

ADLER AND THE DEBATE ON REVELATION IN GOLDEN AGE DENMARK

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In 1843, Adolph Peter Adler, a pastor of the Danish Church, claimed that he had received a supernatural revelation in which Christ spoke to him. The event triggered a religious controversy. In this article, I would like to offer an analysis of the episode of Adler's alleged revelation by taking as a frame of reference the philosophical and theological debates of the time, the reaction of the ecclesiastical authorities to the incident, and Søren Kierkegaard's own proposed diagnosis of the case. Such an analysis will allow us to reach a conclusion regarding the discussion of the time surrounding Adler's episode, namely, that a contemporary revelation seems to present insurmountable difficulties within the margin of the orthodoxy defended by the Danish Church in the first half of the nineteenth century. A rationalist view, such as that adopted by the Danish Church in this period, holds that any discussion of Christian doctrine and its sources must be rationally explicable. The Scriptures, from this point of view, can and should be interpreted from the free, rational, and scientific perspective of the professional theologian. That said, if by "revelation" is meant a supernatural and subjective phenomenon, it follows that there can be no rational reflection on such a revelation. Therefore, it seems that a revelation – especially a contemporary revelation – cannot coexist with a rationalist theology.

Keywords: Revelation – Philosophy of religion – Theological rationalism – Supernaturalism – Adler – Kierkegaard – Reason and faith

In 1843, Adolph Peter Adler, a pastor of the Danish Church, claimed that he had received a supernatural revelation in which Christ spoke to him, an event that triggered a philosophical and religious controversy. In this article, I would like to offer an analysis of the episode of Adler's alleged revelation by taking as a frame of reference the theological debates of the time, the reaction of the ecclesiastical authorities to the incident, and Kierkegaard's diagnosis of the case. Such an analysis will allow us to reach a conclusion regarding the discussion of the time surrounding Adler's episode, namely, that a contemporary revelation seems to present insurmountable difficulties within the margin of the orthodoxy defended by the Danish Church in the first half of the nineteenth century. A rationalist Christian theology, such as that adopted by the Danish

Church in this period, holds that any discussion of Christian doctrine and its sources must be rationally explicable. The Scriptures, from this point of view, can and should be interpreted from the free, rational, and scientific perspective of the professional theologian. That said, if by revelation is meant a supernatural and subjective phenomenon, it follows that there can be no rational reflection on such a revelation. Therefore, it seems that a revelation – especially a contemporary revelation – cannot coexist with a rationalist orthodoxy.

This can only be admitted in a strict sense within a concrete historical horizon. The affirmation of the incompatibility between a supernatural revelation and Christian orthodoxy is based on a series of specific premises. It depends on the concepts and definitions of revelation, theology, and orthodoxy employed and recognized in the theological discussions of the time. Its validity, therefore, has a limited historical character. However, I would like to argue that this historical conclusion can offer us tools to formulate questions of a broader scope. It does not seem unreasonable, for example, to suggest that in our own time a discussion like the one held by the Danish theologians of the nineteenth century is taking place. As then, there are those in our own time who argue that theology should be a rational exercise founded on a historically given revelation, such as the Scriptures, but who would view with suspicion a new revelation. On the other hand, there are also those who argue that this insistence on the intrinsic rationality of Christianity undermines the supernatural character of revelation. I would like to argue that this kind of discussion can help us to better understand the ways in which religious experience is lived in our own historical context.

The article is divided into three parts. The first gives an overview of the theological context in Denmark's Golden Age. The emphasis of this historical description concentrates on the development of theological rationalism in the Danish Church from its radical, almost deistic position in the last decades of the eighteenth century to the moderate rationalism adopted by Mynster and Clausen during the years immediately preceding Adler's revelation. The Adler episode can only be properly understood within the framework of this theological context.

The aim of the second part of the article is to analyze the episode of Adler's revelation.¹ Examining Adler's characteristics as a theologian and pastor prior to the episode, as well as the reaction of the Danish Church to the announcement of the alleged supernatural experience, will help us understand how the decision to suspend the pastor was a coherent and practically inevitable resolution given the rationalist position of the Danish orthodoxy. Finally, in the third part I will explore Kierkegaard's diagnosis of the case. My focus here, however, is not on his analysis of Adler's

¹ For more on Adler, see Koch (1990), Koch (2009), Stewart (2003), Stewart (2007), Watkin (1984).

revelation, but on his reflection about the difficulties involved in the occurrence of an alleged revelation for the modern orthodoxy of the Danish Church.

I.

The historical period known as the Golden Age of Denmark corresponds to the time of cultural splendor in the first decades of the 19th century. This flourishing occurred not only in the field of arts and letters, but also in the field of theology and had a profound impact on the religious life of the Danes.

As in other Lutheran nations, Denmark also witnessed the historical between those who defended the primacy of faith, a position that in practice became an intellectual pursuit of orthodox doctrine, and those who gave more weight to works and having a virtuous life. From this second approach emerged the first pietists and, later, the religious awakening movements (Lindhart 1959). For reasons not only religious, but also political, the Danish Church was in the first group. To establish the official doctrine in a clear and firm manner was essential in order to maintain the unity and social stability.

For their part, the religious awakening movements challenged the unquestioned authority of the Church and argued, appealing to the principle of universal priesthood, that everyone had the right to interpret the Scriptures and practice the rituals as they saw fit (Sanders 2015, 96 – 97). The individual freedom of the believer was preferred to the theological scholarship of the clergy, which was viewed with suspicion.

In its eagerness to establish a firm orthodoxy, the Danish Church adopted from the mid-18th century onwards the rationalist path of the Enlightenment (Bach-Nielsen 2012). This rationalist theology affirmed the full harmony between human reason and the truths of revelation. Understandably, the emphasis was on those doctrinal questions that allowed rational analysis, for example, the existence of God, the immortality of the soul or the moral precepts of Christianity. However, the radicalization of the French Revolution led to a moderation of the more progressive and enlightened policies of the Danish monarchy. This change could also be seen in the reaction of the Church, which adopted a more conservative position.

The prevailing theology remained rationalist in character, but the Danish Church, under the successive leadership of Bishops Balle and Münter, considered it important to reaffirm the supernatural character of Christian revelation. Despite its supernatural quality, there was the conviction that revelation, in particular the Bible, was not contrary to human reason and that, in fact, it was indispensable to interpret it in the light of reason, not of the spirit. In this way, the Danish Church strove to counteract the excesses of the quasi-deistic theology of the previous generation, but without falling into the anti-rationalist fury of the religious awakening movements. These, for

their part, did not trust the attempt at mediation on the part of the ecclesiastical authorities, for they understood that, in practice, this would mean that biblical exegesis and, consequently, the establishment of orthodoxy, would become the prerogative of professional theologians, which was in stark opposition to their belief in an individual relationship between the believer and God.

Perhaps the best representative of this moderate rationalism was Henrik Nicolai Clausen.² In 1825, he published a work of dogmatics entitled *Catholicism's and Protestantism's Church Constitution, Doctrine and Ritual* (Clausen 1825), in which he wrote a chapter devoted to ecclesial doctrine and the sources of revelation. Here, he discusses the role of the Scriptures. For Clausen, the Bible was to be interpreted freely and rationally by professional theologians (1825, 308). Thus, there was no need to resort to ecclesial authority to shed light on the mysteries of revelation; human reason was not only sufficient to perform this task, but it was also indispensable.

This attempt to reconcile supernatural revelation and theological rationalism elicited unfavorable and even hostile reactions. The divine assemblies of the rural religious awakening movements considered the intellectual elitism of the Church to run counter to their striving for greater doctrinal independence. In parallel, the controversial theologian and poet Grundtvig opened a new front against the rationalist orthodoxy of the Danish Church. In 1825, Grundtvig published "The Church's Rejoinder" (1904 – 1909), a fierce pamphlet in which he presented his own view of the Church and denounced Clausen as a traitor to Christianity. The notion of a Christianity founded on scholarly, academic exegesis of the Bible seemed inadmissible to Grundtvig. Instead of the rationalistic intellectualism of the Danish Church, Grundtvig suggested that true Christianity lay in the actual practice of the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist by members of the congregation (1904 – 1909, 416). This he called *the living word*, thereby illustrating the real presence of grace in the Christian's existence, independent of the scholastic prattle of theologians (Bravo 2022).

Finally, the introduction of Hegelian philosophy in Denmark during the 1830s also played an important role in the discussion about the relationship between the supernatural character of Christian revelation and rationalist theology. In 1839, Johan Alfred Bornemann, a student of theology, published a paper in which he argued that "both rationalism and supernaturalism constitute antiquated approaches belonging to an era that has passed away" (1839, 3). Bornemann relied on Hegel's speculative logic, according to which mediation or conceptual unity between opposites was possible. This seemed to harmonize with the position of rationalist theology, since it also affirmed, in its own categories, the harmony between reason and revelation.

² For a more information on the life and intellectual career of Clausen, see Pyper (2009).

Nevertheless, the Danish Church looked with distrust at the increasing influence of Hegelian philosophy in doctrinal matters.

Bornemann's publication triggered a controversy regarding the validity of classical logic. In the theological sphere, Jakob Peter Mynster, the primate bishop of Denmark after Münter, immediately published a reply (1839). The main thesis of his reply was that the opposition between rationalism and supernaturalism was still current in theological discussions of the time. To reinforce this idea, Mynster cited definitions of rationalism and supernaturalism which, in his view, clearly demonstrated their mutually exclusive character.

Mynster concludes that the theologian must choose between rationalism or supernaturalism according to his or her conviction of what the character of the foundation of Christianity is: either reason or supernatural revelation. In this sense, even someone like Clausen had to be included in the group of supernaturalists. Despite his insistence on the need for a rational and free exegesis of revelation, he was also firm in the conviction that such revelation was supernatural. However, the issue of a new revelation, of an additional supernatural element, could prove problematic. It was in the context of these discussions that Adler announced that he had received a revelation from Christ.

II.

Adolph Peter Adler's intellectual career before the 1843 episode shows no signs of any kind of mental instability. In 1832, he enrolled at the University of Copenhagen as a theology student. As was customary for university students of the time, Adler went on a trip abroad in 1837, where he learned about Hegelian philosophy. In June, 1840, Adler successfully defended the thesis entitled *The Isolated Subjectivity in its Most Important Forms* (1840a), a work in which he discusses in detail concepts of Hegelian philosophy. After graduating, he contributed to the contemporary debate on Hegelianism, publishing polemical reviews of works by Hegelian authors, such as Heiberg (Adler 1840b), and anti-Hegelians, such as Clausen (Adler 1840c). Finally, in 1842, already as an ordained pastor, Adler published his *Popular Lessons on Hegel's Objective Logic* (1842), a thorough study on the categories of Hegelian speculative logic.

This shows that Adler's intellectual career was solid. From a theological perspective, his Hegelian convictions made him favor the mediation between reason and supernatural revelation that Mynster had strongly rejected a couple of years earlier. His training placed him more in the academic than in the pastoral field; the predictable thing, in fact, was that his professional path would lead him to a professorship at the University of Copenhagen, not to head a congregation in the countryside.

The latter, however, was what happened. On April 2, 1842, Bishop Mynster officially introduced Adler as pastor of Hasle and Rutsker on the island of Bornholm.

Mynster visited Adler in Hasle on July 21, 1841. The bishop praised his sermon: “free from any extravagance, beautifully written” (Kornerup 1937, 205 – 206). Mynster observed that Adler had a talent for preaching and otherwise seemed to be held in high esteem by his congregation (Mynster 1875, 421 – 422).

In December 1842 the alleged revelation took place. The episode is known to us through the prologue of his book *Some Sermons* (Adler 1843), published on July 4, 1843. Adler relates thus his supernatural experience; preceded by a frightening sound, Jesus appeared, ordered him to get up and write (1843, 3 – 4). The ecclesiastical process that would follow from this episode would conclude, as is known, in Adler’s suspension and dismissal from his position as pastor.³

Upon learning of the incident, Mynster tried to be lenient so as not to produce a greater scandal. However, on August 2, he received a message from the chancellery asking if he would act on the matter. Mynster’s reply is illustrative as to his true opinion of Adler. The text of *Some Sermons*, he points out in his reply, clearly indicates that the author suffers from a certain “mental confusion.” The proof is that those passages which, according to Adler, were conceived in a new light – i.e., which were revealed – are “partly trivial, partly very extravagant or far removed from orthodoxy” (Koch 1990, 145). He cites as an example the following passage: “With the witches nothing can be done. They must be burned” (Adler 1843, 99). The bishop admits that a person in such a state of insanity should not hold office as a pastor.

But Mynster warns that it is best to proceed with restraint. A sudden suspension could exacerbate Adler’s malady, his “confusion.” Otherwise, the bishop assures that he had spoken with Adler a few days before the book’s publication and that everything about his appearance was normal. He also adds that the Bornholm congregation has not only not complained about Adler’s possibly offensive statements from the pulpit, but is even favorable to him.

It is notable that the official reason for the scandal is not Adler’s claim to have received a direct revelation from Christ. It is, instead, a number of “trivial” or “extravagant” phrases. The immediate conclusion is that Adler suffers from insanity, even though nothing about his person seems to suggest such a state of mental illness. Despite the harshness of the diagnosis and appealing to his concern for Adler’s health, Mynster recommended postponing the suspension.

On August 29 the chancellery asked Mynster to offer Adler, through the dean of Bornholm, F. L. Steenberg, the alternative of applying for a dispensation from his post. Adler declined the offer, pointing out that this would mean acknowledging the error of his statements, something he was unwilling to do. In the face of Adler’s reluctance,

³ For Adler’s own account on the process, see Adler (1845).

the chancellery's patience ran out. On January 4, 1844, it demanded that Mynster suspend Adler, an order that was executed on January 19 (Adler 1845, 3 – 5). The official reason for the suspension was Adler's state of mental confusion.

The process was resumed in April 1845, when Mynster asked Adler four questions:

Do you admit to having been in a state of mental exaltation and confusion when writing and publishing your "Sermons" and the so-called "Studies"?

Do you admit that it was fanatical and incorrect to expect and follow those supposed external revelations, such as, for example, the one described in the prologue of your "Sermons"?

Do you admit that your work contains false propositions that deviate from Christian doctrine, as, for example, that "the earth was originally not good" (and, therefore, that it was not originally created by God), or that "the sexual drive is the evil spirit and that it was introduced into the world by virtue of the evil spirit"?

Do you admit that in the aforementioned writings there are statements that are offensive, repugnant and extremely inappropriate? (Adler 1845, 14 – 15)

On May 10 Adler sent his answers. About the first question, he denied having been in such a state of exaltation and mental confusion (Adler 1845, 17). To the second question Adler replied that "it should be evident" that his words corresponded to the Gospels and the revelation, for they also speak of marvelous rescues. He pointed out that, despite the imperfect form of his writings, "like the first tender voice of the child, imperfect and lisping," he was convinced that in that episode he had been "raptured in faith" (Adler 1845, 17 – 18). Regarding the allegedly heretical statements cited in the third question about the original evil of the earth and the identification of the sexual drive with the evil spirit, Adler invoked a multitude of biblical passages to demonstrate that his words had been misinterpreted and that they were perfectly in line with Christian orthodoxy (Adler 1845, 18 – 20). To justify the "offensive, repugnant and extremely inappropriate" statements mentioned in the fourth question, referring to the claim about burning witches, Adler proceeded in a similar manner, citing Scripture passages in which similar cases are mentioned, and pointing out that his use of the expression had been hyperbolic, but innocent and in harmony with orthodoxy (Adler 1845, 20 – 22).

After evaluating these answers, Mynster obtained stronger elements to request Adler's definitive dismissal. It was no longer just the dubious state of mental confusion, but the insistence on a series of clearly heretical statements. These were mainly the statements about the original wickedness of the earth, a thesis interpreted as a Manichean sentence, and about the character of the sexual impulse, a doctrine on

which Adler did not pronounce himself clearly, but which seemed to suggest that before sin human beings were equal to Christ.

Adler learned of these measures in a conversation with Mynster on July 5. He immediately wrote another paper with further responses in which he softened his position. In his first response, for example, Adler finally acknowledged that his words in the prologue to *Some Sermons* were not a revelation “parallel or opposed to Christianity” (Adler 1845, 23). They were rather, Adler argued, necessary points of reference to situate the Christian substance in a secure form (*ibidem*). He also admitted that it was understandable that the unusual and objectionable form employed in his writings had aroused the suspicion of the authorities. Henceforth, he promised to develop the Christian content of his ideas in a form “more suitable and congruent with the specific words of the Holy Scriptures” (Adler 1845, 23 – 24).

Although in this second reply it seemed clear that Adler was retracting the claim of having received a revelation, this new position came too late and, in any case, was not enough. The bottom line for Mynster was that in the process heretical claims in Adler’s writings had been discovered and pointed out and that, whether revealed or not, Adler had insisted that his error had been a matter of form, not content; that is, Adler offered to communicate the same ideas in a less controversial style. To Mynster, this stubbornness gave no indication that Adler had overcome his state of mental confusion and, therefore, he remained unfit to perform his position as pastor. This was the end point. On August 26, 1845, the king signed the resolution on Adler’s dismissal.

The process documents provide us with interesting information. As can be seen, the specific issue of the alleged revelation appears nowhere directly, except for the last series of Adler’s answers, in which he admits that he had not actually received a revelation either parallel to or opposed to Christianity. But Mynster had not asked him about his revelation, but whether he admitted to being in a state of mental confusion when writing the prologue to *Some Sermons*. Adler understood that the trial was at bottom about his alleged revelation, which should be cause for scandal. But Mynster’s emphasis was on the pastor’s mental confusion, a madness that neither the Bornholm parishioners nor the bishop himself could detect in their direct dealings with Adler.

Despite this, it was clear to both Mynster and the chancellery that he was suffering from some form of mental illness that rendered him unfit to continue to lead a congregation. The main evidence was the prologue of *Some Sermons*, and, specifically, the trivial, extravagant, or unorthodox character of certain passages. This led, in turn, to scrutiny of the possible heretical content of some of these sentences, an inquisitorial interrogation that must have wounded Mynster’s enlightened sensibility.

Nevertheless, the bishop mentions in his questions a state of exaltation on Adler’s part; he found it fanatical to follow, as the pastor claimed, a supposed external revelation.

Although the official reason for dismissal was insanity, it was difficult to conceal the fact that the alerts about Adler's mental state had been triggered after the announcement of his revelation. Without saying so outright, it was suggested that being the object of a supernatural revelation involved a certain insanity. This was problematic within an orthodoxy that affirmed the revealed, supernatural foundation of Christianity. Mynster, the primate bishop of the Danish Church, held against Bornemann's Hegelianism the opposition between rationalism and supernaturalism, but simultaneously sought to unite, like Clausen, rational exegesis with supernatural revelation. For Kierkegaard, this was one of the symptoms of the religious confusion of the time.

III.

Kierkegaard examined the incident in the work traditionally known as *The Book on Adler*. This title would suggest that the main interest was directed toward Adler and his revelation. Thus, it is illuminating that in the two draft manuscripts of the text the full title that appears is: *The Religious Confusion of the Present Age, Illustrated by Mag. Adler as a Phenomenon* (Kierkegaard 1918, 73, 75; Kierkegaard 1998, 1). This longer title shows, on the other hand, that Adler is basically an excuse – or, better, an opportunity – to shed light on and analyze the real object of the book: the religious confusion of the time.

In “an age of reflection and common sense,” (Kierkegaard 1998, 30) as Adler's enlightened age is, one expects – or, rather, demands – that the revelation of the extraordinary individual conforms to the criteria of the established order, i.e., that it becomes attainable to reason. But if revelation is a fact, Kierkegaard argues, this very fact gives divine authority to the individual who receives the revelation, regardless of its content: “If I imagined a letter from heaven, then it is not the content of the letter, no matter from whom it came, that is the main point. The main point is that it is a letter from heaven” (Kierkegaard 1998, 32). The extraordinary individual has divine authority because the revelation, if it is a fact, comes from God. But this divine authority, especially in a public official like Adler, is a scandal for an age of reflection and common sense. Kierkegaard knew, as did Adler, that the real cause of the trial was not a few heterodox sentences, but the alleged fact of the revelation and its implication: the divine authority held by an ordained pastor of the Danish Church.

But, as has been discussed, the orthodoxy of the Danish Church had no problem accepting the supernatural fact of divine authority. Clausen insisted on the need for a rational theology – free and independent of ecclesial authority – to shed light on true Christian doctrine. However, this rational exercise was to be limited to a supernaturally revealed source: the Scriptures. Mynster himself, who had conducted the Adler process,

affirmed, in the face of the mediating proposal of Hegelianism, the validity of the opposition between the rational and the supernatural as the foundation of Christianity. The Church had to recognize the supremacy of the latter, the revealed Scriptures, over human reason.

Then the episode of revelation happened. For Kierkegaard, the Adler phenomenon exposed the confusion of the time regarding the supernatural character of revelation. The supernatural is that which does not allow itself to be assimilated by natural reason. The foundation of Christianity is thus supernatural. Kierkegaard uses another expression: it is paradoxical. Christianity, he says, “is the paradox that the eternal once came into existence in time” (Kierkegaard 1998, 37). It is a contradiction that does not submit to the examination of reason, then or now, but must be believed or produce scandal.

From Kierkegaard’s point of view, to be and to become a Christian in a qualitative sense depends on the individual becoming a contemporary of Christ, that is, on conceiving him or herself as a contemporary of the moment when Christianity made its entry into the world, and, in this condition, ascertaining whether he or she would believe or be scandalized by the paradox (Kierkegaard 1998, 38). Orthodoxy admits, on the surface, the paradoxical character of Christianity, for it recognizes as its foundation the supernatural revelation of the Scriptures. However, it does so, according to Kierkegaard’s analysis, without having carried out the exercise of contemporaneity. Instead of becoming contemporary with the paradox, orthodoxy studies supernatural revelation through the lens of eighteen hundred years of theology, scholarship, and exegesis. From this perspective, Christianity ceases to be a paradoxical truth to be believed or be the object of scandal, and instead becomes something *probable* (Kierkegaard 1998, 39).

In other words, for orthodoxy, revelation is not fundamentally supernatural or paradoxical, but something plausible, as can be seen from the eighteen hundred years of Christian history. This can be observed thanks to the Adler phenomenon. When a man appears who claims to have had a revelation, this presents an opportunity in real time to carry out the exercise of contemporaneity: “No, thanks, all the profound and speculative and learned and perspiring prattlers, who can very well understand that eighteen hundred years ago one had a revelation – they would be in a predicament” (Kierkegaard 1998, 44). Kierkegaard’s observation seems to hit the mark. Mynster – i.e., orthodoxy – went out of his way to dodge the question of revelation. Instead, he directed the process toward Adler’s state of mind. In any case, the episode was *studied* by Mynster and the chancellery; in other words, it was never regarded as something supernatural. This is also the reason why Kierkegaard rejects the genuine character of Adler’s revelation. In the face of Mynster’s questioning, Adler’s impulse was to justify his revelation, something an apostle would never do.

Kierkegaard's claim that Christianity is a paradoxical truth that remains the same in all ages may seem radical. Nevertheless, it illustrates well the confusion of modern theology in the context of his time. Although a rationalist theologian like Clausen might argue that the foundation of the doctrine is supernatural, the Kierkegaardian analysis shows that at bottom that foundational revelation, the Scriptures, is not regarded as supernatural, even though it is called so, but as something susceptible to be interpreted and assimilated by the light of human reason; it is regarded, to use Kierkegaard's expression, as something probable. This can be observed in a direct way thanks to the Adler phenomenon. The episode of his revelation was neither accepted by faith nor rejected with scandal. His case, instead, was examined rationally and in the end, it was concluded not that Adler was an apostle or a heretic, but that he was in a state of mental confusion, i.e., that his position was unreasonable.

Conclusion

Kierkegaard's diagnosis offers an interesting commentary about religiosity in the modern world. According to this analysis, Danish orthodoxy clung to the supernatural foundation of Christianity, revelation, but at the same time its modern sensibility did not allow it to accept the paradoxical ineffability implicit in a revealed content. It then turned revelation into an object of theological and exegetical study, thus stripping it of its supernatural aspect, but still insisted on calling it supernatural. This misunderstanding and abuse in the use of the categories of Christianity is what Kierkegaard calls the religious confusion of the time.

It is important to note that Kierkegaard was not alone in observing this modern confusion. Mynster himself, as has been seen, denounced the attempted mediation of Hegelianism, and argued that rationalism and supernaturalism were mutually exclusive categories. In the rival theological and ecclesiological field, Grundtvig rejected that doctrine depended on the academic scholarship of theologians. In his view, the real foundation of Christianity was to be found instead in sacramental practice, the living word, the moment when grace becomes present in the existence of the congregation. In a way, it was a position similar to Kierkegaard's – despite the well-known animosity between the two thinkers – in that it also stressed the importance of contemporaneity and the assent by faith to the introduction of the eternal into the temporal. It is evident that the religious awakening movements also censured the intellectual elitism of the Church and looked with distrust at the uneasy union between rationalism and revelation.

This is, to a certain extent, a discussion of a semantic nature. The religious confusion of the time is a confusion in the use of categories. This does not mean, of course, that there cannot be a conciliation or mediation between reason and revelation. It does mean, however, that there is a contradiction if one affirms the supernatural character of

revelation – the supernatural being understood as that which does not admit rational assimilation – and at the same time seeks to rationalize that revelation. For Kierkegaard, this confusion is apparently made possible when the supernatural – the miracle, the revelation, the paradox – belongs to a remote past. But a case like Adler's, an alleged contemporary revelation, exposes the confusion and shows that the rational cannot deal with the supernatural. To do so, it would be necessary to define the supernatural differently or to employ other categories.

As explained above, this conclusion has a limited historical character. It depends on the definitions used in the theological discussions of a given historical moment. But this discussion can help us to better understand our own religious context. It could help shed light on the categories we use today to describe religious experiences, in particular the notions of rational analysis and revelation. This is a problem with which most religions – at least those that assume a supernatural foundation – must deal with in the post-Enlightenment context.

A quick glance at our own time shows us that today there are religious groups like those that were at the center of the theological debates in the time of Kierkegaard and Adler. There are those who fervently embrace the supernatural religious experience and reject any attempt at rationalization, which they consider harmful from a spiritual point of view. But there is also an extreme opposite, which believes that the supernatural foundation of religion is only apparent and that it is possible to interpret the revealed data using a scientific approach.

It could also be argued that most of the “orthodoxies” of the great religions still prefer a position of moderate rationalism, i.e., a reconciliation between faith and reason. In practice, this usually means something similar to what a theologian like Clausen suggested, namely, that the foundation of doctrine is a supernatural revelation that must be accepted by faith, but the subsequent theological and exegetical analysis must be carried out rationally. In this context, what would happen if a new Adler appeared?

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