
FRANZ ROSENZWEIG AND THE CRITIQUE OF MODERN THEOLOGY: IN THEOLOGOS AS DIAGNOSIS AND RUPTURE

FRANZ ROSENZWEIG E A CRÍTICA DA TEOLOGIA MODERNA: *IN THEOLOGOS*
COMO DIAGNÓSTICO E RUPTURA

FRANZ ROSENZWEIG Y LA CRÍTICA DE LA TEOLOGÍA MODERNA: *IN*
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RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta a crítica de Franz Rosenzweig à teologia moderna conforme desenvolvida na seção *in theologos* de “A Estrela da Redenção” (*Der Stern der Erlösung*). Em vez de oferecer uma reconstrução abrangente, o foco recai sobre uma tensão específica: a transformação da teologia sob a pressão da racionalidade científica no século XIX. Situando seu pensamento no contexto da crise intelectual do século XIX - marcada pela ascensão da racionalidade científica como paradigma dominante da verdade -, argumenta-se que a teologia, ao tentar constituir-se como ciência, perde seu objeto próprio: a revelação. Reconstruindo a crítica de Rosenzweig desde Schleiermacher, passando pelo Idealismo Alemão, até a teologia científica do século XIX, o artigo demonstra como a revelação é progressivamente transformada em conceito. Com base em *A Estrela da Redenção* e *O Novo Pensamento* (*Das neue Denken*) de Rosenzweig, bem como nas interpretações de Stéphane Mosès e Reinhold Mayer, argumenta-se ainda que a crítica rosenzweiguiana não se dirige à teologia em si, mas à sua submissão às normas epistemológicas da filosofia moderna. O artigo conclui indicando, de maneira preliminar, a reconfiguração de uma teologia fundamentada na revelação como acontecimento.

Palavras-chave: Rosenzweig; teologia moderna; revelação; filosofia; ciência.

ABSTRACT

This article sets out Franz Rosenzweig’s critique of modern theology as developed in the *in theologos* section of “*Der Stern der Erlösung*”. Rather than offering a comprehensive reconstruction, it focuses on a specific tension: the transformation of theology under the pressure of scientific rationality in the nineteenth century. Situating his thought within the intellectual crisis of the nineteenth century—marked by the rise of scientific rationality as the dominant paradigm of truth—it argues that theology, in attempting to constitute itself as a

science, loses its proper object: revelation. Reconstructing Rosenzweig's critique from Schleiermacher through German Idealism to nineteenth-century scientific theology, the article demonstrates how revelation is progressively transformed into concept. Drawing on Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption* and *Das neue Denken*, as well as interpretations by Stéphane Mosès and Reinhold Mayer, it further argues that Rosenzweig's critique is not directed against theology as such, but against its submission to the epistemological norms of modern philosophy. The article concludes by indicating, in a preliminary manner, the reconfiguration of theology grounded in revelation as event.

Keywords: Rosenzweig; modern theology; revelation; philosophy; science.

RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta la crítica de Franz Rosenzweig a la teología moderna, tal como se desarrolla en la sección in theologos de "La Estrella de la Redención" (*Der Stern der Erlösung*). En lugar de ofrecer una reconstrucción exhaustiva, se centra en una tensión específica: la transformación de la teología bajo la presión de la racionalidad científica en el siglo XIX. Al situar su pensamiento dentro de la crisis intelectual del siglo XIX - marcada por el auge de la racionalidad científica como paradigma dominante de la verdade-, se argumenta que la teología, en su intento de constituirse como ciencia, pierde su objeto propio: la revelación. A través de la reconstrucción de la crítica de Rosenzweig desde Schleiermacher, pasando por el idealismo alemán, hasta la teología científica del siglo XIX, el artículo demuestra cómo la revelación se transforma progresivamente en concepto. Basándose en *La Estrella de la Redención* y *El Nuevo Pensamiento* (*Das neue Denken*) de Rosenzweig, así como en las interpretaciones de Stéphane Mosès y Reinhold Mayer, se sostiene además que la crítica de Rosenzweig no se dirige contra la teología en sí, sino contra su sumisión a las normas epistemológicas de la filosofía moderna. El artículo concluye indicando, de manera preliminar, la reconfiguración de una teología fundamentada en la revelación como acontecimiento.

Palabras clave: Rosenzweig; teología moderna; revelación; filosofía; ciencia.

Introduction

Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929) stands as one of the most original and penetrating critics of the modern philosophical and theological tradition. His magnum opus, *The Star of Redemption* (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, 1921), does not merely oppose German Idealism, but rather calls into question the very possibility of a system capable of subsuming the totality of reality under conceptual unity.

As Stéphane Mosès has shown, Rosenzweig's work must be understood as emerging from the collapse of the traditional relation between system and revelation, a collapse that defines the intellectual crisis of modernity (MOSÈS, 1992, p. 45–52). In this sense, Rosenzweig's project cannot be reduced to a confessional or religious undertaking; it

constitutes, instead, a radical reorientation of the relation between philosophy, theology, and lived experience.

What is often overlooked, however, is that Rosenzweig's critique of theology is not merely reactive. It does not simply oppose a historical development, but exposes a deeper structural displacement: the substitution of event by concept.

Within the Brazilian context, Rosenzweig remains comparatively underexplored, a situation compounded by the absence, until recently, of a complete translation of *The Star of Redemption*¹. Against this backdrop, the present article focuses on a decisive moment within Rosenzweig's work: the *in theologos* gesture, through which he articulates a profound critique of modern theology.

The central thesis advanced here is that Rosenzweig does not reject theology as such; rather, he rejects the transformation of theology into a science governed by the epistemological norms of modern philosophy. In doing so, he exposes a structural loss: the disappearance of revelation as a concrete, temporal event.

2 The Nineteenth Century: Science and the Crisis of Theology

Rosenzweig's critique must be situated within the intellectual horizon of the nineteenth century, an epoch in which science increasingly established itself as the primary criterion of truth. Knowledge came to be defined in terms of demonstrability, systematic coherence, and universality.

Within this framework, theology increasingly found itself compelled - though not without resistance - to justify its legitimacy according to these same criteria. This development, as Mosès observes, reflects not merely an external pressure, but a deeper transformation in the structure of thought itself, whereby revelation is no longer received as event but reinterpreted within the horizon of conceptual knowledge (MOSÈS, 1992, p. 60-68).

For Rosenzweig, this movement entails a decisive displacement. Theology ceases to begin from revelation and instead begins from thought. What appears, at first, as a strategy of preservation becomes, upon closer inspection, a process of transformation that risks undermining theology's own foundation. This displacement is not accidental; it is constitutive.

3 In theologos: From Experience to System

Rosenzweig reconstructs the development of modern theology as a movement that unfolds from Schleiermacher through German Idealism and culminates in nineteenth-century scientific theology. This trajectory reveals a progressive detachment from revelation as lived event.

The trajectory becomes visible already in Schleiermacher. With him, religion is relocated into the sphere of subjectivity and understood as a “feeling of absolute dependence”. While this move seeks to safeguard religion from rational critique, it simultaneously entails a decisive shift: revelation ceases to be an encounter and becomes an internal experience.

In this transformation, the external address of revelation is replaced by the inwardness of consciousness, thereby initiating a process through which theology becomes increasingly mediated by philosophical categories.

This movement reaches a decisive turning point in Hegel, the most radical expression in German Idealism, where theology is fully absorbed into the philosophical system.

Rosenzweig identifies in this development the culmination of a long-standing philosophical tendency: “Alle Philosophie frug nach dem ‘Wesen’” (The Star of Redemption, p. 430). The search for essence entails a fundamental reconfiguration of reality, such that, as he provocatively states, “Die Welt darf beileibe nicht Welt sein, Gott beileibe nicht Gott, der Mensch beileibe kein Mensch...” (The Star of Redemption, p. 430).

In this movement, reality is displaced by its conceptual representation. God ceases to be encountered as living presence and becomes a moment within the totality of thought. Theology, in turn, loses its autonomy and becomes a function of the system.

Building upon these developments, nineteenth-century theology seeks to establish itself as a science. Rosenzweig captures this transformation succinctly in the formulation: “Sie wollte Wissenschaft sein.”

In attempting to assume scientific status, theology adopts the methodological assumptions of philosophy. As Luca Bertolino argues, this leads to a “philosophisation of theology”, in which theological content is subordinated to conceptual structures that ultimately dissolve its specificity (BERTOLINO, p. 12–15).

The consequence is a structural inversion: revelation, which ought to function as the foundation of theology, becomes derivative, while conceptual thought assumes primacy. Theology no longer begins from revelation, but from its conceptual mediation.

4 Structural Critique: The Loss of Revelation

Rosenzweig's critique is not merely methodological, but ontological. The issue at stake is not simply how theology argues, but what it becomes. What is transformed here is not method alone, but the very object of theology.

When theology adopts the model of scientific knowledge, it necessarily transforms its object. Revelation—understood as an event that addresses the human being in time—cannot be captured within a system of universal concepts without ceasing to be revelation.

This insight is rooted in Rosenzweig's broader critique of philosophical thinking. Philosophy, in its traditional form, replaces reality with its conceptual equivalent. When theology adopts this model, it undergoes the same transformation.

As Reinhold Mayer has emphasised, Rosenzweig's project should therefore be understood not as a rejection of theology, but as a reorientation of its foundation. Theology must return to revelation, not as a concept, but as lived event (MAYER, 2005, p. 112–118).

The loss of revelation is thus not accidental, but structural. It follows from the attempt to render theology scientific.

5 Time, Language, and Event: Toward a New Thinking

Rosenzweig's critique of modern theology becomes fully intelligible only when read in light of the alternative he develops in *Das neue Denken*. It is there that he articulates, with particular clarity, a decisive break with the traditional philosophical paradigm of system - not as a mere internal correction, but as a radical transformation. As he himself states, this is not a "Copernican revolution", but rather a "complete renewal" („Nicht etwa eine 'kopernikanische Wendung' [...] sondern [...] vollkommene Erneuerung“; (ROSENZWEIG, 1984, p. 428).

This renewal concerns not only the content of thought, but its very structure. Thinking ceases to be conceived as a self-sufficient, systematic enterprise and is instead understood as relational, grounded in language and interlocution. In this sense, Rosenzweig insists that "speaking and listening are subject to different laws" (ROSENZWEIG, 1984, p. 429), thereby indicating that thought is no longer founded upon deduction, but upon response.

Within this transformation, temporality assumes a central role. Against the ambition of systematic thought to anticipate and master reality, Rosenzweig introduces time as a

constitutive limit of knowledge. Thinking requires time-and this means, as he formulates with striking clarity, that nothing can be anticipated; time, here, resists system: „Zeit brauchen heißt: nichts vorwegnehmen können [...]“.

From this perspective, it becomes clear why revelation cannot be incorporated into a system of knowledge. It is neither an object of deduction nor of demonstration - at least not without distortion - but rather an event: Revelation occurs; it interrupts the continuity of conceptual thought and inaugurates a new form of relation between God and the human being.

As Mayer observes, this shift may be understood as a transition from a logic of essence to a logic of relation, in which truth is no longer something possessed, but something that happens (MAYER, 2005, p. 130-135).

6 Opening: Revelation as a New Foundation

The critique articulated in in theologos does not culminate in a rejection of theology as such, but rather in its fundamental reconfiguration. What is at stake for Rosenzweig is not the abandonment of theology, but its liberation from a framework that has rendered it incapable of remaining faithful to its own origin.

This reconfiguration entails a decisive inversion of the categories through which theology has traditionally understood itself. In this inversion, God is no longer approached as an object of knowledge but as a subject who reveals; truth ceases to be a conceptual possession and becomes an encounter; theology, finally, relinquishes its claim to scientific status and assumes the form of a response.

In this way, Rosenzweig does not dismantle theology, but restores it to its proper ground. That ground is not a system, nor a method, but revelation understood as event—an occurrence that cannot be anticipated, mastered, or subsumed under conceptual unity, but must be received in the temporality of lived experience.

7 Concluding Remarks

What emerges from this reading of in theologos is not merely a historical critique, but a structural diagnosis that continues to resonate beyond its original context. In other words, modern theology, in its attempt to conform to the epistemological standards of science,

undergoes a transformation that ultimately leads to the loss of its own object. In adopting the model of systematic knowledge, theology ceases to begin from revelation and instead reconfigures itself within the horizon of conceptual thought.

At the same time, however, Rosenzweig's critique should not be understood in purely negative terms. Rather, it opens the possibility of a renewed relation between philosophy and theology—one in which neither is abolished, but both are transformed through the primacy of revelation as event. Philosophy is thereby recalled to the limits of its conceptual ambition, while theology is restored to the experiential and relational ground from which it arises.

Whether this reconfiguration can be sustained without reintroducing conceptual mediation remains an open question. The further development of this reconfiguration - particularly with regard to its implications for contemporary theology and philosophy - remains an open and promising field of inquiry.

Footnotes: Translation of *The Star of Redemption* by Leandro Otto Hofstätter, currently under revision.

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