

evangelical commitments of biblical authority and born-again identity were important in staking out a distinct subcultural identity. And rightly ordered practices of gender and sexuality were also an important part of that identity. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a list of new books by conservative Christian authors outlined this new orthodoxy in respect to homosexuality. That emergent tradition insisted on the Bible's plain condemnation of homosexual acts and acknowledged the psychiatric research on sexual orientation. Conservatives' embrace of the therapeutic sciences, however, took up recently discredited theories of disease and cure, and both conservative church members and leaders in Christian Right organizations insisted that homosexuals could be cured of their same-sex desires. What seemed to provide evidence for these claims was a crop of Christian therapeutic ministries that promised help for homosexuals who wished to change their attractions. Christian Right spokespersons touted these ex-gay ministries as evidence that lesbians and gays were not "born that way" but could "choose" a righteous lifestyle. In practice, as the ethnographic work of scholars Tanya Erzen and Lynne Gerber shows, that lifestyle looked much like an evangelical variant of a gay subculture. Ex-gay communities, Gerber argues, marked out a "queer-ish" sexual identity that was symbolically bounded by biblical orthodoxy and born-again conversion.²³ Along similar lines, the Christian abstinence campaigns of the 1990s also presented sexuality in identity terms. Evangelical spokespersons urged chaste young people to express identity pride by "coming out of the closet."²⁴ These campaigns relied on visibility tactics that mirrored what had been a long-standing strategy in movements for sexual and gender rights. As lesbians and gays publicly professed their identities by coming out, evangelicals similarly presented Christian sexuality as the public expression of an interior truth.

What most chroniclers of the culture wars have taken for granted, however, is that sexual identity and biblical orthodoxy point to wholly separate sources of truth. And in many ways, this assumption has stood as patently true precisely because of the ways that Americans of various faith traditions—and of none at all—perceive the Bible as an accurate map of a religious past. The Bible's antihomosexual meanings guided the practice of faith communities and informed the political agendas of social conservatives. Denominations and public politics alike have proceeded on questions of biblical meaning but with the central question focused on whether the Bible should have any standing in civil legislation.

For many Americans—religious and not—the Bible has served as a neutral measure of a regulatory past. To repeat Mark Noll's observation of the nineteenth-century debates over biblical teachings about slavery: not only did both sides "read the same Bible," he notes, but "they also read the Bible in the same way."²⁵ The primacy of conservatives' claims to religion stand, in part, because their ways of representing religion and homosexuality seem to represent what Americans of the late twentieth century took to be an established fact: religion had always condemned homosexual acts.

This notion—that religion's primary relationship to sexuality is one of regulation and suppression—may well be the most important assumption that foreclosed the complex and capacious history of a particular footnote published in June 1986. Derrick Sherwin Bailey's *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* stood as the uncontested authorization for sodomy laws because few people could imagine a book on this topic being otherwise. However, the set of influences and practices that I trace in this book show what else we might discover by looking beyond narratives of religious regulation to consider the way that religion—and a particular Protestant tradition—has been a productive source for the twentieth-century politics of sexual emancipation. Teasing out the history of this other relationship between religion and sexuality, however, requires looking for religion within a site defined by its absence. Secularism is so often positioned alongside sexuality that one scholar coined the neologism "secularism" to illustrate the "assumed synonymy" of the secular and the sexually liberated.²⁶ But this perceived congruity should also suggest sexuality as a paradigmatic site for the kind of rethinking taking place in the recent critical studies of secularism. This scholarship urges inquiry into the ways in which a Protestant ideology remains most pervasively in force in the seemingly religiously uninhabited domain of the secular. The point that religion scholar Tracy Fessenden makes of secularism should also hold true of sexuality, where it is likewise important "to consider the consolidation of a Protestant ideology that has grown more entrenched and controlling even as its manifestations have often become less visibly religious."²⁷ If this is so, then nowhere is Protestantism more pervasive or more invisible than in what seems to be the quintessentially secular quest of finding and expressing a liberated sexual self, a practice critical to the politics on all sides of the late twentieth-century culture wars. What may well give continued animus to the political debates over religion and sexuality is not their difference

plain text—in a New Testament passage in 1 Corinthians. The RSV also excised some “sodomites” from the plain text as well. The KJV has several Old Testament passages that reference “sodomites” as ancient pagan idolaters; the RSV and most subsequent translations changed these figures to “cult prostitutes.” These changes tracked along a therapeutic logic, which narrowed the meanings of sodomy to homosexual behavior and thus sloughed off the previously attached meanings of idolatry. This set of translation changes were also carried forward by the evangelical translators of the NIV, whose choices challenged a number of the other RSV precedents. In the translation choices for passages referencing sodomites and other ancient sexual sinners, evangelicals belatedly followed liberals’ modern therapeutic paradigm. They, too, reconfigured an older sodomy tradition into an emergent homosexuality tradition.²⁶ Thus, the NIV translation worked to ratify and authorize a new antihomosexual tradition. Translators not only changed the Bible’s meanings but changed the wording to make plain newly understood meanings. The debate over whether a modern notion of a sexual orientation should moderate the Bible’s plain prohibitions against “homosexual acts” obscured the more fundamental changes in modern Bibles. The seemingly plain tradition of homosexual prohibition was itself a product of earlier interpretive changes that through the process of translation became embedded into the words of the text.

Conservative Christians encountered a newly manufactured anti-gay tradition in the pages of their Bibles, and the late twentieth-century explosion of new Bible products also further expanded and cultivated readers’ connections to those newly plain meanings. Conservative Protestant publishing companies offered an expanding array of what religion scholar Paul Guting calls the “culturally relevant Bible.”²⁷ Glossy covers, attractive images, and magazine-like styles were important to the consumer packaging of new translations, paraphrase editions, and Bible study tools. They offered the Bible as a lifestyle product with to-the-minute wisdom for everyday choices. These Bible products illustrate a second important aspect of conservative Christian practices of literalism. In addition to avowed fidelity to biblical authority, the practice of literalism also conveyed a personal and affective relationship to the text and its divine author—the Bible not only speaks authoritatively but speaks to me.²⁸ Indeed, the format of late twentieth-century Bible products actively cultivated this sense of closeness. Formats that elicited readers’ personal engagement with the text also gave material meaning to

the repeated injunction to “hide God’s word in your heart.” The Bible’s meanings were not an external authority but an interiorized truth. The personal attachment to the Bible’s meanings served as a mechanism for the production of a distinctive sexual self. When evangelicals spoke of the ways that biblical authority marked out a distinct practice of sexual behavior—sexual abstinence, heterosexuality, and marital fidelity—they were not speaking of a rote performance of external rules but were referring, rather, to living out a deeply embedded sense of self. The political rhetoric of “defending moral values” might communicate to outsiders an adherence to external rules and authorities; for the born again, however, the affective personal life of faith was about being authentic to an interior truth.

Indeed, we should notice at this juncture how religious claims to sexual authenticity worked to form identities in ways similar to those of gays and lesbians. An example from the late 1970s illustrates the comparable patterns in sex and lifestyle advice represented in two subcultural iterations of sex manuals. The standard in this genre was Alex Comfort’s *The Joy of Sex* (1972), a runaway best-seller that translated recent sex research into practical how-to techniques. Evangelicals followed suit with Tim and Beverly LaHaye’s *The Art of Marriage: The Beauty of Sexual Love* (1976). Published the next year were Charles Silverstein and Edmund White’s *The Joy of Gay Sex: An Intimate Guide for Gay Men to the Pleasures of a Gay Lifestyle* and Emily L. Sisley and Bertha Harris’s *The Joy of Lesbian Sex: A Tender and Liberated Guide to the Pleasures and Problems of a Lesbian Lifestyle*. There were certainly important differences in these texts—the books for gays and lesbians addressed lovers rather than spouses and offered advice for navigating non-monogamous and multiple-partner encounters. But evangelicals also fostered ideals of sexual authenticity and pleasure for a distinctive subcultural identity, one marked by a unique sexual essence that was created by God and set apart by principled avowal to moral boundaries. Christian sex advice texts, not unlike the gay and lesbian version of this genre, coached couples who identified with an outside-the-mainstream sexual lifestyle in the techniques that helped them realize the intrinsic pleasures of that outsider status. Taken together, these texts added a maxim to the Sermon on the Mount: blessed are the marginalized, for they shall have the greatest sex.

In many ways, it makes sense to speak of the moral politics of Christian Right supporters as a kind of identity politics—even a particular sexual identity politics. A number of religion scholars have emphasized that

but their similarity. Both sides claim a proprietary relationship to a small but inviolable plot of interior real estate that promises nothing less than the freeing key to the authentic self. Where a reigning Protestant ideology continues to govern most securely, it seems, is in this domain of the innermost heart.

Notes

ABBREVIATIONS

CL	Congregational Library and Archives, Boston, Mass.
CRH	Council on Religion and the Homosexual
FLHL	Flora Lamson Hewlett Library, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, Calif.
GA Records	General Assembly Records of the Presbyterian Church (USA)
GBC	Gender Equity Collections, Elihu Burritt Library, Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, Conn.
GLBTHS	Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, San Francisco, Calif.
IGIC	International Gay Information Center Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library, New York, N.Y.
IHGLC	James C. Hornel Gay and Lesbian Center, San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco, Calif.
KTV	King/James Version
LGEBTRAN	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Religious Archives Network
MCC	Metropolitan Community Church
ONGLA	ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles, Calif.
PHS	Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pa.
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBC	Archives of the Southern Baptist Church
UPCUSA	United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America

INTRODUCTION

1. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, RSV: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor