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The Shepherd Meets the Divine Economy: Foucault, Agamben, and the Christian Genealogy of Governance

In his recent thinking, Giorgio Agamben has been occupied with an extensive project that he calls the genealogy and archaeology of Christianity. In particular, he has attempted to bring forth, how a certain paradigm of *governance* has developed in the history of theology (during a long period of time), first with the Church Fathers, and subsequently, in medieval Scholastics. This paradigm of Christian governance is called the divine *oikonomia*, or in its Latin equivalent, *dispositio.* Furthermore, Agamben argues that this "providential-economic" paradigm of governance is the central heritage of Christianity for modernity, for the modern governmental state, both in its liberal as well as welfare modalities.[1]

In this framework, Agamben has also revisited Michel Foucault's work. However, both the general pertinence of Agamben's recent project, and more specifically, its relationship with Foucault, remain yet to be explored in a comprehensive and systematic fashion.[2] This is, of course, partly because the latest outcomes of Agamben's project have been published only during the last couple of years, but it may also be because of their seemingly esoteric focus on ancient theology. The aim of this article is to deal with this relationship, not merely at the level of Agamben's explicit remarks, but also more broadly, regarding the consequences of his argumentation. We ought to find out, what sort of perspective, with what implications, do Agamben's analyses of the Christian *oikonomia* provide for our rereading of Foucault.

First, as the indispensable background, we will briefly discuss Foucault's 1970s notion of *pastoral power*, highly central for his overall approach to Christianity. After that, we will turn to Agamben's account of the economic-providential paradigm. Our central question does not concern the historical

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[1] When writing this article, a part of the key sources discussed (Foucault and recent Agamben) not yet appeared in English. French translations of Agamben's recent work were available, and have been used as references in the article. For the sake of terminological and stylistic coherence, I have mainly provided my own English translations of Foucault's and Agamben's texts.

[2] A part of Agamben's recent work has already been discussed, also regarding its relationship with Foucault. See Jeffrey Bussolini, "Critical Encounter between Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault: Review of Recent Works of Agamben: *Il Regno e la Gloria*: *per una genealogia teologica dell'economia e del governo*, *Il sacramento del linguaggio*: *Archeologia del giuramento*, and *Signatura rerum: Sul metodo*," *Foucault Studies,* no.10, 2010, 108-43; Bussolini, "What Is a Dispositive?," *Foucault Studies,* no. 10, 2010, 85-107; Alberto Toscano, "Divine Management: Critical Remarks on Giorgio Agamben's 'The Kingdom and the Glory'," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, vol.16, no.3, 2011, 125-36; Mitchell Dean, "Governmentality Meets Theology: 'The King Reigns, but He Does not Govern'," *Theory, Culture & Society,* no. 29, 2012, 145-58. However, the most recent works of Agamben are not yet included in the former. For a discussion on Foucault and Agamben's earlier thinking, see, e.g., Mika Ojakangas, "Impossible Dialogue on Bio-Power: Agamben and Foucault," *Foucault Studies,* no. 2, 2005, 5-28.

details, and the respective accuracies or inaccuracies of Foucault's and Agamben's readings of the corpus of theological texts (to deal with this would require another article). Instead, the intention is to tease out the main features, as well as the main differences, of the two theoretical-philosophical conceptions of the Christian paradigm of power and governance (with their modern, secularized legacies), elaborated by these two seminal thinkers.

Indeed, the two genealogies turn out to be fundamentally different, even incompatible, something that may be surprising if we consider their common orientation, as well as the intersection of their cultural-historical contexts, and even their documents. We will stress that for Foucault, first and foremost, the kernel of pastoral power (and consequently of Christianity as such) is not the generation of the subject or the self, but on the contrary, *de-subjectivation*, i.e., the eradication of subjectivity, of the self, and of the open potentiality or "virtuality." This, as we will note, is starkly opposed to Agamben's view of *oikonomia*. Above all, two features of the latter will come to the fore, and will occupy our focus: the "*anarchic*" and "*sabbatical*" functioning of the providential-salvific machine and its production of subjectivity. Moreover, as we follow and take further Agamben's argument, we are invited to disclose the violent, destructive, and even self-destructive logic at play in Foucault's pastoral scheme.

Finally, the objective is to demonstrate that besides the critique of pastoral power, there is still even more pervasive significance for us to recognize in Agamben's current *œuvre*, as we approach it from the point of view of reinterpreting Foucault's 1970s and early 1980s thinking. We will observe that Agamben's theological genealogy and archaeology actually range into a thorough questioning of the theological roots of "power" and "governance" in Foucault's work. We will see that Agamben's analysis of Christianity is, indeed, pertinent for our rethinking of Foucault.

PASTORAL POWER, OBEDIENCE, AND DE-SUBJECTIVATION

It is well known that the concept of pastoral power is at the crux of Foucault's treatment of Christianity in the latter half of the 1970s and in the early 1980s. Foucault states that the core of Christianity as such, and what makes it unique among religions, is precisely the fundamentality of the scheme of a *shepherd* guiding a *flock* of ewes. It is the model for both God's relationship with human beings, and for the ecclesial relationship between humans. For Foucault, the entire history of the Christian church is, first of all, the history of pastoral power (of its reorganizations), from early Christianity until Reformation and Counter-Reformation, from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism. [3] To put it concisely, Foucault argues that we should understand the genesis of the modern, governmental and biopolitical state – taking charge of the life of each and everyone, of individuals and populations – as the secularization, i.e., as the "capture," modification, and application of the pastoral scheme in a non-religious framework.[4]

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[3] Michel Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population. Cours au Collège de France, 1977-1978* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2004), 133-41, 151-5.
[4] Foucault, "'Omnes et singulatim': vers une critique de la raison politique" in *Foucault: Dits et écrits II, 1976-1988* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 953-80; Foucault, "Le sujet et le pouvoir" in *Foucault: Dits et écrits II*, 1041-62; Foucault, *Sécurité*, 169, 195-7.

Pastoral power is organized on a teleological, finalized basis by its salvific aim: to guide a multitude of living beings, i.e., a flock, into salvation. It works in order to insert and maintain the flock on the "right path" of movement, change, and development. The rationale orienting this practice of guidance is grasped by the maxim *"omnes et singulatim"*: saving the multitude as a whole, but just as importantly, saving individually each one of the ewes taken as a unique being, so that the guidance of the totality and of each singular individual cannot be separated. It is through this pastoral guidance that Christianity brings about the "universalization" of *oikos* and *oikonomia*, of the "economy" and *management* of the household. The prominent invention of Christianity is *oikonomia psukhōn*, the economical guidance/conduct of souls, i.e., the unified administration, which grasps the life of the whole humanity as such (no longer referring to the limited sphere of the household, as it did with Aristotle).[5]

How, then, is the position of the pastor determined in the "economy of souls." First, she must "appear publically" (be present) for the flock, in a constant and continuous manner, thus gathering together their dispersed multitude. Second, she must also *survey* and actively intervene to guide the flock, in an equally constant and continuous fashion. The position of the shepherd is one of *incessant activity*, with no room for suspension. What is required of her is unending *poiesis*, as the object(s) (i.e., the flock) and the *telos* of the activity (the salvation of the flock), are exterior to the activity itself. The activity and the pastor who acts serve as instruments and as intermediaries. Furthermore, the pastoral activity is characterized by its conscious, strategic, planned, and calculated deployment of the means and measures adjusted and responsive to the singularity of each individual and situation.[6]

Another central feature of pastoral power is the status of command and obedience. Foucault underlines that in the Christian economy of souls, obedience and dependence have a generalized, all-inclusive nature. This means that the pastor's power to command, and also her obligation to do so, originates only from an order given to her in turn. Someone is a shepherd only because she is also, at the same time, an obedient ewe under the guidance of another shepherd's, and so on. What accomplishes the web of obedience-dependence is its reciprocal quality. Each pastor is a servant not only of the one who has given her the task, but also of the flock in her guidance, for the sake of whom she must be ready to sacrifice herself. In other words, pastoral power is *oblational*. In Foucault's understanding, this oblational logic is behind the whole institutional-administrative order of charges, ministers, and vicars.[7]

Foucault's Christianity is, at all levels from theology to practice, essentially a religion of obedience – of total, absolute, and unconditional obedience and dependence made into an end in itself. For Foucault, this is tantamount to concluding that the real effect of Christian "spirituality" and its asceticism is

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[5] *Ibid.*, 178-80, 196-7; Foucault, "'Omnes et singulatim'."

[6] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books), 18-23; Foucault, "'Omnes et singulatim'"; Foucault, *Sécurité*, 133, 177-8.

[7] Foucault, "Le sujet et le pouvoir"; Foucault, *Sécurité*, 178-83; Foucault, "'Omnes et singulatim'."

nothing except *self-sacrifice*, i.e., renouncement of the will, of selfhood, and of subjectivity as such, thus excluding all initiative from the one who obeys.[8]

To be sure, Christian asceticism and the confessional practices, as Foucault sees them, function by producing a self, "interiority" as a field of conscience and self-knowledge, which are communicated to the confessor. It is the domain of "hermeneutic" knowledge of all the thoughts and representations passing in the soul, of their origin located either in divinity or in the flesh. Nevertheless, Foucault makes it very clear that the generation of this "hermeneutic-confessional" self is only a technique, only an instrument, and not the goal or the crucial effect of pastoral power. The latter is nothing except *de-subjectivation*: the eradication of selfhood and subjectivity, of the "personal," of ego, of will, of autonomy and independence as such.[9] This de-subjectivation is, in Foucault's account, inseparable from Christian salvation itself:

> After all, when one submits oneself to a teacher of philosophy in Greece, that is in order to be able to succeed, at a given moment, in being master of oneself…But in Christian obedience, there is no end…One obeys to be able to be obedient…Thus, if there is an end in obedience, it is a state of obedience defined by the *renunciation, the definitive renunciation of all will of one's own*…And what is going to be reproached in the pleasures of the flesh is not that they render us passive…it is the fact that in these pleasures operates, on the contrary, an activity that is individual, personal, egoistic. It is the fact that "me," myself, I am directly interested in them, and I maintain in them, in a deranged fashion, this affirmation of me as being what is essential, fundamental [10] …But all the same, the fundamental principle of Christian asceticism is that the *sacrifice of self constitutes the essential moment* of what allows us to accede into the other life, into the light, into the truth, and into salvation. *One cannot save oneself unless one sacrifices oneself* [11]…if one turns around to oneself…it is essentially and fundamentally in order to *renounce oneself*.[12]

Christian mysticism, Foucault asserts, is also annexed to the self's becoming engulfed in God and losing its subjectivity and its selfhood as such. Correspondingly, the core of Christianity, one that has prevailed throughout its history, is hostile towards the pagan Greco-Roman ideals of "return to the self," "care of the self," and "culture of the self." In the latter, there is the whole set of techniques, equipment, and exercises, used to protect and

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[8] Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité. Le gouvernement de soi et des autres II. Cours au Collège de France, 1984* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2009), 293-4; Foucault, "Du gouvernement des vivants. Annuaire du Collège de France" in *Foucault: Dits et écrits II,* 944-8; Foucault, *Sécurité,* 178-83; Foucault, *L'herméneutique du sujet. Cours au Collège de France, 1981-1982* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2001), 209, 240-7.

[9] Foucault, *Le courage,* 293-4; Foucault, "Du gouvernement des vivants"; Foucault, *Sécurité,* 178-83; Foucault, *L'herméneutique,* 209, 240-7.

[10] Foucault, *Sécurité,* 180-2, emphasis added, my translation.

[11] Foucault, *L'herméneutique,* 240, emphasis added, my translation.

[12] *Ibid.*, 245, emphasis added, my translation.

enhance the freedom, the independence, and the autarchy, i.e., to safeguard one's selfhood and subjectivity. What is thus taken care of in the culture of the self should be understood in terms of the "empty" potentiality or "virtuality," i.e., of the radically open and indeterminate capacity, force, or power to "artistically" invent and create something new and unexpected. It is selfhood, subjectivity, and freedom without content.[13]

Hence, in a way reminiscent of Nietzsche, Foucault builds a stark opposition between, on one hand, the pagan culture of the care for the self, as care for the creative (aesthetic) capacity, for the autonomous, indeterminate, and open (i.e., anarchic) potentiality; and, on the other hand, Christianity, centered on the pastoral renunciation of the self and of the subject. In the light of our discussion, we can state that what is at issue in the notion of pastoral power is not the production of subjectivity or subjectivation, but on the contrary, *de-subjectivation*.[14]

THE SABBATICAL MACHINE

The concepts of subject and subjectivation are central also in Agamben's thinking, and what is here most significant in his recent genealogical analyses of Christianity. In this framework, the subject is not to be understood as "life" or "living," but instead, as the *liv-ability* of life. It is not activity or doing, but the act-*ibility* of action. The subject and subjectivity, as well as the self and selfhood, must be something *inactive* and *inoperative*, precisely because they are the *potential* of acting, being, and living, in distinction from all the modes of actuality and activity.[15] Correspondingly, the consciousness or the experience of the subject-subjectivity, and also of the self and selfhood, is traced back precisely to the sense of that *inoperative potentiality* (*dynamis*), not of activity/actuality (*energeia*):

> [I]t is only through the contemplation of capacity, rendering inoperative all specific *energeia*, that something like the experience of "proper" and "self" becomes possible. The self, the subjectivity, is what is opened as a central deactivation...[16]

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[13] Foucault, "L'éthique du souci de soi comme pratique de la liberté" in *Foucault: Dits et écrits II,* 1527-48; Foucault, *L'herméneutique*, 230-1, 240-1, 306-8, 405-6, 450; Foucault, *Le courage*, 293-4. Gilles Deleuze makes a similar point in his *Negotiations, 1972-1990* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 92-118.

[14] Cf. Nietzsche's genealogy of Christianity, and especially of the "*ascetic ideal*," whose effects he saw not only in Christianity, but in other religions, philosophies, and modern cultural formations as well: "For an ascetic life is a self-contradiction: An unprecedented resentment reigns here, the one of unsaturated instinct and will to power, which would like to become master, not over something in life, but over life itself, over its deepest, strongest, undermost conditions; An attempt is made here to use strength in order to plug the sources of strength...satisfaction is sought after and felt in loosing the self, in self-castigation, in self-sacrifice." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral. Eine Streitschrift* (Augsburg: Goldmann Verlag, 1992), 105-6, my translation.

[15] Giorgio Agamben, *La règne et la gloire. Pour une généalogie théologique de l'économie et du gouvernement. Homo sacer II, 2* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), 373-4.

[16] *Ibid.*, 373, my translation.

When we take a closer look at Agamben's insight on the Christian paradigm of governance (and its historical legacy), we note that this idea of the subject and self as potentiality is at the center. In what follows, we will also see that the essential differences between Agamben's and Foucault's genealogies of Christianity revolve precisely around this issue.

We could say that the Christian God is the perfect subject or self, i.e., pure and supreme potentiality, as well as power, capacity, or force (*dynamis* or *potestas*). The nature of this divine subjectivity is inactiveness, inoperativeness, or "idleness" (in Greek *anapausis* or *katapausis*), in distinction from all actualization/activity. Ultimately, what is really sacred and worshipped is not God's activity (production, creation, or work) but the *Sabbath*, i.e., the suspension of activity. The roots of this "sabbatism" (*sabbatismos*) are discovered already in Judaism and then revisited and developed further in the history of Christianity, first and foremost by St. Paul, and subsequently by the Church Fathers (e.g., John Chrysostom and Augustine).[17]

Already in Paul's epistles, if we follow Agamben's reading, the idea of subjectivity-subjectivation, understood not in terms of activity and actuality, but of deactivation and potentiality, is not limited to the being of God. It extends to human beings as well. *Katapausis* – meaning precisely deactivation, which also brings about the "potentialization" (perhaps, in today's terms, we could even say *empowerment*) and subjectivation – awaits the people of God. Agamben's argument is that the real sense of the Pauline messianic call and vocation is found in the formula of *hōs mē*, which can be translated "*as not.*" Agamben suggests that *hōs mē* is a "tensor" of a particular kind, operating on language, or more precisely, on the semantic field of concepts. It does not stretch the semantic field of one concept towards another concept, however, but instead sets a concept in tension with itself, with its meaning. From this tension issues the dispossession or the expropriation of all property and "properness." Taken in the fundamental sense, this is the deactivation of actual identities as such, and the detachment of potentiality from the concomitant settings of juxtapositions, e.g., circumcised/non-circumcised, free/slave, or man/woman.[18]

At first, Agamben's conception of sabbatism would appear to be incongruous with governance and "governmentality" as such, i.e., as suspending the operations not only of profane governance, but also, of the ecclesial-salvific-liturgical one. Indeed, Agamben suggests that in the history of Christianity we discover what is probably the most radical attempt to realize this "anti-governmental" tendency in the development of the medieval Franciscan sect, in the striving of the Friars Minor to establish a pious form of life (*forma vitae*), solely from the basis of following the "evangelic example" of the life of Christ, and the "form of the holy gospel." This example cannot be brought back to any normative code, or to any doctrinal set of ideas. The only command, which can be extracted, is that of *altissima paupertas*, i.e., extreme poverty, having no actual content other than the revocation of ownership and property/properness, i.e., the expropriation of life in relation to itself as well as to others, in the spirit of Pauline *hōs mē*.

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[17] *Ibid.*, 357-8, 373-4.

[18] Agamben, *Le temps qui reste. Un commentaire de l'Épître aux Romains* (Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 2004), 39-52; Agamben, *La règne,* 369-70.

This anti-normative crux of *altissima paupertas* implied a position of exteriority, a resignation, in relation to the Catholic Church, its canonical law, its functional order of commands and charges (*officium*), and its coded liturgy.[19]

Yet, it would be erroneous to think that Agamben's genealogy ends in a simple, binary opposition between, on one hand, sabbatism and the inoperative subjectivity/selfhood, and on the other hand, governmentality, between the anti-institutional form of life and the church. Agamben's genealogy of the Christian (or, as it would be more exact to say, Roman Catholic) paradigm of salvific governance, i.e., of the divine *oikonomia* in Greek and *dispositio* in Latin, contends this binary setting.

As said above, the objective in Agamben's recent thinking has been to retrace the development of the Christian paradigm of *oikonomia-dispositio* from its birth with the Church Fathers (e.g., Tertullian, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine) to its systematization as a doctrine of *gubernatione mundi* in medieval scholasticism (Thomas Aquinas' treatise on this subject is central). Throughout the historical transformations, what remains at the core is the location of the origin and source of power – of the divine governance of the world as such, from God to the church – not in action, but on the contrary, in deactivation:

> In the beginning and end of the supreme power resides, according to Christian theology, not a figure of action and governance, but of *deactivation*…this ineffable *vacuity itself is what nurtures and aliments the power* (or rather, what the machine of power turns into nutrition). This means that in reality the *center of the governmental dispositive…is empty, is nothing but Sabbath and katapausis*.[20]

It is not the governmental practice itself, the use of power on beings, which occupies the real kernel of Christian *oikonomia-dispositio*, but the unproductive, contemplative praxis, one that makes all specific activities, all *energeia*, inoperative. It ensures the human capacity to dominate, to produce, and to know things, through "emancipating" human life from the necessities of biological, as well as social operations, functions, and destinies. It is contemplation that "empowers" and gives mastery over things, paradoxically, by detaching the potentiality from all actual relations to these exterior things. Determinate actualities are replaced with indeterminate possibilities, i.e., with freedom and subjectivity, in which life and the body as a whole are opened into a variety of novel, unexpected, "innovative" performances and uses. It is in this sense that governance and mastery have their resource in the sabbatical suspension of activity, i.e., in sabbatical subjectivation.[21]

Thus, instead of a juxtaposition between the anti-normative and anti-institutional messianism and the governmental institution of the church, we

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[19] Agamben, *De la très haute pauvreté. Règles et forme de vie. Homo sacer IV, 1* (Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 2011), 118-21, 124-8, 131-43, 162-4, 167, 170, 185, 189, 194-5; Agamben, *Le temps,* 51-2.
[20] Agamben, *La règne,* 362, emphasis added, my translation.
[21] *Ibid.,* 366, 373-5.

have the picture of an economic-governmental dispositive, which works by seizing and capturing, or so to speak, by the instrumentalization and technologization of the messianic call, of *hōs mē*, of the sabbatical revocation of operations as well as identities.

This is, for Agamben, a new approach to an issue of continuous interest: the *state of exception*. Now, in the Christian economy, in its sabbatical *modus operandi*, we have something like the prototype of governance that works through the recurrent generation of the state of exception, through the deactivation/suspension of norms, which in reality generates a zone of in-difference between the "inside" and "outside" of normative order. This is necessary to safeguard and reproduce the very basic conditions of that order itself.[22]

THE ANARCHIC MACHINE

Now we know that sabbatism is what constitutes, according to Agamben, the basis of subjectivity and selfhood, inside what he takes to be the Christian paradigm of governance. The "sabbatical machine" of governance, Christian *oikonomia*, is also an apparatus of subjectivation, i.e., of producing and preserving subjectivity/selfhood.

In fact, Agamben's prominent thesis is that already in the doctrine of Trinity (as elaborated in the thinking of the Church Fathers), we come across the theological scheme of the subject-producing governance. As the Father's hypostasis, the Son is inseparable from him in terms of the substance. The substance of God, his potentiality/power (*dynamis*) as such remains one and undivided. Yet, without compromising this oneness of substance, God can split his own action apart from his being. He can separate the actual use/practicing of power from the power as pure potentiality. He is able to do this by generating out of himself the Son, as the hypostasis, as a separate person, to whom the Father's suspended governmental action (i.e., the salvific practice) and speech are transferred.[23]

The distinctness of the Son means that he is a person and an agent, who reigns in an absolute manner together with the absolute power of the Father. Indeed, we should consider Christ as a free, autonomous subject in the true sense of this, as one whose speech and salvific activity are not determined by, and cannot be derived from, any exterior cause or principle, not even (and especially not) from the Father. The Son is, *par excellence*, a produced subject, yet one whose potentiality and power is (just like the Father's) "*anarchic*" (*anarkhos*), without *arkhē*, without foundation or ground.[24]

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[22] See Agamben, *Homo sacer I. Le pouvoir souverain et la vie nue* (Paris: Seuil, 1997), especially 23-47; Agamben, *État d'exception. Homo sacer II, 1* (Paris: Seuil, 2003), especially 56-70.

[23] Agamben, *Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif?* (Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 2007), 21-31; Agamben, *La règne*, 93-113.

[24] Agamben, *Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif?*, 21-31; Agamben, *La règne*, 93-113. Agamben is well aware of the fact that in the history of Christian theology, the issue of Christ's "subjectivity," i.e., his independence and anarchism, has been a source of some controversy. In early Christianity, the teachings of Arius and the current called Arianism denied the "unfounded" nature of the Son. In his genealogy of *oikonomia*, Agamben focuses on what can be considered as the theological mainstream of

This "anarchistic," foundationless subjectivity and subjectivation is, just like sabbatism, absolutely indispensable for the providential governance. Only as an autonomous, free potentiality-subject is the Son able to accomplish the task of putting into practice, exercising, applying, and administering the power of the Father on his behalf, separately from him, so that the latter can in turn remain detached (transcendent) from the administrative operations. Christian *oikonomia-dispositio* is also an anarchic machine, which seizes and captures the anarchic, un-grounding and un-founding process of subjectivation, just like it does with sabbatism:

> The fracture between being and *praxis,* like the anarchistic character of divine *oikonomia,* defines the logical place, where the essential tie becomes comprehensible that unites in our culture governance and anarchy. Not only is something like a providential government of the world possible only because *praxis* has no foundation in being, but this governance, having its paradigm…in the Son…*is itself intimately anarchic. Anarchy is what the governance must presuppose and take upon itself as its own origin…Oikonomia is thus always already anarchic, without foundation…*[25]

Moreover, from this Trinitarian descent, Agamben goes further to explore the birth of another feature, also central in the Christian *dispositio*. This is what we can call the "*vicarial*" character of governance. It means that in the providential rule, power is not practiced immediately, but in a mediated or delegated manner, through the intermediacy of a proliferating nexus of vicars, ministers, functionaries, offices, and charges (*vices* and *officium*). Providential-salvific power is vicarial power, *potestas vicaria.*[26]

Christ is the first and paradigmatic minister or vicar. According to his model, like the Son, every vicar of providential governance is a produced "work of God," *opus dei*, and *effectus* of the Father's power. The vicar represents and manifests, but also exercises, puts into practice, and makes effective the divine power, whose work and effect she is herself.[27]

In the example of Christ, it follows that each vicar is both an effect of power and an anarchic subject. The priesthood and all the members of the Church participate in the redemptive work of Christ, taking a part that is at once active and passive. It is passive, because in all of the acts of liturgy, the Lord acts in us and through us. However, it is also an active part, because we associate ourselves with the work of redemption through actions that are our own, that each of us performs freely and voluntarily, as agents.[28]

The whole opposition between activity and passivity, subjectivity and produced work, is a "false," profane one. In "spiritual life," the opposition collapses into indecidability or in-difference. In the life of the vicar, and in

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Trinitarianism, endorsing the Son's anarchism as part of the doctrine. Agamben, *La règne*, 98-101.

[25] Agamben, *La règne*, 108, emphasis added, my translation.

[26] *Ibid.*, 208-15, 219-20.

[27] Agamben, *Opus dei. Archéologie de l'office. Homo sacer II, 5* (Paris: Seuil, 2012), 36, 40, 43-4, 76-7, 107, 110-4; Agamben, *La règne*, 208-15, 219-20.

[28] Agamben, *Opus dei*, 44-5, 55-6, 60-2, 66-76, 88; Agamben, *La règne*, 208-15, 219-20.

officium of the Church, the two poles refer back to one another in a circular manner. Divine grace turns us into instruments of power, but without forcing us. It makes us (paradoxically) "free instruments," whose freedom is inseparable from instrumental functionality. For such perfect "beings of command," command and obedience with all their rules are inseparable from subjectivation, "empowerment," and "liberation."[29]

This means that every ecclesial *officium*, its functionality and its norms, is no longer only a matter of particular actions or conducts (like in the case of juridical norms). Instead, the office with its rules become *rules of life*, constituting the mode of life as *habitus* or *hexis,* i.e., habits, orientations, tendencies, and dispositions. In the most fundamental sense, the religious norms do not organize the activity (at least not primarily), but the life or existence, meaning also, the subjectivity, the potentiality, and the open field of possibilities available.[30] The result is that the suspension of norms (at the level of codes of conduct), the liberation of life from biological and social determinations, the autonomous subjectivation, the evacuation of potentiality – anarchism and sabbatism – are made to coincide with the most thorough obedience to normative order (turned into *habitus*, mode of life, etc.). This is precisely what the apparatus of *oikonomia-dispositio* aims to achieve through the seizure and institutionalization of Sabbath and anarchism.

Agamben's genealogy of Christianity depicts the functioning of the governmental machine that is a sabbatical and anarchist apparatus, one of potentialization-subjectivation, but also a meticulous, functional apparatus. In the light of Agamben's recent work, it is in this strategic generation of in-difference between freedom and command/obedience that we should search for the legacy left by Christianity for the modern governmental state.

It is no exaggeration to assert that the differences between Foucault's and Agamben's conceptions of the Christian paradigm of governance, of religious *oikonomia,* are striking. On one side, we have the pastoral apparatus of completely determinate orders, of accomplished reciprocal dependence, enclosing all openness of potentiality, bringing about a generalized de-subjectivation of each and every one, and demanding constant activity and "actuality." On the other side, we encounter the economic-providential apparatus, working through the anarchic un-grounding, through the sabbatical care for potentiality, through free subjectivity, and through the vicarial hypostatization. Despite the fact that the bodies of theological texts, forming the starting point for both Foucault and Agamben, overlap to a significant degree, they have elaborated two incompatible ideas of the Christian dispositive and Christian economy.[31]

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[29] *Ibid.*

[30] Agamben, *De la très haute pauvreté*, 8-9, 13, 36, 42-3, 47, 66-7, 72, 81-7; Agamben, *Opus dei,* 117-9, 123-4, 129-31.

[31] In spite of the shared orientation and Agamben's explicit homage to Foucault, the differences between their views on Christian governance are more radical, and Agamben's position regarding the whole concept of pastoral power more critical, than what, e.g., Bussolini suggests. He is right in emphasizing Agamben's overall critique of Foucault, yet he does not focus on the consequences of Agamben's theological genealogy for our understanding of the idea of pastoral power. See Bussolini, "Critical Encounter"; Bussolini, "What is a Dispositive"; Dean, "Governmentality Meets Theology."

THE DESTRUCTIVE LOGIC OF PASTORAL POWER

Next, what needs to be discussed in detail is how Agamben's idea of *oikonomia-dispositio* actually relates to Foucault's thinking, and what sort of perspective it opens for rereading Foucault. To start with, the following remark by Agamben – one in which he is speaking of Foucault's notion of Christian confession and penitence – leaves one rather perplexed:

> The example of confession proves to be particularly enlightening: The formation of occidental subjectivity…certain of itself, is inseparable from the centennial action of the penitential dispositive, where a novel *me* is constituted…The scission of the subject operated by the penitential dispositive produced hence a new subject…[32]

How are we to understand this? As we know, Foucault is very explicit in his statement that pastoral power and penitence aim at the repudiation of the "me," of the self, and of the subject as such. It is de-subjectivation, in which no "novel self" or "new subject" is offered in return. In Foucault's terms, such a constitution of a new subjectivity, "certain of itself," belongs rather to the pagan "culture of self." Is it the case, then, that Agamben for some reason neglects these central facets of pastoral power?

Nevertheless, it turns out that he comes back to this issue, in a manner that revises the problematic thesis discussed above. Now, he leaves no doubt about the heterogeneity between his and Foucault's takes on Christianity. Foucault's starting point is a highly valuable one, i.e., his observation of the Christian introduction of universalized, *economic management (oikonomia-psukhōn)*. However, Foucault's analysis goes awry in identifying Christian economy with the pastoral scheme, and in the related omission of the substantial linkage relating *oikonomia-dispositio* and *gubernatio* with the theology of providence and Trinity.[33]

Agamben's claim is a stringent one. The logic and *modus operandi* of the Christian paradigm of governance has nothing to do with the shepherd and the flock of sheep:

> But how is the divine governance of the world realized? *At no point is it…about a force which, by intervening from the exterior, would guide the creatures like the hand of the shepherd steers her sheep…*[34]

It is not so much the doctrinal or ideological side in Foucault's conception of pastoral power (the principles of obedience and self-sacrifice, their justifications), which is the target of Agamben's argument. Rather, it is the nature of the relationship established in Foucault's scheme, attaching the shepherd with the flock, i.e., with a multitude of individuals in guidance. We are familiar with the centrality, for Foucault, of the constant vigilance,

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[32] Agamben, *Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif?*, 42-3, my translation.
[33] Agamben, *La règne*, 173-8.
[34] *Ibid.*, 204-5, emphasis added, my translation.

focused attention, and strategic-rational, interventionist activity by the shepherd. In the pastoral dispositive, it is action of a particular kind that is stipulated. It is one that is oriented towards an exterior object (or objects), and having a goal that is separate from the activity itself (the flock's salvation). This means, that in Foucault's account, pastoral guidance is an activity of "*poietic*" and instrumental species. Besides, it is self-conscious and rationally planned (as opposed to unintended and accidental) in its orientation towards its object and goal. It is these characteristics of the pastoral relationship that come forth in Agamben's treatment.

The active and activating nature of the pastoral scheme, Agamben demonstrates, has certain noteworthy consequences, which contradict the basic premises of theological thinking, but even more significantly, the basic conditions of salvific governance itself. If we follow the teleological, hierarchic logic of goals and activities, of ends and means, something that is made for the sake of something else is inferior and submitted to that other thing (its goal and teleological cause). Correspondingly, if providence is thought of – in accordance with the pastoral model – as a guiding activity, performed instrumentally for the sake of the individual creatures (the "ewes") and for the sake of their salvation, it follows that providence itself is inferior to the beings that it is striving to take care of, or to their state of being.[35]

Such a thought of the inferiority of providence, with respect to the finite creatures of the world, is obviously unacceptable from the theological point of view. Agamben points out how the pastoral exigency of omniscience and interventionist activity, i.e., grasping the flock *omnes et singulatim*, refutes the claims of divine *dignitas*. If God is portrayed as a shepherd, this seems to have blasphemous implications. Agamben states the point by quoting Jerome:

> It is absurd to extend the majesty of God to the point where he would know at each moment how many mosquitos are born and how many die…We must not become vain adulators of God to the point of travestying the providence by extending it to those questions.[36]

Following Agamben's argumentation, and even taking it a bit further, one conclusion appears to be inevitable. Foucault's concept of pastoral power is not really a Christian one. Perhaps we should not even regard it as a religious idea at all. After all, it leaves no room for transcendence, for anything like *dignitas* of the Supreme Being. Instead, pastoral power appears to be something like a dispositive of "profanation," one that is in strife with the claims of religious authority.

Agamben's recent work calls us to think how, in Foucault's pastoral dispositive, it is already the elementary character of the governmental activity itself – the goal-oriented, strategic intervention targeted on exterior object(s) – that threatens to do away with the independence and indeterminacy, with the freedom and anarchism of subjectivity-as-

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[35] *Ibid.*, 181-93.
[36] *Ibid.*,188, my translation.

potentiality. The constant exigency of such guiding practice issues the self-sacrifice, or what we can also denominate the de-subjectivation of the pastor.

To avoid this, the governing subject (whether divine or secular) should be protected, or her subjectivity-potentiality ought to be protected in its empty openness and independence. It should be safeguarded against becoming attached to and dependent on the life of the flock in all of its changing, empirically appearing multiplicity. We already know the means at play in Agamben's *oikonomia*, applied for this assignment: sabbatism, hypostatization, and the vicarial transference of governmental practice. Borrowing Foucault's terms, but taking them radically beyond their original domain of reference, we could speak of something like the Christian paradigm of subjectivation, Christian "care for the self," or Christian self-governance, working to defend the in-actuality of power as *dynamis*.

Still, it is the case that in Foucault's Christianity, there is no room for such "care for the self." The constant exterior, finalized activity of the shepherd excludes the sabbatism as such, i.e., it excludes the contemplative detachment, deactivation, and withdrawal. What it also excludes is the Trinitarian hypostatization: the generation of the Son as both an anarchic as well as vicarial subject, and the whole vicarial governance following this logic. In Foucault's pastoral formation, command and obedience de-subjectivate. They renounce the will, selfhood, autonomy, and indeterminacy of potentiality. Instead, in Agamben's account, the Son and every vicarial "being of command" are constituted by the in-difference between command/obedience and free agency. This raises, again, the crucial question: In what sense is it justifiable to say that pastoral power is Christian, if it cannot be combined with the idea of the Trinity?

From the perspective opened by Agamben, we could take still further the critical treatment of the form of pastoral power as Foucault presents it. If the openness and indeterminacy of potentiality (the anarchism) is eradicated, how is it possible to accomplish the central task of pastoral power itself: to constantly respond, to adjust, and to modify in a creative and innovative way the practices of intervention to each singular individual and to each new situation (*omnes et singulatim*)?

Pastoral power appears to be an apparatus that undermines its own necessary conditions of functioning. Hence, we could call it a *self-destructive* machine, in the last instance incapable of guiding individuals towards salvation, which is its *raison d'être*. We are left with a question: If pastoral power really was at the core of Christianity, and the basis for the organization of Church, how is it possible that such a religion, and its central institutional form, have survived for some two thousand years and expanded globally?

What is entirely absent in Foucault's genealogy is the anarchism-potentialization-subjectivation axis of Christian governance, in its intertwinement rather than juxtaposition with normativity, command, and "office." As a result, there is a sort of gap in Foucault's analysis, when it comes to the genealogical descent of certain essential characteristics of the modern governmental state: governance through freedom and governance through contingency or aleatory processes, not against them. It is especially

in liberal, and later in neoliberal governmentality that these features occupy the center.[37]

Foucault proposes us a detailed analysis on the centrality of modern political-economic knowledge (originating in the 18th Century) for the formation of both liberal as well as neoliberal governmentality. He also points out that *oikonomia psukhōn*, the generalized and economical management of souls is a key invention of Christianity. Yet, understanding Christianity strictly in the pastoral terms of continuous, individualizing surveillance and guidance, Foucault relates the Christian legacy to the development of *raison d'État* and the *police*. For him, it is not modern economics and liberalism that have their roots in the Christian tradition(s). On the contrary, precisely due to their anti-pastoral characteristics – governing through freedom and contingency, the lack of omniscient sovereign – Foucault regards economic-liberal governance as radically atheist. While forcefully denying the Christian descents of economic liberalism, Foucault does not really offer us any alternative view on its historical roots either, one that would reach further than the 18th Century's epistemic transformation. In this respect, there really is a kind of blank in Foucault's genealogy of modern governmentalities.[38]

To compare, the strength in Agamben's notion of providential economy is precisely the attention given to the anarchic and potentializing, or empowering aspects of the Christian dispositive, and its non-pastoral heritage adopted and re-elaborated by modern liberal governance.[39]

POWER AND GOVERNANCE AS SECULARIZED CONCEPTS

In Agamben's genealogy of Christianity, there are still certain noteworthy consequences to be reckoned with, when we approach it from the angle of interpreting Foucault. Agamben not only contests, in a thorough manner, Foucault's concept of pastoral power. He suggests that when we take a more extensive look at Foucault's 1970s and early 1980s *œuvre*, we are referred back again to the theological paradigm. There is certain proximity, albeit an unacknowledged one, between Foucault's thinking of power and governance and divine *oikonomia-dispositio*. To formulate it more polemically, we could say that Agamben aims to show that in some of the most central concepts of

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[37] See Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique. Cours au Collège de France, 1978-1979* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2004).

[38] *Ibid.*, 196-7; Foucault, "Le sujet et le pouvoir"; Foucault, "'Omnes et singulatim'."

[39] If the scheme of pastoral power does not, really, belong to the Christian paradigm of governance, what, then, is its cultural-historical place? Agamben offers no explicit answer to this question. Nevertheless, we should briefly point out one unexpected parallel, occurring when Agamben is diagnosing our current phase of capitalism (which he does not determine in more specific, chronological terms), and the new kinds of technological dispositives that have emerged. These new apparatuses of control are still called dispositives, despite the fact that they no longer function through the production of subjectivity at all, but instead, through processes of de-subjectivation, in which we gain no new subjectivity in return. Agamben, *Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif?*, 43-6. In this respect, they turn out to be similar to pastoral power, as understood by Foucault. We are left somewhat bemused, as Agamben only asserts this without further argument.

Foucault, there is (irrespective of his overt intentions) a considerable remainder of secularized Christian theology.

Although Foucault did, at times, express his skepticism towards giving any fixed definition to the concept of power, it is still the case that he did also treat the concept "theoretically," at the abstract level, on various occasions, especially in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[40] On these occasions, Foucault presents explicitly his basic insight that we should understand power as a dynamic, practical relation, one that is strategically oriented, and as a dispositive in which power and knowledge support and condition one another reciprocally.

Agamben pinpoints a significant lineage going from Christian *oikonomia-dispositio* to Foucault's concept of dispositive, in the whole variety of its uses:

> The "dispositives," of which Foucault speaks, are in a certain manner articulated with this theological heritage. They can be taken back to the fracture that separates and reunites in God being and *praxis*, the nature (or the essence) and the operation, through which He administers and governs the world of creatures. The term dispositive denominates that in which, and through which, a pure activity of governance is realized, without the least foundation in being[41]…The action (economy, but also politics) has no foundation in being: Such is the schizophrenia that the doctrine of *oikonomia* has left as a heritage for the Western culture.[42]

This facet, associating in a positive sense Foucault's thinking of power and governance with the economic-providential paradigm, is precisely the anarchic view of power: power's lack of *arkhē,* i.e., its lack of foundation, determining principle, and origin. It is from Christian *oikonomia-dispositio* that the account of power descends as a network of relations, one that unfolds anarchically, without deriving from the being of any agent or subject, nor "objectively" from some principle or law (as we noted, not even from the being of God).[43] Still, in Foucault, we can observe the influence of the "schizophrenic" legacy, beginning from the doctrine of Trinitarian hypostatization, in which the anarchic governmental activity of the Son is "emancipated" from any ontological foundation in the being of the Father.

In the early 1980s, Foucault quite strongly argues that what defines power and governance is their being productive and preservative of the subject and subjectivity. In other words, they operate through the openness of the "possible" (virtuality or potentiality), and not by excluding or annihilating the former. In this, power/governance differs fundamentally from violence.[44]

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[40] See, e.g., Foucault, "Le jeu de Michel Foucault" in *Foucault: Dits et écrits II,* 298-329; Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume I*, 92-7; Foucault, "Le sujet et le pouvoir."
[41] Agamben, *Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif?,* 26-7, my translation.
[42] *Ibid.*, 25, my translation.
[43] See especially Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume I*, 92-7.
[44] Foucault, "Le sujet et le pouvoir."

Agamben believes that this point on subjectivity and subjectivation is at the core of the concept of dispositive, both in Foucault's, as well as his own understanding:

> Indeed, every dispositive implies a process of subjectivation, without which the dispositive could not function as a dispositive of governance, but is reduced into a pure exercise of violence. Thus, Foucault has shown how, in a disciplinary society, the dispositives aim, through a series of practices and discourses, of knowledges and exercises, to create docile but free bodies. These bodies assume their identity and freedom as subjects inside the very process of their subjection. So, the dispositive is, first of all, a machine producing subjectivations and through that, it is also a machine of governance.[45]

We are already aware of the theological origins of this. They are found in the Trinitarian process of hypostatization and in the vicarial logic of the ecclesial *officium*. It is in the former that we come across the archetypal view of governance as productive of agents or subjects, whose open and anarchic potentiality is in-different from their status as works/effects of power, and from their docility as "beings of command."

Even though Agamben himself does not present this point explicitly, we are notified of a tension in Foucault's thinking: between his conceptual understanding of power and governance as subjectivating (working through the openness of possibilities) with its (unacknowledged) roots in Christian *oikonomia-dispositio*, and pastoral power as essentially de-subjectifying. In the end, we are left with one further question If pastoral power does not fit into Foucault's general concept of power and governance – as it does not fit into the Christian paradigm of governance either – should we then even speak of pastoral power any longer, or rather of pastoral violence?[46]

CONCLUSION

The substantial differences between Foucault's and Agamben's genealogies of Christianity have become clear. Their incompatibility revolved, first of all, around the issue of subjectivity, potentiality, and freedom. To put it very simply: Foucault's pastoral Christianity is de-subjectivating (renounces the openness of potentiality), whereas Agamben's Christian *oikonomia-dispositio* is subjectivating. The sabbatical and anarchic taking care of the emptiness and indeterminacy of potentiality, and of power itself, belongs centrally to the *modus operandi* of the Christian economy, as Agamben sees it.

When explored from the vantage point offered us by Agamben's current work, Foucault's scheme of the shepherd and the flock appeared to be opposed to the whole sabbatical-anarchic-vicarial idea of *oikonomia*, and thus

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[45] Agamben, *Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif?*, 41-2, my translation.
[46] Agamben's take on the theological roots of Foucault's concept of dispositive is aptly noted by Bussolini's "Critical Encounter"; and Bussolini, "What is a Dispositive." However, what he does not discuss is the tension in Foucault between the idea of pastoral power and the (implicitly) economic-providential idea of governance through subjectivity and the "possible."

somewhat strangely, also to the doctrine of Trinity as such. Correspondingly, there was a lacuna in Foucault's analysis (unlike Agamben's), when it comes to the genealogical roots of the anarchism at play in the modern governmental state (especially in liberal and neoliberal governmentality). In all, from Agamben's perspective, the whole linkage of the notion of pastoral power with Christian theology has turned out to be somewhat obscure. Pastoral power is a de-subjectivating, violent, and even self-destructive apparatus, quite different from the Christian paradigm of providence and salvific economy.

Finally, we saw that Agamben's genealogy of *oikonomia-dispositio* expands into something like a genealogy of the theological traces in Foucault's thinking of power and governance, taken more broadly. To formulate it polemically, we could conclude: Foucault's basic idea of power and governance as a groundless (anarchic) network of subject-production, something which is never possessed by any of the subjects involved in this web, is a secularized theological concept (or, more accurately perhaps, a secularized Roman Catholic concept).

Through the reading of Agamben, our attention was drawn to a disjuncture in Foucault. On one hand, we have his view of the de-subjectifying apparatus of pastoral power. On the other hand, there is Foucault's more general treatment of the concepts of power and governance in terms of subjectivation and the openness of the "possible." When it comes to the latter vein, Foucault's own thinking remains still conceptually attached to the Christian paradigm of *oikonomia-dispositio*, something that Foucault himself did not seem (at least explicitly) to acknowledge. Not only does Agamben's recent thinking present a significant contribution to our understanding of Christianity and governance, but through the points discussed, it also paves the way for a novel, critical rereading and reevaluation of the relationship between Foucault and the Christian tradition.

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