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CHAPTER 8

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

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North American newspaper and news magazines began reporting on 'militant homosexuals' in late 1969 and 1970.[1] 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.[2] 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'.[3] 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.[4] 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.[5] 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.[6] 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.[7] 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.[8]

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.[9] 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'.[10] 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 ninetieth-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.[11] 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'.[12] Adding to the letter's explication of gay-welcoming apostolic Christian doctrine, *ONE Magazine* included other published essays by independent Catholic priests.[13]

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.[14] 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'.[15] 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.[16] In New York, the Mattachine Society held a Protestant discussion group during the 1950s that was led by Methodist minister Edward Egan.[17]

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.[18]

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?'[19] 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.[20]

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.[21] 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.[22]

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.[23] 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.[24] 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'.[25] 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.[26] 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'.[27] 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.[28]

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.[29] 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.[30] 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'.[31] 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'.[32] 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.[33] 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.[34] 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'.[35] 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'.[36] 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.[37] 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'.[38] 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 Angles 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'.[39] 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.[40] 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'.[41] 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.[42] 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'.[43] 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'.[44] 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'.[45] 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'.[46] 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'.[47] 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'.[48] 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'.[49] 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'.[50] 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'.[51]

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'.[52] 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.[53] 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'.[54] 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'.[55]

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.[56]

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.[57]

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'.[58] 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.[59] In 1976, representatives from the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Israel formed the World Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations.[60]

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.[61] 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.[62]

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'.[63] 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.[64] 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.
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.
22. White, *Reforming Sodom*, pp. 88–89.
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.
24. 'MCC Directory', *MCC Cross Currents* (Fall 1972), pp. 14–15, Periodical Collection, GLHS.
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.
27. 'MCC Church for everyone', pp. 1–2 and David Joe Robinson, 'The Rhetoric of Troy Perry: A Case Study of the Los Angeles Gay Rights Rally' (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1972), p. 151.
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.
29. 'Not afraid anymore', *Los Angeles Advocate* 4:1 (January 1970), p. 1 and 'More demonstrations', *Los Angeles Advocate* 4:1 (January 1970), p. 1.
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.

34. *In Unity* 2:7 (August 1971), back cover. Churches: Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Chicago, Costa Mesa (Calif.), Miami, Phoenix, Washington D.C., Dallas, Honolulu, Oakland. Missions: Tampa, Sacramento, Milwaukee, Denver, Tucson, San Jose, Fresno, and New Orleans.
35. Paul Breton, interview with the author, 3 August 2005.
36. Letter, David J. to Dignity, 18 May 1972, Joe Gilgamesh Killian papers, correspondence files, ONE International Gay and Lesbian Archives (OIGLA), Los Angeles, Calif., p. 1.
37. Jim Highland, 'A brief history of dignity: 1969–1981' (published by Dignity/Los Angeles), Dignity collection, history files, OIGLA, p, 1.
38. Letter, Patrick Nidorf to Karl, 21 February 1975, appendix, Gary K. Johnson, 'Dignity: an introductory investigation', unpublished paper, c.1975, Dignity collection, unprocessed files, OIGLA.
39. Advertisement, *Los Angeles Advocate* 4:1 (January 1970), p. 35.
40. Nidorf to Karl, 21 February 1975.
41. Patrick Allen, interview with the author, 2 August 2005.
42. *Dignity: A Monthly Newsletter* 2:1 (March 1971), p. 3.
43. *Dignity: A Monthly Newsletter* 2:1 (March 1971), p. 3 and Johnson, 'Dignity: An introductory investigation', n.p. Bob Fournier was a pseudonym for Bob Pelletier.
44. 'Outside Los Angeles', *Dignity: A Monthly Newsletter* 2:6 (August 1971), p. 3.
45. *Dignity: A Monthly Newsletter* 3:9 (November 1972), pp. 9–10. Patrick Allen, interview with the author, 2 August 2005.
46. Joe Gilgamesh, 'Editorial', *Dignity: A Monthly Newsletter* 2:2 (April 1971), p. 2.
47. Gilgamesh, 'Editorial', p. 2. Emphases in original.
48. Allen, interview with the author, 2 August 2005.
49. 'Dignity: From dream to national reality', *Dignity: A Monthly Newsletter* 4:7 (September 1973), p. 1.
50. R. Rashke, 'Dignity like a fishbone lodged in the church's throat', *National Catholic Reporter* 6 April 1976, p. 28.
51. The Rt. Rev. Michael Francis Itkin, B.L.C., 'A Bishop for the resistance', *Gay Power* 1:12 (n.d.), p. 3 and The Rt. Rev. Michael Francis Itkin, B.L.C., 'Christ and the homosexual', *Gay Power* 1:10 (n.d.), p. 10.
52. Letter, Robert J. Richards to 'dear friend' (n.d.), Broshears Papers Box 4, Robert Jude Tato/Mark Richards file, GLHS, p. 1.
53. Ray Broshears, 'Orthodox Episcopal Church of God', *Gay Pride* 2 (Winter 1972–1973), p. 4. Broshears Papers, LGHS.
54. Lester Kinsolving, 'The Paper Priests', *San Francisco Examiner*, 11 October 1971, p. 33.

55. Editorial response to letter to the editor, *Vector* (newsletter for the Society for Individual Rights; November 1970), n.p.
56. 'A new church for gay people', (n.d.) Ephemera—Subject files—American Church, IGIC Collection, New York Public Library, p. 1.
57. Sunday bulletin, Birchard Papers, Box 1, File 13, Flora Lamson Hewlett Library (FLHL), p. 1, Fiske, 'Color some of the churches lavender', p. E7, Robert Mary Clement, interview with the author, 30 August 2005 and 'New church opens doors in Gotham', *The Advocate* (19 August–1 September 1970), p. 16.
58. 'Achvah' (1973) Ginsburg Papers, Gay and Lesbian Historical Society, p. 1.
59. 'History of our congregation', Congregation Etz Chaim: www.etz-chaim.com/about.htm. Accessed 8 October 2007, 'The story of congregation Beth Simchat Torah' (circa 1982), CBST collection, box 8, History of CBST file, Archives of the LGBT Center, New York and Congregation Beth Simchat Torah online archive, on the LGBT Religious Archives Network: www.LGBTran.org. Accessed 29 July 2007. The history of Beth Chayim Chadashim is recounted in Swicegood, *Our God Too*, pp. 236–245.
60. See Aliza Maggid, 'Joining together: building a worldwide movement', in Christie Balka and Andy Rose (eds), *Twice Blessed: On Being Lesbian or Gay and Jewish* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), pp. 157–170.
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.
62. Recent literature on contemporary LGBT religious practice includes Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, *Living Out Islam: Voices of Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), Christine Firer Hinze and J. Patrick Hornbeck (eds), *More than a Monologue: Sexual Diversity and the Catholic Church* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), Steven Greenberg, *Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), Pamela R. Lightsley, *Our Lives Matter: A Womanist Queer Theology* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2015) and Christine Beardsley and Michelle O'Brien (eds), *This is my Body: Hearing the Theology of Transgender Christians* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2016).

63. Joan Wallach Scott, *Sexularism* (Florence: European University Institute, 2009), pp. 12–13.
64. For a history of heterosexuality see Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005).