall be manifold; and although the words are shut up and sealed until the appointed time, nevertheless it is added that

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<sup>59</sup> Hobbins, 129.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 129-30.

the learned shall understand.”<sup>61</sup> Like Arnold, John of Paris identifies the promise that the learned will understand as authorizing some speculation about prophecies of the end times. However, the Dominican theologian expounds the term “learned” very differently, writing that “therefore, although I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, nevertheless I wish to recall briefly the testimony of those who are said to have received the spirit of prophecy.”<sup>62</sup> Where Arnold understood the “learned” of Daniel 12 to be more or less identical to his prophetic watchmen, the faithful who drew solely on Scripture for their knowledge, John presents the term learned as applying not to prophets but to himself, a university-trained theologian. The institutionalized learning of the university, not direct divine revelation, was what gave one the authority to speculate about the end times.

In stark contrast to Arnold then, John’s tract reflects the interests and methodology that university training instilled in the theologians it produced. Rather than Arnold’s pastoral agenda of reaching the irreligious masses with the voice of terror, John addresses theoretical questions such as whether the Antichrist will be united to the Devil in the same way that human and divine natures are united in Christ (John’s answer is no).<sup>63</sup> Rather than appealing to individual revelation, John identifies three possible sources of eschatological knowledge: prophets, canonical Scriptures, and natural philosophy and astronomy. While the Dominican theologian expresses his skepticism about apocalyptic speculation at the outset, writing “truly I think that no one can know at what time the Antichrist will be born by determining the day and hour,” he analyses each of these possible sources of knowledge one by one to determine what information

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<sup>61</sup> John of Paris, “The *Tractatus de Antichristo* of John of Paris: A Critical Edition, Translation, and Commentary,” ed. and trans. Sara Beth Peters Clark (unpublished doctoral dissertation: Cornell University, 1981), 70.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 73-4.

about the end times could be gained from them.<sup>64</sup> In this understanding, the expertise of the scholastic theologian in carefully sifting through a wide variety of possible sources of eschatological knowledge mattered as much as the sources themselves.

Concerning the first possible source, prophets other than those recorded in canonical Scriptures, John writes that “explicit revelation is not found to have been made to anyone as far as the determination of the day or year. Nevertheless, the proximate times of the Antichrist are found to have been prophesied by some.”<sup>65</sup> The “some” in question were the Anglo-Saxon king Edward the Confessor, the German nun Hildegarde of Bingen, Joachim of Fiore, the Cumean Sibyl, an anonymous Cistercian monk, and the early Christian martyr Methodius. John drew this list from the *Speculum historiale* of his fellow Dominican Vincent of Beauvais, and Anna Milne-Tavendale argues that by the inclusion of these prophets John subtly responds to critics of his order and “propels his discussion from a purely academic context into the public sphere.”<sup>66</sup> Two of the prophets, Hildegarde of Bingen and Joachim of Fiore, were particularly associated with the controversy surrounding the mendicant orders.

We have already seen how some mendicants’ radical interpretation of Joachim’s prophecy of the *viri spirituales* had provoked controversy, and the prophecies of Hildegarde had been invoked against the mendicants by the secular cleric and theologian William of Saint-Amour. The German nun had predicted a “womanish time” characterized by heresy, schism, and a general decline in the faith and William cited this prophecy in support of his argument that the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>66</sup> Anna Milne-Tavendale, “John of Paris and the Apocalypse: The Boundaries of Dominican Scholastic Identity,” in *John of Paris: Beyond Royal and Papal Power*, ed. Chris Jones (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2015), 133.

mendicants were agents of the Antichrist and a sign of the imminence of the final tribulations.<sup>67</sup> John, however, argues that the relationship between Hildegarde's womanish time and the advent of the Antichrist is unclear, as she had predicted that it would not last past 1256 and what she described could be understood to refer to the status of the Church before the coming of the Antichrist just as much as that of the Church at the time of the Antichrist. Therefore, the Dominican theologian asserts that each person should "consider very carefully and very intently in what way this has truth for the time in which Hildegarde predicted."<sup>68</sup> Hildegarde's prophecy was ambiguous and could not be taken as a condemnation of John's Dominican order. In responding to Arnold, John also took the opportunity to intervene in the secular-mendicant controversy that had made apocalyptic speculation so politically fraught at the University of Paris in the early-fourteenth century.

The writings of Joachim of Fiore were even more closely associated with the secular-mendicant controversy than those of Hildegarde of Bingen and Milne-Tavendale describes John's inclusion of the Calabrian abbot in his list of prophets as potentially "highly subversive both academically and politically."<sup>69</sup> It is remarkable then, that John's discussion of Joachim's prophecies contains relatively little commentary and is mostly a summary of the Calabrian abbot's predictions, including those that had been interpreted as prophecies of the rise of the mendicant orders. John, summarizing Joachim, writes

It is necessary that such [men] preach and lament the very ruin of the Church, to whom both voluntary poverty should be pleasing, and for whom purity of spiritual doctrine and life should present no obstacle in the hardships of future tribulation. Therefore such

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 135; relevant excerpts of Hildegarde's writings can be found in "Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*," in *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 100-03.

<sup>68</sup> John of Paris. 88.

<sup>69</sup> Milne-Tavendale, 137.

doctors and prophets must be sent to dumbfound and not flatter not only inferior men but also the bishops and prelates themselves. The doctors and faithful preachers must surely be revealed next in order to strike earthly and carnal hearts with every blow, and by their studies silence should be imposed on the proud and arrogant masters.<sup>70</sup>

As the Dominican theologian is writing in Joachim's voice rather than his own, and offers little commentary on these predictions, it is difficult to determine his intent in this passage, but Milne-Tavendale offers this interpretation: "by stressing the knowledge and the purity of doctrine of the new order, John asserts himself as a leading scholar who, along with the other 'such doctors,' is dedicated to the university's mission to control the source and dissemination of eschatological knowledge."<sup>71</sup> By associating the university with the prophesied spiritual men of Joachim of Fiore, in this case, the Dominicans, John turns the tables on Arnold and portrays scholastic theologians as those with authoritative knowledge of the end times. Milne-Tavendale further speculates that John's goal was to "divert attention from the anti-institutional messages with which the prophecy had been associated," by "building upon his repeated alignment with the collective mentality of the university masters," while at the same time invigorating his mendicant readers by recalling "the sense of the prophetic mission of the two orders" that Joachim's prophecy had instilled in the Dominicans and Franciscans.<sup>72</sup> In Mine-Tavendale's view, one of John's goals in writing his tract was to re-legitimize Joachite thought, albeit without saying so explicitly.

The only explicit commentary that John does offer on Joachim's prophecies is that he does not remember any specific prediction of the date of the Antichrist's advent in Joachim's

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<sup>70</sup> John of Paris, 89; for relevant excerpts of Joachim's writings, see "Joachim of Fiore," in *Visions of the End*, 126-142.

<sup>71</sup> Milne-Tavendale, 139.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

writings, even though some (he does not specify who) claim that the Calabrian abbot predicted that the Antichrist would be born in the year 1300.<sup>73</sup> Joachim therefore does not provide any more certainty about the end times than Hildegarde. Most of the other prophets receive a similar verdict. The prophecies of war attributed by legend to Edward the Confessor could not provide an specific date for the apocalypse, as prophecies of war were so common.<sup>74</sup> In the prophecies of the Cumean Sibyl recorded by Virgil “nothing is established as being certain.”<sup>75</sup> A prophecy attributed to an anonymous Cistercian monk in Tripoli is “obscure.”<sup>76</sup> Only the prophecy attributed to the early Christian martyr Methodius, often referred to by historians as the Pseudo-Methodius, receives a different assessment. The prophecy states that the world will not last past the sixth millennium, that is, the one thousand years after the incarnation of Christ. By 1300 that would have seemed to have been proven wrong, but John provides two possible interpretations that would place 1300 inside of the sixth millennium. The first is that the Vulgate provides a different way of calculating millennia in which there were less than five thousand years before Christ, leaving five hundred and ninety-three years in which the Pseudo-Methodius’ prophecy could still come about. The second is that millennia could include “fragments” beyond one thousand years, although these fragments could not last beyond five hundred years. This interpretation would leave about two hundred years after 1300 that could be counted as part of the sixth millennium.<sup>77</sup> The Dominican theologian found this prophecy compelling, writing that

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<sup>73</sup> John of Paris, 90.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-8.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 91

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-5; for the text of Pseudo-Methodius, see “Pseudo-Methodius,” in *Visions of the End*, 70-76.

“none of the saints has proposed a seventh millennium; but all say and are of the opinion that the sixth is the last,” and “since God completed the world and the nature of the universe in the first six days . . . it seems consonant with reason that, in six millennia, nature established by God should complete the work of propagation.”<sup>78</sup> While the precise date of the Antichrist’s arrival could not be ascertained from prophecy, the general timeframe of the end times was more accessible.

Indeed, John argues that support for the eschatological timeframe of the Pseudo-Methodius can also be found in another of the sources he identifies for apocalyptic speculation, astronomy. Faced with a variety of vague prophecies, the Dominican theologian writes that “amid so much diversity of opinion, that opinion seems more fitting for which the inquiry of astrological study, which is more scientific, defends the evidence.”<sup>79</sup> This is a stark contrast to the epistemological hierarchy laid out by Arnold in which astronomy was mere human industry, from which no knowledge about the end of the world could be gained. For John, not only could astronomy provide eschatological knowledge, that knowledge was superior to the uncertain predictions of those who claimed to be prophets and could be used to judge their prophecies. Specifically, John claims that astronomy provides clarity about the age of the world that validates the Pseudo-Methodius’ division of history into six millennia. Arguing from within the framework of Ptolemaic astronomy, he contends that since the sun moves one degree in one hundred years and the sun is believed to have been in the fifteenth degree of Aries at the moment of creation, it can be calculated that there had indeed been five thousand years from the creation

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 97.

of the world until Christ, just as Methodius had said.<sup>80</sup> According to John, the concordance between Methodius' claims about the age of the world and the findings of astronomy meant that the rest of the prophecy ought to be seen as plausible. Therefore, applying the interpretation in which a millennium can include fragments of no more than five hundred years, "it can be held probably but without rashness of assertion that for the next 200 years the time is suspect, beyond the space of which the common course of the world will not endure."<sup>81</sup> For John it was scholastic theologians, with their training in academic disciplines such as astronomy, not prophets inspired by revelation, who had the authority to determine what was legitimate in apocalyptic speculation.

The Dominican theologian also undercut Arnold's claim to prophetic authority in his treatment of the Catalan physician's preferred source of eschatological knowledge in his analysis of canonical Scriptures. The Book of Revelation, the most obvious scriptural source of information on the end times, could not yield any definitive date for the Antichrist's arrival, as it was open to many varying interpretations. Some had claimed that the Antichrist would arrive in 1294, others 1356, based on the same chapter, Revelation 12. Similarly, some had found support in Revelation for the thesis that the world would only last for six millennia, or six ages of some other length, but, as John had already demonstrated, Scripture alone could not definitively establish the dates of these millennia.<sup>82</sup> This multiplicity of readings demonstrated that Revelation contained no certain information about the exact date of the time of the Antichrist. This conclusion was supported by the authority of Augustine, who John cites to prove that speculative readings of Scripture "impose no necessity to believe that the end of the world is at

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 97-9.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 100-03; 109-12.



hand,” as they originate from “conjecture of the human mind,” rather than “the prophetic spirit.”<sup>83</sup> Using the traditional scholastic method of appealing to an established authority, John contends that Arnolds claim that prophetic authority comes from the individual’s reading of Scripture is false.

The Dominican theologian also attacks the specific exegesis that Arnold advanced in support of his apocalyptic claims. John objects to Arnold’s reading of Daniel 12:11 on several different grounds. First, because Arnold argued that the “removal of the continual sacrifice,” would take place centuries before the “setting up of the abomination,” that is, the coming of the Antichrist; according to John, this was contrary to the clear sense of the text, which indicated that the sacrifice would be abolished at the same time that the abomination would be set up.<sup>84</sup> The one thousand two hundred and ninety days could not therefore refer to number of years between the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the Antichrist. Furthermore, John argued that Arnold was mistaken to take days to be a symbol for years in this prophecy, as Daniel 12:7 describes the same time period after the end of the sacrifice as “a time, and times, and a time and a half,” which John understands as three and a half years.<sup>85</sup> The one thousand two hundred and ninety days, in John’s interpretation, referred to this period of three and a half years. Rather than the destruction of the Temple, John argues that “it is more reasonable that by the continual sacrifice should be understood the sacrifice of the New Law, which shall be taken away at the time when the persecution by the Antichrist is current for 1290 days.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

John's analysis makes the university-trained theologian into an indispensable figure in the understanding of eschatological knowledge. Most of the possible sources of information about the apocalypse that the Dominican theologian identified were unclear at best, and he was only able to make a positive conclusion after a comparison of the age of the world in the prophecy of the Pseudo-Methodius to the age of the world according to the science of astronomy that only the beneficiary of an advanced university education would have been able to undertake. Even though much of his analysis concurs with the traditional Augustinian position that the date of the Antichrist's advent or any other apocalyptic event could not be known, John's conclusion that astronomy supported the prophecy of the Pseudo-Methodius and the Antichrist could reasonably be expected within two hundred years is not what would have been expected from a traditional Augustinian-minded scholastic. It is particularly incongruous with the reputation of the Dominican order, which, after its greatest theologian Thomas Aquinas condemned Joachim of Fiore's eschatology in the wake of the Scandal of the Eternal Gospel, acquired a reputation for opposing any apocalyptic speculation.<sup>87</sup> Marjorie Reeves describes John as "a Dominican and a scholastic who yet could not keep away from speculations on Last Things and the advent of Antichrist."<sup>88</sup>

The work of Anna Milne-Tavendale sheds some light on this discrepancy. We have already seen how John sought to subtly make the prophecies of Joachim of Fiore less subversive and more acceptable to a university audience. On account of this, Milne-Tavendale writes that "John toyed with the idea of reincorporating the prophetic basis of the Dominican mission

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<sup>87</sup> Whalen, 186-88.

<sup>88</sup> Reeves, 167.

through his use of Joachim's key prophecy of the *virī spirituales*.<sup>89</sup> While John's use of astronomy does not play a significant role in Milne-Tavendale's analysis, it supports the thesis that John wished to rehabilitate apocalyptic speculation after the Scandal of the Eternal Gospel had cast Joachite prophecy in a subversive light. By making potential prophecies subject to review by scholastics trained in disciplines such as astronomy, John strips the prophecies of Joachim of Fiore of the subversive or heretical associations and makes them legitimate subjects of study for university theologians. A prophecy cannot be revolutionary if it is subject to the judgement of the established guardians of orthodoxy. In this situation, speculation about the time of the apocalypse would not automatically be illegitimate, and therefore apocalyptic prophecies such as Joachim's could grant legitimacy to the mendicant orders without threatening the established ecclesiastical order. In this approach to eschatology the Dominican John resembled many in the Franciscan order more than many of his fellow Dominicans who followed the traditional Augustinianism of Thomas Aquinas. The Franciscans, by contrast, tended to follow Aquinas' contemporary Bonaventure, a Franciscan theologian and eventually minister general of the Franciscan order who retained a vision of history in which the mendicants played a key eschatological role as the *virī spirituales*, but rejected the idea that this would lead to the replacement of the existing ecclesiastical order.<sup>90</sup> John's treatise indicates that at least some Dominicans also found this approach attractive.

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<sup>89</sup> Milne-Tavendale, 144.

<sup>90</sup> Whalen, 188-90.

### CHAPTER THREE: HENRY OF HARCLAY

One enemy of the Dominican order certainly found John's approach to the issue of the Antichrist concerning. Henry of Harclay, chancellor of the University of Oxford, opposed the Dominican order's attempt to gain special privileges at that university, and dedicated the first of his *Quaestiones Ordinariae* to the question of what could be known about the coming of the Antichrist. He not only opposed Arnold's apocalyptic speculations but John's as well. Henry, a secular cleric from a minor noble family in the north of England, had been a theology student at Paris when Arnold presented his treatise to the masters and he recounts having heard John of Paris "speak often on this subject."<sup>91</sup> The controversy left enough of an impression on Henry that he returned to it when he began composing his *Quaestiones Ordinariae* roughly a decade later, around the time that he became chancellor of Oxford in 1312. An eschatological controversy was a logical topic to include in a *Quaestiones*, a scholastic genre in which a master would give his solutions to a number of commonly debated questions. Henry's *Quaestiones* are his only surviving major work besides his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. Most scholarship on Henry has focused on his contributions to scholastic philosophy, particularly his engagement with the thought of the Franciscan philosopher John Duns Scotus rather than his intervention in the controversy surrounding Arnold of Villanova, but his eschatological views are just as worthy

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<sup>91</sup> Henry of Harclay, *Ordinary Questions* ed. and trans. Raymond Edwards and Mark Henninger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 29; Mark G. Henninger, SJ, "Introduction," in *Ordinary Questions* ed. and trans. Raymond Edwards and Mark Henninger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xviii-xx.

of close analysis, especially in light of the contrast between his approach to the authority of the scholastic theologian and that of John of Paris.<sup>92</sup>

Henry begins his treatment of apocalyptic speculation with an overview of scriptural passages that deal with the end times. Drawing heavily on the exegesis of Augustine, the English theologian argues that Scripture contains no certain information about the time of the coming of the Antichrist or any other apocalyptic event.<sup>93</sup> In addition to the authority of Augustine, Henry also argues that the numerous and contradictory interpretations of the relevant scriptural passages prove that nothing definitive can be deduced about the dates of prophesied events is contained in the Bible, writing that this “multiplicity of views was foretold in chapter twelve of Daniel: *But you Daniel must keep these words secret and the book sealed until the appointed time. Many will wander this way and that, and opinions will be manifold.*”<sup>94</sup> This is the exact interpretation of Daniel 12 that Arnold rejects in his treatise, as well as the same interpretation that John of Paris advances in his work. Both of these scholastic theologians deny Arnold’s assertion that an individual could gain certain knowledge about the timeframe of the apocalypse from Scripture alone.

Henry also rejects Arnold’s interpretation of the “learned” whom Daniel 12: 10 promised would understand as prophets informed by revelation in Scripture. While John of Paris replaces prophets with scholastic theologians in his interpretation of Daniel, Henry focuses on why Arnold and other would-be prophets could not be counted among the learned, writing of

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<sup>92</sup> Mark Henninger, “Henry of Harclay on the Univocal Concept of Being,” *Mediaeval Studies* 68 no. 1 (2006): 205-237; John T. Slotemaker, “John Duns Scotus and Henry of Harclay on the Non-Necessity of Opposed Relations,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 77 no. 3 (July, 2013): 419-451; Charles Bolyard, “Henry of Harclay on knowing many things at once,” *Recherches de Theologie et Philosophie Medievales* 81 no. 1 (2014): 75-93.

<sup>93</sup> Henry of Harclay, 5-11.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Arnold's exegesis "and so, that master [Arnold] was one such learned and instructed, as he asserts, and is able to understand. This then, is the theory he set out in a short book, a book that also contained much other nonsense and heresy."<sup>95</sup> Arnold's claims could be dismissed as nonsense because they contradicted the established authorities of scholastic theology. Regarding Arnold's claim that the twelve hundred and ninety days prophesied in Daniel 12 should be interpreted as years, the English theologian argues that "there is no evidence for it, nor is it probable: Jerome and all the saints say that it all should be understood as referring to the length of the persecution Antichrist will raise. We should without a doubt trust them rather than our Master Arnold."<sup>96</sup> Not only was Arnold's reading counter to more authoritative writers, it was also opposed by what Henry took to be basic principles of biblical exegesis: "when he says that 'day' means 'year' in the book of *Daniel* as it does in the book of *Ezekiel*, this is not a valid argument. This should never be supposed unless there is an explicit text saying as much, as there is in *Ezekiel*."<sup>97</sup> In Henry's view, the opinions of traditional authorities and established principles of exegesis counted for more than the inspired individual's reading of Scripture.

It was not only Arnold's exegetical methods that were suspect for Henry. He notes the similarity between Arnold's interpretation of Daniel and that of contemporary Jewish writers, stating "I believe that this Master (Arnold) was of their faith, albeit secretly for fear of the Christians. For the Jews base their theory on the same text from *Daniel* that Arnold uses, and they, like him, begin their counting from the time of the abrogation of the daily sacrifice by Titus and Vespasian."<sup>98</sup> Henry was either not aware of or unconvinced by Arnold's claim in his later

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

writings that Christians needed their own predictions drawn from the book of Daniel to refute Jewish exegesis. To the English theologian, Arnold's willingness to draw on Jewish exegesis made not only his orthodoxy, but his Christianity itself suspect.

Alex Novikoff's analysis of medieval intellectual culture offers some insight into when Henry might have found Arnold's appropriation of Jewish apocalyptic thought particularly disturbing. Novikoff argues that the institutionalized form of debate that was crucial to pedagogy in the medieval universities, the disputation, "penetrated a public sphere where it became applied—indeed performed—before and among audiences not trained in the lecture halls of the medieval university."<sup>99</sup> One of the most prominent examples of this public culture of disputation was Jewish-Christian debate. Either in *Adversus Iudaeos* literature or in debates staged in front of a public audience, the scholastic culture of disputation provided "new rhetorical tools that disseminated the arguments," many of which were as old as Christianity, "to a broader audience."<sup>100</sup> Scholastic theologians then, would have seen the countering of Jewish theological arguments as part of their public duty to Christendom. It therefore seems plausible to interpret Henry's reaction to Arnold's use of Jewish exegesis as his attempt to fulfill that duty and not allow a Christian writer's use of Jewish exegesis to legitimize Jewish eschatological thought in the eyes of more Christians, as Henry believed that the Messiah Jewish writers were expecting "will be in truth the Antichrist."<sup>101</sup>

While both John and Henry reasserted the authority of university-trained theologians against amateurs like Arnold, the English theologian found much to criticize in the French

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<sup>99</sup> Novikoff, 227.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 228; 172-222.

<sup>101</sup> Henry of Harclay, 25.

Dominican's treatment of the Antichrist as well. In contrast to Arnold, Henry refers to his fellow theologian as "someone quite worthy of respect," but nevertheless he rejects John's assertion because the world will only last six millennia, including fragments of up to five hundred years, it was probable that the Antichrist would come within two hundred years of 1300.<sup>102</sup> Rather, Henry claims that when previous Christian authors refer to the end of the world in the sixth millennium, "by the sixth millennium they mean the sixth age of the world which began with Christ."<sup>103</sup> He cites the English chronicler Henry of Huntingdon as well as Augustine as authorities who teach that a millennium can mean either exactly a thousand years or an age of biblical history that is defined by events and people rather than its exact duration. These six ages were from Adam to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, from Abraham to David, from David to the Babylonian captivity, from the Babylonian captivity to Christ, and, finally, from Christ until the apocalypse. As these ages did not all last the same number of years, there was no standard by which a theologian might establish the length of the sixth age. Indeed, Henry writes that it "may perhaps be longer than all of the others."<sup>104</sup> For Henry not only the specific year but also the general timeframe of the Antichrist and the apocalypse were unknowable.

After his discussion of John's own conclusions, Henry then analyzes other predictions of the end times. He argues that "we should remember that all those who have searched long about the end of the world, even if they were saints, have been mistaken in their guesswork."<sup>105</sup> Even authorities as venerable as Pope Gregory the Great and Bede had believed that were living close

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 47-9.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 51.



to the end of the world, and yet centuries had past since their times without the appearance of the Antichrist. Likewise the prophecy attributed to Saint Edward the Confessor, which John of Paris also discusses, seems to indicate that the world would not last past 1115.<sup>106</sup> As even the saints were mistaken in their apocalyptic speculation, prophets who had not been canonized fare no better in Henry's estimation. Indeed, Henry writes that he counts the Cumean Sibyl, Hildegarde of Bingen, and Joachim of Fiore "more among the poets than the prophets."<sup>107</sup> However evocative or poetic their writings were, they could provide no certain knowledge about the timeframe of the apocalypse. Where John of Paris portrayed prophecies outside of canonical Scripture as a complicated set of sources for qualified theologians to sift through, Henry portrays them as problematic writings which theologians ought not to take too seriously.

Despite his hostility to any attempt to discern the date of the coming of the Antichrist from their writings, Henry concedes that these poets could predict non-apocalyptic events. He acknowledges that "Joachim [of Fiore] did in fact prophesy truly about many things, such as the two orders [Franciscans and Dominicans] that would arrive after his time, the deposition of the Emperor Fredrick, and many other things."<sup>108</sup> Not only does Henry recognize the Cistercian abbot's writings as a legitimate prophecy of the mendicant orders, he also writes that "our modern 'thinkers' are much more deserving of rebuke than either Joachim or Hildegard. You never catch these older reckoners giving precise dates to things, but always speaking cautiously."<sup>109</sup> For the English theologian, the problem of apocalyptic predictions was a recent

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 51-2.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 67.

phenomenon, and not one he blames writers like Joachim for, even as he rejects Joachim as a possible source of eschatological knowledge. This complicates the analysis of Anna Milne-Tavendale, who argues in regard to John of Paris that “the later condemnation of his tract by the secular Henry of Harclay suggests that the radical implications of John’s inclusion of Joachim’s *virī spirituales* for Dominican identity were still understood by his audience.”<sup>110</sup> On the contrary, Henry clearly states that Joachim’s writings were not as troubling as those of later would-be prophets such as Arnold of Villanova.

Rather, the most dramatic divergence between Henry’s approach to the relationship between scholastic theology and apocalyptic prophecy and John’s lies in his treatment of astronomy. In contrast to John’s argument that astronomy could provide a basis to judge which prophecies were more likely, for Henry astronomy offered no more certainty about the end of the world than any other possible source of knowledge. He writes, discussing a theory, based on the Arabic astronomer Abū Ma‘šār, that the Antichrist would arrive six hundred and ninety-three years after the establishment of Islam, based on a supposed conjunction between religious events and the motion of the planets, “I find it quite extraordinary that otherwise intelligent men try to confirm this theory.”<sup>111</sup> Regarding John’s discussion of Ptolemy, he argues that John failed to take into account that “it has been discovered since Ptolemy’s time that the fixed stars do not always move in a uniform motion through the signs from Aries to Taurus; rather, they move sometimes forward and sometimes in a retrograde manner,” and therefore John’s conclusions “are quite preposterous and hardly need refuting.”<sup>112</sup> If the Sun’s motion through the Ptolemaic

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<sup>110</sup> Milne-Tavendale, 145.

<sup>111</sup> Henry of Harclay, 71.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

degrees was not constant, then it could not be used to definitively establish the age of the world and confirm the prophecy of the Pseudo-Methodius. In Henry's *Quaestio*, the authority of the scholastic theologian is not derived from the capability, provided by university training, to determine what prophecies were plausible. Rather, Henry demonstrates the authority of scholastic theology by delegitimizing all attempts to discern the timeframe of the end of the world. The authoritative knowledge of the university-trained theologian placed apocalyptic speculation outside of the realm of acceptable intellectual activity.

As a secular cleric, Henry had no reason to see apocalyptic prophecies as a source of religious identity like the Dominican John, and therefore had no reason to find a way to incorporate such prophecies into his defense of scholastic authority against Arnold of Villanova. Indeed, he was just as opposed to John's attempt to preserve prophecy by subordinating it to astronomy as he was to Arnold's assertion of the authority of prophecy itself. While Robert Lerner's claim that "in relying on the Bible alone, the 'visionary' Arnold was methodologically more traditional than the scholastic John" is something of an overstatement, as it does not take the individualism of Arnold's approach to Scripture into account, Henry certainly objected to his fellow theologian's approach to prophecy and scholastic authority.<sup>113</sup> Even though he was less concerned with Joachim of Fiore than with his more radical followers, the English theologian simply rejected the tradition of eschatological speculation associated with the Calabrian abbot. While he acknowledged that Joachim had predicted the rise of the mendicant orders, any attempt to use that prophecy to claim authority - even indirectly through astronomy - was illegitimate in the judgement of Henry of Harclay. The secular cleric, who spent much of his career in conflict with the Dominicans, saw no place for apocalyptic prophecies in the university.

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<sup>113</sup> Robert Lerner, *The Powers of Prophecy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), 65

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre theorizes that every culture contains specific social roles that take on particular moral and metaphysical significance. He describes these special social roles as characters and offers the public-school headmaster in Victorian England and the Prussian officer in Wilhelmine Germany as examples of characters who are distinctly important to their society's self-understanding.<sup>114</sup> The scholastic theologian was one such character in fourteenth-century western Europe. The fact that the place of the professional theologian in society was contested only reinforces this status, as MacIntyre writes that "I do not mean by this that the moral beliefs expressed by and embodied in the characters of a particular culture will secure universal assent within that culture. On the contrary, it is partly because they provide focal points for disagreement that they are able to perform their defining task."<sup>115</sup> The case of Arnold of Villanova and his critics illustrates how the scholastic theologian provided a focal point of disagreement in an eschatological controversy.

Arnold proposed a different character, that of the watchman whose individual reading of Scripture is a watchtower that enables him to foresee the coming of the Antichrist, relegating the character of the university-trained theologian to a mere supporting role in society. In response, John of Paris presented the theologian as a judge who uses specialized knowledge gained through university training to determine which prophecies were plausible. The character of the theologian was contested within the university as well however, and Henry of Harclay offered

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<sup>114</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 27-30.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

yet another interpretation of the character of the theologian. For Henry the theologian was a gatekeeper whose role was to demonstrate the illegitimacy of any attempt to determine the timeframe of the end of the world. As a secular cleric, Henry had no attachment to the Joachite tradition of apocalyptic prophecies, but for the Dominican John, Joachite thought provided a potential source of authority for his own order both within the university and in the wider society.

The fact that this controversy has received little attention in recent scholarship on the public authority of medieval theologians indicates that the themes developed by Hobbins, Wei, and Novikoff ought to be developed further. The writings of John of Paris and Henry of Harclay reveal that such authority was internally contested between different kinds of clergy as well as challenged from the outside by figures like Arnold of Villanova. The contested place of the university and its theologians in society demonstrates how complex and multipolar questions of authority were in the later Middle Ages. Theology faculties were a sight of contested authority as well as a bloc that attempted to exert authority over the rest of Christendom, and there is much room for scholars to further explore the complexities of the authority of scholastic theologians in medieval society.

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