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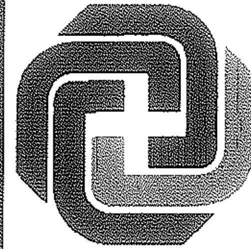

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REVIEWS

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many mistakes. I would ask only that my more immediate audience, the Reformed churches, be remembered, since for them even my proposal about "real presence" will involve a major stretch, to say nothing about my astonishing suggestions regarding bishops and the pope. But I hope it will also be remembered what sort of pope I have in mind.

THE BIBLE IN CAPTIVITY: HOBBES, SPINOZA, AND THE POLITICS OF DEFINING RELIGION

Jeffrey L. Morrow

The term "religion" is so commonplace these days that one rarely questions that a simple definition exists. Each day our periodicals demonstrate the ease of using this word. The seemingly facile usage of "religion," however, obscures its original political-historical context. In this article, I will complement the work of various scholars who argue that the emergence of religion as a modern category denoting private beliefs was primarily a political construct that facilitated the removal of the newly redefined religious from the public sphere. In addition to other historical accounts that describe this process, I will add the consideration of biblical interpretation, arguing that the raison d'être of the historical-critical method for studying the Bible in the seventeenth century was precisely to assist in the political task of transforming the public sphere.

The work of William Cavanaugh is particularly helpful in considering the argument at hand. In his recent 2009 book *The Myth of Religious Violence*, his 2002 book *Theopolitical Imagination*, and his 1995 article, "'A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House': The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the Modern State," Cavanaugh convincingly argues that the word "religion" has a complex past and that the traditional story of the "Wars of Religion" is problematic.[1] Following Talal Asad's description in his now-

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1. William T. Cavanaugh, "'A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House': The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State," *Modern Theology* 11 (1995): 403–8; William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* (New York: T & T Clark, 2002), 31–42; and William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), especially chapters 2 and 3. Also invaluable is Talal Asad,

famous 1993 book *Genealogies of Religion*, Cavanaugh notes that in the medieval period, religion had to do with the practice of the virtues within the church's liturgical life and also with religious orders; it primarily referred to monastic life and discipline.[2] In the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries political theorists such as Jean Bodin, Thomas Hobbes, Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau redefined religion as pertaining to private beliefs, matters that did not belong in the public sphere: in other words, the newly defined secular realm.[3]

Cavanaugh finds an early example of the redefinition of religion in the very idea that the wars of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe were religious. The standard story is that after the Reformation doctrinal disputes broke out all over Europe's divided Christendom and these religious disputes turned into bloody battles; modern centralized states then emerged in order to use their justified monopoly on the legitimate use of violence to bring peace to these sectarian conflicts.[4] Cavanaugh objects to this on three counts. First, state centralization was a much longer process that reached back into history at least six hundred years, well before the Reformation itself; the wars were the final stages of state centralization.[5]

Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1993), 37–45. I also benefited greatly from Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 146–54; and Peter Harrison, *"Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

2. Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 64–68; Cavanaugh, "Fire Strong Enough," 403–4; Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 37–45; and R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 214. Asad explains, "During the period [early Middle Ages] the very term *religious* was therefore reserved for those living in monastic communities; with the later emergence of nonmonastic orders, the term came to be used for all who had taken lifelong vows by which they were set apart from the ordinary members of the Church" (39n22). Writing further, he mentions, "For medieval Christians, religion was not a universal phenomenon: religion was a site on which universal truth was produced, and it was clear to them that truth was not produced universally" (45n29). St. Thomas Aquinas used *religio* in his *Summa Theologiae* in I-II.49–55 and II-II.81.7–8 to refer to the reverence for God habitually developed within the church's communal liturgical practices. See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (Cambridge: Blackfriars, 1964).

3. Cavanaugh, "Fire Strong Enough," 403–8; Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 31–44; and John Neville Figgis, *From Gerson to Grotius, 1414–1625* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1960), 124. In his most recent work, Cavanaugh links the beginnings of this transformation with the fifteenth-century works of Nicholas of Cusa and Marsilio Ficino. See Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 70–71 and 69–85, for a more complete history of this change.

4. If by religious such stories included thick descriptions of religion as ways of life, including politics and not merely doctrinal beliefs, such stories would be less problematic. The stories, however, expressly deny the public and political implications of religion as a complete way of life, and instead view these conflicts as over differing beliefs.

5. Cavanaugh made the following observation, in the specific context of the emergence of religion as a category denoting private beliefs and the use of the adjective "religious" to modify these wars: "the principal promoters of the wars in France and Germany were in fact not pastors and peasants, but kings and nobles with a stake in the outcome of the movement toward the centralized, hegemonic state" (*Theopolitical Imagination*, 31).

Second, these "religious" battles were not primarily between Catholics and Protestants, but between Catholics and Catholics, and thus clearly not over religious matters of doctrine and private beliefs. Protestants fought on either side, teaming up with Catholics, in these battles.[6] Third, to describe the wars as religious is not only inaccurate, but anachronistic, since the definition of religion as private beliefs was being redefined as such at precisely this time. The purpose of such a redefinition was to declaw the church's authority on political matters and to exorcise the public realm of the newly defined religious.

I now hope to expand upon Cavanaugh's work by describing one way in which political theorists aimed to undermine the church's authority, namely, by using the Bible for their own ends in competition with the

6. No one has made this case as persuasively as Cavanaugh (*Myth of Religious Violence*, 142–77; and "Fire Strong Enough," 399–403). Cavanaugh pointed out that the regions which already had concordats with the pope, limiting papal authority within their realms, remained Catholic through the Reformation, and the Protestant Reformation was only successful in regions that had not been able to secure any other means of limiting the pope's authority. Both Catholic and Protestant state rulers wanted to restrict foreign (i.e., papal) authority in their realms. Confessional conflicts were incidental when they occurred: (1) in 1547 the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (a Catholic) attacked Lutheran states (Protestant), but for the purposes of consolidating authority; (2) in 1572 the Queen Mother Catherine de Medici (Catholic) launched the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre slaughtering Huguenots (Protestants), but this had to do with the threat French Calvinism posed to the ecclesiastical system in France, which, because of earlier concordats, was viewed as a threat to French royal authority. To recognize the complexity involved, and see how in most cases these wars involved Catholics fighting Catholics and Protestants fighting Protestants, simply look at the tally Cavanaugh provides: (1) in 1527 the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (Catholic) attacked Rome (Catholic); (2) in 1552–1553 Lutheran princes (Protestant) teamed up with King Henry II of France (Catholic) and went up against the Holy Roman Empire (Catholic); (3) by 1576 French nobles (both Protestant and Catholic) rebelled against King Henry III of France (Catholic); (4) beginning in 1576 the Catholic League (Catholic) opposed the Politiques (Catholic) who teamed up with Protestants; (5) in 1588 the Guises family (Catholic) financed by King Phillip II of Spain (Catholic) attacked King Henry III of France in Paris (Catholic) who teamed up with Henry of Navarre (Protestant, who, after succeeding Henry III to the French throne, converted to Catholicism and took the name Henry IV); (6) in 1618 the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II (Catholic) launched the Thirty Years' War and allied himself with the Lutheran elector of Saxony (Protestant) and Albrecht von Wallenstein (Protestant) against petty princes (Catholic) and Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden (Protestant) who were backed by Cardinal Richilieu in France (Catholic); and (7) nearly the last half of the Thirty Years' War was primarily fought between the Habsburgs (Catholic) and the Bourbons (Catholic). In what sense can these be called religious wars? Cavanaugh includes many more examples (over forty in total!) in his recent work, *Myth of Religious Violence*. See also Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Volume II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 15, 59–60, and 254–59; J. H. M. Salmon, *Society in Crisis: France in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 189–90; Richard S. Dunn, *The Age of Religious Wars: 1559–1689* (New York: Norton, 1970), 6, 23–31, 48–49, and 69–78; Figgis, *From Gerson to Grotius*, 6; and Franklin C. Palm, *Calvinism and the Religious Wars* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1932), 51–55.

church. I will proceed in two parts. First, I will briefly describe how the Bible went from being both a material and visual artifact encountered primarily in communal liturgical life to being held captive by emerging modern European states where it increasingly became thought of principally as a book.

In the second part, which constitutes the bulk of my claim, I will argue that the political theorists Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza helped create a new method for interpreting the Bible that facilitated its transformation into a book. While the Reformation had already played a large role in pruning away the complex allegorical interpretations of Scripture, Hobbes and Spinoza took the Reformation focus on the *sensus literalis* of Scripture to a new level by turning the focus to the merely historical. By making such a hermeneutical shift, Hobbes and Spinoza effectively limited the formerly multifaceted Scripture experience, changing it from a theological wellspring, encountered in a multitude of diverse material and visual locations and situations, into a particular kind of book that is a primarily historical text—a book in the most limited sense of a collection of printed words on a page. The purpose of Hobbes and Spinoza in approaching Scripture in this manner was primarily political, and their biblical exegesis always served their political convictions. In the wake of the seventeenth-century "wars of religion," Hobbes and Spinoza wanted to demonstrate why their political programs were the solution to the problems of the time.

Cavanaugh's account of this time period has brought to our attention the flaws in the standard telling of this history, and it has done much to help us understand how religion became regarded as a private affair. The standard account of the history of biblical interpretation also has its flaws. Chief among these is that we have failed to see the political motivations of those who are regarded as the founders of modern biblical criticism.[7] My attention to these flaws stems both from a desire for a more accurate understanding of the history and from a desire that the vestiges of this Bible battle be recognized and their origin properly attributed to the politics of the time. In many cases, we continue to reproduce the biblical arguments and conclusions of Hobbes and Spinoza without recognizing that their exegetical work was constructed in order to provide a biblical support for their political convictions. In their hands, the Bible became a book and a tool to be used by those who held the ultimate authority over life and death, namely, the rulers of modern states.

7. For the broader history of the politics undergirding the advent of modern biblical criticism, see Jeffrey L. Morrow, "The Politics of Biblical Interpretation: A 'Criticism of Criticism,'" *New Blackfriars* (forthcoming).

LIVING WATERS FLOWING THROUGH DIVERSE TRIBUTARIES: SCRIPTURE'S MANIFOLD FORMS IN MATERIAL, VISUAL, AND AUDITORY CULTURE

Our contemporary experience of the Bible is that of a book, which can be purchased in a multitude of locations with various covers, in various translations and print sizes, according to the preferences of the reader. Prior to the end of the fifteenth century, however, only the wealthy elites and monks, scribes, and others who spent time in libraries and scriptoria had easy access to actual textual copies of the Bible. Before we can ascertain the change that occurred regarding the way the Bible was understood, we must first consider how it was encountered prior to this alteration. For those who sought to assert the power of the state over the transnational church, concretizing the Bible and limiting its multifaceted influence was of utmost importance. Political theorists recognized that in order for a state to have authority over its people who were believing Christians, the state would have to demonstrate that the Bible supported the state's claims to authority contra the church. One way this was done was by privatizing the Bible and relegating it to the realm of "religion." In other words, Hobbes, Spinoza, and others sought to extract the Bible from the liturgical world of common worship and common, manifold interpretations.

Even those like monks, rabbis, bishops, and others who had access to the Bible as a text had in the forefront of their thoughts and habits of reading the liturgical cycle, rather than the order of the canon bound as a book and serving as a historical artifact. Often their reading of the sacred page served an explicit liturgical purpose geared toward worship. At other times, when they studied the texts on their own, they made associations between scriptural passages based upon the liturgical juxtaposition of texts in the liturgical cycles of readings, not to mention the fact that many of these manuscripts were artistically illuminated and the written text itself was often artistically calligraphic.[8] The Bible as a book was not simply

8. Peter Candler notes, "Even when sufficient literacy is achieved by the medieval monk so as to permit reading privately in one's cell, this form of engagement with the text is never abstracted from a rigorous daily routine of matins, masses, vespers, and so on. *Lectio divina* is, however 'private' reading might be, always a matter of reading and interpreting not just communally but liturgically. . . . It is not a possibility for such religious to abstract their reading from the liturgical cycle of daily masses and annual feasts, the use of the entire body, hands, knees, lips, tongue, ears, not to mention the eyes, all of which the reading of such texts requires." See Peter M. Candler Jr., *Theology, Rhetoric, Manuduction, or Reading Scripture Together on the Path to God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 7; and also Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 82.

letters to be read, but rather an entry into the sublime. Hence the beauty of the writing and the meticulousness of the accompanying images were as much a part of the Bible as the words contained therein. "Illumination" meant precisely what it claimed; the pictures brought to light the message of the text. Scripture was used for meditation—for *lectio divina*—and it became a living text to those who were immersed in it.[9] Both the professed religious and laity relied on Scripture as a way to interpret and make meaning in their world.

For the vast majority of Jews and Christians the primary encounter with Scripture was not at all textual in the sense of reading books. The Bible was embedded in material and visual culture, but not primarily in book form. Rather, the most common way in which Scripture was encountered was in liturgical worship. In buildings architecturally indebted to images of the Bible, with mosaic and painted images reflecting biblical scenes, reciting and singing prayers that were biblically based, listening to Scripture proclaimed, engaging in gestures inspired by biblical texts: this constituted the Mass's visual, material, and auditory encounter with the Bible.[10]

The Bible was hence not primarily viewed as a book, and certainly not a personal belonging that could be carried around at leisure and read in private. Books are tangible, they are bound together, and their contents are typically arranged in a fixed order, moving from front to back, left to right, or, in the case of Jewish Hebrew Scriptures, right to left. But, in the liturgy, different texts from various parts of the book are read "out of book order" together at various times. So, in the liturgy of the synagogue, a text from the front of the book, in the Torah, might be read alongside a text from the middle of the book, in the Prophets. At the Mass, a Gospel reading from the New Testament, proportionately near the end of the Bible, might be read after a reading from the Old Testament, closer to the beginning or middle of the Bible. During certain liturgical seasons, like the end of Ordinary Time, the first reading might come from a New Testament book found even closer than the Gospels to the back of the Bible, and so the "order" might seem even more disorderly, at least as far as how one typically reads books.

9. For an excellent discussion of the ways in which even those medieval Christians who had access to printed Bibles in the monasteries and universities still encountered Scripture in these polyvalent ways, see Denys Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 162; and Jean Leclercq, O.S.B., *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982 [1957]).

10. Candler, *Theology, Rhetoric, Manuduction*, 7, 9, 15, 18, 27, 38–39, 50, 66, 74, 77n17, 77–82, 151–60, and 162; Gavin D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square: Church, Academy, and Nation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 112–13, 119–22, 132–33, and 138; Illich, *In the Vineyard*, 69 and 82; and Walter J. Ong, S.J., *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 269. So also today, the Bible is primarily encountered in this liturgical form by both Christians and Jews alike.

In such a liturgical context, it is easy to see how Scripture functioned polymorphically for the majority of people. It was not taken home and read at any time. Rather, certain portions were listened to in community and were juxtaposed with other portions. In Christian contexts, Old Testament passages were read in light of New Testament passages, and vice versa. Certain passages were further meditated upon in other prayerful contexts, such as the rosary and stations of the cross. Other senses than hearing were also involved in experiencing Scripture. In Christian contexts there was the smell of incense, while in Jewish Havdalah liturgies there was the smell of spices. For both religious traditions the taste of wine and bread was sometimes involved. Music, artwork, and gestures like kneeling, sitting, standing, beating the breast, bending the knee, bowing at the waist, and others—all of these affected how Scripture was understood and experienced.[11]

This multifaceted experience of Scripture extended beyond the normal form of the liturgy as well. Whether in the shape of passion plays, Corpus Christi processions, recited prayers, artwork displayed in the home, jewelry, clothing, Passover Seders at home, or similar other instances, Scripture was brought to life and made a part of the everyday world and imagination of both Jews and Christians.[12] This was a world where there was no secular hermetically sealed off from divine work; "religion" had not yet come to denote a privatized set of beliefs. There were diverse ways of encountering and responding to Scripture, and there were always issues to debate, but the debate that would develop which envisioned the church and state vying for power had not yet reached its most vigorous phase.

HOW THE BIBLE BECAME A BOOK: THE ROLE OF HOBBES AND SPINOZA

In contrast to this manifold experience of Scripture, the Bible began to be encountered as a book—primarily an object of print culture—with the advent of the printing press.[13] Common people were now able to

11. Candler, *Theology, Rhetoric, Manuduction*, 152–55 and 162.

12. For an excellent discussion of the Bible's multifaceted presence in material, visual, and auditory culture, see Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). Here Jansen uses the images of Mary Magdalen found in sermons, artwork, naming practices, journal entries, and so on to demonstrate the creative interaction of Christians with the Mary Magdalen of both the biblical text and popular legend.

13. Candler, *Theology, Rhetoric, Manuduction*, 9n19, 10, 13, 15, 30, 33, 74, 76–77, 79, 119, and 160; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400–c. 1580*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005 [1992]), 420 and 450; Pickstock, *After*

own and read their own personal or family copies of the Bible in printed form.[14] In Reformation England, parishioners supported the Reformation by bringing their personal copies of printed Bibles in English to Mass and reading aloud from them in order to interrupt the community's liturgical celebration.[15]

The Reformation also brought with it a certain level of distrust in creative allegorical interpretations of Scripture. When the full panoply of patristic, rabbinic, and medieval biblical interpretation is surveyed, it quickly becomes apparent that not every interpreter was a strict adherent of what has come to be called the *quadruplex sensus* of Scripture. Much more was occurring in allegorical or spiritual biblical interpretation than typology, tropology, and anagogy.[16] In the Christian world, great interpreters such as Pope St. Gregory the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas set out guidelines for how one was to engage in spiritual interpretation, and there always appeared some cautions about using any and every allegorical reading. Protestant Reformers, however, were nonetheless uneasy with the liberties of such interpretation. In this move they joined thinkers such as William of Ockham, who also readily attacked allegorical interpretations.[17]

It is important to note, however, that, despite this distrust of the allegorical, the Protestant Reformers were quite clear about the centrality of reading the Bible theologically; they saw it as pertaining to God and how to relate with God. Their concerns were for Christian souls, and they saw the Bible's literal interpretation as furthering this theological goal. Hence

Writing, 161n139; John Bossy, *Christianity in the West: 1400–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 97, 99–101, and 103; and Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 134 and 137.

14. Of course, even in printed form, and precisely as a book, the Bible as book could function as an important part of material and visual culture, and, in fact, could do so in new ways, as Colleen McDannell's discussion of the Bible in American homes primarily in the nineteenth century makes clear in her *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 67–102. My primary point is that Scripture's content was experienced more frequently by more people in more diverse ways prior to the printing press and to the focus on the Bible's historical aspects. It is important to point out, however, that even with the printing press, in the sixteenth century Bibles were still too prohibitively expensive for most families to own. See Peter van der Coelen, "Pictures for the People? Bible Illustrations and their Audience," in *Lay Bibles in Europe 1450–1800*, ed. M. Lamberigts and A. A. den Hollander (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press and Peeters, 2006), 185–205.

15. Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 420.

16. See, e.g., the comments in Bogdan G. Bucur, "Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies in Byzantine Hymnography: Rewritten Bible?" *Theological Studies* 68, no. 1 (2007): 92–112.

17. A. J. Minnis, "Material Swords and Literal Lights: The Status of Allegory in William of Ockham's *Breviloquium* on Papal Power," in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 292–308; and Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

the Reformers may have attempted to read the Bible more literally than allegorically, but the focus was still primarily theological. On the other hand, it was not long before this supposed literal interpretation came to provide the theological underpinnings for political theories in opposition to the transnational church. Luther's "two kingdoms" is perhaps the most noteworthy application, for it was out of concern for people's souls that Luther proposed this sharp dichotomy. As such it provides the precursor to Cavanaugh's description of the modern understanding of religion: "The concept of religion being born here is one of domesticated belief systems which are, insofar as it is possible, to be manipulated by the sovereign for the benefit of the State. Religion is no longer a matter of certain bodily practices within the Body of Christ, but is limited to the realm of the 'soul,' and the body is handed over to the State."[18]

With political theorists the focus narrowed from the theological to the historical. While it may be argued that Hobbes and Spinoza retained their own theological concerns, their arguments regarding the Bible did not stem primarily from anxiety for salvation. They were concerned with state control of people's bodies more so than the good of souls, now relegated to the private realm, thanks in part to the trajectory set by the Protestant Reformers. Biblical interpretation turned away from primordially unified supernatural and natural concerns to focus on the natural and historical alone. There had already been a precedent for this, particularly among Renaissance thinkers and even earlier, including the medieval figures William of Ockham and Marsilius of Padua, the Renaissance luminary Niccolò Machiavelli, the Protestant Reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin, as well as Hobbes's and Spinoza's seventeenth-century contemporaries Isaac La Peyrère and Richard Simon.[19] Hobbes and especially Spinoza went much further than their predecessors however, and in their works we may see the beginning stages of what came to be called the historical-critical method of biblical studies.

18. Cavanaugh, "Fire Strong Enough," 405.

19. Sascha Müller, *Kritik und Theologie: christliche Glaubens-und Schrifthermeneutik nach Richard Simon (1638–1712)* (St. Ottilien, Germany: EOS, 2004); Francis W. Nichols, "Richard Simon: Faith and Modernity," in *Christianity and the Stranger: Historical Essays*, ed. Francis W. Nichols (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 115–68; Richard H. Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère (1596–1676): His Life, Work, and Influence* (Leiden: Brill, 1987); and Henning Graf Reventlow, "Richard Simon une seine Bedeutung fur die kritische Erforschung der Bibel," in *Historische Kritik in der Theologie: Beitrage zu ihrer Geschichte*, ed. Georg Schwaiger (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 11–36. Indeed, a relatively recent work that has made an important contribution to the field demonstrating that there were many precursors to Hobbes and Spinoza, particularly in the Reformation, is Travis L. Frampton, *Spinoza and the Rise of Historical Criticism of the Bible* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 23–42. See also Randall C. Zachman, "Gathering Meaning from the Context: Calvin's Exegetical Method," *Journal of Religion* 82 (2002): 1–26; Scott Hendrix, *Tradition and Authority in the Reformation* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1996), 236–37; and Richard H. Popkin, "Some New Light on the Roots of Spinoza's Science of Bible Study," in *Spinoza and the Sciences*, ed. Marjorie Grene and Debra Nails (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1986), 171–88.

Relying upon the works of others (probably La Peyrère and Machiavelli for Hobbes and, in addition to all three of these individuals, Ibn Hazm for Spinoza), Hobbes and Spinoza began to focus on the historical background to the Bible to a degree that had never before been attempted with such forcefulness.[20] Although both ostensibly allowed for theological readings of Scripture, the very methodological guidelines of their programs indicate that a theological reading of the Bible is virtually impossible. In *Leviathan*, for example, Hobbes argued that biblical interpretation needed to follow the dictates of reason, which are opposed to theology.[21] He explained:

> For it is not the bare Words, but the Scope of the writer that giveth the true light, by which any writing is to bee interpreted; and they that insist upon single Texts, without considering the main Designe, can derive no thing from them cleerly; but rather by casting atomes of Scripture, as dust before mens eyes, make every thing more obscure than it is; an ordinary artifice of those that seek not the truth, but their own advantage.[22]

In the end, however, Hobbes claimed, based upon the Bible of course, that the temporal ruler of each state was responsible for religion within her realm.[23] Without the Leviathanic state, we pose a mortal threat to

20. J. Samuel Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Biblical Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Jürgen Overhoff, "The Theology of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 51 (2000): 527–55; Paul D. Cooke, *Hobbes and Christianity: Reassessing the Bible in Leviathan* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996); A. P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Cultural Transformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Eugene Combs, "Spinoza's Method of Biblical Interpretation and His Political Philosophy," in *Modernity and Responsibility: Essays for George Grant*, ed. Eugene Combs (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 7–28; and Sylvain Zac, *Spinoza et l'interprétation de l'Écriture* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1965). It is not insignificant that Machiavelli, who was influential for both Hobbes and Spinoza, was also a key figure involved in the transition between the understanding of "state" (*stato*) in the sense of an individual ruler to the modern abstract connotation. See William T. Cavanaugh, "Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State Is Not the Keeper of the Common Good," *Modern Theology* 20, no. 2 (2004): 246; Cavanaugh, "Fire Strong Enough," 398; Maurizio Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State: The Acquisition of Transformation of the Language of Politics, 1250–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 353.

21. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 30.

22. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 474.

23. Hobbes even went so far as to argue that if a ruler asked a citizen to blaspheme God with her lips, she should obey the ruler, since only what is in the heart matters. Thus there is no room for martyrdom in Hobbes's account of religion (392–93), where he wrote, "And if it be further asked, What if wee bee commanded by our lawfull Prince, to say with our tongue, wee beleeve not; must we obey such command? Profession with the tongue is but an externall thing, and no more than any other gesture whereby we signifie our obedience; and wherein the Christian, holding firmely in his heart the Faith of Christ, hath the same liberty which the Prophet Elisha allowed Naaman the Syrian" (referring to 2 Kgs 5:18 regarding Naaman bowing down before the idol Rimmon).

each other, as Hobbes put it in his oft-quoted remark, "during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man."[24] Thus the state ruler alone, or the officials she appointed, was able to provide official interpretations of the Bible. Such programmatic arguments are not, however, where we find Hobbes's importance for the later historical-critical method. Rather, the way in which Hobbes read the Bible when he made his arguments highlights his turn to the historical in biblical interpretation.

One example of this comes in his exclusion of the supernatural from the meaning of the texts. Not only did Hobbes deny the role of the supernatural in the authorship of the text, he also chose to ignore the supernatural as it arose in the stories. When he came to passages referring to God's Spirit, for instance, Hobbes interpreted the Spirit naturalistically, for example, as wind.[25] Likewise, Hobbes interpreted concepts like heaven and hell as merely temporal.[26] This latter propensity was especially important for Hobbes because his political vision relied so heavily on the fear of death. For the citizen, nothing must be more threatening than physical death; heaven and hell would be interpreted accordingly in order that the state ruler who held the power to execute or to pardon would be the ultimate source of authority. Eschatological teachings threatened the authority of the state because the state's jurisdiction did not extend to the realm after death. In order to make the most of state control of its citizens' lives on earth, Hobbes had to argue that nothing else mattered beyond life on earth.[27]

Hobbes's quest for the history behind the text was clearly tied to his political program. Hobbes's concern was for the English state; the above examples of his scriptural interpretation buoyed the power of that state. Hobbes wished to provide a theoretical defense of the status quo, where the king ruled both church and state and was the ultimate interpreter of the Bible. Hobbes wrote his famous political tome *Leviathan* (1651) primarily in France while in exile during the English civil war. Upon his return to England, after the political climate change in the wake of the civil war, he did not find a warm welcome.[28]

24. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 91.

25. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 305–17. Sometimes Hobbes interprets the Spirit of God as the faculty of understanding, as in dream interpretation (307–8). In one instance, Hobbes interprets the Spirit of God as zeal (308). In all of these interpretations, he is very clear that "there be no Immateriall Spirit" (505).

26. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 484–86 and 492–93.

27. As Hobbes puts it, "It is impossible a Common-wealth should stand, where any other than the Soveraign, hath a power of giving greater rewards than Life; and of inflicting greater punishments, than Death" (349).

28. While in France Hobbes apparently met with numerous intellectuals of the day, likely including Isaac La Peyrère since they shared many of the same friends and ran in the same circles.

Hobbes's naturalistic and historical reading of the Bible necessitated the understanding of Scripture as a text similar to other historical texts. While he continued to acknowledge the importance of the Bible as an authority to Christians, his methodological approach to reading the Bible represents a fundamentally different way of encountering Scripture than in the past. Hobbes claimed that he was using "science" and "reason" in examining the Bible, yet all of his exegesis merely supported his already existing political convictions, especially the conviction that the state sovereign had absolute authority over all his citizens. By employing biblical interpretation in this way Hobbes furthered the concept of the Bible as a book to be examined as a historical artifact. In short, Hobbes's disingenuous exegesis was politically motivated; it supported the authority of the state.[29]

Spinoza went even further than Hobbes, and in fact set out a detailed methodological program for biblical interpretation, many points of which survived into contemporary historical-critical methodologies.[30] Like Hobbes, Spinoza argued that the state needed to have absolute control over any expressions of religion in the public sphere. When it came to the Bible, however, Spinoza's focus on the historical far surpassed Hobbes's treatment. Getting to the history behind the text was of paramount importance for Spinoza. In fact, Spinoza did not believe anything more should be done with the biblical texts until the complete histories were discovered. In short, as David Dungan made clear, "Spinoza and his followers multiplied questions about the physical history of the text to the point that the traditional theological task could never get off the ground."[31]

Like Hobbes, Spinoza removes supernatural elements from the Bible. For Spinoza, no God exists apart from nature itself. Hence, Old Testament prophets were not inspired by God in any traditional understanding, but rather they simply had vivid imaginations.[32] Spinoza likewise denied the existence of miracles.[33] Spinoza viewed the Holy Spirit simply as peace

29. For a more thorough treatment of the political and historical background to Hobbes's biblical interpretation, see Jeffrey L. Morrow, "*Leviathan* and the Swallowing of Scripture: The Politics behind Thomas Hobbes's Early Modern Political Biblical Criticism," *Christianity & Literature* (forthcoming).

30. James Kugel comments, "In a few pages of his remarkable little book the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), Spinoza outlined a new proposal for *how* the Bible was to be read, and the program became the marching orders of biblical scholars for the next three generations." See James L. Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture Then and Now* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 31.

31. David Laird Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem: The Canon, the Text, the Composition, and the Interpretation of the Gospels* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 172. Dungan is indebted here to the analysis in Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

32. Baruch Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 70–73.

33. Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 125.

of mind from doing what one ought to do.[34] Finally, Spinoza reduced all the moral precepts of the Bible to loving God and loving one's neighbor, which for Spinoza meant toleration of differences in private beliefs, helping those in need, and being obedient to the state. Any other moral laws from the Bible had no relevance, as they were intended only for earlier states, like the Hebrew state in the Old Testament.[35]

Spinoza's motivations were, like Hobbes's, political. Spinoza laid out his biblical hermeneutic in his famous political work, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670). Unsurprisingly, his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* supported the form of politics for which Jan De Witt, then head of the Dutch Republic, stood. As soon as De Witt was murdered, Spinoza's theological and political work was officially banned. As with Hobbes before him, Spinoza's goal was to help bring peace to a world he perceived as irrationally violent. Both Hobbes and Spinoza saw the cause of such violence lying, at least in part, in the diversity of confessional loyalties. And both Hobbes and Spinoza saw a solution in a "rational" method of scriptural exegesis.

In a passage Dungan suggests might be the Magna Carta of historical criticism, Spinoza summarizes the basis of his exegetical method:

> The rule that governs interpretation must be nothing other than the natural light that is common to all, and not to any supernatural right nor to any external authority. Nor must this rule be so difficult as not to be available to any but skilled philosophers. It must be suited to the natural and universal ability and capacity of mankind . . . our rule fits this description.[36]

34. Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 235.

35. Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 112, 119, and 145.

36. Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 160. Spinoza's method may be enumerated as follows: (1) discover the original meaning of the words in the Bible, or as Spinoza puts it, "investigate . . . all possible meanings of any passage" (142); (2) assemble biblical statements together by topic (143); (3) come up with a nearly complete historical biography of each biblical author (144); (4) arrive at a complete history of the transmission of each biblical book (144); (5) discover all the relevant historical details concerning the canonization process for each specific biblical book (144); and (6) come to know the complete history of the textual transmission of each biblical book (145). Only after this thorough historical investigation is complete can the exegete begin to examine the actual meaning of the biblical texts (145). See Dungan's comments on this method in *History of the Synoptic Problem*, 232–38. Dungan pointed out how Spinoza believed there were certain platitudes that could be known and universally accepted—like love of neighbor—and how Spinoza used the assumption of such platitudes, combined with his historical method, to eviscerate Scripture of theological meaning. Spinoza proceeded to go through his study of the Bible and demonstrate that we do not know enough about the original meaning of the words in their original languages, nor can we arrive at sufficiently complete historical biographies of the authors, and so on. In effect, after laying out the details of his new historical method, Spinoza proceeded to show how there was no realistic way to answer the questions he multiplied; all the exegete is left with are the multiple historical questions and the fruitless investigations to try and answer them (236–40).

Such a method would allegedly reduce violence on behalf of religion because the method would lead to accord instead of discord.[37] Hence, for Spinoza, the Bible was a book, a historical text, that, if regarded primarily as an objective text, could bring peace. The readers needed only to apply reason in their approach to this book, and they would all reach the same conclusions, as if it were basic geometry or algebra.

Violence allegedly in the name of religion was the primary factor motivating the turn to history in the work of these early modern political philosophers and biblical interpreters. As Jon Levenson observed:

> It is no coincidence that the early pioneers of biblical criticism—Hobbes, Spinoza, Richard Simon—lived in the aftermath of the Thirty Years' War. Through the famous formula *cuius regio, eius religio* (whoever's realm, his religion), the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), which ended that war, established the superiority of the state over religion in fact and provided a hospitable climate for a theory to the same effect.[38]

These theorists blamed the contemporary conflicts on differing religious standpoints. A historical method for reading the Bible—one which was ostensibly neutral and objective—promised to them the opportunity for all people to agree on the meaning of biblical passages. While many came to the conclusion that the state ought to have the ultimate authority vis-à-vis the church, the very phrase *cuius regio, eius religio* indicates that these supposedly unbiased methods for interpreting the Bible ironically rendered a multiplicity of religious denominations rather than common religious convictions leading to peace.

In the minds of Hobbes and Spinoza, the reason for fearing religious violence was to be found in the religious wars of the previous decades. Now we have come full circle. These allegedly religious wars provided Spinoza with the justification for the privatization of religion, newly redefined, as well as for a biblical hermeneutic that matched such political aims. This involved a new definition of religion, private beliefs, and the transformation of Scripture. No longer was Scripture theological, about God and human relationships with God, nor was it experienced in diverse forms of auditory, material, and visual culture.[39] The Bible was now

37. For a more thorough account of the political backdrop of Spinoza's biblical hermeneutic, see Jeffrey L. Morrow, "The Early Modern Political Context to Spinoza's Bible Criticism," *Scottish Journal of Theology* (forthcoming).

38. Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 117.

39. I concede the possibility that Hobbes and Spinoza may have had real theological concerns. See the spirited defenses of such theology, particularly for Spinoza, in Brayton Polka, *Between Philosophy and Religion: Spinoza, the Bible, and Modernity*, 2 vols. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007); and Frampton, *Spinoza and the Rise of Historical Criticism*. My point is that their exegesis did not allow for any theology beyond historical interpretation or beyond individual formation as civil servants that was at the heart of any theological concerns for Hobbes and Spinoza, if they in fact had such concerns.

simply a written text like any other, dealing with people from long ago, and it was to be read historically by trying to get behind the text in search of "objective" history.[40]

Of course, with such a great multiplication of necessary first-step historical questions, as in Spinoza's proposal, theological interpretation became impossible. But, according to Dungan, that was exactly the point of such historical questions in the first place:

> to create an endless "nominalist barrage," if you will, an infinitely extendable list of questions directed at the physical history of the text, to the point where the clergy and the political officials allied with them *could never bring to bear their own theological interpretations* of the Bible. In other words, Spinoza switched the focus from the *referent* of the biblical text (e.g., God's activity, Jesus Christ) to *the history of the text*. In so doing, he effectively eviscerated the Bible of all traditional theological meaning and moral teaching.[41]

CONCLUSION

The emergence of religion as a category denoting privatized beliefs occurred between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. This creation of religion as many now understand the word coincided with the Bible's transformation from living polymorphic Word to ossified historical text limited to words on paper. Hobbes's and Spinoza's approach to reading the Bible helped to restrict the previously diverse encounters with Scripture. In so doing, they contributed to the redefinition of religion as a modern category. The purpose of this redefinition of religion, and of the Bible's transformation, was for Hobbes and Spinoza primarily political. By regarding the Bible as a historical text accessible to interpretation by natural reason, Hobbes and Spinoza sought to support the state in bringing an end to conflict that they regarded as religiously motivated.[42]

40. This is not to say that individuals and communities no longer experienced Scripture in such polymorphic ways; they did and they continue to do so. The Bible, however, became viewed increasingly as the property of scholars in the university setting, where such modern historical concerns dominate.

41. Dungan, *History of the Synoptic Problem*, 172.

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