

*The Triumph of Religion* preceded by *Discourse to Catholics* by Jacques Lacan, (trans.) Bruce Fink, Polity Press, Cambridge 2013. ISBN 9780745659893. £13. 23.

While Freud's Judaism has been discussed in detail, Jacques Lacan's Catholicism has been less closely examined. However, one cannot but notice that time and again Lacan [1901-81] - one of the leading French psychoanalysts and thinkers of the 20th century - writes in relation to the New Testament, to theological texts, particularly Augustine, to Pascal, Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Avila etc.

This volume contains, for the first time in English, two oral documents which were originally published in their original French in 2005 - the *Discourse to Catholics* (9th and 10th March 1960) and *The Triumph of Religion* (29th October 1974). The latter is a press conference held in Rome at the French Cultural Centre. Here Lacan insists that 'there is *one* true religion and that is the Christian religion' and that 'the true religion is the Roman one' (p. 66, italics original). These are surprising comments coming, as they do, from a psychoanalyst often considered an atheist.

Michel de Certeau described Lacan's discourse in its history, narratives and theoretical loci as Christian. This view is echoed by Elizabeth Roudinesco, Lacan's biographer, who describes mysticism and the Trinity as two of the great myths on which Lacan based his reading of Freud. But de Certeau went further. He suggested that some of Lacan's key psychoanalytic ideas were influenced in some way by Benedictine monasticism. De Certeau, one of three Jesuits who together with Lacan founded in 1964 the École Freudienne, had an in-depth knowledge of Freud's works which he had read in the original German and remained an active member of the Lacanian circle throughout his life, often lecturing and writing on the intersecting discourses of mysticism and psychoanalysis.

It is well known that Lacan had a brother who was a monk at the Benedictine abbey of Hautecombe. According to his brother, although Lacan had stopped hearing mass when he started his medical studies, he continued to believe in God and to be deeply immersed in Catholic culture. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that in 1939 when he married, he asked Dom Bernard Laure, the Abbot of Hautecombe, to officiate at the ceremony. In due course Lacan had his children baptised and at Easter 1953 he wrote to his brother claiming that his psychoanalytic teaching belonged to the Christian tradition. In the following September Lacan wrote again to his brother restating the importance he attached to religion and asking if he

could arrange a private audience for him with Pius XII in order to talk to him about the future of psychoanalysis within the Church and 'do homage to our common father' while in Rome. He also approached the French embassy to see if they could arrange it for him. Elizabeth Roudinesco, his biographer, thinks he was probably aware that his philosophically articulated work was likely to appeal to the growing number of priests who wanted to become psychoanalysts and to other Catholics who in general had difficulty accepting Freud.

Shortly before this Pius XII had given three addresses in which he spelt out the Church's view on psychoanalysis. The Vatican at that time was under the vehemently anti-psychoanalytic influence of Cardinal Ottaviani and Agostino Gemelli yet taken together we can see in these three papal addresses a tentative shift toward a more open attitude to psychoanalysis. The first address was delivered to surgeons on 14th September 1952 at the First International Congress on the Histopathology of the Nervous System; the second on 13th April 1953 at the Fifth International Congress on Psychotherapy and Clinical Psychology; and the third two days later at the International Catholic Congress on Psychiatry, Analytic Psychotherapy and Child-Guidance. The latter event was one of a series established by Maryse Choisy - the first having been held in 1949 at another the Benedictine abbey, this time that of Bec Hellouin in Normandy. Choisy, a journalist who had been briefly treated by Freud and later analysed by René Laforgue, had converted to Catholicism following a meeting with Teilhard de Chardin in 1938. After her conversion she devoted herself to bringing about a rapprochement between Catholicism and psychoanalysis. In 1946 she founded the journal *Psyché* which ran until 1963. The idea for the review took root among a circle of intellectuals, poets, writers, philosophers and theologians that she brought together in 1945. Contributors included Françoise Dolto, Teilhard de Chardin, Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger and Claude Lévi-Strauss.

In the end neither his brother nor the embassy were able to arrange a private audience with the Pope and the best Lacan could manage was to attend a public audience at Castel Gandolfo. He went there with Maryse Choisy and Serge Leclair. Roudinesco concludes that Lacan's approach to the Church was merely an opportunistic attempt to gain powerful supporters. (Rather paradoxically she was later to suggest that Lacan would have wished for a Catholic funeral. But her objectivity, in this regard, was called into question by the courts).

But his brother saw things differently from the beginning and was convinced that Lacan had been re-converted to Christianity and embraced once again the values of Catholic spirituality. Indeed, in the homily he preached at Lacan's funeral, his brother said that Lacan's

psychoanalytic oeuvre was steeped in Catholicism. This view, largely overlooked, is given considerably credibility by the publication of these documents.

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