

Ludwig Babenstuber (1660–1726)

Scholarly biography

Life

Ludwig Babenstuber was born in 1660 in the village of Deining (formerly Teining) in Upper Bavaria. According to preserved school records, he completed his studies in 1680 at the Jesuit gymnasium in Munich (today's Wilhelmsgymnasium). In 1681 he entered the Benedictine Order as a novice in the abbey of Ettal, and a year later he made his religious profession there. He then continued his philosophical and theological studies at the Benedictine University in Salzburg between 1683 and 1689, receiving a solid scholastic education and being ordained a priest in 1689.

After completing his studies, Babenstuber devoted himself primarily to teaching. He initially served as head of the monastic school in Salzburg. From 1690 to 1693 he lectured in philosophy at the local university, after which he was sent to the house of the Canons Regular in Schlehdorf in Upper Bavaria, where from 1693 to 1695 he taught theology. In 1695 he returned to Salzburg and successively held chairs of moral theology (casuistry), dogmatic theology, and biblical exegesis at the renowned Benedictine university there. He worked continuously at this institution for twenty-two years (1695-1717), also holding important administrative offices. For three years he served as vice-rector, and in the years 1709-1716 he held the office of pro-chancellor (vice-chancellor) of the University of Salzburg. In addition, for five years he was dean of the theological faculty, contributing significantly to the development of the university.

In 1717 Babenstuber returned to his home abbey in Ettal, where he spent the last years of his life, devoting himself mainly to writing. He died on 5 April 1726 in the Benedictine monastery at Ettal, remaining until the end a highly respected member of his order.

Views and scholarly activity

Ludwig Babenstuber was known as a committed Thomist in both moral and dogmatic theology. In his lectures and writings he faithfully followed the teaching of St Thomas Aquinas, especially in matters of metaphysics and the doctrine of grace.

In moral theology he was an ardent defender of probabilism, the position that in cases of moral doubt one may follow a solidly probable opinion. He held, among other things, that a single outstanding theological authority, if beyond any reasonable objection (*omni exceptione maior*), could by itself render an opinion probable, even against the view of the majority. At the same time, however, in matters of faith (dogma) he rejected the use of probabilism entirely, demanding certainty and unanimity in doctrinal questions.

A characteristic feature of Babenstuber's scholarly attitude was his readiness to correct his own views in the light of official decisions of the Church. An example is the question of celebrating private Mass on Maundy Thursday and Holy Saturday. Initially he held this to be permissible, but before publishing his *Ethica Supernaturalis* he learned of the ecclesiastical prohibition of such practice and promptly withdrew and revised his position.

Babenstuber also took an active part in the theological controversies of his time. As a strong Thomist he published polemical works defending orthodox Church teaching and Thomistic philosophy against currents regarded as heterodox. He spoke out firmly against Jansenist theses. In one of his treatises (*Dissertatio theologica*, 1720) he set out and demonstrated the differences between the doctrine of St Thomas and the teachings of Pasquier Quesnel and Cornelius Jansen, leading representatives of Jansenism.

He likewise defended the Thomistic doctrine of *praemotio physica* (the physical pre-motion of the will by grace) against criticism from Molinist theologians. This was the aim of *Vindiciae praedeterminationis physicae* (1707) and its polemical continuation *Vindiciae vindicis* (1721). His apologetic writings, both in defence of Thomism and against Jansenism, earned him a reputation as one of the most skilful controversialists of his time.

Babenstuber's extraordinary diligence and erudition were widely admired. Although the beginnings of his studies did not foreshadow exceptional achievements, through constant work he quickly made up for his deficiencies and became known as one of the most learned men of his age. Contemporaries called him *vir consummatae in omni genere doctrinae et probitatis* - a man of consummate learning and integrity in

every field. As a professor and scholar he enjoyed enormous authority and was described as a light of his age and an ornament of the University of Salzburg.

Works

Babenstuber's literary output is impressive and wide-ranging. Sources note that he left at least about 25 works, and according to more recent research even over 30 different scholarly and devotional writings. These cover a broad spectrum from philosophy and scholastic theology to monastic history and hagiographical literature.

Among his earlier publications were philosophical disputations such as *Quaestiones philosophicae* (Salzburg 1692) and *Quaestiones metaphysicae* (Salzburg 1694). In the following years he published numerous works in moral and dogmatic theology, including *Regula morum seu dictamen conscientiae* (Salzburg 1697), *Tractatus de jure et justitia* (Salzburg 1699), and *Deus trinus et unus* (Salzburg 1705). He also addressed difficult doctrinal issues, for example in *De statu parvulorum sine baptismo morientium* (Salzburg 1700) on the fate of unbaptised infants, and in *Tractatus theologici de gratia divina* (Salzburg 1706) on divine grace.

In defence of classical Thomistic doctrine he published important polemical works such as *Tractatus de peccato originali* (Salzburg 1709), *Sacrosanctum Missae sacrificium* (Salzburg 1710), and the already mentioned anti-Jansenist and anti-Molinist writings.

A significant part of his work has a historical and devotional character connected with the Benedictine tradition. For his own abbey he wrote *Fundatrix Ettalensis* (Munich 1694) on the foundation of Ettal and the miraculous statue of Our Lady of Ettal, later translated into German. He also composed hagiographical works such as *S. Magnus, Algoiorum apostolus* (1721) and Marian works including *Sacrae deliciae Mariani amoris* (Salzburg 1701; expanded Augsburg 1712) and *D. Virgine et matre Mariae, fundatricis Ettalensis, miracula et beneficia* (Augsburg 1725).

Major works

Two writings stand out as syntheses of his scholarly achievement: *Philosophia Thomistica Salisburgensis* (first ed. Salzburg 1704), a four-volume Thomistic philosophical course, later reprinted in Augsburg (1724) and again in 1738.

Ethica Supernaturalis Salisburgensis sive Cursus Theologiae Moralis (Augsburg 1718; expanded 2nd ed. 1735), a comprehensive course of moral theology. In this work Babenstuber presented a systematic scholastic ethics, defended probabilism, and showed Christian morality in strict connection with the truths of faith. Full imprint of the first edition: *Ethica Supernaturalis Salisburgensis sive Cursus Theologiae Moralis*, Augusta Vindelicorum (Augsburg) 1718.

Babenstuber's writings represent one of the most important achievements of late scholastic learning in the German lands, showing him as a faithful continuator of Thomistic tradition and at the same time a scholar responding vigorously to the intellectual challenges of his age.

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- Thomas Oestreich, "Ludwig Babenstuber," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907.
- Placidus Glathaner OSB, "Babenstuber (Pabenstuber), Ludwig," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 1, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1953, p. 480.
- A. Weiß, "Babenstuber, Ludwig," in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 1, Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1875, p. 726.
- Friedrich Wilhelm Bautz, "Ludwig Babenstuber," in *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, vol. 1, Hamm: Bautz, 1975 (2nd ed. 1990), col. 316.
- Paweł Piotrowski, *Between Norm and Message. Justice in Tractatus VII of Ludwig Babenstuber OSB as a Model of Social Communication in the Eighteenth Century*. The article attempts to interpret Tractatus VII of Ludwig Babenstuber OSB as a model of eighteenth-century social communication situated between the moral norm and its social transmission. Its point of departure is the scholastic concept of justice developed by Babenstuber in the Aristotelian-Thomistic

tradition, encompassing legal, commutative, distributive and vindicative justice. The author shows that this conception serves not only a normative function but also constitutes an elaborate mechanism for communicating values, sanctions and obligations within the religious and political community of the early modern period. The analysis is supplemented by a comparison with selected modern theories, in particular those of John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, which makes it possible to grasp the continuity of the problem of legitimising norms of justice and their social impact. The conclusion argues that Babenstuber's *Tractatus VII* can be read as an early model of normative social communication whose intuitions remain актуал for contemporary reflection.

- “Ludwig Babenstuber,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02178a.htm>
- “Ludwig Babenstuber,” German Wikipedia, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludwig_Babenstuber
- “Babenstuber, Ludwig,” *Deutsche Biographie*, <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/gnd122883268.html>
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