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LIBERTAS PHILOSOPHANDI
Freedom of Expression, Conscience and
Thought in Modern Philosophy

a cura di Diego Donna e Mariafranca Spallanzani

“He was in the world, and the world did not know him”.
Spinoza’s Christ and the Freedom of Philosophy

Diego Donna

Scholars have studied the figure of Christ within the Theological-Political Treatise for quite some time, as a symbol of the riddle that runs through Spinoza’s reflection on freedom of thought. Christ is placed by Spinoza at the centre of a specific problem in the Treatise, also reflected in the Ethics, which is: if freedom consists in adequately understanding our nature and the nature in which we are included, why is this understanding so difficult to reach for most of mankind? What kind of philosophical and political obstacles stand in the way of reaching intellectual perfection? As we shall see, Spinoza’s Christ incarnates this riddle, which is individual and collective at the same time, and corresponds to the distinction between the philosopher and common people.

Keywords: *Spinoza, Christ, Freedom of Philosophy, Imagination, Intellect.*

Introduction

In this contribution I will deal with the problem of freedom of thought, taking Spinoza as my starting point. I would like, however, to choose a specific and perhaps unusual perspective: the thesis I will set out is that the tension between imagination and intellect, expressed by the figure of Christ, lies at the root of Spinoza’s philosophical research. What’s more, it reflects the distance between common people and those who can gain access to the truth of philosophy.

In the *Theological-Political Treatise* Spinoza does not propose in any way to subordinate theology to philosophy, but indicates them as two separate and legitimate paths towards salvation, each operating in its own realm¹. And things could not be otherwise, considering the “uncertain and risky” conditions that dominate the everyday life of men, as Spinoza writes in chapter fifteen of the *Treatise*².

¹ Cfr. *Tractatus theologico-politicus* [TTP], 5, 15, *Opera*, 4 vols., III, ed. C. Gebhardt, Heidelberg, 1925 [G.], pp. 77, 188; [*Theological-Political Treatise*, in E. Curley (ed.), *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, 2 vols., II, Princeton-Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2016] [C.].

² Cfr. TTP, 15, G. III, p. 187: “Quare hoc totius theologiae et Scripturae fundamentum, quamvis mathematica demonstratione ostendi nequeat, sano tamen iudicio amplectimur. [...] Quasi vero ad vitam sapienter instituendam, nihil tamquam verum admittamus, quod

What would be the best tool for government? If it cannot be fear, which raises the risk of political uncertainty by undermining unanimity and consent – which is essential for Spinoza –, then people must act as if they were a unified mind (*una mente*). In any case, those who are not capable of rational self-determination must still be governed³, which can be considered as a Machiavellian position: “the divinity of Scripture must be established only by the fact that it teaches true virtue”⁴. This explains why religion is extremely useful in a practical sense, even while having nothing to do with the speculative domain dedicated to the true knowledge of nature: “Euclid wrote only about things quite simple and most intelligible. Anyone can easily explain his work in any language. [...] Nor do we need to know about his life, concerns and customs [...] or the fate of its book, or its various readings”⁵.

The *Theological-Political Treatise* recognises therefore the political use of religion (faith and revelation), in line with the development of the 17th-century libertine tradition, but defends at the same time the freedom of the philosopher. Freedom of the mind is a private virtue which differs from security, which is the virtue of the State, understood as civil society’s ability to conserve itself in its own right⁶. Spinoza’s *libertas philosophandi* does not yet resemble Voltaire’s freedom of thought: the case Spinoza is defending is philosophy itself, and the genitive in the expression “freedom of philosophy” must be taken literally. It simply indicates, as Spinoza writes in the introduction to the *Treatise*, just as in his letters to Oldenburg, that the freedom of action granted to the philosopher by a sovereign, not only does not undermine social peace, but is its actual precondition.

Christ is in this sense a symbol of the division between intellect (adequate ideas) and imagination (signs and parables), much more than a reconciliation between the two. He ultimately reflects the same contradiction felt by philosophers, who reserve speculative truths for themselves when faced with the ignorance of the masses.

ulla dubitandi ratione in dubium revocari queat, aut quod pleraeque nostrae actiones non admodum incertae sint, et alea plenae”.

³ Cfr. *Tractatus Politicus* [TP], 10, § 8, G. III, p. 356.

⁴ TTP, 7, G. III, p. 99; C. p. 172.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 111; C. p. 185.

⁶ Cfr. TP, III, § 12; 5 § 1, pp. 289, 295.

1. Christ as a philosopher?

Let us concentrate first on the form of communication that Christ had with God, which, Spinoza argues, came about through an intellectual perception of divine design, without relying on any bodily medium⁷. Spinoza clarifies the twofold point of view from which we must consider the nature of this exceptional man: it appears "according to the flesh" in the historical form of the sermons referred by witnesses, but it expresses a universal message of salvation "according to the spirit"⁸, comprehensible even by way of natural reason alone. We know from the letters that Spinoza's Christ does not have a divine nature: his resurrection was entirely spiritual, Spinoza declares in a famous letter to Oldenburg, and it is not at all necessary to know Christ according to the flesh in order to reach salvation⁹. The prophets expressed spiritual things in a bodily way¹⁰, but prophecy, whose object does not involve speculation, did not increase their knowledge. On the contrary, Christ's knowledge is distinct from both the authority of the Mosaic legislator and prophets' speculation.

These passages seem to support a link between Christ and philosophy: Spinoza will even say that no one becomes blessed if they do not have within themselves the mind of Christ, through which they grasp God's laws as eternal truths¹¹. A hasty reading might lead us to equate this exceptional man's perfect knowledge (*ad tantam perfectionem supra alios pervenisse*)¹² with the "beatitude of the mind" (*beatitudo mentis*) that Spinoza presents in the fifth and last part of the *Ethics*¹³. The intuitive knowledge described in the *Ethics* is an intellectual vision of the essence of things through the essence of God¹⁴. Accordingly, Christ was not only a prophet, but the mouth of

⁷ Cfr. TTP, 1, G. III, p. 21.

⁸ Cfr. TTP, 14, G. III, p. 349. This "spiritual" conception of the nature of Christ, probably Docetian, is shared by many heterodox Dutch Christians with whom Spinoza comes into contact in the youthful phase of his intellectual biography. On the relationship between the philosopher and the heretical culture of the seventeenth century see, among others, K.O. Meinsma, *Spinoza et son cercle, Etude critique historique sur les hétérodoxes hollandais*, Paris, Vrin, 1983; S. Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell. Spinoza's Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2013; A. Bettini, *Il Cristo di Spinoza*, Milano, Ghibli, 2005.

⁹ Cfr. Spinoza to Oldenburg, *Epistolae* [Ep.], 73, G. IV, p. 308.

¹⁰ Cfr. TTP, 1, G. III, p. 28.

¹¹ Cfr. TTP, 4, G. III, p. 119.

¹² Cfr. TTP, 1, G. III, p. 21.

¹³ Cfr. *Ethica* [E], V, prop. 37, G. II, p. 303.

¹⁴ Cfr. E, V, prop. 31, G. II, p. 299.

God (*os Dei*), since he grasped the laws of God understanding them not in the form of images but as “eternal truths”¹⁵. God revealed some things to humankind through the mind of Christ, Spinoza carries on, not by way of images or angelic forms, but directly to his mind (*pura mente*)¹⁶, making him perceive his designs *vere et adæquate*¹⁷. In this perspective, the experience of Christ could set out the conditions for a universal ethics, at the foundation of civil life, but also for a philosophical knowledge totally subsumed under the knowledge of God¹⁸. The holy (or “virtuous”, expressed philosophically) behaviour that follows would be offered to the world as a possibility for salvation that is neither theological nor political, but purely intellectual¹⁹.

However in the *Treatise*, the transition between Christ’s perception of “things in truth” and their teaching contains a few highly problematic aspects. Christ perceived revealed things adequately or with the “pure mind”. And yet, this claim raises a number of difficulties. First of all, of which kind of God’s essence did Christ have knowledge? The God-person found in tradition, or Spinoza’s God-substance²⁰ (as would seem to be the case, if one identifies the figure of Christ with that of the philosopher)? The first-case scenario is traditionally associated with the life of the blessed. Spinoza quotes the passage from the *Epistle to the Romans* (1, 20) in which the hidden things of God (his power and divinity) have been seen by his creatures since the foundation of the world. With these words Paul is suggesting that everyone can understand the power of God by natural light, deducing from it the things to seek or to shun²¹.

What if the spirit of Christ were comparable to the true idea of God, that is, the infinite intellect as the immediate infinite mode of the attribute of thought? In this sense, understanding God’s mind would mean recomposing the two fundamental orders of reality, that of existence and that of the essence of things. The double track of Spinoza’s ontology and ethics is played out on these two orders: from the whole to the part or from the formal essence of God’s

¹⁵ Cfr. TTP, 4, G. III, p. 65: “Tum enim res intelligitur, cum ipsa pura mente extra verba et imagines percipitur”.

¹⁶ Cfr. TTP, 1, G. III, p. 21.

¹⁷ Cfr. TTP, 4, G. III, p. 65: “Christus itaque res revelatas vere et adæquate percipit”.

¹⁸ Cfr. *ibidem*, p. 60.

¹⁹ Cfr. E, V, prop. 36, schol., G. II, p. 303; TTP, 4, G. III, pp. 65-66.

²⁰ Cfr. *ibidem*.

²¹ Cfr. TTP, 4, G. III, p. 68. Cfr. Spinoza a Oldenburg, Ep. 73, G. IV, p. 308.

attributes to the essence of singular things. The existence of singular things must be conceived "in God", assuming the idea of the infinite substance as a product of the intellect alone.

This hypothesis, which is sustained, among others, by Ytzhak Melamed²², proves to be problematic. The excellence of the mind of Christ (*longe excellentior*), Spinoza states, goes beyond the foundations of human rationality (*nostræ cognitionis fundamentis non continentur*)²³ not because it is foreign to them (there is nothing divine about Spinoza's Christ), but because it deduces its understanding of the causes directly from an intellectual awareness of its own nature. Nevertheless, a controversial point lies in the difference between Christ's knowledge and the imaginative aspect of preaching. Of Christ we know only three things with certainty: Christ is not the son of God, except in a purely metaphorical sense²⁴, he was not resurrected from death and he led a morally perfect life. Finally, his message was forced to rely on the only examples of morality and charity that common people could understand:

For instance, when Christ says blessed are those who mourn, for they shall receive comfort [Matthew 5:4], we do not know from this Text what kind of mourner he means. But because he teaches later that we should be apprehensive about nothing except the kingdom of God and his justice, which he commends as the supreme good [see Matthew 6:33], from this it follows that by mourners he understand only does who mourn for the kingdom [...]. It was Christ who spoke. And he did not institute laws ad a lawgiver, instead as a teacher he taught lessons because (as we have shown above) he did not want to correct external actions so much as the heart²⁵.

²² Cfr. Y.Y. Melamed, *Christus secundum Spiritum: Spinoza, Jesus and the Infinite Intellect*, in N. Stahl (ed.), *The Jewish Jesus*, New York, Routledge, 2012, pp. 140-151. Some commentators have underlined Spinoza's ambivalent use of the figure of Christ in the *Treatise*. Theo Verbeek, among others, comes to mind (*Spinoza's Theologico-political Treatise: exploring 'the will of God'*, Burlington, Ashgate, pp. 2-3). The presumed identity between prophecy and certain knowledge is played on two misunderstandings, deliberately devised by Spinoza. The first concerns the use of the term "divine": both prophecy and rational knowledge are "divine", but in a different sense, the former being considered by the people to be extraneous to the natural light, the latter, on the contrary, as it is based for the philosopher on the appropriate concept of God which, being in turn rational, is accessible to all. Certain knowledge can then be understood as belief, or subjective awareness (belief), or in the more specific sense of science. "As a result, the point of Spinoza's definition of 'profecy' is not to explain the meaning of the word 'profecy' but to lay down a dialectical principle such that he can establish an identity of some sort between his own philosophy and traditional religion".

²³ TTP, 1, G. III, p. 21.

²⁴ Cfr. *Ibidem*, p. 24.

²⁵ TTP, 7, G. III, p. 103; C. pp. 176-177. Cfr. also TTP, 11, G. III, pp. 157-158: "[...] donec tandem aliquando religio a speculationibus philosophicis separaretur et ad paucissima et

Christian law (*religio catholica*) is “universal” in the sense that it expresses an inner experience: the “eternity” of Christ is the sign of his universal example. If Christ proclaimed it as a law, he did so because of the ignorance of the people²⁶. Was then Christ a prophet or a philosopher? The experience of Christ could outline the conditions of a universal ethics; his conduct would be offered to the world as a possibility of salvation, neither theological nor intellectual, but purely moral: the “voice” of Christ can be called the “the voice of God” in the same way as that which Moses heard, Spinoza concludes²⁷. And in this sense it can also be said that Christ was the “way to salvation”. Christ’s aim was not to impose new laws, but to teach moral doctrines. Such doctrines, unlike what is contained in the Old Testament, should not be interpreted.

These, after all, are the conclusions that Spinoza draws from his reading of the entire Scripture, given the fact that we can only have a moral and not an intellectual certainty of its contents:

We have taught only the method of investigating those statements of Scripture which concern the way we should conduct our lives, and which therefore can be investigated more easily. For really there was never any dispute among the Writers of the Bible on these matters. [...] This method teaches us only how to seek out what the Prophets really saw or heard, not what they wanted to signify or represent by those symbols. For we can conjecture this, but not deduce it with certainty from the foundations of Scripture²⁸.

We cannot demonstrate by reason whether the foundation of Theology – that men are saved only by obedience – is true or false. So someone may raise against us the objection: why then do we believe it? If we embrace it without reason, like blind men, then we too act as foolishly and without judgment. On the other hand, if we want to maintain that we can demonstrate this foundation rationally, then Theology will be part of Philosophy, and ought not to be separated from it. [...] Nevertheless, I maintain that we can use our judgment, so that we accept what has already been revealed with at least moral certainty²⁹.

In Strauss’ opinion, Spinoza was driven in writing the *Treatise* by two priorities: preventing his own persecution from spreading from Jewish to Christian environments and seeking to agree with poten-

simplicissima dogmata, quae Christus suos docuit, redigatur”.

²⁶ Cfr. TTP, 4, G. III, p. 65.

²⁷ Cfr. TTP, 1, G. III, p. 21.

²⁸ TTP, 7, G. III, p. 105; C. p. 178.

²⁹ TTP, 15, G. III, p. 185; C. pp. 278-279.

tial philosophers or liberal Christians who were exasperated by the religious wars. This is why Spinoza, according to Strauss, expresses himself in a contradictory way, so to speak: those who feel that his heterodox affirmations in the *Treatise* are scandalous – Strauss concludes – will later be reassured by Spinoza's more or less orthodox formulas³⁰.

According to this interpretation, the figure of Christ embodies the very conflict that the philosopher himself lives, caught between the two sides of the audience to which he addresses his appeal in defence of a life according to reason: Christians, on the one hand, unable to fully become philosophers, and philosophers on the other, forced to think and live in obedience to external theological doctrine and political authority. This ambivalence is reflected in the argumentative structure of *Treatise*, poised between the needs of theology (revelation) and philosophy.

Christ's mind communicated with "God's mind": this claim is understandable only if by "mind" one understands the thoughts that inspired Christ's moral behaviour. What remains is the paradox of a man who knew the divine nature *uno intuitu*, and yet, like any other prophet, his doctrine was translated through signs, parables and images. The problem reappears in the transition from the inner experience of Christ to the teaching of the apostles.

2. *The message of Christ and the conflict between churches*

Moving from the speculative to the moral and political level, we realise that Christ announced a universal morality that goes beyond the historical context of ritual obligations. While Moses prescribed a political legislation valid only for the Jewish people³¹ and Mohammed was in all likelihood an "imposter"³², the life of Christ is entire-

³⁰ Cfr. L. Strauss, *Come studiare il Trattato teologico-politico di Spinoza*, in *Scrittura e persecuzione* (1952), trans. by G. Ferrara, F. Profili, Venezia, Marsilio, 1990, pp. 137-197. Cfr. also L. Kolakowski, *Chrétien sans Église. La conscience religieuse et le lien confessionnel au XVII^e siècle*, Paris, Gallimard, 1969. For A. Tosel (*Spinoza ou le crépuscule de la servitude. Essai sur le Traité Théologico-Politique*, Paris, Aubier, 1984, p. 167), the *Tractatus* constitutes a kind of "introduction à la philosophie. [...] La forme polémique, le langage volontairement traditionnel, la dispersion assumée des énoncés pour éprouver la sagacité des lecteurs et former *l'intellectus* à son labeur de *concatenatio* ne doivent pas manquer qu'il s'agit là d'autant de moyens pour mettre en place ce que l'on a nommé *l'Éthique* souterraine du TTP".

³¹ Cfr. TTP, praef., G. III, pp. 9-10; 3, G. III, p. 48; 4, G. III, pp. 63-64; 5, G. III, p. 70.

³² Spinoza a Ostens, Ep. 43, G. IV, p. 226.

ly distinct from that of the other prophets. And yet, Spinoza continues in the *Treatise*, the tradition of the apostles, inspired by the example of Christ, was eventually marked by the same contradictions and problematic aspects. The teachings of the apostles surely differ from other forms of preaching and religious superstition, because they can be translated into the precepts of “justice and charity”, intended not for a single nation but all of humanity. While in the Old Testament (the books of the prophets) God’s will coincides with the law of Israel, the apostles’ teaching in no way involves political authority.

At a closer look, however, one realises how many political problems all this brings about. The absence of a specific theological authority produced divisions regarding the “foundations” of the Christian doctrine. As different cultural and geographical orientations developed, a clash between opposing orthodoxies became inevitable:

The main points of Christ’s deeds and passion were immediately spread throughout the whole Roman Empire. [...] Whatever has been corrupted or is faulty could have happened only in other matters for example, in some circumstance of a narrative or a Prophecy, to move the people to greater devotion, or in some miracle, to torment the Philosopher, or, finally, in speculative matters, after schismatics had begun to introduce these into religion, so that everyone might prop up his own inventions by abusing divine authority³³.

The teaching of the apostles is certainly different from other forms of preaching or religious superstition: religion meets a universal precept, which does not force obedience. The apostle takes up the message of the teacher and transmits it into a law of justice and charity, which is mediated inwardly by the spirit of Christ:

Scripture is properly called the word of God only in relation to the universal divine law. [...] From Scripture itself we have perceived its most important themes without any difficulty or ambiguity to love God above all else, and to love your neighbour as yourself. But this cannot be forged, nor can it be something written by a hasty or erring pen³⁴.

The apostolic doctrine is based on a few teachings, which are not related to the command of prophecy and the political destiny

³³ TTP, 12, G. III, p. 166; C. p. 256.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 164-165; C. pp. 254-255.

of a people. The apostles wrote but also preached as teachers, if not as "philosophers" nor as prophets, says Spinoza³⁵. Religion, established by the covenant at the time of Moses, becomes universal law with the apostles:

Before the coming of Christ the Prophets were accustomed to preach religion as the law of their Country and by the power of the covenant entered into the time of Moses, but after the coming of Christ the Apostles preached the same religion to everyone as a universal law solely by the power of the passion of Christ³⁶.

This law is by no means new, because it is fully natural; but whereas the prophet does not discuss it, imposing it as a commandment received from God, the apostles are so rational that they seem to dispute and not prophesise³⁷. And yet, even the new doctors and teachers will soon equip themselves with the "signs" necessary "to convert the people"³⁸. Spinoza's account of the teaching of the apostles is confusing, for they were teachers and prophets: "Nobody who reads the New Testament can doubt that Apostles were prophets"³⁹. They were inspired by special revelation only insofar as what they preached was confirmed by signs⁴⁰.

Above all, the absence of a specific authority in the apostolic sphere produces important divisions from the beginning, concerning the "foundations" of doctrine. One might recall the relationship between faith and works that affects the conflict between Paul and James⁴¹. They increased the dogmas of religion to such an extent and confused them with philosophy, says Spinoza, that the supreme interpreter of religion had to be, at the same time, a supreme theologian and a supreme philosopher⁴². This situation gave birth to several rigorisms, and it will certainly be so forever, concludes Spinoza, if religion is not finally separated from philosophical speculation⁴³.

³⁵ Cfr. TTP, 11, G. III, p. 152: "Apostoli namque ubique ratiocinantur, ita ut non prophettare, sed disputare videantur".

³⁶ TTP, 12, G. III, p. 163; C. p. 253.

³⁷ Cfr. TTP, 11, G. III, p. 152.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 153.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 151.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 156-157.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 157.

⁴² Cfr. TTP, 19, G. III, pp. 236-237.

⁴³ Cfr. TTP, 11, G. III, pp. 157-158.

At this point the philosophical problem turns into a political one. The message of charity promoted by Christ was overturned by schisms and conflicts between the different churches, in order to establish the true interpretation of the word of God. In Andre Toseł's words, a political power took shape, hidden under the non-political veil of a private morality⁴⁴; the apostle had now become a theologian representing a Church struggling for hegemony.

Both the religious experience of the Old Testament, which dictates direct obedience to the will of God, and the religious experience mediated by the teachings of the apostles fall into the conflicting language of authority. Contradictions and issues afflict the apostolic tradition as much as they do the Jewish religion. The latter elaborates its own sense of prophecy and miracles; the spirit of Christ should speak to the conscience of all. But in the end they both turn out to be inseparable from the imaginary bonds of government: theocratic in the case of the Jewish people and apparently non-political in early Christianity, yet immediately corrupted by conflict between churches. The dogmas of the *religio catholica* had become a source of conflict between the parties contending the monopoly on interpretation, which makes it increasingly difficult to distinguish "doctors" from "theologians". The Christian community, which originally provided an alternative to worldly power, had been transformed into yet another ecclesiastical apparatus. In fact Christ or the natural religion of charity and justice, Spinoza bitterly concludes, paraphrasing John (1:10): "*was in the world, and the world did not know him*". On the contrary, the world dispersed its fruit, reabsorbing it into theology⁴⁵; but one thing is to "understand Scripture and the mind of the Prophet, and another to understand the mind of God"⁴⁶.

Divine law requires God to be loved under the form of obedience; on the other hand, the renewed form of Christ's moral (or philosophical?) and apolitical message does not provide us with the adequate idea of *causa sui* or infinite substance. While the figure of Christ marks a line between the experience of the prophets and the

⁴⁴ Cfr. A. Toseł, *La figure du Christ et la vérité de la religion*, in A. Bento, J.M. Silva Rosa (eds.), *Revisiting Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise*, Hildesheim-Zürich-New York, Olms, 2013, pp. 172-173.

⁴⁵ TTP, 12, G. III, p. 163; C. p. 253.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

teaching of the apostles, in reality it is also the symbol of an inevitable overlap between the two:

The Holy Spirit gives testimony only concerning good works. That's why even Paul calls them the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Really, the Holy Spirit is nothing but a satisfaction which arises in the mind from good actions. The only Spirit which gives testimony concerning truth and certainty in speculative matters is reason⁴⁷.

Only with great difficulty can this division be recomposed by the figure of the philosopher, the only one with true knowledge of God, gained from the clear and distinct idea of the *causa sui*. Such an idea remains inaccessible for common people, indeed, who need the sustainment of religious imagination to act in a morally correct way. The underlying assumption does not change for notions such as sin and merit are foreign to the true nature of the mind:

It's certain that nature, considered absolutely, has the supreme right to do everything it can, i.e., that the right of nature extends as far as its power does. For the power of nature is the power of God itself and has the supreme right over all things [...]. Now the supreme law of nature is that each thing strives to persevere in its state, as far as it can by its own power, and does this, not on account of anything else, but only of itself. [...] Nor do we recognise here any difference between men and other individuals in nature, nor between men endowed with reason and those others who are ignorant of true reason, nor between fools and madmen, and those who sensible and sane. [...] Just as the wiseman has the supreme right to do everything which reason dictate [...] so also the ignorant and the weak-minded have the supreme right to do everything appetite urges, or to live according to the laws of appetite. This is just what Paul teaches, when he recognizes no sin before the law, i.e., so long as men are considered as living only according to the rule of nature⁴⁸.

Imagination drives men to pursue morality by moderating their desire. In the Jewish religion, imagination is unequivocally subordinated to political authority. The miraculous wonders and prophetic imagination had been welded to the historical destiny of the Jewish people. The Christian message is announced to men through parables and signs, but it also communicates the advent of an inner law. Thanks to it, the amendment of the intellect should be enriched by a

⁴⁷ TTP, 15, G. III, p. 188; C. p. 281.

⁴⁸ TTP, 16, G. III, pp. 189-190; C. pp. 282-283.

new ethic, i.e. by a behaviour suited to the perfect knowledge of our nature. This is a necessary task for philosophy, betrayed rather than exemplified by the legacy of Christ. His teaching remains trapped in the precepts and figures that dominate the imaginative life of the prophets. In the end, his teaching continues to be hindered by the churches.

Conclusion

Can we believe Spinoza's words when he states that the wisdom of God assumed human nature, and Christ was the way of salvation?⁴⁹ Spinoza's reasoning in the *Treatise* seems to be as follows: true ideas depend on the proper idea of God, they are God's "commandments", so to speak, prescribed by God himself because he exists in our minds⁵⁰; not differently, albeit with other terms, the "law" of God is only respected by those who are concerned to love God not out of fear of torment, nor out of love for anything else (wealth, fame, etc.), but simply because they know that the supreme good is the knowledge and love of God. One should not forget that the use of terms such as "natural" and "divine knowledge", "law", "commandments", "salvation" is not at all straightforward in the *Treatise*, as if Spinoza took pains to draw a dialectical link between philosophy and theology that more often than not confuses rather than clarifies the boundaries between these two domains.

Summum bonum is on the other hand the knowledge and the love of God, an intellectual love of God, according to the fifth part of the *Ethics*. *Beatitudo mentis* is contemplation of our acting in virtue of the very essence of the infinite substance, *causa sui* in all things. Was this really the content that Christ understood with the pure mind? Christ could then reconcile the distinction between imagination and the intellect, the same distinction that prevents common men from making use of natural reason. I rather propose that Christ is the very image of Spinoza's "rationalism": no doubt a peculiar rationalism, that recognises the prerogatives of the imagination and the body while defending the possibility of an adequate and intellectual knowledge of God and our nature. If this knowledge

⁴⁹ Cf. TTP, 1, G. III, p. 21.

⁵⁰ Cf. TTP, 4, G. III, p. 60.

was merely compatible with the perfect behaviour of an exceptional man, it would not communicate, as it seems, with the external forms of man's passionate life. On the contrary, even assuming that this knowledge was expressed by the mind of Christ, the problem becomes how to translate the "salvation" of the mind, in which lies Spinoza's sense of *Libertas philosophandi*, into a collective process of emancipation.

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LIBERTAS PHILOSOPHANDI

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a cura di Diego Donna e Mariafranca Spallanzani

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