

Spinoza and Socinianism - An Assessment of the Theological Compatibility

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Summary:

Starting from the interactions of Benedict Baruch Spinoza with the clusters of the dominant Calvinism in the Netherlands, our study aimed to assess how the unconventional theological vision of the Amsterdam philosopher overlaps with the *socinians'* thinking, the systematic subordinationist confession which, opposed to the official Reformed Church, reached over the 16th Century, to occupy somewhat relevant positions in the confessional landscape of the provinces of Holland, Zeeland and Friesland. At the end of our trial, we may conclude that, although authentic from the point of view of the form of manifestation (arianism, pnevmatomahie, disavowing the soteriological significance of the sacrifice and resurrection of the Savior, rejection of the sacramental work and authority of the Church, etc.) the ups and downs are in reality the partially convergent endings of somewhat incompatible theological and philosophical developments and constructions, which are nothing but an implicit consequence of the irreconcilable antagonism between Spinoza's pantheism and the biblical inspirational thematics professed by Lelio and Fausto's Sozzini descendants.

Keywords:

Benedict Baruch Spinoza; Socinianism; Colleges; Pantheism; Arianism; Pneumatomy; Theory of Sample; Soteriology.

The close relationship of Benedict Baruch Spinoza with the Dutch *Collegiants* and the interferences of his vision regarding Christianity with their theology are historically certified facts today. In fact the so called „Spinoza circle” – the group of his Christian supporters, those who protected, translated his work in Latin and printed his philosophical work, was made of exactly those Dutch or Frisian *Collegiants* who

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rejected the „official“ Calvinism of the Reformed Church – *Hervormde Kerk* and implicitly the theses of the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563).

Historically the origin of the *Collegiants* lies in the decision of the Synod of Dordrecht (1618 – 1619) which by rejecting the anti-predestinationist theses of Jacob-Hermann Arminius (1560 – 1609) which were supported in the debates by the professor of Leiden, Simon Episcopius (1583 – 1643), decided the exclusion from the Reformed Church of more than 200 pastors – *the Remonstrants*, subjecting them to persecution for a time which, although short (1620 – 1625), generated known victims such as the hero of the fight for independence Johan van Olden Barneveldt and the jurist Hugo Grotius¹. After being rejected the pastors of Arminian orientation identified for the first time at Rijnsburg, near Leiden, the solution of organizing free congregations – *colleges*, non-institutionalized communities and with little concern for the belief learning, perfectly autonomous congregations where „...any believer could officiate when the Holy Spirit descended upon him”², the freedom to preach and teach the *Holy Scripture* being not limited as long as the baptism seemed to be the only practice which achieved unanimity (or at least majority) of the choices of the participants. When persecutions stopped, the *Collegiants* grew in number and became in the time of Spinoza about a third of the Dutch Christians, their remarkable appeal for the aristocrats and bourgeoisie made them represent, as Paul Zumthor says, “... rather a party within the state than a sect within the Church”³.

Rejecting the rigor of Calvinist normatives of creed the communities of the *Collegiants* proved to be pervious to influences of the radical groups resulting from the Reformation; thus the members of the *colleges* and the *mennonites* of Friesland find common issues in the universal priesthood (in fact in the postulated inexistence of the sacramental priesthood) and the negation of pedobaptism; similarly, the constant appeal to the „illumination“ of the Holy Spirit would link the *Collegiants* to

¹ Paul Enns, *Manual Teologic*, translated by Laura Brie and Teodora Pășcuți, Editura Casa Cărții, 2005, p. 492. For relationships between Calvinists and Arminians, see Alain Cairns, “Arminianismul”, in: *Sabia și Mistria* 2/2000, p. 11-12 și James I. Packer, *Să revenim la Evanghelia biblică*, trans. by Olimpiu S. Cosma, Făgăraș, Editura Agape, 2001.

² Paul Zumthor, *Viața de toate zilele în Olanda din vremea lui Rembrand*, translated by Ioana Littera and Alexandru Cuniță, Bucharest, Editura Eminescu, 1982, p. 120. The first congregation of collegians – Rijnsburger Collegianten was founded by the brothers Gijbert, Jan Jacobsz and Adriaen van der Kodde. Their (organisatory) model was followed by the German pietism. The name “collegians” comes from “college,” the name brothers Kodee gave to the house where they used to organize the meetings of their followers. The group from Rijnsburg was followed by other important communities in Amsterdam and Hoorn. The collegians which were founded in 17th Century existed almost two centuries, i.e. until the end of 18th Century.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 119.

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the *spiritualist fractions* of the „radical Reformation”, and the inappetence to link faith to its metaphysical substrate, to the *Socinians*. This community pattern characterized by the opening to the influence vectors from the outside but also by the firmness of the options for the non-institutionalized and non-dogmatic congregationalism was joined also by Benedict Baruch Spinoza when he lived in Rijnsburg (1661 – 1663) and he attended the local *college* established by the van der Kodde brothers.

Considering these circumstances we intend to assess the theological and philosophical content of the interaction of Benedict Baruch Spinoza with the *Collegiants* in general, and with the *Socinians* respectively, especially the *Socinians* who, as main doctrinary option, denied the divinity of Jesus Christ. We will take into account that, as Johnathan Israel puts it, the diffusion and influence of the *Socinians* amongst the *Collegiants* were significant after 1640, especially in the Dutch provinces of Zeeland and Friesland, the last was the fatherland of Menno Simons, hence a region enclined to „radical reformation”⁴. Therefore it should not be a surprise that amongst the *Collegiants* and *Socinians* there appeared and functioned a certain spiritual symbiosis which was encouraged by the reciprocal exchange of theological ideas, an atmosphere which could not be strange to Spinoza during the three years of his stay in Rijnsburg.

This is precisely why, noticing that, when he approaches the Christian philosophy, the philosopher of Amsterdam comes to conclusions which in relatively numerous situations have the same shape as the interpretation of the *Socinians* (despite obvious differences in theological substantiation and conceptualization), we will try a diagnosis regarding the interferences of the thinking of Benedict Baruch Spinoza with the antitrinitarianism spread amongst the Dutch *Collegiants* in the 17th Century. In other words we will consider an exploration of what a specifically *Socinian* topic/conclusion/position is according to Spinoza in relationship to the Roman Catholic and Calvin Christianity, in terms of formal identity/similarity as well as in terms of rational mechanisms used by the philosopher for the foundation of his own approaches. We will discover thus, maybe surprised, that Spinozism and Christianity of the followers of Lelio and Fausto Sozzini („exported” in the United

⁴ *** *Collegiants*, in *Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia*, lucrare disponibilă pe site-ul <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Collegiants> (12.03.2016). It is meaningful to look at the *Collegiants* from the perspective of their very specific organizational they adopted, i.e. the congregation without any ecclesiological valences or confessional identity, formed exclusively by lay people who could be affiliated (even not mandatory) to a certain Church /confession. In many cases they were affiliated to Menonites, Socinians, Quakers, or even to the official Calvinism. Cf. Earl Morse Wilbur, *Our Unitarian Heritage*, 1925, available on the website <http://www.sksm.edu> (16.03.2016)

Provinces initially by militants like Woidowski and Ostorod⁵ and subsequently by the Polish students at the University of Leiden⁶), adopt similar positions when they reject the great doctrinal topics of the Church.

I. Spinozism and socinianism – the Problem of Analytical Perspective

Analyzing the relationship between the terms of the analyzed binom, Johnathan Israel insists⁷ on the „alliance between Spinozism and Socinians”, showing that their proximity was substantiated in their mutual support thus:

- the Socinians did not hesitate to support the work of Spinoza: Pieter Balling translated a part of his work in Dutch, Jarig Jelles wrote the preface to *Ethica ordine geometrico demonstrata* (1677), and Jan Rieuwertz printed clandestinely his works (forbidden in 1687, after *Tractatus theologico-politicus* was condemned by the Church in 1661);

- in exchange Spinoza provided them with: (i) „a new methodology of biblical critique”, (ii) „a incisive and comprehensive argumentation in favor of tolerance” and (iii) a set of moral and ethical principles independent of the „Church authority”.

This view finds in the end the community of interests between the two parts, i.e. the emergence and the development of an „alliance“ based mainly on reciprocal support. Otherwise, as Johnathan Israel explains, the „alliance” continued during the entire 18th Century leading to the dissemination of the philosophy of Spinoza as well as to the paradoxical but authentic situation in which spinozism, materialism and

⁵ Earl Morse Wilbur, *op. cit.*. [16.03.2016]. The highpoint of the immigration of „Polish Brothers” was around 1660, after they were expelled from Poland, being stimulated by the tolerance climate the Arminians and Mennonites, and especially the Collegians were treated (in spite of the constant reiteration of the anti-Socinian decrees issued by the Calvin authorities). This reciprocal openness determined the Socinians refugees in United Provinces to try to affiliate with the other two mentioned denominations. They opted for a „formal unity” which allowed the promotion of a specific anti-trinitarian confession of faith.

⁶ Paul Zumthor, *op. cit.*, p. 149. The Church of „Polish Brothers” was a anti-trinitarian group of Calvin origin, formed after 1565. Their most important leader was the noble Jakub Sienieński who founded in 1602 at Rakow an „Academy” for religious studies which gradually put emphasis on Lelio and Fausto Sozzini thinking. The norms of their believe were synthesized in a „Catechism from Rakow” (1605). After the abolition of the „Academy” (1638) at the pressure of Calvinist authorities, many Polish anti-trinitarians found their new home in the United Provinces.

⁷ Jonathan Israel, *O revoluție a minții. Iluminismul radical și originile intelectuale ale democrației moderne*, translation and Foreword by Veronica Lazăr, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Tact, 2012, p. 36.

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socinianism will later appear at the „radical“ democrat illuminists with egalitarian tendencies, which will oppose the „moderates“, the traditional Christians or even deists of monarchical and „aristophile“ orientation⁸.

On the other hand, Wiep van Bunge stresses that, excepting Johannes Bredenburg (1643 – 1691), the adherence to spinozism proper (as theological and philosophical thinking/view) of the *Collegiants* who supported the thinker of Amsterdam through action is limited, the same can be said about him since no one can talk about his „opening“ toward the theology of the Rijnsburg community. Therefore the source of the relationship of Benedict Baruch Spinoza with the *Colegiants* (thus with the *Socinians* amongst them), lies in the area of the common options for religious and political freedom, values which both parties, confronted with the hostility of the surrounding world, embrace simultaneously, even if the believers of Rijnsburg did it without the formal support of a dedicated theoretical thinking⁹.

We believe both interpretations have their own truth value; they become complementary through juxtaposition, augmenting one another and finally outlining of what the cohabitation of Spinoza with the *Socinians* must have meant. This would have to be carefully nuanced in regards to decrypting and assessment of the actual content since the two parties look at and try to understand the world from totally different perspectives; the interpretive filter which he applies to the observable reality is a profoundly different one, and the work methods tend sometimes to be even antagonistic. Therefore the similarities of some conclusions regarding theology will have to be cautiously assessed because they are not the product of a possible/presumed systemic convergence. Then the similarities of theological view - real and significant - will have to be first explained according to their causes: *how and why* reached Spinoza certain theological conclusions identical/closer to those of the *Socinians* as long as between his God - One, but impersonal and identic with the Univers and their God - One, but personal and transcendent an insurmountable distinction appears? *How and why* Spinoza and the *Socinians* have similar pronunciations, kindred or relatively convergent in a series of peculiar theological problems? All these questions, necessary from our point of view, will be the topic of our analytical essay.

We will not end this sequence without dwelling on the topic of biblical critique indicated by Johnathan Israel as a landmark of the influence of Spinoza on *Socinians*. In this respect we will notice that truly Spinoza is the first critic of the of the *Holy Scripture* in the modern meaning of the term, the one who launches for the first time

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 27-33.

⁹ Wiep van Bunge, “Spinoza and the Collegiants”, in: *Philosophia Osaka* 7 /2012, p. 13-14, available in electronic form.

the „idea of historical and philological enquiry of the Bible”, indicating „the necessity of the critique of the sources [and] of a critique” thereof¹⁰. Against this background, Spinoza rejects the entirely inspired character of the *Holy Scripture*, its value of historical, moral or liturgical document with undeniable value for faith, but he does not deny the usefulness of its content, especially in relationship to the bulk of the believers: „The Scripture [...] matches all the words and arguments according to the understanding of simple people [...]. It can teach them and clarify for them enough in order to imprint in their soul submission and devotion”¹¹.

By contrast, for Lelio and Fausto Sozzini and their followers the Bible was the only and authentic source of faith, even if man cannot approach it only through reason; the reading and the exegesis of the Bible were for *Socinians* actual *rational* exercises, an element which does not lead implicitly to the decrease in the usefulness value of the *Holy Scripture*. In fact the Socinians were only radicals of the principle *Sola Scriptura* and of the literal exegesis trying to identify the exclusively rational thread and decipher the logical base of the *Bible*, reaching opinions/conclusions challenged by the other Christians, but preserving the intrinsic value of the biblical text.

II. Spinoza and Religion

Starting from the premise that theology and philosophy „differ from one another like apples from oranges”, without preserving „... any relationship and any kindred”¹², Benedict Baruch Spinoza, who, until he acquired classical culture at the school of Franciscus den Enden¹³, studied the Jewish Bible at the „Keter Tora” school with the Sephardi rabbi Saul Levi Morteira¹⁴, operates with his own view in what regards the place and role of religion concerning the relationship between man and divinity. A view decisively marked by his own philosophical presumptions - pantheism and impersonal God, and theological presumptions - the exclusively human character of the biblical writings, views which would attract successive rejections and which, viewed through the lens of monotheistic thinking, offer enough elements which can be considered sufficiently problematic in order to cancel the orthodoxy of the philosopher of Amsterdam.

¹⁰ I. Brucăr, “Baruch Spinoza”, în: Nicolae Năstase (redactor), *Filosofie. Analize și interpretări*, Oradea, Editura Antet, 1996, p. 136.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, V, p. 90.

¹² Benedict Spinoza, *Tratatul teologico-politic*, XIV, Traducere, studiu introductiv și note de I. Fîru, București, Editura Științifică, 1960, p. 218.

¹³ P. P. Negulescu, *Scrieri inedite*, București, Editura Academiei, 1972, p. 138.

¹⁴ Gh. Al. Cazan, *Introducere în filosofie. Filosofia medievală și modernă*, București, Editura Actami, 1996, p. 177.

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In fact Spinoza thought that „the traditional faiths must be effaced”¹⁵, so that, through a complex philosophical exercise based on the postulate *Deus sive substantia* he would annul the vast majority of the normative and axiological landmarks of the traditional religious thinking, that including the sacrifice and the resurrection of Jesus Christ the Redeemer. Practicly he would claim „...a total liberty of analysis” regarding the religious beliefs and practices¹⁶, by virtue of which he would deconstruct the Catholic and Protestant religious practice of his time, disavowing its dogmatic foundations, cultural practices and horizons of eschatological expectations.

This way Spinoza would advance a totally peculiar view of religion, denying the very idea of reward after death of the virtuous and rejecting the miraculous as long as not even God „can change the order of nature”¹⁷. Finding his grounds exclusively on reason, Spinoza would claime the necessity of a highly simplified belief (any liturgical expression is useless), as well as the necessity of minimal cultural practices (linked to that simple faith) since the unique and authentic meaning of the relationship of man with God is faith, submission and bowing to Him, while „...the entire Law is only the love of the neighbor”. Any other theological and liturgical details are not important since love for the neighbours, once it is assumed rationally and practiced as such, becomes, that love alone, necessary and sufficient for the believer who bows to God since it has a referential value as a „norm of universal faith“ in which every theological teaching has to have its source¹⁸. Consequently the theological contents of faith including the great topics of Church doctrine reduce their own meaning into disappearance. They lose their dimension of axiological reference because „...we cannot say that someone is or is not a believer, we can only judge him according to his deeds, i.e. if his deeds are good, even if he differs from other believers regarding dogmas, he is still a believer and, on the contrary, if his deeds are bad, if he fits into dogmas, he is a non believer”¹⁹.

Practically Spinoza would reduce the entire theology to belief in God, on one hand, and practicing love, on the other hand (which up to a point is not fundamentally wrong) because „...for faith there is no need for real dogmas, but for pious dogmas, which urge th soul to submit”, so that the faith teachings are used only „to strengthen the soul and the love for the neighbour”, and as long as they do this thing their

¹⁵ Al. Boboc, “Benedict Spinoza”, în: *** *Istoria filosofiei moderne și contemporane*, vol. I (de la Renaștere la „epoca luminilor”), București, Editura Academiei, 1984, p. 379.

¹⁶ Michel Onfray, *O contraistorie a filosofiei*, 3, Libertinii barocului, Traducere de Dan Petrescu, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2008, p. 297.

¹⁷ C. I. Gulian, *Introducere în istoria filosofiei moderne*, București, Editura Enciclopedică Română, 1974, p. 109.

¹⁸ Benedict Spinoza, *Tratatul teologico-politic*, XIV, p. 212.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, XIV, p. 213.

„dogmatic“ correctness becomes indifferent and even useless²⁰. Any theological debate, any question of theological and philosophical sustainability of faith and even any attempt/preoccupation to link the teaching to the Holy Scripture encounter from the very start the futility which the supreme triadic truth reserves for them: faith, submission, love.

From this perspective Spinoza would identify and formulate a set of „dogmatic“ landmarks which would be granted by him a normative universal value which builds on the theses of submission to God, their circumvention making impossible the exercise of faith itself because „...if any one [of the „dogmas“] is removed, submission ends too”²¹:

- God, „the model of real life” is „the suprem, righteous and most merciful being”, His existence is undeniable;
- God is undoubtedly the One;
- God is ever present and omniscient in virtue of His ubiquity since He „...is everywhere present, that is he knows everything”;
- „He has the right and supreme authority over all things and does nothing forced by a law, but according to His unconditioned will and only according to His grace; hence everybody has to submit to Him, and He to nobody”;
- The divine cult must be worked out in order to be the measure of submission of the believers to God; this would have to be nothing else but the practice of „righteousness and love for the neighbor”;
- Redeemed are exclusively those who „submit to God“ practicing thus faith and love in submission;
- All people are sinners since „there is no one who does not sin”; but God forgives the sins of those who come to Him through faith and submission²².

Through this set of „dogmas”, Benedict Baruch Spinoza breaks with the Judaism and Christianity which surrounded him, outlining a absolutely peculiar theological program in relationship to the confessional landscape of the United Provinces. As any system with aximatical nature, the „dogmas” are conceived and elaborated as minimal statements (as scope and conceptual content) which define his religious position; since they are minimal, the „dogmas” avoid detail, but it, the detail, is, at least in this case, absolutely necessary in order to understand what the philosopher of Amsterdam thought, claimed and learnt.

a). That good, right or merciful God - supreme being - is not the God of Judeo-Christianity since in fact Spinoza sees divinity under the impersonal specter of its identity with the Universe with which in fact it is to be confounded. This God is

²⁰ *Ibidem*, XIV, p. 214.

²¹ *Ibidem*, XIV, p. 216.

²² *Ibidem*, XIV, p. 215-216.

„...everything that exists”, that is the Universe, the unique substance, *Deus sive substantia*, the two terms are nothing else but different names of the same unique reality. For Spinoza, divinity is identical with the existent in all its subsistence forms since „everything that exists is divine, is a body from the body of God”²³. Moreover, this God does not have the elements of creative divinity *ex nihilo* from the Book of Genesis because „a substance cannot be produced or created from another substance” and furthermore „besides God, no substance can exist and cannot be conceived” (*Scolia* from *Theorem XV*²⁴), being reduced to the status of a simple demiurge – immanent cause of a world seen as perpetual adjustment of his own traits. One God of the philosopher of Amsterdam has (much) too little in common with the God of Church and Synagogue; He is an impersonal God who creates of His own Self and is subject Himself to necessity (*Corollary I to Theorem XXXII*²⁵).

Nevertheless this God is in the situation to be subject of Spinozist „dogmatic” theses – and hence in the position of absolute divinity of the unique true/not corrupted/unaltered system of thinking and religious practice, a perfectly possible thing because „...God did not ask from people another knowledge than that of His godly justice and love, knowledge which is not necessary for science, but only for submission”²⁶, so that, beside the fact that God is One, good and right, nothing else matters: „... if He is fire, spirit, light, thinking [...] has no link to faith”²⁷.

b). The exercise of faith proposed by Spinoza transcends in turn the actual theological content of the dogmas of institutionalized religions. Accepting in a rational fashion the existence of divinity and the necessity of submission to this, the believer „discards” at that moment every personal responsibility regarding the adherence to the Truth. Thus it would be sufficient for him to accept the minimalism and relativism of the seven „dogmas” in order to fulfill his faith because „each one owes to adjust these dogmas [...] according to his capacity and to interpret them for himself as he sees fit” and do this consistently and „without restraint”²⁸. Spinoza does not establish any relationship between the doctrinal content of faith and the Truth of faith; faith is a goal in itself, and can be exercised very well notwithstanding Truth since „...for faith one needs not so much truth but piety and [...] this is not right and redemptive otherwise than in relationship with submission [...]; nobody is a believer otherwise but in relationship to submission”²⁹. Or, to put it otherwise, that faith, no matter how

²³ P. P. Negulescu, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

²⁴ Baruch Spinoza, *Etica demonstrată după metoda geometrică*, partea întâi, traducere din limba latină: prof. S. Katz, București, Editura Antet XX Press, 1993, p. 13.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, partea întâi, p. 26-27.

²⁶ Benedict Spinoza, *Tratatul teologico-politic*, XIII, p. 210.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, XIV, p. 216.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, XIV, p. 217.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, XIV, p. 216-217.

subjective, which, by cultivating submission, transforms any human perspective on One God in Truth would receive automatically the character of veracity.

c). Placing redemption at the end of faith, submission and love lies also under the specter of peculiar interpretations of Benedict Baruch Spinoza since this is something completely different than the traditional finalities of the Judeo-Christian soteriologies. For Spinoza, redemption amounts to reaching supreme freedom through knowledge: „...Redemption is done in, through and for knowledge [...]; he who knows [...], reaches freedom...”³⁰. It is the product of an „optimum“ state of consciousness, it is reached and learnt with the correct assimilation, with full understanding of the implacable necessity which dominates the individual existence. A kind of redemption which is different from the one taught by Jews and Christians, doable exclusively through knowledge and which in fact is knowledge; a redemption which materialises in and through acquiring knowledge because Spinoza’s man would have to be aware fully that he is an integral part in a universal system - imperturbable and inextricable - of lawfully stated causalities that it is part of an infinite web of causes and effects with which he can make peace and which he would be able to dominate only when he knows them and recognise their value of implacable laws. Man would earn his salvation by going through reason beyond necessity, finding his freedom - understood/realized/assumed necessity. The mean through which individual consciences reshape in order to understand necessity is built on submission by its practicing together with working faith in love towards the neighbor. What finally is nothing else than placing the entire life under the specter of reason because „...beatitude [*i.e.* salvation] comes when reason has been chosen”; this way man would save himself in this life and for this life³¹, his horizon of eschatological expectation has to exclude also traditional topics for people of Judeo-Christian orientation, such as immortality of the soul or resurrection.

d). Therefore it will not be surprising to notice that the faith normatives formulated by Spinoza leaves no place for the person and work of Jesus Christ from the perspective of the act of faith and of the goal of salvation, leaving the impression that the form of religiosity which they want to declare does not presume linking to anyone else but God (understood from the most subjective perspectives), to faith and submission to Him. A concession toward Judaism from which the refugee philosopher of Rijnsburg nonetheless originated? No, but only a consistent position in relationship to the minimalism and relativism of the Spinozist religious program. And complementarily a circumscribing in a normative key of the role and place of Christ - of major reference from a prophetic and moral and ethical point of view, but only that - within this.

³⁰ Michel Onfray, *op. cit.*, 3, p. 292-293.

³¹ *Ibidem.*

e). Similarly it would not have to capture the complete absence of the indication of elements belonging to ecclesiology and the complete suppressing of the mystery (of the sacrament from a Western perspective), sufficient elements to make Spinoza „acceptable” for radical reformers, but who in fact give the measure of the dominant position he grants to reason in building a set of norms of declaratively theological nature and which tend to mark a peculiar form of religiosity. The same perspective receives also the minimalism of divine cult which regardless of the concrete way in which it is going to be exercised and totally independent from any regulation, it would be authentic as long as it obeys the commandments of faith, submission and love. Under these circumstances the Church and its work, impregnated by the impenetrable mystery of the sacrament of the incarnation of the Word and the godly energy of grace, become superfluous, useless in relationship to the presumed capacity of reason to find - alone and build - equally alone the link between man and God, i.e. the essence itself of the religious practice.

III. Socinian Topics in Spinoza

Like the *Socinians* Benedict Baruch Spinoza considers that all Churches „betrayed” Christianity, „corrupting it” through „mysteries, dogmas and ecclesiastical authority”; still, „the moral teaching of Christ remains the highest of ethics and the purest tradition of moral teaching”, so that religion would be simplified to the maximum by renouncing the theologisation in a philosophical key and its reduction to „...the very few and simple dogmas Christ gave us [...], to the principles of justice based on equality and mercy”³². The exclusion of the intrusions of philosophy in religious thinking is hence a significant point of convergence in the thinking of both parts, point which paradoxically, although it claims to exclude the predilect products of reason - the philosophies, it would lead to coagulation of some views on religion based not on the undefinable (from a rational point of view) theological substrate of Christianity, but on the rational - and only rational - exploration of the link of man to his Creator.

Rejecting the previous accumulations of theology – on the consideration that these are „excessively” dependent on philosophy, the two parties would search in parallel (but with the same method of rational analysis of the Bible) new answers, new interpretations and explanations to the great topics and questions of religion, proposing solutions in too few places comparable/compatible with the traditional ones, but which, in relationship to one another, would turn out to be sometimes identical or close, just as in other situations they would be on antinomic positions, betraying the discrepancies between the two interpretive views and perspectives. Despite the latter, the reality of coincidences and similarities is undeniable. By

³² Jonathan Israel, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

following and describing them, we will stress what is, as form and systemic result, interpretation in Socinian key in Spinoza, just as stressing the divergence elements, we will point out the way in which the different prerequisites of approach of the *Holy Scripture* (like the obvious opposition between the Spinozist pantheism and the theism of the *Socinians*) can generate together with similarities and convergences also a series of antagonistic conclusions.

Christology

The very sensitive problem (from a theological but also from a philosophical point of view) of the ontological relationship between God The Father and Jesus Christ, and the question of the nature of the person of the Messiah causes to the two parties a similar response from the point of view of the actual theological content: Christ was a simple man, hence not God according to nature taught by the Niceans and also not the incarnated divine being described from the perspective of Platon by Arius of Alexandria; as a simple man, His pre-existence is excluded, to say nothing about co-eternity with the Father, hence there was a moment in which the Messiah came into existence.

a). In a similar fashion with Miquel Servet, Lelio and Fausto Sozzini considered the thesis of consubstantiality of Father and Son as a fundamental error which can be imputed to Saint Athanasius the Great, considering that the teaching regarding the godliness of the Son (and in parallel of the Spirit) contradicts the *Holy Scripture* reflecting explicitly the tritheism which would have been adopted by the Church after the Synod of Constantinople (381). At the same time, still admitting the exceptional character of the man Christ, the Socinians supposed, but without real biblical support, that at a certain point (previous to His public activity), the Messiah would have been raised in the sky in order to be „instructed“ by God regarding the mission he had to fulfil, receiving a divine „power“ which accompanied Him on earth and supported Him all throughout His work.

b). Beside the fact that he considers the Messiah as an only man, Spinoza relates to Christ outside the messianic frame, either the one imposed by the Church, or the political and theocratic frame of the Synagogue, the numerous prophetic veterotestamentary references regarding the future incarnation of the Messiah are not part of the family of verosimil scriptural theses which are also acceptable for the philosopher of Amsterdam. For him Christ is not the Messiah, but an extraordinary man, a perfect human being, a prophet par excellence, the one whom „...the will of God was [...] revealed directly” and who, by virtue of his exceptional status, „communicated with God mind to mind”³³. Thus, „...the voice of Christ can be called the voice of God”, whereas „God’s wisdom [...] took the shape of human nature in Christ”, and for this

³³ Benedict Spinoza, *Tratatul teologico-politic*, I, p. 22-23.

reason „Christ was the path tor salvation”³⁴. Though a simple man, Christ addressed his fellow men with the authority of God, „inflaming them in the love of God”³⁵. Being the „mouth of God”, He discovered the entire Truth accessible (and necessary) to man, Thruth which He alone understood, assumed, lived and preached, thus realizing, in His person and work, the authentic and whole revelation³⁶.

From this perspective, the preaching of Christ, though relatively not explicit through the use of parables (intended for those who „...were not yet to understand the Kingdom of Heaven”³⁷), is the most authorized source for the man preoccupied with his own salvation, all the more as Christ „...prescribed sometimes as laws” the data of really important faith and which were revealed to Him as such, so that, learning everything that is a task for man from a soteriological perspective, Christ „stood for God...”³⁸.

c). Even though they reach simultaneously the thesis of exclusive humanity of the Saviour, the two parties leave no place at all to the idea of a possible systemic convergence since the modalities/ways through which they reach conclusions are different. In other words, Lelio and Fausto Sozzini, on one hand, and Spinoza, on the other hand, following their own rational construction and counting on specific argumentations, they would give their opinions in identical fashion regarding the unique nature of the Saviour Jesus Christ.

Thus, *Socinians* formulate that conclusion claiming they base it exclusively on the *Holy Scripture*, there is actually a private exegesis, specific to the entire subordinationist family and which was used by Arius of Alexandria and his followers. Thus, when they formulated their christological conception, they seem to have omitted that Jesus Christ is God (*Jews 1, 8 – „But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.”*), Lord and God (*John 20, 28 – „And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God!”*) and that He is one and the same with the Father (*John 10, 30 – „I and My Father am one”*), having the ontological fullness of the divine being (*Colossians 2, 9 – „For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”*). The cause of this state lies also in postulating the primacy of reasong, since this brings Lelio and Fausto Sozzini to the paradoxical situation to identify Christ with John’s *Logos*, but grants Him the quality of „interpreter” of God – *interpretes Divinae voluntatis*³⁹ in relationship

³⁴ *Ibidem*, I, p. 23.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, XIV, p. 216.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, IV, p. 74-75.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, IV, p. 75.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, IV, p. 74-75.

³⁹ *** “Socinianism”, in: *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, lucrare disponibilă pe site-ul <http://www.newadvent.org.htm> (24.03.2016).

with the world and denies Him at the same time the preexistence as personal being. This way, the Socinians do nothing else but reiterate after a millenium and a half (!), the teaching of ancient Alogi who in about 170 - 180 rejected the *prologue to the Gospel of John* (which they had excluded together with the Apocalypse out of the inspired writings), they are „against the term Logos” and deny the divinity of Christ⁴⁰. In conclusion, reading the *Holy Scripture* and „reexamining“ the christological tradition of the Church, the Socinians find the thesis of consubstantiality as rationally incomprehensible, and reject it on the grounds of this criterion, even if, being inexplicable, this does not mean necessarily that it cannot be true in itself, beyond any human criterion, even because chiar dacă, inexplicabilă fiind, nu însemna neapărat că nu poate fi adevărată în sine, dincolo de orice criteriu omenesc, fie și doar pentru că „with God [...] all things are possible” – *Matthew* 19, 2.

On the other hand, for Spinoza Christ cannot be consubstantial with the Father firstly because the unilateral recourse to reason blocks him from conceiving the idea of incarnation of divinity. In fact, if He accepted the thesis of a Christ something else than man from the perspective of nature, Spinoza would not be consistent with himself, renouncing practically the essential presumptions of his philosophy, in this case the thesis *Deus sive substantia*. Only secondly Spinoza rejects the thesis of godliness of the Saviour because His God is not a person, but „...Univers itself”⁴¹. In fact, in the entire framework of the christological problem, reason cannot do anything else but, possibly, to support the formulation of the dogma and not the very content of this since in order to assimilate and experience the Christian teaching regarding incarnation in order to believe that „...And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us...” (*Ioan* 1, 14), one needs faith, the fundamental exercise of faith, but a faith structured in a different way from the one professed by the philosopher of Amsterdam, and the faith which „...is a power of God because it is the strength of Truth”⁴² respectively. Finally we have to mention that, relativizing the value of truth of the *Holy Scripture*, Spinoza would push away all the New Testament references to the divinity of the Saviour, considering them enough unclear and corrupted by the „imagination” of the authors in order to be seen as normative and, at the same time, as bearers of cognitive value in a theological sense: „...the belief in the things related [in the Bible] does not belong to the divine law [...]; the one who does not know them at all and still has healthy opinions and lives a true life, that one is trully happy...”⁴³.

d). We have to specify that the exclusively human identity of the Saviour is not completed by other common/similary interpretations in the field of christology since:

⁴⁰ Adrian Niculcea, *Hristologiile eretice*, București, Editura Arhetip, 2002, p. 188.

⁴¹ P. P. Negulescu, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

⁴² Clement Alexandrinul, *Stromatele: Stromata a II-a*, cap. XI, 48.4, (PSB 5), p. 139.

⁴³ Benedict Spinoza, *Tratatul teologico-politic*, V, p. 92.

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- although He did not have an existence prior to the moment of the Annunciation, the Christ of the Socinians was born nonetheless miraculously through divine intervention while for Spinoza, He is only the son of Joseph and Mary;

- *the Socinians* claim unequivocally the resurrection of Christ and His Ascension to the Father, while Spinoza denies resurrection not only as a historically attested fact in the case of the Saviour, but also as actual possibility, since „...we cannot talk about the return of the real body after death [so that] the event [resurrection] must be interpreted symbolically”⁴⁴, as a renewal of life, as symbolic resurrection consecutive to assuming faith and practicing submission and love.

Pneumatology

Regarding the Holy Spirit, Spinoza and the *Socinians* reached conclusions only sequentially close to one another, despite the fact, in the understanding of both parties the Spirit is not a personal being and even less a divine one, the few common points of view are based, as in the case of christology, on different premises and rational constructions which let a series of elements of systemic divergence emerge.

a). For Socinians, the Holy Spirit is a power, an impersonal divine energy, the active, working and efficient force through which divinity makes himself known and acts in the world, „a power of sanctification of God”⁴⁵, hence an impersonal non-material entity, a pronoiator energy emanated by the being of divinity. This vision would be grounded on a series of biblical texts linked to the concept of godly power - such as those in Luke 1, 35 - „The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee” or *Romans* 15, 19 - „...by the power of the Spirit of God [...] I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ”, texts which seem to suggest the impersonal character of the Holy Spirit, even if in parallel the Holy Scripture stresses the personality of the Holy Spirit (*John* 14, 26, *John* 16, 13, *Nehemiah* 9, 30), as well as Its godliness (*Luke* 1, 32 - 35; *Acts of the Apostles* 5, 3 - 4). This way the pnevmatomachia of Fausto and Lelio Sozzini goes beyond the pnevmatomachia of Macedonius, the one who, accepting the personality of the Spirit, limited himself to denying Its godliness, provoking the know rebuffs of Saint Athanasius the Great and Saint Basil the Great.

b). The vision of Spinoza on the Spirit - *ruah* is more complex, Its valence as godly power manifested in the world, of „power of God” (in the sense of Job 33, 4 - „The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.”), representing only one of the many (and different) meanings in which the third person of the Christian trinity is seen by the philosopher of Amsterdam. In fact,

⁴⁴ Michel Onfray, *op. cit.*, 3, p. 267-270.

⁴⁵ *** “Socinianism”, in: *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.

Spinoza grants the Spirit so many meanings as contextual interpretations the veterotestamentary references to the Hebrew term *ruah* allow. When the *Holy Scripture* talks about *ruah* in relationship or from the perspective of man, this one should be understood, as the case may be, as soul, breathing/expiration, power, skill, opinion or spirit. The same when it is linked to God and His leaning over to the world, *ruah* would indicate what „is above all the other things of the same kind”, that is a „very powerful wind” (like in *Isaiah* 40, 7 or *Genesis* 1, 2), a „very dearing soul” (such as Gideon or Samson) or, finally, „any virtue or power above the usual ones” (*Exodus* 31, 3 – „*And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship*”).

This way, Spinoza tends rather to suppress the fully-fledged existence of the Holy Spirit, implicitly taking his distance from the *Socinians*. Practically, with the exception of the case in which it is regarded (and understood) as „the power of God”, the Spirit of the philosopher of Amsterdam is „reduced” to the immanent dimensions of the some phenomena/states/manifestations of unusual magnitude, but natural and/or human not less since, identifying with the Universe, God does not intervene in the world from outside and He neither can do that. In its content, in the logic of Spinozist logic, the Spirit cannot be anything else than it is God (too) and cannot have its own identity. The spirit of Spinoza has no quality of personal subject, indicating a category of actions of divinity reducible to self formation/self transformation because any visible change of the world is due to and is an „inner“ work of the power of God, as „everything we ascribe to reality are in reality traits of God”⁴⁶. From this perspective the Spirit can be regarded as godly power, without being explicitly and distinctively, such a power. He can indicate the power and work of God without being actually what it is for Socinians, that is an impersonal entity emanated from Father and distinctive from Him. The Spirit – *ruah* can be described as a source of visible transformation, of the observable dynamics of the world, that is a change in the traits of God, that being rigorously nothing else but God in Himself. It is undoubtedly of little coherence, but the paradoxical logic itself imposed by the Spinozist pantheism imposes this interpretation.

Soteriology

In respect of the teaching about salvation, Spinoza and the *Socinians* find themselves in the same position when they approach the sacrifice of the Saviour through the lens of what today is *the theory of example*, in this case the interpretation initiated by Fausto and Lelio Sozzini and continued by the Unitarian Anglo-Saxon movement, in which it is considered that „...the death of Christ was not necessary for forgiveness of sins”. Thus between salvation and crucifixion „there is no

⁴⁶ P. P. Negulescu, *Scrieri inedite*, p. 149.

relationship”, for this reason the work of Christ is reduced to giving an example of virtuous life capable to motivate and determine people to follow Him⁴⁷.

a). In essence, the Socinians arrived at this interpretation of sacrifice working through:

- negation of the consequences of the original sin regarding the human condition, considering that from an ontological and anthropological perspective humanity is not affected in any way by the effect of the fall⁴⁸;

- rejection of the legal interpretation on the necessity of sacrifice formulated by Anselm of Canterbury (*satisfaction theory*), interpretation seen as inoperative since the real godly perspective on justice „does not request absolutely and inexorably that sin be punished”, the love and mercy of God prevailing against the tendency to punish the sin; from this perspective the *Socinians* considered that God „could free mankind from the original sin without the work of Christ”, without the sacrifice of the Saviour respectively⁴⁹.

b). Spinoza would consider also that the exceptional man Christ is the „path to salvation” in the sense of faith and life example for the entire humanity, but also as a source par excellence of the redeeming teaching (as restrained as it is) since „...the wisdom of God [...] clothed the human nature in Christ”⁵⁰. In parallel, just like the Socinians, the philosopher rejects the thesis of original sin because in itself the sin is nothing else than „what blocks man to reach his perfection, that is [...] to pursue God, hence the nature”⁵¹.

c) When they deny the traditional teaching about the original sin, Fausto and Lelio Sozzini suppose that, though true in itself, the fall of the protoparents did not affect in any way their offspring. Practically the *Socinians* consider that, when we are talking about what God expects from man and humanity, the answers and responsibilities cannot be but individual, one cannot accept the idea of a guilt with ontological connotations and which engages the entire humankind, even if, after the fall, the Father warned Adam that „cursed is the ground for thy sake!...” (*Genesis* 3, 17), indicating to him precisely the universal impact of his disobedience. By detaching humanity from the original sin and the ontological and anthropological consequences of this, the Socinians do nothing else but react in a radical fashion to the content of the anthropology promoted by the Reform. In the spirit of Renaissance which he encountered in Siena and Florence, Fausto Sozzini, walking in his uncle’s

⁴⁷ Paul Enns, *op. cit.*, p. 323.

⁴⁸ *** “Socinianism”, in: *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (25.03.2016).

⁴⁹ *** *Praelectiones Theologicae*, XVI, in: *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum* I, 566, material disponibil în format electronic.

⁵⁰ Benedict Spinoza, *Tratatul teologico-politic*, I, p. 23.

⁵¹ Michel Onfray, *op. cit.*, 3, p. 267-270.

steps Lelio, would have opposed the assigning of blame to alle people for the error of the first of them in order to just give back to man, also from a theological perspective, that dignity and beauty which the humanists had just rediscovered and were cultivating in order to render it compatible with the Good through his own powers as long as he had been created by God in His own image and with the perspective that man would acquire the resemblance with Himself. Despite this anthropological „optimism”, which was capable to separate them from the surrounding protestant world, *Socinians* saw sin in the very meaning of the Reform, that is in the form of infringement of moral and ethical normatives stipulated in the *Holy Scripture*; the man of the Socinians, since he was perfectly free in his attitude toward God, could choose sin to the detriment of virtue.

In exchange, in virtue of the absolut determinism which rules over the last detail in the existence of any human being, Spinoza cannot admit free will because free will „does not exist”⁵². Thus the philosopher cannot connect sin to the will of man, with his placing in relationship to a set of values which he can or cannot adopt/respect/assume. The man of Spinoza cannot in fact do anything else but what is imposed on him necessarily the result of infinite causal chains which restrict him altogether because „...what happens to anyone results from divine necessity”, not even God being able to interpose, stop or deviate the implacable course of events. Moreover in the universe of Spinoza, which submits a succession of imperturbable causal relationships, there exist and can be no distinctions between good and evil; good and evil are linked to an absolut relativism, descending in the realm of the subjective as long as, since they do not have their own content, are reduced to the dimension of individual perceptions and interpretations: „...the terms good and evil do not mean anything positive which we could find in things [...]; they are nothing else but shapes of thinking which we build comparing things to one another”⁵³. Implicitely, the significance of sin cannot be linked to the reference, determined in the Gospel, of the binom good-evil.

d). Removing the soteriological value of sacrifice and minimizing the extraordinary significance of the incarnation of the Saviour, His crucifixion and resurrection. the Socinians as well as Spinoza would define the outlines of a completely different soteriology which would separate them one more time from Christianity and Judaism in their neighborhood.

Thus the Socinians would overlook the fact that Christ „... *Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.*” (*Romans* 4, 25) and that „... *hath once suffered [...] death for our sins [...], that he might bring us to God*” (*I Peter* 3, 18), supposing that, in His archetypal love, God would forgive sins also in

⁵² Gh. Al. Cazan, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

⁵³ Baruch Spinoza, *Etica demonstrată după metoda geometrică*, Partea a patra, p. 141.

the absence of sacrifice. Thus, though they do not err when they talk about the primacy of love of God in relationship to His justice, the *Socinians* omit that „where there is sacrifice, there there is the destruction of sins, there you find celebration and joy” (Saint John Chrysostom), the reduction of the work of Christ to the exceptional signification of His example of faith and life is, in its content, not justified.

On another level, the view of Spinoza on soteriology is decisively shaped by the rigidity of the causal relationships which acts universally, relationships which culminate in postulating the supposed „incapacity” of God (in His turn subjected to the impenetrable order of Cosmos with which He actually identifies) to intervene in the world He created. Placing Himself in the impossibility to interrupt the infinite preset string of causes and effects in eternity and for eternity, the God of Spinoza would not be the Saviour God of Church and Synagogue, The One who „... *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” (*Romans 5, 8*) and implicitly He would not be the God who forgives the sins of people („*who can forgive sins but God only?*” – *Mark 2, 7*). Under these circumstances, the thinking of Spinoza would not understand redemption as a synergic divine and human act, but only as human work, a fundamental work full of significations, but which would limit itself to the power, will and especially reason of every individual separately, being the ‘ultimate goal of all human actions...’⁵⁴. Implicitly salvation cannot be but the triumph of reason and life lived according to the commandments and virtues of this, out of which *knowledge of God*, theognosia, ‘...our greatest thing’ and *love*, ‘...the greatest happiness of man’ come out strongly. These two - knowledge of God (which would suppose implicitly the exercises of faith and submission) and love for God and, also then, of the neighbors would be the referentials of the essentially human act of salvation: „...The knowledge and love of God is the ultimate goal toward which our actions must converge”⁵⁵. This perspective on salvation is perfectly compatible with the role and place of the Savior in the logic of Spinoza’s thinking, which cannot value the soteriological and anthropological depth of the incarnation of the Word, who „...*But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men*” (*Philippians 2, 7*) in order to work, through Self sacrifice and Resurrection, on the salvation of humankind by reestablishing the true immortal nature, transfigured by the light of God’s grace.

Eschatological Perspective

In the space of the teaching about the things behind, disparities between the two parts grow and become more since Benedict Baruch Spinoza suppresses the concept

⁵⁴ Benedict Spinoza, *Tratatul teologico-politic*, IV, p. 69-70.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, IV, p. 70.

of eschatology itself and its implications, reducing life and the world to this life and this world. In this context, since the *Socinians* adopt eschatological perspectives relatively convergent with the ones of the protestant world, the divergences between the two parties prevail in order to keep similar only the teaching about hell, in fact about the nonexistence of hell as a world of eternal punishment.

a). In the field of their eschatological thinking the Socinians would remove hell⁵⁶, although they keep the traditional teaching about resurrection (in the sense of *Thessalonians* 4, 14 – „*For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him*”) and the existence of paradise (according to *1 John* 2, 27 – „*And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever*”), and this on the grounds of two complementary argumentations:

- first a series of biblical texts such as the ones of *Ezekiel* 18, 4 – „*The soul that sinneth, it shall die.*” or *Matthew* 10, 28 – „*And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*”, seem to suggest the inexistence of hell (obviously in a unilateral lecture);

- second, the specifically Socinian thesis of the preeminence of God’s love, love which would make impossible the existence of a place of eternal ordeal; consequently, even if one cannot speak of a universal salvation - because God is nonetheless just - there cannot be a hell for the damned, a possible reality of this being in contradiction with divine love so that *annihilationism* (eternal death) represents, from a Socinian perspective, an appropriate dogmatic solution.

In fact, in the face of the monstrous outlines of hell described in the Western churches as well as in the face of predestination to hell of those condemned in eternity in Calvinism, the *Socinians* would try to find and established, it is true - through a partisan biblical exegesis, a ‘balancing’ solution between the divine love and justice, identifying it in the definitive death of sinners. Thus hell cannot exist because a God who love His creation, would not be able under any circumstance to push the idea of justice until He makes it compatible with the existence of the place of eternal punishment. In this logic, definitive death - seen as a supreme punishment of the sinners - would be ‘preferred’ by God to throwing them in the tenebrous world of hell.

b). Concomitantly Spinoza leaves no place for eschatology in his theological thinking, notwithstanding the fact that he defines and uses the concept of salvation. But the way in which he thinks it - simple state of absolute bliss in this life, corroborated with the rejection of resurrection, would take him again to the situation

⁵⁶ *** “Socinianism”, in: *The Catholic Encyclopedia* [03.04.2016].

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to postulate the uselessness, the inexistence of any hope linked to „...a new heaven and a new earth” (*Revelation* 21, 1).

The man of Spinoza cannot redeem himself by following the open way (materialized by) the man Christ and can thus reach the maximum of hope of the human nature: „beatitude”, an absolute bliss since through understanding and full awareness of the absolute necessity man would not suffer as a consequence of the incapability to break the causal chain in which he was predestined to be. But a salvation which would not stop death because the death of living beings is an eternal preassigned element of the Spinozist Universe, an intrinsic and defining law of the world and not, as in Judeo-Christianity, an accident with cosmic implications, but with a limited temporal scope. Not even God can simply transform life limited by death in life, cannot restore to life its original ontological overture, the authenticity of the eternity, the constitutive eternity. Implicitly God would not be able to decide, at a certain moment, on the destiny of the human individuals (despite the Psalm 93, 2 – „*Rise up, O Judge of the earth...*”), would not be able to open them or, on the contrary, close the horizon of the eschatological expectation because „He is not the one to decide the fate of people because he cannot do anything”⁵⁷.

Therefore the man of Spinoza would not die in the hope to rise again to real life; therefore the created world would not come to an end in order to be replaced by a radically transformed one, but it would perpetuate itself infinitely including an endless chain of human existences predestined to be only transient. As a consequence hell and paradise - the poles of the Judeo-Christian poles of destiny cannot make themselves way and cannot find a place in the thinking of the philosopher of Amsterdam, for whom there cannot be a paradise and, opposed to this, a hell. If we nonetheless insist on talking about a (certain) inferno, this cannot be anything else but the sum of „bad human passions”⁵⁸. Since it is perfect and cannot fall from the perfection given by its metaphysical identification with God, the Universe of Spinoza cannot change at the end of history to make room for spaces of communion and non-communion with the divinity represented by paradise and hell, their supposed existence being, in solidarity with the other topics of traditional Christianity, „things related only to speculation”⁵⁹.

Desacralization of the Cult

The rational perspective on the *Holy Scripture*, doubled by the more than restrained attitude toward the traditional exegeses of this, lead the two parties to the situation to develop independently and on grounds of their own systemic peculiarities

⁵⁷ Michel Onfray, *op. cit.*, 3, p. 281.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 3, p. 267-268.

⁵⁹ Benedict Spinoza, *Tratatul teologico-politic*, V, p. 90.

relevant elements of convergence also regarding the public divine cult, consisting in denying the sacramental valences of this, in removing the predominantly liturgical dimension imprinted by the historical Churches to the concern of man for the reconstruction of the original link with his Creator.

In its content, both Spinoza and the *Socinians* with whom he cohabitated in Rijnsburg regarded the religious act from consistently non-sacramental and non-ceremonial perspectives, rejecting uncompromisingly the liturgical dimension and the cultural practices of the historical Churches.

a). Thus the Socinians would go even further than the Protestant tendencies to desacralize the cult, from which, removing the Catholic practices as well as those Lutheran or Calvinist, they retained only *Baptism* (reduced to converted adults, hence the rejection of *pedobaptism*) and the *Lord's Supper*, which they yet practiced from an exclusively commemorative perspective (thus completely non-sacramental)⁶⁰. Renouncing the sacramental dimension of the religious practice, the *Socinians* would generalize the cultural value of the symbol, of the sign, entering the logic of the reformer of Zürich, Huldrych Zwingli, but also of the Anabaptists and Mennonites together with whom the communities of *Collegiants* appeared. Thus for Fausto and Lelio Sozzini, the *Baptism* and *Lord's Supper* are simply „acts of profession [of faith]” which „are not strictly necessary for salvation”⁶¹. Actually, as long as they see Christ as a simple man, even if one who through the immaculate life and martyrly death gave humanity the supreme example of faith, the *Socinians* cannot assimilate fully the significations of His Mystery. By postulating the exclusive humanity of the Savior, these cannot find anything beside the human nature to bring it from the outside the ontological surplus value meant to make it complete, to support it in order to obtain the resemblance to God.

b). Concomitantly Spinoza would stress that „the natural law of God does not pretend ceremonials, that is actions which in themselves are indifferent and only through tradition are called good”⁶², thus excluding all the prayers, celebrations, liturgical practices and sacramental works of the Church. Thus the philosopher of Amsterdam would build the structure of the seven dogmatic statements excluding any reference to the exterior cult manifestations/practices since these are placed in the area of the ‘traditional’ practices, disputable as scriptural sustainability („...if they were ever established by Christ and apostles, which is not yet sure enough for me”) and irrelevant for the religious authentic practice, since they are not „things which would have to do with happiness or which would comprise something holy in them”⁶³.

⁶⁰ *** “Socinianism”, in: *Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia* [02.04.2016].

⁶¹ *Ibidem* [02.04.2016].

⁶² Benedict Spinoza, *Tratatul teologico-politic*, IV, p. 72.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, V, p. 88.

The fact the Spinoza rejects the sacramental dimension of the cult results from the very architecture of his view on religion. A direct and effective intervention of the divinity - as the essence of the sacraments itself supposes as mysterious work of sharing God's grace with man, in man and for man, is for Spinoza not only inappropriate, as long as „...things are produced by God with the utmost perfection since they have their origin necessarily in His most perfect [...] nature”⁶⁴, but especially impossible. And that is because, supposing that by grace man can ‘taste’ in advance, while he is in this life, the other/another existential state, the godly one, the Spinozist philosophical construction would encounter insurmountable contradictions. Thus the logic of Spinoza's thinking imposes necessarily the unchangeability of man from an ontological point of view, as long as he, as a living being, cannot be anything else but one of the infinite peculiar and temporary traits of God since „...the essence of man is made of certain changes of the traits of God[...], man is a modification or a face which shows the nature of God in sure and determined way”. Then a possible transfiguration of man would suppose also a change in God, obviously unacceptable because „all things resulted necessarily from the given nature of God and are determined in the necessity of nature of God in order to exist and act in certain way”⁶⁵, what ultimately does not express anything else but the absolute determinism which governs the Universe of the thinker of Amsterdam. Finally, even if He would want, God could not intervene for and for the benefit of man, for Spinoza „...being a naivete to believe that God could change the fixed and eternal order of things as a consequence of our implorations and prayers [...]. All phenomena [...] happen as a logical consequence of the natural laws”⁶⁶. God does not intervene in nature in order to influence it⁶⁷, because „...everything is determined by the necessity of the divine nature in order that it exists and acts in a sure form”, so that not even God can exercise His will deprived of the restraint of the immutable and eternal constraint⁶⁸.

Consequently, since God cannot do anything beyond the preset course of the infinite web of causal relationships in favor of being which, nonetheless, hypostatizes (even if temporary) His perfecte and infinite existential traits, Spinoza does nothing else but suppress the very concept of sacramental work of the Church, removing it from His theological discourse.

IV. Conclusions

Since we have arrived at this point we will be able to conclude regarding the following configuration of the essential points of faith and religious practice in which

⁶⁴ Idem, *Etica demonstrată după metoda geometrică*, partea întâi, p. 27.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, partea întâi, p. 3-38.

⁶⁶ I. Brucăr, *art. cit.*, p. 115.

⁶⁷ C. I. Gulian, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

⁶⁸ Baruch Spinoza, *Etica*, partea întâi, p. 24-26.

Benedict Baruch Spinoza thinks the same as the Arian Christians and Pnevmatomachs who were the the *Socinians*:

a). The maximum simplification of the teaching about God, with denial of the dogma of the Holy Trinity – a direct result of the two parties to assimilate and make use of the elements of theognosia brought by revelation because, as Spinoza says, „...people must not [...] know the traits of God, but this is a gift only for some believers”⁶⁹.

• Obviously the Church speaks only about knowing divinity in the limits of revelation, theognosia being by its nature limited, partial and relative to what the man is given to understand, but also then we cannot omit that „faith means knowing God [...] and confess Him sincerely and truly”⁷⁰. And this knowledge has as its main source the divine and human person of the Saviour Jesus Christ because „you cannot know anyone else from the Father but the Son”⁷¹, while „...neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him” (*Matthew* 11, 27) and „...he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?...” (*John* 14, 9), so that „Nobody confesses God, if he does not confess Christ...”⁷². Therefore the dogmatic formulation in the sense of positive content of the teaching, of faith norm, cannot be relativized; it has an absolute value since theology itself „contains a doctrinal element, the objective teaching of the Church, Its catechesis...”⁷³.

b). The rejection of the thesis of redemption through and in Christ with denial of the soteriological fundamental value of His incarnation, sacrifice and resurrection - reduced to the human dimensions of an exceptional life and martyrical death, initiating (but not doing) for what the philosopher of Amsterdam calls „the way of salvation”.

• In itself the linking of the two parties to that soteriology which later would be condensed in the *Theory of example* is more than problematic since salvation is possible only in the name of Christ („Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” – *The Acts of the Apostles* 4, 12), supposing firstly the faith in Him as Saviour („For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that

⁶⁹ Idem, *Tratatul teologico-politic*, XIII, p. 206.

⁷⁰ Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei, *Comentariu la Evanghelia Sf. Ioan*, cartea a noua, Introducere, (PSB 41), p. 799.

⁷¹ Casiodor, *Istoria bisericească tripartită*, Cartea a II-a, cap. XI, (PSB 75), p. 93.

⁷² Sf. Ioan Casian, *Convorbiri duhovnicești, Despre Întruparea Domnului*, Cartea a V-a, cap. XV, 2-3, (PSB 57), p. 828.

⁷³ Paul Evdokimov, *Ortodoxia*, traducere din limba franceză de dr. Irineu Popa, Arhiereu vicar, București, EIBMBOR, 1996, p. 54.

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whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” – John 3, 16), so that from a biblical perspective, „...we were the cause of His incarnation and for our salvation He let himself move by the love for people so that He took a human body and appeared in it”⁷⁴.

c). The disavowal of the Church as a divine and human institution that preserves the apostolic norm of faith and of the sacramental practices established by Jesus Christ with the goal to make possible on earth the experience of the eternal life.

• When Spinoza and the *Socinians* meet in the congregation reduced to a simple human gathering of the Collegiants in Rijnsburg, the traditional acceptance of the Church of „...icon of future kingdom”⁷⁵, of space which „keeps us for God” because „it reserves the kingdom of God for its sons”, is annuled definitively. Actually the Church is „...the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Timothy 3, 15), is the Temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6, 19), the mystical body of Christ (Ephesians 1, 22 – 23), the flock of God (I Peter 5, 2), the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5, 25 – 28), so that it can be said that „...who does not have the Church as a mother cannot have God as a Father”⁷⁶.



Finally, all these points of convergence can be considered as being the result of the following factors with decisive value: **(i)** the simultaneous tendency to simplify/dilute the doctrinal content of faith, with limitation of the formative impact of the dogmas; **(ii)** the concern with putting the faith teachings through the filter of reason, and for the restraint of the suprarational character of the faith truths; **(iii)** the partialization of the normative value of the *Holy Scripture* in the foundation of the teaching through practicing subjective unilateral exegeses and **(iv)** removing the mystery, supranatural from the divine cult accompanied by renouncing the divine and human valences of ecclesiology.

⁷⁴ Sf. Atanasie cel Mare, *Tratat despre întruparea Cuvântului și despre arătarea Lui nouă, prin trup*, cap. I, IV, (PSB 15), p. 93.

⁷⁵ Origen, *Despre principii*, Cartea întâia, II, 6, (PSB 8), p. 94.

⁷⁶ Sf. Ciprian al Cartaginei, *Despre unitatea Bisericii ecumenice*, VI, (PSB 3), p. 438.