

Pazmany Peter Catholic University
Faculty of Humanities

PhD Thesis

Aniko Laszlo

Apocalyptic state theory and world-view of the seventeenth century

Supervisor: Dr. Sandor Oze DSc.

Head of Doctoral School of History: Dr. Ida Frochlich DSc.

Head of Idea History Programme: Dr. Ida Frochlich DSc.

Sites of research: Alte Bibliothek des Theologischen Seminars, Herborn
Staats- und Stadtbibliothek Augsburg
Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, München
Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel
British Library, London

2016

I. The theme and goals of the dissertation

The 17th century was the time of the prophets of the new age. Prophets appeared one after another who tried to convince their readers, in their shorter or longer works, that they were in personal contact with God, so they were perfectly able to interpret the signs of nature, the movement of the stars and one could learn the future events in details from their prophecies. The Renaissance brought the mixture of different traditions. The cyclic historical approach, mixed with prophet Elijah's 6000 years' worldview and St. Augustine's 7000 years' world-week theory, played a key role in the newly formed view.

In the view of the events of the century the Kingdom of God materialized on Earth meant the light at the end of the tunnel. The source of millenarism is the books of the Old Testament where Yahweh promises his followers that their belief and commitment will be rewarded in their lifetime. This Old Testament promise lived on even after the appearance of Christianity and shortly got linked to the hope that Christ would return in the last days, the dead would be resurrected and would reign with him. The Kingdom of Christ – according to some – would have lasted for a thousand years exactly followed by the last major battle against the armies of Gog and Magog and finally the Last Judgement would have closed our earthly existence.

In 1629 Johann Heinrich Alsted arrived in Alba Iulia accompanied by two fellow teachers Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld and Ludwig Philipp Piscator. The scholars of Herborn came to the principality at the invitation of Gabriel Bethlen in order to teach at the newly founded academy and to increase its reputation in Europe. Upon their appearance the intellectual life of Transylvania began to develop, the peregrination to the West livened up, the royal press started to flourish and regular religious discussions were being held between the different denominations of the Protestant religions.

Shortly before Alsted's trip to Transylvania, in 1627 he published his most famous millenarian work, the *Diatribes de mille annis apocalypticis*. The millenarian theory, standing in the focus of the *Diatribes*, was unacceptable in his own Calvinist circle – as the followers of Calvin specifically refused the earthly realisation of the thousand-year-kingdom of Christ – but the Lutherans were pleased to refer to it.

During the preparation of my study I focused on the *Diatribes* and studied how the millenarism affected the apocalyptic state theory and worldview in the seventeenth century.

In my work I described the historical approach of the era and sought answers to the following questions: How did the new age people view their own era? How did the contemporary view of history change and how did it change the vision of the future? What was the impact of Alsted and later Comenius in Hungary and Transylvania? Which events had influenced the contemporary thinkers always to seek the messages of God behind the natural phenomena?

My research was based on the apocalyptic books of the Herborn library that tried to predict the future events of the new age relying on the texts of the Bible, in connection with the various natural phenomena.

According to my assumptions the Herborn library materials could refine the image of Alsted drawn by Howard Hotson in his famous monograph, *Paradise postponed, Johann Heinrich Alsted and the Birth of Calvinist Millenarianism*, published in 2000. The sources found in the Herborn library, which is mainly based on the original book collection of the seventeenth century college, could give us a better understanding of the popular prophetic works of the era of the *Diatrobe*, which focused on the latest chapters of the world history. The collection of the library contains large numbers of prophecies and astrological predictions that tried to describe the final millennium of mankind, closely connected with the texts of the Bible: mainly the Book of Daniel, the prophecies of the 1290 & 1335 days and the Apocalypse of St John the Apostle.

In my dissertation I mainly focused on the texts that had been written shortly before the publication of the *Diatrobe* and therefore might have affected Alsted's millenaristic point of view. I also tried to put emphasis on the ones that were in some form referring to the European, more specifically to the Hungarian and Transylvanian situation. I introduce sources that might be less known for Hungarian researchers, so my conclusions are supported by longer quotations with identical transcriptions in their letters. My thesis discusses in detail the following prophecies found in the Herborn library:

- *Der von Gott bestimpten Zahlen deß Antichrists, 1260. endlicher Außgang und Ende, Apocal. 11. 12. 13. Sampt widerholung, wie und welcher Gestalt, gemeldte von Gott bestimpte Zahlen, diese verschieene Jahr her, bey deß regirenden Käysers Rudolph Zeiten, auffß gewisseste zum offternmal zugetroffen, 1608.*
- Paul NAGEL, *Des newen Cometen und Wundersterns im October, November und December 1618. erschienen/ wahrhaftige Deutung und Außlegung per Magiam insignem, dergleichen zuvor nicht gesehen: Allen Menschen auff Erden zur guten Nachrichtung und Warnung fürgestellt, 1619.*

- Nicolaus HARTPRECHT, *Tuba temporis iver Wahrhafftige/ Unseilbare Zeitrechnung/ Der gleichen die Welt noch nie gesehen hat*, 1620.
- Ioannis a LIPTITZ, Nobilis Silesii, *Mysteria Apocalyptica, Das ist: Kurze doch gewisse Demonstrations, daß in Anno Christi 1623. die großmächtige Enderung/ mit bald hernach folgendem deß Antichrists fewrigem Untergang eynbrechen werde*, 1621.
- *Propheseyen und Weissagungen jetzt gegenwertig und künfftige sachen/Geschicht und Zufäll/ biß zum Ende der Welt ankündend. Als nemblich: M. Johann Liechtenbergers/ Johann Carionis/ M. Josephi Grumpeck/ Der Sibyllen/ und vil anderer. Den Frommen zur Ermahnung und Trost: farnämblich aber den bösen zum Schrecken und Warnung/ ohne alle Partheyligkeit/ zusammen getragen/ und auß den alten Exemplaren gtrewlich nachgetrucket. Im Jahr 1620.*
- Paul EGARD, *Posaune der Göttlichen Gnade und Liechtes*, 1623.
- M. Gottlieb HEYLAND, *Examen Cronologicum oder Sämtliche Anleitung, zu dem rechten eygentlichen Hauptverstande der H. Offenbahrung S. Johannis unnd anderer Weissagungen Göttlicher Schrift, neben deutlicher Außführung, was bey der Kirchen Gottes und währenden vier Monarchien S. Daniels bißhero von Zeiten zu Zeiten daran erfüllet oder noch zugewarten*, 1623.
- *Wunderbarliche Prophezeyhung und Weissagung eines Siebenbürgischen Prophetem/ betreffende was sich im 1630. Jahr [...] zugetragen werde*, Hermanstadt, 1630.

The selected works, without exceptions, could have been the famous prophecies of the century in Europe. According to my assumptions these sources can take us closer to understanding how Alsted's millenarian views were formed. 1623 – the year in which most of the contemporary sources I found in the Herborn library were written – could have been the life-changing year that made Alsted side with chiliasm. Hotson highlighted in his famous

monograph on Alsted that in the theses written in 1622 and 1626 by the professor of Herborn the belief and rejection of the milleniarism existed side-by-side. Alsted wavered between them and the final push was definitely made by Piscator's commentary on the apocalypse, but was certainly also influenced by the "new age prophets" whose predictions have survived to date among the old Herborn college walls.

In addition to the Herborn prophecies, I highlighted the figure of Michael Tofaeus from the Hungarian literature, who, based on his Psalm explanations, can be connected to the millenarian circle in which Johann Heinrich Alsted was a founding member.

II. Research Methodology and structure of the dissertation

In my thesis I studied the apocalyptic predictions of the 1620s and I focused on the texts still available mainly in the Herborn library. When preparing the overview of the Hungarian and foreign literature I aimed to present the latest research results as well as showing the changes of the historical approach. I did not present the less known sources in the appendix, but rather in the main body of the thesis or in footnotes, in transcriptions. During the preparation of my dissertation I also did research in Augsburg, Munich, Wolfenbüttel and London.

In the introductory chapters I analysed the new age transformation of the Christian historical approach and the Renaissance messianism in details. Thanks to the geographical discoveries and the spread of printing the gates of the world opened for the late Renaissance thinkers and the printed leaflets brought the first information explosion. Alsted's universal science is closely linked with the Renaissance universalism.

In the subsequent chapters I covered the modern appearance of the Apocalypse. In every era we can find a group who thought that the end of the world is near and the key to survive were in their hands alone. The European events of the 17th century created such an intense situation – first of all the appearance of the reformation, its extension to the approach of the total reformation of the 17th century and the Thirty Years' War might be highlighted – where the prophecies based on the Bible provided the primary support for the survival.

During the early modern era the newly discovered astronomy got priority and sought to raise a new generation of scientists in the contemporary Protestant education in Wittenberg who were watching the signs of the surrounding world and coded messages of God with humanistic interest. Alsted also devoted particular attention to the celestial events and attached special importance to the planetary alignments occurring in regular intervals, especially to the unique constellation of Saturn and Jupiter observed in every 800 years. During the century Aristotle's view seemed definitely disproved: the path of the stars were not constant, the order accommodated over centuries could be disrupted by the appearance of a new star. But what happens if this coincides with the next big alignment which is additionally the magical 7th one in a row?

In the next chapters I focused on the predictions of the prophet Daniel and the apocalypics of the apostle John in the Book of Revelation, which were amongst the most popular contemporary apocalyptic texts. In a short chapter I presented the position of the 17th century Transylvanian higher education.

In the main chapters of my thesis I analysed two apocalyptic works of Alsted, the previously mentioned *Diatribē de mille annis apocalypticis* written in 1627 and the *Prodromus religionis triumphantis* published posthumously in Alba Iulia. In my dissertation I referred to the German translation of the *Diatribē* and from the last book of Alsted, I focused on one chapter which addresses the thousand-year millennial kingdom.

In the subsequent chapters I detailed the aforementioned prophecies and in the last chapters I concentrated on the afterlife of Alsted's view. Jan Amos Comenius, the student of the Herborn professor, carried on with his pansophic efforts in their most perfect form and tried to implement them fully. The core of Alsted's views can almost always be found in the roots of his work, goals and approach.

In the last chapter I examined the Psalm explanations of Michael Tofaeus. The Transylvanian bishop followed in the footsteps of Alsted, his thoughts and Psalm explanations echoed the objectives of the Herborn professor. I was not able to identify a direct link between the two prophets, Alsted and Tofaeus, but the figure of Comenius assures that Tofaeus followed the path designated by Alsted and through his works, similarly to the Herborn professor, he sought the perfect preparation of the parusia.

III. The main results of the dissertation

In my dissertation I analysed the historical approach of the 17th century and primarily focused on Alsted's writings and the apocalyptic books of the Evangelical Seminar's old library in Herborn. These prophecies became relevant in the thinking of the man of modern history, they helped them to understand their past, showed them their future and served as instruments with which to change the world.

The predictions of the modern age prophets help us understand the apocalyptic thinking of the modern era. In my dissertation I analysed not only Alsted's prophecies but the predictions of Paul Nagel, Paul Egard, Eustachius Poysssel, Ioannis a Liptitz, Johannes Lichtenberger, Joseph Grünpeck, Jacob Hartmann, Nicolaus Hartprecht, the Psalm explanations of Mihaly Tofaeus, the Sibyl oracles and Carion's Chronicle.

- The heavenly events kept reminding the astronomers that the last act of the world's history had come, these events could not be just coincidences, but God was sending them further and further divine messages.
- A bright comet appeared in the sky in 1577, the seventh great conjunction occurred in 1603, the planets returned to their original positions they had during the time of the creation. One year later, in 1604 a new star appeared in the Serpentarius, between the Saturn and the Jupiter and strengthened the conjunctio magna. Alsted pointed out that the two big planet's influence is universal but they will affect more Central Europe, the area of the fiery triangle, which took in the Hungarian, German and the Moravian region.
- Achieving a total cultural-spiritual reformation was one of Alsted's main goals which required the creation of the Protestant union, the conversion of the non-Christians and the translation of the Bible to the languages of the world. According to his view these steps were necessary prerequisites of the parusia and the encyclopedia, which aimed to collect all experience and knowledge of the world in seven volumes, also prepared the believers for the second coming of Christ.

- Alsted believed that God provided the people with two books to let them study the perfect order of the world. In order to understand the creation completely people needed both books. Besides studying the Bible it was crucial to observe the natural phenomena carefully which were the marks of the images from the Creator's spirit.
- Alsted believed the kingdom of Christ would finally bring the total Reformation when the Church could shine in its size and perfection. He stated in several places of the *Diatribes* that the thousand years should not only be understood as the symbol of perfection, but also according to the natural schedule of our known world. In his thesis Alsted repeatedly emphasised that the thousand-year empire, the martyrs' resurrection and reign would take place on the Earth before the final judgement, so it would form the idea of the millennium as a worldly phenomenon.
- It can be clearly seen in Alsted's posthumously published volume, the *Prodromus religionis triumphantis*, that he focused on the basis which connect the opposing parties rather than the differences that divide forever. In his last work he uniquely combined millenarism with irenicism and believed that the reconciliation between the Protestant denominations is one of the largest steps on the road to parusia.
- Alsted received most of the inspirations for his works from the East – his primary sources were Michael Sendivogius from Poland; Stephanus Pannonius from Belgrade; Johannes Dobricius from Silesia; Cyprian Leowitz and Johannes Kepler, astrologists of the Habsburg Empire.
- In the Transylvanian College Alsted had an opportunity to implement his education reform in an emerging environment which was still under the strong influence of the Renaissance spirit. Bethlen's empire seemed to be an appropriate medium for the refinement and fulfilment of the Reformation.
- The new age prophets, without exceptions, expected the beginning of the last era of the world in the near future because after passing the 6000 years predicted by Elijah and the occurrence of the seventh big alignment nothing other was left than the millennium and the Last Judgement.

- The prophecies discussed in my thesis were born in the beginning of the 1620s and in my opinion had to have a strong influence on Alsted's later view and works. The "prophets of the Herborn library" aimed to predict the exact date of the Last Judgement and their calculations relied both on the celestial signs and the texts of the Bible. They expected the beginning of the last chapter of the world during the 1620s, so some of them had to face the fact that their predictions were not fulfilled.
- I was not able to identify a direct link between the two prophets, Alsted and Tofaeus, but the figure of Comenius assures that Tofaeus followed the path designated by Alsted and through his works, similarly to the Herborn professor, he sought the perfect preparation of the parusia. Tofaeus, similarly to his predecessors, kept asking his supporters to learn from past events, because this was the only way to move forward and thus to restore the long lost harmony of the world.
- Alsted, Comenius and Tofaeus all proclaimed that everyone had to find God's lost image in themselves, this was the only way to understand the order of Creation and the world.

IV. Publications

- 2011 Protestant martyrology in the new age, conference, Debrecen
Title of the lecture: Mártírok királysága (Alsted és a millenarizmus)
Publication of the paper: *Protestáns mártírológia a kora újkorban*,
Studia Litteraria, 2012/3-4.
- 2012 Conference of the Idea History Program of the Peter Pazmany
Catholic University PhD School
Title of the lecture: Johann Heinrich Alsted a 17. századi szellemi
áramlatok örvényében
- 2013 400 years anniversary of Bethlen Gabor's accession to the throne,
International conference, Cluj Napoca
Title of the lecture: Bethlen Gábor Erdélye és Alsted apokaliptikája
Publication of the paper: *Bethlen Erdélye, Erdély Bethlene*, szerk.
DÁNÉ Veronika, LUPESCU Makó Mária, OBRONI Teréz,
Kolozsvár, Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2014.