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Methodius and Methodologies: Ways of Reading Third-century Christian Sexual Symbolism

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Abstract

St Methodius of Olympus, Bishop of Patara and martyr of the Diocletian persecution, uses sexual language in an unusual way. In a treatise on celibacy, *The Symposium*, he describes the relationship of Christians to Jesus Christ using the language of male orgasm. The cross is described as the moment of Jesus Christ's own ecstatic orgasm, and St Paul is described as a figure inseminated by God. This language is investigated with reference to a variety of selected methodologies, including Christian Platonist perspectives, feminist perspectives, Foucaultian perspectives, and men's studies perspectives.

Keywords: celibacy, ecstasy, language, Methodius of Olympus, orgasm

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to reflect upon different ways of interpreting sexual symbolism in the writings of St Methodius of Olympus, third-century bishop and martyr. The presence of this sexual language might seem strange in a treatise Methodius wrote on virginity but for the fact that Christian celibates—monks, nuns, priests—have for hundreds of years celebrated and expressed their relationship with God using sexual metaphors. Talk about a celibate's metaphorical sexual relationship with the Divine is a well-attested theme in the ascetical and mystical tradi-

tions of Christianity, and one which has been studied in some detail.[1] From its initial origins in the early church, this kind of talk probably reaches its fullest and most familiar flowering in the mysticism of Bernard of Clairvaux in the twelfth century, and of Catherine of Siena in the fourteenth. It remains a stock part of the language of contemporary catholicism, which still refers to consecrated virgins as those who are betrothed mystically to Christ.[2]

Although the sexual language of celibates has received extensive study, proper investigation of its place in the thought of St Methodius is lacking. This is curious, because it is one of the most striking aspects of his work. The English and French language studies of Methodius by Herbert Musurillo[3] in the late 1950s and early 1960s (which provide the critical edition of the Greek text), and, more recently, the English language studies by Patterson,[4] and the German language studies by Rowan Williams[5] and Katarina Bracht,[6] in large part by-pass this important topic, restricting their observations on sexual language to one or two incidental remarks. Peter Brown, in *The Body and Society*, devotes little more than five pages to a discussion of Methodius and celibacy, but does not go on to give anything like extensive treatment to the issue of erotic symbolism.[7] Two reasons make this gap in the scholarship unfortunate. First, Methodius has been acknowledged as one of the very first

1. For recent studies see D. Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1995); G. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); A. Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001); A. Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). For a general introduction and overview of the theme of eros in different religious traditions, see J. Runzo and N.M. Martin (eds.), *Love, Sex and Gender in the World Religions* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000).

2. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), para. 923 and 1618-20.

3. Methodius, *The Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity*, in H. Musurillo (ed.), *Ancient Christian Writers 27* (ET; London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1958); Méthode D'Olympe, *Le Banquet*, in H. Musurillo (ed.), *Sources Chrétiennes, 95* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1963).

4. L.G. Patterson, *Methodius of Olympus: Divine Sovereignty, Human Freedom, and Life in Christ* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997).

5. R.D. Williams, 'Methodius von Olympos', in *Theologische Realenzyklopadie*, Bd. 22 (Berlin: de Gruyter), pp. 680-84.

6. K. Bracht, *Vollkommenheit und Vollendung. Zur Anthropologie des Methodius von Olympus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999).

7. P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 183-88.

instances of the sustained use of erotic metaphors in the context of Christian spirituality (according to Nygren, he was the very first exponent of 'Bride-mysticism').[8] He stands, in other words, at the very beginning of the wider phenomenon of Christian celibate use of sexual language that was later taken up by Ambrose, and then by figures like Bernard of Clairvaux in the medieval period. Second, the specific content of the symbolism found in Methodius is remarkable: religious ecstasy is described in terms of male orgasm, and the indwelling of Christ in the Christian (either male or female) in terms of a divine insemination with the *logos spermatikos*—to use a pun possible in English, a symbolic 'coming of Christ' in the sexual sense of the word 'come'. Bolder and more explicit than is usual, Methodius uses metaphors of spiritual ejaculation of divine sperm, even suggests the pregnancy of a trans-gendered St Paul following his spiritual homosexual copulation with Jesus Christ. All this is discussed by Methodius in a matter of fact, 'medical' tone; in the words of Peter Brown, 'with studied good nature and surprising circumstantiality'.[9] With Methodius, sexual language in early Christian spirituality reaches a curious climax. No wonder his work finds its way into Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* as an example of a 'troubled stream of ... eloquence'.[10] George Tavard once called Methodius's description of the 'sexual act' one which 'modern exhibitionism could envy',[11] and Herbert Musurillo (responsible for the critical edition of Methodius), could only manage an embarrassed footnote to say that the imagery is 'extremely bold'.[12] The metaphors of penetration, orgasm and ecstasy in Methodius pre-date the 'tidying-up' of such language into an 'acceptable' tradition, and provide an ideal opportunity to investigate different ways of reading the erotic symbols of Christian mysticism while still at an early, and fresh, stage of development.

Anyone familiar with Christian Platonism will probably know that this sort of language may be explained with reference to the nuptial imagery of the Bible (especially the Song of Songs), and the role of *eros* in Plato's philosophy. Methodius's picture of St Paul as bride and mother is validated in part by Gal. 4.19 and 1 Cor. 4.15. The analogical relationship between husband and wife, Christ and the church, is only what can be found in 1 Cor. 6.15-17 and Eph. 5.31-2. That a church father with a rather

8. A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (London: SPCK, 1982), p. 418.

9. Brown, *The Body and Society*, p. 185.

10. E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (ed. David Womersley; London: Penguin, 1995), I, ch. xv., p. 481.

11. G.H. Tavard, *Woman in Christian Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), p. 78.

12. Methodius, *The Symposium*, ET, p. 200 n. 32.

over-eager passion for scriptural allegory should seize on these erotic motifs is not at all surprising. But to employ a useful distinction, explanation of a text is not necessarily the same thing as understanding it. Methodius's language is capable of sustaining a variety of readings, not just those indebted to Platonism. The association of God and sex, religious ecstasy and orgasm, can hardly fail to call out for comment, especially when (as is the case in Methodius) the language is mixed up with issues of the erotic, gender and the social construction of celibacy.

Admittedly, there are big differences between sex and sexuality; yet it is hard to avoid connecting the two at some level. I do realize that defining the erotic is problematical and highly subjective. How does one define a category such as 'eroticism'? All categories are problematic. What I understand by the terms 'sexual', 'erotic' or 'gender' are not universal frames of reference that can be applied to all times in all places. Although Methodius's rather 'medical' presentation of sex strikes me as being mostly dispassionate, this does not preclude the notion that this aspect of his work also transmits particular codes of sexuality, most specifically celibate sexuality. Most certainly, the associations of orgasm and the impassioned state of religious ecstasy can hardly be understood only on a 'medical' level.

I will focus here on one very specific issue: not how to explain this language, but the problems of limiting interpretation of this language. This will involve reflecting upon how different methodological perspectives offer different ways of reading Methodius's sex-language. This essay is therefore an exploration of Methodius *and* methodologies. It includes discussion of the potential of interpretations of Methodius informed by Christian Platonism, feminism, the work of Michel Foucault, and men's studies.[13] I will describe how some of these methodologies suggest negative evaluations of Methodius's metaphors. Ultimately, however, wishing to move towards consideration of the scope for any retrieval of Methodius's sex-language by contemporary Christianity, I conclude with some remarks on how a reading of Methodius informed by men's studies might allow for more positive evaluations of his sexual metaphors, and, within specific limits, even allow for *celebration* of such language today.

Historical Background

Before turning to the methodological discussion it will be useful to sketch some background, not least because—although there is a small

13. The selection of such methodologies is not arbitrary, and is justified by (a) important relevant literature, and (b) the specific content of the discussion.

and manageable corpus of scholarly work on him—Methodius is not one of the best known of the early church fathers. What biographical information we have is not very helpful: the sources are confused and contradictory. Nevertheless, only excessive caution would prevent the observation that he was bishop of Olympus and Patara in Lycia, now south-westernmost Turkey, and that he was martyred in the Diocletian persecution of 311/12 (not the earlier Decian persecution as Jerome thought). His geographical location and dates mean that it is likely he had contact with St Nicholas of Myra (Santa Claus), a younger man who eventually became bishop of the neighbouring town. Methodius's Christology has received attention as an example of beliefs about Jesus in the decades preceding the Council of Nicaea in 325, and his contributions to the theory of Christian asceticism have been studied. He has usually received attention as an early opponent of Origen—in Rowan Williams' opinion, 'the most vocal critic of Origen in the pre-Arian period'.[14] This fact makes Methodius's use of sexual language all the more interesting: it can usefully be compared and contrasted with Origen's quite different erotic language in the latter's famous *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. His use of sexual symbolism occurs in his only extensive work which survives intact, *The Symposium*.

As the title hints, Methodius's *Symposium* is modelled on Plato's dialogue of the same name. But whereas in Plato's *Symposium* eros is praised by a party of men, Methodius's interlocutors are virgins, all female, extolling the virtue of chastity. Ten chaste women take turns to praise sexual abstinence, rounded off by a hymn applauding continence and a short concluding dialogue. It is clear that Methodius's virgins are 'storied' females, not real women but gendered literary traces of historical virgins. Probably suggested by Jesus' parable of ten bridesmaids (Mt. 25.1-12), the virgins are expressions of Methodius's male rhetorical use of women for theological ends.

The text of the *Symposium* has received some interest for its literary merits, and is a fine example of early Christian interaction with elite culture: in the words of Herbert Musurillo, 'perhaps the most beautiful symbolic prose-poem of the early patristic period'.[15] According to Rowan Williams, '*Er schreibt ein durchaus elegantes, attischen Stil nachahmendes Griechisch, und der Hymnus, der am Ende von* Symposium *steht, ist eine feine, wenn auch metrisch unregelmäßige, Komposition*'.[16]

14. R. Williams, *Arius* (London: SCM Press, 2nd edn, 2001), p. 168.

15. Methodius, *The Symposium*, ET, p. 37.

16. R. Williams, 'Methodius von Olympos', in *Theologische Realenzyklopadie*, Bd. 22 (Berlin: de Gruyter), p. 681.43-45.

Male Orgasm in The Symposium

References to male orgasm in *The Symposium* occur during a complicated and multi-faceted allegorical interpretation of scriptural texts in the second of the ten virgins' speeches (that of the virgin Theophilia), and, in a more developed fashion, in the third speech (that of the virgin Thalia). Sequentially, Theophilia first gives a 'general' report of male orgasm, then Thalia uses the language of male orgasm, mystically, of Christ. What is the context of these references? Theophilia's speech is essentially a defence of Christian marriage, albeit one which recognizes strict celibacy as a more excellent state. She gives a dense allegorical interpretation of Gen. 2.21-24, the story of the formation of Eve from Adam's rib which culminates in the union of husband and wife (or, perhaps better, the *re*-union of husband and wife, since Eve was initially divided from Adam's body) as 'one flesh'. Unexpectedly, Methodius draws attention to the deep sleep which Adam entered when his rib was removed, and likens it to the ecstasy and self-forgetfulness of orgasm.

> Moreover, this was perhaps the symbolism of that ecstatic sleep into which God put the first man, that it was to be a type of man's enchantment in love, when in his thirst for children he falls into a trance, lulled to sleep by the pleasures of procreation, in order that a new person, as I have said, might be formed in turn from the material that is drawn from his flesh and bone. For under the stimulation of intercourse, the body's harmony—so we are told by those who have consummated the rites of marriage—is greatly disturbed, and all the marrow-like generative part of the blood, which is liquid bone, gathers from all the parts of the body, curdled and worked into a foam, and then rushes through the generative organs into the living soil of the woman. Hence rightly is it said that *therefore a man leave his father and his mother*: for man made one with woman in the embrace of love is overcome by a desire for children and completely forgets everything else; he offers his rib to his divine Creator, to be removed that he himself the father may appear once again in a son.[17]

'Ecstatic sleep', therefore, is associated with the physical sensations which accompany the ejaculation of semen. Ideas of eros, ecstasy and pleasure are neatly summarized by the single metaphor of male orgasm. For Methodius, male orgasm henceforth becomes a symbol for a variety of religious themes. The references to being overcome with desire and forgetting everything else are, perhaps, particularly suggestive of self-transcendence and, potentially, self-emptying *kenosis*.

17. Methodius, *The Symposium*, ET, pp. 49-50; cf. *Sources chrétiennes 95*, 2.2.31-33.

Having interpreted the 'sleep' of Adam in terms of male orgasm, and indicated that through this some explanation may be given of the ecstatic union of husband and wife in one flesh, Methodius proceeds to apply the same group of ideas – orgasm, ecstasy, union – to the indwelling of Christ in the Christian soul. According to the typology used here, Christ is the new Adam, and the Church the new Eve, formed from the rib of Christ, one with his flesh and bone. If the union of the old Adam and Eve can be spoken of in terms of orgasm, so too can the union of Christ and the Church. But how is the orgasmic 'sleep' of Adam recapitulated in the life of Christ? When did Christ sleep in ecstasy? Odd as it may seem, Methodius locates Christ's orgasmic ecstasy at the crucifixion:

> For it was for her sake that the Word left his heavenly Father and came down to earth in order to cling to his spouse, and slept in the ecstasy of his passion. Voluntarily did he die for her sake ... for the reception of that blessed spiritual seed which he sows and plants by secret inspiration in the depths of the soul; and like a woman the Church conceives of this seed and forms it until the day she bears and nurtures it as virtue.[18]

To employ an apt French euphemism, the cross is Christ's own *petit-mort.*

The ecstasy of the divine orgasm is not something which is limited just to one point in time, 'once for all', but is, says Methodius, repeated over and over again in the celebration of the Eucharist.

> [*There is*] intimate union between her [*the Church*] and the Word, coming down to us even now and continuing his ecstasy in the memorial of his passion. For otherwise the Church could not conceive and bring forth the faithful *by the laver of regeneration* [Titus 3.5] unless Christ emptied himself for them too for their conception of him, as I have said, in the recapitulation of his passion, and came down from heaven to die again, and clung to his spouse the Church, allowing to be removed from his side a power by which all may grow strong who are built upon him, who have been born by the laver and receive of his flesh and bone.[19]

Intimate union with Christ is not the preserve of the whole Church as his spouse, but also, according to Methodius, of every soul which he has come into.

> It is impossible for anyone to participate in the Holy Spirit and to be counted a member of Christ unless again the Word has first descended upon him and fallen into the sleep of ecstasy, that he may rise from his own deep sleep and, filled with the Spirit, receive a renewal and rejuvenation ... God, taking from Christ's side during his ecstasy, that is, after his

18. Methodius, *The Symposium*, ET, p. 65; *Sources chrétiennes 95*, 3.8.70-71.
19. Methodius, *The Symposium*, ET, p. 66; *Sources chrétiennes 95*, 3.8.71-72.

> incarnation and passion, prepares for him a helpmate, that is to say, all souls who are betrothed and wedded to him ... receiving from him the pure and fertile seed of doctrine.[20]

Methodius gives us one illustrative example of a soul who has had the pure and fertile seed of Christ implanted in him, and brought it to fruition in the birth of the Church: St Paul, trans-gendered bride of Christ and mother of Christians.

> When he [Paul] had grown to manhood and was remade and fully developed in spiritual perfection, he had been made into a helpmate and bride of the Word. Then, receiving the seed of life and conceiving ... [*he*] became Church and Mother, himself bearing in travail those who believed in the Lord through him until Christ was likewise formed and born in him. *My little children,* he says, *of whom I am in labour again until Christ be formed in you* [Gal. 4.19]. And again: *For in Christ Jesus, by the gospel, I have begotten you* [1 Cor. 4.15].[21]

This is an interesting set of ideas, and it might be tempting to say that the linking of themes in this way is unexpected in the early Church. It is important to bear in mind the central place of the ecstasy of orgasm in Methodius's typological system: such ecstasy here acts as the facilitator of union with Christ. This is not a peripheral theme, but one that lies at the heart of Methodius's way of expressing his relationship with God. In many ways, the symbolism is particularly apt because it accommodates themes of ecstasy, eros, the act of indwelling, and generative power. It also draws on the nuptial and sexual imagery of biblical texts. Indeed, if an early Christian wanted to talk about union with Christ by analogy with sexual union, and identified that union specifically as something ecstatic (perhaps in line with a particular religious experience), does not the language of orgasm then become *entirely* appropriate? Indeed, once one starts to think that orgasm might be one of the best metaphors for talk about ecstatic union with Christ, it becomes hard to see why the theme does not occur *more* regularly in the Christian tradition. Why is it that Christians do not talk about Christic orgasms more?

That final question, though intriguing, is beyond the scope of this essay. It suffices here to point to the fact that attitudes to male orgasm in late antiquity were often negative;[22] Plato associated orgasm with a loss of rational control,[23] and Augustine followed his lead.[24] Augustine claimed

20. Methodius, *The Symposium*, ET, pp. 66-67; *Sources chrétiennes 95*, 3.8.72-73.
21. Methodius, *The Symposium*, ET, p. 67; *Sources chrétiennes 95*, 3.9.75-76.
22. See M. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 117-39.
23. Plato, *Timaeus*, 91b.
24. Augustine, *City of God*, 14.24.

that, given the choice, a world without orgasms would be preferable. When Methodius views the ecstasy of orgasm positively, he provides an exception to the rule followed by Plato before him and Augustine after him.

What I want to go on to discuss here is how best this sexual language in Methodius can be interpreted. What is one to make of the symbolism of Christic orgasms in the third century?

Two Ways of Interpreting the Sexual Language of Celibates

The critical problem is this: the interpreter of this sexual language is faced with a puzzling range of possible readings which emerge from different models of recent scholarship. Different methodologies will of course generate different things to say about celibacy and sex language, but the problems which pertain to Methodius are particularly acute precisely because, although the symbolism is *explicit*, it is also explicitly *symbolical*. It seems that even if it is possible to give an explanation of such language with reference to the New Testament and to the tradition of Christian Platonism, other ways of understanding the language continue to require attention. The critical problem is one of explanatory objective, and it hinges on the issue of whether a sexual symbol, even when it is signally metaphorical, should be taken at face value as a symbol, or whether it can only be satisfactorily explained with reference to the wider potential of its meaning or meanings.

Although Methodius is a writer from the patristic period, I will explain what I mean with brief reference to two different scholars' recent explanations of erotic symbols in the medieval period. I acknowledge that this involves applying scholarship relating to a later historical period to an earlier one, and that this brings with it its own set of problems. Nevertheless, only extreme caution would prevent one from seeing the obvious resemblances between the symbolism used by Methodius in the third century and the symbolism used in the literature of medieval monks and nuns. Since later writers do not use the specific symbolism of male orgasm, this requires me to move from Methodius's orgasm-language to the rather broader erotic themes found in medieval spiritual writing, but this is not entirely unjustified. The two different works of scholarship which I will use to explicate the interpretative problem – studies by Denys Turner and Caroline Walker Bynum respectively – look at broadly similar examples of erotic symbolism in medieval spiritual writing. But the different methodologies used by Turner and Bynum lead to strikingly different explanations of the phenomenon. Both must be counted as necessary reading for anyone interested in erotic language in the traditions

of Christian spirituality and asceticism. Their different accounts of erotic imagery will help inform reflection upon interpretation of Methodius's religious orgasm-language.

Denys Turner: Arguments for Limiting Interpretation to Christian Platonist Perspectives

I will begin with Denys Turner's *Eros and Allegory*. Turner's book is a study of medieval commentary on the biblical Song of Songs. The Latin monastic tradition of erotic symbols is interpreted by Turner with reference to the tradition of Christian Platonism. In other words, the erotic language used by medieval celibate monks is interpreted as knowingly and deliberately Platonic, metaphorical and, in a *literal* sense, non-sexual. This is despite the fact, as Turner acknowledges, that the most tempting explanation of this language to modern scholarship 'after Freud' is probably as a phenomenon of psychopathology. He is careful to guard against reductive Freudian readings of the tradition:

> Medieval monks do not seem all to have been repressed. Most seem to be happy. They *like* sexual imagery, and if a Freudian would require of repressed subjects that they are ignorant of the forces which they sublimate and that they misrecognise them in their subliminal form, then the medieval monk, by and large, lacks an important symptom: he *knows* what he is doing, he *intentionally* denies to himself a genital outlet for his sexuality and *deliberately* transfers his sexual energies upon a spiritual object.[25]

Turner explicitly avoids any explanation for the reason that this would involve ignoring the explanations which the monks themselves gave for the erotic language. 'My own explanatory objective is limited to the sort of account which the monks themselves could have recognised in their own terms, and these are theological, spiritual, and hermeneutical', says Turner. He continues: 'My explanatory purpose is therefore of set purpose limited'.[26]

Turner's work is a useful reminder, therefore, of the danger of too quickly and simplistically arguing that the adoption of sexual language by celibate Christians is nothing other than an expression of hidden urges, even if it does seem that at some level the phenomena is linked to the release—albeit a literary release—of pent-up sexual energy.[27] There

25. Turner, *Eros and Allegory*, pp. 17-18.

26. Turner, *Eros and Allegory*, p. 18.

27. This is not to deny that pent up sexual urges are recognizable in many traditional depictions of celibate Christians. See V. Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). Burrus's study makes no reference to Methodius.

have been some examples of this kind of argument in some older scholarly studies, but they have now been superseded by more nuanced accounts.[28] There is, it seems, more to sexual symbolism than desperate and misdirected expression of otherwise suppressed sexuality.

Problems with Limiting Interpretation to Christian-Platonist Perspectives

The explanation which Turner proceeds to give of medieval monastic erotic language is, I think, completely satisfactory *in its own* terms; but this does not mean that it has satisfied everyone. Amy Hollywood, in her book *Sensible Ecstasy*, has criticized Turner for neglecting to allow a broader scope of interpretative methods—and specifically those drawn from feminism—to be brought to such literature.[29] Notwithstanding Turner's own purposefully limited explanation, he does of course allow that the celibates did, in fact, transfer their sexual energies away from other people and towards God. This must mean that not just Platonistic readings are relevant to the literature. Study of issues of sexuality, and the study of the cultural assumptions which at least in part enable the construction of that sexuality, are relevant to a broader, multi-dimensional explanation of the phenomena of erotic language in medieval Christian literature. Study of the content of a metaphor is just as important as study of what the author expressly says that metaphor means, for how something is said is just as important as what it expresses, carrying with it all kinds of additional resonances. Despite Turner's argument, there is, after all, room to concentrate much more self-consciously on the metaphorical in Methodius, and much more self-consciously on language and its structures in general. It can no longer be assumed that a scholar can by-pass the 'epiphenomenon' of language to arrive at the 'real stuff' or 'phenomena' behind or below language. If one is convinced about the centrality of language for human meaning and society, one has to be open to analyses influenced by a diverse range of theories and methods taken from various literary theories, ideology critique, feminist and gender studies, theories of the construction of the body. Allowing the 'free play' of a diversity of theoretical approaches is part of the task of any completely satisfactory explanation of erotic symbols in texts like that by Methodius.

Symbolic language has the facility to affect the reader in ways which cannot be determined by either readers or writers. As Ricoeur has argued, language is loaded with a surplus of meaning, and, further, polysemy

28. See J. Leuba, *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972).

29. Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, p. 320, n. 1.

has 'creative potentialities'.[30] The symbolizing function of metaphorical writing may be suspended by a reader: a metaphor may be taken literally. A reader may be familiar with the notion that this sexual language is explicitly metaphorical, and is not meant to refer to sex but to something else. Nevertheless, the language of eros, sex and sexuality still has the capacity to be taken literally, affecting the reader erotically and sexually on at least an instinctual level. Ricoeur has suggested that sexual language is especially problematic, involving 'an infra-, para-, superlinguistic expression. It mobilizes language, true, but it crosses it, jostles it, sublimates it, stupefies it, pulverizes it into a murmur, an invocation. Sexuality demediates language; it is Eros and not Logos'.[31] Sexuality, in other words, usurps meaning.[32] The sexual language of the Song of Songs, or of the *Symposium* of Plato or of Methodius, always threatens to usurp the philosophical and theological intentions of readers: as Origen has it, turning them lustfully from the 'inner spiritual man' to the 'outward and carnal'.[33] Erotic and sexual language is therefore powerful, carrying with it the potential to disturb, divert and ensnare the reader.[34]

Caroline Walker Bynum: Arguments for Widening Interpretation of Celibates' Erotic Metaphors

This brings me to Caroline Walker Bynum's analysis of erotic language in medieval Christian spirituality in her book, *Fragmentation and Redemption.* The contrast with Turner's purposefully limited interpretation is informative, for Bynum is unwilling to allow the stated purposes of

30. P. Ricoeur, 'Word, Polysemy, Metaphor: Creativity in Language', in M.J. Valdés (ed.), *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 65.

31. P. Ricoeur, 'Wonder, Eroticism, and Enigma', in J.B. Nelson and S.P. Longfellow (eds.) *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection* (London: Mowbray, 1994), pp. 80-84 (83).

32. Jean Baudrillard notes the displacing quality of seductive signs: '*se-ducere*: to take aside, to divert from one's path' (Baudrillard, *Seduction* [New York: St Martin's Press, 1990], p. 22). He goes on to say that, 'Seduction takes from discourse its sense and turns it from its truth ... It makes the manifest discourse say what it does not want to say' (p. 53). If these insights are applied to Methodius, it becomes clear that the sexual symbols of Christian mysticism are booby-trapped by their own erotic content.

33. Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, prologue.

34. That which is threatening to an Origenist is not threatening to all. The capacity of erotic and sexual language for power has been interpreted more positively by others. Audre Lourde sees eroticism from a black lesbian feminist perspective as a potential means of empowerment for women. See her 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power', in Nelson and Longfellow (eds.), *Sexuality and the Sacred*, pp. 75-79.

medieval writers restrict her explanation of the presence of the language of sex in texts of Christian spirituality. Her explanation is, therefore, not merely theological, spiritual, or hermeneutical, but allows for explanations which no one in the medieval period chose to state, even if they did occur to them. She uses with some critical caution, the liminal theory developed in anthropology by Victor Turner.[35] Symbols have an 'orectic' dimension (from the Greek, *orexis*, yearning, appetite). By this, Victor Turner means that they have a sensory quality, they are in some sense appealing: symbols are themselves objects of erotic desire. Words, rhetoric, symbols, are experienced in the body as well as in the mind. Refuting precisely the sort of body/mind dualism which is foundational to early Platonistic Christianity, a symbol apprehended intellectually is also a symbol apprehended physically. As such, sexual language may be experienced psychosomatically; it 'opens out beyond itself to an intractable physicality'.[36] Bynum argues that the erotic symbolism of medieval mysticism had just such an orectic power, especially for women. Women's spirituality was sometimes associated with 'erotic ticklings',[37] somatic expressions of the Christian and Platonist sexual symbolism (examples could include Hadewijch's physical satisfaction at the embrace of Christ,[38] and Margery Kempe's cuddling with Christ in bed[39]).

The methods used in Caroline Bynum Walker's analysis of erotic language in the spiritual writing of medieval women can help us to understand Methodius. I would, of course, note the obvious differences between the *Symposium* written by a male bishop in the third-century Mediterranean world and texts by medieval European women. Nevertheless, what does the insight that sexual language may be experienced psychosomatically do to change the way Methodius is read? Straightforwardly, it means that the erotic content of the symbols comes into sharp focus: whether readers acknowledge it or not, they are likely to be that feature of *The Symposium* which makes the text attractive in the first place. For many readers, attention is drawn and held by references to orgasm more than by references to the spiritual life of celibates. For many readers, the text is at least as much about the symbols as it is about what the symbols symbolize.

35. C.W. Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), pp. 27-51.

36. Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 20.

37. Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, pp. 88 and 191.

38. Hadewijch, vision 7; see *Hadewijch: The Complete Works* (ed. Mother Columba Hart; New York: Paulist Press, 1980), pp. 280-81.

39. Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), Bk 1, ch. 1, p. 42.

Now, although Methodius may have been able to satisfy himself that the language of sex is permissible for theological and philosophical reasons, his use of it also, in addition, belies something of how sexuality was constructed by him and those around him. It is informative (if rather predictable) that, for the *man* Methodius, the sex seems to centre on male orgasm. There seems to be little scope in the *Symposium* for sex to be seen as much more than an opportunity for a man to ecstatically forget himself. Good as that ecstasy may be for *him*, this condition seems to be bought at the price of the denial of the other. Sex is asymmetric: the two are not equal partners in the union achieved; man, and the ecstatic and transcendent potentiality of male orgasm, dominate.

Multi-dimensional Perspectives

Far from limiting the interpretative scope of the sexual language in Methodius's *Symposium* to the perspectives of Christian Platonism, Bynum's observations illustrate the importance of analysing the Christian symbolism of male orgasm using a range of interpretative models. Once these observations are granted, it becomes appropriate to bring critical strategies developed in feminist discourse, gender studies, and men's studies to bear on such language. What I want to outline here are some initial steps towards a multi-dimensional evaluation of the worth of Methodius's Christic-orgasm symbols. It is impossible for me to attempt anything like a comprehensive survey of all the ways Methodius might be interpreted with reference to feminist discourse, gender studies, and men's studies, and I do, of course, acknowledge the difficulties in defining such discourses themselves. Here I take gender studies to refer to enterprises in cultural studies which have borrowed some critical strategies from feminist studies to examine how cultural notions of femininity and masculinity are produced and performed. I acknowledge that my observations here towards an evaluation of the Christic-orgasm symbol involve a range of hermeneutical issues, are subjective, partial, far from perfect, and open to question. They are, ultimately, only what seem fitting to me, a British male. Nevertheless, I have tried to implement some criteria to govern these observations, and have selected voices to inform the following on the basis of relevance to either (1) Methodius in particular, or (2) the construction of male orgasm in the ancient world.

Methodius in Feminist Perspective

Some feminists have been very critical of the sexual language used by Christian ascetics and mystics in contexts which foster female celibacy.

Since Methodius's *Symposium* is a treatise on celibacy in which the main literary protagonists are female, this issue is, in this case, particularly acute. As I said earlier, Methodius's virgins are 'storied' females, expressions of the man Methodius's rhetorical use of female characters in an attempt to achieve the goals of patriarchal theology. You do not have to be Rosemary Radford Ruether to be suspicious of a patriarchal religion encouraging women to negate their own sexual desires, submissively fulfilling the expectation that if a woman is not a mother, she must be a maiden – economic goods in the possession of a father, be he earthly or heavenly.[40] Ruether has made direct comment on sexual language and celibacy in Methodius in *Sexism and God-Talk*. Unfortunately, her feminist criticism of the text has nowhere been noted in the scholarly literature dedicated solely to Methodius. Although this is a shame, it is also, in itself, probably enough to justify the aims of this essay: the insights of any form of cultural study, be they feminist or any other, have nowhere been allowed to inform studies dedicated to Methodius. Unfortunately, what is said in *Sexism and God-Talk* is brief, and can be summarized in a few sentences. Ruether is especially critical of male appropriation of natal imagery in Methodius's *Symposium*:

> female roles have been both sublimated and taken over into male 'spiritual' power. Male headship power controls the higher conception, gestation, birth, and suckling and relates this to a transcendent sphere that negates the 'carnal' maternity of women.
>
> A new and higher spiritual intercourse, a spiritual conception and birthing in the womb of baptism, overcomes the carnal gestation and birth of human mothers from which we all receive sin and death.[41]

Ruether's criticisms therefore centre on the patriarchal misappropriation of female gender roles, which in this instance (in 1983) she identifies as maternal. Methodius represents a literary suppression of the natural, *physical* motherhood of women, and the reification of an unnatural, *spiritual* motherhood in its place. The ideal mother-figure for Methodius is not female; it is St Paul.

While Ruether is critical of the *Symposium* for its patriarchal misappropriation of supposedly female gender *roles*, there are, of course, other grounds for criticizing the wider theological symbols used by Methodius too. It is fairly obvious that Methodius's symbolic language for relation-

40. Others, meanwhile, have argued that Christian female celibacy in late antiquity allowed some form of emancipation, enabling women to overcome the enduring effects of gender attitudes in the period. See J.E. Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins* (London: Verso, 1991).

41. R. Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (London: SCM Press, 1983), p. 143.

ship with Christ – male orgasm – excludes women. Curiously, this point does not feature among Ruether's criticisms of *The Symposium* in *Sexism and God-Talk*. Now, one aspect of Methodius's use of the symbol of male orgasm is its cultural association with the Stoic idea of the *logos spermatikos*. This idea was adopted by Christianity at a very early stage ('God's sperm abides in them', says 1 Jn 3.9). Quite reasonably, the *logos spermatikos* has tended to have been given short shrift by feminist theologians, taken to represent the exclusive patriarchal equation of masculinity and reason. Thus, to take just one example, Marcella Althaus-Reid has observed, 'From God's testicles, as his divine witnesses, we find a process of auto-dissemination of the Word from which women in Christianity have been excluded'.[42] The God of patriarchy is definitively male; so, too, is the seed of reason in every soul. The language that Methodius uses could be seen to encourage a view of the church as passive and submissive receivers of the divine sperm. The people of the church, and especially Christian women, are passive receivers of a patriarchal version of 'reason'. Women are suppressed by a cultural system that defines them as naturally unreasonable, and Methodius's language is exposed as patriarchal rhetoric designed to subjugate women. Read in the light of these particular feminist perspectives, evaluations of Methodius's symbolism of Christic-orgasm must be negative.

Methodius in Foucaultian Perspective

Moving beyond feminist perspectives to the wider perspectives of cultural and gender studies applicable to the period of late antiquity, it becomes unavoidable to relate Methodius's orgasm symbolism to Michel Foucault's highly influential analysis of sexuality in classical Mediterranean societies. Following the publication of the second and third volumes of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*,[43] which deal with Greek and Roman antiquity respectively, recent years have seen a steady flow of research on masculinity and sexual practice in late antiquity.[44] I would like to delineate here just

42. M. Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 54.

43. M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. II. *The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Pantheon, 1985); III. *The Care of the Self* (New York: Pantheon, 1986).

44. See J.J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1990); H.J. Larmour, P.A. Miller and C. Platter (eds.), *Rethinking Sexuality: Foucault and Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); V. Finucci and K. Brownlee (eds.), *Generation and Degeneration: Literature and Tropes of Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints*; D.B. Martin (ed.), *The Cultural Turn in Late Antique Studies: Gender Asceticism, and Historiography* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

two readings of sexuality given by Foucault in volumes 2 and 3 of *The History of Sexuality*. The chief sources for *The Use of Pleasure* are three elite philosophers: Plato, Aristotle and Xenophon. Predictably, these philosophers emphasize the moral dimension of reflection on sexuality. By moral dimension I do not just mean the mere construction of ethical codes to regulate sexual behaviour in society; rather, 'a means of developing ... an aesthetics of existence',[45] a 'stylization of conduct for those who wished to give their existence the most graceful and accomplished form possible'.[46] Plato's *Symposium* makes a fine example of one of the things meant by this: a reflection on what eros is *for*, how desire should be *used*. And for Plato, desire is to be used as a means of ascent to the Good: the soul gives up bodily desire in the interests of the desire for truth, leaving behind the material world until it reaches the ultimate beauty; this gives, in theory at least, eternal instead of momentary satisfaction.[47] Such themes from *The Use of Pleasure*, therefore, are concerned with an idealization of eros that has almost romantic qualities. It is straightforward to harmonize this set of ideas with the general content of Methodius's *Symposium*, and easy to locate Methodius's language of Christic-orgasm in the context of this dimension of Foucault's reading of sexuality in the elite circles of the classical world.

Nevertheless, other themes identified by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* are darker: they are more concerned with the selfish indulgence of sexual appetite. Such notions of sexual indulgence are interpreted by Foucault as part of a wider, violent performance of power. Sexual gratification involves the social domination of others. It is no accident that *The Care of the Self* begins with Artemidoros's *Oneirokritika*, an interpretation of dreams in which sex symbolizes power, not romantic love.

> Artemidorus sees the sexual act first and foremost as a game of superiority and inferiority: penetration places the two partners in a relationship of domination and submission. It is victory on one side, defeat on the other; it is a right that is exercised for one of the partners, a necessity that is imposed on the other. It is a status that one asserts, or a condition to which one in subjected.[48]

'No caresses, no complicated combinations, no phantasmagoria', says Foucault.[49] Penetration is an expression of power. Sex is symbolic of the sadistic, not the erotic.

45. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 252-53.
46. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 250-51.
47. Plato, *Symposium*, 563 e.
48. Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, p. 30.
49. Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, p. 28.

Now, in the light of Foucault's understanding of this other dimension of cultural construction of sex in late antiquity, Methodius's language looks like just another expression of patriarchal power penetrating and indwelling its victims. If Foucault is right, then the direct contemporaries of Methodius would have understood the sexual language of *The Symposium* in connection with the patriarchal domination of younger men, slaves and women. If this analysis is correct, Methodius may be read in line with other Christian writers of the period. Stephen Moore, in his book *God's Gym* has provided a Foucaultian reading of the sexual language which originally inspired Methodius's symbolic Christic-orgasm, namely, the erotic metaphors from Paul's letters in the New Testament. Moore writes of the Spirit as 'God's phallus ... it penetrates you, it invades you, it annihilates you, causing you to "groan inwardly," to expel "sighs to deep for words" (Rom 8.23, 26)'; the Spirit 'is *in* you, filling your every orifice (cf. Rom 5.5; also Eph 5.18), insinuating itself between you and yourself'.[50] Moore, although more than able to find sexual symbolism in Paul's idea of the indwelling Word wherever he wills it, restricts his understanding of this symbolism to the sadistic and masochistic. With relentless Foucaultian logic, slavishly captive to what Milbank has described as the 'ontology of violence',[51] sexual symbolism is, for Moore, itself symbolic of domination: 'nothing to do with romantic love, much less divine love, and everything to do with submission and control'.[52]

Methodius beyond Foucault

Once again, then, there are strong reasons to be very cautious about Methodius's sexual language. But Foucaultian readings of the 'submission and control' type are, I think, rather reductive and too cynical. For when the *The Symposium* is taken at face value, it remains a treatise which presents relationship with the divine in terms of romantic love. A more properly *theological* reading of Methodius than that provided by the terms and conditions of Foucault's 'submission and control' model of sexual behaviour should be able to interpret this sexual language more positively.

50. S.D. Moore, *God's Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 29.

51. J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 278-80. Drawing on Nietzsche's will to power (axiomatic in his thought), Foucault's political anthropology lacks any notion of social relations that are not alienated. See also Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 49: 'Power will never do it by itself; and Foucault's text should be criticized for ... reviving the illusion of power'.

52. Moore, *God's Gym*, p. 159.

The sexual language would then come to be seen not as an expression of power and subjugation, but as a celebration of love for the divine.

A reductive reading in terms of a 'submission and control' Foucaultian perspective is, then, in theological terms, a missed opportunity. For Foucault there can be little joyous celebration of sexual imagery, but only something that could sometimes look like a puritanical fear of sex. For Methodius, by contrast, romantic love and divine love are, apparently, one and the same: the sexual imagery is fitting because it is equated with ecstasy, the losing of self in another through love, and, ultimately, a fertility that brings eternal life. The *Symposium* is marked by 'an extraordinary spirit of joy and spontaneous exaltation'.[53] The sex-language does not seem at all violent. Neither does it appear to be something feared. It must be noted that, contrary to many constructions of orgasm in late antiquity, male orgasm seems to be viewed positively by Methodius. Procreation is seen as pleasurable, and is accompanied in the text of *The Symposium* with references to trance-like ecstasy. Not only is sex good, but male orgasm is good, too. Ejaculation of sperm leads to new life; it is, for Methodius, *positive*.[54]

Methodius in Men's Studies Perspective

There is then, perhaps, some scope for a more positive evaluation of Methodius's symbolism. More promising readings of Methodius's sexual language may draw on men's studies (that area of gender studies which borrows critical strategies from feminist studies to examine how masculinity is culturally produced and performed). If certain aspects of masculinity are embraced and celebrated, the way is open for men to recognize the value of Methodius's symbolism as a relatively natural expression of transcendence.[55] For instance, there is scope here for men to appropriate

53. K.E. Kirk, *The Vision of God* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1931), p. 188.

54. Methodius was deeply impressed with the potency of semen. Indeed, elsewhere, he even uses it as an example to impress his readers with God's power to raise the dead to new life: 'Now, in case we choose to exhibit the seminal fluid discharged from a man, and place by it a corpse, each by itself, which of them, as they both lie exposed to view, will the spectators think most likely to become a man—that drop, which is nothing at all, or that which has already shape, and size, and substance? ... the very thing which is nothing at all, merely because God pleases, becomes a man'. Methodius, *On the Resurrection* 1.14, translation in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, repr, 1997), VI, p. 368.

55. See J.B. Nelson 'Embracing Maculinity', in Nelson and Longfellow (eds.), *Sexuality and the Sacred*, pp. 195-215. Nelson draws on Jung's linking of phallus with logos and transcendence (pp. 198-99), and writes that the 'orgasmic sexual experience

some of the work done on the spirituality of orgasm by particular feminist theologians and apply it to Methodius's Christic-orgasm. Mary Pellauer's essay, 'The Moral Significance of Female Orgasm', provides a good example of just that sort of feminist analysis of the religious connotations of female orgasm which could be used to inform such readings. In Pellauer's analysis, 'Orgasm is sui generis ... Ecstasy is what is at stake here ... immanence and transcendence meet here ... It is a limit experience'. '[I]f I am right that ecstasy is a limit-experience, then religious issues are inherent in orgasm'.[56] A theology informed by men's studies could adapt Pellauer's connection of female orgasm and religious experience to construct a celebratory attitude towards male orgasm and spirituality, drawing on the ancient Christian language of Methodius's *Symposium*. Such attitudes would at least allow a signally positive evaluation of Methodius's language of Christic-orgasm, and perhaps make them a viable resource for any developing theological accounts of male sexualities, gay sexualities, and celibate sexualities, which seek the support of traditional early Christian sources.

But does not the language of *male* orgasm in Methodius still yet function to exclude women from celebrating these symbols from Christian tradition? Do the associations of this language with the *logos spermatikos* mean that it has to be evaluated negatively? There was scope in late antiquity to complicate such conclusions. Cultural constructions of gender and sexuality in the period were paradoxical and contradictory. Literature of the time speaks of men who menstruate and women who produce semen.[57] The biology of Galen (with which Methodius seems to have been familiar)[58] provided a different understanding of semen to that of

brings its own revelation' (p. 214). I suppose that if one chose to read Methodius anachronistically in light of Jung, his sexual symbolism would seem perfectly fitting, and arouse little curiosity.

56. M.D. Pellauer, 'The Moral Significance of Female Orgasm: Toward Sexual Ethics that Celebrates Women's Sexuality', in Nelson and Longfellow (eds.), *Sexuality and the Sacred*, pp. 156-57 and p. 159. Pellauer uses the term 'limit-experience' by analogy with the term 'limit-question'. See Steven Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987). For further analysis of the mystical dimensions of female orgasm and *jouissance*, see also Catherine Clément, *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

57. D.B. Martin, 'Contradictions of Masculinity: Ascetic Inseminators and Menstruating Men in Greco-Roman Culture', in Finucci and Brownlee (eds.), *Generation and Degeneration*, pp. 81-109.

58. In Methodius, *The Symposium*, ET p. 195, n. 20, and p. 199, n. 23, Musurillo draws attention to two parallels—by accident or design—between Methodius and Galen. Neither, however, concerns 'female sperm'.

Aristotle: in the second century Galen had developed the notion that there was 'female semen',[59] alongside male semen; apparently a reference to a female 'orgasmic process analogous to ejaculation in the male'.[60] He thought that both male and female semen was necessary to procreation, and thereby ignored Aristotle's idea that only male sperm was generative. If this is the case, then there may be potential for a recovery of Methodius's symbols which are not necessarily patriarchal. Methodius dwelt in a world of symbolic celibate inseminators; he could well have lived in a world of symbolic *female* celibate inseminators, too.

Conclusion

That Methodius thought explicit sexual language to be completely at home in a treatise on religious *celibacy* is important. Celibacy unquestionably provided the ideal model of sexual behaviour within his Christian community, and recent re-evaluations of celibacy allow this fact to be viewed positively. In her book, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins*, Joyce Salisbury has argued that celibacy was actually a form of emancipation, providing a cultural and sexual 'space' which enabled women to overcome contemporary social attitudes.[61] The celibacy of the virgins from Methodius's *Symposium* places them *outside* the problematic social and sexual systems of late antique culture. As Isherwood has recently argued, celibacy queers heterosexuality in unexpectedly liberative directions.[62] In this sense, at least, celibacy can challenge patriarchal societies and opens up new liberative and theological possibilities.

Methodius, of course, takes his inspiration from Plato. Eros for him is a means of ascent to truth: his is a romantic idealization of desire. In this context, the sexual language is not just a literary release of pent-up sexual energy. The symbol of Christic-orgasm is not necessarily just a misdirected expression of suppressed sexuality. Sex symbolizes divine love. Methodius speaks for real men and women—third-century Christians—who engaged in sexual renunciation and, to all appearances, *celebrated* sexuality with an 'extraordinary spirit of joy and spontaneous

59. See Martin, 'Contradictions of Masculinity'. On the theme of 'female semen', see pp. 83-85 and pp. 91-92.

60. U. Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for Heaven: The Catholic Church and Sexuality* (London: André Deutsch Limited, 1990), p. 152. See also M. Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, pp. 106-107.

61. Salisbury, *Church Fathers*.

62. See L. Isherwood, *The Power of Erotic Celibacy: Queering Heterosexuality* (London: Continuum, 2006).

exaltation'.[63] His use of sexual tropes does not just mobilize his language; it transfigures it into an invocation. *The Symposium* provides an opportunity to explore a set of cultural expectations and constructions of sexuality quite different to those of modern society and much contemporary Christianity; an opportunity, so to speak, to think and perceive things differently.[64]

63. Kirk, *The Vision of God*, p. 188.

64. Peter Brown partially justifies his own study of Christian celibacy on the basis of an insight of Foucault, whom he quotes in the preface to *The Body and Society* (p. xviii). Foucault says in *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 8: 'After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain knowingness ... and not, in one way or another ... in the knower's straying afield from himself? There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on thinking and reflecting at all'.