



**New Approaches in History and  
Theology to Same-Sex Love and Desire**

**EDITED BY MARK D. CHAPMAN  
AND DOMINIC JANES**

# Genders and Sexualities in History

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Mark D. Chapman · Dominic Janes  
Editors

# New Approaches in History and Theology to Same-Sex Love and Desire

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## SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

*New Approaches in History and Theology to Same-Sex Love and Desire* is a genuinely groundbreaking collection, where international and interdisciplinary new scholarship explores the relationship between religion and same-sex desire. The collection re-evaluates the history of same-sex relationships in the churches, as they have been understood in different periods of history and in various contexts. Recent marriage equality legislation in many countries has meant that churches of all types have found themselves forced to address questions on same-sex marriage and queer lives, for which they are often ill-prepared. The collection reveals the hidden queer histories of the Church and its theologies, and the many counter-currents through history that question the dominant, negative understanding of same-sex relationships in the contemporary churches. The authors tell unexpected stories. Some in the churches have been at the vanguard of legislative and social change affecting queer lives. Some churches have offered safe queer spaces. The essays offer new interpretations and original research into the history of sexuality that inform the contemporary debate in the churches as well as in the academy. The collection provides new perspectives and approaches that enrich the historiography of sexuality and of religion. In common with all volumes in the 'Genders and Sexualities in History' series, *New Approaches in History*

*and Theology to Same-Sex Love and Desire* presents a multifaceted and meticulously researched scholarly collection, and is a sophisticated contribution to our understanding of the past.

John Arnold  
Joanna Bourke  
Sean Brady

# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction: Same-Sex Love and Desire—A Time for New Approaches</b>	<b>1</b>
	Mark D. Chapman and Dominic Janes	
<b>2</b>	<b>Theological Amnesia and Same-Sex Love</b>	<b>11</b>
	Adrian Thatcher	
<b>3</b>	<b>Sexuality as a Guide to Ethics: God and the Variable Body in English Literature</b>	<b>29</b>
	Chris Mounsey	
<b>4</b>	<b>The Tradition of Homophobia: Responses to Same-Sex Relationships in Serbian Orthodoxy from the Nineteenth Century to the Present Day</b>	<b>55</b>
	Nik Jovčić-Sas	
<b>5</b>	<b>Sexual Ethics in the Shadow of Modernism: George Tyrrell, André Raffalovich and the Project that Never Was</b>	<b>79</b>
	Philip Healy	



6	<b>‘Pope Norman’, Griffin’s Report and Roman Catholic Reactions to Homosexual Law Reform in England and Wales, 1954–1971</b>	93
	Alana Harris	
7	<b>Some Found a Niche: Same-Sex Attracted People in Australian Anglicanism</b>	117
	David Hilliard	
8	<b>‘The Ecclesiastical Wing of the Lavender Revolution’: Religion and Sexual Identity Organising in the USA, 1946–1976</b>	139
	Heather R. White	
9	<b><i>Christ and the Homosexual: An Early Manifesto for an Affirming Christian Ministry to Homosexuals</i></b>	161
	Bernard Schlager	
10	<b>‘Homosexual Practice’ and the Anglican Communion from the 1990s: A Case Study in Theology and Identity</b>	187
	Mark D. Chapman	
11	<b>How Queer Can Christian Marriage Be? Eschatological Imagination and the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions in the American Episcopal Church</b>	209
	Rémy Bethmont	
12	<b>Setting the Table Anew: Queering the Lord’s Supper in Contemporary Art</b>	227
	Mariecke van den Berg	
13	<b>The Queerness of Saints: Inflecting Devotion and Same-Sex Desire</b>	249
	Donald L. Boisvert	
	<b>Index</b>	265

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## LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 12.1	Elisabeth Ohlson, <i>Palm Sunday</i> , 1998	232
Fig. 12.2	Elisabeth Ohlson, <i>Calvary</i> , 1998	238
Fig. 12.3	Elisabeth Ohlson, <i>The Last Supper</i> , 1998	240

# Introduction: Same-Sex Love and Desire—A Time for New Approaches

*Mark D. Chapman and Dominic Janes*

The relationships between diverse forms of religious and sexual identities have been widely contested in the media since the rise of the lesbian and gay liberation movement in the 1970s. One of the key images that often appears in public debate is that of ‘lesbians and gays in the church’ as a significant ‘problem’. On the one hand, many members of faith communities have remained hostile to physical expressions of same-sex desire, whilst on the other hand many lesbian and gay activists have been suspicious of various forms of religion. The compromise that has been reached over church exemptions from the obligation to perform same-sex marriage ceremonies in England indicates that many people do continue to find interactions of religion and homosexuality to be problematic. At the same time, research over the past forty years or so into queer theology and the history of same-sex desire has shown that such issues have played an important role in the story of Christianity over

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many centuries. John Boswell's ground-breaking books *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (1980) and *Same-Sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe* (1994) created considerable controversy because they argued that the early and medieval Church was not inherently hostile to same-sex desire and that this was really only a development of the later Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> The contributors to this volume have all been inspired by the challenges of such revisionist study to explore religion and same-sex desire as fields of opportunity for investigation and debate. They come from a wide variety of backgrounds and from different stages of their careers both within and beyond higher education. Many of the chapters look back to the gospels and the later traditions of the Church in order to think in broader terms about practices and truths in modern culture.

This book is an inter-disciplinary attempt to offer a range of evaluations of the history of same-sex relationships in the churches as they have been understood in different periods of history and in various contexts. In addition, we have sought to encourage authors to engage with 'theological' questions and assessments especially as these relate to contemporary questions in the churches. As we have noted, with the recent legislation in many countries that has allowed for same-sex marriage, churches of all types have found themselves having to address questions for which they were often ill-prepared. The speed of change has meant that there has been little leisurely debate; instead there are often panicked reactions and ill-thought-out statements. Although there is now a highly developed literature on queer theology, few church leaders had engaged with it—it was considered far too risky as it questioned the traditional teachings on marriage and sexuality in which the churches had a huge ethical investment. Churches were consequently frequently caught off guard as legislation changed and they often found themselves at odds with wider society. A further complexity is created by the fact that in many churches, especially those like the Anglican Communion or the Lutheran World Federation that have a wide global spread, issues around sexuality have been the focus for a range of issues, many of which relate to the history of mission and colonialism. This has meant that for many churches it has been difficult to engage dispassionately with issues in human sexuality.

In response to such questions, what the essays seek to do in the present volume is to uncover some of the hidden histories of the Church and its theologies; there are many counter-currents through history that question the dominant understanding of same-sex relationships in the



contemporary churches. They tell sometimes unexpected stories, many of which invite serious further attention. It is quite clear through history that some in the churches have been at the vanguard of legislative and social change. Similarly, some churches have offered safe queer spaces. What is also clear is that the wider society was not always quite as hostile to same-sex relationships as might have been believed. Overall, these essays offer new interpretations and original research into the history of sexuality that might help inform the contemporary debate in the churches as well as in the academy.

Adrian Thatcher in his chapter ('Theological Amnesia and Same-Sex Love') argues that recent generations have suffered from a loss of collective memory regarding how we reached the current and prolonged culture wars about sex. He contends that the pervasive belief in the existence of two opposite sexes is an early modern assumption that has persisted into the twenty-first century. Both heterosexuality and homosexuality, he contends, are recent constructions based upon it. His chapter continues by arguing that the churches have nothing to fear from the replacement of the modern sex binary by a continuum that embraces gender, sex and orientation. Theological amnesia is also a key element addressed in Chris Mounsey's contribution ('Sexuality as a Guide to Ethics: God and the Variable Body in English Literature') makes an explicit link between past and contemporary changes in religious attitudes. His focus is on early modern Britain and the writings of Aphra Behn and Jonathan Swift who understood their own lives and developed their own sexualities, not by following the changing moral codes of the old and the new churches, but by following the devices and desires of their own bodies. He argues that the rise of Protestantism can be considered in relation to the concept of fashion or 'lifestyle choice'. The notion that the acceptance of homosexuality in recent decades is also a choice is one that has been advanced by various strands of conservative opinion. But Mounsey contends that such contemporary moral re-fashioning should be taken as seriously as the changes that took place in the course of the Reformation. Matters of taste and culture have always played a role in processes of religious and moral change.

Nik Jovčić-Sas ('The Tradition of Homophobia: Responses to Same-Sex Relationships in Serbian Orthodoxy from the Nineteenth Century to the Present Day') presents a case study of amnesia and hostility from Eastern Europe. He argues that over the past two decades Serbia has earned a reputation as one of Europe's most intolerant nations towards

the LGBTQ+ community. His chapter explores the ways in which nationalism and Serbian Orthodoxy can be located at the heart of the current climate of homophobic discussion and how this discourse has developed. Building on the thesis proposed by John Boswell in his aforementioned *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (1994), Jovčić-Sas looks at Serbia's history of brotherhood rituals or '*Pobratimstvo*' and how they declined after Serbian independence from the Ottoman Empire with the influx of Western European views on sexuality.

With the contribution from Philip Healy ('Sexual Ethics in the Shadow of Modernism: George Tyrrell, André Raffalovich and the Project That Never Was') we move from orthodoxy to Roman Catholicism in order to explore a case study of the challenges facing those attempting to build bridges between traditional forms of religion and the cultural forms of modernity. Healy's focus is on the writer André Raffalovich (1864–1934) who, in 1896, converted to Roman Catholicism and published his treatise *Uranisme et unisexualité*.<sup>2</sup> In this book, Raffalovich argued that homosexuality was neither a disease nor a crime. His book also set out an ethics of homosexuality. In the following year George Tyrrell (1861–1909) published *Notes on the Catholic Doctrine of Purity* for circulation among his fellow Jesuits.<sup>3</sup> This was a pastorally sensitive attempt to deal with the laity's scruples in the area of sexual thoughts and desires. Raffalovich and Tyrrell were drawn together by their interest in sexual ethics in particular and in contemporary theology more generally. Tyrrell became the leading British exponent of what came to be called 'modernism' and was condemned as heretical by Pius X in 1907. Tyrrell wanted to interpret traditional Christian doctrine in the light of contemporary thought and believed that Raffalovich was well placed to undertake a similar project for sexual morality. Although Raffalovich declined to do so, Tyrrell's letters to his friend indicate what that project might have looked like.

It was not until the post-war period that the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church in Britain attempted to frame a position on (male) same-sex desire as Alana Harris explains ('"Pope Norman": Griffin's Report and Roman Catholic Reactions to Homosexual Law Reform in England and Wales, 1954–1971'). Using the virtually unknown 'Griffin Report'—a Catholic submission to the Wolfenden Committee on sexual law reform in England—as a starting point, this chapter explores progressive Catholic reactions to homosexual law reform from the time of the publication of the Wolfenden Report (1957) through to the passing of

the *Sexual Offences Act* (1967). Alongside exploration of the separation of sin and crime advocated by this Catholic group, the chapter evaluates the theologically informed, jurisprudential writings of the prominent Catholic politician and polemist, Norman St-John Stevas (1929–2012). Both case studies illustrate the growing capacity and confidence of an educated, middle-class Catholic elite to formulate new theological positions and interrogate traditional teachings on love and sexuality. Through this lens, culminating in St John-Stevas' co-sponsorship of Leo Abse's bill in 1966, the surprising and counter-intuitive contributions of a liberal Catholic milieu to the evolution of modern sexual subjectivity can be reappraised, alongside an alternative rendering of the place of religion in politics in the 'long 1950s'.

David Hilliard ('Some Found a Niche: Same-Sex Attracted People in Australian Anglicanism') explores another context in which prejudice and intolerance mingled with more positive responses to the development of modern forms of sexual identity politics. His contribution surveys the relationship of same-sex attracted people to the Anglican Church in Australia from the nineteenth century to the present and how they sought to reconcile their sexuality with their religious faith. He argues that the subject of homosexuality as a moral problem or pastoral issue was almost totally absent from public discussion within the Anglican Church before the 1960s. However, there is evidence from the mid-nineteenth century onwards that some same-sex attracted people, although secretive about their sexuality, were able to find spaces within Anglicanism where they obtained emotional and spiritual fulfilment and, in some cases, met partners and maintained clandestine social networks. Men were often drawn to cathedrals in the capital cities and to inner-urban Anglo-Catholic churches, teaching in church schools and theological colleges, bush brotherhoods and religious communities, overseas missionary work, and ministry to young people. Single women who were same-sex attracted might be drawn to teaching in church girls' schools or to full-time church work as missionaries or deaconesses. From the 1970s, same-sex attracted Anglicans became more visible in the Church. Some became active in the emerging gay-rights movement, formed groups for mutual support and urged the Church to reconsider its negative view of same-sex relationships.

The process by which 'lesbian and gay positive' religious groups emerged during the post-war decades in the United States is the subject of Heather Rachele White's chapter ('The Ecclesiastical Wing of

the Lavender Revolution: Religion and Sexual Identity Organising in the USA, 1946–1976'). She finds that in America religion, and particularly Christianity, was a visible and important part of the lesbian and gay liberation movement that emerged in the wake of the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City. Like post-Stonewall radicalism the 'gay church' phenomenon was also not completely new; both were indebted to earlier efforts at reform. Her essay traces religious involvement as an intertwined element of the history of politicised sexual identity that began to coalesce in the United States after World War II and became visible to the American mainstream in the 1970s. She argues that focusing on Christianity in relation to this history counters the implicit and explicit ways that queer histories are often told without attention to religion. Next, Bernard Schlager ('*Christ and the Homosexual: An Early Manifesto for an Affirming Christian Ministry to Homosexuals*') points to the work of a particular individual as having played an important role during this period. Schlager discusses how the American minister Robert Wood presented his fellow Christians with a view of homosexuality in his book *Christ and the Homosexual* (1960) that was revolutionary. Wood argued that homosexuals held a rightful place in Church and society and that they should abandon neither Christianity nor the Church. More specifically he called for the advancement of civil rights for homosexuals; the construction of pro-homosexual theologies; the education, ordination, and career placement of 'out' homosexuals; and marriage equality for same-sex couples. Schlager situates these topics within Wood's lifelong ministry of promoting the full acceptance of homosexuals in American society through his own denomination, the United Church of Christ.

The final set of chapters focus upon debates from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The first of these contributions looks at some of the challenges in bringing about change within major denominations as opposed to achieving forms of self-expression within new movements. Mark Chapman ('"Homosexual practice" and the Anglican Communion from the 1990s: A Case Study in Theology and Identity') discusses the ways in which the Anglican Communion has redefined itself around the issue of the legitimacy of same-sex relationships, especially among the clergy, since the 1980s. Chapman offers a political interpretation of the ways in which opposition to homosexuality has become what Murray Edelman calls a 'condensation symbol', which brings together a set of wider issues that have emerged between the different provinces of the Communion, especially between Global South and North. The

first section of the chapter traces the history of debates from the gradual liberalisation of the approach to homosexual relations in the American Episcopal Church from the 1970s to the divisions following the 1998 Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops that stated that ‘homosexual practice was incompatible with Scripture’. Divisions were heightened after the election of a bishop in a same-sex relationship in the American Church as well as the issuing of liturgies for same-sex blessings in the Canadian Diocese of New Westminster. The second part of the chapter discusses the issues between the provinces of the Communion, especially those in Africa, where many claim that homosexual practice is ‘unAfrican’. The discussion then moves on to explore the symbolic language of theological debate in the Anglican Communion. Chapman suggests that although there are efforts to reconcile the different factions where condensation symbols have been rendered sacred, there is little chance that there will be the humility sufficient for major compromises or changes to be made.

Same-sex marriage has been one of the most controversial issues in recent cultural and religious debate. It is fitting, therefore, that this book continues with Rémy Bethmont’s exploration of the theological underpinnings of queer marriages (‘How Queer can Christian Marriage Be? Eschatological Imagination and the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions in the American Episcopal Church’). He argues that the pace of change in many Western countries over same-sex issues in the last couple of decades and the successful outcome of political campaigns for marriage equality has had a considerable impact on the development of the Christian LGBTQ movement. The (American) Episcopal Church’s decision to call same-sex unions ‘marriage’ at its 2015 General Convention is seen as being of great importance. The provisional liturgy of blessing authorised by the previous General Convention in 2012 purposefully eschewed the term marriage in relation to same-sex couples and inscribed them within the broader notion of covenanted households, putting them on the same plane as married heterosexual couples and monastic communities. The result was to leave a certain degree of ambiguity in the way in which same-sex relationships were imagined either as friendships or marriages. It was the changing American secular context and the language of rights that led to the inclusion of same-sex couples in holy matrimony in a move that was questioned by many members of the clergy and laity. The adoption of a marital terminology in 2015 seemed to signal the end of the friendship template for Episcopalian

queers yet Bethmont argues that both the friendship and the marriage templates in fact share a similar approach.

The final two chapters explore queer possibilities in relation to Church life and personal belief and practice. Mariecke van den Berg presents a case study of the possibilities for not merely accommodating the LGBTQ community within mainstream churches but of queering theological beliefs and liturgical practices ('Setting the Table Anew: Queering the Lord's Supper in Contemporary Art'). She explores the queer potential of the exhibition *Ecce Homo* (1998)—and in particular the work *The Last Supper*—by Swedish photographer Elisabeth Ohlson. *Ecce Homo* merges biblical imagery with the symbolism of contemporary queer (sub-)cultures. It evoked much debate when it was held in the cathedral of Uppsala, which is widely regarded as Sweden's 'religious capital'. *Ecce Homo* was predominantly understood as an embrace of an 'inclusive Jesus' that implied a critique of (Christian) homophobia and an invitation to the Church of Sweden to take a more LGBTQ-friendly stance. Van den Berg investigates the queer potential of *The Last Supper* by bringing into dialogue the 'ordinary theology' of the participants in the debate and queer theological insights that were developed in the two decades since the exhibition was first shown.<sup>4</sup> She argues that *Ecce Homo*'s queer potential lies in a mixture of specifying queer suffering and the embrace of kitsch and parody. She sees this mixture exemplified in *The Last Supper*, where Jesus dines on crisps and wine in the company of cross-dressers and a dog. As Ohlson makes 'repetitions with a critical difference' to the food, the guests, the Host and the table of the Last Supper, possibilities for a queer re-reading of the Biblical narrative and its present-day sacramental enactment emerge.<sup>5</sup>

The potential queerness of Christian devotion is the subject of Donald L. Boisvert's contribution ('The Queerness of Saints: Inflecting Devotion and Same-Sex Desire'). In the Roman Catholic context—and to a more limited extent in Anglicanism—saints and holy persons occupy a central place in devotional culture. He presents what he sees as this robust devotional culture as inviting not only expressions of deep fervour and piety but also manifestations of physical and erotic desire. Furthermore, he regards saints and other sacred or holy figures as often characterised by their inherent 'queerness'. Boisvert argues that they transgress any number of boundaries and fixed identity categories. His chapter examines devotion to saints as a means of queer affirmation in the Christian tradition and aims to question the all-too-common

perception of religion, and especially of Catholic Christianity, as being inherently opposed to, or dismissive of, same-sex desire. While it is true that many churches, both in their theological posturing and their public discourse, employ homophobic and even anti-body rhetoric, it is equally accurate to claim that their rich ritual life makes possible an interesting array of queer opportunities and strategies for the active expression and display of same-sex yearnings. The chapter discusses two examples of saintly figures drawn from examples from the author's own life: St. Dominic Savio (1842–1857) and St. Peter Julian Eymard (1811–1868). These are presented and analysed as sites of queer rhetoric and performance. In an echo of the opening chapters of this book it can be argued that hope lies in discovering the queerness present in Christian traditions that challenge normative secular mores. The contributors to this volume seek to advance such new approaches in history and theology to same-sex love and desire in order to better understand the past and to prepare us for the challenges of the world to come.

## NOTES

1. John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) and *The Marriage of Likeness: Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: Villard, 1994).
2. Mark André Raffalovich, *Uranisme et unisexualité: étude sur différentes manifestations de l'instinct sexuel* (Paris: A. Maloine, 1896).
3. George Tyrrell, *Notes on the Catholic Doctrine of Purity* (Roehampton: Manresa Press, 1897).
4. Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).
5. Elisabeth Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions with a Critical Difference* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

## Theological Amnesia and Same-Sex Love

*Adrian Thatcher*

For twenty-five years I have been writing about theology and sexuality. Two principal issues have been the possibility of the accommodation of women's bodies in masculine sacral and sacramental space (the ordination of women), and the possibility of the accommodation of same-sex desire within the modern two-sex binary (homosexuality). They have a common yet often unnoticed root: gender. More recently the visibility and audibility of intersex and transgender people have tested this struggling two-sex binary still further. I have come to see there is widespread amnesia in the churches about these matters. There is little hope for a lessening of disagreement if there is no agreement about how we got to where we are. In the first section I develop the charge of theological amnesia—the loss of collective memory regarding how we reached the present and prolonged culture wars about sex. I show that the pervasive belief in two opposite sexes is a modern assumption, and that heterosexuality and homosexuality are both modern constructions based upon it. In the second part I suggest that the churches have nothing to fear from the replacement of the modern sex binary by a continuum embracing gender, sex, and orientation (and perhaps *libido* as well). The argument

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as a whole is developed in much more detail in my book *Redeeming Gender*.<sup>1</sup>

### THE ROOTS OF AMNESIA

Anyone suspicious of the assumption that people in biblical times thought about matters to do with sex, reproduction and the body much as we do today, would do well to read Thomas Laqueur's 1990 book, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Laqueur argues that for most of our history in the West, there has been one sex, not two. 'For thousands of years it had been a common place that women had the same genitals as men except that, as Nemesius, bishop of Emesa in the fourth century, put it: "theirs are inside the body and not outside it"'.<sup>2</sup> Galen (c.130–c.210 CE), he continues, 'demonstrated at length that women were essentially men in whom a lack of vital heat—of perfection—had resulted in the retention, inside, of structures that in the male are visible without'. Men and women constitute a single sex with similar reproductive equipment in which 'the vagina is imagined as an interior penis, the labia as foreskin, the uterus as scrotum, and the ovaries as testicles'.<sup>3</sup>

In a medical school where I teach part-time (the Plymouth University Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry) I discovered a second edition of a rare tome, by a French doctor, Francois Mauriceau (1637–1709), *The Diseases of Women with Child, and in Child-Bed*.<sup>4</sup> The first edition was published in 1668; the second edition in 1683. The work lends the full authority of the emerging science of anatomy to the standard belief that women, being men, have testicles; it describes what female testicles do; why these testicles are inferior to men's; and why women need to have an orgasm (or orgasms) to conceive. In 1668, then, the one-sex theory is alive and well in the medical schools of Europe. 'Every Woman', declares Mauriceau, 'hath two Tefticles as well as Men, being also for the fame ufe, which is to convert into fruitful Seed the Blood that is brought to them by the Preparing Veffels...; but they differ from thofe of Men in feituation, figure, magnitude, fubftance, temperature, and compofition[sic]'.<sup>5</sup>

The second edition of Mauriceau's work, forty-five years later, contains a commentary by the editor, Francois Chamberlen. This commentary is especially useful for understanding how, in the short period between the first and second edition, the one-sex theory was already

being challenged. Chamberlen frankly disagrees with Mauriceau. ‘Our Author’, he chides, in a dissenting footnote, is ‘*lying under a Miftake*’. Women, he proclaims (in 1683), do not have testicles at all. They have *Ovaria*. They do not make seed. There are not any spermatic vessels for conveying it to the womb. Women have eggs, which get impregnated by the sperms of men:

We find that the Tefticles of a Woman are no more than, as it were, two clufters of Eggs, which lie there to be impregnated by the fpirituos Particles, or animating Effluvioms,...And as he is miftaken in the Tefticles, fo is he likewife in an Error in his acceptation of the Woman’s Seed: For indeed there is none fent forth by the Ejaculatory Veffels (by us called Fallopius’s Tubes) in coition, there being no Seed in the Ovaria, or Tefticles....<sup>6</sup>

The arrival of incommensurable sexual difference in the middle of the seventeenth century is announced in these discoveries. It takes at least another century before it is widely adopted. Under a one-sex theory the inferiority of women had been guaranteed by the assumption that women were deficient versions of the default male body. Now that women constituted a new and ‘opposite sex’ how could the older patriarchy be sustained? The problem was heightened by new developments in philosophy. Natural rights theories and theories influenced by Cartesian dualism, then contemporary, were incompatible with gendered superiority and inferiority. If there are human rights, all humans have them. If humans are fundamentally souls, as Descartes thought, the sex of bodies attached to them is irrelevant to their status. What happens, as Londa Schiebinger has shown,<sup>7</sup> is a new two-sex ideology that preserves patriarchy by other means. The bodies of women are deemed *utterly* different from the bodies of men, made for pregnancy, childbirth and nurturing; their brains too small for doing science or philosophy; their bodies too delicate for sport; their passions (located in the uterus) too strong to escape the calming of male control. Their role is maternal, their place is domestic, their social position remains subordinate to men. The ‘opposite’ sex arrives.

Laqueur’s thesis has its critics. They want to say that he rides roughshod over contrary evidence, and is overly discursive.<sup>8</sup> But the changes in the medical understanding of sexed bodies in the seventeenth century signals a radical development from past theories, whatever they

were. Michael McKeon names the new ideology ‘The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sexuality hypothesis’,<sup>9</sup> which, I think, stands whether or not Laqueur’s claims about previous centuries are over-simplified. This hypothesis holds that in early modernity, the

one-sex model of anatomy was incompletely challenged and replaced by the modern two-sex model, according to which the difference between men and women is not a matter of distinction along a common gradient but a radical separation based on fundamental physiological differences. Women are not an underdeveloped and inferior version of men; they are biologically and naturally different from them—the opposite sex.<sup>10</sup>

Schiebinger shows how the new sciences were enthusiastically deployed in order to maintain the gendered *status quo*. Two sex theories quickly became orthodoxies, and they came in two versions: one version assumes inequality, the other kind assumes equality. I trace inequality in the exemplars of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel from many more that could be chosen.<sup>11</sup> My exemplars of the equality version of two sexes are Francois Poullain de la Barre, John Stuart Mill and Mary Wollstonecraft.<sup>12</sup> The former, inequality, version was generally favoured by the churches until the second half of the twentieth century.

There is one obvious place where traces of the one-sex theory survive more or less intact, down to the present day. These are the expressive practices of Christianity in liturgy, hymnody and public proclamation, and in official Vatican documents. Many theological students (and their teachers) in the 1970s and 1980s utilized the new and disparaging term ‘sexism’ to identify, remove and replace terms such as ‘man’, ‘men’, ‘mankind’, ‘fellowship’, and so on, when these same terms were intended to include women and children, but without saying so. We railed against the masculine nomenclature at the basis of Christian God-language, and tried not to use ‘He’, ‘Him’, ‘His’, ‘Himself’ when preaching and hymn-singing. (In my home church we still confess to ‘our heavenly Father’ that ‘we have sinned against you and against our fellow men’).<sup>13</sup> But we completely failed to understand the origin of this masculinist language. We had yet to learn that masculinist language *provided massive, primary evidence of the unaltered continuation of the one-sex theory* into the twentieth century, and now well beyond it. Since women are men (albeit inferior and all that males are not), it is obvious that to speak of ‘men’ is to speak of men and women. That is what the Church has always done.

Since perfection and likeness to God appear as masculine qualities at the masculine end of the one-sex continuum, it is obvious that women, thus stigmatized, will be unable to represent the perfect Christ. The Roman Catholic arguments of say, *Inter insigniores*<sup>14</sup> are all analyzable in terms of the masculinism of the one-sex theory. A one-sex theological anthropology is then mixed with that modern bastardized concept—complementarity. Complementarity has a triple parentage: the ravings of Rousseau, Einstein’s theory of light, and a literal reading of Genesis 1 (without Genesis 2 and 3). The rise and rise of complementarity as an accepted theological term is astonishing. First used in official Catholic writing in *Familiaris Consortio* in 1981, by 2003 the Anglican House of Bishops declared, contrary to a mass of evidence, that ‘a belief in complementarity has always been a part of orthodox Christian theology’.<sup>15</sup> The bishops even elevate it to the status of an Anglican ‘core belief’.<sup>16</sup> Complementarity re-runs the frisson between rival eighteenth-century theories about whether two sexes are equal or not. In some evangelical thought complementarity is affirmed just because it does *not* deliver any sense of equality between women and men, and is set against liberal ‘egalitarianism’, which does.<sup>17</sup> It is a late religious equivalent of the secular theory of two unequal sexes exemplified by Rousseau. Other evangelicals have wisely moved beyond complementarity preferring to find their model for human relationships in the Persons of the Trinity.<sup>18</sup>

It is *prima facie* odd that Church documents of all denominations, while foregrounding scripture ostentatiously, rely so heavily on the nomenclature of modernity—sexuality, heterosexuality, homosexuality, orientation and so on—and more recently ‘complementarity’. They sound like modernists! There has to be an historical reason why conservative Christians do this, and there is. Ever since the invention of heterosexuality in 1892,<sup>19</sup> the authority of science has been invoked to render it compulsory, and alternatives to it as deviant. Complementarity is the new natural theology, as flawed as the one it replaces, but sounding modern and respectably scientific. As biblical appeals to Sodom and Gomorrah and ‘going after strange flesh’ (Jude 7, AV) sound increasingly unconvincing, a doctrine emerges that marginalizes gay, lesbian and bi- people, supports heterosexual marriage, and requires its supporters to forget, or falsify, or deny altogether the being of intersex, third sex and transgender people.

The adoption of the language of heterosexuality brought a challenge to the churches’ procreative understanding of sex in the second half of

the nineteenth century. It signalled the replacement of the procreative principle within sexual ethics by a new pleasure principle:

In the United States, in the 1890s, the 'sexual instinct' was generally identified as a *procreative* desire of men and women. But that reproductive ideal was beginning to be challenged, quietly but insistently, in practice and theory, by a new *different-sex pleasure* ethic. According to that radically new standard, the 'sexual instinct' referred to men's and women's erotic desire for each other, *irrespective of its procreative potential*.<sup>20</sup>

The churches were confronted with a dilemma. On the one hand, the new understanding of sex began to introduce a pleasure ethic they were not yet able to accept. On the other hand, heterosexuality conveniently contrasted with its opposite, 'homosexuality', and the new language made the condemnation of some non-procreative sexual acts (those between same-sex partners) easier. As the emphasis on the importance of sexual pleasure for men and women grew in the twentieth century, the churches were able to accommodate and incorporate it (albeit within marriage). That heterosexuality was about the pleasure principle was quietly forgotten: that heterosexuality was about marginalizing homosexuality was gratefully seized on and extended. The normalization of this modern nomenclature across the wide spectrum of theological and ecclesial opinion in the last fifty years, without regard to its origins, indicates a disabling amnesia at the basis of many modern pronouncements about homosexuality and heterosexuality.

On the one hand, the preservation of the ancient one-sex theory contrives to exclude women from priesthood and devalues women in millions of Protestant homes. On the other hand, the insertion of the two-sex theory into popular theology, validated not just by science but by the male God, contrives to exclude sexual minorities from full acceptance and visibility, and from marriage where appropriate and desired. Roman Catholic theology requires the one-sex theory in order to confine ordination to men. But it also requires the two-sex theory to accord to women the unconditional dignity and respect that is due to them as the baptized children of God (albeit with the restrictions that belong to 'female nature'). I call this the 'modern mix',<sup>21</sup> an incompatible blend of theories that constitutes the best the churches can do with sex/gender.

I, therefore, think it fair to speak of theological amnesia since there is little sign of awareness of these matters as the churches continue to

wrestle with problems of sexuality and gender. From the Greek *amnesia*, ‘forgetfulness’, amnesia is the loss of a large block of interrelated memories, sometimes caused by brain injury or shock. Think of the Church as a single body. That is how the Church often thinks of itself—the one ‘body of Christ’. It is easy to see how the collective body of the Church is in a state of forgetfulness regarding sexuality (and other topics as well), perhaps in reaction to ‘the shock of the new’.<sup>22</sup> There are three elements to the charge of amnesia: simple *forgetting*, wilful *bypassing* and what I call ‘repetitive *consolidation*’. Simple forgetting is innocent: the older a body is, the more likely it is to forget. But wilful bypassing is much less innocent. All Christians agree the Bible is the primary source for our knowledge of God’s revelation in Christ. The problem of course is that confident interpretation of this primary source requires some knowledge not simply of its many historical contexts, but also of the long history of its interpretation and reception. Those who would regard the Bible as a ‘how-to’ book that tells Christians what to do, misunderstand what the Bible is, and is *for*. Once it is assumed that the text of Scripture has a fixed meaning or meanings, it becomes necessary to ignore large parts of history or tradition, since history and tradition repeatedly reveal disagreement and diversity over how scripture is to be understood.

‘Repetitive consolidation’ works in two ways. As all advertisers and media commentators know, the repetition of a message is able to lead to its acceptance, simply by the power of frequency, than by any truth it may contain. When I occasionally say during lectures ‘The Bible says nothing at all about homosexuality’, students sometimes think they have misheard me. I’m making elementary points of course (that the Bible, since it is not a person, cannot say anything—it lets itself be read; or that homosexuality appeared first in 1869,<sup>23</sup> so finding it in the Bible is impossible, etc.). I’m not denying there are passages about ‘unnatural sex’ or men having anal sex with other men, which need to be taken seriously. That millions of Christians still believe the Bible condemns homosexuality is testimony to the power of repetition to enforce what is, at best, highly misleading. But the consolidation I also worry about is the power of the modern discourse of sexuality to replicate a rigid two-sex view of humanity and to invest sexuality with a significance it never used to have. As Foucault has taught us, the nineteenth century saw the emergence of ‘new structures of knowledge’ and ‘a new style of reasoning’<sup>24</sup> prior to which ‘modern preoccupations with the centrality

of sexual habits, tastes or preferences (what are often termed “orientations”, “identities”) to one’s *true* or *inner* self were yet to emerge’.

Kim Phillips and Barry Reay argue similarly. Indeed, the title of their book, *Sex before Sexuality—A Premodern History*, conveys a sense of the difficulty of reading back through the linguistic fog generated by modern concepts and attempting to apply these to an understanding of sexual relationships in pre-modern times. They argue that ‘historians of pre-modern sex will be constantly blocked in their understanding if they use terms and concepts applicable to sexuality since the late nineteenth century’.<sup>25</sup> ‘Our appraisal’, they continue, ‘based on years of reading and analysis within the field, is that premodern sexual cultures were significantly different from modern or indeed postmodern ones and we misrepresent them if we emphasize historical continuities and enduring patterns or sexual identity. Surface likenesses, we believe, should not be read as samenesses’.<sup>26</sup>

The modern notion of two ‘opposite’ sexes and the modern sexualization of the self both cloud theological reflection upon the human body and its desires, especially when theology incorporates them into its own discourse instead of resisting them in the name of a different theological vision. Mary Hawkesworth notes, following Foucault, that in the eighteenth century ‘the one-sex model of embodiment that had dominated European political thought and practice for nearly two millennia gave way to a two-sex model that posited men and women as *incommensurate opposites* rather than as embodied souls ordered along a *continuum* on the basis of proximity to the divine’.<sup>27</sup> If sex was once about ‘embodiment’ it became at this time a political and legal *category* ‘that determines citizenship rights, educational and employment opportunities, levels of income and wealth, and access to prestige and power’.<sup>28</sup> Sex was no longer just a ‘biological or physical characteristic’. Babies were assigned a sex before they were given a name. Modern bureaucracies affixed sexual status ‘to birth certificates, passports, drivers’ licenses, draft cards, credit applications, marriage licenses, and death certificates’ where it ‘sculpts the contours of individual freedom and belonging in ways that ensure that domination and subordination are thoroughly corporeal’.<sup>29</sup> In *Redeeming Gender* I mention also how the dimorphic ideal has extended itself into clothing, fashion, hair style, popular music, the cult of celebrity and so on, and how too many women internalize the way men look at them.

The link between debates about gender and the ordination of women, and between debates about homosexuality is becoming clearer. Robert Shoemaker argues that the one-sex body, still accepted in seventeenth-century England, made the populace more tolerant of sexual relations between men:

The fact that men and women were thought to inhabit the same bodies, except for the degree of heat and dryness present, meant that each could be more or less like the opposite depending on the amount of heat and moisture they possessed. The line between being a man and woman, and between male and female sexual behaviour, could thus be easily crossed.<sup>30</sup>

But there was another reason. Because men in the one-sex body regarded themselves as superior, more perfect, their *preference* for male company was understood even if its sexual expression was not condoned. The frequent misogyny in the tradition is also explained by the lower valuation of women in the one-sex body, while, within the spectrum, people we call ‘bisexual’ or ‘third sex’ or ‘intersex’ would have caused little surprise.

By the twentieth century the churches were more open to the use of the new sexual terminology while retaining their opposition to all sexual practices outside of marriage. Timothy Willem Jones speaks of the incompatible juxtaposition of ‘moral and medical models of sexuality’ in mid-twentieth century Anglican thought,<sup>31</sup> and ‘the institutional incorporation of sexological understandings of sexuality by the church’.<sup>32</sup> He explains that ‘the adoption of sexological language, however, did not replace the previous moral paradigm. Anglican discussions recognized new sexual identities: the homosexual, the pervert, the bisexual, the invert; but maintained a moral condemnation of all sexual acts external to heterosexual marriage’ (Jones 2013: 179).<sup>33</sup> The new modern narratives of sexuality rendered ‘homosexuality’ deviant, and the churches bought into them.

Jay Emerson Johnson thinks the absolute confidence in the two-sex ideology among the churches of the Anglican Communion has actually supplanted the troubles about homosexuality. ‘Twenty-first-century realignments’ in that Communion may be shaped ‘not so much by “homosexuality” per se but by the construal of human love and intimacy as divinely gendered’.<sup>34</sup> Opponents of women’s ordination and opponents of ‘homosexuality’ are often the same people, using the same language



‘frame’.<sup>35</sup> Jane Shaw, also aiming her remarks at the Anglican Communion, bemoaned in 2007 ‘a group of texts’ that (sadly much enlarged in subsequent years) ‘all aimed at promoting a conservative line about homosexuality...in which Genesis 2 is taken as the blue-print for sexual difference and therefore heterosexuality’.<sup>36</sup> The almost desperate attempt to find compulsory heterosexuality in the biblical narratives yields the reason for this improbable but widespread search. As biblical proof-texts that are claimed by conservatives to proscribe homosexuality become less and less plausible, the language of modernity is endorsed to enforce ‘opposite’ sex norms, in which of course the centrality of marriage is more important than ever. The process is well known to sociologists: ‘The corollary of the privilege of heterosexuality is the stigmatization of non-heterosexual identities, manifested in many sexological studies and in the cultural and legal regulation of homosexuality’.<sup>37</sup>

The modern sexualization of the self has been thoroughly ingested in both conservative and liberal theology. ‘Sexuality’ is at once catapulted into optimal theological significance when, for example, the Roman Catholic Catechism declares it ‘affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul’.<sup>38</sup> Nothing, then, is more important than our sexuality. How can we thrive without the self-knowledge our sexuality provides? Instead of offering critique of the accelerating emphasis of sex on the theological understanding of the person, the emphasis must somehow be included and the modern discourse given its full *imprimatur*. And the modern two-sex binary, just at the time when social and medical science is acknowledging its over-emphasis,<sup>39</sup> is re-appearing as complementarity, and baptized as a sacred truth taught as early as Genesis 1.

It is becoming more obvious outside theology that ‘biological, psychological, and social differences do not lead to our seeing two genders. Our seeing two genders leads to the “discovery” of biological, psychological, and social differences’.<sup>40</sup> ‘Queer biology’—a ‘school of thought [which] argues that our understanding of the biological world is framed by *what we think we already know*’<sup>41</sup>—is becoming better known. From this perspective, ‘absolute sexual dimorphism remains one of the last false metanarratives governing our thinking, and contributes to a relationship between the sexes grounded in hierarchy and privilege’.

The broad historical summary I bring to theological reflection on desiring bodies begins with Laqueur’s one-sex model. There is no idea of ‘opposite’ sexes in the Bible and for the first 1700 years of Christianity,

and equal sexes still less. Around 1750 a two-sex model became increasingly prominent, endorsed by medical science and philosophy. Feminist thought and liberal philosophy accepted the two-sex model, and engaged in battles to establish forms of equality between the different sexes. The battle was won but the consequences of victory were unforeseen. The alleged fact of two opposite sexes became a new ideological binary within which ‘all sorts and conditions of men’ were required to fit. Heterosexuality became compulsory, creating a new class of deviant—the homosexual. In the second half of the twentieth century, it began to be realized that sexual difference had been much overstated. Half a century of gay activism (the Stonewall riots of 1969 is a convenient starting point) has placed lesbian and gay people in the mainstream, while the weakening of the two-sex binary has enabled the needs of intersex and transgender people to be reassessed.

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS: A HUMAN CONTINUUM

Instead of a sexual binary I envisage a single human continuum, though more like a circle than a straight line, running from male to female, or from female to male. A continuum is ‘a continuous sequence in which adjacent elements are not perceptibly different from each other, but the extremes are quite distinct’.<sup>42</sup> Day and night is an obvious example of a binary that is really a continuum. There is no absolute distinction between day and night. They are mediated by dusk and dawn. A clear majority of people will locate themselves towards one ‘end’ of the continuum, but several minorities will not. The continuum provides a space in which intersex people may find a home, and the dilemmas of trans people may be better understood.

Related to the single continuum is the Kinsey Scale,<sup>43</sup> which showed that people do not all fit conveniently into exclusive heterosexual or homosexual categories. The first continuum is more basic and so ontological. The Kinsey continuum is about *orientation*, but at its root it is a criticism of the categories ‘homosexual’ and ‘heterosexual’, which turn out to be much less basic than the structure of human being itself. These limited categories just did not straightforwardly fit the desires and self-understandings of more than a small minority of the respondents. Within this continuum, lesbian, gay and bisexual people have a place along with straights. In relation to sexual desire we all exist together within the continuum, and in different places along it. Desire may also require a

continuum, not simply in relation to its objects, but in relation to its extent, running from people who are (prosaically and unfairly) classed as 'asexual' to people whose *libido* is fiercely strong and requires to be regularly curbed and controlled. It turns out that the ancient continuum still has a lot to teach us about human solidarity prior to the modern bifurcation of sex. Its debilitating defect is that the continuum is a slide where women are deficient men, intolerably deficient in all respects, with men more perfect, rational and spiritual. The modern binary perpetuated this defect, leading eventually and unevenly to the conclusion that—no—women were not the inferior, or beautiful, or second sex, but equal to men after all. The binary was reinforced, but at considerable cost.

How has theology coped with all this? Badly. Protestant and Roman Catholic thought in the areas of sexuality and gender has been unduly influenced by Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar, both of whom held preposterous versions of the two-sex theory and read them far back into history and scripture.<sup>44</sup> The rise of fundamentalism and conservative evangelicalism is in part a yearning for authority, simplicity and certainty in the face of many late modern complexities—a certainty, which, however desirable, is unfortunately unavailable. This very evangelicalism militates against theological reflection (since God's answers to questions of sex are already written in the Bible, rendering further reflection unnecessary). In England a clear majority of people outside the Established Church (and a majority inside it) think their Church is quite simply immoral in its stance towards women and gays.

Here is an obvious theological 'fact': there is no sex binary in God. Since God is 'beyond gender', or 'the genderful God', it is to be expected that all human individuals whatever their place in the human continuum, are each thought partially to reflect the image of their Creator. Since we are to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Gen. 1:27) and sex is the means by which God enables living creatures to complete the procreative task, some of us are male, some of us female. God makes a dozen 'kinds' in Genesis 1. 'Humankind' is a kind, not two opposite kinds. Human solidarity across the species is vital, not simply across sexual difference, but across all human differences as well. (Even this is overly humanocentric.)

Theologians of all persuasions commonly load on to Genesis 1:27 more than the text can carry. Pope John Paul II is a leading example, with his insistence that Genesis 1:27 'constitutes the immutable basis of all Christian anthropology'.<sup>45</sup> Leaving aside that if we read the rest of

Genesis 1 in a similar manner we would all be vegans and believers in a six-day creation, I ask what is wrong with taking *Jesus* as the immutable basis of all Christian anthropology instead. The New Testament is clear. *Christ* is the image of God (Col. 1:15, 18; see also 2 Cor. 4:4). Giving priority to Christ over Adam in any appropriation of the *imago dei* should not be a controversial move. Theologians who prioritize Genesis 1 usually go on to argue that two opposite sexes exist by divine *fiat* from the beginning of time. Genesis 2 and 3, and their long and dismal heritage of interpretation, are then either ignored in the pretence that the Bible teaches two equal sexes, or invoked as a qualifier to ensure women retain a secondary and derivative status (see 1 Corinthians 11). Ancient Christology attempted to combine three convictions, that Jesus Christ is truly human (*vere homo*), truly divine (*vere deus*) and truly one. There is much more to the being of Christ than his male body. Being fully God, Christ too in his divine nature is above distinctions of sex/gender. The metaphysical Christ, the cosmic Christ, is not sexed because He/She/It is *vere deus*, and belongs to the realm of the Creator, not to the world of sexed creatures. The One Christ is one with all humanity through the human nature, and indivisibly one with God the Father and God the Spirit through the divine nature.

I was in theological college when John Robinson's *Honest to God*<sup>46</sup> was published. Ever since, liberal Protestant theology has given much more prominence to the humanity of Jesus than to the divinity. Rosemary Radford Ruether's question, flung down in 1983, 'Can a male Savior save women?'<sup>47</sup> belongs to the same genre. Her question has, as part of its answer, that the whole Christ is *not male*. The Word made flesh is the divine Word. And that leads to another remarkable feature of the creedal basis of Christianity. The Jesus of the creeds has a human nature, but is not a human person. I saw this as a huge anomaly back in 1990 (and wrote my book, *Truly a Person, Truly God*,<sup>48</sup> in an attempt to mitigate it). More than twenty-five years on, I now see it as a huge advantage. Because the very personhood of the Christ is *divine*, it too is beyond the distinctions of sex/gender.

The human nature of the incarnate Word belongs to all human nature; the maleness of Jesus belongs to that nature because that nature cannot exist merely abstractly. If the divine nature is to be incarnate, it must be incarnate in a particular being that is created and sexed. The whole Christ in his/her divine being is beyond distinctions of sex, and the humanity of Christ, as tradition east and west insists, is *inclusive of*

*all humans whatsoever*, since Christ is confessed by the Church as *homo* (a member of the species humankind) not *vir* (a male individual), *anthròpos* not *anèr*. That the incarnate Christ was also *vir* and *anèr* cannot be doubted. What must be doubted is the over-emphasis on the maleness of Christ by derogatory one-sex and two-sex theories, respectively. The one-sex theory of Catholic thought emphasizes Christ's maleness and gives the Christ a *male* nature, as well as a *human* nature. The two-sex theory of modern theology understandably emphasizes Christ's maleness and makes the male nature a stumbling block.

In relation to the theology of gender these observations have profound consequences. In relation to the modern category of homosexuality, the inclusiveness of the human nature of Christ is decisive. The whole continuum is saved. The single nature of humankind, assumed by the Christ, is reconciled with God. The saving fact of Christ's human nature is that it is not a male nature, a female nature, or a homosexual or heterosexual nature. It is an inclusive *human* nature, and if it were not, it could not be called a human nature, but something else like a quality or characteristic. Heterosexuality, homosexuality and all the other markers of sex/gender identity have no *ultimate* value however valuable they may be *proximately* in the formation of all the people who have recourse to them as they acquire confident self-knowledge. These markers nonetheless arose from the dominating ideology of two sexes, prescribing what is permitted and proscribing what is forbidden.

A theological doctrine of a human continuum leaves much in place and changes much as well. The distinction between male and female is unproblematic for most people. Heterosexuality may seem to them what nature intended. Heterosexuals will continue to [over]populate the world. It does not follow of course, from God's command to be fruitful and multiply, that every member of the species need be preoccupied with obedience to it. It is a command to the species, not to every individual within it (as vowed celibate people will agree). Plenty of heterosexuals are unable or unwilling to propagate the species: what matters is that enough members of the species do it—not all of them are needed. Spiritual propagation is a well-used idea throughout Christian tradition—there are more goods to be realized than the undoubted good of having and raising children.

Other continuities remain in place. The misuse or denigration of one's own or another's body in promiscuous behaviour cannot be condoned whatever framework or anthropology is deployed. Its dangers remain the

same whether located in the continuum or in the binary. The importance of the virtue of chastity remains. The availability of marriage to same-sex couples,<sup>49</sup> despite reservations about it from some gay men in particular,<sup>50</sup> is more of a continuity with tradition than a break with it, seeing that it is a permanent, exclusive, faithful relationship between two people. The drive for same-sex marriage outside the churches was inspired by the just demand for ‘equal marriage’. The drive for same-sex marriage within the churches is inspired by the rediscovery of the power of mutual love in Christian ethics, a love that will not be confined to binaries. Christians are becoming aware that God, in whom there is no binary at all—only pure difference between Persons—has created a world of astonishing diversity. This diversity extends beyond the narrow confines of the all too human attempt to confine it. A huge advantage of the continuum is the place it provides for intersex, third sex and transgender people in a way the binary does not. Christians need have nothing to fear from the loosening up of the modern sex binary and its offspring, the heterosexual/homosexual distinction. The valorization of both has produced terrible theological mistakes and pastoral disasters. There is a better way.

## NOTES

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## Sexuality as a Guide to Ethics: God and the Variable Body in English Literature

*Chris Mounsey*

When the Government's Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill received Royal Assent on 17 July 2013, having been passed by both Houses of Parliament, it looked as though it might have been an important step forward towards equality for homosexuals. But when, on 24 March 2014, our prime minister began to trumpet his vision of equality in the wake of the first gay weddings, the BBC reported that while 'David Cameron said the move sent a message that people were now equal "whether gay or straight"... some religious groups remain opposed'.<sup>1</sup> The Church of England, which was effectively established as the country's state church in 1662 with the imposition of the *Book of Common Prayer* upon all of its congregations, was one of the religious groups that opposed the Bill. And the state church continues to oppose it. On Friday, 17 January 2017, *The Independent* reported:

Church of England bishops have rejected the idea of changing its opposition to same-sex marriage. The House of Bishops said there is 'little support for changing the Church of England's teaching on marriage' that it is

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between one man and one woman. The Rt Rev Graham James, Bishop of Norwich, said at a press conference that the church should not ‘adapt its doctrine to the fashions of any particular time’.<sup>2</sup>

The discrepancy between the Government of England’s view of marriage and the Church of England’s view of marriage is suggested in this statement to be due to their different roles: the government steers the nation through the changing fashions, while the Church remains true to the nation’s core beliefs. What this chapter will explore is how neither of these positions serves or reflects the needs and desires of the individuals who make up our nation. Did David Cameron really believe that gay marriage would increase equality, or was it a move to increase the popularity of the Tory party among the growing number of openly homosexual couples, or was gay marriage no more than an artefact of the coalition with the Liberal Democrats: a convenient shift in fashion which we no longer need to associate with the party’s typical right-wing goals? And at the same time I wonder whether Bishop Graham remembers he is a representative of a church that chose to separate itself from the Roman Church in 1534, and ‘adapt its doctrines to the fashion’ of Protestantism, which the Church of England’s own website records: ‘At the Reformation the Western Church became divided between those who continued to accept Papal authority and the various Protestant churches that repudiated it. The Church of England was among the churches that broke with Rome’.<sup>3</sup>

Despite its obduracy about same-sex marriage, in January 2017, at the same time as rejecting it, the Church of England Bishops claimed in ‘A new report, following two years of internal discussion, ...[that] the church needs to adopt a fresh tone and culture of welcome and support’.<sup>4</sup> This can only be a good idea. In the summer of 2013 I was denounced from the pulpit of my central London parish church for writing a book subtitled ‘Towards a Twenty-First Century Homosexual Theology for the Anglican Church’. I was singled out in his sermon by the priest in charge and criticised for arguing against the unchanging rules of the *Book of Common Prayer*, which was waved at my back as I tapped my way out of the church where I was not welcome. Hurt and angry it took me a while to recall that the priest was blaming me for the fact that the elected tail had just wagged the unelected moral guide-dog of the blind Houses of Parliament to vote down the bishops and bring in gay marriage. What right had I to question the *Book of Common Prayer*?

What right had I to challenge the acceptance of changing fashions in religious belief that book heralded in its imposition upon all English parishes? However, what actually put the twist in my smile was that marriage as a gay estate is one to which I am ambivalent since I do not believe in equality.

In *Being the Body of Christ*, the book that caused the rumpus in my church, I argued the case that the dominantly heterosexual world had and still has things to learn from its homosexual members if it is to survive. I have always been homosexual, but was then newly blind. What my new gift taught me was that accepting God's gifts may be meant to challenge us. Furthermore, I argued that a catholic church, which the Church of England labels itself in the daily repetition of the Apostles' Creed, ought to welcome all people with all their gifts in all its roles. God did not create a fashion for one set of sexual behaviours to be preferred over others, humans did. God created us all, just as we are and always have been. When two people look at each other and recognise what they both are, the revelation of a possible 'us' occurs like a third person that is made up of neither one objectifying the other nor vice versa. The 'us' is irreducible to the wishes of either one, and is rather a moment of mutual respect in relation to each other, overseen by God. If this description appears to encompass falling in love, it is also the basis of a society made up of individuals. Falling in love and loving one another as Christ taught us are by no means the same thing, but they are not all that different. Loving one another as Christ taught us might as easily be described using the same words I chose above:

When two people look at each other and recognise what they both are, the revelation of a possible 'us' occurs like a third person that is made up of neither one objectifying the other nor vice versa. The 'us' is irreducible to the wishes of either one, and is rather a moment of mutual respect in relation to each other, overseen by God.

In my understanding the wanting for there to be an 'us' is not guided by physical lust. Indeed, one might ask: how few times do we look at others in that way? More often, we just want to get on. Perhaps we want to pass one another on a pavement without bumping one another into the traffic. And this requires an 'us' in the form of a joint agreement to pass carefully. Now I carry a white stick, you have to look as I cannot. You have to make all the moves, but you do so as I do not know how best to

help us pass one another. You know this because of my white stick. We are not equal to each other; we are not the same as each other. You make allowances for me and are happy to do so. It makes you feel good about yourself, and it makes me feel happy to be blind so that a tiny moment of passing on the street can be focussed into an 'us'. An 'us' that is remembered by both of us. This meeting of individuals is an ethical imperative, which Martin Buber called 'I-thou' and Emmanuel Levinas the 'face-to-face'. If this is so in the little meetings, then it is all the more true of sexuality.

My sexuality is the thing closest to myself in my closest dealings with another person: it creates me as consciously myself in tension with another person who I can neither reduce to myself nor understand as absolutely different from myself: who is 'the same only different' from me. And in the same way as a blind person passes a sighted person on the street, if my sexuality is not congruent with yours, we should pass one another carefully so neither of us gets hurt. Just as we want the best for our partner in life, so we also want the best for everyone else who is our neighbour. It makes us both feel good about ourselves.

And this is why ethical development has spread throughout our community, throughout history and still spreads today. It is an unstoppable movement that has, for example, brought me from the decision to disguise my homosexuality at the University of Winchester when I began to work there twenty-five years ago, through the faltering steps of planning, then the running of an undergraduate module called 'Literature, sexuality and morality'. It should be no surprise then, that there was no question that I should add my name to the 'out' list of members of staff on the university website. What I want to make clear, however, is that none of these actions or decisions was due to an increased sense of equality. I am not equal with the staff members on the out list who do not label themselves 'gay' or 'homosexual'. They may call themselves 'heterosexual ally' or 'supporter of the LGBT community', but as these labels suggest they might be heterosexual they are not equal to me. But nor am I different from them as we are all staff members at the University of Winchester, working towards the goal of better education for our students. Separating the terms 'equality' and 'difference' just does not capture what is going on even in something as relatively innocuous as an out list. Instead, what the example of the out list suggests is the recognition of variability, the co-terminal knowledge of sameness and difference ('the same only different') that animates sexuality, the foundation

of self-as-consciousness—which consciousness also grounds the ethical imperative in our relationships with others that do not become sexual. This is the basis of variability, which, I believe, guides us in all our dealings with all other people.

Variability inverts the expectation that morality should be fixed and stable, and is more flexible than laws that change depending on the vagaries of politics. But it is not completely situational and not at all relative.<sup>5</sup> If we always begin with the knowledge that the person with whom we are interacting is ‘the same only different’ from us, we begin from the point of view that we cannot expect to reduce them to our viewpoint (believe me, I am a blind man). Our neighbour will always exceed our expectations, and given that fact, which comes with the concomitant statement that we always exceed our neighbour’s expectations, we know that if we want to be accepted for what we are, then we have to accept our neighbour for what they are. This is why ethics is an imperative. If we are obdurate with our neighbour, and will only accept them if they keep to our standards, then we permit them to do the same to us. We are no longer neighbours, and we no longer live in society. There is no ‘us’. We are at war. As I came to the idea of variability by way of my work on sexuality, it suggested itself to me that sexuality is the basis of this ethics: sexuality, that desiring aspect of each one of us. Each one of us knows what we desire, no matter how much we try to cloak those very personal desires with other people’s moral expectations. In our final self-analysis we know when we are lying to ourselves about what we desire—it is the closest thing to ourselves in our closest dealings with another person. Thus we should listen to and learn from our bodies, without fear, since our interactions with other people are guided by an ethical imperative.

It might seem difficult to reverse the common expectation to argue that sexuality should guide our moral actions. But think of the tenderness with which we treat our loved ones. Is this not the very best model for ethical interactions with all other people? When we love we do not curtail our beloved, we want them to have everything they want: this is what we mean when we say we want the best for them. And following this ethical approach to the variable body, we cannot go wrong. Or can we? Would not trusting in our sexuality lead us to become libertines? The fear of untrammelled sexuality is our contemporary society’s latest bugbear, filled as it is with easy-access pornography and stalked by pederasts. But this is not the first time this has been common. Untrammelled sexuality characterised England when the *Book of Common Prayer* was

imposed onto its church. Nor is what I am arguing new about trusting sexuality to be a guide to ethics. This chapter will explore the libertine court of Charles II through its literary representations by the notoriously sexual Aphra Behn. It will argue that she is an ethical writer. It will then explore why Jonathan Swift, dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, attacked the *Society for the Reformation of Manners*, which was set up to impose a uniform moral standard upon England. His reason: for their misunderstanding of the unaccountable upsurge of desire. In sum, I shall demonstrate that sexuality has been our real guide to ethics for as long as the *Book of Common Prayer* has been imposed on us as our supposed moral touchstone, and suggest that we should continue to trust it.

### LIBERTINE LAW—APHRA BEHN

The idea that the court of Charles II was characterised by sexual promiscuity is probably not so far from the truth. After twelve years of exile, he returned from Holland in 1660, and, after publicly humiliating the corpses of his oppressors, granted theatres licences to perform once again and for women to act on stage for the first time: if these can be regarded as signs of the Restoration reaction against the 'spiritual authoritarianism' of the Puritan era, then all well and good. More properly, we should look to the Act of Uniformity of 1662, which imposed the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) on England and excluded from public office those who did not adhere to the rites of the Anglican Church. Whether or not this suggests that I am arguing that the BCP was responsible for the sexual promiscuity of Charles's court, the derivation of the word 'Libertine' does set itself in opposition to Puritan ideas, and the word does imply a relaxation of church discipline. The word was first used in Geneva at the time of Calvin, where the leader of the Libertine faction was Ami Perrin, who argued against Calvin's 'insistence that church discipline should be enforced uniformly against all members of Genevan society'.<sup>6</sup> For more than a hundred years before Charles II, then, libertinism had been regarded as a reaction against Puritan authoritarian religious discipline, and Vivian de Sola Pinto associated libertinism with Hobbesian materialism: 'Those who condemn the pleasures of sense are the priests and teachers who have a vested interest in illusions inherited from the ages of monkery and superstition, the "kingdom of darkness" as Hobbes calls them'.<sup>7</sup>

While this is a persuasive argument in its atheist turn, for reasons I do not have space to go into here,<sup>8</sup> I would rather associate the libertinism of Charles II's court with an increased interest in Epicureanism, and in particular Lucretius. Epicurean philosophy is best known for its naming fear of the wrath of the deities as the cause of human misery, and, following the belief that the universe was not the work of the gods but rather the result of atoms combining and following the laws of reason. Epicureanism recommends rising above unhappiness and degradation in order to achieve a happy, tranquil life characterised by freedom from fear and pain through rational detachment from earthly things. Charles Segal suggests that Lucretius' world, as a development of Epicurus, is 'a place of marvels' and the poet's 'wonder even borders on a sense of the sacred',<sup>9</sup> which suggests that Lucretius was secretly not Epicurean at all. Amy Olberding, noting Segal's query as to how Lucretius expects one to be rational and detached from a world that is so full of beauty, argues that 'to feast upon nature with the gratitude and wonder of one who finds her bounty an abundant source of joy', is to make sweet the bitterness of life.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Lucretius assures his readers that all admonitions to use their body for the purpose that religion, government and society claim it was designed for, that is, hard work, are false:

But now avoid their gross mistakes, that teach  
 The Limbs were made for work, a use for each;  
 The Eyes designed to see the Tongue to talk.  
 The Legs made strong, and knit to Feet, to walk;  
 The Arms framed long, and firm, the servile Hands  
 To work, as Health requires, as Life commands:  
 And so of all the rest, what e'er they feign,  
 Want e'er they teach, tis Non-sense all and vain.  
 For proper Uses were design'd for none,  
 But all the members framed, each made his Own. ...  
 Thus these, and thus our Limbs and Senses too  
 Were form'd, before that Mind did know  
 What Office, 'twas that they were fit to do.<sup>11</sup>

Following Lucretius, then, the libertines of Charles's court 'made life sweet' by framing their members however they wanted, rather than by following divinely, politically or socially inspired moral guidelines that they thought 'Non-sense all and vain'. They did so largely by overindulgence in sensual pleasures. They welcomed Thomas Creech's translation



of Lucretius' major work, *De rerum natura* (1682) from which the preceding quote comes, fuelling sales to help the book reach five editions before the end of the century.

Aphra Behn, the first professional British woman writer, has come to prominence in the last forty years. In her entry on Behn in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Janet Todd associates Behn's rise to fame with John Wilmot, Second Earl of Rochester, the man who might be thought of as the libertine's libertine.<sup>12</sup> And to be sure, not only did she write an encomium to his life, but her poem 'The Disappointment' appeared in Rochester's *Poems upon Several Occasions* in 1680 before it appeared in her own in 1684. But where Rochester was so devoted to libertinism that he died of it, or at least of venereal disease and without his nose at the age of 33 years, Behn lived until she was 49 years old, which is above the average life expectancy for a middle-class woman living in the seventeenth century, and there is no suggestion that she died of a sexually transmitted disease.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, Behn was a devotee of libertinism, and wrote about positive female sexual experience in 18 plays, 6 novels and many poems. In *The Island of Love*, a poem published as an adjunct to her *Poems upon Several Occasions*, Behn makes clear her belief in the pervading nature of Lucretian Epicureanism in her attitude to love as the blind god Cupid controlling all of humankind:

This is the Coast of Africa  
Where all things sweetly move;  
This is the calm Atlantic Sea  
And that the Isle of Love;

To which all Mortals tribute pay,  
Old, Young, the Rich and Poor;  
Kings do their awful Laws obey,  
And Shepherds do adore.

There's none its forces can resist,  
Or its Decree Evince,  
It Conquers where and when it list,  
The Cottager and Prince.

In entering here, the King resigns,  
The Robe and Crown he wore;

The Slave new Fetters gladly joyns  
To those he dragg'd before.<sup>14</sup>

Love here seems not at all the wonderful thing you might expect from a libertine poem, but is capricious and enslaves even slaves. But for Behn, the Lucretian epicurean, there is a rational solution to the vagaries of Cupid. One might perhaps note the use of all male nouns and pronouns in this poem, and Behn makes us aware that if anyone, it is women who are better able to manipulate reason and realise their happy, Lucretian life.

In her most famous play *The Rover*, we see Hellena berate her brother Pedro about his choice for their sister Florinda, of a rich, old husband. Playacting with Florinda, Hellena mocks the ageing lover Don Vincentio: 'And this is the Man you must kiss, nay you must kiss none but him too—and nuzel through his Beard to find his Lips. And this you must submit to for Threescore years, and all for a Joynture!'<sup>15</sup> As this shows, Behn is a true libertine and not afraid to discuss the possible pleasures and pitfalls of physical sex. The 'threescore years' reminds her audience that life is short, and when sexual fulfilment is set against the horror of Vincentio's lack of physical attractiveness, the play's advice to women is to maximise their pleasure. The rational calculation suggests they forget the duty owed to family and follow their own desires. In this way, we can read *The Rover* as a more physically focussed version of the love or duty plot, and one true to the libertine tradition where the outright winner should be—and is—physical love. But there is more to it than this. Hellena spends much of the play reminding her paramour Willmore (who lives up to his name sexually) that she knows he wants to be promiscuous, and that if he continues to act upon his insatiable libertine desires then she will act on hers. After she accuses him of having had sex with the courtesan Angellica, Willmore offers his hand in marriage as security for his faithfulness, which she refuses with the argument:

Hellena. O' my Conscience, that will be our Destiny, because we are both of one humour; I am as inconstant as you, for I have considered, Captain, that a handsom [sic] Woman has a great deal to do whilst her Face is good, for then is our Harvest-time to gather Friends; and should I in these days of my Youth, catch a fit of foolish Constancy, I were undone; 'tis loitering by day-light in our great Journey: therefore declare, I'll allow but one year for Love, one year for Indifference, and one year for Hate—and then—go

hang your self—for I profess myself the gay, the kind, and the inconstant—the Devil's in't if this won't please you.<sup>16</sup>

This is a rational argument, against which Willmore's untrustworthy claim to faithfulness has no answer. But where, you may ask, is the morality in Behn's libertine world?

Aphra Behn has been read by feminists as being against patriarchy, and by more recent critics as upholding the libertine politics of Charles II's court. But there is more to her association with libertinism than Rochester, being a woman, or politics. Behn wrote a commendatory poem to the second edition of Thomas Creech's translation of Lucretius *De rerum natura*. Janet Todd suggests that 'Creech was eager to neutralize his dangerously unchristian subject matter but Behn saw the poem as a triumphant assertion of rationalism and materialism, a victory of reason over faith'.<sup>17</sup> Todd explains her view by suggesting that the version of Behn's poem in the edition of Creech's *De rerum natura* (1683) was a toned down version of that in her own *Poems upon Several Occasions*. In fact only three lines are different, the last three lines of the following quotation:

And Reason over all unfetter'd Plays,  
Wanton and undisturbed as Summers Breeze:  
That gliding Murmurs o'er the Trees,  
And no hard Notion meets, or stops it way;  
It Pierces, Conquers, and Compells  
As strong as Faith's resistless Oracles,  
Faith Religious Souls content,  
Faith the secure Retreat of Routed Argument.<sup>18</sup>

The last three lines in Behn's own *Poems upon Several Occasions* tell us that Reason 'Pierces, Conquers and Compells':

Beyond poor Feeble Faith's dull Oracles.  
Faith the despairing Souls content,  
Faith the Last Shift of Routed Argument.<sup>19</sup>

We must therefore agree with Todd in her assertion that Behn changes her view of 'Reason' between the versions of the poem, from the equal of faith, 'As strong as Faith', to something stronger than faith, 'Beyond

poor Feeble Faith'. However, it is the changes in the last line that catch my interest here. Faith changes from being 'the secure Retreat' into 'the last Shift' of 'Routed Argument'. Faith for Behn is no final answer to reasonable argument, no 'secure Retreat', instead, it is the 'last Shift', the 'seventh veil' barely hiding the naked fact that Faith can give no proof of its correctness, whereas Reason can and does. And who would trust the rake Willmore's declaration of faithfulness to Hellena?

It is in Behn's recognition of the limits of faith in terms of reason that I find her recognition of variability, and I shall explore it in terms of the poem she shared with Rochester, 'The Disappointment'. This poem, which tells of an interrupted sexual encounter between Lisander and Cloris, is an almost direct translation of a Pierre de Corneille poem 'L'occasion perdue—Recoverte' (1658). However, Behn translates only the first 12 verses culminating in Lisander's failure to consummate, and where Corneille continues for a further twenty-eight verses in which Lisander tells Cloris he loves her and the encounter returns to sexual intercourse, Behn finishes in a quick two-verse account of Cloris running away from the scene like 'Daphne from the Delphick God'. Abigail Williams suggests that 'The Disappointment' is a clever manipulation of a libertine genre, the premature ejaculation poem, of which Rochester's 'Imperfect Enjoyment' is the best known. Williams argues that in 'The Disappointment', 'Behn takes a genre devoted to the retelling of an event that traditionally marginalises the woman's experience, and replays it through the mouth of a woman'.<sup>20</sup> But there is a big difference between 'The Imperfect Enjoyment' and 'The Disappointment' that passes Williams by. Rochester's poem is a premature ejaculation poem, but Behn's is a poem about the failure of Lisander to get an erection.

Natures support, without whose Aid  
 She can no humane Being give,  
 It self now wants the Art to live,  
 Faintness it slacken'd Nerves invade:  
 In vain th' enraged Youth assaid  
 To call his fleeting Vigour back,  
 No Motion 'twill from Motion take,  
 Excess of Love his Love betray'd;  
 In vain he Toils, in vain Commands,  
 Th' Insensible fell weeping in his Hands.<sup>21</sup>

Making her point clear, Behn transforms Cloris's discovery of this failure into the reason why she runs away disappointed.

Cloris returning from the Trance  
Which Love and soft Desire had bred,  
Her tim'rous Hand she gently laid,  
Or guided by Design or Chance,  
Upon that Fabulous Priapus,  
That Potent God (as Poets feign.)  
But never did young Shepherdess  
(Gath'ring of Fern upon the Plain)  
More nimbly draw her Fingers back,  
Finding beneath the Verdant Leaves a Snake.<sup>22</sup>

Cloris was ready for sex, but Priapus, the erection, has failed to make its appearance whence Cloris, confronted with a slithering snake, takes the appropriate action and runs away.

In confronting the sexuality of the poem so directly, what can we learn? While this poem might easily be thought trivial, I do not believe it is. Instead I think the poem is truly libertine, and wholly ethical. Behn's Cloris is not appalled by Lisander's sexual overexcitement, but she is brought up short by the thought of why he has failed to get an erection. Has he been having sex with someone else before meeting her? Is that why he is impotent? Having a lot of sexual encounters is what libertines did, after all. I would suggest that 'The Disappointment' is not a woman's take on a premature ejaculation poem, but another exploration by Behn, like that of *The Rover*, of how women are able to use reason to come to a decision, even at moments of sexual arousal. Behn herself wrote of Creech's translation that it

...dost advance  
Our Knowledge from the state of Ignorance;  
And Equallst us to Man!<sup>23</sup>

Of course, Behn is also noting the fact that women were not given an education in the classics, so she does not know enough Latin to read Lucretius in the original, but she is also drawing attention to the fact that knowledge of rationality is what Lucretius is really discussing, that she has read it and learned from it how to make rational judgments.

Cloris running away is, I believe, her realisation that although she is as sexually excited as Lisander, she does not want to have sex with him so soon after he has had sex with someone else. In terms of Behn's connection with the venereal-disease-ridden Rochester—and Hellena's attitude towards Willmore—she does not have faith in Lisander's sexual health so follows her reason and leaves him: a lucky escape. And this is an ethical decision. Ethical because the decision is made based on evidence and the application of rationality, and it is made between two people in the throes of sexual congress, the result of which is the reduction of Cloris's pain. In Lucretian terms, it is also a triumph of reason over faith, so no wonder Thomas Creech was worried about his translation's effect on his status after the imposition of the BCP: because of its atheist nature his Fellowship at All Souls' College was challenged.

In the three differing approaches towards the Lucretian Epicureanism of Rochester, Behn, and Creech, we find variability. Between the two men in her poem, Rochester and Creech, Behn decides that it is Creech (named Daphnis) with whom she would rather be close in conversation and verse, than Rochester (named Strephon) the 'Ravisher':

No sooner was famed Strephon's Glory set,  
 Strephon the soft, the Lovely, Gay and Great;  
 But Daphnis rises like a Morning Star  
 That guides the wandering Traveller from afar  
 Daphnis, whom every Grace, and Muse inspires  
 Scarce Strephon's Ravishing Poetick Fires  
 So kindly warm, or so Divinely Cheer.

...

Mayest thou [Daphnis] thy muse and mistress there Caress,  
 And may one heighten t'others happiness;  
 And whilst thou thus Divinely dost converse  
 We are content to know, and to admire thee in thy Sacred Verse.<sup>24</sup>

Rochester's libertinism is all physical, with all its dangers, Creech's libertinism is all chaste conversation, and Behn's libertinism is somewhere in the middle—physically self-protecting but sexually active. What we have seen in this brief account of Behn's libertine verse is that the ethics of the libertine way of life (which culminate in the avoidance of sexually transmitted disease) can derive from sexuality rather than the moralists or the laws. Furthermore, in Behn's recognition of the limits of faith in terms

of Lucretian reason, I find her recognition of variability: Rochester's, Creech's and her own ethical systems are all based upon Lucretius and all are 'the same only different'.

### ANGLICAN FAITH—JONATHAN SWIFT

But that was not the end of the battle between reason and faith. The ravages of libertinism understood in Rochester's version were devastating to social cohesion and even for the future of the human species. Newspapers printed the 'Bills of Mortality' each month: the numbers of children christened, and the numbers of people buried, and it made stark reading. The population of Britain was decreasing. Why no-one took any notice of Aphra Behn's version of libertinism I do not know; if they had, it would have brought forward our understanding of ethics and morality greatly and it would also have brought forward the cause of women's rights. Instead, and perhaps not surprisingly, the backlash against libertinism attacked only Rochester's version of it and in 1691 the *Society for the Reformation of Manners* (SRM) was set up with the espoused aims of suppressing profanity and immorality. The SRM gained both Church and Crown patronage, and was encouraged by the Archbishops of Canterbury, John Tillotson and Thomas Tenison, while Queens Mary and Anne issued Proclamations against Vice at its behest. But not everyone supported it. While the ideals of the SRM might have appeared laudable, the results of their activities were the censorship of the theatres, breaking up brothels and tormenting prostitutes. Attacking writers and prostitutes, I would suggest, is never a good idea. This is not to say that all writers are men who visit prostitutes, but rather that if one attacks both prostitutes and writers for the same reason—profanity—the writers will find themselves on the side of the oppressed and will write in support of prostitutes.

Jonathan Swift, ordained Anglican minister and later dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, was the most famous writer of the period who wrote in support of prostitutes and against the Church- and Crown-financed SRM. Swift's first attempt at criticising the activities of the SRM was a brilliant and subtle satire, *A Project for the Advancement of Religion, and the Reformation of Manners*.<sup>25</sup> So subtle is the satire, however, that even Wikipedia today cites the pamphlet as supportive of the SRM's goals. But right from its dedication to the Countess of Berkeley it is pure satire. The pamphlet was published in 1709, the

year after the death of Elizabeth, first Countess of Berkeley, and while another Elizabeth was second Countess of Berkeley, and the dedication to whichever one, mentions 'that beautiful Race (images of their Parents) which calls you Mother'. If the dedication is to the late countess, then she was mother to Lady Henrietta Berkeley, who while still under age, had an affair with her sister's husband Ford Grey, Lord Grey of Warke, which became a national scandal and the topic of one of Aphra Behn's novels, *Love Letters between a Nobleman and his sister* (1684). If the dedication was to the present countess, then she was the mother of Lady Betty Germaine, who disgraced her family by marrying in 1706, on three weeks' acquaintance, a man who was below her in rank, a recent widower, thirty years her senior and an illegitimate son of William II, Prince of Orange. Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough, called him an inn-keeper's son,

If the dedication is not enough to warn readers about the satire, Swift begins the pamphlet proper with the comment: 'Of all the Schemes offered to the Publick in this projecting Age, I have observed with some Displeasure, that there have never been any for the Improvement of Religion and Morals'.<sup>26</sup> Since the SRM had been set up in 1691, and the pamphlet published in 1709, Swift does not seem to think much of what it had achieved in the past 18 years. A much less subtle attack on the SRM followed in 1734 (though it was almost certainly written much earlier) in the form of Swift's poem 'A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed'. This time the subject matter is so unsubtle that it has been impossible for men to write about since the feminist denunciations of it in the 1970s. Susan Gubar, half of the *Madwoman in the Attic* team, has written of Swift that 'at no time were ... female grotesques more prevalent than during the eighteenth century. Emblems of filthy materiality, committed only to their private ends, the decaying prostitutes portrayed by Jonathan Swift in his excremental poetry are quite literally monsters whose arts are both debased and debasing'.<sup>27</sup> Since this statement hardly anyone has been brave enough to read the poem seriously for its contribution to knowledge, and when critics have tried, they have turned meekly to psychoanalysing Swift, and suggesting that he had a problem with women's bodies. Brean Hammond, for instance, argues in his paper 'Corinna's Dream' that 'I intend to use this most controversial of Swift's poems to suggest that it calls for a broadly materialist and a broadly psychoanalytical response; and in trying to explain why I think this is so, I will be hinting that continuities exist between two of the great



master-narratives of our time, those of Marx and Freud, so frequently presented as mutually exclusive'.<sup>28</sup> I am not sure whether Freud and Marx had read Swift. I am sure that Swift had not read Marx and Freud, but I am sure Swift had read Aphra Behn, and for this reason I shall agree with Gubar that 'in the representation of male dread of women and, more specifically, of male anxiety over female control and artistry, Swift's contaminating bitch goddesses evoke a long line of female monsters of biblical and classical origin'.<sup>29</sup> They do, and the 'bitch goddess' whom Swift attacks in his poem is the Lucretian epicurean, Aphra Behn. He, an ordained minister of the Church of England, cannot let her get away with atheism and the triumph of rationality over faith.

So when we turn to the poem, let us all put away the idea that Swift hated women. He loved two women dearly during his life, Vanessa and Stella. That he married neither of them was probably because he was illegitimate and had no income with which to support a wife. And he loved the whore Corinna too.

Corinna, Pride of Drury-Lane,  
 For whom no Shepherd sighs in vain;  
 Never did Covent Garden boast  
 So bright a batter'd, strolling Toast;  
 No drunken Rake to pick her up,  
 No Cellar where on Tick to sup;  
 Returning at the Midnight Hour;  
 Four Stories climbing to her Bow'r;  
 Then, seated on a three-legg'd Chair,  
 Takes off her artificial Hair:  
 Now, picking out a Crystal Eye,  
 She wipes it clean, and lays it by.  
 Her Eye-Brows from a Mouse's Hyde,  
 Stuck on with Art on either Side,  
 Pulls off with Care, and first displays 'em,  
 Then in a Play-Book smoothly lays 'em.<sup>30</sup>

As Corinna continues her toilette, she removes her teeth, her breasts and her buttocks. She cleans off her white and red makeup and applies plasters to her syphilis sores. She takes a mercury pill hopefully to kill off other venereal diseases and goes to sleep. What I would like to suggest is that Swift shines his light on Corinna to enter into dialogue with Hellena in Behn's *Rover*, and where Hellena tells us 'that a handsom Woman has

a great deal to do whilst her Face is good', Swift reminds us that women amount to more than the sexual attraction of their bodies. Corinna deconstructs herself of what makes her marketable and what remains but a woman who dreams? And if there is something terrible in her poem, it is that her dreams are no different from her daily life:

With Pains of Love tormented lies;  
 Or if she chance to close her Eyes,  
 Of Bridewell and the Computer dreams,  
 And feels the Lash, and faintly screams;  
 Or, by a faithless Bully drawn,  
 At some Hedge-Tavern lies in Pawn;  
 Or to Jamaica seems transported,  
 Alone, and by no Planter courted;  
 Or, near Fleet-Ditch's oozy Brinks,  
 Surrounded with a Hundred Stinks,  
 Belated, seems on watch to lye,  
 And snap some Cully passing by.<sup>31</sup>

She, it would seem, is just the person whom the SRM should help. But they don't, and they appear in her dream:

... struck with Fear, her Fancy runs  
 On Watchmen, Constables and Duns,  
 From whom she meets with frequent Rubs;  
 But, never from Religious Clubs;  
 Whose Favour she is sure to find,  
 Because she pays 'em all in Kind.<sup>32</sup>

While Swift's suggestion remains indelible that the SRM, the 'religious Clubs' are hypocrites since prostitutes buy them off with free sex, there is a much more important point being made in this poem: that sexual attraction demonstrates the failure of reason, and therefore, and more importantly, that Behn's Lucretian epicurean ethics puts too much faith in reason. Furthermore, Corinna is atomised in her undressing as a satire on Lucretius' atomistic beliefs, because in Swift's time atomism was a belief, an article of faith. Just because the atomic theory of matter has now been demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt, in Swift's time it was just an idea, in which Behn chose to have faith. Thus, when we read of Corinna we read of a woman who is not in as good a bargaining position

as Hellena, and who cannot even dream of the rational detachment of a happy life free from fear or pain. Corinna cannot bargain with the random Willmores who pay her for sex, for them to be faithful to her if they want her to be faithful to them: for Corinna, sex is a life-and-death financial arrangement. She sells sex in order to buy food, and on the night of the poem she has found no punters and nowhere that she can get her dinner on credit.

But in attacking the SRM in the same poem, Swift is suggesting that a stern moral code is not the way to help Corinna. Cupid's darts fly off everywhere, hit everyone and cause chaos, as is demonstrated by the fact that Corinna can use sex to buy off their threats of prosecution. However, as with Behn, we are left with the question about whether and how the poem is an ethical response to Corinna. First, it is important to respond to Gubar's critique with some questions. Would she rather Swift had never written about the destitution of a sad old prostitute? Would she rather have had Swift make her into some sort of Hellena, always with a bright witty riposte to her Bully, her Cully, her Watchmen, Constables and Duns? Would she rather not know that Corinna had to buy off the members of the SRM with free sex? From my own point of view, I would rather know, and I would rather know how much Corinna meant to Swift.

Corinna's name is an old one, as she was the beloved of Ovid, and the addressee of his *Amores*, written in 16 BC. Nor was she new for Swift, who wrote about her in an earlier poem, *Cadenus and Vanessa* (1726), in which she was also portrayed as a prostitute, although this time with a higher class Cully.

*Corinna*, with that youthful Air,  
Is Thirty, and a bit to spare;  
Her Fondness for a certain Earl  
Began when I was but a Girl;<sup>33</sup>

The poem, which is subtitled 'A Law Case', tells of an imaginary court case between the Nymphs and the Shepherds, heard by Venus as the judge, in which the nymphs accuse men of being attracted to women less for love and more for their wealth:

The counsel for the fair began  
Accusing the false creature, man.

The brief with weighty crimes was charged,  
 On which the pleader much enlarged:  
 That Cupid now has lost his art,  
 Or blunts the point of every dart;  
 His altar now no longer smokes;  
 His mother's aid no youth invokes—  
 This tempts free-thinkers to refine,  
 And bring in doubt their powers divine,  
 Now love is dwindled to intrigue,  
 And marriage grown a money-league.<sup>34</sup>

The 'law case' is, of course, really between Swift the Anglican minister, and Behn, the Lucretian 'free-thinker'. And in his reworking of the same ideas, Behn's rational response to sex portrayed by her heroines Hellena and Cloris is turned back on itself. Swift's women's accusation that men blunt Cupid's darts and reduce sex to a financial transaction reminds us of Behn's failed erection poem, 'The Disappointment'. Likewise, the shepherds accuse the nymphs that they are only interested in sex: presumably, if Cloris had loved Lisander she'd have stayed with him, but because he broke the sexual bargain she ran away.

That modern love is no such thing  
 As what those ancient poets sing;  
 A fire celestial, chaste, refined,  
 Conceived and kindled in the mind,  
 Which having found an equal flame,  
 Unites, and both become the same,  
 In different breasts together burn,  
 Together both to ashes turn.  
 But women now feel no such fire,  
 And only know the gross desire;  
 Their passions move in lower spheres,  
 Where'er caprice or folly steers.<sup>35</sup>

The situation based on the rational calculations of libertine ethics is intolerable to Venus, who wants men and women to love one another, whereas rationality makes all men Cullies and all women whores, so she '...threw her law-books on the shelf',<sup>36</sup> enlists the help of the goddess of wisdom and between the two of them they create Vanessa to win back the Shepherds to love. Vanessa is young and beautiful with £5000,

and with Athena's help, is also clever. What Venus doesn't know, is that Athena only gives Vanessa wisdom to make her invulnerable to men's approaches. The result of turning their creation loose on the world is hardly what they expected—Vanessa is hated by women and frightens off all the Shepherds. The reason for this failure is because what both goddesses are doing is rational calculation, they are still using the libertine ethics that started the problems with love that were being heard in the original court case. As Swift tells us, Venus:

... studied well the point, and found  
Her foe's conclusions were not sound,  
From premises erroneous brought,  
And therefore the deduction's nought,<sup>37</sup>

And this is where the poem takes a brilliant turn. Swift reminds us that love is not a calculation and cannot be warded off with calculations written in books, however wise or moral. Cupid's arrows will always defeat rational argument and moral codes,

But Cupid, full of mischief, longs  
To vindicate his mother's wrongs.  
On Pallas all attempts are vain;  
One way he knows to give her pain;  
Vows on Vanessa's heart to take  
Due vengeance, for her patron's sake.

...  
The boy made use of all his craft,  
In vain discharging many a shaft,  
Pointed at colonels, lords, and beaux;  
Cadenus warded off the blows,  
For placing still some book betwixt,  
The darts were in the cover fixed,  
Or often blunted and recoiled,  
On Plutarch's morals struck, were spoiled.<sup>38</sup>

Plutarch's *Morals* runs to five volumes of miscellaneous essays, and is the first recorded source of the chicken-and-egg problem; suggesting that it is not possible to decide in a court case who is at fault in the problems of modern love. But Swift goes on to make a much more important point.

He first reminds us that love does not happen between eternally youthful imaginary nymphs and shepherds. It happens to real people,

Cadenus many things had writ,  
 Vanessa much esteemed his wit,  
 And called for his poetic works!  
 Meantime the boy in secret lurks.  
 And while the book was in her hand,  
 The urchin from his private stand  
 Took aim, and shot with all his strength  
 A dart of such prodigious length,  
 It pierced the feeble volume through,  
 And deep transfixed her bosom too.<sup>39</sup>

In the poem Swift himself is Cadenus who ‘many things had writ’ and Vanessa his pet name for Esther Vanhomrigh, his tutee, and the object of his ageing affections when he was forty-four years old and she less than twenty years old. The rest of the poem explores how their love affair might go, should he teach Vanessa how to be a proper wife, or should she teach him how to be a proper beau? But the poem does not reach a conclusion, an arrangement that can be reduced to a series of statements of fact:

But what success Vanessa met  
 Is to the world a secret yet;  
 Whether the nymph, to please her swain,  
 Talks in a high romantic strain;  
 Or whether he at last descends  
 To like with less seraphic ends;  
 Or to compound the bus’ness, whether  
 They temper love and books together;  
 Must never to mankind be told,  
 Nor shall the conscious muse unfold.<sup>40</sup>

And nor can the world know. What is going on between Cadenus and Vanessa is their joint decision to have faith in each other in each moment they are together. They have not made a calculation of what they both should be and become while they are in love. They will each remain being themselves, as the poem says: ‘For Nature must be Nature still’.<sup>41</sup> Thus, for Swift, the ethics based on his account of sexual attraction are

irrational—‘faithful’ in the proper sense of the word: full of faith. They are not reducible to the Lucretian epicurean happy state:

Love, why do we one passion call?  
 When ‘tis a compound of them all;  
 Where hot and cold, where sharp and sweet,  
 In all their equipages meet;  
 Where pleasures mixed with pains appear,  
 Sorrow with joy, and hope with fear.<sup>42</sup>

Neither can Swift’s ethics of love be reduced to a financial arrangement. How different is a wife from the whore Corinna, if she sees only the fiscal benefits of marriage and has no faith in her husband? And this ethics is found in the mutual feeling of love, which is ‘having faith in your body and the body of your partner’. And in this faith we find variability: the knowledge that my loved one is ‘the same only different (from me)’. If we learn this from our most intimate dealings, which happen at the most unexpected moments, then we can extrapolate from that knowledge into all our dealings with other people. We do best when we do not reduce them to us or to our expectations and understanding of ourselves, but let them flower as they are themselves. And we do best when we are following this ethical imperative.

## CONCLUSION

Following this argument, if this gay man has a lesson to teach the bishops, it is that their ‘fresh tone and culture of welcome and support’ for the homosexual members of their congregations might be based on the idea of variability, which has motivated our society since the foundation of the Anglican Church. It is not a new fashion, just a new way of understanding the way things have always been. And as to gay marriage, this new legal form should neither be understood to be the equal of heterosexual marriage nor as entirely different. It is the focus of the words ‘heterosexual marriage’ and ‘gay marriage’ that needs to be reconsidered. Heterosexual marriage is not a one-size-fits-all estate. Each heterosexual marriage is entered into for a series of different reasons, balancing a sense of commitment and financial security, in ways that are unique to each couple. In the same way, each gay couple who marry do so for their own

unique set of reasons in which commitment and financial security are two of the many elements in play.

This is not to argue against the truth of the coming and going of fashion. Gay people have for centuries hidden the gift of their sexuality because of the long-standing fashion for homophobia. Now that execrable fashion has passed, in many places, into obscurity, it is time for the heterosexual world to learn from those people they have persecuted for so long. I did not want to go to Gay Pride this year, so I was moody when my partner cajoled me into going. I do not like crowds as I become disorientated. But I am so glad I went. My partner described to me a trans person who had caught his eye, who was six feet six tall and wearing six-inch-high heels. Thin as a reed, they had short brown hair like a boy, large hooped earrings and black bell-bottomed trousers. Their top was skin-tight Lycra in rainbow colours. ‘They are so vulnerable!’ my partner cried, and I demanded to be introduced. And so this big bear man was introduced to a trans person for the very first time, and we embraced. They were very thin indeed, and so very vulnerable, they could barely whisper a quick ‘Thank-you for loving me’, into my ear. But how could I not love them? They were out on the streets and I was proud of them. It could only happen at Gay Pride. ‘You look magnificent!’ I told them, ‘Trust me. I am a blind man’.

## NOTES

1. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-26793127](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-26793127). Accessed 17 January 2017.
2. [www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/church-of-england-reject-same-sex-marriage-house-of-bishops-gene-lift-opposition-homosexuality-lgbt-a7549906.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/church-of-england-reject-same-sex-marriage-house-of-bishops-gene-lift-opposition-homosexuality-lgbt-a7549906.html). Accessed 3 March 2017.
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4. [www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/church-of-england-reject-same-sex-marriage-house-of-bishops-gene-lift-opposition-homosexuality-lgbt-a7549906.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/church-of-england-reject-same-sex-marriage-house-of-bishops-gene-lift-opposition-homosexuality-lgbt-a7549906.html). Accessed 3 March 2017.
5. A more detailed account of variability may be found in the introduction to my *Idea of Disability in the Eighteenth Century* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013), pp. 14–18.
6. Jonathan Zophy, *A Short History of Renaissance and Reformation Europe*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2003).
7. Vivan de Sola Pinto, *Enthusiast in Wit: A Portrait of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, 1647–1680* (London: Routledge, 1962), pp. 26–29.



8. The social contract for mutual benefit and the idea of an objective science of morality that Hobbes advocated were far removed from the libertine's search after pleasure.
9. Charles Segal, *Lucretius on Death and Anxiety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 7.
10. Amy Olberding, "'The feel of not to feel it": Lucretius' remedy for death anxiety', in *Philosophy and Literature* 29:1 (2005), pp. 114–129.
11. Thomas Creech, *Titus Lucretius Carus His Six Books* (London: J. Sawbridge, 1683), pp. 126–127. I am quoting from the second edition as it is in this version that Aphra Behn's commendatory poem can be found.
12. Janet Todd, 'Behn, Aphra (1640?–1689)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004). [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1961](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1961). Accessed 23 March 2017.
13. The life expectancy of a middle-class woman in the seventeenth century was about forty years.
14. Aphra Behn, *Poems upon Several Occasions, with a Voyage to the Island of Love* (London: J. Tonson and I. Tonson, 1684), p. 9.
15. Aphra Behn, *The Rover, or the Banish'd Cavaliers* (London: John Amery, 1677), p. 4.
16. Behn, *The Rover*, p. 34.
17. Todd, 'Behn, Aphra (1640?–1689)'.
18. Aphra Behn, 'To the unknown Daphnis on his excellent translation of Lucretius', in Thomas Creech (ed.), *Titus Lucretius Carus His Six Books* (London: Sawbridge, 1683), p. C2.
19. Behn, *Poems upon Several Occasions*, p. 53.
20. <http://writersinspire.org/content/aphra-behn-poetic-culture>. Accessed 19 September 2014.
21. Behn, *Poems upon Several Occasions*, p. 74.
22. Behn, *Poems upon Several Occasions*, p. 75.
23. Behn, 'To the unknown Daphnis', p. C2.
24. Behn, *Poems upon Several Occasions*, p. 57.
25. Jonathan Swift, *A Project for the Advancement of Religion, and the Reformation of Manners* (London: H. Hills, 1709).
26. Swift, *A Project for the Advancement of Religion*, p. A2.
27. Susan Gubar, 'The female monster in Augustan satire', *Signs* 3:2 (1977) pp. 380–394, at 380.
28. Brean S. Hammond, 'Corinna's dream', *Eighteenth Century* 36:2 (1995) pp. 99–118.
29. Gubar, 'The female monster', p. 380.
30. Jonathan Swift, *A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed* (London: J. Roberts, 1734), pp. 3–4.
31. Swift, *Beautiful Young Nymph*, p. 5.

32. Swift, *Beautiful Young Nymph*, p. 6.
33. Jonathan Swift, *Cadenus and Vanessa* (London: J. Roberts, 1726), p. 26.
34. Swift, *Cadenus and Vanessa*, pp. 5–6.
35. Swift, *Cadenus and Vanessa*, p. 6.
36. Swift, *Cadenus and Vanessa*, p. 10.
37. Swift, *Cadenus and Vanessa*, p. 15.
38. Swift, *Cadenus and Vanessa*, p. 22.
39. Swift, *Cadenus and Vanessa*, pp. 23–24.
40. Swift, *Cadenus and Vanessa*, p. 35.
41. Swift, *Cadenus and Vanessa*, p. 26.
42. Swift, *Cadenus and Vanessa*, p. 55.

## The Tradition of Homophobia: Responses to Same-Sex Relationships in Serbian Orthodoxy from the Nineteenth Century to the Present Day

*Nik Jovčić-Sas*

Belgrade's first Pride march in 2001 was arguably one of the most significant moments of Serbian history following the break-up of Yugoslavia. Shortly after the event had begun, the participants were attacked by thousands of ultra-nationalists and football hooligans who hospitalised both policemen and queer individuals throughout the city. The march's bloody conclusion created a new reputation for Serbia as a country synonymous with violent homophobia. Over the past seven years, the government has attempted to change this reputation through a number of measures: the passing of an anti-discrimination law in 2009, greater police and military protection for Belgrade Pride since 2013, and as of 2016 the country boasts its first LGBTQ+ minister, Ana Brnabić. These policies have created minimal impact and have been criticised

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by queer Serbian activists who describe them as a ‘charade’ for the sake of strengthening Serbia’s bid for European Union membership.<sup>1</sup> Beneath these superficial policies, verbal and physical assaults against LGBTQ+ individuals are common, queer women suffer incidents of corrective rape and research carried out by EurActiv estimates that as many as 63.4% of gay men have suffered from suicidal thoughts.<sup>2</sup>

Strong external pressure to improve LGBTQ+ rights from the EU and other Western nations has highlighted a crisis of national identity concerning the nature of Serbia’s place within Europe. ‘First Serbia’, the name given to the predominant anti-European discourse, views EU intervention on this issue as an attempt to destroy Serbia’s traditional Orthodox Christian culture. This view is endorsed by the Serbian Orthodox Church, which has responded by placing itself at the heart of the anti-LGBTQ+ movement, teaching that same-sex relationships are not native to Serbia, and that extreme violent homophobia is a part of Church Tradition. The SPC (*Srpska Pravoslavna Crkva*)<sup>3</sup> works alongside far-right ‘First Serbian’ political groups, holding annual anti-Pride marches, lobbying the government to oppose equal rights, and has even openly called for violence against the LGBTQ+ community. The strong reactionary nature of the anti-LGBTQ+ movement, and the Church’s dominance over matters of tradition and theology, has made critical analysis difficult.

In this chapter I will argue that the Serbian Orthodox discourse surrounding same-sex relationships has changed significantly following the country’s independence from the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century. Through the exploration of this history I will show that the current climate of extreme homophobia is a result of Serbia’s struggle to assert its identity within Europe, rather than being an inherent part of the Serbian Orthodox faith. Furthermore, I propose that this drastic change in belief and practice represents a break in the continuity of the holy Tradition that gives the SPC authority. To demonstrate this theory I will begin by outlining the central themes that underpin homophobia in contemporary Serbian society. I will then look at the way shifting spheres of cultural and political influence between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries impacted on perceptions of sexuality, focusing specifically on same-sex relationships between men. In particular, I will focus on the Orthodox Christian tradition of ‘brotherhoods’ known in Serbian as *Pobratimstvo*, and discuss John Boswell’s theory that these relationships constituted a form of Church-condoned same-sex marriage. To

conclude, I look at the implications on the Serbian Orthodox Church's response to the rise of LGBTQ+ rights. My aim is to challenge the use of Orthodox Christian tradition as a justification for homophobia in Serbia, and create space for the discussion of 'queer' expressions of love and identity within the Serbian Orthodoxy.

There are three recurring themes used to characterise the queer community by those in Serbia opposed to LGBTQ+ rights: illness, foreignness and moral/cultural decay. Isidora Stakić, in 'Homophobia and hate speech in Serbian public discourse', presents an image of how these ideas manifest in the public realm focusing on the discourse that surrounded the introduction of the anti-discrimination law in 2009. The strong response solicited by the government's intent to pass such a law, against public opinion, makes it a good case study for understanding perceptions of same-sex relationships in Serbia. Same-sex desire is seen as a 'mental disorder' that is neither a normal nor a tolerable part of the human condition. Research in 2008 showed that 70% viewed 'homosexuality' as a sickness and recent studies have showed little change in that statistic.<sup>4</sup> Several major politicians gave this as a reason for objecting to the law, including Dragan Marković Palma who said, 'I have nothing against homosexuals, but I will never vote for something that is sick'.<sup>5</sup> In addition, same-sex relationships are characterised as a sign of moral decay that threatens order and decency in society. A representative for the Serbian Progressive Party, the party of current Serbian Prime Minister Aleksander Vučić, gave the following statement: 'The affirmation of and promotion of the so-called "personal preferences" under the slogan of equality and freedom is not acceptable. This will, undoubtedly, lead to a situation in which sodomy and paedophilia will be protected as personal preference'.<sup>6</sup> The far-right Serbian radical party (SPS) also echoed this sentiment and stated the new protection awarded to LGBTQ+ individuals would protect paedophilia and necrophilia.<sup>7</sup> These comments are also an example of the way queer and trans individuals are frequently equated with sex criminals.

However, in the current political climate of ethnocentric nationalism, the most significant threat same-sex relationships pose is to the Serbian Orthodox tradition. In the 1980s, ethnic tensions between Serbian and Albanian ethnic groups in Kosovo began to stir Serb nationalism throughout Yugoslavia. The region of Kosovo has a vital national significance to Serbs, as the battle fought there in 1389 between the Serbian and Ottoman armies is constructed in the country's national

mythology as a sacrifice made by the Serbian people for the benefit of all of Christendom. This created the foundation for Serbian identity as an Orthodox Christian warrior nation blessed by God. The tensions in Kosovo led to the rise of Serbian nationalists who sought to restore power to the Serbs in the region, such as Slobodan Milošević. This new nationalism, centred on the myth of Kosovo, has brought Orthodoxy to the forefront of Serbian identity after decades of secular socialism. In the words of Bojan Aleksov: 'Modern Serbian national identity has basically evolved out of confessional belonging [to Serbian Orthodoxy] and both are nowadays seen as mutually interchangeable'.<sup>8</sup> In recent years, this has endowed the Church with an unprecedented level of power within society, which it has used to attack the LGBTQ+ community.

In 2009 the Serbian Orthodox Church successfully requested the government to withdraw the anti-discrimination law.<sup>9</sup> In their appeal to President Boris Tadić, the SPC claimed that banning discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals was a 'trampling' of the Church's religious freedoms and that there was no 'scientific evidence' that sexuality was an inborn trait, and that it was a 'mental disorder'.<sup>10</sup> In the same year, the Church influenced the government in banning Belgrade Pride. The Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral, Amfilohije Radović, then acting as caretaker of the patriarchal throne, commented on behalf of the SPC calling it a 'parade of shame' and instructed anti-gay protesters to exact violence on LGBTQ+ individuals: 'The tree that does not bear fruit should be cut down and thrown to the fire'.<sup>11</sup> This comment constituted an unlawful incitement to violence according to Serbian law, but no action was taken against the Metropolitan.<sup>12</sup> Later in the year, Amfilohije also said on the subject of Belgrade Pride:

Yesterday we watched the stench poisoning and polluting the capital of Serbia, scarier than uranium. That was the biggest stench of Sodom that the modern civilisation raised to the pedestal of the deity. You see, the violence of the wrongheaded infidels raised more violence. Now they are wondering whose fault it was, and they are calling our children hooligans.<sup>13</sup>

The Church often speaks of same-sex attraction as a contagious evil from Western Europe, alluded to here by Amfilohije as 'modern civilization'. Queer or trans individuals as those affected by this illness, are

not seen as truly Serbian, as expressed by ‘an anonymous Serbian Monk’ on Orthodox Blogging site ‘Pravoslavie’: ‘The visible gay community in Serbia is tiny, and most of the people in it are foreign, of only partial Serb ancestry, or otherwise just kind of elite/foreign-minded—definitely not average Serbs by any stretch of the imagination. ... Serbs are generally not interested in and not tempted by this particular aspect of Western influence’.<sup>14</sup> In their attacks on the LGBTQ+ community the Church refers to this pseudo-scientific language as a justification for discrimination, more frequently than biblical or patristic texts. The current Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Irenej has also continued the use of this language to describe gay individuals in more recent years: ‘I have pity for these people, who belong to the so-called gay population. This is a disorder or an aberration of human nature... I cannot understand why they are imposing this problem on us and are openly demonstrating it’.<sup>15</sup> Across the continent these sorts of beliefs are becoming increasingly anachronistic, as many countries push to improve LGBTQ+ rights. This has led the SPC and other First Serbia actors to suggest that Serbia’s place is in ‘Old Europe’ rather than the ‘modern civilization’ of the European Union that threatens Orthodox Christian tradition.<sup>16</sup>

It is important to recognise that for the Orthodox Church, tradition is much more than mere custom; it is a living link to Christ himself, as described by Timothy [Kallistos] Ware: ‘the faith and practice which Jesus Christ imparted to the apostles... which since the Apostles time has been handed down from generation to generation in the Church’.<sup>17</sup> Protection of these traditions is of the utmost importance, as it ensures correct belief and practice, and gives the Church its authority. Thus the breaking of tradition calls the legitimacy of the Church into question, and so, in the words of St. John of Damascus, one of the fathers of the Orthodox Church: ‘We do not change the everlasting boundaries which our fathers have set... but we keep the Tradition just as we received it’.<sup>18</sup> In the Kosovo-centred nationalism of the past thirty years, these traditions have gained a new powerful political significance. Yet while the connection between nationalism and religion has certainly generated growth for the SPC, a look at this history of this Church on the issue of same-sex relationships reveals that popular nationalism threatens to obscure the beauty and complexity of Orthodox Christian tradition so as to fit with far-right politics.

## OTTOMAN AND SERBIAN SEXUALITY IN THE BALKANS

Winston Churchill once said the Balkans ‘produces more history than it can consume’, referencing the complexity the region’s past adds to understanding its social and political climate. In my research I was confronted by a plethora of sources from the varying cultures and historical periods that have existed within the Balkans that have impacted on the development of attitudes towards sexuality in Serbia, from the Romans to Soviet Communism. In this chapter I focus on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which saw an unprecedented shift in attitudes on same-sex relationships, which gave birth to many of the arguments used against the LGBTQ+ community today. From the time of the Ottoman occupation of Serbia a more liberal climate had been fostered with regard to romantic and sexual *morés*, quite different from the rigid and increasingly ‘medical’ attitudes of those seen in Western Europe within the same era. This cultural difference allowed Serbian Orthodoxy to maintain long-held practices and beliefs regarding sexuality no longer seen in other parts of Europe.

It is sometimes overlooked that there have only been two fully autonomous Serbian states in the last five hundred years: the Republic of Serbia that came into existence in 2006, and the Kingdom of Serbia that was created after independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1882. The Republic of Serbia styles itself as the heir of that earlier state, and as the originator of modern Serbian nationalism. The cultural milieu in which the Kingdom of Serbia came into existence reveals a great deal about the country’s relationship with Europe and also same-sex relationships. From the beginning of the nineteenth century the Ottomans’ power over the Balkan region had started to wane. The imperial powers of Western Europe had been transformed by the technological and political innovations of the enlightenment, catalysed by an influx of resources from expansion in Africa, Asia and America. The conservative religious and political elites of the Ottoman Empire, conscious of these developments, saw modernisation as a threat to social order and pursued a policy of isolationism, ‘cocooning themselves in their privilege’.<sup>19</sup> This proved a fatal miscalculation, as the flood of colonial wealth in Western Europe left the Ottoman Empire susceptible to inflation that created widespread famine, political instability and exaggerated cultural differences across the continent. This proved fertile ground for insurrection, and in 1804 a confederacy of Serbian peasants began a campaign to take the ‘Paşalık’ of Belgrade.<sup>20</sup>



Life for these Serbs and other Orthodox Christians in the Balkans at the twilight of the Ottoman Empire was very different from those of their Western European counterparts, and not only in terms of wealth and technology. Turkish rule over the centuries was brutal in its treatment of Orthodox Christians, who formed part of an underclass known as the 'reaya' (literally translated as 'flock' or 'herd'). As part of this class, Serbs were subjected to heavy taxation, slavery and gross acts of ethnic cleansing. This description of the punishment of Serbian revolutionaries demonstrates the cruelty used by the Sublime Porte against its Christian subjects:<sup>21</sup>

Men were roasted alive, hanged by their feet over smoking straw until they asphyxiated, castrated, crushed with stones, and bastinadoed. Their women and children were raped and sometimes taken by force to harems ... Outside Stanbul Gate in Belgrade, there were always on view the corpses of impaled Serbs being gnawed by packs of dogs.<sup>22</sup>

Centuries of brutality led many Christians to convert to Islam, thereby exempting themselves from some of the Porte's most severe policies. For those who did not convert, Orthodoxy and its traditions became inextricably linked to their ethnic identity. This is especially evident in the Kosovo mythology that plays such an important role in Serbian nationalism today. In 'Serbian Orthodox Fundamentals', Christos Mylonas explains how the ritual use of Orthodoxy's presence within everyday life and the mythology of Kosovo, 'sacralised' the Serbian ethnic identity and made orthodoxy the 'primordial factor of Serbianhood'.<sup>23</sup> It turned the Serbian revolution into an almost cosmic struggle between sacred Orthodox Christian warriors and their foreign Islamic oppressors.

Nevertheless, the presence of Turkish culture in the Balkans for almost half a millennium had a massive impact on the customs of Christians. Turkish influence can be seen throughout the region in language, music, food, costume and during the nineteenth century, in the differing attitudes towards sex and relationships between the Balkans and the rest of Europe. Nineteenth-century Western Europe had become obsessed with the repression of certain expressions of sexuality, a subject addressed at length in Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*. The new discourse understood sexuality in purely medical terms, described by Foucault as 'scientia sexualis'.<sup>24</sup> Within this discourse, sexuality that went against perceived social norms—from masturbation to alternative

expressions of gender—were portrayed as ‘mental illness’. These ideas were often tied to ideas of national superiority and racism. Hórvath explains how ‘scientia sexualis’ prompted empires to police the sexuality of their subjects:

...the idea of individual and racial progress overall was based not only on the development of reason, but also on a repression of sexual instinct; that is, the repression of one’s immediate instinctive reaction was the essential mechanism of evolutionary progress in both the intellectual and moral sphere. The analogy was simple: those who could control their own internal natural impulses were believed to be more capable of controlling the forces outside them.<sup>25</sup>

Western European imperial powers enforced this understanding on their colonised subjects, often with severe consequences. For example, one recent study found that out of 185 countries with past or present anti-gay legislature, 57% could trace their origins back to British colonialism.<sup>26</sup> Expressions of sexuality or gender in colonial countries that did not fit with Western European laws were mocked as inferior or ‘uncivilised’.

The Ottomans’ policy of isolation delayed the impact of this new discourse in the Balkans until the latter half of the century. In contrast, the Sublime Porte had little or no interests for the romantic or sexual endeavours of its subjects. Jurisdiction for these issues came under individual ‘millets’,<sup>27</sup> which dealt with these issues according to their own cultural or religious customs. Even so, the ultimate hegemonic supremacy of the Sultan allowed for behaviours that fell outside of millet’s laws.<sup>28</sup> As a result, the Ottoman Balkans was home to a kaleidoscope of sexual and romantic traditions: polygamy, monogamy, celibate monasteries and harems might be found to exist within the walls of a single city.<sup>29</sup>

Ottoman sexuality was ‘male-orientated, pleasure-bound and generally unrestricted by religious belief’.<sup>30</sup> Homoerotic themes in particular were popular in literature and forms of theatre such as Karagöz, and this culture allowed ‘much social and sexual interaction, including same-sex, between Muslims, Christian and Jews’.<sup>31</sup> The contrast this approach to same-sex desire had towards other European imperial powers came to define the Balkans in the Western imagination, as captured by the British writer Thomas Moore: ‘In England the vices in fashion are whoring and drinking, in Turkey, sodomy and smoking. We prefer a girl and a bottle,

they a pipe and a pathic [i.e. boy]'.<sup>32</sup> Western travellers less inclined towards the strict rigors of Victorian sexual morality came to the Balkans in search of this greater liberalism, including the infamous aristocrat and poet, Lord Byron. In *Byron and Greek Love*, Louis Crompton sets an intense contrast between the homophobia of Lord Byron's England and the strong homoeroticism he experienced throughout Greece and Albania, and reflected in his writing.<sup>33</sup> Byron wrote fondly of his sexual experiences with men in the Balkans, describing one bathhouse in Salonika (modern day Thessaloniki) as 'a marble paradise of sherbet and sodomy'.<sup>34</sup>

The academic work of Crompton, Drucker and Ze'evi exposes the immense shift in the perception of same-sex relationships in the Balkans, particularly in Greece and Turkey. Today, both countries have very hostile attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the current president of Turkey, has curtailed the rights of individuals in same-sex relationships because he believes they have no place in traditional Turkish culture.<sup>35</sup> While Greece is certainly more liberal than Turkey on this issue, the Greek Orthodox Church has used very similar rhetoric to the SPC to describe the LGBTQ+ community, and violence against queer individuals is a prevalent issue.<sup>36</sup>

Comparatively little work has been done on this issue in regards to Serbia. The preeminent form of same-sex relationships in Orthodox Christian cultures during Ottoman colonialism in the Balkans were 'brotherhood' and 'sisterhood' unions. Many variations existed, but the most relevant to our discussion are the brotherhood unions that were performed by the Church in Serbia. In *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe*, queer Church historian John Boswell claimed that brotherhood and sisterhood unions 'fulfilled what most people today regard as the essence of a [same-sex] marriage, a permanent romantic commitment between two people witnessed and recognised by the community'.<sup>37</sup> The book received mixed reviews, not least because of the implications of Boswell's claim that these unions used to be a part of accepted practice in the church from the early centuries of the faith. Philip Lyndon wrote that 'if gay marriage used to be a regular part of Christian tradition, then the official Roman Catholic prohibition of homosexual acts must be unfounded, for the prohibition rests chiefly on the argument of tradition'.<sup>38</sup> If proven to be true, such an argument would also have ramifications for the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Of the liturgies Boswell worked with, two originate from Serbia. However, Boswell's research focused more on the historical development of brotherhood unions through early Christianity and the Middle Ages, and only discussed later developments in this practice within the Balkans briefly. Academic consensus supports the Serbian Orthodox Church's rejection of Boswell's theory that brotherhood unions (or in Serbian: *Pobratimstvo*<sup>39</sup>) constituted a form of 'gay marriage'.<sup>40</sup> While I agree that the term 'gay marriage' is perhaps anachronistic in relation to these unions, I would argue that in light of the cultural and historical context they did constitute a 'form of permanent romantic commitment', *similar* to marriage, that was condoned by the Serbian Church.<sup>41</sup> The practice of brotherhood rituals that took place in the Balkans before the mid-twentieth century presents a potential disruption to Serbian Orthodox narratives on same-sex interactions between men. Taken in the context of the Ottoman's laissez-faire approach to diverse sexual norms, and their own celebration of male same-sex desire, these inter-personal bonds created a unique space for queer interactions between Serbs to flourish. In addition, many aspects of this tradition epitomise Serbian nationalist idealisation of the Serbs as an Orthodox Christian warrior nation.

The Serbian brotherhood liturgies featured by Boswell were originally collected by Pantelija 'Panta' Srečković and published in pamphlets from the Learned Serbian Society in 1885.<sup>42</sup> Though Srečković indicates that at the time of publishing *Pobratimstvo* was widely practised, the tone of the piece's commentary is clearly that of an outsider. This strongly suggests that the practice was most likely extinct in more westernised urban areas, such as Belgrade. Nevertheless, Srečković writes that the ceremony was common 'from Thessaloniki to Istria, from the Adriatic shores to beyond the Danube and Sava rivers, everywhere where Serbian is spoken'. We are told *Pobratimstvo* is a bond made between men with the purpose of assisting one another in life and in battle. It is preferred to take place between individuals of the same nation, and it is forbidden for monks 'because [*Pobratimstvo*] does not become monks, who have withdrawn from the world and have made a vow of celibacy, and renounced all that are close to them by blood'.<sup>43</sup> Srečković's commentary additionally addresses some controversy surrounding the practice, quoting one Russian priest who describes *Pobratimstvo* as 'reprehensible' and banned by the Tsar's imperial decree within Russia.

Numerous sources suggest the social function of brotherhood unions was to create strong bonds between men. Leopold Von Ranke,

in his book *The History of Serbia and the Serbian Revolution* records brotherhood bonds as one of the foremost aspects of Serbian society and gives us this description of its purpose: 'Persons unite with one another "in the name of God and St. John" for mutual fidelity and aid during their whole lives. A man, it is considered, will make the safest selection for his "brother", in choosing one, of whom he may at some time have dreamed that he had solicited assistance in some case of need. The allied designate themselves "Brothers in God", "Brothers by choice", Побратими.'<sup>44</sup> Another significant function *Pobratimstvo* offered to society was that the men who were bound in this union were believed to be better soldiers. This may explain why the unions were common during the Serbian revolution, and why many prominent revolutionaries including the leader of the first uprising Djordje 'Karadjordje' Petrović entered *Pobratimstvo*.<sup>45</sup> Anthropologist, Mary Edith Durham, in *Some Tribal Origins, Laws and Customs of the Balkans* wrote on the military duties of the *Pobratimi*, '...when two "pobratims" (sworn brethren) went to war, it was the duty of the one to cut off and carry away the head of the other, if slain, to prevent it falling into the hands of the enemy'.<sup>46</sup>

Durham also tells us about the romantic nature of many brotherhood unions and relays her discussion with a Serbian Orthodox Priest (referred to colloquially as a 'pope') on the reason for the decline of *Pobratimstvo*: 'My old friend, Pope Gjuro of Njegushi, spoke in the strongest terms against this ceremony, which he said the Church should never had permitted. He described it as "the marriage of two men and against all nature", and intimated clearly, as did others, that it had been used as the cloak for vice'.<sup>47</sup> In his 1917 ethnography of Serbian customs, Tih R. Gregorovitch also describes these relationships serving a practical military purpose while also solemnising 'deep friendships' that were 'tender and very touching'.<sup>48</sup> Gregorovitch also tells us that *Pobratimstvo* not only unified the two individuals concerned, but also their families, and that the gravity of such a relationship was a reasonable excuse to obstruct marriage.<sup>49</sup> Other accounts from the early twentieth century also make open references to the erotic nature of *Pobratimstvo*. Paul Nücke observed brotherhood rituals among Orthodox Christians in neighbouring Albania. While he described such unions as 'stark sexual' (strongly sexual), he notes that oral and anal sex were prohibited for being too 'Turkish', and that interfemoral sex was more 'de rigueur' among Christians.<sup>50</sup> Nücke also compared these unions directly to ideas of 'Greek Love' and warriors such as the 'Sacred Band of Thebes'.

In spite of this evidence, the Serbian Orthodox Church denies that men entered *Pobratimstvo* to solemnise romantic relationships. Some critics of Boswell disregard this evidence. These include Daniel Mendehlson who suggests they were totally platonic political unions.<sup>51</sup> Others suggest that even if there were a romantic component to these relationships that priests who performed the liturgies did so without the knowledge they were endorsing such behaviour. However, given that the unions mentioned by Srećković, Durham, Gregorovitch and Näcke were all presided over by priests and have various romantic or erotic elements, this assumes a naivety that is hard to believe. It seems more plausible that the priests who performed brotherhood unions did so with a silent acceptance, or a willingness to look the other way. In addition, the idea that priests were oblivious to romantic interpretation of *Pobratimstvo* seems strange when one takes into consideration that the clergy would have been most aware of the liturgical parallels with the Orthodox marriage rite.

The ceremony to create *Pobratimstvo* approximately follows this order: first, the couples are processed by the priest into the centre of the Church, are given white candles.<sup>52</sup> They then perform a rite known as 'The Common Cup' where they take communion together, then the 'The Dance of Isaiah' where they are processed around an altar table three times, and then end with a kiss.<sup>53</sup> Many of these liturgical acts are found exclusively in the performance of an Orthodox Christian marriage, and a great deal of the liturgical language also bears strong similarities, including the recitation of arguably the most well-known verse related to marriage, 1 Corinthians 13. For a priest these linguistic and ritual parallels with marriage would have been inescapable, while for the laity Boswell argues the visual symbolism would have been the most revealing of the ceremony's intention: '... the most striking parallels have to do with visual symbolism, which was certainly more memorable for the congregation: the couple standing hand-in-hand at the altar, being joined and blessed by the priest, would last longer in imagination and memory than the precise wording of any ceremony ...'<sup>54</sup> Perhaps one reason the romantic history of *Pobratimstvo* has struggled to find currency is due to the fact that it jars not only with modern Orthodox teaching, but understandings of sexuality across the entirety of contemporary Christianity. In *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* and also in his earlier book *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, Boswell focuses on attempting to explain this disconnect. Boswell discusses the

overlooked the importance of celibacy within the early Church, seen to be the 'premier lifestyle' for both men and women.<sup>55</sup> Marriage was not a priority for early Christians, and for much of the first one thousand years of the Church there was no codified Christian marriage rite. St. Augustine and Tertullian only speak of the 'blessing of the Bride' rather than marriage and St. John Chrysostom (another father of the Orthodox Church) mentions that within his lifetime weddings were practised in a pagan fashion with a Christian blessing taking place on the day prior.<sup>56</sup> Sexual desire for persons of either the same or the opposite sex was seen as a physical temptation that distracted from a spiritual life in Christ. In his letters St. Paul urged Christians that '...it is good for [the unmarried] to stay unmarried', and that individuals should seek marriage only so that they would not 'burn in passion'.<sup>57</sup> This belief was echoed in the writings of the Greek Church Fathers, such as Gregory of Nyssa who praised marriage as a religious economy where one may satiate their desires only so they can pursue a spiritual life without early distraction.<sup>58</sup> This negative view of uncontrolled sexual desire created parity within the early Church between same-sex and opposite-sex relationships.

Secondly, Boswell looks at how in the Graeco-Roman world in which Christianity was born, views of same-sex relationships were very positive. Opposite-sex marriage was seen as a purely financial and dynastic commitment, and same-sex relationships were viewed as a place more suited to the investment of emotional ties and romance. There also exist numerous examples that show the use of the word 'brother' as a word to refer to same-sex male lovers, such as the late first-century 'Satyricon'. Much like *Pobratimstvo* it was believed that men who loved one another made better soldiers, as attested by the Spartans or the Sacred Band of Thebes as discussed by Plutarch (46–120) 'the most warlike peoples, Boetians, Spartans, Cretans who are the most susceptible to this love but also the greatest heroes of old, Meleager, Achilles, Aristomenes, Cimon, Epaminodas'.<sup>59</sup>

Ritual bonds that emphasised friendship and love over dynasty and carnality became popular in the early church. Paired martyrs such as St. Sergius and St. Bacchus, became the Christian ideal for these relationships and they are frequently referenced in Serbian brotherhood liturgies: '... let these love each other without envy and temptation all these days of their lives. It hath pleased Thee that the holy Martyrs Serge and Bacchus were united not in the bonds of birth but in spiritual faith and love'.<sup>60</sup> However, for reasons that have only been

speculated on, brotherhood unions began to decline in Western Europe from the fourteenth century. This may be in part due to the popularity of St. Augustine within the Western Church, and his focus on the significance of sex within marriage for procreation, which did not find the same reception in the Eastern Church. Brotherhood unions continued in the region that is now Serbia throughout the Byzantine Empire and then in the Ottoman Empire, due in part to their laissez-faire attitude toward sexuality. The Serbian Orthodox Church's continued practice of *Pobratimstvo* preserved a unique tradition from the early Church into the nineteenth century.

With the evidence in our possession, it is perhaps too ambitious to claim *Pobratimstvo* is an equivalent to marriage within the orthodox Christian understanding of the term. They were celebrated emotionally significant interpersonal bonds, but too much remains unclear to corroborate an unequivocal statement such as the one proposed by John Boswell. Yet, what we see in the similarity of *Pobratimstvo* to marriage, and the evidence presented by the contemporary ethnographers, is that brotherhoods created spaces in which same-sex desire could exist within a Serbian Orthodox context. If we take Durham's and Näcke's understanding that this interpretation of these relationships was well known to both clergy and laity, certain invocations of *Pobratimstvo* could be understood as a form of *Oikonomia*: a practice that allows for more accommodating applications of doctrine for the wellbeing of an individual or community.

References to the practice of *Pobratimstvo* trail off by the mid-twentieth century, and there are little or no records from people living that claim to have witnessed them. The invention of 'homosexuality' and the importation of a more Western approach to sexuality would come to change traditional cultural understandings of same-sex love between men. In the next section I will show how this new discourse transformed *Pobratimstvo* from a proud tradition to a sign of perversion and a threat to national honour.

## NEW DISCOURSES ON SEXUALITY IN AN INDEPENDENT SERBIA

Towards the end of the nineteenth century attitudes towards sexuality in the Balkans had grown much closer to those held in Western Europe and thus signalled the shift towards Serbia's contemporary climate of extreme homophobia. This was prompted by both the decline of the



Ottomans across Southeastern Europe as well as the increase in Western Europeans visiting the region. In 'Hiding sexuality', Dror Ze'evi discusses the impact of the Western imagination on the way the Ottomans viewed their own traditions, particularly through the medium of travelogues. Ze'evi gives the example of the writings of the British Admiral Adolphus Slade (1804–1877), and his attitudes towards the culture of the Ottoman Porte:

If there be a man in the Empire...qualified to undertake the task [of reforming the Ottoman government], it is likely he will be found among the ministers of Mahmoud II, who are, four-fifths of them, bought slaves from Circassia or from Georgia—whose recommendation was a pretty face—whose chief merit, a prostitution of the worst vices, whose schedule of services, successful agency in forwarding their master's treacherous schemes against his subjects.<sup>61</sup>

Travelogues like Slade's fuelled the belief held in Western Europe that the Ottomans were morally inferior and deviant, and that the Empire's downfall was a result of their 'uncivilised' desires.

Having read such accounts Ottoman elites in turn went on to 'dis-member' older sexual discourses in order to surpass Western morality on their own terms.<sup>62</sup> In the Balkans, this resulted in the disappearance of traditions once common in everyday life, such as the harem, polygamous relationships and homoerotic themes within the arts:

The sexual differences between Europe and the Ottoman world had become apparent, and the attempt to present morality back home as superior was much more than an effort to counter a Western offensive. It was in fact a re-creation of the Ottoman sexual world as an improved version of the European one, an idealised parody of bourgeois monogamous heteronormalcy.<sup>63</sup>

Anthropologist Matti Bunzl wrote that in the late nineteenth-century Balkans and Eastern Europe 'the nationality struggle... may have been fought in part through competing models of sexual abjection'.<sup>64</sup> New countries in the region sought to conform to Western standards as a mark of 'civilisation', and attempted to repress any traditional expressions of sexuality or gender identity that may be seen as 'deviant'. Serbia's new aristocratic urban elite, much like their contemporary Russian counterparts, attempted to westernise the country through emulating bourgeois

society, and in doing so applied the understanding of 'sexuality deviancy' to their own culture.

Serbia's first code of law decreed by the revolutionary leader Karadjordje in 1809 did not mention same-sex relationships or make any prohibition of same-sex sexual acts, but in 1860 Miloš Obrenović introduced the country's first law prohibiting same-sex sexual acts, which carried a maximum penalty of fifteen years imprisonment. This wording is reminiscent of contemporary laws in other European nations that spoke about 'sexual deviance' or 'inversion' in the most vague terms: '[Those who] have put themselves or are found in such a position as nobody should gain pleasure misusing their sexual drive'.<sup>65</sup> Despite these reforms, Serbs were still very much regarded as 'other' across the rest of the continent. Alexandre Degrand, French Consul in 1893 described the region in these terms: 'it is not any more the Orient, but it is still not the West either, it is in the process of transformation'.<sup>66</sup> Several factors fed into the perception of Serbia as 'other', one being the Slavic origins of the Serbs. A great deal of animosity was held regarding Slavs across Europe during the period: German and Austro-Hungarian newspapers frequently blamed Slavs alongside Jews and Gypsies for crimes and various social issues (it is also often forgotten that Slavs were one of the groups singled out during Hitler's political regime).<sup>67</sup> Serbia was also still regarded in many ways as 'Turkey in Europe' and portrayals of the Balkan region were distinctly orientalist. The British *Westminster Gazette* newspaper in 1907 published a series on the region that referred to the Balkans as 'Savage Europe' and popular literature like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* played into the stereotypes of the region as being filled with stupid, superstitious peasants and villainous lustful elites.<sup>68</sup>

During the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Belgrade these negative beliefs came to have real-world repercussions, as harsh colonial policy was enforced on the basis of the Serbs' allegedly inferior character. Prostitution was an issue of serious contention between the Austro-Hungarian occupying forces and the local inhabitants of the city. Belgrade had served as a hub for trafficking between Budapest and Istanbul, and with the increased number of women left widowed by the war, as much as five per cent of the population of the city had been estimated to be working in the sex industry.<sup>69</sup> Jovana Knezević explains how the Austro-Hungarians took this situation as proof that Serbs were as morally inferior as had been suspected. The language used by members of the occupying forces to describe Serbs was extreme. One newspaper

wrote, '...a Serbian woman is worth only spitting on'.<sup>70</sup> This contempt also applied to men, and scientists wrote that Serbs were genetically inclined towards acts seen as sexually immoral. Knezević gives the example of one Austro-Hungarian physician who wrote 'by nature... [Serbs are] hot-blooded and generally sexually inclined', and who also stated that Serbs celebrated their military victories with massive orgies.<sup>71</sup>

Sexualised bodies became an issue of 'national honour' and to counter the portrayal of Serbs as an inferior or lustful nation, Serbian elites rigorously policed individuals' sexuality using the Western taxonomy. Prostitutes were accused of succumbing to deviant values brought from the West, and 'modern men' who sought their services were diagnosed as suffering from having 'nervous centres...[that] were somehow defective'.<sup>72</sup> One Serbian physician wrote that the proliferation of prostitution would corrupt the nation and lead to 'bestiality, lesbianism and sodomy'.<sup>73</sup> This use of medical terms by Serbs illustrates how deeply embedded the Western discourse had become in society, and also how sexuality became an issue of Serbian sovereignty.<sup>74</sup> This approach to sexuality also inevitably influenced the decline in the practice of brotherhood unions.

Some of the very last references we have to the practice of *Pobratimstvo* are in the 1940s. Christopher Isherwood in a journal describes being told by a friend that the Balkans is a land where 'marriage between men was presided over by Priests'.<sup>75</sup> In 1948, the Yugoslav sociologist Dinko Tomašić in a book discussing the interplay between social organisation and politics in the Balkans wrote of brotherhood unions: 'Pobratimstvo...may take on homosexual aspects. Homosexuality is to be expected in a society in which the relations between men and women are placed in sharp contrast in which men from their early childhood are almost exclusively in the company of men...each group rather secluded from the other'.<sup>76</sup> Taking into account the prominence of the new Western discourse on sexuality, I believe the disappearance of *Pobratimstvo* is specifically tied to the advent of 'homosexuality'. The word 'homosexuality' first appeared in a translation by C. G. Chaddock of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1892, and its advent represented a major shift in the perception of same-sex relationships. David Halperin argues that 'homosexuality' was unique in comparison to previous aphorisms as it isolated sexual acts from the cultural phenomena in which they existed.<sup>77</sup> The majority of antecedent terms describing same-sex relationships created certain cultural distinctions, that is, the ages of the persons involved, active or passive, and so on.

‘Homosexuality’ obliterated such boundaries and placed all forms of same-sex relationships under a single category, offering a method by which it was possible to discern who is a ‘homosexual’ through ‘positive, ascertainable and objective behavioural phenomena’.<sup>78</sup> *Pobratimstvo* had a number of qualities that had made it an acceptable form of same-sex relationship, particularly the way it emphasised Orthodox spiritual friendship and Serbian warrior culture without questioning an individual’s sexuality. In addition, Näcke describes that certain acts were avoided so as to retain their Christian character and not be too ‘Turkish’.<sup>79</sup> Under the gaze of the new ‘scientia sexualis’, however, all sexual acts or expressions of romantic love between men were symptoms of ‘homosexuality’.

Seeking to distance themselves from ‘uncivilised’ behaviours, Serbs began to view ‘homosexuality’ like prostitution, as a foreign sickness. One Belgrade psychiatrist Vojislav Kujundžić theorised in this spirit that ‘the Turkish conquerors spread that illness [homosexuality] among the people’.<sup>80</sup> *Pobratimstvo* in turn became an unwanted mark of otherness, and vanished from society. Mary Edith Durham wrote:

... I was often assured that the custom was extinct and I never came across a case. But it possibly still lingered in out-of-the-way places. People who wished to appear ‘civilized’ in Montenegro were very apt to deny the existence of customs they thought would be despised. But it was admitted that ‘Pobratimstvo’ had but recently died out. Medakovitch in 1860 mentions it as prevalent.<sup>81</sup>

It should be noted that negative attitudes towards expressions of same-sex sexuality did exist within the Balkans before the rise of Western influence. Dror Ze’vi observes that prior to the rise of Western influence in the Ottoman Empire, there were voices that discouraged same-sex relationships—but that these views only gained prevalence with the importation of the Western sexual taxonomy.<sup>82</sup> In Serbia, the Orthodox Church held beliefs that certain sexual acts between men were sinful but it is important that discussions of same-sex relationships are not simply equated with conversations about sex. Relationships, of course, have a much greater emotional, social and cultural significance than mere carnality. For example, some consider Emperor Justinian’s law that prohibited anal intercourse between males as an Orthodox prohibition of ‘homosexuality’, but such a belief reduces romantic relationships

between men as revolving around engaging in anal sex. In addition this also ignores that anal intercourse was a sex act avoided by Christians who saw it as too ‘Turkish’. Even when we take those critical voices into consideration, it is clear the language used by the contemporary SPC has its origins the taxonomy of the nineteenth-century ‘scientia sexualis’ described by Foucault, rather than the traditions seen in Serbia prior to the country’s independence.

Timothy Ware wrote on the issue of tradition saying that ‘not everything received from the past, is of equal value’.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, one of the chief works of the Church over the past two thousand years has been to consider the authenticity and authority of the traditions handed down to them. The changing attitudes towards *Pobratimstvo* reveal a questionable and rather new tradition in Serbian Orthodoxy, which is wholly intolerant to any form of love or desire between men, and scrutinises individuals under the psychiatric pseudo-science of nineteenth-century Western Europe. This development is not unique to Serbia, but rather part of a broader process of westernisation seen across the Balkan region after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, the history of brotherhood unions draws the value and authority of this supposed ‘tradition of homophobia’ into question.

Even if we choose not to accept Boswell’s thesis that *Pobratimstvo* constituted a form of ‘gay marriage’, it is clear that these relationships were much more than purely platonic or political bonds. Joan Cadden’s review of *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* suggests that the negative reception of the book ‘[underscores] a scholarly tendency to ignore or dismiss the possibility of homoerotic relationships, especially in Christian societies’.<sup>84</sup> The history of brotherhood unions in the Serbian Orthodox Church shows a plurality and tolerance that undermines the use of tradition as a justification for the current atmosphere of violent discrimination. More than that, I would argue that *Pobratimstvo* is a celebration of several fundamental aspects of Serbian culture and Orthodox Christianity. Their preservation from the first millennia into the twentieth century is a testament to the unique Byzantine character of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Their military nature and prevalence in the struggle for independence from Ottoman colonialism exemplifies the warrior culture, which sits at the heart of the current Kosovo oriented nationalism worshiped by ‘First Serbia’.

The clash of ideologies between far-right Serbian nationalists and the European Union have made the issues of sexuality and nationalism

in Serbia as closely intertwined today as they were in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Church's role in this conflict is more important than ever, yet the reactionary nature of its response to the LGBTQ+ rights movement has made reasonable dialogue on same-sex relationships in orthodoxy impossible. This has been further reinforced by the SPC's close relationship with the far-right nationalist movements in Serbia that has given the Church the elevated prominence it enjoys today. We must remember, however, that nationalism is not the primary purpose of the Church—and if Orthodox Christians allow misguided patriotism to obscure history, they risk forfeiting their claim to authority and disfiguring the traditions handed down to us by God through Jesus Christ and his bride, the Church.

## NOTES

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## Sexual Ethics in the Shadow of Modernism: George Tyrrell, André Raffalovich and the Project that Never Was

*Philip Healy*

Faith, hope and love: these are the theological virtues by which the people of God take their bearings on their pilgrim journey towards the Kingdom. The history of the Christian Church tells of how varyingly these virtues are made manifest in the lives of the faithful, both individually and corporately. The episode of Church history discussed in this chapter took place in the last years of the nineteenth and the opening years of the twentieth centuries. The epicentre was England. The *dramatis personae* were a recently baptised French Jew of Russian extraction, Marc-André Raffalovich, and an Irish Jesuit, Fr. George Tyrrell, himself a convert from the Church of Ireland. At the time of their meeting, both were living in London's fashionable Mayfair district, where Tyrrell was stationed at his order's Farm Street church. Here it was that Raffalovich, a Mayfair resident, had been baptised in 1896. The writings of Fr. Tyrrell were to cause major theological shockwaves, which would very shortly reach Rome with devastating personal consequences for him.

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André Raffalovich was born in Paris in 1864, the year after his parents and elder siblings had emigrated from Odessa.<sup>1</sup> His father was a banker, one of a number of Russian Jews whose wealth had derived from the trade in grain and who became international financiers. Many emigrated to the west where life was perhaps easier, not least beyond the reach of the various anti-Jewish pogroms that were a feature of nineteenth-century Russia. The Raffalovich family, however, do not appear to have been the victims of the pogroms; André's father and elder brother Arthur, a well-published economist of the day, were regularly engaged by the Tsarist government in raising foreign loans for it. As with the other émigré Russian Jewish financiers in Paris, the Raffalovich family settled into the life of the French capital's *haute bourgeoisie*. Something of the social and cultural world that they inhabited can be gleaned from the Paris chapters of *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, Edmund de Waal's exquisitely drawn memoir of his forebears, the Ephrussi family; a European banking dynasty that, as with the Raffalovich family, derived its wealth from the trade in grain at Odessa.<sup>2</sup>

Raffalovich's mother was a gifted linguist, and contributed articles to the *Journal de Saint-Petersbourg*. She kept abreast of currents in contemporary scientific, social and political thought, and was a close friend and *confidante* of the scientist Claude Bernard, whom she used to assist by translating scientific papers from German. Ernest Renan and his family were friends, and André and his elder sister Sophie used to play with the Renan children. Mme Raffalovich and Sophie followed closely the travails of the Irish nationalists, and wrote to those held in prison. It was as a result of one such correspondence that Sophie married the Irish nationalist journalist and politician, William O'Brien. In his adolescence, André began to emulate his mother by writing, mostly reviews, for the *Journal de Saint-Petersbourg* and other papers. His essays were usually on contemporary British or American writers, and in his precocity he would send the published article to his subject and commence a correspondence. Robert Louis Stevenson even spent a day with the young André on a visit to Paris. George Meredith and Robert Browning became friends; Algernon Swinburne remained both bemused and amused.

After his schooling in Paris it was decided that André would go up to Oxford for his university education, but the plan was thwarted by ill health. Instead, he settled in London with his former governess and his mother's companion, Miss. Gribbell, as his house-keeper. A young man of independent means, for the next twenty years he moved in the

literary and artistic circles of fashionable London. He wrote poetry, and Meredith and Browning spoke encouragingly of it. Raffalovich was one of a number of late Victorian poets whose verse took as its subject matter the love of young men. They were known as the Uranians.<sup>3</sup> He became very friendly with Oscar Wilde, although a mocking review of one of his volumes of verse contributed to a serious estrangement. In due course, Raffalovich was to write the first published account of Wilde's trials, and he took a severe view of Wilde as a corrupter of youth.<sup>4</sup> As well as Uranian verse, Raffalovich wrote two society novels, and a number of plays. The latter were in the *avant-garde* style that was beginning to make its presence felt on the London stage in the 1890s under the influence of Ibsen. *The Blackmailers*, a five-act play, tackling the social problem of the blackmailing of homosexuals was written with the poet, John Gray.<sup>5</sup>

Gray was to become Raffalovich's lifelong friend. Their family backgrounds could not have been more different. John Gray was the son of a metal turner at the London Arsenal. He had made his way, however, by night school to a clerkship in the post office, and from there to the Foreign Office, where he became a librarian. Probably by a junior Foreign Office diplomat, Gray was introduced to the artists, Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, and encouraged by them in his writing career. He soon met Oscar Wilde, who was captivated by Gray's striking good looks, and they became lovers. As a compliment to Gray's beautiful appearance, Wilde gave his surname to the eponymous protagonist of his novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.<sup>6</sup> There was a falling out between John Gray and Oscar Wilde, however, when Lord Alfred Douglas came on the scene; Gray had something of a breakdown. Shortly after, he was taken under the wing of André Raffalovich, and they remained close companions for the rest of their lives.

Like a number of other nineties poets, John Gray was received into the Roman Catholic Church. Raffalovich's sister, married now to William O'Brien, converted, as did Miss. Gribbell. André Raffalovich followed. What is noteworthy, however, is that he was baptised in the same year as he published his major work on homosexuality, *Uranisme et unisexualité*.<sup>7</sup> Despite Raffalovich's censure of Wilde, his book is not a condemnation of homosexuality from the perspective of his new faith. It is a nuanced study of homosexuality made up of a series of literary and historical case histories, with a few medical case histories from Krafft-Ebing added for good measure. Raffalovich begins the work by

propounding a classification of types of human sexuality. But his principal focus is ethical: he is quite clear that homosexuality and heterosexuality are of equal validity, and that no one should be obliged to suppress his or her individuality, provided that it does not harm others. He is, however, keen to advocate that homosexuals, as all human beings, have duties as well as rights. He makes the case for what he calls 'the superior uranist', and by way of example instances the nineteenth-century German poet, August von Platen. There is nothing coy in Raffalovich's treatment of his subject; he recognises the physicality of homosexuality, but he sets chastity as his ideal for expressing the love between two men. Thus he is able to reconcile his acceptance of homosexuality with his new faith; he even extols the prudence of the Catholic Church in accepting chaste homosexuals into the ranks of its clergy. It was in the mid-nineties that Raffalovich got to know well the artist Aubrey Beardsley and his sister Mabel. As the consumption took hold, which was to lead to Beardsley's early death in 1898, Raffalovich made him a regular allowance. He also guided his friend's path to Rome; Beardsley was received into the Catholic Church a year before he died. In 1904, John Gray edited Beardsley's letters to Raffalovich; this was a riposte to the critic Roger Fry's description of the artist as 'the Fra Angelico of Satanism'.<sup>8</sup>

Both Raffalovich and Gray grew in their new faith commitment to the extent that Gray decided to seek ordination and Raffalovich, whose health never seems to have been robust, spoke of seeking ordination vicariously through Gray. In 1898, John Gray was admitted to the Scots College in Rome; he was ordained priest in December 1901. He went as curate to the working-class parish of St Patrick's in the Cowgate, Edinburgh. A few years later Raffalovich commissioned Sir Robert Lorimer, one of the leading Scottish architects of the day, to build a new church in the well-to-do Morningside district of Edinburgh. St. Peter's is an exquisite building in Italianate style with an equally fine presbytery. John Gray was installed as first rector. Raffalovich moved from London and bought a house a short distance from the church; he attended mass every morning. His Tuesday evening dinners and Sunday lunches were a feature of Edinburgh social life. Raffalovich and Gray kept in touch with contemporary culture, and Raffalovich was host to many writers and artists who were either residents of, or visitors to, Edinburgh. They died, just a few months apart, in 1934.

Let us return now to the treatise, *Uranisme et unisexualité*. After its publication in 1896, Raffalovich continued to study and to write about

homosexuality for a further decade in the *Archives d'anthropologie criminelle*. He gained a reputation for being an authority on the subject, and was certainly treated as such by Havelock Ellis who refers to Raffalovich in his book *Sexual Inversion* (1897)<sup>9</sup> and frequently engages with his views in the footnotes to it. It was one of Raffalovich's more substantial pieces, the '*Annales de l'unisexualité*',<sup>10</sup> which brought Raffalovich into contact with Fr. George Tyrrell in July 1899.<sup>11</sup> Fr. Tyrrell was, at the time, on the staff of writers of the Jesuit periodical, the *Month* (the journal that, notoriously, had rejected Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, a number of years previously).

At the time his correspondence with Raffalovich began, Tyrrell had established a reputation as a highly gifted religious writer and a pastorally sensitive confessor and spiritual director, especially among educated and thoughtful Catholics who were troubled in their faith by the advances of modern science and contemporary thought. Tyrrell was born in Dublin in 1861. He never knew his father who had died before his birth. His mother was often short of money as she raised the family, which included George's sister and brilliant elder brother. Tragically, his brother had seriously damaged his spine in an accident as an infant, and was to die young, his academic career cut short. George was brought up in the Church of Ireland. As a teenager he came under the benign influence of the High Churchman, Fr. Dolling, and accompanied him to London to work for him. This was a time when the established Church was committed to setting up missions to the urban poor, and such was the project Fr. Dolling was engaged on. Tyrrell was eighteen years old. Within months, however, he had been received into the Roman Catholic Church and accepted as a postulant by the Jesuits. Tyrrell's was a mercurial nature. This does not, however, provide an adequate explanation for his subsequent signal development as a theological writer. The Irish element is no doubt important. He was to direct something of the *saeva indignatio* of Dean Swift at the flummeries of the Vatican curia. But of greater significance, I would suggest, was his class background. Tyrrell came from the same Irish Protestant background as his contemporaries, Oscar Wilde, W. B. Yeats and Bram Stoker—not the landowning Protestant ascendancy but the Irish Protestant professional middle class. The intelligent members of this class were particularly alert to the shifting plates of modern life as they sensed their settled ways about to be challenged. And they rose to the challenge.

In his first letter to Raffalovich (24 July 1899),<sup>12</sup> Tyrrell discusses the ‘terminology’ that Raffalovich had used in the ‘Summary table of sexualities’ in *Uranisme et unisexualité*. Raffalovich’s attempt to classify the full range of human sexuality is a sort of armchair tabulation by comparison with the Kinsey Scale; nevertheless, it is much the same exercise.<sup>13</sup> Tyrrell proposes his own simpler tabulation. He also writes that he had come to the same conclusion as Raffalovich about the moral equivalence of heterosexuality and homosexuality in his *Notes on the Catholic Doctrine of Purity*.<sup>14</sup> This little book of just under a hundred pages had been written and privately published for circulation among his fellow Jesuits. In its shorter first part, the book describes the Catholic doctrine of purity, and in the longer second part it analyses in the language of neo-scholasticism, but in dialogue with contemporary psychological studies (e.g., Maudsley, *The Pathology of Mind* (1879; 1895), G. L. Turner, *Wish and Will* (1880)), the fraught area of giving assent to ‘venereal’ thoughts and deeds. It has the mark of the confessional firmly stamped on it. Tyrrell has reflected long and hard on the issues involved.

It is noteworthy that Tyrrell’s subject is ‘purity’, rather than, say, sexual ethics, and that he defines this in positive terms before turning to the degrees of culpability of the various assaults on virtue. The Catholic doctrine of purity rests, he writes as a good scholastic, on reason and revelation, and is adumbrated in Adam’s integrity, the Church as Mystical Body, the Eucharist and the dogma of the Incarnation. Tyrrell is clear that ‘manhood (*sic*) is most properly manifested in the mastery of impulse’.<sup>15</sup> Procreation is chief among impulses because its results are ‘of the greatest moment both to individual and to social life’.<sup>16</sup> Mastery of the instinct to procreate is most necessary, but also most difficult: ‘and this it is that makes chastity the very crown and seal of perfected manhood’.<sup>17</sup> We need not be detained by the various limitations of this view. Tyrrell is writing for his fellow priests what he hopes will be of pastoral use to them in the confessional.

What we need to acknowledge is Tyrrell’s rejection of rigorism in the second part of his book. While he certainly believes that virtue ‘is normally the result of industry’, he is determined to relieve his penitents of scruples in the area of sexual ethics.<sup>18</sup> As he concludes:

A surreptitious mortal sin is a contradiction in terms. It is true that consent is instantaneous, as the crossing over any dividing line is instantaneous. But coming up to the line is a prerequisite. If I walk habitually on the

edge of a precipice, I can fall over it any instant; but if I habitually walk ten miles from the edge it will take me about two hours to commit suicide. All who live habitually in the grace of God are a good way off from the edge, some more and some less, and will need a proportionately long deliberation before they come into a position of proximate danger.<sup>19</sup>

It was in fact the question of mortal sin and hell, and the proportion of humankind likely to be in residence there, that was to get Tyrrell into serious trouble with the ecclesiastical authorities. He had taken two overly zealous Redemptorist moral theologians to task on the subject in an article, 'A perverted doctrine', published in a liberal Catholic journal.<sup>20</sup> It was written in his most trenchantly ironic style. In Rome, however, eyebrows were raised, noses wrinkled, and pious ears offended. This was just the latest of a series of his writings, including *Notes on the Catholic Doctrine of Purity*, that were causing concern. Tyrrell was rusticated, and left Farm Street in the heart of Mayfair for Richmond, North Yorkshire. There are worse fates. There followed a number of years of hard reading and even harder thinking, as he tramped the dales with his dog Jack.

Like Alfred Loisy, his French counterpart in what came to be called the Modernist movement, Tyrrell had been early greatly engaged with John Henry Newman's thinking on the development of Christian doctrine.<sup>21</sup> He had also been excited by Leo XIII's call, in his encyclical letter, *Aeterni Patris* (1879), to re-discover the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. In the case of the latter, however, he met serious opposition from within the Society of Jesus, which had its own interpretation of St. Thomas as mediated by the Jesuit theologian Francisco Suarez (1548–1617). (One is reminded of Hopkins' seeking the thought of the medieval Franciscan Duns Scotus in preference to that of the authorised Jesuit neo-scholasticism.) Tyrrell found this approach overly rationalistic, and ultimately sterile and dead. He called this 'Jesuitism', and saw it as the besetting fault of contemporary Catholicism and the reason why so many thoughtful faithful were turning away from the Church. He even began to find Newman too intellectualist. Tyrrell wanted religion, not theology; he came to focus on faith rather than doctrine. And the faith of the Church was, above all, a mystery. To the rigid, neo-scholastic mind of ultramontane Catholicism, this was revolutionary stuff.

Moreover, just as he found the traditional doctrinal accounts of Catholicism severely wanting, so also Tyrrell found traditional Catholic



accounts of morality at fault. As he wrote to Raffalovich: 'I fear it is the same in the moral as in the dogmatic order; we are painting and decorating while the foundations are rotting away' (12 December 1904).<sup>22</sup> Tyrrell recognised Raffalovich's expertise in the field of sexual ethics, and urged him, either in collaboration with himself or on his own, to publish on 'the unfaced purity problem' (30 July 1901): 'You have a pen & ability & leisure & liberty & money & experience; & might do more for souls by a good work on the "selfmanagement" question than all the confessors of Christendom will do in centuries' (16 June 1903). It was not, of course, that Raffalovich was not writing and publishing on homosexuality, but his audience was a predominantly professional legal and medical one, and Tyrrell wanted him to address a more specifically Catholic moral theological one. Tyrrell put his finger on the cause of Raffalovich's reluctance: Raffalovich was too 'clerical'. On his conversion, and given his social status, Raffalovich had begun to move in clerical circles; he did not want to abandon the recently achieved comfort of his ecclesiastical closet.

Tyrrell and Raffalovich's relationship was, however, robust—Tyrrell could accuse Raffalovich of clericalism without offence, and Raffalovich was able to criticise, for example, Tyrrell's article, 'A Perverted Devotion', and Tyrrell to admit the force of Raffalovich's particular line of attack. They visited each other, and they corresponded until a few months before Tyrrell's death in July 1909. Raffalovich was no fair-weather friend, despite his clericalism, and he stood by Tyrrell throughout his ecclesiastical troubles, particularly his expulsion from the Society of Jesus in 1906 and his excommunication in October 1907. Tyrrell's excommunication was inevitable, given his theological intransigence, after Pius X's decree *Lamentabili* and encyclical letter *Pascendi* of July 1907, which condemned 'modernism' as the 'synthesis of all heresies'.<sup>23</sup> Tyrrell and his fellow Catholic modernists had come up against the ecclesiastical juggernaut of the ultramontane Church. There was to be no meeting of minds, and little attempt at charity, on either side. The battleground was ultimately philosophical. Pope Pius and the ecclesiastical authorities understood 'the Faith' in scholastic terms; the modernists regarded Kant and post-Kantian philosophy to have rendered such an approach meaningless. The Church's claim that the human being was capable of 'knowing' God through the intellect and from Revelation failed to persuade an increasing number of Catholics brought up in a social and cultural world wider than the Church, and under the impress

of Kant, with its distinction of ‘phenomena’ and ‘noumena’. Modernist and scientist (and according to the Church, atheist) met in knowing phenomena only. And on the basis of knowledge of phenomena only was built the sciences, including the theological sciences. Such views were flatly contradictory to the scholastic methodology that had only recently been endorsed by Pius’s predecessor, Leo XIII. But the modernist and scientific world view was also of course a direct challenge to the authority of the hierarchical Church. Catholic modernists, such as Tyrrell, were, however, driven by their own pastoral concern for the faithful, whom they saw intellectually perplexed by the conflict between Church and contemporary culture, and lapsing in significant numbers.

Tyrrell’s personality was not that of someone who would back down easily if he believed that he was doing the right thing. He was also an English prose writer of the first rank; he had learnt much from his reading of Newman, and not just about the development of doctrine; he had learnt how to write. His style of apologetic has a rapier sharpness, and he was ready to deploy irony at the expense of those whose views he was contesting. Constitutionally, he was incapable of suffering fools gladly. When he was notified of his excommunication Tyrrell felt something like relief since he now knew where he stood. For all his ‘clericalism’, Raffalovich rallied to his friend’s side. He tactfully offered financial support, which Tyrrell also tactfully declined. Right from the beginning of their friendship there was a great rapport and openness between the two men. Tyrrell could write: ‘I don’t seem to mind what I say to you, you are so large & sympathetic with the queerest people...’ (c.28 October 1900).<sup>24</sup> Tyrrell even admitted to having experienced predominantly ‘unisexual sympathies’ during his college period. And Raffalovich is able to report that, after thirteen years of settled chastity—what Tyrrell called his ‘truce’—he is no longer at peace (21 June 1909). The friendship and correspondence may not have drawn from Raffalovich the book that Tyrrell was calling for, but it did elicit from Tyrrell himself numerous pregnant *obiter dicta*—a paragraph here, a few sentences there—on the subject of ‘purity’, both in the more specific context of homosexuality and more generally in terms of human sexuality across the board.

Raffalovich’s articles in the *Archives* periodically reminded Tyrrell of what he had regularly dealt with as a priest in the confessional until he left Mayfair in 1900—‘that appalling underworld of moral tragedy ... seething & simmering, a witness to the futility of priests & moralists—*sicut erat in principio*, etc.’ (19 March 1907). These are ‘souls in agony’

(12 July 1908), and yet '[t]he Church is blind & deaf & dumb in this matter' (16 June 1903). For Tyrrell, the traditional Catholic remedies are now found to lack any efficacy: 'Personally I have come to the conclusion that our mistake is in always hoping that by prayer or sacraments or methods of some kind there may be some ease at last from the cross, & in not making up our minds that there is to be no respite'.<sup>25</sup> Tyrrell has moved a long way from his early embrace of Newman's idea of doctrinal development. Only revolution will do now. He acknowledges one of Raffalovich's *Archives* articles in the following terms:

... I am afraid it only deepens my long-growing suspicion that the foundations of our traditional sex-morality are doomed, not through the superior force of the enemies of morality, but through their own inherent unsoundness & implicit immorality. If this scandalises you, remember it is exactly what you maintain when you say, so rightly, that inversion is a normal phenomenon & not the result of diabolical malice. That is against scripture, against the general consensus of the Fathers, of the theological schools etc etc etc; & still it is an ascertained truth of science (22 January 1903).<sup>26</sup>

Religion's role is 'to foster the love of goodness as being God's will'—but ethics is a science, and it is up to humankind 'to find out & determine what is right & wrong'. This is dynamite, and Tyrrell lights the fuse: 'I wish to Heaven all our ethical & moral treatises could be burnt & forgotten & that we were forced to study the whole subject afresh from Nature & from the facts' (24 November 1908). On the scientific status of ethics opinion will differ, but there can be no dissension that the ethical operates in the natural order.

So far we have been concentrating on Tyrrell's critique of traditional Catholic 'sex-morality'. What was his positive formulation of how it should be developed? His friend and biographer, Maude Petre summarises his foundational thought—that religion is neither theology nor morality: 'deeper than theology is faith' and 'deeper than morality is love'.<sup>27</sup> When, in a letter of August 1907, Tyrrell articulates for Raffalovich what this might mean in terms of sexual morality, we can see in the compass of his focus the distance he has travelled since 1897 and the publication of *Notes on the Catholic Doctrine of Purity*. But at another level, he does not seem to have moved at all. He still sets the bar at the highest level:

One thing I feel more & more—that the power of sexual self-restraint is the root of all morality; that it is obligatory of all—married or unmarried, uni-, bi-, or hetero-sexual; that no married sex act is moral from which a man could not have refrained. This is a hard saying. But its denial lands us in inextricable difficulties. I am prepared to discuss even free-love as an ethical question provided it is not understood to mean a loss of power. For most, it simply means an abandonment of self-control; complete non-morality. The notion that marriage is easier than celibacy; that it is a moral relaxation; that every man has a right to satisfy desire; that to refrain is a sacrifice of right—all that is bad doctrine. Augustine was nearer the truth, for all his false dualism, than our corrupt moral theologians. Morality is a crucifixion. The question is whether man is equal to the cross (15 August 1907).<sup>28</sup>

A hard saying indeed. What is missing from Tyrrell's account is any recognition of the erotic. Would its incorporation have led him to a different, perhaps less strenuous, formulation?

Tyrrell's life was cut short by Bright's disease at the age of forty-eight years. He died on 15 July 1909 in Storrington, Sussex. As an excommunicate, he was denied a Catholic burial by his local bishop. Tyrrell's friend, the French Jesuit, Père Brémond, however, led prayers over the grave as he was interred in the Anglican churchyard. For that, he too was to incur the bishop's displeasure. What had Tyrrell achieved? His writings retain their freshness of style and sharpness of address. Throughout, a *mens catholica* shines through, even in his most modernist phase. He understood, however, that the Catholic Faith had to speak a new language if it was to engage the attention of new generations who had passed beyond the old scholasticism. Having seen the problem, he attempted to tackle it. Because for Tyrrell the Faith was not simply a matter of the intellect, but indeed the Way, the Truth and the Life, human behaviour was an integral part of it too. Yet in the field of morality, he detected the same sclerotic hand of scholasticism, particularly in the privatised world of sexual ethics. In his judgement, his friend André Raffalovich was intellectually best placed to take on the issue of sexual ethics in the modernist project. Raffalovich had read deeply in the subject and given long years of thought to it. But he was not to be drawn outside his professional remit for legal and medical readers to enter the contemporary theological fray. He did not want to jeopardise his hard-won new religious affiliation; perhaps he was anxious that any public involvement on his part might have deleterious consequences for John

Gray, since Pius X had set in motion a McCarthyite witch-hunt for modernist priests, with a vigilance committee in every diocese. And Tyrrell was right, too, that Raffalovich enjoyed the ‘clerical’ culture of his new religion.

His friendship with Raffalovich, however, drew from Tyrrell in his correspondence many insightful observations and thoughts about sexual morality. On the broader theological front, the Church delayed a further half-century before addressing many of the issues raised by the modernists. Pope John XXIII’s opening remarks to the Second Vatican Council—‘For the substance of the ancient deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another’—seemed to acknowledge that the categories of scholastic theology were not the last word in expressing the Catholic Faith.<sup>29</sup> It still remains to be seen whether the Church is willing to think through its sexual ethic in a way that can be understood and embraced in a post-scholastic culture. As Tyrrell’s French Jesuit friend, Père Bremond prayed at his graveside in Storrington, some miles away to the east of the county, in Hastings, another French Jesuit, the young Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, was studying in his province’s theologate, which had been expatriated to England as a result of the *laïcité* laws of his own country. His reading was beginning to take him on a course of study, not only involving theology and doctrinal development but also evolutionary theory and palaeontology, which would lead him in time to elaborate a wider salvific vision of the cosmic Christ. Perhaps there is hope after all.

## NOTES

1. For accounts of Raffalovich’s life see Brocard Sewell (ed.), *Two Friends: John Gray and André Raffalovich* (Aylesford: St Albert’s Press, 1963), Brocard Sewell, *Footnote to the Nineties: A Memoir of John Gray and André Raffalovich* (London: Cecil and Amelia Woolf, 1968), and Philip Healy, ‘A biographical note’, in Nancy Erber and William A. Peniston (trans.) and Philip Healy and Frederick S. Roden (eds), *Marc-André Raffalovich’s Uranism and Unisexuality* (London: Palgrave, 2016).
2. Edmund de Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2010).
3. The term was derived from the Greek sky god Uranus who, according to one of two genealogies for Aphrodite, goddess of love, given by Pausanias in Plato’s *Symposium*, procreated her without any female involvement. This is heavenly love or the love for young men. It is

- opposed to the other creation story of Aphrodite as a result of the union of Zeus and Dione, which gave birth to common (heterosexual) love.
4. *L'affaire Oscar Wilde* (Paris: G. Masson, 1895). Raffalovich incorporated the pamphlet in *Uranisme et unisexualité* the following year.
  5. For accounts of Gray's life see Brocard Sewell, *In the Dorian Mode* (Padstow: Tabb House, 1983), Jerusha Hull McCormack, *John Gray: Poet, Dandy, and Priest* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1991) and Jerusha Hull McCormack, *The Man who was Dorian Gray* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000).
  6. Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 290.
  7. Marc-André Raffalovich, *Uranisme et unisexualité: Etude sur différentes manifestations de l'instinct sexuel* (Lyon: privately printed, 1896). For an edited English translation, see Nancy Erber and William A. Peniston (trans) and Philip Healy and Frederick S. Roden (eds), *Marc-André Raffalovich's Uranism and Unisexuality* (London: Palgrave, 2016).
  8. John Gray (ed.), *Last Letters of Aubrey Beardsley* (London: Longmans, Green, 1904).
  9. Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion: A Critical Edition*, Ivan Crozier (ed.) (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008).
  10. It was published in *Archives d'anthropologie criminelle* 7 (1897).
  11. For accounts of Tyrrell's life and work, see George Tyrrell and Maude Petre, *Autobiography and Life of George Tyrrell*, 2 vols (London: Edward Arnold, 1912) and Nicholas Sagovsky, 'On God's Side': *A Life of George Tyrrell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
  12. Raffalovich had the majority of his autograph letters from Tyrrell bound in a volume that is now held at Blackfriars, Oxford. These letters relate to the topic of sexual morality. See Thomas Michael Loom, 'Tyrrell's letters to André Raffalovich', *Month* (February–March, 1970), pp. 95–101 and 138–149 for extracts from, and discussion of, the letters.
  13. The Kinsey Scale or the Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale was first published in Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1948).
  14. George Tyrrell, S. J., *Notes on the Catholic Doctrine of Purity* (Roehampton: Manresa Press, 1897), p. 80.
  15. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
  16. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
  17. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
  18. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
  19. *Ibid.*, pp. 72–73.
  20. *Weekly Register* 100 (16 December 1899), pp. 797–800.
  21. The literature on the Catholic Modernist Movement is extensive, particularly in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. See Alec Vidler, *A*

*Variety of Catholic Modernists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) for an overview, and Thomas Michael Loome, *Liberal Catholicism, Reform Catholicism, Modernism: A Contribution to a New Orientation in Modernist Research* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1979) for a fuller treatment, including bibliographies.

22. See note 12 above.
23. See *The Programme of Modernism: A Reply to the Encyclical of Pius X, 'Pascendi Dominici Gregis'*, trans. George Tyrrell (London: Unwin, 1908), which contains the text of the encyclical. The description of modernism as 'the synthesis of all heresies' is on p. 214.
24. See note 12 above.
25. This quotation comes from a letter by Tyrrell to one of these 'souls in agony', the actor, Charles Thursby, who was much troubled in conscience by his homosexuality. Thursby was a friend of Raffalovich; he had played the role of Hyacinth Halford Dangar in Gray and Raffalovich's 1894 drama, *The Blackmailers*. The letter is simply dated 'Sunday', and is probably from 1908.
26. See note 12 above.
27. Tyrrell and Petre, *Autobiography and Life of George Tyrrell*, vol. 2, p. 177.
28. See note 12 above. Emphases in original.
29. Delivered on 11 October 1962.

## ‘Pope Norman’, Griffin’s Report and Roman Catholic Reactions to Homosexual Law Reform in England and Wales, 1954–1971

*Alana Harris*

In 1964 the Conservative MP, barrister and Catholic polemicist Norman St. John-Stevas published *Law and Morals*—an exploration of the nexus between religion and law, Church-State relations and religious liberty within a British and American context. Comprised of chapters spanning capital punishment, euthanasia, artificial insemination and sterilisation, St. John-Stevas’ book also undertook an in-depth exploration of birth control and homosexuality. While yet to reject unequivocally papal teaching on birth control—these forthright condemnations were elicited

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following the promulgation of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in 1968, which reiterated the Vatican's prohibition on 'artificial' contraception—even here he concluded<sup>1</sup>: 'Catholics would be well advised if they treated the morality of birth control as one within the sphere of moral theology, based on the acceptance of the teaching mission of the Church, rather than of natural ethics'.<sup>2</sup> In another chapter on homosexuality within this same volume, St. John-Stevas cited extensively from Derrick Sherwin Bailey's influential biblical exegesis of the Old Testament and the writings of the Church of England Moral Welfare Council, while also considering the findings of Dr. Kinsey and contemporary psychology.<sup>3</sup> The weight of St. John-Stevas' argument for his Catholic readers was, however, directed to what he clearly considered the *definitive* 'guidance on this problem'.<sup>4</sup> Addressing the question of whether 'Catholic moral thought require[d] the maintenance of a legal ban on all forms of homosexual behavior or would it favour the sort of change proposed by the Wolfenden Committee?', St. John-Stevas outlined the findings of a now little-known committee appointed by the Archbishop of Westminster that endorsed the distinction between sin and crime in adjudicating the matter.<sup>5</sup>

Writing here for an educated English Catholic audience, which was increasingly moving into the middle class and the professions following Butler's *Education Act* (1944), St. John-Stevas was an exemplar and spokesman for a growing and increasingly powerful constituency within post-war English Catholicism seeking to reconcile their faith with modernity and move this religious minority into the mainstream by sloughing off its reactionary, 'recusant' and anti-intellectual reputation.<sup>6</sup> In both these remarkable and erudite expositions on non-reproductive sexuality, this urbane dandy, Oxbridge-educated and widely respected ethicist, and prominent Catholic layman sought to reconfigure traditional Catholic teaching with modern medicine and redraw the intersections between law and morality. In doing so, as early as 1958, St. John-Stevas was interrogating how Augustinian and Thomistic understandings of 'natural law' could retain a place in the ethical decision-making of modern English Catholics while moving, with increasing vehemence after 1968, towards a profound reconfiguration of what this 'common good' meant.

This separation of law and morality, and the prioritisation of conscience over prior consensus would become more manifest, and indeed highly controversial moving into the 1960s. St. John-Stevas' co-sponsorship of Leo Abse's *Sexual Offences Act* in 1967<sup>7</sup> and, the following year, his very public rejection of *Humanae Vitae* on the *Panorama* programme,<sup>8</sup>

within his print journalism (for *The Economist* as well as the *Catholic Herald*) and through best-selling books such *The Agonising Choice* (1971),<sup>9</sup> catapulted the newly elected MP for Chelmsford into the public eye. Both of these high-profile interventions, seemingly surprising from an avowedly Christian politician and practicing Catholic critiquing Vatican precepts, turned on a re-examination of non-reproductive sexuality which on the continent would be characterised as a 'personalist' theological approach. Inspired by the *nouvelle théologie* which takes lived experience and intersubjectivity as its starting point, personalism was an increasingly prominent moral philosophy rooted in notions of love, personal growth and relational fulfilment.<sup>10</sup>

A practical example of St. John-Stevas' application of this theological orientation was his speech to the House of Commons on the second reading of the *Sexual Offences Bill* on 11 February 1966:

Celibacy is a high ideal; I certainly subscribe to that. But the fact is that few are capable of it. It requires a degree of religious commitment which is quite rare. We know that a sizeable proportion of the population, through no fault of their own, are attracted sexually only to members of their own sex. This is not a question of diabolical lust. It is a question of misplaced affections and misplaced sexual drives. Some are capable of a degree of self-control, some are capable of a degree of self-sacrifice and sublimation, but most people in this situation are not. This is a fact which we have to face, and in this situation the law must be practical. It is not the function of the law to enforce every virtue or to forbid every vice. Our rulers and law-givers are not spiritual directors. They are the guardians of the common good. They are the keepers of the peace. The great criticism of the present law is that its extremity drives the whole issue underground and by its blanket condemnation of every form of homosexuality creates precisely those underworld conditions [deplored].<sup>11</sup>

In this impassioned, highly personal and pragmatic intervention, it seems probable that St. John-Stevas spoke from a well-informed perspective and, most likely, personal experience of the 'incidences of human suffering' caused through this law.<sup>12</sup> His stance two years later on the Pope's ban on the use of 'the pill', and his reflections on the sufferings of heterosexual couples embracing marital sexuality and seeking to avoid unfettered childbearing also drew the ire of Catholic traditionalists, who maligned him as 'Pope Norman'.<sup>13</sup> This chapter therefore seeks to illuminate the unappreciated but pivotal part played by this flamboyant, liberal,

though far from radical Catholic in shaping discourses on morality and sexual ethics within parliamentary and confessional circles in the 1950s and 1960s. While previous discussions of ‘permissiveness’ have tended to focus on the Hart-Devlin debate (i.e., the famous jurisprudential disagreement between two legal academics about the relationship between law and morality), attention to the theology, politics and jurisprudence of Norman St. John-Stevás illuminates the ways in which another opinion-leading progressive and controversial intellectual was engaging with the moral dilemmas of the day and reaching philosophically innovative as well as pragmatic conclusions.<sup>14</sup>

This chapter explores Roman Catholic reactions to homosexual law reform from the time of the Wolfenden Report through to the passing of the *Sexual Offences Act* (1967). Following St. John-Stevás’ lead in *Law and Morals*, it will commence by examining the nature of and reactions to the largely forgotten (perhaps even quietly buried) Catholic Commission to the Wolfenden Inquiry—a learned and progressive report by Catholic clerics and medical experts that endorsed the position of the reformers in advocating the separation of sin from criminality. While mentioned very briefly within Matthew Grimley’s exploration of the Church of England’s contribution to the Wolfenden Report,<sup>15</sup> bundled into partisan commentary on the role of religious bodies in Higgins’ trenchant study,<sup>16</sup> and reproduced in a short extract in Lewis’ recent monograph,<sup>17</sup> the composition, operation and recommendations of this Catholic committee have not been subject to any sustained scholarly analysis. This historiographical absence is quite extraordinary given that the Catholic committee was the only other religious body, alongside the Anglican Moral Welfare Council, to submit evidence and, in the opinion of its chairman, ‘the Catholic Memorandum was by far the clearest statement that had yet been submitted on the subject’.<sup>18</sup>

Contemporaries clearly knew about and discussed the report, and in a radio broadcast on 22 September 1957, Sir John Wolfenden ‘paid a special tribute to the contribution which the Catholic authorities had made to the problem of homosexuality’ and the assistance provided by its submission in his committee’s deliberations.<sup>19</sup> This neglect must therefore be explained by a general historical amnesia surrounding the intersections of religion with modern British politics and the evolution of discourses of sexuality<sup>20</sup> such that, as Grimley ruefully puts it, ‘to argue that institutions (especially religious ones) could themselves have been agents of permissiveness has been too counter-cultural for some tastes’.<sup>21</sup> Moreover,

following a clear retrenchment from its findings under Cardinal Godfrey (who assumed the see of Westminster in December 1956), it is also clear that within internal church circles there was a concerted attempt to mute and mitigate the legacy of the report, whilst not disavowing it completely. In reconstructing, where possible, the operations of this committee, we are able to view a moment in which the Roman Catholic Church made a palpable and positive contribution to the post-war reconstruction agenda. Moreover, this civic engagement also illuminates the growing capacity and confidence of the Catholic laity to formulate new theological positions and interrogate traditional teachings, which ultimately culminated in the dissonance and discontent of the 1960s surrounding church authority and sexual ethics.<sup>22</sup> As a forerunner of, and later spokesman for this loyal dissent during the years of the Second Vatican Council and its aftermath, Norman St-John Stevas' perspective on homosexuality offers another lens through which to situate broader liberal Catholic thinking on love and sex. Moving beyond the Hart-Devlin debate, which, for many, epitomises the debates around secularisation and permissiveness leading into the 1960s, St. John-Stevas' renderings of the relationship between religion and law in a liberal, plural society offer an alternative vision of the place of religion in politics in the 'long 1950s'.

### THE CATHOLIC MEMORANDUM ON HOMOSEXUALITY: A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS?

In view of the English Catholic hierarchy's recent opposition to the terms of the *Equality Act* in 2007, and continuing resistance to gay marriage,<sup>23</sup> it might seem counterintuitive that in the public enquiry leading up to the Wolfenden Report in 1957, an official submission from the Catholic Church supported liberalisation and compassion—through the use of sexology and psychological medicine—to address 'the problem of homosexual offences in relation to the law'.<sup>24</sup> So how did this Catholic Commission come to be convened, who served on it, and why has it been obliterated from the historical (and ecclesiastical) record?

Contained within a detailed briefing note on the Commission to the Bishops' Conference in 1958, the recently elevated Archbishop of Westminster, William Godfrey, sought to outline to other members of the episcopate the circumstances surrounding Catholic involvement in the Wolfenden Report.<sup>25</sup> It is clear that such an explanatory document

was elicited as a defence against press interest in Catholic endorsement of decriminalisation,<sup>26</sup> as well as determined by clear differences in personal temperament, theological stance and leadership approaches between the present incumbent and his predecessor.<sup>27</sup> As this *ex post facto* memo related, there was an initial request from the Home Secretary, David Maxwell Fyfe, seeking to appoint a Catholic onto the Departmental Committee of Inquiry into Prostitution and Homosexual Offences, which resulted in the Marquess of Lothian's membership and, by coincidence, the enlistment of Mr. William Wells MP, a Queen's Counsel, who also happened to be a Catholic.<sup>28</sup> A personal visit to Cardinal Griffin after the committee had convened was then arranged to request evidence from a specifically Catholic perspective and, in response, the Archbishop invited the Chaplain of the University of London, Monsignor George Tomlinson, to form a small committee in December 1954.<sup>29</sup> This resulted in the formation of an advisory body comprised of mostly middle class, professional laymen and women to explore a contentious and complex medico-moral issue.

This was a largely unprecedented initiative in the pre-conciliar English Catholic Church, though broadly in line with Cardinal Griffin's civic commitments manifested in wartime,<sup>30</sup> and initiatives such as the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council, which offered (within bounds) policy advice on marital relationships, sex education and family planning.<sup>31</sup> Convened from January 1955, the advisory body met fortnightly over six months<sup>32</sup> and was comprised of Father John McDonald (Professor of Moral Theology at St. Edmund's College), Father John Preedy (a parish priest of Englefield Green), Miss Bernice McFie (a pioneering psychiatric social worker working in London County Council hospitals), Miss C. M. Jenner (a probation officer), Dr. Eric Strauss (President of the British Psychological Association, and one of Britain's leading neurologists)<sup>33</sup> and Mr. Richard Elwes QC (a Recorder in Nottingham, and a Wolfenden witness in a personal capacity, who denounced police malpractice in the investigation and prosecution of homosexual offences in Derbyshire).<sup>34</sup>

Despite assiduous efforts to trace the workings of the so-called Griffin Committee—chiefly the position papers it prepared (after a reported but lost initial summary of Catholic moral teaching and papal statements prepared by Fr. John McDonald)<sup>35</sup>—all investigations have been in vain. The historical record will not, therefore, allow a detailed interrogation of the nature of its deliberations and the submission drafting process.

Records are, extraordinarily, missing from Cardinal Griffin's files at the Westminster Diocesan Archive and Monsignor Tomlinson's papers were not kept by the University of London chaplaincy. It is also highly curious, as Brian Lewis notes, that material surrounding the Catholic submission is not present within the Wolfenden files at the National Archives.<sup>36</sup> Fortunately, however, at the suggestion of the Home Office, which was 'enthusiastic about this evidence',<sup>37</sup> the Committee's submission was printed in its entirety in the 1956 Summer edition of *The Dublin Review*<sup>38</sup>—an intellectual Catholic quarterly, published in London and under the editorship of the eminent historian and member of the wartime Moot, Christopher Dawson.<sup>39</sup> Contained within a special issue entitled 'Crime and Punishment' and accompanied by an editorial considering possible analogies between the sacrament of penance and criminal punishment,<sup>40</sup> the report was preceded by an article on 'Obscenity, literature and the law' by Norman St. John-Stevas.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, it is quite possible that St-John Stevas edited this special issue in its entirety and, as is clear from his chapter in *Law and Morals*, he was intimately familiar with this Catholic Committee and the terms of its submission.

So what was the 'Catholic position' that this submission put forward? Section one of the position paper opened with a brief survey of the 'Catholic teaching on homosexual offences' and considered, in pithy terms, the relationship between original sin, the subconscious, and habituation into virtue.<sup>42</sup> It concluded that 'notwithstanding these strong tendencies ... [and] whilst every sympathy must be shown towards homosexual persons, such persons must not be led to believe that they are doing no wrong when they commit homosexual acts'.<sup>43</sup> After this quite cursory survey of the Tradition (which was markedly non-biblical in its framing), the report concisely stated: 'crime as such is a social concept not a moral one and therefore is a problem to be tackled by the State with the assistance of its specialists in jurisprudence and psychiatry. Sin as such is not the concern of the State but affects the relationship between the soul and God'.<sup>44</sup> So here, curiously and emphatically, we have a Catholic restatement (and endorsement) of the distinction between crime and sin, public and private, famously articulated by the Wolfenden Report. As Matthew Grimley has astutely observed of the Anglican report, but in terms equally applicable to Griffin's Committee, 'on the question of homosexuality, the Church was a pioneering body in advocating reform, and was well in advance of public opinion on this question, something which caused it problems'.<sup>45</sup>

Reflecting the world-class psychological expertise gathered under Tomlinson's chairmanship, the report in section two included an illuminating summary of various views existing on 'sex inversion' and distinguished those from the Freudian and Adlerian schools of psychology in their taxonomies of 'homosexuality'. In a focused and forthright conclusion the submission, characterised by its concision, curtly recommended 'the existing law does not effectively distinguish between sin, which is a matter of private morals, and crime, which is an offence against the State, having anti-social consequences'.<sup>46</sup> Echoing the Church of England Moral Welfare Council in *its* reasoning that 'it is not the function of the state and the law to constitute themselves the guardians of private morality, and that to deal with sin as such belongs to the province of the Church', the Catholic report was otherwise markedly different in style, tone and content from the Anglican one.<sup>47</sup> The Church of England's report, with its extended explanation of the 'causes' of homosexuality, its differentiation between condition and conduct, and its consideration of 'ruthless lesbian[s]' and the 'paederast' adopted a more discursive methodology and veered into partisan but fashionable sociological analysis of family breakdown and abnormal maternal attachment in its conclusion that "society gets the homosexuals its deserves".<sup>48</sup>

Cardinal Bernard Griffin died on 19 August 1956, having sanctioned the Committee's submission but unable, thereafter, to endorse explicitly its findings nor explain its conclusions with the release of the Wolfenden Report itself in September 1957. His successor was of a markedly more conservative and cautious temperament, and it is only through his episcopal papers—which are focused on the 'public relations' issues generated—that what little is known of the Commission survives. Nevertheless, following the publication of the submission in the *Dublin Review*, and a brief commentary in *Theological Studies*, there were concentrated and conflicted comments in the intellectual Catholic weekly *The Tablet*.<sup>49</sup> This was generated by Leo Gradwell's analysis in December 1956, which praised the report's 'firm foundations and ...[remarkable] clarity of expression' but feared that in advocating repeal it might 'be regarded as a homosexual's charter'.<sup>50</sup> This generated a lively 'letters to the editor' correspondence, initially from a London-based, anonymous Temple 'Barrister' who demurred that in this 'largely pagan [age]' 'if the Law is not to attempt a restraining hand' on 'private sin between males', 'who is?'<sup>51</sup> An immediate rejoinder followed from Committee member Richard Elwes, who contested Gradwell's characterisation of the criminal

offence as a 'dead letter' and the 'homosexual blackmailer' as 'a quarter myth'.<sup>52</sup> He moreover dismissed 'A Barrister' for overlooking the distinction between sin and crime applicable in 'every Catholic country' and for choosing *The Tablet* as 'a medium in which to disturb foundations in Christian penology'.<sup>53</sup> Finally, the correspondence from Elisabeth Abbott of Thaxted concentrated on the Report's recommendations on prostitution but praised its 'deep and careful consideration of the problems involved' and concluded 'We should all be grateful for this Report: brief, wise and just'.<sup>54</sup>

A more sustained and critical correspondence, however, was elicited by the publication of the Wolfenden Report itself on 4 September 1957, drawn by the media coverage that foregrounded the supportive contribution of the churches, and thereby stimulated commentary from both laity and clergy. This was most pronounced in *The Tablet*, initiated by a lengthy and lucid contribution by Dr. Letitia Fairfield—the longstanding (though retired) Chief Medical Officer of the London County Council, a trained lawyer and lifelong public speaker on contraception, venereal disease and prostitution. Entitled 'The reservations of Mr Adair', Fairfield drew attention to the dissenting report of the distinguished Scottish lawyer who served on the Wolfenden Inquiry to conclude:

One would much prefer to support the Committee's recommendations (who would not rejoice in relieving the distress of men caught in such a wretched dilemma?) but [the reformers have not] ... answered Mr Adair's arguments adequately. It is not, as they suggest, that one fears that the removal of sanctions would "open the flood gates" but that it would allow scandalously corrupting situations to arise, which there would be no means of controlling ... far too many of our fellow citizens cheerfully assume that if a thing isn't expressly forbidden it can't be very wrong.<sup>55</sup>

This criticism, perhaps surprising from a prominent Catholic commentator often considered a progressive, drew a sharp response from Richard Elwes. His eloquent but acerbic intervention accused Dr. Fairfield of 'callousness' in view of the disproportionate effect of the law on suicide rates and public shame, while detailing its 'grossly inequitable' and 'ineffectual' operation.<sup>56</sup> He bluntly concluded: 'Dr Fairfield's article shows how even a superior and sensitive intelligence can accept what would not be tolerable if we were not accustomed to it' and stressed 'the formidable body of opinion, theological, medical, sociological and legal,



which has found expression in this recommendation' including through 'Cardinal Griffin's committee', which should be 'respected as representative of the Catholic body in this country'.<sup>57</sup> Fairfield's rejoinder was similarly spirited, and opened with a reflection on the Catholic Committee, which she acknowledged as an 'authoritative' theological exploration, while maintaining:

Anything further in their report was of course only an expression of the personal opinions of the members. How could it be anything else? The problems of the secular control of homosexuality or prostitution have never even been discussed by Catholics as a body; the attitude of the Church has varied enormously in different countries and different ages, and it is extremely improbable that British Catholics would agree about the legislation [being] desirable. The matter can therefore surely be discussed without imputation of *lese majesty* or disloyalty.<sup>58</sup>

The correspondence between the two rumbled on,<sup>59</sup> and another London-based correspondent Peter Hay joined the fray to contend 'Injustice is surely more loathsome than the vague possibility of scandal'.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, *The Tablet* in its December editorial agreed with Dr. Fairfield on 'the [undesirable] social effects' of decriminalisation leading to 'an immediate campaign to get rid of the social disapprobation as well'.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile in the more accessible, widely circulating *Catholic Herald*, an editorial entitled 'Sins and their consequences' considered the Anglican Church Assembly debate on the Wolfenden Report and offered extended comment on (and some endorsement of) the Archbishop of Canterbury's suggestion to weigh the heterosexual offences of fornication and adultery alongside considerations of homosexuality.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, its leader maintained that the Catholic moral theological position, with its adjudication of the 'natural' and 'unnatural', would still differentiate heterosexual sin from homosexual acts and lead the moralist to adjudicate some breaches of the moral code as 'more' or 'less' grievous.<sup>63</sup>

Behind the scenes, Cardinal Godfrey sought to have conversations with Monsignor Tomlinson and other members of the Committee, with Monsignor Tomlinson asking the permission of his archbishop to communicate to the other Committee members that 'a relaxation of the law as it stands at present would not be expedient, and that Your Grace will urge members of the Hierarchy who may wish to make public comment upon the findings of the Wolfenden Report to avoid casting discredit upon the representations of the committee approved by the late Cardinal Griffin'.<sup>64</sup> A letter from Richard Elwes to the archbishop was

less placatory, reasserting an understanding that '[we] were accepted as putting forward the representative Catholic point of view ... And as the legal member of the Cardinal's Committee I begin to feel a little short of clerical support!'<sup>65</sup> A similarly robust defence of the Committee's conclusions was advanced by Father John McDonald, Professor of Moral Theology at St. Edmund's College Ware, assuring the archbishop that the Catholic submission 'was not prepared in a hurry', and offering a detailed commentary on the Wolfenden Report, which he described, under the heading 'General impressions', as 'on the whole a sane and balanced Report taking into account the difficulty of the matter dealt with' and which 'I feel has had an unfair treatment in the Press'.<sup>66</sup> Elwes would emerge as the most forthright and staunch defender of the legitimacy of this Catholic perspective against clerical critique and press criticism, sparring in the popularist, working-class Catholic weekly, *The Universe* with the East London Franciscan priest Alphonsius Bonner.<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile on 4 December 1957, the Catholic peer and former Oxford don Viscount Pakenham initiated the first debate on the Wolfenden Report, approaching it from a Christian standpoint in its distinction between crime and sin and advocating (along with eight others who supported reform) that the House should take advantage of this opportunity 'to do the civilised thing'.<sup>68</sup>

These conflicting assessments and public controversies, in which Catholic parliamentarians were involved, forced Cardinal Godfrey to act. On 2 December (two days before the Parliamentary debate), he tried to pre-empt discussion and to clarify the 'principles which should be borne in mind when consideration is given to the proposals'.<sup>69</sup> His statement began with an explanation of its need '[i]n view of the enquiries which reached Archbishop's house following the publication of the Report of the Home Office Departmental Committee', and proceeded in cautious and legalistic terms to outline the (unchanged) 'Catholic moral teaching'. In this press statement, the Archbishop of Westminster tacitly retreated from the Catholic Committee's recommendations, observing that 'there are certain private acts which have public consequences in so far as they affect the common good'. He concluded by unequivocally restating the moral law that 'homosexual acts are grievously sinful'. While making it patently clear where *he* thought the balance of probabilities lay, Godfrey said that on the question of 'fact' regarding the consequences of legislative change, Catholics were free to make up their own minds about whether law reform would cause 'worse evils for the common good' and/or seemingly condone homosexual acts.<sup>70</sup>

This pastoral statement quelled but did not definitively settle the matter—there was another bout of correspondence to the editors of *The Tablet* in July 1958 surrounding a conference organised (but cancelled at the last minute, due to predicted poor attendance and unlikely legislative change) at Spode House by the Dominican Cornelius Ernst.<sup>71</sup> This gathering would have brought together Catholic members of the Wolfenden Committee, and representatives of the Griffin Committee (including Monsignor Tomlinson), to discuss ‘the problem of homosexuality in the context of Catholic theology’ though the lens of ‘moral assimilation’ to new knowledge and developments.<sup>72</sup> Cardinal Godfrey also continued to receive correspondence about the ‘horrible, cracklers, lunatic’ recommendations of ‘Catholic educated men of committees’,<sup>73</sup> with other correspondents condemning the Catholic Church’s capitulation to the moral relativism of the ‘Archbishop of Canterbury and Dr Soper’ as well as ‘the Bow Group ... leaning over backwards to show that it is modern-minded and tolerant’.<sup>74</sup> The author of this last homophobic diatribe was Brigadier R. F. Johnson, who annexed to his letter a speech he had delivered to the Bow Group in late 1958 that acerbically asked: ‘If Wolfenden is to be a plank in the Tory platform, shall we re-name the Primrose League the Pansy League?’<sup>75</sup> So how did the Bow Group—the oldest Tory think tank founded in 1951, which in its infancy jauntily cut against the mainstream opinion of Conservative Party grandees—come to form a subject of correspondence to the Archbishop of Westminster?<sup>76</sup> While merely conjecture, a strong explanation lies in the fact that there were several young, prominent Catholics involved in the establishment of this influential discussion group—chiefly two rising stars, William Rees-Mogg (later editor of *The Times*) and, prior to his forays into substantive publication on this issue, academic lecturer (King’s College London; Oxford and Yale) and legal adviser to Sir Alan Herbert’s Committee on book censorship (1954–1959), Norman St. John-Stevás.

#### ‘POPE NORMAN’, PERMISSIVENESS AND THE HART-DEVLIN DEBATE

In January 1959 *Crossbow*, the Bow Group’s quarterly publication aimed at young Tories eager for an intellectual alternative to socialist ideology and social-scientific policy, took the theme ‘Politics, morals and society’

and collected together a series of articles under the editorial 'A new conscience' or how 'Puritanism is more out of favour today than it has been since the Restoration'.<sup>77</sup> Amongst articles on prostitution, obscene publications and social services, thirty-year-old St. John-Stevas wrote a commentary entitled 'Wolfenden reconsidered'.<sup>78</sup> Acknowledging the political acumen of the Home Secretary in not moving beyond what 'the ordinary voter' was prepared, at the moment, to accept, St. John-Stevas diagnosed the immediate task of articulate, liberal-minded reformers as 'work(ing) to educate public opinion on the subject of homosexuality and so provide a basis for a more Socratic approach than is normally associated with public discussion of moral issues'.<sup>79</sup> Here, in 'narrowing the gap between educated and general opinion', he identified the church as playing an important part and advocated the pressing need for an 'informed Christian conscience ... [on] the problem of homosexuality'. Outlining to an elite and educated Tory readership the revisionist arguments of Sherwin Bailey about the Sodom story and the 'defective' nature of St. Thomas Aquinas' philosophical condemnations in view of modern scientific findings about homosexuality, St. John-Stevas concluded that 'Christians can thus no longer regard the homosexual state as the result of indulged perversion, but as a disposition which has its own special, although at present obscure part, in the Divine plan'.<sup>80</sup>

After consideration of the findings of both the Church of England and Roman Catholic submissions to Wolfenden, he pronounced that 'Christian morality arises from sources other than positive law and is independent of it. To make the State the source of moral obligation is to subscribe to a dangerous form of totalitarianism'.<sup>81</sup> Written around the time St. John-Stevas completed his doctoral thesis on law and morals at the University of London and met his lifelong companion (the banker Adrian Stanford, whom he tutored in law at Oxford), but well before his election to Parliament, the *Crossbow* article was forthright in its plea for greater education and compassion.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, at this stage in St. John-Stevas' intellectual formation he retained the outlines of a grounding in Catholic 'natural law' theory (and Vatican pronouncements on the 'primary' and 'secondary' ends of marriage), for within this same article he definitively stated: 'For the Christian, the sexual act is not only relational but conceptional, and may legitimately be used only within the marriage bond. Accordingly homosexual love, however elevating an experience it may be in individual cases, must not be expressed in sexual acts, nor can homosexual relations ever become institutionalised in a Christian society'.<sup>83</sup>

As St. John-Stevas' later personal reflections on faith and politics published as *The Two Cities* (1984), make clear, there was a clear evolution in his moral theology and sexual ethics across the 1950s—most evidenced in his changed opinion on the need for the sexual act to be 'relational [*and*] conceptional'. From a hard-line position against contraception articulated in a debate he organised at the Cambridge Union in 1950 with the sexologist Norman Haire, and the following year at the University of London Union against Marie Stopes,<sup>84</sup> St. John-Stevas dates his 'doubts' about the Catholic position on contraception to his doctoral explorations from 1958 and his 'attraction to the Anglican position' from early 1960, which was 'more theological(ly) ... convincing than that of the Catholic natural lawyers'.<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, it was not until 1967 that he first aired these dissenting sentiments at a conference at Georgetown University,<sup>86</sup> and only after the release of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in July 1968 was his *enfant terrible* or saintly reputation, as Christopher Hollis affectionately parodied in *The Spectator*, crystallized.<sup>87</sup> As for his earlier emphatic pronouncement against 'institutionalised homosexual relations', he and Stanford became civil partners in 2009, shortly before St. John-Stevas' death, albeit in a quiet ceremony that was explained as necessary to avoid death taxes.<sup>88</sup>

Consolidating these reflections on homosexuality into a larger framework, and strengthened by the jurisprudential apparatus of his doctoral explorations, St. John-Stevas' published *Life, Death and the Law: A Study of the Relationship between Law and Christian Morals in the English and American Legal Systems* in 1961. The chapter on homosexuality within this volume expanded upon the perspectives enunciated with clarity in the *Crossbow* article, though here he also outlined the history of English laws on sodomy. Within it, he summarised medical and psychological opinion on homosexuality and, surveying the Christian perspective in which the 'Anglican viewpoint' and the 'Roman Catholic viewpoint' are commended as 'useful guides to contemporary Christian thought'. As such, he concluded that 'contemporary medical knowledge of the state of inversion must also modify traditional Christian views'.<sup>89</sup> Within this broader exploration of a range of issues encompassing contraception, artificial human insemination and euthanasia, St. John-Stevas' opening chapter offered a philosophical discussion of the shifting boundaries between law and morality and contemporaneous reflections on Church-State relations or, as he terms it, 'Common ground in the Common Good'.<sup>90</sup>

The salience of this intervention in moral-juridical rethinking, which had a contemporaneous impact and wide public reach, has not been thus far recognised.<sup>91</sup> Instead, existing historical considerations of the redrawing of the public and private spheres through the 1950s and into the age of 'permissiveness', such as those by Frank Mort, Adrian Bingham and Cook and Bauer,<sup>92</sup> invariably focus on the Hart–Devlin debate—sparked by Sir Patrick Devlin's Maccabean Lecture in Jurisprudence at the British Academy in 1959.<sup>93</sup> In Devlin's enunciation at that gathering, expounded in more detail within his later publication, *The Enforcement of Morals* (1965), the ordinary person's sense of what was morally unacceptable could justify making conduct a criminal offence and 'the suppression of vice is as much the law's business as the suppression of subversive activities'.<sup>94</sup> As Devlin's *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry opines, this perspective was grounded in an appreciation of 'a sort of sub-Christian morality that prevailed in Britain at the time'.<sup>95</sup> While that biographer does not continue to so adduce, it might also be added that despite Devlin's 'lapsed' state for much of his life, his Catholic upbringing, his devoutly Catholic extended family circle, and an education steeped in the Ignatian spirituality of the Jesuits at Stonyhurst might also explain his enduring recourse to an Augustinian understanding of the 'earthly city' as echoing (sometimes dimly) a divine order. For many commentators Devlin's diagnosis of the disgust and revulsion of the 'ordinary Briton' for homosexual acts has made him a spokesperson for a hidebound conservatism and reactionary Christianity often deemed synonymous with the perspectives of English Catholics in post-war, secularising Britain.

It is therefore illuminating to juxtapose St. John-Stevas' reconfiguration of law and morality, as a practising Catholic, Conservative politician and public polemicist, with Devlin's tacit restatement of Thomistic 'natural law'. As a biographical profile of St. John-Stevas in a 1967 edition of *Crossbow* opined: '[his] political views owe much to his Roman Catholicism. Throughout all of them there is a constant searching for the "moral consensus" of society (similar to Newman's idea of the "common possession" in society)...'<sup>96</sup> This search for a 'moral consensus', or the synthesis of developments in Catholic theology and the application of natural law in a liberal and religious plural society, is evidenced in *Life, Death and the Law* in which St. John-Stevas directly analysed Devlin's Maccabean Lecture and critiqued the 'comprehensiveness' of his claim that there are 'no theoretical limits set to the State's power to legislate

against immorality'.<sup>97</sup> Here he diagnosed a gap in the argument that (i) if society has the right to pass judgment on matters of morals that, (ii) it has the right to use the weapon of the law to enforce them. As he adduced: 'the conclusion that society has the right to enforce moral judgments by law does not flow from the premises that it has the right to pass them'.<sup>98</sup> Invoking Hobbes, he concluded: to follow 'Sir Patrick's principle erects a Leviathan ... [and] leaves no basis of right for Church, conscience and individual liberty'.<sup>99</sup> Instead, St. John-Stevas argued that the purpose of the law is 'to make good members of the earthly not the heavenly city',<sup>100</sup> and therefore only 'those moral offences which affect the common good are fit subjects for legislation'.<sup>101</sup>

As a guide to what constituted the 'common good' (and building but extending upon J. S. Mill's definition of 'common welfare', given his interest in nineteenth-century political thought as a Bagehot scholar),<sup>102</sup> St. John-Stevas identified 'public order and civil peace; the security of the young, the weak, and the inexperienced; [and] the maintenance of the civilized decencies of public behaviour'.<sup>103</sup> Gently disagreeing with the absolutism of the Wolfenden Report, he opined that 'one cannot say arbitrarily that no private act can ever affect the common good' but adduced that the test as to 'whether behaviour, public or private, strikes at the common good so gravely that it endangers the fabric of society' is a question of fact and a rational judgment. Here he was drawing a distinction with Devlin's characterisation of moral judgments as defined with reference to an emotional reaction.<sup>104</sup> Directly distinguishing his definition of the 'common good' from those of abstract natural law enthusiasts or idealists, St. John-Stevas mobilised that touchstone for English Catholics, Newman, to conclude: 'The pursuit of the common good is not the chase of the absolute, but more often than not the selection of one amongst a number of warring expedients'.<sup>105</sup> Seeking to gloss this further, in the final analysis it should be remembered:

The law is nothing else than the collective conscience of the community on those issues which cannot be left to individual choice. In so far as the community is faithful to the Western and Christian tradition it may reflect higher norms, but the State is not competent to create a moral order through the medium of law ... Its true function is to define, make effective and possibly preserve society's pre-existent moral views. The law systematized consciences, and to that extent has moral authority, but consciences can err, and the law accordingly cannot guarantee rightness.<sup>106</sup>

Like Devlin, an identification of the 'common good' also undergirded St. John-Stevas' jurisprudential and moral conclusions, but, simultaneously, he viewed the church as an organic body capable of development. Natural law should be modulated through history and rationality (chiefly, in his day, psychology and sexology) and, most importantly (and quoting Newman directly), the believer's conscience should be acknowledged as the 'aboriginal Vicar of Christ'.<sup>107</sup> As St. John-Stevas explicitly concluded in *Life, Death and the Law*, 'The Christian lawmaker must constantly scrutinise the data provided by the social sciences, by history, economics, and psychology, to see how theological principles are to be modified into law'.<sup>108</sup> With a characteristic light-hearted flourish he surmised: 'Good theology is no guarantee of good government; if it were, Catholics would be placed in a nice dilemma by the history of the papal states'.<sup>109</sup> In St. John-Stevas' very public stance from 1967 endorsing homosexual reform and advocating the morality of the pill, while vigorously opposing abortion law reform, he would appeal to the theological principle of the *sensus fidei* (or insights of the laity) in justifying his Vatican II-informed pontifications on liberty, the 'primacy of conscience' and a personalist morality.<sup>110</sup> In the wake of the *Humanae Vitae* encyclical in July 1968, many other practicing English Catholics would also adopt their own versions of his pragmatic modifications of natural law through the lens of medicine and the social sciences, and come to similar conclusions about what the 'common good' now required.<sup>111</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored a spectrum of Catholic reactions to homosexuality in the period from 1954 to 1971, from the submission of Cardinal Griffin's Catholic Commission to the Wolfenden Inquiry and the conflicted responses that these recommendations for decriminalisation elicited from laity, clergy and the episcopacy. It has contrasted these conflicted approaches with an exploration of the jurisprudential and theological attempts of Norman St. John-Stevas to forge an updated but nevertheless traditional Catholic position on homosexuality that fused natural law teaching with the insights of biblical exegesis, modern medicine and psychology. As this exposition has illuminated, the attempts of St. John-Stevas and the Griffin Committee to formulate a new compact between religion and law in a liberal and pluralist society within Catholic Church circles and wider political discussions were doomed to



failure. These were derailed, for a time, by the forces of conservatism within the Roman Catholic Church itself and have subsequently been forgotten in accounts of the ‘secularising’ forces of permissiveness that culminated in Leo Abse’s legislation. Nevertheless, as this chapter has endeavoured to illuminate, there is a strong case for re-examining the contribution of religion (including Catholicism) in formulating a new architecture of British sexual subjectivity in the wake of the Second World War. The endorsement of the Wolfenden Inquiry’s recommendations by the Griffin Committee and its extension through the theojuridical explorations of St. John-Stevas demonstrate the ways in which Catholic lay progressives were seeking to remodel understandings of natural law and church teachings on non-procreative sexuality. As such, this chapter contributes to a new recognition of the ways in which mid-twentieth-century Catholicism continued, unexpectedly, to shape discourses of same-sex desire within broader debates about homosexuality and post-war modernity.<sup>112</sup>

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## Some Found a Niche: Same-Sex Attracted People in Australian Anglicanism

*David Hilliard*

People who are same-sex attracted have been part of the Anglican Church in Australia since its beginnings, but usually they have been invisible and without a voice. For the last fifty years, homosexuals and homosexuality have been the subjects of statements by church leaders, reports, synod resolutions and theological discussion. This chapter seeks to focus on same-sex attracted people themselves. How did they interact with the Anglican Church, how did they seek to reconcile their Christian faith with their sexuality, and how has their relationship with the Church changed over time?<sup>1</sup> The Anglican Church was for two centuries a dominant feature of Australia's religious landscape.<sup>2</sup> From the beginnings of European settlement in 1788 until the 1980s (when it was overtaken by the Roman Catholic Church) it was the largest religious denomination in Australia. It had a presence in almost every suburb and community, and in many places its churches were local landmarks. As a religious denomination, it was neither homogeneous nor centralised. Reflecting its origins in the Church of England, and the recruitment of clergy from England until the early twentieth century, it embraced a wide range of doctrinal

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views. What was distinctive about Anglicanism in Australia was that differences in doctrine and theological orientation were anchored in the diocesan structure. In the Australian Church there was a strong sense of diocesan independence, which originated in the separate origins of each colony and the huge distances that separated the major towns and cities. For these and other reasons each diocese developed over time a distinct identity with an ethos and dominant theological outlook, which differed in subtle ways from its neighbours. This meant that the experience of same-sex attracted Anglicans varied enormously, depending on where they lived.

Men who were sexually attracted to men and women who were drawn to women, surrounded by social disapproval, were secretive about their sexuality and rarely recorded their feelings. They may have had sexual experiences with others of the same sex, but they did not have a language to describe their desires. It was not until the first decade of the twentieth century that newspapers used the word 'homosexual' as referring to a particular type of person, with distinctive characteristics. In every Australian state, male (though not female) homosexual activity was subject to legal penalties, based on British legislation. For long periods these laws were enforced only spasmodically but during the Cold War of the 1950s, in a mood of panic about the spread of 'perversion' that was alleged to be undermining the nation's social fabric, the police became more vigorous in seeking to arrest men for illegal sexual behaviour.

During the interwar years some individuals with same-sex desires began to think of themselves as homosexuals, aware that there were others like themselves and that there were places where they met.<sup>3</sup> In the major capital cities a clandestine (male) homosexual subculture had been emerging since the 1920s with its own codes, nicknames and slang. It had meeting places at 'beats' (which had existed since the mid-nineteenth century) in public toilets, parks and other outdoor areas, and its social life revolved around particular hotel bars, cafés, coffee shops, the arts scene and Saturday night 'camp' parties in private homes. The only substantial contemporary evidence of this subculture comes from legal records, newspaper reports of court cases and convictions for offences against the law, and sensational articles on scandals and the 'problem' of homosexuality. Same-sex attracted men usually discovered homosexual meeting places and social networks through chance encounters or through a friend who knew the way in.<sup>4</sup> The great majority lived 'closeted' or double lives, concealing their sexual feelings and their same-sex encounters

and relationships from their families, work colleagues and heterosexual friends. In this climate, in which homosexuality was regarded with disdain or hostility, the Anglican Church, with its numerous institutions and organisations, created spaces—not many but more than most other denominations—where same-sex attracted men and women found it possible to find spiritual and emotional satisfaction, and also to form social connections that were almost invisible to outsiders.

### LIVES FROM THE NINETEENTH CENTURY TO THE 1970s

From the mid-nineteenth century, three areas of church life that were attractive to unmarried and same-sex attracted Anglicans were school teaching, missionary work and teaching in theological colleges. Later, some were drawn to leadership in church youth organisations and to church choirs. The evidence is largely anecdotal and impressionistic, unless individuals infringed the law and ended up in court or for some other reason left a mark on the written records. From oral evidence, it seems that unmarried men and women of homosexual orientation, both ordained and lay, have had a significant presence on the teaching staff of church schools. They enjoyed the company of boys and young men, or young women, and found the work satisfying. Some single men are remembered as very effective school chaplains. Mostly these same-sex attracted teachers avoided any emotional involvement or sexual connection with their pupils, who became their surrogate family. However, boarding schools in particular provided an environment that allowed some to express their sexual interest in adolescent youth.

In nineteenth-century South Australia, for example, one of the colony's first homosexual scandals involved a clergyman at a boys' boarding school. Samuel Allom, a gifted teacher, was appointed in 1849 as second master of the new Collegiate School of St. Peter, but after three years he was forced to resign when it was found that his claim to have been educated at Eton and Oxford was false. Allom then started a private boarding school in a village near Adelaide. In 1854 he was charged with 'indecent exposure of his person and other obscene practices' with two of his pupils. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to four years' imprisonment. The bishop of Adelaide deposed him from holy orders. Allom was not the last Anglican schoolmaster to end his career in disgrace.<sup>5</sup> In recent years, diocesan committees of inquiry and government royal commissions on child sexual abuse have uncovered numerous examples

of illicit sexual relationships between teachers and pupils in Anglican schools, and those of other denominations, going back many years.<sup>6</sup> In the past, whenever these were discovered the schools successfully concealed them from outside investigation.

Women teachers were more successful in avoiding scandal. Many famous principals of Anglican girls' schools were unmarried; some were lesbians who formed life-long partnerships with female colleagues. One famous example, and no secret at the time, was the relationship between Dorothy Ross, head of Melbourne Church of England Girls' Grammar School in 1939–1955 and her protégé Mary Davis, whom she appointed head of the junior school. In 1950 Mary was appointed head of a non-denominational school for girls, St. Catherine's, Toorak, at the pinnacle of Melbourne's educational establishment. From then on the two women lived separately, but their lives continued to be intertwined in many ways.<sup>7</sup>

Another fulfilling sphere that the Anglican Church offered to clergy who realised they were not of the marrying kind was overseas missionary work, in Asia, East Africa and the Pacific Islands. This offered a chance to escape from the constraints of parish life and also the attraction of doing useful work for the Church in exotic places overseas. It is possible that some unmarried women who were same-sex attracted were likewise drawn to work in the mission field as a fulfilling alternative to marriage, but there is no direct evidence. There is, however, quite a lot of evidence for the men; for example, in the Melanesian Mission, which from the mid-nineteenth century worked in the Southwest Pacific, drawing its missionaries from England, New Zealand and Australia.<sup>8</sup> We know little about the reasons why young men who were same-sex attracted offered themselves for Melanesia. Some may have hoped that by throwing their energies into missionary work in distant places they would be removed from sexual temptation. However, we do know that some of them, after they arrived in the Pacific Islands, found themselves attracted to young Melanesian men. Almost every bishop of Melanesia from the 1870s onwards had to deal with the issue. When 'indecent' behaviour was discovered, the offending missionaries were instantly dismissed and their resignation was announced without explanation. Almost all of them later found work in other parts of the Anglican Church, in Australia or England or North America. In 1931 the discovery of Bishop F. M. Molyneux's homosexual behaviour compelled his instant resignation

from the diocese (due to 'serious illness') and return to England in disgrace. He spent his later years running a poultry farm.

From the late nineteenth century, with the spread of Anglo-Catholic influences in the Australian Church, we see the emergence in each capital city of churches that were distinctly Anglo-Catholic in their doctrine and ceremonial. Some of these churches, such as Christ Church St. Laurence and St. James' in central Sydney, St. Peter's, Eastern Hill, in Melbourne, and St. George's, Goodwood, in Adelaide became quite famous. From the first, these and other inner-urban Anglo-Catholic churches were attractive to some homosexual men. They gravitated there, along with 'arty types', idealistic rebels, traditionalists, eccentrics and other single men and women. It is likely that some of these single women were lesbians, though the evidence is anecdotal. They were drawn to Anglo-Catholic churches because they were uplifted by the style of worship, because they felt out of tune with respectable family-oriented suburban churches, and because on their first visit they sensed that in these socially mixed congregations there were others like themselves and that they would be accepted as they were. The men, if they stayed, might become servers or sing in the choir. At a time when meeting places for homosexual men were few in number and hard to find, these inner-city Anglo-Catholic churches were safe havens: visible and respectable places for discreet social contact and places where a young man might make new friends.<sup>9</sup>

The Australian historian Manning Clark recalled in his autobiography that his father (about 1908) went along to Christ Church St. Laurence and afterwards, over tea and biscuits in the rectory, noticed that 'women were the great absentees, and the men often lapsed into high-pitched giggles'.<sup>10</sup> It was because of this reputation that a Sydney evangelical clergyman fifty years later warned his son against visiting this exotic church: 'I don't like some of the types that hang around there.'<sup>11</sup> These Anglo-Catholic churches provided pastoral support in ways that other churches did not. Same-sex attracted men and (though in lesser numbers) women often found sympathetic clergy with whom they could discuss their 'problem' in the confessional, in the knowledge that whatever they said would remain confidential. They (usually reluctantly) accepted the teaching of the Church that their homosexual behaviour was wrong. They felt guilty after each lapse and tried not to fall into sin again. There is no evidence that Anglo-Catholic priests counselled anything other than chastity when men confessed to homosexual behaviour, though the

advice they gave in the confessional differed greatly in its tone and its practical application. Some confessors were known to be severe. A few, such as Canon F. E. Maynard, vicar of St. Peter's, Eastern Hill, in 1926–1964, were widely read in modern psychology.<sup>12</sup> An Anglo-Catholic homosexual, a former member of a religious brotherhood, who lived in Melbourne in the 1940s, recalled that Father Maynard was 'very understanding' as a confessor whereas the assistant priest of St. Peter's, Father Cheong, was 'much tougher'.<sup>13</sup>

Occasionally we get a glimpse of the individuals who went to these churches. One of them was the seventh Earl Beauchamp, governor of New South Wales in 1899–1900, a devout Anglo-Catholic who attended St. James' in Sydney. He loved the climate and the vitality of Sydney and in his later years returned there several times: 'I doubt whether anywhere in the world are finer specimens of manhood than in Sydney. The lifesavers at the bathing beaches are wonderful.'<sup>14</sup> In England in 1931, when his wife petitioned for divorce on the grounds of his habitual homosexual behaviour, he resigned his numerous public appointments and spent the rest of his life in exile. Others were shop assistants and clerks. In 1891 a Sydney church paper recorded the death of Edwin Paddon Martin, a middle-aged bachelor who had moved in rather exotic Anglo-Catholic circles in England before migrating to Sydney. There, after trying out several churches, Paddon became a parishioner of Christ Church St. Laurence where he was a server, sang in the choir, joined several devotional guilds and beautified the church interior. 'In the art of decorating churches Edwin Paddon Martin especially excelled', said his obituary.<sup>15</sup>

An older homosexual in Adelaide, who had attended St. George's, Goodwood, for much of his life, recalled that he first noticed other homosexual men in the congregation in the 1940s, with the number peaking in the decade after the Second World War. In those years, he said, the diocesan Servers' Guild of St. Laurence, had 'quite a few flappers'.<sup>16</sup> Father Howell Witt, rector of a small Anglo-Catholic church in central Adelaide, who liked being naughty, caused a wave of laughter in the staid diocesan synod in the early 1950s when he quipped: 'Most of the clergy are shepherds looking after the sheep but I'm the gardener looking after the pansy patch.'<sup>17</sup> Not all members of these urban Anglo-Catholic congregations approved of this homosexual presence, especially when it turned into an exclusive in-group. At St. Peter's, Eastern Hill, a sociologist in the 1970s discovered that some dissension had arisen in

the congregation over the fact that a group of younger men 'are known to be homosexuals. They seem to be accepted by most, but not all, other parishioners'.<sup>18</sup> Cathedrals in the capital cities were favourite places for homosexually inclined men who were drawn by the attraction of dignified worship, good music and a large and varied congregation that provided both an opportunity for anonymity and also a place to meet others who had similar interests.

For same-sex attracted evangelicals, it was much harder to find supportive niches in the Church. The ethos of suburban evangelical churches tended to be robustly heterosexual and family-centred. Young men who were not seeking girlfriends and young women without boyfriends often found themselves on the edge of the church's social life. It is likely that the great majority eventually conformed to what was expected of them and sought to overcome their same-sex attraction by entering into marriage. Yet in Sydney and Melbourne, as in England, there are examples of clergy who remained resolutely single, in a culture that exalted marriage and family, and who obtained emotional and religious fulfilment through their ministry to university students and young people generally. Women were not subject to the same scrutiny. Evangelical women who did not feel drawn to marriage sometimes joined the order of deaconesses. After the 1980s they might be ordained as deacons and (though not in Sydney) priests. Some of them lived for many years in close relationships with other women, sharing a house and engaged in a joint ministry. However, it is unlikely that they ever regarded themselves as lesbians.

Some homosexual men and lesbians quietly attended evangelical or 'low' churches in the places where they lived. One of them was the author (and Nobel Prize winner) Patrick White who in the late 1940s, with his partner Manoly Lascaris, settled in a rural area on the edge of Sydney. For five years they attended the early communion service at nearby St. Paul's, Castle Hill, but 'did not linger for long after the services and took no part in the general life of the parish'.<sup>19</sup> White's religious faith did not fit easily with either the theology or the puritanical style of Sydney Anglicanism. Subsequently, he and Manoly would drive into the city to attend Christ Church St. Laurence. Initially he appreciated the music, the theatre and the handsome servers, but eventually he gave it up, finding it 'too showy'. He did not return to organised religion but retreated to a private faith. Nevertheless, Anglicanism left its mark on him and he retained an interest in the Church for the rest of

his life. Some of the clergymen he had known appear as characters in his novels and some recognisably Anglican types (such as the parish do-gooder) are satirised.<sup>20</sup> Ordinary suburban churches with plain worship sometimes provided unexpected opportunities for homosexually inclined men to make social contacts. In Sydney in the late 1940s at St. Aidan's, Longueville, Adrian, a young man in the choir, fell in (unrequited) love with another member of the youth fellowship. Then one Sunday he noticed two unfamiliar faces in the congregation at Evensong—a woman and her adult son. After the service while everyone chatted outside the church door the rector introduced the newcomers: 'Trevor's interested in the theatre, Adrian, so tell him all about the Parish Dramatic Society.' That meeting led to an affair that eventually led Adrian to the bar at the Carlton Hotel and Sydney's homosexual subculture.<sup>21</sup>

The spread of Anglo-Catholicism in Australia led to the foundation of religious communities. The Australian Church also produced its own variant, 'bush brotherhoods', which emerged from the 1890s to minister to people in sparsely settled regions and the outback.<sup>22</sup> Everywhere these religious communities and brotherhoods were attractive to same-sex attracted young men who were drawn, often for reasons for which they were barely aware, to the all-male environment and a religiously sanctioned alternative to marriage. This may also have been the case for women, though the evidence is sparse. In the Australian Church religious communities, whether local foundations or branches of English communities, were always on the margins of church life and, compared with Roman Catholic religious orders, their numbers were very small. Not many young men joined them. But of those who did, it would be reasonable to conclude from fragments of evidence and anecdote that a significant proportion (though not a majority) was homosexual in orientation. Whenever homosexuality became an issue in these communities their leaders were strict; the vow of celibacy was binding on all, and overt homosexual behaviour was clear evidence of an individual's unsuitability for the religious life. However, from the late 1960s onwards there is evidence that some younger members of religious communities felt less constrained and visitors began to notice 'camp' gossip, gestures and innuendos.<sup>23</sup>

Until the 1970s it was not hard for pious young men to get accepted for ordination. The great majority of theological students were unmarried, aged in their twenties, and sexuality was not a subject that bishops or their examining chaplains raised during their interviews. It was

assumed that unmarried ordinands would remain chaste. In some high church theological colleges, where the atmosphere was mildly tolerant, same-sex attracted students soon found there were others like themselves. There they often formed friendship networks that supported them in their later ministry. Once ordained, almost all same-sex attracted clergy were secretive about their sexuality. Many were ridden with guilt, finding it hard to reconcile their sexual feelings with their religious faith, and they were nervous about possible exposure. Others came to accept their sexuality as something given by God. One priest, looking back over his ministry of thirty years in three dioceses, reflected:

But it's okay, it's quite okay, to be gay. This is how God made you; how God made me. Of course I don't understand, and I won't this side of heaven, but I go in faith. I trust in Him...He wants me for Himself. He wants you gays for Himself. That's why I've come out.<sup>24</sup>

Parishioners usually saw unmarried clergy as confirmed bachelors (or celibate priests) without asking awkward questions. Some homosexual clergy, who wanted fewer restrictions on their personal lives, transferred into non-parochial ministries, such as chaplaincies or administrative posts in missionary organisations. A few rose to high office. Several, with same-sex partners (usually with the partner living separately) have been appointed as archdeacons and deans of cathedrals.<sup>25</sup>

The great majority of same-sex attracted or homosexual clergy left no mark on the historic record for only those who transgressed are recorded. Almost always the evidence appears in the context of a scandal: a clergyman is charged with an offence or is suddenly dismissed from a church post or hastily resigns, often on the alleged grounds of ill health or a breakdown. Sometimes the offence was sex with an adolescent boy. In other instances the cleric was caught by police at a known homosexual meeting place. Sometimes these scandals involved prominent people in the Church; some of them were married and living double lives.

One of the most prominent was T. M. ('Tosh') Robinson, the much respected (unmarried) warden for twenty years of St. John's College, Morpeth, a large theological college near Newcastle, New South Wales. In 1954, he was charged after being caught by the local police having a sexual encounter with a truck driver and had to skip the country within a week, before his case went to court. Francis James, publisher of the national Anglican newspaper, who knew Robinson quite well, later



claimed to have enabled his departure.<sup>26</sup> Robinson urgently needed an income tax clearance in order to leave Australia and James arranged it by going direct to the Deputy Commissioner of Taxation. There was no mention of Robinson's resignation in either the church or the secular press; he just disappeared. He spent the following years in various Anglican chaplaincies in Europe—Algiers, Tangiers, Marseilles and Malaga—and died in obscurity in England in 1977.<sup>27</sup> Some clergy left the ministry after their disgrace. Others were later readmitted to parish work by kindly bishops in other dioceses and lived down their past. Anglican bishops had much discretion over whom they licensed. Some bishops, especially in remote parts of Australia where it was hard to fill vacant parishes, were willing to give an erring priest another chance, providing he promised not to misbehave again and there was no public scandal. By the 1960s there is evidence of the existence of informal and discreet networks of clergy who identified themselves as homosexual. They were more likely to emerge in large urban dioceses than in country areas where clergy were thinly spread and it was hard to lead a private life. Apart from oral evidence, we have a valuable source in the papers of Father Harold Rogers. In the 1970s in the working-class western suburbs of Melbourne he was one of a group of homosexual clergy who called themselves the Ballarat Road Set or the Three Wise Sisters of the Western District. They socialised together and held parties for their friends. Rogers himself gave outrageous nicknames to his clerical colleagues. One very pompous cleric was dubbed the 'Duchess of Roxborough', one was 'The Mystic Rose' while another was 'Princess Minetta'.<sup>28</sup>

### ANGLICANS DEBATE HOMOSEXUALITY

Within the Anglican Church the subject of homosexuality was rarely mentioned in theological journals or the church press. One of the first discussions was a respectful though critical review in the national church newspaper in 1955 of Derrick Sherwin Bailey's *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*. The reviewer thought it 'would be a dangerous book to put into the hands of a homosexual', for it contained 'too much special pleading' and 'might well persuade one who could stand up against his tendencies towards homosexual practices to justify in his own opinion his conduct in yielding to them'.<sup>29</sup> However, this was a book for scholars, not a popular readership. Then from the late 1960s

came the publication, in England and the United States, of the first of a wave of inexpensive paperbacks that questioned the traditional Christian condemnation of homosexual behaviour. The most widely read of these in Australia was Norman Pittenger's *Time for Consent*, which was sold in every Anglican bookshop.<sup>30</sup> During the 1970s, in a liberalising social climate, the homosexual subculture in Australia's capital cities became visible and expanded dramatically in size. For the first time, books on homosexuality were given positive reviews in the major newspapers. A popular television serial, *Number 96*, had among its characters an openly homosexual (and likeable) young lawyer. The word 'camp', which had been used for many years to refer to the homosexual world, was supplanted by 'gay'. A new 'gay' identity emerged; people began to speak of the 'gay community'. New gay pubs, bars, clubs and discos were opened and began to advertise. The first commercial gay and lesbian magazines appeared. Telephone counselling services were started. Specialised groups proliferated: social, cultural, sporting, religious and political.

At the same time, liberal forces in the major political parties took up the issue of homosexual law reform, as part of a broader movement to reform and renovate Australian society. This followed the decriminalisation of male homosexual acts in England and Wales on the lines recommended in 1957 by the Wolfenden Committee and enacted in 1967. (The first Australian state to decriminalise male homosexual behaviour was South Australia in 1975; the last was Tasmania in 1997.) During the early 1970s the social questions committees of several major Anglican dioceses examined the issue. In 1971 the Melbourne diocesan committee caused quite a stir when it recommended that those laws of the state of Victoria that imposed criminal penalties on homosexual acts in private between consenting adult males should be repealed.<sup>31</sup> The report focused on the legal issues, with only three pages on 'theological considerations'. It was endorsed by an overwhelming majority of the diocesan synod and widely circulated.

The diocese of Sydney was unique in the Australian Church as a stronghold of conservative evangelicalism. On the issue of homosexual law reform, it took a much tougher position than other Anglican dioceses. The report on homosexuality produced by the diocesan Ethics and Social Questions Committee, released in 1973, worked from theological first principles.<sup>32</sup> Because homosexual behaviour was clearly contrary to the mind of God as revealed in the Bible it should never be given the status of an accepted form of sexual activity. Moreover, in the current

climate of moral uncertainty the demand for the toleration of homosexuality, which ‘defies the polarities of sex’, was a real threat to ‘the monogamous heterosexual marriage union’. The report therefore recommended that homosexual behaviour should remain subject to legal penalties, as a deterrent, with a few minor adjustments to the existing laws. The diocesan synod approved the report by a large majority.

Meanwhile, the confidence of gay Anglicans was boosted by the beginnings of the gay movement. The first ‘political’ homosexual organisation in Australia was the Campaign Against Moral Persecution (CAMP), founded in 1970 in Sydney, from where it quickly spread to other capital cities.<sup>33</sup> Almost everywhere, churchgoing Anglicans were actively involved; some Anglican clergy became members or showed their support. In Melbourne, Anglican priest David Conolly, looking for a place in the city centre to hold the first meeting of CAMP in 1971, approached the Dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral who without hesitation allowed the use of a room in the Cathedral Buildings.<sup>34</sup> For the first time, gay men and women ‘came out’ and felt able to make a public statement of their sexuality. They began to argue in public that it was possible to be both a believing Christian and a homosexual, without seeing themselves as either sick or sinful. Their theology was thin and they avoided entering the debate over the meaning of the relevant scriptural texts but they spoke from their own experience. They wrote to the correspondence columns of daily newspapers and church papers, challenging what they saw as common misconceptions about homosexuality. In several dioceses, some of them addressed gatherings of clergy and church committees that were examining the subject. ‘A Christian Homosexual’ wrote to a Sydney Anglican paper:

In my experience, the attitude of condemnation within the church has driven many homosexuals from the love of Christ which they so sorely need ... Surely psychological knowledge has reached the stage where human sexuality ... must be seen as a gift of God, and the human behind the sexuality given the right to live as a child of God and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>35</sup>

The author of this letter was Peter Bonsall-Boone, a former theological student who was organist and synod representative of St. John’s, Balmain, a small inner-urban Anglo-Catholic church. He was also the full-time secretary of St. Clement’s, Mosman, a busy evangelical

parish; he had already told its rector of his homosexuality. In 1971 he co-founded a church group within the Sydney branch of CAMP called Cross+Section. This group, meeting weekly, sent out a letter to Sydney Anglican clergy asking for their support. Then in October 1972 Bonsall-Boone and his partner Peter de Waal, with a lesbian couple, were interviewed in a 45-minute television programme on homosexual relationships in a documentary series produced by the Australian Broadcasting Commission called *Chequerboard* which explored controversial issues. The program aroused wide interest because those interviewed were articulate and spoke naturally about their lives. It was also notable as the first time on Australian television in which two men exchanged an affectionate kiss; the film clip is preserved as an exhibit in the National Sound and Film Archives in Canberra. From within the diocese of Sydney there was an immediate and hostile reaction. Soon after the programme was shown Bonsall-Boone was dismissed from his post because, he was told, he had involved the parish in controversy. This led to a large demonstration by gay and lesbian activists outside St. Clement's during the morning service the following Sunday, in front of newspaper reporters and television cameras. It made no difference; Bonsall-Boone was not reinstated.

During the 1970s the leaders of the diocese became alarmed by the emergence of the gay movement and the growing size and visibility of Sydney's gay subculture. Other social movements and cultural trends of the period, as well as the policies of the federal Labor government (1972–1975), added to their fears. They disapproved of the emerging feminist movement and women's liberation, the relaxation of censorship of books, plays and films, calls for the decriminalisation of abortion, the increased availability of civil marriage and the 1975 Family Law Act, which eliminated the concept of 'matrimonial fault' in divorce. These movements and social changes they saw as expressions of rebellion against God's laws, undermining the Christian foundations of Australian society. They urged Christians to fight back against the social program of 'secular humanism' by supporting the Festival of Light, an organisation formed in 1973 to combat 'moral pollution' and promote 'Christian moral standards'. There was no scope for compromise.

The diocese of Sydney stiffened its resistance to the demands of gay activists and liberal reformers for homosexual equality. It continued to oppose the decriminalisation of homosexual acts until the New South Wales state government passed the legislation in 1984. In 1985 a

diocesan committee produced a report on 'Homosexuality and ministry', which laid down that a known 'practising' homosexual 'cannot properly occupy any office or perform any duty which involves ministry within the Christian fellowship'. In addition to the ordained ministry, this included positions such as churchwarden, parish councillor, lesson reader, organist, choir member, youth leader and Sunday school teacher.<sup>36</sup> The report was endorsed by the synod but was hard to enforce. Those individuals in evangelical parishes who were same-sex attracted kept this side of themselves well-hidden while those parishes with a significant homosexual presence quietly ignored it.

Since the 1970s the pastoral policy of the diocese towards homosexuals has been a consistent one, though its implementation in parishes has been uneven.<sup>37</sup> It makes a distinction between men and women who are in same-sex relationships and have no desire to change and those who are same-sex attracted but wish they are not so and are seeking to abstain from homosexual acts. The former might attend services but should not be appointed to positions of responsibility in a congregation. The latter should be encouraged and supported by the Christian fellowship as they struggle to relinquish the 'homosexual lifestyle'. Instead of accepting the claim that a homosexual orientation is unchangeable, they should be encouraged to seek healing and change. To this end, the diocese has encouraged several organisations that claim to enable individuals to overcome same-sex attraction.

Meanwhile, in several cities small groups of gay Anglicans and their friends, mostly men, formed organisations for mutual support, to minister to the gay and lesbian community, and to be a voice for the needs of gay and lesbian Anglicans in the Church. Informally linked to the American Episcopalian lesbian and gay organisation, Integrity, they took the same name. Mostly they kept a low profile. Integrity-Adelaide, for example, began in 1980. It met monthly in a church, usually with a Eucharist—there was no lack of priests willing to lead worship—followed by a meeting with a visiting speaker or a discussion, and it sent out a monthly newsletter; there were up to fifty on the mailing list. All its active members were men; very few women attended. Occasionally it held joint activities with other gay Christian groups and the Metropolitan Community Church. These included an occasional 'bush dance', an ecumenical Christmas carol service and (from 1986) an annual memorial service at a city church for people who had died of AIDS.<sup>38</sup> There were similar groups in Brisbane and Perth.

The most militant body was in Sydney where AngGays was formed in 1979 to meet the personal needs of gay Anglicans and to refer them to sympathetic priests and parishes. Combatting what it saw as the 'oppressive attitude and policies' of the diocese, AngGays used militant tactics. Its members refused to see themselves as repentant sinners. They wrote letters to the church press, distributed literature to members of the diocesan synod, published an occasional bulletin, joined in demonstrations and marches wearing tee-shirts with the slogan 'Gay and Christian', constructed elaborate floats with political messages for Sydney's annual Mardi Gras parade—in 1983, for example, they made a huge paper-maché statue of the Madonna and Child with the sign 'AngGays Supports Lesbian Mums'—and generally annoyed the diocesan leadership.<sup>39</sup> AngGays also annoyed a number of gay Anglicans who had found niches in one of Sydney's few Anglo-Catholic churches, placed a high value on discretion, and feared that the noisy tactics of AngGays were making the diocese even more hostile. Finally, after twelve years, AngGays dissolved itself and its members went in different directions. By the mid-1990s, with their early enthusiasm exhausted and feeling that they had achieved little, most of these gay Anglican organisations had faded away. In the pluralistic diocese of Melbourne gay and lesbian Anglicans got together in the late 1990s when a gay priest, Father Nigel Wright, began an annual St. Dorothy's Day Mass at his church.<sup>40</sup> It is now called the Midsumma Mass, held at St. Mark's, Fitzroy, as a listed event in the city's annual lesbian and gay Midsumma Festival. It attracts more than a hundred gay men, lesbians and well-wishers from all denominations. Changing Attitude Australia was founded in 2006 and for eight years held occasional meetings, published an online newsletter and compiled a list of 'welcoming congregations'.

### THE AUSTRALIAN CHURCH TODAY

Looking at the place of gay men and lesbians in the Anglican Church of Australia at the present day, one can identify at least four trends. Firstly, as in other parts of the Anglican Communion, the place of same-sex attracted people in the Church, the acceptance and blessing of same-sex relationships, and the ordination of homosexual persons, is a subject of fierce debate. During the last two decades there has been a wave of theological explorations of the subject, from widely different standpoints.<sup>41</sup> From the evidence of public opinion polls and surveys, Anglicans in the

pews, like the Australian population generally, are more accepting than ever before of gay and lesbian relationships. However, the large and growing conservative evangelical section of the Australian Church, centred on the diocese of Sydney, remains resolutely opposed to any suggestion that homosexual behaviour is compatible with the profession of Christianity.<sup>42</sup>

Secondly, in a polarised church, to avoid open warfare, few bishops are now willing to ordain or appoint to parishes men or women who openly acknowledge their homosexuality. Although the Anglican Church of Australia does not, says its website, have ‘a formal, official position on the issue of homosexuality’, the General Synod of the Australian Church in 2004 resolved that it ‘does not condone’ the ordination of people in open committed same-sex relationships or the liturgical blessing of same-sex relationships.<sup>43</sup> In 2012 the Australian bishops agreed on a protocol that reaffirmed these motions. However, there remained scope for bishops to interpret the protocol in their own way. Several bishops of smaller dioceses have since then expressed their personal support for same-sex relationships or quietly supported gay clergy in their dioceses. In 2011 the bishop of the diocese of Gippsland in Victoria appointed a partnered gay priest to a parish and was strongly attacked by conservative evangelicals around Australia for departing from the teaching of scripture, in defiance of Resolution 1.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference. The bishop withstood the pressure and the priest remained in his parish, but the onslaught was a warning to other bishops to tread carefully. Moreover, after a series of widely publicised cases, in every state, of sexual abuse involving clergy and teenage boys, some bishops see male clergy who are known or believed to be gay as a potential problem, and they are more inclined than before to inquire into the private lives of unmarried clergy.<sup>44</sup> So the number of known gay clergy has fallen and almost all of these are in older age groups.

Thirdly, the niches that the Anglican Church once offered for same-sex attracted people have largely (though not entirely) dissolved. As the urban gay subculture has become more diffuse and geographically dispersed, and with dating websites and apps changing the shape of gay socialising, same-sex attracted men no longer look to Anglo-Catholic churches and city cathedrals as meeting places, though some continue to be drawn to their mixture of beauty in worship and intellectual freedom. Those men who attend these churches tend to be middle-aged and older. During the 1980s and 1990s, in each major city, Anglo-Catholic (and

Roman Catholic) clergy took a lead in ministering to people with AIDS. John Foster, academic historian and author of a classic AIDS memoir, *Take Me to Paris, Johnny*, was a liberally minded Anglo-Catholic and parishioner of St. Mary's, North Melbourne; his narrative is permeated with religion.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, a study in 1992 of the influence of religion on the lives of gay men found that the church 'is the last place they would go for advice or counsel regarding their sexual orientation'.<sup>46</sup>

Some gay men and lesbians may be drawn to radical interpretations of Christianity and perhaps join a theologically liberal and 'inclusive' congregation, either in the Anglican Church or in the Uniting Church in Australia. Ali Wurm, a priest in South Australia who is a lesbian, during her theological studies in Boston in the 1990s came to a new understanding of Christianity. She now saw the church as 'a movement for liberation rather than an institution located in buildings', inspired by 'the radical life of Jesus' and committed to transforming social relations and the ways that power is shared.<sup>47</sup> Fourthly, as the liberal-high section of the Anglican Church declines numerically and the age profile of those in its pews rises, it has fewer connections than it did a few generations ago with young women and men who are same-sex attracted. Pentecostals in various groupings, who have grown rapidly since the 1970s, now outnumber Anglicans as regular churchgoers. Young Australians who are keen Christians are much more likely to attend Pentecostal or evangelical churches. These take a conservative view of homosexuality, though there are signs that several Pentecostal churches, keen to reach as many people as possible, are becoming more welcoming. In these congregations young people who are same-sex attracted have found friends and usually have no wish to leave the only form of church community they know. For some, this tension may lead them to make a deliberate decision to renounce sexual activity or to seek counselling. Some solve the problem by leaving the Church or by giving up religious faith entirely. Others do what previous generations of gay men and lesbians have done. They keep their personal life separate and concealed from their church life, quietly disagree with what their pastors write or preach on the subject and make their own decisions about their sexual behaviour and partnerships. In this vibrant and variegated network of churches they will in turn find or create their own niches.



## NOTES

1. For historical surveys of Australian Anglican attitudes to homosexuality since the 1960s, see David Hilliard, 'Australian Anglicans and homosexuality: a tale of two cities', *St Mark's Review* 163 (1995), pp. 12–20, 'Sydney Anglicans and homosexuality', *Journal of Homosexuality* 33:2 (1997), pp. 101–123, and 'Gender roles, homosexuality, and the Anglican church in Sydney', in R. N. Swanson (ed.), *Gender and Christian Religion*, Studies in Church History 34 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998), pp. 509–523 and Graham Willett, 'Into the present: Anglicanism and homosexuality in the 1970s', in Colin Holden (ed.), *People of the Past? The Culture of Melbourne Anglicanism and Anglicanism in Melbourne's Culture: Papers to Mark the 150th Anniversary of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, 1847–1997* (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 2000), pp. 41–65.
2. The standard history is Bruce Kaye (ed.), *Anglicanism in Australia: A History* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002).
3. There is now a substantial literature on Australia's gay history. Major works include Graham Willett, *Living Out Loud: A History of Gay and Lesbian Activism in Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2000); Clive Moore, *Sunshine and Rainbows: The Development of Gay and Lesbian Culture in Queensland* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2001); Graham Willett and John Arnold (eds), *Queen City of the South: Gay and Lesbian Melbourne*, special issue of *The La Trobe Journal* 87 (2011) and Garry Wotherspoon, *Gay Sydney: A History* (Sydney: New South, 2016). Because of the paucity of documentary sources, the scholarly literature on lesbians in Australia is much less extensive. A pioneering work is Rebecca Jennings, *Unnamed Desires: A Sydney Lesbian History* (Melbourne: Monash University Press, 2015).
4. See for example, the personal accounts in Garry Wotherspoon (ed.), *Being Different* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1986).
5. John Tregenza, *Collegiate School of St Peter, Adelaide: The Founding Years, 1847–1878* (Adelaide: The School, 1996), pp. 60–62, 64–76 and 98–99.
6. Notably the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, appointed by the Australian government in 2013: [www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au](http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au). Accessed 6 June 2016.
7. Barbara Falk, D. J.: *Dorothy Jean Ross, 1891–1982* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000), pp. 144–151.
8. David Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: A History of the Melanesian Mission, 1849–1942* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1978), pp. 90, 155, 185–186 and 251.

9. These were local examples of a correlation that first became apparent in England in the 1840s. See David Hilliard, 'UnEnglish and unmanly: Anglo-Catholicism and homosexuality', *Victorian Studies*, 25:2 (1982), pp. 181–210; also Martin Stringer, 'Of gin and lace: sexuality, liturgy and identity among Anglo-Catholics in the mid-twentieth century', *Theology and Sexuality* 7:13 (2000), pp. 35–54.
10. Manning Clark, *The Puzzles of Childhood* (Ringwood: Council of Adult Education, 1989), p. 37.
11. Interview with Rev. David Conolly, Melbourne, 3 June 2015.
12. On Maynard as a confessor and counsellor, see Colin Holden, *From Tories at Prayer to Socialists at Mass: St Peter's, Eastern Hill, Melbourne, 1846–1990* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), Chap. 14.
13. Interview with Donald Smith, Adelaide, 18 May 1992.
14. Paula Byrne, *Mad World: Evelyn Waugh and the Secrets of Brideshead* (London: Harper Perennial, 2009), p. 97. Lord Beauchamp is generally believed to be the model for Lord Marchmain in Evelyn Waugh's novel *Brideshead Revisited*.
15. *The Banner and Anglo-Catholic Review* (Sydney), 2 November 1891.
16. Interview with Barry McPherson, Adelaide, 13 June 1988.
17. Interview with Bishop Howell Witt, Perth, 28 September 1992. Witt was Bishop of North West Australia in 1965–1981 and Bishop of Bathurst, New South Wales in 1981–1989.
18. Kerreen Reiger, 'Communal aspects of an urban parish', in Donald E. Edgar (ed.), *Social Change in Australia: Readings in Sociology* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1974), p. 184.
19. David Marr, *Patrick White: A Life* (London: Cape, 1991), pp. 282–284 and 357–358. White was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1973.
20. Rodney Wetherell, 'Uncheery soul', *Meanjin* 64:1–2 (2005), pp. 243–254.
21. Adrian Dixon, 'Adrian finds his Avalon', in Wotherspoon, *Being Different*, pp. 76–78.
22. Peter F. Anson, *The Call of the Cloister: Religious Communities and Kindred Bodies in the Anglican Communion* (London: SPCK, 1958), pp. 581–587; T. W. Campbell, *Religious Communities of the Anglican Communion: Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific* (Canberra: Campbell, 2007).
23. See Alistair Mason, *SSM: History of the Society of the Sacred Mission* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1993), pp. 239–240, for 'gossip about homosexuality' at the SSM's theological college in Adelaide.
24. John Green, in Dino Hodge, *Did You Meet Any Malagas?: A Homosexual History of Australia's Tropical Capital* (Darwin: Little Gem, 1993), p. 35.
25. One of these priests, an influential figure in the diocese of Brisbane, was commemorated by a discreetly worded collection of essays: Christopher

- C. Levy (ed.), *James Warner, Priest, 1937–1993* (Brisbane: Chris Levy, 1995).
26. Interview with Francis James by Stuart Piggin, Margaret Lamb and Robert Linder, Sydney, 19 June 1990, Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity Archives, Moore College Library, Sydney.
  27. Kenneth Leslie, 'Thomas Marshall Robinson: a memoir', *Church Scene*, 19 May 1977, pp. 13 and 15.
  28. Brian Cartledge, 'The biography-in-progress of Harold William Rogers, Anglican priest (1922–1988)', in Robert Aldrich and Garry Wotherspoon (eds), *Gay Perspectives: Essays in Australian Gay Culture* (Sydney: University of Sydney, 1992), pp. 113–129, at 117. The papers of Harold Rogers are held in the State Library of New South Wales, MLMSS 9073.
  29. P. M., review of *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, by Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *The Anglican*, 9 September 1955, p. 8.
  30. Norman Pittenger, *Time for Consent: A Christian's Approach to Homosexuality* (2nd ed., London: SCM Press, 1970). Another popular work was by an American Methodist: H. Kimball Jones, *Toward a Christian Understanding of the Homosexual* (London: SCM Press, 1967). For a survey of this first wave of literature, by an Australian evangelical Anglican, see Kenneth Orr, 'Christians take another look at homosexuality: a review article', *Journal of Christian Education Papers*, 59 (1977), pp. 10–31. The publication of this article led to Orr's enforced resignation as an associate editor of the journal.
  31. Diocese of Melbourne, Social Questions Committee, *Report on Homosexuality*, 1971 (Melbourne, 1971).
  32. Diocese of Sydney, Ethics and Social Questions Committee, *Report on Homosexuality* (Sydney, 1973).
  33. Willett, *Living Out Loud*, Chap. 3.
  34. Interview with Rev. David Conolly, Melbourne, 3 June 2015.
  35. *Australian Church Record*, 13 January 1972, p. 6.
  36. 'Report on ... homosexuality and ministry', in *Year Book of the Diocese of Sydney* (1986), pp. 309–313.
  37. See, for example, Ray Smith, *Care of Homosexuals by the Local Church* (Sydney: Smith, 2000) and Mark D. Thompson (ed.), *Human Sexuality and the 'Same Sex Marriage' Debate* (Sydney: Anglican Youthworks, 2015).
  38. Integrity–Adelaide records, 1982–1994, Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives, Melbourne.
  39. AngGays records, 1968–1988, Public Library of New South Wales, MLMSS 5361.
  40. In gay slang since the 1940s the phrase 'friend of Dorothy' was a euphemism for homosexual.

41. B. G. Webb (ed.), *Theological and Pastoral Responses to Homosexuality*, Explorations 8 (Adelaide: Openbook, 1994); Anglican Church of Australia, Doctrine Panel, *Faithfulness in Fellowship: Reflections on Homosexuality and the Church* (Melbourne: John Garratt, 2001); Louis William Countryman, Michael Donald Kirby and Nigel Wright, *Five Uneasy Pieces: Essays on Scripture and Sexuality* (Adelaide: AFT, 2011); M. Bird and G. Preece (eds), *Sexegesis: An Evangelical Response to "Five Uneasy Pieces" on Homosexuality* (Sydney: Anglican Press, 2012); Alan H. Cadwallader (ed.), *Pieces of Ease and Grace: Biblical Essays on Sexuality and Welcome* (Adelaide: ATF, 2013); Alan H. Cadwallader (ed.), *A Kaleidoscope of Pieces: Anglican Essays on Sexuality, Ecclesiology and Theology* (Adelaide: ATF, 2016) and Mark D. Thompson (ed.), *Human Sexuality and the 'Same Sex Marriage' Debate* (Sydney: Anglican Youthworks, 2015).
42. Muriel Porter, *Sydney Anglicans and the Threat to World Anglicanism: The Sydney Experiment* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011) is a critical analysis of Sydney Anglicanism. For a sympathetic account, see Marcia Cameron, *Phenomenal Sydney: Anglicans in a Time of Change* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016).
43. Anglican Church of Australia, 'Homosexuality': <http://www.anglican.org.au/home/about/social-issues/Pages/homosexuality.aspx>. Accessed 20 May 2016.
44. See for example, *Report of the Board of Inquiry into the Handling of Claims of Sexual Abuse and Misconduct within the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, 26 May 2004* (Adelaide: not publisher identified, 2004).
45. John Foster, *Take Me to Paris, Johnny*, 3rd ed. (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2016).
46. David Paul, 'The modern inquisition: the influence of religion on attitudes and behaviour of gay men', in Garry Wotherspoon (ed.), *Gay and Lesbian Perspectives III: Essays in Australian Culture* (Sydney: University of Sydney, 1996), pp. 241–263, at 261.
47. Ali Wurm in Dino Hodge (ed.), *The Fall Upward: Spirituality in the Lives of Lesbian Women and Gay Men* (Darwin: Little Gem, 1996), pp. 47–60, at 57.

## ‘The Ecclesiastical Wing of the Lavender Revolution’: Religion and Sexual Identity Organising in the USA, 1946–1976

*Heather R. White*

North American newspaper and news magazines began reporting on ‘militant homosexuals’ in late 1969 and 1970.<sup>1</sup> The most evident inspiration for this militancy was the June 1969 riots in New York’s Greenwich Village, when patrons at the Stonewall Inn answered a police raid with angry violence. The months after the riot brought a new wave of activism that paired confrontational protest with a call for gay identity pride.<sup>2</sup> Journalists writing about the gay radicalism also highlighted a related and somewhat perplexing development: the rapid growth of explicitly gay-identified churches. In December of 1969 the *Los Angeles Times* ran a feature on the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC). Within a year of its founding, the church attracted a regular attendance

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of four hundred. A photo of pastor Troy Perry, fiery-eyed and clad in a black cassock, accompanied the journalist's description of the church as 'the first in the country to have a homosexual pastor, a predominantly homosexual congregation, and to identify itself unabashedly as a church for homosexuals'.<sup>3</sup> The *New York Times* followed with articles on the Church of the Beloved Disciple, a gay-welcoming independent Catholic congregation whose founder, Robert Clement, marched in the first Gay Pride demonstration with flyers announcing the new church. Within eight months, Beloved Disciple claimed a regular attendance of 200.<sup>4</sup> Journalists writing about gay churches expressed surprise, presuming that a church would be the last place one would expect to find a militant homosexual. One reporter surmised, 'homosexuals have generally felt about as comfortable in most local churches as early Christians did in the Coliseum'; another went so far as to wonder if the 'flaunted brand of homosexual Christianity' could actually be what it claimed.<sup>5</sup> The combination of gay radicalism and religion seemed like a contradiction in terms.

In truth, this 'ecclesiastical wing of the lavender revolution'—as one journalist dubbed it—was an important part of the gay social movement. Like post-Stonewall gay radicalism, the gay church phenomenon was also not as new and novel as it seemed. Both were part of an earlier and ongoing movement. This essay traces this religious involvement as an intertwined part of the history of politicised sexual identity, which began to coalesce after World War II and became visible to the American mainstream in the 1970s. Focusing on religion in this history counters the implicit and explicit ways that the queer histories are told without attention to religion.<sup>6</sup> When religion appears in these stories, if it appears at all, is it as a secondary effect of more central secular developments. Such narratives cast religion as constitutively heteronormative and queerness as intrinsically non-religious. This either/or binary obscures the important place of religion in queer identity organising by explaining it away: the religion versus queer frame inevitably portrays queer religious expression as a fascinating but wrong-headed form of bad faith. By taking seriously queer religious expression, however, we see a different picture. Religious ideals and practices, in various contexts, provided powerful resources for challenging social stigma and for enacting new forms of communal solidarity.

## HOMOPHILE FELLOWSHIPS

On Christmas Day, 1946 in the Southern city of Atlanta, a small group—‘old and young; men and women; gay and non-gay’—gathered before a makeshift altar of two cocktail tables. Helen Pappas, who recounted this memory three decades later, called this meeting ‘the world’s first gay-oriented church’, a pointed counter-claim to the assumed primacy of the 1968-founded Metropolitan Community Church. Sources dated closer to the time show that this Eucharistic Catholic Church did indeed deliberately welcome homosexuals, through without the bold advertising of the later MCC.<sup>7</sup> The history of this church, which was one part of a quiet effort to link homosexuality and spirituality, shows the earlier roots of the Stonewall-era ‘gay churches’. The founder of the Atlanta church, George Hyde, was a former Roman Catholic seminarian who had been expelled after a fellow student accused him of immoral conduct with another man. Hyde heard rumours that the priest of The Sacred Heart, a Roman Catholic congregation in downtown Atlanta, refused to serve the sacrament of holy Eucharist to a young man who had confessed his homosexuality. In response, Hyde gathered a small group of sympathisers that first protested the priest’s exclusionary behaviour and then decided to form their own church. The new congregation had no formal denominational ties, and Hyde’s ordination to the priesthood was granted by a suspended Greek Orthodox bishop. The congregation called themselves the Eucharistic Catholic Church after the sacrament denied by the Roman priest.<sup>8</sup>

Hyde’s ministry to homosexuals, bold as it was, was not entirely exceptional. More information about Hyde’s ministry appears in the publications and correspondence files of ONE, Inc., one of the first homophile organisations in the United States. These records also tell of other similar fellowships. ONE, an organisation headquartered in Los Angeles, discretely published a low-budget magazine that explored positive aspects of homosexuality. It was one of the few critical alternatives to mainstream newspapers and magazines that unreflectively spoke of homosexuality as a form of deviance and criminality. *ONE Magazine* and other smaller publications helped to foster a shared sexual identity among its readers, and its subscriber and correspondence networks also provided the organising channels for an emerging social movement. By the late 1950s, leading participants in these networks began to call themselves the ‘homophile’ movement, choosing a term that emphasised

same-sex love and solidarity over the ascribed medical term ‘homosexual’, which participants saw as too sex-focused and clinical.<sup>9</sup> As participants in these homophile networks redefined homosexuality, many of them also developed religious practices as resources for self-acceptance.

In 1954, Hyde placed an advertisement for the Eucharistic Catholic Church in *ONE Magazine*, a homophile publication that circulated out of Los Angeles. The advertisement assured the magazine’s homosexual readership that ‘we do not attempt to judge’ and provided an address where inquirers could write for further information about ‘a church truly one and catholic, embracing any and all’.<sup>10</sup> By this time, Hyde had moved from Atlanta to Washington DC, where he joined with the Orthodox–Catholic Church of America as an ordained bishop. This small branch of independent Catholicism traced its roots to late nineteenth-century leaders who split from Rome to claim a separate practice of Catholicism. In the 1950s and 1960s, Hyde recalls, many of the priests and bishops associated with this jurisdiction of independent Catholicism welcomed homosexuals into their churches and their ministries.<sup>11</sup> Hyde also corresponded with one of the magazine editors, James Kepner, in 1961. The letter explained the apostolic succession, a key matter of doctrine that distinguished their ‘canonical’ communion from ‘wrongly-believing Protestant’ and ‘human Catholic’ churches. The apostolic lineage granted a unique authority to the otherwise unorthodox welcome to gays and lesbians. ‘In this modern world there is a TRUE [sic] Catholic, Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ’, Hyde wrote, ‘and here, in this section of His true Church, the homosexual is warmly embraced’.<sup>12</sup> Adding to the letter’s explication of gay-welcoming apostolic Christian doctrine, *ONE Magazine* included other published essays by independent Catholic priests.<sup>13</sup>

Homophile journals provided a multi-layered forum for reading, discussing, and connecting around religious ideas. Journals regularly published articles written by clergy of various denominations. The themes addressed in those essays were re-aired in readers’ letters published in later issues. Editors of magazines and newsletters also put their networks to use by connecting individuals seeking spiritual counsel to sympathetic clergy in their city or region. This referral service operated as a hidden version of the published list of welcoming congregations, which began to appear in homophile publications a decade later.<sup>14</sup> Homophile leaders also intentionally worked to solicit support from clergy and religious leaders. In a 1958 letter to ‘Father M.’, Mattachine leader Phillip Jason



urged him to consider the quandary of homosexuals 'seeking a *modus vivendi* within the teachings of his Church'.<sup>15</sup> Participants in homophile organisations also directly organised religious services. Chuck Rowland, a member of ONE, formed a short-lived congregation called The First Church of the One Brotherhood in 1956. The church met in Los Angeles' First Christian Spiritualist Episcopal Church.<sup>16</sup> In New York, the Mattachine Society held a Protestant discussion group during the 1950s that was led by Methodist minister Edward Egan.<sup>17</sup>

Through the 1950s, most participants in these homophile religious networks carefully hid their beliefs and identities from public scrutiny. Most essays in homophile publications appeared under pseudonyms, and the journals themselves circulated through the mail in discreet packaging or were purchased nervously from urban newsstands. Group meetings took place in private homes. Participants rightly feared that public exposure might lead to being fired from a job, social exclusion, or even arrest. And yet, this underground press also facilitated national and international communication networks for a readership that was largely socially invisible. In this hidden forum, homophile writers developed new ideas about homosexuality and connected them to supportive religious resources.<sup>18</sup>

There was one remarkable exception to this hidden discourse—Robert Wood's *Christ and the Homosexual* (1960). Wood was a United Church of Christ minister and a participant in the Mattachine Society and the West Side Discussion Group in New York. He was also a devoted sadomasochist who frequented New York's gay leather bars. He published the book under his own name and financed the publication himself through a vanity press. No mainstream press would touch it, and Wood's efforts to publicise it through mainstream channels went virtually unheeded—it was too radical. But the homophile organisations received the book with enthusiasm, heaping it with book awards and rave reviews. 'Homosexuals DO have a place in the church!' one reviewer exclaimed; 'to say the book is a sympathetic one is an understatement'. The book made Wood a minor celebrity in the small and hidden world of the homophile movement, and it also opened up a conversation into venues beyond the homophile publications. In a 1961 letter to Robert Wood (also discussed in the next chapter of the present book) a Lutheran candidate for ordination addressed the conflicts he experienced when he acknowledged his same-sex attractions during his senior year in seminary. He confessed to Wood that he desired both 'the companionship

and love of a partner through life', and 'to serve our Lord in ministering to people'. He continued, 'but—how to reconcile all this and not be a hypocrite. I despise falsity, particularly in myself, but can I dare to be honest or must one always retain this hypocritical mask?'<sup>19</sup> For this young man, like many other gay Christians, the most strongly felt incongruity between their personal and spiritual lives was the necessity to hide.

Through the 1960s, homophile organisations continued to form alliances with sympathetic religious leaders—a group dominantly comprised of liberal mainline Protestant clergy but also including Reform Jews and Catholics. In 1964 homophile leaders and supportive clergy in San Francisco created a new organisation, the Council on Religion and the Homosexual (CRH), with the explicit aim of building religious support for the homophile cause. In the late 1960s, the CRH played a prominent role in several of San Francisco's battles for homosexual and transgender rights, making the organisation a model for homophile leaders in other cities. In dozens of smaller US cities—such as Kansas City, Dallas, Hartford, and St. Louis—aspiring activists turned to progressive clergy for help in stating their city's first homophile organisation.<sup>20</sup>

Clergy support was a widespread part of the homophile movement's history but this trend has largely escaped the analysis of contemporary historians. The reaction of historian James Sears is typical: writing about the 1965 formation of the Chicago Mattachine Society, Sears noted with surprise that a minister hosted the meetings in his church and also used the church's printing supplies to produce the monthly newsletter. 'A rarity in the pre-Stonewall era', Sears surmised.<sup>21</sup> This arrangement was more typical than Sears or other historians have realised. Many of these clergy were involved in the African American civil rights movement and other social justice struggles and saw anti-homosexual discrimination as a related struggle; some were gay and closeted; and nearly all worked with churches or community organisations located in so-called homosexual ghettos of urban centres. The Reverend Cecil Williams, senior pastor of Glide Memorial Methodist Church, was perhaps the most visible of these clergy advocates—an African American and civil rights activist, he helped to connect homophile and transgender organising with various freedom struggles in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco. The instrumental involvement of clergy and supportive congregations helped to enable new growth in the homophile movement during the late 1960s.<sup>22</sup>

The homophile movement laid the foundation for a subsequent wave of radical activism that followed the June 1969 riots at the Stonewall Inn

in New York City. Post-Stonewall activists for gay liberation claimed the riot as the origin of the movement. However, a longer view of the history counters these claims, showing this it was not a wholesale beginning but rather an important shift. An important part of this shift was a focus on 'coming out' by publicly declaring a gay or lesbian identity.<sup>23</sup> For some, the confrontational expression of sexuality went hand in hand with a critique of institutional religion. However, many other out and proud activists discovered this new identity in church. The 1970s brought a boom in explicitly gay-identified churches, which in turn inspired further religious organising—including gay synagogues, Catholic support groups, mainline Protestant reform organisations, and new experiments in gay spirituality. The challenge these groups brought to established religious institutions is often perceived as a secular incursion stemming from somewhere outside of religious traditions. However, as the first section of this chapter showed, much of the politics of gay identity pride had in fact been nurtured by the earlier involvement of religious groups. Where the earlier homophile organisers quietly connected spirituality and sexuality, the new generation of religious activists advertised their welcoming fellowships with evangelistic zeal and demanded that their leaders be allowed to honestly profess their sexual identities.

### SPIRITS OF LIBERATION

In October 1968, twelve people gathered in the living room of Troy Perry's Los Angeles home for a church service. Perry, a gay man and former Pentecostal minister, led the first meeting of the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) with borrowed vestments and his Bible. Perry founded the MCC to be 'a Christian church for all people with an outreach to the gay community', and his preaching communicated a Pentecostal-inflected ecumenism within the cultural idioms of Los Angeles' gay communities. Within a year, the predominantly gay congregation increased to more than 300.<sup>24</sup> As the largest and most rapidly growing fellowship, the MCC held a leading role in the gay religious movement. Much of the church's growth can be attributed to Perry's charismatic leadership. But the church also received instrumental support from leaders in Los Angeles' gay community. Owners and patrons of local gay bars and the regular coverage by the gay newspaper, *The Los Angeles Advocate*, contributed to the growth of the Los Angeles congregation. In a 1969 *Advocate* editorial, Jim Kepner described Perry's

church as ‘a center of a New Movement’ that served to ‘draw together people from different backgrounds, with different prejudices, different expectations, and weld them into a united community’.<sup>25</sup> Excitement in Los Angeles over the MCC spread since the *Los Angeles Advocate* attracted a national readership and mainstream newspapers carried stories about the young church. Perry’s charismatic leadership and the churches’ ecumenical emphasis on God’s acceptance of ‘all people’ proved to be a recipe for exponential growth.

As the MCC completed its first year, it had developed a distinctive worship style that attracted a congregation of wide denominational diversity. While Perry drew heavily from his Pentecostal background in planning services, he also relied on the experience of several assistant pastors, including John Hose, Richard Ploen, and Jerry Joachim, who came from Evangelical Reformed, Presbyterian, and independent Catholic backgrounds respectively.<sup>26</sup> These ministers assisted in the Sunday services and administration of the church. One observer described the liturgy as a ‘high church Pentecostalism’, and Perry himself humorously acknowledged the eclecticism in one of his sermons. ‘MCC has been criticized’, he said, ‘for some of the “funny” things it does in services sometimes. That’s what happens when people with many varied background get together to do something... Remember, your turn will come, when something from your background will show up in services and people of other faiths could throw up their hands in horror’.<sup>27</sup> These ‘funny things’ attracted a following even more diverse than the pastoral staff. Although a significant minority of church members and attendees claimed a fundamentalist or charismatic church background, most were from mainline Protestant churches, nearly a quarter claimed Roman Catholicism as their faith heritage, and a handful had been members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The MCC also created a non-membership category for ‘friends’, permitting an official affiliation for those who supported the church but could not profess Christian tenets of faith, thus including a number of Jews, agnostics, atheists, and Buddhists within the fellowship.<sup>28</sup>

As the MCC grew, Perry took an increasingly active role in local gay politics, joining homophile leaders in October 1969 to form the Committee for Homosexual Law Reform.<sup>29</sup> The committee’s first event was a rally that drew two hundred people to the steps of the Los Angeles Civic Center. The demonstrators’ placards, which included the slogans ‘The Lord is My Shepherd and He Knows I’m Gay’ and ‘Oral

Can Be Moral', defended gay rights in religious terms.<sup>30</sup> With a strategy of encouraging the membership of his church to become more politically active, Perry continued his leadership in area rallies and demonstrations for gay rights. His activities, however, were destined to conflict with church members who believed that the church should not have a political role. One contributor to the weekly church newsletter declared, 'We're a church first, we're social second and don't want to get politically involved'.<sup>31</sup> These issues caused contentious debate within the congregation. Homophile activist Jim Kepner scathingly criticised conservative church members, charging that 'they want the word "homosexual" mentioned in whispers, if at all. They want MCC to look exactly like "normal" churches ... any hint of camping shrivels their respectable souls'.<sup>32</sup> Some church members feared the notoriety that the MCC might incur for public involvement in gay causes, and they preferred that the church stay out of the civic arena altogether.

In spite of the resistance from some members of the congregation, Perry continued to join rallies and demonstrations for gay rights, and his fiery speaking style and personal charisma quickly earned him a public role in the gay rights movement. Perry seized an activist role with the conviction that 'God does not take a back seat', and his supporters even cheekily termed him the 'Martin Luther Queen' of the gay movement.<sup>33</sup> Perry's increasing popularity gained publicity for the church, and the Los Angeles congregation continually drew more members, as well as inquiries about starting congregations in other locations. Within two years of the MCC's first meeting in Perry's living room, congregations and missions in other cities joined together with the Los Angeles congregation to form the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. The denomination's first conference gathered delegates from the growing roster of churches in Los Angeles, Phoenix, San Diego, and San Francisco, as well as from missions in Chicago, Costa Mesa, Dallas, and Honolulu. Within a year, the list of churches and missions had more than doubled in number.<sup>34</sup> The MCC's exponential growth required it to encompass increasing religious and political diversity and the denomination's loose administration gave local pastors considerable freedom to experiment. In the interest of holding ecumenical services, Paul Breton, who pastored the MCC in Washington DC, remembered holding 'a high-church service one Sunday [and] a Baptist-type service the next Sunday'.<sup>35</sup> Perry's prominence as the founder of the MCC gave the

denomination a Pentecostal reputation, but local congregations spanned a wide array of theological and liturgical emphases.

As the MCC strove to keep its services ecumenical in order to allow their congregations to welcome believers across a spectrum of traditions, some gay Christians felt the need for services that remained connected to their particular denominations. One gay Catholic man commented in a 1972 letter, 'In Miami I joined M.C.C. and got much out of services... The thought that here finally is a church where gays could worship God as homosexuals enthralled me. But, I am a Catholic and very happy to be so. I still want to be Catholic in spite of my homosexuality. I want to be of some help to Catholics who are gay and having problems accepting themselves as both human beings and Catholics'.<sup>36</sup> As the largest and fastest growing fellowship, the MCC was often the first church community that many gay people encountered where they could openly acknowledge their sexual identity, but for many it was also a stepping-stone into gay religious organising that reconnected participants with their particular tradition of origin.

The letter excerpted above, which was addressed to leaders of Dignity, told of how attending the MCC awakened in the author a desire to reconnect with Roman Catholicism. Dignity, a fellowship for gay Roman Catholics, had begun within months of the MCC, holding small group meetings that met in members' homes in the San Diego and Los Angeles areas. Within a few years, Dignity branched out to include local chapters and missions in other cities, all focused on connecting homosexual laity with gay and sympathetic priests within a shared commitment to the Roman Catholic Church. One of Dignity's members situated its founding within 'the impetus for change' and 'the spirit of renewal' moving in the post-Vatican II Catholic Church.<sup>37</sup> The reforms of the Second Vatican Council, which had just adjourned in 1965, initially contributed to a strong level of support for Dignity from various leaders in the American Catholic Church. Dignity's outreach to the gay community was directed to the laity and priesthood of the church, and as it grew to become a national movement, it remained committed to working within the Roman Catholic Church.

Dignity was first organised by Father Patrick X. Nidorf, an Augustinian priest and a counsellor who became concerned with the needs and anxieties of gay Catholics that he encountered in his practice. He explained, 'In working with [homosexual] Catholics it became more and more obvious [that] their deep spiritual needs which were not being met and the

overshadowing non-acceptance of Holy Mother [Church] were causing a great many of the inner conflicts'.<sup>38</sup> After discussing the matter with his provincial and his order, Nidorf decided to organise a therapy group that would provide support to gay Catholics working out their feelings of conflict between their faith and their sexuality. He posted advertisements in the *Los Angeles Free Press* and the *Los Angeles Advocate*, which addressed 'Catholic Gays' and invited them to join a group where 'we share successful ways of bringing dignity into our lives. Honest talk / sensitivity / sincere people'.<sup>39</sup> The advertisement invited those interested to write to Father Nidorf, whose concerns over the confidentiality and seriousness of the group led him to screen the inquiries carefully.

The early meetings combined discussions of theological texts on homosexuality, group therapy, and a service of Holy Mass.<sup>40</sup> Patrick Allen, who began regularly attending Dignity's meetings several months after the group moved from San Diego to Los Angeles, recalled that the feeling of community in the small group was the aspect that held the greatest draw for its members. 'There was very definitely a feeling of brotherhood, of community, and far more spirituality than I really felt in churches', he remembered, 'and also—I don't know if I want to say protest—but [a feeling] that God didn't make any garbage... and we didn't accept the way the church looked at us'.<sup>41</sup> Along with this sense of community, however, the group maintained a cautious, even secretive, outlook. For a long time the meetings remained small, gathering between ten and twenty people in members' homes, and most participants concealed their identities by using only their first names.

About two years after Nidorf hosted the first meeting, the direction of Dignity began to turn. Nidorf encouraged its members to take more responsibility for the group's direction, appointing leading members to serve on a formation committee. One of the committee's first decisions was to approach the Archbishop of Los Angeles to request his support for Dignity. After hearing from the group, the Archbishop called a meeting with Nidorf and his Provincial, at which he expressed his concern for gay Catholics, but forbade Nidorf to continue his leadership in Dignity.<sup>42</sup> In deference to the Archbishop's dictate, Nidorf turned the leadership of Dignity over to its formation committee in February 1971. After this turn of events, Bob Fournier, who chaired the committee and edited Dignity's newsletter, nonetheless expressed his certainty for the group's future. 'Dignity will continue', he insisted in the newsletter.

‘Why? Because there is a need. As Gay Catholics, we love the Church. We want the sacraments. Theologians must hear our voice and must realise that we are flesh and blood. We are not abstract moral cases’.<sup>43</sup> With this vision of Dignity’s mission to gay Catholics and to the larger Church, Fournier and the handful of gay men in the formation committee invested their energies in helping Dignity grow from an intimate gathering into a larger fellowship. Dignity’s monthly newsletter provided a key medium for connecting interested laity and sympathetic priests and theologians across the country.

As Dignity received mail from readers across the country, its leaders began strategising about ways to expand their outreach, suggesting for the first time, in the August 1971 newsletter, ‘If you live outside the Los Angeles area, why not try to organise a chapter of DIGNITY for your area ... It would be a great thing if gay Catholics could be organised throughout the country’.<sup>44</sup> Within a year of this invitation, Joe Gilgamesh, who was serving as Dignity’s president, made a cross-country trip to visit Dignity’s contacts in six cities: Chicago, Washington DC, Louisville, Boston, New York City, and Philadelphia. Upon his return, he wrote about Dignity’s growth with enthusiasm: ‘During the past three years we have seen the concept of our founder, Fr. Pat [Nidorf], growing to maturity from one small group meeting in homes to a national organisation with 300–400 members and several chapters’. Dignity united priests and laity across the country, Gilgamesh wrote, ‘so we can bring the message of Christ to the gay Catholic and bring the message of the gay Catholic to the steps of the Church’.<sup>45</sup> What was initially a small fellowship that focused upon the conflicted allegiances of individual gay Catholics began to envision a larger mission of bringing together gay Catholics and the Roman Catholic Church.

Dignity’s commitment to the Catholic Church influenced its leaders’ systematic approach to questions about the moral status of homosexuality. Under Fournier’s editorial influence, Dignity’s newsletter regularly published articles and commentary by progressive Catholics on the issue of homosexuality. Fournier commented on this theological work, insisting that Catholic gays should see ‘the use of sex as morally right’. He founded his argument in a view of homosexuality as an intrinsic condition, advising to his readers, ‘Remember, you *cannot* be held morally accountable for a condition you did not freely choose’.<sup>46</sup> The choice for gay Catholics, Fournier argued, was to use sex ‘in the only mentally healthy way for *you*’, and he admonished his readers to live proudly: ‘Use



your gay conscience and be proud that you are a gay Catholic. Live as a gay Catholic: use sex your way; receive the sacraments'.<sup>47</sup> Fournier and other contributing theologians emphasised gay Catholics' freedom of conscience for making decisions about 'the use of sex'.

In practice, however, these decisions were often far more complicated, and local Dignity chapters served as communities in which both priests and laity sorted out the implications of sex, celibacy, and relationships. Los Angeles Dignity member Patrick Allen recalled the difficult choices confronting Dignity's lay and clerical members. Lay members had to confront these questions, but Allen remembered that the clerics in many ways had the more difficult decisions. 'Almost all the priests who started out with Dignity... were trying to understand their own sexuality', Allen recalled. The priests who acknowledged that they were gay then faced decisions about 'whether to stay within their local ministry [and] whether to stay within their vows of celibacy'.<sup>48</sup> In their openness to discussing these options, Dignity chapters provided a function unanticipated by its founders, who had envisioned a primary focus on laity. Many of the clerics who participated as ministers to gay Catholics themselves found support for coming to terms with homosexuality and questioning their role within the church. In the wake of Dignity's first national conference in 1973, one leader of the organisation stirringly depicted Dignity's role within the Roman Catholic Church, declaring that the organisation formed a 'vehicle through which [homophiles] can enter into dialogue with the Church [and] through which they can stand before the Christian body in the role of prophet'.<sup>49</sup> A few years later, a journalist for the *National Catholic Reporter* echoed this observation in less ceremonious terms, describing Dignity as 'a fishbone lodged in the throat of the Catholic Church. The institution can't swallow it; and it just won't go away'.<sup>50</sup> As an organisation of insiders, Dignity visibly represented an unpalatable but persistent issue.

In contrast to Dignity's denominational loyalties, several independent Catholic churches insistently left Rome behind to openly proclaim their welcome to gay Christians. Unlike the quiet meetings of earlier independent Catholic groups, like George Hyde's 1946 congregation in Atlanta, independent Catholic leaders of the 1960s and 1970s vocally declared their ministry by and for gay people. Mikhail Itkin was one. Like George Hyde, Itkin was ordained by Clement Sherwood into the American Holy Orthodox Catholic Apostolic Eastern Church, but he separated from the group to form his own order in the Synod of the

Evangelical Catholic Communion, calling the group The Community of the Love of Christ. In the late 1960s, Itkin exploded onto the San Francisco scene, uniting radical politics and liberation theology as a self-proclaimed 'bishop for the resistance'. In December 1969, he held a Christmas Midnight Mass for homosexual liberation, where those attending burned draft cards, and affirmed their 'solidarity with the liberation movements of all oppressed peoples everywhere'.<sup>51</sup>

Alongside Itkin, San Francisco was home to quite a few independent gay priests. Robert Richards, a former Roman Catholic and independently ordained priest, established the Community of St. John the Beloved, with the purpose of providing 'a pastoral ministry to those Gay Catholics unable, for whatever reason, to satisfy their social, moral, and spiritual needs in their present parish'.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Ray Broshears founded the Orthodox Episcopal Church of God, and proselytised through his newspaper, *Gay Pride*, in which he combined local gossip with articles expounding his church's esoteric theology.<sup>53</sup> While these gay priests provided important social services and active ministries, they were also criticised for the pretensions of their titles and ceremonial attire. In a 1971 exposé, a journalist for the *San Francisco Examiner* accused these colourful prelates of manufacturing their elaborate claims to ecclesial authority: 'These "paper priests" carefully acquire a smattering acquaintance with liturgics... and church history—and use both to the hilt'.<sup>54</sup> A number of gay leaders voiced a similar impatience with independent Catholics' titles and ceremonies. One gay organiser in San Francisco gave up all attempts to clarify the 'confusion' over 'bishops, priests, ministers, etc.'. He complained in the monthly newsletter for the homophile organisation S.I.R.: 'There are so many people around S.I.R. Center these days with clerical collars and titles that we haven't time to figure it all out'.<sup>55</sup>

Many of these independent gay clergy focused on social ministries and political protest, rather than parish ministry, but a handful of independent priests did lead congregations. The largest of these congregations, The Church of Peter, Paul, and the Beloved Disciple in New York City, called itself a 'gay sacramental Church'. Drawing from the margins of both Christian tradition and gay community life, the Beloved Disciple innovatively fused sacramental traditions with radical politics. Father Robert Mary Clement and his lover, John Noble, publicised the first service of the Beloved Disciple at a commemorative demonstration held on the first anniversary of the Stonewall riots. Clement marched in the

Stonewall demonstration wearing a black cassock and carrying a placard stating 'Gay People this is Your Church'. Noble marched by his side, handing out flyers announcing the first service, which emphasised the church's commitment to gay pride:

Gay people of New York, here at last is a traditional church which you can enter proudly and as yourself, without fear of censure or denunciation ... If you accept your own homosexuality honestly within yourself, then here is a Church where you can face your God openly, with the same honesty and self-respect.<sup>56</sup>

As a self-described 'traditional church', the Beloved Disciple celebrated a mass service derived from an ancient Gaelic liturgy, with clergy, acolytes, and choir members elegantly attired in vestments and robes. The Beloved Disciple infused these traditional elements with gay liberation symbols. The choir wore the emblematic lavender of gay liberation, and the church's very name embraced a homoerotic interpretation of Christ's relationship with the disciple John.<sup>57</sup>

Gay-welcoming churches also provided models for gay and lesbian Jews, who formed gay-welcoming synagogues, lesbian-feminist communities, and advocacy organisation within established Jewish movements. A group of gay Jewish men in San Francisco formed 'Chutzpah' (later called Achvah) in 1972. They explained the new group in a promotional flyer: 'Why a Jewish Gay group? Why not!? ... Gay religious movements are not unusual in our present society'.<sup>58</sup> Some of the gay synagogues were direct spin-offs of gay churches. A small group of gay Jews who attended the Los Angeles MCC founded Beth Chaim Chadishim (BCC) in 1972. The BCC was also supported from the beginning by a Reform rabbi, Erwin Herman, whose son was gay, which led to the synagogue's decision to affiliate with Reform Judaism. New York's Beth Simchat Torah, founded in 1973, was inspired in part by the Church of the Beloved Disciple, and Miami's Congregation Etz Chaim (1974) was started by Jews who first met with the local MCC.<sup>59</sup> In 1976, representatives from the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Israel formed the World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations.<sup>60</sup>

By the end of the 1970s, gays and lesbians had formed separate spiritual fellowships and institutional reform initiatives that crossed every major American faith tradition. Some of these groups advocated for institutional form. Caucus groups in mainline Protestant denominations as

well as advocacy organisations within liberal Judaism brought attention to the fact of gay and lesbian religious leaders as they also sparked institutional debates over homosexuality.<sup>61</sup> Other groups, such as Affirmation (for members of the Church of Latter-Day Saints) and Evangelical Concerned (for conservative Protestants) provided accepting spaces for socially conservative religious groups. The religious organising of this decade was also not limited to established institutions but included new experiments like the 1976-founded Radical Faeries and non-institutional practices of lesbian feminist spirituality. Viewed broadly, sexual and gender identities have helped to catalyse a great variety of religious and spiritual practices, a fact of lived experience and collective expression that continues to this day.<sup>62</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The importance of religion to homophile and gay liberation activism is a history that was discounted during its own day and was then subsequently almost entirely forgotten. In newspaper articles as well as history books, the picture of sexual and gender identity movements tends to reflect the ideological assumptions of ‘sexularism’, a term coined by historian Joan Wallach Scott to capture the axiomatic linkages between secularism and sexual emancipation. Scott’s work deconstructs this ‘sexular’ ideology in order to showcase various ways that religious practice and belief have productively enabled various kinds of gender activism, with a particular focus on the overlooked history of Muslim feminisms. She calls broadly for ‘a more nuanced and complex historical approach to the supposedly antithetical concepts: the religious and secular’.<sup>63</sup> Scott’s work is also conceptually useful for rethinking the presumed secularism of queer organising in the United States (the focus of the present chapter) and elsewhere. This rethinking also helps to account for the particular preponderance of Christian involvement in homophile and gay liberation movement. The embedded Christianity of sexual identity movements problematises the perceived rupture from religion that is assumed to constitute the modern, secular queer. We might ask: what was *secular* about the Christianity and the other forms of religiously-identified gay organisations other than their queerness? To rephrase this question as a statement: *secular*, as it was used in contemporaneous media coverage, named the assumed difference between gay-identified churches and mid-century forms of American Christianity. Mid-century American

Christianity (and arguably also the post-war construction of Judeo-Christian religion) was normatively defined—like American culture at large—by heterosexuality.<sup>64</sup> This naming of the queer *as* secular obscures more than the proliferation of gay-identified religious groups. It also camouflages the more diffuse influences of Christianity within homophile and gay liberation movements—not surprising, since Christianity was the largest and culturally dominant faith. This context of hegemonic Christianity in all sides is important to the formation of queerness as secular, because it is from a perspective embedded in normative Christianity that a queer claim to Christianity is viewed as bad faith—or as no faith at all. What made gay churches ‘not Christian’ were the same cultural operations that made queer movements secular: their challenge to the entwinement of culturally normative heterosexuality with hegemonic Christianity.

## NOTES

1. Steven V. Roberts ‘Homosexuals in revolt’ *New York Times*, 24 August 1970, p. 1.
2. I use ‘gay’ here as movement activists of the late 1960s and 1970s used it—to encompass a diverse identity collective. Since the 1990s, this diversity has been signalled with the terms ‘LGBT’ (for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) and ‘queer’. For reflection on the historiography of the Stonewall Riots, see John D’Emilio, ‘Stonewall: myth and meaning’ in *The World Turned* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 146–153, Scott Bravmann, *Queer Fictions of the Past: History, Culture and Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 68–96, and Ernesto Londoño (with Susan Stryker) ‘Who threw the first brick at Stonewall?’ *New York Times*, 26 August 2015.
3. John Dart, ‘A church for homosexuals’, *Los Angeles Times*, 8 December 1969, p. C1.
4. Edward Fiske, ‘Color some of the churches lavender’, *New York Times*, 28 March 1971, p. E7.
5. “‘The gay Church,’” *Time Magazine* 98:7, 23 August 1971, pp. 38–39.
6. For exceptions to this trend, see ‘The gay religious movement’, in Jim Downs, *Stand by Me: The Forgotten History of Gay Liberation* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), ‘Born against at Stonewall’, in Heather White, *Reforming Sodom: Protestants and the Rise of Gay Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), pp. 138–170 and Mark

- Jordan, *Recruiting Young Love: How Christians Talk about Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
7. Helen Pappas, 'Happy birthday Jesus!' *SAGA* (December 1976), p. 8; periodicals archive, International Gay Information Center (IGIC) Collection, New York Public Library. This account claims the gathering took place in a gay bar, which Hyde later corrected in an oral history interview. See J. Gordon Melton interview with George Hyde, July 6, 2005: [www.lgbtran.org/Interview.aspx?ID=6](http://www.lgbtran.org/Interview.aspx?ID=6).
  8. J. Gordon Melton interview with George Hyde.
  9. For a history of the homophile movement, see John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970* (1983; repr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
  10. Advertisement, *ONE Magazine* 2:10 (December 1954), p. 32, letter to the editor, *The Advocate* (30 September–13 October 1970), p. 19 and George Hyde, interview with Anderson and Melton, January 2005.
  11. On independent Catholic churches, see Julie Byrne, *The Other Catholics: Remarking America's Largest Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016) and Peter F. Anson, *Bishops at Large* (1964; repr. Berkeley: The Apocryphile Press, 2006).
  12. Rt. Rev. George Hyde, DD (Bishop John Augustine) to The Editor of *One Magazine* (30 September 1961) and Bishop John Augustine to Mr. D. T. Cone (30 September 1961). Both found in the correspondence files of James Kepner, marked 'Religion'. ONE Records, ONE LGBT Archives (unprocessed).
  13. Bernard Newman, 'The path of truth', *ONE* 11:7 (July 1963), p. 5 and Thomas Martin and Bernard Newman, 'Guilt and the homosexual', *ONE* 8:12 (December 1960), p. 12; Also see 'Roundtable discussion: Must Christians live with guilt?' *Ladder* 3:6 (March 1959), pp. 12–20.
  14. See for example 'Church directory', *WSDG Newsetter* August 1970, p. 2. This list included five Christian Churches and one synagogue, the Woodruff Avenue Temple in Brooklyn.
  15. Letter, Phillip Jason to Father M. (n.d.; circa 1958). Papers of the Mattachine Society of New York 3:33. Microfilm 11783, reel 10, 1.
  16. Marvin Cutler (ed.), *Homosexuals Today: A Handbook of Organizations and Publications* (Los Angeles: Publications Division of ONE, Inc., 1956), pp. 105–107 and Jim Kepner, *Rough News—Daring Views* (New York: Haworth Press, 1998), pp. 10–11.
  17. Letter, Rev. Edward Egan to Rev. Robert Wood, 7 December 1957, Robert Wood papers, Congregational Library (CL), Boston, p. 1.
  18. For further analysis of American homophile publications and Christianity, see White, *Reforming Sodom*, pp. 43–70.

19. Letter, Al Gramstedt to Robert Wood, 24 January 1961, Robert Wood Papers, CL, pp. 1–2.
20. On 1960s homophile organizations and supportive mainline Protestant clergy, see White, *Reforming Sodom*, pp. 71–107.
21. James Thomas Sears, 'Bob Basker (1918–2001): selling the movement', in Vern L. Bullough (ed.), *Before Stonewall: Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context* (New York: Harrington, 2002), pp. 197–198.
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23. John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 235.
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25. Jim Kepner, 'Angles on the news', *Los Angeles Advocate* 3:8 (October 1969), p. 23.
26. Thomas Swicegood, *Our God Too: A Biography of a Church and a Temple* (1974, repr. New York: Writer's Showcase Press, 2003), pp. 114–121 and 135–137; and 'MCC Church for everyone', *MCC News*, 26 October 1969, pp. 1–2.
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28. 'MCC Church for Everyone', pp. 1–2 and Barry Dank, 'The Development of a Homosexual Identity: Antecedents and Consequents' (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1973), pp. 35–37. Sociologist R. Stephen Warner cites Dank's statistics on the religious representation in the MCC as reflective of the proportions of the general religious population of the United States. See R. Stephen Warner, 'The Metropolitan Community Churches and the gay agenda: The power of pentecostalism and essentialism', *Religion and the Social Order* 5 (1995), pp. 81–108, at 88.
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30. 'Not afraid anymore', p. 1.
31. 'MCC goes to SF', *MCC News*, 25 December 1969, pp. 1–2.
32. Jim Kepner, 'The urge to punish—two extremes', *The Advocate* (19 August–1 September 1970), p. 2.
33. Kepner, 'The urge to punish', p. 2, quoted in Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), p. 261.

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35. Paul Breton, interview with the author, 3 August 2005.
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42. *Dignity: A Monthly Newsletter* 2:1 (March 1971), p. 3.
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61. UCC Gay Caucus (1973); Gay Presbyterian Caucus (1974); Lutherans Concerned for Gay People (1974); Integrity Gay Episcopal Caucus (1974); Methodist Gay Caucus (1975); American Baptist Gay Caucus (founding date unknown; contact person listed in 1974). A 1974 listing cites contact persons for gay caucuses at the Graduate Theological Union, Yale Divinity School, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Atlanta Theological Association, Chicago Theological Seminary, and Union Theological Seminary, 'Contact persons in seminaries' (1974), Birchard Papers Box 3, File 2, FLHL.
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## *Christ and the Homosexual: An Early Manifesto for an Affirming Christian Ministry to Homosexuals*

*Bernard Schlager*

In 1960 United Church of Christ (UCC) minister Robert Wood (born in 1923 in Youngstown, Ohio) borrowed \$1000 from his life insurance policy to publish *Christ and the Homosexual*, a work that called for a radical reappraisal of traditional Christian condemnations of homosexuality and an unapologetic acceptance of homosexuals in church and society. Published under his own name and with a run of 5000 copies, the book would be reviewed positively by several homophile publications and serve to launch Wood's lifelong ministry of writing, speaking, and activism in support of homosexuals. Although Wood never came out of the closet

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during his thirty-year career as a parish minister, he did not shy away from engaging in a wide-ranging public ministry to advance the cause of homosexuals: through countless writing projects and dozens of speaking engagements; persistent lobbying for change within his denomination at all levels; a fifty-five-year (and still counting) correspondence with hundreds of individuals from all walks of life; and participation in numerous secular and religious homosexual-rights organisations.

In this chapter I explore *Christ and the Homosexual* as an early and detailed manifesto for creating a Christianity inclusive of gay and lesbian people and then ask why it exerted so little influence in its day despite the fact that its author, following the book's publication, continued to work for several decades to effect positive change for lesbian and gay people in Christian and secular venues.<sup>1</sup> Through work in his own denomination, Wood sought to convince church leaders that they should not only address homosexuality as an important moral issue of the day but also provide much-needed pastoral care for the many (and largely invisible) homosexuals in the pews (and pulpits) of their congregations. Through his work with secular homosexual-rights organisations, Wood strove to convince those alienated by Christianity that they should not abandon the church, which, he argued, could be reformed to accept and embrace homosexuals. Moreover, he believed that Christianity's long and dismal record of dealing with homosexuals was scandalous because it betrayed the very mission entrusted to the church by Jesus Christ: to preach the saving message of the Gospel to all people, gay as well as straight, and, in the process, to improve life for homosexuals not only within the church itself but also throughout American society at large.

### KEEN OBSERVER, CONCERNED PASTOR, AND CLOSETED HOMOSEXUAL

For Robert Wood, the church had an indispensable role to play in making the world a better place for homosexuals. Stating his conviction in the book's preface that '[i]t has always been the responsibility of the Church to... alter social mores to enable God... to work more effectively in the world',<sup>2</sup> Wood sets out a twofold aim for the book: to diagnose the spiritual dilemma faced by the homosexual and to counsel the church on how to minister more effectively to him. Focusing exclusively on male homosexuals (with the belief that most of his conclusions would be

applicable for lesbians as well),<sup>3</sup> he begins the first chapter with a series of vignettes that portray a diverse—but suffering—population of male homosexuals in American society in the late 1950s. He then moves on to establish the prevalence of homosexuality in contemporary culture before focusing on the many problems that confront the gay male. In the last chapters of the book Wood reviews the negative impact that the church has had on homosexuals in the past and present and then explores the reasons for this negativity. Finally, he presents his pastoral plan for how the church can change its understanding of homosexuality and help change societal views so that homosexuals might be better accepted by—and better integrated into—church and society.

Midway through the book Wood writes the following:

I have long hesitated to offer these observations of mine, for there are many, many persons much better qualified to discuss the situation. But no one has appeared with such a book, and in the meantime the negative attitude of the Church continues. My prayer is that this offering will bring forth a flood of writing, pro and con—but at least some discussion of homosexuality and Christianity, so that Christians may inform themselves and then decide how Christ would deal with the situation.<sup>4</sup>

Writing this book while serving as pastor of a UCC congregation in Spring Valley, New York, Wood never comes out to the reader as a gay (clergy)man. Rather, he claims other identities in an attempt to establish his personal credibility to speak on a subject that few know anything about. His credibility comes instead from the three roles that he embraces: he is an observer, a pastor, and a friend of homosexuals. Having had ‘twelve years of observing homosexuals and easily a thousand informal consultations with homosexuals’,<sup>5</sup> Wood is a keen observer of homosexual life. He is also a student of popular culture, a reader of psychological case studies, and conversation partner with countless homosexuals; he is someone who speaks with authority on homosexuality as he reveals presumably hidden—and, at times, shocking—aspects of homosexual culture to the reader. As a concerned pastor, the author dedicates the book, in part, to his fellow clergymen as he repeatedly seeks throughout the book to provide an answer to the question ‘how would Jesus Christ react to the homosexual?’<sup>6</sup> And, finally, Wood expresses appreciation, using first names only, for ‘a representative group from the homosexual community itself’ whom he calls friends and whom, the

reader might assume, Wood consulted in the research and writing of the book. While he explicitly eschews the professional identities of psychologist, sociologist, and theologian, Wood repeatedly stresses that it is his role as pastor that gives him greatest credibility for what he writes on the topic.

Before readers reach the book's first chapter they are met with an introduction by Albert Ellis (1913–2007), the famous psychologist and sexologist who viewed homosexuality, at least in the 1950s and 1960s, as an illness that was potentially—and preferably—curable. Ellis states in his introductory remarks that Wood is ‘dead wrong’ about many aspects of homosexuality including his presumption that homosexuality is innate, that not all homosexuals are neurotics, and that ‘the long-practicing homosexual can rarely or never become truly heterosexual...’<sup>7</sup> To amplify his criticism, Ellis cites Donald Webster Cory, author of *The Homosexual in America*, who had recently come to believe that homosexuality was, in Ellis’ words, ‘one hundred per cent self-defeating’.<sup>8</sup>

If today it seems strange that Wood would include such negative remarks in a book advocating a positive view of homosexuality and homosexuals, Ellis does applaud Wood for the ‘profound human sympathy and truly Christian forgiveness’ that informs the book.<sup>9</sup> It may be that Wood felt the need for a highly recognised psychologist to affirm his own sympathetic approach to the topic even if such affirmation did not extend to Wood’s own views on homosexuality. For Wood’s claims about homosexuality were radical ideas for two influential groups in America in the late 1950s: for psychological professionals, who saw homosexuality as a form of mental illness to be cured, and for Christian clergy who viewed homosexuality as inherently sinful and homosexuals in need of repentance and redemption. Indeed, many homosexuals at this time shared the view that they were ill and/or sinners. Wood brings together his powers of observation and pastoral sensibilities in the aforementioned vignettes (or ‘snapshots of the landscape’ as he calls them) that make up the book’s first chapter. Each of these vignettes seeks not only to demonstrate the chapter’s stated thesis that ‘the homosexual community is a vast complex segment of society’,<sup>10</sup> but each also shows the reader how deep are the struggles that many (most?) homosexual men face in contemporary church and society.<sup>11</sup>

From a young college man who shows up in his pastor’s study for counselling because he is uncertain about whether or not to marry his girlfriend, given his considerable homosexual experiences, to two men

who enter a committed relationship and find full acceptance from their parents and other family members as a married couple, these stories reflect some of the many dilemmas that Wood believed gay men faced in the late 1950s when he was writing. Chief among these dilemmas is what Wood refers to many times throughout the book as the 'wearing of masks', that is, the requirement to hide one's homosexuality.<sup>12</sup> Homosexual men are also depicted as deeply lonely in their search for meaningful love; they struggle with guilt over their sexual desires and sexual activity; many are in (or about to enter into) straight marriages filled with deep unhappiness for wife, husband, and children; and many question their place in churches where they are forced to hide even as they provide selfless service as clergymen, musicians, and volunteers for many congregational activities.

Wood takes some risks, writing as he does in the late 1950s, in describing aspects of male homosexual culture that would clearly have shocked many, if not most, of his readers. For instance, he writes about sex in shower rooms, a teenage boy who 'liked to put on... sweaty basketball shorts and have an orgasm',<sup>13</sup> and a trucker who is murdered by a trick he meets late one night at a truck stop. One vignette is devoted to a detailed description of an 'orgy of homosexual sadist-masochist debauchery' replete with hot pokers, the pouring of hot wax, and whippings.<sup>14</sup> At the end of this vignette Wood quotes from the first chapter of St. Paul's *Letter to the Romans*, long used by many Christians to demonise homosexual people for engaging in 'unnatural' relations, as a biblical reflection on the S&M scene just described.<sup>15</sup> Wood never identifies himself as a homosexual in *Christ and the Homosexual*, although his familiarity with gay culture was evident to many of his reviewers and readers. Having come out to himself (and a few friends) in college, he increasingly explored 'the gay life' while in seminary at Oberlin School of Theology. Prior to his arrival at the seminary Wood had informed the dean that he was gay, and in his first ministerial assignment at Broadway Tabernacle Church in Manhattan from 1951 to 1953 he continued to explore his sexual identity. It was during these two years that he explored a variety of gay bars, theatres, and cruising areas and began to build a network of male homosexual acquaintances and friends.<sup>16</sup>

In *Christ and the Homosexual*, however, Wood almost always refers to homosexuals in the third person. The homosexual is 'the other' for whom he advocates with a strong sense of sympathy. Writing from a perspective of pastoral concern, he attempts throughout the work to hold

up a mask of presumed heterosexuality. One of the few times he does let the mask drop—and then only slightly—is in his description of the S&M dungeon scene. In that vignette he employs the impersonal ‘you’ and describes the scene in such detail that the reader is left to assume that the author writes from first-hand experience. Moreover, Wood stresses the allure that the scene holds for the visitor: ‘As you slowly descend the open stairway, your senses are assaulted and simultaneously stimulated and repulsed... some fascination compels you to stay and behold. Never, you think, has there been a sight like this!’<sup>17</sup> Other than this one short section of the book, however, Wood maintains his distance as a presumed outsider who is concerned for—but not a member of—the male homosexual community that he describes so perceptively.

In his bold call for the acceptance of homosexuals in church and society, Wood believes it important to convince the reader of the cultural influence exerted by homosexual men in contemporary American society. After settling upon ‘a most conservative figure’ of 500,000 homosexuals in an overall population of 175 million, Wood devotes all of Chap. 2 in *Christ and the Homosexual* to proving the outsized gay male influence upon post-World War II American culture.<sup>18</sup> Wood portrays gay men as trendsetters in many areas of contemporary male fashion: they were the first, he believes, to wear blue jeans, leather jackets, and short swimming suits and the first to wear T-shirts, jewellery, and use cosmetics. In sum, homosexual men have led the way in fashion and heterosexual men have unknowingly followed. Wood also finds that American cinema, although not permitted to portray homosexuality openly on the screen, showed an interest in catering to homosexual sensibilities while some foreign films were beginning to depict homosexuality in a positive light. Broadway plays, novels, and art markets, he claimed, were also dealing with the topic of homosexuality more frequently and seeking to attract homosexual audiences.<sup>19</sup>

Using popular animated cartoons and ‘men’s room jargon’ as additional sources for understanding cultural mores, Wood finds increasing evidence for the spread of aspects of the homosexual S&M scene to broader society. Finally, Wood refers to the ever-increasing American fixation on youth as something that reflects gay male culture while simultaneously afflicting aging homosexual men even more powerfully than heterosexual men.<sup>20</sup> After establishing what he sees as a remarkable influence of homosexuals on American popular culture, Wood shifts to a more weighty discussion of the plight of homosexuals. American



homosexuals, he says, suffer from a variety of stereotypes (they are seen as effeminate, godless, or oversexed) and they are forced to hide their homosexuality. More significant for Wood, however, is the fact that homosexuals belong to a minority group that is persecuted. Like Donald Webster Cory before him, Wood believes that the homosexual minority is unrecognised and, therefore, powerless. Whereas Cory had envisioned a future movement of civil protest by homosexuals, Wood focuses his energies instead on calling upon the church to take a lead in coming to the aid of homosexuals. Claiming that '[t]he rights of the homosexual minority ought to be as much a concern for the Church and government as the rights of any other minority group in our melting-pot society',<sup>21</sup> Wood blamed the church for being indifferent to homosexuals: 'If church groups have time to consider the plight of Hungarian refugees', he wrote, then 'certainly they have time to consider the plight of the American homosexuals, who easily number ten times as many'.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, the major stumbling block for most Christians when it came to the issue of homosexuality was long-standing church teaching that homosexuality was a sinful condition and that all homosexual behaviour was immoral. To argue successfully that the homosexual minority deserved acceptance by church and society, Wood understood that he had to articulate a convincing theological and pastoral rationale for reversing Christianity's negative views on homosexuality so that the homosexual could be viewed as a person worthy of love and respect—and not as a sinner and outcast in need of forgiveness and healing. He writes:

As long as homosexuality remains in the category of 'sin', in the eyes of the Church, the homosexual (who no more chose to be so afflicted than did the paraplegic) will consider himself under oppression. He has been damned by a blind and ignorant institution. The Church holds up the threat of ostracism from its membership should a person's homosexuality become known... The Church oppresses the homosexual today directly through theology, dogma, threats of expulsion and damnation.<sup>23</sup>

In Chap. 4 of *Christ and the Homosexual* Wood begins to lay out a positive pastoral theology of homosexuality by arguing first that the sources of the church's negative stance on homosexuality were threefold: avoidance ('a refusal to look at the situation'), ignorance, and oppression. By not considering the important religious and spiritual roles played by

homosexuals in many other cultures throughout history and by showing a lack of gratitude 'for the immeasurable contributions made to it by homosexual craftsmen and leaders',<sup>24</sup> the church refused to revise its understanding of homosexuals and the value they bring to society. After brief references to the various ways in which the church throughout its history had persecuted and even, at times, executed homosexuals, Wood states that, in the end, there were two main reasons why the church opposed homosexuality: because of the connection between homosexuality and pagan religions and because the church insisted on maintaining a theology of marriage based on procreation.

Although Wood gives these two reasons for the church's intransigence on the issue of homosexuality, he believed that a restrictive theology of marriage was the more important reason for the oppression of homosexuals by the church. After listing nine reasons why two people get married, he declares that the most important is the first: namely, that 'two people are in love and wish to spend the rest of their lives together in the closest possible relationship'.<sup>25</sup> True Christian marriage, therefore, is not primarily based on reproduction (and the production of new church members) but rather on uniting two people in love. Wood states that he is not denying the goodness of having children, but, instead, is emphasizing the proper Protestant view of marriage:

If we concur with our leading Protestant marriage counselors that [uniting two people in love] is the most valid single reason for wanting to marry, then it is equally valid whether the two people be of the same sex or of opposite sexes. The sociologists' emphasis on a stable home life as the most important single force in a community is not weakened when that home life is composed of two men or two women instead of a childless heterosexual couple.<sup>26</sup>

And such an understanding of marriage, of course, no longer limits the institution to heterosexual couples.

Wood refers often to the 'affliction' of homosexuality in *Christ and the Homosexual* and at many places in the text he speaks to a number of challenges that homosexuals face, including sexual promiscuity, loneliness, and even despair: 'What is so important for the individual homosexual and for society to understand is that the presence of homosexuality in one's life need not keep one so afflicted estranged from the love and presence of the living Christ. Indeed, like other handicapped

people, homosexuality may be the cross that leads to Him who also carried a cross'.<sup>27</sup> It is significant, however, that once he has stated the root causes of the church's intolerance for homosexuality and called for 'rethinking the theological position on homosexuality'<sup>28</sup> in the first three chapters of his book, Wood provides in the final two a uniquely positive pastoral theology of homosexuality. This is remarkable when one considers that this book was published in 1960, at least a decade before other gay-positive Christian books that found much larger readerships.<sup>29</sup>

Once he has dethroned procreation as a requirement for Christian marriage, Wood proceeds to speak of homosexuality as 'the creation of God (since God is the creator of everything); and as such it is just as good as any other creation of God'.<sup>30</sup> This does not mean, of course, that there are no moral requirements for the Christian homosexual with regard to sexual behaviour. Sexuality (whether hetero- or homo-) is a 'divine creation' and the (im)morality of its expression all depends on how the individual lives it out. Wood proposes three necessary 'conditions' for the moral expression of homosexuality: 'These then are the three conditions wherein I find homosexuality and the expression of it by a homosexual capable of being moral: (1) for its adverse affect on the birth rate; (2) as another avenue for sacramental love; (3) and as a vehicle for self-expression'.<sup>31</sup> Deeply concerned that the planet could not support an already exploding human population, Wood quotes many sources (from reports from the United Nations, US government, and several articles from newspapers and news magazines) to argue that, in fact, homosexuality was a 'God-created way of protecting the human race on this planet from the suicide of overpopulation'.<sup>32</sup> While Albert Ellis finds Wood's claim to be 'dubious',<sup>33</sup> Wood devotes several pages to his theory that homosexuality is a form of divinely inspired birth control and marshals support from the popular British science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke (1917–2008) who had written that mandatory homosexuality might someday be required if human beings were to survive on Earth.<sup>34</sup>

To illustrate his second 'condition' for moral homosexual behaviour, Wood points to the relationship between Jesus and John in the Gospels as an example of the sacramental love possible between two men. 'God... has... provided', Wood writes, 'not one but two avenues of expressing physical human love: heterosexual and homosexual. Through homosexuality, a great many more people can have a love experience, and this is good, it is moral, it is a positive help to both individual and society'.<sup>35</sup>

Homosexual love can be as healthy and as holy as heterosexual love. The third condition for moral homosexual behaviour is based upon Erich Fromm's theory of human love, which posits that 'mature love' should foster the healthy self-expression of the two individuals in a relationship.<sup>36</sup> For Wood, the homosexual, like the heterosexual, is called upon to seek a love relationship that is motivated by this basic human need for healthy self-expression rather than 'hedonistic indulgence, egocentric aggrandisement or narcissistic pleasure'.<sup>37</sup> Anticipating criticism from those who would charge him with changing moral standards for the sake of 'the homosexual libertine', Wood provides a three-fold answer: homosexuality has always existed and will always exist; these moral conditions require 'a greater sense of responsibility to society' for the homosexual than ever before; and these conditions release the homosexual from 'the limbo of 'immoral behavior'' and provide him with the opportunity to experience 'a resurrection experience' and become a benefit to society.<sup>38</sup>

Having laid out his pastoral theology of morally acceptable homosexual behaviour, Wood presents the first affirming program of homosexual pastoral care ever published in book form in the history of American Christianity. Wood recognises that there are many reasons why the church has oppressed the homosexual but he believes that the ultimate authority and example for a Christian ministry to homosexuals is Jesus Christ himself:

In approaching homosexuality and its derivative problems for individual and community through Christian ethics, we go beyond the ethics of Christendom, the ethics of the Church, the ethics of the New Testament, the ethics of the Bible, until we come to the ethics of Jesus Christ. 'HOW WOULD JESUS CHRIST REACT TO THE HOMOSEXUAL?' must always be our fundamental question. Thus, the title of this book. This means not just the Jesus of history, but also the presence of the living Christ. Christ demands faith, discipleship, worship of God, exercise of love and obedience to His ways as much from the homosexual as from the heterosexual.<sup>39</sup>

The 'Jesus of history' and the 'living Christ' of faith, Wood posits, provide both example and mandate for a ministry to homosexuals that welcomes and includes them. Pointing to sixteen New Testament passages that highlight Jesus Christ's own ministry of inclusion, Wood concludes that the contemporary church must seize the present moment and minister to all people, not just heterosexuals:

The basic point is that the saving message of Christ and the freely flowing grace of God are as much for the homosexual as the heterosexual; that the Church must minister equally to both; that the demands of Christ apply to both; that both are capable of being moral, as well as immoral and amoral. The homosexual who surrenders to the Master will find new joy and adventure and strength and be on the pathway to everlasting life no less than the heterosexual.<sup>40</sup>

Wood presents an extensive pastoral plan for welcoming and including homosexuals in the life of the church. He mentions, without name, 'isolated [American] churches which have been bringing an effective ministry to the homosexual and his community' and he points to enlightened ministries in Scandinavia and the Church of England as further examples of what is possible for churches interested in ministering to their homosexual congregants.<sup>41</sup>

Recognising, of course, that homosexuals were already present and often very active in American church life (both as laity and as clergy), Wood cautions against hanging a banner of welcome on the church building ('This would only drive the boys away', he writes). Rather, he believes that homosexuals want to be fully included in congregations—not as peculiar 'exhibits' or regarded with suspicion—but as full and equal members.<sup>42</sup> Still, Wood argues that homosexuals often bring specific gifts to church life: in addition to ministries in music and the arts, he emphasises the disproportionately high percentage of homosexual men in the clergy and he criticises seminaries that refuse admission to students because of their homosexuality.<sup>43</sup> Wood does not limit the role that homosexuals should play in congregational life to the choir loft or the pulpit and in this he is, again, in the vanguard of proposing the inclusion of homosexuals in all facets of church life: 'Leadership in youth programs, teaching, Bible scholarship, curriculum preparation, recreation and outdoor programs may be as capably fulfilled by the homosexual as the heterosexual. If the Christian Church will not trust the homosexual in these fields of endeavor, who will?'<sup>44</sup> In a long list of what the church was *not* doing in terms of ministry to homosexuals, Wood proposes a pastoral plan that extends from counselling homosexuals to prayer sessions to the preaching of sermons. The pastor of a congregation should welcome homosexuals (as individuals and as couples) and help parents of children who have recently come out of the closet.<sup>45</sup> Classes in the correct interpretation of biblical texts that have been used to condemn homosexuality should be offered so that lay people can understand and benefit from them.<sup>46</sup>

With regard to sex education, Wood calls for classes that provide accurate and complete information for everyone and he points out a twofold connection between homosexuals and expanded sex education programs in the United States from 1942–1959: ‘The homosexual is exercising an influence on sex education, and is, at the same time, benefiting from the greater enlightenment in this very personal yet universal area of life. The more responsible sex education there is, the more tolerable the position of the homosexual will be’.<sup>47</sup> Pre-marital counselling offered by churches should also include information on homosexuality, Wood believes, since homosexuals often consider—and are frequently pressured by others to enter into—heterosexual marriages.<sup>48</sup> Wood states his strong support for same-sex marriage and says that he, as a minister, would certainly marry a couple ‘sincere in their desire for a spiritual blessing upon their union’ as long as they took his pre-marital counselling course.<sup>49</sup>

Wood is a strong proponent of education on homosexuality for laity and clergy, in churches and secular venues, and through a variety of means. Homosexuals themselves are in desperate need of Christian publications on homosexuality and, lamenting the lack of training about homosexuality for clergy, he encourages the production of ‘books and pamphlets, training courses and seminars’ for ministers so that they may become competent pastoral counsellors to homosexuals.<sup>50</sup> Wood also recommends that issues relating to homosexuality and topics of concern to homosexuals be addressed in church-sponsored seminars, clergy retreats, and at the meetings of congregational Social Action Committees.<sup>51</sup> Educating people about homosexuality beyond the walls of the church is also key for Wood. Recognising that the plight of homosexuals in American society will change only if society at large embraces ‘an enlightened approach’ to homosexuality, he believes that individuals at all levels of society (from the nuclear family to the federal government) and in all areas of society (including the school system, law enforcement, penal and mental institutions, and the military) should receive such education:

Every place I have visited, in every interview and conversation I have held on this subject, I have been aware of a need for more education. Whether one is inclined to be sympathetic, apathetic, or antipathetic towards the homosexual, all are agreed that more education concerning the problem is a good thing—certainly more education at all levels of the Church hierarchy, but also on all levels of secular society. In business, the armed forces,

legislatures, schools, courts, intitutions [sic] and the home, there is little enlightened knowledge concerning the nature of the homosexual, his problems and the problems he creates, and how the Christ follower is to react.<sup>52</sup>

A fascinating proposal made by Wood in *Christ and the Homosexual* is the founding of an 'Institute of Homosexual Studies' to pursue a wide range of topics relating to the study of homosexuality. Envisioning 'a religiously centered institute for the concern of the homosexual in society', Wood points to a Yale University centre devoted to the study of alcohol and New York's George W. Henry Foundation (that provided legal aid for male homosexuals) as potential models for such an institute. He also mentions the Mattachine Society and *One* as providing two examples of 'faltering efforts' toward such an institute as the one he envisions.<sup>53</sup> Made up mostly of 'influential heterosexuals' (because of Dr. Henry's belief—shared by Wood—that most homosexuals involved in such an organisation would not remain in platonic relationships with one another), Wood's institute was to be a centre of both study and action devoted to homosexuals' 'spiritual well-being and their constructive place in Church and community.'<sup>54</sup> Arguing that the proposed institute should be interdenominational in its sponsorship, Wood also suggests that it might have official ties to the National Council of Churches.<sup>55</sup>

Like the other educational projects mentioned previously, the institute would be interdisciplinary in nature and deal with a broad range of topics including sexuality studies, psychology, sociology, counseling, and, of course, religion since 'a proposed institute must evolve ways to lessen if not entirely avoid the tragic conflict which leaves most homosexuals today outside the influence of the Church'.<sup>56</sup> In his proposal for such an institute Wood reveals his understanding that positive change in church and society for homosexuals would require the bringing together of scholars, activists, clergy, and professionals from a variety of fields. Writing 40 years before such an institute was to be founded in the United States, Wood's vision for a religiously affiliated study and action centre devoted to homosexuality reveals remarkable foresight—and perhaps even a bit of prophetic wisdom—on his part.<sup>57</sup> Wood summarises the ultimate purpose of an affirming ministry to homosexuals in remarks he makes in connection with a discussion of suicide: '[I]t is our task as pastors, parents, fellow citizens, fellow homosexuals [sic] to let

the homosexual know that he does count; that there is a constructive and worthwhile place in life for him; that we do love him in a way that will redeem his life from one of futility and the bleakness of suicide to one of romantic living and heroic dying'.<sup>58</sup>

### FROM MANUSCRIPT TO MINISTRY: BLUEPRINT FOR A LIFE'S WORK

In July of 2012 I had the opportunity to conduct an oral history interview with Robert Wood at his home in New Hampshire. At 89 years of age, Wood was sharp, warm, and witty as we discussed the reasons why he had written *Christ and the Homosexual* more than fifty years before. Wood gave three reasons for writing the book: as a young seminarian 'wrestling with homosexuality' he was unable to find a single book on homosexuality in the Oberlin School of Theology library; as a newly ordained clergyman in the 1950s, he discovered that his fellow clergy were 'either negative or neutral' on the issue of homosexuality; and Donald Webster Cory had strongly encouraged him to write about religion and homosexuality.<sup>59</sup> Believing, in the end, that 'the Lord prompted me to write the book', Wood set out in the late 1950s to research a book to which he would append his own name and identify his current congregation of employment, The First Congregational Church in Spring Valley, New York. Upon the book's publication in 1960, Wood gave a copy to each member of the church council and the only reaction that he received was from one council member who was reported to have said, 'He seems to know what he's talking about'. In retrospect, Wood believes that the book's publication did not cause any problems for him with church members 'because [the congregation] knew me as their pastor'. In fact, Wood says that he waited a few years after he arrived at the Spring Valley congregation to undertake the project since he wanted first to establish a relationship and develop a sense of mutual trust with the congregants.<sup>60</sup>

*Christ and the Homosexual* was reviewed favourably by several gay and lesbian publications soon after its release. *ONE Magazine* described the book as 'intimate, compassionate and well-informed... [and] probably the best and most readable description of the gay life currently in print'. The reviewer also declared it to be 'the first book written by a responsible clergyman to welcome homosexuals into the Church without



demanding that they give up the practice of homosexuality'.<sup>61</sup> Lesbian activist Del Martin reviewed the book for the national lesbian magazine *The Ladder* and wrote that Wood was 'the first American to tackle the subject of the homophile and the church openly and forthrightly' and she lauded the book as 'a definite step forward in America'.<sup>62</sup> *The Dorian Book Review* christened Wood the Edward Carpenter of 'mid-century American literature' and praised Wood for 'boldly [setting] forth his views on the potential parity of homosexual and heterosexual love, and fulfillment as a devoted Christian'.<sup>63</sup> The homophile Mattachine Society showed its approval of *Christ and the Homosexual* by awarding Wood its Award of Merit in 1960 and praised him: 'for the inspiration his outspoken message has given to so many' and 'for active promotion of individual freedom and education in the human community'.<sup>64</sup>

A single church publication, *The United Church Herald* (published by Wood's own denomination), reviewed the book. Rev. William Jacobs, campus minister at Wood's alma mater, the University of Pennsylvania, wrote: 'I can only applaud his courage and concern for these children of God... He rightly castigates the church for its condemnation and unfeeling rejection'.<sup>65</sup> Only two professional journals, *Psychiatric Quarterly* and *Sexology Magazine*, printed reviews of the book and while the former concluded that 'this rather pitiful book will serve the dangerous purpose of self-justification for many homosexuals and... its proposals could be disruptive and destructive in religious and social life', the latter opined that '[a]nyone could profit from this book. It will challenge the most profound theologian, yet be practical and clarifying to the simplest layman'. The *Sexology* reviewer added that '[t]he homosexual may get a fresh perspective of himself'.<sup>66</sup>

The Robert Wood Papers at the Congregational Library in Boston contain several dozen letters from seminarians, parents of homosexuals, psychologists, social workers, and pastors who wrote to Wood not only to express their appreciation for the book, but also to tell him about their struggles with relationships to homosexuality and to seek his advice on a number of matters. For example, a Lutheran seminarian in the Midwest (mentioned in the previous chapter of the current book), who had just had his 'coming out', asked Wood for guidance as he struggled to balance his desire for a life partner with a call to ministry; he and Wood carried on a warm correspondence throughout 1961 and the seminarian even paid Wood a visit in late March of that year. A woman from Long Island, who identifies herself as an active member of her

community and a mother of teenagers, addressed her letter to Wood's entire congregation to let them know that she agreed with Wood 'that the homosexual has indeed been disinherited by the Church' and also reported that her doctor considered Wood 'the wave of the future'.<sup>67</sup> A lesbian couple, writing from their new home in San Francisco, commended Wood for his 'courage' and 'splendid example' and told him about how they had met in 'the church choir of a small town and soon fell in love'. Fearing 'the constant threat of exposure', however, they moved across country to San Francisco in order to be 'freer to move in homosexual circles'. Should Wood ever be thrown out of his New York church, they urged him to 'come to us in San Francisco. The walls will have to be built of rubber, because your church would grow and grow'. Another particularly moving letter came from an American missionary who had to leave his lover behind in Communist China, only to learn that the lover subsequently suffered physical and mental persecution by the government for not publicly denouncing his American companion.<sup>68</sup>

Following the 1960 publication of *Christ and the Homosexual*, Wood continued to serve as a pastor at UCC churches (in New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts) until his retirement from active ministry in 1986. While pastoring in these churches, Wood continued to work as an advocate for gay and lesbians by speaking at local and national homophile organisations;<sup>69</sup> by writing for a variety of publications on issues relating to homosexuality and religion; and by advocating for equal treatment of homosexuals in federal employment and the military.<sup>70</sup> He was the only clergy person to join the 25 June 1965 picket organised by gay rights activist Frank Kameny to protest the unfair treatment of homosexuals by the federal government. Almost three decades later, Wood offered written testimony to the House and Senate Armed Services Committee in 1993 to support lifting the ban on 'out' gay and lesbian members in the US Armed Forces.<sup>71</sup>

It was in his own denomination, however, that Wood devoted most of his energy to creating the kind of church that he had described in his book. He continued to counsel individual homosexuals and the parents of homosexuals through his own work as a parish minister and through the correspondence he conducted by mail throughout the years. He described his parish work with homosexuals and their families in a letter to a denominational official: 'So you need also to know what the parish Pastor has done with homosexual and loved ones in light of the Sacraments, marriage, Confirmation, involvement in the life of the local

parish, draft counselling, work with local police and extremist groups, with the county sheriff's [sic] office and parole board, biblical teaching, dating, and introducing one homosexual to another'.<sup>72</sup> Wood also became an outspoken and consistent voice for change within the denomination itself, especially during the 1960s and 1970s even though, as evidenced in many of the letters contained in his archives, he frequently felt ignored by many denominational leaders who seemed slow to answer his call to convene meetings and establish policies that would lead to greater acceptance of homosexuals in the church. That some denominational officials were made uncomfortable by *Christ and the Homosexual* is clear. For instance, soon after the publication of the book, Rev. Truman B. Douglass (1944–1969), Executive Vice President of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries of the UCC, told Wood that he wished that he could revoke his ordination after the book's publication.<sup>73</sup> And despite the positive book review in the denomination's own publication, Wood's work was rarely recommended as a pastoral resource by church officials.

Wood was most active in the gay rights movement from the early 1960s through the late 1970s. Although he focused his work primarily on bringing about change in the UCC denomination (beginning with his work in the late 1950s as a member of the Social Action Commission of the Congregational Churches of the New York City area, the UCC Council for Christian Social Action, and especially while he served on the Board of Homeland Ministries from 1968 to 1973), he also tried to convince organisations such as The National Council of Churches to foster dialogue between homosexuals and the churches.<sup>74</sup> In addition, he regularly wrote letters to the editor at *The New York Times*, *Time*, and other national news publications.<sup>75</sup>

Beginning in the 1980s, Wood's correspondence reflects his growing frustration with what he believed was a lack of recognition from a younger generation of gay and lesbian activists in the denomination for the work that he and others had undertaken since the 1950s. By any reckoning, the ordination of Bill Johnson as the first 'out' gay minister in the UCC (making him the first uncloseted homosexual to be ordained by a major American Christian denomination) is a particularly important milestone in the history of the gay rights movement in the United States. While Wood recognised the significance of this event, he took many opportunities over the years to remind those in denominational leadership positions that Johnson's accomplishment owed much to those who

came before him. As Wood explained in a 2002 letter to the editor of *United Church News*:

Joshua didn't topple the walls of Jericho all by himself and Bill Johnson didn't topple the walls barring ordination of homosexuals all by himself. Bill deserves credit for what he did. But so do those of us who unlocked doors of prejudice and ignorance towards homosexuals years before Bill appeared... In my 1960 book 'Christ and the Homosexual', I called for ordination of homosexuals 12 years before Bill's ordination. In that award-winning book I suggested that parents of gays minister to other parents and proposed church-sanctioned one-gender marriages. When you record historic moments for gay rights within the church, be more inclusive than what you wrote in the June issue.<sup>76</sup>

The UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns (which had been founded in 1972 as the UCC Gay Caucus) did present Wood with its Pioneer Award (which honours those 'who have worked with courage, prophetic vision and often times with little support to pave the path for this current generation of LGBT folk') in 2004 and Wood has received recognition from several other religious and secular LGBT organisations since that date.<sup>77</sup> Speaking with him in the summer of 2012, I had the sense that, although he has often felt underappreciated by younger LGBT religious leaders, organisations, and individual activists, he had come to believe that he and his generation of leaders were beginning to receive recognition for the groundwork they laid in the 1950s and 1960s, groundwork that was necessary for the accomplishments of the gay rights movement in subsequent years.

Despite the positive reviews given to *Christ and the Homosexual* in 1960 and 1961 from the then-small American gay press, it is worthwhile to ask what influence this book had on the homosexual rights movement within American Christianity in the 1960s and later. After all, the 1960s was a pivotal decade in US lesbian and gay history that witnessed the founding of The Council on Religion and the Homosexual (1964) and the Metropolitan Community Church (1968) as well as protests led by oppressed sexual minorities at the Compton Cafeteria Riots (1966) and the Stonewall Riots (1969). During this time of profound social change in the United States one wonders why Wood's book—with its clear call for the equal treatment of homosexuals in church and society and its bold arguments for homosexual ordination and same-sex marriage—did not

cause more of a stir than it did. After all, not one major periodical (secular or religious) reviewed the work and even within Wood's own denomination—then, as now, one of the most liberal Christian denominations in the country—it never served as a catalyst for the change it called for.

My questioning of the book's influence is not intended to minimise the importance of the long-standing, persistent, and, I would argue, effective personal ministry of Rev. Wood. In fact, I believe that *Christ and the Homosexual* became a blueprint of sorts for the work that he carried out with a dogged and creative zeal—and at considerable risk to his own reputation and livelihood from 1960 onwards. Again, this was a book to which he affixed his name and his was a ministry in which he did not shy away from speaking, writing, and agitating to bring about a world of equality and justice for homosexuals. There are several reasons, I believe, why this book received a decidedly muted reception upon its publication in 1960 and never achieved the kind of widespread recognition and influence on the Christian gay rights movement that books such as Derrick Sherwin Bailey's *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (1955) or *Towards a Quaker View of Sex* (1963) did in Great Britain.<sup>78</sup> First of all, the fact that Wood's book was published by a vanity press with a reputation for not promoting the works of its authors prevented it from receiving a widespread and ongoing distribution among booksellers and libraries; its publication by Vantage Press most certainly contributed to the difficulty that Wood had in securing book reviews by non-homophile journals and magazines.<sup>79</sup>

Second, the early 1960s were a time of invisibility for most homosexuals in the United States. While Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and Cory's *The Homosexual in America* (1951) had certainly made the American public aware of the presence of homosexuals in the country, Wood's proposals entered into a culture where most religious leaders, psychological professionals, and the wider American public either did not appreciate—or simply chose to ignore—the prevalence of homosexuality in society. Third, *Christ and the Homosexual* was published almost a decade before the founding of important gay and lesbian advocacy groups in many Christian denominations (in the late 1960s and early 1970s). These groups, although most often not officially recognised—at least at first—by the denominations they sought to change, later provided effective means to educate church members about homosexuality and to pressure church officials to change church policies. Had at least some of them been in existence when

Wood's book appeared, his ideas may well have spread through networks of homosexual Christians and their allies and been an animating force for change in the church.

Fourth, Wood's closetedness may have contributed to the muted reception that the book received upon its publication and lessened any significant influence thereafter. Wood did not clearly identify himself as a homosexual in the book and he never came out publicly as a gay man until his retirement from active ministry in 1986. Perhaps had he written as an 'out' gay author who spoke openly from his own experiences, the book may have attracted a wider readership. In 2007, Wood wrote the following about the decision that he and Hugh Coulter, his partner of more than 26 years, made to remain closeted as a couple in the congregations where Wood served: 'We chose not to "out" ourselves but to live our lives as a caring, loving couple and let parishioners and everyone else accept us as they found us. We didn't fit the stereotypes folks had of queers in those days'.<sup>80</sup> Historians enter into dangerous territory when attempting to describe 'what if' scenarios and then surmise how the past may have been different had such scenarios actually come to pass. My purpose is not to predict the past but rather to suggest that Wood's decision to remain in the closet as the author of *Christ and the Homosexual* may have limited its effect in religious as well as secular circles. The fact that Wood did not come out until retirement certainly affected how some individuals in the gay and lesbian liberation movement understood his place in history. (It was, after all, William Johnson and not Robert Wood who became the first 'out' ordained homosexual minister not only in the UCC but in all of mainline Protestantism.)

Steven Law, Wood's authorised biographer, offers the following explanation for Wood's decision not to come out until his retirement and it serves as a helpful reminder, I think, of the high price that he would have had to pay, a price that may well have threatened his employment as a parish minister:

It is no wonder that the Rev. Robert Wood withdrew into the compartmentalized world of closet life. Are we tempted to think Rev. Wood to be less courageous because he wasn't out as many of us are as a consequence of the Civil Rights movement [?] The closeted life helped him complete 36 uninterrupted years of Christian service at the Broadway Tabernacle, the First Church in Spring Valley, Zion UCC, and the First Church in Maynard. It's from this closeted vantage point, one must consider his ministry to gay and lesbian brothers and sisters...<sup>81</sup>

*Christ and the Homosexual* did, however, open doors for Wood because it granted him a measure of credibility in the secular gay world. The fact that an ordained Christian minister in a mainline denomination called for the full acceptance of homosexuals within church and society was astounding in and of itself. In addition, here was a minister who wrote about homoerotic desire and same-sex love in ways that could be understood as positive and life-giving. More significant was Wood's call for the church to reject its centuries-old demonisation of homosexuality by establishing new theological and pastoral frameworks for normalising homosexual identities and sacramentalising same-sex relationships, including marriage. Robert Wood was the first Christian minister in the United States to publish a book that argued, from biblical, psychological, theological, and pastoral perspectives, for an improved life for homosexuals. In doing so, he addressed directly three issues that would roil American Christian denominations from the late 1960s to the present: the full acceptance of homosexuals in church and society; the ordination of non-celibate homosexuals; and a wholehearted embrace of same-sex marriage. *Christ and the Homosexual* challenged its readers to abandon their negative views of homosexuality and to embrace homosexuals as fellow Christians by following the example of Christ whose life and ministry were characterised by compassion, love, and acceptance.

## NOTES

1. For recent insightful discussions of *Christ and the Homosexual* within an historical context, see especially Mark Jordan, *Recruiting Young Love: How Christians Talk About Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. 73–79, and Heather R. White, *Reforming Sodom: Protestants and the Rise of Gay Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), pp. 63–68.
2. Robert Watson Wood, *Christ and the Homosexual: Some Observations* (New York: Vantage, 1960), p. 11 (hereafter *CH*).
3. *CH*, p. 13.
4. *CH*, p. 109.
5. *CH*, p. 13. Wood mentions a 1952 survey that he conducted in a community known to be 'the haunt of homosexuals'. Taking the form of conversations with pastoral leaders at 15 churches in this community, Wood discovered that only one of these churches ministered to homosexuals. In addition, at two points in the book Wood refers to a meeting that brought together 43 male homosexuals in Manhattan (on 16 May 1952)

- to talk about religion and homosexuality. Organized by Donald Webster Cory, author of the widely-read *The Homosexual in America*, this meeting featured an '[unnamed] young clergyman [who spoke] on the spiritual approach to homosexuality'. Although Wood did not attend this meeting, he received a copy of the meeting's minutes (*CH*, pp. 77–78 and 100).
6. *CH*, p. 175.
  7. *CH*, p. 16. A few reviewers of *Christ and the Homosexual* remarked on the odd inclusion of an introduction that contradicted the author's own views on homosexuality.
  8. Ellis cites Cory's article in *The Encyclopedia of Sexual Behavior* which was published in 1961. While Cory does not use the term 'self-defeating' in this article to describe homosexuality, he has a decidedly negative view of the homosexual's psychological health: 'Briefly summarized', Cory writes, 'the homosexual is definitely emotionally disturbed, suffering from fear of the other sex, puritanical distortions about sexuality, self-abnegation, feelings of inadequacy, self-destructive drives, and compulsive desires'; Donald Webster Cory, 'Homosexuality' in *The Encyclopedia of Sexual Behavior*. Albert Ellis and Albert Abarbanel (eds) (New York: Hawthorn, 1961), p. 491.
  9. *CH*, p. 17.
  10. *CH*, p. 19.
  11. Wood's stories are about white and mostly middle-class men. He discusses race and ethnicity only when he argues that homosexuals should be considered part of a minority group like 'Negroes', 'migrant workers', or 'Hungarian refugees.' Many of these vignettes might be considered pastoral 'case studies' since they provide a description of a situation in which a person is seeking spiritual guidance from a religious professional.
  12. See especially *CH*, pp. 76–77, for Wood's understanding of how the wearing of masks by homosexuals leads to a life of hypocrisy.
  13. *CH*, p. 22.
  14. *CH*, pp. 33–35.
  15. *CH*, p. 35; see St. Paul, *Letter to the Romans* 1:24–28.
  16. Robert Wood, interview by Steven Law, no date, cassette tape entitled 'Christ and the homosexual', box 5, MS 4704 Robert Wood Papers, Congregational Library, Boston, 14 May 2012. Before entering Oberlin School of Theology Wood wrote to the dean and told him that he was homosexual. The dean, who told Wood to come to seminary anyway and that they would 'figure it out', never made any further mention of the issue. Robert Wood, interview by Steven Law, no date, cassette tape entitled 'Christ and the homosexual', box 5, MS 4704 Robert Wood Papers, Congregational Library, Boston, 14 May 2012.
  17. Wood did, in fact, base this S/M vignette on an actual experience he had in New York City in the late 1950s. Interview of Robert Wood by author. 18 July 2012. See Jordan, *Recruiting Young Love*, pp. 74–75,



for a perceptive reading of Wood's slippery use of the second person to describe the S/M dungeon scene.

18. *CH*, pp. 12–13. Wood's 'conservative' count of 500,000 homosexuals (male and female) in the US population is curious since he reports, erroneously, that 'Kinsey suggests 6,330,000 males, or one-third of the adult male population' were homosexual. Kinsey, in fact, estimated that while 37% of males in the American population had engaged in homosexual sex that led to orgasm, only 4% of the post-adolescent white male population was 'exclusively homosexual throughout their lives'; see A. Kinsey, W. Pomeroy, and C. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1948), pp. 650–651.
19. *CH*, pp. 43–55. Wood includes Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* and *Never the Same Again* by Gerald Tesch in his list of books with homosexual themes; '*The Children's Hour*, *The Immoralist*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* ... *Tea and Sympathy*... and *Waiting for Godot*' are named as examples of Broadway plays that deal with homosexuality to a greater or lesser extent; *CH*, pp. 53–54.
20. 'If the problem of growing old is a real one for heterosexuals, it is even more so for homosexuals', *CH*, p. 56.
21. *CH*, p. 103.
22. *CH*, p. 132.
23. *CH*, p. 112.
24. *CH*, p. 101.
25. *CH*, p. 113.
26. *CH*, p. 117.
27. *CH*, p. 106.
28. *CH*, p. 151.
29. See especially Troy Perry, *The Lord is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay* (Los Angeles: Nash, 1972); John McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual* (Kansas City; publisher not identified, 1976); and Virginia Mollenkott and Letha Scanzoni, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor? A Positive Christian Response* (San Francisco: Harper, 1978). While Wood's book is not mentioned in any of these books, it is listed in the bibliography of the popular book by Clinton R. Jones, *What About Homosexuality?* (Nashville: Nelson, 1972).
30. *CH*, p. 154.
31. *CH*, p. 174.
32. *CH*, p. 163.
33. *CH*, p. 17.
34. Wood (*CH*, pp. 166–167) refers to an article written by Arthur C. Clarke in the April 1958 edition of *Harper's Magazine* entitled 'Standing Room ONLY.'

35. *CH*, p. 168.
36. *CH*, p. 171.
37. *CH*, p. 171.
38. *CH*, pp. 174–175.
39. *CH*, p. 175. Emphasis in original.
40. *CH*, p. 178. At the very end of his book Wood writes movingly of the relationship between the homosexual and Christ: ‘What can the homosexual hope to receive from Christ? He can be saved from a sense of hopelessness before God and achieve an assurance of God’s abiding love and understanding; from a paralyzing sense of guilt to a sense of God’s forgiveness as a continuing process; from anxiety and fear to confidence and poise; from irresponsible and frustrated desires to responsible and integrated purpose; from feverishly unstable emotions to a maturing experience of love; from promiscuous sexuality to a controlled and constructive way of expressing his psycho-sexual urges; from a deadening feeling of being always an immoral person to the knowledge that under certain conditions an expression of homosexuality can be moral’ (*CH*, p. 211).
41. *CH*, p. 105.
42. *CH*, pp. 146–147.
43. *CH*, p. 148.
44. *CH*, p. 149.
45. *CH*, p. 104.
46. *CH*, p. 132.
47. *CH*, p. 58. Wood proposes over a dozen topics (including the hymen, fetishes, exhibitionism, and homosexual vocabulary) that should be included in any high-quality sex education curriculum for heterosexuals and homosexuals alike (*CH*, pp. 135–136).
48. Wood is clear in his denunciation of marriage counselors who advise heterosexual marriage for a homosexual in an attempt to ‘cure’ the person’s homosexuality; see, for instance, *CH*, p. 81.
49. *CH*, p. 200.
50. *CH*, p. 133.
51. *CH*, pp. 130–131.
52. *CH*, p. 182.
53. The Yale Center for Alcohol Studies moved to Rutgers University in 1962; see ‘The history of the Center of Alcohol Studies’ at <http://alcoholstudies.rutgers.edu/history>, accessed 14 September 2014.
54. *CH*, p. 125.
55. *CH*, p. 129.
56. *CH*, p. 127.
57. One of the earliest centres founded in the United States is The Center for LGBTQ and Gender Studies in Religion (CLGS), which was established

- in 2000 at Pacific School of Religion, an interdenominational seminary in Berkeley, California, with historic ties to the United Church of Christ.
58. *CH*, p. 194.
  59. Interview of Robert Wood by author, 18 July 2012.
  60. Interview of Robert Wood by author, 18 July 2012.
  61. *ONE Magazine* 8:5 (1960), p. 25.
  62. *The Ladder* 4:8 (1960), p. 2.
  63. *Dorian Book Quarterly* 2 (Second Quarter 1960), p. 6.
  64. 'Two awards to Rev. Wood for his controversial book', photocopy of newspaper article without author, title of publication, or date, box 4, folder 2, MS 4704 Robert Wood Papers, Congregational Library, Boston, 11 May 2012; see also *New York Mattachine Newsletter* 5:10 (1960), p. 6. The Prosperos, a religious organization, also presented Wood with its own Award of Merit.
  65. *United Church Herald* 4:1 (January 12, 1961), pp. 22–23.
  66. *Psychiatric Quarterly* January 1960 (photocopy of book review without author or page number), box 4, folder 2, MS 4704 Robert Wood Papers. Congregational Library, Boston, 11 May 2012. *Sexology Magazine* quoted in an undated flyer from Dorian Book Service, box 4, folder 2, MS 4704 Robert Wood Papers, Congregational Library, Boston, 11 May 2012.
  67. AG, Letters to Robert Wood, 24 January 1961; 3 February 1961; 7 April 1961; 5 June 1961; 12 June 1961, box 4, folder 2. ELC, Letter to Robert Wood, 24 March 1960, box 4, folder 1, MS 4704. Robert Wood Papers, Congregational Library, Boston, 11 May 2012.
  68. AB and JW, Letter to Robert Wood, 18 July 1960, box 4, folder 1; Letter to Robert Wood, 18 July 1960, box 4, folder 1.
  69. Wood spoke at the meetings of several homophile organizations, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, including the Mattachine Society and the Janus Society of Philadelphia. In 1971 he offered the keynote address at the First National Conference on Religion and the Homosexual.
  70. Wood wrote several articles in *The Ladder* and in *The New York Mattachine Newsletter* in the first half of the 1960s.
  71. 'Rev. Robert W. Wood', LGBT-RAN Profile Gallery: [www.lgbtran.org/Profile.aspx?ID=28](http://www.lgbtran.org/Profile.aspx?ID=28), accessed 14 September 2014.
  72. Robert Wood, Letter to Rev. Edward A. Powers, General Secretary of Christian Education, UCC, 18 May 1968, box 1, folder 9, MS 4704 Robert Wood Papers, Congregational Library, Boston, 19 July 2012.
  73. Interview of Robert Wood by author, 18 July 2012.
  74. See references to Wood's work with the Social Action Commission of the Congregational Churches of the New York City area in his letters from 1958 to 1967, box 1, folders 1, 2 and 9, MS 4704 Robert Wood Papers, Congregational Library, Boston, 17 July 2012; see also Wood's correspondence with officials from the Board of Homeland Ministries and the

- National Council of Churches, box 1, folder 9, MS 4704 Robert Wood Papers, Congregational Library, Boston, 16 July 2012.
75. See, for example, Wood's letters to the editor in *The New York Times* (4 January 1964) and *Time* magazine (25 January 1966).
  76. Robert Wood, Letter to the Editor, *UCC News* (July–August 2002): [www.ucc.org/ucnews/julaug2002/letters-to-the-editor.html](http://www.ucc.org/ucnews/julaug2002/letters-to-the-editor.html), accessed 14 September 2014. On 28 March 2002 Wood wrote to a Rev. Mitzi Eilts: 'It was my generation of gay activists (including friend Barbara Gittings) the pre-Stonewall pioneers, who unlocked the door so Bill and his generation could kick it open so today's generation might come out with pride. Bill's historic act was 3 years AFTER Stonewall when it was much safer to identify openly with the subject. My book was 9 years BEFORE Stonewall', box 1, folder 4, MS 4704 Robert Wood Papers, Congregational Library, Boston, 16 July 2012.
  77. 25 October 2013 Calendar of Prayer, United Church of Christ: [www.ucc.org/worship/calendar/current/October2013COP.pdf](http://www.ucc.org/worship/calendar/current/October2013COP.pdf), accessed 16 September 2014.
  78. Wood references Bailey's *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* several times in *CH* and lauds it as 'a milestone in the enlightened understanding of [the church's] history of negativeness [towards homosexuality]' (*CH*, p. 99). Wood believed that the book was particularly helpful in dispelling widely-held misunderstandings about biblical texts long understood to condemn homosexual behavior; see Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans, Green, 1955) and Alastair Heron (ed.), *Towards a Quaker View of Sex* (London: Friends Home Service Committee, 1963).
  79. Vantage Press, once the largest vanity press in the United States, operated from 1949 to 2012. It was charged several times in its history of defrauding its authors by not fulfilling claims to distribute and promote the books it published; see, for instance, Ronald Sullivan, 'Jurors' vanity press review: publisher defrauded authors', *New York Times*, 7 April 1990: [www.nytimes.com/1990/04/07/nyregion/jurors-vanity-press-review-publisher-defrauded-authors.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/07/nyregion/jurors-vanity-press-review-publisher-defrauded-authors.html), accessed 31 August 2014.
  80. Robert Wood, 'Gay before ONA: the pilgrimage of an early gay pastor' (undated): [www.ucc.org/50/pdfs/wood.pdf](http://www.ucc.org/50/pdfs/wood.pdf), accessed 13 September 2014.
  81. Steven C. Law, 'Introduction of Robert Wood', UCC Coalition Meeting, Denver, 8 July 2004, box 2, folder 4. MS 4704, Robert Wood Papers, Congregational Library, Boston, 14 May 2012.

## ‘Homosexual Practice’ and the Anglican Communion from the 1990s: A Case Study in Theology and Identity

*Mark D. Chapman*

The Anglican Communion is a collection of thirty-eight completely independent churches that have come to be referred to as ‘provinces’. Unlike in some other global communions, most obviously the Roman Catholic Church, there is no international canon law; individual churches are free to act as they see fit. Nevertheless, from the mid-nineteenth century, when the Communion began to develop as a backdrop to the spread of the British Empire (and to a lesser extent the spread of American influence overseas), consultative bodies have emerged for the different churches to discuss matters of mutual concern.<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that the Anglican Communion was born in controversy. The first Lambeth Conference of Bishops from across the Communion was assembled by Charles Longley, Archbishop of Canterbury in 1867 and was originally gathered principally because of calls to tackle the disputes that emerged in South Africa between Archbishop Robert Gray of Cape

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Town and the liberal Bishop J. W. Colenso of Natal.<sup>2</sup> The worldwide Lambeth Conference has met approximately every ten years ever since.

Despite calls for a centralized pattern of authority, the resolutions of the bishops have been nothing more than advisory and have no canonical (legal) status. It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that other pan-Anglican forums emerged principally out of the need to make decisions more efficiently and in between the gatherings of bishops. The Anglican Consultative Council, made up of clergy and laity from the different churches, was established at the 1968 Lambeth Conference as a smaller body that would regulate membership of the Communion and discuss other matters of mutual concern. In 1978 the so-called Primates' Meeting (made up of the senior bishop of each of the provinces) was established initially as an informal body for mutual support and prayer. Collectively, along with the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury, these institutions have become known as Instruments of Communion (or Unity). Despite the occasional disagreement over the years, since 1867 Lambeth Conferences and the other Instruments of Communion through much of the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been concerned for the most part with the problems that came with unparalleled missionary growth and expansion, particularly in Africa.<sup>3</sup> As countries gained political independence from Britain so their churches emerged as independent Anglican churches—which came to be referred to as 'provinces'.

Many of these new churches came to possess an identity that was distinct from the church of the colonizer, which means the relationship with the Church of England and some of the other churches of the global north, has become increasingly problematic. This has manifested itself particularly over the issue of homosexual practice. A post-colonial complexity, coupled with an extremely weak form of central authority, has meant that in the past thirty years or so the Anglican Communion has been stretched to its breaking point. The member churches have frequently been subject to significant disagreement and conflict with one another, which has led to the occasional schism. My intention in this chapter is to offer a political analysis of the dispute over sexuality in terms of what Murray Edelman calls a 'condensation symbol', which brings together a set of wider issues that have emerged between the different provinces.<sup>4</sup> In a manner that is not always easy to explain, approaches to homosexuality and same-sex relationships have taken on a powerful symbolic meaning and have come to be the single

most important marker of identity and belonging in some parts of the Anglican Communion. The earlier disputes over rituals or doctrine have been supplanted by a new cultural symbol; a conservative stance on homosexual practice has come to be seen by many Anglicans as a badge of orthodox Christian belief.

## HOMOSEXUAL PRACTICE AND THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

Resolutely conservative attitudes stand in marked contrast to the more nuanced and open approaches to homosexuality from some in the churches in the 1950s and 1960s. This was especially true of the Church of England, which, although never condoning homosexual practice, was generally supportive of the changes through the 1950s and 1960s that eventually led to the legalization of homosexuality.<sup>5</sup> The General Convention of the Episcopal Church of the United States affirmed in 1976 that 'homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church'.<sup>6</sup> The question of homosexuality was not a major theme at the Lambeth Conferences of 1978 and 1988, even though the question did find its way onto the agenda. It did not, however, provoke serious disagreement; both conferences recognized that further work was needed before any decision could be reached. In 1978, the Conference simply noted the need for 'deep and dispassionate study of the question of homosexuality'. Although it affirmed 'heterosexuality as the scriptural norm', it also recognized the need to 'take seriously both the teaching of Scripture and the results of scientific and medical research', and applauded the fact that 'such studies are now proceeding in some member Churches of the Anglican Communion'.<sup>7</sup> Reaffirming this resolution in 1988, the bishops also urged 'such study and reflection to take account of biological, genetic and psychological research being undertaken by other agencies, and the socio-cultural factors that lead to the different attitudes in the provinces of our Communion'. At the same time, there was a call for 'each province to reassess, in the light of such study and because of our concern for human rights, its care for and attitude towards persons of homosexual orientation'.<sup>8</sup> Here the approach to homosexuality resembles that taken over the ordination of women as priests and bishops where different churches have moved at different speeds without any schisms, even though there is a degree of impairment of Communion at a global level.

By the 1990s, however, things had begun to change. Initially, the preparatory papers for the 1998 Conference did not move further than the previous two Conferences. The report of the Commission suggested that the time was not yet ripe for a decision about homosexuality; the issues were too highly charged and no resolution was thought possible. 'We have prayed, studied and discussed these issues and we are unable to reach a common mind on the scriptural, theological, historical, and scientific questions that are raised'.<sup>9</sup> The draft report simply confirmed the past Conference's statement that sexuality is 'intended by God to find its rightful and full expression between one man and one woman in the covenant of marriage'.<sup>10</sup> Before the Conference, however, there were calls for more decisive action. Importantly, in 1997 there was a meeting of a number of Anglican Church leaders from much of Africa, but also parts of Southeast Asia who gathered together at Kuala Lumpur under the umbrella term 'Global South'. This 'Global South Encounter' issued a communiqué condemning such 'actions as the ordination of practising homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions' and expressing 'concern about mutual accountability and interdependence within our Anglican Communion'.<sup>11</sup> Shortly before the Lambeth Conference in August 1998 the mood changed with nine bishops, again mainly from the Global South, issuing a letter calling bishops to suspend 'both the ordination of practising homosexuals and the blessing of same sex relationships'. The crucial issue, they held, was 'whether we are in danger of allowing [modern globalising] culture with its philosophical assumptions, economic system, sexual alternatives, and hidden idols to determine what we become'.<sup>12</sup>

The discussion of the report on homosexuality at the Conference indicated a significant shift in the power base of worldwide Anglicanism. Through the tense debate, a number of bishops from the Global South, with support from Western conservatives, toughened the final resolution, which went far further than had initially been intended. There was an insertion of a brief text declaring that 'homosexual practice is incompatible with Scripture', which was accepted by a large majority. While the exhortations of the original draft to listen to homosexual persons and to reject homophobia remained, all homosexual activity was permanently ruled out by the short clause; if homosexuality was 'unscriptural' then it was un-Anglican and any further dialogue was pointless. Immediately afterwards, some dioceses in North America were outraged by the debate and the vote. In other places the Resolution (numbered 1.10) was



elevated into a bastion of orthodoxy. Indeed, since the Conference, it became commonplace for 'orthodox' Anglicans to affirm their allegiance to the Lambeth Resolution (which had no more canonical authority than any other Lambeth resolution) and to refuse relationships with those who have moved in a different direction. For instance, the new secretary general of the Anglican Communion, Archbishop Josiah Idowu-Fearon, declared in August 2015 in a BBC interview: 'I stand by Resolution 1.10' (in the context of chastising The Episcopal Church for changing its canons to allow for same-sex marriage).<sup>13</sup> Similarly, at the Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa (CAPA) meeting on 9–10 March 2015 in South Africa some Primates of substantial Anglican churches—Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, and Rwanda—absented themselves on the grounds that the chairman of CAPA, Archbishop Bernard Ntahoruti of Burundi, had attended a meeting in 2014 (along with the archbishops of Central Africa, West Africa, and Tanzania) with bishops of the Episcopal Church. At the Primates' Meeting in January 2016, Stanley Ntagali, Archbishop of Uganda, walked out on the grounds that the Primates of Canada and the Episcopal Church had not voluntarily withdrawn. Earlier, the Provincial Assembly had resolved 'to not participate in any official meetings of the Anglican Communion until godly order is restored'. 'Godly order' would require the removal of those two churches with which the Church of Uganda had declared itself out of communion.<sup>14</sup>

The Kuala Lumpur Statement is particularly interesting in its explicit linking of globalization and neo-colonialism with liberalization of sexual morality. It indicates how the tensions in the Communion were beginning to divide between the 'liberal' churches of the west from the churches in the 'Global South', often in alliance with conservative groupings in the West.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, increasingly liberal laws on same-sex marriage in much of the West meant that churches have had to face the question of how to approach public expressions of homosexuality. On the other hand, churches in much of the developing world have seen any capitulation to such changes as a sacrifice of the Gospel. 'Global South' churches have tended to adopt a conservative approach to sexuality and the family, which was first codified by the colonizers and was often identified with missionary Christianity.<sup>16</sup> In parts of Africa, criminal codes imposed by the British rulers had criminalized homosexual practices during the colonial period and in many places they have remained on the statute books after independence (and in some places harsher laws have been introduced since independence). In Kenya, Uganda, and

Nigeria, for instance, very similar colonial-era legal codes criminalize a 'person who ... has carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature', with a punishment on conviction of a fourteen-year prison term.<sup>17</sup>

There are obviously significant complexities that relate to the imposition of Western legal codes on traditional societies. As Marc Epprecht notes, the outlawing of homosexual practice has helped to create a sexualization of human identity, which may not have existed earlier. At the very least, the recent history of homosexuality and the complex relationship with the colonial past requires careful investigation.<sup>18</sup> For many church leaders, however, liberalization of sexual morality has been understood as a surrender to the all-pervasive power of Western, especially American, culture. It threatens to destroy the 'biblical' morality that in many parts of Africa had only relatively recently supplanted traditional approaches to marriage and sexuality. In particular, homosexual practice has frequently been regarded both by political and church leaders as 'unAfrican'.<sup>19</sup> This has been subjected to a great deal of discussion: the history of sexuality in Africa proves far from straightforward.<sup>20</sup> There have also been some theologians, most notably Archbishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa, who have been outspoken advocates for gay rights, as Marc Epprecht acknowledges.<sup>21</sup>

African legal and political development was closely tied up with the style of Christian mission and the approach to the Bible that was exported by the first missionaries. Indeed, as Steven S. Maughan has shown in his recent history of the Church of England's missionary activity in its heyday up to the First World War, many of the domestic conflicts of the Church of England, including interpretation of the Bible, were transferred to the mission field.<sup>22</sup> These were made still more complex by the association of the missionary societies with imperialism and the project of a 'Greater Britain', which often took place in dialogue with local cultures that were perceived as less sophisticated. In summary, it might be suggested that the planting of Christianity involved at one and the same time the export of the legal codification of the social and ethical morés of late Victorian England.<sup>23</sup> As Neville Hoad writes: 'the African bishops at Lambeth in 1998 worked an earlier domestic ideology of civilised modernity (the nuclear family, anachronistically coded as religious tradition) against an emerging one: public tolerance of homosexuality'.<sup>24</sup>

The missionary historian Kevin Ward has suggested that rather than simply being an attack on the Enlightenment and liberal values,

opposition to homosexuality in some parts of the world is itself a product of a Western understanding of what it is to be human with the sexualization of identity.<sup>25</sup> This means, he claims, that 'Homophobia is as much a western intrusion as is homosexual identity'.<sup>26</sup> He goes on:

The fact that the conflict has focussed so fiercely on homosexuality is itself an indication of the ways in which what is essentially a conflict within western secular society has spilled over to the rest of the world, itself coming to terms with modernity and the increasing dominance of secularity and its discontents.<sup>27</sup>

Hardly surprisingly, then, there has been something of what can be regarded as a 'post-colonial' backlash over the issue of homosexuality, which quickly led to deep division at the Lambeth Conference of 1998.<sup>28</sup> More generally, however, opposition to homosexuality has come to symbolize a broader resistance to the inexorable forces of modernization in which all the mainline denominations have been implicated.<sup>29</sup> What might have begun as an issue in post-colonial approaches to sexuality has taken on a far more thoroughgoing symbolic force throughout the Communion. To grasp the importance of homosexuality in contemporary ecclesiastical politics requires a thoroughgoing analysis of the symbolic language in which the debate is couched, which I will attempt in the final section, after I have sketched the recent history of division in the Anglican Communion.

Five years after the 1998 Lambeth Conference in 2003 the Diocese of New Hampshire elected Gene Robinson, a divorcee in a same-sex relationship, as bishop. Reactions were predictable. The conservative American Anglican Council thought it showed 'how far much of the Episcopal Church has moved out of the thriving mainstream of worldwide Anglicanism'.<sup>30</sup> The confirmation of Robinson's election by the bishops of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church on a vote of 62 for and 43 against brought to a head the divisions in the American Church. At the same time, the Convention, although ruling out official liturgies for same-sex blessing, had also allowed 'local faith communities' to 'explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions'.<sup>31</sup> In the same year, the Canadian Diocese of New Westminster had authorized a liturgy for blessing same-sex relationships, with Bishop Michael Ingham seeing it as a biblical imperative: 'Homosexual persons, like all persons, take strength and comfort from the overwhelming

witness of Scripture to the unconditional love of God. The Bible urges the church to put into practice the compassion of Jesus towards all who suffer prejudice, discrimination and rejection because of their particular human differences and uniqueness. This Rite of Blessing is one response to that clear biblical imperative'.<sup>32</sup> Dissenting American bishops looked to the Anglican Primates 'to intervene in the pastoral emergency that has overtaken us', and Archbishop Peter Akinola of Nigeria commented: 'We have come to a crossroads and these events are hoping to determine the future and fate of our Communion. Definitely something must happen'.<sup>33</sup> In England the nomination of Jeffrey John, a celibate homosexual in a relationship, as an area bishop in the Diocese of Oxford, provoked a huge outcry from conservatives within the Diocese of Oxford as well as from elsewhere in the Anglican Communion, and he was eventually forced to step down.<sup>34</sup>

The recently appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, immediately faced a crisis. He summoned the Primates to an emergency meeting in October 2003. They reaffirmed Resolution 1.10, including the need to listen to homosexuals and to one another, but also noted that the Diocese of New Westminster and the Episcopal Church had acted before the Communion was of one mind.<sup>35</sup> A commission chaired by Archbishop Robin Eames of Armagh in Ireland was set up to address the issues of inter-communion. This produced *The Windsor Report* of October 2004, which sought to clarify the nature of communion and authority, especially the discipline necessary to ensure that communion between provinces could be maintained.<sup>36</sup> It called for 'Communion-wide dimensions of theological discourse' (§41) and for formal mechanisms to promote conversation across the churches. Nevertheless it concluded that the Canadian and American churches had 'acted in ways incompatible with the Communion principle of interdependence, and our fellowship together has suffered immensely as a result of these developments' (§121). The *Report* suggested that one way forward would be the adoption of what it called a 'common Anglican Covenant', which would 'make explicit and forceful the loyalty and bonds of affection which govern the relationships between the churches of the Communion' (§118). Efforts to produce a covenant, which included a greater degree of centralization of authority, have continued, although the final text has not met with approval in many churches. By August 2016, only twelve of the member churches had adopted or subscribed to the Covenant.<sup>37</sup> The 'listening process' that encouraged dialogue

between people from different cultures and viewpoints, particularly over attitudes towards human sexuality, was also formalized and resources were produced.<sup>38</sup>

Tension has remained high within the Communion. In the summer of 2006, for instance, CAPA issued a statement ('The road to Lambeth') that they would 'definitely not attend any Lambeth Conference to which the violators of the Lambeth Resolution are also invited as participants or observers'.<sup>39</sup> Again, Lambeth Resolution 1.10 had been elevated into a boundary marker. Partly because of such agitation, the Lambeth Conference of 2008 was a very different gathering from its predecessor. Rowan Williams sought to encourage a process of listening named after a Zulu method of conflict resolution called 'Indaba'. Coming together to listen was not simply about tolerating difference, but about understanding that difference, and drawing it into one's own decision-making structures. On this basis there might be a real progress 'beyond peaceful diversity' towards a deeper sense of 'Christian unity'. In his concluding presidential address, Rowan Williams commented that by using such methods the Anglican Communion might thereby become 'more of a "catholic" church in the proper sense, a church, that is, which understands its ministry and service and sacraments as united and interdependent throughout the world'.<sup>40</sup> The 2008 Lambeth Conference could be seen as promoting a voluntary commitment to a non-coercive form of mutually shared authority, together with a mechanism for listening. This was shortly afterwards institutionalized in a process called Continuing Indaba to ensure communication between churches. While it is too early to comment on the success of this initiative, it is nonetheless clear that disputes and disagreements continue.<sup>41</sup> When in 2017 the General Synod of the Church of England voted to ask for the banning of so-called conversion therapy, a number of conservative clergy have threatened schism. This followed soon after the Episcopal Church of Scotland voted to allow same-sex marriages in its churches. Two dissident bishops have been irregularly consecrated to offer alternative oversight to parishes who resist such moves, although as yet the numbers affected remain very modest.

For many more conservative bishops in 2008, it was clear that the best way forward was to define Anglicanism more rigidly and prescriptively. A significant number of bishops mainly from Africa boycotted the 2008 Lambeth Conference, choosing instead to attend an alternative gathering organized by the so-called Global Anglican Future

Conference (GAFCON) held in Jerusalem shortly beforehand. In his opening address, Peter Akinola, Primate of Nigeria, spoke in strongly post-colonial terms of

setting participants free from [the] spiritual bondage which T[he] E[piscopal] C[hurch] and its Allies champion. Having survived the inhuman physical slavery of the 19th century, the political slavery called colonialism of the 20th century, the developing world economic enslavement, we cannot, we dare not allow ourselves and the millions we represent [to] be kept in [a] religious and spiritual dungeon.<sup>42</sup>

A declaration was issued that called for the expulsion of errant churches, and setting up a network of ‘orthodox’ churches. The Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans was established as a clearly defined group founded on subscription to a set of teachings based upon a particular way of reading the Bible, which ‘is to be translated, read, preached, taught and obeyed in its plain and canonical sense, respectful of the church’s historic and consensual reading’. The statement went on: ‘We reject the authority of those churches and leaders who have denied the orthodox faith in word or deed.’ Orthodoxy was defined at least in part as acknowledgement of

God’s creation of humankind as male and female and the unchangeable standard of Christian marriage between one man and one woman as the proper place for sexual intimacy and the basis of the family. We repent of our failures to maintain this standard and call for a renewed commitment to lifelong fidelity in marriage and abstinence for those who are not married.<sup>43</sup>

The GAFCON network, based in England, has become an alliance of many of the churches of the Global South together with other conservatives from across the Communion. It met again in 2013 in Kenya and is due to meet at Jerusalem in 2018. It is headed by the former Archbishop of Sydney, Peter Jensen, as general secretary and is chaired by Nicholas Dikeriehi Orogodo Okoh, Primate of Nigeria. A Primates’ Council is made up of Anglican leaders from South America, Rwanda, Congo, Uganda, Tanzania, and Sudan along with Foley Beach, Archbishop of the Anglican Church in North America, the largest of the dissenting Anglican Churches in North America. It exists to promote a ‘global

family of authentic Anglicans standing together to retain and restore the Bible to the heart of the Anglican Communion'.<sup>44</sup>

### CONDENSATION SYMBOLS

Recent Anglican history demonstrates that realignment of Anglicanism is being promoted around a set of issues that find their focus in approaches to homosexual practice. Through church history, different issues have functioned as what the political scientist Murray Edelman has called 'condensation symbols': for St. Paul, 'circumcision', for instance, obviously carries with it a whole range of ideas and a whole set of historical presuppositions.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, in contemporary political rhetoric various phrases (such as 'gun control', 'family values', 'freedom of choice', or in Britain 'tackling unemployment' or 'reducing the deficit') can take on a whole range of associations and become coded phrases for identity politics. Similarly, according to Edelman, various historical events (such as 'Remember the Alamo' or 'Remember Pearl Harbor') can become condensation symbols that might later be used to justify wars.<sup>46</sup> In much the same way, particular theological or ethical positions on a whole range of issues take on far broader symbolic meaning than the presenting problem.

The rise of GAFCON shows that opposition to homosexual practice has become a symbolic focus for a whole range of complex geographical, theological, and ecclesial identities; a distinctive stance on homosexuality is but a part of a range of theological attitudes and approaches. What might now look relatively insignificant or inexplicable to the secular outsider has taken on a whole range of meanings. In some ways this displays a degree of similarity with some of the earlier disputes in the Church of England. In its early years, for instance, this sort of identity politics was associated with the so-called Vestiarian controversy of the 1560s, where passionate conflict raged over the seemingly inconsequential matter of ecclesiastical dress. Yet what to wear in church functioned as a symbol for a whole range of issues that related to the role of the reformation and how much further it should proceed in the wholesale clearing away of the clutter of the Church of Rome. For some, late medieval choir dress was the very mark of the beast in much the same way that the Book of Common Prayer was a 'popish dunghill', as John Field put it in the famous *Admonitions* to Parliament.<sup>47</sup>

Such controversies are symptomatic of the vast bulk of ecclesiastical conflicts through history; things are seldom what they seem. Sometimes it is difficult to grasp the venom and the energy with which people promoted or resisted certain practices. This is particularly true of the ritualist controversies and the campaigning groups that embraced a whole system of competing practices and ideas that served to shape Victorian perceptions of the identity of the Church of England (and that were of course central in shaping the theologies of the missionary societies that transplanted Anglicanism across the world). In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the presenting issues for ecclesiastical dispute have been many and various. There were times not so long ago when some Anglo-Catholic parish churches in England had notices saying that they were not in communion with the Church of South India because it had ‘lost’ the Apostolic Succession after union with the non-episcopal churches.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, during the 1990s cards circulated that were to be given to parishioners in churches opposed to the ordination of women for them to pass on to hospital chaplains to let them know that only male priests should administer the last rites. In these apparently small and insignificant gestures it is obvious that a whole range of identity questions are involved. What seems important in trying to understand such symbolic controversies is that there is a sensitivity to language as well as to the contexts—both ecclesiastical and political—in which they emerged.

In relation to the analysis of the contemporary issues facing the Anglican Communion over sexuality it is crucial to understand the nuances of disagreement both at a surface and a deeper level. Key to this is a proper recognition of the profoundly *political* nature of ecclesiastical discourse. Understanding the symbolic politics of difference thus becomes central in efforts to move towards resolution and to live with diversity. As Chris Brittain and Andrew McKinnon have written:

The position one takes on ordaining gay and lesbian bishops and blessing same-sex partnerships has become a symbolic marker around which differing (and competing) interests within the Communion are constructing strategic partnerships, and possibly even forging a new common identity: “Orthodox Anglicans.” This conflict cannot simply be reduced to the effects of a so-called culture war between liberals and conservatives, terms which do not fit well in a number of the local socio-political cultures discussed here, since these basic poles stem from a U.S. context.<sup>49</sup>



This presenting issue, I would suggest, is little different in kind from earlier controversies, even if it is being played out on a larger global stage. Like earlier disputes, it is framed in terms of identity around a key symbol; 'orthodoxy' is associated with a particular attitude towards homosexual practice that is quite distinct from the more usual focus on doctrinal teaching that had characterized earlier controversies.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, the way the debates have been conducted is in terms of the manipulation of language and discourse, much of which involves distinct models of biblical interpretation or different understandings of natural law. In addition, symbolic actions have become extremely important, such as refusing to share communion or refusing to meet with certain people in certain places who have acted in ways that appear to them to contravene the symbolic code. Here, naturally, there seems to be a fetishization of certain symbols that renders them beyond criticism.

The Anglican Communion may not have much by way of central authority, but each of the member churches has adopted some form of more or less effective synodical structure, which means that conflict and disagreement are frequently at the very centre of church life. Synods, which have traditionally been convened when decisions have needed to be reached, are inherently places of disagreement and require compromise and horse-trading to make effective decisions.<sup>51</sup> In analyzing ecclesiastical controversy, a study of conflict can thus be extremely important, as Ephraim Radner has pointed out in his call for an analysis of Christian divisions in their relation to political power both inside and outside the church: 'I would suggest, in fact, that a more proper framework in which to lodge a discussion of Christian division today would be something like "eristology"—from the Greek word associated with the goddess of discord. Eristology, then, is the study of *hostility* in its disordered forms and forces'.<sup>52</sup> Building on this idea, I would suggest that a detailed analysis of the cultural symbolics of theological politics needs to become the key mode for addressing theological controversy both in the past and in the present. Here, a warning from George Orwell's 1946 essay, 'Politics and the English language', seems particularly relevant: 'In our age there is no such thing as "keeping out of politics". All issues are political issues, and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred, and schizophrenia'.<sup>53</sup> Ecclesiastical controversy and dispute, then, are very much part of the dirty business of politics and they require careful theological analysis ('eristology'). Similarly, as Graham Ward suggests in his analysis of theological politics, 'there is no pure theological discourse'.<sup>54</sup> All this requires

a proper and full discussion of the messiness of the political rhetoric and strategies behind (ostensibly) theological language.<sup>55</sup> There is a sense through church history of an emphasis on slogans and catch-phrases that capture a range of practices and ideas—‘popish dunghill’ is, after all, a good soundbite. Christians should not be embarrassed about conflict or politics.

Although in themselves the slogans that function as condensation symbols often have little impact on the daily lives of most people and are quite detached from their everyday experience, they nevertheless instil a sense of identity and security that does not ultimately rely on rational or analytical argument. Indeed, personal identity is constructed through the encounters that people have with one another and the ways in which they construct their opponents’ views: words like ‘traditional’ or ‘orthodox’ take on meanings quite detached from anything theological or rational and can easily be associated with the construction of ‘friend’ and ‘enemy’.<sup>56</sup> As Brittain and McKinnon suggest, ‘the construction of effective condensational symbols has been an important component of organizing opponents of the “liberal agenda.”’<sup>57</sup> Or, as Edelman puts it more generally, ‘people involved in politics are symbols to other observers; they stand for ideologies, values, or moral stances and they become role models, benchmarks, or symbols of threat and evil’.<sup>58</sup> This means that political language exists in part to create rhetorical mechanisms for demonizing opponents and robbing them of personality as well as promoting group solidarity, sometimes by creating a sense of victimhood.

In all this, according to Edelman, there is a degree of the fetishization of the symbolic: ‘The political entities that are most influential upon public consciousness and action ... are fetishes: creations of observers that then dominate and mystify their creators’.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, gathering around markers and creating badges or symbols that reinforce group solidarity become the key factors in identity formation. At the same time, this process of the ‘symbolization’ of politics can make reasoned discussion difficult, if not impossible. There is no neutral space. Instead, everything is marked out by clear boundaries, and strategies are created to ensure that nobody transgresses the boundaries. According to Edelman, there is constant re-enforcement and reiteration: ‘people in the same social situations use similar language to cope with the problems they face; and that kind of predictability is characteristic of a great deal of political language. Most of it is banal, precisely because it reassures speaker and audience that whatever they think will serve their interests

is justifiable'.<sup>60</sup> The use of symbolic language implies that there are wide areas for manipulation and interpretation through careful use of rhetoric, and through networks of persuasion: 'While most political language has little to do with how well people live, it has a great deal to do with the legitimization of regimes and the acquiescence of publics in actions they had no part in initiating'.<sup>61</sup>

All this seems to resonate with the ways in which language can be used in theological controversy. On many matters that will have no direct effect at all on the church member—and here the attitude towards same-sex marriage is probably a good example—there will nevertheless be a manipulation of language to ensure that people feel that they are 'involved in fateful or significant events'.<sup>62</sup> Things become important because people are constantly told that they are important. Symbolic language thereby becomes a form of political persuasion that might be labelled 'heresthetic' (to use a term borrowed from W. H. Riker's book *The Art of Political Manipulation*).<sup>63</sup> Rhetoric moves beyond the simple art of persuasion to a complete redefinition of the terms of the political debate. As the political theorist Iain McLean puts it in relation to Thatcherite economic policy: 'persuading people that it was true, made it true'.<sup>64</sup>

What I am suggesting is that any attempt to analyze and provide a way forward through conflict in the church requires a framing of the issues as widely and as deeply as possible. In particular, there is the need to embrace and understand political rhetoric as this is expressed in highly potent 'condensation symbols'. In all this, much more than ethics and biblical interpretation is at issue. Indeed, it is quite clear from recent history that there is a powerful rhetoric at work across the Anglican Communion that needs to be addressed in detail. The more that all those involved are able to analyze and deepen their understanding of these symbols, the more likely it becomes that they will be able to grasp the underlying differences and move towards a perhaps costly peace (which admittedly might only be established by redrawing boundaries through a peace treaty rather than any reconciliation of opponents). In all this, there is a need to be open to the nuances of language and rhetoric, which might perhaps begin with deep facilitated listening (as is being attempted by the Church of England, and to a lesser extent by the Anglican Communion).

Ultimately this will be about helping people to open themselves up to the 'other', both the transcendental 'other', that is, to the God who

always remains distinct from any contextualization and closure, but also to the ‘other’ whose perception of the Good News and its implications remains different. As Graham Ward puts it (admittedly somewhat provocatively): ‘The institutional churches are necessary, but they are not ends in themselves; they are constantly transgressed by ... an erotic community ... The body of Christ desiring its consummation opens itself to what is outside the institutional Church; offers itself to perform in fields of activity far from chancels and cloisters’.<sup>65</sup> The practice of Christian listening as a means for addressing conflicts is highly unlikely to involve reaching uniformity, still less is it about exclusion, but instead it is about trying to express something of the otherness of God as this is recognized in the communities that exist to proclaim the Gospel of his Son. In turn, this requires a listening to the ‘other’ within that very community. Christian communities exist in an inter-relationship and interdependence but they do so in a political and highly conflicted world. Of course, there may be splits after listening and there may well be messiness and blurred edges (or in prosaic language, ‘impaired communion’), but there is unlikely to be complete separation. Agreeing to disagree may be a profoundly liberating step and it may well in the end be a way of resisting violence and promoting peace.

## CONCLUSION

Whether there is any possibility of reconciliation or acceptance of diversity over the issue of homosexuality is a question that the Anglican Communion continues to face. The current Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, an experienced peacemaker, who visited each of the Primates within his first year in office, initially expressed a degree of pessimism about the future of the Communion. More recently, however, there seems to have been a change of tone; at the meeting of the Primates held in Canterbury in January 2016 there was a desire expressed to ‘walk together’, despite differences.<sup>66</sup> Even though relationships with the Episcopal Church (TEC), which the previous summer had changed its canons to allow for same-sex marriages in church, were particularly strained, and even though there was a request that TEC be removed from doctrinal and ecumenical bodies, it was not to be excluded from the Communion altogether.<sup>67</sup> This policy was upheld at the ACC meeting at Lusaka later in the year.

In May 2016 a task group was appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury to discuss the way forward, which notably included participation from the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Michael Curry, along with representatives from the Indian sub-continent, Australia, Africa, Canada, and England. Within the Church of England there is significant opposition to changing the teaching on homosexuality, despite the significant number of clergy who have entered into civil partnerships or, since the change of legislation in 2013, the few who have married their partners. Facilitated discussions ('shared conversations') to encourage diversity and respect difference have taken place at various levels from bishops to General Synod to groups of dioceses. Legislation is likely to be brought before General Synod within the next few years that is likely to change the policy towards what the Church can offer people living in same-sex relationships. But with so many other churches in the Anglican Communion gathered around Resolution 1.10 as a 'condensation symbol', which has become a badge of orthodoxy, there is little hope that such a method will be exported across all the churches of the Communion. Indeed, if it adopts a pluralist solution the Church of England is likely to be labelled as another of those declining imperialist institutions (like the Episcopal Church) seeking to cast its liberal spell on a hapless Communion. The power of political rhetoric contained in condensation symbols may be too strong for any listening process to overcome. Where condensation symbols have been rendered sacred, there is little chance that there will be the humility sufficient for the listening process to work, and for any compromises or changes to be made. In all this, however, it should not be forgotten that it is Christian homosexuals who continue to bear the pain of Britain's colonialist past.

## NOTES

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4. See Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
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15. Miranda K. Hassett has drawn out these connections in *Anglican Communion in Crisis: How Episcopal Dissidents and the African Allies are Reshaping Anglicanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), esp. Chap. 3.
  16. On this, see N. W. Hoad, *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), esp. Chap. 1: 'African sodomy in the missionary position' on the Ugandan martyrs.
  17. See The Law Library of Congress, Global Legal Research Center, *Laws on Homosexuality in African Nations*, February 2014 at: <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/criminal-laws-on-homosexuality/homosexuality-laws-in-african-nations.pdf>. Accessed 3 August 2016.
  18. See, for instance, Marc Epprecht, 'The "unsaying" of indigenous homosexualities in Zimbabwe: mapping a blindspot in an African masculinity', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24:4 (1998), pp. 631–651; and more generally Marc Epprecht, *Sexuality and Social Justice in Africa: Rethinking Homophobia and Forging Resistance* (London: Zed Books, 2013), esp. Chap. 3.
  19. Such rhetoric could sometimes come from more liberal-minded bishops. According to the conservative website Anglican Ink, in April 2015, for instance, Victor Atta Baffoe, Bishop of Cape Coast in Ghana, claimed that while it was important to be open to the LGBTBI community, it was crucial for the state to teach young people that 'homosexuality is not part of us, it is alien' at: [www.anglican.ink/article/homosexuality-un-african-says-ghana-diocese](http://www.anglican.ink/article/homosexuality-un-african-says-ghana-diocese). Accessed 4 August 2016. See the analysis of religious rhetoric in the sexuality debate in South Africa by Louise Vincent and Simon Howell, "'Unnatural", "un-African" and "ungodly": homophobic discourse in democratic South Africa', *Sexualities* 17:4 (2014), pp. 472–483.
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23. Hilary M. Carey, *God's Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c. 1801–1908* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Imperial Horizons of British Protestant Missions, 1880–1914* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Joseph Hardwick, *An Anglican British World: The Church of England and the Expansion of the Settler Empire, c. 1790–1860* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).
24. Hoad, *African Intimacies*, p. 57.
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26. Ward, *A History of Global Anglicanism*, p. 310. See his unpublished val-  
edictory lecture: 'Intimate encounter: a gay scholar reflects on 40 years'  
engagement with East African Christianity, revival, conflict and sexuality'  
(23 January 2014, University of Leeds). I am grateful to Professor Ward  
for making the paper available to me.
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29. See also Christopher Craig Brittain and Andrew Mackinnon,  
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66. Primates' Communiqué at: [http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/206035/Communiqué\\_from\\_the\\_Primates\\_Meeting\\_2016.pdf](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/206035/Communiqué_from_the_Primates_Meeting_2016.pdf). Accessed 4 August 2016.
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## How Queer Can Christian Marriage Be? Eschatological Imagination and the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions in the American Episcopal Church

*Rémy Bethmont*

The liturgies for same-sex marriages authorised by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in 2015 were the result of a six-year process whose first stage was the production of theological and liturgical resources that did not label same-sex relationships as marriages. The liturgy authorised in 2012 was tellingly entitled ‘The witness and blessing of a lifelong covenant’. As I shall make clear, the definition of lifelong covenant was in no way inferior to that of marriage since marriage itself was defined as a lifelong covenant. Talking about covenanted relationships placed both same-sex and different-sex couples within a larger frame of reference in which commitments that did not centre on a couple were equally honoured, such as vows binding a monastic community. The breadth of this frame of reference is particularly arresting to the queer eye because it can accommodate the various ways in which

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monogamous gay and lesbian relationships have been thought of in queer religious discourse since the 1990s. Marriage has certainly been an important template, which has been given prominence in much of the Western world by the secular campaign for marriage equality, but another script has also been put forward, that of covenanted friendship, favoured by people who feel uncomfortable with the idea of marriage.

It has to be said that the use of the word 'marriage' in the 2012 liturgy was avoided for political reasons. The Standing Committee on Liturgy and Music (SCLM), which was commissioned by the 2009 General Convention to develop resources for the blessing of same-sex unions, had not been given any mandate to apply the word marriage to these unions. Given the apprehension and misgivings to which this move gave rise within certain sections of the Church, the Commission's chair, Ruth Meyers, felt it very important not to overstep the bounds of the Commission's mandate. But the positive consequence of the prohibition on the word marriage was an openness in the liturgical and theological resources to the way in which committed gay and lesbian relationships should be labelled and imagined. This positive consequence, however, may not have always been fully recognised in the wider Episcopal Church.

When I attended the Consultation on same-sex blessings in June 2014 in Kansas City as a delegate of the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe, I was struck at how much the issue that seemed to dominate was not so much the renewal of the Christian imagination about all committed relationships as the absence of the word marriage from the 2012 same-sex blessing liturgy. Although the American context provided an explanation for this, I could not help wondering whether the Episcopal Church was not becoming obsessed with the very family values that queer theology had been encouraging the Church to move away from. How were the queer resources authorised in 2012 being received by people who campaigned for the blessing of same-sex relationships in the Church? In Kansas City, in-depth discussions took place in small groups. In my own small group, there seemed to be an agreement that the Commission had produced a very valuable theological document. At the same time, the question of how much it related to the way in which ordinary church members actually viewed marriage or any of the covenanted relationships mentioned in the document was asked. Episcopalians still have some way to go before they conceive of the union of a couple as a covenant. In this context of Episcopal searching for a

covenantal understanding of committed relationships in general, what, we ask, is the meaning of the inclusion of same-sex unions in Christian marriage that the last General Convention officially validated?

In fact the strong eschatological underpinning of the various queer ways of describing and labelling gay and lesbian relationships in SCLM's work means that choosing the word marriage to name same-sex unions does not necessarily exclude the theological insights behind the choice of other images. Using the examples of Michael Vasey's and Eugene Rogers' writings, I will show how much same-sex unions viewed in terms of friendship or of marriage have in common when they are both viewed eschatologically. In that perspective, the choice of one label over another has limited significance. The resources produced by SCLM are very much inscribed in this eschatological perspective. Given the American legal, historical and political context, the choice of the word marriage in 2015 makes perfect sense without necessarily compromising the queer renewal of the Christian imagination that SCLM is inviting the Church to enter into. What seems clear, however, is that the Episcopal Church still has some way to go before this renewal actually happens. The revision of the marriage canons and the authorisation of inclusive marriage rites are hardly the end of the road but merely a station on the journey—albeit a significant one.

### NAMING GAY AND LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS ESCHATOLOGICALLY

The new marriage liturgy authorised by the Episcopal Church is heavily indebted to the recovery of an eschatological view of the Eucharist as a foretaste of the heavenly feast and as the Kingdom of God breaking into the here and now. In Anglicanism worship plays a central role in articulating doctrine (*lex credendi, lex orandi*). In doing so it also plays a central role in forming the Christian imagination. It provides images and words that form and reform the *sensus fidelium*. There is a continuum between Eucharistic eschatology and a renewed way of thinking about Christian morals.<sup>1</sup> The natural paradigm that has dominated Western thinking since at least Thomas Aquinas has been increasingly challenged by an eschatological paradigm. What I call the natural paradigm is that way of thinking by which moral rules are derived from the natural order, which, in spite of sin, still bears witness to the perfection of God's Creation in the beginning, to the Creator's intention for his Creation. Classically in the natural paradigm, salvation goes hand in hand with

conformity to the order of Creation.<sup>2</sup> The natural paradigm has tended to look to what was in the beginning to find the moral truth of humankind: true morality is found in Adam and Eve's innocence before the Fall and the quest for holiness is about finding one's way back to that original truth and purity, with the assistance of grace.

A stronger eschatological awareness in the Western Church has meant that the quest for the natural order in the beginning has no longer been as obviously necessary to the moral quest and indeed to salvation. One emphasises the new reality of the New Creation, which surpasses rather than restores the perfection of the old.<sup>3</sup> Therefore morality can be defined in terms that need not refer to the law of nature and salvation is rediscovered, as James Alison puts it, as being led to inhabiting a space of 'serenity about nothing human being simply "natural", but everything being part of a human social construct, to the extent where we can begin to imagine God quite removed from any justification of the present order, and yet ever palpitating beneath the vertiginous possibilities of the bringing of a divine order into being'.<sup>4</sup> Queer theology in its fresh approach to homosexuality has made great use of what I call the eschatological paradigm, along the line of a great deal of patristic theology, by which the truth of humankind is defined by the end-times, rather than being defined by what God created in the beginning. Negotiating the shift to the eschatological paradigm has been anything but straightforward, however. The eschatological paradigm enables one to recast one's discourse on homosexuality away from its naturalness or unnaturalness, towards the way in which gay and lesbian relationships relate to the realities of the New Creation. But traditionally, while eschatological thinking (in the Patristic Church notably) allowed for a positive assessment of affectionate relationships that were not procreative, it tended to view the sexual dimension of any relationship in a negative light.<sup>5</sup> The ideal marriage for the Patristic Church is a spiritual marriage, devoid of sex.<sup>6</sup> Relating gay and lesbian relationships to eschatological imagination has meant rethinking the theological tradition and experimenting with a variety of images to describe the truth of gay and lesbian relationships in the light of the New Creation.

In the early years of queer theology friendship seemed to be as readily invoked as marriage as a template for gay and lesbian relationships.<sup>7</sup> Michael Vasey, in *Strangers and Friends* (1995), saw gay relationships as a gift to Western Church and society, which had lost any sense of intimacy between males out of idolatrous conformity to the capitalist order.

Capitalism turned men into competitors in the public sphere, leaving the married domestic sphere as the only space for emotional fulfilment and intimacy.<sup>8</sup> The 'family values' that the church identified with, said Vasey, would have been hardly comprehensible to the Primitive Church for which family was very much part of the order of this fallen world. Family values for early Christians would have embodied all those things belonging to natural man that one should die to; most particularly, preference given to your own clan over universal fraternity with all those who had been baptised into the Church.<sup>9</sup> Gay people, said Vasey, could help the Church reconnect with the breadth of covenanted relationships that scripture and tradition commended. While Vasey was by no means censorious of gay people adapting to themselves the marriage script to order their lives, his preference seemed to lie with the script of affectionate, covenanted friendships such as can be found in the monastic tradition represented by Aelred of Rievaulx. More than marriage, the script of intimate friendship would make more significant the gay contribution to the critique of an idolatrous capitalist order the Church had bought into.

For Vasey, the classic Christian understanding of romantic love is not found in its relatively recent restriction to heterosexual marriage but in 'an intuition of beauty, a moment of revelation both about God and about creation'.<sup>10</sup> This revelatory quality of the erotic is linked to eschatology: it is a revelation of the Kingdom of God and a foretaste of heaven. It is not incidental that Vasey ends his book with a section about heaven or 'gay paradise' as he entitles it: 'The classic Christian imagination saw the awakening of love, the sweetness of sexual pleasure, and the fruitfulness of the sexual act as real but partial anticipations of the true locus of human longings for joy and immortality. The true and lasting fulfilment of these hopes lay in heaven'.<sup>11</sup> And Vasey laments the 'loss of heaven from the modern imagination',<sup>12</sup> something he thinks gay people could help the Church recover:

The biblical and traditional images of heaven are so preoccupied with style and public celebration as to be almost camp. While relentlessly political, they have more in common with a Gay Pride event than with the sobriety of English political life or the leisurewear informality of evangelical Christian life. ... The hope of heaven does not rest on fitting in with the way of the world but on the Lion and the Lamb—on the beauty of a king who strives for justice and the love of a gentle friend who takes to himself our pain and failure.<sup>13</sup>

The broadening of the Western imagination about affectionate relationships, to which gay people may contribute more easily than straight people, is closely linked to a renewed, enhanced eschatological imagination. Vasey strove to present gays and lesbians, indeed the gay culture, which was universally reviled by Evangelicals in his days, as a gift to the Church. His concern was to underline the differences between gay and straight people, rather than what they had in common, to show that the straight Church needed their gay brothers (and probably their lesbian sisters, too, although Vasey hardly ever mentions them). On one count at least, it seems that Vasey was right: the constancy with which eschatological reflections have underpinned queer theology has meant that gays and lesbians are helping the Church to recover the 'hope of heaven' by relating moral thinking to the New Creation. An eschatological approach has characterised a number of queer theologians who have come to favour the template of marriage for gay and lesbian relationships.

Eugene Rogers is one such queer scholar. Steering away from the image of friendship, Rogers enthusiastically took up marriage as the better image for same-sex unions. This made him a supporter of the civil campaign for marriage equality, but his queer theology of marriage is not formulated in terms of rights. Rather it moves away from considerations of individual rights to emphasise what a gay and lesbian partaking of marriage can offer the Church and the world, how it can further God's kingdom. In that sense, it is quite remote from the idolatrous attachment to bourgeois marriage and family values that Vasey writes against. Rogers' theology insists on relating gay and lesbian relationships to the hope of heaven, bringing it much closer to Vasey's than one might at first think.

Eugene Rogers defines marriage as having an 'eschatological end in the grace and gratitude of the Trinitarian life, apart from childbearing'.<sup>14</sup> When desire is deepened in marriage, it may 'trick lovers' into 'acts of faith, hope and charity', it stretches forward 'into things that are more desirable'.<sup>15</sup> Gay and lesbian relationships can equally partake of a vision of marriage as 'bodily means that God can use to catch human beings up into less and less conditioned acts of self-donation, finally into that unconditional response to God's self-donation that God's self gives in the Trinity'.<sup>16</sup> Situating marriage eschatologically makes it the twin brother of celibacy (as indeed 'spiritual marriages' did in patristic times) and makes its meaning independent from procreation. The fruitfulness



of the marriage is situated in its straining forward into the life of mutual self-offering in the New Creation. In this sense, procreation links up with the Christian meaning of marriage only if the couple with their children form a community that seeks to partake of the life of the Trinity. Procreation in other words is merely one possible channel by which the eschatological fruitfulness of a marriage may bloom. Vasey and Rogers use very different images for committed same-sex relationships, but they both approach them eschatologically, thereby providing a critique, explicit or implicit, of the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Church's obsession with bourgeois family values. The right ordering of relationships should certainly be of concern to the Church, but it should view this ordering in the light of the New Creation that God is bringing about. In this light, bourgeois family values do not *mean* enough. This kind of eschatological thinking has been fundamental in the development of the recent liturgy for the blessing of same-sex unions in the Episcopal Church and for the even more recent revision of this liturgy, adapting it for marriage for both same-sex and different-sex couples.

### THE EPISCOPAL THEOLOGY OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

In July 2015, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church authorised for trial use a gender-neutral version of the 1979 marriage rite, which paralleled the gender-neutral revision of the marriage canons. More interestingly, it seems to me, the Convention also authorised *The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage*, which has come out of the work of the SCLM on the blessing of same-sex couples. This liturgy, based on the 2012 *Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant*, constitutes a thorough rewriting of the marriage rite, taking up the definition of marriage as covenant, found in several recent Anglican liturgies, and using the notion of covenant to shift the definition of marriage from *taking* another to *giving* oneself to another. This is powerfully conveyed in the vows the two spouses make, especially in the 2015 version, prior to the relatively minor revisions made by the competent legislative committee of the 2015 General Convention:

In the name of God,  
I, N., give myself to you, N.  
I will support and care for you [by the grace of God]:

in times of sickness, in times of health.  
 I will hold and cherish you [in the love of Christ]:  
 in times of plenty, in times of want.  
 I will honor and keep you [with the Spirit's help]:  
 in times of anguish, in times of joy,  
 forsaking all others, as long as we both shall live.  
 This is my solemn vow.<sup>17</sup>

Legislative committee changed the first sentence of the vow to 'In the Name of God, I, N., give myself to you, N., *and take you to myself*'. This was done at the instigation of a priest who insisted that the taking importantly signified the total acceptance of one's partner.<sup>18</sup> Giving, he said, should be complemented by receiving. The rite was authorised by the Convention with this revision. Although the authorised version of the vows objectively moves the rite closer to traditional liturgies where the two spouses 'take' each other, it does not ultimately change the focus of the liturgy on the self-offering of the partners. In particular, the celebrant's first question to each partner still reads: 'N., do you freely and unreservedly offer yourself to N.', a striking rewriting of the traditional question asking whether each partner will 'have' or 'take' the other.<sup>19</sup> Marriage as self-offering is reminiscent of Rogers' theology. And indeed, Rogers sat on the SCLM sub-committee responsible for drafting the theological document accompanying the 2012 liturgy. But the work of SCLM was thoroughly collective and the liturgy and theological resources that the Commission produced cannot be traced back to one scholarly influence.

The central notion of the theological document, 'Faith, hope and love: theological resources for blessing same-sex relationships' is that of covenanted households, something, as it appears, borrowed from Bishop Thomas Breidenthal.<sup>20</sup> Tellingly, although the document was produced at a time when SCLM had not been authorised to use the word marriage for same-sex relationships, it was the same document that was again submitted to the 2015 General Convention, together with the request that equal marriages rites be authorised. The Commission only added responses to the theological document by people representing various backgrounds and shades of opinion in the Episcopal Church. This sufficiently shows that the Commission saw their theological work of the 2009–2012 triennium as a sufficient theological rationale for

same-sex *marriage* rites; whether one calls same-sex unions marriages or not does not change the meaning of the blessing imparted by the church on the couple. We must note that the SCLM material was complemented by the work of the task force on marriage, which strove to show that same-sex covenanted relationships were the same thing as marriage. But the fact remains that the SCLM theological document was seen as equally valid to accompany marriage rites in 2015 as they had been to accompany a liturgy which eschewed the word marriage in 2012.

This was made possible by the focus on the notion of covenanted households. It enabled the Commission to write about same-sex unions in the wider context of covenanted relationships of which marriage is but one example, next to monastic communities. What these various households have in common is their eschatological vocation: they are all called to ‘contribute to the Church’s witness to the new life God offers in Christ and through the Spirit, which the Church celebrates in the “sacraments of the new creation”’.<sup>21</sup> The term ‘household’, like ‘covenant’, has a sacramental resonance for Episcopalians. In the 1979 baptismal liturgy, celebrant and people together declare to the newly baptised: ‘We receive you into the household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood’. And of course the 1979 Prayer Book puts the baptismal covenant at the heart of the baptismal rite and, one might say, at the heart of contemporary Episcopalian theology. A covenanted household is therefore an expression of what it is to be Church, caught up in the dynamics of sacramental life. ‘In these covenants, two people vow to give themselves bodily and wholeheartedly to each other. They do this, in part, to live out the promises of baptism while also living into the self-offering of Christ, as expressed in the Eucharistic table: “This is my body, given for you”’.<sup>22</sup>

Strikingly, next to the Prayer Book marriage service, the 1979 baptismal liturgy was an important source for the 2012 liturgy of blessing, which became the 2015 inclusive marriage liturgy. The possibility for the couple to be presented to the celebrant has followed the 1979 baptismal practice of sponsors presenting the person to be baptised, the understanding being that the sponsor is someone who will support the newly baptised in their life of faith.<sup>23</sup> This represents a fascinating rewriting of the question found in many traditional Anglican liturgies ‘Who

giveth this woman to be married to this man?’ The patriarchal giving away of the bride has been rewritten as a presentation by members of the Christian community who promise to ‘love, respect, and pray for N. and N., and do all in [their] power to stand with them in the life they will share’.<sup>24</sup> The covenantal vows here are subsumed in the baptismal vows in which the whole Church shares and the covenantal relationship becomes a commitment to ministry and mission.

Following Rowan Williams in his 1989 paper ‘The body’s grace’ and Thomas Breidenthal’s reflections about sanctifying nearness, the theological document affirms the vocation of sex as fruitfulness quite independently from procreation. Rather, the vocation of sex is about radical availability and vulnerability to another, leading to a giving of oneself that mirrors Christ’s own self-offering:

The movement of sexual desire toward intimacy and into commitment begins as we give ourselves over to another in faithful relation and continues toward the final moment of committal, surrendering our lives to God. This movement describes a lifelong, deliberate process that, with obedience and faithfulness, produces visible holiness and the fruits of the Spirit. Both for the good of the couple and for the good of the Church, God blesses this loving, intimate commitment. This blessing, in turn, empowers the couple for their ministry in the world and energizes the Church for mission.<sup>25</sup>

Covenantal language enables the Commission to relate all committed relationships to the eschatological meaning of the sacramental life of the Church. While the focus was initially on the blessing of same-sex unions, many in the Commission, right from the start, felt that they were engaged in the sort of work that might lay the foundation for a renewed way of looking at different-sex marriage: ‘Some will find this kind of theological reflection on same-sex relationships unfamiliar and perhaps unwarranted. Many opposite-sex couples would likewise find this to be a new way of thinking about their own marital vows. Thus, General Convention Resolution 2009-C056, which called for these theological resources, becomes an opportunity for reflecting more broadly on the role of covenantal relationship in the life of the Church’.<sup>26</sup> As the chair of SCLM indicated to me, for many Commission members, the production of the resources for same-sex blessings was seen as preparatory work in view of recasting the marriage liturgy of the 1979 Book of

Common Prayer (BCP) at a time when a comprehensive revision of the BCP was already looming.<sup>27</sup> The revision of the marriage canons and the authorisation of marriage rites for both same-sex and different-sex couples in the summer of 2015 can therefore be understood as a declaration about both kinds of couples sharing in the same eschatological hope and renewal.

### AN INCOMPLETE PROCESS

In a sense, Michael Vasey's hope that gays and lesbians might help the Church recover its sense of heaven may be becoming reality in the Episcopal Church. However, the process of rethinking marriage in the light of the New Creation is far from complete. Some eschatological images around marriage still sit uncomfortably with the inclusion of same-sex relationships in holy matrimony and take us back to the lexical instability of queer religious discourse since the early 1990s to the terminology of same-sex unions. It is striking, for example, that the image of the wedding feast, a central eschatological motif which Eugene Rogers uses extensively in his writings, was completely left out of the liturgy. When I asked Ruth Meyers, the chair of SCLM, for a reason, she answered that the Commission felt the gendered language around Christ and his bride was 'complicated' to deal with. A church in which women priests and bishops represent Christ at the altar can only agree with Rogers that 'religious discourse works in a much richer and subtler fashion than by supposing that one has to instantiate physically what one ... represents figurally'.<sup>28</sup> But the liturgical translation of this statement is anything but easy, as the variety of attempts to name the persons of the Trinity in non-patriarchal ways sufficiently indicates.<sup>29</sup> Eschatological bridal imagery is also traditionally steeped in a hierarchical worldview. The bride in Ephesians 5:21–33 is submitted to Christ as the woman is submitted to her husband. And in spite of the egalitarian way in which this passage is analysed by SCLM in the theological document,<sup>30</sup> bridal imagery was not given liturgical expression. This imagery, however, is now offered to same-sex couples thanks to the gender-neutral version of the 1979 marriage rite whose introduction states that the 'joining of two people in a life of mutual fidelity signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church'. But the adaptation of the 1979 rite came out of the request for equal rites—that the Prayer Book liturgies be made available to gay and lesbian couples and that the new 2012

liturgy be made accessible to straight couples. The adaptation of the Prayer Book liturgy did not go much beyond using inclusive language. The only other change is the deletion of the reference to Cana in the introduction.<sup>31</sup> Given the theological work of SCLM and of the more recent task force on marriage, it would be very surprising if this adaptation (and indeed the 1979 rite) was not revised before long.

The present state of things reflects the superimposition of two different logics, one theological and one political, in the work that has brought the Episcopal Church to bless same-sex marriages. The secular campaign for marriage equality was paralleled in the Church by demands formulated in the language of rights, which was markedly different from the theological language of the material produced by SCLM. Two distinct things in fact happened: the Episcopal Church increasingly positioned itself politically on the side of marriage equality in the US debate and it increasingly positioned itself theologically in favour of a profound rethinking of the significance, place and role in the Church of covenanted relationships.

The consultation on same-sex blessings that took place in June 2014 in Kansas City was organised by SCLM in preparation for the General Convention of 2015. The impassioned demand by many participants for applying the term marriage to same-sex unions was part of an equality agenda: separate liturgies for gay and straight couples could never be equal. The reference to African-American history of 'separate but equal' education, which turned out not to be equal, was the explicit reference. The changing context of the legalisation of same-sex marriage in an increasing number of states also provided for a practical objection to the continued avoidance of the term marriage. In these states, priests would marry same-sex couples on behalf of the state in the context of a liturgy that never used the word marriage: from a civil point of view, a marriage was being contracted, while from a religious point of view, something not called a marriage was celebrated simultaneously. The legalisation of same-sex marriage in all states following the decision of the Supreme Court, which was reached during General Convention in June 2015, provided an additional boost.

Discussions at the Kansas City consultation in 2014 and the in-depth conversations that I conducted with three members of my small group one year later suggest that the demand for equal rites reflected a political necessity whose theological grounding was the respect for the dignity of all human beings created in the image of God.<sup>32</sup> But my small

group did not explicitly relate this to the theological and liturgical reflections of SCLM on the blessing of same-sex unions. Two middle-aged gay and lesbian participants strikingly refer to the superimposition of the demand for equality and the theological work on same-sex relationships. Rev. Tom expresses his personal preference for the term holy union (or holy covenant, as in the 2012 liturgy)<sup>33</sup>: 'It was the secular LGBT community that decided that marriage was going to be the vehicle to get to more equity. Just like they chose the military service as the vehicle to get equity. Would I have chosen the military service as the vehicle? No. Would I have chosen marriage as the vehicle? No. But they did and here we are'.<sup>34</sup> For Rev. Tom, a staff consultant of SCLM, the marriage model is problematic because it is still loaded with patriarchal baggage which has traditionally made this institution something about property. He echoes many gays and lesbians who have been hesitant or have simply refused to call their unions marriages because they did not want to buy into bourgeois values and its patriarchal, property-based order. At the same time, Tom did not hesitate to get married when he was told by the Church Pension Fund that because he lived in a state which had legalised same-sex marriage, his male partner could only claim various spousal benefits if he was *married* to Tom. A civil union was no longer enough. Tom is now a married man who remains uneasy about the institution of marriage.

Joy shares some of Rev. Tom's concerns. Unlike him, she has always thought of her union with her female partner as a marriage, but marriage defined as covenant and not as a patriarchal institution. 'I want to see marriage transformed', she says.<sup>35</sup> Like Tom, she cannot be satisfied with the mere legal fact of marriage equality if it means gays and lesbians are simply conforming to the traditional institution of marriage (which Joy describes as transactional rather than covenantal). However, she realises that her and her partner's view of marriage as a school of faith and a vocation is something that they do not share with a great number of people. She sees the theological work of the Church as essential to point the way towards a more profound view of marriage that liberates and encourages people to build a community of love reaching beyond the couple's home. This work (which the SCLM understood as one of its most important tasks) has started but it is still in its infancy and needs to be received widely.<sup>36</sup> The theological document, she says, 'may look alien to many people in our culture. Even as a Church, as a whole, we're not there. I'd like us to move towards that. With baptism we've moved

in a little time from a private ceremony celebrating the birth of a child to covenantal vows. I hope the same thing will happen with marriage’.

Marriage equality should not lead to gay and lesbian conformity to the bourgeois family model but should renew the meaning of marriage for all Christians. Tom’s and Joy’s remarks are striking indicators that the process launched by the theological and liturgical work of SCLM is still incomplete. And the continuance of this process is at risk of being compromised if Episcopalians yield to the temptation of seeing the inclusive revision of the marriage canon in 2015 as the end of the road. The road does not stop with the full inclusion of same-sex couples in marriage but rather with completing the process of claiming back the eschatological meaning of all covenanted relationships. Episcopalians have not finished learning how to be Church better as a covenanted community, within which all types of covenanted commitments have their unique roles to play.

So will the blessing of same-sex marriages as marriages in the Episcopal Church facilitate the process of renewing the meaning of marriage for all? This has undoubtedly been the hope of SCLM and of others in the leadership of the Episcopal Church. One must note, however, that this attempt at renewal is entering a new operating mode. Up to the last General Convention, reflection was conducted largely without the language of marriage. The prohibition had positive sides in that it forced a search for alternative language that has proved fruitful. I am not only talking of the work of SCLM but of the work accomplished beforehand by various rank and file gay and lesbian Episcopalians. SCLM’s work was collective in more ways than one. One of the Commission’s starting points was reviewing the many liturgies that had been created unofficially by or for same-sex couples, for unofficial use in local parish contexts, often with the approval of the bishop. Joy and her partner wrote their own commitment ceremony in 1999, when using the word marriage was not an option in their diocese. Parts of this liturgy inspired the rite produced by SCLM. Joy’s words provide some food for thought as to how some gays and lesbians have been forced to reimagine marriage in a very deep way.

[Marriage] was always the word that meant something to us because it had a lot of resonance in a lot of ways. When we had our wedding (in 1999) we were forbidden from using that word so we had to think again and then the biblical language of covenant became meaningful. ... I now



refer to us as married but when I use that word, it has covenant very much embedded in it, in a way that it might not have if we had simply been able to use the word marriage and not have to think more deeply. So in some ways the Church saying ‘you can’t use that word’ was a benefit to us. It required us to reflect and think more deeply. I won’t say it was a good thing the Church did that, but as our President said last week, ‘God works in mysterious ways’.<sup>37</sup>

In a new, post-2015 political situation, it is now the word ‘marriage’ that has to be used in the process of recovering more deeply the Christian meaning of covenanted relationships within the larger covenanted Church community. Given the force of the *political* logic that led to marriage equality, the Episcopal Church will have to make sure that the political victory of the equality campaign and its language of rights does not swallow up the *theological* legacy of the campaign. The queer theological voice must continue to show its relevance in the new age of equality. This is the condition for preserving for the whole Church the spiritual gifts of same-sex relationships and perhaps for keeping alive the prophetic voice that sees the true Christian meaning of all committed human relationships in their eschatological vocation.

## NOTES

1. See my own papers ‘Homosexualité, loi naturelle et rapport à l’accomplissement eschatologique de l’humain: Réflexions sur un aspect négligé du débat anglican sur l’homosexualité’, *Istina* 58:2 (2013) and ‘The difficult attempt to separate reproduction from sexuality in Anglican moral theology’, in Gisela Engel and Nicole C. Karafyllis (eds), *Re-produktionen*, Salecina-Beiträge zur Gesellschafts- und Kulturkritik (Berlin: Trafo Verlag, 2005), pp. 103–114.
2. ‘Creation-as-moral-package’ as James Alison calls it in *Faith beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2001), pp. 98–99.
3. See for example Sue Patterson, ‘Nature, sex and the cross: Homosexuality and Christian discipleship’, in Murray A. Rae and Graham Redding (eds), *More than a Single Issue: Theological Considerations Concerning the Ordination of Practising Homosexuals* (Hindmarsh: ATF, 2000), pp. 122–140. Patterson bases much of her argument on Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1993).
4. Alison, *Faith*, p. 103.

5. See St. Augustine's view of intercourse within marriage that is not exclusively for the sake of procreation in *The Good of Marriage*, X, 10–11.
6. See John Boswell, *The Marriage of Likeness: Same-Sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe* (London: Fontana Press, 1995), pp. 119–120.
7. As distinct from gay theology, following the distinction made by Elizabeth Stuart in *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions with Critical Difference* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).
8. Vasey followed David Greenberg's analysis in *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
9. Michael Vasey, *Strangers and Friends: A New Exploration of Homosexuality and the Bible* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), pp. 33–34.
10. Vasey, *Strangers and Friends*, p. 236.
11. Vasey, *Strangers and Friends*, p. 245.
12. Vasey, *Strangers and Friends*, p. 245.
13. Vasey, *Strangers and Friends*, p. 248.
14. Eugene F. Rogers, 'Sanctification, homosexuality and God's triune life', in Eugene F. Rogers (ed.), *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 221.
15. Rogers, 'Sanctification', p. 223.
16. Rogers, 'Sanctification', p. 224.
17. The brackets refer to an alternative text for the vows, which deletes the references to the grace of God, the love of Christ and the Spirit's help to make it easier for couples in which one of the partners is not a Christian to use the liturgy.
18. This detail was reported to me by Ruth Meyers, chair of SCLM.
19. This is the case in all versions of the English and American Books of Common Prayer.
20. Thomas E. Breidenthal, *Christian Households: The Sanctification of Nearness* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2004).
21. 'Faith, hope and love: Theological resources for blessing same-sex relationships', in Episcopal Church, Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, *I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing: Resources for the Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant in a Same-Sex Relationship* (New York: Church Publishing, 2012), p. 48.
22. 'Faith, hope and love', p. 48.
23. The chair of SCLM explained that initially the Commission had even kept the term 'sponsors' and only replaced it by 'presenters' when they realised that it was misunderstood as patronising by some same-sex couples who were given one first draft of the text for feedback (interview with Ruth Meyers, 7 September 2015).
24. The 1979 Book of Common Prayer provides for the possibility of a presentation, but the parallel with baptism is tenuous, especially because the

- presenters do not make any vows (distinct from the general affirmation of support given by the assembly) to love and support the couple.
25. 'Faith, hope and love', p. 49.
  26. 'Faith, hope and love', p. 34.
  27. Interview with Ruth Meyers, 7 September 2015. The 2015 General Convention has set the process of liturgical revision into motion by requesting the SCLM to present 'a plan for the comprehensive revision of the current Book of Common Prayer' to the 2018 General Convention (Resolution A169).
  28. Rogers, 'Sanctification', p. 235.
  29. See Esther McIntosh, 'The possibility of a gender-transcendent God: Taking Macmurray forward', *Feminist Theology* 15:2 (2007), pp. 236–255. McIntosh's failure to identify or indeed put forward herself non-patriarchal ways of naming God in the liturgy that are at once poetic, recognisably Christian and fully satisfactory from a feminist point of view is telling.
  30. 'Faith, hope and love', p. 48.
  31. Ruth Meyers indicated that the Commission did not feel that the Gospel passage about Cana is really about Jesus adorning marriage by his presence, as the introduction to the 1979 rite puts it, and there was a desire in the Commission to move away from this when drafting the 2012 liturgy. Presumably, this explains the deletion in the gender-neutral adaptation of the 1979 liturgy.
  32. The Consultation was structured as a series of plenary meetings alternating with small-group discussions.
  33. The names of my Kansas City small-group members have all been changed.
  34. Interview, 30 June 2015.
  35. Interview, 29 June 2015.
  36. Interview with Ruth Meyers, 7 September 2015.
  37. After the Charleston Church shooting on 17 June 2015, Barack Obama referred to the failure of the killer to deepen racial divisions in the United States. Instead some national coming together had taken place, showing the power of God's grace to bring about good out of evil.

## Setting the Table Anew: Queering the Lord's Supper in Contemporary Art

*Mariecke van den Berg*

In 1998 and 1999, an exhibition was held in Sweden that resulted in a long-lasting debate on questions regarding Christian faith and homosexuality. Questions that had usually been discussed in church communities and congregations were to become a matter of national importance. The exhibition was by the photographer Elisabeth Ohlson and titled *Ecce Homo*. It consists of twelve photographs depicting events from the life of Jesus Christ, set in contemporary Sweden and mixed with the imagery and symbolism of LGBT culture and themes. In this chapter I will take

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the debate on the exhibition, and in particular the interpretations of one of its centrepieces, *The Last Supper*, as my point of departure to explore a queer perspective on the celebration of the Lord's Supper, which addresses themes that are of importance to present-day considerations on how to queer Christianity, Christ, and our churches. *Ecce Homo* will soon celebrate its twentieth birthday. When it was on display, the concept of 'queer' had not yet found its way to Swedish mainstream media. However, in the two decades that have passed since it was first shown in the basement of the Sofia Church in Stockholm, a body of queer theology and queer theory has been developed that allows for a new perspective on both the process of sense-making at the time in Sweden, as well as the exhibition itself. As I hope to show, a dialogue between recent queer theological insights, late twentieth-century art and a healthy dose of Swedish 'common knowledge' present in the debate will provide an interesting mix from which new perspectives on the Lord's Supper may emerge. I will provide a more detailed description of the exhibition later, followed by an overview of the most important trends in the responses in the written media. From the 'queer moments' that I detect in the debate, I will then zoom in on *The Last Supper*. Let me begin, though, with a brief note on methodology and my conceptual framework.

Had *Ecce Homo* been on display today, it would surely have been widely debated on the Internet. In 1998 and 1999, however, the debate was mostly played out in written media: newspapers and magazines. In fact, toward the end of the second millennium the Internet was still such a new thing that when the images of *Ecce Homo* did end up on a website, this was cause for a specific report in the newspaper.<sup>1</sup> For my research, I have made use of the press archive of Riksförbundet för homosexuellas, bisexuellas, transpersoners och queeras rättigheter (RFSL, the Swedish Federation for LGBTQ Rights). While undertaking fieldwork in Stockholm, I made photocopies of all articles related to *Ecce Homo*, resulting in a set of in total 606 new items. For this chapter, I have decided to focus only on opinion pieces, reviews, editorials and letters to the editor; a total of 163 articles. For this narrowing of the material, I have two reasons. The first is that the remaining 443 items follow a fairly predictable pattern of news reporting. They announce the exhibition coming to this town or that, they give an account of protesters and defenders of the exhibition, sometimes accompanied by one or more brief quotes from the artist, and announce where the exhibition will be held next. The second reason is that although some interesting conclusions can be drawn from the trends in these types of reporting, for

this chapter I am mainly interested in those articles where the authors deliberately try to formulate a moral framing for the exhibition, to make sense of what they are seeing, and to relate the images to their personal understanding of the Christian faith. To follow this process of meaning-making as a form of what Jeff Astley has called 'ordinary theology'<sup>2</sup> is basically an epistemological choice. I regard the chief editors, letter writers, art critics and journalists who responded to *Ecce Homo* as a collection of 'occasional theologians' who together—whether as Lutherans, members of the Evangelical 'Free Churches' outside of the (at that time) State Church, or self-proclaimed atheists—reveal how a nation arrives at what in hindsight can be pinpointed as a formative moment in the emancipation of LGBT Christians. In this 'archive of amateur theology' I will then look for moments of queer theology. By this I mean, following Patrick Cheng, that in the debate I will look for traces of a theology that is based on 'a self-conscious embrace of all that is transgressive of societal norms, particularly in the context of sexuality and gender identity' and that 'disrupts the status quo'.<sup>3</sup> Although the debate tended to take a more 'apologetic' stand on the position of LGBT people within the Lutheran church, as I will expand on later, there were also moments where *Ecce Homo* inspired a queerer take on Christianity in general, and the figure of Jesus Christ and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in particular.

Queer moments can most prominently be detected in places where representations fail to meet the expectations of the familiar; they are representations 'with a twist'. In the case of *Ecce Homo* much of the argumentation would be centred on a specific set of questions related to the representation of Jesus: who is Jesus, are there limits to how he might be represented, and who gets to decide? As one journalist rather to the point wondered 'who owns copyright over Jesus?'<sup>4</sup> David Morgan, in his work on Christian visual piety,<sup>5</sup> investigated precisely this process of 'copying Jesus'. Morgan has argued that popular representations of Jesus are to be understood as the accumulation of centuries of previous representations. In fact, Jesus-imagery bears such strong resemblances of repeated characteristics that an iconic Jesus (long hair, a beard, kind eyes) appears, who in the collective imagination almost unconsciously has come to represent the historical Jesus.<sup>6</sup> Visual representations, however, reflect not the historical Jesus but what people think or hope Jesus was like.<sup>7</sup> Different Jesuses may thus appear, still recognizable as Jesus, but, depending on the ethnic, gendered or sexual ideology and belonging of the artist (and, I would add, the spectator), bearing different connotations that make possible a personal and a collective identification. Every

representation of Jesus is therefore necessarily layered with the meaning of previous traditions and choices. One might argue that it is precisely the layered iconic character of visual representation of Jesus that makes possible both recognition and deviance. The concept of repetition forms an interesting starting point to look at *Ecce Homo*. Queer theorist Judith Butler<sup>8</sup> has argued that gender and sexuality can be viewed as the repetition of social conventions of gendered and sexual behaviour. In her view, identity is the result of acting out expected behaviour rather than answering to the call of some innate female or masculine, heterosexual or homosexual core. The queer potential lies in the possibility of repeating gendered and sexual behaviour differently, not according to dominant norms but to personal preference. Queer could then be described as the intentionally failed repetition of gendered and sexual codes. This concept has been taken up by queer theologians such as Elizabeth Stuart, who in *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions with a Critical Difference*<sup>9</sup> argues that gay and lesbian theology needs to break with its reiteration of essentialist conceptions of gender and sexuality, and instead pick up on (in her view ancient) Christian conceptions of gender identity as ultimately meaningless. From a queer theological perspective, then, the focus in this chapter will be on those elements in Ohlson's art (and its interpretations) where from an LGBT perspective Jesus figures appear that testify to the 'unstable body of Christ'<sup>10</sup> where, according to Lisa Isherwood, we may locate 'a transgressive challenge to the straight mind'.<sup>11</sup>

### INTRODUCING *ECCE HOMO*

*Ecce Homo* brought together two things that are often thought separately or even in necessary opposition to each other: religion and homosexuality. This shows already from the title. 'Ecce Homo' ('behold the man') are the words uttered by Pilate when he presents Jesus, flogged and with a crown of thorns, to the crowds.<sup>12</sup> It also plays with the word 'homo', which of course literally translates to 'man' but also has connotations with 'gay'. As stated, *Ecce Homo* consists of twelve photographs in which events from the life of Jesus as described in the Gospels are depicted in modern society and accompanied by LGBT symbols and, importantly, people. For the various Jesus-figures, as well as other characters such as Mary, the disciples and the Pharisees, Ohlson recruited models from her own community of gay and lesbian friends. The exposition may read as a journey through the life of Jesus from a gay and lesbian perspective, reading queer

motives and messages into the Gospel, but just as easily as a search for the religious meaning in events that may occur in any given queer life.

A brief description of some of the works will clarify the ways in which Ohlson mixed Christian and LGBT imagery. The *Conception of Jesus* shows two women, likely a lesbian couple, dressed in white and embracing one another while sitting on a bed. One of them is visibly pregnant; an angel holding a test tube in the right upper corner of the photograph suggests that she 'miraculously' became pregnant through insemination. The *Baptism*, doubtless one of the more controversial works, is set in a bathhouse. The men allegedly representing Jesus and John the Baptist are naked, while Jesus (the reason for the strong reactions to this particular work) seems to have an erection. A dove rests on his left shoulder, and the hand of John the Baptist on his left hip. *Palm Sunday* (Fig. 12.1) shows a 'traditional' Jesus with long hair and dressed in a white garment. Ohlson relocated the triumphal entry to Jerusalem to the Gay Pride in Stockholm. The donkey has been exchanged for a bicycle. The disciples and the crowd are formed by a motley collection of queer people: leather people, a lesbian couple in wedding dresses exchanging a kiss, people with the rainbow colours painted on their faces or laying rainbow flags in front of Jesus—instead of, as the Gospels narrate, their robes.

For several reasons, the furore to which these images gave cause would stretch over many months, even into the next year. *Ecce Homo* would become a 'travelling show' that was on display in many cities in Sweden, bringing debate to wherever it went next. During these months, certain specific events would add fuel to the fire. While the photographs had already led to a degree of controversy when first on display during the 1998 Pride Week in Stockholm, they would lead to an extensive national debate when they were shown in the cathedral of Uppsala, Sweden's 'religious capital city', a few months later. The combination of what some people interpreted as a 'homosexual Jesus' and the sacred space of the church was problematic for many believers. Among them was Pope John Paul II who after the Uppsala exposition cancelled a meeting with the then Archbishop of the Church of Sweden K. G. Hammar. The debate was reignited when the photographs were to be shown in the Riksdag, something to which several Members of Parliament objected, to the dismay of other MPs. And then again, when things had quietened down somewhat, a book on *Ecce Homo* was published by Gabriella Ahlström, a close friend of Elisabeth Ohlson's.<sup>13</sup>





**Fig. 12.1** Elisabeth Ohlson, *Palm Sunday*, 1998, reproduced with permission of the artist

What Elisabeth Ohlson intended to accomplish, as she stated on a great many occasions, was to convey that ‘Homosexuals, too, should have a place in the message of love’.<sup>14</sup> She saw Jesus as ultimately a ‘rebel of

love' and produced through *Ecce Homo* the images she herself had found lacking when growing up.<sup>15</sup> Indeed it was this representation of Jesus as rebelling against the establishment, as an icon for inclusion, that appealed to many of those who wrote in support of *Ecce Homo*. Interestingly enough many of those who read into *Ecce Homo* a kind of rebel-Jesus were self-proclaimed atheists or non-believers. One of them, Monica Sundberg, states in her column: 'There are many of us non-believers who feel very deeply about the Christian message that Jesus represents. He who let the outcasts come to him and who cleansed the money changers from the temple'.<sup>16</sup> In this interpretation of Ohlson's Jesus, his most defining characteristic is that he chooses the side of the marginalised. Something similar can be read in another supportive column: 'Jesus never avoided the deviant, the messy, the dangerous. He wanted to spread his message among everyone, he consorted with "sinners," the poor, the sick. These images, of the modern Jesus, do what Jesus himself did, mixing with the outcasts, the sick, those who are "different"'.<sup>17</sup>

In line with this dominant apologetic theology, many interpreted *Ecce Homo* as an invitation to the Church of Sweden to become clear on its take on homosexuality, arguing that the outcast-motive ought to function as a template for an LGBT-accepting attitude on the part of the Church.

For me, as a member of the Church of Sweden, it felt right that Archbishop K. G. Hammar chose to contribute to an important debate on the tolerance of, and appraisal and respect for, excluded groups... The Church of Sweden that I know, and that I frequent, sides with the weak. It supports homeless people, junkies and prostitutes without condemning them. It is a church that fights for suppressed people in other parts of the world. That that self-same church does not accept that presently people are excluded because of their sexual orientation is completely logical because that is a matter of human dignity.<sup>18</sup>

Underlying this interpretation of *Ecce Homo*, which I call the 'inclusive Jesus' interpretation, is a somewhat fixed understanding of Jesus as well as of LGBT people. 'Inclusive Jesus' has always been there underneath the surface, simply waiting for someone with modern inclinations to uncover a facet of his message and character that had been there all along. The only thing that changes, the question that *Ecce Homo* poses, is whether 'everyone' includes LGBT people and whether their love may count as equal to that of heterosexual people. In order to argue for the

inclusion of LGBT people into the message of love, they are equated with the 'outcasts' we encounter in the Gospels. The enumeration in the quote above is only one of many. LGBT people are also compared to lepers, people who are possessed with demons, the disabled, tax collectors and other despised outsiders whom Jesus, according to the Gospels, visited, helped or dined with. The effect of these enumerations is, of course, that the marginal position of LGBT people (as well as that of the other 'outcasts' that are brought to the fore) is affirmed rather than questioned, and as a result the implicit assumption that homosexuality is sinful or deviant is left untouched.

For many who opposed the exhibition from a religious perspective, the identity of Jesus was not expanded, but desecrated. As was to be expected, some saw the exhibition as a provocative violation of the traditional understanding of Jesus Christ: 'Christian doctrine is not a smorgasbord where you can choose or reject at will... There is a part of the faith that is left to the individual, but there is also a hard core which is non-negotiable. This is where the understanding that Christ was both truly God and truly man needs to be located. This is exactly what Elisabeth Ohlson's images oppose'.<sup>19</sup> The problem with Ohlson's art for many opponents was, as becomes clear in a letter to the editor by 'Reverend and doctor in Theology' Bo Johanneryd, that Jesus himself here seemed to be portrayed as a gay man: 'Do the church representatives who opened up the cathedral's doors to these current images think that the Jesus of the Gospel can be gay or transvestite? In that case this would not be classical Christianity but something completely different'.<sup>20</sup> To suggest that Jesus could himself be gay was considered by some opponents to suggest that Jesus could have been sinful.<sup>21</sup> In an analysis by sociologists Per Dannefjord and Fanny Ramsby, however, such an interpretation encounters difficulties regarding developments in the Christian teachings on homosexuality. These teachings, they argue, have gradually moved in the direction of distinguishing between 'being gay' and 'doing gay', where only the second is seen as sinful. From this perspective it becomes hard to argue that imagining a gay Jesus implies imagining a sinful Jesus. The problem opponents have with *Ecce Homo*, they argue, is that they associate the imagery with sexuality, precisely because the symbols that are used point in the direction of homosexuality: 'Heterosexuality is the "normal" and does not need to be defined. Because homosexuality on the contrary is defined from sexual actions it is commonly associated with sex. Therefore, just because we know the exhibition is about homosexuality, we read sexual actions into the images'.<sup>22</sup>

Opposing the exhibition, then, would be hard without the opponent stating explicitly that they had a problem with homosexuality—a stance that went against the more accepting attitude that was becoming dominant in Sweden. Perhaps for that reason another objection to the exhibition was made: that it was not historically sound. When Speaker of Parliament Birgitta Dahl suggested that *Ecce Homo* should be on display in the Riksdag, one letter to the editor challenged her first to account for the historicity of the exhibition: 'If anyone wishes to exploit Jesus Christ, the Son of God, for their own purposes and call out their message in what is supposed to be the stronghold of democracy and balanced decision-making, shouldn't they need to make plausible if there is any historical, factual or Christian tradition based foundation for the image they present of Jesus?'<sup>23</sup> The debate shows that space mattered in lending legitimacy to a perspective on Christianity where faith and LGBT acceptance would go together well. That *Ecce Homo* was shown in the Uppsala cathedral (and afterwards in other church buildings) was understood by many as a sanctioning of its message by the Church of Sweden. In the space of a church the exhibition would transform from a work of art to a sermon.<sup>24</sup> That the photographs were on display in the Riksdag was understood to have important symbolic value as well; now the government, too, would side with the message of LGBT acceptance.<sup>25</sup> Both events were of major importance in the metamorphosis of *Ecce Homo* from a private perspective on Christianity to an LGBT hermeneutics that would change the interpretation of Christian teaching on homosexuality in a fundamental way.

It seemed that in the end the debate was about deciding what in Sweden could count as sacred in the sense defined by Gordon Lynch: 'a grounding or ultimate source of power, identity, meaning and truth'.<sup>26</sup> For opponents it was important to stress that Jesus Christ was sacred and that this sacredness was being violated by *Ecce Homo*. In their attempts to rescue Jesus from profanity, they would evoke other symbols in which the sacred could be located. As one opponent criticises the 'outspoken' group of defenders of *Ecce Homo*: 'In their view [the children's book character] Pippi Longstocking is more important than Jesus Christ. Images of a naked Pippi Longstocking were cancelled because of loud protests from precisely this group but images that hurt many people's spiritual values which are met with applause as they are being dragged down'.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Christian Democrat Johnny Gylling had wondered why Pippi seemed to be getting the kind of protection he would have

liked to see applied to Jesus.<sup>28</sup> To this accusation, Linda Norrman Skugge responded: 'Sure, Pippi is a literary figure created by Astrid Lindgren. But is Jesus suddenly only a fictive, literary figure for the Christians? I thought he was something much more, some sort of almighty being. I thought Jesus was someone that all people irrespective of their colour, class and sexual orientation were entitled to. If Jesus can suddenly be compared to Pippi then the whole of Christianity crumples'.<sup>29</sup> Besides Pippi, other 'images of the sacred' are brought to the fore in the attempt to define the limits of the acceptable. 'What would the media and cultural responses have been if Ohlson had focused on Islam's central figure Muhammad instead of Jesus as a homosexual victim of AIDS? Or if Olof Palme would have been placed in that role? I at least can imagine that responses would have been quite different'.<sup>30</sup> Pippi (symbolic of naughty yet innocent childhood), Palme (the Social Democrat prime minister who was murdered in 1986) and the Prophet (in this quote imbued with meaning in the aftermath of the Salman Rushdie affair) form an impressive collective of secular and religious saints. That together they were not able to stop *Ecce Homo* implies that in 1998 and 1999 other saints entered the stage in Sweden; gay or lesbian fellow citizens, and a Jesus who affirmed their legitimacy. *Ecce Homo* indicated a shift in what in Sweden counts as sacred.

Among art critics, the 'simplicity' of *Ecce Homo* was a further point of critique. As Dan Jönsson states:

'Ecce Homo' [is] permeated by prosaic poses, by kitschy romantic 'friendship book'<sup>31</sup> illustrations, and by a—I am surprised myself when I write this—splendour, which partly is not so far removed from the smug certainty of faith among its literalist, authoritarian opponents... [W]ith an image of 'Heaven' as a place where everybody seems to have been bathing in Ariel Futur, Ohlson's vision of paradise on the whole feels just as frightening as that of fundamentalists.<sup>32</sup>

According to another critic, Cristina Karlstam, it was the very simplicity of *Ecce Homo* that fuelled the debate and steered it towards a theological discussion on homosexuality, at the expense of a discussion of the potential that art has 'to shape spiritual and existential questions'. As she argues, more 'complex' exhibitions that provided a new perspective on religion or Jesus went by unnoticed.<sup>33</sup> While critics, then, often supported what they saw as the political message of *Ecce Homo*, they were

overall not too impressed by its artistic endeavours to shed new light on Christian beliefs and practices. It had too much kitsch, too much glitter and glamour, too much simplicity. And not only Jesus remained, in the view of some, a shallow figure. LGBT people, too, were thought to be represented in a stereotypical way: 'Those who might be offended by the exhibition are in that case the broad group of homosexuals who look and want to live like any given Svensson'.<sup>34</sup>

From a queer perspective it is interesting to explore this critique of simplicity further. The assumption seems to be that the theological message of *Ecce Homo* was evident and that, in the end, theological discussions as such are straightforward while ('good') art is layered, complex and diffuse. It seems logical that any queer project that wants to be a 'repetition with a critical difference', that wishes to question the status quo and find the cracks in discourses and representations that uphold gender and sexual identity as fixed and a given, would draw on methods that lay bare the fluidity of both LGBT subjectivity and the figure of Jesus. While I do not wish to claim that such a project was Elisabeth Ohlson's explicit goal I do wish to argue, supported by the insights of some of the 'ordinary theologians' in 1998 and 1999 Sweden, that *Ecce Homo* contains elements of the deconstruction of dominant conceptions of both LGBT people and Jesus. Moreover, I would like to show how the subversive moments in *Ecce Homo* are accomplished by a double move of, on the one hand, explicating the specifics of queer suffering and, on the other hand, a turn, indeed, to the unpretentious and the evident; a move from kitsch to camp. I will explicate this balancing between suffering and camp before moving to a more in-depth discussion of *The Last Supper*, where both come together in one single work.

The motive of suffering in *Ecce Homo* was recognised by many. According to a review by theologian Gunnar Hillerdal, artistic expressions of the Scriptural 'ecce homo moment' are quite different from early Christian traditions that represent Jesus as a beardless toddler or Eastern traditions that represent him as Christ Pantocrator. Instead, the 'ecce homo moment' pictures Jesus at his most humble and powerless moment. It is here, he argues, where we are to place the *Ecce Homo* exhibition as 'an expression of the conviction that homosexual men and lesbian women are allowed to connect their own vulnerability to the actual mocking that Jesus himself had to endure...'<sup>35</sup> In *Ecce Homo*, this 'vulnerability' is made explicit in several works. An important political layer is added precisely by the specific Biblical moments to which this



vulnerability is connected. Suffering is present for instance in *Calvary* (Fig. 12.2), which presents Jesus as a victim of homophobic violence by right-wing extremists, pointing to the fact that vulnerability is not a characteristic of the gay and lesbian community as such, but, just like the death of Jesus, has its causes in the hatred of others.

Importantly, Ohlson also addresses the suffering that hit the gay and lesbian community during the AIDS crisis. Having lost several friends to AIDS, she found it of particular importance to put a human face to those she loved and lost. Her *Pietà* is dedicated to this theme. As Gabriella Ahlström explains, it is set in the Söder Hospital in Stockholm where many patients who suffered from AIDS would be treated, and where some of them died. Jan Sörman, the model who is used for Jesus and who is himself HIV-positive, got to choose his own ‘Mary’ and opted for ‘gay mamma’ Kerstin Bergström, a welcoming bartender in the club he

**Fig. 12.2** Elisabeth Ohlson, *Calvary*, 1998, reproduced with permission of the artist



likes to frequent.<sup>36</sup> Ohlson thematised AIDS in a time where, Elizabeth Stuart argues, much gay and lesbian theology neglected to offer a perspective to those who were suffering from AIDS and those taking care of them.<sup>37</sup> Ohlson's *Pietà* suggests that in the suffering of Christ the suffering of AIDS is implied, but also that the specific death of AIDS victims can be a hermeneutical lens through which to understand the death of Christ as a death died in fact not in a glorious, heroic manner, but in a context of social disapproval, mockery and silencing.

While there is a place for suffering in *Ecce Homo* the exhibition's overall tone is, as noted by the art critics, cheerful, almost optimistic and whimsical. Its joyful colours and over-the-top figures have been interpreted as stereotypical and even kitsch, but I insist that they are not: they are camp. In their excessiveness, Ohlson's leather people, lesbians and transvestites play with heteronormative and cisnormative anxieties about gendered and sexual misfits. Her characters do not try to be normal; they are a parody of the normal. The effect of not trying to fit in but going along with society's prejudices about LGBT people is that it creates space for joy and pride. There seems to be no intention on the part of Elisabeth Ohlson to make her characters fit in, and since they do not fit in, they have the room to themselves to have a Gay Pride, a dinner party or a heavenly gathering just as they please. *Ecce Homo* is not simplistic. Rather, it reveals the effort it takes to make the normal look simple.

### THE LAST SUPPER

Elisabeth Ohlson's interpretation of the Last Supper (Fig. 12.3) would become the most emblematic photograph of the exhibition, often discussed and reprinted in the media. This could partly be ascribed to the fact that it so clearly reminds us of Leonardo Da Vinci's *Last Supper* and therefore speaks to the imagination, but perhaps even more so because it is one of the few photographs where the heterosexuality and masculinity of Jesus himself are in question. The text from Matthew 26: 26–28 accompanied *The Last Supper* at the exhibitions.

During supper Jesus took bread, and having said the blessing he broke it and gave it to the disciples with the words: 'Take this and eat; this is my body'. Then he took a cup, and having offered thanks to God he gave it to them with the words: 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins'.





Fig. 12.3 Elisabeth Ohlson, *The Last Supper*, 1998, reproduced with permission of the artist

Ohlson's *The Last Supper* is set in an old building, with a polished wooden floor. In its centre is the table, which, contrary to the background, is somewhat makeshift; a few tables are haphazardly pulled together, covered with a few plain tablecloths. All in all, the table of the Last Supper resembles the setting of a bingo night at the community centre, which gives the whole picture an informal character. Bread and wine have been replaced by champagne and potato crisps. The disciples of the Last Supper are represented as cross-dressers in outrageous outfits. Jesus himself wears his traditional white robe, but also high heels.

Ohlson's version of the Last Supper, when read as an invitation to reconsider both narratives of the origin of the Eucharist or Lord's Supper and its contemporary politics, can be understood through an even more specific notion of failed repetition; that of ritual failure. Over the past decade, ritual studies scholars such as Ute Hüsken<sup>38</sup> have taken up Ronald Grimes' explorative work on this topic. According to Grimes, religious rituals are enacted according to a 'script' or 'grammar' that warrants the appropriate performance. The script, however, is not fixed; it can be altered after a moment of intentional or accidental failure when

the ritual is carried out in the wrong way, for instance because the ritual is not followed through to the end, or because not all appropriate procedures are followed.<sup>39</sup> Ritual failure can lead to a strong reaffirmation of the script, but also—importantly—to a negotiated change in the ritual and the underlying script. As I will come to argue, *Ecce Homo's* Last Supper shows how both religious and gendered/sexual scripts can be repeated differently. Later, I will focus on four different elements of *The Last Supper* where critical alterations have been made by the artist: the guests, the food, the host and the table.

That the table guests in *The Last Supper*, taking the place of the twelve apostles, are transvestites was one of the reasons why this specific work was deemed sacrilegious by some and revolutionary by others. The guests are an important means to define the host; because they are 'strange', Jesus is either 'inclusive' or, if he participates in the travesty (which some have concluded based on the fact that he wears high heels), a 'sinner' himself. Journalist Ann-Charlotte Glasberg points to the importance of Ohlson's choice to include transvestite guests instead of, as has been mentioned, 'Svensson-Swedes': 'It is not just people in invisible and discrete isolation who are included in the Christian message of love, but also those who stand out: leather people, flashy transvestites and the openly kissing lesbian couple.'<sup>40</sup> Ohlson's disciples include those who resist dominant norms on gender, who refuse to pass as a 'normal' family, and therefore form an implicit critique of hierarchies that exist not so much between straight and gay, but within the LGBT community itself where, journalist Åsa Jonzon argues, cross-dressers are at the bottom of the ladder.<sup>41</sup> In their travesty, their playful parody of gender, Ohlson's disciples resist any fixed gender identity. For them, their gender identity is only a temporary state of affairs.

Two guests stand out in their peculiarity: Judas, and the dog. To start with the latter, Ohlson used dogs repeatedly in her work; there is a dog in *The Birth of Jesus* and in *Palm Sunday* as well. Gabriella Ahlström interprets the dog as a substitute for children in gay and lesbian relationships.<sup>42</sup> Journalist Gunnar Lindqvist has a different interpretation; the dog in *The Last Supper* is the 'dog of loyalty' that is leaving the picture.<sup>43</sup> I find this latter interpretation interesting in particular when connected to the other strange table guest: Judas. For as far as people took the trouble to pinpoint Judas, they have opted for the figure on the far right who, since they have a bill stuck in their stockings, seems to be a reference to the thirty pieces of silver Judas was awarded for his betrayal

of Jesus. To me, the presence of Judas and the ‘dog of loyalty’ who takes his leave have the effect that the option of non-participation, of disloyalty, becomes imaginable, and I find this an important corrective to the ‘inclusive Jesus’ interpretation of Ohlson’s work. In this interpretation, which had become dominant, LGBT people are ‘out there’ in their marginal position, waiting for Jesus to come and rescue them, perhaps not just for their sake, but also as a means to rehabilitate Jesus from a tradition that has been excluding sexual minorities for centuries, to transform him into a Saviour that modern Swedes can identify with. For some queer people it may be tempting to have no part of Christianity to begin with, not even in its ‘sanitised’ LGBT affirmative version when this version still bears the traces of their exclusion. Until the Eucharist, the ‘saying grace’, happens on their terms they may refuse to be the ‘weirdos’ that make Jesus look good.

The food that is served at Ohlson’s *The Last Supper* has most definitely undergone some alterations as well. Bread and wine have been replaced by champagne and crisps, party food. While the Lord’s Supper has traditionally been a meal of remembrance of the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus and is therefore generally (though not in all Christian traditions) celebrated in a rather solemn style, there has always been, as theologian David Jasper has argued, a festive character to the sacrament as the verb ‘to celebrate’ implies.<sup>44</sup> Ohlson has brought this element of festivity to the fore. A queer Last Supper, Ohlson seems to imply, refuses the seriousness and severity with which Christianity has sometimes sheathed itself—perhaps a bit too much to the taste of some, especially those whose sexuality has been the subject of earnest discussions in synods and church boards. At Jesus’ dinner party, there is no place for such earnestness; this is a feast without reservations, an unconditional celebration.

Theologian Lisa Isherwood describes how the host has functioned as a site of queer resistance when a member of the US-based advocacy group ACT UP crushed the host when receiving communion in protest to the church’s silence on HIV/AIDS.<sup>45</sup> The activist refused to be a part of a body that did not recognise or would even contribute to the ongoing agony of some of its members. In *The Last Supper* the host seems to me to be a key element in the photograph; not in the first place Jesus as the one who welcomes people at the table, but the wafer he holds in his hands. The wafer, only visible on a closer look, is in fact a make-up removal pad. This signals perhaps most strongly the effect of the photograph: at the very moment where the Biblical Jesus utters the words

'this is my body', Ohlson's Jesus holds up the ultimate symbol of the constructedness of the gendered body. As Graham Ward has argued, the Lord's Supper is the moment where Jesus, in extending his body to the bread and through the bread to other bodies, loses his distinct masculinity.<sup>46</sup> The pivotal moment here is therefore not Jesus' announcement of his self-sacrifice, but his expression of the gender and sexuality of his/the body as a performed reality. In this photograph Jesus is not on the verge of disappearance and death, but uncovers the conditions of his appearance. This is also a moment of invitation; Ohlson's Jesus asks his disciples, and perhaps also the spectators, to participate in the celebration of the uncertainty of the body, of the playfulness that becomes possible when bodies are taken less seriously.

Finally, the setting of the supper, at the table, has a multi-layered meaning that deserves further scrutiny. At first sight, Ohlson here catches Jesus at one of his more intimate moments. While in the Bible we often find him in the middle of a crowd of followers or listeners, the Last Supper is a moment he shares with his most intimate friends, of which the Bible only mentions his twelve male disciples. It is a moment of 'ease' and intimacy in a narrative that soon after will accelerate into the events leading up to his death. It seems as though the Last Supper is Jesus' last moment in the privacy of the home before going public once and for all. However, as Sarah Ahmed argues in her book *Queer Phenomenology*,<sup>47</sup> tables, also tables in the private space of the home, have a politics of their own. There are written and unwritten rules as to who may sit at the table, and when, and in what position. The politics of the Last Supper has become undeniably important in church history, and its politics has been strongly based on ideologies of gender and sexuality. Over the centuries, the table of the Last Supper has become a template for power positions in the church. The fact that Jesus shared his last meal with his male disciples has informed a church politics in which men were seen as the legitimate bearers of power. They would sit at the tables of synods and church boards. They would become the key figures in the choreography of the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the Eucharist. Female bodies and, for that matter, queer bodies, would be exempt from such performative liturgical moments, and while women were allowed on the receiving end of the ritual, queer bodies have often been excluded altogether.

This split between bodies allowed at the table can also be seen at the tables of power, the tables of decision-making, where heterosexual men have often been formulating policy and dogma concerning those

who were not allowed to join in on the conversation in the first place. Ohlson's interference in the narrative of the Lord's Supper that positions Jesus amidst transvestite disciples can be understood as a disruption of the politics of the Lord's Supper. She connects to other critical interpretations of the Lord's Supper as a male-centred and white event by, for instance, Mary Beth Edelson (*Some Living American Women Artists/Last Supper*, 1971), Judy Chicago (*The Dinner Party*, 1997) and Renee Cox (*Yo Momma's Last Supper*, 1996). *Ecce Homo* inscribes gender-queer people into the basic narrative of church politics and, by positioning them as the intimate friends of his final hours, makes it possible to imagine them in central positions also at the institutional level of the Church. Though these intimate friends are still biologically male their masculinity is a subject of discussion and this creates at least the discursive space to question the gendered and sexual politics of present-day tables (arguably stretching even beyond that of institutionalised religion to the tables of the restaurant, the business meeting and the government).

## CONCLUSION

Twenty years after *Ecce Homo*, the celebration of the Lord's Supper is still, in many church denominations, a repetitive ritual failure. It fails to live up to its potential as a celebration of the unity of the people of God as the body of Christ when LGBT people are excluded from participation. *Ecce Homo* shows that we may retell Christianity's founding narratives and that we may redo its sacraments. These subversive strategies are indeed, as Elizabeth Stuart argues, repetitions with a critical difference. To repeat one's faith differently, with small alterations, one step at the time, acknowledges that there can be no tabula rasa, no fresh start for religious, gendered or sexual identities. This may sound like a disappointing conclusion, but I would like to suggest that the critical repetitions we have at our disposal also show our commitment to our faith, that they place us firmly into a tradition that is by no means shallow.

The debate that was unleashed when *Ecce Homo* moved from an obscure cellar to the Uppsala cathedral shows that not even the sacred can be fixed in one place or in one figure; it is as fluid as are our identities. New 'sacreds' emerged in the aftermath of *Ecce Homo*, implying new loyalties and, for LGBT people, new allies. It also showed that when the tables are turned, when the social order is questioned in some fundamental way, new certainties vie for legitimacy. The discomfort with Ohlson's

leather people and transvestites uncovered a deep-seated longing for the ordinairiness of Svensson gays who are 'just like us' but for the fact that they are gay. *Ecce Homo*, however, eschews showing comforting queers and a comforting Jesus. It makes a case not for the inclusion of queers into the story of salvation, but for a queer perspective on salvation that alters it in meaningful ways. Its most important point, perhaps, is that in embracing the devious and parodying the normal there is room for joy, play, pride and celebration in the Christian sense of the word, as a saying of grace for being truly free.

In the debate on *Ecce Homo* it became clear that for many people, happy queers were much more controversial, much more offensive, than suffering queers. While representations of AIDS and homophobia were causes for social outcry, representations of Gay Pride and joyful dinner parties were cause for conflict and rejection. The underlying reasons for the unequal distribution of sympathy are puzzling, but important. Perhaps suffering is less threatening to the social order because the cause of queer pain, at least in Ohlson's work, is either non-personal (a lethal disease) or sub-cultural (right-wing extremists in *Calvary*). And perhaps it is harder for non-queer people to participate in pride than in suffering. Whereas suffering requires empathy, pride requires loyalty. Ohlson's work, in particular *The Last Supper*, shows the need for ways of celebrating the sacraments for queer people that do not just include them in the already known, but that allows for their perspective fundamentally to change what is being celebrated in the first place. We need queer liturgies that allow for the specifics of queer suffering so that the causes for this suffering may be located not in the abstract or the extra-ecclesial, but in the very real practices of the faith today. These liturgies also need to allow for the specifics of queer pride, joy and parody. Champagne and crisps may be a good start.

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## The Queerness of Saints: Inflecting Devotion and Same-Sex Desire

*Donald L. Boisvert*

When I was eleven or so, I took a vow of chastity. This might strike one as a rather excessive thing for an eleven-year-old boy to do, and it undoubtedly was. But I was a little queer boy. What was I to do? How else could I both express and claim my sexual and my religious difference? I was surely pining away for my young saintly boyfriend, St. Dominic Savio (1842–1857), with his supposedly perfect record of bodily continence, and this vow was a way for us to seal, in my imagination, our rather one-sided crush on my part. I am also sure that my Catholic guilt-induced feelings about the solitary sin of masturbation (called self-abuse in those days) had something to do with it. Thankfully, a wise confessor eventually told me that I was much too young to be bound by such a vow, thereby considerably reducing any lingering guilt I may have felt when I invariably touched myself again, as any teenager might. I do remember how special this vow made me feel, as though I were set apart: inviolable, chaste, pure and holy. The fact that I also wanted to be a saint only made it seem that much more necessary and desirable.

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What a queer thing to have done at eleven years old! I may well smile about it now, but something was definitely at work back then. I knew instinctively that I was different from all those other boys, both in terms of my emerging desires and my overly intense devotional piety. Such a dramatic statement about my yearning for, and my commitment to, a chaste life—as immature and tentative as it undoubtedly was—was clearly about performing and drawing meaning from this difference, as much as it was about entering into some form of privileged, almost secretive relationship with a holy figure. I wanted *to become* like St. Dominic Savio. Not only did I also ‘want’ him, but I vowed that I would not touch myself if I could not touch him. How pleasurable could such denial be? Though my memory may be hazy, I suspect rather strongly that I drew a great deal of guilty (and not-so-guilty) pleasure from it. My not touching myself bonded St. Dominic Savio and me—and through us, all the heavenly host of saintly boys and men—in some holy, gratifying and queerly salvific way. Devotion to saints was a safe haven for me, a place where I could easily slide between the cracks of my faith and my sense of erotic difference. I may have thought these two were ultimately incompatible, but I relished living in the ambiguity, precisely because such ambiguity created a significant measure of meaning in my life. Saints in their exemplary lives and glorified bodies would emerge as sites of same-sex yearning for me. They became, in their equivocal unattainability, beacons of hope.

Saints in the Christian tradition have long been the source of particularly intense religious care and attention. In the Roman Catholic context, and to a more limited extent in Anglicanism, saints and holy persons occupy a central place in the church’s devotional culture. Marked by its rich and intricate levels of sensory experience, including that of the sexual, this robust devotional culture invites not only expressions of deep fervour and piety, but also manifestations of physical and erotic desire. This most definitely includes ardent expressions of same-sex longing. In fact, saints and other sacred or holy figures are often characterized by their inherent ‘queerness’. They transgress any number of boundaries and fixed identity categories—whether these be cultural, gendered, sexual, political or even ecclesiastical. Saintly devotion opens up a vast and diverse array of inspired possibilities with respect to how persons can reimagine and recreate themselves, not only as religious beings but sexual ones as well. Devotion to saints can be a remarkably privileged means by which religious LGBTQ persons can claim a legitimate place for themselves within

Christian communities of faith. Insofar as saints (and for me, male ones especially) destabilize normative religious and sexual categories, they act as queer agents of subversion, and devotion to them becomes a locus for religious and sexual experimentation and reframing. Sainthood devotion can allow LGBTQ Christians to inhabit religious spaces with pride.

This chapter examines devotion to saints as a means of queer affirmation in the Christian tradition, and it aims to question the all-too-common perception of religion, and especially of Catholic Christianity, as being inherently opposed to, or dismissive of, same-sex desire. While it is true that many churches, both in their theological posturing and their public discourse, employ homophobic and even anti-body rhetoric, it is equally accurate to claim that their rich ritual life makes possible an interesting array of queer opportunities and strategies for the active expression and display of same-sex yearnings. I will discuss two specific examples of this drawn from my own life. The first looks at devotion to the young, nineteenth-century Italian saint, Dominic Savio, pupil of St. John Bosco (1815–1888), and the ways in which pious practices associated with his cult (I have already discussed one that I had chosen for myself, my vow of chastity) could be used to circumscribe and define an emerging same-sex affectional identity. The second examines a particular form of Eucharistic devotion—one associated specifically with the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament and its founder, St. Peter Julian Eymard (1811–1868)—as a site of potential queer rhetoric and performance. This is therefore an exercise in queer self-reflection, but one grounded explicitly in religious ethnography.

The saint and the queer inhabit contiguous spaces of resistance. We are, in a manner of speaking, enshrined by our marginalities. The queerest of all Christian theologians of liberation, Marcella Althaus-Reid, expresses this reality as follows:

Holiness then becomes a category of the marginalized, when we consider that the saint is meant to be an outsider to society, not in the sense of failing to participate actively in the political life of her community, but due to her dissenting role. It is participation in the transformation of the structures of society which marks the distance from the centres of order and power. That is Queer dissent, and divine dissent, as in prophetic or other models surrounding the idea of Holy women and men in popular spirituality.<sup>1</sup>

In my 2004 book, *Sanctity and Male Desire: A Gay Reading of Saints*, I wrote about Dominic Savio and Peter Julian Eymard. I offer the following two excerpts by way of a *mise en scène*. Firstly,

Dominic Savio and I had two important things in common. We both wanted to be priests, and we both wanted to be saints. He never achieved the former, though he rather splendidly attained the latter. I went part of the way in the former, and, as for the latter, only time will tell... there was something else that I sensed about us, something unspoken yet deeply attractive. We were different from our young companions, lonelier, less rowdy, more focused on things ethereal and heavenly. In fact, we were both sissies, queer boys, and I suspect that each, in his own time and place, knew it in his innermost heart, as did those around us. Perhaps that is why I thought we were so much in love with each other.<sup>2</sup>

And secondly,

I was with a group whose very purpose was the adoration of, and devotion to, the Eucharistic body of Jesus himself, the most perfectly desirable of all males. My closed seminary world was replete with young, beautiful male bodies: in the classrooms, showers, playing fields and dormitories, but also in my moments of silent prayer before the exposed body of my God in the monstrance. (...) For me, Saint Peter Julian Eymard was the father, the guide, the path to follow. I saw myself dedicating my life to the cult of the Eucharist. Though his spirituality appeared surreal and fantastic to us teenagers (there were stories of physical struggles with the devil near the end of his life), we sensed that his mission was our mission; his passion, our passion; his longing for communion with the divine body and blood, our longing.<sup>3</sup>

Consider the crossings between these two passages about two seemingly different saints: crossings of desire most blatantly, but also crossings tied to some fairly orthodox motifs such as saintliness, priesthood and Eucharistic presence. Mine was nothing if not the path of Roman Catholic rectitude. But subverting all this—destabilizing it, as it were—was my incipient queerness, my ability to read desire and longing and craving into all this Catholic devotional *bric-à-brac*. There is certainly nothing new about all this. Queers have been mincing around altars and statues for eons. As Dominic Janes writes, ‘...the joys and sorrows of the ecclesiastical closet are not only important as an aspect of history, but

reflect formative elements of the subject position of sexual nonconformists in modern society as a whole'.<sup>4</sup> Paradoxically, perhaps it is the very joys and sorrows of those churchy closets that can bring us to that place of resistance and subversion alluded to by Althaus-Reid.

My own ecclesiastical closet had been constructed and richly decorated with elements borrowed from the lavish piety of my youth. This was not an 'ecclesiastical' closet in the sense that it belonged to an ordained person (though I did want to become one), but it was a site of pleasure and devotion containing suspiciously queer markers of difference. In fact, perhaps it was a kind of make-believe closet, one whose purpose was not so much to hide as to keep me in full view of others, designed to keep both me and them off-guard, thereby helping to sustain and strengthen my emerging religious and erotic desires. I offer three such markers: my playing at priesthood and church; my persistent need and desire to enter seminary; and my ongoing search for masculine companionship in my engagement with saintly figures. These are privileged indicators of who I was to become: signs, if you will, of my future queer priestly self. They constituted my ecclesiastical or churchy closet, my space of potentialities, and my special fabulous stage on which I could play out who I thought I wanted and needed to become. Such closets are not always comfortable to one's self or acceptable to others. They undermine, and they question, and they even transpose. But what they most definitely did do—gloriously so—is offer the young pious boy that I was a *frisson* of devotional delight and surrender, and moments through which I could relish the sheer pleasure and inclination of my queer difference.

I suspect we too often undervalue the radical potentiality of religious play. How often do we hear stories of future priests or other vowed persons playing at such roles in their youth? In the process of vocational discernment, these can be strong indicators of a particular religious calling. That was most certainly my case, but with a uniquely queer touch. My earliest memory of such play was of wanting to be a nun like those who taught at my parochial school. I would wear a blanket on my head as a veil, and I would play school with my brother and sisters. Here, I was crossing a gender boundary, and I recall that it disturbed my father. I, on the other hand, felt totally comfortable, as though it were the most natural thing to behave like this. I certainly did not grasp the gender subversion happening here in our home, but my father most certainly did. Later, and very much in a line of continuity for me, I would play at dressing like a priest, making vestments out of old bedsheets that I

would wear to say make-believe masses, turning my dresser in my room into an altar, which I decorated with the appropriate liturgical colours, and collecting statues of various saints as one might in church. Interestingly enough, though this may all have been make-believe, I also found myself at the age of only thirteen serving as a real sacristan in my parish church, fondling and handling and delighting in those play-things that were now very real holy vessels. Was the line between the two worlds fixed and impermeable? Most certainly not. Was I still playing at priesthood and church? Most definitely. Except that, this time, it was becoming delectably serious. Except that, this time, I knew what I wanted to do with it, and I had to make a decision about how to live out my desires in a suitably conventional way.

From a very early age—at least from nine or ten—I knew that I wanted to be a priest. In those days, the most appropriate course of action was for a young boy to attend what was called a minor seminary. Minor seminaries were like private secondary schools, and the belief was that if you were able to nurture vocations from a young age, they stood a good chance of blossoming into real ones. For me, therefore, minor seminary was but the means; my tangible desire was for the priesthood. This desire emerged in my life from a variety of sources: first, from my mother, whose own French Canadian Catholic piety marked me; second, from the religious environment in which I found myself, one characterized by an exalted view of sacerdotal ministry; and third, but by no means least, from my own sense of difference about where I was being called. Mine were times on the cusp of change. For a boy in the early 1960s to declare unequivocally that he wanted to be a priest rang somewhat strangely, and most definitely counter-culturally, to many of those outside the Church. I knew that I was positioning myself as being different, and I knew that others also knew. In fact, I was proud of this difference. Not only did it make me stand out in my own mind, but it helped make sense for me of all those hours of religious ‘play’ that I had indulged in since my childhood. And it also moved me from ordinary time and space to sacred time and space. I knew that from now on, I would inhabit an altered and more significant universe, one in which many of the values and misgivings of the everyday world would give way to a mood of religious wholeness, or so I thought. With a sense of relief and wonder, I also knew that I would find myself in a space shared by other boys. Perhaps that was the ultimate triumph. I was about to enter a world of much-needed masculine companionship.

Saintliness in my life has always been multifocal, and it has repeatedly been intimately linked to notions of masculinity, of what it means to be a male in both a Christian and broader cultural sense. My relations with male saints, I have argued, have grounded my sense of same-sex desire and the various ways in which I lived and expressed it. Most certainly, saints were formative in giving me a language and a voice with which to name who and what I was—or, perhaps more appropriately, who and what I thought I wanted to become. Saints were glorious in their individualities, inspiring in their uniquely visionary and purpose-driven lives, and quite enticing in their appeals to higher and nobler sentiments of Christian virtue. When I entered minor seminary, I carried all that with me. Of course I knew that the boys with whom I found myself living on a daily basis were not the same as the saints that I venerated. Of course I did not confuse or conflate them. But I suspect there may have been some slippage, some gentle but necessary merging or muddle. Devotion to my saints may have carried over into devotion to those boys who quite unknowingly sparked my incipient desires for them. Thus it was that my queer ecclesiastical closet simultaneously contained images of ecstatic male saints and brooding young seminarians, all against a background of habitual Eucharistic fervour. My closet was not a place to hide and make believe, but a refuge where I could safely unravel my incipient desires. The seminary became not a battleground for me, as it did for so many others, but a garden of wonder and secret delights. And so, as I traversed adolescence in this hothouse environment, my yearning for the priesthood fused with my same-sex desire and my saintly devotions. I came to the conclusion—unconsciously at first, but with more certainty later—that they really were of one piece. The man I wanted to become should be, at one and the same time, a priest, a lover of men and a devotee of saints. There were no contradictions in this, only the greatest and noblest of certainties, only a sense of a vocation that was, and still is, uniquely mine. St. Dominic Savio and St. Peter Julian Eymard provide tangible examples of the ways in which my devotion to saints has been instrumental in fixing and safeguarding a place for me as a gay man in the church. But why these two saints specifically? Fundamentally, because each one is associated with a particular phase of my life: my early adolescence in the case of Savio; my seminary years for Eymard. But beyond those obvious biographical links, each also exhibits a particular sense of Catholic queer masculinity, and therefore each modelled a way of claiming a space for myself in Catholic devotional culture. This devotional culture was vast, and rich, and multi-dimensional, and so very pleasurable. I hid and discovered myself within its opulent folds.



In many ways, Dominic Savio ‘saved’ me. He made it possible for me to understand, almost instinctively and without shame, that I could love other boys and still remain a faithful follower of Jesus. Perhaps those two figures, Dominic and Jesus, were even conflated in my young and impressionable mind. Perhaps I saw them as mirroring each other, and I was caught in a web of pleasurable desire between them. Perhaps I thought that we three formed a sort of queer Trinity, and that this was as it should be. Contrary to many gay men who have grown up in Christian churches, I have seldom, if ever, felt that acute and insurmountable tension between my desires and my religious yearnings. For me, these two have always been seamless. It was this earliest, most important saintly figure in my life, Dominic Savio, who made that possible. My almost obsessive devotion to him was the means by which I ‘clued into’ my innate sense of devotion to, and appreciation for, the bodies of other males. I certainly knew that this was where my interests lay. I just needed to have it affirmed, and the young Italian saint, that paragon of youthful piety and wholesomeness, was conveniently there to encourage and inspire me. It made sense that I would want to be as chaste as him. My somewhat naïve vow of purity was like a brotherly bond of reciprocal blood-letting, a promise of eternal and unending togetherness.

There was something else that Dominic Savio taught me, and that was the painful joy and recalcitrant beauty of difference: sissified difference, book-wormish difference, the difference of the pious and devout. He himself was all those things, and he became a saint not in spite of them, but because of them. These were the attributes of his personality that John Bosco wrote about in the biography that got the young student canonized. Of course, a ‘sissified difference’ was not among them, but it most certainly was there if you were able to read between the lines. Which I did in spades, and repeatedly. I even tried imitating some of Dominic’s saintly gestures—by not touching myself, of course, but also by stepping into a fight between two boys, or even, as I vaguely recall, by warning my playmates of the dangers of talking dirty. I may cringe now in thinking about such things, but these rather over-dramatized gestures made it possible for me to claim my difference by mimicking defiantly the difference of Dominic Savio. And that difference, grounded as it was in my enthusiastic sense of devotion to the young saint, actually became quite normalized in practice, almost as though it were a necessity. In fact, that necessity was defined by certain key qualities I considered important to my emerging priestly vocation: piety, chastity, obedience, and a sense of total dedication to the church. On the other hand, I am not sure I

could have separated, at that time, my sense of calling to the priesthood from my emerging same-sex desire. I am still not sure that I can, though I am now both a priest (albeit Anglican) and an out gay man. The two operate in far more than tandem; they are fused.

In fact, Dominic Savio, in becoming a saint—a real Christian holy man—taught me that I too could become really quite manly in the service of Jesus. His and my sissified difference did not disqualify us from the heights of sanctity, yet neither did it shield us from the more mundane and occasionally risky realities of living as young queer men in a heterosexual world. Savio, as with other saints, was a kind of superhero for me. He was brave, and strong, and good, and kind. Above all, and despite his youth, he lived a highly disciplined life. I found that quite alluring, for I sensed a kind of existential need for such a life lived deliberately and with purpose (shortly thereafter, the seminary environment provided me with the kind of disciplined daily routine that I craved). This driven sense of purpose was a characteristically manly attribute for me, one that I much admired and wanted to emulate. Despite our youth, I knew that both Dominic Savio and I belonged in the company of holy men: holy men with a distinctively queer touch, which was at once a blessing and a challenge—but holy men, nonetheless.

Apart from my vow of chastity, I recall another devotional moment from my youth that was centred on Dominic Savio: the birthday gift that I asked for. I wanted a plaster statue of the saint that I had seen in a religious goods store. It must have been for my eleventh or twelfth birthday, and I thought the statue was quite lovely. It showed Savio standing with his right arm in the air holding a crucifix. This gesture referred to the fight he had broken up between two boys by stepping between them, reminding them of the suffering of Jesus on the cross, and then telling them to throw the first stone at him. I thought this rather daring gesture was quite heroic. The statue became my most precious keepsake, and I placed it devoutly on the makeshift altar I had set up in my bedroom. On the saint's feast day in March, I brought the statue downstairs to the kitchen where I insisted that it be placed on the top of a high cabinet, with an all-day vigil candle in front of it. My private devotional space and object were thus expanded into a public family ritual. It was my way of honouring my saint and, perhaps more importantly, underscoring for others the exclusivity and intimacy of our special relationship—almost as though I were saying, 'Here is my very own heavenly boyfriend'. Almost, in fact, as though I were outing myself to my family. We all have ways of speaking the unspeakable in our most intimate contexts.

Many decades later, I had the opportunity to visit Dominic Savio's shrine in Turin, Italy, where his relics are kept. Turin is home of the Salesian order, but also where Savio attended John Bosco's school for boys. I was quite moved to be there. What I recall most vividly were the *ex votos*, in the form of baptismal garments, left behind by grateful parents for the birth of their child (mostly males, I assumed, as the ribbons were blue). It struck me then that this young saint had never really lost his devotional appeal, but that he was now being prayed to as someone who watches over infants and children. It makes sense, given the generational association. In a way, I felt that Dominic was no longer mine exclusively; that I had to let him go. Yet his image still graces my study today. In fact, I have never really abandoned him, as I assume he has not me either. Some loves last forever, even though we may think we have outgrown them. Some devotional desires continue to ground us, even though we may be unconscious of their lingering power. Sainly presences loiter subversively in our imaginations.

My devotion to St. Dominic Savio could perhaps be seen merely as the unsurprising and understandable enthusiasm of a young Catholic boy caught in the throes of his emerging sexual identity. At one level, this is undoubtedly true. Supporting this, however, and also covering it as though it were a kind of sacred canopy (to use Peter Berger's term), there can be found the solid overlay of Catholic devotional culture. In my youth, this devotional culture was strong and all-inclusive, and it was adaptable and flexible enough to accommodate a broad and varied panoply of practices. There were, of course, the church-sanctioned observances, which were carefully circumscribed. But along with them—as well as beneath, over and somewhat hidden next to them—were any number of other sorts of devotional strategies one could use in interacting with saints and various holy figures. In my personal relationship with Dominic Savio (for that is what it was, truly and most vividly), I constructed a deeply intimate world of need and affirmation. I tried, most obviously, to behave like the saint, and my vow of chastity was its capstone. I also fabricated rites of devotion: to his imagery, to his statue that I lovingly cherished, to his stories and hagiography, as well as marking his feast day with special renewed fervour. In all these acts of devotion, I set about strengthening and reaffirming our privileged bond. More importantly, I was learning—deliberately and for life—that my difference could become a font of queer grace. Saints can mould us deeply. They fashion, and shape, and create us in so many ways, and never more so

than when we are at a liminal point in our lives. If saints are the resisters and marginalized ones that Marcella Althaus-Reid claims they are, then those truly exceptional sites of resistance and queer dissent should be what we call 'home'. Why? Because these are places and figures of queer becoming and belonging in the deepest sense of the word. It is with and through these holy figures that we learn about desire, that we dare to conflate pleasure and holiness, and that we come to see ourselves as blessed in the eyes of heaven. It was first (and probably always) the eternally desirable St. Dominic Savio who brought me to that place of embryonic self-affirmation and self-acceptance.

St. Peter Julian Eymard, on the other hand, was all about the Eucharist in its vast and delicious array of manifestations in Catholic devotional culture. In fact, he was all about the specifically Eucharistic male body and its adoration. At that time in its collective life, perpetual adoration of the exposed Host was the Congregation's prime source of spiritual identity and practice, as was the notion of divine kingship. In the Congregation's houses throughout the world, including the minor seminary where I was a student, there were garish thrones of Eucharistic adoration, royal mantles surmounted by a crown. The monstrance with the Host stood in the centre. Religious were expected to spend two hours every day, and one hour at night, in contemplative prayer before the exposed Host. Vowed priests and brothers wore a simple image of a cloth monstrance on their cassocks over their hearts. We even had our own variation of the Madonna: Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. She held baby Jesus in her arms, who held a chalice and Host uplifted in his. Through this omnipresent and rich devotional visual environment, we were quite intentionally being trained as future adorers of the Eucharistic body, and expected to become vigilant guardians of the holy flesh. I found myself rather comfortably ensconced in this Eucharistic-centred culture and its recurring emphasis on bodies—notably on the one Body—that needed to be perpetually guarded and worshipped. I learnt here the real value and worth of real bodily presence. I learnt here that an army of men was engaged in this work of adoration, and that it was devotionally proper and meritorious to do so. I learnt here how to kneel before the sacred flesh I was being trained to place at the very centre of my life.

There is something in the notion of being an 'adorer' that raises interesting questions about submission and abandonment of self. Could these not be seen as forms of queer positionalities? Obedience and deference to divine Kingship, though they may have been framed in the language of

religious duty, opened up any number of possibilities with respect to what a pious young boy should want to emulate in his devotional life, and even later in his erotic life. From a religious perspective, adoration can be given to God alone, and the seminary ideal of perpetual Eucharistic devotion reinforced that orthodox view. Yet what about other forms of adoration, as unorthodox as these might be? What about the non-divine flesh that stalked the seminary halls? Could that flesh be equally adorable, equally worthy of perpetual veneration? The seeds were planted.

One of our virtuous models was St. Tarcisius, a young Roman altar boy who chose to be martyred rather than allow the consecrated Host he was carrying to imprisoned Christians to be desecrated by pagans. By holding up the life of St. Tarcisius as exemplary, it was clear that total heroic devotion to the Eucharist, perhaps even to the point of death, was expected of the seminarians. This heroism was most eloquently marked by its sacrificial quality. Like the young martyred saint, the seminarians had to be willing to give up everything in service to the Blessed Sacrament, much like the founder did in confronting the various barriers that stood in the way of his Eucharistic mission. Such a dramatic ethos is tied closely to a deeply exalted sacramental view of the principle of the Real Presence. Furthermore, this notion of sacrificial heroism may have appealed rather keenly to the youthful sense of adventure of the students. It is one of the characteristics of any sort of religious pedagogy for the young, in particular when it comes to using the lives of saints as models, to play on the twin concepts of exalted idealism and selflessness. More than devout religious fervour was at stake, however. Tarcisius also made possible the deployment of a particular romantic ideal of Catholic masculinity, centred on such significant concepts as heroism and youthful vitality and virility.

What appealed powerfully to me in this closed world of Eucharistic fervour was its corporeal emphasis: the regular taking and ingesting of consecrated flesh; the prostration before exposed, though hidden, royal flesh; the daily intimate, almost promiscuous cohabitation of human male flesh with that of the flesh of Jesus in the bread (there was less of an emphasis on the wine). Of course, other sorts of rather more prosaic flesh inhabited this somatic world: the pungent flesh of rambunctious and desirable boys most notably. Perhaps the smells and sights and sounds of this flesh were conflated in my mind with the hallowed flesh of the altar or the kingly throne of exposition. Perhaps my youthful senses were stimulated and pleased equally by both. Perhaps, in my more secret and guarded moments, I desired both in the same way. In fact, I

know I did. I may not have been able to put words to this budding clandestine desire, but it delighted and excited me. The comfortable world of Peter Julian Eymard and his army of Eucharistic adorers enveloped me safely, a sort of defiantly queer embrace. Seminary was my school for desire. Never was this brought more dramatically home to me than when I had to wake up in the middle of the night to spend an hour in prayerful adoration before the exposed Host. The eeriness of it stimulated and partly frightened me, but so did the pleasure of spending time alone with my Eucharistic King. There was a sort of enchanting delight to this nocturnal rendezvous, a kind of secret, almost forbidden contentment.

The Eucharistic ardour of our fatherly founder provided the template for our own flights of Eucharistic fancy. Were we good enough adorers, worthy sons of his own passionate and single-minded devotion to the Blessed Sacrament? The persona of Peter Julian Eymard was an ambiguous one. Images and statues show him as a severe figure with sharp features, almost forbidding in his appearance. Yet this appearance was also one of intensely focussed devotion to the exposed Host in the monstrance, which he was shown carrying in his hands. Through this image of the founder, we were being told, as his sons, of the need for a single-minded devotion to the real bodily presence of God. Saints can and do inspire. It was from my time with the Congregation that I formed a strong Eucharistic spirituality, one that takes quite seriously the fact of this bodily presence of God at the heart of the Christian faith. Such a holy bodily presence, however, was not limited to the material elements of bread and wine or to the sacrament exposed for adoration. It tended to spill over into the beauty and availability of other physical bodies, ever resplendent in their own Eucharistic transubstantiation into sites of gloriously devout and deviant longing.

Saintliness is always a performance. It both inhabits and reflects the particular cultural context in which the holy person finds him or herself, while still speaking meaningfully to the life situation of the devotee, regardless of time or place. Sanctity is about relationships. The saint and the devotee recognize and need each other, and there is a sense in which they also legitimate each other. Their mutual recognition grounds the authority of the saint and the piety of the devotee. An essential element of saintly performance is its inherent suppleness: the multiple creative ways in which the figure of the saint and the devotion undergirding it can be refashioned time and again for a variety of purposes. Such openness can speak in different ways to different people. For some, the

saint can be an advocate, an intercessor, a model, a guide; for others, the saint can be subversive, destabilising, threatening, a source of divisiveness. Saints are like blank slates on which can be projected or written any number of human needs, wants and aspirations. Saints, in fact, are never securely fixed. It is this quality of ultimate un-rootedness that makes it possible for saints—in their lives and persona, and through the various rituals and forms of piety that surround them—to be used by the devotee as a means of self-expression and self-realization. The Catholic cult of saints encourages this. In establishing intimate and mutually beneficial rapport with a favourite saint, the devotee can model their own life on that of the holy person. The saint offers the comfort, security and certainty of a holy life well lived.

In other words, the saint provides the believer with a devotional script. This script can operate at two levels: first, as a source of legitimate Catholic saintly heroism, and second, as an open ‘strategy’ allowing the devotee to insert him or herself into the saint’s life and take from it such necessary material or inspiration as would benefit their own lives. This can be—and it most often is—a religious or spiritual process. But saints speak not only to what is most clearly or obviously holy. Saints speak in multiple ways to people’s lives, to their hopes and doubts, but also to the ways in which they want to become different or better, and to the ways in which they want to claim their unique individuality. Saints are ultimately liminal figures, and they attract and nurture persons who find themselves in in-between places. This very much reflects my own devotional experience with St. Dominic Savio and St. Peter Julian Eymard. Savio stood at my transition from childhood to adolescence; Eymard at the crossover from vocation to a sense of dissipated calling. Yet each also saw me through the process of erotic and sexual coming-of-age. Each was able to teach me something about what it meant to be a holy and happy queer boy. Not simply teach me, however, but also affirm me. In my devotion to them and in my own pious meanderings, I came to a healthy and balanced sense of acceptance about myself. There would be minor crises later on, of course, but this secure sense of self-acceptance—indeed, of a positive sense of celebratory giftedness about who I was—would remain with me. These two saints—the chaste boyfriend and the Eucharistic mentor—were critically important tutors on the way. In enfolding my life with their lives, I became more and more myself. In looking to their lives as models and inspirations, my own life, as a believer and a gay man, was enriched and made holy.

American historian of religion Robert Orsi, in his book *Between Heaven and Earth*, writes:

Presence is central to the study of lived Catholic practice—the study of Catholicism in everyday life is about the mutual engagement of men, women children, and holy figures present to each other. (...) The materialization of religious worlds includes a process that might be called the corporalization of the sacred. I mean by this the practice of rendering the invisible visible by constituting it as an experience in a body—in one's own body or in someone else's body—so that the experiencing body itself becomes the bearer of presence for oneself and for others.<sup>5</sup>

I return to my beginning, to my youthful foray into the delicious pleasure and pain of an undefiled body, to this holy intimacy I sought to create with an attractive young saint, to my queer desire to present myself as a chaste offering to my God. Seduction and corporalisation were most certainly at work in my vow. I wanted to make Dominic Savio love me, to be like him, to respond in a way similar to his, to the seductive and compelling touch of the sacred. But I was simultaneously inscribing onto my body the values, desires and hopes of a certain Catholic devotional culture, its young boys to live pure and chaste lives. Through this vow, Dominic Savio became intimately present to me. My relationship with him was thereby being engraved onto my very own sexual body—made somatically and spiritually real, as it were—through the exquisite pleasure of denying my natural bodily urges. In a similar way, my adoration of the divine body in the exposed Host, following the model of Peter Julian Eymard, moved me into the orbit of other exposed masculine flesh, conflating my desire for holiness and my desire for same-sex delights, inflecting such desire with a subversive queer potential. My body, already heavily inscribed with Catholic potential and Catholic fervour, became a truly Catholic queer body. It became deeply and irretrievably textured with the language of Catholic liturgical camp, the usual refuge and potentiality of the sexually marginalized.

The presence of the holy can also be fraught with danger and risk, as Orsi insists on reminding us. The presence of the divine can cause us pain and uncertainty. The devotional strategies we elaborate in response to its presence—or rather, that we elaborate to affirm its presence—can leave us vulnerable. Yet it is at this very point of susceptibility that we become most intimately attached to it. It is there that we are called



into the deepest union with it. My saintly presences ‘pushed me’ into zones of devotional and erotic risk, places where I could learn to claim and affirm my sexual difference. These were not radically big or dangerous risks, but they did allow me to flourish as unabashedly queer. In fact, there is something deeply reassuring and securing for queer people in camp Catholic and Anglican devotional culture. In it, we can play out our deepest and most secretive desires, and all in plain sight of the Church. What better way to cultivate, secure and ultimately affirm our difference? The queerness of saints, their innate ability to open up spaces of unspoken desire, their edgy marginal presence in our churches and communities, their knack for living at the liminal extremes of religious and cultural spaces and possibilities: all these things can become sites for the affirmation and celebration of same-sex desire in the broader Christian tradition. Saints are nothing if not the most outrageous of all seducers. They can help us to become who we are as queer people.

## NOTES

1. Quoted in Andy Buechel, *That We Might Become Gods: The Queerness of Creedal Christianity* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015), p. 85.
2. Donald L. Boisvert, *Sanctity and Male Desire: A Gay Reading of Saints* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004), pp. 125–126.
3. Boisvert, *Sanctity and Male Desire*, pp. 155 and 158.
4. Dominic Janes, *Visions of Queer Martyrdom from John Henry Newman to Derek Jarman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 29.
5. Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 73–74. For a more extensive discussion of the notion of presence, see Robert Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

# INDEX

## A

Abse, Leo, [94](#), [100](#)  
Achvah, [153](#)  
Act UP, [242](#)  
Adler, Alfred, [100](#)  
Aelred of Rievaulx, [213](#)  
AIDS, [130](#), [133](#), [238–39](#), [242](#), [245](#)  
Akinola, Peter, [194](#), [196](#)  
Allen, Patrick, [149](#), [151](#)  
Allom, Samuel, [119](#)  
American Holy Orthodox Catholic  
Apostolic Eastern Church, [151](#)  
AngGays, [131](#)  
Anglican Church (Australia), [117–37](#)  
Anglican Church (England). *See*  
Church of England  
Anglican Communion, [2](#), [6](#), [19–20](#),  
[187–203](#)  
Anglican Consultative Council, [188](#)  
Anglo-Catholicism, [121–24](#), [132–33](#)  
Aquinas, St. Thomas, [105](#), [211](#)  
Augustine of Hippo, St., [67–68](#)

## B

Bailey, Derrick Sherwin, [94](#), [105](#), [126](#),  
[179](#)  
Barth, Karl, [22](#)  
Beardsley, Aubrey, [82](#)  
Behn, Aphra, [3](#), [34](#), [36–40](#), [44](#), [46–47](#)  
Beth Chaim Chadishim, [153](#)  
Bonner, Alphonsius, [103](#)  
Bonsall-Boone, Peter, [128](#)  
Bosco, St. John, [251](#), [258](#)  
Boswell, John, [2](#), [56](#), [63–67](#), [73](#)  
Bow Group, [104–05](#)  
Breidenthal, Thomas, [216](#), [218](#)  
Breton, Paul, [147](#)  
Broshears, Ray, [152](#)  
Browning, Robert, [80–81](#)  
Buber, Martin, [32](#)  
Butler, Richard Austen, [94](#)  
Byron, George, [63](#)

## C

Calvin, Jean, [34](#)  
Campaign Against Moral Persecution,  
[128–29](#)

Carpenter, Edward, 175  
 Celibacy, 95, 124  
 Chamberlen, Francois, 12–13  
 Changing Attitude (Australia), 131  
 Charles II, king of England, 34  
 Churchill, Winston, 60  
 Church Marriage Advisory Council, 98  
 Church of England, 30–31, 34, 42–44, 94, 187–208  
     General Synod, 195  
     Moral Welfare Council, 94, 96, 100  
 Church of Ireland, 83  
 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 146  
 Church of Peter, Paul, and the Beloved Disciple, 140, 152–53  
 Church of Sweden, 231–33  
 Chutzpah, 153  
 Clark, Arthur C., 169  
 Clement, Robert, 140, 152  
 Closet (homosexual), 118, 165, 180, 252  
 Cold War, 118  
 Colenso, John William, 188  
 Colonialism, 188, 191–93  
 Committee for Homosexual Law Reform, 146  
 Communism, 60  
 Community of St. John the Beloved, 152  
 Community of the Love of Christ, 152  
 Condensation symbols, 197–203  
 Conolly, David, 128  
 Consumerism, 166  
 Contraception, 94  
 Conversion therapy, 195  
 Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe, 210  
 Corneille, Pierre de, 39  
 Cory, Donald Webster, 164, 167, 174, 179

Coulter, Hugh, 180  
 Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa, 191  
 Creech, Thomas, 35, 38, 40  
 Crucifixion, 238–39, 257  
 Curry, Michael, 203

## E

Eames, Robin, 194  
 Edelman, Murray, 197, 200  
 Egan, Edward, 143  
 Einstein, Albert, 15  
 Ellis, Albert, 164, 169  
 Ellis, Havelock, 83  
 Elwes, Richard, 98, 102  
 Epicureanism, 35, 44, 50  
 Epicurus, 35  
 Episcopal Church (American), 7, 193–94, 202–03, 209–223  
     General Convention of, 189, 209, 215, 218, 220–22  
     Standing Committee on Liturgy and Music, 210, 215–20  
 Ernst, Cornelius, 104  
 Eschatology, 211–15  
 Eucharist. *See* Last Supper  
 Eucharistic Catholic Church, 141  
 European Union, 56, 59  
 Evangelicalism, 123, 133  
 Eymard, St. Peter Julian, 9, 251–52, 255, 259, 261–62

## F

Family Law Act (Australia) 1975, 129  
 Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans, 196  
 First Church of the One Brotherhood, 143  
 Foster, John, 133  
 Foucault, Michel, 16–17, 61

Fournier, Robert, 149–50  
 Freud, Sigmund, 44, 100  
 Fyfe, David Maxwell, 98

## G

Galen, 12  
 George W. Henry Foundation, 173  
 Gilgamesh, Joseph, 150  
 Global Anglican Future Conference, 195–97  
 Global South, 190  
 Godfrey, William, 97, 102, 104  
 Gradewell, Leo, 100–101  
 Gray, John, 81–82, 89–90  
 Gray, Robert, 187  
 Gregory of Nyssa, 67  
 Griffin, Bernard, 94, 98–100  
 Griffin Committee, 97–104, 109–10  
 Gylling, Johnny, 235

## H

Haire, Norman, 106  
 Hammar, Karl Gustav, 231  
 Hart-Devlin debate, 104–109  
 Hegel, Georg, 14  
 Herbert, Alan, 104  
 Herman, Erwin, 153  
 HIV, 130, 133, 238–39, 242, 245  
 Hobbes, Thomas, 34, 108  
 Hollis, Christopher, 106  
 Hopkins, Gerard Manley, 83, 85  
 Hose, John, 146  
 House and Senate Armed Services Committee, 176  
 Hyde, George, 141–42, 151

## I

Idowu-Fearon, Josiah, 191  
 Ingham, Michael, 193  
 Instruments of Communion, 188

Integrity, 130  
 Isherwood, Christopher, 71  
 Itkin, Mikhail, 151

## J

James, Francis, 125–26  
 Jason, Philip, 142  
 Jenner, C.M., 98  
 Jensen, Peter, 196  
 Jesus Christ, images of, 227–45  
 Joachim, Jerry, 146  
 John XXIII, pope, 90  
 John the Baptist, St., 231  
 John Chrysostom, St., 67  
 John of Damascus, St., 59  
 John, Jeffrey, 194  
 John Paul II, pope, 22, 231  
 Johnson, R.F., 104  
 Judaism, 80, 153  
 Judas, 241–42  
 Justinian, emperor, 72

## K

Kameny, Frank, 176  
 Kant, Immanuel, 14, 86  
 Kepner, James, 142, 145, 147  
 Kinsey, Alfred, 21, 84, 94, 179  
 Krafft-Ebing, Richard von, 71

## L

Lambeth Conference  
   1867, 187–88  
   1968, 188  
   1978, 189  
   1988, 189  
   1998, 132, 190, 193  
   2008, 195  
 Laqueur, Thomas, 12–14, 20  
 Lascaris, Manoly, 123  
 Last Supper, 239–44, 260–61

Law, Steven, 180  
 Leo XIII, pope, 85, 87  
 Libertinism, 36, 170  
 Loisy, Alfred, 83  
 Longley, Charles, 187  
 Longstocking, Pippi, 235  
 Lorimer, Robert, 82  
 Lucretius, 35–36, 40–41, 45  
 Lutheranism, 143, 175  
 Lutheran World Federation, 2

## M

Madonna, 131, 259  
 Marriage, same-sex, 1, 29, 63–68, 73, 168, 172, 209–223  
 Martin, Del, 175  
 Martin, Edwin, 122  
 Marx, Karl, 44  
 Mattachine Society, 142–43, 173, 175  
 Mauriceau, Thomas, 12–13  
 Maynard, F.E., 122  
 McDonald, John, 98, 103  
 McFie, Bernice, 98  
 Meredith, George, 80–81  
 Metropolitan Community Church, 130, 139, 141, 145–48, 153  
 Meyers, Ruth, 210, 219  
 Midsumma Festival, 131  
 Mill, John Stuart, 14, 108  
 Milošević, Slobodan, 58  
 Missionaries, 120  
 Modernist (theological) movement, 85–86  
 Molyneux, F.M., 120  
 Monasticism, 124  
 Moore, Thomas, 62

## N

National Council of Churches, 173, 177  
 Nemesis, bishop of Emesa, 12

Newman, John Henry, 85–88, 108  
 Nidorf, Patrick X., 148–50  
 Noble, John, 152–53  
 Ntagali, Stanley, 191  
 Ntahoruti, Bernard, 191

## O

O'Brien, William, 80–81  
 Ohlson, Elisabeth, 8, 227–45  
 Okoh, Nicholas, 196  
 ONE, Inc., 141, 143, 173  
 Orthodox-Catholic Church of America, 142  
 Orthodox Episcopal Church of God, 152  
 Orwell, George, 199  
 Ottoman Empire, 56, 60–62, 68  
 sexuality, 62, 64  
 Ovid, 46

## P

Palme, Olof, 236  
 Pappas, Helen, 141  
 Pentecostalism, 133, 146  
 Permissiveness, 96, 104–109  
 Perry, Troy, 140, 145–47  
 Pittenger, Norman, 127  
 Pius X, pope, 4, 86–87, 90  
 Ploen, Richard, 146  
 Plutarch, 48, 67  
 Poullain de la Barre, Francois, 14  
 Preedy, John, 98  
 Pride, lesbian and gay, 51, 55, 58, 140, 231, 245  
 Primates' Meeting, 188  
 Prostitution, 71–72

## R

Raffalovich, André, 4, 79–90  
 Rees-Mogg, William, 104

Renan, Ernest, 80  
 Richards, Robert, 152  
 Ricketts, Charles, 81  
 Robinson, Gene, 193  
 Robinson, Thomas M., 125  
 Rogers, Eugene, 214, 216  
 Rogers, Harold, 126  
 Roman Catholic Church, 81–82,  
 93–116, 133, 148–52, 249–64  
 Ross, Dorothy, 120  
 Rousseau, Jean-Jaques, 14–15  
 Rowland, Chuck, 143  
 Rushdie, Salman, 236

## S

Sado-masochism, 143, 165–66  
 Saints, cult of, 249–64  
 Savio, St. Dominic, 9, 249–52,  
 255–59, 263  
 Second Vatican Council, 90, 148  
 Secularism, 155  
 Serbian Orthodox Church, 55–78  
 Sergius, St., and St. Bacchus, 67  
 Sexual Offences Act (England and  
 Wales) 1967, 94–96  
 Shannon, Charles, 81  
 Sherwood, Clement, 151  
 S.I.R., 152  
 Skugge, Linda Norman, 236  
 Slade, Adolphus, 69  
 Society for the Reformation of  
 Manners, 46  
 Sodom, 15, 105  
 Soper, Donald, 104  
 Soviet Union, 60  
 Stanford, Adrian, 105  
 Stevenson, Robert Louis, 80  
 St. John-Stevas, Norman, 5, 93–97,  
 99, 104–110  
 Stoker, Bram, 83  
 Stonewall riots, 6, 21, 139, 152–53

Stopes, Marie, 106  
 Strauss, Eric, 98  
 Suarez, Francisco, 85  
 Supreme Court (USA), 220  
 Swift, Jonathan, 3, 34, 42–50

## T

Tarcisius, St., 260  
 Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre, 90  
 Tenison, Thomas, 42  
 Tertullian, 67  
 Thatcherism, 201  
 Thomas, Aquinas, St., 85  
 Tillotson, John, 42  
 Tomlinson, George, 97–104  
 Tutu, Desmond, 192  
 Tyrrell, George, 4, 79, 83–90

## U

United Church of Christ, 6, 143, 161,  
 163, 176–77, 180  
 Uranian poetry, 81  
 Urs von Balthasar, Hans, 22

## V

Vanhomrigh, Esther, 49  
 Vasey, Michael, 212–15, 219  
 von Platen, August, 82

## W

Ward, Graham, 202, 243  
 Wells, William, 98  
 West Side Discussion Group, 143  
 White, Patrick, 123  
 Wilde, Oscar, 81, 83  
 Williams, Rowan, 194–95, 203, 218  
 Wilmot, John, 36, 39–40  
 Witt, Howell, 122

Wolfenden Committee, [94](#), [96](#), [105](#),  
[110](#), [127](#)

Wollstonecraft, Mary, [14](#)

Wood, Robert, [6](#), [143](#), [161–81](#)

Wright, Nigel, [131](#)

Wurm, Ali, [133](#)

## Y

Yeats, William Butler, [83](#)