

REVIEW

James Bernauer and Jeremy Carrette (eds.) *Michel Foucault and Theology: The Politics of Religious Experience* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004). ISBN: 0754633535

Michel Foucault and Theology is an important book in the continuing study of this aspect of Foucault's work. Its editors have themselves made major contributions to this debate: Bernauer's *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight* and articles; Carrette's collection of Foucault's writings on *Religion and Culture* and his monograph *Foucault and Religion. Michel Foucault and Theology*, which brings together a number of papers from a wide range of perspectives. Although many of the papers have been previously published, this is a valuable collection and one that should be of interest to readers beyond those interested specifically in theology. Papers discuss such major Foucaultian themes as sex, madness, political action and his relation to Habermas.

As is well known, Foucault was concerned with the relationship between Christianity and sexuality for the last decade of his life. As recently published lecture courses are making clear, this began at least as early as 1974, through a concern with Jesuit colonies in Latin America, and the relation between confession and sin around sexual practices, particularly masturbation. Continuing work through the later 1970s took into account the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Christian pastoral, and the early Church Fathers. This work culminated in the projected fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality* series, *Les aveux de la chair*. If publication of this book seems unlikely – in addition to Foucault's prohibition against posthumous publications, Daniel Defert recently described the extant manuscript as being in a Proust-like state – forthcoming lecture courses are likely to illuminate many of these concerns.

In this collection there is not a concerted attempt to rebuild Foucault's trajectory of thought (despite, for example, Bernauer's illuminating reading of the 1984 course on *parrhesia* and the cynics), but a series of reflections on his work from a theological perspective, some illuminating readings of particular problems with his thought, and combinations of these two approaches. The first chapter is a powerful reading of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians; the second is a detailed analysis of Foucault's relation to the Fathers and sex. There is a very useful discussion of Foucault's widely misunderstood work on

Iran by Michiel Leezenberg, which is likely to become the standard reading of this part of his work, and established scholars such as John Caputo and Thomas Flynn provide previously published but still interesting chapters. Despite its dull title – “From Singular to Plural Domains of Theological Knowledge: Notes Toward a Foucaultian New Question” – Thomas Beaudoin’s chapter is a real highlight. Here he reflects on the way that Foucault’s work can illuminate questions in music, particularly the improvisations of jazz. This is interesting because Foucault rarely spoke about music – unlike art or literature – and yet clearly had an interest in it, notably the work of his early lover Jean Barraqué and Boulez.

Foucault’s relation to the Catholic tradition he was brought up in is noted in a few places – and is obvious in his own writings, such as when he numbers the commandments in the Catholic rather than Protestant way. The final chapter is a fascinating (and deeply disturbing) examination of Catholic attitudes to sex, particularly providing a detailed reading of educational pamphlets. The examination of Foucault’s contentious claims regarding the birth or invention of homosexuality receives a detailed reading. That said, it is notable that Mark D. Jordan critiques many misunderstandings of these passages of the first volume of the *History of Sexuality*, but not specifically of the suggestion in the English translation that “the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species”. The French is substantially more ambiguous, with the sodomite described as “un relaps”, a throwback, a relapse.

Elsewhere there is a willingness to use Foucault, and those he cites, such as Jean Dulumeau, to problematise widely-held assumptions, such as the idea that the Middle Ages was a religious era and the modern age a more secular one. Far from it, it is due to those who wrote the history of the medieval period that our view is more myth than reality, as it was the conflict between Catholics and Protestants that marked the early modern period at home, and which their missionary colonisation spread abroad. J. Joyce Schuld and Henrique Pinto provide chapter length summaries of their own monographs on the subjects of Foucault and Augustine, and Foucault, Catholic thought and interfaith dialogue respectively. In this sense, this book is a state of the art report on the current status of research in this area. It can be recommended to a range of different audiences and will be particularly useful for those interested in Foucault’s thought generally, but who also want a sense of how he is being received in this area, and for those interested in the recent theological turn to contemporary thought (notably Derrida and Heidegger) for perspectives and ideas.

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