

Rubén Peretó Rivas

Universidad Nacional de Cuyo – CONICET

ruben.peretorivas@fulbrightmail.org

ORCID: 0000-0002-7960-1129

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12775/BPTh.2025.010>

18 (2025) 2: 163–178

ISSN (print) 1689-5150

ISSN (online) 2450-7059

The *tekhne* of Married Life in Michel Foucault's Reading of St. John Chrysostom

Abstract. This paper deals with Michel Foucault's exploration of St. John Chrysostom's teachings on marriage, outlined in *The Confession of the Flesh*, the last volume of his *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault highlights the incorporation of monastic principles into married life as a form of spiritual practice. Foucault describes marriage as a lesser but significant *tekhne* or art of living, focused on moral and spiritual enrichment rather than solely procreation. Chrysostom's innovative approach integrated principles like natural inequality, the husband's duty to teach, marital indissolubility, and the importance of the emotional bond, framing marriage as "a little Church."

However, even if Foucault's reading has indisputable merits in terms of the novelty of the doctrine taught by Chrysostom, it is also necessary to point out the limits faced by this reading, of a fundamentally methodological nature, which must be taken into account when assessing his work.

Keywords: Michel Foucault, John Chrysostom, marriage, virginity.

Abstrakt. Niniejszy artykuł zajmuje się badaniem przez Michela Foucaulta nauk św. Jana Chryzostoma na temat małżeństwa, przedstawionych w *Wyznaniu ciała*, ostatnim tomie jego *Historii seksualności*. Foucault podkreśla włączenie zasad monastycznych do życia małżeńskiego jako formy praktyki duchowej. Foucault opisuje małżeństwo jako mniejszą, ale znaczącą *tekhne* lub sztukę życia, skoncentrowaną na moralnym i duchowym wzbogaceniu, a nie wyłącznie na prokreacji. Innowacyjne podejście Chryzostoma integrowało zasady takie, jak naturalna nierówność, obowiązek męża do nauczania, nierozdzielność małżeństwa i znaczenie więzi emocjonalnej, określając małżeństwo jako „mały Kościół”.

Jednak nawet jeśli odczytanie Foucaulta ma niezaprzeczalne zalety pod względem nowości doktryny nauczanej przez Chryzostoma, konieczne jest również wskazanie ograniczeń, na jakie napotyka ta lektura, o charakterze zasadniczo metodologicznym, które należy wziąć pod uwagę przy ocenie jego pracy.

Słowa kluczowe: Michel Foucault, Jan Chryzostom, małżeństwo, dziewictwo.

Michel Foucault, in the last volume of his *History of Sexuality*, published posthumously in 2018 under the title *The Confessions of the Flesh*, devotes several chapters to the study of a series of practices from the first Christian centuries, such as penance, confession and spiritual direction, in order to trace the genealogy of the Western subject.¹ He is interested in what he calls “self-care” or “practices of the self”, by which he means “certain procedures which indisputably exist in every civilisation and which are proposed or prescribed to individuals in order to establish their identity and to maintain or transform it [...]”.² In other words, practices of the self are technologies of the self that possess an important additional property: they are aimed at facilitating individual access to truth. Foucault writes that they are practices “which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, 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.”³

This is one of the reasons why Foucault is interested in the study of the Christian tradition. The “care of the self” is to a large extent inscribed within themes and “practices” that are very specific to Christianity to such an extent that Foucault recognises that the social and cultural circle in which they were mainly developed was the monastic environment, and it was precisely there that the emergence of a Christian self was enabled, which he understands as the articulation and development of one’s own inner reality, the “decoding” or “exegesis of the self”, which he interprets as the “objectification of oneself”.⁴

All this research led him to make meticulous readings of authors from Christian monasticism, especially John Cassian, and to develop what he called, following St. Gregory Nazianzen, *tekhne technon*, that is, the “art of the arts”, alluding with this expression to *exagoreusis* or spiritual direction.⁵ However, at the beginning of the third chapter of *The Confessions of the Flesh*, he notes that while Christianity carefully developed a *tekhne* for monastic life, it did not do the same

¹ On Foucault and Christianity, see Carrette 2002; Chevallier 2011a, 136–141; Chevallier 2011b; Kasumi Clements 2021, 1–40; Krooshof 2016; Landry 2021, 53–59; Rosemann 2022, 75–84; Tran 2011.

² Cf. Foucault 2002a, 1364.

³ Foucault 2005, 15.

⁴ Cf. Foucault 1984, 1491. Cf. Sergeevič Choružij and Stoeckl 2015. See also Chevallier 2013, 45–67; Kasumi Clements 2020.

⁵ Foucault 2021, 86.

for married life.⁶ Thus he selects an author, St. John Chrysostom, to trace in his work that *tekhne* of marriage which, although less developed than the monastic, was equally thought out and discussed in the patristic sphere.

Foucault rightly points to a text from Chrysostom taken from one of his homilies: "For ought the man who lives in the world to have any advantage over the monk, save only the living with a wife? In this point he has allowance, but in others none, but it is his duty to do all things equally with the monk".⁷ Here we can see the effort made to imbue a life that was not governed by a rule, as in the case of the monks, with a religious intensity similar to that of the monks. It is a matter of adapting the ascetic ideals of monasticism to the married man's life in the world.⁸ And Foucault considers that this kind of monastic life in the world will require the care and vigilance of both the Church and the State.⁹

Thus the need arises to "defining, in regard to this difference itself and there where the most is at stake sexual relations between spouses -the set of rules and practices that must be applied so that the least ascetic of these two forms of life is not divested of any religious value or deprived of the hope of salvation".¹⁰ In other words, married life, according to Foucault, will become the object of attention, and not because of its ordering to procreation, as is the case in other circumstances, but in terms of its relation to the ascetic ideal.¹¹

In this article, we will analyse Michel Foucault's reflection on marriage in the texts of St. John Chrysostom and his contributions on the subject. Secondly, we will dwell on the characteristics of the Foucauldian reading, pointing out its limits.

1. Foucault's reading of John Chrysostom's texts

Foucault begins by being surprised, along with Chrysostom, at the existence of marriage, and quotes a short passage from his homilies on the subject:

⁶ Foucault 2021, 193.

⁷ Foucault 2021, 194.

⁸ On pastoral power in early Christianity, see Büttgen 2007, 1129–1154.

⁹ Foucault 2021, 197.

¹⁰ Foucault 2021, 196.

¹¹ On this issue, see Colombo 2021, 71–90, and also C. Mazzucco 2014, 341–374 and Lyndon Reynolds 1994.

Paul remarking on all this, considering that the two spouses leave their parents to attach themselves to each other and that such a long experience then has less influence than this fortuitous decision, reflecting more and more that this isn't a human occurrence [...], Paul, consequently, wrote: *This is a great mystery*.¹²

It is about a force that is stronger than any other force in nature, which overcomes attachment to other people or other things and overcomes difficulties. And this force is the will of God who, moreover, has imposed the rule of the prohibition of incest, although it is a relative prohibition because He built mankind like a tree: there are innumerable branches but only one root. In other words, the fact that we cannot marry our sisters forces us to unite with strangers, which means that we have to unite with unknown relatives.

Another aspect of St John Chrysostom's doctrine that Foucault points out is a sort of shift from a rather negative conception of married life that appears in his treatise *De virginitate* to a positive conception to the point that he expresses: "A life of marriage, if it obeys the precepts, 'is scarcely inferior to monastic life; such spouses will have little cause to envy the unmarried'".¹³ The reason for this variation lies in the fact that marriage, according to the Pauline doctrine taken up by John Chrysostom, is a figure of the union of Christ with his Church, to such an extent that "marriage is a little Church".¹⁴ Thus, marriage is no longer the solution for those who cannot live in continence, but has a positive value in itself, although not as high as the celibate life.¹⁵

Foucault, moreover, systematises Chrysostom's doctrine of marriage in a series of principles. Firstly, the "principle of natural inequality", since God has ordained that the male has the first rank over the female. However, this is compensated for in the second principle, called the "principle of complementarity", which, in the philosopher's words, "giving a positive content to this inequality, which can then be made to function as a principle of order in marital life, and ensure good harmony, whereas marriage might be conflictual otherwise".¹⁶

Thirdly, there is the principle of the duty to teach, according to which the husband must teach his wife a series of moral behaviours, mainly oriented to-

¹² Foucault 2021, 199.

¹³ Foucault 2021, 202, in reference to *Homily on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, XX, 9.

¹⁴ *Homily on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, XX, 6; Foucault 2021, 201.

¹⁵ In connection with this issue, see Büttgen 2019, 6–21.

¹⁶ Foucault 2021, 202.

wards modesty, always surrounding her with “a pious respect”. There is one area, however, where this respect must be much greater: that of the woman's natural modesty. The fourth principle has to do with the permanence of the bond and the reciprocity of obligations, i.e. that the marital union is indissoluble and, although it is not forbidden, it discourages remarriage.

Foucault enunciates the fifth principle as that of “emotional tie that constitutes both the goal and the necessary condition of the good marriage.”¹⁷ And he points out that affection does not refer to a relationship of possession and domination but to a certain form of soul-to-soul relationship. This is a departure from the morality of the ancients, according to Xenophon, according to which the husband told his wife that if he had chosen her and her parents had given her to him, it was for the good of their household and their future children.¹⁸ In St John Chrysostom, on the other hand, the husband only wishes to have children when that reunion of souls, which prefigures the union in the hereafter, takes place: “«I will want to have children when you have tenderness for me.”¹⁹ For all this, the bishop of Constantinople will say: *Kalon ho gamos*; “beautiful is marriage”.

Foucault finds a difference, which he points out forcefully, between John Chrysostom's doctrine and that of earlier Christian authors. For him, procreation is not one of the essential ends of marriage and, moreover, sexual relations between spouses are an object of obligation.²⁰ The disconnection between marriage and procreation, which is so characteristic of Christian doctrine, is certainly striking. Can it really be attributed to Chrysostom? Foucault relies on three formulations to justify it, although he warns that it is never said in such an exhaustive way. First, when Chrysostom lists the purposes for which God instituted marriage, he makes no mention of procreation, since it was instituted “So that we might avoid fornications, so that we might repress our concupiscence, so that we might make ourselves agreeable to God by contenting ourselves with our own wife.”²¹

In other texts, such as *De virginitate*, he does include procreation, but does so in a secondary way: “Marriage was given, no doubt, with a view to procreation,

¹⁷ Foucault 2021, 205.

¹⁸ Xenophon 2021, 206.

¹⁹ Foucault, 2021, 206, in connection with *Homily on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, XX, 8.

²⁰ Foucault 2021, 209.

²¹ Foucault 2021, 209, in connection with *How to choose a wife* III, 9.

but much more to mitigate the fire of desire inherent in our nature”.²² And the idea is reinforced in the homilies he devotes to marriage: “There are two reasons for which marriage was instituted: it’s so that we will be continent, and so that we will be fathers. But of these two motives, the most important is that of continence”.²³ It would seem, then, that procreation is a completely secondary end since, in fact, if God willed, he could perfectly well accomplish it without passing through marriage or the bonds of the body.²⁴

Foucault is rightly surprised by this statement of John Chrysostom. First of all, because it implies a complete departure from Hellenistic culture, in which the *paidopoia*, or production of children, was fundamental to marriage. But also because shortly afterwards the whole of Christianity, with Augustine of Hippo in the first place, will establish that procreation is the first purpose of marriage, even before the need to satisfy concupiscence. The explanation for this oddity is given by the perspective from which Chrysostom considers marriage, a perspective indebted to a cosmology rooted in Origenism. In fact, the divine command “Be fruitful and multiply” was given before the fall and, in paradise, multiplication would take place by an angelic and non-sexual generation. After the fall of the first parents, procreation is established as a kind of substitute or image of lost immortality: man is *immortalised* in the children he procreates. This is one more gesture of the divine *philanthropy* that grants “the succession of children as an image of resurrection”.²⁵ When this – the final resurrection – takes place, procreation will disappear. It is, then, a provisional activity.

If we look at marriage again, it is clear that it arose after the fall and almost as a consequence of it. Foucault recalls *De virginitate*: “Modeled by God, man lived in paradise and there there was no talk of marriage at all”.²⁶ Woman had been given to Adam as a help or helper, but not as a wife. Marriage, says Chrysostom, appears with the fall, “with the corruption of death, the curse, the suffering, the pains of life”.²⁷ It is a bitter medicine given to man just as it is given to children to overcome an illness, in this case concupiscence. In short, “marriage is a law that has its reason for being in the rebellion, after the fall, of

²² Chrysostom 1966, 156.

²³ Foucault 2021, 209, in connection with *Homily XIX on 1 Corinthians VII*, I, 3.

²⁴ Foucault 2021, 209, in connection with *De virginitate XV*, 5.

²⁵ Chrysostom 1998, 141.

²⁶ Foucault 2021, 209, in connection with *De virginitate XIV*, 3.

²⁷ Foucault 2021, 209, in connection with *De virginitate XIV*, 5.

the body against the soul, and whose end is to subdue the body's desires. It is thus a 'habit of servitude'.²⁸

Michel Foucault acutely observes that St. John Chrysostom's position excludes marriage from the social economy, for it is no longer primarily the institution within which procreation takes place, but is a way, along with monastic life, of resolving concupiscence. In other words, it is concupiscence "the common object of the rules of the state of marriage and the *tekhne* of the profession of virginity".²⁹ In the case of marriage, however, a juridical dimension is added since, having been created to satisfy the concupiscence of the spouses, there is no place in it for continence. This is tantamount to saying that the spouses, by entering into marriage, are legally bound to the reciprocal acceptance of the exercise of sexuality. Relying on a text of St. Paul according to which the man's body does not belong to him but to the woman, and vice versa, Chrysostom supports the obligation not to deny oneself to the other. This is, as Foucault points out, a *debt*, for the one whose body has become the property of the other owes something to the other, namely the use of that body.³⁰ In short, in marriage there is a transfer of property.

It is indeed surprising to speak of the transfer of property and not to refer to marriage as a union. The juridical character that John Chrysostom confers on this institution removes the basis for understanding it in any other way. The concupiscence of each of the spouses must be satisfied in the other; there is a limitation in each of them that the other must take care of. Thus, each becomes lord and master of the other's body insofar as that body is the means of controlling his or her own concupiscence. In this way, then, each spouse is to some extent responsible for the salvation of the other. A "salvific chiasmus", in Foucault's words.³¹

After exposing the doctrine on marriage that appears in the homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Foucault comes to some conclusions. The first is that it was precisely this juridisation of married life, when marriage is associated with *debitum* or debt rather than procreation, that will enable a certain jurisdiction of religious authority over sexual practice. Secondly, desire or *epithymia* eventually establishes itself as the "raw material" on which both monastic life and married

²⁸ Foucault 2021, 212.

²⁹ Foucault 2021, 212.

³⁰ Foucault 2021, 215.

³¹ Foucault 2021, 217.

life work. In the first case, it will be a combat with one's own thoughts; in the second, a concerted departure with one's spouse.³²

The aspect that most interests Foucault is the first, because the juridisation of married life enables the exercise of pastoral power or *pastoral care*, a subject to which he had devoted his lectures at the *Collège de France* in 1979 and 1980, and numerous other writings. But he also points out that, whether in monastic life or married life, it is always a question of one's relationship with oneself. In other words, the question is what one has to do with one's own concupiscence.³³

In synthesis, Michel Foucault summarises in the doctrine elaborated by John Chrysostom who, responding to practical pastoral duties, faced the double pressure of reinforcing both the ascetic ideal and the traditional social forms that contradicted it. In the process, new positive valuations of married life emerged, so that an earlier 'Greek use of pleasures' and a previous Christian valorisation of virginity were reconfigured into an 'ethic of the flesh' capable of preserving the symmetry between monastic and married life. Marriage became an art (*tekhnē*) of relating to oneself that avoided fornication and disciplined excessive desire, even while preserving long-held social principles such as natural 'inequality', gender complementarity and the need for affective bonding between spouses. This shift from Origen's clearly more sceptical stance on marriage to John Chrysostom's marriage theology traces a transition from a homosocial world of ascetic discipline to marriage/monastic structures validated on the basis of sexual, self and state surveillance.³⁴

2. Limits of Foucauldian reading

Michel Foucault's interpretation of Saint John Chrysostom is not only novel when viewed from the perspective of patrology, but also brings considerable richness to the understanding of this Father of the Church. Foucault, with his undoubted analytical skills, presents us with a reading of Chrysostom that departs from the more traditional and specialised approaches of his time. In the 1970s, the works of the Church Fathers were mostly studied by theologians and scholars of ecclesiastical or literary history, leaving them out of the interest of

³² See Jordan 2015.

³³ Foucault 2021, 219. See Colombo 2023, 391–409; Zachhuber 2020, 170–182.

³⁴ Cf. Knust 2020, 7–25.

philosophers and theorists from other disciplines. However, Foucault, in his constant effort to understand forms of power, discourse and subjectivity, found in Chrysostom a fertile ground for his analysis since he did not limit himself to a simple exegesis of the theological content of his works, but integrated them into his own philosophical project, addressing questions such as the relationship between power and truth, the construction of Christian subjectivity and the discipline of the body and soul in late antiquity. Through this Foucauldian lens, authors such as Chrysostom, who previously seemed reserved for the exclusive field of patrology or theology, acquired a broader and more contemporary philosophical relevance. Thus, Foucault not only revalues the figure of Chrysostom in the field of the history of Christian thought, but also makes him an interlocutor in contemporary philosophical debates. In any case, we can give Foucault credit for having managed to escape a certain scientific doxa and to have approached Chrysostom as a true milestone in the history of ideas.³⁵

On the other hand, Michel Foucault's systematisation of St John Chrysostom's teaching on marriage is not only original, but also highly effective for a full and deep understanding of the subject. The way in which Foucault organises and structures Chrysostom's thought makes it possible to bring out more clearly the foundations of his teaching on marriage, something that can sometimes be implicit or scattered in the texts of the Father of the Church. In this sense, Foucault does not simply repeat what the author has said, but presents it in a new way, making it easier for contemporary scholars to access and understand.

A particularly illustrative example of this systematisation is the way in which Foucault schematises Chrysostom's doctrine into five key principles: the principle of natural inequality, the principle of complementarity, the principle of the duty to teach, the principle of the permanence of the bond and the principle of the affective bond. This carefully thought-out structure not only orders Chrysostom's thought, but makes it more accessible, allowing each aspect of the doctrine to be examined individually, without losing sight of the broader context of marriage in Christian theology.

However, we can also point out some limits to the Foucauldian reading of the Fathers, in this case John Chrysostom. And, in most cases, these are quite obvious: Foucault is not a patristic scholar and, consequently, does not possess the method of study and approach proper to these texts, which generates, from

³⁵ See Morlet 2021, 139–158.

the point of view of patristic studies, inconsistencies in some of his analyses and conclusions.

First of all, there is one aspect that is frequently pointed out, and that is related to the type of patristic texts that Foucault selects for his analyses. They are always texts of a practical nature, in our case homilies. That is to say, there is no interest on his part in doctrinal texts, whether in the case of Chrysostom, Augustine or Tertullian. In April 1980, James Bernauer, a young Jesuit, opened the doors of the library of the Sèvres Centre to him.³⁶ In his testimony, he tells how Foucault avoided the shelves devoted to dogmatic theology and went straight to the works of moral theology.³⁷ Christianity, then, did not interest him so much for its theology as for its extensive moral literature, ranging from the magisterial texts of the Fathers to simple anonymous treatises on the Christian life. The problem with this selection criterion is that Foucault will only take into account works that deal, as we have said, with Christian *practices*, and not with their foundations, which is entirely consistent with his system. However, practices in patristic Christianity were always local, so it is incorrect to take them as normative for the whole of early Christianity and to conclude universally from them. This is possible, however, in the case of theological works.³⁸

Foucault's choice has another consequence. He grants to a small group of sermons by St John Chrysostom, a prolific author, who in addition to hundreds of homilies has dozens of books and theological treatises, a fundamental importance in the Christian conception of marriage. It is true that on several occasions he insists that Chrysostom is a good *witness* to the evolution of his time. He says: “

[...] he belongs, with the accents that are peculiar to him, to a whole current. Many of the ideas that he formulates concerning marriage also appear in dose contemporaries like Gregory of Nyssa or more distant ones like Saint Jerome. Some have their starting point in Origen. So I won't be referring to a Chrysostom founder of a new ethic of marriage, but to a Chrysostom as a witness and example of a pastoral of married life that was already highly developed in the period in which he wrote.³⁹

On the other hand, from Origen onwards, marriage was not considered in terms of its procreative ends, but in its hierarchical position in relation to virgin-

³⁶ Quoted by Michel Senellart in Foucault 2012, 336.

³⁷ Carrette 1999, 2, note 7.

³⁸ See Dominguez and Ellis 2023, 13–33.

³⁹ Foucault 2021, 197.

ity and voluntary celibacy; it was the question of continence, not children, that was at the heart of the debate. Chrysostom does not appear here as the inventor of this way of analysing conjugal relations and the state of marriage. How then does Foucault justify the choice of Chrysostom for such a detailed analysis and why does he select only a few writings of a pastoral nature? The question is important because Foucault is attributing Chrysostom's teaching in these writings as normative not only of conjugal relations but also of the pastoral power of the Church over marriage, without taking into account, on the other hand, that a few years after these texts, St Augustine, whose influence on the Latin Church will be much greater, radically changes his position by establishing the priority of procreation in the ends of marriage.⁴⁰

But even more. Not only are the texts chosen by Foucault very few and to a certain extent capricious, but within these same texts, he extracts a few short paragraphs and elaborates on them an extensive reflection that cannot be supported by other texts of Chrysostom's. For example, he focuses on the author's assertion that conjugal love has a mysterious aspect in that it is capable of making spouses leave their homes, which is the place where they are safe, to start living with someone who is in some way a stranger. Writes Chrysostom:

Notice, however, that Paul explains love in detail, comparing it to Christ's love for the Church and our love for our own flesh, saying that for this reason a man leaves his father and mother, but he does not elaborate concerning fear. Why so? He would much prefer love to prevail, because where there is love, everything else follows, but where love is absent, fear will be of no use.⁴¹

This is the only text in the whole of Chrysostom's work where this theme is mentioned. It would seem excessive, then, to grant it the centrality that Foucault gives it.

Much more importance and centrality he gives to this brief phrase: "If your marriage is like this, your perfection will rival the holiest of monks".⁴² These words are found in *Homily 20 on Ephesians*, and also, as above, it is the only occurrence of the idea in Chrysostom's entire work. Nevertheless, Foucault sees it

⁴⁰ On this subject, see Hunter 2007.

⁴¹ Chrysostom 2003, 54. There is not a critical edition of the Chrysostom's *Homily on Ephesians*. The greek text could be found in the *Patrologia Graeca* 62, 9–167. In this paper, I quote the English translation.

⁴² Chrysostom 2003d, 61–62.

as foundational to the author's entire theology of marriage, and offers interesting conclusions from it. But, once again, it is possible to ask to what extent John Chrysostom gave it the importance in his writings that Foucault gives it. And it is valid to ask then whether Foucault reads the real Chrysostom or the Chrysostom he has chosen and assembled according to his own interests.

Foucault's insistence on Chrysostom is, then, somewhat arbitrary to say the least, although we can agree with him that the text is fairly representative of a certain tendency. But it is not a trend characteristic of the fourth century, as Foucault seems to claim, but rather of a certain exegetical trend going back to Greek Judaism – the juridical aspect of marriage had already been dealt with by Flavius Josephus – and, on the doctrinal level, dependent on Origen.

Another methodological aspect to note is the relative and uneven quality of the translations Foucault worked with. In the specific case of the *Trois homélies sur le mariage*, he uses the Greek translation by M. Jeannin, published in 1864.⁴³ It is a faulty translation and not based on a critical edition of the Greek text. In the field of patristic studies, it is essential, in order to make an analysis of the level of detail that Foucault makes, to have a reliable edition. And it is not only the text of the Father in question but also the biblical texts he uses. One notices in Foucault a certain indifference to the critical quality of the biblical texts. In his commentary, he speaks of “the biblical text”, as if there were only one, as if it made no difference whether Chrysostom commented on the Hebrew text, in the case of the Old Testament, or on the Greek text. In Late Antiquity, however, the biblical text was very plural. Foucault does not seem to be aware of this fact. And the fact is that at the time he wrote *Confessions of the Flesh* he already had available the Greek bible read by John Chrysostom. I refer to the Alfred Rahlfs edition of 1935 and the Cambridge edition of 1927.⁴⁴ Foucault does not seem to have had the curiosity to consult them.

Finally, it should be added that, in commenting on Chrysostom's text, Foucault prefers to rehearse a personal analysis rather than resort to the scholarly bibliography on the author. The total absence of the abundant bibliography that has been produced on the author is notable. And, linked to this, there is also a lack of contextualisation of the selected texts. In our case, Foucault does not ask under what circumstances these three homilies were preached and what

⁴³ It is Chrysostome 1864.

⁴⁴ Cf. Rahlfs 1935; Brooke et al. 1927.

chronological place they occupy in Chrysostom's work. These data, as any patristic scholar knows, are necessary to arrive at reliable analyses and conclusions.

This indifference to previous studies on Chrysostom by theologians and patristics leads Foucault to make some very questionable assertions, to say the least. For example, he states that concupiscence is "the object common to the rules of the state of marriage and to the *tekhne* of the profession of virginity".⁴⁵ In other words, Christians are united in marriage or choose virginity simply as a way of mastering or channelling concupiscence. This is clearly a very reductive view of the reasons why a Christian makes a choice of state. What he seeks first and foremost is to serve God and thereby attain salvation. Certainly the mastery of sexual desires may be an obstacle to that end, but by no means can it be said that this is the primary motive.

Conclusion

In this analysis, we have explored Michel Foucault's reading of St. John Chrysostom, particularly with regard to Christian marriage practices and the construction of subjectivity in late antiquity. Foucault examines how marriage, within the Christian framework, has become a form of *tekhne* or art of life, which, although of lesser relevance than monastic life, presents a significant spiritual value.

One of the key themes has been the contrast that Foucault draws between monastic and married life. While the former is associated with an ascetic ideal characterised by celibacy, the latter is seen as a practice oriented towards conjugal chastity, although both types of life offer means for the containment of concupiscence.

We also note that Foucault stresses the importance of the concept of "natural inequality" within marriage, which Chrysostom presents as part of the divine order. However, this inequality does not imply a relationship of domination or control, but a complementarity between the roles of men and women. This complementarity, as presented by Chrysostom and highlighted by Foucault in his analysis, not only orders conjugal life, but also bases it on the need for harmony and affection between the spouses. It is here that one of Chrysostom's most novel contributions appears: the introduction of the affective bond as a central

⁴⁵ Foucault 2021, 212.

principle of Christian marriage, thus overcoming a merely functionalist view of marriage as a means of procreation.

Furthermore, it has been shown how procreation occupies a secondary place in the thought of Chrysostom, who considers continence as the primary end of the conjugal union. This focus on chastity and self-control within marriage reflects a tension between ascetic ideals and the practical necessities of life in the world. Foucault notes how Chrysostom displaces procreation as the central goal of marriage, emphasising instead the spiritual development of the spouses through moderation and cooperation in overcoming concupiscence.

Foucauldian analysis illuminates the role of church and state in the surveillance and regulation of marriage. Foucault argues that the development of a *tekhnē* matrimoniale, based on discipline and the regulation of desire, contributes to the emergence of a pastoral that aims to control not only monastic life, but also married life. In this sense, marriage becomes a field for the exercise of pastoral power, reflecting Foucault's interest in the relations between power, truth and subjectivity in early Christianity.

Finally, it is worth noting the limits of the Foucauldian reading, which have been pointed out throughout this paper. Although Foucault makes an important contribution by putting St John Chrysostom in dialogue with his own philosophical project, his approach may be limited from the perspective of the patristic studies. Foucault focuses almost exclusively on homiletic texts, leaving aside other fundamental doctrinal writings of Chrysostom, which might offer a more balanced view of his thought. Moreover, his analysis often overlooks the contextual particularities of the homilies, which can lead to an overly universal interpretation of the ideas expressed by Chrysostom in a specific pastoral context.

In conclusion, Foucault's work on St John Chrysostom offers an innovative perspective on the relationship between early Christianity, the regulation of desire and the construction of subjectivity. His reading of marriage as a *tekhnē* of Christian life reveals how practices of the self, through which individuals access truth and discipline their bodies, not only develop in monastic life, but also extend to married life. However, his analysis needs to be complemented by other perspectives that address more comprehensively the theological and doctrinal context of Chrysostom's writings.

References

- Brooke, Alan E., Norman McLean, and Henry St. J. Thackeray, eds. 1927. *The Old Testament in Greek*, t. 2 (1–2). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Büttgen, Philippe. 2007. “Théologie politique et pouvoir pastoral.” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 62: 1129–1154.
- Büttgen, Philippe. 2019. “Foucault’s Concept of Confession.” *Foucault Studies* 29: 6–21.
- Carrette, Jeremy R. ed. 1999. *Religion and Culture. Michel Foucault*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Carrette, Jeremy. 2002. *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporality and Political Spirituality*. Taylor and Francis.
- Chevallier, Philippe. 2011a. “Foucault et Les Sources Patristiques.” In *Michel Foucault*, 136–141. Paris: Éditions de L’Herne.
- Chevallier, Philippe. 2011b. *Michel Foucault et le christianisme*. ENS éditions.
- Chevallier, Philippe. 2013. “Michel Foucault et le ‘soi’ chrétien.” *Astérion* 11: 45–67.
- Chrysostom, John. 1966. *De virginitate*, edited by Herbert Musorillo, SC 125. Paris: Cerf.
- Chrysostom, John. 1998. *Homélies sur la Genèse*, edited by Laurence Brottier, Sch 433. Paris: Cerf.
- Chrysostom, John. 2003a. “Homily on the Epistle to the Ephesians.” In *On Marriage & Family Life*. Translation by Catharine P. Roth and David Anderson, 43–65. New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press.
- Chrysostom, John. 2003b. “How to choose a wife.” In *On Marriage & Family Life*. Translation by Catharine P. Roth and David Anderson, 89–110. New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press.
- Chrysostom, John. 2003c. „Homily XIX on 1 Corinthians.” In *On Marriage & Family Life*. Translation by Catharine P. Roth and David Anderson, 25–42. New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press.
- Chrysostom, John. 2003d. “Homily 20 on Ephesians 5, 22.” In *On Marriage & Family Life*. Translation by Catharine P. Roth and David Anderson, 54. New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press.
- Chrysostome, Jean. 1864. *Oeuvres complètes*, t. IV L. Guérin & Cie.
- Colombo, Agustín. 2021. “What Is a Desiring Man?” *Foucault Studies* 29: 71–90.
- Colombo, Agustín. 2023. “La spiritualité comme liberté: À propos du rapport entre expérience et action chez le dernier Foucault.” *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 79.3: 391–409.
- Dominguez, Patricio, and Erik Ellis. 2023. “Agustín sobre el Katechon. Una lección de De Civitate Dei.” *Scripta Mediaevalia* 16.2: 13–33.
- Foucault, Michel. 1984. “Le souci de la vérité”, *DE II*, no. 350, p. 1491.
- Foucault, Michel. 2002a. “Usage des plaisirs et techniques de soi.” In *Dits et écrits II*. Paris: Foucault, Michel. 2002b. *Dits et écrits II*. Paris: Gallimard.

- Foucault, Michel. 2005. *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, edited by F. Gros. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Foucault, Michel. 2012. *Du gouvernement des vivants. Cours au Collège de France (1979–1980)*. Paris: EHESS – Gallimard.
- Foucault, Michel. 2021. *History of Sexuality IV: The Confessions of the Flesh*. Translation by R. Harley. Vintage Books.
- Hunter, David G. 2007. *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jordan, Mark D. 2015. *Convulsing Bodies: Religion and Resistance in Foucault*. Stanford University Press.
- Kasumi Clements, Niki. 2020. *Sites of the Ascetic Self. John Cassian and Christian Ethical Formation*. University of Notre Dame Press.
- Kasumi Kasumi Clements, Niki. 2021. “Foucault’s Christianities.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 89.1: 1–40.
- Knust, Jennifer. 2020. “Marriage as a Social Good.” *Marriage, Families & Spirituality* 1: 7–25.
- Krooshof, Stijn. 2016. *Foucault, Christianity and the Care of the Self. A Framework for a New Foucauldian Understanding of Christianity*. Radboud University.
- Landry, Jean-Michel. 2021. “Foucault on Christianity: The Impasse of Subjectivation.” *Political Theology* 22.1: 53–59.
- Lyndon Reynolds, Philip. 1994. *Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianization of Marriage during the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods*. Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae*, v. 24 (E.J. Brill, 1994).
- Mazzucco, C. 2014. “I rapporti tra i coniugi nel pensiero dei Padri della Chiesa (I–III Sec.).” *Augustinianum*, 54.2: 341–374.
- Morlet, Sébastien. 2021. “L’exégèse d’une exégèse. Foucault lecteur de Chrysostome.” In *Foucault, les Pères, le sexe: autour des Aveux de la chair*, edited by Philippe Büttgen et al., 139–158. Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne.
- Rahlfs, Alfred, ed. 1935. *Septuagint: id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes*. Privilegierte württembergische Bibelanstalt.
- Rosemann, Philipp W. 2022. “On the “Christian Turn” in Foucault’s Thought: Apropos of Foucault, les Pères, le Sexe.» *Maynooth Philosophical Papers* 11: 75–84.
- Sergeevič Choruzij, Sergej, and Kristina Stoeckl. 2015. *Practices of the Self and Spiritual Practices: Michel Foucault and the Eastern Christian Discourse*. Translation by Boris Jakim. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Tran, Jonathan. 2011. *Foucault and Theology*. T & T Clark.
- Xenophon. 2021. “Economica.” [c. 7] In Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality IV: The Confessions of the Flesh*. Translation by R. Harley, 206. Vintage Books.
- Zachhuber, Johannes. 2020. “Sexuality and the Christian Self: Michel Foucault’s Reading of the Church Fathers.” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 36.2: 170–182.