

Apocalypse 2014: Post-Tridentine Catholic Exegesis of Revelation: The Futurist Commentary of Alphonsus Frey (1762).

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The book of Revelation, or the Apocalypse of John, the last book of the New Testament, has intrigued interpreters for the last two thousand years due to its cornucopia of images. Should it be read as a book that describes the historical persecution of the early Christians, or should it be read as a book predicting the future? This paper focuses on the futurist commentary of Alphonsus Frey of 1762, which predicts the end of the world for 2014. His approach will be compared to the post-Tridentine approaches to Revelation, in order to show the wider developments in Catholic exegesis that lead in the eighteenth century to an abandonment of futurism.

Post-Reformation Interpreters

The majority of Protestant interpreters of Revelation adopted a historicist view that saw the main events of Christian history up to the interpreter's time foretold in the prophetic images of the text. A common feature of all forms of historicist interpretation was the 'year-day principle' according to which one day in prophetic time corresponds to a literal year.¹ Catholic exegetes, however, can be categorized in

¹ Kenneth G. C. Newport, *Apocalypse and Millenium: Studies in Biblical Eisegesis*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008), 9. On this principle see also William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*. (Washington: n.p., 1982), 56–93.

at least two groups, *preterists* or *futurists*.² For preterists most of the Apocalypse was already fulfilled. The futurists, however, argued that only a small part of the prophecies had been fulfilled, usually chapters 1–3.³ In Catholic exegesis of the sixteenth century one can identify a gradual marginalization of the multiple senses of scripture in favor of a strengthening of the literal meaning of a textual passage. This move occurred in regards to Revelation as a strategic move to defend Catholic doctrine against Protestant critics: one had to prove that the Church of Rome was not the Whore of Babylon and the Pope not the Anti-Christ. Moreover, the text had not only to coincide with the interpretation of exegetes but also to be consistent with dogma and tradition. Jean-Robert Armogathe observes:

The texts served as the scriptural proof that dogma demanded. It was required of the texts of the Bible not only that they provide a foundation to dogma but also that they anticipate their own literal reading. The debate around Revelation was especially strained. How was it possible to retain at the same time a literal and a dogmatic reading of a text that we now know . . . belongs to a very particular genre? The historical interpretation was judged incomplete, the mystical interpretation dangerous.⁴

The Spanish Jesuit Alphonsus Salmeron (1515–1585) seems to have been the first Catholic exegete to argue that Revelation describes primarily the early church and is consequently hailed as the father of preterism. Only from Revelation 9 onwards he saw a connection to the contemporary Church, in which Christ reigns spiritually.⁵ Also, Luis de

2 A ‘counter-historicist’ school certainly existed in Catholicism as well, but seems to have had never much support (Newport, *Apocalypse and Millenium*, 80–82). Charles Walmsley O.S.B. (1722–1797), *The General History of the Christian Church ... deduced from the Apocalypse of St. John* (n.p.: 1771) can serve as example for this strain of interpretation.

3 Newport, *Apocalypse and Millenium*, 16. Jean-Robert Armogathe, *Interpretations of the Revelation of John: 1500–1800*. In John J. Collins et al., eds., *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* (New York: Continuum), vol. 2, pp. 185–203.

4 Armogathe, *Interpretations*, 187.

5 Alphonsus Salmeron, *Disputationum in Epistolas canonicas et Apocalypsin*, vol.

Alcazar S.J. (1554–1613), in his *Investigation of the Hidden Meaning of the Apocalypse*, stressed the historical context of the book.⁶ His was the first preterist commentary on Revelation, and as such understood almost the entire book as a treatment of early church history (ch. 5-20). Only ch. 20 about the millennium, the thousand-year reign of the faithful with Christ (Rev 20: 5), was to be understood about the present time, almost nothing about the future. ‘Alcazar is unusual in the extent to which he was prepared to apply the preterist logic consistently; for him the whole book of Revelation related to the past’.⁷ Many interpreters of all denominations followed Alcazar’s lead, most prominently Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) and in Catholic circles Jacques Benigne Bossuet (1627–1704).⁸

Bossuet, whose commentary became one of the most widely read in the Catholic world, complains that most contemporaries read the book of Revelation as a universal admonition to do penance and to prepare for the return of Christ. If this were the only dimension in which the book could be read, Bossuet argues, then the author, John, would not deserve a place among the prophets.⁹ Instead, a rediscovery of the prophetic dimensions of the book has to be undertaken.¹⁰ Bossuet finds evidence for such a historical-prophetic reading especially in the prophesied fall of the pagan Roman Empire by Alaric (d. 410) in Revelation 17 and 18. He goes even so far as to see in this event the key to understanding the entirety of the book.¹¹ Only ch. 11 about the return of Enoch and Elijah has yet to be fulfilled.¹² Bossuet agrees with Alcazar that one is not obliged to follow the Church Fathers in their musings about images or metaphors, unless they teach unanimously a

4 (orig. Madrid: 1602), 462 describes the possibility (*non inutilis*) to identify the first apocalyptic (666) beast with Mohammed. See also Franz S. Tiefertal, *Die Apokalypse des Johannes* (Paderborn: 1892), 54–55; Edward Bishop Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticæ*, vol. 4 (London: 3rd ed., 1847), 450–490.

6 Luis de Alcazar, *Vestigatio arcani sensus in Apocalypsin*. (Antwerp: 1614).

7 Newport, *Apocalypse and Millenium*, 72.

8 Tiefertal, *Die Apokalypse*, 57; Armogathe, *Interpretations*, 195–196.

9 Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, *L'apocalypse avec une explication*. (Paris: 1689), 10. For an overview of Bossuet see also Elliott, *Horae Apologeticae*, vol. 4, pp. 456–61.

10 Bossuet understands prophets foremost as foretellers of future events.

11 Bossuet, *L'apocalypse*, 22–24.

12 *Ibid.*, 25.

truth of faith or morals.¹³ He is convinced that the historical meaning of the text was not accessible to the Fathers because they never exhausted the literal meaning of the text.

Moreover, Bossuet makes clear that even if one demonstrates that a literal prophecy has been fulfilled in the past, namely in the first centuries of the Church's existence, that such a prophecy could still maintain also a prophecy about the future.¹⁴ As a consequence of such an interpretation, Bossuet does not identify the apocalyptic green horse (Rev 6: 8) with Islam, or the Anti-Christ with Mohammed.¹⁵ Instead, ch. 8 is understood to be about the persecution of Jews under emperors Trajan and Hadrian, in the context of the Bar-Kochba insurrection.¹⁶ Ch. 9 is interpreted as an attack of Jewish heresy against Christianity and about the fall of Rome. Ch. 10 covers in Bossuet's opinion the persecutions under the Roman Emperors. Diocletian (244–311) is therefore the apocalyptic beast whose name is 666, because Diocles Augustus in numbers equals 666.¹⁷ The apocalyptic woman in ch. 12 is the church and her son Emperor Constantine the Great. Ch. 14 portrays the destruction by Alaric and Attila, and so forth.¹⁸

The 'millennium', in which the Church enjoys peace and tranquility, is the period in which the Church lives now, but according to ch. 20 right before the end of the world Satan will be liberated for a short time and allowed to persecute the Church. Bossuet rejects that this is already happening.¹⁹ Despite the certitude with which Bossuet identifies historical events as being predicted by the biblical book, he explicitly warns about a mathematical 'calculation' of the times mentioned in the book, because the numbers are 'secret numbers' (*nombre mystique*) whose full meaning one cannot understand.²⁰ Bossuet's commentary was of course not only written to better understand Revelation, but also served a theological strategy, namely to refute Protestant interpretations

13 Ibid., 29–31.

14 Ibid., 39.

15 Ibid., 136–137.

16 Ibid., 150.

17 Ibid., 269; Didacus, *Enchiridion*, 518.

18 Bossuet, *L'apocalypse*, 273.

19 Ibid., 358.

20 Ibid., 206.

that identified the apocalyptic beast with the papacy.²¹ Augustine Calmet O.S.B. (1672–1757), Louis Dupin (1657–1719) and Jacques-Philippe Lallemant S.J. (1660–1748) are also preterists in Bossuet's sense.²² Calmet likewise believes the anti-Christ would come as a real person, and that figures like Antiochus and Nero only prefigured him. For the French Benedictine, he will be a religious and political leader who will wage real war.²³ The Jansenist Isaac-Louis de Sacy (1613–1684) rejected a chiliast reading in his 1667 translation of Revelation.²⁴

Quite different was the approach of fellow Jesuit Francisco Ribera (or: Ribeira) (1537–1591), who can be credited as the first prominent Catholic futurist with his commentary on Revelation of 1590. He argued that only a small portion of the book relates to the past and the biggest part to future events. The millennium of Revelation 20 is the time between Christ's death and the coming of the anti-Christ. However, for Ribera the saints will rule in heaven and not on earth. For Ribera the anti-Christ is a real person, but unlike Salmeron he does not see him as Muslim or in any way connected to Islam, but instead as a Jew. He would therefore be expected to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem. Unlike Frey, whose explanation we will encounter below, Ribera did not regard the 1260 days in which the two witnesses of Revelation 11 (Elijah and Enoch) will prophesy as a mystical schedule but as literally three and a half years, during which the anti-Christ will persecute the Christians.²⁵

21 Noteworthy is that Bossuet ends his book with reflections about chiliasm, especially Protestant chiliasm, and renews his belief in a spiritual reading of Rev 20. *Ibid.*, 378–385.

22 Louis Ellies Dupin, *Analyse de l'apocalypse, contenant une nouvelle explication simple & littéraire de ce livre, avec dissertations sur les millénaires, sur l'état des âmes après la mort, sur le purgatoire, sur le jour du jugement, et sur d'autres matières importantes de la religion.* (Paris, 1714); Augustin Calmet, *Commentaire littéral sur tous les livres de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament* vol. 8. (Paris, 1726); Jacques-Philippe Lallemant, *Réflexions morales sur le Nouveau Testament* vol. 12. (Paris, 1725).

23 Augustin Calmet, *Dictionarium Manuale Biblicum* vol. 1. (Augsburg, 1775), 77; cf. Newport, *Apocalypse and Millenium*, 73; Tiefenthal, *Die Apokalypse*, 58.

24 Isaac-Louis de Sacy, *Die heilige Schrift erklärt aus den heiligen Vätern ... des neuen Bundes zwölfter Band.* (Augsburg: 1803).

25 For Ribeira's account of the apocalyptic woman see Francisco Ribeira, *In sacram beati Joannis Apostoli & Evangelistae Apocalypsin Commentarii.* (Lyon: 1593), 236–237; on Rev. 11 and computation *ibid.* 118. Cf. the tendentious but learned

Ribera was also among the first, who rejected reading a mystical meaning (*mysticos quidem sensus non attingemus*) into Revelation because such commentaries already existed. If he had written in the same manner, it would have meant ‘bringing wood into the forest’ (*ligna in silvam ferre*). The historical meaning, however, which is most ‘obscure’ and ‘neglected by all’ (*obscurissimus & magna ex parte ab omnibus neglectus*) must be elucidated, he argued. Revelation should consequently be read like any other prophetic book, and as such the historical meaning, that is the historical proof of what was foreseen, had to be established.²⁶ Cornelius a Lapide (1567–1637) followed in his 1627 commentary the role model of his fellow Jesuit, but remained quite cautious and critical of any immediate expectation of the endtimes. He rejected the preterism of Alcasar and thought the end of the world would come around the year 2000, but wisely added that nothing sure and definite could be said about this and rejected any mathematical computations especially about the role of Islam in eschatological affairs.²⁷ Like Ribera and Frey, Lapide was convinced that Babylon in ch. 17 was not the Christian Rome of the present, but the pagan Rome of the future that had apostatized from the faith. According to his logic, at the appearance of the anti-Christ, the Christian Roman Empire will cease to exist, and Rome will become a see of sin, tyranny and vice. Yet, he also reports opinions, such as that of Aureolus, who understood the Babylon of Revelation to correspond to Islam, the beast to Egypt and its Turkish Sultan, and that of Aretas and Capinsachus, who understood

account of Edwin LeRoy Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation* vol. 2. (Washington: Review & Herald, 1948), 484–505; Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticae*, vol. 4, p. 456.

26 Ribeira, *In sacram*, proemium, 3.

27 Jean-Robert Armogathe, *Per Annos Mille: Cornelius a Lapide and the Interpretation of Revelation 20: 2–8*. In Karl A. Kottman, ed., *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern Europe: Catholic Millenarianism: From Savonarola to the Abbe Gregoire*. (Dordrecht et al.: 2001), 45–52. Armogathe calls Cornelius’ stance a ‘mitigated millenarianism, urging the moral necessity of hastening one’s conversion being conscious that the ages to come draw us nearer than ever to the end of the world, *ibid.*, 51). See also Roberto Osculati, *Hic Romae: Cornelio a Lapide commentator dell’Apocalisse al Collegio Romano*. In Roberto Rusconi, ed., *Storia e figure dell’Apocalisse fra ‘500 e ‘600*. (Rome: Viella, 1994), 315–329.

Babylon to stand for Turkish Constantinople.²⁸ Another reserved futurist was the Jesuit Cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621), who believed like Ribeira that the anti-Christ was an individual Jew, and attacked the year-day principle that seemed to favor Protestant interpretations. Nevertheless, Bellarmine’s main point, so it appears, was that if the anti-Christ had reigned in the Catholic Church, one would expect a uniform date of the beginning of his reign among Protestant interpreters. Since such a unanimous consent was far from being established, he dismissed such interpretations as figments of imagination.²⁹

While the commentary of the Flanders Carmelite Didacus a S. Antonio (1681–1763) admits that the book contains many obscure prophecies that no one may ever clearly penetrate, it also states that it is certainly (*clarissima*) also a book that encourages patience and perseverance in persecution.³⁰ The Benedictine Gervasius Bulffer (1714–1792) of Ettenheimmünster follows the idea of Didacus in his 1773 futurist commentary, though he does not mention him. In it Bulffer rejects the notion that Revelation talks at all (!) about past events.³¹ He provides a translation into the vernacular with a short commentary to each verse. Bulffer calls Revelation the only ‘prophecy of the law of grace’ (*einzigste Weissagung des Gesetzes der Gnade*). There is no trace of a history of persecution in Revelation – instead everything is about the future of the Church and its battle with the anti-Christ.³² Consequently, Revelation is taken to be as an introduction to a theology of grace and a

28 Lape, *Commentarius*, 196–97.

29 Bellarmine, *De Summo Pontifice*, book 3, ch. 3, pp. 635–36. There also Bellarmine’s view of John Damascene’s interpretation of Mohammed as the anti-Christ. Cf. Newport, *Apocalypse and Millenium*, 73–76; Armogathe, *Interpretations*, 190; Froom, *Prophetic Faith*, vol. 2, p. 497.

30 Didacus a S. Antonio, *Auctuarium Scripturistici*, vol. 4 (Brussels: 1748), 414. Archives of the Order of the Discalced Carmelites of the Flemish Province in Belgium ‘Series Superiorum et Religiosorum C. D.’ Archive nr. B 0169. Letter of Jean-Pierre Debels of 15 October 2012. On Leonardus see also Chr. de Backer, *Leonardus a S. Martino*. In *Nationaal Biografisch Woordenboek* vol. 7 (Brussel: Paleis der Academien 1977), 508–511.

31 Gervasius Bulffer, *Geheime Offenbarung, oder einzige Weissagung des neuen Testaments* (Augsburg: 1773). Manuscripts of Bulffer can be found in the Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe, see Karl Preisendanz, *Die Handschriften des Klosters Ettenheimmünster* (Karlsruhe: 1932), 48–52.

32 Bulffer, *Geheime Offenbarung*, preface.

book of perpetual consolation.³³ More outspoken as futurist was Johann Hyacinth Kistemaker (1754–1834) of Munster. He is a propagator of the traditional reading of scripture and rejects the achievements of historical criticism. The Fathers and the Fathers alone are for him the authoritative interpreters of Scripture. Bossuet is consequently rejected and criticized for limiting Revelation almost entirely to the past.³⁴ Likewise he discards the interpretation of Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1753–1827) and Leonhard Hug (1765–1846) that certain images had no other meaning than decoration (*Ausschmückung*), because he sees behind this move the danger of labeling a part of Scripture a ‘mere product of human ingenuity’.³⁵

Among Catholic futurists of the eighteenth century, a growing number interpreted Revelation— certainly influenced by Protestant commentaries — as foretelling the downfall of the Church and the Papacy around 1800. Drue Cressener (c. 1638–1718), an Anglican minister, identifies the Catholic Church as the fourth apocalyptic beast (c. Dan 7; Rev 13: 5/8) and the beginning of its 1260 years of reign with Justinian the Great sometime in the sixth century. Consequently, a major blow to Catholicism was expected to happen to the papacy around 1800, and he seems to have been the first to argue for that position.³⁶ He states:

And then since the last Vial ends with the destruction of the Beast, this is a new confirmation of that which has been elsewhere advanced, viz. that the first appearance of the Beast was at Justinian’s recovery of the Western Empire from which time to about the year 1800 will be about 1260 years. ... And that which remains for the ruin of the great City Babylon ... is the conversion of all the

33 Ibid., 166–174.

34 Johann Hyacinth Kistemaker, *Sendschreiben der Apostel*, vol. 2 (Munster, 1823), 478.

35 Ibid., 481.

36 Drue Cressener, *A Demonstration of the First Principles of the Protestant Applications of the Apocalypse* (London, 1690), VIII–IX; cf. Froom, *Prophetic Faith* vol. 2, 592.

Roman Church except a tenth part of it.³⁷

The Scottish preacher Robert Fleming (c. 1660–1716) follows in Cressener's footsteps. In 1701 Fleming produced a discourse on the rise and fall of the papacy, in which he sides with the prediction that a disastrous strike against the papacy would take place around 1800.³⁸ Much like Frey's work, Fleming's discourse found a broad audience at the time of the fulfillment of such prophecies, particularly in 1793 and 1848. William Lowth (1660–1732) estimates that the end of the beast comes in 1866, and likewise predictions about the French Revolution of 1789 and the execution of Catholic kings are frequently uttered throughout the century, usually by Protestants.³⁹ The Berlin preacher Johann Christian Seitz claims in 1720 that the Anti-Christ will come between around 1720, but slightly changes his view after 1735.⁴⁰

An important, yet continuously overlooked work of German apocalypticism, written by arguably one of the most esteemed theologians of the time is the account of the Benedictine Prince Abbot

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- 37 Drue Cressener, *The Judgments of God Upon the Roman-Catholick Church, from Its First Rigid Laws for Universal Conformity to It, Unto Its Last End. ... In Explication of the Trumpets and Vials of the Apocalypse, Upon Principles Generally Acknowledged by Protestant Interpreters*. (London, 1689), 309.
- 38 Robert Fleming, *Discourses on Several Subjects. The First Containing a New Account of the Rise and Fall of the Papacy. The Second Upon God's Dwelling with Men. The Third Concerning the Ministerial Office. The Fourth Being a Brief Account of Religion As It Centers in the Lord Jesus Christ*. (London, 1701); From, *Prophetic Faith* vol. 2, 642–43.
- 39 David S. Katz, *The Occult Bible: Hebraic Millenarianism in Eighteenth-Century England*. In James E. Force and Richard H. Popkin, eds., *The Millenarian Turn, Millenarian Contexts of Science, Politics and Everyday Anglo-American Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Dordrecht, Kluwer, 2001), 119–32; From, *Prophetic Faith* vol. 2, 724.
- 40 Corrodi, *Critische Geschichte*, vol. 3, 122–125; Anonymous (i.e. Johann Christian Seitz), *Ausführlicher Beweis, daß I. die zween Apoc. XI gedachte Zeugen zwey einzelne Personen, II. daß solche Moses und Elias in Person seyen von J.C.S. Dienern der großen Gemeinde Ps. 40:10* (n.p.: 1721); Johann Christian Seitz, *Mathematischer, das ist himmelfester und sonnenclarer Beweiss, daß die 3 1/2 und 1260 Tage der Zeugen Apoc. 2 ... natürliche Tage seyn* (n.p.: 1735). An overview of the treatment of Revelation in the German Enlightenment, however only of Protestant authors, in Gerhard Meier, *Die Johannesoffenbarung und die Kirche*. WUNT 25 (Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1981), 448–83.

Martin Gerbert (1720–1793) of St. Blasien in the Black Forest. He was an erudite theologian, who not only corresponded with Protestant theologians but even asked them for advice in interpreting scripture. The correspondence Gerbert maintained with the reformed minister Johann Jakob Hess in Zurich between 1783 and 1793, which also included personal visits of Hess in the abbey, reveals just that.⁴¹ Gerbert's two volumes, *The Church Militant* (1789), impressed even Cardinal Giuseppe Garampi (1725–1792). It was through the cardinal that in February 1790 Pope Pius VI received a copy of this work.⁴² In *The Church Militant*⁴³ he gives, like Walmsley, a counter narrative of church history, of the persecution of Catholicism, the tribulations and successes over time, and demonstrates that the millennial reign of Christ is not a literal time span of 1000 years but the timely existence of the Church on earth from the beginning to the second coming. For this view he relies on Ribeira.⁴⁴ In Gerbert's judgement, the rejection of the light of the Church through radical Enlighteners, Febronianists, Jansensists and Gallicans and their 'false' or 'hellish' light, are clear symptoms for the time in which Satan will be released (Rev 20: 7).⁴⁵ The anti-Christ that he expects is a singular person, a '*vero singulare monstrum hominis ... diabolium incarnatum*'.⁴⁶

The reason why Revelation contains future references was believed to be, as Walmsley argues, to give

41 Arthur Allgeier, *Der Briefwechsel von J. J. Hess mit Martin Gerbert*. In *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins* 56 (1943), 504–49. Zentralbibliothek Zürich: FA Hess (1741) 181, Bd. 14-19 (17 letters).

42 Arthur Allgeier, *Martin Gerbert und Karl Theodor von Dalberg: Beiträge zu den Schlußkapiteln der Geschichte des Bistum Konstanz*. In *Freiburger Diözesanarchiv* 69 (1949), 66–91.

43 Martin Gerbert, *Ecclesia Militans*, 2 vols. (St. Blasien, 1789).

44 Gerbert, *Ecclesia Militans*, vol. 1, ch. 9, 37–44.

45 Gerbert, *Ecclesia Militans*, vol. 2, ch. 62, 366; cf. vol. 1: 111–117. For a telling description of the Enlightenment see Martin Gerbert, *De Sublimi in Evangelio Christi*, vol. 3. (St. Blasien, 1793), 143: 'Sed deteriora monstra aetas nostra tulit, quae necdum Bossuetus (ex quibus iam cerberus infernalis templum Dei, et sanctorum eius invasit) nata ad praeparanda antichristi tempora Voltaire, Helvetius, Rousseau, Diderot, Dalember, Rainald etc.'

46 Martin Gerbert, *Ecclesia militans regnum Christi in terris* vol. 2 (St. Blasien: 1789), 262.

a tolerable intelligence of transactions that will touch us so nearly and will be more terrible and trying to human nature than any that have ever happened. By a previous, though imperfect, knowledge of dreadful calamities, we are warned to prepare for them. An impending evil ... is less alarming when foreseen and expected.⁴⁷

What Frey offers, however, is not a simple Catholic futurism, but like Walmsley, a counter-historicism that views the book as partly fulfilled and partly about the future.

The Clandestine Futurist: Alphonsus Frey (1700–1763)

Alphonsus Frey was born 3 December 1700 in Nollenden, Swabia/Germany, and entered the Benedictine Abbey of Ochsenhausen and died there on 13 August 1763. Unfortunately, we do not know anything about his education or academic life, apart from the fact that he was professor of oriental languages and exegesis in his monastery, and seems to have become intrigued by the book of Revelation in the 1760s. His unfinished ten-volume commentary on Revelation, as it seems his only book, circulated in many manuscripts throughout the Catholic South of Germany because it predicted with alleged accuracy the fate of the Church until the second coming of Christ in 2014. Until at least 1803, this work stood in the abbey's library and could be consulted, but was lost soon afterwards.⁴⁸ A one-volume summary, written in the 1780s, survived, which Frey's student Bruno Bischoff (1739–1792), also professor of oriental languages in the same monastery, had crafted for the easier use of the students.⁴⁹ Only the 1822 and 1832 Frey's work

47 Walmsley, *The general history*, 269. Walmsley distinguishes seven 'ages' of Church history, while only the sixth is the age of the church militant on earth (shorter reflections on p. 525–32), the seventh the 'age' of eternity (532–33).

48 Franz Xaver Christmann, *Roms unglückliche Sechser: Oder Beleuchtung des bekannten Verses 'Semper sub sextis perdit Roma fuit'*. (Constance, 1803), 164–67.

49 Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, *Synopsis septem sigillorum ac septem tubarum apokalypseos*. Bischoff is also the author of *Interpretatio sibi specietenus adversa complurium cum Animadversionibus in Librum Geneseos*. (Ulm: 1772). On Bischoff see Georg Geisenhof, *Kurze Geschichte des vormaligen*

was translated and published.⁵⁰ An extract from the ‘prophecies’ of Frey, written by an 18th-century hand, is kept in the Staatsbibliothek Stuttgart. The monk’s interpretation is far from applying historical-critical scholarship. Instead, Frey provides a good example of an eisegesis, of reading one’s own expectations and ideas into the text, and is one of the few examples of a clandestine Catholic futurist, that is, of a secretly circulating manuscript which sees Revelation in great parts as a futurist vision. For Frey, the end of the world is bound to the Holy Roman Empire. Like Gerbert, who probably knew this text, the tendencies among German bishops to become independent from Rome were signs of a soon to happen apocalyptic catastrophe. The crisis of the German *Reichskirche* is for him the key to understanding world and salvation history. Frey’s work is therefore also a good example of how biblical interpretation can be contextualized and abused for one’s own politico-ecclesiastical worldview.

Frey divides Revelation into four parts. The first describes the context of the churches in Asia (chs. 1–3), the second (chs. 4–11) deals with the conferrals and withdrawals of God’s grace over time, while the third part (chs. 12–14) describes the apocalyptic battle with the dragon and its persecutions, the fourth part contains the way to heaven through the tribulations at the end of times (chs. 15–22). Unfortunately, only Frey’s musings about the second part have survived. Bischoff mentions that Frey also consulted the Church Fathers, Bossuet, Calmet, Didacus de S. Antonio O.C.D., Cornelius a Lapide S.J., and most importantly John Gerard Kerkherdere (1673–1738), a widely forgotten Habsburg historian, whose *Prodromus Danielicus* (1711) provided Frey with the

Reichsstifts Ochsenhausen in Schwaben. (Ottobeuren, 1829), 203. Staatsbibliothek München: Clm 27057 (1011 pages) contains only the first eight chapters of Frey’s commentary and thus only the historical narrative, not the futurist prophecies. *Ibid.*, clm 27089 is identical with the manuscript in Überlingen.

50 Alphons Frey, *Erklärung der Offenbarung des hl. Johannes als prophetischer Schlüssel zu den Schicksalen der Kirche und der Staaten. Das ist: Fragmente und Ahnungen einer Universalhistorie der christkatholischen Kirche von der Sendung des heiligen Geistes bis zum Ende der Zeiten*, 2 vols. (Ulm, 1822, 2nd. ed., 1832). Since Frey’s commentary begins with ch. 4 of Revelation the interpretation of the first chapters was taken from works of Johann M. Sailer, while the missing chapters 12–20 were commented on by an anonymous contemporary. I excluded these later texts from my analysis.

computational means to calculate the time frame of Revelation.⁵¹

For Frey, the main question for interpreting Revelation is whether the prophecies of the book have already been fulfilled as the historicists claim, or whether most of them are yet to be fulfilled, as the futurists argue.⁵² Frey attempts a somewhat conciliatory middle way by arguing with St. Jerome that even if a prophecy foretold an event of the past, it can still contain innumerable more prophecies for the future.⁵³ He sees his work differ from other commentaries because he dares to compute an exact and applicable time table for this biblical book. Such historical dates are for Frey the hermeneutical key to understanding Revelation. Moreover, he is convinced that he is the first interpreter to give a reasonable explanation of who the first and second apocalyptic beasts are, and that he is the first who makes a distinction between the final persecution and the anti-Christ.⁵⁴

The Seven Ages of the Church (Rev. 6–7)

Under Frey's account, the sixth chapter of Revelation depicts the glory and misery of the Church. The seven seals on the scroll correspond to special graces and to the seven ages of the Church, as Joachim of Fiore had envisioned them. The first seal is a prefiguration of the primitive Church (33–70 C.E.), the second one signifies the Church battling Paganism for 242 years between 70 and 312. The third age is the 277-year conflict with teachers of heresy between 312 and 589. The fourth identifies the roughly 165 years of protection of the Church in the Roman Empire and the first attacks on her by 'Saracens'

51 John Gerard Kerkherdere, *Prodromus Danielicus sive Novi Conatus Historici, Critici, in celeberrimas Difficultates Historiae Veteris Testamenti, Monarchiarum Asiae &c.* (Leuven, 1711).

52 Alphons Frey, *Erklärung der Offenbarung des hl. Johannes als prophetischer Schlüssel zu den Schicksalen der Kirche und der Staaten. Das ist: Fragmente und Ahnungen einer Universalhistorie der christkatholischen Kirche von der Sendung des heiligen Geistes bis zum Ende der Zeiten* vol. 1. (Kirchdorf, 1831), iv.

53 *Ibid.*, iv. Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, *Synopsis septem sigillorum ac septem tubarum apokalypseos*, fol. 3–4: 'Apocalypsis est prophetica, infinita futurorum mysteria continens in quam si plurima fuerint dicta, plura semper dicenda restabunt'.

54 *Ibid.*, v–vii.

and icon-destroyers, between 587 and 754.⁵⁵ The fifth age is the time of transition of grace from the Eastern to the Western Roman Empire, from the Eastern Church to the Roman Church and comprises the time between 754 and 1314, 560 years. The sixth age is the time of apostasy, which begins for Frey with John of Jandun (1285–1323),⁵⁶ Marsilius of Padua (1275–1343), John Wycliffe (1320–1384) and Jan Hus (1369–1415), and consequently lasts from 1314 to 1481, about 167 years. The seventh age is the time in which apostasy in the West increases, especially through the ‘heresies’ of Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564).⁵⁷

This historical narrative Frey sees buttressed by the four apocalyptic riders and their horses in Revelation 6. The first horse is white and symbolizes the Church, while the rider is the Holy Spirit, who with his weapons, bow and arrow, defeats his enemy, Judaism.⁵⁸ The second red horse, which destroys peace on earth, signifies paganism, which tries to eradicate the Church, and its rider the Roman Emperor.⁵⁹ The third black horse is ridden by Satan himself and symbolizes the attack on Christianity by heresy.⁶⁰ After the third seal is broken (Rev 6: 6), a voice among the animals complains about the price of corn and the request not to damage olive oil or wine, which Frey interprets as the prayer of the Church to preserve the teachings of the church (vine) and its doctrinal definitions (oil).⁶¹ It is clear for the Benedictine that this prayer was heard since the Church battled successfully with many

55 Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 63.

56 Not in the Überlingen manuscript, only in the printed translation. See Frey, *Erklärung*, i: 61.

57 *Ibid.*, 60–61.

58 *Ibid.* 66. The crown the rider receives shows that the grace of God was transferred from Judaism to the Roman Empire. *Ibid.*, 67; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 69.

59 *Ibid.*, ff. 73–75.

60 Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 78, ‘*Haeretici solam allegant scripturam ad instar iudicii in materia credendorum*’. The scale that Satan holds in his hand (Rev 6: 5) means that the heretics ponder God’s words with reason alone and disregard the weight of doctrinal decisions. This interpretation of the scale was not new, as also Cornelius a Lapide used it, as Frey admits (Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, fol. 78. Cornelius a Lapide, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin Apostoli*. (Venice: 2nd. ed., 1717), 92.

61 Frey, *Erklärung*, i, 75.

heresies between 312 and 589.⁶² The beginning of the end of the black horse Frey dates to the launch of the persecution of heretics in the year 518 under Justinian the Great (482–565) and its culmination in 589. In the pale or green horse of Rev 6: 7–8 Frey sees the attempts of Satan to eliminate the Church in the Roman Empire through Islam⁶³ and through the iconoclastic emperors Leo Isauricus (714–741) and Constantine V Copronymus (741–775).⁶⁴ When the Eastern Churches at the Council of Hieria (754) rejected icons and relics, it apostatized from the true faith and was subjected to the punishment of God in the form of Islamic persecution.⁶⁵ The name of the rider of the fourth horse, ‘death’, is proof that one should see in him the symbol of the Saracene Caliphate (*Caliphatu Saracenorum*).⁶⁶ Since the Caliph’s theology denies like all Islamic theology the triune God and all sacraments, which are the paths to salvation, Islam ‘is the religion of death’ (*consequente Mahomedismus est religio mortis*).⁶⁷ Also politically, the Caliph’s government is connected to death as its dominion brought destruction to formerly prosperous areas so that Frey summarizes that Islam is also in this respect a religion that ‘contributes to the destruction of the human race’ (*ad destructionem generis humani*).⁶⁸

For Frey the beginning of the fifth seal dates to 754, when grace was withdrawn from Emperor Copronymus and transferred on the king of the Franks, Pippin (d. 768), and the final execution of the seal in 775 when Copronymus and Caliph Al-Mansur (714–775) die.⁶⁹ Since the

62 Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 81–83.

63 Ibid., f. 86: ‘Apostasia a Christo per Mahoemdam introducitur.’ On Islam as the continuation of Ancient Arianism see Frey, *Erklärung*, i, 87; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 92. See the chart in Froom, *Prophetic Faith*, vol. 2, 530; 786–87, which shows that many early modern interpreters saw Islam as an apocalyptic enemy of Christianity.

64 With the introduction of Islamic doctrines and forced conversion (*violentiam armarum; armis cogeret*), Satan wanted to rob Christians of the knowledge of Christ and his true church. See Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 87 and Frey, *Erklärung*, i, 82, 85.

65 Ibid., 88; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 93.

66 Ibid., f. 97.

67 Ibid., f. 98.

68 Frey, *Erklärung*, i, 93; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 99.

69 Frey, *Erklärung*, i, 105–106; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, ff. 110–111. On the commonplace theory of a *translatio imperii* see Werner Goetz,

saints receive, according to the next verse, a white garment and power (Rev 6: 10–11), Frey assumes that this verse indicates the beginning of the thousand-year reign of the Saints on earth and the imprisonment of the full powers of Satan.⁷⁰ The historical proof is that until 775 the most important enemies of the faith are eliminated in Western Europe, and Charlemagne assumes around this time (768) the throne as the new protector of Christianity.⁷¹ The Spanish Reconquista fits obviously into Frey's historical outline, especially the 807 victory over the Saracen fleet and the victory at the battle of Clavijo in 844 'with the help of St. James'.⁷² Although Islam continues in the eyes of Frey for the next centuries to be a powerful force, he sees its power broken by the year 1300.⁷³ Rev 6: 11 nevertheless mentions another wave of persecution during this time, which for the Benedictine is again executed by the Ottomans.⁷⁴ This persecution will last according to Rev 13:42 forty-two prophetic months, and since some months in the old calendars had only 29 days, these amount to 1239 prophetic days, which equal 1239 years.⁷⁵ Consequently, this persecution that began in 775 will continue until 2014.⁷⁶

The earthquake, solar eclipse and red moon and the sixth seal described in Rev 6: 12 are, according to Frey, a prophecy about the fate of East and West. While the East declined more and more, the West was able to rise,⁷⁷ but was brought to a halt by Satan. The Benedictine dates the beginning of this age to about 1314, when Ludwig the Emperor (1282–1347) with the help of Marsilius of Padua and others begins to undermine papal authority, and when the Byzantine Empire allies with

Translatio imperii: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Geschichtsdenkens und der politischen Theorien im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit (Tübingen: Mohr, 1958).

70 Frey, *Erklärung*, i, 114; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 122.

71 Frey, *Erklärung*, i, 119; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 127.

72 Frey, *Erklärung* i, 120; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, fol. 130.

73 *ibid.*

74 Frey, *Erklärung* i, 133–134; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, fol. 139–140.

75 Frey, *Erklärung* i, 136.

76 Frey, *Erklärung* i, 137; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 139–143.

77 Frey, *Erklärung* i, 148–149.

the Ottomans.⁷⁸ The sun that eclipses is therefore the papacy, because the popes receive the light of grace from Christ, but now the ‘shadow’ of Wycliffites, Lutherans and Calvinists as well as anti-Papists overshadow their influence.⁷⁹ The red moon signifies the Roman Empire, since as the real moon receives its light from the sun, so the Roman Empire is enlightened by the papacy. Once the Empire begins to shy away from a consequent defense of the papacy, it sinks into bloody battles and wars. Frey sees this prophecy fulfilled in the Hussite Wars in the West, and in the East in the persecution of Christians under the Ottomans.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, the apostasy and martyrdom of Christians in the East is compensated by gains for Christianity in the West and in Asia and America.⁸¹ Grace is more and more withdrawn from Europe (Rev 6: 14) and given to Spanish/Portugese America (*ab Europa in Americam recedere incepit*).⁸² As source for his knowledge about Christianity in Asia and America, the monk relies on Cornelius Hazart S.J. (1617–1690).⁸³

The seventh chapter of Revelation describes the good effects of penance, symbolized by the four angels who are commanded to stop the four winds, which resemble evil spirits and persecution.⁸⁴ Frey dates the beginning of this process of penance to around 1400 when St. Vincent Ferrer begins to preach.⁸⁵ For Frey, the second angel in Rev 7: 2–3 is the guardian angel of the Holy Roman Empire that arises like the sun in the East, and because the sunrise signifies the papacy it brings true faith. Frey sees such a resurgence of the guardian angel in the time of

78 Frey, *Erklärung* i, 149–155; zu Gregor XI siehe Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 162–163.

79 Frey, *Erklärung* i, 156; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 164.

80 Frey, *Erklärung* i, 160–161. Cf. Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 164.

81 Frey, *Erklärung* i, 163; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 164.

82 Ibid., f. 173. The manuscript does not mention Hazart but the ‘communio historiographorum opinio’.

83 Frey, *Erklärung* i, 163; Cornelius Hazart and Udalrich Dirrhaimer, *Kirchen-Geschicht der gantzen Welt absonderlich der vergangnen und nunmehr verflussnen zwey-hundert Jahren: in welchen enthalten wird die Gelegenheit der Landen Art und Manieren der Religion der Inwohnern* 4 vols. (Vienna: 1678/84); (Munich: 1701/02; 1725).

84 Frey, *Erklärung* i, 174.

85 Ibid., 175–176; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 190.

Emperor Sigismund (1368–1437) when he burned Jan Hus (1369–1415) at the stake in Constance and united the realm in resistance against the Ottomans.⁸⁶ Because of these sincere reform attempts the church receives (Rev 8: 1) ‘half an hour’ of silence in heaven, which means a time of peace in the midst of the tribulation after the Council of Basel (1431). Alphonsus Frey dates this ‘break’ to 1481, the year in which Mehmed II the Conqueror (1432–1481) dies, and when the ecclesiastical reforms seem to bear first fruit.⁸⁷ This half an hour, however, is not to be taken literal but signifies according to the Benedictine the span of a human life, approximately 35/36 years, so that the next tribulation must set in around 1517 – the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.⁸⁸

The Demise of the Church (Rev. 8)

When in chapter 8 the seven angels are given seven trumpets (Rev 8: 2), the seven punishments for sin and apostasy are indicated. The first trumpet is the sign that Europe is robbed of its faith, with the second it is taken from America, with the third the political order of the Church is destroyed, with the fourth the spiritual power of the Church is diminished, with the fifth the doctrine of the Anti-Christ raises to power, with the sixth his dominion begins. The seventh trumpet, however, signifies judgment day and the destruction of the Anti-Christ.⁸⁹

Europe is robbed of its faith because it had become unworthy of it. The guardian angel of America (Rev 8: 3) therefore implores God to receive this grace instead around 1490.⁹⁰ The fire that this angel brings to earth is the spirit of evangelization (*virī Apostolici inflammati*) that had died in Europe with Luther, Beza, Calvin and Zwingli and was reignited by Sts. Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier, Francis des Sales,

86 Frey, *Erklärung* i, 177; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, ff. 191–192.

87 Frey, *Erklärung* i, 180–181; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, ff. 207–208.

88 Frey, *Erklärung* i, 182; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, ff. 212–213.

89 Ibid., f. 217.

90 Frey, *Erklärung*, i: 184–185; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, ff. 218–220 with a detailed account.

Charles Borromeo, Theresia of Avila and Magdalena de Pazzi.⁹¹ ‘There were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning’ – the conversion of America and India brought about major signs and major efforts of grace (Rev 8: 5).

What is similar between a conversion and an earthquake is that dry land becomes in both instances a lake, mountainous land plain, and very much in the same sense the spreading of the Gospels have transformed America. Pagan America has been transformed into a fruitful region, which—after it had accepted the yoke of Christ – bears the fruits of penance and holiness.⁹²

When in chapter 8, verse 6 the angels ‘prepare’ to blow the trumpets, this is for Frey the last admonition to do penance. He dates this event between 1500 and 1501.⁹³ The first trumpet which results in ‘hail and fire mixed with blood’ (Rev 8: 7) points to the apostasy of the Reformation (*falsissima Lutheri dogmata*).⁹⁴ After hail and fire one third of the land is burned (Rev 8: 7), which equals for Frey to the loss of about one third of Europe to the churches of the Reformation.⁹⁵ At the outbreak of the Reformation one ‘could hear’ the sound of the first trumpet, which lasted until 1648, so about 131 years.⁹⁶

With the second trumpet the grace of faith is taken from India and America.⁹⁷ After the sounding of the second trumpet a huge mountain falls burning into the sea (Rev 8: 8). While the mountain symbolizes great power, the fire symbolizes heresy. ‘The meaning must be the following: A power, stained by error, has come into the sea and has gained control over it. As a consequence, a third of the creatures of the sea died’.⁹⁸ The loss of life symbolizes for Frey the loss of the true faith, and the power that reigns the sea are England and the Netherlands, both

91 Frey, *Erklärung* i, 187.

92 Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 224: ‘America enim arido paganismi superstitioni priori addicta, in terram valde fructuosissimam conversa fuit ...’ cf. Frey, *Erklärung*, i: 188–189.

93 Ibid., 190.

94 Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 226.

95 Ibid., ff. 227–229.

96 Frey, *Erklärung*, i: 206.

97 Ibid., 211; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 233 has America instead of India.

98 Frey, *Erklärung* i, 212.

Protestant powers.⁹⁹ The reason why God would withdraw his grace from the American Indians, however, was because the Spanish and Portuguese whom God had sent with the purpose of spreading the Gospel did *not* act righteously. The colonial powers were not driven by a desire to save the Indians spiritually, namely to ‘free them from the servitude of the devil and to offer them the freedom of becoming children of God’ (*a servitute demonis liberare ac in libertatem filiorum Dei afferre*) but by a burning desire for gold (*auro et avaritio sordide*), and imposed on the native population an almost unbearable burden (*jugum vix tollerabile*), did not set a good example but were instead cruel and scandalous in their behavior (*crudelitate graviter offenderunt ... scandali permoti*).¹⁰⁰ The defeat of the Spanish Armada, the first sounding of the second trumpet, was God’s punishment for Spain’s sins and its reluctance to do penance.¹⁰¹

With the third trumpet ‘a large star burning like a torch fell from the sky. It fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water’ (Rev 8: 10). The sounding is again a divine judgment, this time over the worldly power of the Roman Emperors and it occurs in 1700. The only reason why God had continuously saved the Holy Roman Empire was because it did not entirely defect from the Catholic faith. Habsburg’s ‘*pietas austriaca*’ had saved the empire.¹⁰² The star that falls is first and foremost Spain, thinks Frey, with the death of the last Spanish Habsburg, Charles II (1661–1700), in 1700.¹⁰³ That people die from the bitterness of the water, signifies for Frey the series of wars of succession that follow the death of Charles II.¹⁰⁴ After the sounding of the fourth trumpet ‘a third of the sun, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them became dark. The day lost its light for a third of the time, as did the night’ (Rev. 8: 12). This indicates a diminishing of the Church’s power (*potestas ecclesiastica*

99 Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, ff. 235-236.

100 Ibid., f. 236–237.

101 Frey, *Erklärung* i, 216.

102 Ibid., 219–225; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, ff. 240–247. For the concept ‘*pietas Austriaca*’ see Anna Coreth, *Pietas Austriaca*. (West Lafayette: Purdue Univ. Press, 2004).

103 Frey, *Erklärung*, i: 230.

104 Ibid., 232.

decrescere incipit), which he identifies with the peace negotiations between Habsburg and Prussia during the first Silesian Wars (1740ff), in which Prussia desired a secularization of church property. ‘Catholics resisted it, but many lukewarm Christians desire it. The Protestants will not give up to enforce it, and it will be the punishment of our sins’.¹⁰⁵ The third part that falls in darkness is the German *Reichskirche*.¹⁰⁶

The meaning of this sacred text is therefore as follows: a decree of secularization will be issued and immediately a third of the papal church will be suppressed with all its clergy, and bishops in the Holy Roman Empire ... However, how will this suppression be executed with the help of such a secularization decree? After the promulgation of this decree all spiritual goods will be forfeited, including the dioceses and ecclesiastical principalities, the sovereignty and landownership of the monasteries will be taken away and the clergy will only have left meager pensions.¹⁰⁷

The sun, which symbolizes the light of Christ, becomes dark because the preaching of the Gospels and the celebration of the sacraments will face serious obstacles.¹⁰⁸ All this will happen around 1775, because this is the year in which the dragon that was captive will be set lose after his thousand year long captivity (Rev 20).¹⁰⁹

105 Ibid., 235; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, ff. 249–250.

106 Didacus interprets this verse as a description of future persecution and confusion brought about by Judaism, which introduces a wrong understanding of scripture for a false Messiah. Didacus, *Enchiridion*, 475.

107 Frey, *Erklärung* i, 234–235; cf. Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, ff. 252–253. Staatsbibliothek Stuttgart: Cod. Don. 435, p. 4: ‘Tunc enim in Imperio Romano Ecclesiae romano catholicae regimen abrogabitur: episcopatus omnes secularizabuntur: Parochi catholici a suis Parochiis amovebantur: Religiosi ordines dissolventur, et haec omnia in odium et destructionem fidei animarum detrimentum et exitium sempiternum’.

108 Frey, *Erklärung* i, 237; cf. Staatsbibliothek Stuttgart: Cod. Don. 435, p. 4–5: ‘Hinc lux fidei, et claritas Christianae virtutis jam hoc tempore magnam patitur Eclipsin, peccatis nostris ...’

109 A detailed discussion of the apocalyptic schedule with the biblical citations as references is given in Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 91–103; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, ff. 315–328. Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 253 on the millenarian expectation and the computation of 1775.

The anti-Catholic Emperor and the Pseudo-Pope (Rev. 9)

Alphons Frey's exegesis has brought him to the present time. Consequently, he can no longer look into history for proof of his reading of Revelation. Regarding Revelation 9, he therefore reflects first on the methodological question of how he could properly interpret this chapter since it pertains to future events. After all, 2 Pet 1: 20 admonishes that no prophecy could be interpreted according to one's one whim alone, and no historical facts could be used to buttress his claims.¹¹⁰ Consequently, he regards his interpretation of Revelation 9ff as mere "Muthmaßungen" (assumptions) but not as "truths".¹¹¹

After the fifth angel blows the fifth trumpet, a star falls from Heaven and the key to the abyss is handed over this star (Rev 9: 1). The first sound of this trumpet will be heard according to Frey around 1800. It signals the end of the Catholic Holy Roman Empire, the beginning of an anti-Catholic Empire and a pseudo-papacy (*Imperium A catholicum et Pseudo-Papatus*).¹¹² The apocalyptic "star" is a "homo terrenus," a man of the earth, who will not care for religion, not hope for eternal bliss but see his ultimate goal solely in worldly success. The imperial

110 2 Petr 1: 20–21: 'Know this first of all, that there is no prophecy of scripture that is a matter of personal interpretation, for no prophecy ever came through human will; but rather human beings moved by the holy Spirit spoke under the influence of God.'

111 Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 2. An extract of the original Frey manuscript from the Ducal Library of Donaueschingen contains parts of his interpretation of ch. 9 of *Rev*. It was written, most likely copied for the monks of his monastery, before 1800 since the introduction refers explicitly to 'our future.' Staatsbibliothek Stuttgart: Don 435, entitled: 'Extractus ex Manuscripto exegetico R.P. Alphonsi Frey Benedictini Ochenhusani de Secundo Christi Adventu.' The cover is entitled 'Prophetia ... Alphonsi Frey.' This account demonstrates that the later translation and summary manuscript have not been altered in order to vindicate Frey. This pre-1800 account confirms Frey's belief that around 1800 a great distress would affect the church. Staatsbibliothek München: Clm 27057 (1011 pages) contains only the first eight chapters of Frey's commentary and thus only the historical narrative, not the futurist prophecies.

112 Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 260. For Walmsley, *The general history*, 197 the man who opens the bottomless pit is Martin Luther: 'Luther therefore opened the door to Hell, and there issued out a thick Smoke ... What can this thick smoke be but a strong Spirit of Seduction, which had been hatched in Hell?'

crown¹¹³ will be transferred to him after the death of the last proper Habsburg heir around 1832.¹¹⁴ This man will be given the key to the abyss (Rev 9: 1) and he will be permitted to use his power against the Papal See and set up a pseudo-Papacy.¹¹⁵

The abyss is for Frey an image for the apostasy from the true faith through Qur'an and Talmud.¹¹⁶ The key the worldly person receives is the intellect

or the science to explain the Qur'an ... This godless emperor will be an apostate Muslim (*Memeluck*) ... and he will focus all his thoughts to motivate his entire realm to apostasy as well. He will attempt to do this with ... at first sight reasonable arguments from the Q'ran, Talmud and other Jewish writings.¹¹⁷

The decrees of the new anti-Catholic emperor are identified as "smoke" (Rev 9: 2), since they are natural signs of an emerging new religion (*secta*), of a rapidly spreading fire.¹¹⁸ Among the new beliefs of

113 Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 261.

114 Staatsbibliothek Stuttgart: Don 435, p. 2: 'Terra est homo terrena diligens, corde terrae, non coelo affixus, Deum, veraque religionem non curans, spem omnem beatitudinis abjiciens, ultimum suum finem in terrenis ac temporalibus solummodo ponens: verbo homo haereticus, vel apostata, adeo ut sensus hujus versus sit: quod corona imperialis transferatur in Principem acatholicum, mortuo nimirum ultimo Imperatore, saltem e sanguine materno a Rudolpho I Habsburgico descendente quod juxta opinionem auctoris eveniet circa annum Christi 1832.' Franz II (1768–1835) died in 1835; however he had abdicated the Imperial crown already in 1806. 'Ein Mensch... der alle Begierden an die Erde, an das Irdische heftet, der sich um Gott, um die wahre Religion nichts bekümmert, sein ewiges Heil nicht sucht, und sein letztes Ziel ins Gegenwärtige setzt' (Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 3). Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 261: '... seu devolvitur in principem acatholicum, qui religionem et ea quo sunt Dei, aspernabitur, et ea, quo sunt mundi nimium sectabitur.'

115 That the translator of the 1822/31 edition identified this 'homo terrenus' in a footnote with Napoleon I (1769–1821), and the described attacks on the church with Napoleonic church policy, including the imprisonment of Pope Pius VI (1775–1799) and Pius VII (1800–1823), cannot surprise.

116 Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 3–4; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 262.

117 Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 4–5. Not in the Überlingen manuscript.

118 Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 263: '... id est permissa credendi ac scribendi libertate ex eodem Pseudo-Papatu obscura fidei dogmata prodibunt ...'

this new religion will probably be that 1) Jesus was not divine, that 2) all visible ecclesiastical power should be abolished, 3) that all spiritual power should be taken from the Church. As a consequence church holidays will cease to exist, and the invocation of the saints will be stopped. 4) Instead of Christianity a new cult will be erected (*falsam et pestiferam sectam substituerunt*),¹¹⁹ which will be a syncretism of Judaism, Islam and heresy (*Mohametismus et haeresis conjungentur et in unum coalescent*).¹²⁰ The universal persecution of Catholicism and the establishment of this new cult will begin around 1800 and continue until 1980. Then, in 1980, the anti-Christ will manifest himself through false dogmas and demonic miracles.¹²¹

This persecution, which will begin around 1832, will be similar to the persecution of the Israelites by the Egyptians and the five months it lasts (Rev 9: 10) should be understood as 147.5 years, since each month corresponds to a series of 29 months.¹²² The priests of this new religion are compared to locusts with the power of scorpions (Rev 9 :7).¹²³ That these are wearing crowns indicates for Frey that the new religion will find state support, and their humanlike appearance that they will appear to be rational and prudent (*prudencia ponderare videbuntur*).¹²⁴ According to Rev 9: 8 the clergymen of this new religion

119 Ibid. f. 264.

120 Staatsbibliothek Stuttgart: Cod. Don. 435, p. 5. Cf. Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 8; Staatsbibliothek Stuttgart: Cod. Don. 435, p. 2–3: ‘Perversissima Dogmata: 1.) Christum non esse Deum, quoniam multi seductores exierunt in mundum, qui non confitentur Jesum Christum venisse in carne. Hic est seductor et Antichristus 2 Joann.: hi seductores sunt praecursores Antichristi; et Papatu iste per antonomasiam est bestia secunda apoc. 13: 7 descripta. 2.) Mariam non esse Matrem Dei. 3. Invocationem SSorum prodesse hominibus non posse. 4.) Nullam inesse summo pontifici, episcopis, ceterisque rectoribus ecclesiae potestatem. 5.) Neque Christum pollere postestate invisibile ad regendam, neque sanctos ad protegendam ecclesia.’ The fundamental beliefs of the pseudo-patriarch who perverts the fundamental Catholic dogmas are according to Frey: ‘1. qua Abaddon tollet Sacram Scripturam. 2. qua Apollion Symbolum nicaenum. 3. qua exterminans jus canonicum et omnes constitutiones ecclesiasticas, durabitque hoc ab anno Christi 1832 1/2 usque ad A. 1980. toto hoc tempore patietur Ecclesia persecutionem grandem illam, quam Christus praedixit Math 24: 21...’

121 Staatsbibliothek Stuttgart: Cod. Don. 435, p. 6.

122 Frey, *Erklärung*, ii: 12. Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 266.

123 Ibid., f. 266.

124 Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 14–15. Cf. Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f.

will have hair “like women’s hair”, which indicates their effeminate characteristics (*molles ac effeminati*) and their false doctrine.¹²⁵ This persecution will almost extinguish the Church, wherefore its leader, Apollyon, can be called the exterminator (Rev 9: 10) or the new Lucifer or “Afterpapst”.¹²⁶

With the sound of the sixth trumpet (Rev 9: 13–14) it becomes clear that the West has accepted this new religion. This trumpet announces the coming of the Anti-Christ: “Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the [four] horns of the gold altar before God, telling the sixth angel who held the trumpet, ‘Release the four angels who are bound at the banks of the great river Euphrates’”. The gold altar is for Alphonsus Frey the church insofar as it is the true church, the four horns, the four ways of worshipping, namely adoration (*latreuticum*), thanksgiving (*eucharisticum*), prayer for the satisfaction of sin and punishment (*satisfactorium*) and petitionary prayer for future benefits (*impetratorium*). From these four the altar receives a fourfold voice which requests from God judgment over the West, which has abandoned the Church.¹²⁷ The Euphrates symbolizes the Holy Roman Empire, while the four angels that are bound (Rev 9: 14) signify the four devils (*mali angeli*) that destroyed Rome between 400 and 476.¹²⁸ As long as the Empire was worthy of the angels’ protection they were bound. But now the voice from the altar, the voice of the Church is heard, which cries for help because the empire has adopted a heresy after the sounding of the fifth trumpet. The release of the angels must mean the “sentence of excommunication for the Emperor,” thinks Frey. “These four devils will bring unrest to the empire ... the emperor will not usurp this or that right of the church but he will attempt to suppress ecclesiastical power, the Papal State and the city of Rome”.¹²⁹

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125 Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 16. Cf. Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 269.

126 Ibid., f. 271; Staatsbibliothek Stuttgart: Cod. Don. 435, p. 4. Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 19.

127 Ibid., 21–23; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, ff. 274–276; *ibid.*: ‘... Quatuor sacrificandi ritus in Ecclesia receptos designant, videlicet sacrificium Latreuticum, Eucharisticum, Satisfactorium, & impetratorium.’

128 Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 23; 42; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 277.

129 Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 45.

The punishment for this will be the suppression of the Empire (*ruina Romani imperii*).¹³⁰

The three apocalyptic riders that execute the persecution of the faithful (Rev 9: 17) are the forces that had continuously attacked the Church, namely Paganism, Judaism and Islam.¹³¹ Unlike the persecutors of the past, the future ones will not be content with Christians rejecting their beliefs, but only with their complete destruction.¹³²

The Return of Enoch and Elijah and the Arrival of the Anti-Christ in 1980 (Rev 11–13)

‘Then I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven wrapped in a cloud, with a halo around his head; his face was like the sun and his feet were like pillars of fire’ (Rev 10: 1). This angel is not a real but a moral angel (*angelum mysticum*),¹³³ because he signifies more than one person. He signifies according to Alphonsus Frey the remaining faithful clergymen, because after the destruction of the empire the Anti-Christ will sit in God’s temple and demand worship.¹³⁴ The small scroll the angle holds (v. 2) contains the message of the second coming of Christ, his two feet are Elijah and Enoch, who give the convocation of clergy prophetic power.¹³⁵ For 1260 days, each day represents a year, the prophets will preach repentance (Rev 11: 3) in the spirit of Enoch and Elijah.¹³⁶ Yet, by ‘2014 the Church will be banished, proscribed and practically eliminated from the Empire’, while the Eastern Christians are subdued by the ‘yoke of Mohammedanism.’¹³⁷

The reason for the computation of 1980 can be found in Revelation 13. It gives a description of the two apocalyptic beasts. The first has seven heads, of which one is wounded but healed. The wound was the attack on Islam, but it healed because the Ottoman Empire recovered

130 Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 279.

131 Ibid., f. 280.

132 Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 55.

133 Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 290.

134 Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 68.

135 Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 292. Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 71–72.

136 Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 306.

137 Ibid., f. 305.

from the Crusades. Of the second animal the text says that it had two horns like the lamb but it talked like a dragon. This animal represents for Frey current heresies. While the first animal had the number 42, this one had the number 666. The first one is Magog, the second Gog. The first signifies unbelief, the second heresy. Nevertheless, neither of these two animals can be called the anti-Christ, because the devil will call the two together, so that ‘the anti-Christ will do miracles and appear to prove that he is the true Messiah’.¹³⁸ He will manifest himself after the second animal has done its work for 666 years. If one assumes its beginnings to be 1314, the reign of Ludwig the Emperor, then one arrives at 1980.¹³⁹ Frey shows that the word ‘Ludovicus’ either in German or in Latin numbers, always equals 666.¹⁴⁰ In 1980 both beasts will be forged into one with the appearance of the Anti-Christ.¹⁴¹

The returned prophets Enoch and Elijah will be killed by him after preaching repentance for 33 years, consequently in 2013. For Frey their murder indicates the destruction of Sacred Rome, most likely by the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴² After three and a half days of happiness for the murderers, the prophets will rise again and will be assumed into heaven (Rev 11: 11–12). At this moment an earthquake will shake the city, destroy it and kill 7000. This event marks the liberation of the faithful (Rev 11: 13). Frey seems to understand all this literally.¹⁴³ Then, after 33.5 years of domination by the Anti-Christ, he is destroyed in 2014.¹⁴⁴ The seventh trumpet follows, with which Christ’s kingship is restored. After God had given the east 700 years time to repent (753–1453) his universal kingship comes to Earth.¹⁴⁵ The *Church militant* will be united with the *Church triumphant* and her enemies will be destroyed. This union will take place according to Daniel 12: 11–12 forty-five years after

138 Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 108.

139 Ibid., 110; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, ff. 331–332.

140 Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 111. Andreas Helwich (c. 1572–1643) has calculated that some papal titles such as ‘vicarius filii dei’ also equal 666 (see Froom, *Prophetic Faith*, vol. 2, pp. 605–608).

141 Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 120.

142 Ibid., 117; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, ff. 334–335.

143 Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 118; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 337.

144 Staatsbibliothek Stuttgart: Cod. Don. 435, p. 7.

145 Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 120.

the defeat of the anti-Christ, in Frey's opinion, in 2059 (Rev 11:14).¹⁴⁶ Only then fire will fall from heaven, consume the earth and signal the last judgment, which is followed by the creation of a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21).¹⁴⁷ Yet, about the date of the new creation and the resurrection of the flesh nothing certain is revealed.¹⁴⁸

Conclusion: The Enlightenment as Enemy?

Frey was not the only one who saw in the eighteenth century a time of decline of Christianity and possibly the end of all times. The French clergyman Remy Pothier (1727–1812) published his apocalyptic account for the first time in 1773, with the result that it was immediately forbidden by state censorship, because it was so offensive.¹⁴⁹ Also, Pothier believed that the Roman Empire would end in 1800, and that the reign of the Antichrist would follow around 1880 after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1873.¹⁵⁰ Anti-Enlightenment forces translated the book into Latin in 1797 and into German in 1798.¹⁵¹ Also Bishop Marc Antoine Noé (1724–1802) expected the progress of impiety and de-Christianization, and had prepared a speech for the National Assembly of the French clergy in 1785, later published as his *Discours sur l'état futur de l'Église* in 1788. He had based his text on Revelation and predicted a future of persecution and terror for faithful Catholics.

146 Ibid., 127; Leopold-Sophien Bibliothek Überlingen: Ms 14, f. 348. Staatsbibliothek Stuttgart: Cod. Don. 435, p. 6.

147 Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 128; Staatsbibliothek Stuttgart: Cod. Don. 435, p. 8.

148 Frey, *Erklärung* ii, 134; Staatsbibliothek Stuttgart: Cod. Don. 435, p. 9.

149 Remy Pothier, *Ouvrage sur l'apocalypse par un prêtre François*. (Cologne: 1776). The endorsement letter of Pius VI *ibid.* as unpaginated appendix. Bart Van der Hertem, *Het begin van het einde, Eschatologische interpretaties van de Franse revolutie* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 78–81. *Revue de Champagne et de Brie*, vol. 7 (1895), 674; *Dictionnaire de Bibliographie Catholique*, vol. 1 (Paris: 1838), 237.

150 Pothier, *Die Offenbarung*, 46.

151 Remy Pothier, *Die Offenbarung des heiligen Johannes. Der prophetische Schlüssel zu den Schicksalen der Kirchen, und der Staaten bis ans Ende der Zeiten*. (Augsburg: 1798). German translation of *Idem, Compendium Operis in Apocalypsin, ex quo habetur prophetiae intelligentia*. (Augsburg: 1797). See the critical remarks of Sandbichler about this approach in *Oberdeutsche allgemeine Literaturzeitung* CIX (14 September 1801), 509.

Noé's contemporary Claude Fauchet (1744–1793) believed quite the opposite and expected in his 1788 reading of Revelation positive progressive changes.¹⁵² Fauchet's analysis was not unique as Catholic theologians, who were open to the changes of the Enlightenment, including the achievements of historical criticism, increasingly read Revelation as a historical document containing consolation for the early Christians and gave up the notion of an apocalyptic battle with the alleged archenemy of faith, the Enlightenment.¹⁵³ Computational attempts as to when the world would end were given up, and allegorical readings of the text discontinued. However, a few Catholic theologians attempted to bridge theological exegesis as it was done by the Fathers and modern historical criticism, the Augustinian Aloysius Sandbichler (1751–1820) being the most prominent one. Realizing a 'flattening' of Revelation he conceived, inspired by the work of the Reformed theologian Johann Jakob Hess (1741–1828), an 'enlightened' salvation history, which could be reconciled with a new millenarian perspective. It is through Sandbichler that the Catholic Tübingen school received the impetus to develop a new 'salvation history' – and so reading Revelation becomes indeed a key to understanding the formation of modern Catholic theology.¹⁵⁴

152 Marc Antoine Noé, *Discours sur l'état futur de l'Église*. (n.p., 1788); Claude Fauchet, *De la religion nationale* (Paris: 1789), ch. 4; R. Hermon-Belot, *God's Will in History: The Abbe Gregoire, the Revolution and the Jews*. In Kottman (ed.), *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern Europe: Catholic Millenarianism*, 91–100.

153 Johann Babor, *Uebersetzung des Neuen Testaments mit erklärenden Anmerkungen* vol. 3. (Wien: 1805), 65; Benedict Feilmoser, *Einleitung in die Bücher des Neuen Bundes (1810)*, 2nd. ed. (Tübingen: 1830), 565.

154 An article about Sandbichler and Hess is in preparation.