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Leibniz, Spinoza, and the *jus circa sacra*  
Excerpts from the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, Chap. XIX

By

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## 1. Introduction

In this paper<sup>1</sup>, I return to a topic that I have studied several other occasions, namely Leibniz’s reading of the political chapters of Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670; hereafter *TTP*)<sup>2</sup>. I am interested in how Leibniz situated himself in relation to Spinoza’s conception of ecclesiastical right and church-state relations, or to what Spinoza, using a standard expression, called *jus circa sacra*, the “right concerning sacred matters.” My aim is to find and consider whatever meager textual material available for reconstructing Leibniz’s actual position vis-à-vis Spinoza on this most central question in seventeenth-century political philosophy.<sup>3</sup> I will show that Leibniz did, albeit very briefly and in a somewhat hidden fashion, confront Spinoza on the topic of *jus circa sacra*, or at least made preparations for doing so by identifying weak

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<sup>1</sup> I use the following abbreviations for Spinoza : G = *Opera*, vol. I-IV, ed. C. Gebhardt, Heidelberg 1925; C = *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. I-II, trans. E. Curley, Princeton 1985-2015; ALM = *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, ed. F. Akkerman, trans. J. Lagrée and P.-F. Moreau, Paris 1999. Bible quotations are, when not embedded in another translation (e.g. when Edwin Curley translates Spinoza quoting the Bible), given in English in the International Standard Version. OT for the Old Testament, NT for the new. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup> See M. Lærke, *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza. La genèse d’une opposition complexe*, Paris 2008, pp. 93-357; “G. W. Leibniz’s Two Readings of the *Tractatus Theologico-politicus*”, in: Y. Melamed and M. Rosenthal (eds.), *Spinoza’s Theological-Political Treatise: A Critical Guide*, Cambridge 2010, pp. 101-27; “Leibniz on Spinoza’s Political Philosophy”, in: D. Garber and D. Rutherford (eds.), *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy*, vol. 6, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012, pp. 105-34. Other work on Leibniz and the *TTP*, but that does not touch upon the question of Leibniz’s understanding of Spinoza’s political chapters, includes E. Curley, “*Homo Audax*. Leibniz, Oldenburg and the *TTP*”, in: A. Heinekamp and I. Marchlewitz (eds.), *Leibniz’ Auseinandersetzung mit Vorgängern und Zeitgenossen* (= *Studia Leibnitiana, Supplementa XXVII*), Stuttgart 1990, pp. 277-312; U. Goldenbaum, “Die *Commentatiuncula de iudice* als Leibnizens erste philosophische Auseinandersetzung mit Spinoza nebst der Mitteilung über ein neu aufgefundenes Leibnizstück”, in: M. Fontius, H. Rudolph and G. Smith (eds.), *Labora Diligenter* (= *Studia Leibnitiana, Sonderheft 29*), Stuttgart 1999, pp. 61-98; U. Goldenbaum, *Zwischen Bewunderung und Entsetzen. Leibniz’ frühe Faszination durch Spinozas ‘Tractatus theologico-politicus’*, Medelingen vanwege het Spinozahuis 80, Delft 2001; U. Goldenbaum, “Spinoza’s Parrot Socinian Syllogisms, and Leibniz’s Metaphysics”, in: *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 76:4 (2002), pp. 551-74; U. Goldenbaum, “Leibniz’s Fascination with Spinoza”, in: B. Look (ed.), *The Continuum Companion to Leibniz*, London and New York 2011, pp. 51-67.

<sup>3</sup> On this “actualist” requirement in the historiography of philosophy, see my methodological work in M. Lærke, “The Anthropological Analogy and the Constitution of Historical Perspectivism”, in: M. Lærke, E. Schliesser, and J. E. H. Smith (eds.), *Philosophy and its History. Methods of Research in Early Modern Philosophy*, Oxford 2013, pp. 7-29, esp. pp. 23-28, and M. Lærke, *Les Lumières de Leibniz. Controverses avec Huet, Bayle, Regis et More*, Paris 2015, pp. 11-46, esp. pp. 41-45.

points in Spinoza's argumentation, while reading the *TTP* for a second time around the end of 1675.

My aim is to provide some historical and textual foothold for a study—Leibniz's reading of Spinoza's political philosophy—that otherwise easily reduces to the abstract comparison of philosophical positions, with little historiographical justification. With respect to the general theme of this volume, i.e. Leibniz's theory of natural law, and the question of how it compares to that of Spinoza, the general point I want to make is a somewhat negative one. Leibniz's recommended two approaches to Spinoza's political philosophy as laid out in *TTP* XVI-XX, but none them explicitly addressed the question of natural right. The first approach, which I have studied elsewhere, consisted in simply ignoring Spinoza's position and keeping conspicuously silent about a theory that he did not know how to really get a grip on<sup>4</sup>. The second approach, an aspect of which I will study here, consisted in recommending that Spinoza's political theory be confronted on the terrain of the biblical exegesis involved in his theory, and not the philosophical-conceptual framework of his natural law theory. This confirms a general impression that Leibniz largely considered refuting Spinoza's *TTP*, including the last five chapters on political issues, to be a task for a biblical scholar rather than a political philosopher or natural law theorist.

Spinoza's main discussion of church-state relations can be found in chapter XIX of the *TTP*.<sup>5</sup> Here, Spinoza sets out to demonstrate, as the title of the chapter goes, "that the right concerning sacred matters [*jus circa sacra*] belongs completely to the supreme powers, and that the external practice of Religion must be accommodated to the peace of the Republic, if we want to obey God Rightly"<sup>6</sup>. Leibniz read the *TTP* twice, but what he wrote about the work is generally very limited and, to my knowledge, he never explicitly addressed Spinoza's position on this specific issue<sup>7</sup>. When he read the *TTP* for the first time late 1670, his brief notes—some 16 lines—mainly concern the role Spinoza granted Ezra in the constitution of the canon of the *OT* and the transmission of the biblical texts, that is to say, themes regarding the textual status of the Bible that Spinoza discusses mostly in chapters VIII and IX of the *TTP*<sup>8</sup>. Leibniz makes no reference to any of the political chapters of Spinoza's work, that is to say chapters XVI-XX. Some correspondence from the time does make some general remarks about Spinoza's political philosophy, in particular regarding his proximity to Hobbes, but nothing that indicates any deeper critique over and above the scandalized reaction of Leibniz's mentor Jacob Thomasius, whose refutation of the *TTP*, the *Adversus anonymum, de libertate philosophandi* from May 1670, Leibniz may have read before he read the *TTP* itself<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> See notably Lærke, "Leibniz on Spinoza's Political Philosophy", *op. cit.*, pp. 105-34.

<sup>5</sup> To this, we should add § 46 in chap. 8 of the *Tractatus politicus*, on "national religion". On this, see M. Lærke, "Spinoza on National Religion", in: Y. Melamed and H. Sharp (eds.), *A Critical Guide to Spinoza's Political Treatise*, Cambridge, [forthcoming].

<sup>6</sup> For commentary, see P.-F. Moreau, "Spinoza et le *jus circa sacra*", in: P.-F. Moreau, *Spinoza. État et religion*, Lyon 2005, pp. 63-70; M. Lærke, "La controverse entre Grotius, Hobbes et Spinoza sur le *jus circa sacra*. Textes, prétextes, contextes et circonstances", in: *Revue de Synthèse* 137:3-4 (2016), pp. 399-425.

<sup>7</sup> The possibility remains that Leibniz addressed the issue in the letter or letters he presumably wrote to Spinoza around 1672, as a follow-up to his letter to Spinoza from November 1671. This letter does not mention the *TTP*, but Spinoza responded by sending a copy of his work (Letter XLVI, G IV 233/C II 395). Moreover, according to a letter from Spinoza to Schuller, Leibniz wrote additional letters, most likely trying to engage Spinoza in a discussion of the *TTP* (see Spinoza, Letter LXXI, G IV 305/C II 466). The correspondence is unfortunately lost.

<sup>8</sup> See G. W. Leibniz, "Leibniz' Marginalien zu Spinozas *Tractatus theologicopoliticus* im Exemplar der *Bibliotheca Boineburgica* in Erfurt, also zu datieren auf 1670-71", ed. U. Goldenbaum, in: M. Fontius, H. Rudolph et G. Smith (eds.), *Labora diligenter, op. cit.*, pp. 105-7, trans. as "Leibniz' Marginalia on the Back of the Title of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-politicus*", ed. U. Goldenbaum, in: *The Leibniz Review* 18 (2008), pp. 270-72. For Spinoza, see *TTP* VII, G III 126-40/C II 202-24.

<sup>9</sup> See J. Thomasius, *Adversus anonymum, de libertate philosophandi*, Lipsiae, May 1670, reprinted in J. Thomasius, *Dissertationes LXIII*, ed. Chr. Thomasius, Halæ Magdeburgicæ 1693, pp. 571-84. Without

However, Leibniz read the *TTP* a second time during his time in Paris. There is some uncertainty as to what prompted him to engage in this reexamination of the work and when exactly he did. The Academy edition (vol. VI, iii) suggests a conjectural dating around the end of 1675 or the beginning of 1676, a dating that I have myself tended to follow without being entirely sure that it may not have been somewhat earlier<sup>10</sup>. Leibniz met and befriended a member of Spinoza's inner circle, Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus, in the fall of 1675. Some notes that Leibniz wrote down during or after one or several conversations he had with Tschirnhaus about Spinoza briefly refer to topics that also appear in the *TTP*<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, via Hermann Schuller, Tschirnhaus reports to Spinoza that Leibniz "thinks very well" of the *TTP*, making it clear that Leibniz spoke to his new friend about the book<sup>12</sup>. There are however biographical circumstances that may have been more important than Leibniz's encounter with Tschirnhaus, namely his exchanges with the French erudite Pierre-Daniel Huet concerning the latter's apologetic work, the *Demonstratio evangelica*, completed around the end of 1676 but only published in 1679<sup>13</sup>. Spinoza himself learned of Huet's refutation in progress via Leibniz (the information was related in a letter from Tschirnhaus written in May 1676).<sup>14</sup> There is also reason to believe that Leibniz contributed to the fact that Huet made "the author of the liberty to philosophize" one of his explicit opponents; he undoubtedly discussed Spinoza work with the French erudite<sup>15</sup>.

While reading the *TTP* this second time, Leibniz did so pen in hand, mostly writing out passages. His extensive excerpts take up a non-negligible twenty-six pages in volume VI, III, of the Academy edition. About one page of those excerpts concerns chapter XIX. Those notes provide actual textual grounding, however flimsy, for proposing a comparison between Leibniz and Spinoza, but they also indicate the scope of a historically pertinent investigation. Hence, I will take my point of departure in that page of excerpts for my discussion of

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indicating when he had read it, Leibniz refers to it in his letter to Thomasius from 21/31 January 1672, A II, I, 320.

<sup>10</sup> The dating is not based on material evidence. The excerpts are on Paris paper, formally placing the notes between March 1672 and October 1676. There is no possible way of verifying which edition of the *TTP* Leibniz was using (see A VI, III, 248). For a conjectural date, the Academy editors refer to circumstantial evidence: first, that Leibniz visited Spinoza's former teacher Franciscus Van den Enden in Paris around 1674; second, that a brief comment in the margins about not approving of Spinoza's position that "God is the nature of things" (A VI, III, 269-70) testify to knowledge of Spinoza's metaphysics not available to him before meeting Tschirnhaus in October 1675—an interpretive claim which is, at best, contestable. This does not in itself imperil the conjectural dating. If, however, as I suspect, Huet's *Demonstratio evangelica* was the principal context for Leibniz's second reading of the *TTP*, it is perfectly possible that we must place it at a somewhat earlier date, from the time when Leibniz first met Huet late 1672 onward. On the personal relations and exchanges between Leibniz and Huet, see Lærke, *Les Lumières de Leibniz*, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-27.

<sup>11</sup> See Leibniz, "Über Spinozas *Ethik*, 1675-1676," A VI, III, 384-85, trans. in G. W. Leibniz, *The Labyrinth of the Continuum: Writings on the Continuum Problem, 1672-1686*, ed. and trans. R. T. W. Arthur, New Haven 2001, pp. 41-43. We should in particular notice a remark according to which "[Spinoza] says Christ was the greatest philosopher [*summum philosophum*]." We should compare this with the *TTP* XII, G III 103/C II 177, according to which "[Christ] did not institute laws as a lawgiver; instead as a teacher [*doctor*] he taught lessons [...]." Spinoza also says something to this effect in Letter 74, to Oldenburg, 16 December 1675, G IV 311/C II 470—a letter, however, of which Leibniz had no knowledge before October 1676, when he obtained it directly from Oldenburg (see A VI, III, 364-71). For a detailed analysis of the Tschirnhaus notes, see M. Lærke, "A Conjecture about a Textual Mystery. Leibniz, Tschirnhaus and Spinoza's *Korte Verhandeling*", in: *The Leibniz Review* 20 (2011), pp. 33-68.

<sup>12</sup> Schuller to Spinoza, Letter 70, 14 November 1675, G IV 303/C II 463.

<sup>13</sup> On the troublesome publication of Huet's book, see A. G. Shelford, "Of Scepters and Censors: Biblical Interpretation and Censorship in Seventeenth-Century France", in: *French History* 20:2 (2006), pp. 161-81.

<sup>14</sup> See Tschirnhaus to Spinoza, 2 May 1676, Letter 80, G IV 331/C II 484.

<sup>15</sup> See M. Lærke, "À la recherche d'un homme égal à Spinoza. G. W. Leibniz et la *Demonstratio evangelica* de Pierre-Daniel Huet", in *XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* 232 (2006), pp. 388-410; Lærke, *Les Lumières de Leibniz*, pp. 116-27.

Leibniz's position on Spinoza's conception of the "right concerning sacred matters," or *jus circa sacra*<sup>16</sup>.

## 2. The Excerpts from *TTP* XIX

I give below a full translation of Leibniz's excerpts from *TTP* XIX. In order to maintain comparability with Spinoza's text, I translate with a constant side-glance to Edwin Curley's recently published translation of the *TTP*. I indicate in footnotes when Leibniz's text deviates from mere copying or close paraphrase. Moreover, contrary to the Academy edition, I insert square brackets ("[...]") whenever Leibniz jumps in Spinoza's text:

*That the right concerning sacred matters belongs completely to the supreme powers, and that the external practice of Religion must be accommodated to the peace of the Republic, if we want to obey God Rightly. [...]* He notes this: Moses wanted to inflict punishment upon those who violated the Sabbath before the covenant, and hence, while they were still their own masters (see Exodus [16:27]), in the same way as after the covenant (see Numbers 15:36) [...]. Jeremiah 29:7 "Take thought for the peace of the city to which I have led you as captives," he says, "for its welfare will be your welfare." [...] When the Hebrew State was destroyed revealed religion ceased to be law. Even the Hebrews were told that each person should love his neighbor just as himself (see Leviticus 19:17-18)<sup>17</sup>, except if they had broken the law (Leviticus 5:1<sup>18</sup>, [Deuteronomy] 8:8-9 and 17:7)<sup>19</sup>. It was said to the Jews: *hate your enemy, love your neighbor* [+ i. e. the gentile; this is bad +] (Matthew 5:43)<sup>20</sup> [...] But Christ saw that [his word] was to be dispersed throughout the whole world, taught them that they should love everyone<sup>21</sup>. [...] He asks with what right the disciples of Christ have preached. He responds by the right of the power Christ received over the unclean spirits (see Matthew 10:1)<sup>22</sup>. But above we have warned that everyone is bound to

<sup>16</sup> Leibniz, *Aus Spinozas Tractatus Theologico-politicus*, late 1675 (?), A VI, III, p. 648-74.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Leviticus 19:17-18: "[17] You are not to hate your relative in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor if you must, but you are not to incur guilt on account of him. [18] You are not to seek vengeance or hold a grudge against the descendants of your people. Instead, love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord."

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Leviticus 5:1: "If anyone sins because they do not speak up when they hear a public charge to testify regarding something they have seen or learned about, they will be held responsible."

<sup>19</sup> Leibniz paraphrases and abbreviates. Spinoza has: "[...] nevertheless they were bound to inform the Judge of anyone who had broken the law (see Leviticus 5:1 and Deuteronomy 13:8-9) and to kill him if he was judged to be punishable by death (Deuteronomy 17:7)". Cf. Deuteronomy 13:8-9: "[8] You are not to yield to him, listen to him, look with pity on him, show compassion to him, or even cover up for him. [9] Instead, you are surely to execute him. You must be the first to put him to death with your own hand, and then the hands of the whole community" and Deuteronomy 17: 2-7: "[2] You may discover that a man or woman living in one of your cities that the Lord your God is about to give you has done evil in the eyes of the Lord your God by transgressing his covenant. [3] He may be following and serving other gods by bowing down to them—that is, to the sun, the moon, or to any of the heavenly host (something I did not command.) [4] When it is reported to you or you hear of it, you are to investigate it thoroughly. When the truth has been established that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, [5] summon the man or the woman who did this evil thing to your city gates, and then stone the man or the woman to death. [6] Based on the testimony of two or three witnesses, they must surely die, but they are not to die based on the testimony of one person. [7] Let the witnesses be the first to begin executing them, then the rest of the people are to follow. By doing this you will purge evil from among you."

<sup>20</sup> I here indicate the clause "*id est gentilem*" as an additional, critical remark, because Spinoza's text speaks nowhere of the gentile. See below for further discussion of this point.

<sup>21</sup> Leibniz substantially modifies the original text. Spinoza has: "[...] and after Christ saw that they were to be dispersed throughout the whole world, he taught them that *they should treat absolutely everyone with piety*" (my italics).

<sup>22</sup> Slight paraphrase. Spinoza has: "Suppose someone asks now 'By what right could Christ's disciples, who were private men, preach religion?' I say they did this by right of the power they'd received from Christ over

keep faith even with a tyrant, excepting someone who has been given an unquestionable aid against tyrants by a certain revelation of God. This is why no one can take this as an example except if he has the power to perform miracles. Christ says: “do not fear those who kill the body” (see Matthew 10:28), but Proverbs 24:21 say: “my son, fear God and the king”<sup>23</sup>. It follows from this that the power given to the disciples could not be taken as an example<sup>24</sup>. [...] Moses did not choose any successor to the sovereignty, but distributed all his functions so that his successors seemed to be his deputies, who were administering the state as if the king were absent, not dead. In the second state the Priests held this right absolutely [...]<sup>25</sup>.

Leibniz’s excerpts call for some interpretive remarks. They contain variations and comments on Spinoza’s text that are worth mentioning. Most importantly, however, they provide good indications of the topics Leibniz considered contentious or interesting enough to merit attention.

1. Leibniz does not dwell upon Spinoza’s general topic, the *jus circa sacra*. He simply reports the title of the chapter. This might however have sufficed for Leibniz for placing Spinoza squarely within a determined tradition of ecclesiastical right. Historically, the expression must be traced back to discussions among Dutch philosophers and theologians in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Indeed, it is the key expression around which the theological-political discussions turned in the Dutch Republic throughout the long seventeenth century, beginning with Dirk Coornhert and Justus Lipsius to Johannes Wtenbogaert and Hugo Grotius all the way up to Dutch Hobbesians such as Lucius Antistius Constans (pseud.), Pieter van der Hoof and, of course, Spinoza. While Leibniz rarely discusses these authors in this context, and it is unclear how well he knew this tradition when rereading the *TTP*<sup>26</sup>, his relative familiarity with it can be gleaned from later texts, such as a passage in the *Essais de théodicée* where he discusses the pseudonym Constans, the work of Van den Hoof, Spinoza, and the political implications of the disputes between Arminians and Cartesians in Holland. He also recounts how he met both Spinoza and Pieter Van den Hoof in person while traveling in the Netherlands in late 1676<sup>27</sup>. It was common for all the writings in this tradition to defend some version of what is sometimes dubbed “Erastianism”, arguing in

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unclean Spirits (see Matthew 10:1)”. Cf. Matthew 10:1: “Then Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority over unclean spirits, so that they could drive them out and heal every disease and every illness.”

<sup>23</sup> Leibniz here paraphrases an argument by simply noting the supporting references. Spinoza has: “This is also clear from the fact that Christ told his disciples that they shouldn’t fear those who kill the body (see Matthew 10:28). If he’d said this to everyone, the state would be established in vain, and that saying of Solomon—*my son, fear God and the king* (Proverbs 24:21)—would have been impious. That’s far from true.”

<sup>24</sup> Slight paraphrase. Spinoza has: “So it must be confessed that the authority Christ gave his disciples he gave to them only, and that others cannot take them as an example.”

<sup>25</sup> Leibniz, *Aus Spinozas Tractatus Theologico-politicus*, late 1675 (?), A VI, III, 273-74.

<sup>26</sup> Leibniz corresponded with Lambert van Velthuysen in the early 1670s and claimed knowledge of some of the latter’s work, including the Hobbesian treatise *Epistolica dissertatio de principiis justi et decori, continens apologiam pro tractate Clarissimi Thomae Hobbii de Cive* (Amsterdam 1651) (see A II, I, 62). But Velthuysen’s *Dissertatio* does not address the *jus circa sacra* directly. When writing to Graevius in June 1671, Leibniz also mentions “La Couris,” referring to Pieter van den Hoof (Pierre de la Court) and his *Interest van Holland* (Amsterdam 1662), yet another Hobbesian political work not directly concerned with ecclesiastical right (A II, I, 192-93). Although he does mention it once, in 1689, and sent a copy of it to Hermann von der Hardt in 1694 (see A I, V, 432; A I, 10, 480, I have not found any clear indication that Leibniz ever read Grotius’s *De imperio summarum potestatum circa sacra* (1647), arguably the single most important text of this tradition (I am grateful to H. Rudolph for the references). Some later texts do however suggest familiarity with the arguments it contains. See notably Leibniz to Burnett, 6 July 1706, GP III, 310-11, and Leibniz to Burnett, 29 December 1707, GP III, p. 314, in comparison with H. Grotius, *De imperio summarum potestatum circa sacra*, 2 Vols., ed. and trans. H.-J. van Dam, Leiden 2001, Vol. I, Chap. 4, Sect. 6, pp. 246-47.

<sup>27</sup> See Leibniz, *Essais de théodicée*, §375-76, G VI, 338-39.

various ways how the Church must be institutionally subordinated to the State in order to assure the complete integrity of public institutions in the name of the indivisibility of sovereignty, arguing that any concession of power to an institution independent of the state represents a threat to public security<sup>28</sup>.

2. Leibniz generally focuses on issues regarding biblical interpretation, including comparative questions regarding the relations between *OT* and *NT* passages. The excerpt lifts out no less than eleven biblical references, eight from the *OT*, three from the *NT*<sup>29</sup>. This is best explained, I think, by the context of, and motivation for, Leibniz's second reading of the *TTP*. As mentioned above, Leibniz may have engaged in the rereading in the context of his exchanges with Pierre-Daniel Huet about the latter's work in progress on the truth of the Christian religion, the *Demonstratio evangelica*. Leaving to one side an auxiliary argument concerning pagan philosophy that caused him some trouble among his readership, Huet's argument essentially consisted in an extended comparative analysis of the two testaments, attempting to show in excruciating detail how the *OT* displayed "prophetic agreement" with the *NT*, thus vouching for the authenticity and divinity of the Scriptures<sup>30</sup>. I do not find it unlikely that Leibniz reread the *TTP* specifically in view of contributing to Huet's principal argument with which he was in general agreement<sup>31</sup>. This would partly explain why Leibniz's notes focus on Biblical exegesis and on topics that in large part concern the relations between the two testaments, such as Spinoza's dubious use of the Gospel of Matthew to explain *OT* circumstances, or the way that Spinoza appeals to Solomon to clarify the meaning of Christ's commands.

3. As for specific issues addressed in the excerpts, Leibniz first turns to the way that Spinoza establishes that loving one's neighbor and hating one's enemy was the foundation of the Hebrew State, and how this changed with the teaching of Christ. Leibniz's excerpt here includes a rare critical remark. Spinoza claims, referring to Matthew 5:43, that "it was said to the Jews: *hate your enemy, love your neighbor*". Leibniz passes judgement on the argument: "that is to say, the gentile. This is bad [*male*]!" I shall return in more detail to this comment in the next section. I here content myself with an editorial remark: the Academy edition here indicates "this is bad" (*male*) in square brackets as a comment on Spinoza's text made by Leibniz. In conformity with the editorial principles of this older volume, where only additional remark clearly marked out as such by Leibniz in the manuscripts were highlighted as such, the preceding clause, *id est gentilem*, figures in the edition as an integral part of the excerpt.<sup>32</sup> For our purposes, however, it is important to realize that Spinoza's text speaks nowhere of the "gentile" and says nothing that would warrant a characterization of the phrase as a paraphrase. In this context it must therefore be considered an inserted, interpretive comment and indicated as such, along with the "*male*".

4. In the same context, Leibniz moreover reports Spinoza's idea that Christ taught his disciples to "treat absolutely everyone with piety" as meaning that they "should love everyone". This understanding of Spinoza's notion of piety as being primarily an injunction to love is not unwarranted. Hence, elsewhere in the *TTP*, Spinoza clearly affirms that "the whole

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<sup>28</sup> On the seventeenth century Dutch tradition of *jus circa sacra*, see D. Nobbs, *Theocracy and Toleration. A Study of the Disputes in Dutch Calvinism from 1600 to 1650*, Cambridge 1938; J. Lecler, *Histoire de la tolérance au siècle de la Réforme*, Paris 1994, p. 651-74; M. Lærke, "La controverse entre Grotius, Hobbes et Spinoza", *op. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> The references include: Exodus 16:27; Numbers 15:36; Jeremiah 29:7; Leviticus 19:17-18; Leviticus 5:1; Deuteronomy 13:8-9; Deuteronomy 17:7; Matthew 5:43; Matthew 10:1; Matthew 10:28; Proverbs 24:21.

<sup>30</sup> See Lærke, *Les Lumières de Leibniz*, pp. 128-35. Cf. Leibniz to Conring, February 1679, A II, I, 686-87.

<sup>31</sup> See e.g. Leibniz to Burnett, 1 (11) February 1697, GP III, 191; Leibniz to Sophie, 16 (23) October 1691, A II, II, 454-55. See also Lærke, *Les Lumières de Leibniz*, pp. 143-45; I. Backus, *Leibniz. Protestant Theologian*, Oxford 2016, pp. 162-63.

<sup>32</sup> I am grateful to H. Rudolph and H. Schepers for pointing this out to me.

law consists only in this: loving one's neighbor. So no one can deny that one who, according to God's command, loves his neighbor as himself is really obedient, and according to the law, blessed" and that "this command itself is the unique standard of the whole universal faith. Only through it are we to determine all the doctrines of that faith, the beliefs everyone is bound to accept"<sup>33</sup>. It is, incidentally, also a conception that Leibniz and Spinoza have in common, although they do not follow the same argumentative path to reach the conclusion or, for that matter, have the same concept of love<sup>34</sup>.

5. Next, Leibniz focuses on the way that Spinoza rules unlawful even the deposition of tyrants and how he argues that one must fear and obey the secular authorities despite certain biblical passages that could suggest the contrary. Spinoza invokes Solomon's injunction in Proverbs 24:21 to "fear both the Lord and the King" in order to refute a possible reading Christ's recommendation to "stop being afraid of those who kill the body but can't kill the soul," that he considers too strong<sup>35</sup>. Hence, Spinoza is attempting disprove that this verse in the Gospel can be considered a general recommendation to Christians about not yielding to the coercive power of temporal authorities. It is striking how Spinoza pits Solomon against Christ, invoking the authority of Solomon to determine the extension of Christ's recommendation, arguing that the passage in Proverbs induces us to take the passage in Matthew to address the disciples only, rather than the community of all believers.

6. Finally, Leibniz takes an interest in how Spinoza analyzes the difference between the first and the second Hebrew State. The first was governed by Moses who maintained sovereignty even after his death, when priests governed on his behalf *in absentia*, as it were. In the second state, sovereignty was, on the contrary, absolutely held by a class of priests. The broader point Spinoza is trying to make is that, no matter whether the practice of religion is grounded in natural or revealed divine law, in natural or prophetic light, reason or scripture, in order to gain *force of law* it will have to be backed by sovereign power. In order to provide further scriptural evidence for this point, Spinoza also compares two distinct stories in the *OT* about Hebrews who broke the Sabbath, one that took place before, and one that took place after Moses became king. In the first, God complained about people refusing to keep his commandments, but there is no mention of punishment<sup>36</sup>. In the second story, however, taking place after the ratification of the covenant, the offender was brought to "Moses, Aaron, and all the people" and stoned to death<sup>37</sup>.

In sum, Leibniz seems little concerned with Spinoza's philosophical argument and mostly focuses on the details of the exegetical evidence brought to the table, and in particular

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<sup>33</sup> *TTP XIV, G III 174/C II 265*.

<sup>34</sup> See Lærke, *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza, op. cit.*, pp. 240-46.

<sup>35</sup> Matthew 10:28.

<sup>36</sup> For Spinoza's text, see *TTP XIX, C III 230/G II 335*: "[...] the fact that religion acquires the force of law only from the right of the state also explains why Moses was not able to inflict any punishment on those who violated the Sabbath before the covenant, and hence, while they were still their own masters (see Exodus 16:27). After the covenant (see Numbers 15:36), i.e., after each person surrendered his natural right, the Sabbath acquired the force of a command from the right of the state." Cf. Exodus 16:27 [26-30]: "[26] For six days you are to gather it [i.e. manna], but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there won't be any. [27] Nevertheless, that seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they did not find any. [28] Then the LORD asked Moses, 'How long will you people refuse to keep my commandments and my instructions?' [29] You see that the Lord has given you the Sabbath, and so on the sixth day he gives you food for two days. Let each person stay where he is; let no one leave his place on the seventh day. [30] So the people rested on the seventh day."

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Numbers 15:32-36: "[32] As it was when the Israelis were in the wilderness, they found a man who was gathering wood on the Sabbath day. [33] The ones who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses, Aaron, and all the people. [34] Then they confined him until it could be declared what should be done to him. [35] Then the LORD told Moses, "The man is certainly to die. The entire community is to stone him to death outside the camp." [36] So the whole community brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones so that he died, just as the LORD had commanded Moses."



on the way in which Spinoza mobilizes reflections on the history of the Hebrew State, the political savvy of Moses, and the words of Christ and the apostles about love and enmity to substantiate his position regarding the subordination of the church to the state. Leibniz is interested in Spinoza's reasons for rejecting the legitimacy of rebellion against tyrants, and in the exceptions there might be. He is moreover interested in the role Spinoza assigns to Moses and the justification he provides for Moses's legislative power, before and after he covenant. Finally, he highlights the difference Spinoza detects between the power priests had in the first Hebrew State and the power they had in the second. The latter two points are both concerned with the legitimacy of the coercive power held by authorities in the Hebrew State, i.e. the coercive powers that Moses and, later, his priestly successors held in virtue of the Covenant.

### 3. The Critical Comment

I now return to the only critical comment in Leibniz's excerpts. It merits particular attention, partly because of the extreme rarity of such critical comments in the excerpts. In the section to which he adds his comment, Spinoza is explaining how, in the Hebrew State, the preservation of freedom and sovereignty required of the Hebrews that they adapt the divine command to "love your neighbor" so that it excluded enemies, while Christ later expanded it to prescribe that we treat "absolutely everyone with piety" and "love our enemies" too, by reference to Matthew 5:43-44: "You have heard that it was said, 'You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you". From these two examples, showing two differing interpretations of the same divine command in distinct political contexts, Spinoza concludes that "all these things show, with utmost clarity, that religion was always adapted to the advantage of the republic"<sup>38</sup>. It is in this context that Leibniz, after jotting down the reference to Matthew, adds: "That is to say, the gentile. This is bad [*id est gentiles. Male*]". It is not quite clear what it is that Leibniz here considers "bad", for what reason and in what sense we should understand the "badness" in question, as moral, or philosophical, exegetical or other. But we can consider some options.

One possible exegetical explanation would take Leibniz's remark to be criticizing how Spinoza uses *NT* criticism of alleged *OT* positions as an interpretive authority to determine what those positions in fact were, thus using Christian criticisms to determine the authentic nature of Jewish teachings. This is an objection that modern scholarship—Akkerman/Lagrée/Moreau and Curley both take it up in their respective Latin/French and English editions of the *TTP*—has raised in the context of this passage<sup>39</sup>. It is possible, however, that Leibniz already had the same concern and that the "*male*" then simply refers to what Leibniz considered a misuse of the Gospel of Matthew. Another possible explanation concerns the other comment Leibniz makes about the phrase in Spinoza: "*id est gentiles*." Spinoza never says anything about gentiles or pagans in this context. Spinoza rather says that Matthew's words were addressed to Jews only: "It was said to the Jews...". However, if we turn to the Gospel itself, the precept to "hate your enemy and love your neighbor" is not attributed to Jews in particular but arguably also applies to gentiles, or pagans. Hence, if we read the relevant passage in context, Matthew goes on to argue in verse 46-47 that this precept already applied to pagans (*publicani*): "If you love those who love you, what reward will you

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<sup>38</sup> *TTP* XIX, G III 233/C II 338.

<sup>39</sup> See C II 338, note 13 by Curley: "Arguably it's problematic to cite New Testament criticism of the Old Testament as an authority on the OT teachings. There's no problem finding OT evidence that the Hebrews were commanded to love their neighbors (including resident aliens and strangers.) See Leviticus 19:17-18, 19:34, Deut. 10:18-19. The problem, as ALM note, is to find a passage in which the Hebrews were commanded to hate their enemies. But it would appear that Spinoza thought there were passages in the Psalms which encouraged hatred of other nations. See xvii, 77, and the annotation there. Deut. 30:6-7 seems similar in spirit."

get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?” Thus, it is possible that Leibniz, in his comment, reproached Spinoza for unduly restricting the position described by Matthew to Jews only. In both these scenarios, the “*male*” refers to a perceived specific misinterpretation of a biblical passage.

There is however also a certain likelihood that, possibly in combination with any of the points above, we should see a more substantial theological concern being expressed in the exclamation “*male*”. According to Spinoza, the positions described in Matthew 5:43-44, i.e. the Hebrew one according to which we should only love our neighbors but hate our enemies and the Christian one according to which we should “treat absolute everyone with piety” (or “love everyone” as Leibniz paraphrases Spinoza’s text) go to support the claim that “religion was always adapted to the advantage of the republic”<sup>40</sup>. Now, it is hardly an evident conclusion that the teachings of Christ do in fact recommend the same kind of adaptation of religion to the needs of the state that the Hebrews according to Spinoza engaged in. Quite to the contrary, Matthew 5:43-44 rather supports the opposite conclusion, namely that, while the Hebrews tightly linked the meaning of religion to the interests of the state, the Christians broke up that relation, making the divine injunction to love your neighbor entirely independent of state interest. Hence, it could seem, those verses do not, as Spinoza argues, provide testimony to a continuous tradition recounted throughout both the *OT* and the *NT* according to which religion was always adapted to the state. Quite to the contrary, it indicates a break with the Hebrew tradition in the Gospel of Matthew, where the fundamental command of religion is separated from the interests of the state and takes on a more universal character.

Spinoza has an explicit reply to such an objection of which Leibniz also takes note, adding some plausibility to the idea that we should read his comment along those lines. Hence, Spinoza claims, the biblical injunction that the disciples should spread their teaching “throughout the whole world” should be understood as a command destined for the disciples only. It is not a general blueprint for the way that the church should expand or an indication that church doctrine is something to be taught without concern for borders and state interests. This is the point Spinoza makes when pitting Solomon’s command to “fear God and King” against Christ’s “do not fear those who kill the body”. He is arguing that Solomon’s command applies universally, whereas Christ’s recommendation pertains to the disciples only. In that case, there is no discontinuity between the two teachings in the *OT* and *NT*, but only a difference in scope, the latter being limited in scope, the former universal.

If we presuppose that Leibniz’s exclamation “*male*” reflects opposition to Spinoza’s somewhat dubious interpretation of the Gospel of Matthew, it would express his unwillingness to allow for the kind of continuity between the *OT* and the *NT* with regard to the subordination of religion to the state that Spinoza is defending by means of it. On this reading, contrary to Spinoza—or rather Spinoza as Leibniz read him—, Leibniz did not think that “religion was always adapted to the advantage of the republic”. Quite to the contrary, it applied to Jews and the gentile but did not apply not in the reign of Christ in which the lawful command to love *both* your neighbor *and* your enemy broadened the scope of Christian obligation well beyond the confines of the individual state and its limited interests. Moreover, it is a law that holds force over and above civil law. It is not unlikely that Leibniz’s exclamation “*male*” reflects an objection of this more substantial kind, and thus reflects a broader concern with the idea that religion and the divine law upon which it rests should be considered as subordinated to the interests of the state, even in a Christian state.

This would also go some way in explaining the motivations for other excerpts made by Leibniz, which explore the limits of the biblical support for the general argument that Spinoza

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<sup>40</sup> *TTP* XIX, G III 233/C II 338.

advances, addressing questions such as whether it is legitimate to punish a breach of the Sabbath before the Covenant, the status of revealed law in the case of a state breakdown, the conditions of rightful deposition of tyrants, and the merely delegate power that the priest class maintained in the Hebrew State even after the death of Moses. These are all limit situations where the alignment between religion and state interests defended by Spinoza are either not yet in place, strongly put to the test, or simply break down. It is possible that Leibniz made excerpts related to those topics exactly because they represented situations where it seemed possible to contest and poke holes in Spinoza's exegetical argumentation in favor of submission of the church to the state.

#### 4. Conclusion

On this last reading, Leibniz's critical comment on *TTP* XIX provides a key to understanding how Leibniz situated himself with regard to issues in *TTP* XIX. In that chapter, Spinoza aims at establishing that there can be no such thing as an independent church, but that institutionalized religion is, for all intents and purposes, under the sovereign control of the secular authorities. If the philosophically substantial analysis of Leibniz's critical remark is correct, then that remark reflects important resistance to such subordination of the state to the church. This, of course, is by no means surprising. Leibniz always insisted on separating the temporal and spiritual kingdoms in a way that separated the church from the state, for "one should not confound church and nation," as he writes to Burnett<sup>41</sup>. Indeed, Leibniz believed, if church and state were assigned their respective domains of authority nothing prevented their co-existence as equally sovereign, one within the other, *imperium in imperio* as he puts it in the 1686 *Examen religionis Christianae*<sup>42</sup>. Hence, as he argues in some notes on a memorandum by Edme Pirot, rather than "subject the universal church to sovereigns," one should "find a middle way [*juste temperament*] between ecclesiastical and secular power"<sup>43</sup>. In these other texts, it is however a result he reaches based on reflections on natural law theory, using an elaborate conceptual apparatus that, surprisingly, Leibniz never mobilizes in the context of his reading of the *TTP*. This suggests that that, for Leibniz, countering Spinoza on this point was not so much a question of refuting a new political theory on philosophical grounds, but mainly a question of refuting the new, critical biblical exegesis that Spinoza used to support his position. Leibniz did not address Spinoza's political chapters by discussing natural law theory because he believed the most appropriate response should rather be theological and exegetical. While this does not provide the whole story, it helps understanding why Leibniz, who did not see himself as a biblical scholar on account of his lack of Hebrew, never undertook the task of refuting Spinoza's theological-political position, but instead left the completion of that important task to an erudite theologian such as Pierre-Daniel Huet.

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<sup>41</sup> Leibniz to Burnett, 26 May 1706, GP III, 306-7.

<sup>42</sup> Leibniz, *Examen religionis christianae*, 1686, A VI, IV, 2242.

<sup>43</sup> Leibniz, *Réponse de Leibniz au mémoire de l'Abbé Pirot*, in: *Oeuvres*, ed. L. A. Foucher de Careil, Paris 1858-1875, Vol. I, p. 469.