

# THE IDEA OF CHRISTIANITY IN HOBBS'S LEVIATHAN

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*This essay expounds Hobbes's idea of Christianity based on a reading of Leviathan as a whole. Among the conclusions are these:*

*First, that Hobbes was profoundly concerned with the religious questions spawned by the Reformation from start to finish in Leviathan, and there provides his most extended, elaborate commentary on Christian belief. The common neglect of the third and fourth parts of Leviathan is a mistake, not only because Hobbes himself believed them of fundamental importance to his theorizing of the conditions for civil peace and spiritual repose, but because the themes of the latter two parts are present in the first two parts persistently. Leviathan may be seen as a religious treatise and not only a work of political philosophy.*

*Second, in Leviathan Hobbes has worked out a detailed version of reformed Christianity that is his own, based on his own reading and interpretation of the Scriptures but also informed by his familiarity with the major theological issues of his era. He offers, for example, particularly in Chapter 42, a detailed refutation of the arguments of the leading Roman Catholic spokesman, Cardinal Bellarmine, against the reformed churches.*

*Third, the arguments of Leviathan are Hobbes's contribution to dispelling the "terrors" and mystifications of religious belief, as well as the "mysteries" of political authority. This is neither to dispel belief itself, nor a denial that concern for our destiny after death is significant.*

*Fourth, Hobbes shows how it is possible to harmonize "reason" and "revelation," without depending on Aristotle, insisting that it is the religious duty to do this. In his religious humanism, Hobbes thus keeps at the center of his thought this central question of reason and revelation posed by the medieval tradition of the philosophy of the Schoolmen whom he otherwise reviles for their "corruption" under the influence of ancient philosophy. He seeks a Christianity purified of extrinsic influences.*

*Fifth, Hobbes's proposals for seeking religious and civil peace conjointly are such, he thinks, as to enhance the capacity of individuals to take personal responsibility for civic and spiritual virtue, consistent both with their inevitable dependence on their own understanding and judgment, and with their admitted need for reliable and unambiguous political authority, leading to a new level of liberty and dignity, and to a sophisticated appreciation for the importance of civil law.*

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Whereupon [Adam and Eve] having both eaten, they did indeed take upon them God's office, which is judicature of good and evil; but acquired no new ability to distinguish them aright (*Leviathan*, 20.135/144).

All men therefore that would avoid, both the punishments that are to be in this world inflicted, for disobedience to their earthly sovereign, and those that shall be inflicted in the world to come, for disobedience to God, have need to be taught to distinguish well between what is, and what is not necessary to salvation (*Leviathan*, 43.384-5/403).

Whence comes it, that in Christendom there has been, almost from the time of the Apostles, such jostling of one another out of their places, both by foreign and civil war; such stumbling at every little asperity of their own fortune, and every little eminence of that of other men; and such diversity of ways in running to the same mark, *felicity*, if it be not night amongst us, or at least a mist? We are therefore yet in the dark (*Leviathan*, 44.398/418).

## I

Ours, says Hobbes, is "a time wherein the interests of men are changes" (Rev. & Concl., 466/489). Such is his diagnosis and his reason for fearing that his new teaching will be hard to accept. But the need is for new truth to combat ancient errors,

in this time, that men call not only for peace, but also for truth, to offer such doctrines as I think true, and that manifestly tend to peace and loyalty, to the consideration of those that are yet in deliberation, is not more, but to offer new wine, to be put into new casks, that both may be preserved together (Rev. & Concl., 466/489-490).

And,

if a man would well observe that which is delivered in the histories, concerning the religious rites of the Greeks and Romans, I doubt not but he might find many more of these old empty bottles of Gentilism, which the doctors of the Roman Church, either by negligence or ambition, have filled up again with the new wine of Christianity, that will not fail in time to break them (45.435/457).

The truth Hobbes offers can be known to all and, once armed with it, they can guard against "the ambition of a few discontented persons" (Rev. & Concl., 467/491).

Reading *Leviathan* as a whole, one is finally struck by the unity of its thematic structure from beginning to end. The political issues of the new time are inseparable from its theological issues. Separating the first two parts of *Leviathan* from the latter two parts is arbitrary and misleading. Virtually every theme that is addressed at length in Parts Three and Four finds a place in Parts One and Two, at least in brief, as a prelude to the fuller discussions that are to come. Issues of religion and theology run straight through the first thirty-one chapters of *Leviathan* and, in the remainder, there are frequent references back to the well-known arguments of the first and second parts. *Leviathan* is a treatise on reformed Christianity, not only a treatise on the ideal of commonwealth. There is remarkable consistency in this throughout the *Leviathan*. Hobbes's first extended discussion "On Religion" in *Leviathan*, preceded by numerous discrete comments on the topic, comes in Chapter 12 where he observes that religiosity is to be found among the creatures only in man, and thus the "seed" of religion is only in man. What characteristics of man excite in him the religious sense?

First, curiosity to search out the causes of good and evil fortune; second, concern for the origins of things; third, although men and beasts share the quest for felicity, men set their sights quite high, seeking to know the sources of their fortunes and they will make up stories (theorize) about what conduces to good or bad fortune even if they have no certain knowledge:

man did excel all other animals in this faculty, that when he conceived any thing whatsoever, he was apt to inquire the consequences of it, and what effects he could do with it...but this privilege is allayed by another; and that is, by the privilege of absurdity; to which no living creature is subject, but man only (5.27/34).

The "privilege of inquiry" carries with it the "privilege of absurdity." Religion is one of the principal features of human existence wherein is dramatized this peril at the heart of human self-understanding. Hobbes's examination of religion, centrally of Christianity in Parts Three and Four of *Leviathan*, is designed to separate the sensible from the absurd in religious understanding. Hobbes thinks this crucial not alone because he wishes to defend reformed Christianity (Christianity that is expounded so as to align it with what human beings know through rational inquiry to be true) against "Romish superstition," but because he believes ordinary, uneducated people have been wickedly exploited by religious practices separated from common sense:

If this superstitious fear of spirits were taken away, and with it, prognostics from dreams, false prophecies, and many other things

depending thereon, by which crafty ambitious persons abuse the simple people, men would be much more fitted than they are for civil obedience (2.12-13/19).

Hobbes's rejection of the Schoolmen is based in part on his conclusion that their way of philosophizing has contributed to this abuse by constructing an abstract and confusing language which adepts can manipulate to the disadvantage of the uninstructed. In the hands of the false prophets the future is misrepresented. The future is "a fiction of the mind" (3.16/22). What we need is an account of revelation that will show how to approach the future in a non-fictive way, or, as we shall see, to suspend people's preoccupation with the future in favor of the improvement of their spiritual strength, this latter having little to do with the outcome of temporal events. Much, moreover, of Hobbes's discussion early in *Leviathan* about the precision of names is to lay the basis for his refutation of the Schoolmen later on, and he frequently refers to this connection from the outset (e.g., 4.23-24/30, 5.26-28/32-35).

There is a democracy of reason in that "all men by nature reason alike, and well, when they have good principles" (5.28/35). Reason is "attained by industry" (5.29/35), when we are methodical in reasoning about fact and experience to let us go beyond our mere experience. Knowledge of fact and consequence is conditional. We may get these right or we may not (7.40/47-8). Reason cannot get rid of contingency and to find truth is not to be freed from the contingent world of experience. But "sapience" adds "science" to "dexterity" (5.30/36-7). Yet where one has no "infallible science" then "natural judgment" is best — better surely than reliance on books and untested authority.

Implicit in these observations is the idea of a better instructed society of normal men and women, no longer mystified by the confusions and abstractions of the past, less dependent on claims of expertise they have no way to assess. To believe that this is possible, and that the process of achieving it can be directed and advanced by reading *Leviathan*, opens the way to Hobbes's vision of a reformed Christianity that relies on the careful reading of the Bible in a direct and common sensical, not to say rather literal, way. This is what Hobbes proceeds to do in *Leviathan*.

When, for example, Hobbes asserts that human knowledge is necessarily conditional, there being "nothing simply and absolutely so," he associates this with his attack on metaphorical notions he attributes to scholastic philosophy, prefiguring his later attacks on what he takes to be false doctrines of grace and transubstantiation or the "unintelligible" idea of the "beatifical vision" held by the Schoolmen (6.39/46). This last is unintelligible because it depends on asserting a continuity between the nature of the divine and of the human which,

in Hobbes's theology, is impossible; anyone's beatifical vision must be his own interpretation of the encounter with the divine, and there is no way independently to authenticate it.

Generically, religion is "Fear of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publicly allowed, RELIGION; not allowed SUPERSTITION. And when the power imagined, is truly such as we imagine, TRUE RELIGION" (6.35/42). The fundamental difficulty is to learn how to distinguish mere religion from true religion. This is further complicated by the nature of human discourse itself. Discourse in search of knowledge ends either in attaining knowledge or it ends by giving up the inquiry. Wherever discourse breaks off what is then expressed is an opinion about what was or was not true in the past, or what will or what will not be true in the future. This is "judgment" and corresponds to "will" in deliberating over action: we consider in the first case how to understand, in the second how to act. Human beings must continually interpret the world: doubting, questioning, considering — deciding what to think, how to act.

All understanding is conditional, I must construct my picture of the world and this is never fixed or final (7.40/47-8). To do well in this task, it is necessary to start with precise definitions and to reason well from them; this will apply to the interpretation of Scripture or theological doctrines no less than to anything else. Historical accounts are produced by men. If we believe such accounts we are putting our trust in those who have produced those accounts. Not to believe someone's interpretation of Scripture is to distrust him, not Scripture; the only exception to this would be to distrust (an unlikely) immediate revelation from God (7.40-2/47-9).

This means that virtually all Christians are so by tradition and authority, not by immediate knowledge. For all practical purposes, we must accept that knowledge of God is mediated by human interpretation. Much of religious belief and practice is a matter of opinion developed through discourse. Religion may be inherent to human experience but, apart from an authoritative tradition, religious opinion is an unlikely source of unity.

Chapter 12 introduces us to Hobbes's approach to his theological task which is to be completed in the second half of *Leviathan*. If Hobbes should be successful, he will have shown what the core of Christian belief is and that it is a compatible addition to the natural understanding of the human condition that we arrive at through unaided, systematic reflection on our experience.

Anxiety for our futures and over the mystery of origins, Hobbes argues, makes us "Promethean." We are prone to constant fearfulness for what tomorrow will bring; we become "prudent" or "foresightful" in the negative sense of suffering "perpetual fear," preoccupied with "invisible" or unknown causes over which we feel no control. Hobbes

comments that the old saying that religion is born from fear is true — at least as applied to the religion of the Gentiles. However,

the acknowledging of one God, eternal, infinite, and omnipotent, may more easily be derived, from the desire men have to know the causes of natural bodies, and their several virtues, and operations; than from the fear of what was to befall them in time to come (12.70-1/76-7).

When this “scientific curiosity” comes to the fore, then a process of genuine or undistracted reasoning directs us to the first cause and we arrive at the idea of the “first mover” or “eternal cause of all things.” This takes us out of ourselves, so to speak, by replacing the curiosity for our fortunes with curiosity about the nature of the world. Note how Hobbes concludes this reflection:

all this without thought of their fortune; the solicitude whereof, both inclines to fear, and hinders them from the search of the causes of other things; and thereby gives occasion of feigning of as many gods, as there be men that feign them (12.71/77).

Hobbes is saying that the conflicting ideas of God derive from the anxiety-ridden projections of images of what we think God or the gods must be, traceable to the personal hopes, fears and aspirations of those who invent these ideas. This leads to vast variations in belief, ceremony and practice, and to the superstition born of ignorance:

For such is the ignorance and aptitude to error generally of all men, but especially of them that have not much knowledge of natural causes, and of the nature and interests of men; as by innumerable and easy tricks to be abused (37.289/304).

The pure idea of God, by contrast, stripped of these adventitious characteristics, is apprehended in its universality, above the humanly created conflicts that invoke the name of God in a prejudicial way. The pure idea of God, which comes to us when we do not put concern for our fortunes first, brings us into tune with a God categorically different from ourselves who, as Hobbes later says, has no “ends” or goals. True thought and interpretation, when we achieve them, make us more like the divine, and, to speak somewhat paradoxically, less “religious” in the natural or gentile sense of the word. True religion, it will turn out, has little to do with much if not most of what is usually denominated religious. This purification, insisting on the categorical difference between the human and the divine, also diminishes the prospects of eloquent trouble makers to associate their projects with the divine. We become more aware of the assertive nature of such claims and the paucity of evidence to support them.



Hobbes identifies false religion with the Gentiles, while the pure idea of God is expressed in the biblical idea common to Jews and Christians. Logically, it is possible for serious inquirers, like Plato or Aristotle, to arrive through natural experience at a purer idea of God. In the context of Chapter 12, however, the covenant experiences of Abraham and of Moses are central to Hobbes's thinking.

The anxiety-driven human imagination produces the image of spiritual or incorporeal bodies, much like ourselves. They, however, have nothing to do with the idea of God derived from true reasoning about the nature of causality back to the first mover or eternal cause, reflecting rather the influence of "the demonology of the Greeks." To reason correctly about this is to accept that God is "incomprehensible" (3.17/23-4, 12.71/77, 34.257/271). This is not the conclusion reached by the many because they do not understand causality adequately if at all, and may feel threatened by a deity so far removed from the ordinary range of experience.

Religion in a generic sense is ineradicably associated with a pragmatic attitude, and often intimates the completion of our practical lives in a putatively satisfactory way. Precisely for this reason, ordinary religion cannot be experience different in kind from practical experience. Thus it can have no independent existence, no meaning apart from the way our experience has led us to understand the world we inhabit; it is humanly created religion, but not the true religious response to God. That there is something beyond worldly religion is possible. This could free us to examine forthrightly the incompleteness, indeed the incompleteness, of practical life whether under the auspices of religion or under any other auspices.

Thus Chapter 12 "On Religion" directly precedes Chapter 13 "Of the Natural Condition of Mankind as Concerning Their Felicity and Misery." Natural religion is so inextricably part of the natural condition that it cannot be an alternative or antidote to the natural condition. If anything it exacerbates the natural condition in investing particular, private interpretations of the world with religious zeal. When we look straightforwardly at the natural condition, as Hobbes does in Chapter 13, and do not gloss over its characteristics by appeals to misleading religious notions, we begin to see the dramatic, categorical distinction of the divine from the human. That God is incomprehensible follows from the fact that there is nothing in our natural experience on the basis of which we can possibly construct an adequate insight into the nature of God, even though God has made it possible for us to derive the moral virtues in the form of the natural laws that emerge in our natural experience. God discloses himself by speaking to us; the conversation between God and man restricts us to intellectual apprehension, it does not permit, but rather challenges, our penchant to visualize or corporealize God. Nevertheless, the idea of God is the

inevitable result of our reflections on the causes of things — an unavoidable conclusion. What grounds there can be for anyone to interpret God to us is elaborated in Part Three of *Leviathan*. There Hobbes shows us the limitations on anyone's claims to possess a special insight into God's nature which would give him a special authority in relation to the rest of us. The distinction between priesthood and laity, for example, is transformed into the vision of the cooperative and complementary relation of preachers and hearers of the word characteristic of Hobbes's reformation theology.

Thus, the task of working out a proper earthly order depends on a clear grasp of the natural condition of mankind, something which is universally possible because all the elements necessary for such an understanding are to be found in careful reflection on human experience, accessible in principle to all human beings. Does this make God irrelevant in a Hobbesian scheme? It depends on how one chooses to look at the question.

For some, it would follow that we are on our own to deal with our experience according to our own lights, that we need no revelation in order to complete the task, and that the incomprehensible Hobbesian God has simply been relegated to the realm of abstract concepts about which we need no longer worry (Deism). But Hobbes repeatedly insists throughout *Leviathan* that the natural laws emanate from God and that human beings can grasp these through their reason. Often, he formulates this in a way not dissimilar to the traditional Thomistic notion that the Natural Law is that portion of the Eternal Law human beings can share; and this serves to remind us of the continued influence of Thomistic/Scholastic modes of thought in Protestant theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, despite Hobbes's persistent assaults on the Schoolmen. Moreover, Hobbes is quite explicit that there can be no insuperable contradiction between the dictates of natural human reason and the commands of God given through revelation:

Nevertheless, we are not to renounce our senses, and experience; nor, that which is the undoubted word of God, our natural reason. For they are the talents which he hath put into our hands to negotiate, till the coming again of our blessed Saviour; and therefore not to be folded up in the napkin of an implicit faith, but employed in the purchase of justice, peace, and true religion. For though there be many things in God's word above reason; that is to say, which cannot by natural reason be either demonstrated, or confuted; yet there is nothing contrary to it; but when it seemeth so, the fault is either in our unskilful interpretation, or erroneous ratiocination (32.242/255-6).

In Chapter 26, "Of Civil Laws," Hobbes argues that "the law of nature, and the civil law, contain each other, and are of equal extent"



(26.174/185), meaning that the civil law is the putting into practice of the precepts of the natural law (civil law *is* the natural law in operation) in order that they can be practically operative for subjects in the commonwealth. The laws of nature include "equity, justice, gratitude, and other moral virtues" (26.174//185). When this is done, the moral duties of the natural precepts of conduct become legally obligatory in specific ways. It follows that the quality of the civil laws is related to their adequacy in implementing the moral virtues in practice, even though it is clear also that the moral virtues cannot, absent human judgment and law-making decision, become operative for a community as a whole.

In the covenant relationship reciprocity evokes action on both sides. In responding to the laws of nature, human beings are implicated in and responding to the divine intention. Even if God is, in principle, incomprehensible, the effects of his handiwork are present in everything and especially in human beings where an explicit, active response is called forth, and cannot be avoided.

In a way, then, under a creator God, all is revelation. Some of that revelation is accessible to human reason; some of it is accessible by special action on God's part; none of it reveals God's ultimate nature which must remain incomprehensible. But it is not necessary for man to penetrate the ultimate mystery of God since what is required for his orderly existence is available through his own experience, and he can respond to God adequately without trans-human knowledge, to the "purchase of justice, peace, and true religion." God has provided through our natural condition the tools for us to deal with each other until the second coming.

Christian politics and Christian Commonwealths, cannot, whatever else is the case, be grounded in a different natural condition of mankind from that upon which all human orders rest. It can have a special character by adding importantly to what is derived by natural reason alone, but the addition cannot ultimately contradict what natural reason tells us when it reasons skillfully about the human condition.

The seeds of religion in ignorance and fear have been cultivated by two sorts of men: some by "their own invention," some by "God's commandment, and direction." Out of the ambiguous beginnings of religious response, then, there emerges the possibility of true and false response,

but both sorts have done it, with a purpose to make those men that relied on them, the more apt to obedience, laws, peace, charity, and civil society. So that the religion of the former sort, is a part of human politics; and teacheth part of the duty which earthly kings require of their subjects. And the religion of the latter sort is divine

politics; and containeth precepts to those that have yielded themselves subjects in the kingdom of God (12.73/79).

The former sort are the Gentiles, the latter are especially Abraham, Moses and Christ. There is an inevitable civil aspect to religion in both cases, but the character of each is different.

What distinguishes "human politics" from "divine politics"? A difference of focus between ordinary civil society and the Christian commonwealth awaiting the kingdom of God. This is *not* to separate the temporal from the spiritual, a separation which Hobbes rejects (see Chapter 42). Religion, understood as human politics carried on by other means, will claim efficacy in controlling the world, and its spokesmen will claim authority on this basis. Divine politics, by contrast, informs men explicitly of the distinction between the profane and the holy, opening the way to a true understanding of earthly existence, and thus also to true piety as worship separated from political struggle and prescription, but acknowledging civil obligation.

Gentile founders and legislators have always presented themselves as mouthpieces for the gods or as themselves deified, have equated their laws with divine judgment, and have prescribed ritual practices ostensibly to propitiate divine wrath, but frequently to maintain their authority. The Romans, for example, tolerated most religious practices so long as they did not challenge Roman order and authority. For this very reason the Romans did not tolerate the Jews "who, being the peculiar kingdom of God, thought it unlawful to acknowledge subjection to any mortal king or state whatsoever" (12.76/83). In the Christian era it will become possible to overcome this division when rulers and ruled share a common religion.

In distinguishing God's chosen people, Hobbes shows that God could at best be dimly perceived through gentile religion. Indeed, gentile religion appears almost to be calculated to keep the perception of God dim, rather as if it were implicitly sensed that to think clearly about God would have meant bringing the contingent status of the earthly kingdoms out into the open. But God revealed himself explicitly to his chosen people by speaking words and by covenant, thus introducing into the world the potential for a universal understanding which, in this context, must be seen as a threat to habitual claims to religious authority. The issue of authority, as so often with Hobbes, always lurks in the background. At this point in Chapter 12 he refers the reader to Chapter 35 of *Leviathan* for a larger discussion of the distinction between nature and covenant (12.77/83).

In Chapter 35, "Of the Signification in Scripture of Kingdom of God, Of Holy, Sacred, And Sacrament" (see also 38.294/309), Hobbes asserts that the term "kingdom of God" is often used to refer to eternal felicity in the afterlife,

never for the monarchy, that is to say, the sovereign power of God over any subjects acquired by their own consent, which is the proper signification of kingdom.

To the contrary, I find the KINGDOM OF GOD to signify, in most places of Scripture, *a kingdom properly so named*, constituted by the votes of the people of Israel in peculiar manner; wherein they chose God for their king by covenant made with him, upon God's promising them the possession of the land of Canaan; and but seldom metaphorically; and then it is taken for *dominion over sin*; (and only in the New Testament) (35.266/280).

God reigns over all men naturally but nevertheless had peculiar subjects "whom he commanded by a voice, as one man speaketh to another" (35.266/280, 36.277-8/292). First, God spoke to Adam who disobeyed and lost eternal life; then posterity, punished by the flood, reduced to Noah and seven others; then God covenanted with Abraham, which was memorialized in circumcision, creating the Old Covenant or Testament. Abraham consented to be governed by God's positive law, as well as the moral law to which he, like all men, was already necessarily subject (31.234/246, 35.267/280-1, 40.307/322-3). This became the kingdom,

namely, an institution by pact, of God's peculiar sovereignty over the seed of Abraham; which in the renewing of the same covenant by Moses, at Mount Sinai, is expressly called a *peculiar kingdom of God* over the Jews; and it is of Abraham, not of Moses, St. Paul saith (*Rom.*, iv.ii) that he is the *father of the faithful*; that is, of those that are loyal, and do not violate their allegiance sworn to God, then by circumcision, and afterwards in the *new covenant* by baptism (35.267/281).

Here we have the "holy nation" set apart from the rest, governed by a law in addition to the natural law, an order belonging to God by "special" and not just "general" right (35.268/282).

What is holy is whatever belongs to God as king, and, in civil terms, this means the public realm of God's kingdom:

The king of any country is the *public* person, or representative of all his own subjects. And God the king of Israel was the *Holy One* of Israel....So the Jews, who were God's nation, were called (*Exod.* xix.6) *a holy nation*. For by *holy*, is always understood either God himself, or that which is God's in propriety; as by *public* is always meant, either the person of the commonwealth itself, or something that is so the commonwealth's, as no private person can claim any propriety therein....Mankind is God's nation in propriety: but the Jews only were a *holy nation* (35.270-1/285).

When the elders of Israel demanded a king, God told Samuel the people had rejected God himself, even though it was foretold that God would reinstitute His kingship ultimately (Isaiah 24:23; Micah 4:7; Ezekiel 20:33, 37; Luke 1:32, 33; Acts 17:7).

Hobbes concludes, "the kingdom therefore of God is a real, not a metaphorical kingdom; and so taken, not only in the Old Testament, but in the New" (35.269/283). The literal interpretation of "kingdom" is the true one. Why has the earthly reality of the kingdom not received more notice? Because, Hobbes argues, the term *regnum sacerdotale* has been translated not as "sacerdotal kingdom" but wrongly as "kingdom of priests," thus obscuring the claims of Christian kings against the independent priesthood of the Catholic Church (35.269/284, 42 *passim*). The kingdom of God "is a civil kingdom" (35.270/284). It was rejected by the election of Saul, but to be restored by Christ, at least in hope, as according to Hobbes, "thy kingdom come" in the Lord's Prayer petitions for the final achievement of this restoration (35.270/284, 41. 321/338).

If the kingdom of God...were not a kingdom which God by his lieutenants, or vicars, who deliver his commandments to the people, did exercise on earth; there would not have been so much contention, and war, about who it is, by whom God speaketh to us; neither would many priests have troubled themselves with spiritual jurisdiction, nor any king have denied it them (35.270/284).

Even if, then, religious talk is commonly of a heavenly life to come, actual religious practices are of this world, a form of the struggle for power over God's earthly kingdom:

For the points of doctrine concerning the kingdom of God, have so great an influence on the kingdom of man, as not to be determined, but by them, that under God have the sovereign power (38.296/311).

Returning to the end of Chapter 12, we find Hobbes's attention turning to what destroys religious authority. It is first, he says, the effort to require people to believe contradictories:

to enjoin the belief of them, is an argument of ignorance; which detects the author in that; and discredits him in all things else he shall propound as from revelation supernatural: which revelation a man may indeed have of many things above, but of nothing against natural reason (12.77/84).

Second is insincerity or requiring of others what religious leaders do not themselves believe, or not practicing faithfully the precepts they preach. Third, the want of miracles or great accomplishments by

preach. Third, the want of miracles or great accomplishments by religious leaders, or the prolonged absence of such leaders, may let their followers slip back into superstitious practices.

Hobbes summarizes the causes of religious decline as the fault of "unpleasing priests." In particular, at the close of Chapter 12, he singles out the Roman Church as the example of spiritual failure, but he makes it clear that these admonitions apply across the board. The attack that closes Chapter 12 is on a worldly or profane church which we are to distinguish from the true earthly kingdom of God where there is dedication to God. The sacred is, in short, distinguished from the profane, not by being other-worldly or located in some imagined spiritual realm, but by the quality of the lives that are lived by religious leaders and their followers. No existing Christian commonwealth is to be identified with the final kingdom — that can only be established after the general resurrection — but one is to accept such kingdoms as foretastes of the true and final one which will come when it comes, and cannot be dragged into being by anything we can do.

Hobbes's definition of the "holy" and the "sacramental" turns our attention away from ritual towards the quality of the lives led by religious practitioners — it is the understanding and perseverance they bring to what they do and say that is of ultimate significance. In this, as in his concept of the civil, Hobbes redirects our attention towards joint participation in the creation of good order and away from abstract and mystifying divinization, from revolutionary or "prophetic" politics.

## II

We turn then to Chapter 31, the final chapter of Part Two of *Leviathan*, "Of the Kingdom of God By Nature." Here, at the end of the first half of the *Leviathan*, Hobbes asserts that he has sufficiently proved the political theory of the first half. Subjects owe obedience to the sovereign in all things "not repugnant to the laws of God" (31.232/245).

There wants only, for the entire knowledge of civil duty, to know what are those laws of God. For without that, a man knows not, when he is commanded any thing by the civil power, whether it be contrary to the law of God, or not: and so, either by too much civil obedience, offends the Divine Majesty; or through fear of offending God, transgresses the commands of the Commonwealth. To avoid both these rocks, it is necessary to know what are the laws divine (31.232/245).

Hobbes thus establishes the central reason for the second half of *Leviathan*, reminding us of what he announced in the Dedicatory Epistle of *Leviathan* to Mr. Francis Godolphin:

For in a way beset with those that contend, on one side for too great liberty, and on the other side for too much authority, 'tis hard to pass between the points of both unwounded....That which perhaps may most offend, are certain texts of Holy Scripture, alleged by me to other purpose than ordinarily they use to be by others. But I have done it with due submission, and also, in order to my subject, necessarily; for they are the outworks of the enemy, from whence they impugn the civil power (D.Ep., 2/3).

Hobbes "necessarily" must provide an interpretation of Scripture if he is to complete the exposition of a political theory that can create true civil peace. To know the proper bounds of liberty and authority, one must know God's law so as, in turn, to know how to judge the limits of the sovereign's commands. This suggests again Hobbes's Reformation thinking. These are matters that we can grasp by careful reading of Scripture, and about which, in principle, we could reach intellectual common ground. It also shows that Hobbes's aim is to prevent the use of Scripture to expand or to rationalize disobedience to the sovereign's law ("the outworks of the enemy"). Hobbes's individualism is to be the opposite of a recipe for disorder.

How far Hobbes will go on this score we discover in his insistence that we could bear even a sovereign's command forbidding us to believe in Christ, and requiring us verbally to repudiate Christ (42.327/343-5). Holding fast to our belief inwardly suffices. This must be balanced against his argument (43.384/403, 45.430/452) that there could be conditions in which resistance for religious scruples is possible. But this most obvious of reasons for a Christian to disobey civil authority Hobbes does not urge as a sound reason for rebellion. To Hobbes, the prescription to fight and die for one's beliefs "authorizeth all private men to disobey their princes in maintenance of their religion, true or false" (42.327/344). He justifies this by invoking the golden rule: One cannot authorize Christians to die for their beliefs and not authorize Mohammedans (Hobbes's example) to do the same. This is to insist on the radical inwardness to faith, a kind of ultimate indifference to this world and to our status in it. This is made clear by Hobbes's treatment of the problem of idolatry:

the worship which the sovereign commandeth to be done unto himself by the terrors of his laws, is not a sign that he that obeyeth him, does inwardly honour him as a God, but that he is desirous to save himself from death, or from a miserable life; and that which



is not a sign of internal honour, is no worship, and therefore no idolatry (45.427/449-50).

We need not worry that this scandalizes Christianity because others can see the compulsion and will know what is actually going on (45.427-8/450).

Questions perforce arise: Is this compatible with traditional Christianity? Is a belief one can choose not to die for to be taken seriously? To put it another way, is inward adherence to a belief by itself sufficient or must faith show itself in the world? Does this not logically imply the possibility that some undetermined number of overt Christians are secretly something else?

Hobbes's teaching is that a true martyr can only be one who conversed with Jesus on earth and/or saw him after he was risen; no one who did not know Jesus qualifies. Those who are not original disciples can witness to the resurrection no more "but that their antecessors said it, and are therefore but witnesses of other men's testimony; and are but second martyrs, or martyr's of Christ's witnesses" (42.328/345). Martyrdom was part of the Apostles' mission; this distinguishes the Apostles from "other magistracy ecclesiastical" (42.346/363). Martyrdom is a special witness to the resurrection for eyewitnesses to it or for those who conversed with Jesus before the crucifixion and witnessed his other works and ministry, or a risk to be run in preaching to infidels. As miracles and prophecies have ceased, so the basis for martyrdom within Christian society has too.

Hobbes's teaching is designed to exclude the civil disruptiveness of the Christian tradition, prefigured in the Jews as perceived by the Romans, but does it achieve this at the expense of Christianity itself? Hobbes's Christianity is a form of quietism or purely inward religion that requires, in principle, no public manifestation. On the other hand, insofar as Hobbes assumes the universal existence in Europe of Christian political orders, and given his view of the simple requirements of Christian belief in the interim between the first and second coming, this is an issue little likely to arise. That is, it is little likely to arise unless, as was actually the case, there is a civil war within Christendom itself between different sects, each claiming to be truly Christian while denying authenticity to its enemies. To seek to die over a matter of doctrine is, from a certain perspective, a kind of faithlessness because it suggests that the accomplishment of regeneration has not already been assured irrevocably through Christ and that it depends on us, or on the state of the world, for its fulfillment, that there is something we must do or it will not occur: We are to "expect the coming of Christ hereafter, in patience and faith, with obedience to their present magistrates" (42.330/346). In baptism, we do not

constitute over us another authority, by which our external actions are governed in this life; but promise to take the doctrine of the apostles for our direction in the way to life eternal (42.330-31/347).

All of this can be intelligible within a Christian civilization, even though it must seem peculiar from a traditional Christian point of view. Hobbes's argumentative context comes out when he says "to die for every tenet that serveth the ambition or profit of the clergy, is not required"; and no one is required to be a martyr "but such as are sent to the conversion of infidels" (42.329/345). One Christian does not need to witness to another Christian; Christians can be sent as sheep among the wolves, but not "as sheep to other sheep" (42.329/346). We are reminded, as we were early in Part One, of the danger of exploitation of simple people by religious "experts."

But there is still another question: As Hobbes states it, our knowledge of Christ is perforce historical or mediated, not immediate or direct. We know Christ through the testimony handed down through the generations from Christ's own time to ours, and through reading the canonical Scriptures which we accept by faith as divinely inspired, under the authority of the church to which we subscribe. What we can gain is the "spirit of Christ" which is to gain a certain outlook or set of mind through our own individual reflections and appropriation of Christ to ourselves. Christ seems, therefore, to become an exemplar who illuminates the precepts of the natural law by the addition of his preaching and example.

To discuss Christ properly would be to enter into a conversation on human conduct using the resources of the Scriptures as grasped by our own reason and our experience. What is diminished in importance is the immediate, trans-historical, sacramental presence of Christ. For even if the "sacrifice of the Mass" were retained as a practice, its meaning would be transposed by the Hobbesian idiom into a commemoration, extirpating the doctrine of transubstantiation (44.402/422-3), and preaching the word and reading the Bible would take precedence. Is this compatible with "traditional Christianity"? Not if this is taken to mean Roman Catholic Christianity; but it falls within a range of understandings emergent in the Protestant Reformation and familiar in various theological circles today.

Since Hobbes has repeatedly insisted that a kingdom, properly defined, is based on consent of the subjects through covenant, it is consonant to establish what the basis of covenant would be — what well-instructed, God-fearing people could be expected to agree to as civil subjects who are also subjects in God's kingdom. God's subjects are those who "believe there is a God that governeth the world, and hath given precepts, and propounded rewards, and punishments to mankind...all

the rest, are to be understood as enemies" (31.233/246). It is understood that God rules "by his word."

That is, even though God rules all things in the universe, only human beings can be *subjects* in his kingdom because only they can hear and receive his word — can consent to it, and not just be overpowered by it. There is a reciprocity between God and man — God having chosen to be related to man in this way — symbolized in the covenant relationship expressed through voice and words, suggesting Hobbes's enhanced sense of our human responsibility as partners in covenant with God.

This does not deny that God has a right to rule owing to his irresistible power. There is a distinction between God's omnipotence and his chosen relationship with humanity through his word. God has permitted us to deliberate on how to respond to him. It becomes necessary, then, to consider what natural reason tells us about how we should honor God, quite apart from specific commands from God (31.235/248). Even if we have specific commands whose authority we accept, we must also continue to use reason and the evidence of our senses to decide what subscription to the commands of God means to us. On Hobbes's principles, what we discover through natural reason cannot ultimately contradict what we learn through revelation. If the two appear to conflict then we have failed to interpret skillfully or we have reasoned badly. Revelation and human experience must be harmonized. That is our task, and Hobbes's effort in the second half of *Leviathan* is to be exemplary for the carrying out of that task.

### III

Hobbes distinguishes between those things from which we can benefit by bestowing our labor to make them conform to our aims (cultivating fields, educating children), and other independent human beings who can resist the labor we bestow to get them to do our bidding, and whom we must court or persuade (31.235-6/248).

This bears significantly on how we worship God since "God has no ends" (31.237/249), and thus we can do nothing to further his "ends" (nor can we do anything to impede what is an empty category). We worship God out of duty, and not for the purpose of satisfying his ends and making him grateful to us. If God has no "ends," what are his "attributes" according to our natural reason?

1. God exists.
2. God is the cause of the world and thus not identical to the world; if God were identical to the world, the world would have no cause, and thus no God.

3. God created the world, the world is not eternal — to assert the world's eternity would be to deny God's power to cause it.
4. God is not at rest, but cares for the world, otherwise we would have no reason to honor Him, losing our fear and love of Him.
5. God is not finite, but infinite — to say God is finite is to ignore that this is less than can be said of God; thus God has no "figure," none of our "ideas" of God are adequate since all human ideas are finite; He cannot have "parts" or a "totality" or a "place" or "move" or "rest," nor can there be more than one (since several gods would be mutually limiting), nor have passions.
6. God does not have a "rational appetite," but His will is simply the power "by which He effecteth everything" (31.238/250).

To summarize, we attempt to speak of God by the use of negative attributes, identifying what God is not: we say God is "infinite" or "incomprehensible." We can speak positively only in the sense of saying highest or best. We honor God by prayer, thanksgiving, gifts, and by refusing to swear by any but God, and by speaking "considerately of God." Disputes over God's nature are dishonor to Him. The "volumes of disputation about the nature of God" are more for the sake of men's honor than for God's. The expressions of honor should be well considered, thought out; they should be public as well as private for "procuring others to honour him" (31.239/252). Lastly,

obedience to His laws, that is, in this case to the laws of nature, is the greatest worship of all. For as obedience is more acceptable to God than sacrifice; so also to set light by His commandments, is the greatest of all contumelies (31.239-40/252).

Finally, Hobbes insists, that there ought in the commonwealth to be one worship, for without "public worship" the commonwealth cannot be "of any religion at all" (31.240/253).

Part Three of *Leviathan*, "Of a Christian Commonwealth," begins with a discourse "Of the Principles of Christian Politics." To this end, Hobbes must consider not only "the natural word of God, but also the prophetic" (32.242/255). But this does not entail renunciation of our sense and experience, or natural reason. These human tools we employ in "the purchase of justice, peace, and true religion," for there is nothing in God's word contrary to natural reason (32.242/255-6). There are also things beyond us in God's word that we cannot understand. In relation to these things, obedience in faith, independent of understanding, is all we can enjoy. But what we are not to do is to submit "the intellectual faculty to the opinion of any other man" (32.243/256). Our responsibility lies in the fact that what each of us wills derives from our own

experience, and that experience is not what we will it to be, but what we have found it to be in fact:

As for the inward *thought*, and *belief* of men, which human governors can take no notice of (for God only knoweth the heart), they are not voluntary, nor the effect of the laws, but of the unrevealed will and of the power of God; and consequently fall not under obligation (40.307-8/323).

Consequently, though we submit to a promulgated doctrine, which seems to us contradictory to what we understand through our own examination, such submission cannot dispose of our thinking further on it. We can acknowledge a civil authority, but such authority cannot think for us, we must think for ourselves. The sovereign may oblige me to obedience "so as not by act or word to declare I believe him not; but not to think any otherwise than my reason persuades me" (32.243/256). There is a peculiar mixture here of the voluntaristic emphasis on personal interpretation and response, and on the irrevocable control of God over thought which cannot be overcome by any earthly might. Does this mean that the diversity of experience, which Hobbes explains naturalistically in Part One, is also to be understood providentially? The "night" in which we move may, must, nevertheless be "day" to God.

The authority of the sovereign cannot override the irrevocable individuality of all experience (3.17/23, 6.32/39), even though that authority entails the subject's obedience; voices other than the sovereign's are not entitled to our submission since they have no authority. Assuredly, there are those who believe they have a gift of prophecy. But there are two signs of true prophecy that must both be present to insure that we are dealing with a true prophet: he must do miracles, and he must preach no other than the established religion (32.244/257, 37.290/305). This rules out prophecy that counsels revolt against the established authority of a king or his representative. But since we are living in an age when "miracles now cease," we need only doctrine conformable to Scripture. Since Christ came, we need no other prophecy, and "in every commonwealth, they who have no supernatural revelation to the contrary, ought to obey the laws of their own sovereign, in the external acts and profession of religion" (40.307/323). A careful reading of Scripture (for example, Hobbes's interpretation in *Leviathan*) will tell us what we need to know of the rights of Christian governors and the duties of Christian subjects (32.246/259).

The authority of Scripture derives from our belief in its divine inspiration. The real question for Hobbes is, "by what authority they [the Scriptures] are consonant with the laws of nature, they are clearly the law of God (33.254/268). First, insofar as the Scriptures are consonant with the laws of nature, they are clearly the law of God

(33.254/268). Apart from our knowledge of the natural laws, either God must reveal law to us or our sovereign must command it. But who is our sovereign? Is there a universal Church or are there only Christian commonwealths (33.255/268-9)? If there is no universal Church — if papal claims, for instance, are not legitimate — then the command of the sovereign in the Christian commonwealth is definitive. This is Hobbes's view (39.306/321-2).

There is no room for prophecy in our age. All that is necessary is available to us without new, special, divine interventions. The Christian era is an era of working out what has already been revealed sufficiently — no new revelation is required, and no one can properly or convincingly claim to be prophetic. "In the time of the New Testament, there was no sovereign prophet, but our Saviour; who was both God that spake, and the prophet to whom he spake" (36.281/295).

The civil sovereign is not a prophet in the dangerous sense Hobbes opposes. His care of public doctrine is preservative, not revelatory. Subjects retain the ability to read the Scriptures for themselves and to assess the consistency of the sovereign's law with the Scriptures. The subject is obliged to obey the sovereign unless there is a contradiction between Scripture and his commands, but he cannot be obliged by a would-be prophet to disregard the sovereign and take the "prophet's" word as an alternative authority.

For when Christian men, take not their Christian sovereign, for God's prophet; they must either take their own dreams, for the prophecy they mean to be governed by, and the tumour of their own hearts for the spirit of God; or they must suffer themselves to be led by some strange prince; or by some of their fellow-subjects, that can bewitch them, by slander of the government, into rebellion, without other miracle to confirm their calling, than sometimes an extraordinary success and impunity; and by this means destroying all laws, both divine and human, reduce all order, government, and society, to the first chaos of violence and civil war (37.285/299-300, and 37.290-1/305-6).

There can hardly be an authentic prophetic challenge in a Christian kingdom in the new age since Christ where miracles now cease:

For in these times, I do not know one man, that ever saw any such wondrous work, done by the charm, or at the word, or prayer of a man, that a man endued but with a mediocrity of reason would think supernatural...whether the report be true, or a lie...we are not every one, to make our own private reason, or conscience, but the public reason, that is, the reason of God's supreme lieutenant, judge; and indeed we have made him judge already, if we have given



him a sovereign power, to do all that is necessary for our peace and defence. A private man has always the liberty, because his thought is free, to believe or not believe in his heart those acts that have been given out for miracles...be miracles or lies. But when it comes to confession of that faith, the private reason must submit to the public; that is to say, to God's lieutenant (37.291/306).

No more miracles are needed, no new revelations are required, prophets have been superseded. Perhaps everyman is a prophet in the safer sense, that Hobbes accepts, of praying, praising and meditating on Scripture: "signs and miracles had for end to procure faith, not to keep men from violating it, when they have once given it; for to that men are obliged by the law of nature" (40.312/328). Faith is a promise and promises are to be kept. It is essential, then, to understand precisely what sort of promise Christian faith involves, and to learn that it cannot be a promise the purpose of which is to make us promise-breakers in other aspects of our conduct toward each other.

What is required now, and what Hobbes can provide, is the "constant signification of words," not prophecy. The *Leviathan* is Hobbes's alternative to "prophecy," an exemplary application of reason to the Scriptures in the light of natural experience. The acceptable meanings of the word "prophecy" in these latter days are to signify those entrusted to lead public prayers or those who sing God's praises (36.276/290-1).

As he said in the Introduction of *Leviathan*, the argument is not proven by any other method than that of each reader deciding whether what Hobbes presents makes sense — whether we do not find in ourselves what Hobbes discovers in himself, whether, when we read in ourselves not this or that man, but mankind, we are persuaded that Hobbes has understood the human situation and Scripture aright (Intro., 6/11). Hobbes thus submits himself to his own restrictions on the character of what he can communicate.

So long as words are used ambiguously or inattentively, there will be a barrier to grasping the argument. This is no less true in discussing Scripture than in discussing the natural condition of mankind. Hobbes therefore proposes to show, out of the text of the Bible itself, what the proper senses of the key terms are. And among the central terms are "body" and "spirit" (34).

#### IV

Hobbes makes it clear that "body" can only refer to physical things, while "spirit," a term used many times in the Bible, Hobbes

takes to signify the attitude or outlook of a person, the way one understands oneself. For example, to have the "spirit of Christ" means to respond to the world as Christ did, trying to speak in the "spirit" (with the understanding) that Christ spoke. It is "the spirit of unfeigned Christianity, or *submission* to that main article of Christian faith, that Jesus is the Christ; which cannot be interpreted of a ghost" (34.259/273). In short, "spirit" refers to how we understand:

Likewise these words, (*Luke iv.1*) *And Jesus full of the Holy Ghost*, (that is, as it is expressed, *Matt. iv.1*, and *Mark i.12*, of the *Holy Spirit*,) may be understood, for *zeal* to do the work for which he was sent by God the Father: but to interpret it of a ghost, is to say, that God himself, for so the Saviour was, was filled with God; which is very improper and insignificant (34.259/273).

Thus there was no additional physical element that came into Jesus, the spirit of God "dwelt bodily" in him (36.281-2/296); nor thus is there something to be put into us; what there was in Jesus, was perfect understanding and determination to speak and act consistently with what he understood himself to be and what his duty required of him:

Our Saviour Christ therefore to *redeem* us, did not in that sense satisfy for the sins of men, as that his death, of its own virtue, could make it unjust in God to punish sinners with eternal death; but did make that sacrifice and oblation of himself, at his first coming, which God was pleased to require for the salvation, at his second coming, of such as in the meantime should repent, and believe in him (38.304/319-20).

To have a certain spirit, then, is to have this clarity of understanding and determination and to act accordingly. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross did not preclude the necessity for Christians actively to repent and prepare themselves. In this way, Hobbes both asserts the reality of individuality and also shows how entering into a certain "spirit" is to gain an understanding in common with those others of the same "spirit."

When therefore a prophet is said to speak in the spirit, or by the spirit of God, we are to understand no more, but that he speaks according to God's will, declared by the supreme prophet. For the most common acceptance of the word spirit, is the signification of a man's intention, mind, or disposition (36.281/296).

We can share in Christ's spirit to the degree that we understand clearly and affirm his scriptural portrayal. Although we might be helped by the example and preaching of others, we ultimately must

understand for ourselves; nothing can be merely put into us from outside. It is not the infusion into us of some "spiritual material" but intellectual grasp that is at stake. Every man "is bound to make use of his natural reason, to apply to all prophecy those rules which God hath given us, to discern the true from the false" (36.284/298).

In the New Testament the decisive mark of true prophecy is to preach that Jesus is the Christ, any denial of this being false prophecy (36.284/298-9). The word "spirit" is properly used only either for common physical substances (say "spirits of ammonia") or to refer to "some extraordinary *ability* or *affection* of the mind, or of the body" (34.260/273). "So that by the spirit is meant inclination to God's service; and not any supernatural revelation" (36.282/297). Salvation is dependent upon "a serious endeavour to obey" God, and this includes the moral duty "to give to everyone his own" which is "righteousness." To repent, and to believe that Jesus is the Christ, is all that is required to salvation (43.385/403-4, 394/412-3, 393/412). "Divine inspiration" means the entering of the Holy Ghost in the sense of "an acquisition of God's graces, by doctrine and study" (45.429/451).

Hobbes's repeated argument against "incorporeal substances," that "there can be, no image of a thing infinite," and that "figure is a quantity" (45.426/448), runs through the whole of *Leviathan*. Its practical import is instanced in his discussion of angels: Angels are, as the Greek origin of the word tells us, messengers. They have to be physical presences produced by God to send a message for there can be no such things as incorporeal substances:

I say, there is no text in that part of the Old Testament, which the Church of England holdeth for canonical, from which we can conclude, there is, or hath been created, any permanent thing, understood by the name of *spirit* or *angel*, that hath not quantity;...in every place, the sense will bear the interpretation of angel, for messenger...Nor in the New Testament is there any place, out of which it can be proved, that angels, except where they are put for such men as God hath made the messengers and ministers of his word or works, are things permanent, and withal incorporeal...in the resurrection men shall be permanent, and not incorporeal...to say, an angel or spirit is...an incorporeal substance, is to say in effect, there is no angel nor spirit at all (34.263-4/277).

Hobbes accepts on authority of the New Testament ("extorted from my feeble reason") the existence of permanent, corporeal angels (34.264/278), but is obviously primarily concerned to be rid of thought which postulates bodies that are not bodies. God will more likely use human beings as messengers. It is the idea of "incorporeal" bodies

which excites Hobbes's wrath; he asserts repeatedly the corruption of Christianity wrought by this "contagion of the demonology of the Greeks" (44.405/426).

This reinforces the identification of "spirit" with "mind," by which Hobbes means a person's outlook or understanding (40.311/326-7). For example, the Holy Ghost is "the apostles and their successors, in the office of preaching and teaching" (42.323/339-40). The spirits of Moses, Christ and the Apostles reveal, in triune personae (the trinity as an historical unfolding), God's unity as we are able to experience it here and now (16.107/114). And the "spirit" of a commonwealth would be the common understanding of rights and duties its members come to share, those shared background considerations from which the deliberations "in the conversation, and society of mankind" proceed (15.104/110).

We are brought back to the question of the relation of the sovereign to Scripture. In Chapter 38, Hobbes acknowledges that the fear of eternal damnation can well weigh more heavily on a subject than the mere mortal punishments of the sovereign. So it must be determined exactly what "life eternal" and "torment eternal" mean. This determination will show that Hobbes is not intent upon removing the fear of death so much as he wants to show that there is a rational response to it, and a means of salvation through the preparation of one's outlook. In this he avoids Calvinist predestinarian language, although he says later that it is a mystery why some who hear the word preached do not believe, for "faith is the gift of God, and he giveth it to whom he will" (43.387-8/406). In his own way, Hobbes speaks in the humanist tradition of Christian thinking associated with Erasmus, paralleling those elements of English Arminian theology that sought a path between Calvinism and Catholicism, that he seems to have shared with Grotius and others.

Adam's sin introduced mortality, depriving humanity of eternal life on earth; Christ "satisfied for our sins," restoring the possibility of the eternal life on earth that Adam lost (38.292/307). Christ's satisfaction does not mean that mortality is removed, but that resurrection is added in (38.293-4/308-9). The bodily immortality of a human being is not grounded in a doctrine of immortal soul which would mean, as Hobbes sees it, "a living creature independent on [sic] the body" (38.295/310), but in God's capacity to give the body vitality. Hobbes dissociates the idea of "immortal soul" from Christianity.

In rejecting the concept of an independent, immortal soul, Hobbes is also rejecting the dichotomy of the spiritual from the physical life, enabling him to launch an attack on the Roman Catholic doctrines of purgatory and transubstantiation. The latter are for Hobbes devices conjured up out of a false dichotomy of flesh and spirit which can then

be exploited by priests, claiming to be the mediators between the spirit and the flesh, against their gullible adherents.

Connected to this is Hobbes's rejection of idolatry and his insistence on the radical inwardness of faith (45.424-5/446-7). Because there can be no image of a thing infinite, it is necessary to demythologize all religious imagery. Hobbes's discussion of this point is unequivocal and uncompromising. However, at the same time, it is balanced in that Hobbes does not actually rule out the use of religious images for devotional purposes. He distinguishes between "consecration" of a thing — which is to set it aside as "holy," that is, dedicated to God — and "conjunction" which is the claim of priests to endow physical objects with magical powers (44.401/422-3). The use of a place, an image, or an object as "holy" depends on our remembering that it is only a sign for the truly divine which is categorically different: there is "no new quality in the place or image, but only a new relation by appropriation to God." The assertion of "infinite substance in a finite place, is idolatry" (45.428/450).

Immortal soul is not necessary to eternal life (44.409-10/430-1). There is no purgatory (44.412/433-4). The sincere endeavour to live in the spirit of Christ here and now is sufficient for eternal life after the general resurrection; this precludes all the intermediary steps of spiritual development that have been used largely to maintain the power of priests over the laity.

At the general resurrection the kingdom of God will be on earth (38.295-6/309-11, 299/314-5, 301-2/316-7). Those who are elected to God's kingdom will live forever as Adam was intended to; those damned will die a second death and be no more (38.299-300/315). There will thus be no eternal torment of souls. Hobbes thus rejects the doctrine of immortal soul also because he sees it used to frighten and subjugate an unwitting population. To be precise, Hobbes is distinguishing between fear of death, which is an element of Christian thinking, and the fear of perpetual torment after death. Hobbes wishes, in other words, to purge Christianity of its terrorizing qualities. This is quite a separate matter from purging it of concern for spiritual well-being and salvation.

Since Christ's satisfaction for our sinfulness is a dramatic example for men to follow, the burden of achieving eternal life and avoiding the second death is to be met by the determination of each to repent and adopt Christ's spirit. The content of Christianity is, in principle, radically depoliticized and laicized. The doctrinal issues are simplified, the religious spirit is individualized. So long as the sovereign does not force us to deny that Jesus is the Christ — an unlikely event in Christian Europe — we should have little quarrel with his rule. Those doctrines derivative from the basic proposition of faith in Christ

should not and need not be occasions for resisting the sovereign's authority. In fact, says Hobbes, if full assent to all the various doctrines of Christianity were required, "there would be nothing in the world so hard as to be a Christian" (43.389/408).

If one can obey without forfeiting eternal life, then obey. If one cannot obey without forfeiting eternal life, then it may be necessary to disobey since, Hobbes says, we must save the soul and not the body when the choice is unavoidable (43.384). This seems to be a use of the separation of soul and body that Hobbes has elsewhere denied. But Hobbes means that, even though we can, in principle, minimize to the vanishing point the occasions for conflict over religious principles, it is not possible absolutely to preclude conflicts of interpretation over the requirements of salvation. Hobbes's reasonable theology can eliminate most of the occasions for such conflict. To save the soul in this context means to defend one's self-understanding as a devout person. Hobbes actually applauds the courage to face death rather than accept idolatry, particularly in a pastor who has a specific duty as an exemplar of the faith (45.430/452). However, within a Christian culture Hobbes also makes the issue of idolatry a personal question. Whether one is idolatrous depends on one's own disposition towards the use of holy objects. "Christian sovereigns ought to break down the images which their subjects have been accustomed to worship," since this affords protection for ignorant people (45.431/453, 434/457). In short, in reformed Christian life, there is a common interest between sovereign and subjects against the traditional clergy. The impetus for Christian reform lies in the power of the Christian sovereign instructed by Hobbes's theology. And Hobbes proceeds to catalogue many of the central liturgical practices of the Roman Church, and of traditional Anglicanism, which would need changing or elimination.

What, then, is the character of a church composed of these newly emancipated Christian individuals? Hobbes defines "church" to mean *"a company of men professing Christian religion, united in the person of one sovereign, at whose command they ought to assemble, and without whose authority they ought not to assemble"* (39.305/321). In a commonwealth, no assembly is lawful that is not warranted by the civil sovereign, including church assemblies. Hobbes wants to preclude challenges to sovereign authority both from "below" in the zealous religious factions of society and from "outside" in the form of papal pretensions to power, direct or indirect, over the temporal realm.

The overall intent of Hobbes's argument is quite clear: By establishing the earthly locale of God's kingdom, and the capacity of each individual to understand and take up the Christian vocation, and by showing that vocation to be compatible with the natural requirements of a commonwealth which are accessible universally to human reason,



Hobbes shows that the spiritual and temporal realms are not two categorically different things; there is one realm in which the spiritual attribute will be perfected after the resurrection. The civil sovereign is the "chief pastor" as well as the lawmaker for the commonwealth. The division between being a Christian and being a subject is, in a Christian commonwealth, as Hobbes sees it, a false dichotomy that only promotes disruption and civil war, not only in the public realm but also in people's hearts. This divided allegiance results from a misunderstanding of the ideas of "temporal" and "spiritual," which have produced the disastrous belief that there are plural authorities in the world (39.306/321-2).

The natural condition of mankind, out of which men produce commonwealths in observation of the laws of nature, is a universal moral duty which is neither revoked nor superseded nor contradicted by any revelation. Revelation is compatible with the moral duties inherent to humanity. The church does not bring into being a new kind of moral law even if it adds additional duties to the natural laws we already have. Such additional duties must be compatible with the existing natural laws (both proceed from the same divine source). And since the civil laws *are* the natural laws made practically operative in particular circumstances, and since the natural laws can be effectively put into practice only by means of civil laws (see Chapter 26), and since that can only be done by a set of people acknowledging a civil sovereign, to duplicate authorities by imagining a "temporal authority" and a "spiritual authority" is to institute a chronic crisis of authority.

Where pronouncements of rival claimants to authority conflict, some third authority or the preferential acknowledgement of one of the competing authorities will be unavoidable. For Hobbes this means that ecclesiastical pretensions to civil authority are misplaced. The church was not instituted in order to override civil authority, but to call individuals to repentance in imitation of Jesus as Saviour

Abraham's covenant with God did not override the primordial moral obligations imposed without covenant:

For as to the moral law, they were already obliged, and needed not have been contracted withal, by promise of the land of Canaan. Nor was there any contract, that could add to, or strengthen the obligation, by which both they, and all men else were bound naturally to obey God almighty (40.307/323).

The perfect suffusion of the temporal by the spiritual will happen after the general resurrection into immortal life in God's earthly kingdom — the restoration of what Adam lost (41.317/333-4). This perfection will be a renovation of the world we know, not the replacement of it by something categorically and unrecognizably different. Thus there

are not two realms but only one, not two seats of authorities but only one: "one Saviour's kingdom is to be exercised by him in his human nature" (41.320/336), when he comes again.

## V

Can Hobbes ground this teaching in Scripture? According to him, the authority of the civil sovereign is equivalent to that of Abraham in his family (40.308/323). This authority descended through Isaac and Jacob, was cut off and then eventually assumed by Moses. But Moses did not inherit authority from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and so could not claim to be Abraham's successor as such. Thus Moses' capacity to govern the Israelites depended on their believing him to be a true prophet who spoke with God. The people had not spoken with God; God had not commanded them directly to follow Moses, and thus they had to take Moses' word on God's intention; his authority over the Israelites, then, was based on their consent. In a Christian commonwealth whoever "holdeth the place of Moses, is the sole messenger of God, and interpreter of his commandments" (40.310/326, 20.134-5/143-4). This is the civil sovereign. Moses and those who succeeded him controlled both the civil and the ecclesiastical power, which ought to be the case wherever a ruler has "divine right" or "authority immediate from God" (40.312/327).

When the Judges were succeeded by the Kings, all authority in religion and policy transferred from the high-priest to the king. In this, God consented to let his chosen people cast off his government of them in favor of having a king like other peoples (I *Sam.* 8:7). This meant God let the people acknowledge a king who now had the authority to determine the scope of the priests. The transfer of authority was also the transfer of the unity of that authority: "from the first institution of God's kingdom, to the captivity, the supremacy of religion was in the same hand with that of the civil authority." The people, however, often did not understand this and fell to appealing sometimes to religion and sometimes to policy (40.314/329-30). The clear perception of the unity of authority has always been a problem since there were both priests and kings: "they always kept in store a pretext, either of justice or religion, to discharge themselves of their obedience, whensoever they had hope to prevail" (40.314/330). In captivity, the Jews had no commonwealth, and under the domination of the Greeks their religion was corrupted (40.315/331). All of this carries over into the Christian world.

Christ's mission was thus, first, "to restore unto God, by a new covenant, the kingdom, which being his by the Old Covenant, had been cut off by the rebellion of the Israelites in the election of Saul";

and, secondly, to prepare men to enter into the immortality of the general resurrection. Christ's preaching created communities of those living in the hope of "regeneration"; this was not the final actualization of the kingdom — which is to be established only after the general resurrection — and thus not a challenge to established temporal authorities (41.318-19/334-5). In the time to come, Christ will be established explicitly as king of the elect, a new Moses:

Our Saviour, therefore, both in teaching and reigning, representeth, as Moses did, the person of God; which God from that time forward, but not before, is called the Father; and being still one and the same substance, is one person as represented by Moses, and another person as represented by his son the Christ. For *person* being relative to a *representer*, it is consequent to plurality of representers, that there be a plurality of persons, though of one and the same substance (41.322/338).

But this provides no warrant for Christians to disregard the existing civil authorities since there can be no higher representer after Christ. The era after Christ came is the interim before the general resurrection and literal establishment of the kingdom. We are, so to speak, in charge of ourselves in the interim, everything necessary having been given to us:

The time between the ascension and the general resurrection, is called, not a reigning, but a regeneration; that is, a preparation of men for the second and glorious coming of Christ, at the day of judgment (42.325/341-2).

Political revolt is a misunderstanding in that it claims insight into a possible perfection that allegedly is at our disposal to achieve. But since the only true perfection is already, in principle, completed by Christ, the regeneration having already been foretold, we cannot add to it. All we can do is improve our understanding of what has happened, conform ourselves to the requirements of authorized public doctrines (retaining the ability to reflect on their meaning for us), and await the kingdom's literal appearance.

No Christian, whether Apostle or other, can claim any vocation but to proclaim the kingdom of Christ, unless that person additionally should also hold a position of civil authority (42.326-327/342-3, 43.385-7/404-6). Hobbes categorically separates the proclamation of the kingdom from questions of policy. Christ left the Apostles with no coercive power; they are "schoolmasters," not "commanders" and "their precepts not laws, but wholesome counsels," "compulsion is excluded," the "work of Christ's ministers, is evangelization" (42.325/342). Their powers are "ministerial," not "magisterial" (42.329/346).

Hobbes divides his long account in Chapter 42 between a discussion of Christianity before Constantine and after. Primitive Christianity began in a highly congregational and individual state with, at the outset, only the elements of what was eventually to be defined as the canonical New Testament. This means that at that time every Christian had a certain freedom of personal interpretation and freedom to judge the opinions and interpretations of other Christians. Until the canonical New Testament was established, each evangelist "was interpreter of his own gospel" (42.338-9/355).

in that time, when not the power and authority of the teacher, but the faith of the hearer, caused them to receive it, it was not the apostles that made their own writings canonical, but every convert made them so himself (42.342/359).

There was debate and conversation, and this dominated until "kings were pastors, or pastors kings," and the possibility of Scriptures becoming laws arose (42.339/356). The canonical was the emergence of the conventional and, finally, the legal. The original spirit of personal reflection does not disappear but it is now disciplined by the transformation that took place in the advent of a Christian culture made official in Christian commonwealths. The basic affirmation of Christ as savior remains the bedrock, but the existing canon is to be acknowledged even if it could be theoretically challenged. In any case, it is the spirit of Christianity that is central and that remains, even in canonical times, a matter of the inner disposition of each individual.

St. Paul preached to the Jews; some of them agreed with him, others not. They shared the same Scriptures, and they were free to decide for themselves as equal readers of the Scriptures with him. He did not come to them as a sovereign with civil authority. He was bound to persuade by miracles or by the power of his interpretation, leaving the decision to those listening to what he had to say; he was not authorized to use coercion. Where there is not a Christian commonwealth to make the New Testament a law, it is contrary to the law of nature to try to do so; to use the New Testament as an excuse to disobey prevailing civil law is also wrong. Moreover, the kingdom Christ preached was "not of this world" (that is, not of the current world but to come after the general resurrection when it would be ruled directly by Christ), and neither Paul nor any other Apostle was the "vicar of Christ." The original form of the church is thus shown to be incompatible particularly with the subsequent papal claims, if not with episcopacy itself at least if bishops claim religious authority to challenge civil authority.

The Gentiles, by contrast to the Jews, did not share the Scriptures, nor accept their authority, and thus it was necessary to speak to them using reason against idolatry. The basic message of the Apostles in all

cases was that Jesus was the Christ, but his kingdom was not to be a civil order here and now. Like Christ, their task was to invite faith but not to command it (42.344/361, 369-70/387). There can be no final, spiritual commonwealth in this interim world, but only after the general resurrection (42.380/392-3). The Apostles thus had no authority to interpret the prevailing civil laws, they were empowered only to present the gospel message in the most effective way that they could devise (42.338/354-5).

The burden of the argument in Chapter 42 is thus to show that preaching and teaching are categorically separate from the exercise of political authority in the pre-Constantinian period:

we do not in baptism constitute over us another authority, by which our external actions are to be governed in this life (42.330/347).

Explicit commitment to the church is not a release from the civil bonds that prevail, even when they are not Christian, much less when the sovereign is Christian. What is taken on at baptism is an "internal faith" which is "invisible" and under no human jurisdiction (42.343/360). Of course, baptism also inaugurates explicit membership in a particular Christian congregation, but even so there is an individual element of faith that cannot be touched by the other congregants. Relations are either those of friends with a common bond of faith, open to each other's advice and counsel, or of teachers and preachers to pupils and hearers. But if the friend takes not the advice — provided continued commitment to the proposition that Jesus is the Christ — or if the pupil disagrees with the teaching of the teacher, it is a rejection not of that friend or teacher but a personal decision, possible but uncertainly a rejection of God, but this only God can know.

All the terms of ecclesiastical office — bishop, pastor, elder, doctor, teacher — represented the same basic ministerial functions of serving and instructing a congregation, but not commanding them. Thus the primitive Christian congregations did not establish alternative civil orders, nor did Christ come to invest their pastors with civil authority or a message that contradicted the civil order.

Hobbes dissolves the distinction between clergy and laity in two ways: first, clergy and laity alike depend for order on the civil sovereign and are not distinguished by degrees of independence from him; second, every member of the congregation could be, in principle, a pastor and teacher unto himself through his own efforts to interpret and abide by the Scriptures as he understands them, provided only observance of the basic proposition of faith in Christ that defines Christians at all times and in all places.

Taking these considerations, together with the redefinition of the spiritual and the temporal as modes of a single experiential dimension, Hobbes gets rid of the separation of natural and supernatural ends

which had been employed to establish two separate authorities or the doctrine of the "two swords" with its implication that the spiritual sword in principle, if not always in practice, rules the temporal sword (42.380/398-9, 44.400/420-1). Much of the second half of Chapter 42 is devoted to a refutation of the theory of the "indirect power" of the pope as expounded by Cardinal Bellarmine, the greatest defender of papal claims to temporal power (at least where the temporal power was thought to threaten the spiritual well-being of peoples) in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.

In primitive Christianity, Hobbes insists, before the conversion of the kings, even within the Christian congregations themselves the recognition of anyone's authority depended on acknowledgement from the assembled faithful or their representatives (42.332/348). There is no necessary connection between apostolic office and any civil function. The roles of evangelist and prophet are gifts, not offices (42.338/355). What evangelists and prophets have to offer are "not new laws to oblige us in this world, but new doctrine to prepare us for the next" (42.343/360). A doctrine is not a law unless promulgated as law by a sovereign. The New Testament by itself is not civil laws, but admonition and advice; salvation is separate from civil matters in principle. A Christian is never subject, *qua* subject, to other than the civil laws of the commonwealth, whether the sovereign is Christian or not (42.343-5/360-2, 369-70/386-8, 372/390).

For though God be the sovereign of all the world, we are not bound to take for his law whatsoever is propounded by every man in his name; nor anything contrary to the civil law, which God hath expressly commanded us to obey (42.345/362).

Thus, in the early church, to accuse someone of heresy was to express a difference of opinion to be resolved either by congregational agreement, or by agreement to disagree, or by excommunication which, as Hobbes defines it, meant simply that one shunned those whose theological opinions one disagreed with. Excommunication was not an act of authority akin to the acts of judgment and punishment that are marks of the civil sovereign; it was merely the avoidance of those of whom one disapproved. It would be for God to judge finally the issues. Above all, excommunication cannot mean, as Cardinal Bellarmine maintained, that the Pope could, under certain conditions where spiritual well-being was endangered, dispense the bonds of civil obligation of a people to their sovereign.

What of the office of the Christian civil sovereign, the question posed to Christians after the conversion of Constantine? This is the central issue of the second part of Chapter 42 (beginning at 42.354/371). Hobbes's direct attack of Bellarmine's doctrine of the indirect supremacy of the Pope is unequivocal: "Christian kings are still the



supreme pastors of their people" (42.355/372). As far as Hobbes is concerned, Christian kings can exercise the priestly/pastoral functions. They could, if they wished to do so, both preach the Gospel and ordain even though in practice they have historically delegated ministerial functions. The latter can be delegated, but not sovereign power; and sovereigns can give or take back these functions according to what they think is for the public good. Any ecclesiastical officer, in particular Hobbes is thinking of the Pope, has only such authority as is granted by a sovereign as a civil right — the Pope has no divine right to rule (42.356-7/374-5, 360/377-8, 366-7/384-5). Outside his own territory, a pope is only a "schoolmaster" (42.362-3/379). A Christian commonwealth is a church (42.361/378, 368/386, 371/389, 373-4/391-2) and "the church is the same thing with a Christian people" (42.375/393). Hobbes asserts that Constantine actually was a bishop (42.357/374-5, 360-1/377-8, 366-9/383-7).

On the other hand, Hobbes does not deny that the Pope has jurisdiction in his own territory (42.364/381, 375/393). Hobbes rejects the extreme radical wing of Protestantism: The Pope is not the Antichrist since he neither denies that Jesus is the Christ, nor claims himself to be Christ. But he had temporal power only within his own realm. Does he have, then, any kind of authority over all Christians? None, not even "indirect," according to Hobbes. Christ gave the Apostles no jurisdiction over anyone — only the mission to preach (42.366/383-4). The papal claims are entirely dependent on the association of the Roman Church with the Roman Empire. Christ did not set up a distinction between priest and lay but between teachers and hearers of the word.

There is no place in the Scriptures where anyone is commanded to obey St. Peter, especially not a civil sovereign (42.368/385). To duplicate authorities between civil and ecclesiastical, "all peace and justice must cease" (42.373/391). The distinction between the spiritual and the temporal is "but words" (42.378/396). The church cannot be a universal commonwealth for it has no "representant" on earth until Christ returns after the general resurrection (42.380/399). The Savior did not give the Pope authority to command, to judge or to punish (42.379/397).

Bellarmino had argued that these functions could be exercised by popes against civil sovereigns in cases where Christian spiritual well-being was threatened by a misuse of civil power. Some of his Catholic bretheran thought Bellarmine was willing to restrict the temporal claims of papal power too much, that there was an implicit irenicism in his attitude to the reformers. Whatever the case from the Roman Catholic perspective, Hobbes was adamant.

In the Christian era, Hobbes insists, bishops receive their jurisdictions from their Christian sovereigns; there are only national churches, and the spirit of Christianity cannot produce a universal church (42.374/392, 379/397). There is no universal definition of

heresy, but only that which prevails within each Christian kingdom. Deposition of a king is always unjust (even if it would be useful and safe to do it), and thus no Christian bishop has the authority to dissolve the bonds of obligation subjects have to their civil sovereign (42.381/400).

This casts a strikingly different light on Hobbes's project to rid us of the distinction between natural and supernatural ends and on his famous rejection of a *summum bonum*, and his denial that anyone can enjoy "the repose of a mind satisfied," as was spoken of "by the old moral philosophers" (11.63/70). In the perspective of Hobbes's theology, we may say that the repose of a satisfied mind will only come with eternal life at the general resurrection and, while the natural condition, which we must all still undergo in the period between the first and the second coming of Christ, endures, what counts is the inner certainty of the Christian that, by faith, obviates the pursuit of a "highest good" as beside the point. The second coming is guaranteed by faith; there is nothing in the interim period we can do except prepare ourselves; we can neither impede nor advance the end of things. It will come, but we cannot induce it or prevent it.

Pursuing a highest good, under the natural conditions of mankind, will encourage both Pelagianism and anti-nomianism: The first because we are misled into thinking we can will the human condition to completion — but we cannot (not to be confused with the day to day efforts to respond to contingent conditions intelligently); the second, because we are misled into thinking that there is a "true" or "correct" political order, accessible to our understanding, which is distorted or suppressed by the actually prevailing order.

From this perspective, the rejection of contention over the *summum bonum* can be defended as a fundamentally Christian thing to do, although it will not seem so to that Christianity informed by "Aristotelity" (see 46.438-9/461). As Hobbes sees it, here in a Lutheran way, we cannot be saved by works because we are all sinners. Every action in the world is tainted by this fact about us. What conduces to our salvation is the will to do what is right which can never manifest itself perfectly in our actions. And because we cannot do well objectively in this life, "faith only justifies" (42.394/413).

Rejecting the *summum bonum*, in this frame of mind, is to begin to appreciate fully what the life of Christian faith really is. The transformative power of Christian faith is not seen by Hobbes to imply a radical transformation of the world as it now is, but rather to induce a radical transformation in our understanding of the significance, or insignificance, of the present world. This transformation of self-understanding does *not*, however, remove the fear of eternal death.

Hobbes teaches that the alternatives of eternal life or eternal death are real. But what Hobbes does reject is the idea of salvation by

works, particularly salvation by political action. The latter is the antithesis of what Hobbes thinks is the true meaning of Christianity.

Is Hobbes merely presenting a prudential argument? Is he rejecting a highest good or natural end for man just because the postulation of both natural and supernatural ends produces intractable conflicts and contests of authority for us? Is rejecting a *summum bonum* a rejection *ipso facto* of faith?

What Hobbes seems to have decided is that the way to respond to the question of how we ought to live is not by postulating an ideal type of human being, but instead by elaborating the conditions to be observed by everyone in conduct. Observance of proper conduct, in this context, shows itself as the best manifestation of the Christian spirit — of the individual living with faith in the resurrection and salvation to come — not distracted by the temptations of works in the world.

The true Christian with inner, invisible faith does not need to be equipped with a substantive doctrine of what is best for him; it will suffice if he knows what the canons of good conduct towards other human beings are, summarized in the golden rule, in particular by acknowledging the authority of the sovereign in making the law of the land. Even if we say salvation is best, we can deduce nothing specific from that idea about conduct here and now in the changing conditions of life. Such a Christian will not want to be "saved" if that means transported from this world elsewhere. Indeed, in this altered perspective, a Christian need not, in a sense, worry about being saved. This is not a task for him to perform, but an understanding to be achieved.

Since life's circumstances vary so much from time to time and place to place, it is more to the point to seek a universal understanding of the requirements of conduct than to try to establish a substantive agreement on a highest good which has been shown by experience to be unattainable (15.104/110-1). Even in the churches themselves this has fostered violent conflict. If this is what is meant by a *summum bonum*, then it is not to be had. Why, asks Hobbes, is there "such diversity of ways in running to the same mark, *felicity*, if it be not right amongst us" (44.398/418)?

The "final end" that Hobbes admits for mankind is "the introduction of that restraint upon themselves, in which we see them live in commonwealths, is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby" (17.109/117). The end, in short, is conduct of a certain kind, a way of accommodating to each other in the absence of agreement on the substantive end of life.

It is a mistake to think that Hobbes thereby is insisting that there is nothing meaningful in life but self-preservation and mere physical contentment. It is evident in human actions throughout history that

that has not been so. Nor does anything in Hobbes's interpretation of Christianity suggest that self-preservation and contentment would be sufficient to a Christian. One's inner preparedness for the life to come is always at stake. Nor is Hobbes arguing that men *ought* to believe that there is nothing else but self-preservation and contentment. What he is arguing is that the latter compose the common denominator of ordinary human conduct. We remain free to pursue whatever aims make sense to us, but not at the expense of each other; this leads only to mutual destruction.

In the universal human pursuit of felicity, there are two levels: First, felicity is the generic name for the vast range of what human beings will seek in fact, "a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another" (11.63/70). Second, it is what the few who are admirable or gallant among us, who are not seduced by "wealth, command, or sensual pleasure," will seek (14.92/99, 15.97/104). The moral virtue of the few cannot be depended upon in practice; many actions will be objectively alike while the motives will differ. One who obeys the law because he fears the consequences of disobedience will not necessarily be distinguishable from one who obeys the law because he understands and commits himself honorably to the logic of his obligation under the laws of nature. To disdain the absurdity of both wanting law and wanting to escape it is not an easy achievement; it requires a clear and resolute grasp of our situation. The preaching of heroism or virtue cannot alone transform the human condition because the element of individual interpretation and self-concern cannot be eradicated.

That we are not competent to make definitive judgments about each other's motives is reason both to admit our need of authority (the anti-Pelagian insight) and to live by the conviction that faith is not dependent on, or fulfilled by, the external order in which we live; faith is a function of our inner self-understanding which actually makes it easier for us to live by the rule of law (the rejection of anti-nomianism). The rule of law is the only thing that can give us reliable order without the wisdom, which we cannot have, definitively to judge motives. Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit,

Whereupon [Adam and Eve] having both eaten, they did indeed take upon them God's office, which is judicature of good and evil; but acquired no new ability to distinguish between them aright (20.135/144).

The human predicament, after the fall, is to establish a human authority as a surrogate for the divine authority. Authority cannot be dispensed with. Having rejected God's authority, we were forced to create human authority. In principle, because we could not gain definitive judgment of good and evil, we could only gain judgment of conduct as it helps or hinders civil peace. The necessity of sovereigns to

exercise authority is both the penalty of sinfulness and also the remedy from total destruction. This is the interim condition between the rejection of God's direct rule and its restoration at the second coming. Biblical theology thus shows us not only the nature of what we can hope for, but also why we must admit the civil obligations that we do.

This also illuminates for us how Hobbes distinguishes civil sovereignty from God's sovereignty: God's power is not restricted to local, concentrated manifestations, and does not weaken by its diffusion through all that is in the world. The civil sovereign is a "mortal god." It is constrained in the manner by which it can effectively show itself forth. This mortal god is a mere surrogate for the divine authority; the divine power is not so weak as to have to restrict itself to a particular, fixed form. God's strength diversifies itself through all things without losing its identity; no civil sovereign has the power to do this. Our awareness of the sacred, moreover, does not by itself allow us to create unity on earth (consider the Tower of Babel). The essence of true religion is neither ethics nor civil law, but, insofar as it is living by faith with hope, it is compatible in practice with both.

The point of such an argument is not to deny the relevance of either moral conduct or law-abidingness. On the contrary, it is perfectly obvious that for Hobbes these are central requirements. The point is that the notion of a natural *telos* is not required — indeed, is counter-productive — to the achievement of civil peace and of reasonable relations among individuals. The Christian civil religion that obtains under the Christian sovereign of a reformed Christian commonwealth provides further insurance of civil peace among Christians without replacing the inward religious sensibilities of the subjects of the commonwealth. Once they have grasped Hobbes's exposition of salvation, the urgency of their religious fear is transposed into a self-contained idiom of inner expression. They are directed away from anxiously comparing themselves to others towards preparing themselves for what is to come. Their task is to put themselves in order.

Civil salvation from the war of all against all is indispensable to life in the interim. Faith looks beyond civil institutions, even beyond churches, but at the same time must recognize that it cannot crystallize its vision in a doctrine without evoking the latent antagonism of the inescapable diversity of individuals' experience and the diversity of the human imagination in reacting to experience. This antagonism arises not merely because there are people of ill will in the world; it arises out of the diversity of dispositions and understanding that are inescapable facts about the human situation (4.24/30-1, 6.32/39). What is necessary is to make diversity manageable, not to seek a false unity which could only be imposed. The true unity is yet to come, in the meantime we depend on the artificial unity of the sovereign (16.107/114).

Originally, Christianity was not designed to achieve this sort of unity, but to be a collection of communities of the faithful, each of which lived in an intimacy emanating from their members' mutual subscription to support each other in living the Christian life. The politicization of Christianity after the conversion of Constantine — and the exaggerated papal claims that arose after the time of Charlemagne — obscured this basic meaning of the Christian experience, although to a careful reader of the Scriptures it is plain enough what it was. To recapture the meaning of this root experience would go a long way towards reducing the conflicts occasioned both by religious zeal and by false prophecies. This in turn requires a systematic eradication of the residual pagan influences on Christianity that have been preserved through the medieval church. Thus Hobbes rejects the contention of Bellarmine that the true basis of ecclesiastical organization is found in its evolution over time, not in its first forms.

Christianity within the national churches of Christendom, now divided by the Reformation, is a combination of the truly religious spirit in the minds of devout individuals and the conventionalities of Christianity as a civil religion. The civil religion does not produce the ultimate; it mostly is the inculcation of an authoritative religious tradition within the Christian commonwealth (43.387/406). To know this encourages no revolutionary sentiment, however, when it is seen that human beings cannot, in any case whatever, produce anything ultimate. We will always produce only versions of the ultimate, stories about it. This limit we cannot surmount. There is nothing in the Scriptures

from which can be inferred the infallibility of the Church; much less, of any particular Church; and least of all, the infallibility of any particular man (43.387/406).

## VI

In all respects, then, Hobbes teaches us that virtue comes from our own efforts, not from outside. When the idea that virtue comes to us from outside is coupled with belief in the magical powers of priests, rival authorities will appear (46.442/465). Proper reasoning eliminates this duality, this absurdity: "The Papacy is no other than the ghost of the deceased *Roman empire*, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof." "The *ecclesiastics* walk in obscurity of doctrine, in monasteries, churches, and churchyard" (47.457/480-1). Cathedrals and universities are their castles — and not the Roman clergy only. The *Leviathan* could be the basis for reforming both the preaching and the teaching of these citadels (Re. & Concl., 467/491).



This Hobbesian reformation would overcome finally that great duality between time and eternity, transposing it into the unified dimension of human understanding (46.433/466-7). The key is to overcome infatuation with "disputing philosophically" in favor of admiring and adoring the divine, incomprehensible nature (46.444/467). That is, Christianity must be separated from dependence on the residual historical influence of pagan practices and from the influence of the Aristotelian thinking of the Schoolmen. "Aristotelity" is a substitute for "philosophy" which truly is reasoning unencumbered by submission to the authority of past authors. Aristotelity is, in short, a doctrine of philosophy — further complicated by its unfortunate intermixture with the task of interpreting biblical revelation — and thus an actual barrier to philosophizing in the pure sense.

Moral philosophy has suffered because in the past there is virtually no sort of conduct it has not tried to justify (46.438-9/461). The impact of Aristotelian metaphysics on theology has been to create "School divinity" as opposed to that simple biblical faith accessible to all (46.440/462-3). Both in respect to civil order and religious understanding, scholastic philosophy has been a barrier to human well-being. The true moral philosophy encourages absolute obedience to law and denies the privilege of inquisition into private thoughts for anyone — sovereign and priest alike. The civil power is to control external conduct, not inner thoughts. Philosophy cannot be controlled by religion, but equally religion does not, as we now see, require philosophy and need not seek to control it. Philosophy can be suppressed for reasons of maintaining civil order, but not for religious reasons (46.448/471). In principle, this seems to open the way to free scientific inquiry if every side understands correctly the nature of their respective situations.

Hobbes rejects every doctrine which would relieve human beings of their sense of responsibility to order themselves according to sound reasoning. In this Hobbes has spelled out two essential elements of the idea of liberty: 1) the liberty that is associated with the achievement of a rule of law, 2) the liberty that is associated with the adoption of inward religious seriousness. In both cases, the indispensable element is personal responsibility together with a belief in the capacity of human beings to understand their predicament in an undistorted way and to respond to it adequately in the form of self-regulation. The Hobbesian vision of a Christian commonwealth shows it to be composed of individuals continually coordinating their inner convictions with the requirements of civil peace, not because they are bound together by a suppositious *summum bonum*, nor because they are led on a spiritual journey by religious experts, nor because they are infused with some additional substance beyond their understanding but upon which they are dependent, but because they have grasped the true (Hobbesian) idea of Christianity as set forth in *Leviathan* and thus

also achieved a profound grasp of what it could mean for human beings to be dignified and free.

## Notes

All references are to the Blackwell Text of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, edited with an Introduction by Michael Oakeshott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960 — first published 1946), and to the Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought edition, edited with an Introduction by Richard Tuck (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

References are kept within the text of the essay and indicate chapter and page number in the Oakeshott edition first, and then to the page number in the Tuck edition. For example, (20.135/144) means Chapter 20, page 135 in Oakeshott; Chapter 20, page 144 in Tuck. References to the Dedicatory Epistle, Introduction, and Review and Conclusion are D.Ep., Intro., and Rev. & Concl. respectively.

The use of italics, capitals, etc. in the quotations from Hobbes are exactly as found in the Oakeshott text. This essay was written using that text and then subsequently correlated with Tuck. I have not altered or added anything.