

Lecture held by Halvor Moxnes, University of Oslo, at the international conference 'Heteronormativity – a Fruitful Concept?' in Trondheim, June 2nd – 4th, 2005. Please contact author for citations: halvor.moxnes@teologi.uio.no

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HETERONORMATIVITY AND FOUCAULT – THE VICTORIAN DISCOURSE

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This paper takes its starting point in Foucault's plan for vol. 1 of his *History of Sexuality*. Here he rejects the traditional image of a Victorian regime of repression of sexuality. Instead Foucault will study the forms of discourse on human sexuality that developed in this period and its specific forms of "power – knowledge – pleasure." This suggestion remains a provocative, but schematic perspective, and is not supported by detailed studies.

Therefore, I will read texts by an influential Victorian author and clergyman, Charles Kingsley (1819-75), that establish a discourse on pleasure where the power is expressed through a combination of Christian dogmatics and family ideology. These Victorian texts illustrate an insight that was central in Foucault's later work on ancient and medieval Christianity: the link between discourses on Christianity and sexuality (see J.R. Carrette (ed.), *Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault*, Manchester UP, 1999)..

Many of the discussions in Kingsley's writings are triggered by his conflicts with an ascetic movement in England at the time, the (later) Roman Catholic Oxford Movement that propagated celibacy. His texts reveal a tension between the need to provide legitimacy to strong sexual desires and the need to control these passions. Kingsley's solution lies in a fusion of a highly sexualised image of God and Christ with a divinely ordained family that provide the space for sexuality. In Foucault's terms we might see this as an example of the combination of the "deployment of alliance" and the "deployment of sexuality" (*History of Sexuality* I, 106-7). Kingsley's emphasis on divinely legitimised sexuality within the (heterosexual) family brings into play other, related discourses in his texts : masculinity versus effeminacy, true faith (Protestantism) versus heresy (Roman Catholicism), national characteristics, English versus "foreign" (i.e. Irish and Southern Europe).

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Taken together we might see how these discourses make up a pervasive system of “heteronormativity” with “God” and “sexuality” at its centre

See J.R. Carrette, “Beyond theology and sexuality,” in J. Bernauer and J.R. Carrette (eds.) *by Michel Foucault and Theology by Michel Foucault* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 217-32.

Foucault started his vol. 1 of HS with a section called “We “Other Victorians” where he argues against a traditional picture of the Victorian period as oppressive with regard to sexuality, and argues instead that it was a period where **discourses** on sexuality proliferated. Moreover, it was a central period in the development of the growing role of the **system of sexuality**, superimposing itself upon the **system of alliance**, with regard to marriage. And the result was that “heteronormativity” that has more or less remained with us since.

As is well known, this small volume was a brief sketch outlining possible areas of research, that were not followed up when Foucault, after a period of several years, published vols. 2- 3, on Greek and Roman antiquity. And here it was not the systems of power and knowledge regarding sexuality he examined, but the areas of problematization of sexuality among (male) individuals, engaged in the construction of themselves as subjects.

In this paper I will go back to vol. 1, and introduce one of the “other Victorians” themselves, the author and clergyman Charles Kingsley, and attempt a reading in light of Foucault’s hypotheses.

What will I do in this paper in a study of the letters of Kingsley:

1. Illustrate the transition from alliance to sexuality system

Kingsley’s writings provides an interesting example of how the system of sexuality was superimposed on the system of alliance and how the modern form of heteronormativity came into being. Kingsley’s main argument is that the sexual desire

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in the relationship between two partners must be linked to marriage in the alliance system.

2. Point out a new area of concern: male desire and the formation of male sexuality .(*askesis*) in analogy to Foucault's discussion in HS 2 and 3

In *HS* 1 Foucault overlooks a main problem in Victorian discourse on sexuality. This is the problem of male sexuality and its relation to desire. How to deal with desire is a question that is predominant in *HS* vols. 2 and 3, but Kingsley's writings show that it was urgent also in the Victorian period. The particular context for this problem was the ideals of celibacy and asceticism propagated by the Oxford movement inspired by Rome, and Kingsley turns the defence of male sexual desire within marriage into a question of national character and the role of England in the world.

(Cf. the criticism in L. Behlman, "From Ancient to Victorian Cultural Studies: Assessing Foucault," *Victorian Poetry* 41:4 (2003): 559-69.)

3. Illustrate the role of Christian doctrine in legitimating heteronormativity.

Kingsley's texts makes it also possible to go beyond Foucault's discussion of the relations between Christian theology and sexuality. Foucault suggested that there is a link between the Christian ritual of confession and the dominant place of sexuality in the telling the truth of oneself in all modern, secularised places of confession, like justice, medicine, education etc. . This is an important suggestion, but it remained a suggestion about Christianity as a formal structure, and in Foucault's discussions of ethics and sexuality in Antiquity Christianity remained an external power.

In Kingsley's texts we can see how Christianity was an internalised power, where the male gendered identity was grounded in images of the central figures of faith, God and Christ. Kingsley integrated into a single complex two discourses: the discourse of the heteronormative family, stabilising the problematic male desire, and a discourse of the patriarchs of the "holy family", with sexualised images of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Husband. But the dual father and husband images of God and Jesus lacked a feminine element, suggesting not only that heteronormativity was patriarchal, but maybe even more that in Kingsley's universe it was male sexuality/ gender that was most problematic.

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1. Brief presentation of Foucault and Victorian studies/ Cultural studies.

In Victorian studies vol I of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* has played a decisive role, obviously because it's main point is to critique the repression hypothesis of Victorian sexuality. Instead, Foucault argues, Victorians did little but engage in an endless conversation about sexuality. In order to make his point, Foucault places the Victorian discourse on sexuality at the end of long period of development of the discourse on sexuality. In this volume, published in 1976, Foucault was still working with the paradigm of "power and knowledge" – how institutionalised forms of power created normative patterns that structured and sometimes oppressed people's lives. It was the same model that he used in the study of the prison and mental hospitals as institutions of knowledge that exercised power. In *History of Sexuality* Foucault points to what he regards as the main form of power in the area of sexuality: the Christian system of confession, the penitence. It represented a power over people's lives that became internalised through the demand that one's sexuality must be *confessed*. This institution of confession became secularised and proliferated in a number of areas of knowledge and power – medicine, law, psychology, literature – and "confession" became an accepted cultural mode in Victorian times. Another important point for Foucault is of course that sexuality is not a "given", it is socially constructed. And in the centuries leading up to the 19th century Foucault sees a gradual transformation taking place regarding the ways in which sexual relations were socially constructed. In all traditional societies one finds what F. calls "a system of alliance": "a system of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions" (106). But with beginning modernization, from 18th century onwards, Western societies created a new form of system that organizes sexual relation in a different way. It was not so much concerned with the maintenance of the institution and its rules, what is legal, allowed etc, but more with sexual bodies, the sensations of bodies and of emotions. This new system does not supplant the former, but is imposed upon it, and thereby partly changes the character of the institution. Thus, the normative patterns changes from emphasis upon kinship, institutions, inheritance and procreation to an emphasis on the problematic of bodies and pleasures. In the system

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of sexuality the family was valued along two primary dimensions, the husband-wife axis and the parents-children axis.

Foucault has here identified – or constructed – systems of the organisation of sexual relations in Western societies that are powerful patterns of knowledge. We may speak of them as *normative* patterns, and in modern, post-Victorian discourse we may call them “hetero-normative”, since it is heterosexual relations organised in families that form the norm. (Their normativity is no longer as legal systems, but as cultural and mental systems.)

Foucault gives only the briefest of outlines of his suggestions, he does not give any examples of how transition or interaction between systems of alliance and system of sexuality was played out.

Moreover, his suggestion of the important role of the Christian confession with regard to sexuality, is mostly formal, and based on the controlling role of confessions. There is a need for a deeper engagement not only with **the institution of confession** and the cultural **mentality of confessing** that it created, but also with the **content of Christianity**, its ideas and symbols that influenced the formation of sexual relations, and especially the system of sexuality, in this period.

(cf. Carrette, “Beyond Theology,”223: “What F did not explore was the related political struggles surrounding Christian doctrine and the emergence of creedal performances of truth. *Christianity also demanded the utterance of truth in terms of metaphysical belief.*”

2. Brief presentation of Kingsley

Charles Kingsley (1819-75) was the major protagonist of the specifically Christian expression of manliness in this era. Besides being a parish rector for most of his life, he was a prolific writer, a major, if not great Victorian author of historical novels, professor of modern history at Cambridge, a chaplain to Queen Victoria and tutor of

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the Prince of Wales, a never tiring activist for any number of worthy social causes and a Christian socialist. Thus, he was a national figure in mid-Victorian England.

Charles Kingsley is regarded as the primary representative of 'muscular Christianity' in Victorian England. The term 'muscular Christianity' was clearly a critical characterisation from a reviewer of his book *Two Years Ago* (1957).

That was a period in which what it meant to be a man was under transformation and strongly challenged - by industrialisation, by changes in relations between classes, in relations between home and work place, as well as by the demands of the expanding empire, etc.

What makes Kingsley such an interesting figure for us the role of sexuality in his life and writings. As John Maynard (86) says: "In him, sex has become – first in his personal experience, then in his beliefs –the center of a new vision of life, and emotionally charged conviction, about which religion, as well as morality and social issues, must be reoriented."

His personal experience is first and foremost his relationship to his wife Fanny Grenfell. A long and intense courtship was highly sexually charged, pushing the strict limits of Victorian prudence. The letters between them show a strong bodily sexuality, and, more surprising, also an element of sadomasochism witnessed also in a number of pencil sketches made by Kingsley. One possible background for this sado-masochism was feelings of guilt over strong sexual desires and influence from ascetic traditions of driving passions and temptations away by physical means, e.g. self-flagellation. Asceticism and celibacy had a surprisingly strong influence among the upper classes in England in the early Victorian period. This was the time of the Oxford movement, a high church movement within the Church of England, inspired by ascetic traditions from Early Christianity. The most well known figure in this movement was John Henry Newman who later joined the Roman Catholic Church and became cardinal Newman. Kingsley, but especially Fanny were inspired by these popular ideas about celibacy, and Fanny seriously contemplated entering a community of celibate women. Struggling against these ascetic aspirations and ultimately convincing Fanny to chose a sexual life with him, for Kingsley sexuality

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then became not only the centre of his life, but also of his theology and complete orientation of life.

For Kingsley, acceptance of sexuality became the test question for a “healthy” anthropology as well as of theology. This was also his main example to illustrate his ill fated accusation against Newman, when he said that “Truth, for its own sake, had never been a virtue with the Roman clergy” and accused Newman of saying that the saints had used lies to “withstand the brute male force of the wicked world which marries and is given in marriage.” This was a conflict that Kingsley lost, he was publicly humiliated by Newman’s counterattack, and suffered a loss of public respect. But to Kingsley the negative contrast between the celibate life of Christian saints and “the brutal male force” in marriage, even in the “wicked world,” remained central to everything he wrote.

When it comes to the source material I can only build upon a small part of his many writings, mainly his letters (Charles Kingsley, *His letters and memories of his life*. 2 vols. London: Kegan Paul & Co, 1876.). They show him – in part – as an “other Victorian”, with extensive and direct discussions of sexuality and theology. But they, after all, were directed at a limited audience, mostly of colleagues and friends. In his public works, poems and especially novels, he is more prudent. More like “the typical Victorians,” because they also existed, at least to some degree. But there exists also another source and that is the unprinted letters, primarily private letters between Charles and Fanny throughout their lives (now used by scholars such as P. Gay). Together with sketches of erotic scenes these letters are sexually very explicit, and they were not included in the collection that Fanny Kingsley edited shortly after his death. Thus, although there is a basic continuity on main points, like the generally liberal attitude to sexuality, Kingsley shows various parts of his *persona* in these various genres, dependant upon audiences.

The problem of male sexual desire.

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The main problem for Kingsley was how to deal with male sexual desire. In a very general sense we might say that a common ideal in the Victorian period was the combination of **desire** and **affection**. But **how** were these combined? In the early 19th century Christianity still had a great deal of influence in shaping attitudes. The Protestant churches had a very controlling attitude to sexual desire; moreover, growing movements within Church of England, especially the so-called Oxford movement, were influenced by Roman Catholic and Early Christian ideals of asceticism and celibacy. This made male sexual desire highly problematic, and put Kingsley in a difficult position when he tried to argue for an acceptance of sexual desire. Let us try to follow his arguments in some of his letters.

The most explicit discussions of sexuality and marriage are explicitly linked to discussions of Roman Catholicism and arguments against conversions to that church. In a letter of February 5th, 1851 he holds that “the whole question is an anthropological one. ‘Define a human being’, ought to be the first query.” For the definition of what is a human being is central to the problem that Kingsley struggled with: “Celibacy versus marriage”, and in his terminology “the fortress that must be defended at all cost.”

The two forms of definition of the human being were the following. “One as a spirit **embodied** in flesh and blood, with certain relations, namely those of father, child, husband, wife, brother, as necessary properties of his existence” (255). If “spirit” represents the affections and “body” sexual desire, this position argues for an integration of the two so to speak on equal terms, and integrated in a system of family relations.

The other view was that of man (“not a spirit necessarily embodied in, and expressed by an animal, but) “as spirit **accidentally** connected with, and burdened by an animal. ... The ideal of man, therefore, is to deny, not himself, but the animal part which is not himself, and to strive after a non-human or angelic state ... to be single and self-sustained, without relations except to God.” (256). Here affection has the leading position to define a human being, desire, characterised as “animal,” is not

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really part of the human being, and relation to God take precedence over human relations.

There are three sets of possible discourses that may follow from these definitions of the human being (i.e. "man"), and Kingsley pursues them in various contexts.

The first type of discourse concerns the relationship that man as spirit has with his body, and what that says about **control of passions**. The other discourse concerns the "necessary properties of existence", i.e. the importance of these types of social relations, especially **marriage, for society**. And finally, there is the symbolic **relationship between man and God and Christ**.

The issue of the relation between man and spirit is directly a question of the role of the sexual desire. In another letter (1848) Kingsley starts directly by saying that "man is a sexual animal" – but not a mere animal, but "*the* spirit-animal, a spirit manifesting itself in an animal form". There are two forms of relations between spirit and animal, and this is the question of the control of desire, i.e. the animal part. The first is one where "spirit shall control, and matter be controlled." This is an *external* form of control,. This in Kingsley's view was represented by the "earlier age of Christianity", where one could control "fleshly lusts" that were regarded as the sources of sins. This as we shall see was Kingsley's way to deal with traditions of asceticism and celibacy: they belonged to an earlier and imperfect form of Christianity.

The other form of the relation between man and spirit was one where "spirit shall will, and matter express that will." This was the "true ideal of rule, where the subject is not merely restrained by his king, but fulfils the will of his king." This is the *internal* form of control, and Kingsley regard that as an expressions of a later and higher state of development within history. Here "flesh was not meant merely to be the slave of the spirit, it was meant to be its symbol- its outward expression."

That "man is a sexual animal" Kingsley supported by a quotation from the creation story, "male and female he created them," and he repeated that when he had argued that the body was the outward expression of the spirit. The conclusion he

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draws is that “This can only be explained to mean – a woman for each man, and a man for each woman.” Thus, the understanding of man as “sexual animal”, and especially about man reaching his determination as “spiritual animal” is by *necessity* linked to the “binary law of man’s being”, “this binary or monogamic law” that “has been gradually developing itself in the history of man” (188).

Thus, there are several elements at play here: first, the desires of man as “sexual animal” are integrated in and part of man as “spiritual animal”, and thereby internally controlled, not by external control. Secondly, this internalised, spiritual control of sexuality is linked to monogamic marriage. Thirdly, (and to be developed more fully in other contexts) this integration of sexuality in the spiritual animal reflects the spirit of God.

Marriage as “love-match”

Kingsley emphasizes that the higher, spiritual control of desire takes place within marriage, but in order to make that argument, he presents a transformation of the idea of marriage. His ideal of marriage, as a spiritual union, he argued, was very different from earlier forms of marriage. He portrays a form of development of marriage throughout history. He also finds this development reflected in the Bible, with a “gradual rise from intermarriage with sisters, concubinage, polygamy” to the view he finds reflected by Jesus, of “one husband and one wife”, which represents “the original ideal of marriage” (I 188). But even the words of Jesus in the Gospels do not seem to explain Kingsley’s idea of marriage which he sums up in the word “love-match”. And on this basis Kingsley enters into an unusual criticism of the views of marriage described in the Bible. One example is the so-called Levirate marriage among the Jew. Jewish Law (Matthew 22:24-28; Deuteronomy 25:5-10) said that if a man died without children, his brother should marry the widow to secure offspring. This of course reflected the importance of procreation in traditional societies, and the need to secure transmission of inheritance in a legitimate heritage. But to Kingsley this was an insufficient, a lower notion of “the relation of the sexes.” He even argues that Jesus protested against what he calls “the old Jewish error” that “the first end of

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marriage is the procreation of children” , an error that is also held by the Catholic church (spoken of as “Popish casuists”) (II 94-95). Thus, Kingsley explicitly argues against that which has been the traditional view of not only the Catholic church but also of Protestant churches: procreation is the main purpose of marriage. And from the perspective of Foucault’s analysis, Kingsley relegates marriage as a system of alliance, concerned with procreation and transmission of property, to a “lower” view of marriage.

So what was to Kingsley the purpose of marriage and what characterised this relationship between a man and a woman? Kingsley describes marriage as a “love-match”.

Central in this “love-match” is that the relationship between man and woman is both spiritual and sexual. Kingsley describes it as an “eternal union,” and he even vigorously disagrees with the words of Jesus that in “heaven one is not married or given in marriage, but they are like angels” (Matt 22:). Kingsley argues that there must be love among the angels, and if the law makes two beings “unite themselves .. in body, soul and spirit” on earth, that law must also be valid in the spiritual world. Marriage in this world can only be an approximation to a unity that shall be perfect in heaven! Kingsley thus argues for the unity of the spiritual and sexual (bodily) in marriage, and finds this supported by central aspects of religious beliefs: the creation story of the Garden of Eden, “where Spirit and the flesh are one again” and where they are “naked and not ashamed” (I 189). And his strong experience of marriage as a spiritual and sexual union makes him argue, against Biblical tradition, that this union must be everlasting and be brought to completion in heaven.

Kingsley sums up his argument in the following way:

“man is a spirit-animal, and in communion with God’s spirit has the right to believe that his affections are under that spirit’s guidance, and that when he finds in himself such an affection to any single woman **as true married lovers describe theirs to be**, he is bound (duty to parents and country allowing) to give himself up to his love in child-like simplicity and self-abandonment, and , at the same time, with solemn awe and self humiliation at being thus readmitted into the very garden of the Lord “ (i.e. Garden of Eden).

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This is in clear form an expression of a relationship between a man and a woman in terms of the "system of sexuality": man as a spirit-animal, in which sexual desire is included, finds himself in affection to a woman, to such a degree that he "gives himself up to his love in childlike simplicity and self-abandonment". The expressions are all part of the system of sexuality, apart from one reference that seems to be added on, but that obviously has great significance. The love that is portrayed is such "as true married lovers describe theirs to be." Thus, the system of alliance is intact, but described not in terms of economy, class, etc. but in terms of sexuality and love. And finally both the system of sexuality and that of alliance are integrated into the belief system: the acceptance of sexual desire into man's self understanding is done in "communion with God's spirit". And the affective and sexual fulfilment of the union with a woman ("self-abandonment") is an experience of being "re-admitted into the very garden of the Lord," that is a return to the garden of Eden. The erotic and the religious became one and the same.

Where did this love-match come from?

Surprising for a Christian theologian, he says that "you will find nothing of it in Scripture, after the first chapter of Genesis, save a glimpse thereof ... in St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians" (II 94). So where did it come from? "It belongs to our Teutonic race, and was our heritage (so Tacitus says with awe and astonishment) when we were heathens in the German forests". Here Kingsley makes a link to the description of relations among the German tribes observed by the Roman historian Tacitus (CE ?). However, his belief that Christ was present in history and acted also outside of the Christian church, makes him attribute this to the teaching by Christ, a teaching that he did not teach the Jews. He speaks of "the chivalrous idea of wedlock", which is a characteristic term used by Kingsley, held by "our Teutonic race", but which the "Romance or Popish races of Europe" have not grasped.

In his introduction to a historical novel, *Hypatia*, set in Egypt in the 5th century, Kingsley speaks of "the new blood" that was necessary should the Western Church be renewed and recover from the negative influence of Rome. (xiv-xv). And this new blood came from the barbaric tribes that destroyed the Roman empire: "The great tide of those Gothic nations, of which the Norwegian and the German are the purest

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remaining types” brought with them that which was necessary to build a future Christendom, among which were “comparative purity of morals, sacred respect for women, for family life.”

Thus, Kingsley finds in history, in particular the history of the Germanic people the beginnings of a different view of marriage that he calls “love-match.” It was characterized by “chivalry”, emancipation of women, in contrast to views of marriage held in Southern and Catholic Europe, and defined by legal systems and emphasis upon procreation. Thus, Kingsley here describes a development from the “system of alliance” as a lower form of marriage, to “affective marriage”, a system of sexuality, as a higher form.

The historical description of how “chivalry” and marriage as “love –match” originated is interesting from two perspectives. It is surprisingly “modern” in that it anticipates debates in 20th century of the development of “affective marriage” and its roots, especially in Early Modern Puritanism (cf. Maynard, 349-50, nn. 81-83). This illustrates Foucault’s point of the system of sexuality “overwriting” the system of alliance. It is an uneasy balance between them. Kingsley does recognize that humans are social beings, and by necessity are parts in social relations as parents, brothers, husbands, wives etc, that is, form part of the “social body” that family is the main factor in maintaining. However, in the discourses on desires and marriage these broader social relations play little role, and Kingsley explicitly relegates **reproduction**, the main factor in system maintaining role of family, to a lower stage or an earlier stage of marriage. Kingsley’s discussion of desire and passion, his defence of his and his wife’s strong sexual desire illustrates Foucault’s point about the system of sexuality that it has “its reason for being, not in reproducing itself, but in proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating and penetrating bodies in an increasingly detailed way” (HS I 107). Foucault’s words here read like a description of sections of the letters between Kingsley and his wife that she prudently excluded from publication.

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But from another perspective Kingsley's normative marriage is unabashedly Victorian, linked to a discourse of Englishness and English national character, in contrast to celibacy and "lower forms" of marriage as "foreign." In these instances we notice how marriage and family are associated with masculinity, it is the manly character of the English that comes through. A marriage based on "affective love", respect for women and a strongly manly character are vital indicators of a healthy society, so we can see how Kingsley makes a map of Europe according to these criteria. To Kingsley the main contrast is between Protestant faith and Roman Catholicism. He argues that Protestant faith, «which teaches every man to look God in the face for himself, has contributed more than anything else to develop family life, industry, freedom in England, Scotland and Sweden». So here we see a map of manliness imposed on Europe, with England as its centre, that includes other protestant countries like Scotland and Sweden, whereas non-Protestant countries like Spain and Greece fall outside, and Ireland and Naples fall to the bottom.. In other instances Kingsley sees the great divide between Europe and «the Eastern World». This was more a mental divide than a geographical, Kingsley says of Constantinople (as centre for the Greek-Orthodox church) that it «to this day preserves in Europe the faith and manners of Asia». The characteristics of the races of the East, to Kingsley, were i.a. that they were «effeminate, over-civilised». Moreover, the ideas of family and national life, which Kingsley terms «those two divine roots of the Church», had perished, partly due to slaveholding.

The contrast we find in Kingsley's descriptions can be described both as a North-South divide and as a West-East divide, and reflects within Europe the same contrasts as those between Europe and Africa or Europe and Asia. Europe is the normative, and that holds true in religion, industrial and economic development and culture. The forms of sexual relations in family and marriage, and above all the "manly character" of the Englishman are important indicators of this superiority. Thus, "heteronormativity" was not limited to the area of family and marriage, it was part of a much larger social and mental system.

God and Jesus: Masculine protagonists of heteronormativity

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When Foucault wrote about the relationship between Christianity and sexuality, he was primarily concerned with the way in which Christianity “produced” sexuality through confession. Christianity was about confessing one’s identity, and this identity was linked to sexuality. And the demand to confess the truth about oneself as confessing one’s sexuality, was at the same time a demand to sacrifice oneself, to confess sexuality as sin. Foucault focused on this process of confessing the truth of oneself. But he did not see – or at least not study – how this truth of oneself was related to the truth of the divine. Christian identity was shaped in its relations to the identities of God and Christ.

Thus, the relationship between Christianity and sexuality demands a more thoroughgoing investigation than Foucault undertook. It is not enough to understand Christianity as a control mechanism of sexuality, it is a metaphysical patterning of human identities. Theology – as intellectual reflection of Christianity – combines a single truth about the divine – monotheism, with a singular sexual identity (traditionally heterosexuality) most often from the point of view of the male.

Kingsley’s texts provide a unique opportunity to see this process at work, since it is so clearly argued in confrontation with another position: that of a celibate male identity with corresponding images of God and Jesus. Moreover, he explicitly identifies this position as one resulting from **confession**, thus illustrating Foucault’s point of this institution.

Kingsley defends the full force of desire, and in the process he re-defines the images of God and Christ. God and Christ in Kingsley discourse are, as I said initially, not external authorities, they are sources of identification for Christian (men). The relationship is more than symbolic, in Kingsley’s discourse God and Christ are imagined in parallel family relationships to that of men.

Kingsley (255) says that human beings by necessity must be understood in certain relations: as father, child, husband, wife, brother. These relations are *symbols of relations to God*: “That God is our Father. That Christ is the husband of – the Church” (Ephesians 6) “Kingsley use of social relations to describe the relationship between God and the believers or Christ and the church were quite common. But for

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Kingsley these social metaphors became highly sexed. He argued that the use of family metaphors for God and Christ explicitly support sexuality and marriage in the conflict against celibacy and asceticism. Only men who live in sexual relationships who can understand these metaphors (190) : “Fully to understand the meaning of ‘a Father in Heaven’ we must be fathers ourselves; to know how Christ loved the Church, we must have wives to love and love them.” This was something which the celibate Roman Catholic priest could not understand: “And it is a historic fact, that just the theological ideas which a celibate priesthood have been unable to realise in their teaching, are those of the Father in Heaven – the Husband in Heaven.”

It is only the father of children in a sexual relationship in marriage who can understand God as “father in Heaven.” This heteronormative ideal is explicitly masculine. The relationship to God as Father is exclusively that of a son, in a man-to-man relationship: “the highest idea of man is to know his Father, and **look his Father in the face**, in full assurance of faith and love, and (that) out of that springs all manful energy, self-respect, all self-restraint, all that the true Englishman has, and the Greek and Spaniard has not” (253). The sign of the man-to-man, father to son relationship is expressed in a phrase that Kingsley repeats, “to look his Father in the face”: it is the expression of union in the meeting of gazes, similar to the “eye-wedlock” which Kingsley uses to describe a sensual-erotic encounter. This is homo-sociality as the basis of heteronormativity, and identified with the masculine qualities of “the Englishman.” The negative contrast once more is the Roman Catholic faith, which has substituted the Father-God with the “Confessor” who enslaves people, make them incapable of independence, and with the Virgin Mary, who nurses them like infants, and “end by bringing them down to the level of the Irish and the Neapolitan savage.”(253). Foucault’s description of the function of confession as an institution is here illustrated by God-language: confession means to give up masculinity with its sexuality and equal relationship to God. The resulting self-sacrifice turns men into infants and savages.

It is the loss of masculinity that is the great fear for Kingsley, in his role as son and father, and even more in his role as husband, in a man-to-woman relationship. This obviously is the most important relationship to Kingsley, judging from the intensity of his arguments.

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His main argument is a passage in the New Testament: «Husbands love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church» (Ephesians 5:25). This passage is most often understood as comparing human love with a metaphoric use of “love” for the relationship between Christ and the church. And a common way for Christians to identify with this image of the Church on an individual level was to speak of Christ as “Bridegroom of the soul.” The faithful, whether men or women, identified with the “soul” as the “bride” of Christ, the Bridegroom. But Kingsley sexualises this image of Christ’s love. He speaks of Christ as “the Husband in Heaven” or as “bridegroom.” In a sweeping attack upon the «mystics, both Romish and Puritan», Kingsley says that to speak of Christ as «the Bridegroom of the soul» will make the faithful feminine, since “soul” is feminine. He compares this to the desire to imitate Christ as an angel: which always is represented as “a woman, unsexed.” Once more, the argument against this image of Christ is that it threatens masculinity, which actually means male sexuality.

At this point Kingsley changes literary style from argumentation to imagined conversation. He sets up the image of Christ as an angel, and enters into an imagined situation of preparing for a confession. How can a man confess his desires to this angel, who is out of this world, unable to understand ordinary meanness? To have to confess to the angelic Christ makes the «poor, simple, struggling, earthbound» person weak and woman-like, so that it searches for a woman of understanding, and finds it in the virgin mother. To seek comfort in the virgin is the absolute emasculation of male believers, but it does not lead to any solution - only to the ‘pitying smile’ of the Virgin

The stereotype of the Roman celibate priest returns, he is the ultimate example of the emasculated male, «unsexed» but cold. Celibacy is combined with a lack of masculinity and a lack of compassion, to take away sexuality, i.e. that which makes him a man in social relations also takes away his religious powers. The horror of this passage is that man has become «weak and woman-like». It is contrasted with an example from experience. Kingsley tells of a lady he knows well, probably his wife Fanny, who was advised by a Roman Catholic priest: “Go to the blessed Virgin ... she is a woman and can understand all woman’s feelings.”

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It is to this woman-woman relationship that Kingsbury addresses his alternative: «Ah! Thought I, if your head had once rested on **a lover's bosom**, and your heart known the mighty stay of a **man's affection**, you would have learnt to go now in your sore need, not to the mother, but to the Son, not to the indulgent virgin, but to the **strong man, Christ Jesus - stern because loving - who does not shrink from punishing, and yet does it like a man would do it, 'mighty to save.'**»

The reference to resting “on a lover’s bosom” and “the mighty stay of a man’s affection” probably refers how Kingsley convinced Fanny to marry him despite her temptation to enter into a celibate sisterhood. This sexual experience with a man shows her what Christ is like, as a “Husband in heaven.” The “modern” aspect of this relationship is that it is not based on procreation, but on the love and affection of the two parts, it exemplifies “the system of sexuality. But this image of Christ as lover is an unsettling picture in several ways. The argument runs from the role of a man as lover to Christ, described likewise as a lover (and husband). This means that it is an image of the divine that only a man can identify with, and that Christ is identified with the masculine role in a sexual relationship. Thus, the masculine domination of the heteronormative relationship is given a divine legitimation.” And the character of this masculine domination is unsettling. It is a sexual relationship in which a rest on the “lover’s bosom” and his “affection” are mixed with punishment. Christ has a double face, as «stern because loving», and meting out punishment in order to save. This reads as a characterisation of a relationship of sexual abuse where the woman will be punished, but in order that she shall be saved. This description probably reflects Kingsley’s relationship to his Fanny. It was characterised by strong sexual attraction, combined with a religious justification, with sado-masochistic elements (Chitty 80-81, cf. Maynard 1993). Kingsley sent illustrations to Fanny of a crucified woman saint with strokes that caressed and scourged the women’s flesh. Their correspondence suggests that such violent eroticism was part of their sexual phantasies, and maybe more (Barker, *Victorian Studies* 44:3 (2002) 471-72).

Divine heteronormativity?

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With his focus on the role of confession Foucault established a connection between the history of Christianity and the emergence of a discourse of sexuality in the Western world. Confession of self became confession of one's sexuality, and the structure of Christian confession spread to ever growing areas. However, in later studies this link between Christianity, the reflection over it in theology, and sexuality, has only been followed up in a limited way.

This paper has been an attempt to do that, and to point to the close links between monotheism, sexuality and masculinity that combine into a system that I suggest to name "divine heteronormativity".

In Kingsley's writings we catch a central point in Foucault: sexuality and heteronormativity are constructions in specific historic periods. Kingsley is obviously desperately struggling to accept and legitimate his strong sexual desire, directed towards his fiancé, Fanny, within a set of contexts that made this problematic: social conventions and strict limits on erotic relations before marriage, an influential group of a young religious elite that advocated asceticism and celibacy, a theology that spoke of sexuality primarily in terms of procreation and control.

This probably explains that the central focus of his writings became the sexual relationship between the couple, not a discussion of marriage, procreation and the social role of family in society. In this way he illustrates the importance of the "system of sexuality" over "the system of alliance." But with this sexual relationship at the centre of his religious, personal and political struggles, he constructed an all-encompassing system of heteronormativity. More important even than his relationship to his wife was his relationship to himself. Like men in Greek and Roman Antiquity in Foucault's HS 2 and 3, Kingsley struggled with masculine *askesis*, to find a form to his life that integrated but also controlled his desire. The importance of masculinity becomes clear when we observe how it is developed in analogy with the divine figures of God and Jesus. This masculine dyad is positively contrasted with the Virgin Mary, and object of misogyny. The father-son relationship with God is described in terms of a homo-social relation and confirms Kingsley in a superior masculinity. In a forced interpretation of Biblical material Jesus is made into a highly

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sexed masculine figure, combining affective and volatile sexual aspects, to serve as Kingsley's ideal "alter ego." This was part of an interpretation that brought Kingsley the criticism that he advocated a "muscular Christianity" and went beyond the acceptable even for liberal minded Victorians. Finally, marriage and masculinity form the centre of the political, they represent the English, Germanic (and Protestant) values, in contrast to other nations, that are underdeveloped, feminine or simply savages, as e.g. the Irish and the Spanish.

Thus, the sexual, the religious and political are combined in a heteronormative system. And, as one of Foucault's interpreters within the area of theology, Jeremy Carrette, points out: this continues to-day: theology and sexuality are dominant discourses that serve to confirm the idea of a fixed self. We may say that Christianity and theology do not play such an important role to-day. But there are two billions Christians in the world to-day, and a strong will to play a political role to preserve heteronormative structures especially in the monolithic Roman Catholic church and among conservative protestants. Therefore the linkage between the confessions of the "sexual selves" of individuals and their confessions to religious truths is of enormous importance. And it will therefore be an important task to de-construct the divine heteronormativity. The example that I have given of Kingsley's construction of such a divine heteronormativity suggests that it can also be deconstructed.