

to bear the full weight of its politics. Its militant gay chauvinism, for example, comes off as an ad hominem attack on heterosexuals, as though the oppression of gays was somehow grounded in heterosexuality.

Theoretically this work, like Altman's, is located within the politics of the early gay movement. It has, consequently, a kind of Marxist gloss. Typically, the last chapter is entitled "Towards a Gay Communism" and throughout the book there is sporadic use of Marxist terms like 'capital' and 'ideology.' But like a number of early gay liberationists, Meili does not understand Marxism. Specifically, he does not understand that for Marxists, social phenomena — like gender, sexual identity or even "homosexual desire" — are produced historically in the activities and practices of people; and to understand these phenomena it is necessary to see them as being socially produced rather than as being "congenital" which is what he thinks they are.

Michael Goodich's *The Unmentionable Vice* is essentially a history of the administration of sexual life in the Middle Ages. It begins with a short chapter on the incidence of gay life in Europe between the 11th and 14th centuries, and ends with an account of the trial of one Arnold Veriolle. But for the most part the book is a compendium of medieval canonical and secular law dealing with sexual life. It concentrates especially on the Gregorian reforms and on the work of the various Lateran Councils, particularly the fourth.

Goodich presents his material factually and, consequently, without much attention to historiography. He appears, in fact, to know little about the writing of history. Apart from failing to provide any kind of analysis, the chief problem with the work concerns what is to be considered historically as homosexuality — a term invented in the later part of the 19th century. This problem is compounded by the fact that for the medieval authorities to distinguish same sex relations from other "sexual deviations" was not all that important. A sin against nature could be defined as broadly as "wasting one's seed outside its normal vessel," which could even include nocturnal emissions. What the church was after was not just "homosexuality," but any form of sexual non-conformity, irrespective of sexual orientation. To organize an account of this period, as Goodich has done, in order to emphasize its homosexual (i.e. modern) features, inadvertently involves a reconstruction of historical categories and therefore a reconstruction of historical reality itself.

The book, however, is useful for the light it throws on the organization of

sexual oppression in the Middle Ages. Clearly, it was not the nuclear family that was being defended by the suppression of sexual deviancy. Rather, it was something more like the social order, or better put, the social relations of medieval life and their management by the Catholic church. Attacks on sexual non-conformity, interestingly enough only really began, according to Goodich, in the 13th century. At that time they were closely linked to the suppression of political non-conformity and to xenophobia. In some instances, in fact, legislative reference to sodomy appeared ambiguously to apply to "homosexuality," other forms of sexual deviancy and to heresy. Even in the Middle Ages a charge of sexual deviancy was a popular form of political attack. The commie fag is not an entirely modern invention.

Goodich's material, and not his analysis or lack thereof, consequently, shows that it is not religion or Christianity, as such, that is against sexual deviance. Rather, it is the church as an administrative apparatus committed to the preservation of a particular set of social relations that is concerned to enforce sexual orthodoxy — hence the homosexual interpretation of the Sodom and Gomorrah story. What *The Unmentionable Vice* illustrates is how the church, with its commitment to social order and its selective interpretation of the *Bible*, prefigures the modern state with its use of the "scientific" work-up of gay life (for example, in psychiatric accounts) as a means of providing a rationale for handling what, on other grounds, is seen as a social/political problem. Unfortunately, Goodich does not make enough of this distinction between religious content and administrative practice. As a result, on the one hand, homosexual oppression appears in the book to be grounded in religion; much the way it is grounded in the family for Altman, and in heterosexuality for Meili. On the other, the administrative similarities between the medieval church and the modern state are virtually lost.

Faced with the challenge of forging a new political analysis for gays, none of these books really has much to say. They are, of course, more-or-less interesting in their own right. In terms of the new two-line struggle emerging among gay politicians between those who view the family as the center of gay oppression and those who see it as a function of the state, Altman's and Meili's works fall into the former camp, while Goodich's provides some evidence in support of the latter. Until these issues are taken up more concretely, most gay activists — in Toronto, at least — will probably continue to defend gay businesses against the state — be they small publishing ventures or steam baths. ●

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