

Eschatology and Discernment of Spirits: The Impact of Peter of John Olivi's *Remedia contra Temptationes Spirituales* (14th-15th Centuries)¹

In the last years of his life, between 1292 and 1298, the Franciscan Peter of John Olivi wrote a series of short devotional texts, known as *Opuscula*, aimed at the religious edification of the laity. Olivi's perspective was strongly eschatological: in his opinion, the imminence of the end of time made lay religious experience more authentic than that of the clergy, which would eventually oppose the final evangelical renewal.

Among the twelve surviving *Opuscula*, the most eschatologically oriented is titled *Remedia contra temptationes spirituales*. The *Remedia* are characterized by a cautious and rigorous judgment on spiritual gifts, such as visions and raptures. According to Olivi, these phenomena are particularly difficult to discern when the Antichrist is approaching and "some will renounce the faith by paying heed to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons" (I Tim 4, 1). Following this apocalyptic perspective of *discretio spirituum*, the *Remedia* are divided into two parts: the first includes twelve remedies against spiritual temptations, whereas the second puts forward four remedies against corrupt teachers and their doctrines. This structure, however, is not fixed. The work is transmitted by a huge number of manuscripts, and is often attributed, as we will see, to other authors (Bonaventure, Venturino of Bergamo), or forms part of larger works (such as Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Christi* or Vincent Ferrer's *Tractatus de vita spirituali*). Accordingly, its structure remains fluid from version to version.

By focusing on the Latin and Italian vernacular traditions of the *Remedia*, this paper will identify two ways of reading Olivi's work: one more

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radical, which emphasizes the eschatological orientation of the text; the other more focused on erasing or blurring its apocalyptic implications.

1. Olivi's *Opuscula* in Context

Peter of John Olivi was born around 1248 and entered the Order of Friars Minor at the age of twelve, around 1260. In 1292 he moved to the Occitan town of Narbonne to be the *lector* of the local Franciscan house, where he died on 14 March 1298.

Just before his death, Olivi wrote his famous commentary on the Apocalypse (the *Lectura super Apocalypsim*), where he combined his usual eschatological evaluation of Francis and his order with a negative judgement of the corruption and decay of ecclesiastical authority.² Even though it enjoyed a wide circulation, often anonymously and not always in heterodox contexts,³ the *Lectura super Apocalypsim* was officially condemned as heretical by Pope John XXII in 1326. Even before this condemnation, many copies of this work were publicly burned.

During the years he spent in Narbonne, Olivi also wrote other works which were absolutely orthodox. From the classes taught between 1293 and 1295 in his convent he drew up a treatise on contracts (*De contractibus*), which provided a global view of economics, with innovative reflections on the concept of value as well as of merchant “capital” (*capitale*). The *De contractibus* was widely read and used by authors as influential as Bernardino of Siena and Antonino of Florence, and is now considered by historians a masterpiece of scholastic economic reflection.⁴

During the same years, Olivi also wrote a treatise on the Mass. The *De missa* was composed for the benefit of less cultivated priests, so that they could administer the sacrament with greater awareness of its theological implications.⁵ In this case the audience was clerical, not lay; but

² See D. Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans. From Protest to Persecution in the Century After Saint Francis* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 75–88.

³ See P. Vian, “L’interpretazione della storia nella *Lectura super Apocalypsim* di Pietro di Giovanni Olivi e i contesti della sua ricezione,” in *Pietro di Giovanni Olivi frate Minore* (Spoleto: CISAM, 2016), 307–61.

⁴ See S. Piron, “Marchands et confesseurs. Le *Traité des contrats* d’Olivi dans son contexte (Narbonne, fin XIII^e-début XIV^e siècle),” in *L’Argent au Moyen Age* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998), 289–308; Peter of John Olivi, *A Treatise on Contracts*, Critical Edition and Commentary by S. Piron, Translated from the Latin by R. Thornton and from the French by M. Cusato, OFM (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2016).

⁵ See S. Piron, “La bibliothèque portative des fraticelles, 1. Le manuscrit de Pesaro,” *Oliviana* 5 (2016), online, <http://oliviana.revues.org/804>; Petrus Johannis Olivi, “Tracta-

like the *De contractibus*, the treatise on the Mass was intended to address to a larger audience, with a practical purpose, abstract reflections usually being inaccessible to the unlearned.

Finally, in the last years of his life Olivi embarked upon a religious subject, but for a lay audience, in thirteen short devotional texts known as *Opuscula*. As underlined by Antonio Montefusco, these texts share a similar bipartite structure: the first part briefly puts forward several moral reflections (external pedagogy); while the second tends to develop them in a more contemplative manner (inner experience).⁶

This twofold structure, which divides human life into its outer and inner spheres, was quite common in Christian theology at least since Augustine. It represents the fundamental formulation of a set of reflections, common to the Christian tradition, whose principal aim is the discernment (*discretio*) of visions and other spiritual gifts, whether or not they truly derive from God. In this long, ideal trajectory which led, in the early modern age, to the theory and practice of 'spiritual direction,' Olivi's work is significant for at least three reasons. First of all, it is significant for its implementation of easily recognizable and reproducible mnemonic devices. Olivi usually draws upon two typologies: a numerical scheme, as in the *Tractatus de septem tentationibus* and in the *Remedia contra temptationes spirituales*, or a symbolic image, as in the *Miles armatus*. The numerical scheme, in particular, lends itself easily to modifications, and we will see that the transmission of these texts shows frequent variations and adaptations.

Secondly, Olivi's *Opuscula* stand out for presenting the relationship between the inner and outer experiences in new and remarkable ways. Indeed, Olivi retrieves a monastic legacy, but he projects it on the lay world, tightly binding the inner and the worldly aspects of life. At the same time, he extends the mystical tradition by locating inner experience inside a general eschatological vision of Church history and of the history of the entire Christian world.

Therefore, in his last years in Narbonne Olivi was stimulated by the urban context to create a practical reflection necessitated by the new needs of lay society (in particular that of merchants, as the *De contractibus* shows). This is the third and most important peculiarity of this *corpus*: its lay audience. This *genre*, independent of the academic and scholastic tradition, explains on the one hand the poor level of organization of these

tus de missa," ed. by S. Piron, *Oliviana* 5 (2016), online, <http://oliviana.revues.org/817>.

⁶ A. Montefusco, "Structure and Tradition of Pierre de Jean Olieu's *Opuscula*: Inner Experience and Devotional Writing," *Franciscan Studies* 69 (2011): 153–74; Id., "Per l'edizione degli *Opuscula* di Pierre de Jean Olivi: sul *corpus* e la cronologia," *Oliviana* 4 (2012), online, <http://oliviana.revues.org/555>.

texts (which contain many repetitions), and on the other their bilingual circulation.

About half of the *corpus* (6 texts out of 13) have reached us both in Latin and in Provençal.⁷ We have reason to believe that this use of the vernacular was facilitated, if not promoted, by Olivi himself.⁸ In Olivi's view, at the time when the Antichrist is approaching, faith must be "more and more a matter of experience" (*experimentalius*), because clerics are less and less worthy of their status and so the Christian doctrine must be broken (*fracta*) and distributed, that is to say divulged, to the laity. The *Opuscula* represent precisely this attempt to prepare the lay elects, modeling their inner experience on the Franciscan spirit, for the end of time.⁹

This interpretation of Church history could sound dangerous to the ears of ecclesiastical authority, and indeed many of the Beguines, followers of Olivi's teachings, were condemned as heretics. But the radicalization of the conflict took place only later. The devotional treatises written by Olivi as a "master of spiritual life"¹⁰ do not show, in their contents, anything particularly heterodox. The Beguines themselves, as Louisa Burnham has pointed out, were a "textual community" which read both heretical and orthodox works.¹¹ In the Beguines' communities, Olivi's *Opuscula* were perhaps the most prudent texts, aiming to distinguish between true and false spirituality.

The importance attached by Olivi to the historical and theological role of the laity was part of his "progressivist conception of spiritual intelligence,"¹² which he inherited from Joachim of Fiore and Hugh of St.

⁷ Just in Provençal in the case of the *Grases de vera penitencia* (ed. by P. Bianchi De Vecchi, *Testi ascetici in antico provenzale* [Perugia: Università degli Studi, 1984], 131–41).

⁸ See A. Montefusco, "Il progetto bilingue di Olivi e la memoria dissidente," in *Pietro di Giovanni Olivi frate Minore*, 183–209; A. Montefusco and S. Piron, "In vulgari nostro. Présence et fonctions du vernaculaire dans les œuvres latines d'Olivi," *Oliviana* 5 (2016), online, <http://oliviana.revues.org/904>.

⁹ See A. Montefusco, "Structure and Tradition," 171. The quotations above are from Petrus Johannis Olivi, *Expositio in Canticum Canticorum*, ed. by J. Schlageter (Grottaferata: Collegio S. Bonaventura, 1999), 193–94, 244; Id., "Lectura super Lamentationes Hieremie," in *La Caduta di Gerusalemme. Il commento al Libro delle Lamentazioni di Pietro di Giovanni Olivi*, ed. by M. Bartoli (Roma: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo, 1991), ad 4:4.

¹⁰ See P. Vian, "Olivi maestro di vita spirituale," in Pietro di Giovanni Olivi, *Scritti scelti*, ed. by P. Vian (Rome: Città nuova, 1989), 145–50.

¹¹ L. A. Burnham, "Just Talking about God: Orthodox Prayer among the Heretical Beguines," in T. J. Johnson ed., *Franciscans at Prayer*, *The Medieval Franciscans* 4 (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2007), 249–70; Ead., "The Angel with the Book," in *Pietro di Giovanni Olivi frate Minore*, 363–93, at 373.

¹² See R. E. Lerner, "Ecstatic Dissent," *Speculum* 67 (1992): 33–57, at 52.

Victor.¹³ And it is precisely because of the general value of supernatural gifts – resulting from the “synergism between ecstasy and the theology of history”¹⁴ – that divine visions and inspirations were discussed by Olivi so rigorously and cautiously.

2. Discerning Spirits in the Times of the Antichrist: the *Remedia contra Temptationes Spirituales*

It is no coincidence that among Olivi’s *Opuscula* the *Remedia contra temptationes spirituales*, the text which is most meticulous in its instruction on how to discern true and false spiritual gifts, is also the most eschatologically oriented. This eschatological orientation is clear from the beginning of the treatise, which aims precisely to give “some remedies against certain spiritual temptations that are proliferating on the earth at this time,” because “although they do not expressly attack one of the principal articles of the faith, [...] they come close to destroying the principal roots of our faith and are preparing a seat and throne for the Antichrist.”¹⁵

These remedies consist of several exhortations not to “desire visions or revelations or sentiments that go beyond nature or are outside the normal path pursued by those who love and fear God through true faith,” insofar as “this desire can rarely occur without the presence of pride and presumption, without the temptation of some vain curiosity concerning God’s secrets, and without a weak and defective faith”; or not to search consolation in prayer and contemplation, to “flee from and abhor every sentiment, no matter how exalted, and every vision, no matter how certain it appears,” which leads “to an opinion or feeling that goes against some article of the faith, against sound morals, and especially against

¹³ As pointed out by B. FitzGerald, *Inspiration and Authority in the Middle Ages. Prophets and their Critics from Scholasticism to Humanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 135–51, at 150 in particular, where it is stressed, however, that “Hugh never posited an institutional transformation, while Olivi suggested that this historical progress, with its more widespread spiritual knowledge, would lead to a Church without hierarchy.”

¹⁴ R. E. Lerner, “Ecstatic Dissent,” 52.

¹⁵ R. Manselli, *Spirituali e Beghini in Provenza* (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio evo, 1959), 282: *aliqua remedia contra aliquas temptationes spirituales que in hoc tempore habundant in terra; quamvis expresse non sint de aliquo articulorum fidei principalium [...], sunt in periculum destructionis principalium radicum nostre fidei et [...] preparant cathedram et sedem Antichristo*. The translation is taken from R. J. Karris, OFM, *Spiritual Warfare and Six Other Spiritual Writings of Peter of John Olivi* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2012), 25–36 *passim*.

humility and righteousness,” and other similar advice.¹⁶ These suggestions are significant proof of Olivi’s prudent “openness, cautious as it is demanding” to charismatic and prophetic inspirations.¹⁷ Generally speaking, we could talk about a sort of “double bind” between Olivi’s apocalyptic expectation and his conception of visionary experience: the former encourages and discourages the latter at the same time. Therefore, as remarked by David Burr, Olivi “saw the dangers inherent in visionary experience and found it prudent to issue a few disclaimers of his own in this regard; yet he was at least open to such visions, even when, far from mirroring faith, reason, and holy Scripture, they seemed to fly in the face of all three.”¹⁸

But this contrast can also be viewed inversely: Olivi was open to such visions, yet he saw the dangers inherent in them. This way of framing his attitude, as far as the *Opuscula* are concerned, seems more appropriate. In the *Remedia*, in particular, caution in regard to “spiritual temptations” clearly prevails: the term remedy (*remedium*) itself means both medicine and support against these temptations, following a physiological metaphor which is widespread in late medieval religious as well as erotic literature, and is still awaiting a comprehensive study.¹⁹

Conforming to the usual twofold structure of the *Opuscula*, these remedies are divided into two categories: the first includes twelve suggestions against spiritual temptations, whereas the second puts forward four warnings against corrupt teachers and their doctrines. Thus the medicines prescribed by Olivi do not come in a form of a symbolic image, but a numerical scheme: something easy to modify, interpolate, or adapt.

¹⁶ R. Manselli, *Spirituali e Beghini*, 282–3 *passim*: *quod non desideres visiones aut revelationes aut sentimenta que sint supra naturam et supra communem cursum illorum qui amant et timent Deum per veram fidem, quia predictum desiderium raro potest esse absque radice et fundamento superbie et presumptionis et absque temptatione alicuius vane curiositatis circa secreta Dei et absque fragilitate et defectu fidei; quod omne sentimentum quantumcumque altum et omnem visionem quantumcumque appareat tibi certa, ex quo ducit corruptum in opinionem aut affectionem contra aliquem articulum fidei aut contra bonos mores et maxime contra humilitatem et contra honestatem, fugias et abhorreas.*

¹⁷ See P. Vian, “Pietro di Giovanni Olivi,” in *Mistici francescani. 2. Secolo XIV* (Milano: Edizioni Francescane, 1997) 566–77, at 572 (“disponibilità, cauta perché esigente”); W. L. Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits. Assessing Visions and Visionaries in the Late Middle Ages* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011): 59–69.

¹⁸ D. Burr, “Olivi, Apocalyptic Expectation, and Visionary Experience,” *Traditio* 41 (1985): 273–88, at 278.

¹⁹ See N. Tonelli, *Fisiologia della passione. Poesia d’amore e medicina da Cavalcanti a Boccaccio* (Florence: SISMEL, 2015), 206–21; A. Montefusco, “Stimuli, Remedia e altre immagini: sulla rivoluzione devozionale dei francescani,” *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome. Moyen Âge* 131 (2019), forthcoming (my thanks to the author for having shared with me this study in advance).

And this potential textual instability was largely exploited by those interested in using, copying, or rewriting the *Remedia*.

3. Readers and Rewriters of the *Remedia*

The study of the *Remedia*'s influence and reception is made particularly difficult for at least three reasons. First of all, it is difficult because of the number of surviving manuscripts. Ciceri's catalogue of Olivi's works lists 34 manuscripts as containing this text,²⁰ but the scholar who so far has examined its reception most thoroughly, Joachim Vennebusch, hints at over 70 manuscripts (unfortunately, without specifying their location).²¹ Moreover, tracking the transmission of the *Remedia* is complicated because of its frequent anonymous or pseudepigraphical form: the work is often attributed to other authors, for example Olivi's master Bonaventure, the less known Dominican preacher Venturino of Bergamo (1304-1346), or Jean Gerson (1363-1429).²² This peculiarity is more than understandable in light of Olivi's condemnation as a heretic by John XXII, which made it prudent to omit his name. Nevertheless, anonymity and pseudepigraphy do not help the scholar who is attempting to track down the manuscript copies of the *Remedia*. This task is made even more difficult because of the frequent indirect transmission of the text, included, as we will see, as part of larger works (normally without revealing the source).

Thus, the reception of Olivi's *Remedia* is still awaiting a comprehensive investigation. Vennebusch has pointed out the minor adaptations the treatise has undergone in the hands of members of different religious orders: for example, in the second warning of the second part, talking of the "holy men and women whose lives are considered to have been perfect," several manuscripts, probably produced in a Benedictine *milieu*, replace the name of St. Clare with those of St. Benedict, Pope Celestine V, and St. Scholastica.²³ More generally, I think we can identify two ways

²⁰ A. Ciceri, *Petri Johannis Olivi Opera. Censimento dei Manoscritti* (Grottaferrata: Collegio S. Bonaventura, 1999), 190-2.

²¹ See J. Vennebusch, "Zur Überlieferungsgeschichte des Traktates "De remediis contra tentationes spirituales" (Petrus Johannis Olivi, Venturinus de Bergamo, Ludolphus de Saxonia, Johannes Gerson)," *Scriptorium* 33 (1979): 254-9, at 254.

²² See B. Distelbrink, *Bonaventurae scripta authentica, dubia vel spuria critice recensita* (Rome: Istituto storico dei Cappuccini, 1975), 177-8; J. Vennebusch, "Zur Überlieferungsgeschichte," 256-8; J. Gerson, *Œuvres complètes* 9, ed. by P. Glorieux (Paris: Desclée, 1973), 518-24. On Venturino see also C. Gennaro, "Venturino spirituale," *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 23 (1987): 434-66.

²³ See J. Vennebusch, "Zur Überlieferungsgeschichte," 256.

of reading Olivi's work: one designed to tone down the apocalyptic implications of the text by casting them as more abstract and moral; the other, on the contrary, intended to accentuate the eschatological orientation of the text by giving it a historical perspective, in potential dissent with the established Church.

The first trend sometimes results in a complete elimination of the apocalyptic dimension, as in the *Vita Iesu Christi*, composed around 1374 by the Carthusian Ludolph of Saxony († 1377 or 1378). The austere and contemplative Carthusian order has never departed from its ancient strictness and actually attracted members of other religious orders, who sought a more ascetic spirituality.²⁴ A former Dominican friar, Ludolph was among them. His "Life" of Christ managed to reinvigorate the Mendicant tradition of meditation, which developed and adapted the monastic legacy for people living in the world, in a renewed monastic spirit.²⁵ In doing so, he drew from a large number of authors, among them Bonaventure, as well as several texts at the time attributed to him (such as the *Stimulus amoris* and the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*), and also Olivi. For Ludolph, Franciscan devotional literature is part of a sort of Christological encyclopedia, completely detached from history. As part of this body of Franciscan literature, Olivi's *Opuscula* stand out for their singular eschatological inspiration. But the Carthusian gives the meditation on Christ's life a purely moral and contemplative aim, with no consideration of present and future times. Consequently, the *Remedia*, included (without mentioning Olivi's name) in Book 2 of the *Vita Iesu Christi*, are totally deprived of their eschatological dimension. This 'disempowerment' is particularly evident in the prayer (*oratio*) concluding the *Remedia* in Ludolph's treatise, which rejects the desire for visions and revelations, privileging virtuous deeds as the only necessary preparation for Christ's return to earth, whenever that may be:

Lord Jesus Christ [...] remove from me all danger of presumption and pride that I may never desire visions and revelations

²⁴ See H. Rütting, "Die Kartäuser und die spätmittelalterlicher Ordensreform," in *Reformbemühungen und Observanzbestrebungen im spätmittelalterlichen Ordenswesen*, Berliner historischer Studien 14, Ordensstudien 6 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1989), 35–8; and, more briefly, B. Roest, "Observant Reform in Religious Orders," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 4: *Christianity in Western Europe, c. 1100–c. 1500*, ed. by M. Rubin and W. Simons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 446–57, at 453–4.

²⁵ See M. Walsh, "'To Always Be Thinking Somehow About Jesus:' The Prologue of Ludolph's *Vita Christi*," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 43 (2011): 1–39, at 6; and, more generally, W. Baier, "Ludolphe de Saxe," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, ascétique et mystique* 9 (Paris: Desclée, 1976), 1130–38.

[...], which may in some way lead me into errors. Most loving Lord, daily make me ascend to virtuous deeds; ever have me progress in virtue, constantly strive and long for the higher life, so that by being watchful and circumspect, I can prepare for thy coming at an indefinite time.²⁶

The *Vita Iesu Christi* was a bestseller in late medieval and early modern Europe. Through this *medium*, the *Remedia* were translated into many languages, circulated in early 16th century Spain – where Ludolph’s work played a key part in the restless spirituality of the times – and also reached Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*.²⁷ But Ignatius also knew another text in which Olivi’s *Remedia* were included: the *Tractatus de vita spirituali*, attributed to the Dominican friar Vincent Ferrer (1350–1419). This is not the place to deal with the problem of the apocalyptic nature of Ferrer’s thinking, when it started to appear and whether it was moral and penitential rather than actually apocalyptic.²⁸ Suffice it to say that the *Remedia* – maybe known to Ferrer due to their attribution to his fellow

²⁶ I quote, correcting the Latin text, from Ludolphus de Saxonia, *Vita Christi* (Mediolani: Iohannes Antonius de Honate, impensis Petri Antonii de Castellione, c. 1488–1489), without page number, Book 2, Chap. 41: *De remediis contra spirituales novissimi temporis temptationes et exercitio mentis in Deum* (“The Remedies for the Spiritual Trials of the Last Days, and Meditation on God”): *Domine Iesu Christe [...] exclude a me omnem motum presumptionis et superbie, ut numquam visiones desiderem aut revelationes que me ducere quoquomodo possent in errores. Fac, Domine piissime, ut quotidie ad opera virtutum ascendem et semper in bono proficiam ac continue in altiore vitam tendere et suspirare, ut sic vigilando et solícite agendo ad incertum tuum adventum [Matth. 24:44] me valeam preparare*. For the English translation, see M. I. Bodenstedt, S.N.D., *Praying the Life of Christ: First English Translation of the Prayers Concluding the 181 Chapters of the “Vita Christi” of Ludolphus the Carthusian; The Quintessence of His Devout Meditations on the Life of Christ* (Salzburg: Analecta Cartusiana, 1973), 136.

²⁷ The first who pointed out the importance of the *Vita Christi* in Cisneros’ Spain (where the work was translated in 1502–1503), was M. Bataillon, “Érasme et l’Espagne,” in *Recherches sur l’histoire spirituelle du XVI^e siècle* [1937], pref. by J. C. Margolin (Genève: Droz, 1998), 47 ff. An indirect impact of the *Remedia* on Ignatius is underlined by P. Vallin, “Les Règles du discernement des esprits et Ludolphe le Chartreux,” *Revue d’ascétique et de mystique* 38 (1962): 212–9; Id., “Notes à propos du *De remediis contra temptationes spirituales*,” *Revue d’ascétique et de mystique* 45 (1969): 453–5. This impact is not mentioned, however, by P. Shore, “The *Vita Christi* of Ludolph of Saxony and Its Influence on the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 30 (1998): 1–34, and in Ignazio di Loyola, *Esercizi spirituali. Ricerca sulle fonti*, ed. by P. Schiavone (Cinisello Balsamo: Paoline, 1995). On the relationship between the *Spiritual Exercises* and their sources see, more generally, A. Prosperi, “The Two Standards. The Origins and Development of a Celebrated Ignatian Meditation,” *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 2 (2015): 361–86, at 370–9.

²⁸ P. Daileader, *Saint Vincent Ferrer, His World and Life: Religion and Society in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 150–7.

Dominican, Venturino of Bergamo²⁹ – were thus included in a treatise which was as prudent and moderate as it was popular.³⁰ Even if the *De vita spirituali* was actually written by Ferrer (which is not at all certain),³¹ the text certainly expresses a conservative opinion regarding the issue of religious visions and their authority, according to which spiritual gifts ought to be regarded with great suspicion, as they might be of demonic inspiration. In that way the *De vita spirituali* echoes Ferrer's early treatise *De moderno ecclesie scismate* (1380), without mentioning the threat of the Antichrist or other specific eschatological expectations, typical of Ferrer's late preaching.³²

Both in his early moderate period and in his later apocalyptic one, Ferrer was always interested, above all, in the moral and penitential effect of his preaching. The same can be said for Bernardino of Siena (1380-1444), whose path, though, was somewhat inverse: the principal 'pillar' of Franciscan Observance left a youth full of apocalyptic curiosities – albeit marked by a static eschatology and focused on individual and social perfection, not on Church history as a whole – for a certainly more prudent maturity.³³ After 1423, in the works and sermons of the last twenty years of his life, Bernardino repeated many times his rejection of any speculation on the Antichrist as a “diabolical deception.”

Is it not true that in the time of the blessed Bernard, and before and after him – not only then, but even in our own times, when I myself was a child fifty years ago – is it not true that there was spread around the deception of many revelations and visions which claimed that the Antichrist had already been born? These revelations – because of the apparently holy life and reputation of those who were preaching and writing about it – were believed to be true; yet, as I have never tired of preaching, with

²⁹ A. Sisto, “Pietro di Giovanni Olivi, il beato Venturino da Bergamo e san Vincenzo Ferreri,” *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 1 (1965): 268–73; C. Gennaro, *Venturino spirituale*, 452.

³⁰ For the manuscripts, the editions and the translations, see T. Kaeppli and E. Panella, *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum medii aevi*, vol. 4 (Rome: Ad S. Sabinae/Istituto storico domenicano, 1993), 470–2.

³¹ See P. Daileader, *Saint Vincent Ferrer*, 189–91.

³² See R. Rusconi, *L'attesa della fine. Crisi della società, profezia ed Apocalisse in Italia al tempo del grande scisma d'Occidente (1378–1417)* (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1979), 221–2; P.-B. Hodel, “Commentaire et analyse,” in *Le Tractatus de moderno ecclesie scismate de saint Vincent Ferrier*, ed. by P.-B. Hodel (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2008), 209; P. Daileader, *Saint Vincent Ferrer*, 190.

³³ See R. Rusconi, *L'attesa della fine*, 246–57; Id., “Apocalittica ed escatologia nella predicazione di Bernardino da Siena,” *Studi medievali* 21 (1981): 85–128.

my own experience to back me, they have all proven to be truly diabolical deceptions.³⁴

This programmatic passage is taken from the treatise *De inspirationibus*, written by Bernardino shortly before his death in 1444. In the *De inspirationibus* we can easily recognize extensive quotations from the *Remedia*.³⁵ Bernardino never mentions Olivi's name, but he was certainly aware that the author of the text was the theologian from Béziers; indeed, he transcribed in his own hand, together with the *Remedia*, many other works by Olivi in two manuscripts now at the Biblioteca Comunale of Siena.³⁶

In line with his general and deliberate eschatological disempowerment of Olivi's thinking, Bernardino not only dissociates himself from the desire for visions and prophecies, in the name of pragmatic caution (because, as we read at the very beginning of the treatise, "we are often deceived by what appears as good");³⁷ but he also abstains from projecting these expectations on to a comprehensive historical and eschatological plane.

Nevertheless, there was also another way of reading the *Remedia*: a way characterized, instead, by a strong emphasis on the eschatological dimension and on the value of direct inspiration in the face of the approaching end of time, when ecclesiastical authority is losing its status.

John of Rupescissa's *Liber Ostensor* presents a prime example of this tendency. In the eleventh treatise of this huge apocalyptic compilation

³⁴ Bernardinus Senensis, *Opera Omnia* 6, ed. by the Fathers of S. Bonaventure College (Ad Claras Aquas: ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1959), 223–311, at 274: *Nonne tempore beati Bernardi et alii praecedentibus et sequentibus temporibus, insuper et temporibus nostris, etiam dum eram puer, iam sunt quinquaginta anni, cucurrit delusio multarum revelationum et visionum, asserentium Antichristum fuisse iam natum? Quae revelationes, ratione apparentis vitae ac famae eorum qui praedicaverunt atque scripserunt, apparuerunt vanae; et tamen, sicut saepius praedicavi, experientia teste, fallaciae daemonum reptatae sunt.* The English translation above is drawn from F. Mormando, "An Early Renaissance Guide for the Perplexed: Bernardino of Siena's *De inspirationibus*," in *Through a Glass Darkly: Essays in the Religious Imagination*, ed. by J.C. Hawley (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 24–49, at 42–3.

³⁵ As noted in the commentary of the edition provided by the Fathers of S. Bonaventure College of Quaracchi and in F. Mormando, "An Early Renaissance Guide for the Perplexed," 29–30.

³⁶ Siena, Biblioteca Comunale, ms. U.V.5 (ff. 15va–16va) and ms. U.V.6 (ff. 282ra–284va), on which see R. De Pierro, *Lo scriptorium di san Bernardino nel Convento dell'Osservanza a Siena, in margine al Progetto Codex: aspetti di produzione e conservazione del patrimonio manoscritto in Toscana*, ed. by G. Pomaro (Pisa: Pacini, 2014), 29–105, at 85–91.

³⁷ Bernardinus Senensis, *Opera Omnia* 6, 223: *Saepe [...] fallimur sub specie boni.*

by the Franciscan prophet, captive in the prisons of Avignon, we read the entire text on the “remedies elegantly given by friar Peter of John against the Antichristian threats,” concluded with a note by Rupescissa on its usefulness for contrasting the already near (*propinquus*) and looming (*proximus*) Antichrist.³⁸

This radical trend, more hidden and elusive than the conservative one, at the beginning of the 16th century reached the spiritual father of the Clerics Regular of St. Paul (better known as Barnabites), the Dominican Battista Carioni (Battista of Crema), and his pupil, the Lateran Canon Serafino Aceti (Serafino of Fermo); the latter frequently insists, in his works, on the discernment of spirits necessary during the end of times, complicated by the “temptations of the mystical Antichrist.”³⁹

To be sure, this trend was known to Gabriele Biondo. Son of the great humanist and historian Biondo Flavio, who delineates first “an historical era that came to be known as the Middle Ages,”⁴⁰ Gabriele Biondo has left us mystical and eschatological works scattered in four manuscripts still completely unpublished. From his texts he emerges as a ‘spiritual director’ *ante litteram* of a little community between Venice and Florence which in the first years of the 16th century attracted the suspicions of ecclesiastical authority. From his texts he also emerges as a passionate reader of the tradition of the Spiritual Franciscans, and among them, in particular, of Olivi. Biondo himself translated the *Remedia*, with a considerable preface which introduces the treatise as a sort of a prophecy of the “blessed” Peter of John Olivi on the times of the “mystical Antichrist,” who “has to precede and cause the arrival of the overt Antichrist.”⁴¹

³⁸ Jean de Roquetaillade, *Liber ostensor quod adesse festinant tempora*, ed. by A. Vauchez, C. Thévenaz Modestin and C. Morerod Fattebert (Rome: École française de Rome, 2005), 777 (*remedia que contra antichristiana pericula eleganter ponit frater Petrus Iohannis*), 784.

³⁹ Serafino of Fermo, “Breve dichiarazione sopra l’Apocalisse di Giovanni, dove si prova esser venuto il precursor d’Anticristo et avvicinarsi la percossa da lui predetta nel sesto sigillo,” in Id., *Opere spirituali alla christiana perfezione utilissime et necessarie* (Piacenza: Francesco Conti, 1570), 491–574, at 492–3, 505 (“tentationi del mystico Antichristo”), and *passim*. On the discernment of spirits see Id., “Trattato della discretione a persone spirituali utilissimo,” in Id., *Opere spirituali*, 241–320. On the influence of the Spiritual Franciscans on Battista of Crema and his pupil Serafino (who quotes explicitly Angelo Clareno, Ugo Panziera and Ubertino of Casale) see E. Bonora, *I conflitti della Controriforma. Santità e obbedienza nell’esperienza religiosa dei primi barnabiti* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1998), *ad indicem*.

⁴⁰ See A. Mazzocco, “Introduction,” in *A New Sense of the Past: The Scholarship of Biondo Flavio (1392–1463)*, Supplementa Humanistica Lovaniensia, ed. by A. Mazzocco and M. Laureys (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2016), 17.

⁴¹ Seville, Biblioteca Capitular y Colombina, ms. 325 (7-1-9), ff. 111v (“el quale Antichristo mystico deve precedere et causare la venuta dello aperto Antichristo”), 127r (for the reference to the “beato Pier Joanni de Olivo”).

It does not seem a coincidence that Biondo, together with Rupescissa, is one of the few readers who knew and reported the name of the real author of the *Remedia*. But the importance of this text in Biondo's works, as well as of its programmatic intertwining of *discretio spirituum* and great tribulations of the end of times, goes far beyond the translation itself. Biondo intensely meditated on the teachings of the *Remedia* and connected them with other Franciscan authors who may have already acknowledged Olivi as spiritual director *ante litteram*. Among them is Ugo Panziera, with his attention to the illusions of self-love of the "modern saints," and his warnings against the dangers of spiritual perfection if desired too fervently.⁴² Among them is also Iacopone da Todi, especially his apocalyptic *lauda* "Or se parerà chi averà fidanza?" built on the subtext of Christ's eschatological discourse of Matthew 24.⁴³ Iacopone confronts the traps set before the believers who are looking too insistently for perfection and are "eager to tell of their raptures and prophecies" ("dicer ratt'e profezie so' gulusi"). Preceded by the title "Of the great battle of the Antichrist" (*De la grande battaglia d'Antichristo*), this *lauda* is included in the "iacoponic anthology" set up by Biondo or by one of his followers, and transmitted in the same manuscript, now at the Biblioteca Capitulary Colombina of Seville, in which we read also the translation of Olivi's *Remedia*.⁴⁴

In conclusion, Olivi's "remedies" against spiritual temptations propose a "mixed message [...], simultaneously innovative and conservative."⁴⁵ In the history of reception and transmission, his cautious and somewhat ambivalent list of suggestions was taken by his readers and redactors in opposite directions. Its mixture of eschatology and discernment of spirits was repurposed in two opposite ways. On one hand, the text was turned into a contemplation disengaged from history (Ludolph of Saxony), or used for penitential and moral purposes (Vincent Ferrer and Bernardino

⁴² See Ugo Panziera, "De l'excelente pericoloso stato dello spirito che nel mondo regna, et della mia imperfectione," in Id., *Trattati* (Florence: Antonio Miscomini, 1492), ff. 73v–76r (for a modern edition see *Mistici del Duecento e del Trecento*, ed. by A. Levasti [Milan: Rizzoli, 1935], 312–6). On Panziera see the entry by I. Gagliardi in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 81 (2014), online, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ugo-panziera_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ugo-panziera_(Dizionario-Biografico)/); on his influence on Biondo see M. Lodone, "L'eredità dei francescani spirituali tra Quattro e Cinquecento," *Oliviana* 4 (2012): 21, 24, online, <http://journals.openedition.org/oliviana/487>.

⁴³ As pointed out in the commentaries: see Iacopone da Todi, *Laudi trattato e detti*, ed. by F. Ageno (Florence: Le Monnier, 1953), n. 50, 198–201; Id., *Laude*, ed. by M. Leonardi (Florence: Olschki, 2010), n. 6, 19–21 (229–32 for the commentary). Leonardi properly links the *lauda* to Olivi's *Remedia* themselves. For a comparative analysis of Iacopone's and Olivi's works see, more broadly, A. Montefusco, *Iacopone nell'Umbria del Due-Trecento. Un'alternativa francescana* (Rome: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 2006), 65–109.

⁴⁴ Seville, Biblioteca Capitulary Colombina, ms. 325 (7-1-9), 51v–53r.

⁴⁵ W. L. Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits*, 69.

of Siena); on the other, the same text was read as an apocalyptic exhortation to discern spiritual gifts at the end of times, when visions and revelations are difficult to discern, more dangerous, but also more necessary.

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