



MICHEL FOUCAULT
AND THEOLOGY

JAMES BERNAUER
AND JEREMY CARRETTE

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Whilst Foucault's work has become a major strand of postmodern theology, the wider relevance of his work for theology still remains largely unexamined. Foucault both engages the Christian tradition and critically challenges its disciplinary regime.

Michel Foucault and Theology brings together a selection of essays by leading Foucault scholars on a variety of themes within the history, thought and practice of theology. Revealing the diverse ways that the work of Michel Foucault (1926–1984) has been employed to rethink theology in terms of power, discourse, sexuality and the politics of knowledge, the authors examine power and sexuality in the church in late antiquity (Castelli, Clark, Schuld), raise questions about the relationship between theology and politics (Bernauer, Leezenberg, Caputo), consider new challenges to the nature of theological knowledge in terms of Foucault's critical project (Flynn, Cutrofello, Beadoin, Pinto) and rethink theology in terms of Foucault's work on the history of sexuality (Carrette, Jordan, Mahon). This book demonstrates, for the first time, the influence and growing importance of Foucault's work for contemporary theology.

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Michel Foucault and Theology

The Politics of Religious Experience

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This book is also the outcome of a continuing dialogue between James Bernauer and Jeremy Carrette on Foucault and religion and they would like to thank all the contributors for agreeing to include their work and for making the project possible. We hope this book reflects the richness of Foucault scholarship within theology today.

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‘Interpretation of Power in 1 Corinthians’ by Elizabeth Castelli, *Semeia* 54, Society for Biblical Literature, 1992, pp.199–222.

‘Foucault, the Fathers and Sex’ by Elizabeth A. Clark, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Oxford University Press, vol.56, no.4, 1998, pp.619–41.

‘Augustine, Foucault and the Politics of Imperfection’ by J. Joyce Schuld, *Journal of Religion*, The University of Chicago Press, vol.80, no.1, January 2000, pp.1–22.

‘Power and Political Spirituality: Michel Foucault and the Islamic Revolution in Iran’ by Michiel Leezenberg in *Cultural History After Foucault*, ed. John Neubauer, Aldine De Gruyter, New York, 1999, pp.63–80.

‘On Not Knowing Who We Are: Madness, Hermeneutics and the Night of Truth in Foucault’ by John D. Caputo in *Foucault and the Critique of Institutions*, ed. John Caputo and Mark Yount, Penn State University Press, University Park, Pennsylvania, 1993, pp.233–62.

‘Partially Desacralized Spaces: The Religious Availability of Foucault’s Thought’ by Thomas Flynn in *Faith and Philosophy*, vol.10, no.4, October 1993, pp.471–85.

Earlier versions of James Bernauer’s ‘Michel Foucault’s Philosophy of Religion: an Introduction to the Non-Fascist Life’ appeared in *Budhi* vol.3, 1999, pp.1–28 and *iichiko* n.66, Spring 2000, pp.6–34.

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Introduction: The Enduring Problem: Foucault, Theology and Culture

James Bernauer and Jeremy Carrette

Critique is the movement by which the subject gives itself the right to question truth on its effects of power and to question power on its discourses of truth ... in a word, the politics of truth.
Foucault, 1978, 'What is Critique?', p.32.

[The church] is a superb instrument of power for itself. Entirely woven through with elements that are imaginary, erotic, effective, corporal, sensual, and so on, it is superb!
Foucault, 1978, 'On Religion', p.106.

The dialogue between continental philosophy and theology has been growing in recent years, with new emergent forms of so-called 'postmodern' theology.¹ While the work of Jacques Derrida, with his continuing play with theological themes, has largely dominated much of this discussion, there has been a growing appreciation of other French post-structuralist writers and their engagement with religion. New works and translations are continually revealing important, but as yet unexplored, aspects of a body of literature that reworks traditional theological questions. The work of Michel Foucault (1926–84) is one of the developing fronts of this discussion, with new translations and works examining his contribution to religious, theological and philosophical thought. While Foucault's work has become a major strand of postmodern theology and new forms of body theology, the wider relevance of his work for theology still remains largely unexamined. One striking feature, among many, emerging from theological examinations of Foucault's work is the sense in which his thinking holds a distinctively Catholic dimension, particularly with its visual piety and confessional agenda. This stands in contrast to the predominantly Protestant theological concerns with the 'word' and 'text' of the postmodern gospel. However, what also remains distinctive in Foucault's thinking is his critical analysis of institutional practices, which opens up the wider social and political agenda of theology. Foucault both engages with the Christian tradition and critically challenges its disciplinary regime. He therefore becomes, at once, both guardian and adversary of the Christian faith, a tension which creates the possibility of developing new relationships within Christianity that are more inclusive and less oppressive.

This collection of essays positions itself at the intersection of three important contemporary discussions.² First, it breaks new ground in our understanding of Michel Foucault's writings in that it shows the significance of his analysis of culture for consideration of religion in general, and Christian practices in particular. Foucault as investigator of religion is an almost totally unknown Foucault. There are several

reasons why that is the case but perhaps the most influential was the decision not to allow posthumous publication of his text on Christianity and sexuality (*Confessions of the Flesh*) which he had almost completed before his death. Fortunately, though, extensive recent research in Foucault's archives as well as Gallimard's decision to publish his lectures at the Collège de France give us a much better understanding of his religious-political interests. This provided the context for a collection of texts from Foucault himself selected and edited by Jeremy Carrette: *Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault* (Manchester University Press and Routledge, 1999). The second discussion is the political functioning of contemporary religion. Foucault's examination of the Iranian revolution in 1978 anticipated forecasts about the need for new tools in the analysis of political-spiritual regimes. More central to his own work, though, is his conviction that a sharp distinction between the secular and religious in modernity cannot be sustained. Foucault engaged in religious analysis because he came to appreciate that the forms of knowledge, power and subjectivity animating western culture are constructed in decisive ways in argument with or acceptance of religious practices and concerns. The third discussion is that of religious historians, educators and theologians about the implications of postmodern thought for grasping the present operation and future possibility of religion. There are indications that we are on the eve of a post-Foucauldian spiritual sensibility, which transforms theological knowledge. In order to map such a landscape it is worth plotting some of the coordinates of Foucault's challenge to theology.

THE CONDITIONS OF THEOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

What are the conditions of theological knowledge and what makes the discourse of theology possible at any given point in history? To raise these questions is to take Michel Foucault's archaeological and genealogical projects into the heart of Christian theology; it is to consider seriously the possibility of theology as a form of knowledge taking shape in the historical process. Theological discourse emerges in each period of history according to the epistemic structures that make its statements possible (archaeology). It emerges out of the relations between people and their institutions in order to shape the practices of living (genealogy). This means that revelation and exegesis are shaped according to the regimes of knowledge available at any given moment in time. While this historization of theological understanding may seem obvious, it creates a point of contestation in the relationship between culture and theology. Indeed, the correlation of theology with contemporary culture is a key factor in shaping the nature of the Christian tradition and one which defines much of the present debate in modern and, so-called, 'postmodern' theology. Types of theology, according to Hans Frei, can be differentiated according to the levels of receptivity theologians display towards the existing cultural debates.³ Such a mapping reflects the 'enduring problem' of the multiple relations between theology and culture that Richard Niebuhr explored in his classic work of modern theology, *Christ and Culture*.⁴ The 'enduring problem' continues in the space of 'postmodern' theology, both in the critique of modernity and in the collapsing of the boundaries between theology and culture. Foucault turns much of this debate inside out by raising questions about the nature of tradition, space, authority and power in

theology. His work emerges from within the history of Western Christianity – ‘as an analysis of the cultural facts’ – and brings theology back into history, through a critique of the foundations of theological knowledge.⁵

Foucault’s philosophical–historical project, which is neither simply history nor philosophy, refuses to separate theology and culture. Theology is no longer separated out in some binary construction which assumes that the lines where Christian theology ends and the contemporary culture begins are somehow clearly visible. Theology has a history and that history reflects the continual immersion of theology in the cultural environs. Theology evolves through a series of engagements with the contemporary world. It negotiates the changing world and its message through the political, philosophical and social values of the time, even if it refuses to accept fully or acknowledge such values. From its negotiations with neo-Platonic philosophy, through its affirmations of Aquinas, to its excursions with Existentialism, theology has spoken its truth in the conditions of its time. Nonetheless, the past still functions for theologians as an imagined space in which to reconstruct the political present; it exonerates the past as its truth in the present. The struggle of theology is to see tradition as change rather than narrow preservation, which conceals its present politic in terms of continuing an imagined, and constantly reimagined, past.

Theology, in its engagement with Foucault, recognizes the ‘history of the present’ and acknowledges that all appeals to the past are but, paradoxically, an affirmation of the present political desire for knowledge and power about the nature of truth. If theology is to overcome its archaic preservation of this imagined past it must constantly renegotiate the terms of its tradition in the new spaces of the present world without fear and prejudice. The illusion of theology, as Foucault recognized, was that it held the categories of its thought above the practices of its living community.⁶ It competes between the values of preserving the tradition and holding tradition as change. If theology is to avoid becoming simply a library of the past and an elitist model of orthodoxy (radical or not) it must be prepared to explore the conditions of its knowledge and politics of its thinking. Foucault’s work provides an opportunity to examine the conditions of theological knowledge and exposes the hidden regimes of power behind the so-called ‘virtues’ of Christian theology. The naivety of theologians ends with its engagement with Foucault, because Foucault returns theology to its history, to its struggles for authority and power, to its practices of the self and to its embodied reality. Foucault takes theology from its doctrinal closet into its pastoral reality. His work uncovers and destabilizes the unexamined authority of theological discourse and brings Christianity back to the fragility of human struggle. Foucault’s methodology disarms the doctrinal by revealing the unconscious of theological knowledge.⁷

The engagement of theology with Foucault has been part of a new wave of theological engagements with French intellectual culture from the 1960s. He has become part of a line of thinkers from the left bank of Paris who have enabled theology to rethink its project in terms of a critique of modernity. This critical consciousness of contemporary culture has enabled theologians to rethink the nature and order of its knowledge. Within this current exploration of post-structuralist thinkers in theology, it is important and revealing to understand the particular location of Foucault in the contemporary theological debate – important and revealing because it shows us the way Foucault is being used by theologians and why

other theologians are afraid of employing Foucault's method and insight into theology. Theology becomes a fearful and defensive discourse when its academic exponents become afraid of losing power in the face of the uncontrollable realities of their bodies and their hidden will to power.

Theologians can easily assume a narrow consciousness in the attempt to assert authority through blind intellect, rather than recognizing the dark unconscious of knowledge behind their utterances. They wish to hide in the closet of authority and domination rather than respond with the loving affirmation of shared humanity and a desire to understand the vulnerabilities of themselves and those in their community. Theologians, like any other intellectual group of thinkers, can easily be lost in the regimes of their knowledge-power. They become afraid to listen to those outside their groups or cliques in an attempt to remain blind to the other, whether it be women, people of the two-thirds world, homosexuals or black minorities. Theologians need to take the ethical responsibility to examine their utterances in terms of the regimes of power knowledge they propagate and be willing to suspend such judgment in the face of critique within the Christian community. At a time when the worldwide church, on either side of the denominational divides, faces the politics of exclusion and its collusion with oppression, particularly in response to world poverty, globalization and gay sexuality, Foucault becomes a central thinker for conceptualizing the politics of authority and power in the church. It is precisely at this point that we see the theological lines of engagement with Foucault and understand the sites of resistance, for Foucault's critical methodology is a methodology for the silenced.⁸

WHAT HAS MICHEL FOUCAULT TO OFFER THEOLOGY?

The essays in this volume reflect the multiple forms of engagement between Foucault and theology. The essays embrace Foucault for a critical historical project, as new ways of reading Christian history, they use Foucault to rethink the discourse of the self, the politics of truth, the ideologies of belief, the closure and opening of dialogue and the strategies of embodied knowledge. However, we must not assume that Foucault's relationship is simply a modernist critique of knowledge: it also continually opens up the space of theology and Christian living to new possibilities. Foucault offers theology the critical apparatus to find new inclusive and non-dualistic forms of living; he offers the possibility of imagining ways of rethinking theology, as practice rather than belief.⁹

Foucault's critique is an instrument to examine all forms of knowledge and not simply something opposed to theological knowledge. Foucault certainly assists in developing a self-reflexive critique of theological knowledge, but he also offers a critique of the positivistic knowledge of man and the human sciences. This critique of anthropological man inadvertently opens up the space for theology to empower itself against the claims of humanistic rationalism.¹⁰ It is this which allows Maurice Clavel to claim that Foucault's *The Order of Things* offered a powerful affirmation of the Christian faith.¹¹ In this sense, far from undermining theological discourse and practice, Foucault establishes ground to develop new forms of negative theology and offers new perspectives for rethinking contemporary body theology.¹²

Given Foucault's concern with the conditions of knowledge, it is not surprising

that those theologians fighting for oppressed and marginalized groups have taken up Foucault's entry into the theological world. We find Foucault has been welcomed by feminist theologians, those working on the boundaries of sexuality and theology and also those dissolving the boundaries between politics and theology.¹³ If Foucault's method and critique have been used to establish new forms of theology, his later work has also been celebrated by scholars of late antiquity and Biblical studies (see Castelli and Clark in the present volume). Foucault offers a new critical hermeneutics for Christian theology and this has slowly established new readings of the Biblical text, such as in Anthony Thisleton's recent study of Corinthians.¹⁴ What Foucault offers theology is the space to think differently, not by imposing a new dogma for contemporary theology, but allowing his methods to rethink questions inside theology which have previously been suppressed or obscured owing to the interests and attachments to dominant forms of knowledge. As Foucault famously declared in 1984:

There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. . . . But, then, what is philosophy today – philosophical activity, I mean – if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?¹⁵

Foucault's challenge to theology is to think differently by freeing theology from what it 'silently thinks', to enable Christian theology to recognize its hidden regimes of knowledge power beneath the rituals of its performances.¹⁶

THE CATHOLIC FOUCAULT: THE SILENT CULTURE OF THEOLOGY

The relation between religion and culture is always a two-sided one.

Dawson, *Religion and Culture*, 1947, p.57.

Religion is the substance of culture, culture is the form of religion.

Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 1959, p.44.

Most of modern theology reworks past issues for new audiences and in the fetish of the new commodifies its knowledge for a new market and a new generation. We do not have to travel far to see how the present debates about religion and culture are forgotten reincarnations from the past. Indeed, we only have to go as far as the middle of the twentieth century with Christopher Dawson's Gifford Lectures in the 1940s and Paul Tillich's correlation of faith and culture in the 1950s and 1960s to see how Niebuhr's 'enduring problem' occupies the theological landscape of modernity as much as postmodernity.¹⁷ It cannot do otherwise, for the problem of theology and culture is at the heart of humanity's relationship to God. Where the death of God theologians once embraced the liberalism of a changing world, Radical Orthodoxy asserts its rejection of modernity in its nostalgic and elitist conservatism, both failing to see the 'will to theological power' and the imperialism of their projects. The

recognition of the games of truth and power in theological discourse provides a new way of reading the successive engagements between theology and culture.

In Foucault's work power is mobile, it is strategic and fluid, refusing to rest by refusing to see 'truth' as given. Truth for Foucault is negotiated and Foucault himself disappears in his own strategic application of knowledge. This strategic knowledge is for Foucault about identifying 'problems'.¹⁸ It is these problems which enable Foucault to see the unconscious of knowledge within certain disciplinary practices. It is wrong to assume, as Foucault made very clear, that he believed power 'could explain everything' or that it was 'sufficient to characterize a society'.¹⁹ It is rather that Foucault examines discursive regimes through the 'relations of power' rather than the 'relations of meaning' in order to examine strategically the politics of truth.²⁰ Foucault is the great strategist and, when we approach Foucault's work in the field of theology, it may be strategic to ask what forms of theology shape Foucault's own thinking. This is to realize that theology often assumes its efficacy in its silent operation, particularly when it has lost some of its currency as a public discourse.

If the interface of theology and culture is to be taken seriously then we also have to understand that Foucault's critical thinking is born out of his own French Catholic context. Foucault is not exempt from carrying forward his own theological ideas behind his historiographical and philosophical work. It might be possible to ask what theological conditions made Foucault's work possible. Does Foucault's writing hold a distinctively Catholic agenda? While these questions have been raised on the edges of Foucault scholarship, much remains to be documented.²¹ It is not the purpose of this introduction to outline the trajectories of such thinking in detail, but if we are to recognize the theological importance of Foucault we need at least to open up this question.

The privileging of certain Catholic concerns can be seen in his discussion of the practices of confession and the examination of conscience and of the place of sexuality in both.²² Foucault's understanding of pastoral power is never far from the structures of Catholicism. We may also note how the visual qualities of his work hold echoes of Catholic ritual and iconography or what David Tracey identified as the 'analogical imagination' of the Catholic mind.²³ These inferences take on greater weight when we consider Foucault's celebration of Catholic ritual and dress. Foucault had spoken and written of Christian experience with insight and much more of that insight could have been expected if he had had the time to finish his studies of Christianity. Still, his concentration on the role of confessional experience within Christianity may have distorted his interpretation of Christian sexuality. Indeed, his focus might have reflected the legacy of his own Catholic milieu and led him to a similar obsession about sin that John Mahoney had argued to be the negative influence of auricular confession on Catholic moral theology in general.²⁴

Foucault's examination of Christian practice was drawn to a sexuality saturated with sinfulness. This was understandable because Foucault did show the historically important role which confessional practice came to exercise in the Christian pastoral governance of souls. More dramatic, though, was his presentation of a modern Christian anatomy of the body which was the fruit of that governance. It was a governance which enmeshed the body within the coils of a rebellious flesh. Foucault's interest in Christianity led him to a fascination with its institution of a 'moral physiology of the flesh' and its 'culpabilisation of the body by the flesh'.²⁵ His

continuing sensitivity to discontinuities had caught the shift in the 16th century from a concern with sins generated out of relationship with others to a sinfulness dominated by one's relationship to the body. Foucault showed a Catholic 'mapping' of the body's sinful sites. The sins of the flesh were the touchings of masturbation, the gazings of desire, the speaking of lusts, the listenings with pleasure.²⁶

With the same unforgettable force that Foucault had exhibited in describing the torture at the beginning of *Discipline and Punish*, his studies of Christian sexuality were beginning to paint another dramatic, tortured figure, the Christian as enfleshed. The figure which Foucault's learning and lectures portrayed is certainly not unknown to Christians, so many of whom have been victims of theology's frequent denigration of the body and sexuality. And yet that denigration is certainly not the full story, because there have been so many religious thinkers and spiritualities which have stressed the goodness of creation. To take an example from but one historical period, there is Leo Steinberg's *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and Modern Oblivion*.²⁷ Steinberg's arguments and paintings tell of this other story. From before the 15th century to beyond the mid-16th century, Western art 'produced a large body of devotional imagery in which the genitalia of the Christ Child, or of the dead Christ, receive such demonstrative emphasis that one must recognize an *ostentatio genitalium* comparable to the canonic *ostentatio vulnerum*, the showing forth of the wounds'.²⁸ If flesh could be inscribed on a register of sin and fault, it was also at the core of Christian faith, the Incarnation. God had become Flesh, had become human, and this incarnation embraced sexuality as well. Perhaps the most striking paintings Steinberg's volume reproduced were those of a naked Redeemer and particularly those of a crucified Jesus who seemed to be in the process of returning to life; it was a resurrection announced in an erection, in a flesh revived. The manifestation of the Redeemer's sexual power showed that there was no shame attached to it and, indeed, that the New Adam had restored the innocence of the original creation, an 'unculpable flesh'. These paintings were works of piety: 'We could say that Christ is shown refuting that tenaciously clinging Docetism which denies the carnality of his body. He is helping the believer overcome a last vestige of doubt about the utterness of his humanation.'²⁹

The Catholic incarnational imagination that Steinberg highlighted resonated with the religious faith and spirituality of many contemporary Catholic writers. William Lynch speaks for them, for example, in his *Christ and Apollo*, where he argued that thought and art manifesting Catholic conviction should be in conflict with any facile intellectualism associated with the Apollonian.³⁰ And Foucault's thought has a similar respect for the limited and finite; its style is incarnational, as it were. His interest was not in some general liberation but in concrete practices, in the ways human agents exercise freedom in particular situations. He appreciated the difference between the analytical verbal confession and the historically earlier public manifestation of sinfulness as a state, the adoption of a 'theatricality' in which verbal expression was subordinated to a way of life which exhibited itself in acts of austerity and attitudes of repentance.³¹ The appeal of this ritual, incarnational dimension is demonstrated in an account of Foucault's intense viewing of Pope John Paul II's 1978 papal inauguration. Although he had flown to London to be interviewed on that day, his insistence on watching the televised ceremony made the conversation impossible and so he returned to Paris without any interview.³² Foucault appreciated that these

ceremonies were not ethereal but, rather, that they exercised power. For example, Foucault spoke of the impact of the service which the Archbishop of São Paulo held for a Jewish journalist who was killed by the police. The Jewish community could not hold a funeral so the Archbishop organized an interdenominational service, which

drew thousands and thousands of people into the church, on to the square and so on, and the cardinal in red robes presided over the ceremony, and he came forward at the end of the ceremony, in front of the faithful, and he greeted them shouting: 'Shalom, shalom'. And there was all around the square armed police and there were plain clothes policemen in the church. The police pulled back; there was nothing the police could do against that. I have to say, that had a grandeur of strength, there was a gigantic historical weight there.³³

This specific sensitivity to the historically weighty is an important element in Foucault's incarnational style.

His very notion of enlightenment and critique mirrors a religious discernment of spirits. As with the discernor, Foucault wants to understand how the present is different, how the critical question should become a positive one: 'In what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?'³⁴ This practice of discernment runs through his writings. His interest was with how knowledges operated in an historical field. His early turn away from psychology as a discipline was motivated by his appreciation of the human being's radical liberty and ability to challenge structures. Foucault strove to grasp not the conditions of possibility but rather the conditions of reality for institutions such as the asylum, the clinic and the prison. His criticism of humanism was a mode of escaping the abstract human sciences that functioned within that ideology. His analysis of power's operation in the strategies of a disciplinary society aimed to grasp how our modern sense of being human was produced by precise technologies and not just the ideas of philosophers. The journey of Foucault's incarnational discernment culminated in his final efforts to restore philosophy to being a way of living, a form of caring for the self and not just a type of knowledge. That effort entailed a new appreciation for spirituality, which Foucault saw as an ensemble of practices that create not the mere consciousness of the subject but the very being of the subject and its paths of understanding.³⁵ For Foucault, the practices of spirituality do not lead to an isolation from the world but rather a critical immersion into it and a refusal of its immutability. His spirituality is a political exercise, for he recognized that 'one of the first great forms of revolt in the west was mysticism'.³⁶

Living in the period that he did, Foucault could not help but encounter the effects of the political faiths that ravaged the 20th century. Although modernity's technological marvels and professed self-descriptions have obscured it, one could claim that the past century was a great Age of Faith. Western democracies, fascist states, the Communist world, all embraced great myths and preached the need for faith: belief in one's innocence, or in the providential destiny of one's race, or in the inevitable progress of class struggle. The continuing relevance of faith in the political realm is easy to appreciate when one takes notice of the contemporary fundamentalisms around the globe. From a Foucauldian perspective, mysticism as 'revolt' may represent a way of leaving the theological positivism and patriotism of

the Age of Faith. Problematic as the term ‘mysticism’ is within the history of religions, particularly as Jantzen has shown from a Foucauldian genealogical perspective, Foucault’s model of mysticism as ‘revolt’ does problematize the private-individualistic reading of mysticism developed in 20th-century psychology.³⁷ Mystic experience as social and political ‘revolt’ attaches us to an otherness which limits the claims of any theological categories as well as the unity organized within those concepts. The mystic’s intensity of experience is a human revolt against the modern subject and the ideological visions of nature and history that are anchored in that subjectivity. The idea of a Foucauldian mysticism of revolt is an elaboration of a way of relating to oneself differently from modern subjectivity; such practice is a politics of the self which will create new spiritual communities for us to inhabit. And we recognize that these communities will be in critical tension with established faith traditions. Some of the texts in this volume pick up this possibility and open the world and human knowledge to a reality or force that contests the present order of society. There is a constant opening to a transformative presence, something which pushes the human condition to find new possibilities and resists the ‘closure’ of the theological vision. The site of Foucauldian mysticism is a politically inspired social antagonism which allows that which is beyond and within humanity to find the hope of transfiguration and resurrection. It interrogates the limits of the human imagination and opens a vision for the possibility of developing new models for human engagement with each other, the world and the divine, a divine present and absent in the fragile and all-too-human theology.

The work of Michel Foucault stands as a significant voice for theology to rethink critically its project. Foucault’s work is nonetheless challenging for contemporary theology and the essays in this volume show the rich and imaginative ways his work can bring theology to a new critical understanding. They contribute to the ‘enduring problem’ of theology and culture and bring theology into the critical space of the politics of living and managing the truth of our being-in-the-world.

THE ESSAYS

The essays in this volume bring together a range of theological engagements with Foucault in the last 14 years and also draw together six new pieces from a range of scholars examining the contemporary engagement between Foucault and theology; the majority of these papers were originally delivered at a special colloquium at Loyola University in Chicago in 2000.³⁸ The aim of the collection is to give a sense of both the diverse range of theological questions inside Foucault’s work and the application of his work to theological concerns shaped by Foucault’s critical project. The volume has been divided into four parts according to the broad thematic concerns emerging from Foucault’s work. The first part brings together essays examining different aspects of a Foucauldian exploration of the church in late antiquity, the second opens up Foucault’s work on the politics of theology, the third draws together a collection of essays showing the interventions of Foucault’s work into the nature of theological knowledge and, finally, the fourth part shows the continuing importance of Foucault’s work for rethinking work on theology and sexuality. The collection does not attempt to capture every aspect of Foucault’s work or present every key

piece of scholarship in the area; it rather presents a representative number of past pieces (seven essays) and locates these alongside some important new avenues of exploration (six essays), by both new and more established scholars in the field of Foucauldian studies in theology. If the collection manages to raise a different set of questions and opens new problems for theology then it will carry the spirit of Foucault's work: we hope it will contest the institutional spaces of our knowledge and problematize contemporary theology.

Part One contains three previously published articles, which capture something of the scholarly trajectory of Foucault's work in relationship to the church in late antiquity. The field of late antiquity studies has grown enormously since Foucault's death and these essays can only be representative of the wider engagement. Nonetheless, the essays included are important landmarks and show different facets of the discussion, a corrective reading of Foucault's account of the early church Fathers, a utilization of Foucault's methodology for Biblical criticism and an engagement between Foucault and Augustine. Much of the work takes places in the shadow of Foucault's unpublished fourth volume on Christianity, which still remains an enigma for Foucault scholars.³⁹

Elizabeth Castelli's 'Interpretation of Power in 1 Corinthians', written originally in 1992, has become a classic essay in bringing Foucault's analysis of discourse and power to New Testament studies. It explores Paul's discourse in relationship to his 'conversation partners' – the Christians at Corinth – and tries to show the competing site of discourse and power. By playing on the 'lexical coincidence' between Paul and Foucault to develop a 'cultural critique' of Corinthians, Castelli reveals the strategies of power within the text.

Castelli makes power visible in the Biblical text and explores how this operates in Paul's elision of rhetoric and thematics. She uses Foucault effectively to show how power 'refocuses the analysis' of I Corinthians. She wants to reveal the 'multiplicity of discourses inhabiting the text' and how Paul asserts himself as 'privileged speaker'. In addition, she notes how Paul abstracts his power through a discourse of unity over-against the Corinthians who hold 'multiplicity and diffusion'. This analysis is located in a feminist analysis and Castelli reveals how the competing discourses are mapped onto the gendered body. The essay shows the creative and critical value of Foucault's work for biblical hermeneutics and reflects an important shift in such studies towards contemporary critical theory.

Elizabeth Clark's 'Foucault, the Fathers and Sex', written originally in 1988, was one of the first important moves in making Foucault's work on the early Fathers available to the academic theological world. It subsequently opened up a rich engagement between Foucault and church historians. After overviewing the content of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* for a new readership, the essay critically examines Foucault's account of the continuity and discontinuity between the Greco-Roman and Christian attitudes to sex. Clark tests the validity of Foucault's claims, highlights the problems of his historiography and notes the issues requiring qualification. She documents Foucault's concern with the aesthetic of the self, the solitary self-examination and the codified sexual acts according to authority. By taking the focus of the Desert Fathers of Egypt, she qualifies Foucault's argument, not least by suggesting that monastic life was not simply about 'sex in the head' but involved real anxieties about sexual activity. Clark also shows that Evagrius and Cassian do not

easily support Foucault's move towards an 'incitement to sexual discourse' or provide an easy road to Freud's Vienna. Clark's other concern is that Foucault makes no distinction between the themes in Clement of Alexandria and Cassian. She nonetheless recognizes that Foucault's treatment of the history of Christianity is dependent on 'scattered references' and whether the unpublished fourth volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* would answer these questions is unclear.

J. Joyce Schuld's 'Augustine, Foucault and the Politics of Imperfection', written in 2000, reflects a new interface between Foucault and late antiquity studies. Schuld's work makes an important step in Foucault studies by exploring an issue which will be undoubtedly illuminated much further when Foucault's fourth volume, containing a discussion of Augustine,⁴⁰ is – if ever – published. However, Schuld is not limited by the Foucault archive and seeks rather to show how Christian social ethics can benefit from a dialogue between the pre-modern and the postmodern. What Schuld demonstrates is that Augustine and Foucault hold similar political concerns about institutional power and the moral imperfections of human endeavours. She shows how Foucault is not a threat to the evaluative judgments of Christianity, but rather a source for critical understanding with his 'prophetically unsettling methods of scrutiny'.

After examining the problems of a dialogue between Christian social thought and Foucault and discussing the misunderstandings surrounding such an engagement, Schuld shows how Augustine's *City of God* and Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* carry similar political concerns and cross-fertilize each other. Both, she argues, are suspicious of 'culturally privileged rhetoric'. Augustine's concern about the appeals of 'imperial glory' and Foucault's concern about notions of 'scientific progress' are both attempts to question 'self-evident authority'. Schuld reveals how both Augustine and Foucault, even though dealing with different operations of power, attempt to 'shock' their readers in order to collapse the moral order of the day. Both, she argues, encourage a political commitment to the world and hold onto the 'fragility' and 'messiness' of the human condition. They both, according to Schuld, hold an 'antitriumphant' and 'antiutopian' approach to their respective worlds.

In Part Two, James Bernauer's 'Michel Foucault's Philosophy of Religion: an Introduction to the Non-Fascist Life' examines Foucault's thought as a form of resistance to the fascist glorification and production of the obedient subject as an ideal for human life. For Bernauer, there are three planes that organize Foucault's treatment of religion. First, Foucault's history of the present necessitates an excavation of the continuing role exercised by Christian technologies and problematics in defining modernity. Secondly, Foucault's thought, especially its last stages, provides tools for an effective religious self-criticism, an activity that itself remains a legacy of Christian traditions. Finally, Bernauer sees Foucault's privileging of friendship as an ethical experience to be a counter-force to the fascist project of creating states of permanent enmity. This essay shows how important for understanding Foucault's approach to religion are the yet to be published final lectures from his 1984 course at the Collège de France.

Michiel Leezenberg's 'Power and Political Spirituality: Michel Foucault on the Islamic Revolution in Iran' is one of the few investigations of Foucault's effort to grasp the historic significance of a specific contemporary event, the Iranian Revolution of 1978–79. He shows how various threads in Foucault's thought made

him sensitive to the novelty of the calls for change in Iran at a time when many, if not most, Western intellectuals saw those voices as encouraging a mere regression to the pre-modern. He was particularly interested in the spiritual dynamics of the masses which were in revolt against the Shah. Foucault was prescient of the important challenge which Islam's political force posed to customary modern styles of political analysis as well as to modern regimes of government. Since the attacks on New York and Washington of 11 September 2001, there has been wide recognition of the need to map the complex worlds of Islamic culture. More than 20 years earlier, Foucault had posed the task of that mapping before a large audience of readers. Leezenberg shows both the strengths and the weaknesses of those writings.

The title of John Caputo's essay, 'On Not Knowing Who We Are', captures perhaps the most significant and hard-won of Foucault's personal spiritual insights. Foucault renews a respect for a wise ignorance of ourselves. Such unknowing, referred to by Foucault as the 'night of truth', is a refusal of the positive, knowledgable identities that have been fabricated for human beings as ways of mastering them. Caputo portrays Foucault's writings as chapters in a hermeneutics of refusal that rejects an entire series of humanistic knowledges and their products: '*homo psychologicus, homo economicus, homo religiosus*'. For Foucault, all truth about the human is traversed by untruth. Witnessing to this negativity, realizing that we need not be who we are scripted to be is a practice of freedom that welcomes difference and that, for Caputo, could promote a distinctive caring for others in such healing acts as compassion and forgiveness.

In his 'Partially Desacralized Spaces: the Religious Availability of Foucault's Thought', the first essay of Part Three, Thomas Flynn indicates that one route to fruitful dialogue between Foucault and religious thought would cross the philosophical domain of event, space and experience. Foucault's stress on the category of event in his work protects him from subordination to any search for the metaphysical God of the philosophers. His orientation would be to the unrepeatable in history, to a Biblical sensibility. Foucault maintained that contemporary space was still not completely desacralized and his own travels seemed to reflect that argument. As one of his biographers reported, Foucault found in the desert of California experiences of transgression which served to transform his own intellectual trajectory. Finally, Flynn leads us to wonder about the forms of transcendence to which Foucault's restless journeys of mind and body brought him. Does Foucault present a type of secular mysticism in which one's exposure to the mystery of otherness exhibits the whirlwind of one's own 'non-unitary multiplicity'?

In 'Exomologesis and Aesthetic Reflection: Foucault's Response to Habermas', Andrew Cutrofello investigates Foucault's critical approach to modern technologies of the self and his effort to demonstrate their contingency. Cutrofello argues that the injunction of Foucault's last work, the call to care for the self, is part of a deliberately conceived strategy for subverting the triumphant, Socratic tradition of 'know thyself'. Cutrofello claims that Foucault aimed to reverse or transvalue the relationship between visible bodies and articulable speech. His argument takes account of Foucault's deep interest in the distinct forms of early Christian confessional practice: the contrast between the public performance of penance by a sinner (*exomologesis*) and the verbal confession of sins (*exagoreusis*) that was to become the standard Catholic form. Foucault's analysis of the two forms is shown to

reflect a common strategy in his work in which items of fascination open spaces for new ways of imagining. In Cutrofello's words, it is 'tempting to read Foucault as regularly attempting to conjure something like an experience of the sublime'.

Thomas Beaudoin enters into another experience of Foucault's life and creativity by considering his interest in music and the potential of that interest for reframing theological knowledge. His 'From Singular to Plural Domains of Theological Knowledge: Notes Toward a Foucaultian New Question' aims to loosen the grip of modern subjectivity on the theological domain. He enters into a conversation with Howard Gardner's effort to theorize a plurality of intelligences and, in the light of that work, Beaudoin presses the question of what is taken to count as theological. Are there subjugated modes of theological knowledge? Is musicality one of them? Beaudoin's contribution is a very suggestive proposal on the necessary pluralism of theological styles of understanding.

Henrique Pinto's 'The *More* Which Exceeds Us: Foucault, Roman Catholicism and Inter-faith Dialogue' develops Foucault's idea of the 'more' in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* to open the infinite possibilities of human becoming in the 'divine'. By locating theology in the decentred subject, historicity and finitude, Pinto seeks to establish a 'non-unitary theology of religious pluralism', which can transform human beings. His work develops an 'ethical sensibility of the other' and offers a critique of the Roman Catholic engagement in inter-faith dialogue. Following the work of Janzten and Carrette, he develops Foucault's theology of language and bridges the divide between the human and the divine. In this critical repositioning theology becomes a 'dialogical practice' and an 'embodied openness to the Other'. His work moves towards a 'Foucauldian mysticism' in creatively developing Foucault's 'more' as a theological concept. The 'more' constantly resists theological closure and marks out the spaces for Christian living in a world of 'open-ended dialogue with the other'. In the end, what Pinto establishes is not just a theological reading of Foucault, but a theological space within Foucault's writing. His engagement with the 'more' shows how Foucault's work, as Maurice Clavel found, can be inspirational to Christian faith – the openness to the 'more' in human life.

Part Four opens with Jeremy Carrette's 'Beyond Theology and Sexuality: Foucault, the Self and the Que(e)rying of Monotheistic Truth' which attempts to rethink theology outside the regime of sexuality, the fixed self and monotheistic truth. It argues that sexuality and monotheistic theology are fundamentally related and control both the body and the understanding of God. By documenting how Foucault's genealogy has been developed in 'queer theory', Carrette seeks to show how Foucault offers a way out of 'sexuality'. He argues that theological engagement with the discourse of sexuality continues an oppressive epistemology, because it anchors reality in a single point. Carrette's essay explores how queer theory can assist theology in overcoming its fascist tendency to control the body and God. In an exploration of Foucault's work on the Christian self, Carrette reveals how Christianity, as opposed to Buddhism, is located in a single truth of self, God and sexuality. Developing Foucault's critical history of the self, he examines the problematic of bisexuality and the multiplicity of desire. He argues that modern theology continues to have a problem with a 'multiple self'. Carrette's essay is an attempt to celebrate the diversity of Christian living and complexity of desire. His challenge to theology is to give up the control of the body by giving up the

human–theological control and order of God. The essay shows how theology can liberate itself in the very ambiguity and uncertainty of Christian living.

Taking his starting point from a subtle reflection on Foucault's distinction between the 'sodomite' and the 'homosexual', Mark Jordan leads us into a consideration of the power possessed by Christian rhetorical programmes in regard to sexuality. His 'Sodomites and Churchmen: the Theological Invention of Homosexuality' argues that, contrary to frequent interpretation of Foucault, his history of sexuality does not claim that modern viewpoints on sexuality have simply replaced the Christian rhetoric of sinful identities. Jordan does acknowledge a difference of functions between the two regimes: "'Sodomite" functions as a category for denouncing and excluding, while "homosexual" is a category for managing and regulating.' He shows, however, that both rhetorics endure and, thus, at least in the case of Roman Catholic documents, the 'rhetorical logic of "sodomy" persists under the new term "homosexuality"'. Faced with theologies that may be defunct and yet still devouring, Jordan wonders about the potential for resistance of certain theological categories. Whether that resistance emerges or not, Jordan's analysis forces us to confront the continuing, often unrecognized, influence of Christian churches 'over the imagin-ation of sex in societies that once were Christendom'.

From the perspective of Foucault's approach to ethical formation, Michael Mahon's 'Catholic Sex' examines an important set of popular 20th-century American Catholic moral pamphlets about sex. He finds that they exhibit profoundly modern versions of the self and of manhood. They promote a Cartesian subjectivity aimed at independence from the world and at estrangement from the bodily. They foster a masculinity that is both domineering and suspicious of companionship. Mahon draws a sharp distinction between the ideal of self-control which these texts extol and a Christian path of self-denial and self-sacrificing love.

NOTES

- 1 The phrase 'postmodern theology' can be misleading. It can imply both a periodization and a philosophical position. In the former sense it is broadly used to refer to theology after modernity, but this is problematic in terms of its modernist assumptions about history. In its philosophical sense the term 'postmodern' is used loosely to include French 'post-structuralists' (Foucault, Derrida, Levinas, Lacan, Kristeva), but more nuanced readings abandon such simple and misleading equations. The term 'postmodernism' still has a currency with reference to the work of Baudrillard and Lyotard. See, for example, David Macey, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory* (London: Penguin, 2000) and Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).
- 2 Preliminary versions of several of these papers were presented at a colloquium, 'Michel Foucault: Religious Explorations', which was held on 26 April 2000 at Loyola University in Chicago (see Acknowledgements). James Bernauer wishes to thank Loyola University, its Department of Philosophy and its Jesuit Community for their support during that year.
- 3 Hans Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992).
- 4 H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1951).

- 5 Michel Foucault, 'Who are you, Professor Foucault?' (1967), reprinted in *Religion and Culture* by Michel Foucault, ed. Jeremy Carrette (Manchester University Press & Routledge, 1999, p.91).
- 6 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (London: Penguin, 1975, p.30); Jeremy Carrette, *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporality and Political Spirituality* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000, pp.109–28).
- 7 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Routledge, [1966] 1991, p.xi); James Bernauer, *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Toward an Ethics for Thought* (Amherst, New York: Humanities Press, 1990, pp.61ff).
- 8 Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, pp.25ff.
- 9 Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, pp.108–28.
- 10 Bernauer, *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight*, pp.61ff, 178.
- 11 David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (London: Hutchinson, 1993, pp.192, 415); Jeremy Carrette, 'Prologue to a Confession of the Flesh', in *Religion and Culture* by Michel Foucault, p.15.
- 12 Bernauer, *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight*, p.178; Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, pp.85–108, 146–7.
- 13 For example, Bryan Turner, *Religion and Social Theory* (London: Sage [1983] 1991); Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Mark Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Grace Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).
- 14 Anthony Thisleton, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Eerdmans Paternoster, 2000).
- 15 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* (London: Penguin, 1984, pp.8–9).
- 16 Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p.9.
- 17 Christopher Dawson, *Religion and Culture* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1947); Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1950); Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Galaxy and Oxford University Press, 1964); Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (1951).
- 18 Michel Foucault, *Remarks on Marx* (New York: Semiotext(e) [1978] 1991, pp.159ff); Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, p.130.
- 19 Foucault, *Remarks on Marx*, pp.148, 170.
- 20 Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power', in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980, p.114).
- 21 See Laura Penny, 'Catholic, more or less', *Globe and Mail*, 4 March 2000; Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, p.151. We are also grateful to Paul Morris for his reflections on Foucault's Catholic inheritance.
- 22 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* (London: Penguin [1976] 1990); Foucault, 'About the Beginnings of the Hermeneutics of the Self' [1980] in *Religion and Culture*, pp.158–81.
- 23 David Tracey, *The Analogical Imagination* (London: SCM, 1981).
- 24 John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987, esp. pp.1–36).
- 25 Michel Foucault, *Les Anormaux: Cours au Collège de France, 1974–1975* (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 1999, pp.180, 188).
- 26 *Les Anormaux: Cours au Collège de France, 1974–1975*, pp. 174–5.
- 27 *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and Modern Oblivion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 2nd rev. edn). This was first published as a special issue of the journal *October*, 25 (Summer, 1983). James Bernauer sent Foucault a copy of the issue

which Foucault acknowledged receipt of, expressing his hope of finding a French publisher for it. (Note from Foucault to Bernauer, 5 February 1984).

- 28 *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and Modern Oblivion*, p.3.
- 29 *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and Modern Oblivion*, pp.234, 237.
- 30 William Lynch, *Christ and Apollo: The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1960).
- 31 Foucault, 'On the Government of the Living', in *Religion and Culture*, p. 155.
- 32 Bernauer owes the story to a conversation with Foucault's partner, Daniel Defert.
- 33 Foucault, 'On Religion', in *Religion and Culture*, p. 107.
- 34 'What is Enlightenment?', in *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984, Volume I: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997, p.315).
- 35 Foucault, *L'herméneutique du sujet: Cours au Collège de France, 1981–1982* (Paris: Gallimard Seuil, 2001, p.17).
- 36 Michel Foucault, 'What Is Critique?' in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext[e], 1997, p.74).
- 37 See Janzten, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*; Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (London: Routledge, 1999, pp.7–34).
- 38 See note 2.
- 39 See *Religion and Culture*, where Carrette tries to recover some of the available fragments of this volume.
- 40 See *Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault*, ed. Carrette, pp.45, note 205; 184ff.

I
FOUCAULT AND THE
CHURCH IN LATE
ANTIQUITY