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# To Be Christian and Homosexual

## From Shame to Identity-Based Claims

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Martine Gross

**ABSTRACT:** This paper draws on a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews to explore how gay and lesbian Christians in France deal with their dual identities. The journey of those who leave a traditional church to join an inclusive church is like an act of conversion. From such participants' testimonies, it is apparent that they go through various phases: entanglement, break with the past, and a search for a new meaning. As in any act of conversion, they must free themselves from their old ties; in this case, they must break free from submission to a religious institution they previously saw as the only legitimate body representing Christianity. Not all of them are necessarily ready to do so. Many stay in traditional churches, which accounts for the small number of inclusive churches in France. Respondents in this study demonstrate many of the same identity negotiation strategies found by other researchers, some of which seem to be experiences in a way that is particular to France, due to the hegemony of Roman Catholicism.

### INTRODUCTION

The Roman Catholic Church, as well as many Protestant churches, condemn homosexuality unambiguously. In this article, "traditional" will refer to mainstream churches, not particularly known for their openness toward sexual minorities. How, then, does a Christian homosexual manage the co-existence of these two dimensions of his or her identity, dimensions which may be experienced separately or together? Christian homosexuals may thus experience their homosexuality in a world separated from the rest of their activities or, alternatively, integrate

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their homosexuality into daily life via some form of social activity or work. A Christian might also create an individual form of religiosity without joining a church or Christian community, and without participating actively in the life of a church. This article describes the identity-related efforts of Christian homosexuals in France, specifically in relation to their attending or not attending a local church.

## **BACKGROUND**

Researchers who have studied the situation of Christian homosexuals have generally done so in a pluralistic religious context. Whether in the United States or the United Kingdom, Protestant churches are not organized around a central institution in the way that Catholic churches are. Attendees can choose the church whose openness or rigor fits them best, and these churches can also adapt their discourse to their audience. The situation of Christian homosexuals in France is rather different; that is, they live in a context that is both impregnated by Catholic culture and very secularized.

Christianity came to France during the second century, and, ever since, the Catholic faith, symbols, and liturgical calendar have been at the center of France's popular life. Yet, the French Revolution and the separation between church and state that was decreed in 1905 have made France a secular country. The influence of Catholicism, transformed into a private issue, has diminished with regard not only to its practice (church attendance, number of priests, and rate of baptisms and marriages), but also with regard to belief in God and church membership. According to a recent survey, in 2006 only 10 percent of the French population maintained regular religious practice.<sup>1</sup> Fewer and fewer people claim to be practicing Catholics, and more and more identify themselves as "without religion." Those calling themselves Catholic have distanced themselves from the institution of the Roman Catholic Church, in particular its customs, morals, and discipline. Those who feel the need for a religious life seek one that will "do them good," that will help them to realize their personal potential, and thus meet the late-modern imperatives of personal accomplishment and development.<sup>2</sup> The positions held by the Vatican on morals and sexuality thus create a divide between official Catholic norms, expressed from on high, and the moral universe in which people live while asserting their right to self-fulfillment and autonomy.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Because individuals do not generally publicize their sexual orientation and even sometimes actively hide it, it is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain a truly representative sample of this "invisible" population.

Nevertheless, a large-scale, national survey researching homosexual Christians allows for the examination of some hypotheses about these people who assume a dual identity: homosexual and Christian.

To explore how gay and lesbian Christians are managing their dual identities, I have used data from three sources: a questionnaire-based survey,<sup>3</sup> semi-structured interviews with some respondents of this survey, and published testimonials. The latter were published in a collection<sup>4</sup> the aim of which was to help other homosexual believers by showing them a possible way to integrate their identity dimensions: participation in an inclusive church. Inclusive churches are gay-positive churches, not to be confused with a welcoming or gay-friendly church. A gay-friendly or welcoming church welcomes the participation of gays and lesbians and is generally a mainstream church, whatever its denomination. On the other hand, an inclusive church is formed specifically to help people reconcile their homosexual identity with their Christian identity. Inclusive churches in France, for example, will not be found among Roman Catholic churches. This collection of testimonials led me to think that orienting oneself toward an inclusive church, whatever one's initial affiliation, seemed like a path of conversion, of which the testimonial would be a fundamental step, an exemplary discourse presented to others.<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that in France leaders of these churches have chosen the adjective "inclusive" rather than "gay," a choice that has to be understood in terms of the French context. Specifically designated groups, for example, gay groups, ethnic groups, and so forth, are delegitimized in France, unless they are open to everyone. French universalism is regularly opposed to minority rights, whose promoters are criticized as *Communautarists*.<sup>6</sup> The term "inclusive" implies that the church welcomes every person regardless of sexual identity, sexual orientation, gender, or biological sex, and is felt to be better suited to French universalist principles.

The survey contained 250 questions, some of which were open-ended, allowing the interviewees to freely express or expand upon opinions regarding not only their beliefs and practices, but also attitudes toward their way of life and their participation in the gay and lesbian world or in a parish. Designed by sociologist Andrew Yip of Nottingham Trent University to explore these issues in the United Kingdom, this questionnaire was adapted for France,<sup>7</sup> and four thousand copies were sent by regular mail throughout the country. Copies were also sent to Christian groups welcoming homosexuals (e.g., David et Jonathan, Devenir un en Christ, Centre du Christ Libérateur, Rendez-Vous Chrétiens, Gays Anglicans, Metropolitan Community Church Montpellier and Paris), and to gay and lesbian groups and media that welcome Christian members or readers (e.g., Centre Gay et Lesbien, Web sites, the gay press, and Interpride, whose members organize annual gay pride marches around the country). Advertisements were

published in the Christian press (*La Croix, La Vie, Réforme, Témoignage Chrétien, Golias*), and flyers announcing the survey and giving directions for downloading it from the Internet were distributed in churches, as well as establishments in the gay neighborhood of Paris.

## RESULTS

Three hundred and eleven men and 84 women answered the survey. They were almost exclusively Catholics (89 percent Catholic; 6 percent Lutheran-Reformed; 5 percent other Christian faith). Between 16 and 80 years old, 75 percent were between 26 and 55 years old, and the mean age was 42. In general, respondents' education level is high; two-thirds of the sample have a master's degree or a doctorate. Most of them work and have quite significant economic resources. They live throughout France in towns of different sizes: Paris and its suburbs (38 percent), but also rural areas and small towns with less than two thousand inhabitants (12 percent). Respondents are Christian believers, and quite a few also practice their religion. That is, they believe in a personal God, one whom they can approach. Many respondents agreed that God is a life source within us, that God is in and among rather than above us, and that one can have an intimate and reciprocal relationship with God. They regularly pray—63 percent every day or several times a week—and read the Bible. 56 percent regularly go to a parish, and nearly 75 percent participate in the activities of their parish. It may be surprising that in a country where religious practice is strongly on the decline, homosexual Christians show such religiosity. However, I probably did not reach those who have turned away from religion, or those for whom religion has never been essential. Indeed, the length of the questionnaire required a significant time commitment, and, therefore, a great deal of motivation, which those who are not religiously committed arguably would not have.

One hundred and seventy-one respondents mention that that they do not or no longer go to a church regularly, even though they may do so now and then (as more than 50 percent have done during the last three months). The first reason given for this is the church's doctrinal condemnation of homosexuality ( $n = 36$ , 21 percent; see table 1), be it the Roman Catholic Church or another denomination. All but two of those who gave this reason, however, are Catholics. Some respondents mention that they feel uncomfortable in church because of their homosexuality (13 percent), and that they have personally had negative experiences relating to homosexuality in the church they used to attend (18 percent). The fourth reason for not attending church anymore is that they experience a personal relationship with God that does not require the church's mediation, or that they prefer another kind of community of believers (4 percent). Most of the respondents mention that they feel

**TABLE 1 Why do you not attend church (any more)?**

(171 not attending a church) Response rate: 84%

|  |          |           |
|--|----------|-----------|
| The Church or its representatives' position                    | 36       | 21%       |
| I can't find my place as a homosexual;<br>church is homophobic | 23       | 13%       |
| It doesn't appeal to me, I don't need it                       | 19       | 11%       |
| I don't feel at ease: intolerant closed<br>environment         | 18       | 11%       |
| I don't need a place dedicated to relate to God                | 16       | 9%        |
| Lack of time   | 12       | 7%        |
| I don't like liturgy   | 11       | 6%        |
| I attend church for special occasions                          | 10       | 6%        |
| I can't find there what I am looking for                       | 10       | 6%        |
| I am affiliated to a Christian community                       | 6        | 4%        |
| My moral/sexual behaviour is not adequate                      | 5        | 3%        |
| <b>I lost faith</b>  | <b>3</b> | <b>2%</b> |

completely at ease with their homosexuality (see table 2), but some have experienced breakups of friendship or family bonds because of it, have thought about or attempted suicide, and have temporarily rejected their faith or left the church. The latter was only temporary, however, since relatively few respondents ( $n = 23$ ) mentioned that their faith has been weakened because of their homosexuality (see table 3); only 3 respondents mentioned that they no longer go to church because they have lost their faith (see table 1).

Who are the people who attend a church, then? They are a bit older than those who do not go to a church: 40.1 years as opposed to the mean age of 36.9. A quarter of the overall respondents are more than 55 years old, while that age bracket represents only 15 percent of those who are not attending church.

They are more likely to hold opinions on sexuality that conform to Catholic doctrine. They disagree more often than those who do not attend church, for example, with the idea that God created all forms of sexuality. They also more often agree that a sexual relationship has to be potentially

**TABLE 2 How would you describe your current attitude towards your own sexuality?**

(171 not attending a church) Response rate: 98%

|                                   |            |            |
|-----------------------------------|------------|------------|
| <b>Completely at ease with it</b> | <b>113</b> | <b>67%</b> |
| Not ideal, but put up with it     | 52         | 31%        |
| Wish to change it if possible     | 3          | 2%         |
| Total                             | 168        | 100%       |

**TABLE 3 Check the items illustrating the impact of your sexuality on your faith**

(171 not attending a church) Response rate: 88% Multiple responses explain a total beyond 100

|   |           |            |
|---|-----------|------------|
| It strengthens my Christian faith         | 33        | 19%        |
| <b>It weakens my Christian faith</b>      | <b>23</b> | <b>13%</b> |
| It challenges my Christian faith          | 65        | 38%        |
| My sexuality is an expression of my faith | 56        | 33%        |

procreative, and that heterosexual marriage is the ideal of any Christian sexual life. They are less critical of the traditional Christian understanding of homosexuality. Overall, those who do not disapprove of the Church’s stance on homosexuality are a minority in this sample, but they are proportionally more numerous among those who participate in a parish. When considering the Catholic doctrine on moral issues other than homosexuality, those who are going to church agree more often with statements such as “re-marriage after divorce is incompatible with Christian faith,” “Abortion is incompatible with Christian faith,” and “having heterosexual sex outside of marriage is incompatible with Christian faith.”

A striking result is that people who are not attending a church are more inclined to agree with the statements, “same-sex genital acts are always incompatible with Christian faith” and “A bisexual Christian should opt for a heterosexual lifestyle.” This could be related to the ways in which people who are still attending a church have negotiated the tension between their religious commitment and their homosexuality. It is possible that they have been able to continue attending church because they did not feel strongly condemned in their local church.

Looking at responses to the question of why participants remain affiliated with a church, we see an ambiguity with regard to the definition of “church.” Three meanings were used, and respondents shifted between them, sometimes within a single sentence. These are: church as a place of worship, as a gathering of believers, or as an institution with official doctrines. Respondents’ explanations of their ties to the church differ

**TABLE 4 How old are you?**

|              | Going to church |      | Not going to church |      |
|--------------|-----------------|------|---------------------|------|
| Mean age     | 40.1            |      | 36.9                |      |
| Less than 35 | 62              | 29%  | 66                  | 39%  |
| 36–45        | 57              | 26%  | 48                  | 28%  |
| 46–55        | 45              | 21%  | 31                  | 18%  |
| More than 55 | 53              | 24%  | 26                  | 15%  |
| Total        | 217             | 100% | 171                 | 100% |

TABLE 5

|  | Going to church | Not going to church | Significance (khi2)              |
|--|-----------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = rather disagree, 3 = not sure, 4 = rather agree, 5 = strongly agree   |                 |                     |                                  |
| All sexualities are created by God and to be fully accepted  | 0.83            | 1.19                | $p = 0.01$ ;<br>$F = 6.11(S)$    |
| Sexual intercourse should always be potentially procreative  | 1.81            | 1.44                | $p < 0.01$ ;<br>$F = 13.31 (VS)$ |
| Same sex genital acts are always incompatible with Christian Faith   | 1.12            | 1.57                | $p < 0.01$ ;<br>$F = 11.92 (VS)$ |
| Heterosexual marriage is the ideal of any Christian intimate sex life  | 2.77            | 2.12                | $p < 0.01$ ;<br>$F = 22.74 (VS)$ |
| A bisexual Christian should opt for a heterosexual lifestyle   | 0.84            | 1.56                | $p < 0.01$ ;<br>$F = 26.65 (VS)$ |
| The ordination of women priests should be welcomed by all  | 3.67            | 4.2                 | $p < 0.01$ ;<br>$F = 16.60 (VS)$ |
| Tradition biblical exegesis on homosexuality is incorrect  | 3.74            | 4.02                | $p < 0.01$ ;<br>$F = 6.96 (VS)$  |
| The Churches have encouraged heterosexism in society   | 4.32            | 4.62                | $p < 0.01$ ;<br>$F = 12.04 (VS)$ |
| The Churches have contributed to the perpetuation of homophobia  | 4               | 4.36                | $p < 0.01$ ;<br>$F = 12.06 (VS)$ |
| The Churches have not taken due account of the experience of gay, lesbian and bisexual Christians in their examination of the issue of human sexuality | 4.23            | 4.59                | $p < 0.01$ ;<br>$F = 17.05 (VS)$ |
| Using contraceptives is incompatible with Christian Faith  | 1.71            | 1.41                | $p < 0.01$ ;<br>$F = 7.98 (VS)$  |
| Re-marriage after divorce is incompatible with Christian Faith   | 2               | 1.61                | $p < 0.01$ ;<br>$F = 11.68 (VS)$ |
| Heterosexual sex outside marriage is incompatible with Christian Faith   | 2.4             | 1.8                 | $p < 0.01$ ;<br>$F = 21.48 (VS)$ |
| Abortion is incompatible with Christian Faith  | 3.17            | 2.43                | $p < 0.01$ ;<br>$F = 25.86 (VS)$ |

based on these definitions. Some of them respond that “it is the Church of Jesus Christ, we are his children” (church as a gathering of believers). Others hope that it will evolve, and say that despite its flaws it has made them discover God’s love, and they believe in all or some of the values the church seeks to transmit (the church as institution). The rest respond that it is a place where they can live their faith (church as a place of worship). Thus, despite their criticisms, they remain affiliated with a church because of a feeling of belonging that is not easily undermined.



**TABLE 6** How would you in general describe your parish, as far as homosexuality is concerned?

|                          | Attending church |      | Active in the parish |      |
|--------------------------|------------------|------|----------------------|------|
| Very or quite benevolent | 68               | 33%  | 54                   | 37%  |
| Very or quite hostile    | 43               | 21%  | 29                   | 20%  |
| Not sure                 | 95               | 46%  | 64                   | 43%  |
| Total                    | 206              | 100% | 147                  | 100% |

More than two-thirds of those who attend church do not stop with church services on Sunday; they also participate in the life of their parish, spending on average 3 hours and 45 minutes per week in church-related activities. In addition to praying and participating in the service, people organize parish activities such as sharing groups, Bible studies, catechism classes, parish councils, choir, and preparation for the sacrament, or they participate in other charitable activities, such as organizing a Christian community movement. Twenty-one percent of those who go to a church consider its attitude on homosexuality to be hostile, while a majority of the respondents does not really know what their church's attitude is. Those who participate in the life of their church beyond simply attending services are more likely to consider the church's attitude to be benevolent (37 percent versus 33 percent).

One has the impression when reading the responses that the attitude of the parish, parishioners as well as clergy, does not reflect the official stance of the institutional Church. Respondents experience the parish as being more benevolent toward homosexuality than are the stances of official representatives of the institution. Furthermore, many of those who turned away from the church because of its official position on homosexuality did not have particularly negative experiences in their former parish. This tends to confirm the distance described by H el ene Buisson-Fenet between doctrinal prescriptions and pastoral practices.<sup>8</sup>

Most of those who go to church found it initially troublesome to discover their attraction to the same sex. Those who participate in the life of their parish have found this a bit less often, and some even found coming out to be a good experience. None of those who go to church without participating in the life of their parish did so, however (see table 7). Members of the latter group more often say that their homosexuality challenges their Christian faith (see table 8). It seems that participating in the life of the parish strengthens faith, while going to church without such participation tends to weaken faith. It could also be that those struggling with the integration of their identities might feel less comfortable attending parish activities. In any event, participation in the life of the parish enables the participant to be recognized for qualities beyond his or her homosexuality.

TABLE 7 Feeling upon the “discovery” of your sexual orientation

|   | Active in the parish |     | Not active in the parish |     |
|---|----------------------|-----|--------------------------|-----|
| Felt bad, isolated, misunderstood                           | 20                   | 67% | 13                       | 87% |
| Felt well, no feeling of guilt                              | 6                    | 20% | 0                        | 0%  |
| Denial, repression  | 2                    | 7%  | 2                        | 13% |
| It will get better with time                                | 1                    | 3%  | 0                        | 0%  |
| Feeling of discrepancy between my religion and my sexuality | 1                    | 3%  | 0                        | 0%  |

Nevertheless, for many, the price of parish participation is to leave a part of oneself in the closet. Indeed, 40 percent of the 171 respondents who attend a place of worship told no one about their homosexuality (see table 9). Only 15 percent told everyone, and 37 percent told some people. A national study on coming out to family and friends found that 35 percent did not tell their fathers, 25 percent did not tell their mothers, 21 percent did not tell their brothers or sisters, and 17 percent did not tell their heterosexual friends.<sup>9</sup> Another study on coming out to colleagues found that 23 percent told almost everyone, 32 percent told no one, and 45 percent told some people.<sup>10</sup> In comparison to these studies of the general French population, coming out seems to be less frequent in religious settings. Visibility in church seems to be related to two factors: considering one’s church to be benevolent on the issue of homosexuality, and actively participating in the life of the parish. Those who consider their church benevolent and those who participate in the life of their parish hide their homosexuality less often. Furthermore, those whose sexual orientation is only known to some in the parish have had significantly more negative experiences than those whose sexual orientation is known to all or to no one (see table 10). Perhaps a partially shared knowledge strengthens rumors and produces more negative reactions than would information that has lost its interest because everybody knows. It is also possible that those who have had negative experiences have no desire to re-live them, and thus prefer partial or total anonymity.

Hiding one’s sexual orientation can be a sign of compartmentalization, a strategy of compromising between one’s conflicting identity

TABLE 8 Impact of your sexuality on your faith

|   | Active in the parish |     | Not active in the parish |     |
|---|----------------------|-----|--------------------------|-----|
| It strengthens my Christian Faith         | 81                   | 43% | 15                       | 25% |
| It weakens my Christian faith             | 10                   | 5%  | 7                        | 11% |
| It challenges my Christian faith          | 62                   | 33% | <b>28</b>                | 46% |
| My sexuality is an expression of my faith | 36                   | 19% | 11                       | 18% |

**TABLE 9 Do people of your parish know that you are homosexual?**

|            | Attend a church |      | Active in the parish |      | Not active in the parish |      | No negative experience |      | One or more negative experiences |      |
|------------|-----------------|------|----------------------|------|--------------------------|------|------------------------|------|----------------------------------|------|
| Not at all | 68              | 40%  | 51                   | 35%  | 36                       | 65%  | 77                     | 47%  | 5                                | 17%  |
| Partially  | 63              | 37%  | 65                   | 45%  | 14                       | 25%  | 60                     | 37%  | 19                               | 63%  |
| Completely | 26              | 15%  | 29                   | 20%  | 5                        | 9%   | 27                     | 16%  | 6                                | 20%  |
| Total      | 171             | 100% | 145                  | 100% | 55                       | 100% | 164                    | 100% | 30                               | 100% |

dimensions—here, religion and homosexual life—by keeping them rigidly separate. The survey measured this by attributing scores to answers that denoted compartmentalization. For example, to the open-ended question, “If you are not a member of a gay group, explain why,” the answers “sexuality and faith are incompatible” and “I am scared to be discovered, I prefer that nobody knows” were assigned a score of 2. To the open-ended question, “Why are you still affiliated with a Church,” the answer “I dissociate my religious life from my intimate life” was given the highest score of 3 as a conscious and deliberate act of compartmentalization, while the answers “I am not only homosexual,” and “church is where I live my faith” were given a score of 1. The same was done to measure respondents’ level of adherence to traditional values of the Catholic doctrine. Strongly agreeing or agreeing somewhat with official Church stances was scored 2 and 1, respectively. These scores are significantly related: the greater the adherence to doctrine, the greater the compartmentalization (see table 11).

Those who compartmentalize greatly do not inform people in their parish of their homosexuality. A female respondent answered the question, “What impact does your sexuality have on your Christian faith?”: “I think my faith has no link whatsoever with my sexuality . . . faith came one day and has never left; what a funny idea to want to pair it with my sexuality!” These individuals do not try to reconcile faith and sexuality, as doing so would contradict their chosen value system; but they do experience varying degrees of difficulty with this way of being.”

**TABLE 10 Do people of your parish know that you are gay?**

|            | No negative experience |      | One or more negative experiences |      |
|------------|------------------------|------|----------------------------------|------|
| Not at all | 77                     | 47%  | 5                                | 17%  |
| Partially  | 60                     | 37%  | 19                               | 63%  |
| Completely | 27                     | 16%  | 6                                | 20%  |
| Total      | 164                    | 100% | 30                               | 100% |

**TABLE 11 Traditional values and compartmentalization**

| Sub-total of respondents attending a traditional church: 190 |                      |      |                      |      |
|--|----------------------|------|----------------------|------|
|  | Traditional values – |      | Traditional values + |      |
| Compartmentalization –                                       | 66                   | 62%  | 29                   | 39%  |
| Compartmentalization +                                       | 41                   | 39%  | 45                   | 61%  |
| Total  | 106                  | 100% | 74                   | 100% |

$P < 0.01$ ; khi2 = 8.55; ddl = 1 (VS)

Jean-Marc, interviewed in *Une nuée de témoins*, said: “On the one side you had the enthusiastic Christian, on the other side the homosexual who had numerous one-night stands. My sexuality had become compulsive, because I could not integrate my faith and my homosexuality. This double life became unbearable.”<sup>11</sup> While Serge, a Catholic, explained to me:

This paradox is still very present. I can’t be present in a group while seeming to lie, while being somewhat of an impostor; belonging to that group and at the same time hiding something for which I know I would be rejected if people knew . . . I can’t simultaneously start therapy in order to feel less guilty and want to be part of a church. But I also can’t be a believer outside a church. One cannot be a believer outside a group. At the same time I can’t join a homosexual group that practices faith while distancing itself from the church.<sup>12</sup>

Only twenty out of 395 respondents mention that they have found an inclusive church, and these are younger than others in the sample. Eleven out of twenty are less than 35 years old (55 percent versus 32 percent in the sample). They participate actively in the life of a church (on average, more than four hours per week). When they join an association of homosexual Christians, they do so in order to reconcile faith and sexuality, and to be activists (i.e., to facilitate change in church and society, or to fight homophobia). None of these respondents wants to change his or her sexual orientation; only three say that their sexual orientation is not ideal, and all of the others say that they feel totally at ease with their homosexuality (table 12). Their responses to the question “What

**TABLE 12 How would you describe your current attitude towards your own sexuality?**

| Response rate: 95%                  |    |     |
|-------------------------------------|----|-----|
| (20 Members of an inclusive church) |    |     |
| Completely at ease with it          | 16 | 80% |
| Not ideal, but put up with it       | 3  | 15% |
| Wish to change it if possible       | 0  | 0%  |

**TABLE 13** Cross the items illustrating the impact of your sexuality on your faith

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Members of an inclusive church: 20  
Multiple responses explain a total beyond 100%

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|   |    |     |
|---|----|-----|
| It strengthens my Christian faith         | 13 | 65% |
| It weakens my Christian faith             | 0  | 0%  |
| It challenges my Christian faith          | 4  | 20% |
| My sexuality is an expression of my faith | 9  | 45% |

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impact does your sexuality have on your Christian faith?" show that they have successfully integrated the homosexual and Christian dimensions of their identity: two-thirds selected the answer "It strengthens my Christian faith" (see table 13).

## DISCUSSION

### Strategies for Dealing with being Both Homosexual and Religious

When one considers oneself both a fervent Catholic and a homosexual, being authentically oneself may lead to a confrontation with what Leon Festinger calls cognitive dissonance: a tension between a value system to which one adheres and practices experienced as contradictory to that system.<sup>13</sup> To reduce cognitive dissonance, Festinger suggests, people employ several strategies. One is to change the behavior that creates the dissonance. In the context of homosexual Christians, one can reduce the dissonance by eliminating the social behavior that creates the conflict, by rejecting either the religious or the homosexual identity.

Another strategy is to change the social environment that reinforces the dissonance. Leaving the church removes the person from the social situation that creates the tension.<sup>14</sup> As noted by Yip, some non-heterosexual Christians continue to associate themselves with churches (as institutions), and some even faithfully serve institutions that do not affirm their homosexuality as an integral part of their self. Others, for reasons primarily related to sexuality, ignore or even challenge the church's official positions, although this does not necessarily lead to their leaving their local churches. Yip's results show that leaving institutional Christianity does not lead to a process of de-spiritualization. On the contrary, almost all still maintain their Christian identity; they leave the church in order to keep their Christian faith intact.<sup>15</sup>

A third strategy, noted in a number of studies of homosexuality and religion, is to add new cognitions to reduce the dissonance. Thumma, for instance, notes that the restructuring of previous cognitions mitigates

dissonance for evangelical Christians.<sup>16</sup> In a study of lesbian Christians, Mahaffy notes that when her respondents attributed their dissonance to their own beliefs, they were more likely to alter their cognitions than to leave the church or live with the tension.<sup>17</sup> Other studies have found several specific strategies are used to alter cognitions. These include:

- Creating a new definition of God. One can reframe God as embracing everyone, including those who deviate from the normative. God could be said to represent every gender, every race, sexual orientation, and every possible social status. Gays and lesbians, therefore, are reflections of God.<sup>18</sup>
- Reinterpreting problematic Bible verses, so that homosexuality is no longer a transgression that should make one feel guilty, but a sexuality created by God. This interpretation reduces the condemnation that some find in specific biblical passages by calling into question their relevance for a modern world. An elaborate exegesis can be made of these passages to show, for instance, that the Greek words translated as “homosexual” are either indefinable or refer to pederasty.
- Emphasizing biblical principles, such as love and acceptance of all persons, to counter the discriminatory attitudes of the church toward gays.
- Focusing on the image of God as Creator. Thus, gays and lesbians are God’s creations. God does not exclude anyone from his love, and thus loves gays and lesbians, who are his children.<sup>19</sup>
- All sexualities are created by God; GLBT people are said to be creations of God, and this obviates the need for “healing” strategies to rid the person of GLBT tendencies.<sup>20</sup>

Distinguishing between spirituality and religion is another way to reduce dissonance. “Spirituality,” when used in a (Christian) religious context, denotes a self-based construction of Christian faith, identity, and practice; “religion” suggests the observance of rituals and conformity to traditional church teaching.<sup>21</sup> Yip supports the thesis that in such cases the “authority” of a person’s religious orientation and faith has shifted from the institutional to the personal.<sup>22</sup> Continuing religious participation is possible in such cases, when the principal source of religious guidance is the self rather than the religious authority. When religious authority structures are held in low esteem, people can hold progressive views about their sexualities and relationships in contradiction to the official stances that normalize hegemonic heterosexuality. Similarly, in her study of homosexual Catholic priests, H el ene Buisson-Fenet has shown that the more they rely on their personal relationship with God as a source of authority, the less they feel accountable to the institution.<sup>23</sup>

Schnoor arrives at the same conclusions when exploring the ways gay Jews negotiate their religious and sexual identities. Some will repress

their gay inclinations so that they do not interfere with their Jewish lives. Some will place strong emphasis on their gayness, while significantly de-emphasizing their Jewish identities. Some are able to turn on or off their specific identities depending on the social context; by completely compartmentalizing their identities in this way, these “commuters” are able to enjoy both their gay and Jewish lives while keeping them separate. Finally, some integrate their gay and Jewish identities through participating in a gay Jewish synagogue, challenging Jewish theological perspectives on homosexuality, emphasizing linkages between Judaism and homosexuality, and using Jewish ethical values to guide them through the gay world.<sup>24</sup>

Another possible resolution of the tension between these identity dimensions is to integrate them through membership in a community of believers with a positive view of homosexuality. Rodriguez and Ouellette found in their study of members of the gay-positive Metropolitan Community Church of New York that a majority of participants had successfully integrated their homosexual and religious identities, and their being integrated was related to higher role involvement at MCC/NY.<sup>25</sup> Shokeid, too, in his ethnography of a gay synagogue in New York City, explains that attendance at this synagogue “was for many an act of restoring their cracked self-image and identity, combining its divided parts into one meaningful identity.”<sup>26</sup>

Respondents in the study under discussion in this article demonstrated many of the same identity negotiation strategies found by other researchers, albeit with some aspects that seem particular to France. These include: avoidance, identity negotiation, and switching.

### **Avoidance: Respondents Who Do Not Regularly Go to a Church Remain Faithful to the Church**

As discussed by Hirschman<sup>27</sup> in his study of the economic market, one can express dissatisfaction with a business or institution through defection, voicing criticism, or silent loyalty. Some of the homosexual Christians who responded to the survey choose, in order to remain true to their faith and themselves, to stop attending church—a kind of defection. Those who adhere to doctrine, but do not go to any church experience an isolated religiosity. Serge, when I interviewed him, mentioned:

When one belongs to the body of Christ, one cannot deviate . . . that’s why I don’t go there anymore. Sometimes, when one is alone, it leads to very strong internal difficulties, so strong that it leads to suicide. I thought about suicide because I felt partially or totally excluded from the church. When one no longer knows how to live with oneself, and if I have a choice to make, it will be rejecting faith, but what a pity . . . I am

suffocating. I am currently cultivating my survival instinct, and it will be stronger than the church.<sup>28</sup>

As shown by Andrew Yip<sup>29</sup> and Melissa Wilcox,<sup>30</sup> when gay and lesbian Christians leave the church behind, they do not necessarily abandon all of their religious practices and beliefs, nor do they abandon a feeling of relationship with the divine. In her book on religion in the United Kingdom, Grace Davie mentions an evolution toward “believing without belonging.”<sup>31</sup> The question “Why do you remain affiliated with a Church?” explores the feeling of belonging, though it involves an ambiguity, as mentioned before, in the meaning of the word “church.” For instance, some respondents who no longer go to church nevertheless answered the question. Only one of these interpreted “church” to mean “parish.” Some answered that they remain affiliated with a church (as an institution) because of their confidence that it can evolve and change. Others answered that they remain affiliated with a church (as a gathering of believers) because of its federative function (“I remain affiliated because it is federative, allowing those who believe to gather to praise God”); because it is a cultural heritage that is not so easy to abandon, complete with values to which they continue to adhere (“Raised in the Catholic faith, I remain attached to the values of justice, equality, support, and love of your fellows”); and because it is a place of spirituality (“I was born there, it gave me the Gospel! So I won’t bite the hand that feeds me! It’s my native religious culture, my spirituality started that way”). For these respondents, not going to church (as a parish) does not mean turning away from the Church (as an institution or a gathering of believers). They refuse to throw away the baby with the bathwater (“Just because the Church doesn’t understand a thing about sexuality doesn’t mean that all should be thrown away”).<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, those who respond that they are no longer affiliated with the Church have left it not out of doubt, but because they reject the institution and its ignorance; they have not abandoned their faith. Thierry, a Catholic, wrote that “the life which is within me no longer has any place in a church, where it smells too much of death, where I am in danger, because if God is taken away from me, my life will stop beating, and if my way of loving is taken away from me, where is that God of love? God’s burning love in me makes me leave this institution . . . I am in my closet, kept warm, and I rebuild myself, alone with God.”<sup>33</sup>

Respondents who no longer attend a parish have not lost faith, and some remain affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church as institution. They understand themselves to be loyal to the Church without confronting its hostile stances on sexuality. For these homosexual Christians who retain their faith but do not go to church, we can speak of a strategy of avoidance rather than defection or exit. They simply avoid putting themselves into situations where they will be confronted with dissonance.



## **Identity Negotiation**

Those who have not turned away from the church and continue to attend services, get involved, and participate actively still have to face the cognitive dissonance created by the contradiction between churchgoing and what they may experience as a deviant sexual practice or as an identity rejected by the Church. Gay churchgoers may be distinguished by their strategies for resolving their identity dilemma: repressing or altering their sexual identity, compartmentalization, reinterpretation, and integration.

Altering one's sexual identity is one option for managing the struggle. Among those who attend a traditional church and accept the church's official doctrine one finds the largest group who believe they would find abstinence or heterosexual marriage to be the most fulfilling sexual options. Some even struggle against their homosexual desire. One respondent answering the question "How did you manage the situation [after discovering your homosexuality]" said:

I think homosexuality is a procedural error in my identity, in the same way as others are born with a lopsided leg or a mental deficit. Christ, Saviour of the world, invites us to go beyond our handicaps and hang ups, and to bear our cross where we stand, without lying to ourselves about our human condition, subject to sin, but with a marvelous grace. God is bigger than my shortfalls.<sup>34</sup>

Separating one's sexual life from one's church life is another way to manage the contradiction. One respondent wrote, "I separate my sexual life from my life in church. I don't need priests. God loves me as I am, as He loves everyone. I accept who I am and I consider that homosexuality and religion can be dissociated." When asked why he remains affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, a homosexual clergyman answered, "It's the place where I carry out the ministry that I love: proclamation of the Gospel. I dissociate that ministry from my private life." This attitude can be considered compartmentalization of an individual's identity dimensions. The more people adhere to Catholic doctrine and, consequently, do not criticize Catholic stances about homosexuality, the more they use compartmentalization as a compromise to manage their dual identities.

Challenging traditional meanings is a third way in which respondents reduce the tension between their religious and sexual identities. Reinterpretation may involve distinguishing Church and faith as two different things. The Church is a gathering of believers. Thus, because of its human nature, the Church as an institution may be wrong. What counts according to these respondents is to practice an authentic and sincere faith: "I remain first and foremost faithful to my God who is good, who forgives, who probes hearts," wrote one. "There is a difference

between Church and faith in God. The Church is about gathering,” responded another. Although the Church remains a gathering place for believers, the price of such integration of identity dimensions is the delegitimation of the Church’s authority. Instead of compartmentalizing their own identities, some people compartmentalize the Church itself. On one side are the doctrines of the Church as an institution and its stances against homosexuality, while on the other are priests who are more accepting and benevolent toward gays and lesbians.

Most of those who criticize the institutional discourse do not turn away from places of worship or from their faith. Their detachment manifests itself instead through an ability to filter religious texts and to construct an individual religiosity; the latter can take the shape of a spiritual life without participation in a community. The risk of such individualism is painful isolation, but joining a Christian LGBT association or an inclusive church can lead to a shared religiosity.

Finally, those who have found an “inclusive” church that is particularly welcoming to sexual minorities experiment with the integration of their faith and sexual identity. One respondent explained, “I’ve chosen the minority way of the gay Christian movement, and I have left the traditional church for a new, alternative and inclusive church.” Another wrote, “I continue practicing my Christian faith, since this is where I found God for the first time. But I am not fixated on it, as I have discovered another church that is more liberal and inclusive and that accepts my homosexuality.” Such an integration of identity dimensions is made possible through keeping the Church as an institution at a distance and joining a different type of church, an “inclusive” one.

Homosexual Christians manage the coexistence of their faith, their need to belong to a community of believers, and their homosexuality differently, depending on whether they participate in a traditional church or whether they have distanced themselves from official church doctrine. This act of distancing oneself may be expressed through a reinterpretation of biblical texts (“Forbidden acts have no link whatsoever with the love I feel for my partner”), their recontextualization (“The texts stem from a certain time period”), or a reappropriation of evangelical principles (“God loves me as I am,” or even, “I am an expression of God’s will”).

Some of those who continue going to a traditional church while criticizing the institutional discourse do not hide their sexual orientation. They are openly gay-identified and can be perceived as “unrepentant,” “self-affirming,” or “practicing.”<sup>35</sup> Their visibility resembles the notion developed by Hirschman of “voice”: they are open about the fact that they continue going to church in order incite change from within. A respondent answering the question “Why do you remain affiliated with your church” says: “Because one can make it change only by being a member . . . It is possible within one’s community of believers . . . It is more difficult with the Church as an institution, and we will not reap the

benefits, but our acts will certainly lead to changes over the next few decades. I have to admit that it takes patience that we don't always have!"

Stéphane, a Catholic layperson who rents the parsonage, is probably the most telling example of this integration. He is very active in the life of his parish, he regularly organizes the lesbian and gay pride celebration in his town; his homosexuality as well as his involvement in the LGBT community are known to all.

I have been told the usual clichés as well as that it was not possible to simultaneously serve God at the altar and at the gay pride parade! That was a trigger for me; I have come to understand that the opposite is true! But I nonetheless felt a deep exclusion, which only served to increase my strength and certainty for what was to come. I have realized that it was not incompatible, on the contrary that it was even complementary. Today, I still live in the presbytery and I am even more active; in the meantime, a new priest has been appointed. And, to beat all . . . they have settled a gay man on the second floor of the presbytery!

### **“Switching” to an Inclusive Church**

It is possible that homosexuals receive a greater welcome within traditional churches than Church discourse would lead us to believe. Some Christian homosexuals do not desert traditional churches, either because their loyalty prevents them from looking for alternatives in a cultural context where Catholicism is strongly legitimized, or because, in the end, the welcome they receive in their home traditional parish suits them just fine. Few of the Christian homosexuals in this study turn to inclusive churches (only twenty out of 395), and are a bit younger than the mean. Most of Christian homosexual associations do not call themselves churches, and only a very few of them do so. The two most important Christian homosexual associations (David et Jonathan, and Devenir un en Christ) do not call themselves a church, and are not considered so by their members. They do not celebrate Eucharist or Sunday services. Furthermore, they try to maintain a dialogue rather than be in a competition with the church, something that is not the case among inclusive churches. That the latter celebrate the Eucharist situates them as competitors of the Roman Catholic Church particularly, and of mainstream churches more generally. Thus, turning toward an inclusive church looks more like a conversion; a person leaves behind one affiliation in order to find a new community.

For Scott Thumma, attending an alternative inclusive church is not a dramatic change; it is an “alternation” of a religious tradition.<sup>36</sup> Gay churches in the United States are not a diluted version of mainstream religious bodies; they have tried to be “as real as” or “better than” the mainstream.<sup>37</sup> In France, there are no such alternatives to the mainstream

Roman Catholic Church. Turning toward an inclusive church is a sort of conversion to another form of religion. Among the twenty respondents who have switched to such a church, only six are Catholic.

I was surprised that among those attending a church, only a very few said that they were members of an inclusive church. After all, such a church offers the possibility to reconcile faith, worship, and sexual identity. To understand this phenomenon, I conducted in-depth interviews with some of the questionnaire respondents and members of these churches. I also studied testimonials collected for publication by those in charge of an inclusive church. The assumption that turning toward an inclusive church is like a conversion is confirmed by member testimonials. Indeed, these narratives mention four different moments that are present to a degree in any conversion narrative: preliminary chaos, separation, elaboration of a new meaning, and finally, proselytizing.<sup>38</sup>

Thumma writes that cognitive dissonance serves as a motivational force only when a person perceives the inconsistency to be intolerable.<sup>39</sup> Such intolerable inconsistency forms a part of the first moment of conversion: chaos. Théophile, a Protestant, describes this experience.

Simultaneously, I discovered my sexuality, or rather my homosexuality. It was a shock to me. At the same time that I received faith and that I discovered the Lord, I realized that I was attracted to men. I was very frightened and I decided to fight my homosexual tendencies. So I prayed. I prayed that God would suppress my bad desires. I prayed so much that He would deliver me from these bad thoughts that oppressed me. My prayers were fervent and sincere. I thus completely repressed my feelings. I suffered a lot. I wanted to commit suicide, to end it all because there was no way out. I felt very bad. Publicly, I was a faithful churchgoer and believer. I talked to all my class friends about Jesus, about his works of salvation and grace. But privately, I was close to the precipice. Instead of disappearing, my homosexual feelings and desire became more intense. I became more and more repressed as my homosexual desire became stronger. This struggle exhausted me psychologically. I did not understand why God did not listen to my prayers, why I was homosexual, why I was like this. Did I have to suffer my whole life? Did God want all of my life to be only suffering? I fought my homosexual desires for eight years.<sup>40</sup>

Théophile's story also illustrates the second moment of conversion, separation:

I had two friends, in Paris. At the same time I went to an evangelical Protestant church. It was, of course, forbidden to be homosexual in that church. It was a sin. I felt very bad. Indeed, I could not be myself in that church and I experienced a deep unease, because I always had the feeling that I was being hypocritical. I wondered if I would have to definitively give up my homosexual feelings to be able to remain within a church. I saw my future: being chaste and celibate for the rest of my

life. So I figured there had to be something else. I looked up information on “homosexuality and Christianity” on the Internet. I searched a lot. And I found it. I discovered a Protestant federation of churches open to homosexuals (UFMCC).<sup>41</sup>

In any conversion process, the third moment involves denigrating one’s previous beliefs and practices. Gay Christians accomplish this by reducing the condemnation implied in specific biblical passages, calling into question the passages’ relevance for a modern world, and emphasizing what they regard as attitudes more faithful to the Bible, such as love and acceptance of all persons. One then has to elaborate a new meaning. Gay Christians reason that since “it is God’s will for us to be gay and Christian,” no other action is required than to follow God’s plans. Théophile, for example, illustrates this step.

On the Internet, I found Christian texts discussing homosexuality in a totally new way! It was no longer about condemnation, but rather about Love. God loves us as we are with an infinite love. What is condemned in the Bible isn’t homosexuality—globally, as such—but rather debauchery and sexual violence, which can be produced by both heterosexuals and homosexuals. But the Bible does not at all condemn a love relationship uniting two beings!! So I met Christians who lived their homosexuality!!! That was proof for me that one can be Christian and homosexual, and not one or the other. What a relief! God put me in contact with people who had his Spirit and who lived their homosexuality!!<sup>42</sup>

Some break from the traditional church, such as the respondent who indicated, “This is how I managed to reconcile homosexuality and Christian faith: I distanced myself from the official discourse of traditional churches that condemn homosexuality.” Others reinterpret or reject accepted church. “I read the scriptures and I changed my approach to the biblical text,” wrote one. “I tried to understand what is essential in the message of the Gospels: it’s all about Love, and not about a rigid and intolerant fidelity to a supposed ‘true doctrine’.” Still others seek to elaborate a new meaning of “church.” “I met other homosexual Christians who truly live their faith and their homosexuality. I found churches open to homosexuals.”<sup>43</sup>

The conversion narrative takes shape during a fourth phase: the exemplary phase, or spreading the good word. In this stage, the convert begins to present his or her conversion pathway to others. Any conversion requires that one emancipate oneself from one’s previous affiliation—in this case, from a relationship of submission to an institution thought to represent all Christians. Not everyone is willing to consider such a step, and so not all break with traditional churches.

The penultimate phase, the elaboration of a new meaning by way of a reinterpretation of texts or a reappropriation of the Gospels so as to integrate one's different identity dimensions, leads to the construction of a religiosity that is simultaneously individual and shared: individual because the materials needed for such a reconstruction are found within oneself, and shared because coming together within a community of believers (whether a church or an association) strengthens and legitimizes—through the sharing of ritual practices with others like oneself—this new integration of two formerly contradictory identities. Going to an inclusive church is a way to transform a religion into a personal resource for self-actualization. Certain “Christian practices and attitudes” are thus assembled in a Christian identity that is able to integrate the homosexual identity dimension. It is possible to compare these inclusive churches with sects (as defined by Max Weber<sup>44</sup> and Ernst Troeltsch<sup>45</sup>): a voluntary grouping of believers that one joins after a personal conversion, and a grouping that is opposed to church, the natural community in which one is born.

Three hypotheses explain why so few homosexual Catholics in this study turned toward an inclusive church. First, the dissonance between the identities functions as motive for change, or dissonance reduction, only if the person perceives this state as problematic.<sup>46</sup> The second hypothesis is linked to the specific French Catholic context. Because Catholicism permeates French culture, the pluralism of churches is not encouraged as it is in largely Protestant, Anglo-Saxon countries. As noted by Bromley,<sup>47</sup> organizations in the low-tension positions within their cultures are most likely to be able to control the exit process. Though France is a secularized country, the Roman Catholic Church is among this type of organization. The Roman Catholic Church in France is experienced as *the* legitimate place where believers gather, so it is difficult for other churches to find an audience; such an audience has to give up a cultural and religious heritage and to follow a conversion-like trajectory. Not everyone is willing to do so, since this would involve turning one's back on a previous affiliation. The third hypothesis can be derived from the affiliation/disaffiliation model of Stark and Bainbridge.<sup>48</sup> Put broadly, in this model, the disaffiliation from a conventional religious organization and affiliation to cults or sects, depend upon the individual's “stake in conformity,” the relative strength of the conventional religious organization, and the “turning points” in the individual's life. Discovering one's homosexuality is undoubtedly a “turning point” that can lead to decrease the “stake in conformity.” Before being able to turn toward an inclusive church, one has to change his/her beliefs about homosexuality and therefore to be less in conformity with his/her social environment.

## CONCLUSION

Independent of participation in a community of believers, many gay or lesbian Christians develop a personal religion that allows for the reconciliation of faith with homosexual practices, and a gay or lesbian identity. For some homosexuals, this religious “individualism” leads to the maintenance of a bond with a traditional church, or to finding a mainstream but welcoming church; for others, the development of a personal religiosity takes place without any form of community, or leads to a search for Christian homosexual associations or “inclusive” churches. This societal shift toward religious individualism may facilitate LGBT Christians’ efforts to create coherence between their religious and sexual identities.<sup>49</sup>

Modernity implies the transformation of religious “belonging” identities into more private “believing” identities. The authenticity of one’s spiritual seeking appears to be more important than being in conformity with religious authorities. This accentuation of the importance of the subject’s autonomy does not mean, however, that the subject can do without some form of shared meaning. As Danièle Hervieu-Léger notes, modernity’s move toward individualization does not at all conflict with looking for a community where individuals can validate their “do it yourself” spiritual experience.

In this study, some Christian homosexuals choose to stop attending places of worship in order to be able to manage the contradiction between their two conflicting identity dimensions. Those who choose to leave the Church do not, therefore, abandon all religious practices. The others, those who go to a church, are often condemned for not giving up the other group to which they belong. Attending a church not known for its openness to sexual minorities does not necessarily suggest the absence of critical thought about the church’s official discourse. Thus, the distribution of church-going respondents is on a continuum, from adherence to doctrine and an effort to suppress “chaotic” homosexual desire, to militancy with the aim of changing the church from the inside via involvement and participation in a parish, where one may or may not hide one’s homosexuality.

In late modern society, the obligation to be oneself is accompanied by the valuing of sincerity and the demand for authenticity. Hiding one’s homosexuality may result in a lot of suffering related to feeling guilty because of one’s transgressive sexuality, but also one’s lack of authenticity. This can lead to severe compartmentalization.

The most significant finding of this study concerns the loyalty that respondents demonstrate toward the Roman Catholic Church. Many attend a traditional church, giving their time and energy to parish activities. Not all of them compartmentalize their homosexual and religious identities; some feel their parish is not as hostile to homosexuality as are

the Church's official stances. It seems that the conflict is resolved by compartmentalizing the Church itself; doctrine and pastoral practice become two separate entities. Gay and lesbian Christians' loyalty to their churches, and the strategies they use to stay loyal, can probably be linked to the legitimacy of Catholicism in the French cultural context and to the hegemonic structure of Catholicism as a whole. There are no pluralistic denominations of the (Roman) Catholic religion, so that switching to a more welcoming church is experienced as a more dramatic rupture than it is in other countries where the "religious market" is diversified.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Frédéric Lenoir, "Vers un catholicisme minoritaire?" *Le monde des Religions* 21 (2007): 5.

<sup>2</sup> Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Catholicisme: La fin d'un monde* (Paris: Bayard, 2003), 133.

<sup>3</sup> See <[www.ehess.fr/centres/ceifr/pages/glb.html](http://www.ehess.fr/centres/ceifr/pages/glb.html)>, accessed 1 August 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Thierry Sereno, ed., *Une nuée de témoins: Expériences de vie et de foi de chrétien/ne/s lesbiennes, gays, transgenres et de leurs proches* (Montpellier: Edition Croix Arc en Ciel, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *La religion en miettes ou la question des sectes* (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 2001), 84–85.

<sup>6</sup> Clarisse Fabre and Eric Fasson, *Liberté, égalité, sexualité* (Paris: Belfond, 2003), 77–78.

<sup>7</sup> Thanks to the association David et Jonathan, and Nicolas Brémont d'Ars, associate researcher at the CEIFR.

<sup>8</sup> Hélène Buisson-Fenet, *Un sexe problématique: L'Église et l'homosexualité masculine en France (1971–2000)* (Saint-Denis: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> "Enquête presse gay 2004," <[www.invs.sante.fr/publications/2007/epg\\_2004/index.html](http://www.invs.sante.fr/publications/2007/epg_2004/index.html)>, accessed 27 July 2007.

<sup>10</sup> See <<http://comingout.free.fr/gsd2f04.htm>>, accessed 27 July 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Marc, in *Une nuée de témoins*, 53; translation by the author.

<sup>12</sup> Serge, interview with author, 16 June 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957).

<sup>14</sup> Andrew K. T. Yip, "Leaving the Church to Keep My Faith: The Lived Experiences of Non-Heterosexual Christians," in *Joining and Leaving Religion: Research Perspectives*, ed. L. G. D. Francis and Y. J. Katz, 129–45 (Leicester, U.K.: Gracewing, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> Yip, "Leaving the Church to Keep My Faith."

<sup>16</sup> Scott Thumma, "Negotiating a Religious Identity: The Case of the Gay Evangelical," *Sociological Analysis* 52, no. 4 (1991): 333–47.



<sup>17</sup> Kimberley A. Mahaffy, "Cognitive Dissonance and Its Resolution: A Study of Lesbian Christians," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35, no. 4 (1996): 392–402.

<sup>18</sup> Pamela Leong, "Religion, Flesh, and Blood : Re-Creating Religious Culture in the Context of HIV/AIDS," *Sociology of Religion* 67, no. 3 (2006): 298–99.

<sup>19</sup> Thumma, "Negotiating a Religious Identity," 340–41.

<sup>20</sup> Melissa M. Wilcox, "When Sheila's a Lesbian: Religious Individualism among LGBT Christians," *Sociology of Religion*, 63, no. 4 (2002): 504–505.

<sup>21</sup> In this article, "traditional" refers to mainstream churches, not particularly known for their openness toward sexual minorities.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew K. T. Yip, "The Persistence of Faith Among Nonheterosexual Christians: Evidence for the Neosecularization Thesis of Religious Transformation," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41, no. 2 (2002): 209.

<sup>23</sup> H  l  ne Buisson-Fenet, "De la dissonance    l'esprit critique: Sur quelques fa  ons d'  tre clerc et homosexuel," *Social Compass* 46, no. 1 (1999): 80.

<sup>24</sup> Randal A Schnoor, "Being Gay and Jewish: Negotiating Intersecting Identities," *Sociology of Religion* 67, no. 1 (2006): 52.

<sup>25</sup> Eric M. Rodriguez and Suzanne C. Ouellette, "Gay and Lesbian Christians: Homosexual and Religious Identity Integration in the Members and Participants of a Gay-Positive Church," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 39, no. 3 (2000): 333.

<sup>26</sup> Moshe Shokeid, *A Gay Synagogue in New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 239.

<sup>27</sup> Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970).

<sup>28</sup> Serge, interview with author, 16 June 2005.

<sup>29</sup> Yip, "Leaving the Church to Keep My Faith."

<sup>30</sup> Melissa M. Wilcox, "A Religion of One's Own: Gender and LGBT Religiosities," In *Gay Religion*, ed. Scott Thumma and Edward R. Gray (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2002), 203–220.

<sup>31</sup> Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> All quotations taken from questionnaires; translation by the author.

<sup>33</sup> Thierry, in *Une nu  e de t  moins*, 13–14; translation by the author.

<sup>34</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations in this section taken from the questionnaires; translation by the author.

<sup>35</sup> Gary David Comstock, *Unrepentant, Self-Affirming, Practicing: Lesbian/Bisexual/Gay People Within Organized Religion* (New York: Continuum, 1996).

<sup>36</sup> Thumma, "Negotiating a Religious Identity," 334.

<sup>37</sup> Comstock, *Unrepentant, Self-Affirming, Practicing*, 74.

<sup>38</sup> Dani  le Hervieu-L  ger, *Le p  lerin et le converti: La religion en mouvement* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999), 129–32.

<sup>39</sup> Thumma, "Negotiating a Religious Identity," 335.

<sup>40</sup> Th  ophile, in *Une nu  e de t  moins*, 7; translation by the author.

<sup>41</sup> UFMCC (<[www.mccchurch.org](http://www.mccchurch.org)>) is the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, an international fellowship of Christian congregations with a specific, positive outreach to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities. Founded by Troy Perry in October 1968, there are currently 350 member congregations in twenty-four countries. MCC Montpellier is a member of the UFMCC.

<sup>42</sup> Théophile, in *Une nuée de témoins*, 9; translation by the author.

<sup>43</sup> All quotations taken from questionnaires; translation by the author.

<sup>44</sup> Max Weber, “Les sectes protestantes et l’esprit du capitalisme,” in *L’Éthique Protestante et L’Esprit du Capitalisme* (Paris: Presses Pocket, 1991), 236.

<sup>45</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, vol. 2 (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 513.

<sup>46</sup> Thumma, “Negotiating a Religious Identity,” 335.

<sup>47</sup> David G. Bromley, “Linking Social Structure and the Exit Process in Religious Organizations: Defectors, Whistle-Blowers, and Apostates,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37, no. 1 (1998): 145.

<sup>48</sup> Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987).

<sup>49</sup> Wilcox, “When Sheila’s a Lesbian,” 500.