

Assembling & Authority

Are you a Hebrew? Are you one of the first Roman Christians? A Christian lawful to Jewish customs and tradition? Is this your century or theirs? Are these your politics or theirs? Your ethics or theirs? Where does the materialism and piety of your faith end and the true worship of your faith begin?

As for the Christian rites, such as baptism, the Lord's Supper, festivals, public prayers, and any other observances which are, and always have been, common to all Christendom, if they were instituted by Christ or His Apostles (which is open to doubt), they were instituted as external signs of the universal church, and not as having anything to do with blessedness, or possessing any sanctity in themselves. Therefore, though such ceremonies were not ordained for the sake of upholding a government, they were ordained for the preservation of a society, and accordingly he who lives alone is not bound by them: nay, those who live in a country where the Christian religion is forbidden, are bound to abstain from such rites, and can none the less live in a state of blessedness.

—**Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, Benedictus de Spinoza; pg. 76**

The Judaeo-Christian Scripture says nothing of going to the blocky brick and mortar, putting on a tie, and worshipping this or that many times a week. However, we can take from Scripture that the first Christians met *at least once* a week. What was their reasoning for meeting *at least once* a week? Let's take a stab at it.

2:37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

2:39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call.

2:40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

2:41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

2:42 **And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship¹**, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

2:43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

2:44 **And all that believed were together, and had all things common²**;

2:45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

2:46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread **from house to house**³, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

2:47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

—**The Acts 2:38-47**

The Jews went to synagogue routinely. We'll concede any argument that Christians were just playing it up like Jews. So all religions do some routine (and traditional) activities? Not our issue right now, aside from it being implicit arguments for universal materialism which all the (superstitiously) religious wish to deny—but like I said, not our issue. So the Christians picked up some habits.

1 If you were given a chance to speak to God directly and ask as many questions as you like, as if to a wise master, would it be morally right of God to allow you to run out of questions?

1.1 The assumption is that no one, not even the authors of the Scripture, understands the teaching of God with absolute accuracy.

1.2 The interesting question is this: From where does the attrition to accuracy in a message originate? Is it with the speaker or is it with the listener? Can we even ask if God would be morally right or wrong to let one cease inquiry because of the flaw in human nature? Is it morally wrong for us to not learn how to generate newer and better questions after we've attained the knowledge to previous ones, given that God only answers the questions we directly ask?

Elementum: There is a relationship between Morality and present Knowledge. What is it? Which precedes, if they are not temporally parallel? That is, can (negative) moral judgments be made against one bearing insufficient knowledge? Must morally right actions follow from sufficient knowledge? Can we even play deductive waltz with concepts such as these? (Are they invalid questions?)

1.21 Back to the original question:

Whence it follows, that if anyone wishes to teach a doctrine to a whole nation (not to speak of the whole human race), and to be understood by all men in every particular, he will seek to support his teaching with experience, and will endeavour to suit his reasonings and the definitions of his doctrines as far as possible to the understanding of the common people,

who form the majority of mankind, and he will not set them forth in logical sequence nor adduce the definitions which serve to establish them. Otherwise he writes only for the learned—that is, he will be understood by only a small proportion of the human race.

—**Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, Benedictus de Spinoza; pg. 77**

2 “And all that *believed* were together, and had all things *common*”

2.1 When you stand in Church, spinning circles and twirling about, are you absolutely certain those who stand next to you believe in exactly the same idea or conception of God that you believe in?

2.11 Aside from the epistemological can of worms I just opened up, we can take an easy path. No, it’s not exactly the same idea or conception, but it only varies in degree, not kind. Is someone standing next to me, as they sing praise and vomit the rhetoric of the Council of Nicaea, actually believing in the same God I believe in, just in a different flavor?

2.12 However, attend to that thought: Is it possible for someone to be standing next to you who does actually not believe in the same idea or conception of God as you? Can we translate the verb “believe” into a distinguishable action? Is spitting rhetoric what one does when he or she “believes?” How about drinking from a divine cup? Is that “believing” in action?

2.13 The biggest question here is: How do you know? If you do not know, then we have a dilemma. Are you assembling with possible serial killers and soccer moms as an expression of faith in your fellows or in God? Is assembling an expression of faith in man or faith in God? Can it be both?

2.14 I suppose the religious person would answer, “By expressing faith in God, I am therefore safe to do whatever it is I want amongst men without worry.” That’s an easy answer. Anything follows from a contradiction; anything follows from the infinite. This will be discussed later.

2.2 Do you have anything in common with those worshipping with you?

2.21 Can a Jew, a Muslim, and a Christian worship together? What does it mean to have commonality amongst beliefs? Can you argue for “general spirituality” while still maintaining arbitrary worship practises and pagan rituals?

3 There's no justification for traveling to a "building of worship" from the Scripture. Any location can be a place of assembly. Acts 19:9-10 shows up that synagogues or schools could function as places of worship as well. Anyone demanding that one must "attend church" must justify why church and not one's own house.

3.1 If the justification is "more people gather there" or anything similar, then one must reconcile "collective faith" with "personal faith." Does it concern God whether or not you worship in an arbitrary body of common beliefs or amongst your immediate family? Or by yourself in your own kitchen? It seems like the whole slew of potential answers are but mere *preferences*.

10:24 And let us **consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works**¹:

10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

—**Hebrews 10:24-25**

1 If you find that assembling with your family or fellows is stressful (contrasted with promoting you to love and do good works) for you, does the Scripture provide you with a sufficient means to endure that stress beyond merely asserting that you succumb to hierarchical obedience? This would be nonsense, if one answers that it does not while maintaining that one must still submit to Strength. Must children presuppose their parents will follow Scripture accordingly?

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

—**Ephesians 6:4**

Or must parents presume their children will follow the Decalogue?

Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth

—**Exodus 20:12**

Children typically do not have much say in the matter of how they will be instructed. So clearly the weight of the struggle for a proper, moral upbringing rests primarily on the parent. What's concerning is the ambiguity in obeying an authority whose power has been legitimized without the child's consent. How exactly is that authority established; how is it made sovereign? This reminds me of a criticism of question begging made against social contract theory. What is the relationship between material upbringing, sovereignty, honor of one's parents, and true worship?

If you accept the theory of the social contract, as opposed to a Spinozistic theory of capacity to desire as the only foundation of one's rights, then would be required of individuals involved need be fully conscious and understanding of their relationship under their contract? Can a child be fully conscious and understanding of its binding relationship with a presupposedly legitimized sovereign power? It seems like the social contract is disturbed when it meets the door to the household. Is it disturbed at the state as well? Is the social contract (growing toward sovereignty) compatible with Divine Fiat Systems (automatic/arbitrary sovereignty)?

Scripture tells us that the father derives his status from God itself.

3:14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 3:15 Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,
 —**Ephesians 3:14-15**

Therefore, the father's authority is either divine or it is not. This can be said without granting that the father himself is divine, but only the binding contract between, say, a father and his son. The divine quality of authority comes from the causal connection between a God's decree to the father's decree and down to the offspring. If you take the father's decrees to not be divine, then you tacitly argue that God's fiats are thus not divine. This is a less interesting stance for our case here. So the father's edicts are divine and sovereign through a non-consensual binding contract. Thus, the child under the father must exercise faith in God through the proxy of the father. This is the understanding implicit in the Decalogue's commandment to "Honor thy [parents]".

However, this is clearly absurd. If we, as children of parents, blindly apply this ambiguous and overly simplistic fiat, we preclude the possibility of children refusing abhorrent derivative Christian philosophies such as that of the KKK and other Christian terrorist groups. No, the argument here is not to blame Christianity for the ills of the world. The argument is that it is absurd, being born into this precarious and chaotic situation, some like to describe as "the best possible", to follow Scripture, written by fallible men, that could not have foreseen the explosion of derivative philosophies which stem from it. The issue is not "Christianity is bad because the KKK is bad." The issue is: How do I make intelligible the notion of honoring a fallible person? If the answer is: Have faith in the divine chain, then you've submitted your defeat to the volatile world which seemingly can easily destroy you.

Concluding Thoughts

Beyond all of what has just been said, we must look at the tone and basis for these recommendations on how to worship. These high priests are not asserting that “in order to worship God [and thus, if you’re a Christian, to be moral], you must assemble.” The idea that piety and morality have some sort of relationship is false. Piety does not produce a moral person, and piety is necessarily constrained to superfluous religious practices.

What was Saint Peter’s justification for these practices?—Don’t act superstitious. Peter needed the same sort of reasoning we need today for any sort of act we make. The high priest was merely recommending what he perceived to be the best means of expressing faith amongst the pagan Romans, given what limited intellects they possessed. Furthermore, they needed to appeal to the lesser intellects of their followers. So they submitted simple and general practices to their followers which would be difficult to argue against. In any case, however, these were recommendations to ancient Christians, not authoritative guidelines binding for the rest of eternity. If you are a Christian and you read them as such, you are a Jew. The arbitrary claims of putting on expensive slacks, driving to a building *even once* a week, and eating kosher foods are but one person’s opinion on how to worship.

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.
—**Matthew 18:15**

Verses such as this suggest that the only requirement of a proper assembly is that a multitude of persons be gathered in God’s name. Perhaps some trivial questions could be asked of this. What is “God’s name?” Like with my previous epistemological issue, the question is not “Can we all believe in the same idea exactly?” but “As we stand together, can you know if I believe in the same idea in just the same way you believe in it?” In what important ways do ideas differ? Does the configuration, or unique identity, of a mind establish exclusivity between itself and other minds to all concepts, all potentially apprehended ideas? Can we become fully conscious of a mutual acquisition of presupposed common notions?

If we cannot know, then we are expressing a certain faith in man, not God. Why? The intentions of man surreptitiously immoral are of a more immediate concern to your well-being. You do not rally and worship amongst men in strip clubs and at the shopping mall. You need to know if

someone is going to harm you. If you deny this (which already has evidence in support of the claim that you do not deny it; you built your own “safe house” of worship), then we have defeatism in the face of man for asinine and blind faith in God, taking the blunt of every ill and hateful action that man can toss your way. You do not live this way: Face it. You are clannish and bigoted; worship at home—*worship in yourselves*.