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Philosophy and Resurrection : The Gospel according to Spinoza

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Many years ago, as a student in a course on philosophy, I wrote the obligatory essay on David Hume's theory of causality, laying out his famous criticism of the principle of cause and effect taken as a ground for metaphysical knowledge. I gave my draft to a typist, as was common before the days of computerized word processing. I recall my annoyance when I received back the typed version of my paper on Hume's idea of cause. The title read: "David Hume on *Casual* Relationships." Now I understand that the Scottish philosopher enjoyed himself in the salons of Paris as much as any foreign visitor, and that the new title had some potential as a line of research. But that was not the paper I had written; and so I had to insist that my typist correct a good hundred references to "casual connections" and the like, to express the more philosophical affair of causality.

This correction of my academic essay recurred to me in preparing this talk about Spinoza. It recurred to me because this transformation of "casual" into "causal experience" seemed a perfect summary of the philosophical life as Spinoza understood it. While Hume, the skeptic, saw our minds' ideas somewhat as my typist had, with no great distinction between the casual and the causal, Spinoza made much of the difference. He taught that "casual experience," where things merely happen to us, is our lowest level of awareness. If we do not wish to live and think merely at random, we have to raise our minds above the accidents of existence that have generated our opinions and pursue the deeper reasons for things, the causal necessities inherent in Nature. We have to replace

our vague notions with what Spinoza calls "adequate ideas," ideas manifesting their logical power in the comprehensive order of thought.[1] The distinction between casual and causal thinking thus marks for him the two endpoints of the steep path that leads from mere opinion or collective belief to wisdom.

The departure point of belief that Spinoza generally has in mind is biblical religion. He holds that the foundation of all adequate ideas is the idea of God. But he deems the stories of the Bible to reflect a natural, *in*-adequate opinion about deity and the divine rewards and punishments. The God whose special providence in human history is described in Scripture is a casually received notion answering to imagination. Spinozist philosophy, however, revises the idea of God, understanding God as the one Substance conceived in and through itself. He finds it necessary to revise other biblical concepts, too – the "love of God," "divine decree," "blessedness," "salvation" and "true religion." Judaism and Christianity take these ideas in an inadequate sense, whereas his philosophy assigns them their proper meaning. Now we know few details about the early thinking of Spinoza, which led to his expulsion from the Synagogue in 1656. But we might deduce that his original confrontation with orthodoxy arose from his radical redefinition of religious language to make its primary object purely philosophical.

Spinoza comes to rewrite the European treaty between philosophy and faith on similar terms. He reverses the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas that the truths of religion are above human reason, and teaches that it is the philosopher who knows true blessedness. What the religious believer believes is a shadow of what the serious thinker thinks. (53) This teaching entails a unique, philosophical view of the Gospel, which I shall try to explain by looking at Spinoza's understanding of the idea of resurrection.

In general, Spinoza's achievement resembles that of the navigators who sought a new route to the East Indies and incidentally discovered America. In the course of re-negotiating the relation of faith and philosophy, and arguing for the separation of church and state, Spinoza incidentally founded modern biblical criticism.[2] Most scholarly explorations of the Bible today take place on the spiritual continent that he discovered. Yet what may be particularly significant for us in the 21st century, as we study his view of the New Testament, is the difference between him and present-day students of Scripture. The difference lies in this paradox of Spinoza's thought – that, as an interpreter of the Bible, he is more radical and rational than our contemporaries, but at the same time he is a more considerate and humane advocate of biblical religion.

1. Spinoza and Present-day New Testament Scholars

Let me begin by clarifying this claim about Spinoza's superiority. When one walks into an urban bookstore today, one finds shelves upon shelves of books of the latest biblical research, books disputing the Old and New Testaments as creditable texts and traditions. Few of the more popular of these writers hold anything sacred except what goes by the name of "scientific history." On our topic, the rising from the dead, we might find a book-length debate entitled *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment*, or a video of a lecture with the subtitle "The Greatest Hoax in History?" The blend of vulgarity and sophistication in these scholars is striking. But one should also be on the lookout for the bad conscience betrayed sometimes in their prose. For the majority of them are ex-religionists who have not thought their way to any sound philosophy or even to a learned ignorance.[3] As a result many of them indulge guiltily in the destruction of traditional biblical faith, while they themselves are unable to replace it with any comparably

profound vision of life, a vision that might continue to bind people to community and meaningful activity.[4]

Spinoza, by contrast, writes the *Theological-Political Treatise* in the Latin of the learned, and further specifies that he only addresses philosophers. Even so, he is cautious about disclosing his boldest thoughts. While driving his stake into the heart of religious fanaticism (and this in the service of religion), he refrains from explicit criticism of the founding miracles of either Judaism or Christianity, the revelation to Moses on Mt. Sinai or Jesus' Resurrection. Publicly he respects these miracles as constitutive of particular religious faiths. In human terms, what matters about the Resurrection is not the literal fact of the event (which, as we'll see, Spinoza does not believe). What matters is what the Resurrection means spiritually and practically to people as an idea. This distinction corresponds to the general distinction he makes between the *truth* of the Bible as a factual account of the world and what the text's language *means*. (91)[5] For Spinoza, biblical science could establish the essential thing for faith, the *meanings* of scriptural texts, which converge in their moral message. But believers would be mistaken to try to establish the factual *truth* of, say, the miraculous events in the history of salvation. (52, 85) Establishing truth always leads to questions of a philosophical sort. Spinoza would have considered our contemporaries, continually testing religious "facts" (like Creation or the Resurrection) through scientific research and debates, as rather too literal-minded – as misunderstanding the aims of both Scripture and science.[6]

What Spinoza thought decided the question of religion vs. philosophy was not the persuasiveness of some research but the attractiveness of a particular way of life. (38) This is a point that few present-day Bible scholars understand, perhaps because they have

not made such a choice and are neither full-fledged philosophers nor whole-hearted believers. For Spinoza, as I said, philosophers are committed to thinking beyond accepted beliefs to a comprehension of the whole. But most people (including philosophers in their youth) require the support that traditional belief gives their efforts to live good lives. This distinction between the philosopher and the believer – the distinction that today's Bible scholars ignore – is important for the way it enters into Spinoza's understanding of the New Testament and makes it so exceptional. He holds that this distinction between the freedom of philosophy and the natural necessity of religion is the key to understanding Jesus. Jesus counts as a philosopher precisely because his thinking was distinct from the religion he taught (55,146,148). It is even reported by Spinoza's confidant Ehrenfried von Tschirnhaus that Spinoza held Jesus to be the "consummate philosopher." "*Christum ait fuisse summum philosophum.*"[7]

Now one might object that such a view of the founder of Christianity only shows Spinoza's bias. His enterprise is to impose a naturalistic viewpoint upon the Bible and its miracles. Of course he would project his own rationalistic mind back onto Jesus, just as he overrates Solomon's wisdom and Moses' political craft. Moreover – the objector might ask – how do the rationalized heroes of Bible history that Spinoza imagines result from his own rule of interpretation, of strictly adhering to the book? Yet Spinoza would remind his critic that he defends the rights of reason against religion on scriptural grounds. He does not just reduce miracles through a systematic naturalism. He argues that theology has made more out of miracles than the Bible intended (78-79, 85-86). Europeans took the "miraculous," which is largely an idiom in biblical poetry, as literal truth. (17, 80-4)[8] Spinoza's rules for biblical interpretation only generalize this check on

anachronistic practices. (89) So long as scholars proceed through apt comparisons and with linguistic sensitivity, they are free to interpret the Bible rationally and speculatively (57, 78, 82, 85, 92, 94-101, 158-9, 162-3). Spinoza's rule of establishing scriptural teaching systematically from Scripture itself is a guide for historical accuracy (86, 90-2), not an excuse for literalism. He is far from underestimating the Bible's intellectual power,[9] and that is all his reading of Jesus insists upon. Spinoza discerns a bold philosophical mind behind the Gospel texts, bolder than theologians might imagine. He only conceals the full import of his view of Jesus, for he has no desire whatsoever to disturb the beliefs of ordinary believers. He would simply indicate to philosophical readers that the Gospel's historic power is no miracle to one acquainted with the power of philosophy. Today's "quest for the historical Jesus," forever entangled in religious controversy, was not only anticipated by Spinoza but also concluded by him to his own satisfaction. Jesus was a thinker – a thinker with a new program, as we shall see.

2. Jesus' New Idea of Salvation according to Spinoza

Let us look more closely at the *Treatise* with this problem of Jesus in mind. At the foundation of the *Treatise* is a distinction between philosophical or causal knowledge of nature and the knowledge revealed to the prophets that they teach to everyone. Now bear in mind that the *Treatise* teaches that *all knowledge is divine*, and that prophetic knowledge may simply duplicate natural knowledge under another form. (9) That leaves us to wonder what the genuinely prophetic knowledge is, that might be unexplainable in any natural terms. This question will play a subtle role in Spinoza's interpretation of Jesus – or "Christ" (to use the name Spinoza chooses). Only on one point will it turn out

that Christ has characteristically prophetic knowledge. I promise to come to that shortly. The greatest part of Christ's wisdom is simply natural. Spinoza teaches that God communicates to philosophical minds naturally without mediation, and that Scripture exhibits Christ's communication with God to be like that – a direct intellectual intuition, "mind to mind" (14). Although Spinoza never puts it so bluntly, Christ appears to be specifically a Spinozist philosopher, since he assigns Christ the indispensable credentials for philosophy according to Spinoza's other writings. Christ perceived the things revealed to him *truly and adequately* and he taught these things, at least to his disciples, as *eternal truths* rather than as laws designed for the good of human beings. (55-6)

Now, in declaring Christ's knowledge to be "true and adequate," Spinoza refers us to Jesus' parables of the kingdom and to Matthew 13 in particular. Here Spinoza hit the bull's-eye. In Matthew 13, Jesus addresses to the crowd parables of "things hidden since the foundation of the world." Then, taking the disciples to private quarters, he restates the speech, but with subtle verbal omissions and substitutions. It can be argued – though we will not do so here – that this private speech of Jesus on what he calls *scandal* explains the essential enmity that motivates the behavior of groups and individuals.[10] Spinoza's claim for Jesus' higher knowledge has good scriptural support.[11] The Gospel actually shows Jesus adapting an obscure wisdom to the unschooled multitude. (55)

Spinoza thus discovers in Christ not a Savior sent to take away the sins of humankind – at least not in the mysterious theological sense – but a sage attempting to enlighten the mass of humanity. Similarly, Spinoza wonders about the import of certain remarks by the apostle Paul. Why does Paul regularly state in his epistles that he is adapting his language for ordinary human comprehension? Why does he say openly that

it is not possible to say everything openly? Why does Paul speak of having the *mind* of Christ, referring ambiguously to a spirit of knowledge as well as to a more encompassing spiritual renewal? (56) Much takes place in the New Testament, in Spinoza's view, as if Jesus and some of his disciples spoke the scriptural language of redemption as an idiom to capture the imagination of the Gentile world without the world being able to realize just how ambiguous that idiom might be.

Now at the heart of the Bible's mission to the Gentiles is the teaching of "true virtue." Spinoza considers the demonstration of the "divinity" of Scripture to hang upon the truth of its moral doctrine. (90) But let us beware. Since *all* knowledge is divine, the Bible's "divinity" can prove nothing about its special, supernatural source. Moreover if, as Spinoza insists, the study of the Bible only yields what its language *means* and not the *truth* of what it says, then only a philosopher can demonstrate its divinity through its true moral doctrine. For only the philosopher can compare biblical teaching to a true account of morality – like Spinoza's *Ethics*, which derives the social virtues from first principles. (51, 58)[12] The *Treatise* proceeds as if the divinity of Scripture were established by anyone and from Scripture alone, since Scripture has to tell us what *its* idea of true virtue is. (90) But this procedure only tests the reader's mettle. Spinoza also teaches that how much the reader sees into the *truth* of the Bible, as *truth*, depends on how much reason there is in the reader. (101) Later he turns this question of the method of discerning biblical truth into a question about the historical origin of that truth in reason. The Apostles themselves, he tells us, depended on a related method of rational deductions. He says darkly that they drew many conclusions from whatever Christ revealed to them, and that they could well have disclosed a few things that they declined to do. (146)[13]

Now surely the apostles and prophets could not have relied upon pure reason for their doctrine of God. For, in teaching humanity about God's Providence, they attribute to God affections such as love and forgiveness; whereas unaided philosophical reason cannot recognize the attribution of feeling to God. (166-7) Thus the teaching about God's care, which is indispensable to the moral effort of most everyone, reaches people through sacred Writ. Yet, according to Spinoza, the Bible's view of Providence is not definite. He claims that the Bible does not teach "formally" *in what way* precisely God cares for all those who worship him and practice good works. (93) Scripture allows for both a popular idea of God's relation to humanity and a purely rational idea. (163) God may be taken as the exemplar of good life because he has a just disposition (popular conception), *or* because *we* see by means of God what is true and just (philosophical conception). God may direct human affairs by giving commandments *or* by letting some men discover natural laws as "eternal truths". (168, cf. 56)

Now if knowledge of the way God directs the world is not the specialty of the prophets, the distinctive knowledge for which we can rely on them, then what *is* their claim to superior vision? Spinoza's answer – which he has presupposed throughout his discussion – is given in Chapter 15. The essential prophetic insight is this, that *those without understanding may be saved – the salvation of the ignorant.* Scripture not only teaches true virtue and obedience to all human beings, whether they are philosophers or not, but it also teaches that everyone may be saved. People without any genuine understanding, indeed people with mistaken ideas (say, about how Providence really works), if they practice charity and justice, can achieve blessedness. Now the reader of the *Treatise* must be aware that in Chapter 4 Spinoza defines "blessedness" as the

knowledge of God. Our true salvation, our "supreme good" is philosophical knowledge, of which God is the totality. (51-2) So serious is Spinoza about the philosopher's blessedness, that at one point he identifies the *Holy Spirit itself* as the rational spirit of truth, regardless even of how the prophets and historians of the Scriptures expressed or experienced it. (95) But in Chapter 15, he redefines the Holy Spirit in a way that takes it to be clearly accessible to all, not just to philosophers or the God-filled prophets. Here he calls the Holy Spirit the peace of mind resulting from "good actions." (177) On this view everyone, even people with no learning at all, may be "saved."

From page one of the *Treatise* Spinoza has assumed an uncompromising philosophical standpoint in looking at the Bible. Wisdom for him is the gold standard of "salvation." In Chapter 15 he presents almost as a philosophical curiosity the idea that people without wisdom can be "saved." But this curiosity happens to constitute *the distinguishing feature* of biblical revelation. (175-77) And such a feature of revelation must affect, in particular, Spinoza's account of Christianity, as Christianity is a teaching addressed to all humankind. Now if we turn back to Chapter 1, and to that *one point* on which (as I said earlier) Christ's knowledge surpassed ordinary philosophy, I believe we shall see how Spinoza implicated Christ in this business of the salvation of the ignorant:

> ...A man who can perceive by pure intuition that which is not contained in the basic principles of our cognition and cannot be deduced therefrom must needs possess a mind whose excellence far surpasses the human mind. Therefore I do not believe that anyone has attained such a degree of perfection surpassing all others, except Christ. To him God's ordinances leading men to salvation were revealed, not by words or by visions, but directly...(14)

Now the attribution to Christ of an intuition of what is not encompassed by human cognition surely makes Christ superhuman. So one might have thought. But there is a verbal subtlety here, which the English translations obscure. Spinoza's text does not use

the term "human" as a positive description of "mind," except in this passage. Instead, it plainly states early on that "mind," meaning the thinker's experience of certitude, is divine. (10) Hence saying that Christ has a mind "far surpass[ing] the human mind" does not place Christ above philosophers. In fact, when Spinoza first uses this expression, "far surpassing" (*longe excellentiore*),[14] it is to say that *all* mental intuition surpasses by far our grasp of words. (10) The only superiority Spinoza grants to Christ is one of degree – as this translation has it, he "...attained such a degree of perfection." Spinoza goes on to specify that Christ received by direct intuition "the ordinances leading men to *salvation.*" (14) This is a valuable clue to Christ's particular excellence, but the reader cannot appreciate it until he or she reads later, in Chapter 15, that the *one* biblical idea above philosophy is the *salvation of people who are ignorant but righteous.* (174) Retrospectively the implication is clear. Christ's "higher" intuition, formerly unknown to philosophy, was the insight that confirmed and expanded the prophets' teaching. (Cf. 224) Christ saw that all ignorant but righteous people in the world could be saved.[15]

The reader who discerns Spinoza's hypothesis about Christ must apply it to a rereading of the *Treatise* in order to realize its full implication. Spinoza claims Jesus for philosophy because he sees him as universalizing the Hebraic mission of saving the unlearned. (79) He sees him as recasting biblical beliefs so that they apply to every soul independently of political context – inspiring in all people a faithful way of life that resembles the conduct of the wise. (161) Spinoza hints in chapters 4, 5 and 11 that Jesus' popular teaching was a philosophical contrivance (55, 67-8, 146), and in chapter 13 that such a contrivance was not in fact unknown to the prophets. (158, 169) Then in chapter 14 he derives *by rational deductions* a popular religion – including the indispensable but

non-philosophical precepts about God's love and forgiveness – a religion that *happens* to correspond to the Gospel. In this religion, he says, a *believer* whose *heart* is inspired by the love of God "knows Christ according to the spirit." (167) The faithful person can "know" Christ without actually participating (like the philosopher) in Christ's knowledge. Spinoza's points all add up. Jesus reasoned out a general, interior gospel on the conviction that the ignorant could be saved. He taught what all people should do and believe in order to experience an inward blessedness like that of the philosopher. (177)[16]

A tentative sketch of the founder of Christianity as Spinoza saw him begins to come into focus. While both the Hebrew prophets and the philosophers of late antiquity had glimpsed the possibility of improving human accord and thus the fortunes of wisdom in the world, pagan polytheism had presented a general obstacle. For it inspired only a shallow piety in the multitude and never commanded the social virtues. But a sage like Jesus, arising amidst the people of the one righteous Lord, might abstract the great moral lessons of the prophets and broadcast them in order to pursue several great objectives. (94, 224) First, to try to preserve the spirit of Israel, as Israel would find herself dispersed increasingly through the Roman Empire. Second, to expose the Empire as a mere secular authority despite its cult of divine emperors. And third, to awaken in the Gentile world a desire for spiritual blessings and a collective life more compatible with reason. The heart of the new program was the simplified creed that taught the salvation of all people. But if this general salvation was opaque to most philosophers, Spinoza saw far enough into the Gospel to recommend it from a powerfully practical viewpoint. (176) For, properly understood, the Gospel would help foster the conditions of enlightenment, both for philosophers and for the multitudes, in this world, in generations to come.[17]

The difficulty for us in grasping Spinoza's account of Christianity lies not just in conceiving a Jesus with a rational program for humanity. The difficulty also lies in imagining Spinoza's approach to the New Testament. Unlike most of us, he was learned in all the great Jewish literature. He did not begin with the assumption that the Gentile Christian theologians knew best how to read Gospels and Epistles that were written by Jews in a Hebraic style. (90, 100) Himself in possession of older and subtler practices of interpretation, he viewed later Christian theology as translating the Bible's extravagant poetry into dogmatic absurdities. (16-21, 89) When Spinoza conceived Jesus as a sage who taught a popular salvation, he by no means thought he flouted the account of Jesus in the Gospel. Here is where a closer look at the theme of resurrection may be illuminating. A philosophical inquiry into Christianity can hardly ignore its central miracle, though, as I mentioned, the *Treatise* does just that.[18] Yet in a private letter we find Spinoza's view that the Resurrection is not an actual physical event, but rather a powerful idea suited to the general imagination. For him the "true" resurrection is salvation through philosophy, which is the topic of his book, the *Ethics*. So our next step is to become acquainted with his thinking about resurrection in these other texts. Then we can test the adequacy of that thinking by trying to read the Gospel *from Spinoza's standpoint*, seeing if the Gospel treats the theme of resurrection at all compatibly with his theories. The second half of this talk will therefore take up two questions. What is salvation through philosophy for Spinoza such that the believer's faith in the Resurrection could stand in for it? Can we find in the Gospel Spinoza's Christ, a philosopher who preaches the Resurrection as the means of saving the unlearned? Let us try to be open to Spinoza's boldest thoughts.

3. Philosophical and Popular Salvation in Spinoza

We saw in the *Treatise* that, to explain divine Providence, Spinoza distinguished a popular idea from a philosophical one. The popular mind imagines God caring for people like an attentive, invisible parent. Spinoza's *Ethics* spells out that this conception is a reflex of the believer's emotional needs. These may evolve into the desire to find special favor with God, to search out the divine will so as to be on the winning side. Philosophy, the *Ethics* explains, has a more sublime conception – an adequate idea of God. From experiences like that of intuitive certainty in mathematics,[19] it envisions the divine intellect as working by necessity. God who lacks nothing desires nothing. He predetermines things without willing or aiming at them: to have purposes would betoken imperfection. Hence God does not *make* extrinsic objects. He *expresses* his infinite power into Nature – expresses it through his attributes, which are dynamic like verbs, rather than static properties like adjectives.[20] God is ceaselessly entering into everything. Such is Spinoza's view, and the philosophical view that he suspects lay behind the Hebrew scriptures (though they have come down to us in a corrupted condition).[21]

Spinoza denies to human sentiment the satisfactions that the God of tradition afforded, but he purports to give no small compensation. The adequate idea or the "intellectual love of God" sublimates the old feeling for divinity and raises it above deception. It needs no sanction outside itself. From blind obedience we turn to a dynamic vision of eternal truth, according to which everything moves by causal necessities – including human beings. Over against this cosmic necessity, the categories of the human moral world – praise and blame, merit and sin – appear as inadequate opinions with no power beyond our conventions. (Cf. 49) In the universe at large the

human moral perspective is a small affair, like the interests of the salamander or the fly. Philosophers in pursuit of self-understanding seek a connection with the larger Whole. They look suspiciously not upon the passions, as the moralists do, but upon the moralists' self-centered ideas about attaining the Good. Indeed the moralists' doctrine of free will is misleading. Free will describes only our ignorance of the causes that move us as we experience our own striving. Philosophers prefer to search out the unconscious causes of desire and envy. They would look upon passion without passion, and transform it into the higher pleasure of interpreting it. In the end, if their conduct surpasses the ethical standard of the city, it is because they are moved by reason's deepest necessities.

Relieved of the illusory notion of the will, the philosopher is little aggravated by other people's "willfulness." Others' offenses, like everything in the world, have causes, the understanding of which robs them of their power to offend.[22] What we take to be a nuisance or an evil, Spinoza says in the *Ethics*,

> arises from the fact that [we] conceive these things in a disturbed, mutilated, and confused manner: and on this account [the strong human being] endeavors to conceive things as they are in themselves, and to remove obstacles from true knowledge...[23]

The so-called "problem of evil" is dispelled like vapor. It arose simply by mistaking God for a human mind and mistaking human minds for separate, free agents. The philosopher meditates on the general causes of things and declines to take the cosmos so personally.

Spinoza admits the existence of freedom in one sense. Namely, freedom as the escape from ignorance that begins when one is disencumbered of the very notion of evil. A proposition in the *Ethics* states, "If men were born free, they would form no conception of good or evil as long as they were free." (IV:48) But we are not born free, because instead of wisdom and judgment we acquire opinions about good and evil. We are

conditioned and motivated by others' emotions; we are ingrained in the fear of death. We "fall" into mere nature – this is the mythical expression – we descend to an inferior psychic state where every pain and anxiety is designated an "evil." Spinoza is actually re-interpreting Genesis in a non-moral sense, as a note to this proposition spells out:

> Thus it is related that God prohibited free man from eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and that as soon as he ate of it, at once he began to fear death rather than to desire to live: again, when man found woman, who agreed most perfectly with his own nature, he knew that there could be nothing in nature more useful to him; but that afterwards, when he thought that the brute creation were similar to himself, he began at once to imitate their emotions and lost his freedom, which the Patriarchs under the guidance of the spirit of Christ, that is, the idea of God, afterwards recovered: on this idea alone it depends that man should be free, and that he should desire for other men the good which he desires for himself... (Cf. 54-57) [24]

Spinoza is saying that latent in every human being is the adequate idea of God or (as he calls it here) the "spirit of Christ." Whatever our individual histories, the realization of that ideal of wisdom would be a release from fear and obsession, from passivity and the irrational imitation of others. What does this Spinozist liberation look like?

Before proceeding to answer this question by further glossing Spinoza's *Ethics*, I should cite the crucial statement he makes in a letter about Christ's Resurrection. In a way it contains our answer. For Spinoza the Resurrection is an incontrovertibly profound symbol. (Cf. 83, 95) It describes for all minds the shift in a person's spiritual center of gravity from the self to the presence of God in the self. Remember: the special virtue of prophecy and religion is to teach everyone, which philosophy as philosophy fails to do.

> I ...conclude [Spinoza writes] that the resurrection of Christ from the dead was really spiritual, and was revealed only to the faithful in a way adapted to their thought, namely that Christ had been endowed with eternity and rose from the dead (here I understand *the dead* in the sense in which Christ did when he said, "Let the dead bury their dead"), and also by his life and death gave an example of extraordinary holiness, and that he raises his disciples from the dead, in so far as they follow the example of his life and death. *And it would not be difficult to*

explain the whole teaching of the Gospel in accordance with this hypothesis. (emphasis added) [25]

Spinoza goes on to say (and with reason) that Paul's arguments in 1 Corinthians 15 agree with him that the Resurrection is spiritual.[26] However Jesus' immediate disciples may have experienced his Resurrection, its spiritual essence was his being "endowed with eternity." He rose from the dead in the sense of rising gloriously above the living death that people accept as human life, and the disciples truly rise from the dead when they follow Jesus' example.[27] The "fact" of the Resurrection is the spiritual event effected by faith. Faith makes the faithful person active and able to fulfill a higher vocation in joy.

Now to return to Spinoza's *Ethics.* It traces out a here-and-now "resurrection" on the plane of rational metaphysics. (Again I must reduce the argument to simple steps.) The idea of every person exists in God.[28] Initially an individual has but an inkling of it. What one calls one's "self" is largely one's body's idea, one's ego we might say today, defined and affected by other people's egos.[29] One's eternal essence remains impersonal and unrealized. But rational people derive from the adequate idea of God other adequate ideas about how the soul functions. They learn to transform the affects that are passions, incited in the social entanglement of inadequate ideas, into affects associated with the joy of self-understanding.[30] Spinoza's is a philosophy of endeavor: the endeavor to be who one truly is, *is* the activity of God within.[31] As individuals reinforce their true being with whatever outside them enhances it, they move by degrees toward intellection of their true natures – as if a special Providence were guiding them.[32] Thus the self as an essence understood increases at the expense of the inadequate idea held by the empirical self. The individual's irreducible, original essence – at one time impersonal and unrealized – is gradually personalized and eternalized.[33] In an early sketch of the *Ethics*, Spinoza called

this arrival at self-knowledge a *rebirth* – echoing the Gospel of John.[34] The rationally enlightened person is thus like the man born blind in that Gospel, who washes away the mud and begins to see. He can now say meaningfully, "It is I." Or to be precise, he says, "I am," *ego eimi.* (John 9:10, cf. 6:20)

4. Resurrection as Philosophical Allegory in the Gospel of John

Now let us turn to John's Gospel, to chapter 11 on the raising of Lazarus, to test the plausibility of Spinoza's conception of Christ and resurrection from the biblical side. Spinoza himself took Lazarus as a test case. According to Pierre Bayle, the French philosopher who lived in Rotterdam, Spinoza told his friends that "...if he had been able to convince himself of the resurrection of Lazarus, he would have broken his system into pieces."[35] Perhaps Spinoza was implying that the Gospel itself did not really try to convince him of a literal resuscitation of a dead man. For John's story of Lazarus *is* extremely odd and provokes a series of questions in the inquiring reader. Indeed, since the early Church Fathers the story of Lazarus has sometimes been taken as an allegory.[36] For no one had found this Lazarus, the alleged friend of Jesus, in any other ancient source.[37] John may well have invented him. Such invention is called *midrash*, the Jewish practice of elaborating tales on Biblical ideas. Spinoza assumes this practice in his general account of the Bible and recognizes the special role midrash had in generating the Gospels. (21, 146-7)[38] For him the Christian scriptures were characteristic products of the Hebrew genius,[39] for which the notion of history never excluded fiction and poetic play. Each Gospel writer had pursued freely his own original method of teaching. (147) Paul had not hesitated to lead the Christian movement, having fetched inspiration from

the mere echo of Jesus' words. Spinoza's awareness of the evangelical imagination made him audacious about reinterpreting the New Testament texts; but this audacity comes out in reference to few specific passages.[40] We cannot say exactly how he read John's text about Lazarus. Nor can we pretend to offer this text's "true" meaning on objective grounds. (As Spinoza knew, when it comes to the speculative reading of Scripture, there are no rigorous proofs.[41]) But we can develop a rough idea of how a philosopher might read this resurrection episode in John. We can try to "explain" the chapter on Lazarus as Spinoza suggested in the letter I cited – according to the "hypothesis" that the whole Gospel takes resurrection to be a spiritual awakening rather than a literal event.

Clearly John 11 teaches that resurrection follows from belief in Jesus. (11:25) But reading it as a factual account of Jesus' power to revive a corpse *does* run into a paradox. For how would any factual *proof* of such power over nature be consistent with *belief*? Moreover, readers cannot come to believe in Jesus and the Resurrection the way the characters in the story do, for these latter are on the scene for the miracle. Perhaps we should first ask, what exactly is the miracle? The very premise of the story, the fact of Lazarus' physical death, is made ambiguous from the start. Jesus says Lazarus is *not* sick with the sickness one dies from.[42] When Jesus later mentions Lazarus's "death," it is following a metaphorical speech about spiritual deadness. It is his disciples' dullness that takes the "death" of the living literally. Then, we note that Lazarus' sisters suggest that his "death" is a result of *Jesus not being there with him,* the absence that the text dramatizes by having Jesus *not go* to Lazarus when he hears of his "illness." (11:6) The text becomes coherent if we posit (after Spinoza) that Lazarus's illness-*not*-unto-death is metaphysical, like the ailment we call the "human condition" – the universal affliction of

the "absence of God."[43] This illness would still be "for the glory of God," as Jesus says. (11:4) Only the glory here would be the "awakening" that follows a person's experience of absolute loss and disillusionment. As Spinoza observed, death in the Bible is a metaphor for life lived in anxiety about all sorts of evils. Resurrection is the higher identity a person attains that overcomes this attitude. (Mt 8:22, Jn 5:25)

This metaphorical reading agrees well with Psalm 82, which Jesus cites in John immediately before we hear about Lazarus. In fact, the Psalm teaches a view of Genesis something like Spinoza's. All humans are gods, children of the Most High, but all are living under the reign of mortality. According to the psalm, the weak and needy go about in darkness, without knowledge, whereas those who should be enlightened have done little to help humankind. Is this the human situation that Jesus remedies, allegorically, in John 11? When Jesus proposes to go to Lazarus in Judaea, the disciples – most *un*-philosophically – declare their fear of death: they all might be killed with Jesus on the way. Jesus replies with a metaphor inspired by the psalm: they have to learn to walk in the night by the light within. (11:10; Ps. 82:5) He adds that Lazarus "sleeps," associating Lazarus with these disciples who are in the dark. Ironically, Jesus' hints are lost on the disciples who take his speech literally. For such as them, Lazarus' death and their visit to his tomb must be literal events. But if we understand Lazarus' "death" and "illness" to refer to one and the same condition, then the story takes place in a beautiful figurative sense. Jesus calls Lazarus by name out of *the cave of the unconscious*; he enjoins *the crowd* to unbind him, so that he can emerge as an individual.[44] Note that *not all* of the disciples are left out of the language game surrounding Lazarus' uncertain "death." For Thomas the twin – the double man – responds with a double meaning of his own to

Jesus' proposal to go to Judaea.[45] He says "Let us go and die with him," obscuring whether he means literally to die with Jesus, or figuratively to die and be raised with Lazarus. So the chapter plays upon the ambiguity of what is literal and what is literature. Thus it unfolds on two planes simultaneously, addressing different readers in their different needs.

Prominent among the needs of most readers is the need for a God (like Jesus ought to be) who does not leave human beings in the lurch. Notice, almost everyone in John's story complains about the evil of Jesus letting Lazarus die. Martha is the first. This wouldn't have happened, she says, if Jesus had been here. Mary follows suit: her accusation is the first thing out of her mouth. Finally the crowd chimes in with the complaint against Jesus – like a chorus in a Greek tragedy, always a little late but nonetheless helpful in stating the theme. For the crowd fully generalizes the grievance against Jesus. They ask (with unintended irony), couldn't the man who opened the eyes of the blind have kept poor Lazarus from dying? Spinoza would detect in that complaint all the anxiety that people have named the problem of evil. (1-2) Why did God let such and such tragedy happen? Martha, in her grief, hints at the possibility of a miracle. The Resurrection on the Last Day, she implies, is not doing much for her or her brother now! So Jesus tells her (ambiguously), I am the Resurrection and the Life who does indeed "work" right now. People need assurance of God's willing compensations for the felt evils of the world. And Jesus gives them what they ask.

How the "miracle" of raising the dead works – how Jesus helps people overcome their passive devastation by the world – seems to be indicated in a curious passage. Martha goes to Mary to say the Master calls her, and Mary immediately "rises." But as

far as the reader knows, Jesus may or may *not* have called her as Martha claims. On the textual facts alone, Mary's getting up is an effect of pure faith that she is personally called. Is this not the faith that Spinoza says lifts people out of their misery? Twice it is said that Mary "rises" – once using the same Greek word as is used for Lazarus' rising (*anistemi*: 11:23). The second time the crowd watches her rise up – an even plainer adumbration of the Lazarus "miracle." This superfluous vignette is not so superfluous if we see it as a genuine miniature of the Lazarus drama – a play within the play, reflecting the very power of belief that the larger story calls upon. In other words, the text is self-conscious. It points to its own concern to move people in their secret depths (11:28) in accord with their idea of a personal God.

Yet this is not the only moment when John's text affords us a higher perspective on his miracle play of Lazarus. As the people remove the stone from Lazarus' tomb, and Jesus is about to call him forth, he makes a not too subtle aside. "Father, I thank you, that you have heard me. And I *know* that you always hear me, but because of the crowd (*ton ochlon*) who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that you sent me." Here Jesus is certainly not addressing the crowd, and not the Father who always hears and hardly needs to be addressed aloud. There must be another, self-selecting audience for these remarks. Jesus distinguishes between his speaking for the crowd, for the sake of their belief, and his speaking more frankly what he knows. Implicitly, he distinguishes between the apparent "miracle," and the eternal presence of God, the fully "awakened" state to which he calls Lazarus. But the crowd hears Jesus' prayer as expressing gratitude for filling their need. They need, he says, to believe that *God sent him* – sent him (no doubt) to display God's care in a more dramatic way.[46] The evangelist has made Jesus

rupture the realistic surface of the very story he is in, and indicate to the attentive reader that the miraculous fiction itself follows from his charitable mission to teach everyone.

In sum, a reader might see in the story of the resurrection of Lazarus a spiritual allegory and – more than that – a tale of the sage instructing appropriately both the learned and the unlearned in the faith that will elevate them. If one is willing to run the risk of reading the Gospel philosophically, one may find it surprisingly consistent with Spinoza's hypothesis, that Jesus was a wise man who, in making wisdom accessible to all, was obliged to make it speak in widely different ways.

Summary: Spinoza and Christianity

Spinoza's account of Christianity resulted from the extraordinary combination of his Jewish learning, his passion for philosophy, and the historical crisis to which he responded. Following the civil wars and religious violence of the 16th and 17th centuries, it was apparent that Christianity in the West was in jeopardy as a civilizing force. The aftermath of the Reformation raised a fundamental question about the relation of traditional theology to the political order. Spinoza's answer was officially to excise truth from the religious sphere – to destroy the zeal for mere "true belief," the varieties of which were tearing European states apart – but to preserve for humanity the Bible's teachings of justice and charity.

This emphasis on the Bible's moral teachings, however, did not prevent him from asking why these teachings agreed with the truths of pure reason, or what pure thinking was behind biblical texts. In this Spinoza made the learned assumption that biblical language, like much poetry, contained a surrogate knowledge. (21,53,95) A

philosophical mind (expressing God's self-activity) might liberate from the parables and fictions of Scripture their deeper truths.[47] Given this philosophic stance toward the Bible, and the dogmatic conflicts of Christianity in Spinoza's day, the paradox of the *Theological Political Treatise* follows. The *Treatise* officially separates religion from philosophy, and insists that the Bible does not teach speculative reasoning.[48] But at the same time the *Treatise* indicates a passage from biblical faith to wisdom. As the Scriptures occasionally associated their own teaching with wisdom, Spinoza had only to associate wisdom in turn with the Scriptures. The result was his use of a pious vocabulary to describe the philosopher's inner life, his express reverence for Solomon and Jesus the sage, and his doctrine of the salvation of the unlearned, behind which lay the idea that belief in resurrection approximated the philosopher's identification with divine mind. To readers today, these ambiguities of Spinoza are puzzling in the extreme. But by such ambiguities he left open for future philosophers the path he had traveled in his own thinking. He left open the possibility of overstepping religion with the implicit sanction of religion itself, of moving from faith to philosophy without rancor or guilt.[49]

The siren call of philosophy makes modern intellectual adherents of the Bible anxious. If they remain faithful to their religion, it is often by flirting with nihilism or skepticism at the same time. Since Pascal they have argued that our choices are either to subjugate the intellect to the mystery of revelation or to wander aimlessly in a futile search after meaning. (Cf. 171-2) They hardly dream that the Bible itself might "save" anyone by confirming one in the life of reason. But Spinoza looked at the Bible differently. He suspected that some of its authors had faced the problems of despair and of disappointment in divine Providence (78, 222), and had wrestled with the problems of

existence no less bravely than the classical schools of wisdom. (5) Such biblical authors simply expressed their spiritual discoveries in inspiring and philanthropic ways. As for Jesus, he was the "consummate philosopher" because he not only knew in himself the way to blessedness, the "natural light" that the philosophers would always follow (Cf. John 11:10), but also found a general path for all those who could not travel the philosophers' dangerous road. If the learned grasped the Bible's intentions, Spinoza thought, they would see that the salvation of the ignorant was in fact their own salvation, too. For the learned would no longer be lost in scholastic quarrels arising from a confusion of the Bible's pedagogy with metaphysical theory, and in compensation they would find new "meaning" both in the literary depth of the scriptural text and in the humane guidance of others. The political order was therefore not doomed. The ethics of happiness might be acquired by the multitudes and, over generations, the number of those coming to wisdom might increase. It all depended on whether wisdom presented itself wisely. It depended on the solicitude of the learned toward the learners.[50]

Near the end of John's Gospel is an episode with Thomas the Twin, who challenges the disciples' story that the Risen Jesus came and spoke to them. He is struck in their account by Jesus' showing them his hands and his side, as if this self-display carried some special meaning. Only if Thomas sees and touches these wounds, he tells his friends, will he believe. Days later, the group (along with Thomas) is visited again in its sealed rooms. Jesus specifically addresses the skeptical disciple and invites him to touch his wounds. The text indicates no such move on Thomas' part. It thus underscores what Jesus says next, that Thomas believes because he has *seen him*, using the word *horao* – "to see" – which in John's text includes the divine act of knowing.[51] Jesus adds,

Thomas should recognize that others too are *blessed*, though they *believe* without "seeing."[52] Now a philosophical reader, understanding "seeing" as a metaphor for knowing, may detect in Jesus' remarks about blessed belief the Spinozist idea of the salvation of those without knowledge. Such a reader might therefore entertain the ironic possibility that Jesus' rebuke of philosophy conceals some philosophy, and that what Thomas beheld with the eye of knowledge, apart from his friends, is the essential question implied in the story. Did Thomas know Jesus as the one who scorned every apparent evil and thus overcame the world? Or, to express it in the text's figurative language, did Thomas know Jesus as the one who *through his very wounds* attained his eternal identity? The story quietly approves some such conjecture. Yet it does not, as a story, offer certitude. Hence the Spinozist reader receives the same cautionary lesson as Thomas. He must respect the belief of believers in the literal Resurrection, as the way in which God has made manifest to them their tie with eternity.[53]

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Notes

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[1] Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, translated as *The Way to Wisdom* by Herman De Dijn (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1996), pp. 21-25, and 115 on *experientia vaga*; and *Ethics* II, P 40, Note 2. All *Ethics* citations are from the A. Boyle translation of *Spinoza's Ethics and De Intellectus Emendatione,* with an introduction by T. S. Gregory (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1959).

[2] Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, translated by Sean Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1990), p. 112.

[3] Some examples of the New Testament scholars' true belief in "critical progress" and their innocence of philosophy may be found in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans, ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), e.g. pp. 253, 270.

As examples of scholars who have popularized their work, yet have vague misgivings about it, see John Dominic Crossan imagining himself having to account to Jesus for his research, in *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), p. xiv; and Marcus Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991) who feels he must "recover the vision of Jesus" for the sake of "church and culture" (p. 17), but can only serve up some lame clichés about "spirit."

[4] Karl Jaspers raised similar concerns half a century ago. See his debate with Rudolf Bultmann in *Myth and Christianity: An Inquiry into the Possibility of Religion without Myth* (New York: Noonday Press, 1958), pp. 51-53.

[5] Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, Samuel Shirley trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1998). These and all page references in the text refer to this edition.

[6] Cf. Roy Hoover, "A Contest between Orthodoxy and Veracity," in *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 124-146.

[7] *Die Leibniz-Handschriften der Koniglichen offentlichen Bibliothek zu Hannover*, ed. Eduard Bodemann, (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1966), p. 103. The authenticity of Leibniz' note recording Spinoza's conversation is little contested today. See Xavier Tilliette, *Le Christ de la Philosophie* (Paris: Cerf, 1990), p. 72. See also Richard Mason, *The God of Spinoza: a philosophical study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 212; Richard Popkin, "Spinoza and Biblical Scholarship" in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 401; Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Marrano of Reason* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 236, n. 4. Granted, contemporary biblical scholarship recognizes that Jesus is steeped in the Jewish wisdom tradition. See, for example, Frances Taylor Gench, *Wisdom in the Christology of Matthew* (New York: University Press of America, 1997), and Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994). But it is the very rare scholar who gives us any profound idea, comparable to Spinoza's, of what Jesus' wisdom was about. See Jean Grosjean, *Ironie Christique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991); Albert Nolan, *Jesus before Christianity* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992); and Jack Miles, *Christ: A Crisis in the Life of God* (New York: Knopf, 2001).

[8] See also Letter 75 to Oldenburg, in *The Correspondence of Spinoza*, A. Wolf trans. (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1966), p. 349, where Spinoza refers to the style of expression typical of oriental languages.

[9] See Letter 21, to Bylenbergh, *Ibid.*, p, 179-80. "I take care not to impute to [Scripture] certain childish and absurd views; and this no one can do better unless he understands Philosophy well, or has Divine revelations."

[10] See John F. Cornell, "A Parable of Scandal: Speculations about the Wheat and Tares in Matthew 13," in *Contagion*, 1998, 5: 98-117. Under the influence of Spinoza's suggestion about Matthew 13, Alexandre

Matheron draws similar conclusions about the deeper layers of this Gospel text. See Alexandre Matheron, *Christ et le salut des ignorants chez Spinoza* (Paris: Éditions Aubier, 1971), pp. 132-134.

[11] *Pace* Sylvain Zac, *Spinoza et l'interpretation de l'écriture* (Paris: P.U.F., 1965), p. 199.

[12] See also Spinoza, *Ethics*, III P 30; IV P 35-37, 46.

[13] "Atque hoc eodem etiam modo Apostoli ex rebus, qual viderant, quasque audiverant, & quas denique ex revelatione habuerant, multa concludere, & elicere, eaque homines, si libitum iis esset, docere poterant." Spinoza, *Opera*, Gebhardt edition (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitatsbuchhandlung, 1972), III, p. 156.

[14] Compare "...natura nobis dictat, non quidem verbis, sed modo longe excellentiore" (Gebhardt, III, p. 16) and "...ejus mens praestantior necessario, atque humana longa excellentior esse deberet" (p. 21).

[15] Cf. Alexandre Matheron, *Christ et le salut des ignorants chez Spinoza* (note 10 above), pp. 144-145.

[16] Johan Colerus left us some interesting biographical details bearing on Spinoza and Christianity, as cited in the introduction to the Dover edition of Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise & A Political Treatise*, R. H. M. Elwes, trans. (New York: Dover Publications, 1951). According to Colerus, Spinoza once assured his Christian landlady that her religion was a good one and that she could be "saved" in it, so long as she lived a pious and peaceable life (p. xix). See also the end of Letter 75 to Oldenburg (touching on the Gospel of John), in *The Correspondence of Spinoza*, p. 350, and Letter 43 to Jacob Ostens, p. 259, on the salvation of the ignorant among non-Christian nations through the "spirit of Christ." Spinoza's private comportment is perfectly consistent with holding an idea of Christ the philosopher who represents wisdom and makes salvation open to all people whether they get that wisdom explicitly or implicitly.

The idea that Spinoza was too fearful to speak his mind tactfully among his friends matches little in the philosopher's character. His indifference to giving his thinking the color of orthodoxy among them can be seen at the end of Letter 73 (21) to Oldenburg, in *The Correspondence of Spinoza*, A. Wolf trans. (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1966), p.344.

[17] Cf. Matheron, *Christ et le salut des ignorants chez Spinoza*, pp. 54-70, 77-84, 276. The *Treatise* suggests, in chapter 16 (directly following the chapter on the salvation of the unlearned), that a genuine political problem, opaque from the standpoint of pure philosophy, is mitigated thanks to the prophetic mission to all ordinary people. For according to chapter 16, as less rational people enter into the social contract, they compromise their "sovereign right" or "self-interest" (to remain irrational) far more than rational people. (180) Thus Spinoza delicately raises the question of how the prophets' teaching, promising "salvation" to people who strive for moral goodness without wisdom, helps them endure the harm they may suffer by nature under the constraints of civilized life.

[18] Spinoza could not but take an interest in the subject of the soul's fate. Steven Nadler, in *Spinoza's Heresy: Immortality and the Jewish Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) argues that what drove the Synagogue to pronounce its ban against the young philosopher was his adamant denial of personal immortality.

[19] *Ethics* I, Appendix, p. 32. Spinoza makes an exception for the great non-mathematical sages of history.

[20] Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (New York: Zone Books, 1992).

[21] Letter 73 to Oldenburg, in *The Correspondence of Spinoza*, p. 343.

[22] *Ethics*, V P 5 - P 10.

[23] Ibid., IV P 73 Note.

[24] Ibid., IV P 68 Note. Again, independently of Spinoza but perfectly in accord with his doctrines, I have argued that Matthew 18 teaches salvation from our "fall" into the world's scandal, and teaches it at two significant levels, one philosophic and one popular. See "Anatomy of Scandal: Self-Dismemberment in the Gospel of Matthew and in Gogol's 'The Nose'," in *Literature and Theology*, 16 (2002), pp. 270-290.

[25] Letter 75 to Oldenburg, in *Correspondence*, pp. 348-349.

[26] Spinoza's reading of 1 Corinthians 15 is entirely sound. One cannot make good sense of this curious argument of Paul - "For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." (15:16-17) – on the notion that the Resurrection is a past, historic event. The apparent consequence of Christ's non-Resurrection, futile faith, is really the *reason* for the non-Resurrection! Faith has to bring about Christ's Resurrection *in* the faithful.

[27] Spinoza avoids deciding whether the disciples all understood the Resurrection in the same way. Both in the *Treatise* and in his earlier response to Oldenburg (*Correspondence,* p. 344) Spinoza leaves open what parts of Jesus' knowledge his disciples received. According to Oldenburg's more literal reading of the Gospels, Spinoza recognizes (or "does not deny") that that the texts show the disciples receiving an apparition of the Resurrected Jesus and believing in it. In this way God *accomodated* to them the revelation of his mind (p. 348). Perhaps his remark near the end of the letter applies here: Spinoza holds that Paul and John know and teach spiritual meanings, albeit in a Hebraic way (p. 349). All this is relevant to the reading we propose of John 11, where the disciples do not all have the same depth of insight.

[28] *Ethics,* II P 11 (especially the Corollary) to P 13, and V P 22, P 30.

[29] Ibid., II P 13.

[30] Ibid., IV Preface, P 15; V P 6.

[31] Cf. *Ethics,* III P 6, and "Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-being," (chapter V) in *The Collected works of Spinoza*, ed. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), vol. 1, pp. 54, 84.

[32] *Ethics*, IV P 18 Note, P 19-20, 30-35.

[33] Ibid., V P 20, Note, P 21-22. Regarding the distinction between personal immortality and eternity in Spinoza, see Genevieve Lloyd, *Spinoza and the Ethics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 114-117.

[34] "Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-being," pp. 138-140 (Chapter XXII). Spinoza also develops there the distinction between human beings moved merely by their animal spirits and those reborn in spiritual knowledge, following John's Gospel and 1 Corinthians 2-3. From the discussion of the soul's re-awakening in divine union, Chapter XXIII follows on the subject of its "immortality."

[35] Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary (Selections)*, Richard Popkin trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1991), p. 320.

[36] *L' Évangile de Jean, traduit et commenté par Jean-Yves Leloup* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1989), p. 281. It is worthy of note that the Fathers of the Church understood the political implications of allegorical reading of the Gospel, given that spiritual knowledge could not be attained by most believers. See Jean-Yves Leloup, *Introduction aux 'vrais philosophes'* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998), pp. 61-2. In any case, Spinoza's philosopher Christ can be loosely traced back to the early Fathers, probably by way of Erasmus, whose *philosophia Christi* could not have been unknown to him. Spinoza even includes Erasmus in one of the dialogues contained in his "Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-being." (See note 31, above.) I say "loosely traced to the early Fathers" because the idea of "philosophy" that is applied to Jesus undergoes significant mutation from the Fathers, to Erasmus, to Spinoza; and these writers base their conceptions independently upon the New Testament. See Anne-Marie Malingrey, *Étude sémantique des mots de la*

famille de 'philosophia' dans la littérature grecque chrétienne des quatre premiers siecles, 2 vols. (Paris: Klincksieck, 1961).

[37] Add to this the fact that the ancient Gospel of Thomas (to which John's Gospel is closest in point of view) assumes that resurrection is an interior event, already accomplished by some disciples. See *The Gospel of Thomas*, Marvin Meyer trans. (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), and Harold Bloom, *Omens of Millenium, The Gnosis of Angels, Dreams, and Resurrections* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996) p. 188.

[38] In contemporary scholarship, see Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 81-83, and especially pp. 105-109 regarding John's "reality effects." Also see Bernard Dubourg, *La Fabrication du Nouveau Testament, v. II: L'Invention de Jésus* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989). Dubourg details the cabbalistic mechanisms that could generate Christian ideas from the language of the ancient Hebrew scriptures.

[39] E.g. Letter 75 to Oldenburg, in *Correspondence*, p. 349. Incidentally, Dubourg (see previous note) makes the strongest argument, and joins a growing scholarly consensus today, that the New Testament is exhibits the same literary craft (or craftiness) as the Hebrew Scriptures, only differently employed.

[40] In certain passages of the *Treatise* (35,67) its author suggests that he has figured out more than he will say. He prefers to encourage the experienced reader to re-examine the Bible with Spinoza's ideas in mind.

[41] Letter 21 to Bylenbergh, in *Correspondence*, p. 172, and cf. *Treatise,* p. 105.

[42] Kierkegaard founds his text *Sickness unto Death* on the Lazarus miracle, skillfully inverting the meaning in John's text, which says that that sickness is *not* Lazarus'! Nonetheless, Kierkegaard's psychological teaching exhibits some striking parallels with Spinoza's teaching about overcoming anxiety and becoming oneself. "It is Christian heroism – a rarity, to be sure – to venture wholly to become oneself, an individual human being, this specific individual human being, alone before God..." See Soren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, Howard and Edna Hong translation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 5.

[43] Another parallel of Spinoza's thinking with our interpretation of Lazarus: the subtitle given (by another hand) to Spinoza's "Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-being" (an early sketch of his *Ethics*) mentions the text's purpose to *cure those who are sick of mind.*

[44] Daryl Koehn pointed out to me why it follows that the crowd is told to unbind Lazarus.

[45] Ancient gnostic texts even suggest that Thomas is the spiritual "twin" *of Jesus*. See Robert M. Grant, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus: The Gnostic Gospel of Thomas* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960), p. 65.

[46] A related example of the pedagogy of the Bible occurring on two levels: Spinoza refers to instances of biblical texts that both give a poetic description of some supernatural occurrence (like "being sent" by God) and then re-describe the same occurrence in natural terms. (*Treatise*, pp. 19, 80)

[47] See Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, (1st part regarding fictions and feigning) especially pp. 103-105. Also *Ethics* III P 11-13, 28-30, IV P 1 Note, and V P 10 Note, P 11-14, 20. For discussion of how Spinozist reason collaborates with the power of the imagination, see Christopher Norris, *Spinoza and the Origins of Modern Critical Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 217- 250.

[48] Cf. Letter 21 to Blyenbergh, in *Correspondence*, p. 180. Remember: Socrates could not teach wisdom to Meno or to anyone else.

[49] Concerning the avoidance of scandal by the wise, cf. e.g. Romans 14:13-23, 1 Corinthians 8.

[50] See Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, p. 27 (paragraphs 14 and 17).

[51] A complete list might begin with John 1:18, 3:3, 3:11, 3:36, 6:46, and 8:38.

[52] The Greek tenses at John 20:29 indicate that what divides Thomas from other disciples is *not* Thomas' historical opportunity to converse with the resurrected Christ.

[53] Again see Letter 75, p. 348.