Exploring Foucault on Care of the Self and Power Relations from an Orthodox perspective

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Abstract

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) was indisputably one of the most significant theorists of the twentieth century.   His work is generally interdisciplinary in nature delving especially into the humanities, and to a greater extent it includes philosophically oriented historical research in philosophy, history and theology. All this was in a quest for truth and to reflect on humanity which is the focus. Foucault recurrently pursued a manner in which to comprehend the ideas that form our present. In the materialist and consumer driven world of the 21st Century, spiritual practices in Christianity are often viewed by growing numbers of subjects as being based on what are considered to be obsolete religious traditions. The article focuses on the notion that Christianity indeed has a huge role to play in life and in understanding contemporary spirituality and religious life. Foucault was seemingly motivated by a strong yearning to discover a substitute for intimacy with the creator God and a desire to see power relations made devoid of the ability to limit a subjects freedom and domination by, for example, churches and their doctrines and dogmas. He argued that self-awareness was not a goal in itself, but rather something that is pursued in order for one to care for oneself in a world in which there are power relations in existence. Foucault maintained that by caring for oneself, one could transform oneself into a more ethical person.   Through considering one's previous and imminent actions and by evaluating if the actions align with ones ethics and goals, one can get to realise how insignificant one is when compared to the limitlessness creation. A standpoint on spirituality and Christianity *per se*, is advanced based on Michel Foucault's work on spiritual observances in Christianity.

Keywords: Religion, Christianity, spirituality, care, hermeneutics, philosophy.

Introduction

Clarification of terms

There is a multiplicity of definitions what religion and spirituality encompass. A few definitions are given below for elucidation as to better understanding issues in this article.

Durkheim (1915) stated that: "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them" and is thus dynamic and ever-changing. Rituals in a Christian church setting or any other faith, which are performed by people as individuals or as a collective, serve to indoctrinate adherents into conforming with and upholding the values of a society. In addition they serve to build a sense of belonging to the community and society in general (Mackay, 2000). Ramsey and Ledbetter (2001) suggest that the term religion: "…is not a neutral, descriptive term but has strong overtones of a political and moral nature" and it has an emphasis on community. Wilson (1998)

calls religion an Enlightenment initiative which Michel Foucault would agree with. "Religious institutions, as social constructs through which people realise their identities, play an important role in forming people's world views, or ideological conceptions of the world" (van Niekerk, 2018). The Christian faith is then viewed in one way as a system of norms, rules and ethics that relate to one's social duties and responsibilities. From a faith perspective, it is the route to salvation and the immortality of the human soul in the heavenly Kingdom due to the saving grace of Jesus Christ (Nicolaides, 2010).

What then is meant by the term spirituality? Forman tells us that: "spirituality tends to be a space-holder in a series of dualisms: The spiritual over against the rational, the dogmatic, the formal church, etc." (Forman, 2004). But Sheldrake emphasizes that "Christian spirituality embodies a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Spirit, in the context of a community of believers" but it previously saw "… a distinction between spiritual and material levels of human existence, between 'interiority' or a life of prayer and an outer everyday public life" (Sheldrake, 2005). Bregman argues that "spirituality" and "religion" should not be in a competitive relationship because spiritualities are classically "religious" (Bregman, 2014). Streib and Hood (2011) state that relatively current empirical studies have established that a growing number of people contrast "spirituality" and "religion," and they tend to self-identify as being spiritual but not religious or as being more spiritual than they are religious. This move has produced some vagueness and uncertainty concerning the conceptualization of spirituality. They urge us to take the self-description "spiritual" very seriously, and question the requirement of conceptualizing 'spirituality' and they suggest that the concept of 'religion' is adequate, since "spirituality" can be understood as privatized, experience-oriented religion.

Michel Foucault – Archaeology and Genealogy

Michel Foucault was *inter-alia* a French philosopher and somewhat of an historian of ideas. His philosophies principally speak to the relationship between power and knowledge, and how these are used as a form of social control through societal institutions such as religion and churches. He was a foremost character in two consecutive waves of 20th century French thought, namely the structuralist wave (1960s) and then the poststructuralist wave. Foucault's work is transdisciplinary in nature, ranging across the concerns of various disciplines. He invariably went on a quest for "*episteme*" which is an unchanging collection of tacit rules that oversee knowledge, and religion as well as Christian thinking were a major part of this quest. He also considered that Western knowledge was a victim of historic periods and thoughts such as the 'Classical' stage during the seventeenth century, and the beginning of a modern epoch at the end of the nineteenth and at the start of the twentieth century. Foucault referred to these eras as "archaeology".

Foucault's views of spirituality were moulded by this approach. As a Postmodern thinker Foucault was averse to an Enlightenment slant to life and its meaning and interrogated the presence of rights which are natural, considered to be inalienable and sacred. Mader describes him as an epistemological constructivist and historicist (Mader, 2014). His work was a philosophically oriented historical research comprising of mainly historical exploration of the construction of truth. He thus endeavoured to yield a historical interpretation of the development of thoughts, changes in them and how they shaped the current period. (Carrette, 1999a).

Foucault used the term 'Genealogy' suggesting that it gives us the "history of the present" and it elucidates on where we have emanated from (Mahon, 1992). Foucault's practice of genealogy has its roots in his understanding of Nietzsche, and also in his own preceding work in archaeology. 'Archaeology' then, is another the term Foucault used to describe his method to writing history (Foucault, 1972; Gutting,1989; Mahon, 1992). A genealogy involved with the

realm of truth tries to find numerous and varying ways in which human beings and societies have created a conception of subjectivity or selfhood based on the quest for knowledge. It was about exploring the discursive traces and orders left by the past so as to write a 'history of the present' time. Thus for him, archaeology is about observing history as a means of comprehending the processes that have led to what society is today (Foucault, 1972). Foucault's comments on the variance between archaeology and genealogy are largely imprecise and perplexing (O'Farrell, 2021). Archaeology tries to identify the conditions of likelihood of knowledge, the determining rules of the development of conversational rationality that function under the level of purpose, meaning or thematic content. 'It is these rules of formation, which were never formulated in their own right, but are to be found only in widely differing theories, concepts, and objects of study, that I have tried to reveal, by isolating, as their specific locus, a level that I have called ... archaeological' (Foucault, 1973).

Genealogy deals with precisely the identical substrata of knowledge and culture as Archaeology (Gutting,1989), but Foucault describes it as a level where the grounds of what is true or false come to be ascertained via mechanisms of power (O'Farrell, 2021).

Foucault strove to inform us from where we arrived at the present time from an epistemic perspective (Stein,1992; Carrette,1999b). He basically worked out of a tradition that succeeded existentialism in the vacillation of a rational mode that problematized the notion of self-expression by considering the notion that there was an unique 'self-awaiting' expression in each person based on social constructionism (Stein, 1992). The core theme expressed was how patterns of thought were caught up in structures and in various ranges of negotiation of power. the arts of existence (life as a work of art). Foucault considers 'techniques of the self' or 'arts of existence' as 'those reflective and voluntary practices by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make of their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria'. (Foucault, 1992).

The Power discourse and Religion as an Apparatus

Foucault viewed Christianity as a historically constructed faith and a device or apparatus (*dispositif*) which he used to designate the numerous institutional, physical and administrative mechanisms and knowledge structures, which augment and preserve the exercise of power within society. He basically regarded it to be a system of morals, systems of power and treatises and actions to forge religious practice in the direction of certain political objectives (Deleuze, 1988; Beazer, 2013). In Western societies, the social system has been generally governed by religiously grounded normative institutions, and legal systems as well as social rules have generally been considered to be God-given institutions. Foucault's view on religion was to an extent "spiritual corporality and political spirituality" (Carrette, 1999a). In 1962 he wrote:

> It is not that religion is delusional by nature, nor that the individual, beyond present-day religion, rediscovers his most suspect psychological origins. But religious delusion is a function of the secularization of culture: religion may be the object of delusional belief insofar as the culture of a group no longer permits the assimilation of religious or mystical beliefs in the present context of experienceǁ (Foucault, 1962: 81).

The search for power and also knowledge relating to religion was important to Foucault and operated together as "power-knowledge" (Foucault, 1980, DP: 27, 28). He defined 'power' in the following terms: …"is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society…the network of power relations [forms] a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being actually localized in them" (Foucault, 1998, HS1: 92). Power and knowledge unite in what Foucault emphasises is his main interest, subjectivity,

i.e. how people relate to themselves and the way in which people act with others and things around them and then reflect themselves in them. Modes of subjectivity are then determined by a double relation which is a subject's interaction with themselves in introspection and with others around them (Foucault & Hoy, 1986). Foucault defined power as 'a multiple and mobile field of force relations where far-reaching, but never completely stable effects of domination are produced' (1980b: 102). Modern power is thus viewed as a 'relational' power that is 'exercised from innumerable points,' and it is extremely unspecified in character, and it is at no time 'acquired, seized, or shared'. There is consequently neither any source of power to challenge at all, nor any subjects possessing any power. It is rather a mechanical activity for which subjects are merely unidentified channels.

Foucault refers to the 'relations of power' (Foucault, 1982) in which there are clear pecking orders, patriarchies or domination: "I would like to disconnect the notion of power from the notion of domination. Domination is only one form of power-relation. I should also note that power has to be de-connected from the notion of repression. There are a lot of power-relations which have repression-effects, but there are also a lot of power-relations which have something else entirely as their consequence" (Foucault, 1980a). Power is not always a bad thing and can yield positive results (Foucault, 1980b).

Power relations serve as a disciplining mechanism not based on any prohibition due to legal constraints, but rather a normalisation via what is considered to be the norm, which creates a positive ideal of being and recompense to all the people who adhere to the norm (Foucault, 1980a; Sarup, 1996). It also has the possibility of punishing those who cannot for whatever reason, or do not try live up to the norm. Thus for example in a given Christian context, when one does something which is teachings forbidden in the Holy Scriptures or the traditions of a church, they will likely be viewed in a poor light and treated with disdain by others who believe they conform. People are thus not viewed in their social context and may be judged by others making them feel punished (Foucault, 1980b). Foucault was predominantly concerned with the self, and its challenges (Piontek, 2006) and the key focus is the human being such as adherents in a particular faith and how they are obliged to conform despite their possible unique stance on an issue.

Power is present where it is materially demonstrated and Foucault argues that disciplinary power cannot be owned, attained, grabbed or even shared, but is rather of a structural derivation. Domination can be characterised as power- over someone and even the oppressed persons can also have power, such as when they oppose something and resist it and exercise their freedom (Tamboukou, 1999; Smart,1995). Foucault states: "where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault,1982). Power transforms people into conforming beings, so in a Church context, there is a measure of power based on 'Divine Will' that obliges one to seek to conform and identify with the teachings and general dogma. People exercise freedom and may resist a teaching in the name of power, and in the process they are both the target and the vehicle of power and by so doing they tend to enhance the norm (Foucault,1982).

> Accordingly, power is not aligned with the law as a model: 'It is this image that we must break free of (*qu'il faut s'affranchir*), that is, of the theoretical privilege of law and sovereignty, if we wish to analyse power within the concrete and historical framework of its operation' (Foucault, 1998: 90). With the rise of power against sovereignty, Foucault further suggested, the law becomes the norm and helps to normalise social and personal relationships rather than to discipline or regulate them. Under such conditions, power does not destroy life but administers it. A normalising society becomes the outcome of a technology of power that coheres around life because power is now 'organized around the management of life rather than the menace of death' (Foucault, 1998: 147) (Betta, 2015)

Foucault interrogated how societal norms and methods of social punishment and construction of possibilities shape society and made possible conceivable structures that tend to marginalise those who do not conform and are viewed as deviant. He argued that power comes from below, mingling amongst individuals without judicial authority or even institutional power; but rather from roots that happen to unite in the formation of firm structures and also institutions (Beazer, 2013). Once the practices of recognition of the structures and institutions are repeated, they solidify as the norms by which society operates (Beazer, 2013; Smart, 1995; Foucault, 1995; Carrette, 1999b). Foucault constructively amplifies Augustine's "…premodern warnings about the hazards of human divisiveness and the desire to subject others to personal dominion. Whether de- scribing institutionalized or deinstitutionalized networks of power, Foucault demonstrates that subjugation operates in modern society most effectively when it quietly suffuses and creates individuals rather than conspicuously restraining them" (Schuld, 2000).

Foucault generally accepted that people envisage power being an entity that can be owned by individuals within a hierarchical structure having a solitary person at the summit that functions by means of negative sanctions (Foucault, 1980a). Foucault perceived power as being something shapeless and self-directed and based on relations and essentially relational. Thus power comprises of what people do, and exists in all human interactions.

Foucault believed that power relations are self-motivated, and that the antagonistic relations which inevitably arise between individuals are incessant, inevitable, and prolific in partiality. Power is thus omnipresent in social links and is within a system of power relations. Foucault accordingly stressed the notion of "power over" people and viewed power as a relational force that pervades society, influencing and connecting all people (Foucault & Hoy, 1986). When viewed relationally, power constructs society and pecking orders by creating homilies and certainties, and by imposing discipline and order as it shapes human wants and prejudices. Foucault was interested in more research on power and stated "We should direct our researches on the nature of power…towards domination and material operators of power…[and] base our analyses of power on the study of the techniques and tactics of domination" (Foucault, 1980). Power as domination model has succeeded within Western social and political theory. Giddens (1984: 257), defines power as "transformative capacity" or "the capacity to achieve outcomes" and for many non-conformists this is problematic. Foucault sought to disrupt the moral self-assurance of society that is synonymous with sanctimoniousness which is supportive of an engagement with evil and injustice in what is a "morally messy world" (Schuld, 2000). In this way he is comparable to St. Augustine as he intentionally obscures moral and social differences that are unquestioned in society and makes subjects reconsider advantaged discourses and institutional relations of power to which their respective cultures indiscriminatingly subscribe. By confrontationally offending established social responsiveness, he shocks his readers into taking a more critical look at habitually accepted customs in society (Schuld, 2000).

God and Foucault

In his work The Order of Things (Foucault, 2002: 420) Foucault repeatedly appeals to God / the gods in deliberating on the death of man: "…it is in the death of God that [man] speaks, thinks, and exists, his murder itself is doomed to die; new gods, the same gods are already swelling the future Ocean; man will disappear…". Foucault exhibited an atheistic mysticism in terms of Christian thinking in which people as unique beings can only discover their true identity in a meaningful enduring relationship with the Triune Godhead for whom they are intrinsically yearning. Foucault in a frantic quest for transcendence, appears to have searched for God in the erroneous areas. In his work The Archaeology of Knowledge he says: "…you may have killed God beneath the weight of all that you have said; but don't imagine that, with all that you are saying, you will make a man that will live longer than he…" (Foucault, 1972).

Foucault has clearly been greatly influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche as evidenced by his utterances and seemingly uses the latter to discover himself (Rosenberg & Westfall, 2018). In fact many scholars consider him to be predisposed to Nietzsche (Picket, 2005). Foucault openly reflects and shows synergy with Nietzsche's ideas. In fact the notion of 'genealogy' is adapted from Nietzsche and becomes a 'Foucauldian' one. Nietzsche's asserts numerous times that "God is dead" (*Got ist tot*) and says this first in 1882 in the third section of his The Gay Science, and this is the essence of his thoughts since once God 'dies' tragedy follows (Nietzsche, 1968). Nietzsche's did not seek to attack Christians but rather the evangelical content of Christianity and he stated: "I regard Christianity as the most fatal seductive lie that has yet existed, as the great unholy lie" (Nietzsche, 1968a).

Nietzsche considered that after the death of God, people can overcome themselves and become superior beings and more god-like than they were before, an *Übermensch*. (Rosenberg & Westfall, 2018). Foucault, considered that the culmination of man is not simply refurbished, and man is not effortlessly substituted, by the invention of an *Übermensch* (Rosenberg & Westfall, 2018). When one fails to acknowledge that there is a God, it is difficult to imagine that people have natural rights. The idea that God is dead imposes that all notions of a universal human nature, or of unqualified moral laws and ethical practices, also then die. Nietzsche asserts that moral judgement has a commonality with religious judgement in that it believes in realities which do not exist (Carrette, 1999a).

Foucault in his own genealogical project maintains there are three diverse but nonetheless related movements or fields, which he refers to as truth, power, and ethics. He states: "Three domains of genealogy are possible. First, a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to truth through which we constitute ourselves as subjects of knowledge; second, a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to a field of power through which we constitute ourselves as subjects acting on others; third, a historical ontology in relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as moral agents" (Foucault, 1997). He argues that: "Between the philosophical exercise and Christian asceticism there are a thousand years of transformation and evolution in which the care of the self is undoubtedly one of the main threads" (Foucault, 2005). Care then is an important notion. Foucault observes that the evolution from antique philosophical spiritual practices to Christian spirituality cannot be designated in terms of an epistemological modification but is rather a multifaceted succession of adjustments and refinements regarding "the arts of living and the care of the self" (Foucault, 1990). He viewed ethics as being: "…the kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself, *rapport à soi*… determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions" (Foucault, 1997). Ethics involves 'seeking the self' or what he calls "*techne* of the self" (Foucault, 1997).

Foucault queries the methods through which a subject establishes oneself as a moral agent (Foucault, 1992). In Stoic practices forms of care for the self, and asceticism existed which were continued in early Christianity (Foucault, 1997, 2018) so that there was some congruence amid traditional and more modern Christian spiritual practices. Christianity according to him failed to introduce novel and pivotal elements in the care of the self that were not already in antique practices. Foucault articulated a new idea of the self as intimately linked to "evil" and "original sin", in other words a notion of the self that is divergent to God's will, and thus needs to be relinquished as religion is delusional due to cultural secularization. Secularisation is very often considered to be the *prima facie* cause of the deterioration of religion. It is in essence "…a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace" (Taylor, 2010).

Foucault argued: "It is not that religion is delusional by nature, nor that the individual, beyond present-day religion, rediscovers his most suspect psychological origins. But religious delusion is a function of the secularization of culture: religion may be the object of delusional belief insofar as the culture of a group no longer permits the assimilation of religious or mystical

beliefs in the present context of experience" (Foucault, 1962). Thus religion can only be considered to be delusion if the broader ethos of society no longer accepts the legitimacy of a spiritual worldview. Christianity poses the idea that an exceedingly challenging "truth" lies concealed in the recesses of the human soul. In a quest for the care of the self and enlightenment, there must be a cautious and scrupulous self-decoding of the actions, instincts, desires, predispositions and desires of the soul. These interpretation of the inner movements of one's soul is inevitably the self-practice of "distrust" in order to cleanse the soul from original sin. Foucault therefore tried to fill the wide gap left by the 'death of God' and sought to find a substitute for right worship of God.

The hidden "truth" in the human soul needed to be made manifest. The confession of truth, *exomologesis*, and other observances are intended to purify one through self-examination (Carrette, 1999a). Foucault was bent on the idea that care and devoutness should be heaped on the self rather than on God. For him, man of the Enlightenment humanism is gone, but he had a strong awareness of human beings as subjects. He argued that all who fail to kowtow the conventional notion of what is rational were characterized as being 'mad' and then marginalised through confinement. In this sense then, 'the noble 'truths' of the Enlightenment were active in giving credence to the exercise of domination. Thus society lost its humanity and rationality and became manipulated by power relations. Foucault consequently anticipated finding a substitute for communion with the Creator God.

The Care of the Self and one's Soul

The care of the soul is hermeneutics in that its theory and practice of interpretation involve an understanding that can be justified based on evil self-importance and defiance towards God. For Christians, the acceptance of the doctrine of the truth and one's adherence to the truth through one's acts of faith, and ultimately the acceptance of the truth all have a bearing on a subject. In opposition to this seeking of self, and in a quest for freedom of the soul, Foucault considers the Greek term "care for the self" (ἐπιμέλεια ἑαυτοῦ) (Mendieta, 2011). He argued that for the classical Greek philosophers, the notion of self-awareness was not a goal in itself, but rather something that was pursued in order to "care for oneself" adequately.

Foucault speaks of caring for oneself as "the art of living" or "technologies of the self" (McGushin, 2011). The practices involved can transform ones into becoming a more ethical person. If one can stoically contemplate nature and reflect on how miniscule one's being is when likened to the universe, one can become more human and ethical (McGushin, 2011). Subsequently the notion of an ethics is concerned with one's relation towards one's self. This "care for the self" is critical for Foucault as he focuses on subjectivity and is absorbed in the manner in which subjectivity is established based on 'truth'. One has to ascertain one's motives and perceptions and develop oneself to a level of self-mastery given the issue of evil and sin which lurks in the dark recesses of the soul. In what way can one master oneself if God's will is not
Followed? Foucault recalls the early and current monastics who adhere to stringent rules and regulations of obedience and chastity under a spiritual master to whom they confess. In this way subjection in a pastoral sense, to a master, becomes a subjection to others and leads to domination (Carrette, 1999a; Foucault, 1997, 2007). However, the subjects through their subjection cannot do justice to the fact that they also establish and come to understand themselves as moral subjects and agents, through various techniques and practices. They forge through subjectivation a permanent relationship to the self (Foucault, 2017). Consequently given the context and culture milieu and patterns and models strategically proposed by existing power–knowledge organizations, they are dominated and thus lose their freedom. However, if subjects critically reflect upon what they do and accept, they can maintain a sense of freedom and ethical approval in power–knowledge regimes (Oksala, 2005). Foucault views the ethical practice of self as a:

> process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. And this requires him to act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve, and transform himself … A moral action tends toward its own accomplishment; but it also aims beyond the latter, to the establishing of a moral conduct that commits an individual, not only to other actions always in conformity with values and rules, but to a certain mode of being, a mode of being characteristic of the ethical subject (Foucault, 1985).

Care of the self is central for understanding "spirituality". The care of the self then "designates a number of actions exercised on the self by the self, actions by which one takes responsibility for oneself and by which one changes, purifies, transforms, and transfigures oneself" (Foucault, 2005). Spirituality requires care for the self and a range of austere practices which allow one's self-transformation leading to accessibility to truth. One has to arrive at the determination of ethical substance" and then this is "the way in which the individual has to constitute himself as the chief material of his or her moral conduct (Foucault, 1992). Foucault states: "We will call 'spirituality' then the set of researches, practices, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are, not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject's very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth" (Foucault, 2005). Spirituality is thus not viewed in terms of the Christian notion. When one masters oneself and his or her passions, one is able to control oneself and impose self-directed limits and does not over indulge (Foucault, 2017, 2005, 1998).

One needs to carefully consider: "…the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice" (Foucault, 1992). Then one can relate to societal moral principles and decide to be ethical or not. Spirituality then becomes as self-mastery requirement for caring for others. People demonstrate a certain way of living based on their self-mastery in order to influence the future manner in which things are done to drive a power–knowledge regimes (Foucault, 2011). One needs to: "attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behavior" using "technologies" of the self (Robinson, 2015). Ethical behaviour is that which contributes to the upright character of the individual in general but it additionally involves how one relates to moral principles by which one endeavours to live on a daily basis.

Foucault viewed ethical behaviour is not merely about a subject observing moral principles or standards but it is endorsed in one's life as acting honestly so as to become a better human being: "an action is not only moral in itself, in its singularity; it is also moral in its circumstantial integration and by virtue of the place it occupies in a pattern of conduct" (Foucault, 1992). One has complex relationships with others and needs to act ethically and care for the self , in order to derive value from such relationships. The chief objection to Christianity of Foucault relates to favouring of the metaphysical and transcendent over the intrinsic corporeal creation.

Foucault devoted himself to filling self-deceiving view of the void left by God's ostensible death. His understanding was likely developed as he felt trapped by society and tried to fill the void by striving for independence and a greater sense of freedom through which he could make his philandering behaviour acceptable. He was equally caught up in the notion of the nearness of the death of man at any time (Bernauer, 2004) especially given the advent of AIDS.

For some people a singular occasion presents itself to arrive at the essence of a true being. Tillich refers to such situations as limit situations (*die Grenzsituationen*). These are unavoidable truths that can ostensibly lead to the annihilation of ones being, but they may indeed also epitomize a radical prospect in which one encounters ones limitations. "We cannot escape these situations, for we are affected and carried by them. These are always specific

situations that are either an advantage or a disadvantage for us; the possibility of self - realization or an impediment. (Tovalcic, 2020).

Guibert, a friend of Foucault mentions him as a tormented man stating of his impending death: "You always think that in a certain kind of situation you'll find something to say about it, and now it turns out there's nothing to say after all" (Ryan, 1993). Foucault believed that people do not always have the same type of relationships to themselves when they constitute themselves as a political subject or Christian believer, and reasons: "I don't think there is actually a sovereign, founding subject, a universal form of subject that one could find everywhere. I am very sceptical and very hostile toward this conception of the subject. I think on the contrary that the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or, ...through practices of liberation, of freedom...starting of course from a number of rules, styles and conventions that are found in the culture" (Foucault, 1984). Foucault noted that through politics and also religion, people become prisoners of social norms forged on Christian or other principles and are investigated, examined and manipulated to conform. People easily obtain a 'label' and are shunned if they are viewed as being somehow divergent or uncharacteristic in how they think and act. But a subject, according to Aristotle has a rational soul has the ability to receive forms of other things and to compare them using the *nous* (intellect) and *logos* (reason) (Leroi, 2015).

The resolve of discipline as it manifests in example the laws of a country or even the Ten Commandments, is to produce passive and compliant individuals that can be easily controlled. Subjects then lose their status as free agents and the opportunity to develop the self (Han-Pile, 2010). Foucault writes of spirituality, " I understand...that which precisely refers to a subject acceding to a certain mode of being and to the transformations which the subject must make of himself in order to accede to this mode of being" (Foucault, 1984a). Foucault promoted the notion that the Christian culture was until lately, nothing more than a highly oppressive one demanding subjection to church teachings, traditions, dogma, institutions and the established order. Within the apparatus as described by Foucault, adherents of all faiths are created by religious discourses and practice techniques of the self to build a religious conforming 'self' (Tran, 2011). To some commentators, Foucault was hugely deluded:

> That this bleak philosophy should have gained such cultural currency is due
> at least in part to the cult of personality that grew around Foucault. A sarcastic
> and fiercely intelligent depressive, he took LSD, repeatedly attempted to kill
> himself, drove a Jaguar and attended sadomasochist parlours in California.
> He was also one of the first famous casualties of Aids (West, 2004).

Being Christian means doing the right thing and thus being a moral person. If one is immoral then one is deemed to be non-conformist and thus implies being out of God's gracious gaze. A spiritual existence is seemingly only a secondary aspect as it was in Classical Greece. A Christian is of necessity expected to adhere to Holy Scripture and traditions and all that they impart for a holy life to be realised. Foucault contends that Christianity did not merely establish models for Church influence on which later state administrations could build, but also fashioned resistance regarding the church's power and the duty of one to be subjected to conform to Church dogma and authority (Siisiäinen, 2015). He regarded the ascetic life and mysticism as forms of counter-conduct (Oksala, 2005; Foucault, 2007). Ascetics as subjects who are isolated people practicing strict self-denial as a degree of personal and especially spiritual discipline could begin to question teachings and dogmas in a quest for the self. In similar fashion, mystics as subjects do not consider church or pastoral aspects when seeking access to God or truth, they merely have a direct connection. Ascetics and mystics are "...a productive tradition of more or less free, critical, and autonomous subjects that "speak truthfully" and that confidently establish themselves in "a face-to-face relationship with God" (Foucault, 2011).

Foucault had a philosophical appeal which added to the cynicism in the west through his indifferent relativistic stance and he derided abstract notions such as truth and justice which he considered to be representing class interests in power relations domination of subjects. Foucault also repudiated humanism and advocated a return to barbarism. He constantly criticized but never offered a coherent alternative and to an extent had an narcissistic, destructive spirit of negativity and irrationality (West, 2004).

Considering the Orthodox Christian Approach

Where there is commentary on the themes discussed above in churches in general, it is frequently inaccurate in its use of modern terminologies and even conceptual frameworks. Traditional values in Christianity such as moral and social values are professed to be long-held and have lasting value in mainly Western society (Pinckaers & Noble, 1995) in which there is a Christocentric orientation and where subjects are required to focus on, and be directed towards Jesus Christ. Subjects are accordingly called on by Churches to be Christ-like as they strive to conform to the figure or life of Jesus Christ. Such a perspective is especially strong in the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches (Spidlik, 1986). The framework or shall we say lens through which interpretation of scriptures is made is based on the practice of reading and interpreting a text (*exegesis*), and is often in reference to authoritative texts such as the Bible or the writings of the Church Fathers (Gallaher & Tucker, 2019). The *Phronêma* or mindset, worldview of Christianity is thus soteriological and is primarily concerned with the issue of the salvation of subjects.

Orthodox spirituality and church beliefs are based on divine revelation as manifesting in the Old and New Testaments. When one reviews the Patristic understanding of the Christian truths we one can clearly realize this. In the mystical vision of the divine energies of the advanced Christian, he or she can get to fully experience the divine presence within one, as a vision of the 'uncreated light' and of the 'energies' of God. For the Orthodox, one gets to experience the special mystical union with God through the sacrament of the holy Eucharist (Nicolaides, 2019).

In Christianity, it is believed that God has revealed himself through Jesus Christ the *Logos* who is the Father's flawless self-revelation who condescended to become man. The Church is the Body of Christ, in which the members are united with Christ as their head (1 Corinthians 10:16-17; Romans 12:4-8). Through Jesus Christ, Holy Scriptures and Holy Traditions as well as the work of the early Church Fathers, God communicates with humanity. This implies that revelation is fully interpreted already and is authentic as in the notion of a Triune Godhead of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In Orthodoxy, apostolic preaching is uninterruptedly handed down and renewed in each new age and in its context by the "Church Fathers as the inheritors of the Apostles and the whole cloud of witnesses who are the saints who bear the apostolic preaching as the memory of the Church which is living Tradition (Hopko, 2015).

A life of moral exactness is based on a call to a life in Christ. This then implies that the spirituality of the Orthodox Christian is depicted as a life in Christ, and commitment to the Lord with a total submission to his Divine will. The Orthodox believer's commitment to serve Christ must always be based on an innermost, free act and should never be compelled by anyone or anything. A spiritual person is one who strives purifies himself of herself all worldly and ethical defects in order to be unified with the love of Christ. The mystical experience one has occurs in this world, but the cause, God, is from outside this material world and in a spiritual realm of the soul. The Patristic traditions suggest clear ways in which one can make spiritual progress in life and accomplish spiritual excellence. These include a process of *catharsis* or purification, holy illumination, and attaining perfection by being immersed in a overall union with God.

In Holy Scripture its states: "For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light" (Psalm 36:9). It is only in the state of total illumination that divine grace allows one to contemplate the divine light. However the hidden truths of Holy Scripture are uncovered only to enlightened subjects. The Church holds on to the untainted spirit of the Holy Scriptures as they were brought to the Saints, and it is through them that we obtain knowledge and grow in the self. The Holy Eucharist serves to unite believers in love to Christ and each other. (Congregation for the Eastern Churches, Instruction on Liturgy - January 1996). By his Real Presence in the Holy Eucharist Christ accomplishes His promise to be with us "always, until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). St. Paul elucidated that the mysteries of God will challenge human understanding or may even seem to be foolishness. Their meaning is revealed to subjects through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (Corinthians 1:18-25, 2:6-10; Romans 16:25-27). The Eucharist is viewed as a mystery because it contributes in the mystery of Jesus Christ and God's plan to save the human race through Jesus Christ. Some aspects of the Eucharist are not easy to comprehend, since God's plan for the world has continually exceeded human understanding (John 6:60-66).

From the point of view of informed historians, this is highly regrettable, since it gives the false impression that there exists a universal, transhistorical, and univocal Orthodox discourse on these matters, whereas it is very difficult to locate such a discourse in the sources" (Gallaher & Tucker, 2019). For Christian believers, all issues and questions are fashioned and responded to in relation to Jesus Christ, the man-God *Theanthrōpos*, who is without spot of blemish (Hebrews 4.15). Whatever a subject believes should be based on reflection of the life of Christ. It is often difficult for a subject to interpret and apply the teaching of Churches unless they have well-informed clerics teaching them and available resources to guide them in search for the self within a Christian context (Dunning, 2019; Harrison, 2010). The "…canons have a quasi-sacral character and exercise a great deal of authority and imaginative power but they are not easy is complex… Most publications on topics of sexual diversity from a specifically Orthodox perspective seek to undergird the received practices and identify theological explanations for them and, more recently, tend to attack the phenomenon of sexual diversity as the toxic bi-product of "secular culture" (Gallaher & Tucker, 2019).

Most Christians readily accept the Christian Church's teachings and disciplines on how to live ethically and many believe the teachings cannot and should not be subjected to individual or collective scrutiny. Clearly, Foucault adopted a divergent approach. Social forces undoubtedly exerted and continue to exert and have an influential effect on how some subjects such as Foucault understand Christianity and what is taught relating to conforming to God's will. Such subjects then accept their own alternative vision on issues of living as being the 'truth' or at least 'partial truth' and then set out to critically refute certain teachings they are not in congruence with as a minor collective or as individual subjects. This is resulting in the rise of a disturbing 'new theology' embracing individual or groups of subjects holding a particular *weltanschauung* or philosophy or view of life.

David wrote in Psalm 14:1 that a fool says in his heart, "There is no God. Paul writes here that fools often have something in common: They believe themselves to be wise. This often-cited verse carries profound implications for how we, as human beings, understand our relationship to God. In Romans 1:22-32 Paul teaches that:

> 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. 24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: 25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. 26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that

which is against nature: 27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;

Paul is relating to the falling further away from God as the cause through which humanity naturally descends into depravation and unrighteousness. When one rejects the idea of God as the creator, why would one then seek to honour Him? If one rejects Him as a God worthy of worship, how can one obtain knowledge or any valid understanding of the Truth? Once people begin philosophising and start from untrue assumptions, they are bound to have false perceptions and conclusions in their lives. Paul further advises that everyone is gifted with an inner conscience, which signals our innermost soul to a sagacity of what is right or wrong and good or evil. There is an inner voice of principled belief which prompts one toward doing what is good and resisting evil and yet many do not listen to it due to ignorance or are caught up in secular concerns. There are some who argue that rationalism and moralism have no place in Orthodox ethics at all. The intellectual scrutiny of an archetypal impression of God and the creation of abstemiousness based on a moral conception of perfection, are all considered by the Orthodox Early Church fathers as part of man's authenticity principle and are not paths to divine truth. "They are hyperreal constructions from which man is to be freed if he wants to achieve perfection and knowledge of God" (Iliopoulos, 2020).

Every person has a knowledge of God is the ultimate source of true wisdom and all knowledge. Unfortunately, one's refusal to acknowledge the truth and glorify God is a trail that leads to a perverse mindset and useless thoughts. Such a person also becomes ethically impervious and inevitably dies destroyed and separated from God's grace. What is required is for subjects who claim to be Christian to comprehend that the mark of divine love is in every single created being and in nature. Churches cannot stand by indifferently to differences of theological belief as this is not in the interest of an increasingly immoral world in need of ethical reform based on the 'Truth'. The trends of modern liberalism are not in harmony with original Christian teachings. Irenaeus and many others teach us that we can see in Scripture that God the Father is truth, and as truth he is known in the Son by the "Spirit of truth" (John 15:26).

Conclusion

There are various approaches to ethics which are generally deontological and then there are others which are largely contextual such as situation ethics and applied ethics. The deontological line takes accepts that normative ethics is determined on the basis of whether or not any action is fundamentally right or wrong based on cogent criteria. There are however also ethical principles and moral truths which will always be hermeneutically considered to be binding as in Christian teachings and the dogma of most churches based on Holy Scripture and Holy tradition which assert that God's command are absolute. To some believers, Christianity is a code-based faith, but being a Christian allows for one's self-transformation and attending Church services is one way in which a person can achieve transformation. A sinner may go to church to promote his or her personal identity or even in a sense offer resistance to what is preached as a form of knowledge, power and also practice. Some attend church to have fellowship with like-minded believers. To Foucault, Christianity and religion in general silence people as a ruling apparatus. In Church and especially in partaking of the Holy Eucharist, people have been transformed and attain even some supernatural power (Foucault, 1980). Foucault believed that religion is capable of transformation and is able to give greater freedom to the care of self and self-development of people. In essence Foucault's "…assessment of Christian techniques of the self in no way presupposes a monolithic and unchanging model" (Macmillan, 2011).

Michel Foucault was not just wrong; he erased any possibility for proving himself to be right. He asserted that "the author" did not exist, that he or she is condemned to produce a work defined by customs of literature, and created through a language imposed on the mind from without. How can we believe an author who tells us the author does not exist, who writes in an objective prose that objectivity does not exist, this historian who tells us that we cannot write history? His canon is self-invalidating. In his 1977 pamphlet Forget Foucault, the eminent French social historian Jean Baudrillard argued that Foucault's writings are themselves discourses in power that impose their own narrative, projecting their own will to truth. Those who lionise this "author" today, devoted as they are to this source of power-knowledge, continue to contradict themselves. Perhaps it is time to take heed of Baudrillard's exhortation. Perhaps it is time to forget Foucault. (West, 2004)

Bernauer (2005) states: "I would like to claim that Foucault's thought does in fact contain a philosophy of religion. In as much as his project was a 'history of the present', he is necessarily engaged in a religious analysis because the forms of knowledge, power and subjectivity which he saw as animating our culture are often constructed in decisive ways in argument or alliance with religious practices and concern". Foucault also appears to have supported the notion that Classical Greek ethics-oriented moralities have moulded Christian thinking to an extent and could operate together with the 'code-oriented' moralities in which the self is sought in determining what is right or wrong. To the Greeks, transformative practices (*askèsis*) were grounded on care of the self and designed at the acquisition of self-knowledge as a means to attaining truth. By contrast, the emphasis on self-knowledge is the source of the view that it is via rational thought that one can hope to arrive at truth. In "Platonic" tradition, reasoning is relative to the concept of the collective truth and one is obliged to think as others do, who are also considered to be "knowing subjects" (Foucault, 1998a). The "care of the self" and a rational manner of thinking as well as knowing oneself, were thus neglected in what became a standard design for the West. Christianity is thus an undoubtedly historically created apparatus and it comprises of a disseminated scheme of morals, power relations, treatises and measures designed to fashion religious practices on the road to carefully selected strategic and political ends in an endeavour to maintain power.

Foucault suffered in his life and philosophy has resolved that man is a being determined by the misfortunes in one's of existence: the essential features of his life are tribulation, struggle, and suffering. Kierkegaard spoke strongly about this, saying that "torment" and "anxiety" are the central elements of human existence. What one is as a human being, is "precisely manifested in these realities" (Tolvajcic, 2020). Nonetheless there are some people who make a 'subjective turn' from religion to spirituality and they live according to their own subjective experiences (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005; Houtman & Tromp, 2018). There is thus an increasing individualized and privatized religiousness in opposition to what some may consider to be obsolete religious tradition and less people are now loyal to their religious tradition, but still yearn for spirituality in their 'care of the self' (Faubion, 2019).

To Foucault the notion of an ethics is always concerned with one's relation to one's self. He supported classical Greek tradition of self-perfection for subjects. People need to self-constitute themselves based on a 'care for the self' and need not conform to a belief if they do not agree with it. Current spiritual self-reflection and introspection find there drive in a 'care of the self' but often one's soul can be troubled by ideas and events that are thrust on one as the norm. To disagree with them as a subject through careful thought, implies non-conformism which may ultimately lead to ostracization from society. For Foucault, people as subjects needed to reconstruct themselves based on the truth they perceive. One should not feel a sense of guilt for having a different opinion or lifestyle to anyone else.

As Christians, we need to however remember what Holy Scripture teaches: "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Foucault was bent on limiting

what he termed power relations manipulating subjects and dominating them and stressed individualism and care of the self. He sought reasons to give subjects their place- a place he either lost or failed to comprehend. Foucault tried to revive the idea of the classical Greeks that philosophy should be a way of life. He thus offers a spirituality of resistance to the domination he believed the church has over subjects. In terms of his notion of power, and ideas on freedom and ethics, Foucault makes an interesting albeit flawed contribution Christologically and Soteriologically speaking but the lack of definitive steps of practical action make his ideas problematic. There are many limitations in Foucault's acceptance and support for the Nietzschean will-to-power. Most disturbing is his narcissistic ethic of self-preservation and acceptance of unaccepted actions which for the most part go against the grain of Holy Scripture and sound Christian teachings. "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure..." (Jeremiah 17:9).

Foucault like all of us have a capacity for self-deception unless we are grounded in our faith. We strive to justify doing things that we know are clearly wrong and against the natural order and God's word. Because of the inherently broken nature of our hearts we commonly see ourselves through self-deceiving eyes. People as subjects are created for salvation and agonize from an unsaved situation and this is why is they rebel against it (Kasper, 1994). For Christians, Christ the God-man is the definitive reality in which the comprehensive victory of 'being' over 'non - being' is revealed (Tovalcic, 2020). "The structures of the finitude are forcing final being to transcend itself, and for that very reason to realize itself as finite" and the prospect of self -transcendence to eternity is "the expression of man's belonging to that which is beyond non - being, that is, to the being itself" (Tillich, 1951).

The Synergy of a subjects exertions with the help of the grace of God brings one to their ultimate destiny of perfection self -transcendence to eternity. Jesus' death and glorious Resurrection achieve for us our end in reaching the presence of the Holy Spirit which dwells within us. In John 15:26 Jesus says of the Holy Spirit or 'Comforter' (*Paraclete*): "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me". Paul informs us in 1 Corinthians 3:16 "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?". The Holy Spirit not only breaths resurrection life in us when we die to sin and join with Jesus in faith, but must also be the primal way in which we walk with Jesus on a daily basis. The *Paraclete* Holy Spirit's work is to produce a Christ-like character one who accepts Him. One can only convey Orthodox Christian spirituality to others by initially learning it through personal experience and through a thorough unadulterated study of spiritual writings. Consequently each subject must attain Orthodox spirituality in his or her own life by living the sacramental life of the Church and by partaking in holy Confession and holy Communion.

Through sanctification we select to do the right thing in all life's situations and then trust God's Spirit to give us His power, love, faith and the wisdom to do it ethically as we develop and get to know our inner selves more. If we are fervent in our prayers and worship God speaks to us by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit to our spirit (Romans 8:14-16). A believer needs to make a conscious decision to listen to the Holy Spirit and pray that the Lord will fill one with His Spirit. Then one needs to be attentive and listen for opportunities to obey the Spirit's promptings. The Orthodox believe that there are seven gifts of the Holy Spirit including wisdom, understanding, counsel, courage, knowledge, devoutness, and wonder (fear) of the Lord.

The Christian faith teaches us that 'God is love' and that God's love is omnipotent while He is omniscient and omnipresent. The love of Jesus is fundamentally empowering and enriching as one seeks to find the self as Aristotle urged γνῶθι σεαυτόν "knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom" (During, 1957). We my argue that every civilization is continuously being shaped anew and everyone has to work their way up to being an ethical, spiritual and

civilized being. The path to realizing self-knowledge is a mission for every person and Jesus Christ guides us to this knowledge. The *Logos* became flesh and exposed to humanity the divine revelation. He is the Truth and only through him we can attain knowledge of the divine will. The metaphysical patterns of the philosophic speculation such as those of Foucault, on the Christian revelation alter the divine undertaking of the personified *Logos*.

God' love is indeed life-giving: "God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:16). Jesus tells us in John 10:10, "The thief cometh not but to steal and to kill and to destroy. I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly". Foucault's main contribution to my way of thinking, is his warning that we should avoid the perils of human disruptiveness and avoid the desire to subject others to personal or collective dominion. Foucault was seemingly "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). Kempis (1380-1471), the author of The Imitation of Christ, said: "An humble knowledge of thyself is a surer way to God". Self-knowledge and meditation on the word of God is the essence of a spiritual life. The Holy Bible informs us that we need to be humble in our self-assessment: "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment..." (Romans 12:3). One's guilt oppresses existence since if we reject it, we also reject the possibility of accomplishing existence at all (Jaspers, 1971).

The primary aim of this article has been to seek to facilitate an ongoing conversation involving highlighting the opinions of disagreement and contradiction on a hermeneutic Christian level relating to Foucault's *inter-alia* notions of power, spirituality, religion and care of the self. A limitation of the work is its mainly Eastern Orthodox understanding of issues. Future research could delve into his work from inter-faith or multi-faith perspectives.

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