

THE CHURCH AT THE END OF TIMES.
PROPHECY AND ESCHATOLOGY IN ALBERT THE GREAT'S
SERMONS AND BIBLICAL COMMENTARIES

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Introduction

Eschatology plays a significant role in the work of the 13th-century theologians for at least two reasons: the philosophical debates on the nature of the soul also concern the problem of individual redemption or damnation; the conflict between secular clergy and mendicant orders, on the other hand, is fuelled by the belief of many Dominican and Franciscan friars to be prophets of the last stage of Church history. After all, the dialectical tension between individual and collective endings has characterised Christian eschatology from its origins.¹

The present study seeks to shed light on only the second way of considering eschatology, focusing on some of Albert the Great's prophecies about the future of the Church. Given the breadth of the topic, we will focus on a limited number of texts: first, we will examine how Albert interprets certain eschatological discourses in the New Testament; second, we will check whether the suggestions offered by the exegetical analysis are reflected in his homilies.

¹ The theological topic is very broad and complex. For some general coordinates, see P. ALTHAUS, *Die letzten Dinge. Lehrbuch der Eschatologie*, Gütersloh 1956; J. RATZINGER, *Eschatologie. Tod und ewiges Leben* (Kleine katholische Dogmatik 9), Regensburg 1977; J. MOLTSMANN, *Theologie der Hoffnung. Untersuchungen zur Begründung und zu Konsequenzen einer christlichen Eschatologie*, München 1985.

1. The destruction of Jerusalem as eschatological prophecy about the Church

The word “eschatology” is by default associated with the fascinating *Book of Apocalypse*: the second coming of Christ and the end of time do not seem to be so accurately described in any other biblical book. In a way, even in the case of Albert the Great, this text can be the starting point for investigating his eschatology: the printed edition of *Alberti Magni Opera omnia* includes also a *Commentary on the Apocalypse (Vidit Iacob)*.² Although Jacques-Marie Vosté demonstrated the inauthenticity of this commentary,³ Alain Boureau has recently reopened the question in a well-structured article with the provocative title *Albert le Grand, commentateur de l'Apocalypse*.⁴ As the debate over the authenticity of the work is still open,⁵ it is more prudent to focus our analysis on other Albert's commentaries on the New Testament.

2.1. A small community devoted to the contemplation

The first commentary of Albert the Great on the Holy Scripture is on the *Gospel of Matthew* (1257-1260).⁶ Like the other synoptic Gospels, the text is a constellation of exhortations and parables intended to prepare the disciples for the coming of the end of times.⁷ Jesus' warnings

² ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Enarrationes in Apocalypsim S. Joannis*, ed. A. BORNET, É. BORNET (Opera omnia 38), Paris 1899, 465-826.

³ J.-M. VOSTÉ, “S. Albertus in Apocalypsim”, in *Angelicum*, 9 (1976), 328-335.

⁴ A. BOUREAU, “Albert le Grand, commentateur de l'Apocalypse”, in *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, 61 (2014), 43-58.

⁵ For a wide-ranging overview on this debate, see also D. BURR, “Mendicant Readings of the Apocalypse”, in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. R. K. EMERSON, Ithaca 1992, 89-102; C. A. SCINE, *Early Dominicans on the Apocalypse: A reading of the 1260s Apocalypse commentary of Peter of Tarentaise*, Dissertation presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Saint Louis University 2010; M. RAININI, “Die sieben Posaunen. Predigt und Apokalypse am Anfang des Predigerordens”, in *Bibelstudium und Predigt im Dominikanerorden. Geschichte, Ideal, Praxis*, hrsg. v. V. Š. DÓCI, T. PRÜGL (Dissertationes Historicae 36), Roma 2019, 57-78.

⁶ Cf. B. SCHMIDT, *Prolegomena*, in ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super Matthaëum*, ed. B. SCHMIDT (Opera omnia 21.2), Münster i.W. 1987, XIII-XVI; “Zeittafel”, in *Albertus Magnus und sein System der Wissenschaften. Schlüsseltexpte in Übersetzung Lateinisch-Deutsch*, hrsg. v. ALBERTUS MAGNUS-INSTITUT, Münster i.W. 2011, 28-31.

⁷ This is due to the eschatological nature of the Gospel's message. Cf. E. GRÄSSER,

become particularly insistent in chapter 24: announcing the imminent destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus prophesies about the end of this world.⁸ Albert the Great comments as follows:

Hic incipit tangere signa consummationis saeculi in signis consummationis Iudaeae, quia eadem particulariter praesignabant destructionem Iudaeae, relata ad Titum et Aelium Hadrianum, quae universaliter accepta, relata ad Antichristum, finem mundi significant.⁹

According to a widely accepted exegetical model,¹⁰ the persecution of the Jews under Titus (*consummatio Iudaeae*) does not completely realise Jesus's prophecy, but prefigures the condition of the Church at the end of times (*consummatio saeculi*):

Tempore autem Antichristi, cum confirmabitur potestas eius, tunc maxime regnabit in Iudaea persequens ecclesiam fidelium, et tunc oportet ad litteram fugere ad montium speluncas et deserta.¹¹

This is a recurring image in the eschatology of Albert the Great: the Church (*ecclesia fidelium*) will be forced to retreat to deserted and hidden places above the mountains ("ad montium speluncas et deserta"). This means that the Church of the future will not be a well-structured institution with properties and secular power, but rather a small and hidden community of believers.

These conclusions reflect the contrast between two different ecclesiologies: the mendicant orders, which attributed to themselves a prophetic role in salvation history, promoted a model of *communitas fidelium* different from that of the institutional Church.¹²

Das Problem der Parusieverzögerung in den synoptischen Evangelien und in der Apostelgeschichte, Berlin 1957.

⁸ *Matth.* 24, 24.

⁹ ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super Matthaeum*, c. 24, ed. SCHMIDT, 566.15-20.

¹⁰ Cf. HUGO DE SANCTO CARO, *In Postillam super Matthaeum*, 24, ed. N. PEZZANA, Venezia 1703, 5ra-vb.

¹¹ ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super Matthaeum*, c. 24, ed. SCHMIDT, 567.47-50.

¹² Cf. R. E. LERNER, "Poverty, Preaching and Eschatology in the Revelation Commentaries of Hugh of St. Cher", in *The Bible in the medieval world. Essays in memory of Beryl Smalley*, ed. K. WALSH, D. WOOD, Oxford 1985, 157-189; Id., "The Vocation of the Friars Preacher: Hugh of St. Cher between Peter the Chanter and Albert the Great", in *Hugues de Saint-Cher († 1263)*, ed. L. J. BATAILLON, G. DAHAN, P. M. GY (Bibliothèque d'histoire culturelle du Moyen Âge 1), Turnhout 2004, 215-231; M. RAININI, "I predicatori dei tempi ultimi. La rielaborazione di un tema escatologico

The physical action “fugere ad montes”, however, can also be interpreted in mystical terms (*mystice*) as an ascetic movement to elevate oneself to the highest virtues:

Mystice autem in Iudaea sunt, quae ‘confessio’ interpretatur, illi qui confessioni laudis sunt dediti, sicut clerici et religiosi, quibus tempore persecutionis fugiendum ad culmina virtutum, quia virtutum perfectione tunc indigent, ‘ut possint resistere in die malo et in omnibus perfecti stare [...] Qui autem sunt *in tecto*, sunt in arce contemplationis, quibus praecipitur, ne descendant in domum carnis, sed alta contemplatione veritatis postponant omnia commoda carnis pro Christo fortiter morientes.¹³

While the interpretation *ad litteram* refers to the condition of the entire *ecclesia fidelium*, the “mystical reading” concerns, above all, the future of consecrated persons (“clerici et religiosi”). Eschatology and ecclesiology merge once again: at the end of times, priests and religious should lead an essentially contemplative life within a small and hidden community of believers.

The vast apocalyptic-themed literature circulating in the 13th century¹⁴ evidently plays a significant role in this interpretation of Jesus’ prophetic teachings. However, the exhortation to lead a virtuous life could also be linked to Albert’s fascination with the contemplative philosophical life. Suffice it to mention the questions devoted to the problem of *felicitas contemplationis* in the first commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* or the reflections on the beatitude of the separated soul in the second treatise of *De natura et origine animae*.¹⁵

nel costituirsi dell’identità profetica dell’Ordine domenicano”, in *Cristianesimo nella storia*, 23 (2002), 307-343.

¹³ ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super Matthaicum*, c. 24, ed. SCHMIDT, 567.58-63, 66-70.

¹⁴ Cf. M. REEVES, *The influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages. A Study in Joachimism*, New York 1969, in particular 133-292; M. RAININI, “I predicatori dei tempi ultimi”.

¹⁵ Cf. ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super Ethica*, X, l. 10, ed. W. KÜBEL (Opera omnia 14.2), Münster i.W. 1987, 743-759; Id. *De natura et origine animae*, II, c. 13, 14, 17, ed. B. GEYER (Opera omnia 12), Münster i.W. 1955, 37-41, 43-44. On the influence of Pagan vision of *contemplatio* in Albert’s thought see, among the others: L. STURLESE, *Vernunft und Glück. Die Lehre vom “intellectus adeptus” und die mentale Glückseligkeit bei Albert dem Großen* (Lectio Albertina 7), Münster i.W. 2005; H. ANZULEWICZ, “Albertus Magnus über die *felicitas contemplativa* als die Erfüllung eines natürlichen Strebens nach Wissen”, in *Quaestio. Journal of the History of Metaphysics*, 15 (2015), 457-466.

2.2. The moral decline of the Church

The prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem is also found in the *Gospels of Mark and Luke*. However, while in the *Enarrationes in Marci Evangelium* Albert the Great offers no significant eschatological considerations, the exegesis of *Luke's* chapter 21 is a constellation of very gloomy prophecies. They concern two particular events evoked in Jesus' prophetic discourse: the destruction of the temple and the heavenly signs announcing both the fall of Jerusalem under Titus and the end of times.

In the first case, echoing a widespread interpretation, Albert compares the stones of the temple with the community of believers composed of "living stones".¹⁶ The material destruction of the temple ("non relinquetur lapis super lapidem")¹⁷ is therefore a prophecy of the future diaspora of the faithful and, consequently, of the spiritual crisis of the Church:

Hoc spiritualiter magis impletum est in Ecclesiis, in quibus lapidibus vivis nihil remansit nisi ignis infernalis, exustio in carnis concupiscentia.¹⁸

This tragic situation results from the moral collapse of priests, cardinals, and bishops increasingly devoted to *concupiscentia carnis, concupiscentia oculorum* and *superbia vitae*:

Deuter. XXXII, 22: *Ignis succensus est in furore meo, et ardebit usque ad inferni novissima: devorabitque terram, hoc est, terrenum habentes affectum, cum germine suo, hoc est, cum nepotibus quos in Ecclesias introducunt: et montium, hoc est, Praelatorum, Cardi-*

¹⁶ Albert the Great focuses on this metaphor in the *Sermones de sancto Augustino*. Cf. J. B. SCHNEYER, "Alberts des Großen Augsburgers Predigtzyklus über den hl. Augustinus", in *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale*, 36 (1969), 100-147. In this regard see A. COLLI, "Albert the Great on Aristotelian Political Vocabulary. Three Examples from the *Commentarium in octo libros Politicorum Aristotelis*", in *Brückenbauer und Wegbereiter: Die Dominikaner an den Grenzen der katholischen Christenheit*, hrsg. v. V. Š. DÓCI, T. PRÜGL (Dissertationes Historicae 40), Roma 2022, 21-37: 31-35; ID., "Immagini della Chiesa nell'esegesi biblica di Alberto Magno (ca. 1193-1280)", in *La Bibbia per la riforma della Chiesa*, ed. M. SETTEMBRINI (Studi biblici), Torino 2025, 141-154.

¹⁷ *Luc.*, 21, 6.

¹⁸ ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Enarrationes in secundam partem Evangelii Lucae (X-XXIV)*, 21, 6, ed. A. BORGNET (Opera Omnia 23), Paris 1895, 631A.

nalium, et Episcoporum, fundamenta comburet: quia fundamentum eorum materia ignis, scilicet, concupiscentia carnis, et concupiscentia oculorum, et superbia vitae. Hoc enim fundamentum, pice tenacis concupiscentiae, et sulphuris foetentis per immundum libidinis confectum, coram igne inferni stare non poterit.¹⁹

The same scenario is prefigured by the heavenly signs during the destruction of Jerusalem: “Et erunt signa in sole, et luna, et stellis”.²⁰ As in the previous cases, these are timeless signs: they do not reflect a single event that has already ended, i.e., the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, but predict the future of the Church. In particular, they foreshadow what will happen to the ecclesiastical hierarchies (sun), the laity (moon), and the religious orders (stars).

When Jesus announces the *signa in sole*, he is probably referring to solar eclipses.²¹ Such astronomical events prefigure the moral decline of papal and episcopal authority:

Sol enim obscuratur, quando illi qui illuminatores orbis terrae deberent esse, obscurantur: sicut Papa, Cardinales, Archiepiscopi, et Episcopi. Sapient. XVII, 19 et 20: *Omnis orbis terrarum limpido illuminabitur lumine, et non impeditis operibus continebatur. Solis autem illis superposita erat gravis nox, imago tenebrarum quae superventura illis erat.* Haec enim luminaria tenebrosiora iam sunt quam alia tenebrosa, tum per ignorantiam, tum etiam per nigram vitam. Hi etiam sunt qui stant, non circumeunt: quia de cura subditorum nihil considerant, sed in altitudine suae ambitionis stant erecti et otiosi. Josue, X, 13: *Stetit sol in medio coeli, et non festinavit occumbere spatio unius diei:* quia non est respectus morti eorum, sed in altitudine diei stant, in superbia ambitionis suae: de qua altitudine dicit Psalmus LV, 4: *Ab altitudine diei timebo.* Hi pro tertia parte percussi sunt: quia lumen dignitatis retinentes et quaestum, tota utilitas spiritualium percussa est. Haec enim tria sunt, dignitas, et temporalium dispensatio, et utilitas spiritualium quam debebant rependere, quae tota percussa est. Ezechiel. XXXIV, 3: *Gregem meum non pascebatis.* Isa. I, 5: *Super quo per-*

¹⁹ ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Enarrationes in secundam partem Evangelii Lucae*, 21, 6, ed. BORGNET, 631A.

²⁰ *Luc.*, 21, 25. Indeed, this is a clear reference to *Is.*, 60, 18-20.

²¹ This reference to particular astronomical events that may indicate the transition from one era to another may be related to the issue of the Great Year (*Annus Magnus*), to which Albert the Great devotes some reflections in other writings. In this regard, see A. PALAZZO, “The *Annus magnus* in Albert the Great’s Parisian Theological Works. *De IV coaequaevis* and *Commentarii in libros Sententiarum*”, in *Vivarium*, 61 (2023), 26-58.

cutiam vos ultra, addentes praevaricationem? Retrocessio autem est, quia reversi sunt ad vomitum, et ad vitam laicalem. II Machab. IV, 14 et 15: *Sacerdotes festinabant participes fieri palaestrae, ... et prae-bitionis ejus iniustae: ... et patrios quidem honores nihil arbitantes, graecas glorias optimas arbitrabantur.* Hoc modo totus retrocessit clerus, qui sol mundi fuit.²²

Both the combination of quotations from various books of the Old Testament and the use of past or present tenses confirm the previous considerations about the timelessness of Jesus' prophecies: Albert predicts the future of the Church, but his criticism is without temporal boundaries. After all, problems related to the moral corruption of the ecclesiastical hierarchies have always accompanied the history of the Church. In any case, the Dominican theologian paints a dramatic picture of the future ruling class of the Church: "clerici erecti et otiosi in altitudine ambitionis" and "in superbia ambitionis, reversi ad vomitum".

The moon (*luna*) – symbolizing the lay people – is clearly affected by these solar eclipses. According to Albert's spiritual reading, this means that lay congregations will be completely devoted to earthly pleasures, following the bad example of priests and bishops:

Et ideo luna, hoc est laicorum congregatio, eclipsim patitur sui luminis, et conversa est in sanguinem, hoc est, ad carnalitatis amorem. Osee, IV, 2: *Sanguis sanguinem tetigit.* Unde exclamat David, Psal. L, 16: *Libera me de sanguinibus, Deus, Deus salutis meae.* Haec etiam stat torpens in otio turpi concupiscentiae, dicente Domino, Matth. XX, 6: *Quid hic statis tota die otiosi?* Et est etiam ipsa luna percussa in tertia parte. Una enim pars laici populi est dispensatio rei familiaris in domo: secunda, congruentia civitatis in civilitate: et tertia est exercitium sacramentorum, quae pars manifeste percussa est, quia de sacramentis nihil curant. Job, XXI, 14: *Dixerunt Deo: Recede a nobis, et scientiam viarum tuarum nolumus.*²³

Concupiscence, as disordered desire, undermines three aspects of the life of the laity: family relations (*in domo*), civil relations (*in civilitate*), and participation in the sacraments (*exercitium sacramentorum*).

This moral decadence also involves the religious orders, which are here symbolised by the stars. By breaking the vow of poverty (*abre-*

²² ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Enarrationes in secundam partem Evangelii Lucae*, 21, 27, ed. BORGNET, 644B-645A.

²³ ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Enarrationes in secundam partem Evangelii Lucae*, 21, 27, ed. BORGNET, 645A.

nuntiatio paupertatis), they are no longer a source of light, but become shooting-stars:

Stellae autem sunt Religiosi, qui sicut stellae in coelo micantes, ita deberent stare in coelesti conversatione. Ad Philip. III, 20: *Nostra conversatio in coelis est*. Judicum, V, 20: *Stellae manentes in ordine et cursu suo, adversus Sisaram pugnaverunt*. Habent autem tres partes, scilicet, votum obedientiae, votum castitatis, et votum paupertatis. Et votum quidem obedientiae aequaliter tenent, et similiter votum castitatis. Sed abrenuntiatio paupertatis manifeste percussa est: quia fere omnes ad terrenorum amorem etiam plusquam saeculares sunt inclinati. Et ideo signanter dicitur, Matth. XXIV, 19, quod deciderunt in terram.²⁴

As in the commentary on the *Gospel of Matthew*, this dramatic situation triggers the search for a new model of Church. The future Church must be conceived as a small and hidden community of believers:

Sapientia enim in verbis, et patientia in verberibus omnia vincunt. Quae duae alae datae sunt mulieri quae Ecclesiam significat, quibus volat in desertum ut defendatur a dracone diabolo, qui eam persequitur.²⁵

The Church will be a small community exiled to the desert, intensely persecuted by the Antichrist (*draco diabolus*). The few remaining faithful seek the wisdom (“sapientia in verbis”) and endure the martyrdom (“patientia in verberibus”).

There is little evidence to date the *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*; however, Albert certainly wrote it after his election as bishop of Regensburg. His eschatological discourse therefore takes into account the situation of the Church of his time. After all, the combination of criticism for present time and predictions for the future is a typical feature of biblical prophecies: Jesus’ predictions on the imminent fall of Jerusalem start from a severe condemnation of the men of his time. In other words, meditating on the *Gospel of Luke* and interpreting the events of his times, Albert the Great condemns the corruption of his contemporary Church and, at the same time, prefigures its future.

²⁴ ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Enarrationes in secundam partem Evangelii Lucae*, 21, 27, ed. BORNET, 645A.

²⁵ ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Enarrationes in secundam partem Evangelii Lucae*, 21, 19, ed. BORNET, 639B.

Eschatological teaching to renew the Church

The juxtaposition of eschatological and ecclesiological themes is one of the leitmotifs of Albert's preaching activity: exhortations and warnings addressed to the Church of his time reflect his idea of the future *ecclesia fidelium*.

A limited number of studies have examined Albert's homiletic writings for at least three reasons: these are mostly unpublished texts, in many cases their authenticity is doubtful, most of them were originally written in medieval German, but handed down through Latin *reportationes*.²⁶ The following remarks are clearly not intended to bring a solution to these difficult questions. The purpose is just to mention a few examples related to our case study.

The immorality of the clergy, as a sign of the end of times, is the core of the sermon *Ego sic curro*, held in Paris on January 27, 1247.²⁷ Thus, twenty years before writing his *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, Albert the Great had identified the corruption of the ecclesiastical hierarchies as the main cause of the future destruction and renewal of the Church:

Isti sunt clerici, qui non excolunt agros, non plantant vineas. Timendum est, quod istis dulciores sunt glarei Cocyti, quia si quando aliquid cum labore acquiritur et cum delectatione possidetur, hominem post se trahit, multo magis illos trahit qui sine labore acquirunt, cum delectatione participant et cum honore possident. Ideo de eis dicit Ezechiel (22,27), et loquitur ad litteram de Ierusalem et de principibus eius: 'Principes, inquit, tui sicut lupi rapientes praedam ad effundendum sanguinem et ad perdendum animas et avari ad sectanda lucra'. Principes Ierusalem clerici sunt, quia et in principatum omnes

²⁶ Cf. J. B. SCHNEYER, "Predigten Alberts des Großen in der Handschrift Leipzig Univ. 683", in *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*, 34 (1964), 45-106; B. GEYER, *Die Universitätspredigten des Albertus Magnus*, München 1966; J. B. SCHNEYER, "Albert des Großen Augsburger Predigtzyklus über den hl. Augustinus", in *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, 39 (1969), 100-147; P. HOSSFELD, E. NELLESEN, *Die Predigt des Hl. Albertus Magnus zu Honnef*, Bad Honnef 1980; E. SCHINAGL, *Naturkunde-Exempla in lateinischen Predigtsammlungen des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts* (Lateinische Sprache und Literatur des Mittelalters 32), Bern 2001; ID., "Naturwissen in den Predigten der Handschrift Leipzig Univ. 683", in *Albertus Magnus. Zum Gedenken nach 800 Jahren: Neue Zugänge, Aspekte und Perspektiven*, hrsg. v. W. SENNER (Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte des Dominikanerordens – Neue Folge 10), Berlin 2001, 633-644.

²⁷ GEYER, *Die Universitätspredigten des Albertus Magnus*, 7.

electi sunt et in sorte electionis dei est clericus, sicut tota tribus Levi in sortem domini electa erat. Isti sicut lupi rapiunt praedam. Praeda lupi est in ovibus et super oves, et oves dominus appellat populum fidelem; ‘ad effundendum sanguinem’, idest ad effuse expendendum sanguinem, idest ad prodigaliter expendendum. Unde Ieremias: ‘sanguis pauperum’ spargitur in plateis. Loquitur de rebus ecclesiae datis ad sustentationem pauperum. Similiter sanguis martyrum, idest res acquisitae sanguine martyrum, in plateis superiacet, quia prodige expenduntur res ecclesiasticae.²⁸

The decline of the Church is also the subject of the sermon *Domine, descende, priusquam moriatur filius meus*, held in Paris on October, 6, 1247. Cardinals and bishops are compared to mediocre sovereigns (*reguli*), only interested in temporal goods:

Item regulus dicitur, qui etsi magna habet regere, in parvis tamen occupatur in regendo. Temporalia parva sunt, spiritualia magna sunt. Magna cura est hodie in regendo temporalia, parva vero circa spiritualia. Reguli sunt omnes isti. Per vicarium regunt spiritualia, et per se ipsos temporalia. [...] Et omnes isti ‘separati sunt in diem malum’, quasi ut incipiat in eis dies malus.²⁹

Albert’s prophecy, however, is not entirely negative: the institutional crisis, which seems to mark the advent of evil into the world (“quasi ut incipiat in eis dies malus”), does not entail a general collapse of the Church, but an opportunity for its renewal. As in the case of the *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, some sermons, presumably delivered in Cologne and handed down through a Latin *reportatio* in the manuscript Leipzig Universitätsbibliothek, ms. 683, explicitly dwell on the idea of the future Church as a small community dedicated to the contemplative life.

The fourteenth sermon, for example, addresses Jesus’ exhortation to vigilance: “vigilate, quia nescitis, qua hora dominus vester venturus sit”.³⁰ Whether Jesus refers to individual death (*mors*) or doomsday (*iudicium*), the central idea is still “staying awake” (*vigilate*). What this concretely means is clarified through an accurate description of vigilance as process of liberation from all earthly pleasures, ending in contemplation: “videre veras et pulchras formas vigilancium est”.³¹

²⁸ GEYER, *Die Universitätspredigten des Albertus Magnus*, 15.6-25.

²⁹ GEYER, *Die Universitätspredigten des Albertus Magnus*, 50.10-15.

³⁰ SCHINAGL, *Naturkunde-Exempla*, 252-260.

³¹ SCHINAGL, *Naturkunde-Exempla*, 258.

Similar considerations apply to the sermon 132, which focuses on another Jesus' prophetic teaching: "Beatus ille servus quem cum venerit dominus invenerit sic facientem, scilicet vigilantem".³² In this long homily, still unpublished, Albert points to the figure of Gregory the Great as an example to follow:

Credo quod multi nostri sciunt quod Gregorius "vigil" vel "vigilans" interpretatur et propter hoc verba ista convenienter de eo exponuntur. Ipse siquidem in opere et effectu operis vigilavit, erat enim unus de pastoribus qui observabant vigilia noctis super gregem suum. [...] Unde vigilia hominis idem est quod vigilia virtutis quae tabefacit carnes resolventes et sapientes nos. Et hoc est prima beatitudo quae facit nos idoneos ad ulteriorem beatitudinem. Et certe numquam dominus secundum istum ad vigilandum super gregem suum constituisset, si non prius praedicto modo super se vigilasset.³³

Jesus' eschatological discourse once again serves to outline the future of the Church. While popes, cardinals, and bishops mentioned above are responsible for the imminent destruction of the Church because of their concupiscence and avarice, Gregory the Great embodies a model of "vigilance" for his virtuous life devoid of all earthly desires and passions. He prefigures the faithful of that small and hidden community who will flee to the mountains at the end of times.

Conclusions

Albert the Great interprets the weaknesses of the 13th-century Church in the light of the Gospel prophecies. The result is a revolutionary vision of what will happen at the end of time: a small community of the faithful, leading a virtuous life dedicated essentially to contemplation, replaces a hierarchical model of the Church, corrupted by the moral decadence of popes, cardinals, and priests.

There are of course some questions that still need to be answered to precisely define this eschatological vision and its ecclesiological implications. For example, it remains to be seen whether Albert is proposing a reform of the Church or simply describing a future scenario; whether these considerations on the end of time also influence his reflection on the condition of the separated soul after death. Moreover, following the

³² Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, ms. 683, ff. 300ra-303vb.

³³ Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, ms. 683, ff. 300ra, 302ra-b.

suggestions of Boureau, an in-depth analysis of the *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, included in the Paris printed edition, is necessary to verify its authorship. Similarly, a complete catalog of the topics covered by Albert in his sermons should be prepared, also completing the edition of the homilies preserved in the Leipzig manuscript and recognizing their authorship.

The “mosaic” is still missing many essential pieces; however, the findings of this study already unveil a new image of Albert the Great. According to a view shared by some, prophesying does not mean knowing future events in advance, but discovering their possible causes in the present.³⁴ The Dominican master, commonly appreciated for his use of philosophical sources and his reflections on physics and metaphysics, reveals himself not just as a theologian or exegete, but as a reformer, if not a “visionary prophet”.

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³⁴ CASSIODORUS, *Expositio psalorum*, ed. M. ADRIAEN (CCSL 97), Turnhout 1958, praef., c. 1, p. 7. In this regard see, among the others, M. SCHLOSSER, Lucerna in caliginoso loco. *Aspekte des Prophetie-Begriffes in der scholastischen Theologie* (Münchener Universitäts-Schriften, Katholisch-Theologische Fakultät. Veröffentlichungen des Grabmann-Institutes zur Erforschung der mittelalterlichen Theologie und Philosophie 43), Paderborn 2000, 161-172; B. FAES DE MOTTONI, “Ispirazione, visione, rivelazione. Note per un lessico della profezia nelle teologie della prima metà del secolo XIII”, in *I Castelli di Yale*, 8 (2006), 11-19; A. RODOLFI, “Sogno e profezia in Alberto Magno”, in *Scientia, Fides, Theologia. Studi di filosofia medievale in onore di Gianfranco Fioravanti*, ed. S. PERFETTI, Pisa 2011, 193-216: 199-209.