APOCALYPSE, ENLIGHTENMENT, AND THE BEGINNINGS OF SALVATION HISTORY

The Ecumenical Friendship of J. J. Hess and A. Sandbichler

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Reading and interpreting the book of Revelation has been one of the most controversial tasks in Catholic exegesis since the Council of Trent. While most followed the preterist interpretation of Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704) and saw in the biblical book predominantly a history of ancient times—in particular of the persecution and the final victory of the church—some remained convinced that it contained mostly information about the future state of the church.¹ This future could, argued the futurists, be deduced from the text and a timetable of events constructed.²

In the eighteenth century, interpretations changed dramatically. Futurism receded almost entirely and only made a comeback after the reign of terror during the French Revolution. Preterist interpretations were now preferred, and many exegetes attempted to build on the insights of Bossuet and improve his historical commentary. Yet some Catholic thinkers, who due to the increased quality of biblical scholarship during the eighteenth century became wary of simplistic preterist or futurist readings of Revelation, began to wonder whether a sound middle way between futurism and preterism existed, one that did justice to the theology of the book. In

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² See, for example, Francisco Ribeira, In sacram beati Joannis Apostoli & Evangelistae Apocalypsin Commentarii (Lyon, 1593).
the German-speaking lands, the most prominent theologian of such a new approach that led to the introduction of “salvation history” into Catholic theology was the Salzburg Augustinian Alois Sandbichler (1751–1820). In this article I want to discuss how Sandbichler developed this new view through the mediation of his Reformed friend Johann Jakob Hess (1741–1828). Compared to other enlightened Catholics, many of whom have garnered fame for their exegesis (like Hug, Feilmoser, and so on), Sandbichler emerges as the only theologian who developed a systematic salvation history in order to prevent a rationalist flattening of the book of Revelation.

CATHOLIC ENLIGHTENERS AND THE BOOK OF REVELATION

During the eighteenth century, Catholic theologians all over Europe began a constructive dialogue with the Enlightenment process and developed new paradigms for theological reflection. Their attempts to make Catholic doctrine intelligible to their culture and defend it against radical attacks can be described as “Catholic Enlightenment.” The spectrum of Catholic Enlighteners was considerable. One could indeed find thinkers who argued against marriage as a sacrament or for the abolition of the hierarchy, yet most intended a reform of the theological disciplines with, rather than against, the church. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Catholics in biblical studies especially began to find intellectual orientation in the historical criticism of their Protestant peers. In order to understand Sandbichler’s middle way, it is necessary to look at the main proponents of such an enlightened Catholic exegetical approach. They all attempt to historicize the biblical accounts and reject any millenarianism.

Three main tendencies changed the Catholic understanding of Revelation in and during the Enlightenment. First, following Protestant interpreters, Catholics slowly reversed “the traditional Danielic vision of world-historical descent through four monarchies” and replaced it with the gradual ascent of reason or a more progressive hope, as outlined by the Marquis de Condorcet (1743–1784) in his Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind (1795). Second, with this new, more optimistic yet historical interpretation, chiliast and futurist interpreta-

tions fell under suspicion. Third, the developments of historical-critical exegesis and the rise of comparative religious studies enabled Catholic exegetes to reassess Revelation as a book written for a specific historical context. Catholic exegetes such as Johann Jahn (1750–1816) followed in the footsteps of Protestants such as Johann August Ernesti (1707–1781), who rejected any mystical reading of the text in his influential *Institutio interpretis Novi Testamenti* (1761). Ernesti argued that an exegete’s sole job was to find the *sensus grammaticus* or *sensus literalis*, through a thorough historical and philological understanding of the text. Jahn, arguably the most famous Catholic exegete of the early eighteenth century, stated that Revelation contained images of the devil, which, although meaningful, were mere images of evil and not of a demonic reality.

Johann Babor (1762–1846), a celebrated professor of biblical hermeneutics in Olmütz, Bohemia, whose works were endorsed by his Protestant peers, states in the commentary to his translation of the New Testament that dogmatic decisions are “irrelevant” for the historical-critical evaluation of a text: “If one wants to judge the aim and content of a book, one has to use the principles which are available for poetic and symbolic books. One must not disregard the imagination and mode of description of the Hebrew prophets of old.” If one uses the Hebrew prophets and prophecies as a key to understanding Revelation, then an important differentiation has to be made, Babor argued. One group of such accounts conveys a message to the prophet in clearly understandable words, the other through symbols and mysteries. Prophets who were told future events in the latter mode must therefore have had supernatural help to explain the otherwise obscure clues. Revelation falls into the same category. It is the symbolic story of how Christianity will be victorious over paganism and Judaism. Nothing in it is about the future.


8. Babor, *Uebersetzung*, 3:115, also with references to Vergil’s *Aenid* and Plato’s *Timaeus*.
Johann Leonhard Hug (1765–1846), professor of exegesis in Freiburg, Breisgau, states in his important introduction to the New Testament (1808), which was also translated into English, his dissatisfaction with most Catholic interpretations of Revelation. In fact, he says, for no other book of the Bible have exegetes produced such distorted interpretations. This he explains by the fact that, since the perdition of the ancient Jewish state, the Jewish way of thinking and writing has been forgotten so that Christians became unable to properly understand the images of the text. Only the recovery of ancient Judaism, as was done by the historical schools of the eighteenth century, suddenly opened the possibility to understanding Revelation yet again. Hug considered the commentary of his Protestant peer Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1753–1827) to be the most important tool of his time for beginning a proper exegesis of Revelation. Following Eichhorn, Hug understands all numbers in the text no longer as symbolic or mystical, but as literal descriptions. Hug is also convinced that not all images found in the text are important, such as the detailed descriptions of plagues (hail, diseases, and the like), because these were just parallels to the Egyptian plagues of the book of Exodus. Likewise, falling stars belong to the vocabulary of both the Orient and prophets predicting bad fate, and therefore should not be taken too seriously. Only two historical events can be connected to the book of Revelation, argues Hug. Apart from the victory of Christianity, they are the destruction of the Jewish temple and the demise of Rome. For Hug, the book is a mere work of consolation, written in the time of the Emperor Domitian (81–96 A.D.), and contains no references to future events. As he explains: “John . . . could encourage Christianity, incite its professors to constancy in these trying times, that they might maintain their religion, and transmit it to those brighter days when it would rise nobly and triumphantly over every adverse fortune, erect its altars in every nation, and become the religion of the world.”

Peter Alois Gratz (1769–1849), a member of the Catholic Tübingen School and friend of Johann Sebastian Drey (1777–1853) and Johann B. Hirscher (1788–1865), was one of the most outstanding Catholic exegetes of the nineteenth century. Gratz follows almost entirely the lead of Hug, stressing that Revelation is a historical book, written for a concrete set of cir-

cumstances, and contains no hints about future events and no justification for any millenarian interpretation.\textsuperscript{15} Like Hug, Gratz argued that the main purpose of the book is to provide consolation for persecuted Christians, the promise of their liberation and victory, punishment of the persecutors (4–9), and the destruction of paganism (10–19). Concerning the 1,260 days in which the apocalyptic woman of Rev 12 will be persecuted and the forty-two months according to Rev 13:5 during which the apocalyptic beast will rule, Gratz comments that these are mystical numbers as in the book of Daniel and point to a short time. “This is after all the main purpose of the Apocalypse, namely to console the Christians of that time and to give them hope that the time of persecution will not last very long.”\textsuperscript{16} Consequently, he conceives Rev 20 as the messianic government of the world before the end of the world. The thousand years of Christ’s reign have to be understood as a prophetic-mystical depiction of the eternal victory of God contrasted with the short three and a half years of persecution.\textsuperscript{17}

The last example is that of Heinrich Braun (1732–1792), who published a remarkable translation of the New Testament in the 1780s.\textsuperscript{18} The best way of reading Revelation, this Catholic Enlightener explained, was to assume the fulfillment of all its prophecies. In his eyes, applying the images of the text to more recent historical events creates an unscientific “could-be” exegesis of the text.\textsuperscript{19} Also, Braun preferred Bossuet’s historicist approach and stated that the book’s aim is to give hope and consolation to the first persecuted Christians.\textsuperscript{20} Its obscurity comes not so much from the text, but from the reader who is unacquainted with the “spirit of Hebrew Poetry” and who does not look for the hermeneutical key where it could be found—namely, in the historical context of the biblical book.\textsuperscript{21} One should, said Braun, assume that the prophecies of Revelation have been fulfilled, but also understand them as a key to conceiving the second coming, as Jesus’s words in Matt 24:25 about the destruction of Jerusalem can provide a key to understanding the last judgment.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{15} Peter Alois Gratz, “Reflexionen über die Offenbarung Johannis,” Theologische Quartalschrift 8 (1826): 587–605.
\textsuperscript{17} Gratz, “Meine Ansicht,” 36.
\textsuperscript{18} Heinrich Braun, Die göttliche heilige Schrift des neuen Testamente in lateinischer und deutscher Sprache . . . nach dem Sinne der heiligen-römisch-katholischen Kirche . . . erläutert von Heinrich Braun . . ., vol. 3 (Augsburg, 1788).
\textsuperscript{19} Braun, Die göttliche Schrift, 3:405.
\textsuperscript{20} Braun, Die göttliche Schrift, 3:405.
\textsuperscript{22} Braun, Die göttliche Schrift, 3:406.
FROM RATIONALISM TO HEILSGESCHICHTE: JOHANN JAKOB HESS

The trends in Catholic theology described above, with their omission of eschatology as a theological category, led some to the rediscovery of eschatology. The merging of Enlightenment Catholicism and Reformed "covenant" theology (or federalism) paved the way for a salvific (heilsge-schichtliche) theology, which found its earliest expression in the works of Alois Sandbichler and later, systematically refined, in the works of Bernhard Galura (1764–1856) and Friedrich Brenner (1784–1848). After centuries in which the kingdom of God had been identified with the institutional church, and despite a profound biblical analysis of "thy kingdom come" in the Roman Catechism of 1566, Catholics found their way back to this biblical paradigm only through the mediation of the Reformed Swiss theologian Johann Jakob Hess, who had recognized the kingdom of God as the main theme of the Gospels and differentiated three stages: a preparatory stage from creation to the birth of Christ, a main stage from Jesus's birth to the end of the world, and the final fulfillment in heaven.23

Federal theology stresses the covenant with God as the centerpiece of dogmatic theology, which manifests itself in history. Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669) is credited with conceiving one of the most influential federal theologies, which helped his followers to better integrate "history and the realities of human existence" into a Scripture-based theological reflection. "Federal theology should thus be seen as an attempt to establish a correlation between revelation and history, between eternity and time—an attempt to recognize the historical character of the divine revelation of salvation history."24 Hess became acquainted with federal theology through Johann H. Heidegger's (1633–1698) Medulla Medullae theologiae Christianiae (1697) during his studies in Zurich under Johann Jakob Bodmer (1698–1783) and Johann Jakob Breitinger (1701–1776). He was also influenced by Nathaniel Lardner (1684–1768) and Charles Bonnet (1720–1793), and took up ideas and challenges put forth by Johann David Michaelis (1717–1791) and Johann August Ernesti.25 From Bodmer

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and Breitinger, Hess received the idea of a practical or pragmatic historiography that is interested not so much in educating the intellect of the reader but rather in connecting the reader and the reader's character with the virtues and characters of history. These thinkers saw historiography as the mindful interpretation of personal actions. Johann Lorenz Mosheim (1694–1755) was probably the main proponent of such a biographical-historical approach, which gradually marginalized orthodox Lutheran and Reformed dogmatic theology.

Nevertheless, until the eighteenth century no pragmatic biographical study of the life of Jesus had been written. In 1764 Hess began working on a “human” history of Jesus, which aimed at being pleasant reading and a useful textbook without too many supernatural elements. While Hess was certainly influenced by Cocceius, he did not share the antirational starting point of his exegesis—namely that of grace and election—but preferred natural reason, just as Joseph Butler (1692–1752) had. In 1768 the first two parts of his History of Jesus’ Last Three Years (Geschichte der drey letzten Lebensjahre Jesu) were published. But only five years later, Hess changed his view that one should understand Jesus only from his moral, political, and psychological context. Reading Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity (1695) obviously changed his mind. He had now arrived at the conclusion that God was leading humanity through history. The newfound insight into the intelligibility of history echoed also Christian Wolff’s (1679–1754) and Bonnet’s desire for a demonstration of a connection of all things (nexus rerum), as well as a better appreciation of Cocceius. Unlike Cocceius, however, Hess believed he could trace God’s footprints with reason alone.

Hess was convinced that if one follows Jesus’s life through the hermeneutic lens of a divinely conceived scheme of salvation history, then the human life of Jesus becomes less important than his teachings, Passion,
and death. Hess used the terms theocracy or "Kingdom of God" to articulate his new vision for a biography of Jesus, in which the question of how far the fate of Jesus describes the nature and reality of the kingdom of God becomes central. This approach is then further explored in his *The Kingdom of God (Von dem Reiche Gottes, 1774)*. According to his pragmatic salvation history, one will not find any inner-Trinitarian speculation in his works since the kingdom of God is nothing but the "continuous guidance of human affairs for the purpose of the most enduring highest possible divine bliss." Consequently, the human being is the center of such an approach.

For Hess, the concept of the kingdom of God has practical implications. By trusting in such providential guidance, humans can overcome, so he is convinced, sensual pleasure and improve their morals. The "Kingdom of God" becomes an "institution of education" (*Erziehungsanstalt*). Such divine pedagogy can be seen throughout biblical history, wherefore Hess reconstructs a coherent outline of biblical providential history. Instead of offering a dry theological analysis, Hess invited his readers to assume the persona of a pious Israelite and to tread with him through the history of God’s chosen people. His account was nevertheless attacked, especially because in the eyes of conservative theologians he appreciated the rationalist explanations of demonic possession. On the other side, rationalist theologians, especially proponents of the so-called mythical school of

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biblical interpretation spearheaded by Georg Lorenz Bauer (1755–1806), rejected his use of the Old Testament as "history."\(^{35}\)

The first Catholic who took Hess’s theological agenda seriously was the Salzburg Augustinian Alois Sandbichler, who had to battle fierce attacks because of his positive engagement with the views of a Reformed theologian.\(^{36}\) Later, Bernhard Galura followed in Sandbichler’s footsteps; however, he did so in a systematic and not an exegetical fashion, synthesizing Hess, Sandbichler, and Kant.\(^{37}\)

THE FIRST CATHOLIC BIBLICAL SALVATION HISTORY

Sandbichler was never afraid of engaging with Enlightenment thinkers. He even stated publicly that a good Catholic theologian should read Herder, Lessing, and Semler and could find pearls of wisdom in their works, even if their views on revelation were ultimately inadequate.\(^{38}\) He began exchanging letters with Hess in 1791 and thus initiated a correspondence that lasted at least until 1812. While Sandbichler embraced much of modern biblical criticism and saw Ernesti, Eichhorn, and Michaelis as heroes of exegesis, he was quite critical of their alleged naturalism.\(^{39}\) For him, the application of the most recent exegetical findings

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35. Ackva, Johann Jakob Hess, 143, 158. For an example of a contemporary Lutheran orthodox critic, see [Johann F. Teller], Gedanken eines sächsischen Predigers über die Geschichte der drey letzten Lebensjahre Jesu (Leipzig, 1774); and Johann F. Teller, Nützige Erinnerungen über Herrn Johann Jakob Hess Geschichte der drey Lebensjahre Jesu (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1774).


37. The papers of Sandbichler, which have unfortunately never been analyzed, are preserved in the University Library of Salzburg. There are fifteen files with smaller theological manuscripts (M II 364), six manuscript volumes of his salvific history Historia consiliorum divinorum (M 1254), which have never been published, and eleven files of reviews (M I 408).


never excluded the possibility of an allegorical reading or the existence of miracles. Instead, the Augustinian attempted to walk a middle way between the extremes of rationalist exegesis, on the one side, and an overemphasis on allegory and disregard for philology and history, on the other. He did this in full submission to the tradition of the church but nevertheless pointed out that many propositions his critics claimed to be part of tradition were instead mere school opinions and thus could not be part of the deposit of faith. This angered many intransigent ex-Jesuits: "I must be happy if I can escape the auto da fe that is prepared for me . . . but I cannot defend something as truth of what I am not convinced—whatever the consequences."  

For example, the Augustinian presupposed Moses's authorship of some parts of the Pentateuch but added that Moses built his books on older fragments, which in Sandbichler's view did not diminish the divine status of the writings. He also conceded that it would not contradict any doctrine of faith to dispute the historicity of the Great Flood. He saw himself not as "the man who explains miracles out of the Bible, where they really are," but instead as a man who does not see the need to concede them where "mediated natural causes" can be assumed or where fables are told, such as in the story about Lot's wife being turned into a pillar of salt. Sandbichler's hermeneutic begins with Ernesti's insight that the literal meaning of the text is crucial. A verse can have an accommodated meaning, but such was in his eyes usually rare. He also rejected as impossible to prove the idea that a verse could have four different meanings, according to the four senses of Scripture. "With such a principle . . . one can read into the Bible . . . whatever one desires," he exclaimed. After centuries of neglecting or marginalizing the literal and historical meaning of Scripture, for Sandbichler it was "time to arm ourselves with the sword—the two-bladed sword of literal meaning against the enemies of religion."

40. Letter to Hess of 29 June 1792. Zentralbibliothek Zurich: FA Hess 1741, 181x, 193. Sandbichler refers here to the two volumes of essays in which he targeted the Catholic Anti-Enlightenment, Revision der Augsburger Kritik über Kritiker, 2 vols. (Salzburg, 1791/92), and in particular, so it seems, the teaching about papal infallibility.
41. Sandbichler, Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte, 1:12.
43. Sandbichler, Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte, 1:27, 1:45.
44. Sandbichler, Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte, 1:272, 274: "Ich verehre Väter, und Theologen, die zur Auferbauung manches aus der Bibel nehmen, was buchstäblich nicht in ihr steht—aber Leute, die mir so etwas als Bibelsinn mit Gewalt für Wahrheit aufdringen wollen—bedaure ich zum wenigsten—oder verabscheue sie gänzlich, so bald ich sehe, dass sie es nicht aus blossem Missverstände thun,— . . . sie ist nur da, der wilden Einbildungskraft wildes Spiel zu verschaffen und die Bibel dadurch herabzuwürdigen."
critics. "Hyperorthodox people," who are easily offended, were therefore not his target reading audience, as he conceded.\textsuperscript{46}

In his first letter to Hess of 5 June 1791 he confessed his debt to the Swiss theologian:

Long have I loved you—held you in high esteem—how could I not? So much have I learned from your writings, so that I can say that my little knowledge of Scripture derives predominantly from Michaelis' and your writings. You have taught me to look at Scripture according to its great, overarching divine plan. Before that I had looked only at singular passages; I saw hardly any coherence and connection. The Bible remained despite all efforts to understand it a closed book for me. But your \textit{The Kingdom of God} tore away the curtain, and I made since then attempts in exegesis . . . for which I would not have had the eyes before. This occurred to me, occurred to others—and of this intellectual transformation \textit{[ideenumschaffung]} among us Catholics you are the author. May God give that many of us do not close their eyes to this . . . enlighten or turn away from \textit{[confessional]} prejudice. . . . Yet, divine providence will lead to a good outcome. Contradiction always has to surface where truth rises—this is my consolation and I walk my way . . . as you walk ahead it does not seem so dangerous anymore and I will follow you—certainly with smaller, inadequate steps.\textsuperscript{47}

On 26 May 1793, Sandbichler assured Hess that an increasing number of Catholic "Bible friends" now see in the Swiss writer a "leader" in the fight against the rationalist destruction of biblical theology.\textsuperscript{48} In a 1811 letter he explained why his interpretation of Scripture, attacked by anti-Enlighteners—"hyperorthodox fanatics," as he called them—as heretical and dangerous, was also attacked by "Christian naturalists and deists." Sandbichler's acceptance of the Bible as the revealed word of God ran against the deists' "anti-Christian principles. That's why they take offense at the words of our faith."\textsuperscript{49} Taking the Bible seriously as a document of the history of God's salvific will entailed a rejection of rationalist approaches to exegesis that saw in every supernatural event or revelation an accommodation of the divine to the uneducated, unenlightened spirit of antiquity:

One can do nothing better than to refute such assassinations with history, although some evil people take great efforts to destroy even that with their hermeneutic of accommodation. Yet, this mendacious hermeneutic has to go—because it must become evident to every unbiased person that

\textsuperscript{46} Sandbichler, \textit{Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte}, 1:525.
\textsuperscript{47} Zentralbibliothek Zurich: FA Hess 1741, 181v, 116.
\textsuperscript{48} Zentralbibliothek Zurich: FA Hess 1741, 181z, 111.
\textsuperscript{49} Letter of Sandbichler to Hess of 4 January 1811, Zentralbibliothek Zurich: FA Hess 1741, 181bk, 420.
one does not have more legitimization to find the intended meaning of the authors of Biblical history than of any other history.\textsuperscript{50}

**AN ENLIGHTENED MILLENNARIANISM**

Since Hess had not applied his historical, pragmatic method to the book of Revelation (his analysis of that biblical text was published only posthumously), in 1794 Sandbichler—encouraged by Hess—undertook this challenge. Sandbichler admitted openly that until the eighteenth century, most interpreters did not fully understand the book because they did not possess the grammatical or historical tools to fathom it. "Were not also the other prophets veiled in darkness until we were able in our own times to penetrate their literal sense?"\textsuperscript{51} Sandbichler wrote his treatise after several readings of the book and after comparing it carefully with similar writings of the Old Testament, in particular the prophets; he consulted exegetical commentaries only afterward. Most Catholic commentaries, he stated, were useless—except Calmet's and Bossuet's, which pay more attention to the literal meaning of the text.\textsuperscript{52} He saw therefore a particular need among Catholics for a "literal-historical interpretation (independent from dogmatic definitions)," because allegorical interpretations of Revelation were sometimes used for upholding "dangerous doctrines." Sandbichler also refrained in his work from citing exegetical authorities—first, because he believed that he gave sufficient arguments for each of his interpretations and, second, because he felt that a mere accumulation of citations would distract from the original text.\textsuperscript{53} The Augustinian emerges here as a quite self-confident scholar who trusted his own reasoning more than the authority of his peers.

Sandbichler took the poetic elements of Revelation seriously and thus had no problem seeing the natural catastrophes described in the text as representing political affairs: wars represented by boiling pots and revolutions portrayed by thunderstorms, solar and lunar eclipses, and earthquakes.\textsuperscript{54} However, he did not follow the rationalist trend of Eichhorn in viewing the biblical imagery as offensive to reason (for instance, the description of the heavenly Jerusalem). "If Milton or Klopstock use

\textsuperscript{50} Letter of Sandbichler to Hess of 26 May 1793, Zentralbibliothek Zurich: PA Hess 1741, 181z, 111.

\textsuperscript{51} Sandbichler, Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte, vol. 2, preface.

\textsuperscript{52} Augustin Calmet, Commentaire litteral sur tous les livres de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament, vol. 8 (Paris, 1726).

\textsuperscript{53} Sandbichler, Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte, vol. 2, preface.

\textsuperscript{54} Sandbichler, Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte, 2:171. Sandbichler refers here to Michaelis and Eichhorn, but also to his Catholic peer Johann Babor, Altherthümer der Hebräer (Vienna, 1794), 295.
such descriptions we don’t dislike them,” but if a biblical writer uses them they are suddenly offensive, writes the frustrated friar.55 Sandbichler also reflected on the method of accommodation and made clear that not everything that rebels against our modern understanding can be degraded to a “Jewish figment of imagination, or an image,” because such an interpretation does violence to the prophets.56 This does not mean that he rejected the differentiation of image, idiom, and so forth; however, he thinks some go too far—for example, when they reject the future conversion of the Jews or the millennial realm of Christ. One cannot avoid all “offenses” of Scripture. According to Sandbichler, one of the main objections against Revelation is that the book seems to describe “what must happen soon” (Rev 1:1). En tachei, however, he explained, does mean the sequence of things, so one can assume that John saw in a short and fast sequence all future epochs of the world. As such, he only saw the main events but not the secondary causes and the times between the epochs.57 “This is how poets . . . work . . . they put centuries together and compress them.”58 He also defended the author of Revelation against the charge of anthropomorphism and made clear that his description of the heavenly Jerusalem might be “philosophically” much more coherent than a deist description of heaven that disregarded the bodily nature of human beings and only paid attention to immaterial souls. Sandbichler thus clearly rejected any Platonist substance dualism and instead embraced a more holistic, biblical view of the person.59

One of the most astonishing idiosyncrasies of Sandbichler’s book is his treatment of hell and the final victory of Christ over all of his enemies—a centerpiece of eschatology. If the kingdom of God is the moral governance of God over all of his creatures, how do his enemies—in particular the damned in hell—fit into this scheme? If according to Ps 109 all enemies of God will be subdued and God will be all in all (1 Cor 15, 20–29), who are these enemies of the kingdom of God if they are in hell? For Sandbichler the enemies of the kingdom must be immoral rational beings.60 The problem that arises, then, is how death as the last enemy (1 Cor 15:26) can be overcome by Christ. Does this not contradict the eternity of hell? Does one have to assume that the immoral inhabitants of hell will be simply annihilated? Sandbichler rejected this option because it contradicts the Catholic tradition of the eternity of hell. Then, however, he made a stunning suggestion. He proposed that demons and other rational immoral beings in hell could morally and intellectually advance. Scholastic

56. Sandbichler, Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte, 2:393.
60. Sandbichler, Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte, 2:7.
thinkers seem to agree that they cannot, yet "scripture seems to suggest here and there the opposite . . . and reason presumes it anyway." Even if the punishments for the damned are eternal—do they include the possibility of improvement? Sandbichler assumed that such could be the case if one understood "punishment" in the right sense—namely, as a punishment that aims at the improvement of the person (poena medicinalis). If the damned could be improved so that they would reject and curse their bad deeds, would not also their physical misery end, Sandbichler asked. All punishments God has sentenced them to would cease, due to their moral improvement, yet their fate would not change. Such "advanced" damned persons would still be unhappy compared to those in heaven and would remain prisoners, but they would now consider their imprisonment as just. In this way they would subject themselves indeed to Christ and give up their inimical stance. If one wants to take St. Paul literally—that the enemy death has to be defeated—then one can argue that since there are grades of happiness in heaven as well, there could be grades among the damned in which death and its consequence (the separation from God), understood as physical evil, cease to exist.

How then did Sandbichler envision the positive counterpart, the resurrection of the flesh? Interpreting Rev 20:4–5, 12 and 1 Cor 15:23, he argued that one can distinguish two resurrections. One is the particular resurrection of the saints, the martyrs and witnesses to Christ on one side and after a thousand years the rest of the faithful on the other side. Until the millennium comes to an end, the resurrected saints are reigning with Christ and preach his word in a physically perceptible way. He cautioned his readers, however, not to think of a political earthly reign of Christ but rather of a priestly one. The resurrected saints are priests rather than kings: "The Saints, who will be resurrected by Christ into his millennial realm, will have an immortal and transfigured body. This body, however is not entirely transfigured as if it would not be in need of further perfection. . . . [T]his perfection will happen in the universal resurrection . . . in which the sensual is gradually transformed into the spiritual." After the universal resurrection follows the universal judgment (Rev 20:4–6). The images of thrones and judges, sheep and trumpets were for Sandbichler just that: signs, which indicate a "great event" and want to capture the "new feeling of the resurrected." With Johann David Michaelis he rejected interpreting Revelation as the story of ecclesiastical decline and the papacy as apocalyptic beast, but he also rejected identi-

63. Sandbichler, Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte, 2:10.
64. Sandbichler, Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte, 2:18.
fying the witnesses of Rev 9 as Luther and Calvin instead of Elijah and Enoch. Likewise, he discarded a simplistic allegorical interpretation that makes these two witnesses the abstract ideas of Scripture and tradition, or natural and positive revelation, because such interpretations only “serve the mindset” of the interpreter and do not explain the text itself. Sandbichler believed that the description of the two witnesses has Old Testament parallels and has to be understood as foretelling the future. Since both witnesses are sent to Jerusalem, he assumed that their main task will be to convert the Jews. Consequently, he assumed that a new Christian community will arise there and build a new temple. This new Jewish-Christian church is identified with the apocalyptic woman in Rev 12.

The city of Rome, as portrayed in Rev 18, is for the Augustinian a neo-pagan Rome that will oppress the church. Due to its persecutions, the number of Christians will dramatically decrease so that at the end there will only be a few good Christians left. For Sandbichler, the apocalyptic beast of the earth from Rev 12:11–17 is priestly power. While in Sandbichler’s time only a few, such as Alessandro Caligioistro (1743–1795), attempted to start such a false religion with forged miracles, the Augustinian was convinced that in the end times many will attempt just that. In those days the “light of science” will be extinguished so that the founders of new cults will be able to obscure their deception. The prophets of this new religion will be “atheists” and superstitious! They will bring about false miracles. The culmination of these false miracles will be the forged resurrection of their leader. The forty-two months of persecution Christians have to endure from this new religion parallels the three and a half years of persecution faced by the Jews under Antiochus, as described in Dan 12. Whether one should therefore take forty-two months literally “remains to be seen by the generations after us,” Sandbichler commented.

After the punishment of these enemies, universal peace will be restored. Sandbichler assumed that the beginning of Christ’s reign on earth will be connected with the conversion of the Jews. He endorsed Friedrich Wilhelm Hezel’s (1754–1824) idea that such a conversion would be possible if

68. Sandbichler, Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte, 2:43.
70. Sandbichler, Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte, 2:62; Johann David Michaelis, Anmerkungen für Unglücke zu seiner Übersetzung des neuen Testaments, vol. 4 (Göttingen, 1792), 118.
71. Sandbichler, Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte, 2:73.
74. Sandbichler, Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte, 2:82.
one could improve the "taste of Jews and teach them proper biblical theology, but while such political and religious measures might fail, Revelation seems to give hope to really expect such a 'revolution' [Umwälzungen]."75

Sandbichler was a rare exception in not dismissing the millennial reign of Christ as allegorical. Yet, he made clear that his account did not support the millenarian expectations of fanatics because he believed this reign to be of "saints" (hagioi, or in Hebrew, kadischim). This word does not designate properly canonized saints but means the faithful, and thus their reign will be an earthly realm, similar to others in which religion can be disseminated and grow through morality, peace, and happiness. It will be a powerful reign with many signs but will be structured according "to the way of nature." "And now I ask! How can the millennial realm . . . be offensive? A theocracy was already visible in the Old Testament . . . and at the beginning of Christianity . . . [it seems that] the resurrected Saints and Jesus as visible king [offend!] I have explained . . . that these Saints are the faithful and Christ as King means the effects of his in the realm of the world."76

The chiliasts misunderstood this theocracy as a merely earthly affair, and in Sandbichler's eyes they overlooked that the regents of this kingdom will be priests who make "Christ visible." This future realm has nothing to do with the presence of a king, like at a royal court, yet something sensually perceptible will indicate the presence of Christ, the kabod Jahue.77 The friar assumed that most millennial interpretations had been rejected because of chiliast abuses and misinterpretations, and because some churches used Revelation for their own propaganda.78 An unsophisticated reader could indeed see Sandbichler as a supporter of political theocracy and thus a danger to society and church. Therefore, it cannot come as a surprise that in 1796 a number of influential ex-Jesuits convinced the Court in Vienna to proscribe his book in the Habsburg Lands.79 The fear of the censors was not entirely ungrounded. In 1815, Thomas Pöschl (1769–1837) read Sandbichler's account as buttressing his own apocalyptic teachings for a reawakening movement, which came under heavy attack by the Catholic Church. Sandbichler tried to correct Pöschl but gave up: "In this man is something holy, something that only needs polishing."80

77. Sandbichler, Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte, 2:108.
80. Theodor Wiedemann, Die religiöse Bewegung in Oberösterreich und Salzburg beim Beginne des 19. Jahrhunderts (Innsbruck, 1890), 100–101. For Pöschl's autobiography in the context of gender studies see Edith Saurer, "Die Autobiographie des Thomas Pöschl: Erweckung,
At the end of the millennial reign, faithlessness and immorality will again increase, and a new anti-Christian time will arrive because the reign of Christ was “all too sensual” and thus taken for granted and ultimately dismissed as unimportant. Satan, who is now liberated (Rev 20), will wage war, but the seducers Gog and Magog will ultimately perish in fire.81

Sandbichler showed that his interpretation of the millennial realm was in accordance with Justin Martyr and Lactantius and similar to that of the Madrid Jesuit Juan de Ulloa in his De primis et ultimis temporibus seu de principio et fine mundi, who had, according to Sandbichler, considered such a position as “not improbable.”82 Sandbichler argued that the church has never clarified the exact heresy or mistake of millenarianism. Was it that the saints are raised from the dead or that there will be an earthly realm?83 The first cannot contradict dogma because it is not a contradiction that some might be resurrected earlier than others; also, the reality of an earthly kingdom is attested by Scripture (for instance, Dan 7).84 Could it be that some regard this doctrine as heretical because the kingdom of Christ lies in the future? Only if one disregards that this future aspect only pertains to the visible (!) development and fruition of this kingdom—in other respects, the kingdom of God has already existed since Jesus’s Resurrection, Sandbichler explained. The future kingdom, however, will be the perpetuation of the invisible one and will last until the day of judgment. Is it, asked Sandbichler, that some theologians have their problems with millenarianism because the kingdom of Christ is going to be an earthly one and not wholly invisible? Yet, if one conceives this future kingdom according to the theocracy of the Old Testament—namely, that the power of God disseminates slowly, reaching nation after nation (“auf alle Völker der Erde nach und nach sich ausbreitend vorgestellt wird”)—and if one eliminates everything “crude” and sees the goal of this realm and its effects in morality and so forth alone, why could it not be part of faithful Catholic theology? After all, Sandbichler stated that the providential reign of God extends from earthly existence into the supernatural.85 The Augustinian friar believed that the thousand-year reign of Christ

84. Sandbichler rejects the notion of a thousand-year-long “sleep” of the saints. Sandbichler, Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte, 2:404.
85. Sandbichler, Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte, 2:403: “Was soll es demnach an seiner Glaubwürdigkeit verschlagen, dass es zum Theile irdisch, und nicht bloss geistig ist?
was rejected so vehemently on account of some extreme, rough, and anthropomorphic concepts propounded by the millenarians. He embraced a reign of Christ and his saints with physical effects but a moral-spiritual influence on the physical world, stressed that his interpretation was based on a "literal" reading, and showed that it does not contradict the common, more figurative understanding. "I let the future citizens of the realm of Christ taste political and physical bliss according to their moral standing." Sandbichler made clear that he followed his own insights despite the criticism of many of his peers:

I went my own way—that is true. The opinions that many theologians hold and elevate to dogmas did not hold me back. Instead I examined them and chose what I considered true. . . . I was also not afraid of the easily foreseeable contempt, the mockery and the gloatting smiles of those, who regard due to some principles a literal and historical explanation of the Apocalypse as the infeasible, fatuous enterprise of a fanatic.

CONCLUSION: SALVATION HISTORY

With Alois Sandbichler, salvation history entered into Catholic theology. The new paradigm was received enthusiastically by the Catholic Tübingen School and has ever since helped Catholics to overhaul systematic theology. That this reorientation of Catholic thought is grounded in the Catholic Enlightenment and a 1794 commentary on the book of Revelation has been undeservedly forgotten.

For Sandbichler, Revelation is the history of the church of all times, of its battle with powerful empires but also of its final perseverance. Sandbichler, the forerunner of modern biblical theology, was also a child of the Enlightenment—the religious Enlightenment—and he valued its effects on the state of theology. The religious Enlightenment of the eighteenth-century scholars, he believed, began the rediscovery of the simplicity and beauty of the Gospels because they had learned to discern revelation and human additions to the deposit of faith. According to Sandbichler, the Apocalypse also teaches that the church should not fear changes in the

Es ist doch den Führungen Gottes angemessen, im irdischen anzufangen, und so dann nach und nach ins Ueberirdische überzugehen.”

86. Sandbichler, Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte, 2:416.
89. See for example Grant Kaplan, Answering the Enlightenment: The Catholic Recovery of Historical Revelation (New York: Crossroad, 2006).
90. Sandbichler, Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte, 2:288.
91. Sandbichler, Erläuterungen der biblischen Geschichte, 2:349.
world, not even revolutions, because they ultimately help in the dissemination of the church’s message. Instead, the providential reign of God through history that Revelation admonishes us to accept, as Sandbichler outlined, is a sign of hope for a further increase of the "true" church of Jesus Christ. That the Augustinian learned this insight from his Reformed friend Hess shows that the confessional divide of the eighteenth century was more permeable than historians have led us to believe and that during the religious Enlightenment a fruitful interconfessional enrichment was possible.
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