

CHAPTER EIGHT

Apocalypticism and the Rhetoric of Reform in Italy around the Year 1000*

Levi Roach, University of Exeter

To note that apocalyptic beliefs and reforming efforts often coincide is to come dangerously close to stating the obvious. The link between church renewal and ideas about Antichrist was already noted by Bernard McGinn, whilst Giles Constable likewise underlined the contribution of apocalypticism to the reforming movements of the twelfth century.¹ In more recent years, such lines of inquiry have been developed in a number of directions, from eighth- and ninth-century Carolingian *correctio*, to the missionary efforts of the thirteenth-century mendicants, emphasising throughout the complex and often complementary roles of reform and apocalypse.² However, despite this work, the subjects are frequently still viewed through separate lenses, the former tending to be seen as archetypally ‘orthodox’, and the latter as dangerously ‘heterodox’. This is not entirely without justification: medieval concerns about the apocalypse did at times go beyond the limits of orthodoxy, and reformers were often keen to emphasise their orthodox credentials, sometimes against their more apocalyptic counterparts. Nevertheless, there is a danger of overstating the divide. Throughout the Middle

* In what follows diplomas are cited by number according to the following conventions: D O III = *Die Urkunden Ottos II. und Ottos III.*, II, *Die Urkunden Otto des III.*, ed. T. Sickel, MGH: DD 2.1 (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1893).

¹ B. McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of Human Fascination with Evil* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994); G. Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

² See, e.g., J.T. Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 130–88; and B.E. Whelan, *Dominion of God: Christendom and Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009). Also now J. Fried, *Dies irae. Eine Geschichte des Weltuntergangs* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2016), 95–126; and M. Czock, “Carolingian Reform and Revelation,” [above, 000–000](#).

Ages most of those who wrote and preached about the apocalypse were well-established figures within the church, meanwhile the central and later Middle Ages produced plenty of examples of reforming movements which tested or exceeded the bounds of strict orthodoxy. Indeed, as R.I. Moore reminds us, the rise of heresy (and accusations of heresy – the two, of course, not being one and the same) in the eleventh and twelfth centuries is as much a by-product of the great reforming efforts of the era as it is a response to these.³ There is, in other words, a danger of narrowing our view of both apocalyptic beliefs and the reforming contexts in which they were so often actualised.

Recent work on monastic reform in the tenth and eleventh centuries has tended to contribute to this divide, albeit largely unconsciously. This argues, *inter alia*, that reform operated on a rhetorical as well as practical level, sometimes being little more than a means of describing (and justifying) regime-change within a religious house.⁴ The language invoked by reformers is therefore taken with a liberal pinch of salt – along [with](#) any apocalyptic concerns expressed therein. Unobjectionable though these arguments may be, they run the risk of replacing an overly positivist (and sometimes downright sycophantic) narrative of ‘reform as improvement’ with one in which the reformers’ own ideals – however misleading

³ R.I. Moore, *The War on Heresy: Faith and Power in Medieval Europe* (London: Profile, 2012).

⁴ The most eloquent recent exponent of this view is S. Vanderputten, *Monastic Reform as Process: Realities and Representations in Medieval Flanders, 900–1100* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013). Elements of such an approach can already be detected in H. Jakobs, *Der Adel in der Klosterreform von St. Balsien*, Kölner Historische Abhandlungen 16 (Cologne: Böhlau, 1969), esp. 275–90. See also S. MacLean, ‘Reform, Queenship and the End of the World in Tenth-Century France: Adso’s “Letter on the Origin and Time of the Antichrist” Reconsidered’, *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire* 86. 3 (2008), 645–75 (trying to bridge rhetoric and reality); M.C. Miller, ‘The Crisis in the Investiture Crisis Narrative,’ *History Compass* 7 (2009): 1570–80; and C. Leyser, ‘Church Reform – Full of Sound and Fury, Signifying Nothing?’, *Early Medieval Europe* 24. 4 (2016): 468–99.

they were as to realities on the ground – are relegated to insignificance. Probing the lines connecting apocalyptic beliefs and reforming efforts thus has the potential not only to enrich our understanding of eschatology, but also to place ideals and ambitions back at the centre of discussions of reform. In order to do so, I will focus on how the language of reform – with its distinctive eschatological undertones – was employed in the late tenth- and early eleventh-century Italy. As we shall see, within this region reform had a strongly argumentative character, but was also underpinned by genuine concerns about sin, iniquity and the end of time.

The immediate context for late tenth- and early eleventh-century Italian reform is offered by the efforts of Otto III to assert his authority within the peninsula. Otto had come to the throne at the tender age of three in 983 and spent his youth north of the Alps, as a *de facto* regency run by his mother Theophanu (d. 991) and grandmother Adelheid (d. 999) oversaw the affairs of the realm on his behalf. Within Italy, this period marks a major caesura: since Otto I's imperial coronation in 962, the Ottonian rulers had spent almost half of their time on the peninsula, often governing their northern lands from afar.⁵ Suddenly forced to go it alone, Italian lay and ecclesiastical magnates began to operate more independently – and various centrifugal tendencies started to develop. Once the teenage Otto III finally reappeared on the scene in early 996, there must, therefore, have been much uncertainty; those who had suffered in the intervening years doubtless hoped for respite (and perhaps retribution), whilst the chief beneficiaries of imperial absence would have looked on with concern.

Otto's initial actions were fairly conventional, however: he arrived in Verona in March, then went to Pavia, the capital of the Italian realm (*regnum Italiae*), to celebrate

⁵ G. Tellenbach, "Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio. Ein Beitrag zu einem großen Thema," in his *Ausgewählte Abhandlungen und Aufsätze*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1988), 770–92, at 774–5, assembles the evidence.

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Easter. From there he proceeded to Ravenna, the other main centre of imperial authority in the north and the traditional staging-post for trips to Rome.⁶ But if Otto's movements conformed to those of his predecessors, his actions already suggested a desire to assert his authority more forcefully within the peninsula. Thus, in contrast to his father and grandfather, Otto III was much more sparing when it came to confirming the rights of bishops, who played a leading role in local politics (above all in the cities which were so prevalent in Italy); he was also more reserved when it came to grants of legal rights (known as *districtus*) to such individuals. In their place, we find monasteries and cathedral chapters enjoying new-found favour.⁷ If this already hinted at a new vision for Italian politics, such tendencies became clearer following the death of Pope John XV, news of which reached the imperial court at Pavia over Easter. Rather than backing a local Roman for the succession, Otto placed his own cousin (and chaplain) Bruno on the papal throne as Gregory V, making him the first 'German' pope – and the first non-Roman pontiff in years. This was an affront to the local urban aristocracy, especially the Crescentii family which had dominated the city (and its bishop) in recent times.⁸ The urban prefect, Crescentius Nomentanus, initially offered

⁶ On Ravenna, see D. Alvermann, *Königsherrschaft und Reichsintegration. Eine Untersuchung zur politischen Struktur von regna und imperium zur Zeit Kaiser Ottos II.* (967) 973–983, *Berliner Historische Studien* 28 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1995), 156–7. For the evens of Otto III's first Italian sojourn, see M. Uhlirz, *Jahrbücher des Deutschen Reiches unter Otto II. und Otto III.*, vol. 2, *Otto III. 983–1002* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1954), 197–220; and J.F. Böhmer, *Regesta Imperii*, II.3, *Die Regesten des Kaiserreiches unter Otto III.*, ed. M. Uhlirz (Cologne: Böhlau, 1956), nos. 1164–1208.

⁷ M. Uhlirz, "Die italienische Kirchenpolitik der Ottonen," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 48 (1934): 201–321, at 265–70.

⁸ P. Toubert, *Les structures du Latium médiéval. Le Latium méridional et la Sabine du IX^e siècle à la fin du XII^e siècle*, Bibliothèque des Ecoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 221, 2 pts (Rome: École française de Rome, 1973), 963–1038; C. Wickham, *Medieval Rome: Stability and Crisis of a City* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), 198–204.

opposition; however, faced with the emperor's arrival in May he gave way, reconciling himself to the new regime. Otto did not stay long, however, and had left the city by mid-June.

Almost as soon as the emperor had departed, trouble started to brew. In early to mid-October, no more than a month after Otto had left Pavia, Crescentius began to make moves to secure his position in and around Rome. He exploited a temporary absence by Gregory V to bar the pope's re-entry and, despite repeated attempts, Gregory was unable to force his way in.⁹ When, early in the new year, the bishop of Piacenza, John Philagathos, returned from an embassy to the Byzantine emperor, developments became more dangerous yet, as the city prefect took the opportunity to have John appointed (anti-)pope. This was presumably intended as a compromise measure, since the latter was an old associate of the Ottonian family, having been a staunch ally of the emperor's mother, Theophanu. John himself had struggled to maintain his position following Theophanu's death, however, and was apparently tempted by the prospect of greener pastures (not to mention a return to favour).¹⁰ Whatever the motives, the new (anti-)pope's contacts with the Byzantine court probably helped his case: the eastern emperor maintained an active interest in Rome, and Basil II's ambassador, Leo of Synada, welcomed these attempts to wrest control of the city from Otto III (even if he was highly critical of Philagathos himself).¹¹ Yet Rome was not the only region to give Otto cause for concern. On 17 March 997 Bishop Peter of Vercelli, a long-time imperial ally, was

⁹ *Regesta Imperii*, ed. Uhlirz, no. 1210b; J.F. Böhmer, *Regesta Imperii*, II.3, *Papstregesten 911–1024*, ed. H. Zimmermann, rev. edn (Vienna: Böhlau, 1998), no. 772.

¹⁰ W. Huschner, "Piacenza – Como – Mainz – Bamberg. Die Erzkanzler für Italien in den Regierungszeiten Ottos III. und Heinrichs II. (983–1024)," *Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento* 26 (2000): 15–52, at 26–30; L. Canetti, "Giovanni XVI.," in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, LV (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 2000), 590–5.

¹¹ Leo of Synada, *Correspondence*, ed. and trans. M.P. Vinson, *Dumbarton Oaks Texts* 8 (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1985), 9–11, 14–23; with C. Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire (976–1025)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 508–9.

killed by the followers of the local margrave of Ivrea, Arduin. As in Rome, this was in essence a local conflict; nevertheless, as there, the mistreatment of a leading local prelate ensured that an imperial response was necessary.¹²

Campaigns on the Slavic frontier prevented immediate action. But even from afar the emperor was keen to make his disapproval known. Indeed, as soon as he caught wind of developments in late March, Otto issued a diploma granting the abbacy of Nonantola to Abbot Leo of SS Boniface and Alexius for the purposes of reform. Nonantola was one of the richest and most important imperial abbeys in Italy and had hitherto been in the hands of John Philagathos. So; by appointing Leo, the emperor was stripping a former associate of one of his most prized possessions, and granting this on to a new favourite (who may, incidentally, have been responsible for relaying the news). The charter in question is distinctly reformist in tone. It opens with a rhyming preamble (~~of~~ *arenga*) meditating upon negligence and the threat posed by ‘rapacious wolves’ (*lupi rapatienses*) and broken vows to religious houses. It then asserts that the abbey has been granted to Leo in order to make good previous ravages and ensure that monastic life conforms to the stipulations of the Rule. The shadow of John lies over this entire act: the implication is that it is he who has brought the centre into such straits (or, at least, failed to salvage it from them); Leo’s responsibility now lies in restoring Nonantola to its former glory.¹³ This document was to set the tone for Otto’s actions in future years: it frames his opponents as oppressors of the church, presenting his own interventions as

¹² U. Brunhofer, *Arduin von Ivrea und seine Anhänger. Untersuchungen zum letzten italienischen Königtum des Mittelalters* (Augsburg: Arethousa, 1999), esp. 80–119; G. Sergi, “Arduino marchese conservatore e re rivoluzionario,” in *Arduino mille anni dopo. Un re tra mito e storia*, ed. L.L. Momigliano (Turin: U. Allemandi, 2002), 11–25.

¹³ D O III 237. See W. Huschner, *Transalpine Kommunikation im Mittelalter. Diplomatische, kulturelle und politische Wechselwirkungen zwischen Italien und dem nordalpinen Reich (9.–11. Jahrhundert)*, MGH: Schriften, 52, 3 pts (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2003), 808–9.

the necessary remedy for wrong-doing. That such rhetoric was influenced by the ideals of monastic reform which had been making waves in recent years – not least in Pavia – stands to reason: the new abbot was acquainted with a number of leading reformers through his work as a papal legate (Leo had famously sided with of Abbo of Fleury against Gerbert of Aurillac in the conflict over Reims); meanwhile, the Italian draftsman responsible for this diploma (a non-chancery figure) had already been involved in producing a privilege in favour S. Pietro in Ciel d’Oro (in Pavia), a centre which had been reformed by Maiolus of Cluny and continued to enjoy close ties with the Burgundian monastery.¹⁴

If Otto was initially prevented from responding as firmly as he should have liked, actions soon followed words. In winter 997–98 the emperor marched south, arriving in Pavia in time for Christmas, before heading on to Ravenna (via Piacenza) and thence to Rome, where he arrived in late February. Upon Otto’s arrival, John Philagathos was taken prisoner and suffered brutal treatment: he was blinded and mutilated by his captors, then later driven from Rome riding backwards on a donkey. These actions were symbolic of the antipope’s disgrace, ritually undoing his appointment. Crescentius, for his part, holed up in the well-fortified Castel Sant’Angelo, where he resisted capture for another two months. Once taken, however, he faced a similar fate: the prefect was beheaded and his body hung in public view from the battlements.

The harshness of these actions has long perplexed historians. Ottonian rulers were normally restrained in their treatment of rebels and Otto broke strikingly with convention

¹⁴ On Leo, see G. Borghese, “Leone,” in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, LIV (Rome: Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 2005), 475–8; on the draftsman, see the introductory remarks to DD O III 218, 236, 237; and on S. Pietro, see C. Andenna, “Un monastero nella vita di una città. San Pietro in Ciel d’Oro fra riforme istituzionali, difficili equilibri politici e uso della memoria,” in *San Pietro in Ciel d’Oro a Pavia mausoleo santuario di Agostino e Boezio*, ed. M.T. Mazzilli Savini (Pavia: Comitato Pavia Città di Sant’Agostino, 2013), 66–87, at 69–73.

here (what Gerd Althoff terms the ‘rules of play’). The grounds must lie in part in frustration: John’s betrayal was a bitter pill, whilst Crescentius had already opposed him and Gregory in 996 and was now a ‘repeat offender’.¹⁵ Yet it is likely that the reformist mind-set so visible in the previous year also had a part to play. As at Nonantola, so too in Rome Otto conceived of his actions as ones of restoration, a cleaning of the Augean stables. One of the first documents issued upon his return to the eternal city – indeed perhaps *the* first – bears a programmatic bull (rather than wax seal, as was conventional) with the striking inscription *renovatio imperii Romanorum* (‘the renewal of the Roman empire’).¹⁶ Though earlier scholarship saw this *renovatio* largely in secular terms, as an attempt to revive the Roman empire of antiquity, the term was often used to describe religious reform, and it was apparently this which was intended: Crescentius had impinged on the rights of the pope, and Otto was determined to make this right (not least for the sake of his cousin).¹⁷ It is within this context that we should understand the apocalyptic language which we now start seeing in our sources. The *Annals of Quedlinburg*, drawn up soon after the events at the well-connected nunnery of Quedlinburg – whose abbess, Mathilda, was acting as regent north of the Alps –

¹⁵ G. Althoff, *Otto III*. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996), 101–14.

¹⁶ D O III 279. On the bull, see H. Keller, “Oddo imperator Romanorum. L’idea imperiale di Ottone III alla luce dei suoi sigilli e delle sue bolle,” in *Italia et Germania. Liber Amicorum Arnold Esch*, ed. H. Keller, W. Paravicini and W. Schieder (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001), 163–89, at 181–4.

¹⁷ Compare P.E. Schramm, *Kaiser, Rom und renovatio. Studien zur Geschichte des römischen Erneuerungsgedankens vom Ende des karolingischen Reiches bis zum Investiturstreit*, 2 vols., Studien der Bibliothek Warburg 17 (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1929); with K. Görich, *Otto III. Romanus Saxonicus et Italicus. Kaiserliche Rompolitik und sächsische Historiographie*, Historische Forschungen 18 (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1993). On the language of ‘reform’, see J. Barrow, “Ideas and Applications of Reform,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 3, *Early Medieval Christianities, c. 600–c. 1100*, ed. T.F.X. Noble and J.M.H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 345–62.

refer to John and Crescentius as ‘ministers of Satan’ (*ministri Sathanae*) within this context, presenting their opponents as ‘friends of Christ’ (*amici Christi*); the two are thus cast as eschatological enemies of God and man, and Otto’s actions as ones of restoring order.¹⁸

If the connection between apocalypse and reform is already latent in the *Annals of Quedlinburg*, it becomes clearer as we look at Otto’s actions over the next year and a half. It was at this juncture that the emperor is reported to have reformed S. Paolo fuori le mura, an important monastery with long-standing links to Cluny, and it was also around this time that he made a number of decisive interventions in favour of S. Maria in Farfa.¹⁹ The latter had suffered significantly in recent years, not least at the hands of the Stefaniani, the local counts of the Sabina who may have been a branch of the ruling Crescentii family (though the jury is out).²⁰ The centre was, in other words, an enemy of Otto’s enemies – and thus a natural ally. Indeed, as an imperial abbey, Farfa was a potential bastion of Ottonian influence in an otherwise hostile region. Yet relations with the emperor were not entirely smooth. A new abbot, Hugh, had been appointed around this time (c. 997), but was initially removed from his post on account of simony and the monastery placed under a certain ‘Bishop Hugh’ (probably Hugh of Ascoli Piceno), who along with the imperial chaplain Herpo was now charged with overseeing affairs there. Upon Otto’s arrival in Lazio in early 998, the monks of

¹⁸ *Annales Quedlinburgenses*, s.a. 998, ed. M. Giese, MGH: SRG 72 (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2004), 497–9.

¹⁹ Otto’s involvement at S. Paolo is only reported in Raoul Glaber, *Historiarum libri quinque*, I.14, ed. J. France, *Rodulfus Glaber Opera* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 28–30, but given Raoul’s Cluniac connections there is little reason to doubt his report. On Cluny and S. Paolo, see I. Rosé, “La présence ‘clunisienne’ à Rome et dans sa région au X^e siècle,” in *Il monachesimo italiano dall’età longobarda all’età ottoniana (secc. VIII–X)*, ed. G. Spinelli, Italia benedettina 27 (Cesena: Badia di Santa Maria del Monte, 2006), 231–71, esp. 246–9.

²⁰ Toubert, *Structures*, 986–96, 1021–2; S. Manganaro, “Protezione regia i mundeburdi degli Ottoni per S. Maria di Farfa (secc. X–XI),” *Annali dell’Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Storici* 27 (2012/13): 73–144, at 133–141. However, see also Wickham, *Medieval Rome*, 198–204.

Farfa were able to prevail upon him to restore Hugh, however. The emperor was backtracking, but throughout he seems to have been guided by – and framed his actions in accordance with – reforming principles: initially he was spurred into action by news that the abbot had bought his office (apparently with the assistance of Gregory V), whilst later he agreed to restore Hugh in order to secure the centre’s institutional independence (as guaranteed by the Rule). The real issue was probably one of imperial power and influence: Otto had not been consulted in Hugh’s appointment, and his restoration was on the condition that future elections be confirmed by the emperor.²¹

In any case, once Hugh was back at the helm, there was a concentrated effort to restore the abbey’s fortunes. Already in mid-March 998 Otto had issued a confirmation of the centre’s rights, and this was followed by a judicial decision in its favour regarding possession of the cell S. Maria in the Alexandrine Baths (in Rome) and a further restitution of estates.²² In autumn 999 the emperor then chose to retire to a spot nearby Farfa to discuss the restoration of the *res publica* (*pro restituenda re publica ... convenimus ... et consilia imperii tractavimus*) and – amongst other things, to plan the Lenten pilgrimage of the following year, – thus signalling the importance of the centre to his regime. Hugh, for his part, took advantage of the imperial presence to petition further privileges. The first of these, issued at Farfa itself, grants the abbey the *fodrum* – a traditional royal/imperial due – on its lands, whilst the second, enacted in Farfa, but only issued upon Otto’s return to Rome, confirms the centre’s holdings once more.²³ This latter text is especially important. Farfa had already had its holdings confirmed a year previously, when Hugh was first restored to his post, so there

²¹ D O III 276.

²² D O III 277, *I Placiti del “Regnum Italiae”*, ed. C. Manaresi, *Fonti per la storia d’Italia*, 92, 96–7, 3 vols. (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1955–60), no. 236 (= D O III 278), D O III 282.

²³ DD O III 329, 331.

was little need for this charter (at least in legal terms). It may be that after recent misfortunes Hugh was keen to marshal as much support as possible, and the document does in certain respects go further than the earlier confirmation. Nevertheless, the real reason for its production lies in developments over the previous year.

~~Its~~ [The diploma's](#) narrative section (or *narratio*) recounts how Abbot Hugh had initially been deposed for simony and the centre placed under the oversight of Bishop Hugh and the chaplain Herpo as a benefice (*in beneficium*) – our most detailed account of these goings on. Then it proceeds to explain how recently both of these figures had suddenly died, indicating to the emperor the error of their (and his) ways. It is for this reason that Otto saw fit to confirm Farfa's liberty once more: in 998 he had been willing to admit a mistake, but by 999 the severity of this error had become fully apparent. Indeed, the emperor explicitly states that the confirmation has been issued for the benefit the soul of his departed friend Herpo (though not, interestingly, for that of Bishop Hugh).²⁴ That Otto was troubled by recent events is confirmed by the document's sanction, which forbids any of his successors from infringing on Farfa's rights, threatening those who do so with facing justice alongside the emperor himself (*nobiscum*) (!) at the Day of Judgement, when Christ comes to judge the age with fire (*dum venerit iudicare saeculum per ignem*). In doing so, the charter breaks strongly with convention. Italian diplomas generally bear secular sanctions threatening monetary fines and compensation; the decision to speak of eternal salvation here must be deliberate.²⁵ It

²⁴ On Herpo, see J. Fleckenstein, *Die Hofkapelle der deutschen Könige*, vol. 2, *Die Hofkapelle im Rahmen der ottonisch-salischen Reichskirche*, MGH: Schriften 16.ii (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1966), 89, 101–2, 113–14.

²⁵ M. Uhlirz, "Rechtsfragen in den Urkunden Kaiser Ottos III.," *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo* 2 (1956): 220–44, at 232–5; J. Studtmann, "Die Pönformel der mittelalterlichen Urkunden," *Archiv für Urkundenforschung* 12 (1932): 251–374, at 307–11. See also M. Gabriele, "Otto III, Charlemagne, and Pentecost A. D. 1000: A Reconsideration using Diplomatic Evidence," in *The Year 1000: Religious and Social*

would seem that the emperor was moved by his friend's death and had judgement on the mind; and Harmut Hoffmann plausibly ascribes this eschatological turn of phrase to Otto himself.²⁶

Were these charters our only sources, it would be difficult to tell what – if any – relationship they bear to the emperor's broader concerns about ecclesiastical renewal. However, here the well-preserved archive of Farfa comes to our aid, furnishing two further sets of sources. The first consist of Abbot Hugh's own accounts of the destruction and later renewal of Farfa, in which he explains how, after years of neglect, affairs at the abbey were set in order during his time.²⁷ Specifically, Hugh recalls how he had reformed the centre at the advice of Odilo of Cluny and William of Volpiano, an action undertaken as penance for his earlier simony. We know that Odilo was present at the Farfa assembly of autumn 999, and it is almost certainly then that the reform took place. Though the emperor's initiative is not mentioned, Otto can scarcely have been unaware of these developments – indeed, the impression is that he was actively promoting his Cluniac associates here, as he would do

Response to the Turning of the First Millennium, ed. M. Frassetto (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 111–32, at 119, discussing a similar case from north of the Alps; and cf. F. Bougard, “Jugement divin, excommunication, anathème et malédiction: la sanction spirituelle dans les sources diplomatiques,” in *Exclure de la communauté chrétienne. Sens et pratiques sociales de l'anathème et de l'excommunication, IV^e–XII^e siècle*, ed. G. Bühner-Thierry and S. Gioanni, Collection Haut Moyen Âge 23 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 214–38.

²⁶ H. Hoffmann, “Eigendiktat in den Urkunden Ottos III. und Heinrichs II.,” *Deutsches Archiv* 44 (1988): 390–423, at 398–9.

²⁷ Hugh of Farfa, *Destructio monasterii Farfensis*, and *Relatio constitutionis*, ed. U. Balzani, *Fonti per la storia d'Italia*, 33 (Rome: Forzani, 1903), 27–49, 55–8. On which, see J.-M. Sansterre, “‘Destructio’ et ‘diminutio’ d'une grande abbaye royale. La perception et la mémoire des crises à Farfa au X^e et dans les premières décennies du XI^e siècle,” in *Les Élités au haut Moyen Âge. Crises et renouvellements*, ed. F. Bougard, L. Feller and R. Le Jan (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 469–85.

elsewhere. Perhaps most revealingly, Hugh recalls that the monks had initially resisted his efforts, asserting that they should not be measured by the example of the saints. In response, he reminded them that in Revelation it is asserted that ““They should wait a short time, until the number of their brothers is completed” [cf. Rev. 6:7]; if it [viz. the number] were completed, then it would have already been the end of the world; when it will be completed, the world will end.’²⁸ At the heart of this aside lies the question of whether sanctity is still possible – Hugh’s answer is affirmative – but in doing so it touches on a traditional apocalyptic trope: that only a short time (*modicum tempus*) remains, and once the number of the saints is completed, the end of time shall be initiated. There is thus a distinctly eschatological undertone to the act of reform – and indeed the call to saintly action might be seen as hastening this along. On its own, this line too would be nothing more than a curiosity; but taken in conjunction with Otto III’s diploma, it may say rather more.

Further light is shed by the *Liber tramitis*, the earliest surviving Cluniac customary, preserved at Farfa. This work owes its existence to the reforms initiated by Hugh, which brought Farfa into the wider Cluniac orbit. From our present standpoint, the interest of the work lies in its opening poem, which explains how and why Cluniac customs had been brought to Italy. Amongst other things, here it asserts that this was done because ‘the end of the world entwines us with the dregs of the age / And the old age of the church is visible everywhere’ (*Finis enim mundi nos fecibus implicat aevi / Et uetus ecclesiae senium*

²⁸ Hugh of Farfa, *Destructio monasterii Farfensis*, ed. Balzani, 49–50: ‘Inter hec notandum est, quod multi stulti nostri ordinis fratres, dum ab aliquo eis proferuntur antiqua sanctorum patrum exempla respondent et dicunt: “Non possumus illos sequi, quia illi fuerunt sancti. nos peccatores, illi perfecti, nos imperfecti”, non intelligentes quod usque in finem mundi non deerunt iusti, qui Deo ita accepti erunt, ut sancti vocentur, sicut in Apocalypsi legitur responsum etiam illis quia clamabant sanctis: “Adhuc sustinete modicum tempus, donec impleatur numerus fratrum vestrorum”; qui si completus esset, mundi iam finis factus fuisset; qui statim ut complebitur, mundus finietur...’.

monstratur ubique).²⁹ Hence at Farfa see similar trends to those observed in Rome. As there, a link is visible between reform and Otto's political interests; moreover, as in the eternal city, there are hints of a deeper eschatological outlook. This is probably no accident: Farfa lay in the Sabina, not far from Rome, and as an imperial abbey was of crucial importance to a ruler seeking to assert his authority within the city.

However, Rome and the Sabina were not the only areas where Otto faced difficulties. As noted, during his absence conflict had erupted between Bishop Peter of Vercelli and Margrave Arduin of Ivrea, leading to the death of the former at the hands of the latter's men, who reportedly went on to burn Peter's remains – a shocking act of desecration. Once Otto had mastered the situation in Rome, he therefore began to turn his attention northwards. In late September 998 he held an important gathering at S. Pietro in Ciel d'Oro in Pavia – an important reformed monastic centre with links to Cluny, it should be recalled – at which he issued a programmatic set of decrees regarding church landholding.³⁰ The focus is on two peculiarly Italian types of tenure, the *libellus* and *emphyteusis*. Both involved the contractual lease of land, the former (generally) for twenty-nine years and the latter for three life-times.³¹ These were very popular with churches, which were technically not meant to give land away (but in practice often had to); they allowed the fiction of stable ecclesiastical land-holding to be maintained in the face of pressures to alienate. The problem lay when leases came up for renegotiation, however. As elsewhere in Europe, there was a strong tendency for these to become permanent, with recipients claiming the land as their own

²⁹ *Liber tramitis aevi Odilonis abbatis*, ed. P. Dinter, *Corpus Consuetudinum Monasticarum* 10 (Siegburg: Franz Schmitt, 1980), 7. On this work and its broader historical context, see S. Boynton, *Shaping a Monastic Identity: Liturgy and History at the Imperial Abbey of Farfa, 1000–1125* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

³⁰ *Die Konzilien Deutschlands und Reichsitaliens 916–1001*, vol. 2, 962–1001, ed. E.-D. Hehl, MGH: Conc. 6.ii (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2007), 562–4.

³¹ Wickham, *Medieval Rome*, 55–6.

property.³² In response, the emperor now ordained that all such grants should only last as long as the bishop or abbot who enacted them; his successor should then be free to reclaim the estates or renegotiate the terms of lease. This was intended to counteract the *de facto* heritability of leases and to guard against venial prelates, who might abuse their office by granting lands to friends and family.

The S. Pietro ordinances were clearly influenced by Otto's recent (and on-going) experiences at Farfa, where the dissipation of monastic land was a major problem. (Apparently Bishop Hugh had misused the estates during his brief abbacy—and earlier abbots had done likewise). It is, therefore, hardly surprising that one of the main lines of transmission for the decrees runs through the Sabine monastery, which clearly hoped to benefit from them (it is preserved within Gregory of Catino's *Chronicon*—also the repository for Hugh's accounts). Nevertheless, the emperor probably also had other conflicts within the *regnum Italiae* in mind here. Indeed, it was on the occasion of this gathering in Pavia that the realm's bishops seem to have written a letter to Pope Gregory complaining about Arduin's depredations, and it is hard not to imagine that the situation in Piedmont also informed Otto's actions.³³ In fact, it has been suggested that Leo, the future bishop of Vercelli (and fierce opponent of Arduin) was responsible for drafting the text; and, though the philological

³² F. Bougard, "Actes privés et transferts patrimoniaux en Italie centro-septionale (VIII^e–X^e siècle)," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome: Moyen Âge* 111.ii (1999): 539–62. More generally, see S. Reynolds, *Fief and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford: OUP, 1994).

³³ C. Violini, *Arduino d'Ivrea, re d'Italia e il dramma del suo secolo* (Turin: Società subalpina, 1942), Appendix no. 2, 131–3; with discussion in H. Wolter, *Die Synoden im Reichsgebiet und in Reichsitalien von 916 bis 1056*, *Konziliengeschichte, Reihe A: Darstellungen* 5 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1988), 161.

arguments are far from watertight, some involvement remains plausible.³⁴ Another leading figure at this juncture was Gerbert of Aurillac, the archbishop of Ravenna who may also have been involved in drafting the text; as Pope Silvester II, he was later to take a leading role in bringing Arduin to justice. It is, therefore, not without reason that some have seen these ordinances as being directed against the Piedmontese margrave and his followers, who similarly stood accused of taking church lands.

Certainly it is not long after this that we start seeing more proactive measures against Arduin: at some point after the Pavia assembly Pope Gregory responded to the bishops' letter of complaint with an epistle of his own to the margrave, instructing Arduin to desist from his attacks on Ivrea (though strangely not Vercelli, at least by name) and make good the damages by Easter, under threat of anathema.³⁵ Whatever the precise intention, this did not have the desired effect, and come Easter the new pope, Sylvester II – Gregory V having died in early February 999 and been replaced by Gerbert of Aurillac – sentenced the margrave to public penance at an important synod in Rome.³⁶ Shortly before this, the Italian chaplain Leo had been appointed to the see of Vercelli, where since Peter's death two otherwise obscure figures had briefly occupied the post, probably under Arduin's aegis.³⁷ Leo's arrival on the scene is announced by a slew of diplomas in favour of the centre: two on 7 May, when he is

³⁴ See H. Bloch, "Beiträge zur Geschichte des Bischofs Leo von Vercelli und seiner Zeit," *Neues Archiv* 22 (1897): 11–136, at 67–8; and Schramm, *Kaiser, Rom und renovatio*, vol. 1, 128–9, respectively.

³⁵ Violini, *Arduino d'Ivrea*, Appendix no. 3, 133; with Wolter, *Synoden im Reichsgebiet*, 165.

³⁶ *Konzilien Deutschlands und Reichsitalien*, ed. Hehl, 582–3; with Wolter, *Synoden*, 170–1; and S. Hamilton, *The Practice of Penance, 900–1050* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001), 1–2, 173.

³⁷ R. Pauler, *Das Regnum Italiae in ottonischer Zeit. Marken, Grafen und Bischöfe als politische Kräfte*, Bibliothek des Deutschen Historischen Instituts in Rom 54 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1982), 32–3.

first attested in this office, two more in early November of the following year, and a fifth in early January 1001.³⁸ Few religious houses enjoyed this kind of favour, and this can hardly be a coincidence: Leo brought Vercelli firmly into the imperial orbit, as was presumably Otto's intention. The bishop's standing at court, already hinted at by his actions as royal *missus* in previous years, is now shown by the fact that he was entrusted with drafting diplomas in favour of his see.³⁹ The resulting documents are most usual, providing precious insights into the thoughts and concerns of a leading royal advisor at this point. From our present standpoint, their interest lies above all in the fact that here we see the same kind of cosmic language being employed as in Rome and Farfa (and also, to an extent, Nonantola). Thus the second of these, in many respects the most ideologically charged, asserts that the various rights conferred to the bishop have been granted so that he and his successors may remain 'undefeated against the heresiarch soldiers' (*invicti contra heresiarchas militis*), a strikingly militant turn of phrase with distinct apocalyptic undertones. This alone would be noteworthy, but the text goes on to proclaim that future malefactors will be cursed and damned amongst the heretics – further fighting words. Evidently in Leo's eyes Arduin and his associates were enemies of God and man, and he returns to this theme in later diplomas, asserting that those who seek to challenge Vercelli's rights are 'driven by diabolical spirit' (*diabolico ductus spiritu*) or 'driven by diabolical contempt' (*diabolico fastu ductus*).⁴⁰ As Heinrich Fichtenau

³⁸ DD O III 323, 324, 383, 384, 388.

³⁹ Bloch, "Beiträge," 61–71. More generally, see H. Dormeier, "Un vescovo in Italia alle soglie del Mille: Leo di Vercelli 'episcopus Imperii, servus sancti Eusebii'," *Bollettino storico vercellese* 28 (1999): 37–74.

⁴⁰ DD O III 384, 388.

noted, such eschatologically charged statements are extremely rare in imperial diplomas; they speak of the depth of Leo's concerns.⁴¹

Were such expressions restricted to Leo's diplomas, it would be difficult to be certain as to their significance. However, here we are fortunate to have Leo's annotations in a number of contemporary manuscripts, which bear further witness to his preoccupations. Not surprisingly, these reveal the bishop to have been widely read, particularly in history and eschatology: he was acquainted with many standard works on the latter subject, including Bede's *Expositio in Lucam*, Haimo of Auxerre's commentary on Isaiah, and Augustine's *City of God*, all of which he had studied in detail.⁴² Most of his annotations give only the most general sense of his interests within these texts, and it would require much further study to allow confident conclusions as to his views.⁴³ In the case of Haimo, in particular, it may be that Leo was interested in the Carolingian exegete's thoughts on episcopal and secular authority. Nevertheless, a few things are clear even at a glance. The first is that Leo was very interested in the machinations of the devil and Antichrist. Thus to chapter nineteen of book twenty of Augustine's *City of God*, dedicated to Paul's statements in II Thessalonians (on the coming of Antichrist), he added the note, 'the devil is called a fugitive' (*diabolus vocatur refuga*), whilst to book fourteen, chapter eleven, on the Fall of Man, he inserted an

⁴¹ H. Fichtenau, "Rhetorische Elemente in der ottonisch-salischen Herrscherkunde" (1960), repr. in and cited from his *Beiträge zur Mediävistik. Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, vol. 2, *Urkundenforschung* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1977), 126–156, at 133 and 135–6.

⁴² On these works, see P. Darby, *Bede and the End of Time* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 65–7, 83–6, and 162–3; S. Shimahara, *Haymon d'Auxerre, exégète carolingien*, Collection Haut Moyen Âge 16 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013); and R.A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁴³ S. Gavinelli, "Leone di Vercelli postillatore di codici," *Aevum* 75 (2001): 233–62, assembles the evidence admirably, but much work remains to be done by way of interpretation.

observation to the effect that those who live according to the flesh are otherwise known as Satan (*Leo nota: alias eris Sathanas*). It was not only Augustine who received such treatment: to Cassiodorus' *Expositio Psalmorum* Leo included an aside considering the qualities granted to the lion (*leo*: Leo's own name) by God and the devil; evidently he wanted to separate the wheat from the chaff here, and had a vested interest in doing so. Finally, and perhaps most strikingly, to a copy of Rufinus' translation of Eusebius' *Historia ecclesiastica*, Leo added a series of striking notes on such varied topics as the 'baptism of heretics' (*baptismum hereticorum*) and the 'felony of Crescentius' (*filloniam Crescentii*).⁴⁴ Though not explicitly eschatological, these annotations reveal that Leo sought guidance on the events of his day within his library, and it stands to reason that he also did so when it came to eschatology.

The evidence surveyed hitherto, patchy though it at times may be, indicates that the reforming initiatives of these years were often accompanied by a degree of apocalypticism. The imperial party was keen to paint its opponents as godless and impious, framing their own interventions as the restoration of an idealised *status quo ante*. In this sense, reform was certainly a highly rhetorical affair. Otto and his supporters were not, however, the only ones to employ such language. As Richard Landes notes, there is a tendency for one group's saviour figure to be another's Antichrist (what he calls the 'second law of apocalyptic dynamics'), and millennial Italy was no exception.⁴⁵ Indeed, though much has been made of the connections between Otto III and the circles of reform – and quite rightly so – these were not exclusive. In particular, William of Volpiano, the Piedmontese friend and associate of Odilo of Cluny – and important reform in his own right – seems to have been on the other

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁴⁵ R. Landes, *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 15.

side of these conflicts.⁴⁶ His biographer, Raoul Glaber – himself an individual with deep eschatological interests⁴⁷ – records that in his youth William had refused consecration at the hands of the bishop of Vercelli (unnamed in his account, but almost certainly the Peter who fell at the hands of Arduin’s men), because the latter insisted on an oath of obedience.⁴⁸ Evidently William was no friend of episcopal authority in the region, and there are signs that his sympathies lay with Arduin and his associates. Thus he felt similarly about Peter’s successor, Leo: later in the *Life* Raoul says that William was accustomed to refer to the latter as ‘this most cruel lion’ (*hic crudelissimus leo*) – a play on Leo’s name – and to assert that the bishop was ‘entirely without God’ (*totus ... sine Deo*).⁴⁹ The reasons for William’s hostility lay in local power constellations, which pitted his family – and the churches they patronised – against those of the bishops of Vercelli. Indeed, it was in these years, probably around the time of the reform of Farfa in autumn 999, that William’s two brothers asked him to found a monastery at Fruttuaria and provided its initial endowment. As Alfred Lucioni notes, this was a reaction to recent struggles in Piedmont. The brothers were apparently associates of Arduin and had been left dangerously exposed by the margrave’s aggressive stance; by endowing a new monastery they might hope to preserve the family patrimony

⁴⁶ N. D’Acunot and S. Moretti, “Guglielmo da Volpiano,” in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, LXI (Rome: Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 2003), 46–50, with further literature.

⁴⁷ R. Landes, “Rodolfus Glaber and the Dawn of the New Millennium: Eschatology, Historiography, and the Year 1000,” *Revue Mabillon* n.s. 7 (1996): 57–77 (though Landes overstates the evidence).

⁴⁸ Raoul Glaber, *Vita domni Wilhelmi abbatis*, ch. 4, ed. N. Bulst, *Rodulfus Glaber Opera* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 260–2.

⁴⁹ Raoul Glaber, *Vita domni Wilhelmi abbatis*, ch. 12, ed. Bulst, 284–6. In the facing-page translation, John France renders *crudelissimus* as ‘very cruel’, losing some of the force of the original.

against disinheritance.⁵⁰ Interestingly, they were not the only associates of Arduin to do so: faced with the prospect of confiscation, many others opted to endow the new monastery – and would do so in ever greater numbers following Arduin’s abortive bid for the kingship some years later. For their part, William’s brothers retired to the safety of St-Bénigne in Dijon (William’s own monastery). ‘Reform’ thus was not a homogenous movement, and while Leo might claim to be reasserting the traditional rights of the church within the region, William and others were equally adamant that this was not so. In this respect, Fruttuaria seems to have been something of a model for centres north of the Alps, where in the later eleventh century reform also started to be co-opted by the anti-imperial faction.⁵¹

Most intriguingly of all, there are hints of a similar brand of apocalyptic discourse within these circles. The key text here is the Tiburtine Sibyl, the importance of which has recently been underlined by Anke Holdenried. As Holdenried notes, the king-list found within this work includes a striking diatribe against Otto III, who is described as bloodthirsty and villainous, and said to have despoiled churches within his domains. The section in question is an interpolation – the Sibyl itself being a much older text – and clearly betrays the redactor’s interests.⁵² It is significant that the complaints raised are reformist in tone: the emperor stands accused not only of despoiling churches, but also of not having ‘entered

⁵⁰ A. Lucioni, “L’abbazia di S. Benigno, l’episcopato, il papato e la formazione della rete monastica fruttuariense nel secolo XI,” in *Il monachesimo italiano del secolo XI nell’Italia nordoccidentale*, ed. A. Lucioni, Italia benedettina 29 (Cesena: Badia di Santa Maria del Monte, 2010), 237–308, esp. 249–51, 259–63.

⁵¹ Jakobs, *Adel in der Klosterreform*, 242–53.

⁵² *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen. Pseudomethodius, Adso und die Tiburtinische Sibylle*, ed. E. Sackur (Halle: Niemeyer, 1898), 182; with discussion in A. Holdenried, “Many Hands without Design: The Evolution of a Medieval Prophetic Text,” *The Mediaeval Journal* 4.1 (2014): 23–42. See also G.L. Potestà, *L’Ultimo messia. Profezia e sovranità nel Medioevo* (Milan: Il Mulino, 2014), 86–91, along similar lines.

through the gate into the sheepfold'. This phrase, lifted from John [10X₂-2](#), was usually reserved for accusations of simony, and it would seem that our anonymous interpolator was trying to tar Otto III with the same brush. Though it is hard to be certain where and when these details were added, there are grounds for thinking that it was in the *regnum Italiae* – or a centre very closely connected with this – in the earlier years of Henry II's reign, with Fruttuaria and its northern mother house, St-Bénigne in Dijon, being the leading candidates.⁵³ Interestingly, one of the earliest manuscripts of this work was copied at Fécamp half a century later (c. 1060 × 1070, according to Neithard Bulst), a centre which itself had been reformed by William in 1001, just after he had founded Fruttuaria. The case for a connection is tantalising is strengthened by the fact that the manuscript presents the Sibyl alongside Raoul Glaber's *Life* of William, in which William's complaints about Leo are to be found (our only independent manuscript witness to this text), and also Adso's tract on Antichrist, all in the same hand.⁵⁴ Clearly the compiler had an active interest in reform and eschatology – and thought such works a natural accompaniment to an account of William's life.

It should, therefore, be clear that on both sides of the divide reforming ideals and rhetoric informed religious and political action in these years. It has often been wondered what – if any – relation such utterances bear to the proximity of the 'apocalyptic year 1000'.⁵⁵ The

⁵³ L. Roach, "The Legacy of a Late Antique Prophecy: The Tiburtine Sibyl and the Italian Opposition to Otto III," *The Mediaeval Journal* 5.1 (2015): 1–33.

⁵⁴ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, lat. 5390, ff. 222r–235v, with N. Bulst, "Rodulfus Glabers Vita domini Willelmi abbatis. Neue Edition nach einer Handschrift des 11. Jahrhunderts (Paris, Bibl. nat., lat. 5390)," *Deutsches Archiv* 30 (1974): 450–87, at 455 (and cf. 453–54, esp. n. 18). See also Palmer, *Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*, 201.

⁵⁵ J. Fried, "Endzeiterwartung um die Jahrtausendwende," *Deutsches Archiv* 45 (1989): 381–473; R. Landes, "The Fear of an Apocalyptic Year 1000: Augustinian Historiography, Medieval and Modern," *Speculum* 75 (2000): 97–145. See also S. Gouguenheim, *Les Fausses*

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possibility of a connection should not be dismissed out of hand: there are signs of a heightened interest in eschatology at and around Otto III's court, and the turning of the millennium may well have played a role here.⁵⁶ Still, there is danger of framing debate entirely in terms of dates and chronology, when such factors are not mentioned in any of our Italian sources. Indeed, if apocalypticism was particularly widespread at this juncture, all indications are that the influence came from the kind of qualitative apocalyptic reckoning championed by Gregory the Great: Italian ecclesiastics believed that they could see signs of the end, but remained uncertain as to quite how close this was.⁵⁷

The bigger question such material raises is that of how – if at all – such rhetoric related to reality. Here Bernard McGinn has famously warned against taking apocalyptic language too literally. As he notes, calling an enemy Antichrist or a limb of Satan might reveal a deeply apocalyptic mind-set, but could equally be a rhetorical trope, little more than a smear. He suggests distinguishing 'Antichrist language' (which we might here broaden to 'apocalyptic language') from 'Antichrist application' ('apocalyptic application'). The former designates the more rhetorical end of the spectrum, involving likening a figure to Antichrist for polemical purposes; the latter involves the literal interpretation of present individuals or events as those preceding the Last Times.⁵⁸ Faced with the rich sources of the central and

terreurs de l'an mil. Attente de la fin des temps ou approfondissement de la foi? (Paris: Picard, 1999), for trenchant but somewhat overstated criticism.

⁵⁶ L. Roach, "Emperor Otto III and the End of Time," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 23 (2013): 75–102, with further literature.

⁵⁷ See Palmer, *Apocalypse*, 57–68; and R.A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World* (Cambridge, 1997), 51–67, on Gregory's eschatology. More generally: C. Leyser, "The Memory of Gregory the Great and the Making of Latin Europe, 600–1000," in *Making Early Medieval Societies: Conflict and Belonging in the Latin West, 300–1200*, ed. K. Cooper and C. Leyser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 181–201.

⁵⁸ McGinn, *Antichrist*, 120–2.

later Middle Ages, McGinn is able to apply these categories well, revealing how both Antichrist language and Antichrist application served to shape people's beliefs about the end of time.

The historian of late tenth- and early eleventh-century Italy, however, is presented with something of a quandary: it is rare that we have more than one or two sets of sources from a given centre, and it would be dangerous to presume too much on this basis. Even at Vercelli and Farfa, where our sources run deepest, we possess little more than fragments: a few charters, some annotations, a brief narrative. We must, therefore, resist the temptation to homogenise the evidence; just as ideals of (and approaches to) reform could vary, so too apocalyptic beliefs, when present, were not monolithic and unchanging. At the same time, we should not downplay or ignore such evidence. In a secular age, it can be tempting to identify all isolated cases as ones of language (rather than application). In this respect, it is striking how much of the evidence surveyed here comes from sources which are not natural vehicles for theological messages; the fact that apocalyptic concerns are even surfacing in charters and marginal annotations may well indicate that they are more than rhetorical. Still, it would be equally problematic to insist that each of these cases is one of application; more often than not, we simply cannot say.

In the end, we are perhaps dealing with another of those famed *questions mal posées*. As McGinn himself was at pains to note, Antichrist language is only effective in a society in which Antichrist application is conceivable: it is not meaningful to accuse someone of being Antichrist, if this is not underpinned by the belief that the archfiend exists and will someday make his influence felt. One of the signal contributions of his book was to point out how, over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Antichrist increasingly became a figure of rhetoric alone, losing the deeper resonances of such language.⁵⁹ From the standpoint

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 200–49. See also Fried, *Dies irae*, 192–214.

of reform, on the other hand, while recent work may have made us more wary of rhetoric, it has also reminded us how central language is to such movements; rhetoric is not simply ‘empty’ (whatever its negative connotations in the modern age) – it shapes thought and action.⁶⁰ McGinn’s distinction therefore only takes us so far. Whether reformers thought that their enemies were literally Antichrist or not is an interesting question, but presumes dichotomy where there was none. Indeed, we should not overstate the differences between apocalyptic language and application: in both cases we are presented with the same world-view, one in which reform is a cosmic battle, fought against the forces of evil, who are by their nature associates of Antichrist (even if sometimes at one remove).

Where this leaves us with the role of apocalypticism in reform more generally is hard to say. In isolating a single theme and region for treatment, there is always a danger of exaggerating its importance (confirmation bias, the historian’s old *bête noire*). Over twenty years ago Timothy Reuter warned historians about taking apocalyptic utterances in twelfth-century Germany out of context. As he observed, if a writer such as Wibald of Stablo was ‘subject to attacks of Angst on Monday mornings, by Tuesday at the latest he had conquered this and reverted to being a knowledgeable and well-informed person.’⁶¹ While I would hesitate to follow Reuter in suggesting that apocalypticism is inherently ill-informed, his point is well made: eschatology was only ever one part of more complex systems of belief, from which it cannot – and should not – be detached. To ignore its contribution would, however, be equally misled. In the monasteries of early to central medieval Italy, as in the

⁶⁰ See R. Toye, *Rhetoric: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), for a pithy survey; and cf. S.D. O’Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁶¹ T. Reuter, “Past, Present and No Future in the Twelfth-Century Regnum Teutonicum,” in *The Perception of the Past in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. P. Magdalino (London: Hambledon, 1992), 15–36, at 36.

universities of twenty-first century Britain, *Angst*-filled Mondays were simply a part of life. Apocalypticism and reform may not have been either side of the same coin, but they were comfortable bedfellows; or, put differently, where calls for reform were earnest and loud, there was normally apocalypticism lurking in the wings.