

Assessing a Revelation from God: a Lesson from Kierkegaard

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 November 2016

Preacher: Joseph Jones

- [0 : 00] I'd like to open with a brief word of prayer. Dear Lord, thank you for this community.
- Thank you for leading each of us as individuals through our lives, step by step forward. Help us to get a better sense of that journey that we are all on this morning.
- And help us also to carry away in our hearts what we hear in the very first psalm, that we meditate on your teaching day and night.
- In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. So, in a sense, the title is a case study in something else.
- And as the book itself is a case study in something else. We're not going to talk a lot about Revelation per se, but it will loom there in the background.
- [1 : 24] And I've written this because there is a lot of detail and I want to get it right, so you will excuse me from reading rather than speaking a little more extemporary as I would prefer to do.
- This morning I will try to give you a sense of how one writer, 170 years ago, grappled with questions relevant to some of the talk and discussion that we've experienced over the last few years at Lerner's Exchange.
- The writer is Søren Kierkegaard. At the end, I hope to have accomplished three things. This listing runs from easiest to hardest.
- Number one, to outline a small bit of church history in Denmark in the middle of the 19th century. Number two, to give you some sense of what it is like to read Kierkegaard, assuming you haven't done so.
- And number three, to give some account of how and why I sense that absolutely everything is in the hands of God, including scientific understandings.
- [2 : 45] For a couple of years, at various points, while listening to several Lerner's Exchange speakers and discussions, I have felt prompting to re-read a book that sits on my shelf.
- Why re-read it? Because this is the book that comes to mind whenever I ask myself why I feel like I live in a single world, every part of which has the same relationship to God as every other part.
- I admit that I might feel differently if I had pursued a different academic path, but that I will never know because I didn't.
- At the beginning of 2016, I finally did that re-reading, probably after 30 years. And I went on to re-read a few other books as well.
- The book is what I feel most able to talk about because I have experience in dealing with books and their authors. Many of you will know that I'm a librarian.
- [3 : 58] And because it gives me something specific to refer to. Think of what I am about to do as a sort of book review.
- Before we get into the topic, I'd like to share this piece of a character's discourse that jumped off the page of a novel that I happened to be reading while doing preparation.

And I'm going to read a short paragraph here. We must trust. We must trust God. I trust in God that he would not deceive me.

I deem the Lord faithful and true and incapable of deceit. For you, that question does not even exist. For you will not grant that he exists in the first place.

You ask for proof. If I told you this minute that I have heard God's voice speaking to me, would you believe that?

[5 : 00] Of course not. We call people who speak to God pious. And we call people to whom God speaks lunatics. This is an age where there is little faith.

It is not God who is dead. It is our faith that has died. This passage sets forth the essence of this morning's topic with eloquence and brevity.

I would not attempt to try to perform this semi-formal exposition on such a difficult topic simply on the basis of thinking about it, or even on the basis of researching it, at least not with the time I have available, not to mention the time I was willing to put into this effort.

Besides, that would probably be an unseemly enlightenment method of engaging with the matter. The main title of Kierkegaard's book, as I have it in my hand, in English translation, is *On Authority and Revelation*.

If you know something about Kierkegaard, and even more, if you know something about this particular book, you'll know that both the author and the title call for a careful approach.

[6 : 25] Let's pause for a small digression. The first day that I had a serious go at writing on these thoughts, I googled Kierkegaard to clarify a simple fact.

Up popped a news item, which turned out to be a Christianity Today review of a book that was scheduled for a 24 March 2016 release.

At that time, the date was about a week into the future. The book is titled *Kierkegaard, A Christian Missionary to Christians* by Mark A. Tietjen, published by IVP Academic.

Here's a quotation from the review. The book provides ample commentary on Kierkegaard's high view of Christ, his relatively low view of human nature, his unique perspective on Christian witness, and his conviction that faith is more than receiving a litany of doctrines.

Historically, evangelicals have focused almost obsessively on apologetics and doctrinal precision, but these are not bad things, Kierkegaard would say, but they are not the essence of Christianity.

[7 : 47] To be pure in heart means repenting of our sins, reorienting our will to obey Jesus, and suffering willingly on his behalf. I offer this review excerpt by way of a preliminary reassurance, since I have a sense that my author does not stand high on the Learners Exchange list of favorite authors.

Nothing like C.S. Lewis, say, or maybe Marilyn Robinson. After this morning, I hope he will stand a little higher.

The centerpiece book today, *On Authority and Revelation*, is definitely not the one you would want to start with. First of all, meet Kierkegaard.

He lived from 1813 to 1855. In that short lifetime of 42 years, a period spent almost entirely in the city of Copenhagen, Kierkegaard produced a voluminous quantity of writings, and has had great impact on subsequent writers who concerned themselves with religion, philosophy, and literature.

If Kierkegaard were to introduce himself, he might well deplore that last sentence. In fact, Kierkegaard might refuse to introduce himself at all.

[9 : 17] That circumstance makes things hard for me if I want to respect the author, which I do. Let me make this simple stab for a start.

Kierkegaard wants you to be awake. He wants you to be aware that you have a self for which you are responsible. He will do whatever he can to give you a poke to make you start thinking.

The last thing he wants is for you to latch on to a formulation and add it to your personal collection of ready-made helpful thoughts.

He wants you to think things through and to keep on thinking and even to suffer from thinking.

When Kierkegaard was a small boy, he acquired the household nickname of Fork. Here's the story in a sentence from Walter Lowry's short life.

[10 : 20] He was rebuked at table for shoveling the food greedily upon his plate with the fork. He rejoined, I am a fork and I will stick you.

Kierkegaard was a lippy youngest son and he became a lippy and very wordy man. The only other thing I'll say about Kierkegaard as an author is that he deliberately fragmented himself in his presentation of his own writings.

Many of his works, at the time of their appearance, were attributed to a variety of pseudonyms. Contemporary readers did not know that these works were all coming from the same person.

By way of contrast, think about how so many writers strive to build a brand. A brand which is their own name.

In some sense, these sorts of writers become idols. That's how the market for ideas and books normally works. I would say that when the fork grew up, he wanted to stick it to the marketplace of easy ideas far more than he wanted to make a name for himself.

[11 : 42] Ironically, doing that is how he made such a great name for himself. Irony. An important word.

This seems like a good spot to interject the fact that Kierkegaard's first book was his 1841 dissertation titled *On the Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*.

You may also find it interesting that he had to petition the King of Denmark in order to write his thesis in Danish rather than Latin.

That was only the third such request to be granted. In this and other respects, he was a people's academic, not an academic's academic.

He didn't do it in Latin. In 1848, Kierkegaard did produce a summation of sorts. The English title in the editions that I have is this.

[12 : 47] *The Point of View for My Work as an Author, A Report to History*. But, that book was not published in his lifetime.

It only came out in 1859, a few years after he died. It seems characteristic of Kierkegaard and his dialectical tendencies that he took this final turn putting together an overall account under his own name.

To some degree, this activity amounted to an undercutting of his previous self-undercutting.

Now, to the book for today, *On Authority and Revelation*. This book shares two things with the just-mentioned point of view for my work as an author.

One, both of the works were written in the later 1840s at a relatively late point in the span of his writings.

[13 : 51] Two, neither of the works was published during Kierkegaard's lifetime. The first fair copy, fair copy means a clean, handwritten version that a publisher would have been able to set into type.

The first fair copy of *On Authority and Revelation* was produced in 1846. After that first fair copy, and here I'm doing a little bit of a librarian textual type thing, Kierkegaard did a great deal more tinkering with the words that he had written.

Here's an indication of what that tinkering consisted of over a period of three years. The textual editor, who is also the translator, had to deal with over a thousand changes, which occupy 144 pages distributed among six volumes of his papers.

Here is what the word changes means. Passages are discarded. Passages are brought back in. And corrections are piled on top of corrections.

This is a book that has been exceedingly worked over. In addition to the corrections, Kierkegaard produced three different prefaces, came up with various different titles, and at the second preface stage considered using a variety of pseudonyms rather than his own name.

[15 : 29] None of Kierkegaard's titles were the ones that I have already mentioned. Here are his three titles in chronological order. The book on Adler.

The religious confusion of the present age. A cycle. Here's a real best-seller title.

A cycle of ethico-religious treatises. The first and third of these titles actually do make up the subtitle for this translation on authority and revelation as it is published in English.

The main point of delving into this bibliographical morass is to indicate that the subject is difficult and that Kierkegaard wrangled with the subject a great deal.

Now, for a brief sketch of how Kierkegaard came to embark on this project. In the spring of 1846, Kierkegaard came home from a two-week trip to Berlin.

[16 : 34] Here is a good place to interject the biographical detail that Kierkegaard's entire lifetime travel abroad, think of your own travel abroad, consisted only of four journeys to Berlin and one brief trip to Sweden, both neighboring countries.

Back from Berlin, here is what Kierkegaard did, according to Lowry's shorter biography. He bought all the works of Adler, along with everything that had been published about his case, and with the thoughts suggested by this apparently unedifying material, he was deeply engrossed for three years, writing and twice rewriting his big book on Adler.

Elsewhere, Lowry as translator adds that Kierkegaard was so constantly immersed in this material that he made no entries in his journal from June 1846 to January 1847.

No journal writing for half a year. The next question is, who was Adolf Peter Adler and why did he matter so much to Kierkegaard?

Similar to Kierkegaard in age and social position and education, Adler, in 1841, took on the pastorate of two parishes in a simple rural community.

[18 : 01] Here's Lowry's summary of the situation from his introduction to his translation. This is the outline story of what happened with Adolf Peter Adler.

According to the testimony of Bishop Minster, he, Adler, was diligent in the performance of his duties and was loved by his flock. But in 1842, he had a vision of light which turned him against Hegel, whose philosophical disciple he had been.

Jesus Christ bade him burn his own earlier books and manuscripts and dictated to him the greater part of a big book which he entitled *Several Sermons* and published at his own expense in 1843.

In 1844, he was suspended by Bishop Minster on the ground that his mind was deranged. And in 1845, he was deposed after he had replied evasively to several questions put to him by the bishop and had admitted that revelation was perhaps too strong an expression.

He was given a small pension which allowed him leisure to write books against the church. It seems useful to add a couple of items to Lowry's account.

[19 : 37] At the end of June 1843, Kierkegaard mentioned Adler in a letter to his brother as a person who was making a stir with orthodoxy.

A much later third-party memoir reports what Kierkegaard told the memoirist about personal conversation with Adler at the time.

So it seems clear that Kierkegaard watched the case develop and had direct exposure to the principal character. Only after a few years and a settling of the dust did Kierkegaard undertake exhaustive study of what happened and reflect on the implications.

It seems that a major factor in Kierkegaard's reluctance to publish his completed work arose from his using Adler as an example.

I don't think Kierkegaard had anything personal against Adler nor did he want to add to the opprobrium already suffered by Adler.

[20 : 41] On the other hand, Kierkegaard's mode of thinking through the issues absolutely required the presence of Adler as a named person, a concrete entity that could not be dispensed with through abstractions.

Despite this circumstance, Kierkegaard was able to extract material from part two that could stand alone and which made no mention of Adler. In 1849, he did publish that portion as one of his two minor ethico-religious treatises under the title *The Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle*.

About half the time that I have available has gone into introducing the characters, setting the stage, and taking a glance at the much ruminated book called *Onothorati and Revelation*.

The book does not lend itself at all to summary. summary. I'd like to start by outlining three reasons why this is the case.

The first problem with summary has to do with the way that Kierkegaard writes, his vocabulary, his syntax, his style of thinking, and so on. His writing is designed to make the reader work at gaining an understanding by struggling alongside the thinking process.

[22 : 14] There is no shortcut. At the risk of illegitimately disembodimenting a snippet, I'd like to bring forward this one sentence from the preface to *Fear and Trembling*, perhaps his best-known work.

even though one were capable of converting the whole content of faith into the form of a concept, it does not follow that one has adequately conceived faith and understands how one got into it or how it got into one.

The second problem with summary is that Kierkegaard's own concerns seem to expand, if not shift, markedly over the extended period in which he worked on this book.

Notably, the third preface, dated 7 October 1848, by far the longest of the three prefaces, makes no mention whatsoever of Adler.

It's sort of like Kierkegaard would be writing his third preface today, make no mention of Adler and be very wrapped up in the election that occurred on Tuesday.

[23 : 49] A new overwhelming theme appears in the first sentence of that preface, the European War, the world historical catastrophe of the present year, in other words, the major turmoil that world history now captions as the revolutions of 1848.

The third problem with summary is the interrelationships and resonances that exist among Kierkegaard's various works. For example, I developed a strong feeling that I needed to re-read both *The Present Age* and *Fear and Trembling*, so that is part of what I did as preparation.

What I will attempt to do is to give a good account of one significant thread in Kierkegaard's ponderings over the case of Adler. Before I do that, though, I want to consider why Kierkegaard became so deeply engaged with the thoughts and actions of an individual who, except for the attentions that Kierkegaard paid him in this book, would be of no interest to anyone.

Here's what Walter Lowry says about his own dutiful reading of Adler's works. In other words, Lowry wanted to do a good job on this, and he felt that he had to go out and look at all of the source material.

Here's what he says. Today, Adler would be totally forgotten were not his name embalmed in this book. I was perhaps too scrupulous in feeling that I ought to read Adler's works, or at least the six books upon which Kierkegaard comments.

[25 : 38] But Tholstrup, another scholar, informed me that no copies were anywhere to be found. Tholstrup told Lowry, you must read them as I did in the Royal Library, where the copies which Kierkegaard owned and annotated are preserved.

In other words, pretty well only one copy in existence. You can imagine that I found no great pleasure in reading them. This author evidently needed the attention of a psychiatrist.

To rephrase the question, what would motivate Kierkegaard to expend such efforts on what would seem an obvious nutcase?

I think a plausible brief answer is self-criticism. Kierkegaard perceived in the case of Adler a strong challenge to his own well-developed way of thinking.

Much of the direction that his thinking had taken was in opposition to objective scientific knowledge, speculative philosophy, the ready-made opinions of popular press, and the ready-made values of popular culture.

[27 : 03] Kierkegaard's opposition to those things was based on a valuing of subjectivity and a valuing of the passion and the inwardness of the individual. In simple terms, Kierkegaard needed to figure out why Adler should not represent a regular outcome of the approach to life that he, Kierkegaard, had so strenuously advocated.

Now to the thread, or perhaps the handle. No metaphor suits this activity, just a few minutes of talk that cannot convey the movement of thought through 200 pages.

In what follows, freely and usually without specific credit, I will draw on a 17 page study of own authority and revelation that Ronald Hustwith published as an article in 1985.

The first of the book's three prefaces opens with this phrase, essentially, this book can only be read by theologians.

The first word, the adverb essentially, carries a lot of weight. Kierkegaard's introduction that follows the prefaces puts a lot of effort into distinguishing between two different kinds of authors, premise authors and essential authors.

[28 : 30] It also needs to be observed that the preface starts with mention of a reader, not an author. To a significant extent, the two must by nature be taken together.

Authors need readers. So I will take the liberty of expanding it a bit and talking about people, not authors, since readers are also at issue.

Premise people regard their ideas as being in isolation from each other. Premise people lack self- understanding.

they lack a big picture. They see no need to reach beyond a well-developed premise to the conclusions that the premise entails.

In the sphere of politics, premise people may resemble a single-issue candidate. They tend to lack perspective and to exhibit inconsistency.

[29 : 35] That's premise people. Essential people see interrelationships of ideas and operate within and reflect on a definite overall view of life.

If it only amounted to that, though, it would suffice to be systematic and logical. But essential people are furthermore engaged in ongoing assessment of what actions are required in life by what they think to be true, what they believe.

Here is what Kierkegaard says in his introduction about Adler as a premise author. Adler has one premise more which distinguishes him absolutely from all other premise authors.

He has a fact of revelation to which he can appeal. Far from me truly is every foolish jest. I shall think of this claim with every possible concession and reserve.

I do not presume to deny it or affirm it. I regard myself simply as a learner. this at least is certain that had he held fast to this fact of revelation as an unshakable fact, though others might consider him mad or else bow to his authority, had he done that, had he not indecisively, waveringly, higgled about it and privately interpreted it away, I would not have been justified in calling him a premise author.

[31 : 22] Like the bishop of the church that suspended and then deposed Adler as a pastor, Kierkegaard had an easy case to deal with. An easy case because Adler hemmed and hawed, manifested inconsistency, and failed to hold fast in clear terms to the assertion that he had directly received a revelation of new doctrine from Jesus Christ.

However, Kierkegaard reproduces the two questions put by the ecclesiastical authority and scrupulously considers Adler's written responses at length.

Part of the point is that Adler's claim would have been far more difficult to deal with if Adler had not, in effect, himself effectively denied the authority of the revelation that he had proposed, yet never to the point of revoking the claim.

Simply put, Adler waffled. His job was on the line. The authorities were after him. Here is how Kierkegaard sums up the outcome.

He was suspended so that the case might be looked into more thoroughly, but by the help of concessions, he slew himself. In that context, Kierkegaard expresses relief that the possibly harder case did not arrive and produced consequences that could impact others.

[33 : 01] Let's go back to the declaration that this book can only be read by theologians. Hustwith proposes, I think correctly, that this is because only theologians presuppose the specific dogmatic concepts of Christianity and attempt to develop and gain clarity about them.

Key concepts relevant to the case of Adler are the nature of revelation and the authority that revelation entails. as Hustwith says, the Christian concept of receiving a direct revelation involves that the one who receives it thereby receives a corresponding authority as well.

With Adler, there seems to have been none of the authority that would be expected but merely an assertion of revelation. Kierkegaard's concern lies with these concepts, and he specifically says he has no interest in getting into Adler's content, even though he read those six books.

Neither shall anything be said about the doctrine he expounds as to whether it is heretical or not. All such questions must be regarded as unimportant in comparison with the qualitative decisive factor.

I grant that this manner of thinking can seem perplexing. Here's a brief recap of what I've tried to elucidate. Adler raised the difficult question of how subjectivity can be evaluated.

[34 : 51] Kierkegaard examined Adler's case at a formal and abstract level, working from Adler's own premises, and explored the ways in which what Adler said and did in the circumstances could not make sense with reference to the concepts of revelation and authority.

This exploration did not require any concern with the specifics of Adler's supposed revelation. To get into those details would have been a distraction.

The point was to expose Adler's overall inconsistency. Kierkegaard was able to take Adler to task within this theological framework precisely because Adler made a claim that presupposed that set of understandings.

Adler stated that he had received a revelation. Remember how Kierkegaard said, Adler has one premise more which distinguishes him absolutely from all other premise authors.

After Kierkegaard demolishes the status of that one premise more on the basis of consistency, Adler becomes no different from any of the speculative thinkers who engage in philosophy or scientific investigation.

[36 : 17] The implicit further criticism of such objective thinkers, the premise people, is that they fail to recognize the context within which their thinking, and far more importantly, their own human lives take place.

The scientific method has no place for revelation as a source of knowledge, and the efficacy that results from that exclusion becomes a source of pride and blindness.

It is possible and rational and consistent to take a part of reality for the whole, and in so doing to deny that a whole exists.

Let Kierkegaard have the next to last word. The fact that God came into existence in human form under the emperor Augustus, that is the historical element in Christianity, the historical and a paradoxical composition.

It is with this paradox that everyone in whatever country they may be living must become contemporary if they are to become a believing Christian.

[37 : 41] with the history of Christianity, they have, in this respect, nothing whatever to do.

But the baleful fact in our age is, among others, that it is almost impossible to find a person who has time and patience and seriousness and the passion of thought to be well brought up to respect the qualitative dialectic.

Science is founded on observation and description and reproducibility. It is a form of understanding that has no place for subjectivity, for inwardness, for passion.

And here I'm possibly contradicting a little bit of what was said a few weeks ago about Tom McLeish. A good way to grasp the contrast and approach between premise people and essential people is to try to imagine what an observable, describable, reproducible revelation could possibly look like.

The fact is, the mode of scientific apprehension itself is founded on domain restrictions that preclude at the outset a more encompassing understanding.

[39 : 14] So, this is what I came up with in response to much of what I have richly garnered from learner's exchange over the past few years.

And the name, that book again, the name of the author, what the name is? Which, Soren Kierkegaard, On Authority and Revelation. Don't start with that.

That's interesting. You sound like you're really, really, really well read, like wow. Well, I've read a lot of books, and I, you know, I have a lot of vague notions.

And it's only when I sit down and do something like this that they cease to be vague. I was surprised you didn't mention Fear and Trembling, which is one of his other famous works.

Yes. Oh, did you mention it? Maybe I might have missed that. No, I, let's see, wait a minute. Yeah, I think I did.

[40 : 33] I did, yes. But, I mean, in that book in particular, that's one of the ones I've read. I was struck by how he was, I think, in a sense, trying to break free from 19th century enlightenment confines of rationality.

But he was taking a leap, so to speak, saying you had to take a leap out of that rational confine. But he said it was more of a blind leap, something that was necessitated by faith.

Would I comment on that further about what you might have... Well, I think that is probably if we're going to take one test case other than possibly St. Paul, Abraham.

That's what he was dealing with. Yes. That was at the core of the book. The notion that Abraham was going off to Mount Moriah with a donkey and his son and a bundle of sticks and was prepared to kill his own son, his only son, for whom he had waited for so long.

And this is a terrifying story. And it is a story that we do not really pay a lot of attention to. Abraham had a direct revelation.

[42 : 02] By the standards of most people, he would be nuts. And how do you deal with that? Do you say God does not speak to anyone? Do you say, and this is bringing this book back in a little more, do you say that, well, we, that was 1800 years ago that Jesus came.

That's all decided. We don't need to think about that. Kierkegaard says, no, there is no 1800 years. It is today. You need to think about this.

You don't inherit this. It is a personal decision. It is something, as we discussed this last night, that I think is important to recognize is it is not just based on revelation, but on relationship, his relationship with God and relationship of trust.

But, of course, then we can say, well, Muhammad said he had a revelation from God. What am I doing in a relationship?

It is not a question. But I am saying, how do we know not only that this revelation is real, but that this relationship is real in terms of, or is it a figment of our mind or imagination, right?

[43 : 21] And so I'm saying, but Abraham was so sure of his relationship with God and that God was revealing to him that he wanted him to do this.

No, that's a really useful point, and it brings out something that I thought about sticking in and didn't. Assess a revelation.

If you have a revelation, to what extent do you assess it? I don't think you do. The assessment comes in, Jeanette tells me she's had a revelation.

Well, I don't have direct access to that revelation, so I start trying to assess whether I think my wife is going nuts. And that's the problem.

You assess other people. If you yourself have a revelation, I'm not sure that there is any kind of gap for you to start assessing. saying. When we were talking about this around the gym, we were talking specifically about how did Abraham assess it?

[44 : 36] I'm basically saying you have a revelation. It's not that mode of apprehension. There is no assessment. There is no gap.

You know. Yeah, except to say that he had that relationship with Yahweh. He had that relationship. He had called him out.

He had blessed him. He brought to pass all of these things that Abraham could see. And Abraham had no reason to doubt God at that point.

I mean, it was a hard decision. It was, as you say, it's with fear and trembling. And I do think that we don't have consideration. But it was in the basis of that relationship when God says, take your son, your only son, go up to Mount Moriah.

And, you know, many would say he had faith that God would resurrect him because he said, me and the boy will go and worship and we will come back. Because God said that it is with Isaac that my covenant will rest.

[45 : 37] So he's saying, well, he is my only son at this point. Ishmael was gone. And it's like, if that's what he wants me to do at this point, that somehow he's going to make this work out. And so even though it seemed contrary to reason and to what was right, he trusted in the character of God and believed him that whatever he did in this situation would be right and loving and good, even if he couldn't see it.

One brief comment on that and then we go to Hervey. Yeah, that precisely brings us right back to Adolph Peter Adwer. And he had the revelation and he had a gap.

So how could it be a revelation? Kierkegaard wouldn't know in the broader context. God is faithful. Yes, he had dealings with Abraham.

Why do we know that? Because out of the mystery of God's work in the world, he produces communities of remembrance and of faithful remembering. Israel and the church are those communities.

Kierkegaard inherited their witness. So yes, we deal with the story of an individual named Abraham, but only in the context of the faithful community which remembers this story and we grow into it.

[46 : 56] So he's not just the individual dealing with God. It's always in a community of remembering and faithful remembering. So Kierkegaard doesn't deny all that.

He's part of Christendom. He critiques it but he's part of it. Isn't that true? Yes. I agree with you, Harvey, but let's do the dialectics on it and take it one step further and say that there was a point in time where Abraham existed and had this direct word from God and needed to act on it.

Did he sit down with a council and say let's review this and let's look at what's... In other words, did he consult his community?

I think the answer is no. So we've got attention there. In the back? Thanks a lot for your talk today. I really enjoyed it. Just a quick comment on what you were saying about Abraham's decision there.

God had already built a track record with Isaac's birth before he was told Abraham to sacrifice him. So I think it's good to keep that in mind maybe in our own lives because I think we all fall into the trap of thinking I've heard from God and I'm sure we all can look at any internet or television and point to people that maybe have gone too far with all of that.

[48 : 30] So I think that's good to keep in mind. God had a great track record, particularly related to what he was talking about with Isaac already. It was a marathon.

It was perfect. When you talked about the assessing, what came to my mind is the book of Our Lady of Fatima, the three shepherds, and the process of the woman, how she was interviewed by priests and by the Pope.

Later on at Medjugorje, Yugoslavia, when I was at the Life and the Spirit Summit, the Roman Catholic priest was there. He said he didn't see anything himself, but he said something, so the people that come to assess is, what did you see?

I showed this to a prof from Regent, Our Lady of Fatima, and it's like they didn't see nothing, but what they did see, it's kind of hard to say what they saw.

There was some sort of a something or other, and they said the Virgin Mary said to pray the rosary. One of them became a nun, but this is two examples of the assessing process.

[49 : 36] What did you see? Or some people think they could have a prophetic vision, and it's a wild imagination, or a big big stump, and a big screw-up. And so sometimes it's just totally like, no, you got the wrong person, there's a law, there's a process of the burden of proof, you know, so yeah, you ought to assess these things.

Yes, well, I think that's in the context of deciding whether someone can be a saint. Yeah. Okay, yeah.

Bruce? Yeah, can you say more about Kierkegaard's view of relationship between revelation and the scientific method as it was developing in his age?

So I'm just not quite sure about that. Did he have a distrust of the scientific method? So that's just a question. But then I just, the other thought that came into my head, you know, we're musing on Abraham and God's speaking to Abraham.

I'm also thinking about how God spoke to Job through Job's turmoil and suffering and how God's response to Job's questions was a direction towards the revealed scientific world.

[50 : 52] So God said, have you considered this? And then God pulls back the curtain on a variety of science, physical matter, eagles, mountains, climate, snow, dew, lightning, thunder, et cetera.

So quite interesting the way God responds to Job. Anyway, my first question is just Kierkegaard's view on science and revelation.

I think Kierkegaard was more concerned with speculative philosophy than he was with science as it was being practiced, but that there were commonalities in the approaches that this mode of thinking was taking.

If we have time, I could read a paragraph here from the beginning of chapter two. The so-called fact of revelation itself as a phenomenon coordinated with the whole modern development.

let's see, where do we want to start? The very thing, I'll start at the beginning, the very thing which seems to give to Christendom and to its learned or eloquent defenders such extraordinary success, this very thing it is which in many ways holds back and hinders individuals from making a qualitative and essential decision, this very thing it is which in the end must play into the hands of the free thinkers, this very thing is the so-much talked-about 1800 years, whether by then the question is removed to such a prodigious distance that the impression of decision or the decisive impression vanishes in the twilight of imagination, or whether we have the paralogistic argument of the 1800 years to the truth of

[53 : 08] Christianity by which glittering and triumphant proof the trust of Christianity is unfortunately undermined, since in that case it is true only as an hypothesis is by this triumphant argumentation transformed from eternal truth into a hypothesis.

how could it ever occur to an eternal truth to sink to the point of proving its truth by the fact it has endured for so and so many years, sink to a paltry comradeship with lies and deceits, which have also endured for many centuries and do still endure, an eternal truth which, from first to last, is equally true in its last instant, not more truth than in its first, so that it did not come into the world shamefaced and embarrassed because it had not yet had the centuries to which it could appeal, then was not foolishly puffed up for having endured so long a time.

In other words, I think the key word in that passage is hypothesis. Martin? So, thinking about the relationship between what Hempgal was saying about this film and so forth, I'm thinking of the passage in Corinthians where St.

Paul says something along the lines of, if Christ was not raised, our faith is in vain, and we are the most foolish of men. So, Paul here is linking our faith with a historical fact, and it seems to me that kind of linkage is something which Hempgal found very difficult.

I've talked with theological liberals, College Chaplain of Cambridge, to whom faith was one thing, history, in fact, was another thing, and it was impossible that your faith could be linked to a historical fact.

[55 : 09] So, therefore, the resurrection of Christ, whether or not it happened, must be irrelevant to our faith, because the revelation of Christ, the resurrection of Christ was something which is claimed to occur in history, and our faith is something subjective which happens to us.

So, this direction of thinking, I think, probably comes out of the other world, and I don't know the extent to which Kierkegaard himself would have had problems with the historicity of the resurrection.

Oh, I don't see that gap at all. I think Kierkegaard sees the historicity of the resurrection as the starting point.

But it's a fact, and therefore dependent in some sense on, you know, our knowing that it's a fact depends on historical analysis.

If we start asking about did the resurrection occur, it becomes a hypothesis. So, the, actually, in a sense, I think, the decision, the big decision is, do you take this as fact?

[56 : 22] And that's what he's saying. I'll get you Zoltan next, but Sheila hasn't, and one in the back. Sheila? I don't think we do the mystical very well in the protestant show.

Well, really, we don't. Why don't more Protestants have visions like what John was talking about? You know, ask yourself this. But one of the reasons that we can look at scripture and say this is a trustworthy vision is that we are told the outcome of that.

We are told about Abraham. We are told about Isaiah. I mean, Isaiah said, in the year the king of Ziyadai, I saw the Lord.

That is an astonishing statement to make. But it changed his life, and he changed, he went out and did God's will and said, here am I, I'm going. And changed a pattern of what was happening in his part of the world.

And the same thing with St. Paul. We get to see the outcome of a vision, and that is a corroborative thing for us. Now, do we ever hear about the people that don't act upon visions?

[57 : 31] what about Akon?

Burying the treasure underneath the tent? I'm not saying there was a vision involved, but there was a decision to deviate.

deviate. Yeah. I would be very, I would be in a state of mental turmoil if I ever had a vision, like St.

Paul. Or maybe not. I might tell anybody. Or you might not be in turmoil. You might not be in turmoil. You might be convinced and absolutely convinced from that point on.

But our whole formation and education is let's take a step back. Let's be careful. I don't want people.

[58 : 32] Did Abraham say I don't want people to think I'm nuts? You. In the back. I mean, I think my sense from reading Kierkegaard and other passages, right?

I think you have to know, yeah, he's positioning himself against Hegel, like Adler. And Adler would be a natural ally, somebody that if Adler's going down, then Kierkegaard would go down as well, right?

And that for Kierkegaard, in responding to Hegel and his whole rationality and trying to bring faith within, under that umbrella, right? I mean, for Kierkegaard, he's challenging that by saying, you know, anything that we find meaningful and able to direct us at all, comes out of a defining commitment that if we are going to bring it under rationality and reduce it to a hypothesis, discredit the essentially, right, from having any guiding value.

And this is the existential move to prevent us from leading into nihilism, right? So if we have something, whether, you know, that this is it, I will never do this, this is this value that is actually going to provide meaning for me, you know, the defining commitment that I must, you know, I'm trying to think of a good one here, but the sense that, hey, I will never do this, right?

And that this is unassailable, unreducible to a list of pros and cons, that I will, you know, whether it's harm my child or that I will, you know, love this person.

[60 : 07] Or pick up a gun and kill somebody for the government? Yeah, whatever it is, but I'm never going to not love my wife. And I'm not going to ever say, well, should I love my wife today? I'm going to love you.

That's a good one. No, this is a definite commitment. And this is, you know, his call to higher immediacy and being a knight of faith and all of that, you know, comes out of this essential truth for him that, you know what, the things that really guide us are not going to ever be open to that sort of rational debate because, you know, this just doesn't fit and it doesn't jive with the core of our being.

So I think, you know, you have to see, yeah, that he has a place for science and rational he's just like, you know what, there are these, those interjections, you know, you know, like the arrival of Christ in this, you know, that this is, this is something that goes beyond that frame.

Zoltan? Very good. Just maybe tie a few, try to tie maybe a few strands together to thinking about the point made regarding the faith community, the importance of that, which I certainly affirm is, do you think Kierkegaard is encouraging us in a sense to assess revelations that we might have, whether legitimate or not, as though we were in Abraham's shoes, in a sense, which I actually think would be wrong.

Because if you think about Adam, for example, right, he had of course no one else to consult. He was in a relationship solely with the Lord. He had every reason to trust God, but made it the fatal mistake of trusting the serpent.

[61 : 58] There was no community then. And likewise, in Abraham's time, the revelatory history was still quite young. And he himself would have had very little to go on.

You think about passages in the scriptures where God would say in the book of Judges, for everyone did what was right in their own eyes because there was no king. And king, you could substitute that for authority.

There was no authoritative anything to do this. And then when Moses comes, Moses says, okay, this is how you tell whether somebody's a prophet or not.

Okay, I'm going to give you the test. Okay, if they come, somebody comes to the guide, I've got a vision. You say, well, let's just see if that happens. And if it doesn't happen, well, then he's a false prophet.

You should, you know, get rid of them, get them out of Israel and not take heed or fear them, is what he says, for they have spoken falsely. So then we have this sort of like measuring line suddenly starting there.

[62 : 59] And then from then on, God adds more and more, precept upon precept, line upon line. And then in the New Testament, whoever the author of Hebrews is, let's say it's Paul, says we have an enormous cloud of witnesses now.

And we have all of this revelatory history. We are now in this community and we are promised that we're guided by the Holy Spirit. So that's where we are now. So if somebody claims they have some revelation, are they really in the position of Abraham?

Like, gosh, golly gee, I don't know. I have nothing, no point of preference. Maybe this is God. Maybe I'm just deluded. Or do you go, I actually have an enormous cloud of witnesses now, a community that I could go to, which Abraham did not have.

And they longed to see the day where the Holy Spirit was poured out upon all flesh and they didn't just have these little sparks. And so I think that there is something to the faith community now that they wouldn't have had back then.

And the fact that he didn't have it then doesn't negate that we have it now. Do you know what I'm saying? And I think it's making that error is what I'm asking. No, I think that's a very good point.

[64 : 04] And again, there are two things that are in tension. And one is the accumulated words that we have from God in the scriptures and what they, you know, what we know from that.

And then there is our individual experience today as a living human being.

We notice that in this balance there are not many people here who actually, I guess maybe Brigham Young was one.

There aren't many people who say I have a revelation and here it is and really stand apart from what we already have.

That says something to me. But it doesn't close off the problem that we have in that are we going to say that God has stopped speaking to people in that way?

[65 : 29] And I'd be very reluctant to do that. Yeah, I would agree. I'm not at all, I'm not a cessationist in that sense. But I'm saying that I do believe that gone are the days when a prophet comes and says I had a vision and you must all hear and bow to that.

And that vision actually goes contrary to what we already know to be true. And if you're in heaven, you'll see a different gospel. Right. So, I mean, I hope, yeah, I don't sound too crazy.

I have had senses of Christ's presence in certain instances in my life, which I actually cherish. But I would never go to somebody and say, I have this sense of Jesus and he told me you should do this.

And I've actually had never, never. You would never. You would never. Even that I should be marrying them. Well, in any case, I didn't.

It didn't work. It didn't work. I do hope that you don't experience the direct bolt of lightning and have people who won't listen to you.

[66 : 45] Because that, you know, that, it's not solvable. Yeah. Thank you. What a robust discussion as I predicted.

Maybe I had a vision. Thank you. Thank you so much for that really insightful and thorough analysis.

It's just given us such a unique entry into the topic and the writers. Thank you so much. Thank you so much. Thank you so much, dad, and I'm still going to see you next time.