

## Frye and Joachim of Floris

*Not previously published.*

The Italian abbot Joachim of Floris (also Fiore or Flora) (ca. 1132–1202) makes more than three-dozen appearances in Frye’s published and unpublished writings, which suggests that the connections between the two are worth exploring. In reading the few texts of Joachim that are available in English and in studies about him by the preeminent Joachimite scholar Marjorie Reeves and others (Bernard McGinn, Delno C. West and Sandra Zimdars-Swartz, Beatrice Hirsch-Reich, Morton Bloomfield), I have been struck by the number of parallels between the two visionaries.<sup>1</sup>

### Who Was Joachim of Floris?

Joachim was a biblical exegete, mystic, and philosopher of history. Sometime before 1192 he founded the monastic order of San Giovanni in Fiore, from whence his name derives. After a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1159, he underwent a spiritual crisis and conversion. For a time he was a hermit and an itinerant preacher in his native Calabria, but he eventually joined the Order of Cistercians and applied himself chiefly to biblical interpretation, seeking to uncover hidden meanings in Scripture, especially Revelation. Pope Urban appointed a deputy abbot so that Joachim might devote more time to his writings. Although he received the favor of three other popes, he was not an uncontroversial figure. The Cistercian order denounced him as a runaway. His work was condemned by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and in 1255–56 by the special commission set up to review his interpretations of Scripture. His work was dismissed by both Bonaventura and Aquinas, yet Dante enshrines Joachim, “spirit-fired and prophet true,” in the second sun canto of the *Paradiso* (canto 12:140–1).<sup>2</sup> In the twentieth century Joachim’s influence can be seen in two writers who influenced Frye, Yeats and Jung, and in Kandinsky.<sup>3</sup>

Joachim’s three chief works—*Liber Concordiae Novi ac Veteris Testamenti* (*Harmony of the Old and New Testaments*, often called the *Book of Concordance*, 1519), *Expositio in Apocalypsim* (*Exposition of the Book of Revelation*), *Psalterium Decem Cordarum* (*Psaltery of Ten Strings*)—focus on scriptural prophecy, especially as it relates to the future of the Church. Joachim is best known for his view of the three states or ages of the world, based on his understanding of the Trinity. The age of the Father or the Old Testament order of worldly affairs was characterized by power and obedience to law and issued in the arousing of fear. It was the period of marriage, work, servitude, and slavery. The age of the Son was the New Testament age of faith instead of works. It was an age of the clergy, the organized church, and the sacraments. It begins with the birth of Christ and continues until 1260, the year of the advent, Joachim speculated, of the age of the Spirit, which would usher in the period of what Revelation calls the “everlasting gospel.” The age of the Spirit was an age of autonomy in which the absolute freedom contained in the gospel message would prevail. The age of the Spirit was the monastic age, so that the need for the Church and other constraining institutions would effectively disappear. All would be freed from the letter of the Gospel, and universal love, freedom, and justice would reign. Frye says that “Joachim of Floris has a hint of an order of things in which the monastery takes over the church & the world” (*Bible*, 17), but Joachim’s monastic ideal is certainly more than a hint. The age of the Spirit is a revolutionary and transformative process. As Eric Hobsbawm writes, Joachim “distinguished between the reign of *justice* or *law*, which is essentially an equitable regulation of social relations in an imperfect society, and the reign of *freedom*, which is the

perfect society” (11). Joachim conceived his three major works as a unified Trinitarian sequence. The *Book of Concordance* centered on the Old Testament and was typologically connected to the Apocalypse of the risen Christ in the *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*. The *Psalter of Ten Strings*, in turn, centered on spiritual understanding. “The Spirit,” Frye writes, “is the voice of inspiration & prophecy, the Christian oracle, of whom the Mother is a hypostatic form: hence it’s involved in all future-centered revolutionary constructs like that of Joachim of Floris” (*Third*, 198).

### Frye’s Knowledge of Joachim

Frye first encountered Joachim’s idea of the three ages in Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* (1:19–20), a book he discovered in the Hart House Library during the 1930–31 academic year. How much of the *Decline* the eighteen-year-old Frye read at the time is uncertain, but he would have surely have run across Spengler’s remarks on Joachim toward the beginning of Spengler’s introduction to volume 1:

On the very threshold of the Western Culture we meet the great Joachim of Floris . . . the first thinker of the Hegelian stamp who shattered the dualistic world-form of Augustine, and with his essentially Gothic intellect stated the new Christianity of his time in the form of a third term to the religions of the Old and New Testaments, expressing them respectively as the Age of the Father, the Age of the Son and the Age of the Holy Ghost. His teaching moved the best of the Franciscans and the Dominicans, Dante, Thomas Aquinas, in their inmost souls and awakened a world-outlook which slowly but surely took entire possession of the historical sense of our Culture. (19–20)

Frye reports that during the summer of 1932 he read *The Decline of the West* in the YMCA in Edmonton (“one of the great nights of my life”) (*Fiction*, 28).<sup>4</sup> As a twenty-year-old, then, Frye had encountered Joachim twice through at least one secondary source. Three years later we find Frye referring to Joachim in two papers he wrote during his final year at Emmanuel College, “The Augustinian Interpretation of History” and “The Life and Thought of Ramond Lull.” In the former he wrote:

In the Middle Ages the only contributions to a philosophy of history could come from thinkers addicted to mysticism, to reflection rather than systematization; that is, with sympathies not altogether given up to the development of systematic philosophy, yet enough influenced by it to work it into their thought. Such a figure, quasi-mystical and almost Oriental, was Joachim of Floris (1145–1202), whose interpretation was threefold. Augustine’s view of the temporal progression (not the most important element of his philosophy of history) was flat, balanced, antithetical, and hinged on the Incarnation. The world of time, after its creation, was the scene of a dramatic change from comparative darkness to comparative light. This was the only essential alteration possible to the *civitas terrena*. The great medieval abbot visioned an organic development in which the age of the Father, or the reign of law, before Christianity, advanced to the age of the Son, or reign of the Gospel, to be finally fused in the age of the Spirit, a sort of Kantian kingdom of ends in which all hierarchical distinctions were to be abolished. The general progression was that of the liberation of the life of contemplation from that of action—the eternal struggle to make thought independent of being. (*Student*, 210)

Frye goes on to say that Joachim stands midway between Augustine's religious view of history and Hegel's philosophical view. "Joachim, partly religious and partly philosophical, superimposes one on the other in time, connecting them by the era ushered in by the Incarnation" (*Student*, 211). In his essay on Lull Frye says only that Lull's prose romance *Blanquerna* is "a worthy connecting link between Joachim of Floris and the Grail legends of the Middle Ages and the great Utopian writers of the Renaissance" (*Student*, 223). Frye is clearly correct in saying that Joachim displaced Augustine's long-held view of history and the Book of Revelation. West and Zimdars-Swartz write that to Augustine

The historical trend was one of deterioration. His vision was of that of a more perfect age in the past and of another yet to come. He was living in an age sure to decline until the end of the world order immediately preceding the Second Advent. He focussed in the Kingdom as a then-present reality that had begun with the First Advent . . . [he] viewed the Apocalypse as instructional instead of prophetic. (12)

Joachim turned this view upside down.<sup>5</sup>

The sources of Frye's knowledge of Joachim are uncertain. He never cites the titles of any of Joachim's works, and there were no texts by Joachim in his own library. The secondary sources he lists at the end of his Augustine paper do not mention Joachim even in passing. Whatever sources were available to him were relatively few, as Frye was writing almost two decades before the virtual rediscovery of Joachim, beginning in the 1950s,<sup>6</sup> and even now scholars continue to use photographically reproduced copies of sixteenth-century Latin editions. Frye had a fairly extensive knowledge of Latin, and it is of course possible that he had access to the sixteenth-century Latin texts. What seems more likely is that Frye's knowledge of Joachim came largely if not entirely from secondary sources. More than a decade after his student papers, Frye ran across the fairly comprehensive chapter on Joachim in Karl Löwith's *Meaning in History*, which he reviewed for the *Canadian Forum* in 1949.<sup>7</sup> The same year in a lecture to students in English Poetry and Prose, 1500–1660 (English 2i) he wrote in his *Diaries* of "the monastic overtones in Utopia, of Joachim of Floris & the monastery militant, so to speak: the conquest of the world by the monastic ideal" (*Diaries*, 86). But the *Diaries* reveal nothing about his reading of or about Joachim.

#### Parallels

In my opening paragraph I mentioned the parallels between Joachim and Frye. Here are a dozen:

1. Both are on a spiritual pilgrimage. Reeves and Hirsch-Reich begin their book on Joachim's *figurae* by saying that the opening phrase of his *Book of Concord*, drawn from Hebrews 13:14, "strikes the keynote of the mood in which he sets out on his labours: that of the spiritual quest which is the true life of Man. The traditional interpretation of these words from Hebrews is that of the pilgrimage from this earthly life to the world beyond. While accepting this, Joachim also looks toward the goal in this life, and for this purpose he will later use all the great Biblical images of the pilgrimage" (1).<sup>8</sup> In *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary* I tried to show that Frye was on a spiritual pilgrimage and that his quest took three forms. First, there is a horizontal pilgrimage in pursuit of an object of desire. Frye begins with the literary universe of William Blake, and he seeks with unremitting energy the verbal formulations that will carry him to a double vision lying beyond the poetic. This is Frye's own horizontal quest. He calls it a purgatorial journey, and its goal is apocalyptic vision: an interpenetrating, kerygmatic universe in which all subject-object distinctions have been

erased and lifted to another level. The shape of the journey is often, in the second place, projected cyclically, and the contour of Frye's career could be described as a cycle, beginning with *Fearful Symmetry* and coming full circle in *The Double Vision*. "The way or journey is a series of cycles (journey of course is from *ournée*) where we get 'up' in the morning and 'fall' asleep at night. At a certain point the cycle stops for us—there's finally a winter-night-old age-sea point with no spring-dawn-birth-rain following. We all take that road; the question is whether (or when) an upward spiral moves against it. It does, of course, but there must be a point at which rebirth must give place to resurrection" (*Late*, 289). The journey assumes still a third shape in the last half of *Words with Power*, where the horizontal and cyclic quests are displaced by descending and ascending movements along the *axis mundi*: "ascent & descent are a verticalized journey" (*ibid.*, 315), the way down and the way up in the Heraclitean formula. Or in another formulation, the path or way of the journey becomes metaphorically a "reconstructed ladder" (*ibid.*, 23).

2. Both experienced sudden illuminations, which were less mystical experiences than epiphanies in which they received a vision of some topic they were struggling with that suddenly came together is a coherent pattern that made sense. "The major images were given to [Joachim]," writes Richard Bauckham, "in moments of visionary illumination, acting as a kind of conceptual breakthrough at points where Joachim had found his thought obstructed" (109). Reeves recounts two of these experiences in which "what was given was not a specific answer to a specific question but an inspiration which freed his mind to work out the problems" (*Joachim of Fiore*, 5). Frye had similar experiences, which he referred to as epiphanies, illuminations, intuitions, enlightenments.<sup>9</sup>
3. Both were primarily exegetes interested in finding the meaning of texts; their projects were fundamentally hermeneutical. Joachim has been called a prophet, but not in the sense of one that foretells or predicts future events. He was an interpreter of prophetic literature. In *The Critical Path* Frye says that one of the two large critical questions that interest him is "How do we arrive at poetic meaning?" (*Critical*, 8). This is a hermeneutical question, and discovering poetic meaning involves exegesis.
4. Both always favored the spirit over the letter in scriptural interpretation. "You ought also to note," writes Joachim, "that the letter of the Old Testament was committed to the Jewish people, the letter of the New to the Roman people. The spiritual understanding that proceeds from both Testaments has been committed to the spiritual men" (McGinn, *Apocalyptic*, 128). The dialectic of Word and Spirit is the driving force behind Frye's *Words with Power*. In this dialectic Spirit is a many-layered term, one that I examine in the last chapter of *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary*, but it is the unifying force that leads toward the gospel of love. In the apocalypse of the Word and Spirit dialogue, the Creation is transformed and renewed and "the U-shaped comic ending reverses the cycles of history, where resurrection abolishes rebirth and revolution-culbute abolishes revolution-turning wheel" (*Late*, 329). The age of the Spirit, Frye notes, is the same as Milton's Word of God in the heart (*Romance*, 163),<sup>10</sup> which he also identifies with the Everlasting Gospel and the interpenetration of Word and Spirit.
5. Both were typologists, interested in the relationship between the events in the Old Testament and the New. The concords between the Old and New Testament that Joachim discovers result in a more or less standard form of biblical typology. Typological readings, of course, lie at the heart of Frye's two books on the Bible, Frye's account of the typological method of reading most extensively set down in chapters 5 and 6 of *The Great Code*.<sup>11</sup>
6. Both focused on the Apocalypse as a text and a teleological event of great importance. Joachim's *Exposition* is devoted to the Book and Revelation, and the Apocalypse is one of

- seven phases of revelation Frye postulates in *The Great Code*. His most complete account of Revelation is in his lectures “Symbolism of the Bible” (*Bible*, 584–600), which are accompanied by an intricately constructed chart of the structure of Revelation (*ibid.*, 591–4).
7. Both place great weight on what the Book of Revelation calls “the everlasting gospel.” The phrase, which comes from Revelation 14:6, meant for Frye what it meant for Blake: the religion of Jesus, which is the embodiment of Blake’s “all religions are one” thesis. In his *Descriptive Catalogue* Blake says, “All had originally one language, and one religion: this was the religion of Jesus, the everlasting Gospel. Antiquity preaches the Gospel of Jesus” (543). In the unfinished poem *The Everlasting Gospel* Blake turns the tables on John’s use of the phrase in Revelation 14:6, where it points to the proclamation of the imminent judgment of God. For Blake, the everlasting gospel had to do with forgiveness rather than punishment for sins, and Jesus turns out to be a kind of Promethean rebel. As Frye explains in *Fearful Symmetry*, “Blake does not mean by one religion the acceptance of a uniform set of doctrines by all men: he means the attainment of civilized liberty and the common vision of the divinity and unity of Man which is life in Jesus” (*Fearful*, 332). In “Blake’s Treatment of the Archetype,” Frye refers to Joachim in the context of “the everlasting gospel”: the Book of Revelation “deals with what it describes, in a phrase which has fascinated so many apocalyptic thinkers from Joachim of Fiore to Blake, as the ‘everlasting gospel,’ the story of Jesus told not historically as an event in the past, but visually as a real presence” (*Milton*, 201–2). And in his *Late Notebooks* Frye writes that the “Joachim of Floris notion, that there’s a coming age of purely spiritual Christianity, an everlasting gospel, has always been central to my own thinking” (*Late*, 202). For Paul Tillich, Joachim means by the “everlasting gospel” that “the presence of the divine Spirit [is] in every individual, according to the prophecy of Joel, which is often used in this context. It is a *simplex intuitus veritatis*, a simple intuition of truth which all can have without intermediate authority. Freedom means the authority of the divine Spirit in the individual” (179). As one might expect, such a view posed a threat to ecclesiastical authority, and in the thirteenth century what is known in the Joachimite literature as the “scandal of the Eternal Evangel” blew up in Paris. From this “scandal,” which was essentially another of the countless power struggles in the Church, Joachim’s authority eventually managed to emerge unscathed.<sup>12</sup> On the place of the church in the Joachimite scheme, Frye writes, “I think in this conception of a Word-Church dialogue in the N.T. I’m coming back to my old historical vs. everlasting gospel thesis. The purely spiritual gospel preached by Jesus is also known to what Augustine called the *anima naturaliter Christiana* [the soul is naturally Christian], to Buddhists and Stoics and what not. What isn’t known to them is the specific historical development known as the Christian Church, which is useful to have around as long as it doesn’t make absurd and blasphemous pretensions. It’s one of many ways in which the Holy Spirit operates: one can renounce the church without sinning against that Spirit: in fact one may well be working for it. Otherwise, why do contemporary writers on religion keep quoting Nietzsche, Heidegger, Marx, Freud? Fold my ass. There is no such thing as a Holy Catholic Church, but a church that knows it isn’t catholic and is sincerely trying to become so is certainly worthy of respect. So I’m back to Joachim of Floris again; the age of the Son is a historical growth establishing the primitive form of the matured religion of the age of the Spirit. And I question whether it would be possible to have the mature religion without a primitive embryo still present in society. If only it could remember that it is embryonic!” (*Late*, 630)
  8. Both took the medieval theory of four senses or levels of meaning—the historical, the allegorical or doctrinal, the moral or tropological, and the anagogic or heavenly—as an important hermeneutical starting point, and both added a fifth sense to the conventional

- four. This means that they both argued for an allegorical approach to textual meaning. Joachim writes in his *Book of Concordance* that *concordia* is not allegorical interpretation: it means only that there is a parallel or likeness between two people or events in the Old and New Testaments. *Allegoria*, on the other hand, “is the similarity of any small thing to an extremely large one, for example of a day to a year, of a week to an age, of a person to an order, or a city, or a nation, or a people, and a thousand similar instances. By way of illustration, Abraham is a single man who stands for the order of patriarchs in which there are many men” (McGinn, *Apocalyptic*, 122). Allegorical meaning is what Joachim called *spiritualis intellectus*—spiritual knowledge or understanding that allows him to discover the hidden meanings in Scripture. Frye’s view of allegory is more expansive than Joachim’s, and as distinct from Joachim he sees allegory as a part of typology or *concordia*. Still, the following account would be congenial to Joachim’s view of allegory: “To some extent the Old Testament had to be read allegorically by the Christian, according to the principle later enunciated by St. Augustine: ‘In the Old Testament the New Testament is concealed; in the New Testament the Old Testament is revealed.’ Certain Messianic passages in the Old Testament were held to refer specifically to Jesus; the Jewish law was abolished as a ceremony but fulfilled as a type of the spiritual life. St. Paul in Galatians, commenting on the story of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar, explicitly says that the story is an allegory, though it later became more exact to say that such stories had or contained allegorical meanings. Hence a doctrine of multiple meanings in Scripture was elaborated which could be applied to religious literature as well” (*Critical*, 174).
9. Both held an optimistic theory of history, one that pointed in the direction of a new creation. “Many passages on the third *status*,” writes McGinn, “can be read as expressing hope in a coming historical era that, whatever its deep roots in the abbot’s organic view of the past, was to be a form of new creation. . . . For Joachim history was the story of the gradual triumph of spirit over flesh, of contemplation over literal-mindedness” (*Apocalyptic*, 103, 107). In an essay on Spengler, Frye writes, “If the death to rebirth transition from Classical to Western culture happened once, something similar could happen again in our day, though the transition would be to something bigger than another culture. This would imply three major periods of human existence: the period of primitive societies, the period of the organic cultures, and a third period now beginning. Spengler . . . attacks and ridicules the three period view of ancient, medieval, and modern ages with . . . a good deal of justification. But he also remarks that the notion of three ages has had a profound appeal to the Faustian consciousness, from Joachim of Fiore in the thirteenth century onward. It is possible that what is now beginning to take shape is the real “Third Reich,” of which the Nazis produced so hideous a parody. (*Modern*, 313–14). Reeves shows how Joachim rejected the pessimistic cyclical view of history in favor of a positive linear one. “Joachimism,” she writes, “shows how strong was the urge to find a more positive affirmation about the meaning of history itself. The linear pattern of successive stages must lead to a final stage of achievement within history itself. Joachim’s Trinitarian pattern supplied the theological basis for this” (*Influence of Prophecy*, 506).
  10. Both had a reformer’s mentality and took a rather dim view of the future of the institutional church. They were revolutionary thinkers, going against the grain of the conventional paradigms of thought and action. In many respects, Frye’s whole career, like Blake’s, was to think otherwise. “At what point,” Frye asks, “did Xy [Christianity] throw away Paul’s spiritual-natural antithesis and pick up his dismal shit about a soul-body combination that separates at death, leaving us with a discarnate soul until God gives the order for the resurrection of the body? This evil notion was concocted to keep man under the priest-king

hierarchy. I suspect the Filioque clause<sup>13</sup> was added to subordinate the Spirit to the Son and reduce the former to continuing the priest-king authority in time. Not that the Eastern Churches did any better with it. Even if you do this, as Joachim of Floris realized, you turn history revolutionary and go through a ‘reformation’” (*Late*, 714). Paul Tillich says about Joachim’s ideas that they “are important because they had a dynamic, revolutionary, explosive power. The extreme Franciscans used his prophecies and applied them to their own order, and on that basis they revolted against the church. Many sectarian movements, including the sects of the Reformation on which much of American life is dependent, were directly or indirectly dependent of Joachim of Floris” (*History*, 179–80). Tillich goes on to mention as examples of these influences the Enlightenment philosophers, the socialist movement, and American Utopianism.<sup>14</sup> Frye was always attracted to religious dissidents, believing that if they were accused of heresy they were on to something important: “As in all repressive cultures, most of the more penetrating thinkers of the Middle Ages were dissidents accused or at least suspected of heresy: they included Siger of Brabant, Scotus Erigena, Peter Abelard, John Wyclif, Roger Bacon, Nicholas of Autrecourt, Meister Eckhart, William of Occam, and Joachim of Fiore” (*Religion*, 219). In *The Great Code*, Frye writes, “The full thrust of New Testament typology goes in two directions: into the future and into the eternal world, the two things coinciding with the apocalypse or Last Judgment. The one thing that would naturally be resisted by a socially established Church by every means in its power would be the suggestion of a transcending of its authority within history. Such teachings as those of Joachim of Fiore about a third historical age of the Spirit, which would succeed the Jewish age of the Father and the Christian ecclesiastical age of the Son, consequently were regarded as heretical” (*Great*, 104).<sup>15</sup> As for the ecclesiastical age of the Son, Frye says, “Joachim of Floris reveals the suppressed feeling that the contentious age of Christianity, refining militant dogmas, going on crusades, torturing heretics and the like, is still immature. (*Late*, 651)

11. Both had highly developed theories of symbolism, and both had an interest especially in the symbolism of numbers (see below). The most complete version of Frye’s theory of symbols is in the Second Essay of *Anatomy of Criticism*. Two later variations on the theory are “Symbols” (*Religion*, 287–9) and “The Symbol as a Medium of Exchange” (*Secular*, 327–41). The most comprehensive study of Joachim view of the symbol is McGinn, “Symbolism in the Thought of Joachim of Fiore.”
12. Both, in order to devote time to their writing, had to retreat from the administrative and functionary duties they were called on to perform.

### The Three Ages

The central focus of Frye’s scattered remarks on Joachim has to do with his principle of the three ages. The eminent Joachimite scholar Marjorie Reeves has this summary of the three-age theory:

Joachim worked out his philosophy of history, primarily in a pattern of “twos”--the concords between the two great dispensations (or Testaments) of history, the Old and the New. But already Joachim’s spiritual experience was creating in his mind his truly original “pattern of threes.” If the *spiritualis intellectus* springs from the letter of the Old and New Testaments, then history itself must culminate in a final age of the spirit that proceeds from both the previous ages. Thus was born his trinitarian philosophy of history in which the three Persons are, as it were, built into the time structure in the three ages or *status* of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The third *status* was to be won by the church only after arduous pilgrimage and great tribulation, like the Israelites marching through the wilderness and crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land. As guides through this crucial stage, Joachim prophesied the advent of two new orders of spiritual men, one of hermits to agonize for the world on the mountaintop and one a mediating order to lead men on to the new spiritual plane. Although the third age belongs par excellence to contemplatives, secular clergy and laymen are not shut out of it. In a strange diagram, a “ground plan” of the New Jerusalem, various categories of monks are grouped around the seat of God, but below, secular clergy and tertiaries (lay members) live according to their rule. (“Joachim of Fiore,” pars. 4–5)

In an expansion of a passage about Joachim’s monastery taking over the church and the world, Frye identifies militant monasticism with a form of Christian yoga and then goes on to express his desire for a secular monastery:

I’ve said that the monastic movement—at least that phase of it that ended with the great Benedictine period—was in a way Christian yoga, & as such the Church’s conquest of it was perhaps a more remarkable assimilation than its conquest of local cults. Putting this beside my idea of orthodox Christian mysticism as a Bhakti Yoga, it’s easier to understand the association of such mysticism with militant monasticism. In the tendency of great mystics to create rival holy orders there is something of revolt, something of sacrifice, when the rival order is laid on the Church’s altar. Hence the number of saints produced by mysticism—saints in the cynical official Roman sense of those who have acquired a special cultic significance from the Church for having been remarkably useful to it. But Joachim of Floris has a hint of an order of things in which the monastery takes over the church & the world. That is the expanded secular monastery I want: I want the grace of Castiglione as well as the grace of Luther, a graceful as well as a gracious God, and I want all men & women to enter the Abbey of Theleme where instead of poverty, chastity and obedience they will find richness, love and *fay ce que voudras*; for what the Bodhisattva wills to do is good.<sup>16</sup> (*Bible*, 16–17)

In his notebooks for *The Great Code* Frye sets down an organizing pattern of what he conceived at the time as part four of the book (*Bible*, 276). As he is always wont to do, he anatomizes his categories into a schema, this one a tripartite framework which includes Vico and Joachim. The various categories of his schema can be arranged in a chart.

	FATHER	SON	SPIRIT
Joachim’s three ages	Age of the Father	Age of the Son	Age of the Spirit
Form of language	Hieroglyphic	Hieratic	Demotic
Conceptual form	Mythological	Theological	Politico–psychological
Vico’s ages	Age of the gods	Age of heroes	Age of the people
Demonic parody	OT Yahweh	Avenging Son of Last Judgment	Destroying angel
Emanation	Daughter (Kore, Athene, Maat)	Mother	Bride
Demonic parody	Totalitarian state	Jung’s terrible mother	Demonic bride (siren, Kali)
Dominating conceptions	Presence (male) and contract (female)	Substance (Catholic) and principle (Protestant)	Process and symbol
Historical stage	Biblical and Classical	St. Thomas through Hegel	Rousseau through Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud



Except for Vico's three ages, which organizes Frye's his theory of language in *The Great Code*, his threefold set of categories in the notebooks disappear from the book, but the notebook exercise does show how Joachim's three ages are a part of his imaginative consciousness. Joachim figures in eleven of Frye's notebook entries for *Word with Power*, though he is absent from the book itself. As indicated above, Frye's central categories have become Word and Spirit: he has collapsed Joachim's Father and Son into the Word.

If the age of the Spirit is to occur, Frye thinks it will be in a Protestant context:

I don't look for it [Joachim's purely spiritual Christianity] in the future of time, but ideally it's always there. I should quite cheerfully write off Protestantism as a transitional phase to it. But Catholic converts who turn back from the wilderness to Egyptian civilized life will never see the Promised Land. The road to Jesus' spiritual kingdom runs through Luther, perhaps Calvin: it gets pretty dry and narrow there, as Jesus said it would, but the self-sufficient Church just won't do. The same thing is true of Xy [Christianity] itself: it's superstitious compared to Judaism and intolerably inhumane compared to the greatest of the Greeks—but it's higher in human scale. I don't know what I mean by "human" here: certainly not that Christians are more human than Jews or Greeks—I'm following Paul's phrasing.<sup>17</sup> (*Late*, 202)

Following a reference to Catholicism's condemnation of Joachim's doctrine of the three ages as heretical, Frye writes in *The Double Vision*, "Just as the Protestant church subordinates itself to the impact of Scripture, so in temporal matters it subordinates itself to the 'higher powers,' without claiming temporal authority. This renunciation extrudes the society of power from the church itself, which thereupon builds itself up on the pattern of Christian liberty, forming an apostolic community in which members are made free and equal by their faith. Temporal authority must then come to terms with this free and equal community in its midst" (*Religion*, 262).<sup>18</sup>

"Physically," Frye says, "history moves towards the resurrection of the body; spiritually, it moves toward Joachim of Floris's ideal of an age of the Spirit" (*Late*, 640). Frank E. Manuel describes the features of the three ages in these terms: "The *Concordia* tells us that in the first we were under the law, in the second we were under grace, and in the third we shall be under still richer grace. The first was knowledge, the second was the power of wisdom, the third will be the fullness of knowledge. The first was spent in the submission of slaves, the second in the obedience of sons, the third in freedom. The first in suffering, the second in action, the third in contemplation. The first in fear, the second in faith, the third in love. The first is starlight, the second at dawn, the third in broad daylight" (40–1).

#### Picture Thinking: Symbolic Diagrams and Numbers

Like Frye, Joachim was a schematic thinker. His main works are full of symbolic illustrations: the ten-stringed psaltery, trees, eagles, alpha and omega, and circles of various kinds, among others.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the most famous of these is his Trinitarian diagram based on the tripartite splitting of the tetragrammaton—the Hebrew consonants of God's name: Yod, He, Vav, He. Joachim derived his diagram from Peter Alfonsi, who arranged his version of the tetragrammaton by changing the Hebrew consonants to vowels (IEUE) and organizing them in a triangular diagram of three interlaced concentric circles: IE (the Father), EU (the Son), and UE (the Holy Spirit). In the original, the circle of the Father is rendered in green; of the Son, in blue; and of the Holy Spirit, in red. In this ingenious formulation, the second half of each pair of vowels became the first half of the succeeding pair. Joachim abandoned Alfonsi's triangular shape, but retained the interlocking concentric circles, known as Borromean rings. Here is Joachim's diagram from his *Liber Figurarum*:



Frye pays a substantial amount of attention to the symbolic significance of numbers, a topic I have examined in more detail elsewhere.<sup>23</sup> The difference between Joachim and Frye is that the Calabrian monk is quite assured in the significance that numbers reveal, whereas for Frye one looks in vain throughout his writings for the meanings, like those of the Pythagorean mystics and cabalists, which he seems to believe are inherent in numbers themselves.<sup>24</sup> Still, Frye is always attentive to the imaginative use he can make of numbers.

In conclusion, it is perhaps worth noting that Frye's reading of the Book of Revelation is very much in tune with Joachim's *spiritualis intellectus* (spiritual understanding). Frye's view of Revelation always hinged on his understanding of verse 17 from the final chapter: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." About this appeal Frye writes, "The suggestion seems to be that the Bible reaches in its closing words, not an end, but a beginning. And that beginning is in the mind of the reader. So that the Apocalypse, in its turn, becomes a type. In that case, what is its antitype? . . . There's only one thing it can possibly be, and that is where we started, with a new creation, which is how Paul describes the gospel in Romans and elsewhere" (*Bible*, 589). Frye does not mention Joachim in any of his commentaries on Revelation, but this view of a new creation would have been altogether congenial to the Calabrian abbot.

Let us close with a final quotation from *The Double Vision*:

I think immense changes could be brought about by a Christianity that was no longer a ghost with the chains of a foul historical record of cruelty clanking behind it, that was no longer crippled by notions of heresy, infallibility, or exclusiveness of a kind that should be totally renounced and not rationalized to the slightest degree. Such a Christianity might represent the age of the Spirit that the thirteenth-century Franciscan Joachim of Fiore saw as superseding the Old Testament age of the Father and the New Testament age of the Logos. Such a Christianity would be neither an inglorious rearguard action nor a revolutionary movement creating suffering and death instead of life more abundantly. It would be a Christianity of a Father who is not a metaphor of male supremacy but the intelligible source of our being; of a Son who is not a teacher of platitudes but a Word who has overcome the world; and of a Spirit who speaks with all the tongues of men and angels and still speaks with charity. The Spirit of creation who brought life out of chaos brought death out of it too, for death is all that makes sense of life in time. The Spirit that broods on the chaos of our psyches brings to birth a body that is in time and history but not enclosed by them, and is in death only because it is in the midst of life as well. (*Religion*, 212–13)<sup>25</sup>

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Joachim's three major works are still only available, for the most part, in the Venice editions of the sixteenth-century. As I do not read Latin, I have had to rely chiefly on portions of the *Book of Concordance* or *Harmony of the Old and New Testaments* translated by E. Randolph Daniel in McGinn, 120–34, and on secondary sources, including the translation of portions of his works in those sources.

<sup>2</sup> Frye twice makes note of Joachim's presence in the *Paradiso: Late*, 223, 720.

<sup>3</sup> For the recurrence of Joachim's vision in the work of artists and thinkers from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, see Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future*, 166–75. Frye was aware of Kandinsky's interest in Joachim: "Kandinsky says in his *Reminiscences* (1912) that this is the third age

of the Spirit prophesied by Joachim of Floris. Of course he was a theosophist. I'm interested in statements like that, of course, but one can't restrict such things to historical periods: at most they're new emphases only on something already there" (*Late*, 47). In *Reminiscences* Wassily Kandinsky refers to "the great period of the spiritual, the revelation of the spirit. Father—Son—Spirit," and he speaks of the "third revelation" as "the revelation of the spirit" (377, 379). Joachim's extensive influence has been traced by Reeves in *Prophecy* and in her *Joachim of Fiore*, and by West and Zimdars-Swartz in their chapter on "The Sustaining Influence of Joachim of Fiore" (99–112).

<sup>4</sup> Frye had gone to Edmonton to dispose of the possessions of his mother's second youngest sister, Mary Howard, who had died on 28 July 1932.

<sup>5</sup> On the radical difference between Augustine's view of history and that of Joachim, see Manuel's "Ascending Jacob's Ladder: The Way of St. Augustine or of the Abbot Joachim," 24–45.

<sup>6</sup> The modern scholarly study of Joachim descends from Grundman, Töpfer, Reeves (*Influence of Prophecy*), and Mottu.

<sup>7</sup> "Turning New Leaves," *Canadian Forum* 29 (September 1949): 138–9; rpt. as "The Rhythm of Growth and Decay" in *Northrop Frye on Culture and Literature*, 141–6; and as "Two Books on Christianity and History" in *Modern*, 226–31. Frye says only that Joachim, "the great medieval prophet of historical progress," is one of the philosophical historians studied by Löwith.

<sup>8</sup> The opening phrase of the *Book of Concord*: "Non habentibus in hoc mundo manentem hereditatem sed futuram inquirantibus" ["Whereas they had not abiding inheritance in this world but seek the one to be"—Vulgate]. The passage from Hebrews: "Non enim habemus hic manentem civitatem sed futuram inquirimus" ["For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come"—AV].

<sup>9</sup> For an account of these epiphanies, see Denham, *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary*, 20–1, 90–6.

<sup>10</sup> Frye takes this tag from Milton's *Christian Doctrine*: "Under the gospel we possess, as it were, a two-fold Scripture: one external, which is the written word, and the other internal, which is the Holy Spirit, written in the hearts of believers" (447).

<sup>11</sup> On Frye and typology, see Munk and Alter.

<sup>12</sup> On the "scandal," see West and Zimdars-Swartz, 101–3 and Reeves, *Prophecy*, 59–70.

<sup>13</sup> The clause ("and the Son") added to the Nicene Creed by the Latin Church in the late sixth century, reflecting the doctrine that the Holy Spirit descends from the Father and the Son (*ex Patre Filioque*), a position maintained by the Latin Church as against Eastern Christendom, which held that the Spirit descended from the Father only. The addition has been traditionally seen as having brought about the schism between Eastern and Western Christendom.

<sup>14</sup> On the earlier influence of Joachim on the radical Franciscans (the Franciscan Spirituals) and others, see Reeves, *Prophecy*, Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore*, 83–165; West and Zimdars-Swartz, 99–112; and McGinn, *Apocalyptic*, 149–81.

<sup>15</sup> For Joachim's role in the revolutionary movement that worked in opposition to medieval structures of religious authority, see Dolzani, xli.

<sup>16</sup> *fay ce que voudras* = "do what you will," the motto of the Abbey of Thélème in Rabelais's *Gargantua*. Bodhisattva = literally in Sanskrit, the "enlightenment being"—the one who seeks Buddhahood but refrains from entering nirvana until all beings are saved.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Corinthians 1: 22–3: "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness."

<sup>18</sup> For a comprehensive study of Frye's attitudes toward the church, see O'Grady, who notes that Frye was much attracted to Joachim's speculations.

<sup>19</sup> On Joachim's illustrations, see the definitive study by Reeves and Hirsch-Reich, *The Figurae of Joachim of Fiore*. They reproduce forty-seven of Joachim's *figurae* (351 ff.)

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<sup>20</sup> “One very striking result of Marjorie Reeves’s work, with Beatrice Hirsch-Reich, on the *figurae* of Joachim of Fiore is considerable new insight into Joachim’s remarkable visual imagination. It is now abundantly clear that far from being mere illustrations, the *figurae* function as central elements in Joachim’s theological thought” (Bauckham, 109).

<sup>21</sup> For an elaboration of some of these patterns see Denham, *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary*, 22–5.

<sup>22</sup> In *Infinity and the Mind* Rudy Rucker remarks, in an account of the special significance of the number 10, that the “Pythagorean would feel quite at home in a bowling alley, ritually building and destroying the *tetradactys* with a sphere punctuated by a triad of holes, and recording his progress with a series of numbers inscribed in squares” (59). The *tetradactys* was for the Pythagoreans a triangular symbol composed of ten dots moving upward from a base of four, like the arrangement of pins in a bowling alley. Frye’s marginalia beside Rucker’s comparison--“quite a flash of insight”--seems to refer only to the clever image Rucker used to describe what for the Pythagoreans was the sacred pattern of the fourth triangular number.

<sup>23</sup> “Number Schemes, Numerology, and Synchronicity,” in *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary*, 224–32.

<sup>24</sup> Manuel, however, thinks that “Joachim’s cumbersome numerological apparatus was historically far less significant than the attributes with which he clothed his three states” (40).

<sup>25</sup> In his *Late Notebooks* Frye writes, “What I seem to have is a revised Joachimism. The first age was prehistoric mythology. In the second age history became history, science science, separating from legend & cosmology. Hence myth became literary or hypothetical. Society’s culture became pluralistic, following the Word that divided like a sword. The second age is the actualizing of prophetic authority. The third age is a reintegration of culture around post-mythological metaphor, a new kind of identification. This grows out of my three stages of metaphor [imaginative, erotic, and existential or ecstatic]. (*Late*, 63)