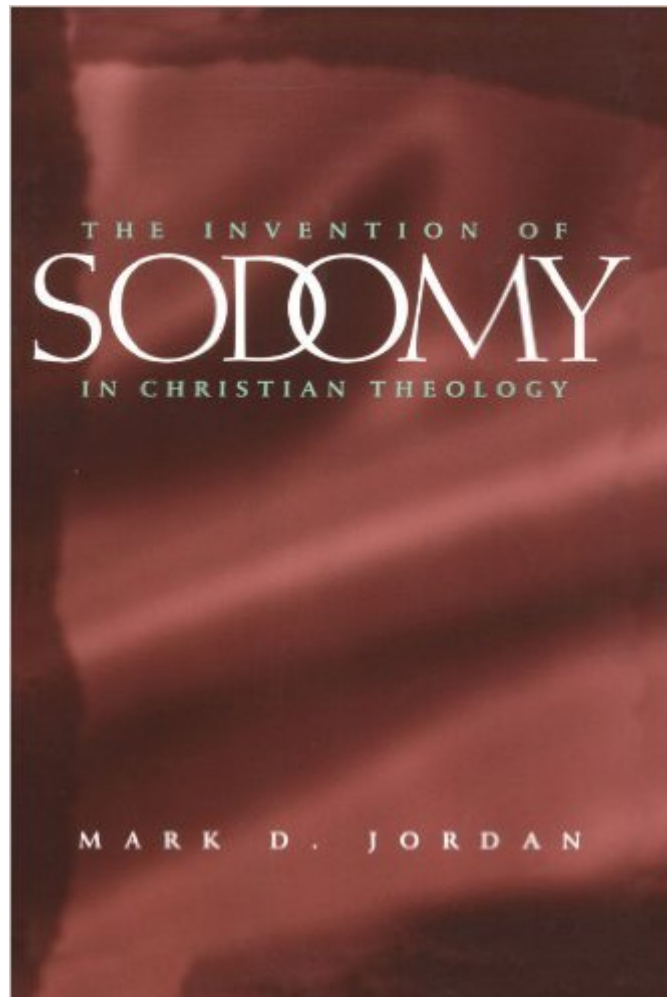


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The Invention Of Sodomy In Christian Theology (The Chicago Series On Sexuality, History, And Society)



Synopsis

In this startling original work of historical detection, Mark D. Jordan explores the invention of Sodomy by medieval Christendom, examining its conceptual foundations in theology and gauging its impact on Christian sexual ethics both then and now. This book is for everyone involved in the ongoing debate within organized religions and society in general over moral judgments of same-sex eroticism. "A crucial contribution to our understanding of the tortured and tortuous relationship between men who love men, and the Christian religion" "indeed, between our kind and Western society as a whole. . . . The true power of Jordan's study is that it gives back to gay and lesbian people our place in history and that it places before modern theologians and church leaders a detailed history of fear, inconsistency, hatred and oppression that must be faced both intellectually and pastorally." "Michael B. Kelly, *Screaming Hyena*" "[A] detailed and disturbing tour through the back roads of medieval Christian thought." "Dennis O'Brien, *Commonweal*" "Being gay and being Catholic are not necessarily incompatible modes of life, Jordan argues. . . . Compelling and deeply learned." "Virginia Quarterly Review

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Customer Reviews

This book addresses some of the same terrain as John Boswell's 1980 book *CHRISTIANITY, SOCIAL TOLERANCE, AND HOMOSEXUALITY*, but with important points of contrast, one of which is it's half the earlier book's length in pages. Jordan takes a Christianized, quasi-Foucauldian approach to the subject, whereas Boswell's approach was essentialist, stressing historical

continuities which Jordan opposes. Boswell equated the modern concept of homosexuality with the medieval concept of sodomy, whereas Jordan does not. Instead, Jordan argues that the term "sodomy," as used by early church fathers and pre-Renaissance theologians, was a usefully vague invective, employed not altogether differently from the ways "philistinism" was used later or, for that matter, the way "homophobia" is used in some circles today. But parallel to what Jordan says about the term "homophobia," "sodomy," too, has been used politically not as a precise explanation for human behavior, but as "a placeholder for an explanation yet to be provided" (167-68). [Arguably, as philosopher Judith Butler does argue elsewhere (cogently), the same could be said for the current uses of "gay," "homosexual," "queer," etc., or for that matter, "sex."] Jordan's book is an important one for people who identify themselves as either Christian or gay (or both) because it addresses issues underlying the clash of values and "culture wars" being played out in society now. If indeed, as Jordan suggests, "sodomy" was invented to fill a gap left by Christendom's refusal of the "erotic"--even between two sexes, perhaps progress lies in our seeking a place for the erotic INSIDE the moral, instead of persisting in (often hypocritically) dichotomizing the two--something, in response to a previous reader's comments, Plato did NOT do (though the later Platonists did).

The author here must deny that the abominable sin of sodomy was never 'invented' but was actually practiced almost since the creation of mankind by God. And this book contradicts God's own, the Holy Bible, in which God says.... "But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." (Genesis 13:13) "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination." (Leviticus 18:22) "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet." (Romans 1:26,27) "Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." (Jude 7) That last sentence should give some pause....

at the start of the second millennium of Christianity. Looking at the preceding "review" that ignores the subject of the book (what Christian theologians of roughly a millennium ago wrote about "sodomy") and seems to have been written by someone who did not read the book but substituted his own condemnations of homosexuality, I was astounded to read that Romans 1 is clear. The

"reviewer" also must not have read that, because the syntax (in the original, which the reviewer probably does not know was not English) is VERY convoluted. There are no condemnations of "sodomy" (by any name) in the Gospels that allegedly report the words of the Christ, and Mark Jordan's book does not deal with the Hebrew background or the first millennium of Christianity. (An earlier reviewer must not have seen the blurb FROM Michel Foucault for John Boswell's book, one that is considerably less sound than Jordan's.)

The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology, did not disappoint me. What I expected was a conformation to what I've questioned in Christianity's condemnation of homosexuality. This book presents undeniable evidence that Early Church Fathers spoke of something other than homosexuality. This book does not address the sin of the Church but does present enough evidence as to present homosexuality as a scapegoat for the Church's sin. One can not read this book without wondering why someone has not yet written about the Church's gravest sin.

The writing and reasoning in this history of the medieval formation of Christian condemnation of the "nefarious sin" of "sodomy" are very crisp. My only complaint is that the book is too short (not examining the condemnation of "sodomites" in the first Christian millennium, or in Jewish or Islamic theology). Jordan shows how one after another Church Father produced incoherent condemnations of sodomy--monastic, clerical, and layman--in part out of concern for suggesting such a sin to those not aware of its possibility, in part not wanting to reveal the extent of its prevalence within the priesthood and monasteries. One striking feature is that this tradition/discourse only began more than a thousand years after Christ, who is not recorded as having condemned sodomy or sodomites.

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