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Spinoza's theory of religion : the importance of religion in Spinoza's thought and its implications for state and society

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7. Spinoza and Secularism

In the previous chapter Spinoza's theological-political teaching has been presented as one in which religion and politics are intertwined, but this goes against the dominant reading of Spinoza as a secularist. This chapter deals with the idea of Spinoza as a secularist, adding arguments why it should be corrected in the light of arguments of a contextualist as well as a textualist nature.

The first section tries to make some distinctions within the concept of 'secularism'

The second section treats with the teleological depiction of Spinoza as a secularist as found, among others, in Steven Nadler's book on the TTP and criticizes it;

The third section turns to the historical context of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century and explains why people in this period would have judged modern secularism to be a very bad idea;

The fourth section investigates how Spinoza might have wanted the state-church in the Republic to teach the people the public faith needed for a stable society.

The fifth section turns to Spinoza's "political Christianity": the Christian faith is treated as a civil religion and as an argument against theocracy

7.1. Defining Secularism

A distinction can be made between political secularism and moral secularism.¹ Political secularism is the normative idea that religion should be confined to the private sphere, and that religion should play no role in the public sphere. Spinoza, I argue, is not a political secularist, because 'authority in sacred matters' according to him, 'belongs wholly to the sovereign powers'. (TTP chapter XIX, title). Spinoza can be described as a proponent of the state-church, but not as a proponent of the religiously neutral state.² A moral secularist is someone who believes that we can lead a good life without the directives of revealed religion. Cliteur for this reason believes that although we cannot call Spinoza a *political secularist*, we can and should call him a *moral secularist*.

But can Spinoza rightfully be called a 'moral secularist'?³ The notion of moral secularism depends on the Kantian distinction between moral autonomy and moral heteronomy. The person who uses his own power of reason to decide or determine what is right and wrong, is behaving in

¹ Cliteur uses this distinction made by Floris van den Berg. Cliteur (2010), p. 173

² See the distinction made by Cliteur (2012).

³ Even if one were to concede that Spinoza thought philosophers could reach wisdom on moral matters through reason alone, without the aid of revelation or Scripture, he certainly did not think that this was the case for the majority of the population.

a morally *autonomous* way. The person who lets God, His prophets or His representatives on earth dictate to him how he should live his life, behaves in a morally *heteronomous* way.

This distinction between moral autonomy and moral heteronomy, however, cannot be meaningfully used to describe Spinoza's position, because Spinoza denies that man is or ever can be fully autonomous. Human beings do not have a free will. They are not the masters over their own thoughts. The human mind is part of the infinite intellect of God. Descartes was wrong in saying '*cogito*', because 'when we say that the human mind perceives this or that, we are saying nothing else but this: that God (...) has this or that idea' (E-IIp11c, p. 250). It is, in other words, not 'I think', but it is God or Nature who thinks in and through me.

One cannot say that making use of your own reasoning capacities is *autonomous*, while obeying God is *heteronomous*, because Spinoza's religion is a reasonable religion. The natural light is God's light as it shines in us. From Spinoza's definition of revelation or prophecy as: 'certain knowledge about something revealed to men by God', it follows that 'the word "prophecy" can be applied to natural knowledge. For what we know by the natural light of reason depends on knowledge of God and his eternal decrees alone. (...) natural knowledge has as much right to be called divine as any other knowledge, since it is the nature of God, so far as we share in it, and God's decrees, that may be said to dictate it to us' (TTP I-1 and 2, p. 13-14).

Spinoza does not share the distinctions which underlie the worldview of the moral secularist, but neither does he share the motivation of the moral secularist. Moral secularism is important, according to Cliteur, because of the danger inherent in 'the divine command theory of ethics': good is whatever God commands us to do, even if this command is to kill your own son (in the case of Abraham). Spinoza, however, does not want to criticize or abolish 'divine command theory'. He does not challenge theology as such, which demands obedience to the revealed divine law. Spinoza calls this idea that people can be saved by means of obedience alone useful and even necessary for the salvation of the majority of mankind. (TTP XV-10, p. 194) The problem for Spinoza is not that we have to obey God. The problem is rather understanding the content of this obligation. For Spinoza it is important to understand that the Bible commands from us that we love God above all else and our neighbor as ourselves. We can obey God by means of performing acts of justice and charity. Since it are the sovereign (state) powers that decide what counts as 'just' and 'charitable', God demands that we obey the laws of the sovereign powers.

Spinoza's concern is not obedience, but to make sure that we have a correct understanding of the divine law to which we have to obey. In order to understand what God wants from us, Spinoza engages in a theological argumentation, whereas moral secularists such as

Cliteur want us to all speak ‘moral Esperanto’, that is, to use a language which does not refer to Holy Books such as the Bible.⁴

How far removed Spinoza’s intentions are from what Cliteur calls ‘the secular outlook’ also becomes clear when we compare how both of them interpret the story of Phinehas in the Bible (Numbers 25: 1-18). For Cliteur this story is exemplary of ‘Biblical terrorism’. When Phinehas executed an Israelite and the Midianite woman this Israelite had taken into his tent, he, according to Cliteur, ‘defied Moses’ authority and took the law into his own hands’.⁵ This example, according to Cliteur, shows that the Bible can be used as a reason to turn against the authority of the state. According to Spinoza however, the story of Phinehas cannot be cited as a theological argument in favor of the idea that sacred law should be obeyed over the law of the state. Phinehas was one of the high priests who had received the legal right to execute state laws. These high priests were the ‘evident substitutes for Moses, that is the sovereign power. (...) Therefore, the right of the priesthood always rested upon the edict of the sovereign power, and the priests never held it except in conjunction with [their own] control of the government’. (TTP XX-14, p. 244-245)

Whereas Cliteur’s study of the Bible leads him to the conclusion that this book is dangerous because it legitimizes illegal acts, such as terrorism, Spinoza’s study of the Bible leads him to the conclusion that Scripture not in any way conflicts with the teachings of reason. (TTP Preface 10, p. 9) Whereas Cliteur’s secular approach turns to reason in order to deny the validity of theological arguments, Spinoza’s theological-political approach is meant to show that reason and theology teach the same things.⁶ And one very important thing that both reason as well as the Bible teaches is that we should always adhere to the laws of the state (E-IVp73p, p. 357; TTP XVI-21, p. 200).

7.2. The Depiction of Spinoza as a Secularist

Steven Nadler in *A Book Forged in Hell: Spinoza’s Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age* has pointed out that it is ‘often assumed that he [i.e., Spinoza] was a strong early proponent of the separation of church and state, and that he, along with John Stuart Mill, laid the foundations for later programs of religious toleration. One commentator even writes that “the spirit of

⁴ Cliteur (2007), p. 12.

⁵ Cliteur (2010), p. 106.

⁶ They differ only in the manner in which they teach it. Philosophy or reason teaches people by showing them the truth. Theology teaches people by means of stories and images that make them willing to obey.

Spinoza lives on in the opening words of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, the phrase referred to as the establishment clause.⁷ Nothing could be further from the truth’.

Nadler should be praised for rightfully correcting this erroneous view. Spinoza did not want to separate church and state. Instead he defended the single authority thesis: the state has the right over sacred things [*ius circa sacra*] and is responsible for the external religion. But as can be deduced from the subtitle of Nadler’s book, Nadler does think that Spinoza was responsible for ‘the birth of the secular age’. He understands Spinoza’s theological-political argument namely as one that is driven by one single motive: ‘his position is based on the fear that, without such singular and secular control over religious matters, there is a real danger to the well-being of the common-wealth’.⁸ To a certain extent this is absolutely true: Spinoza, did want to have state-control over all sacred matters, because he feared that otherwise the clergy will use their powers in order to rebel against the state’s authority.

However, as was argued in the previous chapter, Spinoza also had a positive reason to have the state control the church: religion creates harmony. As people come to endorse the knowledge and love of God as their supreme good, they will stop hating and fighting each other. The desire for uncertain things creates hate and strife between people, but the knowledge and love of God makes that people unite. Instead of envying, hating and fighting one another, they will try to have others share in the supreme good. This positive reason to install a church under the state is not mentioned by Nadler.

‘Conduct that brings about harmony’, Spinoza writes in the *Ethics*, ‘is that which is related to justice, equity, and honorable dealing. For apart from resenting injustice and unfairness, men also resent what is held to be base, or contempt for the accepted customs of the state. But for winning their love the most important factors are those that are concerned with religion and piety’. (E-IV, Appendix 15,p. 360) In other words, in order that people come together in mutual love, and form, as it were, one body in the state, they need religion. It doesn’t matter whether this religion comes forth out of the prophetic imagination (*fides*) or whether this religion comes forth out of adequate knowledge of God (*religio*), since both forms of religion can help in maintaining a peaceful and free state.

No one is forced to believe in this religion, Nadler writes.⁹ And again to a certain extent this is true. Spinoza did not want to install an Inquisition in his ideal Republic, nor did he want to oblige people to attend the church. However, people in Spinoza’s description of the state in the

⁷ Goldstein.(2006) p. 11

⁸ Nadler (2011), p. 205

⁹ Nadler (2011), p. 204-205.

TTP are in a way ‘forced’ to be religious, since everybody has to believe in the seven dogmas of the universal faith, because these seven dogmas are considered necessary conditions for piety. What the state cannot enforce is the way in which the dogmas are interpreted. This is, as has been explained in 6.1, part of the ‘inner religion’ that cannot be controlled by the state, leaving room to the freedom to philosophize. But the ‘external religion’ can be enforced by the state.

Nadler is right in stating that increasing the rationality and freedom of the citizens are important goals for Spinoza, but he forgets to point out that these goals cannot be separated from the goal to instill social harmony in the state. Peace, according to Spinoza, does not consist ‘in the mere absence of war, but in the union or harmony of minds’ (TP 6-4, p. 701). Increasing rationality and freedom is also nothing but the realization that ‘nothing is more advantageous to man than man. Men, I repeat, can wish for nothing more excellent for preserving their own being than that they all be in such harmony in all respects that their minds and bodies should compose, as it were, one mind and one body, and that all together they should aim at the common advantage of all’ (E-IVp18s). Nadler’s reading of Spinoza emphasizes those parts in Spinoza’s philosophy in which he seems to endorse individualism and individual rights, but he neglects the parts that emphasize the need of social harmony, and the crucial role that religion plays in creating it.

Not entirely surprisingly Spinoza’s positive remarks about religion in the TTP are likewise ignored, for instance his insistence that he holds ‘the usefulness and necessity of Holy Scripture or revelation (...) to be very great’ (TTP XV-10, p. 194) and his remark that the Biblical religion ‘is of great value to the state’ (TTP XV-7, p. 193). This is why Nadler’s reading of Spinoza is only partially, but not completely true. For instance, maybe it is true that Spinoza doesn’t want to have a state religion *with* compulsory church attendance and religious observance. However, Nadler does not mention that Spinoza does not have a problem with a state religion *without* compulsory church attendance and religious observance. This is also why Spinoza in the *Political Treatise* emphasized the need ‘that churches dedicated to the *national religion* should be large and costly’ (TP 8-46, p. 740, Italics are not in the original text).

Also, what Spinoza writes about religious dogma, is slightly different from Nadler’s account of it, for he ends chapter 19 by stating that ‘sovereigns today (..) have and always will retain this authority [over sacred matters] absolutely (...) provided they do not allow religious dogmas to proliferate or become confused with knowledge’ (TTP XX-22). Spinoza, in stating that the sovereign has absolute authority over sacred matters, also grants the civil government the right ‘to dictate religious dogma’. The civil authority just has to make sure that these dogmas will not

be more than the seven that Spinoza has laid out, and that these dogmas are not taken to be of a philosophical nature, but of a theological one, meaning that they are solely meant to instill obedience in the people.

According to Nadler Spinoza ‘was an eloquent proponent of a secular, democratic society, and was the strongest advocate for freedom and tolerance in the early modern period’.¹⁰ How Spinoza can be called a proponent of a secular society, while he, at the same time, also according to Nadler, was against the separation of church and state, now is clear. It is because Spinoza in Nadler’s (but also in Jonathan Israel’s) eyes simply wanted to have the clergy out of a position of power. The notion that religion has a positive function to play in society - because without the idea that we should know and love God as our supreme good, people will not unite, but, instead, they will become each other’s enemies, as they are driven by their desires to uncertain things -, is either not noticed or denied by these authors.

Notwithstanding the neglect of some of the major components of Spinoza’s philosophy in general, and his *Treatise* in particular, this reading of Spinoza’s *Treatise* as a work promoting secularism has become so widespread and dominant that in 2012 Boris van der Ham, member of the Dutch parliament for the left-wing liberal party Democrats 66 gave Spinoza’s *Treatise* as a farewell gift to, in his words, stand in Parliament, next to the Bible and the Quran, as ‘a source of inspiration for the secular politician’.¹¹ How far removed this idea of Spinoza as a staunch defender of secularism is of historical reality we will research next as we will go once again to the situation in the Dutch republic of the 1660’s.

7.3. The Public Church of the Dutch Republic

Spinoza lived in a time where there existed no such thing as a separation of Church and State. Although the Dutch Republic is often considered to be a very progressive state, the Republic was in fact ‘a federation of states in which the government committed itself to the cause of reformed religion’.¹² The debates in the Republic at the time were about what the state-religion should be, and how many dogma’s this religion should have.

In his article “Fundamental Doctrines of the Faith, Fundamental Doctrines of Society” professor in philosophy, Manfred Svensson takes issue with a ‘common reading of Western thought’ that takes the seventeenth century to be an age in which the decisive steps were being taken in order to provide for a liberal society. In this common reading it is believed that during

¹⁰ Nadler, writing in the *New York Times* (February 5, 2012).

¹¹ *Volkskrant* (July 5, 2012).

¹² Krop (2012), p. 69.

the seventeenth century religion was made into something that belongs exclusively in the private sphere, and not in the public sphere. Svensson wants to challenge this view. According to him it was way more common in the seventeenth century to pursue quite a different strategy in the dealing with religious strife and intolerance, namely 'to reduce the things necessary to believe (...). If we think of the founders of modern political thought in these terms, what comes to light is the degree to which they too believed that political society needed a shared doctrine'.¹³

This 'shared doctrine' is what the philosopher Charles Taylor has called "a common ground", a basic set of beliefs that unite a people and enable them to live together. Taylor describes this 'common ground' strategy as follows: 'The aim was to establish a certain ethic of peaceful coexistence and political order, a set of grounds for obedience, which while still theistic, even Christian, was based on those doctrines which were common to all Christian sects, or even to all theists'.¹⁴ The goal was not to free society from religion by making religion a strictly private affair, nor was the goal to limit the power of one particular religion by allowing many different religions. Doctrinal minimalism served an ecumenical goal of uniting the different sects in order that everybody could live together in peace and harmony.

This political motivation – to strive for peace - at the very same time could also be described as a religious duty, and hence as a theological motivation. It is the duty of every Christian to search for peace. The best way to end the conflicts among Christians seemed to be by means of formulating the core or the essence of the Christian faith in such a way that everybody can agree with it, which means that this essence should not consist of too many articles of faith.

There is also a philosophical motivation. For the new philosophers doctrinal minimalism had the advantage of providing room for philosophizing outside the few articles of faith that everybody needed to believe in. It is therefore not surprising that we find this kind of doctrinal minimalism being defended, not only in Arminianism and Socinianism, but also in the works of philosophers such as Erasmus, Grotius, Hobbes and Locke.¹⁵

Cuius Regio, eius Religio

For Modern and liberal people, living in the multicultural societies of the 21st Century doctrinal minimalism might sound intolerant and oppressive, but to appreciate the novelty of it at the time, we first have to realize how different things were perceived in the seventeenth century. To understand it we might well take a look at the reigning ideas on religion and politics in Europe of

¹³ Svensson (2014), p. 161-162.

¹⁴ Taylor (1998), p. 33

¹⁵ Svensson (2014), p. 164. However, Fukuoka (2018), p. 170, denies that Hobbes promoted doctrinal minimalism, but she affirms that this is the strategy of Spinoza in which 'he went further than anyone else'.

the sixteenth century. The Dutch historian A. Th. Van Deursen has described 'the dominant position held at the time'. This position entailed that 'tolerance was incompatible with the national interest. Who allowed two faiths divided the nation. A subject could not be loyal to a king whose faith was not shared by him'.¹⁶

Van Deursen continues the cited fragment above by citing the Peace of Augsburg of 1555 as one of the revolutionary theological-political innovations of the sixteenth century, because this law allowed Germans to leave the country if they didn't share the faith of their rulers. Every sovereign would have to choose the religion of his region. *Cuius regio, eius religio*. This view that there cannot be a political unity without the nation sharing the most important articles of faith was also the principle endorsed at the peace of Westfalen of 1648. It remained the dominant view in the seventeenth century.

Spinoza Accepted the Necessity of a Public Church

A convincing case that most, if not all, people in the 1660's – the time when Spinoza was writing the *Treatise* - embraced the idea of a shared faith has been made by Krop. He has described how all parties in the debate on the articles of faith and the freedom to philosophize – Orthodox reformed, as well as the Orthodox Cartesians, as well as the heretic Cartesians or Spinozists - 'spoke the same theological-political language', that is to say, they all subscribed to the idea that the Republic had to protect a society where people enjoyed freedom of conscience as well as a true religion upheld by a public church.¹⁷

The debate between Spinoza and his Orthodox Reformed adversaries should therefore, at least, according to Krop, not be understood as a debate between the proponents of freedom on the one hand and the proponents of religion on the other. All parties agreed that in the Dutch Republic there should be a public church, and that there should be freedom of conscience (and all parties also agreed that there should not be freedom of religion).

Krop describes how this freedom of thought or conscience was carved out historically by article 13 of the Union of Utrecht of 1579, stating that 'every individual may stay in his religion and because of his religion nobody will be submitted to investigation and inquiry'. But this same article also encouraged every province to do as the Peace of Augsburg had prescribed, and to choose a religion that could function as its public church. The main difference between the orthodox Reformed Voetius and Spinoza is on the number of articles of the true faith and on the content of the dogmas of faith, but they both share the pre-modern assumption that a shared

¹⁶ Van Deursen (2013), p. 41-42. Translation is mine.

¹⁷ Krop (2012), p. 70 and p. 87.

religion and a public church are necessary for a peaceful society. ‘All theologians and philosophers of the Dutch republic (...) accepted the existence of a public church with its officially established creed, a guarantee of stability and peace in society on the one hand and a basic need for political (philosophical) and religious liberties on the other hand’. Krop argues that it is therefore anachronistic to speak of Spinoza as a secularist, because Spinoza and his contemporaries lived in a time in which the paradigmatic way of thinking was in terms of a public church, which was considered necessary in order to maintain peace and stability.¹⁸

7.4. The Educational Tasks of the State-Church

How exactly does the state-religion make the citizens unite and more virtuous? On this subject Spinoza remains a little vague.¹⁹ However, maybe the TTP does give some clues to what the public church should do. Spinoza stresses therein namely political consequences of four different aspects of religion: divine law, Biblical narratives, the dogmas of faith and religious ceremonies. How these four aspects of religion could be used by the public church to instill unity and virtue in the populace I will sketch in what is to come.

Teaching the Divine Law

The first element of the state-religion is that it teaches the universal divine law that states that our highest good consists in the knowledge and love of God (TTP IV-3, 4, 5). The divine law unites the people, whereas the people get divided if they think their highest good to consist in sex, money or status. The divine law is distinguished in a natural divine law (discussed in TTP, chapter 4) and a revealed divine law (discussed in TTP, chapters 12, 13, 14). The law of Moses is treated separately by Spinoza in TTP, chapters 3, 5 and 17, because this law should be considered a revealed divine law, but still was ‘not universal, but adapted solely to the temperament and preservation of one people [the Hebrews]’ (TTP IV-5, p. 60). Both the natural divine law as well as the revealed divine law lead to the love of God and the neighbor. Spinoza’s philosophical religion as well as Biblical faith both lead to good works. Both religion (as prescribed by the natural divine law) as faith (as prescribed by the revealed divine law) are extremely useful and even necessary to the state, since they make that people can live together in peace, freedom and harmony.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 86-87.

¹⁹ Frank & Waller (2016), p. 97.

Teaching Biblical Narratives

The second thing that is of importance for the state-church are biblical narratives (discussed by Spinoza in TTP V-14, 15, 16, 17, 18). One cannot directly teach the common people rational truths about the best way to live, because their minds focus on spectacular events that they consider to be ‘miracles’ – events that arouse strong emotions in them. Most people lose interest if they are asked to follow the way in which a rational argument proceeds. It is hard for them to understand someone who is explaining definitions and principles, and then accordingly to follow his reasoning as he deduces certain true propositions that have to lead in their turn to other true propositions, and so forth and so on. If one wants to teach a larger group of people how they best can live together in peace and harmony, you have to do it in another way. You have to tell them certain spectacular stories that will arouse their interest. Only in this way will you make them contemplate on the things that are truly important in order that man can live together in stable societies.

Of course, not everybody needs to know these stories. Knowledge of the Biblical stories is only necessary for the common people who cannot arrive at the intellectual knowledge of God, but have to settle with the imaginary knowledge of God. They need to imagine God as supremely just and charitable, character traits that they can imitate.

That Spinoza does not want to get rid of the church or of the ecclesiastical class, but that he merely wants the pastors and priests to become civil servants serving the civil religion of the state-church, becomes nowhere clearer than when Spinoza discusses how necessary it is that the common people know the Biblical narratives. For on this subject he writes that the common people ‘are required to know only those histories that move their hearts to obedience and devotion. [They do not necessarily have to know all the stories in the Bible, YS.] But the people themselves are not sufficiently skilled to make judgments about them, since they get more pleasure from stories and from strange and unexpected events than from the actual doctrine of the histories. This is why, in addition to reading the histories, they also need pastors or church ministers to explain these to them, owing to the weakness of their understanding’. (TTP V-18, p. 78) In order to have a united people with shared norms and values people need to have (hi)stories in common, but they do not only need to hear those stories, but they also need religious teachers to explain the moral of these stories to them.

Teaching the Dogma's of Faith

Then thirdly the dogmas of faith. Spinoza embraced doctrinal minimalism or the belief that the peace in a society is best served by finding a common ground. It is to be noted that the way in

which Spinoza, who strives in his philosophy to reduce things to an absolute minimum (for instance, by making Descartes' substance dualism into a substance monism, or by making Descartes' six basic passions into three basic passions) needs way more doctrines of the universal faith than Hobbes did. For Hobbes only one article of faith sufficed: 'The unum necessarium, only article of faith, which the Scripture maketh simply necessary to salvation is this, that Jesus is the Christ'.²⁰ Spinoza needs seven articles of faith, maybe in order to hide the fact that this very simple Hobbesian (or rather: Christian) article of faith is missing. The only reference to Christ is at the end of the seventh dogma when Spinoza writes: 'But anyone who firmly believes that God forgives men's sins with the mercy and grace which he directs all things and is more fully inspired with the love of God for this reason, truly knows Christ according to the spirit, and Christ is within him'. (TTP XIV-10, p. 182) As Spinoza states in letter 42 to Jacob Ostens, reacting to the criticism of Van Velthuysen, the Muslims too can possess the spirit of Christ and be saved when they worship God 'by the exercise of justice and by love of their neighbor'. Spinoza's articles of faith are therefore meant to include also other religions. Whereas Hobbes only thinks of establishing unity within Christendom, Spinoza wants to extend the unity in the state to people of other religious persuasions, provided they accept the seven articles of faith, something they can show by acts of justice and charity, acts which are defined by the state and its laws.

The Relevance of Religious Ceremonies

Singled out as the fourth and last element of the state church are its religious ceremonies. Spinoza's discussion of them has not been treated yet. Spinoza can be easily misread as judging religious ceremonies to be totally irrelevant. The ceremonies of the Old Testament were installed with the purpose that the Hebrews would do everything – eating, working, celebrating, etcetera - out of a sense of religious obligation to which they were commanded by God, imagined as a king and a legislator. These ceremonies 'and indeed the entire Law of Moses, related to nothing but the Hebrew state and consequently nothing other than material benefit'. (TTP V-12, p. 75) Ceremonies have nothing to do with 'blessedness' as they don't help us to come to know and love God, but they can contribute in living securely in a state, which is one of the three things that men can honorably desire. (TTP III-5, p. 45) The Christian ceremonies likewise should not be considered as being necessary for salvation or blessedness. They were installed to create a sense of community, the idea of a universal church. (TTP V-13, p. 75) For Spinoza ceremonies are not unimportant. He thought that they could contribute to experiencing a sense of unity among people.

²⁰ Hobbes (1968), p. 615.

7.5. Political Christianity

That Spinoza thought that ceremonies had a political, rather than a religious function, also becomes clear from Spinoza's endorsement of Paul's Christianity. Jesus and Paul were not interested in politics, that is, in teaching laws for the state. What they taught was the natural divine law, adapted to the level of the intellect of the multitude. Thus they told people that they should desire knowledge and love of God above anything else, and that one has to practice justice and charity, and that in order to have justice and charity one has to obey the laws of the state. In this way Christianity gives room for individual states to devise their own particular laws. There is in Spinoza's interpretation of Christianity not a law above the state law.

'Christ (...) was not sent to conserve a commonwealth and institute laws, but to teach the universal law alone. Hence, we readily understand that Christ did not abolish the law of Moses at all. His overriding concern was to offer moral teaching, and to distinguish it from the laws of the state, and this he did chiefly due to the ignorance of the Pharisees who supposed that man lived well by defending the laws of the state, or the Law of Moses, despite the fact that this law, as we have said, related only to the state and sought to compel rather than instruct the Hebrews' (TTP V-3, p. 69).

Since people want to follow Christ's example wholeheartedly, and as Christ's example shows us to be pious, and as the highest kind of piety consists out of 'piety towards one's country', we all have to wholeheartedly obey the laws of the state (TTP XX-10, p. 242). Although the internal religion cannot be enforced by law, it is in fact the most powerful tool in making people obey the laws. It is also not true that the state cannot do anything to make people internally believe the things they need to believe: 'And while it is impossible, of course, to control people's minds to the same extent as their tongues, still minds too are to some degree subject to the sovereign's power, which has various ways to ensure that a large part of the people believes, loves, hates, etc. what the sovereign wants them to. (..) Thus, without any logical contradiction, we can conceive of men who believe, love, hate, despise, or exhibit any passion whatever, owing to the power of the state alone' (TTP XX-2, p. 238). This is a task of the churches that stand under the control of the state. Ceremonies can play a role in that they help to create a sense of unity among the people. A rational goal is in this way served by non-rational means.

According to Spinoza the Bible itself testifies that the state has the absolute authority over the external religion, including religious ceremonies. The Jewish people got the laws of Moses as part of a covenant, that is, a social contract between the people on the one hand and the sovereign (God in this case) on the other hand, in which the people pledged loyalty to the laws of the

sovereign in exchange for protection of this sovereign. The Bible therefore most clearly testifies that 'divine law, or the law of religion, arises from a covenant, and without a covenant there is no law but the law of nature' (TTP XVII-31, p. 229). This again is used by Spinoza as an argument that, also according to the Bible, God does not directly rule over men, but only when men consent to this rule.

In other words, only when people agree to have their societies directly led and governed by God himself, would theocracy be a solution. However, Christians can no longer have such a theocracy, since the New Testament testifies that God's 'covenant is no longer written in ink or on stone tablets but rather on the heart by the spirit of God' (2 Corinthians 3-3; TTP XVIII-1). But with regard to the Jews Spinoza would not be surprised if they courageously would 'reestablish their state (...) and then God will choose them again'. (TTP III-12, p. 55) As long as Jews live in the diaspora, they, however have to adapt to the laws of the state where they live. This is also stated in the Bible by the prophet Jeremiah where the Jews that were prisoners in Babylon are told to 'strive for the well-being of the country into which they were held captive' (TTP XX-12, p. 243). With regard to Christian ceremonies, Spinoza writes that they are not necessary for true religion, but there is no reason to think that he would somehow want to get rid of 'baptism, the Lord's supper, feast-days, public prayers, and any others that are and always have been common to the whole of Christianity' (TTP V-13, p. 75). Much more likely is that he considered them to be part of any Christian state, being one of the means to create unity between the people of that state.

The state can decide what laws it has, also what kind of (religious) ceremonies it wants to have. Every state can become a church, and have its own external cult of religion, meant to unite the people and to make them obedient to the laws of the state. The way in which they think about God is, however, part of the internal religion. The state can and should influence this internal religion by means of the state church. People should know what the divine law is, they should know the Biblical stories, the fundamental dogma's of the universal faith and they should join the ceremonies that the state church prescribes. However, in the end people are free to think about God as they desire, since the piety of the people shows itself in their acts, and not in their thoughts.

Conclusion to the Second Part

Spinoza wrote a 'theological-political' work, also because he was of the opinion that religion and politics are intrinsically linked. Societies cannot function without religion, because people need to

obey wholeheartedly and not only out of fear. Religion cannot really function without the state, because the divine law is completely powerless in a state of nature.

The theological-political challenge is how to devise a civil religion that is able to unite the people, while leaving room for the philosophical religion. That this philosophical religion should be left free is not argued, because of the intrinsic value of individual freedom itself, but rather, because allowing this philosophical religion does not pose any threat to piety and peace in the state, while forbidding this philosophical religion would cause a threat to piety and peace, as the TTP's subtitle testifies.

The two main theses that Spinoza wants to defend in the TTP – the separation thesis stating that philosophy and theology should be held apart and the single authority thesis stating that the state should have absolute authority over the church - are being defended as both being *instrumental to piety and peace*. This already shows that piety and peace are the primary objectives, and that the separation of philosophy and theology and the subordination of the church under the state are derivative. The question whether the theological should rule the political or the political the theological is therefore not the primary question. The primary question is rather about the kind of society that does justice to both the demands of religious piety, as well as to the demands of worldly peace. In other words, Spinoza argues that people need a civil religion in order to live together in peace and they need to live together in peace in order to be truly religious. Piety and peace are necessary for human beings – individually as well as collectively in the form of the state -, because they help us to persist in our own being.

Spinoza's main theological concern is to establish salvation for everybody (or the greatest amount of people) and his main political concern is to establish unity in the state, and these two concerns amount to the same theological-political solution, which consists in building a State-Church with a Civil Religion that is reasonable. In this concern he was not alone. There was widespread consensus in the Republic of the seventeenth century that there needed to be freedom of conscience as well as a state-controlled church which would guard over public religion.