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Eternity and Prophetic Cognition

A Note on Paschasius Radbertus' Understanding of 'Philosophiae Consolatio' V, 6 *

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1. INTRODUCTION

Boethius' definition of eternity as “to embrace and possess at once the whole fullness of unending life”¹ is a cornerstone of medieval discussions on the different duration modes. There are several studies focusing on its meaning and its fortune². As the earliest commentary on 'Philosophiae Consolatio', the Remigian 'Glosses' (9th–10th c.) are usually considered to be the first example of medieval reception of Boethius' idea of eternity³. A study by Claudio Micaelli, however, has pointed out references to Boethian writings, including verbatim quotations of the definition mentioned above, in the writings of the Carolingian scholar Paschasius Radbertus (8th–9th c.)⁴. The philosophical function of these quotations, as partially examined by Micaelli, needs

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¹ Boethius, *Philosophiae Consolatio*, ed. LUDWIG BIELER (CC 94), Turnhout 1957, V, 6.4, p. 101, ll. 8–9: *Aeternitas igitur est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio*. Translation by JOHN MARENBOON, in: ID. Divine Prescience and Contingency in Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy, in: *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia* 1, 2013, pp. 10–21, here p. 17.

² See, among others, PIERRE COURCELLE, *La consolation de la philosophie dans la tradition littéraire*, Paris 1967; LUCA OBERTELLO, *Severino Boezio*, Genoa 1974, here pp. 673–699; ELEONOR STUMP – NORMAN KRETZMANN, *Eternity*, in: *The Journal of Philosophy* 78, 1981, pp. 430–458; PAUL FITZGERALD, *Stump and Kretzmann on Time and Eternity*, in: *The Journal of Philosophy* 82, 1985, pp. 260–269; ID., *Atemporal Duration*, in: *The Journal of Philosophy* 84, 1987, pp. 214–219; BRIAN LEFTOW, *Boethius on Eternity*, in: *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 7, 1990, pp. 123–142; GIULIO D'ONOFRIO, *Boezio e l'essenza del tempo*, in: LUIGI RUGGIU (ed.), *Il tempo in questione. Paradigmi della temporalità nel pensiero occidentale*, Milan 1998, pp. 119–129.

³ COURCELLE, *La consolation* (as note 2), pp. 239–274.

⁴ CLAUDIO MICAELLI, *Paschasius Radbertus e Boezio. Filosofia e teologia in età tardo-carolingia*, in: *Orpheus* 28, 2007, pp. 162–185. Micaelli's analysis relies on the critical edition of Paschasius Radbertus' works conducted by Beda Paulus.

to be considered in more detail, as their usage reveals an interesting understanding of the concept of eternity in close relationship to prophetic knowledge. The present paper aims at exploring this interpretation. For this purpose, I will firstly provide an overview on the quotations at issue (1); secondly, I will take into consideration some aspects characterizing Paschasius' idea of prophecy (2 and 3). I will conclude with some remarks about the possible posterity of this reading.

2. A SURVEY OF THE QUOTATIONS

Paschasius Radbertus quotes Boethius' definition of eternity in three cases: in the 'Expositio in Matheo', in the 'Expositio in Psalmum XLIV', and in the 'De benedictionibus patriarcharum Iacob et Moysi'⁵:

"We ought to invoke [the Holy Spirit] for enlightening the eyes of our heart in order to make us capable to understand the present events, despite the veil of our flesh. Thus, we will have the possibility to become like those prophets who discerned the future events with a keen eye, indicating them almost with a finger. This is the reason why they frequently stated, 'He is coming.' What was the meaning of their prediction 'He is coming'? This aimed to announce to everyone what had not happened yet, but the prophets already knew thanks to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Although their prophecy [the advent of Christ] was evidently pronounced at a given moment in history, the prophets saw past, present and future out of any temporal sequence. The prophet describes God as 'beholder of all ages.' Then, the prophets, inspired by the Holy Spirit, are likewise capable to know future as present events. As eternity completely exceeds any temporal sequence, an eternal knowledge embraces past, present, and future events. For this reason, ancient wise men concluded: 'to embrace and possess at once the whole fullness of unending life.' And they added: 'This becomes clearer by comparison with temporal things.' In fact, the prophets experienced this eternity as elevated above time thanks to the Holy Spirit. They observed as present event what was in God before the foundation of the world, as God is the complete possession of everything all at once and the first cause."⁶

"The meaning of the sentence 'Since God has blessed you forever', is clear from the preceding verses [of Psalm 44]: 'You are the most excellent of men' as 'your lips have been anointed with grace.' After all, so great a blessing is due to the fact that he is the most excellent of men under all aspects. This

⁵ Both Beda Paulus and Claudio Micaelli missed the last case.

⁶ Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio in Matheo I–IV*, ed. BEDA PAULUS (CC Cont. Med. 56), Turnhout 1984, prol., p. 111, ll. 6–29: *Invocandus utique ut ipse aperiat oculos cordis nostri ne presentem eum propter uelamen carnis minus capaces non satis intellegamus quem a longe ipsi conspiciis cernebant oculis et velut coram positi quasi digito designabant quem futurum vere ac fideliter noverant. Hinc est sane quod ubique ecce advenit dicunt. Quid enim est aliud tam frequenter ecce advenit dicere velut coram exhibendo quod nondum erat nisi visibilem omnibus repromittere quem ipsi Deum presentem ubique cernebant? Cernebant autem eum in Spiritu. Et ideo quem sine tempore videbant cui sunt preterita futurave presentia licet complendum esset presentem insinuebant. Ipse est enim sicut propheta ait conspector omnium saeculorum. Unde et ipsi super se rapti in Spiritu praesentialiter tuebantur quicquid eis futurum Spiritus divinus insinuebat. Nam aeternitas quia cunctum excedit tempus simul profecto omnia quae fiunt in tempore comprehendit. Unde nimirum sapientes saeculi aeternitatem etiam nobis volentes ostendere dixerunt: Aeternitas est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio. Quod ex collatione temporalium clarius elucescit. Ad quam sane aeternitatem prophete in Spiritu extra se et extra omne quod corporeum infra tempus est transuerti cernebant presens illud quod ante tempus iam in eo erat. Illuc namque semper presens simul et interminabilis rerum possessio ac negotiorum pariter plenitudo seu causarum summa consistit.* My translation.

kind of blessing descends upon all blessed on the earth. Therefore, the Apostle said: 'Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens.' This blessing does not descend on earthly or Jewish things, as this kind of blessing is for eternal happiness. [...] In fact, the blessing of Christ gives us the possibility to experience the immensity of times and his grace instills the immensity of his goods. After all, as some say, true eternity is 'to embrace and possess at once the whole fullness of unending life.'⁷

"Then, he said: 'I prevailed on the blessings of the everlasting mountains, the delights of the eternal hills', or according to another reading: 'of the eternal rivers.' This blessing is so great and copious that it is not comparable to any earthly or temporal things. Therefore, we have to wonder at so copious a blessing and so noble paternity donating so great a blessing [...]. Celestial favors seem to provide great fortune and happiness in the progeny; favors of the abyss provide invisible rewards and ineffable goods. [...] Then, there are the blessings of the everlasting mountains, of the eternal hills, and of the eternal rivers. When God gives us eternity, we embrace and possess at once the whole fullness of unending life. Therefore, this is not a temporal kind of blessing, rather than an eternal blessing elevating above all things, embracing multiple causes."⁸

Following what seems to be his typical working strategy⁹, Paschasius constructs all three passages as an accurate patchwork of quotations from Holy Scripture. Nevertheless, that the Carolingian scholar does not work as a mere compiler seems to be substantiated precisely by our case study.

In neither of the three passages does Paschasius mention Boethius as his source: in the 'Expositio in Matheo', the definition from 'Philosophiae Consolatio' is attributed to wise men (*sapientes saeculi*), in the 'Expositio in Psalmum XLIV' it is introduced

⁷ Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio in Psalmum XLIV*, ed. BEDA PAULUS (CC Cont. Med. 94), Turnhout 1991, XLIV, 2, p. 50, ll. 630–641, 644–653: *Cur autem dixerit: Propterea benedixit te Deus in aeternum ex praemissis constat causis: quia speciosus forma quia diffusa est gratia in labiis eius prae filiis hominum. Alioquin tanta talis que benedictio non competeret ei nisi prae filiis hominum in omnibus esset speciosus et diffusam gratiam in se haberet prae omnibus. Quoniam haec benedictio est in qua benedicentur omnes qui benedicti sunt super terram. Hinc quoque ait apostolus: Benedictus Deus et Pater Domini nostri Iesu Christi qui benedixit nos in omni benedictione spiritali in caelestibus in Christo. Non enim de terrenis aut Iudaicis est ista benedictio neque temporalis tantum ut sit aeternitas eius usque ad iubilaeum. [...] Verum haec aeternitas in qua Christus benedicatur immensitas est temporum sicut et gratia qua perfunditur immensitas donorum. Nam aeternitas vera sicut quidam definiunt est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio quia nec fine clauditur nec beatitudine vacatur.* My translation.

⁸ Paschasius Radbertus, *De benedictionibus patriarcharum Iacob et Moysi*, ed. BEDA PAULUS (CC Cont. Med. 96), Turnhout 1993, p. 101, l. 1129, p. 102, ll. 1135, 1137–1140, 1141–1147: *Deinde addidit: Praevaluisti super benedictiones montium manentium et desideria collium, uel sicut alia interpretatio habet: fluminum, aeternorum. Tanta siquidem in his et tam magna promissio est ut nullis debeat coaequare terrenis rebus neque temporalibus. Quapropter quaerenda est talis tanta que paternitas tam excellens natura cui tam inclita benedictio congruere queat [...]. Quoniam ubi omnium celorum innocantur beneficia non modica felicitas adesse creditur et beatitudo in novitate prolis. Ubi vero abyssi nulla inuisa et ineffabilia praemia et dona excluduntur. [...] Deinde additur benedictio montium permanentium et collium seu fluminum aeternorum. Ergo ubi aeternitas datur interminabilis vitae et tota simul perfecta possessio largitur. Quapropter non transitorie accipienda est tam magna benedictio quae universis excellit temporalibus et multas complectitur causas.* My translation.

⁹ BEDA PAULUS, *Einleitung*, in: Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio in Matheo* (as note 6), pp. XXI–XXVI; PAUL WERLICH, *Paschasius Radbertus, Theologe, Mönch – und Fälscher? Einige Hinweise zur Pseudo-isidortheese*, in: *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 72/1, 2016, pp. 50–54.

by the expression *quidam definiunt*, then, in ‘De benedictionibus’ it is directly incorporated into the argument. In fact, this kind of approach is not so surprising, considering that Paschasius typically quotes Boethius’ sentences regardless of their authorship. Because the reasons underlying this approach are set out elsewhere¹⁰, here suffice it to note that these quotations are not simply decorative, but they serve to focus on a key theological issue: the relation between prophetic cognition and the temporal limits of human knowledge.

The passage from ‘Expositio in Matheo’ addresses this problem more explicitly. Paschasius associates Boethius’ idea of eternity as “simultaneous whole and perfect possession of life without end” with the fascinating biblical image of God as “beholder of all ages” (*consector omnium saeculorum*), deriving from the Book of Sirach¹¹ and also quoted in another passage of the ‘Expositio in Matheo’ with the same purpose¹². Despite their differences, both expressions reflect the image of God as observer exceeding time or *saecula*, because of an eternal present. A particularly interesting element is, however, that according to Paschasius this timelessness not only concerns the divine act of knowing, but also the prophetic knowledge inspired by the Holy Spirit. Moving beyond the understanding of ‘Philosophiae Consolatio’, which is at the heart of the present study, the novelty is, here, also the usage of the definition of God as “beholder of all ages”, as this biblical citation is not so frequently quoted both in the patristic and early medieval tradition. Moreover, the few exceptions are generally not comparable to Paschasius’ interpretation. For instance, two quotations can be found in Rabanus Maurus’ ‘Commentary on Ecclesiasticus’, but their meaning corresponds to the original intention of illustrating divine foreknowledge, without any reference to prophetic cognition¹³.

In the other two passages at issue, respectively from the ‘Expositio in Psalmum XLIV’ and ‘De benedictionibus’, Paschasius does not engage so directly with the problem of the combination between eternity and prophecy. However, the Boethian definition plays a crucial role to point out a particular form of timeless cognition resulting from the divine blessing: among the different kinds of blessing or favors (celestial, of

¹⁰ MICAELLI, Pascasio Radberto e Boezio (as note 4).

¹¹ Sir., 36,18.

¹² Paschasius Radbertus, Expositio in Matheo (as note 6), I, 7–8, p. 58, ll. 1718–1759, here l. 1722: *Sed omnipotens Deus prescius futurorum sicut propheta testatur qui est conspector omnium saeculorum numquam se talibus obligaret promissis si ista esset de qua typice prophetarum eloquia concrepabant quam secundum electionem gratiae antiquitus nulli dubium est elegisse.*

¹³ Hrabanus Maurus, Commentariorum in Ecclesiasticum libri decem (Migne PL), Paris 1852, 8,7, col. 1020, ll. 32–57. For complete information, it should be noted that some centuries later (1173–1175) Baldwin of Forde uses the expression *consector saeculorum* in a very similar way to Paschasius: *Deus igitur, ut sciant omnes (quia ipse est conspector saeculorum), per servos suos prophetas futura predicens, prescientiam futurorum merito sibi vindicat, quam spiritus mendax, qui in veritate non stetit, mendaciter sibi usurpat* (Balduinus de Forda, De commentatione fidei, ed. DAVID N. BELL [CC Cont. Med. 99], Turnhout 1991, c. LXXXVIII, p. 435, ll. 4–7). Nevertheless, unlike Paschasius, Baldwin does not explicitly attribute the role of *consector saeculorum* to the prophets, who are exclusively a vehicle of God’s prescience.

the abyss), accurately listed by Paschasius, the divine blessing is the most desirable and the greatest, as it makes possible to share with God an *interminabilis vitae et tota simul perfecta possessio*. Despite the significant differences with the usage in the ‘Expositio in Matheo’, the fact that certain humans (usually the prophets) may possess eternal knowledge seems to be the focal point of Paschasius’ understanding of ‘Philosophiae Consolatio’ V, 6.

This interpretation of Boethian eternity evidently raises at least two problems. First, whilst Boethius provided his well-known definition of eternity in order to distinguish divine timeless cognition from human knowledge, inevitably constrained in temporal sequences, Paschasius also refers to it for assuming a potential timelessness of human knowledge. Taken in this sense, eternity is not to be intended as a prerogative of God, since following Paschasius’ reasoning, there would also be humans capable to perceive past, present, and future events as simultaneous in an eternal present.

Second, for both Boethius and Paschasius the very specific reason underlying the distinction between eternity and time consists in the need to justify the prediction of future events (*prophetia etenim annuntiatio futurorum est*)¹⁴, rejecting any possibility that this could cause them before their occurrence. Needless to say, in ‘Philosophiae Consolatio’ this serves to conciliate divine foreknowledge with human freedom¹⁵. Instead, in Paschasius’ writings the intention is to present prophetic cognition as a capability to view and predict future events without determining them.

These two problematic aspects of Paschasius’ understanding of Boethius’ definition not only reveal an extended concept of eternity, regarding both God and certain human beings, but also provide an image of the prophet very different from that depicted by previous Christian tradition.

3. THE DIVINE *ASPIRATIO* AND THE TIMELESSNESS OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

Paschasius Radbertus’ works are significantly influenced by Augustinian writings¹⁶. Nevertheless, his view of prophecy seems to be explicitly contrasting with a well-known argument of ‘Confessions’ Book 11:

“Whatever may be the way in which the hidden presentiment of the future is known, nothing can be seen if it does not exist. Now that which already exists is not future but present. When therefore people speak of knowing the future, what is seen is not events which do not yet exist (that is, they really are future), but perhaps their causes or signs which already exist. In this way, to those who see

¹⁴ Paschasius Radbertus, *De benedictionibus patriarcharum Iacob et Moysi* (as note 8), I, p. 18, l. 412.

¹⁵ Cf. JOHN MARENBO, *Le temps, la prescience et le déterminisme dans la Consolation de Philosophie de Boèce*, in: ALAIN GALONNIER (ed.), *Boèce ou la chaîne des savoirs* (Philosophes médiévaux 44), Louvain-la-Neuve-Paris 2003, pp. 531–564; ID., *Divine Prescience* (as note 1).

¹⁶ Cf. WILLEMEN OTTEN, *Between Augustinian Signs and Carolingian Reality. The Presence of Ambrose and Augustine in the Eucharistic Debate between Paschasius Radbertus and Ratramnus of Corbie*, in: *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis* 80, 2000, pp. 137–156.

them they are not future but present, and that is the basis on which the future can be conceived in the mind and made the subject of prediction. Again, these concepts already exist, and those who predict the future see these concepts as if already present in their minds.”¹⁷

Augustine seems to be very skeptical about the human aptitude to view the future, for it does not yet exist. Because present time is the only existing one, prophecy is not to be conceived as a natural cognition of future events, but rather as a special attitude to read their signs and causes in the present time. This means that any form of natural precognition, for example deriving from astrology, is illusory and, when successful, coming from “unclean demons”¹⁸:

“All these things being considered, we have good reason to believe that, when the astrologers give very many wonderful answers, it is to be attributed to the occult inspiration of spirits not of the best kind, whose care it is to insinuate into the minds of men, and to confirm in them, those false and noxious opinions concerning the fatal influence of the stars, and not to their marking and inspecting of horoscopes, according to some kind of art which in reality has no existence.”¹⁹

According to biblical teachings, successful prophecies have to be divinely inspired. In any case, this is not to be intended as a complete transformation of the temporal categories of the prophet, but rather as a provisional intuition of future events.

About a century later, to preserve divine foreknowledge from being compared to any kind of human presentiment of the future, Cassiodorus treats prophecy as “divine breath which proclaims with unshakeable truth the outcome of events through the deeds or words of certain persons.”²⁰ Also because of Peter Lombard’s reworking²¹, this definition serves as a focal point for the medieval debates on prophecy, marking a border between any natural form of cognition and divine knowledge²². Accordingly,

¹⁷ Augustinus, *Confessiones*, ed. LUC VERHEIJEN (CC 27), Turnhout 1981, XI, 18.24, p. 206, ll. 22–29: *Quoquo modo se itaque habeat arcana praesensio futurorum, videri nisi quod est non potest. Quod autem iam est, non futurum sed praesens est. Cum ergo videri dicuntur futura, non ipsa, quae nondum sunt, id est quae futura sunt, sed eorum causae vel signa forsitan videntur, quae iam sunt; ideo non futura, sed praesentia sunt iam videntibus, ex quibus futura praedicantur animo concepta. Quae rursus conceptiones iam sunt, et eas praesentes apud se intuentur qui illa praedicunt.* Translation by HENRY CHADWICK in: *Saint Augustine, Confessions*, New York 1991, p. 227.

¹⁸ Augustinus, *De civitate Dei*, ed. BERNARD DOMBART – ALFONSO KALB (CC 47), Turnhout 1955, VII, 24, p. 206, l. 57.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, V, 7, p. 135, ll. 49–54: *His omnibus consideratis non immerito creditur, cum astrologi mirabiliter multa vera respondent, occulto instinctu fieri spirituum non bonorum, quorum cura est has falsas et noxias opiniones de astralibus fati inserere humanis mentibus atque firmare, non horoscopi notati et inspecti aliqua arte, quae nulla est.* My translation.

²⁰ Cassiodorus, *Expositio psalmodum*, ed. MARC ADRIAEN (CC 97), Turnhout 1958, praef., c. 1, p. 7, ll. 2–3: *Prophetia est aspiratio divina, quae eventus rerum aut per facta aut per dicta quorundam immobili veritate pronuntiat.* My translation.

²¹ Petrus Lombardus, *Commentarium in Psalmos* (Migne PL), Paris 1854, praef., col. 58, l. 22.

²² Cf. MARIANNE 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, n.s. 43), Paderborn 2000, pp. 161–172; BARBARA 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,

humans do not have any form of prescience and, even if they seem to predict the outcome of certain future events, this is due only to passing divine inspiration, which does not raise them above temporal duration. Thus, prophetic vision or knowledge is not to be conceived as *habitus*, but rather as instantaneous intuition. The divine inspiration leading to prophecy surely influences and shapes human cognitive faculties, such as perception, imagination, and intellect, but it does not suspend the temporal flow characterizing human existence.

In fact, Paschasius seems to match this conventional view of prophecy, as divinely inspired cognition, with the interesting idea of a timeless mode of human knowledge. Echoing Augustine's and Cassiodorus' arguments, he states that human mind needs the grace of the Holy Spirit (*mens nostra spiritus sancti gratia illustretur*) to comprehend the truth (*veritas intelligere*) about past, present, and future. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, he assumes that this inspiration makes some humans, specifically the prophets, capable of a pan-durational (*ex collatione temporum*) knowledge. It follows that prophecy is not merely a vision predicting the occurrence of some particular events (e.g. the birth of the Messiah, Jerusalem's destruction, or *tempora novissima*), it is rather the result of special "divine blessing" endowing human beings with the capacity to permanently conform to the timelessness of divine knowledge.

How this comes about, however, is not clear: whilst all humans, including prophets, are mutable and existing in time, God does not "suffer the condition of time"²³, as he is omniscient, knowing all future events in a single immutable act. Rather than posing the problem by referring to mystical or ecstatic experiences, Paschasius seems to face the question in epistemic terms.

The answer to this enigma may lie in distinguishing opposite metaphysical notions, such as time and eternity, from the epistemic category *quando* having a meaning over any merely temporal sense²⁴. After all, this distinction, underlying the Boethian interpretation of Aristotle's 'Categoriae'²⁵, is crucial to explain the idea of eternity stated in the last book of 'Philosophiae Consolatio'²⁶. By following Boethius' reasoning, it is not contradictory to conclude that the same event A exists in time as a future event (tA) and in eternity as a present event (eA), for it is cognized from two distinct ways of knowing (*scientiae*): human *quando* and God *quando*. Whilst God *quando*, an omniscient act of knowing, explains the divine eternal essence, human *quando* reflects the existence in time. Nevertheless – according to what we assume as Paschasius' under-

2006, pp. 11–19; ANNA RODOLFI, Sogno e profezia in Alberto Magno, in: STEFANO PERFETTI (ed.), *Scientia, Fides, Theologia. Studi di filosofia medievale in onore di Gianfranco Fioravanti*, Pisa 2011, pp. 193–216, in particular pp. 199–209.

²³ Boethius, *Philosophiae Consolatio* (as note 1), V, 6.6, p. 101, ll. 16–17.

²⁴ Cf. PASQUALE PORRO, *Forme e modelli di durata nel pensiero medievale. L'aeuum, il tempo discreto, la categoria "quando"* (*Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* 16), Leuven 1996, pp. 385–393; RORY FOX, *Time and Eternity in Mid-Thirteenth-Century Thought*, Oxford 2006, pp. 40–42.

²⁵ Boethius, *In categorias* (Migne PL 64), Paris 1891, III, c. 'De ubi et quando', coll. 262–263.

²⁶ Cf. MARENBNON, *Divine Prescience* (as note 1), p. 18.

standing of the Boethian definition – there are certain humans capable of perceiving (*cernebant*) past, present, and future events in a single immutable act. This means that they possess God *quando*, despite continuing to exist in a temporal sequence. This is the case of the prophets, which seems to reconcile human temporality with a permanent way of knowing all events from a divine point of view.

4. PROPHET OR PAGAN WISE MAN?

Besides the philosophical difficulties entailed by the different extensional usage of the category *quando* – on which we can just form hypotheses –, another side of the problem concerns the image of the prophet emerging from this atypical understanding of ‘Philosophiae Consolatio’, as the prophets seem to be more comparable to pagan wise men rather than to biblical figures.

In a sense, this anomaly may be summarily explained by considering that – as mentioned above – Paschasius attributes the Boethian definition of eternity to *sapientes saeculi*. It follows that the Benedictine monk reads and uses ‘Philosophiae Consolatio’ as a pagan work or, at least, as a text not directly related to patristic tradition. Albeit credible, this does not suffice to justify the acceptance by Paschasius of a model of prophecy openly contradicting the traditional Christian view: despite references to the divine *aspiratio*, he develops an unusual idea of prophecy without ever distancing himself from it.

To further complicate the picture, Paschasius does not make any further mention of this view of prophetic cognition when he considers the prophets in other passages of his writings: Isaias, David, Simeon, and other traditional prophetic figures are basically depicted as humans endowed with special and provisional intuition (*intuitus*)²⁷ for comprehending present, past and, above all, future events²⁸. Moreover, in another passage from the ‘Expositio in Matheo’, the Carolingian scholar uses the expression *sapientes saeculi* in a negative sense, almost like a reprimand: “ancient wise men made foolish.”²⁹

All this seems to suggest that Paschasius’ quotations from ‘Philosophiae Consolatio’ are incidental, perhaps made for no particular reason, or that he does not effectively grasp the significance of the Boethian definition. However, this conclusion must be rejected in the light of what the preceding analysis has sufficiently demonstrated. There are a number of reasons confirming that the Carolingian scholar deliberately employs this idea of eternity: above all, he refers to it on three different occasions, and

²⁷ Paschasius Radbertus, *De benedictionibus patriarcharum Iacob et Moysi* (as note 8), I, p. 44, l. 1244.

²⁸ Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio in lamentationes Hieremiae*, ed. BEDA PAULUS (CC Cont. Med. 85), Turnhout 1988, I, p. 7, ll. 118–122: *Quod autem propheta non solum praesentia verum praeterita et futura lugeat liber Paralipomenon ubi legitur insinuat quod mortuus est Iosias rex et sepultus in mausoleo patrum suorum universus que Iuda et Hierusalem luxerint eum, Hieremias inquit maxime.*

²⁹ Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio in Matheo V–VIII*, ed. BEDA PAULUS (CC Cont. Med. 56A), Turnhout 1984, VII, p. 705, l. 493: *Hinc sapientes saeculi fecit stultos.* My translation.

he provides an explicit parallelism with the image of God, and then of the prophet, as *conspector omnium saeculorum* proving his profound (correct or not) assimilation of Boethius' argument.

The impression is that the contours of the concept of prophecy, emerging from patristic tradition and usually considered a reference point for the entire Christian thought, are not so distinct and clear before Peter Lombard's systematization. This explains why Paschasius does not seem to perceive the difference between Augustine's and Cassiodorus' view on prophecy as being divinely inspired and the possibility to apply the Boethian idea of God's eternal present to prophetic cognition. This combination certainly makes the prophetic figure very similar to that of ancient wise men (*sapientes saeculi*) living a theoretical life above the temporal realm. But, in a certain sense, this equivocal juxtaposition between biblical and pagan tradition seems to persist over the 8th century. For instance, in his 'Periphyseon' John Scotus Eriugena develops the theme of deification or *theosis*, thoroughly explored from different points of view, also from Greek patristic tradition³⁰, as a process of overcoming or transcending spatial and – more important for our case study – temporal limits:

“[...] and therefore we hold that no other beatitude is promised to those who are worthy, and [that there will be] no other end of this world, but the ascent beyond places and times of all those who shall receive the glory of *theosis*, that is, deification. For those who are bound by place and time are finite; but the eternal beatitude is infinite. Therefore, those who participate in the eternal and infinite beatitude will be encompassed neither by place nor by time.”³¹

Although the influence of Boethius' commentary on the 'Categories' on Eriugena's 'Periphyseon' is difficult to assess³², the fact that the *praedicamenta* “space” and “time” are perceived as “circumstances” (*periochai*) required for existing in the present world, is undoubtedly related to the vast late ancient tradition of commentaries on Aristotelian logic.

In his analysis Eriugena depicts the image of the future beatitude (*beatitudo*) as an eternal condition characterized by the absence of any spatial and temporal determi-

³⁰ See, among others, STEPHEN THOMAS, *Deification in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition. A Biblical Perspective* (Gorgias Eastern Christianity Studies 2), Gorgias 2007; VLADIMIR KHARLAMOV, *Resources for Deification in Christian Theology*, in: ID. (ed.), *Theosis. Deification in Christian Theology*, vol. 2, Cambridge 2012, pp. 247–266.

³¹ Johannes Scotus Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, ed. EDOUARD A. JEAUNEAU (CC Cont. Med. 161), Turnhout 1996, I, 482C–D, p. 57, ll. 1722–1728: *Ac per hoc non aliam beatitudinem his qui digni sunt aestimamus esse promissam nec alium huius mundi finem fore quam ut omnes qui gloriam theoseos (id est deificationis) accepturi sunt ultra loca et tempora ascendant. Nam qui loco et tempore coartantur finiti sunt; aeterna autem beatitudo infinita est; aeternae igitur beatitudinis atque infinitae participes neque loco circumscribentur neque tempore.* Translation by JOHN O'MEARA et al., in: Eriugena, *Periphyseon* (Cahiers d'études médiévales, Cahier spécial 3), Montréal – Washington 1987, p. 74.

³² JOHN MARENBO, *John Scottus and the 'Categoriae Decem'*, in: WERNER BEIERWALTES (ed.), *Eriugena. Studien zu seinen Quellen. Vorträge des III. Internationalen Eriugena-Colloquiums, Freiburg im Breisgau, 17.–30. August 1979* (Abhandlungen der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse 1980, 3), Heidelberg 1980, p. 118.

nation. In contrast to Paschasius' view, this particular *status* refers to an eschatological perspective rather than to an actual possibility. However, the only example provided by Eriugena for illustrating it mentions a biblical figure, the priest Melchisedec:

“For that which is written concerning Melchisedec alone, that he had no father or mother, nor a beginning of days to his attaining essence through generation, nor end of his time, must, I think, be understood generally of all who shall participate in the beatitude that is to come.”³³

In other words, the condition outlined by Eriugena as a future scenario for people leading a righteous life is paradoxically substantiated by a figure existing in the past, lacking in generation and end, and thus eternal.

Despite the analogies, Paschasius' understanding of Boethius' 'Philosophiae Consolatio' cannot be reduced to the phenomenon of *theosis*, since the Carolingian scholar alludes to a divine way of knowing rather than conceiving of a complete process of deification occurring in the future: as mentioned above, according to Paschasius certain human beings are endowed with eternal cognition, albeit continuing to live within a temporal duration.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In the context of extensive research trying to map the influence and the fortune of Boethius' groundbreaking idea of divine eternity, the case of Paschasius Radbertus is generally neglected. This is obviously due to the fact that he does not provide a detailed commentary on Boethius' 'Philosophiae Consolatio', which was generally read and commented on in Carolingian schools from the 9th century onwards³⁴. However, Paschasius turns out to be a sort of precursor of this phenomenon for many reasons.

First, the verbatim quotations from 'Philosophiae Consolatio' V, 6 (as well as references to other writings of Boethius)³⁵, used by Paschasius in his biblical commentaries, prove a discrete diffusion of the text already in the 8th century. Although Alcuin of York presumably also was aware of Boethius' idea of eternity and, more in general, he had read 'Philosophiae Consolatio'³⁶, Paschasius is actually the first Carolingian scholar who refers to it explicitly.

Second, as the present study has attempted to demonstrate, Paschasius' usage of the well-known Boethian definition of the divine eternity as “to embrace and possess

³³ Iohannes Scotus Eriugena, *Periphyseon* (as note 31), I, 482D–483A, p. 57, ll. 1728–1732: *Quod enim de solo Melchisedech scriptum est, patre ac matre caruisse nullum que dierum principium per generationem in essentiam neque finem temporis habuisse, uniuersaliter de omnibus qui futurae beatitudinis participes erunt intelligendum arbitror*. Translation by JOHN O'MEARA et al., in: *ibid.*, p. 74.

³⁴ ROBERT B. C. HUYGENS, *Mittelalterliche Kommentare zum 'O qui perpetua ...'*, in: *Sacris erudiri* 6, 1953, pp. 373–427; COURCELLE, *La consolation* (as note 2), pp. 239–274; LORIS STURLESE, *Storia della filosofia tedesca nel Medioevo. Dagli inizi alla fine del XII secolo* (Accademia Toscana di Scienze e Lettere “La Colombaria”. Studi 105), Florence 1990, pp. 31–34.

³⁵ MICAELLI, *Pascasio Radberto e Boezio* (as note 4), pp. 164–169.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

at once the whole fullness of unending life” cannot be reduced to a working strategy of constructing a patchwork of classical and biblical quotations. Rather Paschasius seems to grasp and conceptualize the innovative idea of the divine act of knowing as timeless cognition, as demonstrated by the choice of interpreting it through the not so frequently cited biblical definition from the Book of Sirach: God as “beholder of all ages.” This makes the Carolingian scholar not a mere glossator, but rather an interpreter of the classical sources.

Third, using Boethius’ concept of eternity for describing prophetic cognition is undoubtedly a distinctive trait of Paschasius’ analysis. Through this fascinating interpretation, the Carolingian scholar proposes the revolutionary possibility of an extended concept of eternal cognition, regarding both God and certain humans, equivalent to a peculiar concept of prophecy.