

# Why Do Gay Christians Go To Church? Foucault and Religion

by

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# Abstract

This thesis explores the subjective experiences of New Zealand men who identify as gay and Christian. In particular, the study questions why gay men attend churches that have traditionally not welcomed or supported them. A small number of international studies have investigated gay men who have left the Church but there are few studies of those who stay. This research uses the work of Michel Foucault to theorise the contours of gay Christianity. Foucault's work has been little used in the sociology of religion. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with twelve men who identified as gay and Christian. Transcripts were examined using theoretically based thematic analysis, and three resulting themes are explored. The first theme describes religious exclusion of gay men and the value of supportive networks for gay Christians. The second theme theorises the concept of religious belief as both a type of knowledge/power and a practice, as well as exploring connections between religion and power. The third theme focuses on subjectivity, analysing ways in which those interviewed constructed an integrated gay and Christian self. Church attendance by gay men is attributed to three factors summarised as reasons of faith, reasons of fellowship and reasons of identity. These findings contribute to academic literature concerning religion, gay identity and Foucault, and there is scope for further research in these areas. The use of Foucault's work in this way may contribute to theoretical and methodological developments in the sociology of religion.

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For Carolyn.

My sister, who died during the writing of this thesis.

You would have been proud.

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# Abbreviations

MC	<i>Madness and civilisation</i> (Foucault, 1961).
OT	<i>The order of things</i> (Foucault, 1966).
AK	<i>The archaeology of knowledge</i> (Foucault, 1969).
DP	<i>Discipline and punish. The birth of the prison.</i> (Foucault, 1975).
HS1	<i>The history of sexuality volume 1</i> (Foucault, 1976a).
HS2	<i>The use of pleasure.</i> (Foucault, 1984a).
HS3	<i>The care of the self.</i> (Foucault, 1984b).

# 1

## Introduction

*“I definitely am a Christian believer ...I have a really strong belief that Christ is my saviour and that he died to save me.”*

– Kelvin, one of the men interviewed for this study.

When Anthony Venn-Brown resigned as pastor of a large Australian pentecostal church few suspected the struggle he had been through. But in spite of his highly successful career, the Assemblies of God could not accept what was seen as an almost unfathomable sin– Venn-Brown was homosexual. “According to my belief system,” writes Venn-Brown (2004:11), “being a Christian and a homosexual was not possible. The two were incompatible, in total opposition, in fact.”

Christian churches are often regarded as destructive for gay men and women. For example, when Melissa Wilcox heard about a friend who had joined an LGBT<sup>1</sup> Christian church, she wrote, “I could not fathom why any self-respecting feminist lesbian would want to be involved with a religion so heavily implicated in the battles against women’s and LGBT rights” (Wilcox, 2003: 10). For both insiders and outsiders the idea of a homosexual Christian seems impossible. In light of such opposition Bouldrey (1995) and Schallenberger (1998) agree that for religious homosexuals the question is whether they can claim a place in the church or remain marginalised and estranged from organised religion. However, I have met gay men who remain active in the Christian Church<sup>2</sup>, even

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<sup>1</sup> Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender.

<sup>2</sup> Where “Church” is used for brevity, the entire group of Christian churches is intended. Also see the definition of terms in chapter two.



in denominations traditionally regarded as conservative. While I do not identify as either Christian or gay, I have a number of friends in both communities. In recent years I have met a number of Christians who see nothing wrong with homosexuality, some of whom are gay or lesbian themselves. The lives of these people captured my interest and led to the present study.

In New Zealand and internationally there are studies which document negative Church-gay discourses. However, this research looks at an anomaly– gay men who come *out* to the Church and who stay *in* the Church. My particular question asks why they stay– it seems fairly clear why one would leave. What do they get out of religious faith. What discourses influence them as gay and Christian? How do they create themselves as religious– and gay– subjects? To answer these questions I interviewed twelve men who identified as both gay and Christian, and who regularly attended a Christian church. This thesis documents the results.

Being gay in the Christian churches has often meant a process of coming to terms with staying in an often hostile situation (Hunt, 2009: 14). Some gay people opt to stay in the church without “coming out”. Ellison (2009: 2, emphasis original) writes, “for most gay women and men, coming out *in* the church has meant coming out *of* the church”. This was not the case with the men in this study; most of them were “out” to the churches they attend, even though many of these churches would traditionally not have accepted openly gay members.

The interview transcripts for this research were analysed using themes developed from extensive reading of the theoretical work of Michel Foucault. Foucault was initially chosen from personal interest; I had adopted him as a theorist I wanted to thoroughly understand. Somewhat fortuitously, I discovered Foucault has been little used in sociology of religion. Thus the current research is an attempt at a Foucauldian-influenced view of contemporary Christianity, as well as the particular challenges faced by homosexual Christians. In a late interview Foucault said:

“I would like to understand how certain sexual behaviours become problems at a given moment, give rise to analyses, constitute objects of knowledge.”

(Foucault, 1982c: 368).

Assuming that homosexuality can be considered a “sexual behaviour”<sup>3</sup>, for Christian churches this behaviour has become a problem. In Foucault’s view, this problem has become an object of knowledge— what Christianity “knows” about homosexuality. The present study attempts to analyse the “problem” of gay Christians, and perhaps generate further knowledge. Foucault wrote comparatively little on religion, yet he did leave some significant pointers, particularly from what has been referred to as his later “ethical” period (Oksala, 2007). In this research Foucault’s concepts of discourse, power/knowledge, techniques of the self, and the subject form the basis for a Foucauldian theory of religion.

By way of background, New Zealand society has undergone significant social changes around homosexuality in the last thirty years. The *Homosexual Law Reform Bill* (1986) decriminalised homosexual acts and the *Human Rights Act* (1993) extended protection from discrimination to non-heterosexuals. More recently the *Civil Union Act* (2004) gave marriage-like rights to gay (and other) couples wishing to commit in this way. During the writing of this thesis the *Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Act* (2013) was passed, allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry in the same way as traditional heterosexual unions. It is unclear whether there has been significant change around homosexuality in the Church in the same period.

The rejection of homosexuality by New Zealand Christians is so well attested it almost seems unnecessary to provide evidence. To give a few examples, a 1972 “Gay Liberation” manifesto stated that oppression of homosexuals happened in the family, the school and the workplace, “supported by the church, the media and the law.” (Brickell, 2008: 308). The manifesto identifies the Church as one of the three main oppressors of gay people. In the 1980s Christian groups opposed homosexual law reform, drawing links between AIDS and homosexuality. During 1982 to 1984, “Challenge Weekly”, a New Zealand Christian newspaper, ran numerous articles opposing law reform. The title of Craig Young’s (2004) paper says it all: “Queers versus the New Zealand Christian Right 1985-1998.” However, this thesis attempts to show another perspective on this narrative. Even Anthony Venn-Brown, whose story opens this introduction, has returned to the pentecostal church, wryly calling himself “the first openly gay pentecostal in Australia” (Venn-Brown, 2008).

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<sup>3</sup>Homosexuality could also be considered, for example, an orientation, an identity, or something else. Definitions of homosexuality are discussed in chapter two.

The main body of this thesis contains seven chapters. The second chapter begins by defining terms, followed by a review of relevant literature, mainly around homosexuality, religion and Foucault. Chapter three lays the theoretical foundation for this study, beginning with an overview of the work of Michel Foucault. In particular this chapter considers how Foucault's theories might be applied to sociology of religion. The methods used to collect and analyse the interview data are discussed in chapter four. Thematic analysis is chosen as the approach to analysis. Themes are patterns or regularities identified in the transcripts by the researcher. Furthermore, this thesis is a *theoretical* thematic analysis, where the themes are derived primarily from the underlying theories of Foucault. In seeking how the discourses of Christianity and homosexuality are enacted and embodied by the interviewees I analyse the transcripts under the categories of *Belonging and Exclusion* (chapter five); *Belief, Knowledge, Power* (chapter six) and *The Care of the Christian Self* (chapter seven). Chapter five presents the value of supportive communities for gay Christians, along with the difficulties of their exclusion by religious institutions. The use of the term "belief" was identified in the data; chapter six considers religious belief as both a form of knowledge and as a practice. This chapter also presents ideas around religion and power related to the interview data. In chapter seven techniques of Christian selfhood are described, and a key question is asked: Why do gay Christians attend church? Three answers are developed from the data: faith, fellowship and identity. Research conclusions are summarised in chapter eight.

## 2

## Definitions and Literature Review

*“One writes to become someone other than who one is.”*

(Foucault, 1983d: 404)

## 2.1 Defining Terms

Describing the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century religious person is complex and is reflected in the challenges of terminology. This research draws on work in the sociology of religion and in gay and lesbian studies. Within these fields there are contested terms which came up frequently in this research and require clarification. These include *religion*, *Christian*, *church*, *liberal*, *conservative*, *denomination* and *homosexual*.

**Religion.**

As Linda Woodhead (2011: 121) makes clear, it has proved impossible to fix a definition of religion upon which a majority can agree. Recognising this, and after reviewing a variety of approaches, I follow Hunt (2005: 13-22) who suggests a minimal “substantive” definition of religion: Religion centres on a “belief in spiritual beings”. In addition, a Foucauldian treatment of religion as *apparatus* is developed in chapter three. In this study I seek to utilise these two definitions of religion without attempting to reconcile them.

### Christian.

Sociological definitions of “Christian” vary considerably and have been described as either substantive, functional, symbolic, affective, or postmodern (Roberts, 1990; Harrison, 2007; Hunt, 2005). In the study I attempt to use Danielle Hervieu-Léger’s (1998) functional-affective description of Christian groups. She suggests Christian identity can be mapped against four dimensions (fig. 1):

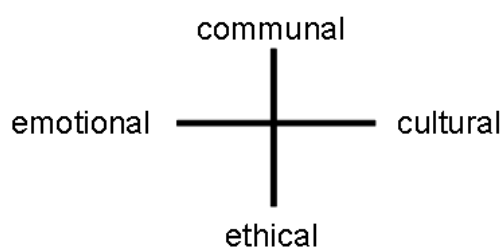


Fig. 1

The *communal* dimension defines the boundary of the group, who is “in” and who is “out”. It includes formal markers of belonging such as baptism and church attendance. The *ethical* dimension concerns the individual’s acceptance of the values of the religion. The *cultural* dimension embraces the intellectual and practical elements of the tradition. For example, the group’s doctrines, books, interpretations and ritual practices such as prayer. Finally, the *emotional* dimension concerns the emotional experience of identifying as a Christian, including collective feelings.

Alternatively, Foucault (1980a: 169) defines Christianity as a “confession”:

“Christianity is a confession. That means that Christianity belongs to a very special type of religion, the religions which impose on those who practise them obligations of truth.”

To locate participants for this study I used the definition: “People who self-identify as Christian and who attend a church at least once per month”. This became the most useful definition.

### **Church.**

A church is a religious organisation that has a division of labour between laity and clergy (McLennan *et al*, 2010: 318). Churches are large organisations that claim a “unique access to spiritual truth” and they order the “spiritual, moral, ethical and social life of an entire people” (Bruce and Yearley, 2006: 260). Churches are typically seen as orthodox and respectable whereas sects and cults are viewed as deviant (McLennan *et al*, 2010: 319). Churches are comprised of groups with differing theologies and methods of governance, called denominations.

### **Conservative and Liberal (Churches).**

“Conservative” and “liberal” can refer both to the theological beliefs of churches and to their social mores. Conservative churches usually hold to a traditional view of the Bible, and tend to have conservative moral and political views. Conservative churches tend to promote “family values”, where families are defined as married heterosexual parents with children. They usually support sexual activity only within heterosexual marriage.

Wellman (2008: 12) uses the term “evangelical” as an umbrella term for conservative Christians in American culture. He writes:

“Evangelicals are generally those who emphasize conversion (the need for a personal decision to follow Jesus Christ), missionary activity (the obligation to share with others this need for conversion), biblicism (seeing the Scriptures as the sole authority for belief and action), and crucicentrism (the belief in Christ’s sacrifice on the cross as atonement for human sin).”

Wellman further divides this group into “fundamentalist”, “pentecostal-charismatic” and “neo-evangelical” groups. Conversely, “liberal” churches tend to be more open to divergence from historic orthodoxy. The term “liberal” usually refers to theologically liberal Protestant churches which also tend to be socially liberal, supporting such movements as women’s rights, gay rights, and environmental issues. These churches can be more accommodating of sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage.

Wellman (2008: 4) writes:

“Liberal Protestant congregations are defined by a distinct set of ideological characteristics. They most often propose that Jesus is a model of radical inclusiveness—fashioning an ethic that emphasizes hospitality to those marginalized in society—justify themselves in their faith tradition as much by reason as by tradition or scripture, and leave decision making about faith or personal morality in the responsible hands of the individual. The moral worldview of these churches reflects a liberal theology that advocates for the concerns and rights of homosexuals; and supports justice causes such as peace, ending homelessness, and ecological stewardship. Even as the liberal moral worldview tends toward libertarianism in personal morality, it proffers stands on social justice and broader support for the ‘common good’.”

Green (2004) offers a compatible model which subdivides mainline Protestants, evangelical Protestants and Catholics into “traditionalist”, “centrist”, and “modernist” ideological categories. Although these writers are working in the context of the USA, the New Zealand situation is similar.

As a generalisation, in New Zealand I apply “conservative” to Orthodox denominations, to Protestant denominations such as the Open Brethren, Baptist, Ratana, Reformed, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventist; and Pentecostal churches such as Assemblies of God, Apostolic, Destiny and Elim churches. However, individual churches can vary from their denomination’s expected cultural-theological paradigm. The spectrum of individual churches within the “main four” Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Catholic denominations in New Zealand (McLennan *et al*, 2010: 322) is less clear and can range from highly “liberal” to highly “conservative”. Hoverd (2008: 50) shows that census statistics, for example, are unable to measure evangelical strains within these denominations.

However, defining churches as conservative or liberal is problematic; Christian views can be deeply nuanced, even in respect to just one issue (Wellman, 2008). There is no necessary corollary between being theologically conservative and socially conservative. The difficulty of defining the beliefs held by particular denominations, churches or

individuals is borne out in the responses from participants in this study. Hunt (2009: 21) comments:

“To say that there exists a theological polarisation of Christian viewpoints, of conservatives versus liberals is, nevertheless, a gross simplification and distortion of the positions taken by the churches on a range of gay issues. The reality is that Christian stances are now extremely complex and divergent given the explosive mixture of biblical hermeneutics, ‘scientific’ evidence and the extension of human rights issues”.

With this understanding I use the terms “conservative” and “liberal” as a necessary convenience; the wide range of views within such churches need to be kept in mind.

### **Homosexual, Gay, LGBT.**

“Lengthy notes on terminology are *de rigueur* in any study of LGBT people”, writes Wilcox (2003: 183). My task is somewhat simplified in that I am only studying homosexual men, however there is much theoretical and community discussion of terminology<sup>4</sup>. It has been argued that across cultures and across time, and even within local cultures such as a city there are multiple kinds of “homosexualities”. The argument is that no single type of homosexual with a unique set of characteristics exists (Murray, 2000: 1). In this view the gay Christian man could be seen as one among many types.

Recent debate has culminated in homosexuality being defined as “sexual attraction, sexual behavior, political self-identification or some combination of these factors” (Parke, 2007). Following this definition of sexuality as sexual attraction, sexual behaviour and political self-identification, for the purposes of this study I define “homosexual” as 1) a man who is romantically attracted to men; and 2) desires sexual contact with men; and 3) defines themselves in their discourse as gay. The first point is intended to exclude “men who have sex with men” but who may otherwise prefer sex with women. Point two is intended to eliminate men who may merely derive deep friendship and love from other men, but would

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<sup>4</sup> For example, the term (homo) sexuality. Jobson (1999: 8) separates the prefix (homo) to disrupt a universalised discourse of sexuality and point out the endemic homo/hetero divide within sexuality discourse.



not identify as homosexual in their sexual desires.<sup>5</sup> The third element is derived from Foucault; it is concerned with discourse– “what may be said”– about oneself. If a man does not speak about himself as gay, he may simply be a man who “has sex with other men”.<sup>6</sup>

For Foucault, homosexuality is an “*ascesis*”, a “practice of the self” (Piontek, 2006:41). Piontek interprets *ascesis* as “working on the self to transform it into a source of independence and pleasure”. “Foucault came to understand both philosophy and homosexuality as modern versions of *ascesis*.” (Piontek, 2006:41).

In an interview with a French gay magazine Foucault (1981: 308) denounced:

“the tendency to relate the question of homosexuality to the problem of ‘Who am I?’ and ‘What is the secret of my desire?’ Perhaps it would be better to ask oneself ‘What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied and modulated?’ The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of sex but rather to use sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships.

Piontek (2006:42) comments, “Gays, according to Foucault, had to do more than assert an identity; they had to create it, and its creation was by no means equivalent to the liberation of an essence.” Foucault, in the interview above says: “We have to work at becoming homosexual.” Foucault rejects the reduction of homosexuality to sexual acts, although he does not pit sexuality against relationality but sees them working together (Piontek, 2006:42). We reduce gay men’s condition to unintelligibility if we “explain” it by appeal to some natural and ahistorical gay essence.

In this study I use the terms “gay” and “homosexual” interchangeably. Occasionally the colloquial term “LGBT” (Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender) is used and is intended to be inclusive of the wider queer community. Having defined terms I turn to a review of relevant literature.

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<sup>5</sup> “Sexual orientation, rather than being about self-conscious identity or actual sexual practice, has to do with erotic desires and dispositions” (Stein, 1992: 5).

<sup>6</sup> In fact, none of the participants used the term “homosexual” of themselves. All preferred to call themselves “gay”. The term “homosexual” came up rarely in the interviews.

## 2.2 Literature Review

On a shelf in the basement of the Victoria University library is a book titled “The Agenda: The Homosexual Plan to Change America”. Nearby on the same shelf is another title: “The Anti-Gay Agenda: Orthodox Vision and the Christian Right.” The denouncements of an “agenda” from two irreconcilably opposed viewpoints ironically illustrate the situation gay people find themselves in.

In this section I draw out themes and major points in the body of literature I am working with. I show firstly that there are few studies of “out gay men” who attend conservative or evangelical churches. I show secondly that there are few studies of Christianity that make use of Foucault. Hence I hope that this combination of topic (“gay Christians”) and methods/theory (Foucault) may help fill a gap in current research.

The literature can be divided into three categories:

1. Homosexuality
  - Lesbian and Gay Studies
  - New Zealand Gay History
  - Homosexuality and Christianity
2. Religion
3. Foucault.

### **Lesbian and Gay Studies.**

The literature on homosexuality is now vast. As this study is primarily oriented towards Christian religion I have not made lesbian and gay studies or queer theory a major focus <sup>7</sup>. In addition to the works referenced earlier in the definition of homosexuality, I found the essays in *Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Critical Introduction* (Medhurst and Munt, 1997) a useful orientation. Many theorists and gay men defend homosexuality as inborn, believing there is an “essential” homosexual nature. However, contemporary theorists and queer

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<sup>7</sup> Piontek (2006: 1) believes there is a degree of conflict between gay and lesbian studies and queer theory. Piontek treats gay and lesbian studies and queer theory as distinct approaches.

activists “more and more reject such notions of fixed sexuality and instead argue that sexuality can be construed and expressed in many fluid ways” (Ganzevoort *et al*, 2011: 219).

### **New Zealand Gay History.**

This study is located culturally and historically within New Zealand. In 2008 Chris Brickell published *Mates and Lovers*, which swiftly became the standard work in New Zealand gay history. Brickell writes that sex between Maori men was not unknown during the pre-colonial period, and that the record of colonial homoeroticism begins with the missionary William Yates who arrived in New Zealand in 1828. Considerable social struggle occurred but one hundred and forty years later, by the early 1990’s, “the gay New Zealander had finally arrived” (Brickell, 2008: 27, 344).

The first man to die of AIDS in New Zealand died in New Plymouth in 1983; only three years later in 1986 Homosexual Law Reform Bill was passed. Because of HIV/AIDS gay and bisexual New Zealanders have had to come to terms with death (Worth, 2003: 12) and their sexual practices have changed. Bouldrey (1995: ix) speaks of watching his partner Jeff die which “led to thoughts of my own mortality and, inevitably my own [Catholic] spirituality.” Picano (1995) titles his spiritual memoir “AIDS: The New Crucible of Faith”. As with overseas studies, New Zealand studies show that churches in general have not been supportive of homosexuality. Guy (2002: 228) surveys the watershed legal and social debate over homosexuality between 1960 and 1986, when the conservative Christian sexual world was “routed” in the arena of public discourse. He concludes that a paradigm change has occurred in New Zealand over this issue where LGBT identities are now much more acceptable in the social mainstream.

*Growing Up Gay. New Zealand Men Tell Their Stories* (Allan, 1996) adds extra context to the interviews conducted for this research. The book contains biographies of twelve New Zealand men, born from 1950 onwards. Although it is not a primary focus, some of them mention their experiences of Christianity, particularly growing up in church-going families. Works such as these illustrate the current apparatus and discourses of both Christian and non-Christian homosexuals in New Zealand.

### **Homosexuality and Christianity.**

In the late 1990s Melissa Wilcox (2003: 10) found that LGBT studies in religion had been little explored. Although the field has expanded, it appears there are still relatively few studies of religion and homosexuality. In the introduction to *Contemporary Christianity and LGBT Sexualities* Hunt (2009) presents an overview of the current situation in Christian Churches. While Hunt's chapter is largely focused on the UK, the situation in New Zealand is likely to reflect similar views. He cites Coleman (1984) who summarises four methodological perspectives that can categorise different Christian approaches:

1. rejecting-punitive
2. rejecting non-punitive
3. qualified acceptance
4. full acceptance.

Two collections treat homosexuality and religion: *Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology* (Comstock & Henking, 1997) and *Gay Religion* (Thumma & Grey, 2005). Andrew Yip has published extensively on gay Christians, notably his study of sixty-eight UK couples in *Gay Male Christian Couples* (1997). Yip analyses their experience of sexuality and spirituality under several categories including "the power of personal experience". What is meant by this phrase is that the positive experience of their lives and partnerships helped many of the respondents justify the acceptability of their sexuality (Yip, 1997: 108). Yip (2003) draws upon research data and various sociological commentators to assert that "the self" is the basis of religious faith for non heterosexual Christians, playing a far greater role than Church authority. Brian Bouldrey's (1995) *Wrestling with the Angel* is a collection of personal stories of gay men and their religious lives. The book includes chapters by men who identify as Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran and Mormon, along with men from non-Christian religions.

Some studies of gay men focus on their experience of rejection from churches. Usually the people interviewed in these studies no longer attend a conservative church. Frequently gay people attend conservative churches but remain "closeted", examples can be found in Yip's work and others above. Wendy Cadge (2005) studies gay friendly "reconciling churches" and characterises them as bridging gay and straight communities. Wilcox (2003) studies the Metropolitan Community Church, a gay denomination in the USA which has branches

worldwide, including in New Zealand.

A nuanced and compassionate hermeneutic by an evangelical gay man can be found in *Strangers and Friends* (Vasey, 1995). Intended for evangelicals, this book describes many of the issues theologically conservative gays face in the Church and attempts to reconcile being both gay and evangelical. *Bulletproof Faith* (Chellew-Hodge, 2008), while not specifically evangelical, is similar in that it aims to help homosexuals work out their Christian faith without rejecting their sexuality.

It is not my intention to evaluate the theological rights and wrongs of homosexuality in this study. However, Hunt comments:

“Despite sophisticated hermeneutics and apologetics, and irrespective of the fact that the liberal Christians may have current civil rights legislation supporting their views of homosexuality, the reality is that they do not have the weight of Church history on their side. The early Christian Church, and traditionally the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Churches and later the Protestant churches, have been explicitly condemnatory of same-sex sexual relations. Whatever revisionist historical accounts claim<sup>8</sup>, the early Church *was* hostile” (Hunt, 2009: 7).

Thus gay Christians find themselves in the position of opposing the shared moral and cultural norms of their Christian peers. Contrary to the impression one might have following Hunt’s description above, Aune (2009: 40) reports:

“In the little academic research and in public understandings there is scant recognition that even within evangelicalism, there are affirming theologians, evangelical churches that give full membership rights to those in gay relationships and several pro-gay organisations.”

She reminds us that “ordinary evangelicals”—those in “the church pews, in the plastic chairs in school halls or the sofas of evangelical living rooms”—do not always simply

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<sup>8</sup>For example, Boswell (1980, 1985) and Davies (2006).

accept the official views of their churches and denominations. Her own study of a UK evangelical congregation revealed such divergence (Aune, 2009). Lending support to this idea, a recent US poll shows the majority of “people of faith” believe that the law should treat LGBT people equally, and believe condemnation of homosexuals by religious leaders does more harm than good (Human Rights Campaign, 2011).

In an older New Zealand study, interviews carried out in 1978 found that “most attitudes expressed tended to be tolerant, if not accepting, of homosexuals and homosexuality” (Bowman, 1983: 109). This was at variance with public attitudinal studies carried out in the United States around this time. In New Zealand, those that held “homosexphobia”<sup>9</sup> views were three times more likely to “claim a current religion”, and all of those belonging to “minority fundamentalist Christian sects (ie Mormons, Pentecostal, Assembly of God, Christian Science and Reform)” were explicitly homophobic. The 2004 New Zealand “Lavender Islands” study, used later in this thesis, yielded important data about gay religion and spirituality (Henrickson, 2007).

Also in the New Zealand context Allison Kirkman’s 1996 doctoral thesis *Ways of being religious: Lesbians and Christianity* is helpful. Kirkman’s study of thirty women draws upon feminist, interactionist and social constructionist approaches and analyses how women who identify as lesbian reconcile their Christian beliefs and their sexual identities. There are potential methodological issues in comparing lesbian women and gay men. Michael Vasey comments, “Many factors, including the different location of lesbian and gay people within the culture, make it dangerous to extrapolate from gay to lesbian issues” (Vasey, 1995: 16). And presumably, this also works the other way. While I agree that the lives and challenges of lesbian women and gay men cannot be conflated, I think there are issues in common, for example the use of scripture and tradition to justify their exclusion from churches. I think the existence of self-help books written for both gay men and lesbian women in the Church supports this claim (for example, Chelley-Hodge, 2008).

While most studies consider the rejection of homosexuals by the church, a few consider their acceptance. In Yip’s (1997) study, mentioned on page 20, the majority of his respondents either left the church or kept their orientation hidden from fellow Christians.

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<sup>9</sup> Bowman uses “homosexphobia” in preference to “homophobia”.

However, he did find a small minority who were openly gay in their church:

“In spite of the fact that this is a rare minority, some respondents are in the fortunate position that their sexuality and partnership do not bring any stigmatization in the local church. The positive and accepting church climate is the most significant reason why they actively participate in church activity and make no secret of their sexuality and partnership” (Yip, 1997: 114).

Scott Thumma’s *Negotiating a religious identity: The case of the gay evangelical* (1991) is the only research I have discovered specifically on openly gay men who remain in the evangelical church. This US-based study takes an identity-based approach and concludes that neither gay nor evangelical identity is compromised in the group of men he studied, “rather both are combined to create the new core identity and self-concept of a gay Evangelical Christian” (Thumma, 1991: 195).

Questions of overlapping identity are described in Ganzevoort *et al* (2011) *Growing up gay and religious*. Their paper begins with a useful overview of gay-Christian conflict, describing it as one of the central conflicts in Christianity within recent decades. It goes on to describe four discourses employed in conservative protestant and evangelical circles: holiness, subjectivity, obedience and responsibility. Based on interviews with young Dutch gay Protestants, the paper characterises four modes of negotiation by gay Christians. Briefly, these four modes can be described as “Christian lifestyle”, where gay identity is rejected; “gay lifestyle”, where Christianity is rejected; “compartmentalising”, where faith and sexuality are kept apart; and “integration”, where faith and sexuality are brought together.

Dawn Moon’s (2005) paper *Discourse, interaction and testimony* is the only other work I am aware of that combines the study of religion and homosexuality with Foucault’s theories. She studies micro-level interactions in both anti-gay and pro-gay Christian groups, discovering Foucauldian notions of performative power in both. I hope the current research will help fill the gap in other studies.

### **Religion.**

This research is centred in the sociology of religion. There are many competing ways in which religion can be studied; Linda Woodhead (2011) summarises a number of these

ways, from “religion as culture” through to “religion as identity” to religion as “compensator” and religious “capital”<sup>10</sup>. She does not favour a particular approach, concluding instead:

“It is more fruitful for scholars of religion to become critically aware of the scope, variety and contingency of the term [religion] and its uses— and so better able to justify and critique their own conceptual choices” (Woodhead, 2011: 138).

In this thesis I have chosen to use the ideas of Michel Foucault to form a basis for analysis. This choice derives from my own interest in Foucault and because his work is largely under-utilised in studies of religion. James Spickard, for example, writes that “discourse” has become fashionable in the social sciences “*with the striking exception of the sociology of religion*” (Spickard, 2006: 170, emphasis mine). “The famous ‘linguistic turn’ seems to have sidestepped our field,” Spickard writes. He notes that although there are occasional theoretical pieces, “none has yet applied the ideas developed by various discourse analysts to sociological discourse about religion” (Spickard, 2006: 170). While Spickard does not reference Carrette’s and Bernauer’s seminal studies of Foucault and religion (1999, 2000, 2004), he is largely correct. Others have noted sociology of religion’s recent lack of engagement with major debates (Fish, 2005: 7). Religion “has been banished to the sidelines in the contemporary field of theoretical struggle” (Craig Calhoun, cited in Beckford, 2003:12),<sup>11</sup> although “post-secularism” may place religion at the centre of sociological inquiry again (Molendijk *et al*, 2010).

Foucault has only been mentioned very recently in the sociological study of religion. For example, Lilian Voyé’s (2004) *Survey of Advances in the Sociology of Religion (1980–2000)* mentions globalization, rational choice theory and debates over the concept of “religion” itself, but no mention is made of Foucault. The relatively few publications on Foucault and religion are mainly in the fields of theology, and of religious studies (Carrette 1999, 2000; Bernauer and Carrette 2004; Tran, 2010). There is a small amount of

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<sup>10</sup> Drawing on Foucault, King (1999: 211) portrays the field of religious studies as a power construct derived from Western Christianity: “The central normative concepts of the discipline of ‘religious studies’ – terms such as ‘religion’ and ‘mysticism’, as well as constructs such as ‘Hinduism’ and ‘Buddhism’ – have a discursive history that is bound up with the power struggles and theological issues of Western Christianity.”

<sup>11</sup> Beckford (2003:12) presents additional evidence of the recent lack of theoretical traction in the sociology of religion.



anthropological literature connecting Foucault and religion. Talal Asad (1993), for example, makes use of Foucault in discussing religion and torture. However there is little else of Foucault in Asad's work.

There is a lack of work on Foucault and religion that is specifically sociological—granting that these days the distinction between anthropology and sociology is thin (Wieviorka, 2010: 21). Brian Turner's work usefully connects Foucault and religion (e.g., Turner, 2008) and Voyce (2009) has written an innovative Foucauldian study of Buddhist bodily practices<sup>12</sup>. Where Foucault is mentioned in relation to religion it is often at a theoretical rather than applied level, for example Furseth (2009). Hence, I argue there is more scope for applying Foucault to the sociology of religion.

### **Foucault.**

"It is hard to imagine writing about sexuality without the work of Foucault", writes Elsbeth Probyn (1997:134). Michel Foucault is the major theorist for this study and here I highlight books and articles that I have found helpful.

Foucault's writing from *Discipline and Punish* (1975) onwards is especially useful as it is in this period that the concepts of power/knowledge and (later) a focus on the self-constitution of the subject come strongly into view. In *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Volume One* (1976) the power/knowledge dyad is developed further, along with new terms such as "biopower", which Morton and Bygrave (2008: 1) describe as the power which targets whole populations as opposed to the individual focus of disciplinary power. Volumes two and three of the *History of Sexuality* (Foucault, 1984a; 1984b) introduce his focus on techniques of the self and subjectivity. The essay "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self" (1980a) is important as it is likely to have been included in the unpublished fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality* (Carrette, 1999: vi; Macey, 1993: 466), and is specifically focused on religion. An excerpt of material likely to have contributed to this fourth volume is collected in *Religion and Culture* (Carrette, 1999). David Macey's *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (1993) is extremely helpful in placing Foucault's work in context. It is arguably the best intellectual biography of Foucault and

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<sup>12</sup>Although sociological in tone, Voyce's work is based in legal studies.

offers explanations of key concepts like the *dispositif* (usually translated “apparatus”). Where Foucault’s books are difficult his interviews often shed light; Lotringer’s (1989) collection is essential.

Alec McHoul and Wendy Grace’s (1993) *A Foucault Primer. Discourse, Power and the Subject*, is a good introduction to Foucault. This work confirms Foucault is more “subject-friendly” than he is sometimes given credit for. McHoul and Grace (1993: 91) write, “Foucault never argued on behalf of the radical structuralist idea that there are no subjects, that the subject can be ‘deleted’ ... even though his remarks in the final pages of *The Order of Things* on the disappearance of ‘man’ are sometimes read in this unfortunate way.” Madan Sarap’s (1996) *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World* is a particularly clear overview of key Foucauldian themes, especially in relation to “techniques of the self”. Finally, David Howarth’s (2000) *Discourse* places Foucault in the wider context of other discourse theories. *The Reality of Social Construction* (Elder-Vass, 2012) is helpful with social-philosophical aspects of Foucault. Elder-Vass argues that realism, free autonomous subjects, and Foucault can comfortably co-exist. A number of other works on Foucault were consulted and are referenced in the upcoming chapters.

This chapter has defined important terms and reviewed the literature relevant to the study. I have presented evidence that there is little extant research which applies a Foucauldian approach to the study of gay Christians. In the next chapter I discuss the theoretical background to the research.

## 3

## Theory– Foucault and Religion

*“I would like my books to be a kind of tool-box... I write for users, not readers.”*

– Foucault, “Prisons” (quoted in Nealon, 2008: 111)

This chapter discusses major theoretical concepts derived from the work of Michel Foucault. As indicated by the above quotation, in this study I attempt to use these concepts as tools to excavate themes from the interview data.

### 3.1 Introduction– A Non-Historical Historian<sup>13</sup>

Nearly thirty years after the publication of his last book, Foucault’s ideas have become broadly disseminated in the academic community. To lay the groundwork for Foucauldian ideas around religion I begin with an overview of Foucault’s “tools”. There is debate about whether Foucault changed his approach over time. For example, towards the end of his life Foucault writes,

“I would like to say, first of all, what has been the goal of my work during the last twenty years. It has not been to analyse the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis...” He concludes, “Thus it is not power, but the subject which is the general theme of my research. It is true that I became quite

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<sup>13</sup> Clifford Geertz, reviewing *Discipline and Punish*, calls Foucault “a kind of impossible object: a nonhistorical historian, an anti-humanistic human scientist, and a counter-structuralist structuralist” (Macey, 1993: 432).

involved with the question of power.”

(Foucault, 1982a: 208, 209)

However, Foucault’s claim that his entire *oeuvre* is centred on the subject may only be a reflection of his interests at the time. As McHoul (1997: 778) comments, “At almost any stage of his writing, there is an interviewed or a lecturing Foucault who summarises his work to date in terms of his current preoccupations”. To be fair, Foucault admits he sometimes changes his mind and that his is a work in progress (AK: 18-19, HS2: 11).

Foucault declares his work had three “theoretical shifts” (HS2: 6) and his work is customarily divided into three distinct phases, the 1960s “archaeological period”, 1970s “genealogical period” and 1980s “ethical period” (Oksala, 2007: 3). These periods do not suggest an abandonment of earlier work, but a “shift in emphasis” (Miller, 2008: 252).

In recent years the influence of Heidegger has been cause for controversy, based on Foucault’s final interview where he claims for the first time that Heidegger was his “essential philosopher”, not Nietzsche: “My entire philosophical development was determined by my reading of Heidegger” (Foucault, 1984f: 470). Rather than identifying particular Heideggerian concepts in Foucault, Rayner (2007: 6) proposes Foucault adopted Heidegger’s *method*. Following Heidegger, Foucault was engaged in philosophy as a practice of self-transformation— a concept that seems to fit with his later “care of the self”.

### **Episteme, Apparatus, Archaeology, Genealogy.**

It is worth looking briefly at how Foucault located his work in order to locate the current study. In his early period Foucault locates his studies within *épistémès*, for example “madness”, “medicine”, and “science”. However, by the time of *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* Foucault changed his organising principle from *épistémè* to *dispositif*, usually translated as “apparatus”. Foucault acknowledges in a 1977 interview that he has moved away from the episteme, admitting that “his attempt to write a history of the *épistémè* in *The Order of Things* had ... led him into a blind alley. The *épistémè* was no more than a specifically discursive *dispositif*” (Macey, 1993: 355). A *dispositif* is a network that binds together a mixed body of discourses, propositions, institutions, architectural forms, laws and scientific statements in relations of power (Agamben, 2006:

2,3; Macey, 1993: 355). Foucauldian research attempts to describe the elements of the *dispositif* under investigation. In this thesis, I use the notion of *dispositif* to refer to the Christian religion.

Foucault's histories are intended to yield a "history of the present". To study these histories Foucault used the method of *archaeology*, which he later developed into *genealogy*. Howarth (2000: 67) even suggests that archaeology and genealogy are articulated together as the "method of problematization" (see HS2: 11-13). Rather than a focus only on language, genealogy is also concerned with investigating *power* and *practices* (Gutting, 2005: 45). Foucault's 1971 essay *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* is often taken as a description of Foucault's methods<sup>14</sup>. Bryan Turner (2008: 136) summarises Nietzsche's concept of *genealogy* as a series of accidental ruptures. Thus, in the current study, Foucault's genealogy leads us to postulate the "rupture" of gay Christianity, a new discourse in the history of the Christian religion. In other words, rather than a slow evolution it requires a historical "break" or "rupture" for Christians to change their approach to Christian homosexuals.

### **Discourse.**

The study of *discourse* is foundational to Foucault's method. Simply put, Foucauldian discourses are the limits and forms of what is, at any given time, sayable (Probyn, 1997: 138). Foucault's concept of discourse is fully discussed in chapter four. However, here I mention two 'meta-theoretical' points which affect the current study.

First, it is important to be conceptually clear about the term "discourse". David Howarth (2000: 2) writes that "for some, discourse analysis is a very narrow enterprise that concentrates on a single utterance, or at most a conversation between two people. Others see discourse as synonymous with the entire social system, in which discourses literally constitute the social and political world." Foucault fits best in the latter category. The term "discourse" is used in at least six distinct theoretical approaches, some of which have little in common. Linguistics, critical discourse analysis, Foucault, post-Marxism, discursive psychology and interpretive repertoires all use the term "discourse". The differences in

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<sup>14</sup> Gutting (2005: 44) disagrees, saying Foucault never claims Nietzsche's methods for his own. This argument need not concern us here.

each theory will be not be discussed here; the point I am making is that my use of the term “discourse” in the current study is specifically Foucauldian.

Second, there is the question of how gay and Christian discourses operate on the men in this study, which relates to the question of causality. Foucault himself was not interested in the causality of discourses, suggesting only that discourses interact with other discourses and non-discursive forms. Dreyfus and Rabinow believe Foucault need not explain how discourses cause people to act, “he need only describe the changing discursive practices” (cited in Elder-Vass, 2012: 153). Elder-Vass (2012: 154) shows it is reasonable to speak of the causality of discourses, suggesting the influence of discourses can be traced to groups of people with the collective commitment to enforce them. He believes it is possible to hold this view while avoiding the primacy of either the thoughts of individuals or the power of institutions (structuralism), both of which Foucault disavowed. Space precludes a fuller discussion.

### **Power/Knowledge, Resistance.**

Looking for evidence of power and knowledge is a key method for Foucault, which can be applied to religion. Foucault offers an apparently simple definition:

“[Power] is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (HS1: 92).

He elaborates,

“the network of power relations [forms] a dense web that passes through apparatuses [*dispositifs*] and institutions, without being actually localized in them” (HS1: 92).

Power relations<sup>15</sup> always operate in tandem with knowledge for Foucault. Wherever one is, the other exists, summed up in the term “power/knowledge” (DP: 27, 28). The *solidus* suggests power and knowledge are not to be studied separately. Power should not be

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<sup>15</sup> “I scarcely use the word ‘power’, and if I use it on occasion it is simply as shorthand for the expression I generally use: ‘relations of power’” (Foucault, 1984e: 441).

understood as simple hierarchies, patriarchies or domination:

“I would like to disconnect the notion of power from the notion of domination. Domination is only one form of power-relation. I should also note that power has to be de-connected from the notion of repression. There are a lot of power-relations which have repression-effects, but there are also a lot of power-relations which have something else entirely as their consequence” (Foucault: 1984a: 418).

Thus, it is important to understand that power is not necessarily ‘negative’ for Foucault; power can be productive. Domination can be characterised as power-over and production as power-to. Even the oppressed can have power, illustrated by the concept of “resistance”. “Foucault has argued that within relations of power, individuals and groups can find space to resist domination, exercise freedom, and pursue their interests” (Tamboukou, 1999: 203), which is described as “resistance” (HS1: 95). Resistance is always present where there is power (DP: 27, 28). Foucault writes that the “swarm” of points of resistance traverse social stratifications and individual persons (HS1: 92).

I conceive of resistance as another kind of power which carries its own knowledge. To use a physical analogy, power can be conceived as something like a network of electrical forces, electrons orbiting an atom, or gravitational forces. As two gravitational bodies always act on each other, power and resistance cannot help attracting each other.

Power relations are manifest in “disciplinary power” on bodies. However discipline is more than just coercion of bodies. In a factory, for example, a job allotted to a worker also characterises and defines her or him. Discipline “makes” people and “normalises” them (Sarup, 1996: 72).

### **Techniques of the Self, The Subject.**

I have already quoted Foucault’s statement, “it is not power, but the subject which is the general theme of my research” (1982a: 209). Indeed, “it was [Foucault’s] concern with the self, and with the problematics swirling around it, that provided the major themes for his thought from 1976 to 1984” (Piontek, 2006: 105). Foucault’s interest in the subject– the human being, “man”– can in turn be applied to the religious subjects in this study. In a

passage in *The Order of Things* (OT: 420), Foucault regularly invokes God or “the gods” in discussing the “death of man”, for example:

“... it is in the death of God that [man] speaks, thinks, and exists, his murder itself is doomed to die; new gods, the same gods are already swelling the future Ocean; man will disappear.”

At the close of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (AK: 232) Foucault writes:

“... you may have killed God beneath the weight of all that you have said; but don’t imagine that, with all that you are saying, you will make a man that will live longer than he.”

These are very Nietzschean statements. Thus it is unsurprising; the predominant American reading and primary source for many interpretations is a Nietzschean Foucault (Picket, 2005: 3). Incidentally, Foucault empathised with those who found his “death of man” thesis uncomfortable, writing “I understand the unease of all such people” and “one cannot but sympathise” (AK: 232).

In spite of the mentions of deity above, Foucault is not really concerned with religion. He is summarising his view that the *concept* of “man” is a modern invention, a view that he elucidates in the final two chapters of the *Order of Things*. The imminence of the death of man is “the single idea for which Foucault’s philosophy is best known” according to Bernauer (2004: 87). Many see Foucault taking pleasure in the nihilistic destruction of “man”, but such an interpretation is “an extraordinary misperception of the temper and meaning of Foucault’s announcement” (Bernauer, 2004: 87). Foucault refers to the destruction of the humanistic concept of *Enlightenment* “man”, not of human beings themselves (see Due, 2007: 15-17). For comparison, Heidegger also criticised humanism, which in post-WWII post-existentialism was viewed as anthropocentric and holding dubious political associations (Han-Pile, 2010: 118). Foucault’s interest in Heidegger might explain his dismissal of humanism. So the “man” of Enlightenment humanism is dead for Foucault, but he retains a live interest in human beings as subjects.



For example, Foucault speaks forcefully about the subject in two late interviews:

“I don’t think there is actually a sovereign, founding subject, a universal form of subject that one could find everywhere. I am very sceptical and very hostile toward this conception of the subject. I think on the contrary that the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or, ... through practices of liberation, of freedom... starting of course from a number of rules, styles and conventions that are found in the culture” (Foucault, 1984g: 452).

Foucault appears to think the subject is not a unity:

“[The subject] is not a substance. It is a form, and this form is not primarily or always identical to itself. You do not have the same type of relationship to yourself when you constitute yourself as a political subject who goes to vote or speaks at a meeting and when you are seeking to fulfil your desires in a sexual relationship. Undoubtedly there are relationships and interferences between these different forms of the subject; but we are not dealing with the same type of subject. In each case, one plays, one establishes a different type of relationship to oneself. And it is precisely the historical continuation of these various forms of the subject in relation to the games of truth that interests me” (Foucault, 1984e: 440).

In the above passage truth games (discourses) and practices constitute us as persons and it even appears we have multiple “selves”, however this is conceived. Because discourses construct us Foucault is often characterised as requiring that we are not free, that the subject can have no autonomy or agency. However, as Miller (2008) and others show, Foucault can be interpreted in a way that allows some degree of freedom for subjects to choose. Elder-Vass (2012: 188-189) contends that Foucault had two views of the subject. These can be summarised as an (early) strong, subjected, non-agential subject and a (later) weak, resisting, agential subject. An interpretation of Foucault’s subjects as free agents is supported by many including Han-Pile (2010), Sarup (1996), and McHoul and Grace (1993). Foucault himself says in a late interview that “the mad subject is not an unfree subject”, and that “power relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free” (Foucault, 1984e: 440, 441).

Foucault takes up an explicit concern with the self in *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality*. Here he considers the question of ethics, by which he means the way in which we relate to our self. The relationship to oneself has four major aspects which I summarise briefly: ethical substance, mode of subjection, self-forming activity, and telos. The *ethical substance* is the part of us which is considered the appropriate domain in which to apply ethics. For example, are ethics to be applied to feelings, to intentions, to desires, or to other aspects of our behaviour? The *mode of subjection* is the way in which we recognise our obligations. For example, these obligations may be imposed by divine law, by reason, by political convention and otherwise. *Self-forming acts* are the means by which we change ourselves, our practices. *Telos* is the ultimate end or purpose to which these ethical techniques aim (HS2: 26-28).

Techniques of the self are the practices by which we apply these ethics to ourselves; the techniques are self-forming activity and the central mechanism of Foucault's late period. Foucault is widely regarded as favouring a reinvention of the self as an aesthetic experience, of making one's life a "work of art". Foucault's ethics of the self can be seen as a way to escape the disciplinary power described in *Discipline and Punish*. "He argued", writes Sarup (1996: 88), "that an ethics of the self was the only way in which an individual could resist the normalising effects of disciplinary power."

## 3.2 Foucault and Religion

Following this brief survey, I now consider what Foucault might theorise around religion. As noted in chapter two, there is little work on Foucault and religion that is specifically sociological. I consider three approaches: First, I ask if Foucault provides a general theory of religion— as we shall see, there is disagreement on this point. Second, I look for comments on religion in his writing, for example mentions of churches or spirituality. Third, I seek to apply elements of his 'non-religious' theory such as power/knowledge to religion. I think the latter two options offer the strongest resources for a Foucauldian theory of religion.

I will begin with an overview of Foucault's comments on religion. Bernauer (2005: 558) suggests Foucault's interest in religious themes is difficult to overlook given the frequent mention of religious practices scattered throughout his writing. Foucault analysed ancient Christian texts as part of his later work, particularly in HS2 and HS3, and the earlier lectures associated with those books. He also wrote briefly on Islam in relation to the 1979 Iranian revolution, and on Buddhism following a stay in a Japanese temple (Carrette, 1999). There are allusions to religion and illustrations using religious concepts scattered through his writing. For example, in *Discipline and Punish* Foucault writes of the "soul":

"It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect". "On the contrary", he continues, "it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power..." (DP: 29).

"Spirituality" is also a concept which Foucault uses:

"By spirituality, I understand... that which precisely refers to a subject acceding to a certain mode of being and to the transformations which the subject must make of himself in order to accede to this mode of being" (Foucault, 1984e: 443).

For Foucault, spirituality involves work on the self; it is not something vague and immaterial. In a 1980 lecture Foucault speaks of "souls" as part of:

"techniques which permit individuals to effect, by their own mean, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in a manner to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on. Let's call this kind of techniques [sic] a techniques or technology of the self" (Foucault, 1980a: 162).

Note that Foucault says that through such self transformation one might attain not only a state of happy perfection, but also "supernatural power." A section of *Madness and Civilisation* discusses the influence of religion on the birth of the asylum. By the end of the classical period, "the asylum is a religious domain without religion, a domain of pure

morality, of ethical uniformity” (MC: 257).

Jeremy Carrette (1999: vi ) presents evidence that Foucault was about to publish more extensively on Christianity when he died. *Confessions of the Flesh (Les aveux de la chair)* was almost complete before Foucault’s death, as he had started writing it before *The care of the self*, and a copy of it is privately held in the Foucault archive. Macey (1993: 466) supports the existence of this fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality*. Carrette (1999) contains what is believed to be currently extant from this work.

On religion itself, Foucault writes:

“It is not that religion is delusional by nature, nor that the individual, beyond present-day religion, rediscovers his most suspect psychological origins. But religious delusion is a function of the secularization of culture: religion may be the object of delusional belief insofar as the culture of a group no longer permits the assimilation of religious or mystical beliefs in the present context of experience” (Foucault, 1962: 81).

Here Foucault says religion can only be delusion if the wider culture no longer accepts the validity of a religious worldview. Foucault seems to accept secularization theory although for the early modern period “he refused the topography of a religious era yielding to a secular age” (Bernauer, 2005: 558).

It is possible to draw some conclusions about religion from Foucault’s study of monastic disciplines. Here he speaks of a “process of subjectification” which “is inseparable from a process of understanding which make the obligation to search and to tell the truth regarding oneself into a permanent and indispensable condition” (Foucault, 1982b: 196). Telling the truth about ourselves is how we are made subjects (subjectified), under the surveillance of one’s confessor. Asad (1993: 111-115) believes Foucault leaves out “one crucially important fact” in his study of Christian monastics. From other texts Asad shows that a monk’s progress was only possible through *social* relationships; the technology of the self was itself dependent on organized community life. There was thus no single point of surveillance— one’s confessor— against which the self examined itself, but a network of mutual observation. The idea that religion can be seen as a type of surveillance is

developed by Geroulanos (2006) and is discussed further in chapter six.

### **The Apparatus of Religion.**

It is claimed that Foucault did not publish a general theory of religion. As Carrette (2000: 5) writes, “we must constantly bear in mind that Foucault does not provide a distinctive and separate discussion of religion or Christianity.” While technically true, my reading of Foucault inclines more towards James Bernauer’s approach:

“I would like to claim that Foucault’s thought does in fact contain a philosophy of religion. In as much as his project was a ‘history of the present’, he is necessarily engaged in a religious analysis because the forms of knowledge, power and subjectivity which he saw as animating our culture are often constructed in decisive ways in argument or alliance with religious practices and concerns” (Bernauer, 2005: 558).

Carrette (2000) attempts to summarise Foucault’s perspective on religion as “spiritual corporality and political spirituality”. By *spiritual corporality* he means “a critique of the silencing powers of religion” and a focus on the body. *Political spirituality* denotes “a critique of religious authority in the demand for confession” (Carrette, 2000: 4). Carrette is a little unclear what he means by “spirituality”<sup>16</sup>. Alternatively he sums up religion as “an immanent political experience which attempts to govern human life” (Carrette, 2000: 142). This aspect picks up on Foucault’s view in *Madness and Civilisation* of religion as a “constant principle of coercion” (MC: 252). Carrette’s work is important, particularly when considering the later “ethical” Foucault. I think it is also useful to consider how an earlier Foucault might have applied concepts such as “apparatus” and “power/knowledge” to religion. When employed with care, many of Foucault’s concepts can be successfully applied to religion. Some examples are sketched below, to be fleshed out through interaction with the study data.

In Foucauldian terms I think religion may be considered a governing *apparatus*. In *The History of Sexuality*, for example, the apparatus is “sexuality”. In Foucauldian conception,

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<sup>16</sup> Flannagan (2007:5) advocates a “sociology of spirituality” but acknowledges that spirituality is an extremely difficult term to define.

we can consider Christianity a historically constructed apparatus: a dispersed system of morals, techniques of power, discourses and procedures designed to mould religious practices towards certain strategic and political ends. As an institution, a church would be a non-discursive form within the apparatus.

Religion and theology tend to associate themselves with a discourse of power according to Caputo (2006: 35). Woodhead (2011: 134) notes that in some writers Foucault's ideas have led to a new sensibility of religion as power. She suggests religion as power has been neglected because secularization theories have emphasised the loss of religion's social power. Woodhead suggests that religion explicitly offers followers a relationship with power; religion "typically offers relationship with some form of higher power or powers". In addition, religious institutions and elites, themselves empowered by virtue of an acknowledged relation to higher powers, also exercise significant this-worldly power over their own followers. This leads to the intriguing concept of God as a *power-over* or *power-to*, considered in chapter six. In chapter six I also propose that religious beliefs are a form of knowledge, and are therefore part of Foucault's knowledge/power circuit<sup>17</sup>.

I suggest Foucault's view of the subject may also be incorporated in a Foucauldian view of religion. In HS2 and HS3, as Roach (2005:61) puts it, "Foucault looks back to a time when moral life was not completely governed by Christian confessional imperatives in order to envision a future beyond sexuality." Foucault believed Christianity introduced into Greek culture the idea of a deep self which must be deciphered and spoken about (Sarup, 1996: 88). Ancient Christianity was preoccupied with obedience and self-renunciation. Under this regime the self was not something to be made, but to be deciphered and renounced.

As an aside, it may be asked whether Foucault's ideas have any bearing on metaphysical questions. Foucault himself was an atheist (Carrette, 2000: *xi*) and it would do him an injustice to read his work otherwise. He did acknowledge his Catholic background: Bernauer (2004: 93) relates an unpublished part of a discussion at Berkeley in the early 1980s, writing, "When one of his discussants noted that his comment seemed 'very Christian', Foucault replied: 'Yes, I have a very strong, Christian background, and I am not ashamed'" (Bernauer, 2004: 93).

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<sup>17</sup> Nola (2003) criticises both Foucault and the "sociology of knowledge", stating they both mistake belief for knowledge.

However, Foucault's analysis is only interested in how religious practices and discourses construct people. Foucault's method is agnostic, which means that for those to whom it matters, discourse theory may still leave room for God. As Spickard (2007:132) writes, "calling religion a discourse does not make it any less real".

To summarise: Based on Foucault's work, I propose that religion is an apparatus—comprised of institutions such as churches, and discourses, bound together in relations of power/knowledge. Within this apparatus, people are both constructed by religious discourses and use techniques of the self to construct for themselves a religious self.

I conclude with two related issues. This study concerns beliefs, or theological discourses, raising the need to clarify the relationship of theology to sociology. The recent development of postsecularism is also relevant for the interaction of theology and sociological theory.

### 3.3 Theology, Sociology of Religion, Postsecularism

What do I mean by "theology"? It is important to distinguish between what might be called professional theology and popular theology. Professional theology is official, academic, systematic, formal, written, held by religious leaders. It uses religious texts such as the Bible in prescribed ways. Popular theology is unofficial, colloquial, unsystematic, informal, spoken, held by laity. It may use religious texts in different ways to that promoted by clergy. Popular theology is what is commonly called "beliefs". My impression is that postsecular commentators primarily work with academic theology. Professional theology influences the lay public through discourse. This is probably one of the roles of preaching in Christian churches. However, I think some at least of the sociological analysis of formal written theology can also be applied to informal spoken theology. In the case of the men studied here, I am interested in their popular theology, their beliefs. The men in this study are employing spoken theology, verbalising their beliefs informally. These discourses may be studied in a similar way to more formal expressions of faith.

Theology has been studied for sociological purposes before, famously in Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber, 2002: 104). Weber took the word "charisma" from theology (MacRae, 1974: 12). Neither theology nor religious studies can be considered sociology. However, theology's connection with social science is critically evaluated by Harrington (2006) and Flanagan (2001) who conclude that there can be a productive relationship between the two. I do not agree with what appears to be Flanagan's fideism.

Bernauer (2005) uses the subtitle "Foucault and theological culture". By this he means the culture of Christian theology itself and its direct influence on pastoral power, confession, and so forth. However, I think it can be argued that all of modern Western culture is theological culture, because it is formed and underlied by religious understandings. As Foucault points out, for example, (Christian) pastoral power became the foundation of governmentality, and confession led to the rise of the psychiatrist. Even in a secularised modernity, we cannot escape millennia of theological discourse– which is perhaps the point of the postsecular turn.

### **Postsecularism.**

Recently there has been a return of contributions in sociology and philosophy with an interest in theology (Harrington, 2006). Harrington lists post-2000 works by Habermas, Taylor, Marion, Janicaud, Joas, Theunissen, Graf, Zizek, Badiou, Debray, Bhaskar, Assmann, Eisenstadt. I would also add Giorgio Agamben to this list. Therborn (2006: 190) in the same volume also detects a "theological turn". "By now the interest of European philosophers in theology has surely made the transition from being a trend to being an established fact", argues Kotsko (2010: 209). Critchley (2012:8) writes, "The return to religion has become perhaps the dominant cliché of contemporary theory".

It seems to me this resurgence of interest in theology is supported by the new theories of "post-secularism". Although the term has various antecedents, it is usually traced to a 2001 speech by Jürgen Habermas. Post-secular terminology comes in the wake of other "posts", the postcolonial, the post-national and especially the postmodern (Dillion, 2012; Boy, 2011). It is suggested that the social world in Europe, Australia and New Zealand is now post-secular, incorporating secularism but going beyond it. Boy (2011) notes that "the



question of secularization theory and whether it should be abandoned forms an important part of this discussion. Only sociologists allowing that classical secularization theory is in disarray find the concept of the postsecular to have any value.” Hans Joas (2008), for example, writes that, “the concept of the postsecular society, which is now alleged to have come into existence, has become no more plausible despite multiple repetitions. There has after all been no sudden increase in the number of believers, nor has the state cast off its secular self-understanding.”

Kotsko (2010: 210) argues that “European investigators of theology are looking for a way *out of* Christianity.” However, I am not sure this is always the case; I think Agamben, for example, is trying to find an ‘in between’ path, rather than outright rejection of religion. I see hints of such an in between path in my reading of Foucault, although he is not regarded as a postsecular thinker. It may be that a postsecular approach can add to the interpretation of Foucault’s work.

In a postsecular world, must one either defend a version of secularism or quietly slide into some form of theism? Critchley (2012: 19) claims to refuse either option, “neither traditional theism nor evangelical atheism will suffice.” What is required is a “theologically engaged atheism that resembles disappointed belief. Such atheism, only a semitone from faith, would be like musical dissonance, the more acute for its proximity” (Critchley, 2012: 19). This phrase seems to me to summarise post-secularism’s philosophical stance, although Critchley does not use this term.

This chapter has considered Foucault’s theoretical tools and their relation to sociology of religion. I suggest that many of Foucault’s ideas can be applied to religion without doing violence to either.

## 4

## Methodology

*“The ideas I would like to discuss here represent neither a theory nor a methodology.”*

(Foucault, 1982a: 777)

As indicated above, Foucault sometimes wished to avoid methodological questions. Riis (2009: 229) also suggests that sociologists of religion often avoid methodology. In this chapter, the methodology for the current study is reviewed; I discuss how this research was carried out and the basis underlying it. I use Crotty’s (1998) schema to link the elements of this chapter.<sup>18</sup> Following this schema we can consider four elements of research that inform one another. Crotty (1998: 3) describes these elements as follows:

*“Methods:* the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data related to some research question or hypothesis.

*Methodology:* the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcome.

*Theoretical Perspective:* the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria.

*Epistemology:* the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology.”

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<sup>18</sup> Crotty (1998: 2) notes that his “scaffold” is only a tool, it is not the only way to analyse and understand the research process.

Following this model, my research can be summarised as follows:

- *Epistemology*: Constructionism.
- *Theoretical Perspective*: Foucauldian themes.
- *Methodology*: Thematic Analysis.
- *Methods*: Semi-structured interviews.

These components are described in more detail in the following sections.

## 4.1 Epistemology

Social constructionism (hereafter, constructionism) has become a foundational epistemology for many social science projects since the 1960s (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008: 4; Crotty, 1998: 3). It is the epistemological basis for the current research. Stein (1992: 6) describes the first volume of Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* as the *locus classicus* of social constructionists. As Gubrium and Holstein (2008: 3) explain constructionism:

“the world we live in and our place in it are not simply and evidently ‘there’ for participants. Rather, participants actively construct the world of everyday life and its constituent elements.”

A man is not born homosexual on this view, for example, but either constructs a world for himself or has his world constructed for him by social discourses. As discussed previously, the early Foucault is less interested in how social actors actively construct their world than in how the world is constructed for them by discourses (Miller, 2008: 268). It is the later “ethical” Foucault who is more amenable to a world constructed by subjects.

Constructionism is interested in the meanings of actions and discourses, and often uses qualitative methods, but there are no specifically constructionist methods. Burr (2003: 24-26) does imply that discourse analysis, discussed below, is a uniquely constructionist method.

In the sociology of religion the constructionist model has been the dominant paradigm since Peter Berger. This means that “religious reality is socially constructed, and this emergent reality acts back upon its producers” (Poloma, 1995: 165). Beckford (2003) acknowledges the constructivist perspective is only one among many, and although he approves of pluralism in theoretical approaches he writes, “I believe that the benefits of social constructionism in the study of religion have not been adequately acknowledged” (2003: 193). It is probably worth clarifying that by adopting constructionism there is no intention to deny *a priori* the possibility that God or supernatural powers exist (Beckford, 2003: 28). The questions raised in this research are simply concerned with the uses human beings make of religion, what might be called ‘methodological agnosticism’.

Constructionism is often contrasted with “essentialism”, which maintains that people have some innate essential characteristics. This has led to another controversy over social constructionism which is particularly relevant for the current study. In Hacking's (1995: 366) description of the debate:

“It was important to one party to maintain that ‘the homosexual’ as a ‘kind of person’ is a social construct, chiefly of psychiatry and jurisprudence. It was important for others to insist that some people in every era have been sexually and emotionally attracted chiefly to people of their own sex.”

However, this issue may not be as great a problem as it once appeared. Citing Stein (1992), Hacking (1995: 366) believes there are “several ways in which essentialist and constructionist attitudes are not only compatible but also mutually supporting.” Hence, without going into detail, the constructionist perspective of the current study need not conflict with ideas of an “innate” homosexuality.

### **Ontology.**

Epistemological and ontological issues tend to arise together (Crotty, 1998:10-12).

Ontology is the study of being, of what exists. I do not feel it necessary to take an explicit ontological position here although I lean towards realism. By realism, Elder-Vass (2012: 6) means “the belief that there are features of the world that are they way they are independently of how we think about them.” Putting this another way, realism is the belief

that realities exist outside the mind. Elder-Vass (2012) argues that social scientists should be both realists and social constructionists, that this is the preferred ontological-epistemological position. Crotty (1998:11) recommends that ontological issues be dealt with as they arise, rather than requiring detailed treatment in our methodology.

## 4.2 Theoretical Perspective

It is important that the theoretical position of a research topic that draws on thematic analysis is made clear (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 81). The theoretical base for this study is largely drawn from the work of Michel Foucault and is discussed in chapter three.

## 4.3 Methodology

### **Thematic analysis.**

This project uses thematic analysis to interrogate the data collected in the interviews. Thematic analysis is arguably the most common approach to data analysis in the social sciences according to Roulston (2001: 280). Thematic analysis was chosen for this research because it can be applied across a range of theoretical approaches and is compatible with constructionist paradigms. Thematic analyses may be further divided into sub-types; *inductive* versus *theoretical*, and *manifest* versus *latent*. These sub-types are described below, but first it is worth defining what is meant by a “theme”.

“A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 82). Themes can describe both implicit and explicit ideas within the data (Guest *et al*, 2012: 10). A theme is often described as a pattern. Ideally there will be a number of instances of the theme across the data set, but there are no hard and fast rules about how frequently the pattern occurs. Thus, the researcher’s judgement is necessary to determine what a theme is, and its prevalence. How ‘key’ a theme is depends on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question. The researcher

always plays an active role in identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest and reporting on them.

Themes can be identified in two ways: Either in an “inductive” or “bottom-up” way, or in a “theoretical”, “deductive” or “top-down” way (Boyatzis, 1998). Inductive thematic analysis is a process of coding data without trying to fit it to a pre-existing theoretical frame, and can be compared with grounded theory. However, Braun and Clarke (2006: 84) emphasise that even in inductive analysis, “researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum.” In contrast, theoretical thematic analysis is driven by the researcher’s theoretical or analytic interest and is thus explicitly analyst-driven. Theory-driven code development is probably the most frequently used approach in social science research according to Boyatzis (1998: 33). Theoretical ideas can be indispensable tools in stimulating sociological research of religion according to Beckford (2003: 11,12), and the interview data in this study was coded using theory-driven analysis. Theoretical thematic analysis tends to provide a more detailed analysis of some aspect of the data rather than a rich description of the overall data. Thus it is possible to code for a quite specific research question. Use of theoretically informed themes for analysis can make the question of the researcher’s reflexivity clear. By ‘reflexivity’, the researcher’s influence on that which is being researched is meant (Hayes, 1997:112).

Hayes (1997:113) mentions a possible cost to using theoretically-driven themes in that “novel material”, inappropriate to the theoretical themes will not be included in the analysis. In this study I tried to counter this risk by being open to ‘discovering’ and including new themes arising from the transcript data. The theme of *belief as knowledge* was initially developed in this way. In addition, I found what I initially believed were “non-Foucauldian” themes arising from the data, e.g. the theme of the *support of others*.

In addition, a theme may be identified at either a manifest level or a latent level (Boyatzis, 1998: 4). A manifest (or semantic, or explicit) level works with the surface meanings of the data; the analyst is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said. Conversely, a latent (or interpretive) level goes beyond the semantic content and seeks to identify *underlying* or hidden ideas and concepts. “Thus, for latent thematic analysis, the development of the themes themselves involves interpretive work, and the analysis that is

produced is not just description, but is already theorized” (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 84). Boyatzis (1998: 16) says thematic analysis enables the researcher to use both manifest and latent-content analysis at the same time. The coding in this study was a mixture of manifest and latent, but largely latent.

When studying religion researchers also need to consider how subjects’ own religious understanding is used. Hunt (2002: 90) writes that a preoccupation in past sociology of religion with social variables, roles and networks, meant there has been a neglect of the actor’s interpretation of their own religious experience. He points to studies which place an emphasis on what people say about their experiences rather than focusing on sociological “causes”. On this view if believers claim to be acting in the name of religion, we should attempt to understand their perspective on religious grounds first. This approach can also be derived from Weber’s work (Furseth and Repstad, 2006: 35,37; Beckford, 2003: 19). As noted in chapter three, Foucault’s thought can support the concept of the free experience of subjects, thus their subjective views of the world can be included in Foucauldian accounts of religion.

In sum, the methodology used in this research is a manifest-latent, theoretical thematic analysis. Given the centrality of Foucault’s theories in the current project, the role of discourse is discussed below. Discourse analysis is shown to be methodological as well as thematic.

### **Foucault and Discourse.**

Foucault did not develop a fully worked out methodology, and criticised the very notion of formulating a single position according to Mills (2003: 111). Foucault tried to question the distinction between theory and analysis when he said “theory does not express, translate or serve to apply practice: *it is practice*” (Mills, 2003: 110, emphasis mine).

Foucault’s methods are *interpretive*, as per the discussion of latent themes above. Interpretive or “hermeneutic” methods do not make claims to discover objective truth; they merely present their own view of the truth (Rabinow and Sullivan, 1987: 1). Ultimately the confirmation or refutation of a particular (Foucauldian) discourse analysis depends on its persuasiveness to the community of social science researchers and scholars, according to

Howarth (2000: 141, 142).

Foucauldian methods are not appropriate for discovering cultural *meaning* but are instead used to investigate techniques and practices such as “management” and “administration” (Kendall and Wickham, 1999: 117-122). Prior (1997: 65) concurs, writing that we do not need to “seek out the ‘meaning’ or authorial intent of texts.”

Foucault’s methods centre on “discourse”. Sarup (1996: 71) pithily defines the concept of a discourse as the production of “things” by “words”. For Foucault, “discourse is more than mere language; it is an institutionalized way of thinking, embedded in language, that shapes people’s thoughts and behaviour” (Spickard, 2007:132). In simple terms, a discourse is “What can be said”. More specifically, *what can be said at a particular moment in history*. In his later period Foucault appears to substitute the term “truth games” for discourses (Foucault, 1984e: 432). A discourse describes a body of knowledge. A discourse can be thought of as a “discipline” both in the sense of scholarly disciplines and of disciplinary institutions such as prisons or the confessional (McHoul and Grace, 1993: 26). As Nye writes (2008: 74):

“Discourses do not simply describe our sense of reality; they give us the means by which we experience it. Thus on a simple level if I use the word ‘table’ to describe (or name) a piece of wood, I might feel inclined to eat my dinner off it. If I use another word, for example, ‘altar’, then it might seem inappropriate to use that same piece of wood for eating.”

Foucault’s discourses are based on statements, “serious speech acts”, linguistic acts where subjects can make “serious truth claims because of their training, institutional location and mode of discourse” (Howarth, 2000: 55). Thus, in Foucauldian terms, utterances about homosexuality become statements when spoken by a trained religious leader, in the pulpit of a church, backed up by Biblical quotations. Statements “may be related to each other to form *discursive formations*. To put things as simply as possible: Discursive formations are sets of rules about what can be said and what should not be said... in a particular social space” (Elder-Vass, 2012: 146). A discourse takes effect through its relation to another discourse.



Foucault is not interested in either the truth of statements or their meaning, but rather in the rules that form a particular discourse. Discourses are not passive objects subject to various external forces. According to Nye (2008: 72), “discourses do not have the power in themselves, they are instead a means by which power relationships are expressed and constructed. Power relationships produce discourses, which act— in Foucault’s phrase— as ‘regimes of truth’. Existing within such a regime makes it difficult to accept any other truth than that which is given by the dominant discourse.”

Foucault’s method is not only about language and the practices implicated in particular discourses, but also about “the material conditions and social structures that form the context for these” (Burr, 2003: 170), which Foucault calls “non-discursive forms”. For example, Foucault’s *Madness and Civilisation* does not start from madness itself, nor reason, but from the institutions that shut up the mad. A discourse may be identified by the institutions to which it relates— laboratory, asylum, church (Sarup, 1996: 70,71). The rules of formation of Christian discourse must be articulated with its non-discursive conditions such as the effects of secularisation. Changes in non-discursive conditions do not first change the consciousness of Christian pastors in order to change their discourse. Instead, non-discursive events “transform the mode of existence of [religious] discourse: its conditions of emergence, insertion and functioning” (Torfing, 1999:90). We can also study the practices of the church as well as its institutional knowledge.

Moon (2005: 552) says that Foucault’s methods limited him to looking at “elite productions of discourse” such as medicine, science or law. However, she emphasises that power is also reproduced in daily face-to-face interactions and that Foucault can be used to analyse ethnographic studies of “micro-level” talk. Hacking (2004) agrees that a complementary micro-macro approach to social science is needed. These papers support the current study’s use of “micro” interview materials in combination with the “macro” approach of Foucault’s theory.

Although Foucault’s method requires situating discourses in a larger history, it is also possible to focus on a limited period of history, as this current study does. Examples of this include studies by Prior (1997) and Moon (2005). Prior states (1997: 68), “For practical research activities of course it would be unrealistic to suggest that qualitative researchers can immediately turn themselves into broad-brush historians... It is not, however,

unrealistic to suggest that qualitative researchers... ask questions about the points at which certain terms... appear and disappear.”

One common solution to methodological problems with Foucault is to supplement him with other methods or theories, which can be called methodological pluralism. Riis (2009: 242) writes that “a methodological variety does not indicate a paradigm crisis. It can express a mature reflection on the methodological challenge of studying complex religion in a dynamic social environment.” Holstein & Gubrium (2005: 492) believe what is required is a new “hybridized” analytics which “co-opts” useful and complementary insights from established traditions. I would agree as my sense is that Foucault alone is not enough to do full justice to some qualitative accounts. Particularly with interview work, or where the data is very recent, or where there is simply little of it, another method is valuable.

To summarise, Foucault’s methods involve a study of:

1. Discourse– what can be said.
2. Practice– what people do.
3. Non-discursive forms– social structures and their context.

### **Discourse and Thematic analysis.**

Given the centrality of discourse to Foucault’s work I began to consider connections between themes and discourses. It is possible that discourses *are* themes. If so, in uncovering a discourse, one also uncovers a theme. Both themes and discourses can be latent (hidden) or manifest, either constructing us without our explicit awareness or consciously appropriated by subjects. For example the discourse of the disciplinary society in *Discipline and punish* could be used as a theme for interpreting interview data. Similarly, discourses of Christian asceticism could be utilised as a theme.

However, I think themes and discourses are probably distinct; the former is methodological, the latter theoretical. In general themes do not construct us, they are merely methodological labels for analysis. Discourses have a larger role in Foucault’s theory. Discourses and themes do share a common approach in identifying shared

meanings derived from spoken or written language (Elder-Vass, 2010: 147). It is only in this sense that themes parallel discourses.

In sum, I am using thematic analysis because it is not wedded to one single approach, and can be combined with Foucault's theories. While I seek to identify discourses, I am not using (Foucauldian) discourse *methodologically*. In part this is because I think Foucault's methods prioritise the theorist and in this study I wanted to hear the interviewee. This is the balance that must be walked between inductive and deductive thematic analysis.

## 4.4 Methods

Methods describe how the data for this study was gathered and analysed. In this research unstructured or semi-structured interviews, also called "informal conversational interviews", were used to generate data (Fontana and Frey, 2005: 705, Johnson and Christensen, 2008:208). Interviews of between one and two hours duration were separately conducted with twelve men, of whom most attended different churches. The interviews were usually conducted in the men's own homes and I travelled to other cities for this purpose. Due to time and travel constraints some interviews were conducted via "Skype" video conference. One interview was conducted in a public cafe at the suggestion of the participant. Two interviews were conducted in the home of a friend of the participant. One participant was away from home at the time and this arrangement was mutually convenient. The second participant was not "out" to his church and was cautious about discussing his faith and sexuality with a stranger. This participant also asked to see the transcript of his interview. The others declined this offer; however all of them wished to read the finished thesis. The interviews were informal in style, and were based around the schedule of interview questions in the appendix. Following a semi-structured method, interviews could vary from this schedule; questions could be phrased in a different way or asked at a different point in the interview. I found that the men sometimes anticipated and answered questions during their initial narrative. In this case I would investigate the lead further. Conversely, if the conversation wandered and a topic had not been covered I would return to it later.

Participants were selected through personal contacts and what has been termed “snowballing”— asking participants if they know others who may be suitable research subjects. A disadvantage of this method is that snowballing may only obtain people who are similar. For example the men in the current study tend to be in the same age group and social strata— they are all white and broadly middle to upper middle class. (The participants are introduced in more detail in chapter five.) It was hoped that men aged both over 50 and under 30 could be interviewed so that age differences might be considered in relation to homosexual law reform in New Zealand. In practice the use of snowballing may have limited the range of participant ages. For present purposes this is acceptable as this study is not focused on social variables such as ethnicity or class; this study is not intended to be representative of the wider gay Christian population. The similarity of participants can be seen as a strength rather than a liability, perhaps yielding a greater degree of reliability by focusing on a smaller population.

### **Sample Size.**

I aimed to find between ten and fifteen participants to interview, hoping thereby to achieve “theoretical saturation” (explained below). I decided to halt data collection after twelve interviews for several reasons. Firstly, it was becoming harder to acquire new participants via “snowballing”. In addition to this I was running into project time constraints. One participant withdrew due to his own busy schedule. Most importantly, I was satisfied that sufficient data had been collected. “Small” sample sizes are common in qualitative research as compared to quantitative (Mason, 2010). One of the reasons for small sample sizes is that there is a point of diminishing return in a qualitative sample— more data does not necessarily lead to more information. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, only one occurrence of a piece of data or code is all that is required for it to become part of the analysis. Secondly, “one occurrence of the data is potentially as useful as many in understanding the process behind a topic” (Mason, 2010: 1). Thirdly, qualitative research is labour intensive and analysing a large sample can be time consuming and impractical. It can also be noted that a single interview does not necessarily equate to a single point of data; it can generate multiple instances of a particular variable being studied.

Qualitative approaches usually involve “purposeful sampling” whereas quantitative approaches usually involve probability sampling. Purposeful sampling seeks in-depth

study of information-rich cases. Qualitative research values deep understanding, whereas quantitative research values the ability to generalise to larger populations from a statistically representative sample.

Researchers generally use the concept of “informational redundancy” or “theoretical saturation” to guide their data collection. Saturation is defined as “when the collection of new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation” (Mason, 2010: 2). Achieving saturation is an ideal and difficult to identify. Sandelowski (1995: 183) says that determining an adequate sample size is “ultimately a matter of judgement and experience” on the part of the researcher. Different kinds of purposeful sampling require different minimum sample sizes. Sandelowski (1995: 181) states that “in deviant case sampling, where the intention is to understand a very unusual or atypical manifestation of some phenomenon, one case may be sufficient.” In line with her assertion, I consider the subject matter of this thesis— gay Christians who attend church— is sufficiently unusual to be usefully served by the current sample number.

### **Research Ethics.**

This study was carried out with ethics approval from Victoria University of Wellington (#19413, 28 August 2012), and with signed agreement from participants. All the interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed. Names and addresses of participants were kept separately from these files. Participants understood that all files and recordings would be destroyed once the research was completed. Prior to arranging interviews potential participants were provided with background information which explained how confidentiality would be maintained. At the beginning of each interview I reiterated my agreement to keep information confidential, and that they could terminate the interview at any time or decline to answer particular questions. To ensure privacy pseudonyms are used in excerpts from the transcripts, and some other details may be changed to avoid possible identification of participants (occupation, place of work, city of residence, name of church). Participants were offered the chance to review and edit their transcripts, but only one wished to do so. Examples of the background information and ethics approval forms sent to participants are included in the appendix. The interviewees are introduced in the next chapter.

### **Locating the Researcher.**

I echo Melissa Wilcox's statement that this is not a study about homosexuality, nor is it about religion or churches (Wilcox, 2003, p. ix). It is a study about people. While I do not appear in the study as a subject, my role as researcher needs to be located. I agree with feminist, queer and postmodern theory that academic study cannot be hermetically sealed from the personal; I cannot completely remove myself as observer and any biases I have need to be acknowledged.

I came to this research as an outsider, which brings both strengths and weaknesses. I am not a gay man, I identify as heterosexual. Some may see this as a deficiency. Dyer (1997: 273) contends that lesbian and gay studies are created only by those who openly identify as homosexual, "or by those who study it on our terms", and I seek to honour this.<sup>19</sup> Plummer (2005: 361) suggests queer theory devolves from a "critical humanism" which encompasses values including human rights, care and compassion, recognition, respect and trust. These accord with values I seek to embody. I also no longer call myself a Christian which puts me outside the faith of those I interviewed, but I believe I bring a sympathetic ear to their views.

In the following chapters I conduct a thematic analysis of the interviews. The transcripts are analysed under the categories of *Belonging and Exclusion*; *Belief, Knowledge, Power* and *The Care of the Christian Self*.

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<sup>19</sup> I am grateful for the advice of a sociologist who identifies as gay, who assured me that queer studies is no longer dogmatic about the requirement of a queer orientation in those who do such research.

## 5

## Belonging and Exclusion

*“The development toward which the problem of homosexuality tends is the one of friendship.”*

(Foucault, 1981: 308)

This chapter begins by introducing the men who were interviewed. Following this I analyse the research findings under the themes of *Belonging and Exclusion*.

### 5.1 Introducing The Participants

The participants who were interviewed are listed in the table below. Names and other identifying details have been changed.

	Name	Age	Church
1	Dave	48	Baptist
2	Kelvin	51	Salvation Army
3	John	59	Gay Church <sup>o</sup> and Baptist
4	Trevor	52	Pentecostal
5	Harry	65	Evangelical Denomination $\Theta$
6	Mike	75	Anglican
7	Chris	28	Baptist ‡
8	Edward	69	Gay Church <sup>o</sup> and Independent Evangelical $\Theta$

9	Colin	50	Salvation Army
10	Bruce	58	Baptist
11	Adam	57	Gay Church <sup>°</sup> and Pentecostal
12	Scott	64	Anglican

<sup>°</sup> Independent Anglican-based GLBT congregation.

Θ The participant did not want his church identified.

‡ This was the last church Chris attended.

All interviewees were of European descent and most were in professional careers, six were self-employed running their own business. Two participants had been employed as clergy. Most respondents had high income relative to the general New Zealand population. Most lived in New Zealand cities, two lived in small towns. Most of the men I interviewed were tertiary educated, 10 of 12 had at least an undergraduate degree compared with approximately 11 percent of the New Zealand population (Henrickson, 2007: 70). Four—John, Dave, Mike and Scott—had theology degrees. All interviewees identified as homosexual, other sexualities such as bisexuality were not addressed in this study. Four—Harry, Bruce, Adam and Scott—had previously been married to women (two were divorced, two widowed) and had grown-up children.

Participants were recruited on the basis that they identified as Christians. Most of those interviewed were brought up as Christians; Dave, Mike and Adam were not. Chris, a former Christian who now calls himself an atheist, was included because I felt his perspective would be useful. He was also the youngest, at 28. Six men were in their 50s, three were in their 60s and one was 75. As noted in the methodology chapter, the use of ‘snowballing’ to acquire participants may have inevitably restricted the study to an older peer group. This could also be an advantage in that older men have had more time to reconcile their gay and Christian life. They can also remember the time when homosexuality was illegal in New Zealand, giving them an ability to reflect on social changes versus changes in the Church.

As can be seen from the table, all attended a mixture of protestant churches. Surprisingly, the majority were evangelical and pentecostal churches, traditionally regarded as



conservative. One of the Baptist churches could be regarded as somewhat liberal for that denomination. A few attended a gay congregation in addition to their preferred church. As it transpired, not all interviewees were “out” to their churches. Trevor, for example, was out to his three pastors, but not to his pentecostal congregation as a whole. Harry was not out to his evangelical church nor Edward to his independent evangelical church, although both attended a separate gay congregation. This accords with Yip’s (1997: 116, 119) study where some respondents chose to tell only those who needed to know.

The participants can be compared with the 2004 New Zealand “Lavender Islands” study of 2,269 LGB participants, of whom 54.7% were male (Henrickson, 2007: 70). In that study that 55.5% of gay men believed in a spiritual force, god or gods. Furthermore, 14.8 % of these respondents were Christians, a higher percentage than might be expected from gays’ overall negative experiences with church. However, it appeared from analysis of the Lavender Islands study that LGB respondents are disaffiliating with Christianity at a rate 2.37 times the general population (Henrickson, 2007: 73). “Current Christian” respondents in the Lavender Islands study were significantly older which may indicate a generational trend as older respondents were also generally more likely to have faith in a spiritual force. Interestingly, respondents generally did not believe that there was such a thing as a “lesbian/gay spirituality” (Henrickson, 2007: 77).

I initially attempted to categorise participants against Hervieu-Léger’s (1998) four primary dimensions of Christianity– emotional, communal, cultural, ethical (Fig 1, and see chapter two).

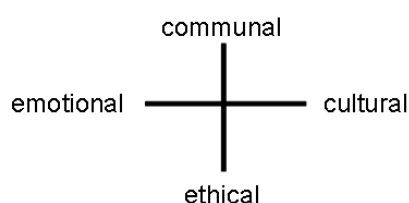


Fig. 1

In her model Hervieu-Léger combines two of these dimensions to come up with a “type”.

Taking the example of one of the evangelical participants in this study, on Hervieu-Léger's model he would likely identify with the *communal* and *cultural* axes. In brief, he would have clear boundaries around group membership and a focus on the Bible and its interpretation. Hervieu-Léger (1998: 224) denotes this *communal-cultural* combination "patrimonial Christianity"<sup>20</sup>.

However, I have a sense that Hervieu-Léger's categories do not quite fit the current data—they do not fully tell the story of these men's religious life. The evangelical man just described, for example would also strongly identify with *emotional* and *ethical* dimensions of the model—experiencing feelings of warmth and belonging, and attachment to evangelical values. Thus, all four dimensions are relevant. In utilising only two dimensions to come up with a "type" this model fails to describe important aspects of Christian experience.

This parallels the difficulty of categorising Christians using terms like "liberal" and "conservative" when peoples' lives and faiths are complex. Even though gay Christian organisations tend to be liberal on many fronts (Hunt, 2009: 13), a person attending a "liberal" gay church may have a "conservative" faith, as John, Harry, Edward and Adam did in this study. The same is true in reverse; Kelvin, Colin and Trevor attended conservative congregations but arguably had broader beliefs.

Chris rejected Christian identity in favour of gay identity, a common mode of resolving this conflict (Ganzevoort *et al*, 2011: 218). However, his rejection of Christianity was not based only on the 'gay issue', he felt uncomfortable with churches' positions on other social issues. One man, Colin, described himself as "spiritual":

I do see myself as probably a bit more spiritual rather than just Christian. I'm on my own path at the moment with that. ... I guess for me its very much connected with nature, with the world. ... But it's also connected with Christianity, with my faith, with something like that. To me I see God in all that. So there's been a

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<sup>20</sup> The full list includes Emotional Christianity, Patrimonial Christianity, Humanitarian Christianity, Political Christianity, Humanist Christianity, Aesthetic Christianity (Hervieu-Léger, 1998).

spirituality there all the time.

Scott called himself a “contemplative”, and used the term “spiritual” several times in his interview. Some commentators identify the emergence of “spirituality” as a new development in the sociology of religion (Wuthnow, 2001; Flanagan *et al*, 2007). Wuthnow (2001: 307) defines spirituality as “a state of being related to a divine, supernatural or transcendent order of reality”, or alternatively, “a sense or awareness of a suprareality that goes beyond life as ordinarily experienced.” Spirituality is largely seen by practitioners as opposed to religion, particularly “organised religion”. However, to be useful this term needs to be distinguished from religion in general, and from New Age religions in particular. I consider this a problem for studies of spirituality. Hunt (2002) is also critical of such approaches. Foucault’s definition of spirituality refers to a “certain mode of being” and to “the transformations which the subject must make of himself in order to accede to this mode of being” (Carrette, 1999: 1). As only two men used the term “spiritual” to define themselves I did not pursue the concept of spirituality further.

Chris Brickell and Ben Taylor (2004: 146) ask what it means to be a gay man in New Zealand in relation to notions of masculinity and heterosexuality. Their study found New Zealand gay men made “little use of the notion of subversion and are instead typically modernist, prioritising self-discovery and authentic self-expression.” A popular stereotype typifies gay men as effeminate or “camp”, which Trevor alluded to:

Interviewer: What can gays offer the church?

Trev: Decorating? (laughs)

In other words, homosexual men are seen as skilled in ‘feminine’ roles like decorating or fashion, not in ‘masculine’ roles like building or sports. However this stereotype did not hold for most of the men I interviewed. Some embodied conventional masculinity, with a “Kiwi bloke” demeanour. Trevor, for example, had a farming background and Bruce was active in sports and working on a major home renovation.

All men seem to have reached a point where they were reconciled with their Christian and gay life. For example, from the interview with John:

Interviewer: You sound, John, that you're very comfortable with where you're at in your journey. Would that be fair?

John. Yes, that's fair, fair comment.

Trev said he had reached the point where:

... rather than try to keep changing things or try to hate where I was at, maybe just accept it [being gay] and think, OK, how do you honour God in the situation you're in. So that's where I'm at now.

Bruce commented:

Being gay is not my identity. ... It's a facet to my personality, it doesn't define who I am.

He added later:

Being Christian is something who I am and it's not an option. And, over time I have also come to realise that being gay is who I am. ... God doesn't make junk.

Adam had spent over ten years heavily involved with an “ex-gay” ministry. He did not not express antagonism, describing them as “really loving and supportive”, but since leaving the group he had completely reconciled his sexuality with his faith:

Adam:

The last couple of years as I've settled in with my identity, at the same time as that, I had a huge revelation of God's unconditional love, and grace.

The men in this study represent examples of what Ganzevoort *et al* (2011: 219) term “integration” of their gay and Christian identities. “In this mode one does not see these elements as mutually exclusive any more, even though the groups one belongs to may still be antagonistic towards each other. The integrator overcomes this antagonism and instead develops an identity that includes both the religious and the homosexual elements.”

A possible exception is Harry who said that apart from the issue of sex, if he could he would choose to be in a heterosexual marriage “because the rules of engagement are clearer.” Harry was one of four men previously married to women. However, he was still comfortable with himself by his own account and this did not seem a major issue.

There was vastly more in the interview transcripts than I can adequately summarise. In reviewing the interviews it struck me that there is considerable diversity among gay Christians. It is important to point this out. Although thematic analysis looks for commonality, this diversity should be upheld.

The first theme I drew from the data is belonging, through the *Support of Others*.

## 5.2 The Support Of Others

A common theme for several participants was the value of support from other people:

Interviewer:

Is there anything that’s been important in helping you or empowering you in your journey with coming to terms with being Christian and gay?

Dave:

Other gay Christian people. Who may just a little bit further along the path, or not necessarily further along the path. Kindred spirits. Asking similar questions to me. ... But also, Christians who are not

gay. Because what my faith is about is inclusiveness. That's why I go to [Baptist church], because it's a mixture of people who go there. They're not all gay. So, yeah, it's not just gays who have helped me, it's other Christians [too].

John:

I think it's tremendously helpful to have other friends around you, in the same situation, with whom you can be honest about struggles and circumstances. ... because none of us are meant to walk a journey like this alone.

Adam:

[I have] a close network of friends, Christian friends. They know me and they love me and they don't care about my sexuality.

Clergy had been helpful to some of the men, for example Trevor mentioned a prison chaplain who was supportive when he came out, and also one of his pastors in the Pentecostal church, with whom he'd recently had coffee:

There are people who do know where I'm at that don't treat me differently. This guy [pastor] I talked to last week, he was good. I felt a little bit understood.

Edward mentioned help from an elder in the small town Brethren church he used to attend. A few men had been able to find traditional churches that were extremely supportive:

Kelvin:

There's a lot of people who have been very understanding, one of the pastors at [location] Salvation Army has been very empathetic and very understanding ... Yeah, just a lot of people who have been very non-judgemental, just accepting of who I am

and are very encouraging. People who I thought would not be, for example people very high up in the Salvation Army who just totally accepted Colin and I for example. That kind of encouragement has gone a long way to help me in my belief and restoring my faith really.

Colin also described his current church experience as “wonderful”.

Some of the men were not able to openly attend the type of church they preferred. John expressed an unfulfilled desire to return to a Brethren church and Edward also preferred a church with “expository Bible preaching”. Two interviewees attended an evangelical church to get the spiritual nourishment they desired, and attended a separate gay-friendly congregation for support. Moving to a more accepting religious group is one way that homosexual Christians integrate both sides of their life (Ganzevoort *et al*, 2011: 219).

Several men described the benefit of a local gay Christian support group, which advertised in a national denominational newspaper. Mike said what had supported him was “love” by which I understood him to mean the love of his partners and gay friends. Relationships such as these are part of the “power of personal experience” (Yip, 1997: 108) which helps gay men come to accept their sexuality in the context of their faith. On finding their sexuality is problematic to the churches, gay Christians undergo a process of reflexivity and self-evaluation, learning to trust their personal experiences (Yip, 1997: 143). Their lived experiences become their ultimate referential framework.

I continue by examining the theme of belonging through two lenses: an analysis of friendship, and an analysis of community.

### **Friendship.**

Friendship expresses support and belonging through shared understandings and affective bonds. It can be contrasted with kinship or professional ties which exist for more explicit reasons; even marriage or cohabitation is associated with discourses concerning social location. A small body of scholarship in sociology seeks to study friendship, for example

Pahl (2000), Pahl and Spencer (2006), Adams and Allen (1998). Outside the rubric of ‘sociology of friendship’ but of particular relevance to gay friendships, Jeffrey Weeks, *et al* (2001) have written on the emergence of “families of choice” in non-heterosexual groups, as “experiments” in alternatives to kinship-based families. They give the example of gay men (and women) who consider their friends to be their family (Weeks *et al*, 2001: 10). “For many individuals who are not in long-term relationships, as well as for those who are, friendships as families of choice are the prime focus of emotional support” (Weeks *et al*, 2001: 58). Pahl and Spencer (2006: 132) describe the existence of “friend- based personal communities” as chosen communities where people are included because of the intrinsic quality of the relationship, rather than for cultural or normative reasons.

How might Foucault theorise the support and care of friends? In his last years Foucault “returned time and time again to the theme of friendship” (Bernauer, 2005: 569) seeking how it might transform our culture. Roach (2005: 58) cautions that Foucault’s formulations of friendship are “vague” and the references “scant”, however some useful ideas may be raised. The interview *Friendship as a Way of Life* (Foucault, 1981) is an important text. Appropriately for our current concern, Foucault aligns friendship with homosexual relationships:

“Another thing to distrust is the tendency to relate the question of homosexuality to the problem of ‘Who am I?’ and ‘What is the secret of my desire?’ Perhaps it would be better to ask oneself, ‘What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated?’ The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of one’s sex, but, rather, to use one’s sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships. And, no doubt, that’s the real reason why homosexuality is not a form of desire but something desirable. Therefore, we have to work at becoming homosexuals and not be obstinate in recognizing that we are. The development toward which the problem of homosexuality tends is the one of friendship.”

(Foucault, 1981: 308)

Firstly, Roach (2005: 58) claims that Foucault is “quite insistent on the value of friendship for the gay community”, which accords with the experiences of the men in this study. “While marriage is not an option for queers in most of the world, friendship, however



imperfect, always has been” (Roach, 2012: 14). However, although gay liberation is an important stage for Foucault, it is not the main point. The acts and desires that may occur within same sex relations are not for Foucault of primary importance. He looks beyond sexuality to find new forms of “multiple” relations. It is in the tying together of “unforeseen lines of force” and the formation of new alliances that new types of relationship are envisaged.

Secondly, Foucault calls for us to experience a “multiplicity of relationships”; exploring friendship is a way in which homosexuality– and perhaps all of society– can develop further. Roach (2005: 57) believes Foucault sees friendship as leading to a new kind of relation, “friendship as a way of life”. These ideas seem to have similarities with Weeks’ communities of choice, above.

As Webb (2003) summarises, “Foucault’s work suggests that friendship emerges from the complex system of relations that condition who we are and how we can act. Friends are those with whom we work on the historical conditions of existence, and those with whom we share the practice of becoming who we are.” Friendship can thus be seen as a practice, a *technique of the self*. Friendship as a Foucauldian practice supports the construction of a Christian self (chapter seven). In ancient times the practices of self care were far from solitary (Webb 2003: 132). In Foucault’s words:

“Around the care of the self, there developed an entire activity of speaking and writing in which the work of oneself on oneself and communication with others were linked together” (HS3: 51).

And:

“All this attention to the self did not depend solely on the existence of schools, lectures and professionals of spiritual direction for its social base; it found a ready support in the whole bundle of customary relations of kinship, friendship and obligation. (HS3: 52).

Friendship might also be described as a productive power relation, another form of the self-empowerment discussed in the next chapters. Before this I want to briefly connect

friendship with the concept of *community*.

### **Community.**

For present purposes I will use “community” to describe a set of social relations where participants have a common sense of identity (Marshall, 1998: 97) <sup>21</sup>. This term was used in the interviews; Trevor expressed an ideal around a church being a community:

Trevor:

I really think that as part of, like, living faith that if you go into any church you belong to that community. That's what I think is the ideal, you know?

Colin and others used the term “fellowship”:

Colin:

I go to church for fellowship. And to keep me connected with God.

In theological discourse, fellowship “implies persons in association, participation, and communion with one another or with the divine persons” (Lewis and Demarest, 1994: 156). The term is important and frequently used in Christian discourse. The concepts of fellowship and community share features in common, for example the idea of “persons in association, participation, and communion with one another”<sup>22</sup>.

Like friendship, the concept of community expresses belonging. Bernauer (2005: 568) connects Foucault’s work on friendship with the idea of community as does Roach (2012: 14) who believes Foucault contemplated “communities of friends”. I wondered whether these communities of friends might prefigure Giorgio Agamben’s *Coming Community*

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<sup>21</sup> Humphrey (2012: 155 - 158) cautions the “constant discovery” of *community* by social scientists is really just another way of saying that people experience social bonds and that it may be too vague to usefully describe collectives. While I consider his point has merit, I use ‘community’ here in lieu of a better term.

<sup>22</sup> In fact, the very origins of sociology lie in an exploration of fellowship according to Staught and Turner (1998: 3).

(1990) and whether the interview data could be theorised in this way.<sup>23</sup> Agamben introduces new ways in which community might be conceived by leaving the requirement of shared identity behind. He invokes a community of “whatever-being”, which Roach (2012: 149) interprets as the Foucauldian community of friends. According to Agamben, the coming community will be made up of a “singularity”. People will not belong to any class (such as being French, or Christian, or gay) or have anything in common except being itself (Agamben, 1990: 1,2). Agamben’s new and seemingly powerless community also has political power because:

“What the state cannot tolerate in any way... is that the singularities form a community without affirming an identity.”

(Agamben, 1990: 38)

Because Agamben’s coming community does not affirm one uniform identity it is threatening to the state, because a state can only manage identifiable subjects. In fact, Humphrey (2012) believes that the term “community” itself is currently used by the state to support its agenda.

Community has previously been conceived around identity. However, Webb (2003: 136) believes that for Foucault “it is a matter of secondary importance whether my friend is like me or unlike me. What matters most is the practice we share and the paths that we follow.” This could be seen as a Foucauldian affirmation of Agamben’s “community without identity”. The community without identity is neither particular or universal (Agamben, 1990: 1,2). This idea is possibly easier described by saying what it is not. I think Agamben imagines a community which is neither human (a universal) nor gay, white and male (particular). A community neither Christian (universal) nor Baptist, heterosexual and middle-class (particular).

The coming community has its own power and language, external power does not have a hold on it. Following this line of thought, I suggest gay people who resist the dominant church discourse are developing their own power and their own language. It is in this respect— and perhaps this respect only— that they demonstrate the “coming community”. I

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<sup>23</sup> Agamben claims Foucault as a major influence (Durantaye, 2009: 209).

do not claim gay Christians are the paradigm of the coming community, only that it is useful to view them through this lens.

However, solving the problem of conflict between distinct communities by erasing all distinctions seems likely to be unpopular with many groups including gay Christians, for whom “identity politics” have become important. Foucault might also disagree with Agamben; in one interview he says the idea that one day there will no longer be any difference between homo- and heterosexuality is a myth (Foucault, 1981: 308).

I have examined friendship and community as part of the theme of *belonging*, its converse is *exclusion*:

### 5.3 Exclusion

Most of the interviews contained stories of rejection by the Church and so it is important to comment on this. As Chris observed:

You never really get over coming out in a conservative church.

John, for example, was asked to leave the boards of several Christian organisations once he came out. In another example, when he was a young man attending a pentecostal church Kelvin’s homosexuality was seen as “demonic”, and he endured attempts to exorcise the unwanted spirits. Exorcism was also attempted on another of the interviewees. I consider these overt acts of exclusion. Trevor did not feel excluded in an overt way, for example by not being invited to meetings. However, he did feel there was an underlying ethos of opposition:

Trev:

It's not like direct opposition or anything like that, but it's kind of like, you kind of just get the feeling that there's kind of... I'm not sure what I'm trying to

say. It's not directly opposition about someone who's gay, but indirectly it is.

Harry spoke of feeling “alienation” as the result of a former pastor’s attitudes:

Harry:

It's not as if he [the pastor] would present a study of [homosexuality], but he would say things like “people with their rainbow flags” etc and, you know, make a joke, or put them down in some way.

Harry noted that “I wasn’t the only person he excluded at all”, describing much of what occurred in that church as struggles over authoritarian leadership rather than anti-homosexual pressure. Chris gave the example of his conservative Baptist church offering to allow his boyfriend to attend church with him when he came out in his late teens. The church believed they were being kind and reasonable but Chris felt that at a fundamental level they did not really understand. The ethos still didn’t feel *welcoming*, which is what he sought.

Based on these comments I began to consider the idea that exclusion can actually be subtle, covert rather than overt. Covert exclusion is implicit, it occurs undercover. It is expressed in the feeling that one is not wanted and does not belong. The experience of exclusion is familiar to marginalised groups. Michelle Erai (2004: 44) writes of the “exclusionary exile” based on gender and race in New Zealand. She ends by embracing an implied *self-exile*: “My personal solution to being queer in Aotearoa/New Zealand? Exile.” Self-exile, removing oneself from oppositional groups is an option gay Christians can take. As discussed above, a sense of exclusion often leads to gay Christians changing church or leaving altogether. Almost all of those interviewed moved to different churches in seeking to reconcile their gay and Christian lives. I think in Foucauldian terms moving church can be seen as an empowering choice, an act of resistance. Vasey (1995: 249) describes a New Testament passage which points to Jesus as one who shares the experience of exclusion with homosexual Christians. I see this interpretation as an example of gay Christians developing new discourses which resist the dominant Christian discourse.

Another way of reconciling the gay-Christian dimension is “detraditionalization” where a believer rejects some aspects of their faith tradition (Yip, 2003: 136). Detraditionalization does not involve the total disappearance of tradition. Heelas (1998) espouses a “coexistence thesis” which argues that the self and traditions coexist and intermingle in constructing a person’s social life. Similarly, Furseth and Repstad (2006: 123) suggest it is possible today to take part in religious communities “without fully supporting the official dogma or even having a definite faith in them.” For example, Kelvin and his partner Colin now attend a Salvation Army church even though its official stance is not pro gay. I want to conclude by briefly examining two ideas for thinking about exclusion, the idea of the *stranger* and the idea of *otherness*.

Georg Simmel’s concept of the *stranger* can illuminate gay Christians’ experiences of being both inside and outside the group<sup>24</sup>. It seems to me that when churches exclude someone they conceive them as a “stranger” in this sense. Simmel’s stranger is constructed out of the social interaction between outsiders (homosexuals) and insiders (the church). However, “the stranger is an element of the group itself ... an element whose membership in the group involves being both being outside it and confronting it.” The stranger has a “synthesis of nearness and remoteness” (Simmel, 1971: 144,145). The stranger gives the group something useful, which it needs: “The stranger’s ability to listen and to theorize possibilities, from society’s margins, allowed for a freedom not found in the group membership itself”. But it is this freedom that threatens the group. Simmel believes that the stranger’s ability to name “dangerous possibilities” was established by society’s ability to simultaneously construct the stranger as “close to us and far from us” (Erickson, 2001: 110).

A stranger is perceived to have a quality in common with many other strangers. “For this reason strangers are not really perceived as individuals, but as strangers of a certain type” (Simmel, 1971: 148). He gives the example of the middle ages where all Jews were taxed identically, as they were all regarded the same. In a similar way, Trevor spoke of stereotypes about gays, who he said are all regarded by Christians as the same.

Exclusion can also lead to the idea of *otherness*. In Christian discourse a gay Christian is

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<sup>24</sup> Also see Williams *et al* (2005), *The Social Outcast*.

an alterity, an “other” which resists normalisation. In fact, Christian discourse may be founded in a rejection of difference at a fundamental level due to its reciprocal influence on Western philosophy. According to Emmanuel Levinas, Western philosophy is focused on ideas of totality and the One. Hence any alterity vanishes as theory tries to explain it: “the relation with the Other is only possible through assimilation into the self” (Sarup, 1996: 68). Language’s function, for Levinas, is to suppress the other and make it the same as the ‘normal’. In response to this problem, “Levinas proposes not the ontological subject but an ethical subject defined in relation to the Other. It follows from this argument that there must be respect for the Other’s heterogeneity” Sarup (1996: 68). He proposes that ethics, in the sense of respecting difference, is the basis of relationship, not ontology. On this view, Christians would be less focused on whether someone *is gay* (ontology) but on relationship with this “other” person<sup>25</sup>. Thus, Western (and Christian) discourse does not approve of otherness, it seeks to normalise sexuality. It seems clear that Christian discourse presupposes a heterosexual human nature:

Trevor:

If you don't say anything, people just treat you like you're heterosexual. You know, “When are you getting married?” or “Where's your partner?”

In Christian discourse to be seen as Christian is also to be seen as heterosexual. In fact, both gay and Christian communities regard “gay Christians” as deviant. However, the discourses of the men in this research show they have walked their own path and developed their own self-construction (see chapter seven).

In summary, the experiences of the gay men studied here can be analysed under the themes of *Belonging and Exclusion*. While gay Christians’ experience of otherness is acknowledged, this study emphasises the positive power of friendship, support and community in gay Christian lives.

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<sup>25</sup> This view is quite different to Foucault’s ethics which were focused not on ontology or relationship, but on the self.

## 6

## Belief, Knowledge, Power

*“It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect. On the contrary, it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power.”*

– DP: 29.

In this chapter the research data is analysed around the themes of *Belief, Knowledge and Power* in religion. These themes developed in two ways. Firstly, *belief as knowledge/power* developed in a “bottom-up” or inductive way, it was triggered by a question which seemed to emerge from the data. The analysis of *religion and productive power relations* largely developed using a “top-down” methodology, although even here some details seemed to “emerge” rather than be imposed.

## 6.1 Belief As Knowledge/Power

Sarup (1996: 72) explains that “power/knowledge is a device for studying the social and scientific practices that underlie and condition the formation of beliefs”. In this section I focus on the element of belief *itself*. Study participants were asked about their beliefs and responded in a variety of ways:

Interviewer:

Tell me tell me a bit more about your beliefs now,  
theologically, or however you'd like to describe



yourself?

Colin:

Let's start with God. OK, obviously I believe in God. I don't believe that Christianity is the only way, to the exclusion of all other religions.

I respect other religions and other faiths.

John self-identified as evangelical, but stressed elsewhere that the Bible needs to be be “rightly interpreted”:

John:

I would still very definitely call myself evangelical. And that means that's difficult because the churches I'm going to would all be pretty uncomfortable with those labels. ... The gay friendly churches are not evangelical.

Here theological discourses, a formal “Christian knowledge”, are explicitly connected with belief. Within a religious *apparatus* theology can be a key discourse that believers use to construct a self, and which constructs them in turn. Kelvin spoke of his beliefs in the following way:

Kelvin:

I definitely am a Christian believer, I'm definitely quite liberal in my beliefs. I'm definitely not a literal bible believer. I don't believe that every single word in the bible is as it is, I have quite a liberal view of the bible.

And later:

I have a really strong belief that Christ is my saviour and that he died to save me.

The phrase “Christian believer” indicates the strong role that *belief* has in the Christian apparatus. Kelvin identified his beliefs around the Bible as “more liberal” but also expressed his faith in traditional Christian terms. None of the participants had what might be called “simple” or naïve beliefs. For example:

Trevor:

I would say that I'm a Bible believer. I think. But it's kind of like, what does that mean, eh? [laughs]... As you get older you see more and you realise that there's a whole lot more and somehow it's all gotta fit sorta thing? So kind of, how does it all fit?

I think some things you let go and some things you hold onto. I think I believe less about less things, ... but there's certain things I try to just hold onto that kinda simplify faith right down to the bare minimum sort of thing.

Here Trevor realises that being a “Bible believer” requires nuanced understanding. His comments about believing less and simplifying his faith should be read in the sense of a mature reflection and parsing of what is important.

It appears that belief is not usually investigated as a defining concept in sociology. Belief has been framed within “conversion” where conversion is “a change in one’s universe of discourse” (Hunt, 2002: 84). Conversion is conceptualised as a change in consciousness, of self image, of one’s meaning system.<sup>26</sup> However, I think treating belief as discourse offers a stronger model for analysis of the current data. Statements like Kelvin’s “I definitely am a Christian believer” prompted me consider belief in relation to Foucault’s ideas about knowledge. Knowledge is defined by analytic philosophers as *justified true belief* (Elder-Vass, 2012: 209). I think if knowledge can be considered a form of belief, then beliefs

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<sup>26</sup> “Conversion” is not a useful term in my opinion, even though Hunt notes it can be used for long, slow changes in behaviour (Hunt, 2002: 84). I prefer to speak of religious “change” or “adoption” as conversion has too many connotations of swift dramatic change.

must be considered part of the Foucauldian knowledge/power circuit.

While to outsiders the details of religious beliefs may seem inconsequential, to insiders beliefs can be extremely important. An indication of the unique role of belief in the Christian world may be intimated from Borowitz (quoted in Harrison, 2007: 16) who claims “for the Jew, religion cannot be so easily identified with the affirmation of a given content of belief.” Christian discourse includes discussion over what exactly is “belief”. Is belief primarily “intellectual assent to revealed truths”, or “trust in a person”, or “a certain mode of existence”? (Lewis and Demarest, 1994: 73). Smith (2005: 216-217) criticises the view that Christian belief is a merely a system of belief in propositions. He says these attitudes arise from defining belief only as a mental state. On this view:

“a mental state is described as a kind of ‘attitude’— in particular a ‘propositional attitude’ that is a belief about a state of affairs... One has knowledge only if one’s beliefs are true.”

Colin indicated that intellectual beliefs alone were unhelpful:

Colin:

... otherwise it becomes an abstract faith. [It needs] the lived experience perhaps. It has to be more than a theory. Otherwise it's just an idea. ... It's an important crux of what makes a faith rather than a theory, something that affects your life rather than just a thought.

Smith goes on to suggest in explicitly postmodern terms that belief is also a matter of the “heart” and of “interpretation of a text”. Others point out that belief is not merely intellectual assent. “Simmel explicitly repudiates the mechanistic psychology that views religiosity as a mental entity, instead proposing to see it sociologically as ‘a form according to which the human soul experiences life and comprehends its existence’” (Scaff, 2011: 226). To foreshadow the discussion below, some of these ways of construing belief also allow belief to be considered a Foucauldian “practice”.

For Foucault, dominant discourses and knowledges maintain their power through an ongoing struggle with “disqualified” or “subjugated” knowledges— the knowledge of those on the margins (Miller, 2008: 257). By subjugated knowledges, Foucault means “a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified”, “naive knowledges”, knowledges insufficiently scientific, low-ranking knowledges such as those of the psychiatric patient (Foucault, 1976b: 82). Foucault suggests that we amplify such subjugated voices, for:

“it is through the reappearance of this knowledge, of these local, popular knowledges ... that criticism performs its work” (Foucault, 1976b: 82).

I suggest that the knowledge gay Christians hold— the knowledge, for example, that one can be gay and Christian— is a subjugated knowledge. Foucault is a “philosopher of discontinuity”; bodies of knowledge (discourses) do not necessarily progress over time in a cumulative fashion (McHoul and Grace, 1993: 4). Hence, what gay Christians know can be discontinuous with the Christian past. These subjugated knowledges can also be expressed in *parrhesia* (truth telling) and thus contribute to *resistance*, discussed below.

### **Belief As Practice.**

A second aspect of belief invites discussion:

Colin:

I've chosen and believe and use Christ and Jesus as the example that I choose, and that is a personal choice that I make.

Phrases such as this indicate belief is not merely intellectual assent to doctrine. The employment of “choice” and the idea of “using” Christ imply an action, *to* believe. This is belief as a volitional experience as opposed to an intellectual one. Hence I suggest that, rightly understood, belief can also be a form of “practice”. Carrette considers this Foucault’s primary understanding of religious belief, commenting:

“The practices of religion create the ‘truth’ of ourselves, which... questions the prioritisation of ‘belief’ over ‘practice’ in the Western conception of religion. In Foucault, as I have indicated, ‘belief’ is a form of ‘practice’. Religious beliefs order and regulate the

embodied subject.” (Carrette , 2000: 150).

In an earlier quote, Colin remarked that intellectual beliefs alone were unhelpful and that faith needs “the lived experience”. He spoke of this kind of belief as leading one to take action such as prayer, which I interpret as a practice. Bruce valued his Baptist church for its actions around social justice issues. For Bruce, belief should result in practice. For similar reasons, Mike felt that the political arena was “the obvious place for the church to be.”

Foucault avoided the “history of beliefs”. Instead he analysed the “history of real practices”, a strategy through which he deliberately removed the discussion of Christian doctrines in his discussion of Christian technologies of the self (Carrette, 2000: 110). Nancy Fraser comments, “Foucault’s genealogy of modern power establishes that power touches people’s lives more fundamentally through their social practices than through their beliefs” (quoted in Carrette, 2000: 111). Carrette (2000: 111) acknowledges that seeing belief as a practice alone may be problematic: “There is ... a tension in Foucault’s later work on Christianity when belief and social practice are separated so absolutely, for religious belief informs practice.” However I think Foucault’s study of the early Christian confessional term *exomologesis* suggests a combination of belief and practice. “Exomologesis as an ‘act of faith’ is indispensable to the Christian for whom these revealed and taught truths are not simply a matter of beliefs that he accepts but also obligations through which he commits himself...” (Foucault, 1980c: 155). In my view the interview data and commentary supports the idea that “belief” is *both* a discourse of knowledge/power and a practice employed by Christians.

### **Truth.**

If we accept that knowledge is “justified true belief” then understanding power/knowledge also requires understanding discourses around truth. Part of Harry’s story illustrates the importance of having the right beliefs, or *true* beliefs. For a number of years he substituted a “house group” for his usual church attendance. In that group were two couples who:

had been asked to not come back to the [evangelical]  
church congregation because their theology was suspect.

This couple were rejected for being outside the church's truth. This illustrates the high value Christian discourse places on the idea of *truth*. Beliefs and knowledge imply a relationship with truth. Truth is therefore also related to power:

“Truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power... Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint”

(Foucault: 1984d: 72).

The subject creates itself through practices which are “games of truth” (Foucault: 1984e: 440). “Each society,” – and, I suggest, each *church*– “has its regime of truth” (Foucault: 1984d: 73). A regime of truth includes:

“the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true” (Foucault: 1984d: 73).

Here Foucault suggests that truth is relative to a particular location, a religious group or church perhaps. Although we may feel otherwise, truth is not universal, but functions within the discourses and mechanisms of a church. Those who have status, church leaders for example, say what counts as true. As far as mainstream Christian discourse is concerned, the things which gay Christians know cannot be truths. This is linked with subjugated knowledge, discussed above.

If this is so, how can truth change and new truths become part of accepted discourse? Foucault does acknowledge that truth can be contested, “it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation (‘ideological’ struggles)” (Foucault: 1984d: 73). However, this “battle for truth” is not centred around discovering absolute truths, but rather around which rules in which truth game are ascendant (Foucault: 1984d: 74).

In summary, religious belief as truth and a form of knowledge always carries power relations alongside it. Merely by espousing beliefs in God, and in Christian discourses the men in this study embody power. This religious power is considered in the next section.

## 6.2 Religion and Productive Power Relations

“Religion is a sphere of force relations in the wider cultural network– it inescapably exists as a manifestation of power” (Carrette, 2000: 148). In the epigram quoted at the beginning of this chapter Foucault states that the even the “soul” is produced by power (DP: 29) <sup>27</sup>. Drawing on Foucault, Geroulanos (2006: 637) believes power can be religious in three ways:

- “1. Certain kinds of power are strictly religious (e.g., Christian pastoral power and its development into a socio-political force).
2. Within a certain group or society, power can be inflected religiously (e.g., in the addition of a church to a panoptic factory).
3. Power, in modernity, may have a fundamentally religious basis.”

Specific power-talk around Christian pastoral power is demonstrated in one of the interviews where Dave refers to the power which (theological) knowledge gave him:

One big [factor] is that I did four years of theological study, and knew that... I wasn't going to let any minister tell me what was right or wrong, you know? I didn't give them that kind of power.

Dave adds:

Walter Wink talks about institutions becoming bigger and more powerful than they first start out to be. And I think he drew me to that, to look at them with a great deal of care and suspicion. Because they, they take over. ... He gave me a bit of a head's up, a red flag about institutions.

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<sup>27</sup> Foucault's ideas about an incorporeal soul are curious. It is not certain he merely used the word “soul” as a metaphor for the human being as he rejects the idea that the soul is an illusion and insists that it has a reality. He devotes a chapter of *The Care of the Self* to “The work of the soul.”

Wink (1984: 7), a theologian, argues that, “The language of power pervades the whole New Testament”. Hence power may specifically affect Christians through Biblical texts and the discourses Christians make utilising them. In some ways it is no surprise when power relations are discovered as, “anyone who goes looking for power will find it” (Spickard, 2007:134). Some argue that Foucault reduces all explanations of social behaviour to interactions of power and neglects other possibilities. Against this, King argues that Foucault’s view is not reductionist, it is merely a “lens”. As he writes, looking for power-knowledge is:

“a lens for examining a particular dimension of the sociocultural dynamic and in no sense to be taken as a definitive or all-encompassing position that reduces everything to power relations” (King, 1999: 208).

The lens of power relations has been useful in examining the current data. Returning to the interviews, Dave explains his conception of power:

It’s a process of giving ... an individual power, or another word to use, a term, is self-actualisation. ... I think that’s what I’m talking about. Self-actualization. Power is just a quicker, easier way of saying that.

This seems a clear example of self-empowerment. Affirming one’s homosexuality in the face of opposition requires a “personal strength” (Lalich and McLaren, 2010: 1304). Yip (1997: 108) also affirms the “power of personal experience” in gay Christian lives, which I connect to the construction of a religious self in chapter seven. Agamben (1996: 113) comments that the goal of a “happy life”<sup>28</sup> in the “coming community” should be a life “that has reached the perfection of its own power and of its own communicability— a life over which sovereignty and right no longer have any hold.” I think that finding one’s own power means that for gay Christians sovereign church politics can no longer have any hold. In terms of state politics, New Zealand homosexual law reform decriminalised the private lives of homosexuals in 1986. Pritchard (2005: 80) comments, “for Foucault, the

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<sup>28</sup> Agamben also uses the term “form-of-life”.



removal of the state from private lives did not liberate sexuality from the effects of power; power was already present in the defining of identity, feelings, and acts as ‘normal’ or ‘deviant’.”

Foucault (1983a) is clear that power relations are not always to be analysed in terms of dominance, power can be “productive”. In this section I emphasise the productive side of power. The oppressive side of power in churches is developed under the theme of “exclusion” in chapter five. As discussed above, beliefs carry knowledge and therefore power. Discourses concerning the Bible and its interpretation structure Christian lives. Adam commented that in recent years he had studied:

what the Bible actually says about [homosexuality]. I discovered a lot of very interesting things [laughs] and it was not quite as I thought. ... Finally for the first time in my life I actually like myself and am comfortable with who I am.

While the Bible has been used to disempower gay men, in this case Adam’s beliefs around the Bible carried potency (knowledge/power). Adam was separately asked what empowered him. He replied:

Understanding the message of radical grace is what really empowered me more than anything else.

He explained “radical grace” as:

Jesus has done it, he's done everything. There's nothing more I can possibly do to earn any more favour or any more love, it's just done.

I think that for Adam, this “message” (doctrine, belief) embodied power/knowledge. When asked about power, Colin stated that he saw God strengthening him, and that he meets God in nature:

Colin:

Life, God, you know I can connect directly with that. I can surpass church, and that gives me strength, that gives me what I need. That gives me the empowerment to believe and to live my life, and feel fulfilled and to have faith.

...

I suppose I do see [God] as powerful. It's not a word I would normally use. ... "Powerful" I guess is close, but it's not big enough for what I imagine God to be.

Colin also talked about God's power as the idea that God is in benevolent control of the world. He acknowledged God is "a powerful force", but that we don't need to worry or ask for help "cos God's actually got it in control anyway."

### **God as a Positive Power.**

Drawing on Alfred Shutz's distinction between direct face-to-face interaction and indirect action with others, Turner (2008: 34) writes, "In sociology it is perfectly reasonable to include in 'interaction', exchanges... between the faithful and their gods." I think it is useful to explore the notion of God as a power in Foucauldian terms. When analysing the theme of support (chapter five) I was curious that the support of God was not often mentioned explicitly. However, a view of the divine as empowering and therefore supportive could frequently be seen in the way interviewees talked about God. I have already discussed Colin's view of God's empowerment, above. Trevor spoke of power in terms of God causing events in our lives:

Trevor:

Either God causes things to happen in our lives or he allows things to happen in our lives and either way ... maybe I should [just accept this].

In context, the idea of accepting God as a power was spoken of as a positive thing. It seemed for Trevor that reframing thoughts about God also helped him in being

comfortable with himself as a gay Christian. Scott commented:

I think I understand the power of God as my own power, really. ... And I understand the power of God is when I am in tune with my Self.

Scott appeared to link the power of God with self-power. When asked if he had any thoughts on God as a power in his life. Edward replied:

Edward:

Yes. God is with me all the time. And I believe God gives us strength to do what he wants us to do. And I acknowledge the fact that God is the source of all power and all strength ... You know, I believe I was created gay by God. [It's] not by accident, we're made that way.

In an earlier discussion about empowerment Edward said:

I've always believed that if we have a faith in God, God is there when we need him.

“God is there when we need him” implies God has power to influence one’s life. The above interview fragments seem indications that God can be a productive power.

### **Theoscopy.**

Linked to the idea of God as a power is “theoscopy”, the sense of being seen by God. The term is developed by Geroulanos (2006) who makes particular use of Foucault’s *panopticism* and of Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle*.<sup>29</sup> Theoscopy “is to live a paranoid experience of nakedness before a God who is all-seeing, hence omniscient and omnipotent, and who accordingly metes out a social experience and a knowledge of

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<sup>29</sup> Foucault rejects Debord’s ideas in *Discipline and Punish* (p. 217), writing “Our society is not one of spectacle, but of surveillance”.

oneself and one's history that is based on this emphasis of being seen" (Geroulanos, 2006: 633). It is likely that believers act as if a panoptic God is there, although perhaps Geroulanos is stretching Foucault a bit far. However, I did not find this idea resonated with what was said in the interviews. For example:

Trevor:

I like the idea of God watching our lives. Say you have a kid that's growing up, you watch how they do ... You watch their life because you're interested in their life. But you don't step in and try and control it or do a whole lot of stuff, you know? And I kinda think that's how God is with us.

Trevor felt God watching us was a productive power relation, not a "paranoid experience". We should be careful not to assume God's observation of us is negative. As above, the idea of God as power-over can also be considered outside the discourse of surveillance. God as power-over implies transcendence but this is not the only way to conceive of the divine. While the analysis of deity as a sovereign power is certainly interesting, there are other possibilities. God could also be power-in or power-through, in the sense of the immanence discussed by Agamben, Deleuze and Spinoza. In *The Weakness of God* Caputo (2006: 23) postulates a "God without sovereignty". I mention these ideas to illustrate that a dominating power-centric view of God is not the only possible view.

This section has discussed personal empowerment and also participants' experience of God as productive rather than dominating, power-in rather than power-over. Where interviewees had been excluded by churches (dominating power) they made a distinction between the action of people and the action of God.

### 6.3 Resistance

Monique Wittig (1992, p. xiii) describes heterosexuality not as an institution, but as a political regime which rests on the submission and the appropriation of women. Borrowing

from Wittig, the heterosexual church supports this political regime which dominates—requires submission from—homosexuals. However, Wittig emphasises domination, which was only part of Foucault's relations of power. Resistance to pastoral power is embodied by many gay Christians:

Dave:

I wasn't going to let any minister tell me what was right or wrong, you know? I didn't give them that kind of power.

Foucault says there are no relations of power without resistances and that studying resistance is a useful starting point towards studying power (Foucault, 1980b: 141; 1982a: 780). Mansbridge (2001: 4) believes Foucault mainly stresses the effects of power rather than the creation of resistance. Alternatively, Nealon (2008:111) thinks Foucault attaches great importance to resistance but says we must avoid the binary of resistance *versus* power.

Carrette (2000: 142) believes that most of Foucault's writing on religion was a negative critique. In his discussion Carrette (2004: 218) describes monotheism as a "system of thought which attempts to obliterate the possibility of difference and diversity." The experiences of many of the interviewees seem to offer resistance to such a discourse of "normalisation." Their mere presence in Christian churches adds difference and diversity. I propose that gay Christians who remain in the church embody resistance to this "obliteration of difference". In fact they embody a dual resistance, both within the Church and within the non-Christian gay community as well. Bruce commented on this:

Bruce:

I have to say, being a Christian in gay circles is quite hard. Because [I have gay friends] but they're hugely anti-church.

However the men interviewed here do not demonstrate a general resistance to all things religious so it is important to ask *what* they are resisting. It appears that those interviewed were often resisting religious organisations or leadership— the "non-discursive form" of the

church. Those studied also resisted certain discourses, for example the discourse that gays are inherently sinful. However, these men are not resisting God, nor even all aspects of the Church. Colin, for example, spoke of God's love:

Colin:

We have to believe that God loves us and will do his best for us.

Adam also summed up his views in terms of love,

Adam:

For me, God is love. That's it. Beginning and end of story. Everything else is just sort of interpretation on that, and how you might apply that.

Thus, the interviewees were clear that it was either God, or their Christian faith, or Christian values that they were responding warmly to, even if organisationally they did not agree with all that was going on. As an aside, I think there is a connection between love and power, but I am as yet unsure of how to frame this. Perhaps, in simple terms, the love of God is empowering for believers. If a power-love connection is valid, Foucault did not raise the idea.

However, if resistance is as ubiquitous and effective as dominating power, what can be made of the negative experiences of the men in this study? For example, Harry, afraid to come out lest he lose his job in a church organisation. Or John, who lost his position in various evangelical institutions when he came out. The experiences of those who appear to have been pressed down by power seem to question the efficacy of (this reading of) Foucault's resistance alone. While I think the empowerment of resistance is a valid interpretation of the current data, caution is needed. Resistance should not be over-emphasised against these men's experience of dominating power in their churches. Parrhesia, described in the next section, also supports resistance.

## 6.4 Parrhesia, Speaking Out

In 1983 Foucault conducted a lecture series at Berkeley where he discussed ancient Christian use of the Greek term *parrhesia* (Bernauer, 2004). Parrhesia can be translated “to speak boldly”. Freedom of speech is implied, in particular the *obligation* to speak the truth for the common good, even at personal risk. Foucault conceived parrhesia as a mode of discourse where one speaks openly and truthfully without the use of manipulation or rhetoric (Foucault, 1983b). Parrhesia conflicts with our Cartesian model of truth according to Foucault; Descartes saw “truth” as what is undeniable. For Descartes we must doubt everything that can be doubted, thus, speech that is not examined or criticized may not have a valid relation to truth.

There is always an element of personal danger in speaking boldly; as Foucault (1983b) says, “the parrhesiastes is someone who takes a risk”. For Foucault, a user of parrhesia must be in a less empowered social position than those to whom they are revealing their truth. For instance, a congregation member speaking the truth to a priest would be an example of parrhesia, whereas a priest revealing the truth to his congregation would not. Foucault concludes:

“To summarize the foregoing, parrhesia is a kind of verbal activity where the speaker has a specific relation to truth through frankness, a certain relationship to his own life through danger, a certain type of relation to himself or other people through criticism (self-criticism or criticism of other people), and a specific relation to moral law through freedom and duty. More precisely, parrhesia is a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth, and risks his life because he recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself). In parrhesia, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy” (Foucault, 1983b).

The usefulness of such a concept for gay Christians speaking their truth to those embodying greater power in the Church seems clear. Participants indicated some situations

where it could be argued parrhesia was taking place. When he came out, John was asked to stand down from leadership in several Christian organisations. He commented that it was “generally done in a generous and good spirit”, but in one case John came into conflict with the principal of the institution. John said, “as far as he was concerned I was challenging his authority.” Furthermore:

John:

It is very, very clear that only churches, not charitable organisations can exclude people on the basis of their sexual orientation and I could have taken [the organisation] to the Human Rights Commission because I had a contract ... and I made it clear that, “You realise that I could legitimately take you to the Human Rights Commission because you're quite clearly breaching employment conditions”.

Another interviewee, Scott spoke out in a similar way. When in conflict with his Christian employers it was only when Scott threatened to involve the Human Rights Commission that those in power backed down. John’s and Scott’s responses could be seen as a speaking of the truth boldly at personal risk. Parrhesia also ties in with Foucault’s concept of “resistance”, discussed above.

Parrhesia could be compared with Foucault’s extensive consideration of Catholic confession in his later work (Hepworth and Turner, 1982; HS3). I agree with Bernauer (2004: 81) that confession is about “truth obligations”, but confession is only of sins, of negative sides of oneself. A statement such as Edward’s “I believe I was created gay by God” would not be considered confession. None of the men interviewed spoke of being gay in terms of confession, thus parrhesia seems a better fit. To give another example of parrhesia, Trevor had coffee with one of his pastors and candidly discussed his church’s negative focus on the parliamentary *Marriage Amendment Act* (2013). He commented:

Trevor:

If you feel like you have to be silent about where you're at, you always feel a bit on the outside. If you



can't be open about where you're at.

...

How can you be part of a community if you can't say where you're at?

Trevor wanted to be able to “say where he was at”. “Coming out”, a common phrase in gay writing, is about not being silent, about speaking. It is “telling yourself” (coming out to yourself) and “telling others” (Outland 2000:1). I suggest coming out is a discourse in itself, a ‘what can be said’ moment. Telling the truth about ourselves, public confession—forms of coming out—are themes in Foucault’s *The Hermeneutics of the Self* (1980a). Foucault writes that if sex is not talked about, “then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power, he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom.” (HS1: 6) In these terms, by speaking the men studied here are putting themselves outside of power.

Foucault continues:

“What sustains our eagerness to speak of sex in terms of repression is doubtless this opportunity to speak out against the powers that be, to utter truths and promise bliss, to link together enlightenment, liberation and manifold pleasures; to pronounce a discourse that combines the fervour of knowledge, the determination to change the laws... ” (HS1: 7).

Des Smith, speaking of the New Zealand *Homosexual Law Reform Bill* (1986), says, “One thing we learned was how important visibility is. A lot of people would like us to go away, but [being visible] is part of our survival” (Rothwell, 2011: A7). In a very real sense, this gay “visibility” can be compared with speaking out (parrhesia).

In conclusion, this chapter has discussed belief as a container of knowledge, and various forms of religious power. It has only obliquely discussed the power of church leadership (Foucault’s “pastoral power”), and the dominating power of the Church as an institution. Instead, it has concentrated on “productive powers” such as *resistance* and *parrhesia* in supporting the theme of *Belief as Knowledge-Power*.

## 7

## The Care of the Christian Self

*“By spirituality, I understand that which precisely refers to a subject acceding to a certain mode of being and to the transformations which the subject must make of himself in order to accede to this mode of being.”*

(Foucault, 1984e: 443)

In this chapter I explore how a religious ethics of the self might look by analysing *The Self Construction of the Christian Subject* and *The Practice of Churchgoing*. The first sub-theme was developed by considering Foucault’s care of the self, the second derives from the motivating question behind this study, the question of why gay Christians go to church.

## 7.1 The Self-Construction of the Christian Subject

In the epigram above, spirituality is a “mode of being” which is achieved by transformations carried out on oneself. These transformations are described as “techniques of the self” or “self forming acts” and are usually associated with Foucault’s (HS2, HS3) study of the pre-Christian Greek ethics of the self. However, in his last years Foucault also studied another way of being, another discursive formation, another set of self-forming techniques. This subject can be found from approximately 1980 in his lectures and interviews, for example in *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self* (Foucault, 1980a), but also to some degree in his published work. I evaluate these Christian *ethics of the code* here in relation to the interview data.

### **The Codified Self.**

In the final paragraph of *The Care of The Self* Foucault describes:

“a mode of subjection in the form of obedience to a general law; ... a type of work on oneself that implies a decipherment of the soul; ... and a mode of ethical fulfilment that tends toward self-renunciation” (HS3: 239,240).

These are features he associates with ancient Christian confession and penance, which was the religious technology Foucault studied most (Bernauer, 2005: 562). In his discussion of confession Foucault (1982b: 196) indicates that subjectification comes about as Christians tell the truth about themselves.

It might appear that Foucault’s view of the ancient Christian subject would be highly applicable to this study. Yet the concepts of obedience and self-renunciation did not seem relevant at all for those interviewed. However, it is important to note that self-renunciation may be relevant for the interviewee, but not in terms of the research questions I posed in this study. It is possible, for example, that certain practices such as kneeling for prayer might be considered to express obedience.

At the surface level of “plain language” themes of obedience did not emerge from the data so I considered possible associations with obedience. For example, in chapter five Trevor spoke of wanting to “honour God” and I wondered whether honour could be related to obedience. However, the tenor of what Trevor said in the rest of his interview did not really seem to fit with obedience. I have previously raised interviewees’ practice of changing churches and their disagreements with church authorities. Mike, for example, declared, “I distrust the institution enormously.” I see these as other examples of non-obedience to religious authority. Furthermore, the discussion in chapter six about God and power indicates participants preferred to render obedience to God rather than to people or an organisation. This may be a subtle point, but it is different to Foucault’s view of obedience to (human) religious authority. In practice, however, obedience to God may have similar self-forming effects in the life of a believer. Adam was asked specifically whether the concept of obedience was relevant to him:

Adam:

Obedience isn't quite the right word. ... [In relation to God] you do things just because it's a love relationship. The concept of obedience doesn't enter into a love relationship. And it's the same with people. In the church, I'm not into obedience to the leaders in the church. It's relationship, you respect each other.

Scott was also asked if obedience was relevant and replied:

Scott:

No, not at all.

If there is any obedience it's to my Self [Scott's term for God] and to that sense of integrity that brings. But I don't hold to obedience to a Bishop or to an institution. ... It's more a question of having integrity in my life rather than obedience.

These are clear rejections of obedience in favour of other forms of relation. I want to consider why obedience and self-renunciation did not seem relevant for the participants by exploring Foucault's work on Christianity in more depth. For Foucault the ultimate aim of Christian ascetics was the renunciation of the self and detachment from the world— not the Greek preparation of the self for social and political obligations (Macmillan, 2011: 12). In ancient Christianity self-renunciation was to be understood as a technique of the self. The defining features of this renunciation were obedience and contemplation. The supreme good was not the mastery of oneself, but the contemplation of God (Foucault, 1980a: 175). Thus, obedience was not limited to actions but included thoughts.

There was also a move to law and authority which meant that what was important was not being a truthful subject, but the content of a truthful statement. The Christian experience thus brought in a new relation between truth and subjectivation. Now truth did not involve a subject's being, as did the previous ethics of the self. The truth about the subject must

now follow the general rules of objective truth-production. To summarise Foucault's ethics of the code:

“The free autonomous subject disappears and becomes the passive agent of a universal rule. The main question no longer concerns the ways one can become a subject of truth, but how one becomes an object of self-knowledge. The constitution of the subject as an object of true discourse in Western culture is at the expense of the Antique figure of the ethical subject of truth” (Macmillan, 2011: 15).

This view of religion is not new in Foucault, in *Madness and Civilisation* he speaks of religion as “a constant principle of coercion. It is both spontaneity and constraint...” (MC: 244). It may be that Foucault would have developed other views, as in his final lecture at the Collège de France he distinguishes two poles in Christian development. The first pole stresses the self examination and fearful obedience to God already described, the second pole sees parrhesia as representing the mystical tradition from which our culture developed a critical attitude (Bernauer, 2005: 568). Thus, Foucault may have also distinguished an element of critical mysticism in the Christian self.

I think parts of a few participants' spirituality could be called mystical, although Bruce specifically rejected the idea:

Bruce:

I'm definitely not a mystic. I'm too practical.

Scott, in particular, called himself a mystic at one point, although his preferred term was “contemplative”. So mysticism may have some relevance for contemporary Christians, although it is unclear how Foucault would have developed this idea further. Foucault insisted that his shift to techniques of the self was only a different way to consider our present, although Christian and modern culture are not coextensive (Macmillan, 2011: 5). Foucault (1980a: 169) comments, “the modern hermeneutics of the self is rooted much more in ... Christian techniques than in the Classical ones.”

So then, why was obedience irrelevant for the men studied? I suggest it is mainly because Foucault focused on “the first centuries of Christianity” (HS2: 12) not on recent

developments. Since that time other discourses and practices may have been incorporated in the Christian *apparatus*, for example, the changes associated with Protestantism. In this study no Roman Catholic or Orthodox Christians were interviewed. Confession to a pastoral authority, the main practice by which Foucault interpreted the Christian self, is largely unknown to Protestants. It is also worth noting that Foucault specifically analyses “prescriptive” texts written for the purpose of offering rules and advice on behaviour (HS2: 12). It is possible that this approach may limit him to finding only what he is looking for—rules.

Foucault does appear to acknowledge that religion can change. Macmillan (2011: 22) footnotes, “Foucault’s assessment of Christian techniques of the self in no way presupposes a monolithic and unchanging model.”<sup>30</sup> In HS2 (29-30) Foucault at first says, “it would be quite incorrect to reduce... Christian moralities to such a model” of submission to laws. “And yet”, he continues, “it may not be wrong” to think that the penitential system brought about “a very strong ‘codification’ of the moral experience. It was against this codification that many spiritual movements reacted before the Reformation.” Foucault seems to be ambivalent in this passage— are Christian moralities reduced to submission to laws or not? Foucault is unclear. Foucault also acknowledges (HS2: 30) that the Greek style of “ethics-oriented moralities... have been very important in Christianity, functioning alongside the ‘code-oriented’ moralities.” He later writes that both approaches to morality could coexist, that we should neglect:

“neither their coexistence, their interrelations, their relative autonomy, nor their possible differences of emphasis” (HS2: 31).

It seems that in his studies Foucault is looking for overall tendencies:

“moral conceptions in Greek and Greco-Roman antiquity were *much more oriented* towards practices of the self and the question of *askēsis* than toward codifications of conducts and the strict definition of what is permitted and what is forbidden” (HS2: 30, emphasis mine).

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<sup>30</sup> Yet Macmillan seems to downplay this statement. Macmillan (2011: 21) also thinks that Foucault’s techniques of the self are intended to champion the Enlightenment values of freedom and autonomy. However I would suggest Foucault was consistently ambivalent, and even hostile toward enlightenment humanism.

On a personal level Miller (1993: 358) says Foucault struggled against “pastoral power” and the requirement to confess, to tell the truth about oneself to another.

In summary, Foucault’s view of ancient Christian practices was not useful for high modern Christians like those interviewed in this study, as it does not adequately describe their experience. Yet, as shown, Foucault acknowledged that Christian experience can include ideas from other discourses such as the older Greco-Roman field. The experiences of the men in this study support this inclusion of other ideas.

### **Doing the Right Thing: Discourses of Morality.**

There is one aspect of Foucault’s ethics of the code that did seem relevant for the data. As previously discussed, Foucault (HS2: 30) suggests there are two kinds of morality, code-based and ethics-based. In the first, the main emphasis is placed on the code and its associated laws and punishments. In the second, the practice of the self is what matters. He is quite clear that even ancient Christianity incorporated both types of morality:

“It would be quite incorrect to reduce Christian morality... to such a [code-based] model. ... ‘Ethics-oriented’ moralities... have been very important in Christianity” (HS2: 30).

“The experience associated with the Roman Catholic Church is a juridico-moral codification of actions”, according to Macmillan (2011: 13). Hence law— or the code— became a general principle for ordering human affairs in early Christianity. I think Christianity still has a discourse of being moral, being a “good” Christian, which is supported by the data. This discourse requires that one follow the prescribed expressions of sexuality, and eschew those which are proscribed. Edward, within his discussion of power, moved directly on to discuss morality:

I believe God laid down principles, and as long as we keep within those principles we're doing the right thing.

Trevor highlighted church thinking around a right/wrong duality:

Trevor:

I think everything about being gay is probably seen as wrong in the church, you know? Whereas I don't think it all is.

That focus on doing the right thing, on principles is, I think, a major discourse within Christianity. Thinking of oneself as immoral is disempowering, thinking of oneself as “doing the right thing” and “being in God’s will” is empowering.

“In the minds of our contemporaries,” comments Jacques Ellul (1986: 69), “Christianity primarily means morality. The spiritual aspect is forgotten, except among a few.” Ellul argues that in the discourses of everyday life, to be Christian is to be moral, rather than spiritual. This may also imply that there is only one valid (Christian) morality. Following Foucault’s discussion of a code-based ethic, it seems likely that this popular discourse around morality originated from Christian influence on Western cultures. This is perhaps particularly the case around sexual morality. Press reports generally identify a conservative sex ethic with a Christian ethic (Mol, 1985: 146). Sexual behaviours are considered to be part of the ethical realm, which Foucault himself notes may not always have been the case (HS2: 25 - 32). Ellul (1986: 88) believes, “The church’s reaction to the encounter with immorality [is an] immense attempt to enforce law and morality”, which evokes notions of disciplinary power.

However, as the Christian apparatus can incorporate more than one style of morality (HS2: 30), it appears gay Christians may follow the ethical path rather than the code-based path. The code-based path would require obedience to laws (homosexuality is wrong) whereas the ethics-based path elevates seeking one’s own moral growth above all else. By resisting this code these men are altering the discourse, perhaps from the “homosexuality is wrong” of conservative church “law” to “homosexuality is good”:

Edward:

I believe I was created gay by God.



Being created by God implies inherent goodness, as God can only create good. At one point Kelvin stated that he lived “a moral life.” However, discourses about morality may also move beyond a binary good/bad dyad. For example, Adam explained that he had previously seen his homosexuality as wrong, but that his position had changed:

Adam:

Until a couple years ago it was always a battle, it was wrong, I can't be gay.

...

My key position now is relationship is everything. And I don't even think in terms of what's right or wrong, but what comes from love. [Nothing else,] just “what is love?”

Pentecostalism “opposes moral permissiveness” according to Black (1991: 116, 117).

Adam attends a conservative Pentecostal church, yet does not “even think in terms of what’s right or wrong”. I think this excerpt demonstrates two things. Firstly, it shows the underlying pervasiveness of code-based morality– the implication from Adam’s statement is that a right/wrong discourse is assumed. Secondly however, Adam’s story also demonstrates that, while significant, a code-based (good/bad) morality may not control every modern Christian.

### **The Ethical Self.**

In Foucault’s better-known analysis, pre-Christian Greek spirituality is formed from techniques which are focused on the self. Foucault (1971: 139) writes:

“Where religions once demanded the sacrifice of bodies, knowledge now calls for experimentation on ourselves, calls us to the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge.”

Foucault presents this experimentation on ourselves as a form of asceticism (*askēsis*) because by choosing certain acts we cut off some possible ways of acting in favour of serving another end (HS2: 72-77). Foucault is concerned with “the games of truth in the relationship of the self with the self and the forming of oneself as a subject” (HS2 : 6).

In relating these concepts to the interview data, it must be remembered that Foucault is discussing ancient selves whereas the subjects of this study are modern selves, influenced by centuries of other discourse. Foucault does allow that the classical concept of the care of the self can be updated to modern thought, but emphasises this would be something new, not merely a repetition of the old (Foucault, 1984e: 443-4). Thus I suggest that the modern Christian subject is “new”, but at least partially incorporates the Greco-Roman focus on self-transformation. The data did reveal an overall sense of the participants transforming themselves, demonstrated by changes in their lives, attitudes and beliefs. For example, in the previous chapter I introduced Scott’s description of God as part of his self:

Scott:

I think I understand the power of God as my own power, really. ... I think there is a Self, with a capital “S”, which I would say is the divine, and a small “s” which is my ego. And I understand the power of God is when I am in tune with my Self, with its capital S.

Here Scott appeared to evoke the novel idea of God being used as a self-forming technique. This suggests the idea that the Christian care of the self involves other persons; a Christian care of the self includes a relation to an Other, that is to other Christians, and even to God. In fact, Foucault’s antique care of the self also includes care for others (Foucault, 1984e: 438). A number of the participants spoke of the importance of fellowship or community in their lives, and of their relation to God (see chapters five and six). John discussed the centrality of his faith to his framing of his self:

John:

So, central to my own notion of who I am, of my value and values, of my purpose, and kind of framing of my self ... was very much a notion of my faith.

Faith and self are clearly interlinked here. Faith, understood here as belief, is both a discourse and a practice which mould the Christian subject.

One point of interest concerns the idea of the self as a unified psyche. As discussed in

chapter three, Foucault says we can have multiple forms of the subject which have “relationships and interferences” between them (Foucault, 1984e: 440). But Foucault does not require these selves to be unified; he allows for a more fragmented view of the self. On this view, we could consider that the subjects of this study have “relationships and interferences” between a homosexual self and a Christian self. These are ways of thinking that are only partially reflected in the participants self-view. For example, Harry spoke of integrating his gay and Christian sides:

Harry:

What I've been able to do to some degree ... is put myself as a gay person on this side, as a Christian person on this side, see them as two halves. How successfully I've integrated those I don't know.

However, specific questions about a unified self were not asked in the interviews and the participants all appeared to describe a coherent and unified self. The next section considers specific techniques of the Christian self.

### **Techniques.**

Self-forming acts or techniques are the means by which we change ourselves, our practices. From the data a number of activities could be discerned which can be understood as techniques to develop oneself: Support group meetings, use of the Bible, attendance at church services, involvement in social activism and even prayer could be seen as “care of the self”. Some of these practices are only briefly touched on; they would reward further study.

Concerning prayer, Kelvin said:

I mean obviously I pray, and I have a once a month meeting. We have a gay Christian group which is a once a month meeting ... and it's open to any people who have an interest in gay and Christian issues.

“Obviously I pray” implies the centrality of prayer as a Christian technique. Harry agreed

that “the intimate or personal nature of the prayer” in his gay congregation was quite special for him. Perhaps, apart from church attendance, prayer could be considered a defining practice for Christians. There are numerous manuals describing techniques, rules, habits, guidelines, methodologies, disciplines of prayer (for example, the 17<sup>th</sup> Century *Practice of The Presence of God*). In a similar fashion to Foucault’s study of confession, I think techniques of prayer and the type of self they engender would provide a rich resource for further research.

Kelvin also mentions support group meetings, which might be considered a technique for self-development. The value of support and fellowship has been considered in chapter five. For some, the idea of serving others could be seen as a technique of the self. For example, Bruce highly valued practical tasks such as cooking at youth camps, and valued involvement in social justice issues in general.

The Bible has been an important document/discourse for Christians and for any Christian homosexual, the Biblical discourses are one challenge that must be negotiated. Although the interpretation of the Bible is also likely to belong to discourses of belief (chapter six), the way it is used may also be analysed as a practice. Edward valued “expository preaching”, a type of sermon centred on an in-depth study of the Bible:

Edward:

With [Independent Evangelical Church] I go there to get the continuing expository preaching of God’s word. ... I go there because I receive spiritual food.

For some Christians there is a sense of submission to scripture which invites analysis in terms of Foucault’s “disciplinary” ideas. Interviewees’ relationship with the Bible was not explicitly investigated in the research questions although a number of the men mentioned it in the context of their interviews. Christian use of the Bible as a technique of the self would be a profitable direction for future study.

In an intriguing phrase, Mike considered he “used” the church, which evokes the idea of a “practice”:

Mike:

Why do I stay [in the church]? I kind of don't in a way. I use it.

The exact form of his “use” was not elaborated on. If he was “using” church in an instrumental sense then it could be argued that all of the men interviewed were “using” the church to achieve certain aims and values in their lives. The important practice/technique of Church attendance is discussed in detail below. Before this, I consider the practice of naming ourselves.

Our selfhood (or subjectivity) is “understood in terms of the positions within ... discourses that are available to us” (Burr, 2005: 169). Names or labels describe these discursive positions. I suggest that for the interview subjects even calling themselves a “gay Christian” signifies more than mere words. Hacking (1995, 2006) says that naming ourselves creates who we are. In turn, who we are recursively reflects back on how we name ourselves. Hacking terms this the “looping effect” of classifications. In similar vein Moon (2005: 554) writes, “Much contemporary theorizing of sexuality shows how language works performatively to produce certain kinds of people while rendering other ways of being unthinkable, or in [Judith] Butler’s terms, *abject*”. Thus, a discourse which can speak the words “gay Christian” brings a new kind of person into existence. However, some of the men commented on the limiting nature of names and categories. For example:

Trevor:

In some ways the categories, you know, gay and straight and all this sort of stuff, they're limiting categories. I like to think possibly it's more of a continuum, people are a bit of a mix sometimes. Some people down more one end and some down more the other end.

John comments:

John:

There's quite an inherent weakness in the notion that ...

there's something called "being gay" that's kind of an absolute category, that you tick these boxes.

...

So much our society determines who are gay, in the names that we were called at primary school. But what does this *mean*, in terms of, there's no *inherent* meaning.

As can be seen, for some gay Christians the question of names and categories is problematic.

In summary, Christians use a wide range of techniques, practices and discourses to construct themselves, some of which are outlined here. The ancient discipline of obedience was largely found to be irrelevant for the interview subjects although the idea of Christianity as a *code-based* faith seemed to have resonance. Ancient Greek ideas of the self have been partially carried through to today, but subsequent discourses have also been important in modifying the Christian self. Several techniques of Christian self-transformation were discussed. I now consider one technique in particular, the practice of attending a church.

## 7.2 The Practice of Churchgoing (Why Go To Church?)

A key question asked at least once in each interview was, "Why do you stay in the Christian church?" or "Why do you go to church?" There was variety in the replies, but there was also a great deal of consistency. A number of the men gave more than one reason for attending church. I sum up their answers in three reasons for attending church:

- Reasons of faith
- Reasons of fellowship
- Reasons of identity.

In support of these reasons some of the respondents also highlighted values that were

important to them, such as forgiveness or the desire to help others. These are described below.

### **Reasons of Faith.**

When asked why they attended church some respondents gave the reason as their faith, belief or connection to God. In other words, their beliefs in themselves were important to them and motivated church attendance. Trevor, for example, cited “faith” in the face of opposition:

Trevor:

For gay people to go to church they must really have faith because there's so much opposition that why would they go otherwise? If they didn't have some sort of faith.

Trevor also felt that staying in the church in spite of opposition was a core tenet of being Christian. Remaining despite opposition also suggests a form of “resistance” to dominating (pastoral) power. Kelvin answered the question by talking directly about his beliefs:

Kelvin:

I have a really strong belief that Christ is my saviour and that he died to save me. And that he sent the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is there to guide me. And there are lots of things in my life that I think have proved that. So yeah, I have a really strong belief that Christ died for me and that Christianity is...  
[pause] I honestly can't say whether Christianity is the only faith, but I certainly believe that it is the faith for me.

To reiterate, these beliefs were given as the response to a question asking why he attended church. Harry also answered this question by talking about his beliefs:

Harry:

I've never lost my faith in God and what I've been able to do to some degree, up until this point, is put myself as a gay person on this side, as a Christian person on this side, see them as two halves. How successfully I've integrated those I don't know and therefore my attendance at [Gay Church] is quite an important part of that for me.

As well as his faith in God, Harry valued church attendance to help him integrate his gay and Christian identity. I equate faith with the concept of “belief” developed in chapter six: Belief both expresses knowledge/power and is also a practice. Attributing religious belief as a “reason” for action may seem strange; it may be helpful to recall Hunt's (2002: 90) advice that sociologists attempt to understand believers' perspectives on religious grounds first (see chapter four). It was clear that for a number of the men interviewed, “belief” was an important reason for attending church.

### **Reasons of Fellowship.**

The reason of fellowship, community or participation in a shared journey is another reason a number gave for attending church. When asked why he attended church, Bruce said:

Bruce:

Because that's part of who I am. That's part of my belief system. ... And to fellowship with likeminded people. I also think it's a cop out to say, Oh I'm a Christian but I don't go to church. Because it's not just for me that I go, but there might be something I can do for someone else.

Bruce added a particular value to fellowship— by being there he might be able to help someone else. In fact, Bruce mentioned all three reasons described above: Identity (“that's part of who I am”), belief (“that's part of my belief system”) and fellowship (“to fellowship with likeminded people”). Dave said:



Dave:

We're on a sort of shared journey and I like that. Our Christianity. There's a humility to it and there's an ability for trying and failing as well.

Dave appreciated the "shared journey", and, like Trevor, also valued mutual forgiveness and humility, acknowledging that church members made mistakes. Colin expressed the importance of fellowship in a desire to recapture the warmth of his teenage church experience:

Colin:

I go to church for fellowship. And to keep me connected with God. ... I guess there's a part of me that will always be searching for that sense of belonging.

[Speaking of his teenage years,] I felt very happy, very part of the church, very fulfilled. Very alive. That wonderful fellowship.

There may also be a faith element here in his phrase "to keep me connected with God". Like some others, Edward's answer showed a combination of the importance of his beliefs and the value of fellowship. Scott valued community, saying he understood Christianity to be "a communal faith" and, as noted below, church-based rituals were also very important to him.

When asked why he attended church Adam replied,

Adam:

Same reason as everyone else [laughs].

For me it's really just being with likeminded people, for that support, the community. It is really about doing things together as a group where you're actually in a supportive community. That's why I go to church, that's the only reason.

Collectively all of these participants sought a strong and supportive community through their church. The idea of communities of friends was raised in chapter five; as Webb (2003) suggests, friends are those with whom we share the practice of becoming who we are. In the same way a supportive community of likeminded people helped the participants become who they are.

### **Reasons of Identity.**

Several participants, including some already quoted, answered that attending church was part of their personal identity or self. Mike concluded his answer with the words:

Mike:

So, why did I stay? Because it was where I wanted to be. Because it's me.

Thus, among other reasons staying in church expressed his sense of identity– “because it’s me.” My sense is that Mike was replying particularly in relation to his fifty-year role as an Anglican priest. When John was asked, “Why did you continue with church participation [through the hard times]?” he replied:

John:

Because that's my identity. Because in the end God helped me through this stuff.

Later, he added:

I stay because I can't connect to God just by myself. Part of that connection is living and expressing faith with others. Part of that vital life is the kind of giving side, and also the being corrected side.

Here we see reasons both of identity and of fellowship (“living and expressing faith with others”). As an aside, John’s comment on “being corrected” by others could be viewed in the Foucauldian sense of “discipline”, a thought I do not have space to pursue further.

Finally, church meetings can be seen as facilitator of certain practices. Some practices, for example the Eucharist, can only be performed in a church setting. An “expository” sermon, as mentioned by Edward above, is usually only experienced in a church meeting. In the context of a church service, prayer, “sharing”, and the Eucharist were important to some of the men interviewed:

Harry:

The Eucharist service itself, the sharing, the way which communion is shared is incredibly meaningful.

Scott also mentioned the importance of the Eucharist and said:

Scott:

The church does provide ritual which helps me personally to engage. ... Those ritual ideas and practices are really useful and helpful.

Rituals are another example of techniques or practices which can occur only in the context of church attendance.

In conclusion, I have suggested that the modern Christian subject incorporates both the Antique focus on self-transformation and a relation to an Other. Churchgoing can be used as a technique to achieve this mode of being. Church attendance may also have links with other Foucauldian ideas, for example attending church in spite of opposition can be seen as a form of resistance.

While there were nuances within the data, the men interviewed for this study stay within the Christian church as openly gay men for a combination of three main reasons. Reasons of faith prioritise belief as knowledge/power and practice. Fellowship and community as sources of support were also reasons given for church attendance. Thirdly, some expressed a sense of personal identity through their church attendance. Thus, the men interviewed in this research attended church for faith, for fellowship, and for identity.

## 8

## Conclusion

*“There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks... is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all.”*

– Foucault, HS2: 8

*“I kind of feel that God loves me no matter what. But I’m not sure about church sometimes, whether it’s the same message.”*

– Trevor, one of the men interviewed for this study.

When I heard of the existence of “out” gay Christians I was intrigued. I wondered what they get out of religious faith, and how they create themselves as gay and Christian. I wondered why they still attended church. After all, New Zealand society has undergone significant social changes in the last thirty years but Christian churches are still difficult places to be openly gay. To answer these questions I interviewed twelve men who identified as both gay and Christian, and who regularly attended a Christian church<sup>31</sup>.

Those interviewed attended a mixture of protestant churches including some churches that have traditionally been regarded as conservative. These men had reconciled and integrated their gay and Christian identities (Ganzevoort *et al*, 2011: 219). This is not to deny that these research participants faced unique difficulties. Almost universally the men interviewed spoke of the opposition they faced and of highly unpleasant experiences in

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<sup>31</sup> As noted in chapter five, one of these men no longer attends church or considers himself Christian.

church settings. However, in this research I have sought to tell a positive story of their lives, an ideal supported by Michel Foucault's ideas concerning productive power.

In many ways this project has been about finding ways to “think differently” about religion, as Foucault's comment above suggests. Foucault's work was used as the theoretical base from which to derive themes in the interview transcripts. Foucault has been little used in the sociology of religion and I hope this research will contribute positively to the field. From a Foucauldian viewpoint, I have suggested that religion is an apparatus— comprised of institutions such as churches, and discourses, bound together in relations of power/knowledge. Within this apparatus, people are both constructed by religious discourses and use techniques of the self to construct for themselves a religious self.

The interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis, which seeks to identify patterns in the data. Specifically, the analysis was theoretically driven mainly by Foucault's work. Having said this, some themes were developed directly from the data and so it would be correct to say the themes were formulated using both inductive (“bottom up”) and theoretical (“top down”) methodologies.

I was often struck by the richness of the data. This meant that I was usually only able to include a selection of the men's comments. Theoretical thematic analysis tends to provide a more detailed analysis of particular aspects of the data rather than a full description of the overall data. However, there was also a significant degree of overlap between different interview subjects.

### **Summary Of Results.**

Three resulting themes have been explored in this thesis:

1. Belonging and Exclusion
2. Belief, Knowledge, Power
3. The Care of the Christian Self.

Under *Belonging and Exclusion*, a common sub-theme for many participants was the value of support from other people. This led to a discussion of friendship, noting the

development in some groups of friendship-based “communities of choice”. Foucault was discovered to be “quite insistent on the value of friendship for the gay community”

(Roach, 2005: 58), a claim which is supported from the transcripts in this study.

“Community” was another term of belonging used by some participants, describing a set of social relations where participants have a common sense of identity. Giorgio Agamben’s concept of a “coming community” with no mutually shared identity was introduced. While I consider this a useful lens through which gay Christian communities may be viewed, the idea of a community which has erased all distinctions may not be welcomed by those to whom their identity is important.

Although the focus of this thesis is on the inclusion of gay Christians in church life, it was also important to acknowledge participants’ stories of exclusion. Georg Simmel’s concept of the *stranger* was used to illuminate gay Christians’ experiences of being both inside and outside the Church. Such exclusion can also lead to the idea of *otherness*. In Christian discourse a gay Christian is seen as an alterity, an “other” which resists normalisation. My interpretation suggests it is usual for Christians to assume other Christians are heterosexual. In fact, as some participants indicated, both gay and Christian communities regard “gay Christians” as deviant.

Turning to *Belief, Knowledge, Power*, I noticed that the word “belief” came up regularly in the interviews and began to consider how Foucault might interpret this concept. This developed in a “bottom-up” or inductive way into the sub-theme of *belief as knowledge/power*. Knowledge is defined by analytic philosophers as “justified true belief” (Elder-Vass, 2012: 209). I considered that if knowledge can be considered a form of belief, then beliefs must be considered part of the Foucauldian knowledge/power circuit.

However, belief is not merely intellectual assent to doctrine. Belief was also shown to be a volitional experience. Hence I suggest that, rightly understood, belief can also be a form of Foucauldian “practice”.

I also proposed that the knowledge gay Christians hold is a subjugated knowledge. These subjugated knowledges can be expressed in “parrhesia” (truth telling) and also contribute to “resistance”. Parrhesia can be translated “to speak boldly” and implies the obligation to speak the truth, even at personal risk. Several participants discussed situations where they had to speak their truth (parrhesia) to those embodying greater power in the Church.

The sub-theme of *religion and productive power relations* largely developed using a “top-down” methodology. This section discussed personal empowerment and also participants’ experience of God as productive rather than dominating. Where interviewees had been excluded by churches they made a distinction between human actions and God’s actions. Church attendance in the face of opposition was interpreted as “resistance” in some cases. However, while I think the empowerment of resistance is a valid interpretation of the data, resistance should not be over-emphasised against participants’ experience of churches’ dominating power.

The final theme, *The Care of the Christian Self*, focused on subjectivity; Foucault’s concept of “techniques of the self” was used to theorise the data. Foucault says these techniques operate on “souls”, and that through such self transformation one might attain “supernatural power” (Foucault, 1980a: 162). These transformations are usually associated with Foucault’s (HS2, HS3) study of the pre-Christian Greek “ethics of the self”. However, Foucault also studied another set of self-forming techniques, which I have termed the Christian *ethics of the code*. This ethic focuses on obedience to pastoral power. Significantly, the concept of obedience was largely irrelevant for the men studied here. I suggest this is mainly because Foucault focused on early Christianity; since that time other discourses and practices may have been incorporated in the Christian “apparatus”. One aspect of Foucault’s interpretation did seem relevant, namely the idea that Christianity is a code-based faith. However, even here the data indicated that not every modern Christian is focused on morality in this way. The data also illustrated several techniques of Christian self-transformation including support group meetings, use of the Bible, attendance at church services, involvement in social activism, and prayer.

The motivating question for this study asks why these gay men attended church, hence this practice was analysed in greater detail. From the transcripts three main reasons emerged for church attendance:

- Reasons of faith
- Reasons of fellowship
- Reasons of identity.

By “reasons of faith” I mean that participants’ beliefs were important to them. Part of these beliefs included the value of participating in a church. In addition, church meetings are usually the only setting in which some practices, such as the Eucharist, may be performed. The second reason for church attendance was the desire for fellowship, or connection with others. All of those interviewed sought a strong experience of community through their church. Thirdly, several participants answered that attending church was part of their identity. My sense is that in most respects gay Christians attend church for the same reasons as non-gay Christians. Adam hinted at this when asked why he attended church:

Adam:

Same reason as everyone else [laughs].

In summary, the gay Christian men studied here incorporated both the Antique focus on self-transformation and a relation to an “Other”. Their churchgoing was used as one technique to achieve a religious mode of being.

### **Evaluation and Future Directions.**

In a sense Foucault’s method is simply to undertake an extended meditation on modes of thought and practices elicited from data. Carol Grbich (2004:39) suggests the actual experience of analysis is an important component of Foucauldian method. From my experiences of undertaking Foucauldian analysis thus far I concur that, while time-consuming, it is a highly rewarding exercise.

It is important to ask: How useful was Foucault? There were times when I wrestled with issues both theoretically and personally. Firstly, I wondered how useful these ideas might be for the participants’ self understanding— perhaps Foucault’s theoretically based approach was too esoteric? I questioned whether Foucault’s theories reduce people to mere discourses (as I have shown in chapter three, they do not). I worried that I might be ignoring important themes in what the men were saying, in favour of trying to see through Foucault’s eyes. Conversely, from a purely academic point of view, I then wondered if the research *should* be useful to the participants. Perhaps I should simply be satisfied with contributing to knowledge? In the course of interviewing and writing I came to a sense of



peace over these questions. I came to believe that, if I have succeeded in my interpretation, then the use of Foucault's work is relevant and respectful to the men concerned.

Secondly, given the almost universal neglect of Foucault in this field, I wondered how useful Foucault would turn out to be for the sociology of religion. As it turned out, I came out the other side convinced that Foucault is very much of use in the sociology of religion. Carrette (2000: 142) believes that most of Foucault's writing on religion was a negative critique. However, as the arguments here present some aspects of religion as a positive power, I think this need not always be the case.

There is scope for further research, both in studying gay Christians and also in applying Foucault to sociology of religion. Due to the limitations of using interview data a number of specific practices were identified, but were not able to be analysed in depth, for example practices of prayer, use of the Bible, and rituals like the Eucharist. Other methodologies such as participant observation might yield more insight in this area. Several participants had adult children, and one noted that "coming out" also meant his children had to "come out" as having a gay Father. Some of these children also attended Christian churches— the subject of Christian children of gay parents would be a fruitful area for research.

While I hope I have developed a little insight in the Foucauldian sociology of religion, there are still many areas to be developed further. Chapter six, for example, suggested a study on Foucault's use of the term "soul". One development in Foucauldian scholarship is the idea that belief is a form of practice which is "inscribed" or reflected in the physical body (Voyce, 2009: 5). According to Carrette (2000), Foucault subverts the conventional Western dualism between spirit and body. Foucault's view of the body and its impact on religion were not able to be included in this study. This too is an area which would reward further study.

## **Conclusion.**

During the writing of this thesis two events occurred which are significant for gay Christians in New Zealand. Firstly, the *Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Act* (2013) was enacted into law by the New Zealand parliament. This means that gay Christians now have the option of full legal marriage, an enormous milestone which is viewed with suspicion by many Christians. Secondly, in June 2013 Exodus International

closed (Stuff, 2013). Exodus was the umbrella organisation for many “ex-gay” ministries worldwide, and two of the men interviewed for this study had formerly been heavily involved with similar New Zealand “ex-gay” groups. At the time of writing it is unclear whether a new organisation created from the former Exodus will retain some beliefs which gay Christians have objected to, such as the idea that homosexuality is inherently sinful. Nevertheless, this is a significant development. Meanwhile, alternative gay Christian groups were already established. For example, a New Zealand website states, “Gay Christian Alliance is a group of gay Christians living in New Zealand who wish to spread the message that it’s OK to be gay and Christian” (Gay Christian Alliance, 2011).

Some New Zealand “fundamentalists”, argue that lesbians and gay men want the normalisation of same-sex relationships. However, these opponents have not realised that queer communities have already succeeded significantly in achieving “normalisation” (Young, 2004: 54)<sup>32</sup>. Kelvin, who attended a Salvation Army church, spoke of the desire to be normal:

Kelvin:

I just want to go to a normal church, because that’s what I want to be, just a normal person.

Are the majority of churches likely to become more accepting of gay Christians? Some of the men I interviewed felt this would occur “in the next 20 years”; others thought this would be much longer in coming, if ever. It would be helpful to know how many gay Christians are out there. As indicated in the Lavender Islands study (Henrickson, 2007) numbers of those in the church who are gay, whether openly or otherwise, are higher than might be expected. Interview commentary in the current study indicated that if the Church was more positive towards gays there would be greater numbers who would want to return to the faith they were brought up in. Most of the interviewees believed that there are many more gay Christians in New Zealand, whether “out” or not, and that more support from the Church would be beneficial. Kelvin said:

My partner Colin and I have been together 27 years. And

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<sup>32</sup> Young is using “normalisation” in a different sense to that of Foucault.

a lot of straight couples haven't been together 27 years. And I honestly think if the Church gave the gay community that opportunity... I mean they say that they won't support gay marriage for example. Well how do they expect gay couples to not be promiscuous if they don't give them the chance to be together. If they gave them that opportunity and supported them, maybe their lives would change.

And:

Getting gay people into church is probably a [big] task sometimes. Because they see Christians as people who hate them.

Ellison (2009: 4) references a recent US survey of 6000 church youth where 9% identified as homosexual or bisexual. Anecdotes from the interviewees in this study, from informal information gathered from the internet, and from academic publications, indicate that the percentage of gay men attending conservative churches without publicly revealing their sexuality may be much higher than might be expected. However, what is revealed in this study is the small but significant number of gay men who are now willing to be "out" and attend a conservative church. To return one last time to Foucault, if discourses ask "What may be said?", we may ask, "What is being said by gay Christians?" Up until recently in Western Christianity, gay men could not speak. Now, perhaps, "I am a gay Christian" can be said.

## 9

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# 10

## Appendix

This appendix contains the information that was given to participants for their informed consent under the ethics approval from Victoria University of Wellington (#19413, 28 August 2012). Section 9.4 below contains the example questions that interviews were based around.

### 10.1 Letter of Introduction

Dear [Name]

Hi, my name is Jonathan and I'm interested in social aspects of Christianity.

I am currently undertaking research towards a Masters degree in Sociology. The issue I am interested in is how Christian gay men "create" themselves and why they stay within the Christian church. (I understand that some of the men I talk to may prefer not to use the term "gay" to describe themselves.)

I wish to talk with men who identify as both gay and Christian, and who regularly attend a Christian church about the following topics:

- current religious beliefs and practices.
- experience of "coming out" to oneself and the Church (if applicable).
- whether Christian gays have experienced exclusion or inclusion by Christian organisations.
- how a sense of self-power or empowerment is developed by gay Christians.

My interest is in your religious experiences and beliefs. I will not ask questions about your sexual behaviour or love life.

It is important to me to respect and value participants so confidentiality is guaranteed. If you're interested in participating or talking with me further, please read the information sheet attached. You can email me at [email address] or I am happy to telephone you.

Kind Regards

Jonathan Beazer

## 10.2 Information Sheet

### *Information Sheet for Research Project* **“Why Do Gay Christians Go To Church?”**

#### **Approval**

This research has been approved by the Human Ethics Committee at Victoria University (Research project number 19413, approved 28 August 2012). The project will be carried out according to these guidelines under the oversight of my supervisor, Dr Rhonda Shaw (contact details below).

Dr Rhonda Shaw  
email: [email address]  
[telephone number]

#### **The Interview**

I wish to make an audio recording of our discussion. The interview can be temporarily or completely halted at any time and you are free to query any questions if they are unclear. If you are not happy about a question you do not need to answer it. You may bring a support person with you to the interview if you wish.

I expect the interview to take around 1.5 hours depending on your needs.

#### **Confidentiality**

The electronic recording of the interview will be kept in a password protected file. A transcription (written version of the audio) will be made. This will also be kept in a password protected file. The material will be kept securely for 36 months. After this period the data and transcriptions will be destroyed. All personal identifying information in the transcription, for example, your name, place names, names of churches and names of workplaces, will be removed from the thesis and any possible subsequent published

material.

I will provide you with a copy of your transcript if you want it, and I would welcome any additional comments or additions in relation to it. Any amendments, either additions or deletions, to the original transcript will be made available to you should you request this.

You may withdraw from the project up to one month after your interview.

### **Transcription By An Assistant**

I will transcribe the interview myself. However if I have time constraints I may have an assistant transcribe the interview for me. They will sign a confidentiality agreement, and once they have completed transcription will destroy their copy of the data. If you do not wish them to listen to the interview I will transcribe it myself.

### **Use of the Data**

The results will be used in a 40,000 word Masters thesis to be completed in March 2013.

It is possible, though unlikely, that my supervisor may ask to see the transcriptions. She will only see the changed transcription, not the original. An academic external examiner from another university will also mark the thesis but not see the transcripts.

I will probably wish to present the results at a sociology conference and publish them in an academic journal article one day. I am also seeking your permission to allow this. I will contact you with the details of publication if and when this occurs.

### **Feedback on the research**

If you want, once the project is complete, I will send you a summary of the results. Once marked, the full thesis will be available electronically from the Victoria University library. I am happy to discuss the results at any time with you.

If you wish to participate in the project I will ask you to sign a consent form which

summarises the above. If any of the above is unclear or unacceptable, please contact me at [email address] I am also happy to discuss this via telephone at [telephone number].

Jonathan Beazer

## 10.3 Consent Form

### *Consent Form (Confidential)*

#### **Why Do Gay Christians Go To Church? (Victoria University Project 19413)**

##### **Consent**

I have read the information sheet for this research. I give my informed consent to (please tick):

- ☐ Allow the researcher Jonathan Beazer to record an interview with me.
- ☐ Allow an assistant to transcribe the data, after which the assistant's copy of the data will be destroyed.
- ☐ Allow Jonathan to use the data in his research thesis.
- ☐ Allow Jonathan to present the results at a sociology conference, and publish the results in an academic journal. I understand that I will be informed of the details.
- ☐ Allow the data to be securely kept for three years from March 25th 2013, after which the data and transcriptions will be destroyed.
- ☐ I understand that Jonathan will seek my permission if he wishes to use the data in any other way.

##### **Feedback on the research:**

- ☐ I wish to be sent my transcript for editing.
- ☐ I wish to be sent a summary of the results.

If you wish to receive transcript or results, please include a postal address or email address:

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Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## 10.4 Interview Themes

### Why Do Gay Christians Go To Church? Foucault and Religion

#### Proposed Topic Guide

Interviews will be semi-structured, so that questions may be asked in a different order or phrased in a different way according to how the conversation evolves. This is not a script, but a guide to question themes. Actual questions may change.

#### [BACKGROUND INFORMATION, ESTABLISHING RAPPORT]

1. Greetings, introduction of the interview, checking informed consent.

Interviewees will be reminded that no questions asking for personal information about sexual behaviour or relationships with partners will be asked. The focus of this research is on religion, not sexuality. Sometimes I will repeat questions in a different way, to get a different angle on things.

2. Tell me briefly about your family growing up?

3. When did you start going to church?

4. How many churches have you attended since? What prompted changing churches (if applicable)?

5. Apart from going to church, what kind of **practices** do you have as a Christian? For example, do you pray, do you attend any groups apart from church meetings? Do you read Christian literature?

6. Have you ever considered leaving the church? Tell me about that.

7. When did you start to consider your identity in relation to your faith?



**[EXCLUSION]**

8. Have you ever revealed your orientation to a church or christian group? What kind of opposition or support did you experience?

9. Have you ever felt excluded, or included in the church? Tell me about that.

10. (If they encountered opposition) So, why did you continue with church participation?

(10b. Have you experienced other occasions when there were tensions between your sexuality and your faith? Can you describe them?)

**[KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF]**

11. How would you describe your **theological** beliefs now? For example, are you a Bible believer, are you a mystic, are you pentecostal? Has it changed at all since you first came out?

12. What do you consider your ultimate source of truth for your life? For example, yourself, the Bible, church traditions, church leadership... ?

**[POSITIVE POWER, EMPOWERMENT, RESISTANCE]**

13. What do you see as being most important in **empowering you** or helping you in terms of being christian and gay?

14. Is there any community you feel you belong to?

15. While we are on the theme of power, do you have any thoughts about God as a “power” in your life?

16. Has there been a time where you have **spoken out** (parrhesia) about something? Or, putting it another way, has there been a time when you have expressed **resistance** to those

in power?

17. I've asked you this earlier, but can you clarify for me again why you stay in the Church?

18. Is there anything else you want to say that we haven't touched on? Is there anything you want to say a little more about?

Thankyou.