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REVIEW SYMPOSIUM

“Spiritual Gymnastics”: Reflections on Michel Foucault’s *On the Government of the Living* 1980 Collège de France lectures

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ABSTRACT: This review locates the 1980 lectures within the context of the wider discussions of Foucault and religion; highlighting the influence of George Dumézil on the comparative and structural analysis. Assessing the problem of the historical accuracy of Christian history in Foucault’s work and the nature of the archaeological approach, the review explores what would be fair to ask of Foucault’s 1980 lectures on Christianity. The review focuses on the internal consistency, selections and theoretical tensions. While acknowledging that Foucault picks up the important shift towards external ritual performance of early Christian life, the review questions Foucault’s lack of appreciation of the notion of “sacramentum,” which informs the central interpretative framework of “truth acts.” The review suggests that Foucault’s thinking is shaped by an “expressionist theology” and operates on a false binary distinction between faith and practice. It shows the problematic reading of Tertullian and the indivisibility between acts and faith in his work and reveals the counter-conduct and freedom practices in Tertullian’s later Montanist commitment—which rejected church authority for inner commitment to God—and also suggests a gendered dimension to expressionist acts. The review reveals Foucault’s own inability to split the faith-practice dichotomy—on which his expressionistic argument depends—and highlights the tensions that persist in maintaining a “truth-act” model from early Christian life. It concludes by suggesting that the philosophy-theology relation in Foucault opens more questions than it resolves.

Keywords: expressionist theology; faith; beliefs; acts; practice; second penance; truth act

The visible sacrifice is the sacrament, the sacred sign, of an invisible sacrifice.¹

¹ Augustine, *City of God* (Harmondsworth: Middlesex: Penguin, 1984), Book 10, chapter 5, 377.

With the publication of the 1980 Collège de France lectures, the initial “French laughter,” intellectual “surprise” and academic “confusion” surrounding Foucault’s interventions into religion, spirituality and early Christianity are given opportunity for more reflection. These lectures present material that may help rethink Foucault’s critical challenge and reconfigure the textual allusions to religion woven throughout Foucault’s oeuvre; marginalized, and sometimes ignored, in the secular academy and the binary politics that sees “religion” as a fetish or thing set apart from everything else—something Foucault refused and resituated in the “history of the present.” In these lectures, Foucault makes significant claims for the importance of early Christian history to our present life. He, for example, is clear that deep in the baptismal and penitential theology of Tertullian “is something rather important in the history of our civilization” (144), that the Christian concern with the second penance (a post-baptismal repentance of sins) is significant to the issue of truth and subjectivity in “the whole of Western civilization” (194) and that the techniques of “telling all about oneself” in Christian monasticism are at the “very heart” of “Western subjectivity” (266). Over inflated or not, Foucault reveals how theology and religion matter to contemporary social and political thought and practice. In archaeology and genealogy, the details of religion become “fascinating” and “utterly gripping” (171) for Foucault.

Furthermore, the 1980 lectures will perhaps shift us towards—some would say consolidate—an appreciation of how religion and theology are an important part of Foucault scholarship and challenge any understanding that seeks to remove religion from an “analysis of the cultural facts” (as Foucault recognized was necessary and valuable as far back as 1969). It will also return us once again to appreciate the influence of George Dumézil’s structural and functional analysis of religion,² as Foucault acknowledged was important to his thinking.³ Dumézil’s underlying structural forms of myth, belief and practice in the ancient world are arguably present in this engagement with Christian ritual acts, with neat schemas, shifts, and comparative analysis. More specifically, we see how the 1980 lectures reposition Christianity in the intellectual and methodological procedures of Foucault’s reading of truth-subjectivity in Western culture.

In many ways these issues and discussions of Christianity and religion are not new to Foucault scholarship (as seen in the varied fragments of Foucault’s lectures on similar material and studies by those who have previously explored the recordings in the Foucault Archive). However, the lectures provide a greater “manifestation” of Foucault’s truth about Christian practices of the self in a more precise order—the “alethurgy” (7) of the Collège de France publication ritual from the inner archival world of the taped-recorded moment. They also offer additional revelations of Foucault’s unpublished *Confessions of the Flesh*, awaiting its—perhaps impossible—“manifestation”

² George Dumézil (1898-1986) studied the structural and functional values of Indo-European myths. He examined a “tripartite ideology” of sovereignty, physical power and fecundity, which functioned in the social world through priest, warrior, and artisan (see Dumézil, *Archaic Roman Religion*, Vols. 1 and 2, translated by Philip Krapp (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press [1966] 1996)).

³ M. Foucault, “Who are you, Professor Foucault?” in Lucille Cairns (trans.) and Jeremy Carrette (ed.), *Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault* (London: Routledge, 1967), 98.

in publication. At least the 1980 lectures give us another part of the puzzle in resolving that publishing enigma of the incomplete 4th volume of the *History of Sexuality*, something Michel Senellart helpfully unfolds in his course context reflections in this volume (342-347).

Importantly, we now have more accessible material to position Foucault's engagement with religion in his philosophical-histories. Though, as Philippe Chevallier generously reflects in his own study of Foucault and Christianity, it is a wonder that with such a rich harvest of materials in Foucault's work that few followed the earlier opening of these issues,⁴ especially as there is more secondary material on Foucault and religion than is noted in Chevallier (see the *Foucault Studies* review of the wider work on Foucault and Theology by John McSweeney).⁵ There have also been many specific reflections on the 1980 Collège de France lectures.⁶ Not to forget, Chevallier's systematic attempt to read Foucault's work on Christianity as a more coherent body of material and his attempt to provide an important step in putting the 1980 papers in order, as opposed to the gathering of the "fragments."⁷ Though the fragmentary may well prove the greatest insight. As Foucault states with reference to the Christian materials in the 1980 lectures: "at the very most I will be able to give only some fragments" (101). He had already acknowledged that his study would only explore "partial aspects of Christianity" (92). The apologetics of the archaeologist's style throughout the Collège de France lectures always entail gestures to the historical "sketch" and to "roughly speaking" (134, 198), which confirm the fragmentary.

Chevallier's work eases the philosophical appropriation of Christianity by masterfully unfolding the strategic frame and the theological and textual chronology, but significantly he concludes that it would be "unfair" to ask of Foucault wider theological considerations—perhaps on the assumption his strategic use of Christianity frees him from too much critical historical interrogation.⁸ It would indeed be "unfair" to question Foucault as a theologian, which he clearly was not. He was, as he states in these lectures, a "negative theorist, not a negative theologian" (76). Chevallier is right to suggest that we cannot ask Foucault to include all aspects of Christian history, but this should not preclude us from asking difficult questions. What would be fair to ask of Foucault's 1980 lectures on Christianity?

The archaeological method, the strategic framework, and the fact that—as Jordon delightfully indicates—Foucault "makes the mistakes of a brilliant non-specialist or anti-specialist" but

⁴ See P. Chevallier, *Michel Foucault et le christianisme* (Lyon: ENS Editions, 2011); J.W. Bernauer, and J.R. Carrette, *Foucault and Theology: The Politics of Religious Experience* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004).

⁵ J. McSweeney, "Foucault and Theology," *Foucault Studies*, No. 2 (2005), 117-110.

⁶ See J.W. Bernauer, *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Towards an Ethics for Thought* (London: Humanities, 1990); J.-M. Landry, "Confession, Obedience, and Subjectivity: Michel Foucault's Unpublished Lectures *On the Government of Living*," *Telos*, no. 146 (Spring 2009), 111-23; A. Szakolczai, *The Genesis of Modernity* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2003), 141-169; and, more recently, M. Jordon, *Convulsing Bodies: Religion and Resistance in Foucault* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014).

⁷ J.R. Carrette, *Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault* (Manchester: Manchester University Press/New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁸ See Chevallier, *Michel Foucault et le christianisme*, 349.

“asks more interesting questions about Christian power than most specialists do” shows us something about the limits and expectations of his project.⁹ There is no doubt that Foucault offers much to theology and the history of religion by “displacing” theological knowledge to the body-power-truth-subjectivity dimensions—and I have celebrated his contribution elsewhere¹⁰—but perhaps it is fairer to assess Foucault’s 1980 lectures according to their internal consistency and to see if his archaeological sketch is successful on his own terms.

Foucault is certainly not averse to correcting his own historical “mistakes,” as he does in lecture 7 in correction of a point in lecture 6; where he confuses Tertullian’s *De Baptismo* as a tract against a Gnostic group he referred to as the Nicolaitians rather than the Cainites (148). He plays with his audience in suggesting they would have corrected the “mistake,” but such precision is another tension within the “sketch” of the archaeologist. When is it right to correct the archaeologist as historian? This debate has long shaped the pages of Foucauldian commentary¹¹ and, as Elizabeth Clark underlined in 1988, the material on the Church Fathers is no exception and requires a “leap of faith.”¹² Are factual corrections necessary, as Foucault suggests, but omissions and inconsistencies unimportant? Significantly, Foucault recognized the reality of critical “reproach” (12) when assessing the success of his approach. The important point—as we have noted—is that he is using the Christian material to make wider philosophical comments about truth and subjectivity in Western society: the obligation and ritual manifestation of truth. Working through the 1980 lectures provides us with an insight into a profound question of inner worlds and external acts, which define the human animal as a social being shaped by truth claims.

The Baptismal-Confessional Apparatus

Negotiating the philosopher-historian, as O’Farrell so insightfully demonstrated,¹³ is never easy, but understanding the philosophical ordering of the history is key to making sense of the 1980 lectures. It is well known that Foucault’s claim that Christianity is a confessional religion is somewhat limiting and reflective of his Catholic position.¹⁴ It is, nonetheless, clear that Foucault had already set the dynamics and agenda of his “tell me who you are” model in *History of Sexuality, volume 1*. In 1976 Foucault stresses the “obligation to confess” and underlines its persistence through to present society in so far as “Western man has become a confessing animal.”¹⁵ The argument in 1976 and 1980 holds much the same force, even if the historical material is different. As

⁹ Jordon, *Convulsing Bodies*, 123.

¹⁰ See J.R. Carrette, *Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault*; J.R. Carrette, *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporality and Political Spirituality* (London: Routledge, 2000).

¹¹ See H. V. White, “Foucault Decoded: Notes from the Underground,” *History and Theory*, vol. 12 (1973), 23-54.

¹² E.A. Clark, “Foucault, The Fathers and Sex,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 56, no. 4 (1988), 625.

¹³ C. O’Farrell, *Foucault: Historian or Philosopher?* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

¹⁴ See Bernauer, and Carrette, *Foucault and Theology*.

¹⁵ M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality; Volume 1*, translated by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1976), 59-60.

Foucault suggests: “the confession became one of the West’s most highly valued techniques for producing truth.”¹⁶ When Foucault recognises that “sex is boring,”¹⁷ and that subjectivity and truth become the new focus, it is still the confessional apparatus, albeit extended to the related pre-and post-baptismal material in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th century BCE, that drives the selection of the Christian material. As Foucault (84) reiterates in 1980: “Christianity really is, at bottom, essentially, the religion of confession” (either of faith or confession of self). The central concern for the archaeologist is what is selected for a narrative of strategic emergence in the present. It is on these grounds that we gain a better understanding of Foucault’s 1980 lectures.

What becomes fascinating in this work is how Foucault consciously moves back to the methods of archaeology—or “anarchaeology” (79) as he somewhat jokingly suggests. It is a return to a discursive mode rather than continuing the genealogical—body and pastoral power—question in relation to Christianity (79, 100). The “displacement” (76) and theoretical frame with which Foucault approaches Christianity requires a long preparatory process in order to shift our thinking from ideological and objective concerns. It takes Foucault until the middle of the 5th lecture (6th February, page 100) before he concedes to finish “this rather over-long introduction,” not just of the 5th lecture, but, as it turns out, the entire course introduction. The framing is extensive so as to map the space of concern, and to shift the register of our observations. Such an introductory process included: (1) opening the theme of government and truth with Emperor Septimius Severus’s ceremonial hall and the relation to ritual performance, with his idea of “alethurgy” (9th January Lecture); (2) use of Oedipus as example of the ritual manifestation of truth (16th January Lecture); (3) further unfolding of the Oedipus example to show the techniques or procedures of truth manifestation (23rd January Lecture); (4) the specific methodological approach to Christianity and its relation to the regime of truth (30th January Lecture); and (5) a final extension of the notion of regimes of truth, before outlining the key areas of baptism, penance, and spiritual direction (6th February Lecture), the subjects of the subsequent lectures (13th February to 26th March). What is established in this process is a clearing—or “getting rid of”—for the selectivity and setting down of parameters concerning the “mechanisms and procedures” (12) for the “manifestation of truth in the form of subjectivity” (80). Borrowing from Medieval sacramental theology, he frames this in terms of “*actus veritatis*” or, as Foucault will call it, the “truth act” (“*acte de vérité*”) as part of the salvific schema (81, 178). We might suggest that what Foucault is establishing is a kind of anthropology of Christian practice, acts rather than beliefs. However, the passing and forgotten gesture towards the “sacramental” is precisely where we find the illumination and problem in Foucault’s 1980 lectures, even if the archaeologist’s gaze is now established.

Foucault’s “truth act” gaze isolates and privileges a baptismal-confession apparatus and brackets out Christology and pneumatology. This is baptism by water, not the anointing of oil

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁷ M. Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress” in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (London: Penguin, 1983), 340.

and not the benediction of the Holy Spirit, which also shapes Tertullian's narrative.¹⁸ It is also neither "the symbolics of blood" —the forgotten strand of his first foray into the history of sexuality¹⁹—nor an interpretation of Christ's redemptive action or 2nd century Christian martyrdom. Tertullian reflected on "two baptisms," albeit one metaphorical of redemption in Christ; recognizing "those who had faith in his blood were to be washed in water, and those who had washed in water would need also [to be washed] in blood."²⁰ Foucault's reading is, in part, a continuation of his 1978 Collège de France lecture model of the tripartite schema of law-salvation-truth (the Dumezilian echo) and there is much here for a comparative or cross-cultural reading of salvific structures; with conversion structures involving trance, seizure by higher power, awakening, dream, memory, and reunion mentioned alongside Christianity. However, Christianity is "unique in the field of cultures and civilizations" involving a salvific model through "death" and the "other" [resistance to the devil] (159-160).

Although Foucault's modeling is mainly between Greco-Roman and Christian, the Dumezilian comparative skill extends the "schema of salvation" (178) to include passing mention of Buddhism and Hinduism (186, 228, 232) and reminding us of Foucault's stay in a Zen temple in Japan and fascination with other models of truth-subjectivity; something also evident in his reading of Islamic subjectivity in Iran.²¹ However, in the 1980 lectures the cross-cultural model shows not only different structures, as for example those found in Eastern "Enlightenment" models which do not require subject positions (186), but also shared techniques of manifestation and direction across East and West (228, 232). What makes Christianity stand out and makes it distinct from the Greco-Roman tradition is the fact that the "exploration of oneself is on a quite different scale" (228). It also generates "salvation in non-perfection" by "dissociating salvation and perfection" (259). In this sense, the "truth act" inside the salvific framework of Christianity is based on, what we may call, a specific salvation of *expression*. The Christian has a "truth deep within," a "deep secret," that needs to be shown (312-313). However, while the obligation "you have to" (96) and the demand to "show yourself" (148, 201, 213) are read by Foucault as something vital to Western truth-subjectivity, it should not be assumed that Foucault is implying "interiority" that is waiting to be discovered and brought out (308-309). According to Foucault, the "law of externalization" (308) is to produce the self/truth in the "act," not retrieve it. There are no pre-existing "identities" awaiting emergence in "alethurgy." This is behaviourist Christianity, concerned with act and expression, not interiority.

¹⁸ Tertullian, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism* (London: SPCK, 1964), 17.

¹⁹ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 148.

²⁰ Tertullian, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, 35. Square brackets from original.

²¹ M. Foucault, "Michel Foucault and Zen: A stay in a Zen temple," in Jeremy Carrette (ed.), and Richard Townsend (trans.), *Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault* (London: Routledge, 1978), 110-114.

What drives the selection of the archaeologist is what we can call—adopting Phillip Cary’s reflections on “outward signs” in Augustine’s theology²²—an “expressionist” concern with discourse and practice. Significantly, Augustine rejects the powerlessness of external signs for the power of inward grace. In Foucault, however, we find an anthropology of “expressionist” Christian practices, not a theology of faith; a politics of expression, not a Christianity with inner depth. In effect, Foucault creates a foundational myth for the Western subject caught in the predicament of a culture that demands “tell me who you are” and Christianity services this myth, with profound insight and confusing limitations along the way.

Expressionist Theology

Foucault is not entirely wrong to highlight “truth acts” or the nature of the “expressionist” theology²³, it certainly shapes a serious part of our cultural condition (even if not the entire story). To Foucault’s credit he is aware of the historical conditions of the Christian context and the rationale for expression. Foucault recognizes that the shifts in Christian history arise from a changing set of circumstances, something the great church historians long knew. Foucault is aware of its relation to Hellenistic culture, its response to pagan rites and Gnostic challenges (118-9, 147-148, 309). Overall, Foucault has picked up something important about the politics of “manifestation” in early Christianity. For example, though unaware of the British church historian Henry Chadwick and his 1967 understanding of baptismal rites, Foucault’s work can be seen to find much agreement with Chadwick’s assessment of the Christian need for external manifestation of their status or truth. As Chadwick asserts:

But the Christians were well aware that if they were to be a society with a coherent community life they could not live on a purely individualistic inwardness. They needed form and order, and they knew that the visible signs of baptism and eucharist were *dona data*, God’s gifts to his church, *verba visibilia*, a visible actualization of the very substance of the gospel.²⁴

External manifestation of truth through ritual, as the 1980 lectures exhibit, was a key part of governmentality. Whether of a Roman emperor, Oedipus or Christian convert the ritual acts of truth were required for community coherence and Foucault effectively documents this fact.

Importantly, Foucault’s structure is one that sustains his argument to build a model of the institutionalization and intensification of pre-Christian practices according a gradual expansion of the “tell me who you are” foundational myth. The steps towards institutionalization and intensi-

²² P. Cary, *Outward Signs: The Powerlessness of External Things in Augustine’s Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); M. Foucault, “Iran: The Spirit of a World Without Spirit,” in Lawrence D. Kritzman (ed.) and Alan Sheridan (trans.), *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984* (London: Routledge, 1979), 211-224.

²³ “Expressionist” theology is one built on external signs/manifestations not inner states. It neglects inner motivations and commitment for exterior actions. See Cary *Outward Signs*.

²⁴ H. Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin, 1967), 258.

fication in Christianity are crafted according to three neatly divided stages of repentance (170): pre-baptismal technologies and “repentance only in baptism” (lectures 6 and 7); post-baptismal technologies and “collective repentance” (lectures 8 and 9) and techniques of spiritual direction and “renewable repentance” (lectures 10, 11 and 12). Each of these steps is seen to provide evidence of the way Christianity is institutionalized (145) as a set of practices already in play in the ancient world and each is built on forms of “manifestation” or “expression.” It seeks to show how the Christian tradition moved towards a slow intensification of penitential practices from the one-off baptismal event to the frequent confessional practice, albeit this relates to wider theological and social factors.

Each of these steps services Foucault’s desire for an historical model of Western truth-subjectivity, from Christian confession to the present, but they rest on a number of fault lines in the text that unravel much of the intensification process of “tell me who you are”: sacrament, resistance, and the binary politic of belief-practice. Foucault’s narrative inadvertently narrows the analysis of inner/outer truth inside sacrament, restricts the elements of resistance and limits the resources for freedom practices within Christianity. Ultimately, these steps expose the faith-practice tensions within Foucault’s text, which wrongly polarize Eastern and Western Christianity as holding the “pole of faith” and the “pole of confession” respectively (134-5).

The Lost Sacrament and Tertullian’s Trick

Foucault, as I have suggested, creates a framework to read baptism-confession by extracting or using a passing link to Medieval sacramental theology (through the work of Tommaso de Vio) and the idea of “*actus veritatis*,” the “truth act” (“*acte de vérité*”), but what is never sufficiently unfolded is the emergence of sacrament in relation to baptism and confession that is associated with this interpretative idea, because the “truth-act” is related to the nature of a deep boundary of inner and outer worlds that rests behind the “tell me who you are” problematic of Foucault’s narrative. In a long forgotten text from 1876, by Wolfred Nelson Cote, suitably entitled *The Archaeology of Baptism*—though obviously referring to the non-Foucauldian variant of archaeology—the logic of sacrament becomes clear: “The natural tendency of the human mind is to adopt a physical and outward act as a sign, figure, symbol, or representation of an inward and spiritual state.”²⁵ Cote is recalling the long established tradition of sacrament from Tertullian and Augustine, which carries forward the longer traditions of the *logos* from the Stoics. Augustine’s work on inner states and external signs as a foundation of sacramental theology is well-known in theological circles, but its emergence, I wish to argue, helps us understand the operations and choices Foucault is making in these lectures.

It was in the text on baptism—the opening line and in numerous sections to follow—that Tertullian deploys the Latin term “*sacramentum*”/“*sacramento*”;²⁶ carrying forward the older

²⁵ A.N.Cote, *The Archaeology of Baptism*, (London: Yates & Alexander, 1876), 1.

²⁶ “*Sacramentum/sacramento*,” as Evans’s Latin-English version of Tertullian’s *On Baptism* shows, means “the whole sacred act, in which material things are used for spiritual purposes” (E. Evans, “Introduction,” in Tertulli-

Greek term “mysterion” and partly implying the Roman oath. However, as Ernest Evans makes clear in his translation of *De Baptismo*, Tertullian does hold the seeds of the later sacramental tradition in his work on baptism, as it evolves through Augustine’s theological semiotics of inner and outer reality in the 13th century discussion and beyond.²⁷ Foucault never sufficiently reflects on Tertullian’s idea of “*sacramentum*” in *De Baptismo*, but its importance to baptism and penitence is vital. It is vital not only because it connects baptism and penitence to Foucault’s central interpretative schema of “truth act” – taken from “the sacrament of penance” (81) – but because it illuminates the very structure of “truth-subjectivity” in the dynamic of external manifestation and inner truth – the invisible truth. Sacrament in Tertullian offers the potential for a different archaeological understanding. Furthermore, Foucault’s decision in these lectures to focus on Cassian (c.360-435), without also engaging Augustine (354-430), is to miss the apparatus that could illuminate the truth-act. There are only three brief references to Augustine in the 1980 lectures. There are, however, considerably more in the 1980 James lecture, but this text returns to the uncontrollable sexual body – sex in erection – rather than the truth-subjectivity question of the 1980 lectures.²⁸

The shifts of focus and selective decisions distort something central about the truth-subjectivity question. It relates to what I am suggesting is Foucault’s preoccupation with a kind of “expressionist” agenda of Christianity in the 1980 lectures: the “acts” and “manifestations.” Of course, in the Stoic-Augustinian tradition of expressionistic theology there is more emphasis on inwardness, but the nature of “manifestation” shapes Foucault’s thinking. It relates to the ontological nature of human expression and truth obligations. How do we ever know the inner truth of the other? We can see the dynamics of *exomologesis* and *exagoreusis* as constitutive elements of what I am suggesting is an expressionistic logic at play in Foucault, but it is wrong to assume that Christianity valued the “external act” above the “inner word”; just as Stoics saw the importance of the inner *logos* so Christianity found truth without act. It is worth noting that Foucault is aware of the link between Cicero and Augustine in the 1980 lectures, but his avoidance of the theological semiotics of sacrament from Tertullian onwards means that Foucault approaches Christian theology and truth-subjectivity without a vital tool to articulate the archaeology of truth-subjectivity in Christian thought. While Foucault’s insights remain illuminating they could have been stronger if he recognized the inescapability of the belief-practice binary and understood the inner/outer

an *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism* (London: SPCK, 1964), xxxix). I use the term in this sense, as developed by Augustine – see the opening quotation from Augustine’s *City of God*. In short, “*sacramentum*” refers to the outward sign of the invisible faith. While Foucault frames his discussion in the 1980 lectures through a relation to the medieval discussion of the sacrament of penance, he does not comment or sufficiently appreciate the history of term “sacrament” and neglects Tertullian’s key use in his text on baptism (81).

²⁷ Evans, “Introduction,” xxxviii–xl, see also E. Evans, “Notes and Commentary,” in loc. cit., 45–110.

²⁸ For a summary of Foucault’s use of Augustine, see J.R. Carrette, “Foucault, Michel,” in Karla Pollmann (ed.), *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine; Volume 2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013), 1002–1004.

world of sacramental signs. “Tell me who you are” is a predicament of human identity that Cicero understood in terms of activity revealing the soul and Augustine questioned in terms of semiotics. Acts reveal, but for Augustine it is the inner world and the relation to truth (the inner relation to God outside of act) that remains important. We might add that the “obligatory” act is also not Tertullian’s final word. Foucault’s study suffers from what we may refer to, following Eric Osborn’s study of Tertullian, as “Tertullian’s trick.”²⁹ The way the complex skills of Tertullian as orator make partial readings a distortion of his work.

There is one single aspect of Foucault’s lecture that unravels his neat “expressionist” narrative and it relates to the significance of the pre- and post-Montanist writings of Tertullian. Foucault (206) shows cognizance of this change in Tertullian’s position but does not explore the fact as significant (presumably because these facts do not embellish the archaeological selections for “acts” as opposed to the inner relation to God). As Foucault writes in summary of the Montanist position: “The Church cannot take the decision for God.” In this one line Foucault stumbles over the weakness of his own analysis, because it reveals the force of inner piety that would shape what he calls in the 1978 lectures “counter-conduct”: the practices that “redistribute, reverse, nullify, and partially or totally discredit pastoral power.”³⁰ For Foucault, such practices were present in “mysticism” and, significantly, these practices were a kind of resistance to external acts; Christianity can be resistance against “obligations” and outer acts.

Conformity to the church in pre-Montanist Tertullian is one part of the story and the selective focus shows the fragility of the expressionist narrative, because post-Montanist Tertullian is very different. Post-Montanist Tertullian shows the truth of resistance and the fact that Christianity held its own practices of freedom; a tradition that significantly valued women’s religious prophecy (with Priscilla and Maximilla) and one that perhaps reveals a male expressionist politic in the monastic rules of Cassian. Christianity has both expressionist “truth-act” dimensions of “obligation” and inner counter-discourses of “resistance” (due to the inner connection with God); it is not one or the other because Christianity is not a single tradition, but represents a wide array of different forms, expressions, and inner explorations. Foucault touches some of this tension in lecture 4 (30th January) when he explores the “major fault line in Christianity” —the question of the Catholic-Protestant split. For Foucault “avowal” and “faith” come together in the Protestant tradition with “conscience” and “subjectivity exploring itself,” which he sees as a “type [form] of truth act” (85). The ambiguity of “type/form” strains the argument. There are two issues that weaken Foucault’s position here. The first is that the vitality and centrality of the inner relationship to God is evident in the early Church Fathers, in post-Montanist Tertullian and Augustine, as something above and beyond the external manifestation. Second, the perceived united position of faith-avowal is also evident in the Early Church, indeed Foucault’s 1980 lectures constantly falter on the belief-practice binary form, not least because the truth-act is never separate from the divine

²⁹ E. Osborn, *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 6.

³⁰ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population, Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, translated by Graham Burchell (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 204.

horizon, which is something Foucault seeks to split to privilege the expressive act. The belief-practice fallacy haunts the archaeologist and—it would appear—Foucault’s own logic.

Belief-Practice and Expression

What constantly intersects and separates in the 1980 lectures are the ritual acts of truth and sets of beliefs. The entire structure of the 1980 lectures is an attempt to “decouple” faith and truth-acts for the “tell me who you are” foundational rationale. It shapes and determines the structure of the lectures. While Foucault concedes that truth-telling is “a multiple and complex process” (49) and recognizes he is not privileging “content of belief” but truth-act over belief (83)—his “displacement” of the ideological (76-80)—he stumbles at key moments to maintain this position. The problem is that his work, as he suggests, rests on the “therefore” of truth: Descartes’s “I think” holds the “therefore” of “I am” (96-98). The action related to the “therefore” is conditional on the claim of “truth” and so belief haunts the narrative of the truth-act. The key shift emerges in the discussion of Tertullian in lecture 6, where the pre-baptismal unitary scheme is “decoupled”; “illumination” or teaching is separated from “asceticism” or discipline in the privileging of the “act” (130). The “unitary movement” of *metanoia* goes through a process of “splitting” (133 cf. 102), but such a splitting is to extract the theological force of Tertullian’s beliefs—Tertullian’s commitment to the Divine economy and belief in Jesus Christ. However, as soon as Foucault highlights the split between the belief and the act he qualifies “the fundamental distinction”:

Again this differentiation does not mean dissociation and separation. In no way do I mean that there is initiation on one side and then, completely apart, this probationary exercise [that manifests] the truth of the soul. The two processes are interlocked. It is precisely this interlocking that is, I think, absolutely fundamental in the history of Christianity and, more generally, in the history of subjectivity in the West. But there is a connection that leaves each of these processes its specificity. (143)

In this process, Foucault is claiming both “interlocking” and “specificity,” but this does not sustain itself, because it requires disqualifying the ground of the truth-act. The “expressionist” acts, or “manifestation” of truth, can only make sense through the “interlocking.” More importantly, the historical “truth-acts” always emerge within a wider theological belief system. The shift in “act” is always correlated to a “belief” from either Scripture, a notion of sin, the devil, or a theological rejection of Gnosticism, which Foucault repeatedly mentions. Foucault only briefly speaks of Scriptural insights (86, 172, 183), including discussion of Paul’s theology, but the central shifts in baptism, penitence, and confession require the correlation of belief-practice.³¹ Foucault cannot avoid entangling himself in the belief-system and we repeatedly see how his theoretical “decoupling” seems to “re-couple” through the lectures. Take, for example (and there are many exam-

³¹ This is something I have discussed in relation to Foucault’s earlier work on body and belief in *Discipline and Punish*, see Carrette, *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporality and Political Spirituality*, 110-114.

ples), penitence. The act of laying of hands on the penitent, as Foucault notes, holds both aspects of exorcism and the power of the Holy Spirit (196): the “act” is sustained by the force of belief. Belief in God’s all seeing power (87), Christ’s passion, crucifixion and burial (156), theological heresies (147), the theological architecture of “original sin” (122) and Christ’s redemption all determine the “script” behind the “act” in the 1980 lectures. While each theological idea is only touched in passing through the lectures, they determine the “shifts” in the “truth-acts.” It is a “decoupling” without textual foundation in the Church Fathers and in Foucault’s own logic, where theology—the ideology—is introduced with regularity (157).

The historical shifts are always in part Foucault’s shifts, Foucault’s “spiritual gymnastics” (131), as much as those of the Christian past. We can make sense of them by seeing how Foucault reads early Christian history. He does so by showing how the shift in baptism and purification arises from a “move from God to man as the operator of purification” (117). This becomes increasingly evident in Christianity with its institutionalization, but Tertullian (and later Augustine) never lose sight of the inner relation to God even as Foucault creates his “shifts” around a different axis of truth-acts. The focus on ritual acts is Foucault’s attempt to shift the baptismal-confessional apparatus towards the “figure of man”; which, as he had argued in *The Order of Things*, defined the modern episteme. The 1980 lectures are part of the anthropological gesture of modernity, which Foucault explores along the boundary of inner-outer worlds and the belief-practice fallacy. In Foucault’s exploration of religious subjectivity in Christian Europe, Buddhist Japan and Islamic Iran, the transcendent horizon—with or without gods—persistently remains an important presence for truth-acts, meditation, and revolution. The truth-acts reveal “religion as a political force,”³² but they also leave an unresolved “paradox,” which Foucault repeatedly faces in the 1980 lectures and elsewhere (83, 179, 213-5, 227, 258, 309). The paradox of Christian life—showing and erasing and the life of humility—require an explanatory belief behind the paradoxical “truth-act.” Tertullian—like so many inflections on the early “fools for Christ” narrative—was clear in his text on baptism that “foolishness and incapability, the opposites of wisdom and power” were necessary in faith.³³ Paradox and foolishness were counter-discourses of inner faith and meanings not dependent on the “act” and “manifestation.” This reading for some will be seen as a refusal to “displace” the ideology, but that would be to ignore Foucault’s own refusal to “displace” and his constant “decoupling” and “re-coupling” that shape his narrative.

Conclusion: Philosophy and Theology

“‘Tell me who you are’, there is the spirituality of Christianity.”³⁴

³² Foucault, “Michel Foucault and Zen,” 107.

³³ Tertullian, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, 7.

³⁴ Foucault, “Michel Foucault and Zen,” 112.

In assessing Foucault's 1980 lectures it is difficult to avoid considering Tertullian's famous—and much debated—question, in 'On the prescription of heretics': "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" Tertullian was, of course, evaluating the place of the Christian gospel alongside his familiar work in Greek philosophy and leaving in turn complex interpretative puzzles for later scholars on the relative importance of his philosophy to his Christian belief.³⁵ Foucault's management of philosophy and theology in the 1980 lectures is one of equal puzzles. In these lectures, Foucault brings monasticism into philosophy and brings Christian techniques into present day forms of subjectivity. Like Tertullian, Foucault throws open the relation between the philosopher and the theologian. He brings them into a complex negotiation, not least across archaeological methods, theoretical intentions, historical fragments, and displacing logics. In all these open-ended dimensions, the value of Foucault's 1980 lectures is not a neat resolution to the Christian material, or the "Christian book"; it is not about finding harmony between philosophy and theology or between the philosopher and the historian. It is rather about discovering something more of the continuing legacy of Christianity in Foucault's thinking about "an intensification of the relation to oneself by which one constituted oneself as the subject of one's acts."³⁶

What we gain—beyond the existing and previously discussed fragments on religion—is the depth of Foucault's fascination with Christian history; in all its fragmentary nature. There is no question that the 1980 lectures offer a broad cultural analysis of Christianity—"the great strength," "ascendency," and "its development and endurance" (108, 259). Foucault appears to appreciate aspects of Christianity and its place in Western forms of subjectivity with greater intensity. We also see Christianity as both a "religion of confession" and a "religion of salvation without perfection." In my view, these lectures also show us something new about Foucault's "expressionist" commitment in reading Christian history—the "acts" of Christianity—that establish forms of Western subjectivity and reveal uncharted depths in other aspects of the tradition. While the full force of this "expressionist" logic can be seen to move precariously through Christian history, what makes it more vital is Foucault's perception that it has "never ceased" (311). The persistence of the "tell me who you are" culture in the West is something that brings theology and philosophy into creative engagement in Foucault's lectures, but the problem is to lose critical awareness in reading Foucault's conjunction of theology and philosophy. The brilliance of Foucault's 1980 lectures is in opening more than they resolve.

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³⁵ See Osborn, *Tertullian*, 27-47.

³⁶ M. Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, translated by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1984), 41.

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