

From Tension to Reconciliation. A Look at the History and Rituals of the French Organization *David & Jonathan*

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Resumen

Mediante el estudio de caso de la asociación francesa David y Jonatan (D&J) en París, este artículo muestra cómo la reconciliación entre el cristianismo y la homosexualidad ocurre en Francia. Esta reconciliación está referida a cómo D&J se las arregla para mantener unida la homosexualidad y la dimensión religiosa más allá de una supuesta incompatibilidad. En primer lugar, la reconciliación es entendida a nivel de la organización desde el punto de vista de la política de la identidad, para mostrar que ésta opera a través de la integración progresiva de D&J en la comunidad LGBT parisina y a su vez del refuerzo de su integración en esta comunidad cristiana. En segundo lugar, la reconciliación se entiende a nivel de los rituales, desde el punto de vista de la pertenencia individual a la comunidad. La literatura acerca de la tensión de la identidad individual entre cristianos homosexuales es abundante, pero escasean desde una perspectiva etnográfica. La segunda sección busca compensar este vacío mediante el análisis de los rituales religiosos y argumenta que los rituales de D&J fomentan la reconciliación a través de un sentimiento individual de pertenencia a dos comunidades, la religiosa y la homosexual.

Palabras clave: Homosexualidad, Cristianismo, Reconciliación, Rituales religiosos, Comunalización, Francia

Abstract

By studying the case of the French organization *David & Jonathan* (D&J) in Paris, the chapter shows how the reconciliation of Christianity and homosexuality operates in France. Reconciliation refers to how D&J manages to hold together homosexuality and the religiosity and allows us to go beyond the idea of incompatibility. Reconciliation is first understood at the organizational level from the point of view of identity politics, to show that reconciliation operates through the progressive integration of D&J into the Parisian LGBT community and the reinforcement of its integration into the Parisian Christian community. Secondly, reconciliation is understood at the level of rituals, from the point of view of individual community belonging. The literature on individual identity tension among homosexual Christians is abundant, but scarce from an ethnographical perspective. The second section fills this gap by analyzing religious rituals and argues that D&J's rituals foster reconciliation through an individual feeling of belonging to two communities, religious and homosexual.

Key words: Homosexuality, Christianity, Reconciliation, Religious rituals, Communalization, France

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The recent fierce and cleaving debate in France on gay marriage in 2012-2013 reminds us that the reconciliation between homosexuality and Christianity is not taken for granted by Christian authorities. Catholic and Protestant authorities took part in the debate against the bill on gay marriage, showing once again that same-sex relationships are problematic for Christian authorities¹ (Bedouelle, Brugues, & Becquart, 2006; Hervieu-Leger, 2003; McCaffrey, 2006; Willaime, 2013). As a response, several gay Christian organizations have been launched in different Western countries since the 1970's² and many researchers have pointed to the resulting tension gay and lesbian Christians can feel between their religious and their sexual identifications (Gross, 2008; Meek, 2014; Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000; Schuck & Liddle, 2001; Thumma, 2005; Wilcox, 2003; Wilkerson, Smolenski, Brady, & Rosser, 2012; Yip, 1997). This framing of homosexuality by Christian authorities, coupled with the resulting individual tension, raises the question of how homosexual Christians might reconcile religion and sexuality.

A first answer was to develop a critical approach to Scripture and theology. Tom Horner, in his 1978 book *Jonathan loved David*, was the first to interpret David and Jonathan's deep "friendship" as a love story between the two men, opening a still ongoing debate about the possible homosexual feelings between the two characters (Comstock, 1993; Schroer & Staubli, 2000; Zehnder, 2007)³. Horner's book took part in the beginning of gay and lesbian theology, which traces its roots back to Liberation Theologies, a critical interpretative approach from the point of view of oppressed social groups (Lowe, 2009). Such a gay and lesbian interpretation of the figures of David and Jonathan demonstrates that Christianity and homosexuality can indeed be reconciled.

Therefore, the first organization of homosexual Christians in France was named after this biblical story. The French organization *David & Jonathan* (D&J), was launched in 1972, in Paris first, but spread to other French cities within ten years. Very little has been said about this organization (Béraud & Coulmont, 2010; Buisson-Fenet, 2004; Gross, 2012), and the academic work that do refers to it is neither specifically on D&J and its members, nor are they ethnographical. However, this organization is the oldest LGBT organization still alive in France and it counts around 550 members spread in about 22 cities across the French territory. All age categories are represented, although the majority of the members are between 35 and 60 years old, and most of them are educated. The organization is made up of 33% of Catholics, 6% of Protestants, and only 25% of women (20% in the Paris

¹ For the elaboration of the Roman discourse, specifically, see: *Declaration on certain questions concerning sexual ethics. Persona Humana*. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, December 1975; *Educational Guidance in Human Love. Outlines for sex education*. Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1983; *Letter to Bishops of the Catholic Church on Certain Questions concerning the Minister of the Eucharist*. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986; *Some Considerations Concerning the Response to Legislative Proposals on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons*. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1992; *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons*. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2003. Catechism of the Catholic Church, art. 2357: "Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered." They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved."

² For example, the *Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Church* (UFMCC) in 1968, *Dignity* in 1970 for Catholics and *Integrity* in 1974 for Episcopalians in the United-States; *Quest* for Catholics in 1976 and *Evangelical Fellowship for Lesbian and Gay Christians* for Evangelicals in 1979 in the United-Kingdom; la *Communauté du Christ Libérateur* ("Community of the Liberating Christ") in Belgium in 1974, among others.

³ For an overview of the debate in French, see Courtray, 2010.

group)⁴. Although it is the biggest space for queer Christians in France⁵, the vast majority of the members are homosexual, very few are bisexual, and only two trans persons have been noticed in the past ten years.

This chapter aims at understanding how the reconciliation of Christianity and homosexuality operates in France through the case of *David & Jonathan*. Reconciliation in this chapter refers to how the organization manages to hold together religiosity and homosexuality. It allows us to go beyond institutional conflict and mainstream discourses of incompatibility (Thumma & Gray, 2005). From a sociological perspective, “reconciliation” is twofold. First, it is understood at the organizational level, from the point of view of identity politics (Bernstein, 2005; Hopkins, 2014). The first section of the chapter will argue that reconciliation operates through the progressive integration of D&J into the Parisian LGBT community and the reinforcement of its integration into the Christian community. This part of the chapter draws from documents produced by the organization⁶ and in-depth interviews with historical members or members in charge of it.

Secondly, reconciliation is understood at the level of the rituals, from the point of view of individual community belonging. Rituals are understood as techniques of identity tension reduction, which have been understudied from an ethnographical perspective (save Wilcox, 2003). The second section aims at filling this gap by analyzing religious rituals. It argues that D&J’s rituals favor reconciliation through an individual feeling of double belonging. This section stems from six months of ethnographic fieldwork and 30 in-depth interviews⁷ with members of the organization. All material mainly comes from the Parisian group of the organization, which is the biggest and most active part of the it (half of the total national members): in this chapter, *David & Jonathan*, its history and rituals, are understood through the large group of Paris.

David & Jonathan’s history: reconciliation through a politics of double integration

The specificity of gay Christians organizations, like any “gay plus one”⁸ organization (Armstrong, 2002) is the combining of two identities which relates to two communities. Contrary to gay churches like the American UFMCC, members of D&J try not to be cut off from Catholic and Protestant communities. How to negotiate, then, a place in two contradictory communities? This first section of the chapter shows the progressive integration of *David & Jonathan* into the Parisian LGBT community and the way the organization integrates the Catholic and Protestant spheres in Paris.

⁴ The figures come from interviews with members in charge and a survey led by the organization itself in 2007, which reveals that apart from the Catholic and Protestant, 20% of D&J members define themselves as “Christian”, 8% as “being from a Christian background”, 11% as “believers”, 7% as “on a spiritual journey”, 2% as “Deist” (the rest is distributed among categories like “post-Christian”, “free-thinker” or “atheist”).

⁵ Other groups exist but they are either much smaller (*Devenir Un en Christ, le Carrefour des Chrétiens Inclusifs*) or exist mostly through the internet (*la Communion Béthanie*). D&J remains the biggest organized LGBT Christian group in France.

⁶ Especially the synthesis from the former *Studies & Research Commission* of the organization.

⁷ The interviews were conducted between January 2013 and April 2014. They are translated from French to English by the author. The orality of the interviews have been respected as best as possible. Apart from the interviews, all other translations, like the post-it notes, are the author’s as well.

⁸ “Gay plus one other function or identity”: LGBT organizations combining another identity (gay doctors, gay and lesbian swimmers, gay and lesbian lawyers, etc.)

The creation of David & Jonathan: from distance to integration into the French gay and lesbian movement.

Buisson-Fenet identifies three moments in D&J's historical trajectory: until the mid 1970s, the religious component prevails over homosexual experience, which remains rather discreet; 1976 marks the beginning of D&J's political involvement with the very first press release of the organization; and the late 1980s mark its engagement with the AIDS issue (Buisson-Fenet, 2004, pp. 101-125). But D&J's relation to the LGBT sphere reveals a more complex trajectory. At the beginning of its history, *David & Jonathan* was linked to the homosexual movement, for it directly stemmed from the first French homophile organization, *Arcadie* (Jackson, 2009), but the 1970s radical turn in the homosexual movement introduced a distance between *David & Jonathan* and the LGBT activist sphere. The history of the organization since then shows a progressive re-integration into this activist sphere.

Arcadie was the first and largest organization of the French homosexual movement. It belongs to the first period of the Western homosexual movement, which is referred to as "homophile" (Armstrong, 2002; Jackson, 2009). This early homosexual movement took place in a still repressive context⁹, and the organization aimed at integrating and normalizing homosexuality through dignity and respectability, and through teaching society about homosexuality. *Arcadie* members were mostly upper middle class and bourgeois people, most of them coming from a Christian background. The founding father of *Arcadie*, André Baudry, was himself a former seminarist who left the seminary because the contradiction with his "homophile" feelings was too heavy to bear (Jackson, 2006). In December 1971, a few members felt the need to gather together in order to address a specific question: how can one be Christian and homosexual? Among the fifteen persons that first met at the end of December, the three members at the origin of the meeting were strongly integrated to Christian tradition.

...Baudry created his movement [*Arcadie*] in '54 I think, and with a willingness of dignity, of respect, but at the same time with no political or religious commitment, eh, (...) and so there still were a number of Christians who were members of *Arcadie* and very regularly, I think it was almost every week, there was a debate, a conference, someone on, it was a theater, someone on the stage to express a point of view, whatever it was, and the audience was discussing with him. And so one day, a number of Christians, including Max Lionnet who was priest and Gérald de la Mauvinière who was a layman, and Jean-Marie who was priest as well, they said "we must ask our question, how can we be at the same time Christian and homo?" and so Baudry said, "I'll let you have a lounge to do your first meeting, but after that you go elsewhere". So, it's absolutely not, I was not there eh at this meeting, it's absolutely not out of contempt from Baudry, it's only the choice of [religious and political] neutrality which was imposed from the beginning that he asked to abide by... (Jean, 80 years-old, Catholic, member since 1972)

Two of the three founding fathers of *David & Jonathan*, Max Lionnet and Jean-Marie, were priests; the last one, Gerald de la Mauvinière, was a layman but his parents, from the aristocracy, were Catholic and Anglican, and he was an active militant in the *Society of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul*. They show that the more

⁹ In France, the law criminalizing homosexuality (not sodomy, but immoral public acts) would be rescinded only in 1982.

the members were integrated into the Christian tradition, the more they felt the need to create a space dedicated to their specificity: a dual identity. The birth of the organization occurred one month later, when the fifteen members met a second time in January 1972, and decided to label the group *Christianisme et Homophilie* ["Christianity and Homophilia"]. At this time, *David & Jonathan* was the name of the monthly bulletin first published in 1973.

At the same time, the homosexual movement knew its radical turn. In France, a new movement was created in 1971, le *Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire* ("Homosexual Front of Revolutionary Action", FHAR). This organization marks a "new style of homosexual activism" and represents "the deferred 'may 68' of French homosexuality" (Jackson, 2006, p. 160), that is to say the revolutionary moment of sexual liberation. *Arcadie* and the FHAR were strongly opposed in their militant style, the latter "attacking violently the cautious politics of *Arcadie*'s 'little toads'" (*ibid.*), to the point that André Baudry feared a bomb attack against *Arcadie*. On the contrary, *Christianisme et Homophilie*'s position was more nuanced. Jean attended a few meetings at the FHAR; what he says reveals *David & Jonathan*'s position about this new style of activism:

... the gay movement starts in '70, (...) so we ended with [my companion] at the FHAR. Well it was really amusing there [laugh], we went, I think it was on Thursday, (...) and we went to this meeting, it was at the school of Fine Arts and there was an amphitheatre with wooden tiers and the spectacle was on the stage and many things were happening below [laugh]. At that point, well I caricature eh, but this is the memory I have kept, sex was revolutionary. So we discussed a lot about that, and partying was like necessary, and so the next action would be going out at such and such a place, to have a picnic, party etc. And the speech was [on the stage] and practice was below [laugh]. (Have you followed this group for a long time?) No, we went four or five times, it was not really our, well it was funny. (...) I don't know the FHAR enough, the FHAR I know its folklore, I don't know their organization, (...) but well [laughing] lousy revolutionaries, how to put it, the 'revolutionary ass'10 well it's... (Jean, 80 years-old, Catholic, member since 1972)

The way Jean speaks of the FHAR reveals that he does not see it as something serious. As an heir of *Arcadie*, *Christianisme et Homophilie* does not feel close to the FHAR, whose revolutionary style appears more amusing than political. But the evolution of the homosexual movement allowed connections between *Christianisme et Homophilie* and the rest of the homosexual movement.

When the FHAR disappeared in 1974, a new group took over activism, the *Groupe de Libération Homosexuel* ("Homosexual Liberation Group", GLH). In June 1973, young people in *Arcadie* organized a conference that turned out badly, leading the older generations to complain. Some of these young *arcadians* were expelled from the organization and, with some former members of the dead FHAR, they founded the GLH (Jackson, 2006, pp. 160-161). An excerpt of Antoine's interview gives insight into the relationship between the GLH and *Christianisme et Homophilie* which changed its name to *David & Jonathan* in 1974:

¹⁰ The FHAR framed the « ass » and sodomy as revolutionary.

... at that time there wasn't many things, I think *David & Jonathan* was the only homo group in Rouen. There might have been an I-don't-know-what group of liberation, GLH yes that's it, yes, maybe there was, but it was a bit too restless all the same eh, too visible, well a bit too agitated. (...) It was not only, well, too visible, it's above all very, very agitated, or very revolutionary, in its way of posing things, very uncompromising as well. (...) We had a common work to do, but at the same time it was the systematic destruction of *Arcadie* etc., while it didn't seem relevant for me. It was a young approach, different, okay, but *Arcadie* had its place, they had the courage to do things before the GLH, even if for many young people from the GLH it seemed hypocrite, because indeed these gentlemen were dancing wisely, well nothing else was happening, they were not necessarily visible in the street once outside. At the GLH, on the contrary, we displayed a visibility, we really displayed a revolt eh, a revolution, so it was not very compatible with the values of order or at least, those that the Christian religion or those that we were putting forward – when I say order, I mean harmony rather than order – but the GLH is not in a place of harmony, it was clear that it was, virulent, and unbending; at the same time quite disrespectful of what was not from them, eh, me, these kinds of things have always annoyed me. (...) [They] expressed their own intuitions, okay, but as for posing their way of thinking things, their intuition, as the only and unique one that will allow homos to exist, no. (Antoine, 67 y-o, Catholic, member since 1975)

David & Jonathan is rather distant from mainstream homosexual activism. A partial explanation might be found in the generational difference and in the traditional Christian value of order. But the cold relations and the different activist styles gradually gave way to cooperation. Out of Paris, local groups of *David & Jonathan* organized events or workshops with the local groups of the GLH¹¹.

David & Jonathan's integration to the homosexual movement clearly starts in the 1980s. The GLH disappeared in 1979 and another activist group was founded the same year: the *Comité d'Urgence Anti-Répression Homosexuelle* ("Emergency Committee Against Homosexual Repression"). This group was a federation of different organizations and *David & Jonathan* was among them. In May 1980, *David & Jonathan* participated in a national day for gay rights organized by the CUARH. Yet, once again, the interview with Jean reveals how ambiguous *David & Jonathan* was regarding the CUARH:

...we were members of the CUARH but we were following it from a distance. And above all they were hot-heads, so we couldn't really find our way in their way of thinking, it was our ... I don't know the CUARH well, because I was never the one to go there, there were other delegates from *David & Jonathan*. The CUARH ... it took over from the FHAR, it's been far more serious than the FHAR all the same; asking real questions, about knowledge on gay people, the respect they are owed, we were not in the folklore of the FHAR anymore [laughing], which made me laugh but which was not serious. But at the same time, well, they [the CUARH] were always on political positions, there were a lot of Trotskyists, in all these gay organizations. (...) And the way Trotskyists acted was absolutely unbearable, (...) so then I respect the work of the

¹¹ In Grenoble, Rouen, Amiens between 1976 et 1979.

CUARH, and at the same time we didn't feel at ease in front of all these people, and we hadn't really outed *David & Jonathan* by then, we were still almost shameful ... (Jean, 80 years-old, Catholic, member since 1972)

Even if *David & Jonathan* is part and parcel of the CUARH, the organization could not really get its bearings. Here lies *David & Jonathan*'s ambiguity: it could, unlike *Arcadie*, build bridges with gay liberation activists, but, like *Arcadie*, it found them not serious enough or too agitated. In the mid-1980s, the integration into the activist sphere accelerated. The first big step was the outing of the organization in 1985 when the members decided, after debating, to participate in the *Gay Pride* in Paris, where pride marches were organized each year since 1979. D&J's president did not want to participate in the 1985 *Gay Pride* so the organization's participation was decided by vote: one single person gave the majority in favor of marching. Only ten to fifteen people from D&J marched that year. The AIDS epidemic was the second important step. The most important French organizations dealing with AIDS, *AIDES* and *Act Up-Paris*, were born in 1984 and 1989. *David & Jonathan* started to face the issue only in 1991 with the project *Espoir Sida 91* ("AIDS Hope 91") soon to be transformed into *Espoir 2000* ("Hope 2000").

...for a long time *David & Jonathan* didn't want to take AIDS into account, authentic eh, it starts to take it into account in '91, because I participated in the workshop, the first of *David & Jonathan* in '91, it was a national workshop. (...) They accompanied the people individually of course, individual accompanying but not as collective action, ah yes, they've been slow on the uptake. So after they tackled it more head-on, but never in a strong way. There've been two or three actions that have been done, to wake up people, so "AIDS 91", I participated in that, some others were participating more, there was Marseille, there was Rennes, there was Lyon, Strasbourg... (Maurice, 75 y-o, Catholic, member since 1980)

This project was based on phone lines, workshops, and prevention actions. A few *déjistes*¹² collaborated with *Aides* for advice and formation support. Homosexuality and the fight against AIDS are strongly interconnected (Broqua, 2006): *David & Jonathan* took part in this crisis of the French homosexual movement, but, as for the *Pride* march, slightly later.

Since 2000, the organization has entered into a period of normalization of LGBT activism and full integration into the French homosexual movement. In 1999, D&J joined the newly founded *Inter-LGBT*, a federation of about sixty LGBT organizations which plays an important role in LGBT politics in France. D&J is part and parcel of this structure:

...being at the *Inter-LGBT* creates obligations, since the *Inter-LGBT* regularly takes positions on all the issues and especially each year at the time of the *Gay Pride*, eh. So us, we are strong supporters of the pride march because it's the only moment of the year when within the fifteen days before we have articles, on the radio, on TV, in the written press, and we carry the demands into the different ministries, eh. So we are glad to be at the *Inter-LGBT*, we are listened to and appreciated at the *Inter-LGBT*, because for a few years we have been

¹² Members of *David & Jonathan* call themselves "*déjistes*": the abbreviation is D&J, which phonetically gives *déjiste*.

quite present, eh, especially the political committee (...), whereas the former teams [of D&J] were much more shy and timid, but now it's well established. And what pleased us a lot, [is that since] that famous universal prayer of the 15th of August, of Cardinal Vingt-Trois¹³ (...), we have sometimes some difficulties to follow, we are solicited every day, every day, every day, by different media, so still we officially take positions without any problem, that's it, on any issues, through the *Inter-LGBT* and on our behalf as well, that's it. (Luc, 65 y-o, Catholic, member since 2005, national secretary).

Since 2002, *David & Jonathan* has intervened in schools and high schools to raise consciousness about sexism and homophobia. The organization received an official accreditation for these interventions in 2010. Since 2007 it has participated in the World AIDS Day March organized in Paris by Act Up. Finally, during the debate concerning gay marriage in 2012-2013 the organization was invited to meet the Family Secretary and the Attorney General, published a press release supporting the pro-marriage demonstrations and a 40-page document arguing in favor of the bill. The organization participated in all the pro-marriage demonstrations that took place over that year.

How to construct a politics of voice? David & Jonathan's relation to the Parisian Christian community.

Even though contentious politics in the Catholic sphere in France is far less vigorous than it was in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s (Béraud, 2007), *David & Jonathan's* contentious politics still developed into the Protestant and Catholic domains, albeit more discreetly. Contentious politics within an institution is referred to as voice politics (Hirschman, 1970). Voice implies that the actors still belong to the institution, which in the case of the Church means belonging to the greater Christian community. How does the organization manage its integration into the community? Buisson-Fenet notices that D&J has a longstanding will to fit into "the specific outline of Christian movements", therefore connecting religious places where the "liturgical modality" prevails with places where "thinking and debate" prevail (Buisson-Fenet, 2004, p. 113). But nothing is said on how D&J proceeds to do so. This section shows how D&J manages to integrate itself into the Parisian Christian community, which is the basis of its politics of voice.

For the founding fathers of *David & Jonathan*, the organization had a role to play in the dialogue with Christian authorities (Buisson-Fenet, 2004, pp. 101-117), in order to make the Churches understand homosexuality through accounts of what homosexual believers were going through. *David & Jonathan's* line since its creation is to make the Church change, that is to say a "voice" politics: *David & Jonathan* has never been about creating its own Church but about staying in the Catholic or Protestant Church so as to make it change¹⁴. Critical commentaries of biblical texts made by some members of the organization with exegetic knowledge were published in the internal bulletin. In this sense, D&J follows the first stage of the critical textual approach of gay and lesbian religiosities (Yip, 2010). The

¹³ On August 15th 2012, His Eminence Cardinal André Vingt-Trois, Archbishop of Paris, sent a universal prayer to the priests to be read that day. This prayer praised traditional family against the government project on family issues. It has therefore been framed as an attack against the soon-to-be-debated bill legalizing gay marriage.

¹⁴ One of D&J's founding fathers wrote in the bulletin of September 1973: "Even if we are rejected by clergymen, we have to bear witness to Jesus-Christ, we have to remain faithful to the Church. But let us not be deserters. Without boastfulness nor shame, let's take our place into the Church. Let's be in the Church active men and not passive consumers" (quoted in Buisson-Fenet, 2004, endnote 3 p.125)

1982 translation of a book like McNeill's 1976 *The Church and the Homosexual* was therefore noticed by D&J's members. In 1976, when the Roman *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* released its "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics - *Persona Humana*" the organization published its very first press release, and its 1977 Manifesto clarifies the positions towards the Churches (Buisson-Fenet, 2004, p. 103). Since 1984, D&J has participated in the *Forum des Communautés Chrésiennes* ["Forum of Christian Communities" which became *Chrétiens en Forum* in 2003]. More recently, in 2005, when the president of the *Conférence des Evêques de France* [the Bishops of France Conference] declared that the bill criminalizing homophobic insults is "useless" and "deadly for freedom", *David & Jonathan* called for a meeting; the same year, the Vatican released the instruction forbidding priesthood for homosexuals¹⁵: *David & Jonathan* reacted with a press release and the priests of the organization wrote a letter to the French bishops. In 2009, D&J was invited on the radio to debate with a representative of the Vatican, in reaction to the Vatican's refusal to support the universal decriminalization of homosexuality. On the Protestant side, the *Groupe protestant* ["Protestant group"] started an action to think about the synod on the issue of benedictions for same-sex couples; this synod is organized by the *Eglise Protestante Unie de France* [United Protestant Churches of France], and the protestant group sent the bishops letters and met some pastors. Defending LGBT people in the religious sphere has been important since almost the beginning of the organization, but *David & Jonathan's* action is more about reacting to religious authorities' decisions with press releases rather than proper religious activism. As Jean says, the organization is engaged on Church issues "but more on the defensive". Such a politics requires to stay within the institution, that is to say, to remain within the Christian community. Two strategies are followed to maintain integration within the Christian community at large: a strategy of cooperation with other LGBT Christian groups, and a strategy of selection of the parishes they attend for their spiritual activities.

The strategy of cooperation means that *David & Jonathan* works with other progressive Christian groups, especially LGBT Christian groups, either for spiritual activities or for activist purposes. First of all, in 1983, D&J contributed to the creation of the *European Forum of Gay and Lesbian Christian of Europe*. The organization has been a member of the forum since then, and in 2011, on the occasion of the *Europride* in Rome, D&J with the *European Forum* sent a letter to Pope Benedict XVI asking him to stand against homophobic violence and to promote LGBT human rights. In May 2015, D&J hosted the *Forum* during the organization's annual national summit¹⁶. Apart from the *European Forum*, D&J contributed in 1999 to the foundation of the *Réseaux du Parvis* ["Networks of the Parvis"], a federation of about 50 French organizations of contentious and progressive Christians. A former president of D&J was also the president of the *Réseaux du Parvis* at the beginning of the 2000s. The organization has been always represented in the *Réseaux*, but according to this former president the active participation of the *déjistes* is difficult to maintain, probably because of D&J's defensive activist style:

... [being] activist with other Christians in a federation like this one [the *Réseaux*] it's rather difficult to make people come. I am quite astonished, they don't come. (People from D&J ?) Yeah (...), well

¹⁵http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20051104_istruzione_en.html

¹⁶ Each year, in May, the entire organization from Paris and the cities meets during one weekend called les *Journées Annuelles de Rencontre* ("Annual Meeting Days").

“people from D&J” what does it mean? it means that it’s rather people from the local groups, I always hear that local groups “ah, but us you know, people they don’t move a lot, they shouldn’t be too visible, they mustn’t this, they mustn’t that” so meeting other people makes you tired. They want to be together, meet up for a bite, and that’s it, eh, no need to go further. (...) But at the same time, I think there is an idea behind, that a religious Christian organization, Catho furthermore, it can only be tradi[tionalist], it can only be that, it reminds [them] of the Shop¹⁷, it reminds [them] of the rejection, it reminds etc., I think there is a lot of that. Well, there are some people that feel good in it, but I quite often tried in the administrative board when I was still there to sell *Parvis*, to make people come. Each time at the general meeting [of the *Parvis*] I had about ten or twelve [people from D&J], but it was not a lot all the same, and it was more my friends, who knew me well who were a bit in the circuit and everything. No it’s a bit difficult to make people come, a bit difficult. (Antoine, 67 y-o, Catholic, member since 1975)

Regarding Parisian LGBT Christian groups more specifically, D&J regularly organizes activities with the *Carrefour des chrétiens inclusifs* [“Forum of Inclusive Christians”, CCI¹⁸], which is a federation of inclusive groups, and especially the *Communion Béthanie*, a member of the CCI. The *Fêtez-Dieu* in Protestant places (see below) is always co-organized with the president of the CCI. They mutually invite each other for different activities such as religious retreats in monasteries. During the 2012-2013 pro-gay marriage demonstrations, the CCI, the *Communion Béthanie*, organizations from the *Réseaux du Parvis*, and D&J marched together, as they do for *Gay Prides*. D&J is also connected to the *Groupe Lambda*, an American LGBT Episcopal group from the American Cathedral of Paris. Each year since 2010, the *Groupe Lambda*, the CCI and D&J organize a celebration together at the American Cathedral on the day before the *Gay Pride* in Paris. As a comparison, *Devenir Un en Christ* [“Finding Unity in Christ”, DUEC] is another LGBT Christian organization but which follows the Church and is thus absolutely not contentious¹⁹ (Buisson-Fenet, 2004). Although DUEC is on good terms with D&J, they do nothing together. Through its cooperation with different progressive Christian groups, D&J integrates a network and belongs to a larger community of (contentious) Christians.

The second strategy, the strategy of selection, means that those in charge of the spiritual activities carefully choose the churches D&J works with. This strategy rests on the religious capital of some members. Some *déjistes*, thanks to their religious socialization or their job, have developed relationships within and knowledge of religious networks, the clergy or the parishes in Paris, allowing them to negotiate easily a partnership with a parish or the intervention of a specific priest or pastor. Between 2013 and 2014, new partnerships have been concluded with three different churches in Paris. For two of those churches, two different *déjistes* knew a clergy member of the church in question: Raphael knew the pastor of one of the churches because they used to attend the same parish before; as for the other church, the prior D&J president knew one of the church’s brethren because he had been the former’s spiritual director. Concerning the church, the two members in charge of D&J’s spiritual activities went one day to an event there and presented

¹⁷ Metaphor often used to refer to the institution of the Church.

¹⁸ The CCI is not meant only for LGBT people; the website says it brings together Christians willing to promote an inclusive Church, but the federation overwhelmingly gathers LGBT groups.

¹⁹ They took no official position on the gay marriage issue, they did not demonstrate either with the anti- or pro-gay marriage, they never participate (collectively at least) to the *Gay Prides*.

the organization to the pastor who reacted very enthusiastically. They knew he was gay-friendly, for another *déjiste* attending this parish came out to him before. Network is the key to integrating a parish: "...it's because the pastor is a friend of Whatshisname who is friend with Thingy and Whatshername..." says Paul-François. Religious capital allows the selection of gay-friendly priests and pastors:

... me, I am not a supporter of the crusade. That is to say, it's really because I know there's a little chance to have something that we go, after having been there, after having been advised etc. etc., or when from an interpersonal dialogue we know that the interlocutor we will have won't be openly homophobic. Well the *Oratoire du Louvre*²⁰ there are two pastors, and it really seems that the second pastor was much less enthusiastic than [the first pastor we met]. This is also the reason why there has been a very official procedure [of voting our integration into the Parish Council]. (Paul-François, 40 y-o, Catholic, member since 2008, in charge of D&J's spiritual activities)

... [when] we are not sure, when there are several pastors in the parish and we don't know which is gonna be there, so we go, we have a look, we already know that the place is not completely host- not completely hostile. Because we are not, not totally crazy, huh, and we announce ourselves [to be from *David & Jonathan*] at the end after everything went well (Raphael, 31 y-o, Protestant, member since 2011, in charge of D&J's spiritual activities)

The selection strategy is based upon a logic of choosing non-homophobic places, that is to say, a logic of prevention. According to the two members in charge of D&J's spiritual activities, diversifying the churches is important in order to not be separated from the rest of the Christian community: becoming a gay church would be a failure. During the negotiation with the *Oratoire*, the church Council feared that D&J would transform the church into a gay church; the organization had to prove them wrong:

So we provided them with press articles, D&J's political positions and other things, everything, to prove that indeed we were not in the process of locking ourselves into a church and only one church, and that this time was the opportunity to have other partners, precisely to open up to existing parishes. (Raphael, 31 y-o, Protestant, member since 2011, in charge of D&J's spiritual activities)

As for Paul-François, a gay church is "a ghetto, it's about celebrating only between us and only for us, and that, we absolutely want to avoid that because it means we ostracize ourselves". For him, gay churches "play into traditional intolerant Christians' hands": if "we break away" it means that "they have won". Therefore, a successful activity is an activity that gathers *déjistes* and members of the specific parish where the activity takes place:

²⁰ One of the three new churches D&J recently dealt with. The Protestant church welcomes the organization about three times a year for the *Fêtez-Dieu*.

... and for me where it is a big success, it's that at the very first [prayer in the newly partnered church], there were twenty persons, in which one third [were parishioners from the church itself and not from D&J]. (...) [What] seems important to me, it's that in fact out of the twenty people attending, five or six come from the parish. That is to say, it's a COMMON proposition "parish-D&J", and that it's so much a common proposition that there are five or six regular parishioners [he emphasizes this part of the sentence, rolling the "r"] coming to the prayer group. So even if it is in D&J's hands, but for me it's really important, that is to say, within less than three meetings, they started in January our friends, they succeeded in maintaining a regular – I was about to say customers – they have maintained people from the parish, that is to say it's not, it's not D&J which establishes itself, who uses – I mean, we don't rent the room. It's as much a parish activity as a D&J activity. And for me it's primordial. Because it means that we move away as much as possible from a gay church, from a ghetto. (Paul-François, 40 y-o, Catholic, member since 2008, in charge of D&J's spiritual activities)

Finally, the oldest current official partnership is with *Saint-Merry* (see below). This church has hosted D&J's religious practices for about 12 years and is well-known since the 1970s for its welcoming of "Christians from the margins"²¹ (prostitutes, tramps, drug addicts, homosexuals, illegal immigrants etc.). Before *Saint-Merry*, in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, D&J was hosted in *Saint-Bernard* chapel and *Saint-Marcel* church, which shows their long-lasting willingness to integrate parishes. The link to all those churches is not about a "formal contract": D&J is simply accepted into the church for their religious practices and some *déjistes* belong to the parish. Quite a few *déjistes* attend the CPHB Sunday masses at *Saint-Merry*, among all the other attending parishioners, and the *Fêtez-Dieu* (see below) are mentioned in the official program of the church and are open to anyone willing to participate, which demonstrates the open integration of D&J into this church. For the Protestants, the oldest and closest partnership is with the *Maison Verte*, which hosts three to four *Fêtez-Dieu* per year. This parish is also an inclusive church.

This first section has shown that *David & Jonathan* leads a politics of double integration. It became progressively integrated into the LGBT activist sphere, while its integration into the Parisian Christian sphere has always been clearer. Integration into Christianity, through cooperation and selection strategies, is the basis for D&J's voice politics in the Church. Nonetheless, a voice position suggests that individually the actor feels at the same time homosexual and belonging to the Church. The next section analyses the role of rituals in this process.

Contesting but belonging: how does individual reconciliation work through religious rituals?

Cléo (25 y-o) says there were "two Cléo", Samuel (48 y-o) talks about "a knot", Geoffrey (40 y-o) about "personal contradiction and "parallel lives", Annie (36 y-o) about "incompatible duality", Valentina (26 y-o) about "reconciling myself with myself and my faith", and Jean-Louis (55 y-o) explains how alcohol helped him to hold together "his three pieces, family, sex and spirituality". In order for the individual to reconcile her or his faith and sexuality, the organization offers

²¹ Expression from the fieldwork.

different spiritual activities. This section argues that individual reconciliation operates through rituals thanks to a process of double communalization, which, however, is met with some resistance.

A presentation of David & Jonathan's main rituals

The organization offers two main rituals. The first one is the CPHB²² mass at the Church of *Saint-Merry*, located in the center of Paris nearby the gay district. Between 10 and 20 *déjistes* go to this mass each week. The CPHB mass is informally institutionalized in D&J: it is known in the organization that some *déjistes* meet every Sunday and have lunch together after. This ritual is mentioned in the organization's bulletin only since 2013. The Sunday mass at *Saint-Merry* is known for being "destructured" and "upside down"²³. The action does not take place in front of the choir but in the middle of the nave; a wooden platform on which are the lecterns stands at the center of the nave and the audience gathers around it. There is no altar on this platform. The mass is characterized by two main innovations. First, the priest's role in the celebration is largely downplayed, for laypersons are in charge of most of the mass, including the preaching²⁴. During the introductory rites and the Liturgy of the Word, the priest sits among the other parishioners in charge of the mass, near the platform; he comes back only for the liturgy of the Eucharist for which he prepares each week a new Eucharistic Prayer, which is contrary to the instruction codifying catholic liturgy²⁵. The Roman missal is not followed, except for the texts of the Liturgy of the Word. The Gospel is, of course, systematic, but the other two readings can be dropped or cut²⁶; the Gospel reading and the preaching can be done either by a man or a woman. After the Liturgy of the Word, everyone stands up and goes into the choir for the Liturgy of the Eucharist. This is the second main innovation. During this part of mass it is quite difficult to identify the different elements of the liturgy. Several actors take part in the action alongside the priest, even if he is, of course, the only one to perform the most sacred moments such as the Consecration, the epiclesis, anamnesis, oblation and doxology. Laymen and women can sometimes participate through a universal prayer introduced at some point between the beginning of the Preparation of the Gifts and the Eucharistic Prayer; they can also participate in the Intercessions. The CPHB Sunday masses vary greatly from week to week, but some elements are systematically absent: the Penitential Act, the Kyrie and Gloria, the Creed, the washing of the priest's hand and the reverence to the altar are not parts of the CPHB ritual. All of this is known and accepted by the Catholic authorities.

The second ritual, the *Fêtez-Dieu* ["Celebrating God"] was invented and is organized by the organization itself; it is the most popular ritual among the *déjistes* in Paris. It is a prayer group which takes place the second Friday of each month at the Church of *Saint-Merry*, since 2002; apart from this church, four to six *Fêtez-Dieu* are held at the Protestant churches *La Maison Verte* and *l'Oratoire du Louvre*. D&J has a long lasting tradition of prayer group but it became institutionalized only

²² *Centre Pastoral des Halles Beaubourg*, "Pastoral Center of Halles Beaubourg". The CPHB was founded in 1975 on a specific pastoral (art, co-responsibility between priests and laypersons, social commitment). It is a non-geographical church, that is to say that anyone can choose to belong to this church regardless of their diocese.

²³ Expression from interviewees.

²⁴ The priest can do the preaching but I have observed this case only once among the observed masses.

²⁵ Paragraph n° 51 in the *Redemptionis Sacramentum* instruction.

²⁶ On one observation, half of the Gospel was read by a layman, he stopped for a meditative silence, then a laywoman started the Homily, she stopped for a song; another laywoman finished the reading of the Gospel and the Homily.

via the partnership with *Saint-Merry*. No matter where, the emphasis is placed on ecumenism for any *déjiste* to be interested in the ritual. The *Fêtez-Dieu* gather from 35 to 90 members, and many consistently go for dinner after. Four to five members are in charge of coordinating the ritual and of finding members willing to prepare the “celebration”. Sometimes, a priest or a pastor is asked to participate, but the whole celebration is most of the time led by secular members of the organization. Each “celebration” has a title (a theme) and is unique, for the members in charge of preparations change each time. Still, we can identify an outline with a few compulsory elements:

| Song | |
|-----------------|--|
| <i>Stage 1:</i> | Reading of a text from the Bible Song – Writing of the post-it notes |
| <i>Stage 2:</i> | Reading of a text from the Gospel and preaching Reading of the post-it notes – Song |
| <i>Stage 3:</i> | The audience stands and takes each other hand for the Lord’s Prayer |
| <i>Stage 4:</i> | Events announcements, asking members for next preparation |

The post-it notes are a very important moment of the ritual. At their arrival in the church, the members are given a sheet with the songs and texts on which a post-it note is stuck. After the second reading, during a contemplative moment, members write prayer intentions on the post-it notes, which are then collected and read aloud. These post-it notes are important because they give voice to the subjective: they are a way for the individual to express himself/herself amidst the religious ritual. As for the preaching, it quite often alludes to homosexuality in a more or less explicit way. The following table gives a general view of the *Fêtez-Dieu*. In table 1, “General issues” refers to prayer intentions which do not relate to homosexuality in any way²⁷, while the category “Homosexuality and community” refers to prayer intentions regarding homosexuality, life in the couple as a homosexual, the organization *David & Jonathan*, a particular member of it, or the Church of *Saint-Merry* and its community.

²⁷ These prayer intentions relate, for example, to a friend, a relative, any sort of difficulty or fear, a thank to God, a wish for the neighbor to stop making noise, for a homeless person, a persecuted community somewhere etc.

TABLE 1: CONTENT OF THE FETEZ-DIEU

| Date and place | Theme | Number of post-it notes | | Elements heard from preaching |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|--------------------------|--|
| | | General issues | Homosexuality, community | |
| 25/01/2013 <i>Maison Verte</i> | “Christians unity” | 18 | 5 | “...soothe our anger towards hurting words” |
| 08/02/2013 <i>Saint-Merry</i> | - | 24 | 8 | About people judging the differences of others, “why does this man love this other man?” |
| 08/03/2013 <i>Saint-Merry</i> | “We struggled all night long but on Your Word we cast the nets” | 24 | 7 | No explicit reference to homosexuality, but a commentary comes after about the conclave and the hope for a more open-minded Pope |
| 13/12/2013 <i>Saint-Merry</i> | “Nothing is impossible to God” | No post-it notes nor preaching on that day, but during a universal prayer I heard: “We bless you for the organization”, “Thank you God for the 15 <i>Fêtez-Dieu</i> ”, “Thank you for the new members”, and a reference to homo-parenthood | | |
| 10/01/2014 <i>Saint-Merry</i> | “Crossing to the other side”, in tribute to a member who committed suicide | 34 | 10 | Homosexuality, “this vulnerability” |
| 14/03/2014 <i>Saint-Merry</i> | “In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you” | 24 | 6 | No explicit reference to homosexuality |
| 21/03/2014 <i>Maison Verte</i> | “Where is my place” | 7 | 5 | “The good community is the one in which you are welcomed” |
| 11/04/2014 <i>Saint-Merry</i> | “The grace of reconciliation” | 15 | 5 | Exclusion can go as far as “death for homosexuals in some countries” |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 12/09/2014 <i>Saint-Merry</i> | “What have you done with your talents?” | No post-it notes on that day, but at the announcements time, a <i>déjiste</i> expresses another <i>déjiste</i> 's wish, who was absent because of a relative's death: “we can have a thought for him” | | No explicit reference to homosexuality, but the theme is about “Begetting”, which can have a strong meaning regarding homosexuals. “There are so many ways to be a father” |
| 10/10/2014 <i>Saint-Merry</i> | “Am I my brother's keeper?” | 15 | 6 | “There are demonstrations ¹ that kill (...), violence endured because of skin color, (...) sexual orientation ...” |
| 14/11/2014 <i>Saint-Merry</i> | “Jesus draws near and he walks with us” | 14 | 2 | “...being a disciple means making choices sometimes different from the majority (...), it's remembering that the Lord loves us all as we are and not as what we should be...” |
| 28/11/2014 <i>Maison Verte</i> | - no title - | 0 | 5 | “We, who are fighting for all the sexualities to be accepted, aren't we creating boundaries?” |

We can identify three types of elements to describe the *Fêtez-Dieu*.

- Elements from traditional Christian ritual: some elements of the scenography are typical of Christian gatherings such as the mass, the World Youth day, or the Taizé community²⁸. These elements are the church itself, the songs, the texts, the preaching, sometimes liturgical expressions from the dialogue parts of Sunday mass (“Glory to you, O Lord” before the Gospel for example), the standing up for the Gospel reading; sometimes, the Bible is open on the made-up altar, always with its white sheet and candles, and a *Kyrie* might be sung. All these liturgical expressions, objects, gestures, are mediations of the presence of the absent God in situation (Piette, 1999): they are “modes of the presence of God” (Piette, 2003, p. 362) that make the *Fêtez-Dieu* an actual religious ritual.

²⁸ The Taizé community is an ecumenical monastic order based in Taizé, France, gathering Protestant and Catholic brethren from all over the world. The community is focused on youth and organizes different events that are popular among young adults. The songs and prayers from the community are quite famous and are often sung at the *Fêtez-Dieu*.

- Elements referring to the organization: some other elements directly refer to *David & Jonathan* itself. For the Lord’s Prayer, the members stand up and take each other’s hand. The moment directly harks back to the founding moment of the organization: at the end of their second meeting in January 1972, the few *arcadians* attending stood up, took each other by the hand, and recited the Lord’s Prayer. Obviously, this symbolic meaning of the Lord’s Prayer is mostly known by the most involved members, but it still explains why it is framed as compulsory by the members in charge of coordinating the organization’s spiritual practices. The second element referring to the organization is a painting, an “icon” say a few *déjistes*. The painting represents the biblical characters David and Jonathan at the entrance of a city, shaking hands and Jonathan fraternally holding David’s shoulder. It was painted 13 years ago by a friend of a member, and was sanctified by a *Saint-Merry* priest. This painting is present at all the *Fêtez-Dieu* except those at the Protestant churches, for the painting is kept at *Saint-Merry’s* presbytery.

TABLE 2 : CONTENTS OF THE HOMOSEXUALITY RELATED POST-IT NOTES

| Dimensions | Some examples |
|---|---|
| (1) Homosexual experience and reconciliation | “alleviate my anger towards you”, “if things are difficult”, “save our love [as a couple]”, “To some friends, for them to understand acceptance of the other in his difference”, “Help me to accept what I don’t live”, “My Lord make Olivier accept me as I am for I love him”, “To our wedding”, “for my parents to understand our choice to have children”, “You made me different, forgive me for holding a grudge”, “continue to soothe my heart, you do it every day”, “My parents are suffering from not having grand-children, give to my brother and me another form of fertility”, “Thanks for Your help in the coming out I did to my superior at my job” ... |
| (2) D&J, Saint-Merry, and the community | “Thanks to D&J for accompanying us into ecumenism”, “Thanks to <i>Saint-Merry</i> church for meeting up in community”, “D&J, an always more fraternal and warmer space”, “so that no one from D&J this year decides to leave us [commit suicide]”, “Affection 2014, the reason for our organization”, “Thanks for our meetings and <i>Fêtez-Dieu</i> My Lord”, “Make us more involved and available to those joining us”, “Thanks for having made me encounter a community which welcomed me so well as I am”, “We pray You for one of us who is absent and in sorrow”, “welcome all D&J’s members with all their roughness in your Love” ... |
| (3) Tolerance and norms changing | On the «bill» [the gay marriage bill], on «difference», “transform the controversy [on gay marriage] into communion”, on “non-judging”, “debate ... homophobia”, on the respect of differences, “to the next Pope, open and tolerant”, “2014, a space of peace for the young people suffering from discrimination”, “Thanks for [having reminded the figures about suicide rates among young homos]”, “live beyond labels”, “help us not to judge [those rejecting us]”, “25 th anniversary of the AIDS National Council: thank you My Lord”, about the lack of understanding between a child and his parents and a young man who committed suicide ten days ago ... |
| (4) Institutional Church | “so that they become aware of the injustice that the texts make”, “God, open the hearts of those leaders who claim they are Christians and who say that Ebola is the fault of homosexuals, open their hearts to love” |

- Finally the ritual is composed of subjective elements: the post-it notes and the preaching allows the audience to express themselves during the celebration and especially to express their sexuality. The reading of the post-it notes is like a participative universal prayer. The prayer intentions referring to homosexuality make up about a quarter to one third of the post-it notes. Their content refers to four dimensions of their homosexual experience²⁹: dimension 1 refers to their personal experience and difficulties as homosexuals; dimension 2 refers to social links and community; dimension 3 refers to what fuels activism or a sense of discrimination; dimension 4 refers to criticism of the institution.

When the post-it notes moment is not planned in the celebration, elements referring to those four dimensions are nonetheless observable, in the preaching or any other element³⁰. All this shows that the *Fêtez-Dieu* is a religious space, a prayer (elements from traditional Christian ritual), in which the community, a “we” (elements referring to the organization and table 2 dimension 2), and individual feelings, multiple “I” and their sexual difference (the subjective elements and especially the first dimension of table 2), can be expressed.

One ritual but two communities: constructing a double sense of community belonging

A religious experience is about being together. Religious rituals are partly meant to link believers together and make them share their common faith. This process is referred to as religious communalization. Each of the two rituals studied here galvanizes the individual feeling of being part of the large Christian community. The members of D&J attending the *Fêtez-Dieu* and those attending the CPHB mass show a strong sense of sharing a common spiritual experience (see also table 2, dimension 2). The case of Olivan best illustrates this process through the *Fêtez-Dieu*:

... So how come these celebrations, these prayers, have become so central today for the Christian life of D&J? For me it's a bit of a mystery. (...) But in any case, well, (...) I think that each other faith helps construct our [personal] faith. (...) [Before the *Fêtez-Dieu* was instituted], I didn't go often, so why? - I don't know why I didn't use to go, probably because (...) I had the impression it was less promising. In other words, I have the impression that now around the *Fêtez-Dieu*, there is a dynamic. I don't want to say that I was not interested in praying before - it would be worrying to say such a thing - but really now we are carried by each other, that's it. It's something I have discovered the past years only, it means that faith has a collective dimension that is very important. In other words, our starting point, or at least mine, is “we are horrible individualists”. And there's been a moment when I realized that it was wrong. It's a big

²⁹ Those few examples come from all of our observations. The reading of the post-it notes is quick and taking notes can be difficult. Those between commas are exact quotations, albeit not always complete; otherwise only the theme or issue of the post-it note, or just a few words, are mentioned. Some examples might seem ambiguous: “saving our love” means our couple, or a friendship love? “...make Olivier accepts me...”: is Olivier a lover, a friend, a brother? “...one of us”: is “us” referring to the *déjistes* or to the Christians? The importance of the organization to the members and the omnipresence of homosexuality allow us to frame those expressions as being said from a “gay standpoint”.

³⁰ Other forms of universal prayers can be chosen sometimes, a testimony by a member can be read, a specific prayer written for the occasion can be read, etc. Those variations from one *Fêtez-Dieu* to another may also display those four dimensions.

mistake, to live it that way. (...) We are carried by others, how should I put it? We expect from each other. What we experience together is much more important than what each person experiences on their own, even if of course there are also moments when each one is alone, like during prayer for example, but in any case really the collective dimension, community dimension rather, I prefer to put it that way, it is something that when you have tried it once you can't go back. (...) And in a community we can encourage each other, we can say "but you could do this" all that, that's it, it works like that. (Olivan, 53 y-o, Catholic, member since 1986, in charge of the *Fêtez-Dieu* coordination)

This long excerpt reveals how Olivan discovered the collective dimension of faith through the *Fêtez-Dieu*. He used to experience religion in an individualist way and was first skeptical about the *Fêtez-Dieu* and used to not attend the celebration, until he felt a new "dynamic". Others experience the same with the CPHB mass. Indeed, the main innovation of that mass, the moving of the audience in the choir for the Eucharist, is experienced as a powerful moment of togetherness.

The end of the Eucharist Prayer is said by everyone. The whole audience says in chorus "Through him, and with him, and in him", the whole assembly concelebrates. The idea is that the assembly concelebrates, it's not the priest who celebrates - this is the spirit of the second Council - it is a concelebration, we all CON-celebrate altogether. (Bernardo, 70 y-o, member since 2002)

For me it's a beautiful moment as well. It's a moment when we really feel a - we really feel in a community of believers. And a bit as a family around the table. So I find that the symbolism is beautiful, that fact that we all go around the table, and the fact that when we say the Our Father around the table it looks like a family in fact (Annie, 36 y-o, member since 2006)

The sense of belonging to the Christian community is clearly reinforced by the new liturgy promoted in this innovative mass: being around the altar in the choir and participating all together reinforces an individual sense of belonging. While community in the *Fêtez-Dieu* can be limited to D&J, the community constructed in the CPHB's mass is the larger Christian community, experienced as a "family". Such a strong feeling pertains to the fact that homosexual people are included in the CPHB community as such: they belong to the Christian community without being closeted, and being out as homosexual greatly helps the feeling of belonging. At his very first CPHB mass, the day before the World AIDS Day, Florent noticed "many homos in the audience" and "gay couples" and that was "a shock and a pleasure".

...Saying "I am not alone anymore in the Church". And then there was a universal prayer [and the priest³¹ said very strong words about AIDS]. I said "Fancy that!", and the things that touch me because in the gay community these are things we hear about are reconciled with what is very deep in myself, which is my Christian life. (...) I was so overwhelmed to see that in fact these two dimensions so fundamental to my life which are my homosexuality and my faith are perfectly reunited in a Catholic community. (...) You see, it is so natural to have homos at *Saint-Merry* there is no need to explain anything. And I am pleased to commit in a Christian community, something I could not do

³¹ This priest is a former Act Up activist and is known for being outspoken.

[in my previous parish] without having to explain everything. I don't need to explain at *Saint-Merry*. No explanation, that's it, I'm gay, that's it. (...) [Before *Saint-Merry*, when I went to mass] I felt that a dimension was missing from my Christian life, which was the collective dimension. (...) And I don't want to have a community dimension in the parish if I have to lie about who I am. And what I appreciate at *Saint-Merry*, is that it is the Church! It's a church life. And what I find at *Saint-Merry* (...), it's a Christian community (Florent, 40 y-o, not a member of D&J, but regularly attends some D&J activities).

For many *déjistes* who attend the CPHB's mass at the Church of *Saint-Merry* like Florent, visibility as homosexual is the condition of the feeling of Christian belonging. This visibility contrasts with their previous experience in traditional Christian parishes: “[*Saint-Merry* is] a parish where I can be myself without having to hide as homosexual, which is already a lot, and it's not the case of all the parishes” (Annie).

Alongside this feeling of religious belonging, the *déjistes* attending those rituals also develop a sense of belonging to the gay community. A second process of communalization is observable here. Through the rituals, D&J members seek a religious experience but they also seek to share a common sociosexual experience. Many interviewees, when asked why they entered D&J, say that at the beginning of the coming-out process they felt the need to meet people like them. The rituals are therefore also the occasion for a specific sociability they cannot find in other, heteronormative social spaces. In that sense, being with other gay friends becomes an incentive for ritual participation. It shows that the rituals pertain to a gay sociability that is important for an individual sense of identity, friendship being a central element organizing gay and lesbian life (Nardi, 1999; Stanley, 1996). On Sundays, after the mass, the members of D&J in the audience always gather at the same place in the church, chat, and go to lunch together.

There's a collective dimension in religious exchange [that is much stronger at *Saint-Merry*, and therefore] I feel good [at *Saint-Merry*], I end up with my gay friends, because we meet up there a lot and we have lunch together after, etc., and that's it. And so it's a moment of both conviviality, exchange, of depth at the same time, you see. (Jean-Louis, 55 y-o, Catholic, member since 2004)

I like to go to Notre-Dame, so it's totally different, I like Notre-Dame ritual, [but] I often go there at *Saint-Merry* because I am with the people from D&J, so that's it. (François, 57 y-o, Catholic, member since 2010).

Further in the interview, François says that *David & Jonathan* is like a “family-Church” and he emphasizes the fact that even in summer when everyone is gone on holidays he can rely on the *déjistes*. The same occurs with the *Fêtez-Dieu*. As part of the ritual, the *déjistes* share an aperitif after the celebration and go for dinner together. Conversations can be about anything, even though religious news is omnipresent, but part of it can also be talking about the next tea dance in some gay club, calling one another with the wrong grammatical gender, commenting on a new cute member, or making jokes they could not make outside a safe space³².

³² For example, during one aperitif I observed, Bastien was about to go before diner; another member stopped him putting one leg between Bastien's legs in order to immobilize him; Bastien, laughing, said “right there it's fine but don't go further up!”.

...I find that we gather in a way of thinking, that there is a sort of sharing, (...), there is a moment of conviviality also after, we go for diner. (...) [But compared to the Sunday mass at *Saint-Merry*], the *Fêtez-Dieu*, it's in any case more limited to D&J members, so the issue referred to here is more the one that interests us ... it's THE spiritual moment of D&J only, welcomed in a church, you see... (François, 57 y-o, Catholic, member since 2010)

For François, the *Fêtez-Dieu* is important because it is “more limited to D&J members” and therefore the “problematic referred to” can be more specific, meaning that it can be related to homosexuality. But the gay sociability expressed in the social space of the rituals is not *any* gay sociability. It is not indeed the kind of gay sociability the *déjistes* can find elsewhere in the mainstream Parisian gay community. Jordan explains he found in D&J gay men with whom he felt more comfortable:

I am not assiduous in the gay scene, I don't have my “family” in the night scene or the gay things, and so, you see, I was like “I want to meet gay guys who have a dimension at least a bit spiritual”, (...) who have a bit of another dimension with some values and stuff, because I used to come across many people who were not really interesting. (...) Be it in bars or in clubs, well, I felt that something was still missing. What's more, it was not my way of flirting, I was not really comfortable with all the codes (...). At D&J, I found that diversity of gays and lesbians (...) and not this image I had - which was surely a wrong image - of people going out a lot, (...) a bit superficial, like, judging you, a bit in the way of sex sex sex” (Jordan, 26 y-o, member since 2011)

Jordan felt he did not fit in the gay scene. Being Christian means the *déjistes* have some values and behavioral norms that make them feel better among other homosexuals who share them.

This sense of belonging to two communities is finally subsumed under a feeling of protection. Being homosexual in a heteronormative society can create a feeling of oppression or can put one under attack (table 2, dimension 3 and 4). The gay Christian community of *Fêtez-Dieu* and the inclusive Christian community of the CPHB mass were indeed a shield against the Church's 2012-2013 discriminating discourse and the large anti-gay marriage demonstrations:

We absolutely have to convince people of the futility of all sorts of discourses that are currently being held. So when we heard them, well, we had to plug our ears, try to dismantle them and to say “but no!” well dismantle them at first between us (...). And with also this strength, that we shouldn't underestimate - how to put it - that all this was experienced in community. (...) Individually, we would have had great difficulties each one to do this work of deconstruction of the discriminating discourses coming from Rome, for example, we would have had great difficulties. (...) So the idea that we were living all this together in community, it's amazing as allaying source, and that's it, and so, necessarily supporting one another without even being aware of it! It's totally unconscious, but it can only be of that order, and then it reinforces group cohesion of course... (Olivan, 53 y-o, Catholic, member since 1986, in charge of the *Fêtez-Dieu* coordination)

I discovered *Saint-Merry* in December 2012, and the first opposing demonstrations were in January 2013. And in fact throughout all the most terrible period I was at *Saint-Merry*. So I was protected by *Saint-Merry*, in fact, in a way I had a hard time [facing this period], but in fact I was very peaceful, I was protected, I had no problem. But for my sister it was absolutely not like that, [she had to undergo homophobic homilies in her church]. So I offered her to come to *Saint-Merry* on one day that demonstrations were organized because she knew it would have been horrible in her church (...). And for me not at all, thanks to *Saint-Merry*, I was somewhat distant (Vincent, 40 y-o, not a member of D&J).

The only way to be protected from adversity is to find a community that includes and recognizes the two dimensions homosexual believers experience as fundamental, their faith and their sexual identification. With one ritual, whether it be the *Fêtez-Dieu* or the CPHB mass, the individual constructs a link to two communities, a process of double communalization that can lead to a feeling of being protected against heteronormative and heterosexist discourses. In that sense, religion is not anymore a source of tension, but has become a real source of empowerment (Mili, 2005).

Contentious voices in David & Jonathan: women and Protestants criticizing the rituals

At the end of the 1990's, some women in the organization felt the need to launch a specific group. The two women that first initiated this group were feminist and contested the masculine name of the organization: the first name they gave to the group was "Ruth and Noemie", in reference to the biblical couple of women that can be interpreted as a lesbian couple. Other members saw this group as undermining *David & Jonathan's* identity, and the group finally decided at the beginning of the 2000s to change the name and become the *Groupe Femmes* ("The Women Group"), which is a less contentious name. The group gathers together mainly non-feminist women. It led the organization to establish a mixed co-presidency in its bylaws in 2007³³. Since 2010, the issue has been reactivated: some women still contest the name of the organization, criticize the sexist behavior of some members, and the screening of a documentary on male domination led to a large debate. Hence, feminist women also contest the rituals of the organization. They make two points: first, the rituals are "too catholic", and, second, they gather too many men³⁴:

You have the *Fêtez-Dieu* at *Saint-Merry* [and those at the Protestant church *La Maison Verte*], (...) and it's true that the *Fêtez-Dieu* at *Saint-Merry* are very Catholic, there are almost only men, old men, so I don't feel really comfortable, and what's more it's really cold inside, and the songs are catastrophic, so, well. Whereas, the *Fêtez-Dieu* at *La Maison Verte*, they are warmer, because the room is heated, there are decorations, well the atmosphere make me find my feet, and there are other people, more Protestant members. (...) But it's true, I was saying that at the *Fêtez-Dieu* at *Saint-Merry* there are only guys, and it's unpleasant (Marion, 31 y-o, member since 2009).

³³ The *déjistes* elect two presidents, a man and a woman, who are in charge together during their shared presidency.

³⁴ Women represent less than 10% of each *Fêtez-Dieu* observed.

I don't feel like going [to the *Fêtez-Dieu*] you see, (...) the one or two times I attended it, I didn't really feel any ... deep openness. And the fact that there were so many boys, so many men, well it confirms the fact that D&J hasn't managed to become a mixed movement, for me (...). Obviously then, the *Fêtez-Dieu* ... [can only reproduce that]" (Blandine, 68 y-o, member since 1995)

Both Marion and Blandine define themselves as feminist and criticize the Church for being patriarchal. Both do not go to church on Sunday even at *Saint-Merry* because it still reminds them too much of the institution. On the contrary, Annie, quoted above, likes the CPHB mass and its liturgy: the difference lays in the fact that Annie does not display a feminist conscience as strong as that of Marion or Blandine.

Another contention comes from a religious minority among the organization: the Protestants. D&J includes around 40 protestant members in Paris, from different denominations. They also felt the need to launch a group in 2011 to make their voice heard, behind Raphaël (31 y-o, member since 2011) who is used to taking part in collective action since high school. Unlike feminist women, the Protestant members do not ask for the name of the organization to change, but ask for more ecumenical rituals. Every year, all the national groups of D&J meet for a weekend of festivities during which a celebration is organized. In 2014, a controversy broke forth when the priest in charge of the celebration wanted to make it a Catholic celebration arguing that they alternate one year with an ecumenical celebration and the other with a more Catholic ritual. After the JARs, an informal meeting was organized by the Parisian group of D&J to talk about ecumenism, "What is it made for? Are we concerned at first sight?". Regarding the *Fêtez-Dieu*, the Protestant members find it "catho-centric":

[*Fêtez-Dieu*] I enjoy it a lot, then, the majority of the *déjistes* are Catholic. *Fêtez-Dieu* is presented as an ecumenical ceremony, and I think you have heard about that, but it is not that ecumenical. And for example for the *Fêtez-Dieu* of the 40th anniversary of D&J we had songs in Latin you see, so with Raphaël we were like "Ah!" [laughing]. It's just not possible, so that's it. But what's good is that with the newcomers, it's being discussed really, because until now people would come [to the *Fêtez-Dieu*] and wouldn't come back, because if you weren't Catholic you felt like you had nothing to do there (Valentina, 26 y-o, member since 2008)

All the Protestants run off, some already have difficulties to come back to the *Fêtez-Dieu* because they find it too catho-centric, I mean, no! Don't do this kind of thing. [At the last *Fêtez-Dieu* after the Pope's resignation] there was a prayer for the future pope, but it was well done, saying that [whether we are concerned or not] it touches us all because it's also a part of Christianity. Well, it was brought in a soft way. (Raphael, 31 y-o, Protestant, member since 2011, in charge of D&J's spiritual activities)

Quotations from the Pope, songs in Latin, and prayers to the Virgin are typical elements that Protestant members would reject. When they take place at *La Maison Verte* or at the *Oratoire du Louvre*, two Parisian protestant churches, the *Fêtez-Dieu* are organized by a few Protestant *déjistes* and they gather together many more Protestant members. They obviously do not go to the CPHB Sunday mass:

the *Groupe Protestant* organizes the “Rendez-vous au temple” (“Appointment at the Protestant Church”), a meeting in a different Protestant church each month for Sunday worship.

The rituals favor individual reconciliation through a feeling of belonging to two communities. The *Fêtez-Dieu* more specifically is like other gay and lesbian religious innovations, “distinctively gay but also thoroughly religious” (Thumma & Gray, 2005, p. 14). The two rituals studied construct a strong feeling of belonging to Christianity, a feeling that most of the time has been wounded by previous religious experiences in mainstream churches or mainstream Christian communities; and they favor at the same time a feeling of belonging to a specific sociosexual minority. Such rituals allow people to express their faith not simply as Christians, but as *gay* and *lesbian* Christians. Yet, the process of communalization is not universal and the rituals do not satisfy all the members. The diversity of D&J gives way to critical voices that remind us the complexity of the individual-community dialectic.

The case of the French organization *David & Jonathan* has shown from an identity politics perspective the complexity of reconciliation when collective identity is at the intersection of two communities. The Christian identity of D&J, even though contentious, has been clear since the beginning, whereas the integration into the LGBT activist sphere has been progressive. At the individual level, community belonging is fostered by rituals allowing believers to pray as homosexual Christians. The form of the *Fêtez-Dieu* has changed a lot over 12 years and the description made here characterizes a specific moment of D&J’s spiritual life. It means that the process of double communalization through rituals can be fostered by different modalities. *David & Jonathan*’s case opens two directions for future research. First, an international comparison with a religious field structured differently in another country might be insightful. In the US, the UFMCC, unlike D&J, exemplifies the politics of exit, for it is a proper religious denomination. This difference of strategy compared to France can be attributed to the different national religious contexts. The US is marked by a Protestant tradition that allows the multiplication of religious denominations and congregations (Warner, 1994) whereas, even if France’s religious field is changing (Hervieu-Léger, 1990; 2007), France’s Catholic background prevents the religious field from being as pluralistic as in the US and prevents religious organizations like D&J from becoming a gay church. And unlike D&J again, the UFMCC has been clearly implicated in LGBT struggles since its foundation, sometimes in radical ways (Wilcox, 2001). Knowledge on reconciliation could be deepened through analyzing how national religious contexts determine the process. Secondly, the *Fêtez-Dieu* proves that queer religiosities are ritually inventive and can revitalize traditional religion. Further reflections on how queer rituals adapt, renew, or hybridize traditional rituals or ritualistic elements could be an interesting path to follow. Such reflections could moreover benefit religious authorities facing a decrease in religious practice, in France and Europe, at least.

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