

WITH WHICH POLITICAL THEOLOGY ARE WE DEALING? REASSESSING THE GENEALOGY OF POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND LOOKING TOWARD ITS FUTURE

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Abstract: In this essay, I examine Michel Foucault's political contrast between the theological domains of the pastoral and the mystical, in order to note his focus on how necessity and providence are founding and legitimizing concepts of the State. Through this process I develop an analysis of how Foucault, in his critique of the historical uses of theology as a tool of pastoral power, actually points toward another form of political theology than Carl Schmitt's. My contention is that we begin to see another "type" of political theology appear in the writings of Giorgio Agamben, who follows Christian traditions much more closely than Foucault. The re-formulation of political theology within Agamben's work, I argue, has tremendous significance for the field as a whole and is much in need of further elaboration, a task toward which this essay only points.

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In this essay, I want to examine Michel Foucault's political contrast between the theological domains of the pastoral and the mystical, the manner in which he links the pastoral, his conceptualization of governmentality and his development of the care of the self (e.g. as demonstrated in the examination of conscience, among other religious practices), as well as the historical tensions between pastoral power and asceticism. In looking at these various historical phenomena, I try to move closer toward his focus on how necessity and providence are founding and legitimizing concepts of the State, a move which enables us to consider the relationship between sedition and heresy in an entirely new light. The historical contexts with which such an analysis deals – here following Foucault's genealogical accounts closely – tell us a good deal about how the western world has developed an operative political theology (in the Schmittian sense); yet they tell us little about how theology might develop its own political self-awareness which would allow it to perform its tasks otherwise than as history has often dictated. It is this theological strand of possibility that I want to uncover through an examination of what follows.

What I want to develop through this analysis, more specifically, is a platform for understanding how Foucault, in his critique of the historical uses of theology as a tool of pastoral power, actually points toward *another* form of political theology than the one that Carl Schmitt had once envisioned, a field that perhaps has not yet been fully developed beyond its limited theological-scholarly guild¹. My contention in this essay is that we begin to see another “type” of political theology appear – one that has yet to be more clearly identified and discussed – in the writings of Giorgio Agamben. The re-formulation of political theology within his work, I argue, has tremendous significance for the field as a whole and is much in need of further elaboration, a work toward which this essay only points.

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To begin with, Michel Foucault, in his lectures from 1977–1978, which were titled *Security, Territory, Population*, outlines the basic coordinates of the state and its foundational logic, which, we find, is inherently grounded in a pseudo-theological foundation. Just as theological argumentation, for centuries, had defined God as a being that existed out of “necessity”, so too does Foucault isolate this essential condition of political foundations – their origins in “necessity”, as all states will appear to have been grounded – as its own inherent theological

1 The field of “political theology”, theologically speaking, is rather eclectic and broad-ranging; from Carl Schmitt's early use of the term to Ernst H. Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies* (Kantorowicz 1957), the term has often been rooted in political-theoretical discussions. In terms of theological discourse, it has been developed in the works of Johann Baptist Metz, Jürgen Moltmann, and, even more recently, Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder. For an introductory account, see Scott and Cavanaugh 2006. In its more recent philosophical manifestations, see, among others, Critchley 2012, Crockett 2011, and Žižek, Santner, and Reinhard 2005.

justification. Quite simply, and as will be the case historically for many theologies, “[p]olitics is concerned with necessity”, from the state’s origins to its sovereign decisions (Foucault 2007, 263). In general, politics bases its rationale for existence, as well as its operational ethos, on the necessity of taking action, and its “greatest” leaders, we might add, are typically those who engage in decisive and seemingly “necessary” action.

It is in this sense that we might come to understand the 20th century German political theorist Carl Schmitt’s determination of politics as inextricably concerned with a form of decisionism that establishes its foundations, and that implies a certain theological sense of predestination or necessity. According to Schmitt, the sovereign is the figure who makes the final and governing decisions, an action that serves to legitimate their role in society (Schmitt 2005, 5). The exercise of such an action is what then, in turn, gives the political coordinates within a specific state their predetermined character as it were. The state and its accompanying laws are retroactively legitimated, as if by necessity, as the way things “have to be”.

What Foucault isolates within this sovereign logic, or logic of sovereignty, is a “philosophical” law of “necessity”, one that rightly mirrors certain historical theological legitimations for God’s necessary existence, but which also serves to obfuscate the lack of any true justification for the right of the sovereign to rule. It is this “mystical” foundation, as theorists from Pierre Bourdieu to Jacques Derrida have termed it, that underlies all normative legal measures within a state’s provenance (Bourdieu 1991; Derrida 2002). In Foucault’s survey of the literature written in defense of such a state, we can see the necessity for the state’s existence trumping the rule of law, which is also inextricably bound up with the state’s existence:

There is then a necessity that is over and above the law. Or rather, the law of this reason peculiar to the state, and which is called *raison d’État*, is that the state’s salvation must prevail over any other law. This fundamental law of necessity, which at bottom is not a law, thus goes beyond all natural law, positive law, and even the law of God’s commandments, which the theorists dare not call exactly divine law, but call instead “philosophical”, so as to mask things a little (Foucault 2007, 262–263).

Existing in such a manner, the state rests upon its own right to exist, that which truly has no foundation, a genuinely immanent moment of self-creation, if you will. Above every legal norm, it is the existence of the state itself that must be preserved at all costs, even if that means reinforcing the state’s existence in extra-judicial instances. As Schmitt had already made clear, it is precisely the sovereign’s ability to declare a “state of exception” to the rule of law that defines the sovereign’s power (Schmitt 2005, 5).

As Foucault will later discern, the world is governed according to an “economy of salvation” that seeks in some sense only to preserve itself (Foucault 2007, 235)². Any violent action that is taken as a “pastoral” measure in order to ensure the survival of the state – something he explicitly links to a rise in Christian discourse concerning the “governing” or “shepherding” of souls in Christendom – is one carried out in the interests of saving the state. Political necessity exercised through often violent means thereby becomes inseparably linked to pastoral methods of exclusion for the greater “health” of the whole.

The usual, habitual exercise of *raison d'État* is not violent precisely because it readily avails itself of laws as its framework and form. But when necessity demands it, *raison d'État* becomes *comp d'État*, and then it is violent. This means that it is obliged to sacrifice, to sever, cause harm, and it is led to be unjust and murderous. As you know, this principle is completely at variance with the pastoral theme that the salvation of each is the salvation of all, and the salvation of all is the salvation of each. We now have a *raison d'État* for which the pastoral will be one of selection and exclusion, of the sacrifice of some for the whole, of some for the state (Foucault 2007, 263).

The performance, or theater, of the state, as he will put it, is one played out against the backdrop of a rigorously formed, Christian conceptualization of pastoral power, one that is mobilized theoretically on behalf of the state in order to maintain the “peace” or normative adherence to law that comes after one accepts its necessity, much as believers had accepted God’s law as the inevitable condition of their right to life. Citizens of the state, much like believers who undergo ascetic practices in order to deepen their faith, are therefore willing to endure – and indeed in some sense themselves to bring about – a certain level of violence to the social body so that the state might survive. This constitutes its own peculiar, secularized form of salvation, a formulation that signals the state’s implicit theological origins (Foucault 2007, 266–267).

What Foucault “uncovers” in this genealogy of the state in the Western world is a consistent and underlying dialectic between obedience and sedition – the latter arising from a general state of discontent, the former from a certain acceptance of the state’s right to exist – that mirrors, with great precision, the dialectic found within ecclesial structures set up antagonistically between the orthodox and the heretical. His contention is that the dialectic, no matter what location it is found in, is actually internal to a state, or Church for that matter, that cannot ultimately justify its reason for existence, its *raison d'État*. As such, he will conclude that “[...] sedition should not be seen as extraordinary so much as an entirely

2 Foucault’s formulation of an “economy of salvation” that seeks only to preserve itself can be discerned at work in Agamben’s articulation of such a theological economy in relation to the political governance of our world; see Agamben 2011, 47.

normal, natural phenomenon, immanent as it were to the life of the *res publica*, of the republic”, though it is more likely to be treated as anything but a part of its normative identity (Foucault 2007, 267). In most instances, the legitimacy of the sovereign rests upon its ability to act, again, “decisively” against any such mobilized moments of sedition, revolt, “heresy”, antinomianism or the like. There is no doubt that such “seditious” movements are often “bad” for the general health and welfare of the state, but it is also the case, as Foucault makes clear – and as Agamben will later second with renewed force – that these movements arise from within the rule of sovereign power and not as an external threat to its rule.

This tension is likewise played out *within* the Church, and, as Foucault spends a fair amount of time exploring, between the pastorate which “shepherds” the flock, and its mystical elements which promise an immediate communion with the presence of God (Foucault 2007, 213). This tension between the pastoral and the mystical is the ongoing dialectic that will place mysticism and a variety of movements inspired by the Holy Spirit under intense scrutiny throughout the Middle Ages, and even, one might wager, up to this very day³. Such movements were certainly active throughout the Reformation, a situation captured quite succinctly in his estimation that such movements include “[...] a particle, a fragment, a spark of the Holy Spirit in each of the faithful and so they will no longer need a shepherd” (Foucault 2007, 214)⁴. It is this framework for tensions within the Church which will play itself out on occasion in the domain of scriptural interpretation – who has access to it, who has the right or authority to interpret it – and which will become heightened throughout the Reformation as a tension between competing ecclesial authorities.

Throughout his assessment, however, Foucault will make clear that the organization of the pastorate, and its accompanying power, lies fundamentally at the heart of Christianity: “[...] Christianity in its real pastoral organization is not an ascetic religion, it is not a religion of the community, it is not a mystical religion, it is not a religion of Scripture, and, of course, it is not an eschatological religion” (Foucault 2007, 214). Each of these “anti-pastoral” tactics (or forms of “counter-conduct”), as Foucault labels them, which are *also* somehow a part of the Christian tradition – although this dual identity is not clearly sketched out in detail – are actually “border-elements” established as counter-practices to the pastoral core of Christianity: that which, he will claim, establishes the foundations of modern governmentality. To what degree they are not simply “border-elements” but actually

3 See the analysis given to the role of the Holy Spirit in ecclesial reform in Congar 2011. The Franciscan order, which will prove exemplary to Agamben, was likewise subjected to numerous tests in order to discern whether it fell under the heading of any seditious “Holy Spirit” movement that threatened the established, hierarchical order of the Catholic Church at the time of the order’s founding.

4 The search for an inner truth (confession) that resides in tension with a more lasting and final illumination (mysticism) is what will eventually prompt, in Foucault’s estimation, the separation of confession from faith; see Foucault 2014, 134.

constituent of the Christian tradition, however, is not a topic that Foucault will discuss at length in this context, although it is a point I want to return to in a moment when I will briefly take up Giorgio Agamben's implicit expansion (and subtle critique) of Foucault on just this point.

What Foucault does pick up and develop, and in great depth as it will underpin a good deal of his analysis throughout his later lectures at the Collège de France, is how his genealogy of pastoral power lays the foundations for the birth of the state as it is "situated within a more general history of governmentality", which also evolved to combat any form of disorder within its "system" (Foucault 2007, 247, 196). Again, re-affirming the initial connection made between God and the sovereign, Foucault measures out the relationship not only between these two crucial figures, but also between pastoral power and governmentality. To do so, first, he establishes the nature of sovereign logic in relation to its theological foundations, but also its distance from the actual pastorate: "[...] God does not 'govern' the world; he does not govern it in the pastoral sense. He reigns over the world in a sovereign manner through principles" (Foucault 2007, 235). The imagined close proximity of the divine to our world – a foundational principle of many traditional western religious worldviews – is revealed as a completely mistaken proposition in terms of how the omnipotence of God is actually perceived. God, as the ultimate transcendent sovereign, reigns over our world from a great distance, one that cannot be easily bridged, at least not by traditional theological accounts. Once this revelation of God's distance is critically introduced, it is only a short step toward the establishment of another way of perceiving God through the role of Jesus Christ, the shepherd who governs the flocks, the one who reintroduces the pastoral paradigm, for, in Foucault's words, "[t]he Western sovereign is Caesar, not Christ; the Western pastor is not Caesar, but Christ" (Foucault 2007, 156).

Foucault's essential development here is that it is the series of everyday, bureaucratic practices he terms "governmentality", rather than the sovereign's exercise of ruling power, as in the case of a monarch, for example, that generates the daily activity of the state and therefore is an essential component of the state's identity. As such, it does not come to exist as a self-legitimizing construct, like the sovereign who rules solely through claiming the right to rule as it were, but rather is formed through what Foucault calls a relation of self to self (Foucault 2005, 252) – that is of the "apparatus (*dispositif*) of subjectivity" which aligns the "subject's knowledge (*connaissance*) of himself and of the subject's obedience to the law" (Foucault 2005, 319). Governmentality is thereby concerned with the formation of subjectivity, the relating of self to self through everyday life, within the boundaries of a given state. It is precisely then the construction of subjects in relation to law which becomes manifest for Foucault in the exercise of pastoral (and ecclesial) power through certain disciplinary apparatuses that come to shape the Western subject as we know it, from

confession to the examination of conscience, and from certain meditative practices to spiritual direction, among others (Foucault 2014, 266)⁵. It is in this way that, in his lectures from 1974–1975, he will link the practice of confession, for example, to the social regulation of the “abnormal” (Foucault 2003, 169). In terms of governmentality, these religious practices will soon give way in the modern period to more “secularized” practices of selves relating to selves, such as through police interrogation, prisons, medical and psychological practices and so forth – analyzed themes that would come to dominate his published genealogical studies.

In his lectures *On the Government of the Living* two years later, from 1979–1980, Foucault continues to expound upon these connections, but also to deepen the scope of his analysis in pursuit of the link “[...] between the government of men, the manifestation of the truth in the form of subjectivity, and the salvation of each and all” (Foucault 2014, 75). In his genealogical examination, he privileges the “truth act itself” rather than the beliefs or dogmas of the believers (Foucault 2014, 83), and turns to the history of the practice of confession, or the revelation of a truth deep within oneself that one is not even fully cognizant of, and which is the basis of many other Christian practices, such as baptism, that also serve to reveal the hidden “mysteries of the heart” found within believers (Foucault 2014, 103, 106). Acts such as confession become the basic practices that strive to assist the believer in “becoming the truth”, or that which becomes the condition of subjectivity: “[...] avowal and faith come together again in [a type] of truth act in which adherence to the dogmatic content has the same form as the relation of self to self in subjectivity exploring itself” (Foucault 2014, 85). The establishment of the subject, whether in religious or political terms, becomes effective through such practices of confession as are aimed at bringing the subject into existence.

Despite this arrival of the self at the truth it seeks to become through such everyday practices, there remains yet, for Foucault, a fundamental anxiety about whether or not one has actually achieved this state of “salvation”, a precarious identification that keeps one uneasily within the domain of pastoral influence. In his words, “[i]f one wants to have faith, one must never be certain about what one is oneself” (Foucault 2014, 127). This fundamental anxiety, in turn, gives rise directly to a Protestant, even Calvinist, formulation of the self that continuously strives to find guarantees of its anticipated salvation. As Foucault notes, this baseline of anxiety and insecurity historically brings about a new form of fear that coincides, in a sense, with the rise of the modern nation-state, or that which appeared to offer humanity more security than religion was capable of providing in material terms⁶. It is in this

5 See also Foucault 2003, 175–180, and Carrette 2000.

6 It would be interesting in this regard to read the establishment of the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), which defined “internal” political boundaries within the Western world, and which recognized Calvinism as a legitimate tradition, as mirroring this struggle for “self” identity that Foucault isolates in this context.

later formulation of a justification for state apparatuses that we will see subjects formed through a fundamental anxious wish for security to be granted by the state, a parallel, incessant but also always incomplete motion toward alleviating one's anxiety for a salvation that can never truly be attained during one's lifetime. His reading too, from this point of view, is a significant piece of political theology in that it reveals how the modern turn from religion to the nation-state, and so from theology to politics, is one that yet maintains the same religious practices for the formation of political, "secularized" subjects.

In this overlap between the exercises of both pastoral power and state governance, there is also a specific dispossession of the self that is symbolically captured by the Christian call to embrace the death of one's self, or the "mortification" of the self, but which is also, as Foucault rightly identifies, what lies at the heart of early Christian rites of exorcism (Foucault 2014, 151). What is actually encountered in such rites, which essentially posit that a soul is "possessed" by another spirit, one wholly foreign to it, is the presence of an "otherness" *within* the self. Both exorcism and the state's conditioning of the subject are as such "[...] thought on the basis of the problem of the other, of the other as that which has seized power in us" (Foucault 2014, 160). It is this otherness at the core of the believer that, in turn, actually motivates one's acceptance of the presence of God (or the sovereign who rules the land): "What one knows is God or the divine in oneself, or what enables you to know the divine itself" (Foucault 2014, 254). In this fashion, the self in whom God resides as a form of otherness and, in parallel, the sovereign who does likewise for the citizen are cemented as identical formulations, and in such a way as to guarantee the obedience of the "masses" as it were.

Foucault's creative, if somewhat one-sided, reading of Christian adherence to an "economy of salvation" outside the confines of the law – a basic reading that has sustained not only centuries of opposition to Judaic Law and even anti-Semitism, but also its emphasis on a grace or mercy beyond all law – is what will lead him to the "standard" (mis)reading of Christian supersessionism:

It is in this opposition between the Old Testament as book of the law and the New Testament as book of salvation that a whole line of Christian thought developed, of which Saint Paul, of course, was the first representative to whom one always referred afterwards, a line internal to Christianity for making Christianity a religion not of the law, but of salvation (Foucault 2014, 183–184).

Foucault acknowledges that such a stance outside the law can lead to Christian claims being taken to the extremes of both asceticism and antinomianism, but also that such stances inherently flow outward from this basic position taken with regard to the Law. The dynamic tension between normativity (law) and a push to go beyond such measures (something like

“grace”) would seem to be entirely constitutive of Christian identity, with any possible danger to the *status quo* and revolutionary tendencies both included.

What he is more concerned with at the moment, however, is not a re-reading of Christianity that would call into question such a rigid division between the law and grace, which has been the general direction of theology over the last half-century or so, but rather to utilize this perceived division in order to isolate and mobilize the “truth” of the dispossessed subject who lives under a certain pastoral power exercised in the modern (secular) world as a form of governmentality. What was effectively developed in a post-Reformation, Western context was a subject “freed from its own truth” precisely through its subjection to a logic of governmentality (Foucault 2014, 227). This “manifestation of the truth” that “de-identified” the subject ended up being the very logic by which the “self” was transformed into a citizen-subject (Foucault 2014, 226).

These various strands of interlocked thought will coalesce in his *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, the title of his lectures from 1981–1982, on the examination of conscience and the care of self. In general, Foucault seems here to be setting up an alternative to the “economy of salvation” that functions within the domain of pastoral power. In its stead, salvation is rather re-presented as a personal measure utilized in order to save oneself alone, something he finds active within ancient philosophical practices that ran counter to later Christianized ones. Hence, in this context, he inspects monastic traditions in relation to ancient philosophical schools of thought, rather than perceiving monastic life itself as a counter-measure to pastoral power. As such, he is able to draw up his own counter-force to pastoral power, that which is located in the ancient, Greek care of the self and the courage to truth (*parrhēsia*), a major concept within Foucault’s later work.

He begins this re-defining of salvation by first re-contextualizing it vis-à-vis Greek traditions: “Salvation is a completely traditional term. You find it in fact in Plato, where it is associated with the problem of care of the self and care of others. One must be saved, one must save oneself, in order to save others” (Foucault 2005, 180). In the Christian tradition, which Foucault takes up in this context specifically in order to provide a foil to ancient philosophical uses of the term, salvation becomes a complex event that sometimes involves one saving oneself, in a sense, or, more directly, being saved by someone else (i.e. Jesus Christ, God, etc.). The sense of the terms that Foucault is seeking to recover from their Greek usage, however, is one wherein salvation is

[...] an activity, the subject’s constant action on himself, which finds its reward in a certain relationship of the subject to himself when he has become inaccessible to external disorders and finds a satisfaction in himself, needing nothing but himself. In a word, let’s say that salvation is the vigilant, continuous, and completed form of the relationship to self closed in on itself (Foucault 2005, 184–185).

What he discovers is a form of Hellenistic and Roman salvation in which “[o]ne saves oneself for the self, one is saved by the self, one saves oneself in order to arrive at nothing other than oneself” (Foucault 2005, 185). The “otherness” that had so permeated the self, and which had to be, at times, exorcised from the self in a religious rite of dis-possession, is no longer the primary way of defining the self. Moreover, in this formulation of things, there is no “binary” system of dividing the self at all, understood as an act of self-renunciation, within this ancient scheme of relations (Foucault 2005, 185).

The error, according to this ancient line of inquiry on caring for the self, is not, following Christianity, to fail to renounce the self, but simply to forget to care about oneself in order to care, first and foremost, for someone else above one’s own self (Foucault 2005, 198). Paying attention to otherness, from this angle, is *the* problem for Foucault above all else. *This*, he is suggesting, is the “error” that Christianity seems to fall into, with its apparent death of the self and through its call to love others ‘more than’ one’s own life. As he will render it, “[a] fundamental element of Christian conversion is renunciation of oneself, dying to oneself, and being reborn in a different self and a new form which, as it were, no longer has anything to do with the earlier self in its being, its mode of being, in its habits or its *ethos*” (Foucault 2005, 211; see also 250). It is in fact a “dying to death” in order to be reborn (Foucault 2014, 214). In the ancient line of thought he is pursuing, and in opposition to the Christian “death to the self”, there is no radical discontinuity with the self, as one is turning directly *toward* this self, the final “goal” toward which one is advancing.

Ancient ascetic practices within certain philosophical schools of thought – early forerunners of Christian monasticism, a counter-practice he does not fully take up directly⁷ – were not geared toward the renunciation of the self, but invested in a “return to the self” that sought to bind one to the truth as it were. This is not a form of conversion understood in a later Christian sense as *metanoia*, or a conversion based on repentance, but rather, following Pierre Hadot’s work, an awakening to the self (*epistrophe*) and an embracing of the self (Foucault 2005, 215). Foucault’s later remarks on a form of speaking the truth, *parrhēsia*, will be bound up with this subject who seeks to express the self in as fully a manner as possible (Foucault 2014, 130–131)⁸. In his words, “[w]hat authenticates the fact that I tell you the truth is that as subject of my conduct I really am, absolutely, integrally, and totally identical to the subject of enunciation I am wherein I tell you what I tell you. Here, I think, we are at the heart of *parrhēsia*” (Foucault 2005, 407).

Christianity, as opposed to ancient Greek practices of *parrhēsia*, will propose to transfer such courageous truth-telling onto God and not onto human beings. As Foucault

7 See his comments on monasticism, in Foucault 2014, 195, 258–264.

8 See also Foucault 2011.

will elaborate in his last lectures from 1983–1984, for humanity, there will be only a fundamental mistrust of the self in relation to God, one that leads to a form of obedience to God as the only way to access such truth-telling (Foucault 2011, 334). To be sure, Christianity would eventually, even “paradoxically” as Foucault renders it, take up some forms of ancient practice aimed at knowing the self, such as the examination of conscience, but it did so by grafting something “foreign” onto itself (Foucault 2005, 422–424)⁹. What the ancient Greek philosophical schools he examines were after was a *forma vitae*, or “form of life” that lives beyond the rules of society, entrusting its members to a radical care of the self (Foucault 2005, 424).

Perhaps one could make an argument that there is little difference between the ancient model’s stress upon how the care of the self “becomes coextensive with life” (Foucault 2005, 86) and those many Christians who have historically made their faith likewise “coextensive with life”, one which Jesus himself proclaims to be the “way, truth and the life”¹⁰. Yet there would still remain a crucial difference that Foucault himself notes, for the Christian sense of the fullness of life has often been rooted in a life *beyond* this life, a clear distinction from the ancient Greek conceptualization: “[...] in Christian asceticism there is of course a relation to the other world (*l’autre monde*), and not to the world which is other” (Foucault 2011, 319).

Though it is perhaps not as clear how or why the Christian “rebirth” of the self differs so dramatically from an ancient model of caring for the self which also recognized that the self was to “become again what we never were”, or, more precisely, “become again what we should have been but never were” (Foucault 2005, 95), Foucault’s quest to seek after a “form of life” lived outside the law does bear a certain similarity to the Christian quest to search for a similar “form of life”. It is Foucault’s insistence on an alternative path which is mirrored rather precisely by permanent tensions within certain Christian monastic and religious orders throughout the centuries – a point that Giorgio Agamben has taken up directly in his study of monastic and Franciscan practices and principles, which I will explore in a moment. As I now intend to demonstrate, Foucault’s perhaps overstated claim that Christianity divorces knowledge of God from knowledge of the self likewise seems to step beyond what many theologians would consider to be *the* domain of Christian practices of the self (Foucault 2014, 310).

9 See also his remarks on the role of “examination” in general, and insofar as it is explicitly linked to his commentary on pastoral power here, in Foucault 1977, 184–194.

10 See John 14.6.

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In her *Torture and Truth*, Page duBois takes up a line of inquiry that in many ways runs parallel to Foucault's, especially in that she seeks to discern the manner in which truth is "extracted" from the bodies of those who supposedly "know" it, which can be an often violent, even torturous affair. This is a resonance we can still hear echoing in the word "confession", which certainly has connotations in the world of police and military affairs no less than in the Church (duBois 1991). Any difference between these two worlds, however, lies in the way in which the religious confession still holds something in reserve, as Karmen MacKendrick has put it in a theological paradigm, something that cannot be fully disclosed and which perhaps seduces us still further toward and into its mystery (MacKendrick 2013, 50–51).

What I want to briefly argue is that, despite his rigorous genealogy of the modern subject, Foucault yet fails to take up a certain significant and alternative methodological consideration in his genealogy of the self, one that might alternatively posit how Christianity contains within itself a sort of "negative dialectic" that exceeds the standard juxtaposition of the pastoral against the mystical, or even the orthodox against the heretical. That is: perhaps the Christian subject does not fully manifest the truth hidden or concealed within it, but retains something of a mystery beyond itself, which constantly and consistently *undoes* the subject. To gain a glimpse of how one might work with, but also beyond, Foucault, we might turn to the writings of Giorgio Agamben who gives us such an account and, to do so, has adapted Foucault's insights *within* a specific Christian (Pauline) formulation of the self.

What is most obvious about Agamben's incorporation of Foucaultian insight can be gleaned quite readily from his genealogical study of an "economy of glory" that is framed by his analysis of the rise of Western governmentality, which he takes up explicitly in his *The Kingdom and the Glory*. Like Foucault, Agamben is concerned with halting the assimilation of a more fundamental human essence – humanity's "pure potentiality" which is at times described as our essential tendency toward rendering the state's apparatuses of subjectivity "inoperative" – rather than promoting a form of actuality in league with that which is "operative". In his words, "[...] the governmental apparatus functions because it has captured in its empty center the inoperativity of the human essence", an essence he is determined to liberate (Agamben 2011, 246). As such, Agamben isolates those religious traditions that in fact resisted inscription into the practices of governmentality, that have sought to liberate something like a human essence that is all-too-often contorted and inscribed into the apparatuses of governmentality. What Agamben seeks to do, however, is to find such resources within the Christian tradition rather than in ancient Greek traditions.

Though this empty space of inoperativity at the center of governmentality coincides with the inoperativity of the "messianic operation" which suspends normative measures like the rule of law (Agamben 2011, 249), it yet differs from it in that the suspension offered by

the messianic is assimilated within the economy of glory in order to legitimate the latter's movement away from our pure potentiality and toward a form of actuality (or *necessity*, as Foucault had earlier called it), or, by definition then, the formation of government itself. Agamben elaborates on how governmentality sublimates the messianic suspension thus: "In accordance with an apparatus that has by now become familiar to us, a doctrine of glorious life that isolates eternal life and its inoperativity in a separate sphere comes to substitute that of the messianic life. Life, which rendered all forms inoperative, itself becomes a form in glory" (Agamben 2011, 249). The "formlessness" of the messianic, or life itself, in all its myriad existence, is given "concrete" (representative) form through the apparatuses that in effect give shape to "whatever being", as he will suggest in one context (Agamben 1993); they construct the "human being" itself, as he will take up the idea in another (Agamben 2004). Agamben's entire corpus of work, it would seem, is geared toward dismantling such representations and offering to us an alternative, albeit vague ("whatever"), "originary" being, exposed to the world in its nudity. Indeed, there is a complex rethinking of the subject that issues forth from Agamben's work, one that pivots on a reconceptualization of the subject who is rendered "inoperative", but thereby more authentically itself: "[...] it is only through the contemplation of power, which renders all specific *energeia* inoperative, that something like an experience of one's 'own' and a 'self' becomes possible. 'Self', subjectivity, is what opens itself as a central inoperativity in every operation, like the live-*ability* of every life" (Agamben 2011, 251). Though this may be a highly paradoxical formulation, it is the path toward our truest selves – our "whatever" being – that Agamben resolutely steers us toward.

As if recognizing Foucault's earlier elaboration on the "apparatuses of subjectivity" in the Western governmental construction of the self, Agamben will nonetheless push past the point where Foucault left off, intending to arrive at a new understanding of the self that seeks to escape from its indebtedness to the machinery ("apparatuses") of Western governmentality and theological (pastoral) power, for, as he too recognizes, "[...] from the perspective of theological *oikonomia* [...] nothing is more urgent than to incorporate inoperativity within its own apparatuses" (Agamben 2011, 251). It is in response to this "urgent" task which he wishes to see brought to a standstill that Agamben counter-proposes another one: rendering such apparatuses themselves inoperative through a "messianic" suspension of their economy. In suggesting this, he points toward something like poetry, which manages, entirely within the coordinates of language, to suspend the normal economy of language, its "economic and biological operations" and to point through this suspension toward a "new, possible use" of language for the human being (Agamben 2011, 252).

We should recognize in this formulation of calling a halt to the operations of the governmental apparatus something like *another* reading of the Christian subject, one that takes up something akin to the monastic "form-of-life" (*forma vitae*) that Foucault was likewise after,

but which also is to be distinguished from the pastorally constituted Christian subject. Envisioning this “new” form of subjectivity beyond what we have hitherto known takes the trajectory, for Agamben – and here the contrast with Foucault’s reading of Paul as the one who focused more on salvation than on the law is striking – of something like a Pauline death to the self that is also a death to such standard dialectical, representative formulations¹¹. This is precisely what Agamben will take up in his reading of Saint Paul on one’s (non)identity conceived through the “division of division itself”, which to his mind constitutes an entirely different approach to understanding the formation of the Western Christian subject (Agamben 2005). Such a reading converges exactly, moreover, with the theologian Jürgen Moltmann’s attempt to isolate the nucleus of Christian identity as the “negation of negation”, something he takes up following both Hegel and Theodor Adorno’s development of a “negative dialectics” (Moltmann 1993, 254; Adorno 1973). What both thinkers propose is a movement beyond the historical tensions Foucault identifies, and the alleged favoring of grace over law, but also a step backward, closer to the Pauline proclamation that all identities, all social divisions as it were, were themselves subject to another division, one into spirit and flesh, that served to undermine any strong representational claims¹².

In seeing this movement of non-identity as it were, we might notice as well how the fundamental anxiety that Foucault identified as constitutive of Christian identity is actually dispelled by the self that recognizes its own fractured identity, and does this as the means by which it is “saved” so to speak. This movement toward a poverty of the self is not anxious about whether it has achieved something permanent, but rather is “helped” by the knowledge that it is not a permanent, monolithic self. And this is perceived to be the case not in another world, either yet to come or permanently “elsewhere”, but firmly *within* this world – a work of “absolute immanence” that characterizes Agamben’s work from its inception (Agamben 2000).

Beyond this implicit critique and refinement of Foucault’s position, Agamben, for his part, seems to have in some sense defied Foucault’s criticisms of Christianity by taking up the history of monasticism, and more precisely, the Franciscans, *in order to* demonstrate how it has been at times the most prominent attempt to establish a “form-of-life” lived beyond the confines of both the Church and society, beyond the “laws” of both. In his *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, for example, Agamben takes up the history of monastic rule and of the Franciscan relationship to possession and use in order to establish a “form-of-life” potentially lived outside the law, that which seeks access to the “thing itself” as the person or presence standing before us. His short study of the permanent tensions between

11 See, e.g., Romans 6.

12 See Romans 7–8 and Galatians 3.28, among others, as well as Agamben’s commentary on this division (Agamben 2005, 49).

life and liturgy in these early Christian communities yields the Franciscan “solution” to this problematic equating of life and rule: the “highest poverty”, or an attempt to live “extraneous” to the law – making use of something while not actually possessing it (Agamben 2013, 122). What results from such a reinterpretation of Christian life (rather than doctrine) is that, in Agamben’s words,

[...] [t]he specific eschatological character of the Franciscan message is not expressed in a new doctrine, but in a form of life through which the very life of Christ is made newly present in the world to bring to completion, not the historical meaning of the “person” in the economy of salvation, so much as his life as such (Agamben 2013, 143).

It is only as such that the Franciscans are able to step “outside” the Church while yet remaining fully within it. This is, moreover, another way to present us with the “messianic” life, which is really just *life* itself and therefore “absolutely” immanent: that which we have such trouble recognizing in its precarious vulnerability, much like the nudity of our own bodies that we seek to clothe and hide, though our bodies nonetheless still do exist and persist underneath their many-layered veils (Agamben 2010).

The “ontology of poverty” that Agamben unfolds through his analysis of the Franciscan ideal, I would argue, becomes that which “undoes” the standard reading of the Christian subject as one bound up and complicit with pastoral power: he identifies a “more fundamental” essence of the Christian self that would be more in line with Foucault’s “counter practices” of the Christian self. What Agamben seeks to usher in is no less than a death to the modern “self” which was conceived on the basis of the Western paradigm of governmentality (again in agreement with Foucault). There is a poverty of the self that he detects at work in Franciscan thought and it is one that seems to be a more authentic bearer of the messianic principle at the heart of the Christian narrative. In this counter-proposition to the governmental manufacturing of selves, the Pauline “division” of the subject becomes a pouring out, or *poverty*, of the self that brings about, not just the death of the subject, but a political challenge to *all* political subjects: “The ‘highest poverty’, with its use of things, is the form-of-life that begins when all the West’s forms of life have reached their historical consummation” (Agamben 2013, 143). Hence he can suggest, in the end, that “[t]he Franciscan form of life is, in this sense, the end of all lives (*finis omnium vitarum*)” as we have consistently represented life in the West (Agamben 2013, 143). To suggest as much is certainly not to suggest that human “life” comes to an end – the various “apocalyptic” scenarios that some of Agamben’s critics might have felt he was moving closer toward – but rather to point toward an end to the ways in which we have represented human life, and opening us up to new senses of being human than we have perhaps ever conceived.

As Paul himself once conjectured, in the death one dies with the Messiah (whom he took to be the historical person of Jesus Christ), there is yet another life possible, though one that may appear as the opposite of the reality that an individual had previously known and lived out. What Agamben seems to be telling us is that this manifest proclamation may not have been entirely forgotten after Paul's death, but may have survived in various "forms-of-life" lived in faithfulness to this particular messianic suspension of (human, religious, political, economic, or just *all*) identity as we had known it. Such "forms-of-life" in fact may have been thriving around us all along, unnoticed but crying out for a radically different access to the vital *life* we all were already always living. Though Agamben's recent research has only pointed toward a series of somewhat marginalized Christian traditions and practices as countermeasures to the Church's more dominant hegemonic narrative, rather than offering us a fuller scale along which to revise the methods of theological inquiry itself, there is yet enough critical and historical interpretation on offer in his claims to present a bold re-envisioning of political theology as a whole, one very much in need of further elaboration.

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TYTUŁ: Z którą teologią polityczną mamy do czynienia? Oceniając genealogię teologii politycznej i wypatrując jej przyszłości

ABSTRAKT: W niniejszym tekście przyglądam się dostrzeżonemu przez Michela Foucaulta przeciwieństwu między teologicznymi obszarami władzy pastoralnej oraz mistycznej, by wskazać na nacisk, jaki filozof kładł na konieczność i opatrność jako pojęcia założycielskie i legitymizujące Państwo. Dzięki temu rozwijam analizę tego, jak Foucault, krytykując historyczne wykorzystania teologii w roli narzędzia władzy pastoralnej, faktycznie wskazuje na rodzaj teologii politycznej odmiennej od tej stworzonej przez Carla Schmitta. Twierdę, że zaczynamy zauważać odmienny „typ” teologii politycznej w pismach Giorgia Agambena, który podąża za tradycjami chrześcijańskimi znacznie bardziej niż Foucault. Moim zdaniem przeformułowanie teologii politycznej w dziele Agambena ma kolosalne znaczenie dla całego pola badawczego jako całości i pilnie domaga się dalszego opracowania, na co niniejszy esej zaledwie wskazuje.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, rządomyślność, władza pastoralna, mistycyzm