



adelma von vay



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OCCULTISM AND HERESY

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The subject of my paper is the connection between heresy and false spirituality as seen from the perspective of Christian orthodoxy. I will begin with Adelma von Vay's understanding of Jesus. In the last chapter of her book "Spirit Force Matter" she - or the spirits that used her as a medium - invites us to judge whether this book is a work of a clean or an unclean spirit, an angel or a demon. I will try to answer this question.

According to Adelma, God first created matter, the universe, and only then, through force and matter, he gave birth - somewhere she says "created" - his many firstborn, who still can spiritually ascend or fall. Some of them fell which caused a chain of succeeding new divisions and creations of new spheres of being, including ours. Those firstborn who remained faithful to God, the Messiahs, help the fallen spirits to realize their mistake and start turning back to God. Jesus is one of such Messiahs ... In accordance with orthodoxy we believe that Jesus is one of three persons or hypostases of God, the only Son, begotten not created, God's Word, Logos, through whom all things were created - including matter and universe. We believe that in historical Jesus God was incarnated. *Adelma's Christ is not God*, Logos, through whom all things were made, but a created being, a very majestic one though. According to Adelma God didn't incarnate, the Uncreated didn't appear in the created. This is of course a well-known heresy of denying Christ's divinity (that was much debated about especially in the 4th century in connection with Arianism). I will try to show the connection between this heresy and a certain form of false spirituality. But first just a few words about occultism and theosophy in general.

Occultism covers a wide range of theories and practices based on esoteric knowledge of the world of spirits and unknown forces hidden in human and universe, forces which can be used to influence events for the benefit of the practitioner of occult practice. From the perspective of Christian orthodoxy this is dangerous because the temptation of pride and an illusion of power might appear when such practitioner believes in a *mechanical effectiveness* of his/her occult practice. Christians too can pray for our benefits, health for instance, *but our prayer is a humble supplication that can't automatically influence events if this is not God's will*, besides, the basis of all Christian prayer is "thy will be done" and the imitation of Christ on the Mount of Olives when, facing the approaching suffering, he prayed:

“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.” We acknowledge our powerlessness and we admit that in the final instance we don’t know what is good for us.

Adelma von Vay was close to the most important people in theosophical society which was founded towards the end of 19th century. Their theosophy is characteristic of esotericism and gnosticism and is a mixture of western and eastern occultism and mysticism. The emphasis is on personal mystical experience which is a privilege of only a few, a direct contact with spiritual reality through intuition, meditation, revelation or some other state transcending normal human consciousness. The theosophists also claim that all religions contain an inner esoteric teaching which is concealed in sacred texts and *might be deciphered*. Another characteristic is a fascination with occult phenomena, with supernatural or other extraordinary occurrences, and with the achievement of higher physical or spiritual powers. They believe that knowledge of divine wisdom gives access to the mysteries of nature and humankind’s deeper being. The theosophical society investigate unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in human beings.

A lot of this may be found in Adelma’s writings: she was a medium for communication with spirits; she could predict future and write in a language unknown to her; she had special healing abilities etc. Now what’s problematic about all this is *confusing investigation of nature with investigation of God’s realities*. This confusion is characteristic of pagan and magical way of understanding. She regarded a research of illness as a part of spiritual research and - for instance - considered homeopathy to be the beginning of a scientific proof of the existence of spiritual forces. She considered spiritism to be a scientific discipline that investigates spiritual phenomena and thus connecting religion and natural science into one discipline that seeks God. She thought that through the insight into physical matter we can start getting to know God and his laws, which are similar to him; the more spiritual we get the more we understand natural laws. She said that logic is a proof of God who is the highest principle, the central part and the motor of the universe through his natural laws and that he dwells in the midsts of this all. She says that God is so great that even the purest spirits can hardly comprehend him. It’s true she emphasizes hardly, but still, they *can* comprehend him. *So her God is not the absolute transcendence*. She neglected a lesson that was given to us by centuries of the negative theology, the apophaticism, that tries to articulate that God is absolutely different from all existing things and beyond all being. She believes in the possibility of the systematical investigation of the supernatural. Which means that she’s forgetting the abyss, the ontological gap between God and the creation.

Like it is the case with many esoteric occultisms, following Adelma’s teaching one might forget about the transcendence. *And the forgetting of transcendence is the main characteristic of false spirituality*. Such fascination with the occult phenomena and various states of altered consciousness deals only with *hidden natural forces* and not with the supernatural. All the colourful and spectacular spheres and personal beings that one might see and encounter in such state are still something created, something existing, whereas true spirituality desires the Uncreated, the Transcendence that is beyond all existence. Now it’s important to emphasize that states of altered consciousness are not necessarily wrong. Many great mystics were experiencing ecstasies and extraordinary occurrences, but they were just a stage in their path to the Beyond-existent and not central for their spirituality. The existing things - be it in everyday life or in the state of altered consciousness - must direct us beyond them and lead us towards the Absolute. *The false spirituality is fascinated by existing things and therefore closer to physics than to metaphysics*, and - because of the belief that the salvation of the mystery of humankind

and universe is just a matter of time - closer to common-sense science than to true spirituality. The science is supposed to deal with reality. But what is real? The only real thing is that we don't know what we are and that we are going to die. And such humility is the beginning of true spirituality which is a sensibility for the mystery, a susceptibility for the absolute Otherness that has a transformatory effect on us. *True spirituality is a sensibility for God's energies which are glimmering of the Transcendence in the created. Not only in states of altered consciousness but also through normal everyday things these energies make us turn to what's beyond all existence. All things can lead us to God.* The Transcendence is a transcendence of being so it's not limited by the laws of being. The Spirit blows where he chooses, his activity is not limited to the states of altered consciousness. The fascination with them might be connected with blindness for the Epiphany.

According to Christian orthodoxy God is our most intimate and absolutely distant at the same time, so close no matter how far ... God is so far that none occult practice or esoteric knowledge can get us nearer to him and so close that we don't need such knowledge. *In esoteric occultisms both extremes are overlooked.* There God is not our most intimate but if we engage in occult practice we can get to know him. Adelma's God is neither the absolute transcendence nor he has incarnated. The Son's incarnation that we believe in is the paradox of uniting the transcendence and the presence in its purest form. The God revealed himself and remained hidden. Love came through the Body. The Uncreated appeared in the created. This is so magnificent that it exceeds the wildest imagination and it is the most fantastic and exciting thing that we can think about, or better, we can't think about. Compared to this the occult heresies and their fascination with breaking on through to the other side when they're really remaining on this side seem infantile when compared to the real thing. The true break through, the revelation and the mystery of God's incarnation, beats anything we can meet in heretical occultism also as far as sheer intensity and wildness is concerned even if we leave aside all other implications.

Now is it symptomatic that such interest in occult phenomena and forgetting the transcendence results in blindness for the mystery of incarnation (or perhaps vice versa)? Is there a connection between false spirituality and the heresy of denying Christ's divinity which Adelma was proclaiming? I believe there is but we must beware of the simplifications. Such connection is a very complex one on many levels. It is emphatically personal and thus mysterious and it transcends our usual common-sense way of thinking. At the end of the book "Spirit, Force, Matter", the author/authors ask us to judge whether this is a work of an angel or a demon. Despite Adelma's undoubted heresy as far as her teaching is concerned, this question must remain unanswered. It is true that Christians of today can't compare with our masters of theology of bygone centuries, but perhaps we progressed when it comes to reluctance to judge others. *Namely, there is always a possibility that someone is indeed a heretic as far as his/her teaching is concerned but at the same time participating in the true faith as far as his/her existence on deeper level is concerned, which is all that matters.* Adelma's person remains a mystery. Perhaps her constant acts of charity show her true faith more than her theories. The criterion of our orthodoxy is our desire to remain within the togetherness of ecclesiastic congregation which is a mystical category that means an entire mysterious hierarchy of ascending spirits. The true heresy begins when one on deeper level lacks humility and because of vanity or his/her mind wants to make divisions in such mystical Church communion. With regard to this I can have some direct insight only into my own potential heresy. The insight into mistakes of others - for instance Adelma's - is not a direct one which is why it is hard to judge them.