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1 Introduction

I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.
(Matthew 10: 34)

MAY 11, 2000

It's the second-to-last day of the United Methodist Church's ("UMC") 2000 denominational meeting, the General Conference. Delegates to this gathering have just voted to retain language characterizing homosexuality as "incompatible with Christian teaching" in the *Book of Discipline*, the denomination's compilation of policies and doctrines. I watch, heartbroken, along with dozens of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered ("LGBT") United Methodists ("UMs") and their supporters as the delegates prepare to vote on several other measures that restrict LGBT UMs in the life of the church. Suddenly, the work of General Conference is shut down as a multitude of LGBT UMs and their allies enter the delegate area to protest the "incompatibility" vote. They wear clergy stoles provided by pastors who had to give up their ministries in order to live openly as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. The protesters are also clad in buttons, stickers, and other paraphernalia traditionally found at a Gay Pride festival, and many wear crosses with rainbows painted on them, signaling their identity as LGBT Christians. This is their second day of protest; almost 200 of them were arrested the day before, along with a UMC bishop.

Before the end of the day, the protesters will have been removed and 27 of them (including two UMC bishops) arrested, and the denomination will have voted to maintain its stance on homosexuality by a two-to-one margin. In addition to the incompatibility language, the United Methodist Church will have once again prohibited lesbians and gay men who will not commit to celibacy from being pastors. UMC pastors will have once again been forbidden to perform same-sex commitment ceremonies ("holy unions"), and UMC churches will have been forbidden to host them. The denomination will have once again been forbidden to fund any program or organization "supporting" homosexuality. The overall outcome will be

considered a victory for the conservative and evangelical elements of the UMC², and interpreted as continued inequality within the church among the “inclusionists.”³

General Conference 2000, particularly the restrictive votes and the inclusionist protest, is a good place to begin the story of the UMC LGBT inclusion struggle⁴ because this moment in UM time captures the nature of the conflict exceptionally well. The year 2000 was the culmination of a 28-year period during which the inclusionists were consistently outvoted on the “incompatibility language” (which was first added in 1972) and the homosexuality-related prohibitions (the first of which was added in 1976).⁵ The two-to-one margin in 2000 could mean that most UMs did not approve of homosexuality, that evangelical groups were more successful in getting delegates elected, or that other factors were in play. One might wonder, though, why a denomination generally committed to social justice appeared not to sustain that commitment when it came to LGBT people in their own church. Inclusionists, in turn, chose to protest because they understood protests as a natural and appropriate response to inequality. Indeed, inclusionists had protested to some degree at every General Conference since at least 1988, though 2000 marked the first time related to homosexuality that such protesters were arrested and removed from the plenary floor.⁶ However, as inclusionists both told me and demonstrated by their actions, their day-to-day lives as UMs were not focused on protest and politics, but rather on mundane church activities and on their walk with Christ. One might wonder, then, why inclusionists perceived General Conference as in need of a protest that would shut it down, albeit temporarily; one might also wonder about the effects of their protest on the rest of the church. The logic behind the votes and the protest, their relation to each other, and their impact on those invested in the struggle (evangelicals, inclusionists, the “Methodist middle”⁷) are the subject of this book.

MEANING, POWER, AND INEQUALITY IN MAINLINE CHRISTIANITY

The question of how mainline Christian denominations such as the UMC should respond to their LGBT members has received a great deal of attention recently. The issue of LGBT inclusion has been characterized as “the most divisive element facing the Church today,” the most volatile issue facing mainline denominations, and “the fault line in American Christianity.”⁸ Every mainline denomination has been dealing with the subject since the 1970s, as have denominations outside the mainline, all four branches of U.S. Judaism, and other world religions.⁹ Denominational struggles over homosexuality have been intractable and frustrating for those seeking inclusion, those resisting it, and the large majority of Christians “in the

middle” who generally support gay rights but who do not find homosexuality morally acceptable. At the time of this writing, the Episcopal Church in the United States is in deep tension with the worldwide Anglican Communion as a result of the Episcopal Church’s unwillingness to cease performing holy unions or to guarantee categorically that no more lesbian or gay bishops will be consecrated. Studying the United Methodist struggle may thus be valuable simply because the UMC is among the denominations that have felt the need to ask, “Will homosexuality split the church?”¹⁰

Beyond the UMC conflict’s import for church members, a case can be made that any church struggle involving votes and protests should have some valuable insights for the study of social inequality. Christianity is an extremely powerful social institution, for better and for worse, and because it trades so heavily in meaning and symbols, it can be a high-stakes locus for reproducing or transforming any kind of inequality based on social devaluation; this may be particularly true for LGBT inequality. For example, people who attend church frequently demonstrate more anti-gay prejudice than those who do not attend church frequently, and even people involved in LGBT-tolerant religions show more anti-gay prejudice than those with no religious preference.¹¹ Correlation is not causation, but it does suggest some kind of relationship between Christianity and anti-gay prejudice. My research suggests that religiously conservative Christians object to the church supporting civil rights for LGBT people even in the public sphere, while they work diligently to keep prohibitions that can be interpreted as anti-gay in place within the church.

Even those in the “Christian middle,” who support civil rights for LGBT people in the public sphere, often treat the church quite differently. U.S. polls suggest that people who would be completely comfortable with a gay man selling furniture, performing surgery, and even serving in the military are unwilling to belong to a denomination that would ordain the same gay man as a pastor. Similarly, some people who believe that a lesbian couple is entitled to legal protection of their rights as a family unit would leave their congregation if its pastor blessed the same couple’s holy union in church.¹² While the commitment of such people to equality in the public sphere is laudable, it is somewhat inconsistent that such commitment should not extend into all social institutions, including religion. Studying the UMC conflict can help explain why LGBT equality is more likely to be stymied within Christianity than within other, non-religious, contexts.¹³

It is also important, however, to acknowledge and understand when and where Christianity is a source for transformation in the direction of equality. What does religion look like for inclusionists, both LGBT and heterosexual? Here, too, the study of a mainline denomination’s sexuality struggle can help explain the differences between Christians who reproduce LGBT inequality on all fronts, those who support equality in civil society but not in the church, and those who work to make the church fully inclusive.

This study takes seriously the connection between religion's role in helping people make sense of the world, on the one hand, and religion's homophobia and heterosexism on the other. My approach follows that of Sered (1997, 1999) in linking the symbolization of a group to its disenfranchisement. By applying mechanisms of devaluation normally associated with other kinds of inequality (racism, sexism, class inequality) to homophobia and heterosexism, and by demonstrating how these mechanisms work in a religious context, I seek to show that the United Methodist Church reproduces homophobia and heterosexism institutionally regardless of whether that is its intention. The issue of intentionality is important because evangelical and conservative UMs routinely claim that they don't mean anyone ill, and that they are not "unkind" or "stony-hearted" as inclusionists sometimes characterize them. They profess simply to be committed to religious values that do not allow them to accept homosexuality.¹⁴ Without entirely rejecting their claim, I situate it in a larger context of cultural values and institutional priorities that renders intentionality unnecessary for social inequality to flourish in the church.

The "United Methodist Church" is, of course, more than the delegates who vote on what to leave in or remove from the *Book of Discipline*, and more than the congregations filled with people who might accept a lesbian pastor but not necessarily a lesbian pastor. The denomination also includes the inclusionists, those clergy and laity who consider themselves "the loyal opposition"¹⁵ when it comes to the sexuality-related prohibitions. The inclusionists clearly intend to transform the church in the direction of LGBT equality. However, the question can be raised, even in their case, as to whether actions such as the General Conference 2000 protest truly aid them in their cause. My findings suggest the controversial possibility that protesting may have a complex set of consequences for the inclusionists, not all of them positive.

Finally, the UMC sexuality struggle should be of interest to those concerned with LGBT equality more generally because of just how "American" United Methodism is, and because of just how Methodist the United States has been in the past. The extent to which U.S. Methodism and American culture have historically informed each other suggests that the UM sexuality struggle may provide insights about the possibilities and challenges facing LGBT people and their allies in society more broadly.

PREVIOUS STUDIES OF THE UNITED METHODIST LGBT INCLUSION CONFLICT

While a number of researchers have studied the UMC inclusion struggle, most have been interested either in documenting inequality or in theory development, but not in both to an equal degree.¹⁶ Comstock's (1996) study of lesbian/gay/bisexual people in the United Church of Christ and the UMC

represents a good example of research that focuses on recording experiences of sexuality-based inequality without separately generating new theory. Comstock studied religious belonging, switching, leaving, and "religious shopping;" service, participation, leadership, and advocacy in church; experiences with seminary, ordination, ministry, and employment; beliefs and theology; available support and community; and evaluations, feelings, reasons, and challenges related to staying in the church. He found substantial structural and cultural inequality in most of these areas. In terms of feelings associated with being an LGBT United Methodist, 50 percent of respondents reported feeling angry, 46 percent reported feeling discouraged, 44 percent reported feeling marginalized, 41 percent reported feeling sad, and 26 percent reported feeling unwelcome (ibid., 204–205). Most UM respondents did not feel good about their affiliation with the denomination, and "reported that they remained affiliated with their denomination because they are committed to changing their denomination" (ibid., 229), particularly with regard to the homosexuality-related prohibitions. Others stayed because they had found supportive local congregations or because they protected themselves by maintaining only a "tangential" relationship with the denomination. Still others stayed, simply, because United Methodism was home for them (ibid., 228–229).¹⁷

Several studies of the UMC sexuality struggle that focus on theory development incorporate the inclusionist experience of inequality to some degree, such as Stephens' (1997) application of various conflict resolution theories to the struggle. Similarly, Oliveto (2002) studied the processes by which important organizations on both sides of the struggle came into existence, determining that congregations were a particularly important locus of social change because they served as a meeting place for "private" and "public" concerns. One early study (Wood and Bloch 1995) examined the conflict but took a substantially different tack, finding evidence that General Conference 1992 served as a model of civility and Habermasian communication.

One study (Moon 2000, 2004) stands out in combining theory development and a focus on inequality within the church. Moon used participant observation and interviewing to study two UM congregations, one in Chicago and one in a nearby rural area, in order to learn how members of these congregations made sense of homosexuality and denominational struggles around it. The urban church, which prided itself on being inclusive, had experienced turmoil over the issue. The rural church had few inclusion-minded members, and had several members involved with ministries designed to transform homosexuals into heterosexuals. While Moon interviewed some lesbian and gay church members, her focus was on "normals," those she described as "unmarked," and she sought to show "how [such] people reproduce the silent authority of normative sexuality as they seek in their daily lives to discern authority and wrong, godly and sinful, loving and unloving" (2000: 15–16).

Moon found that her respondents defined church and politics as opposites (2000: 18; see also Moon 2004). They appeared to construct marriage and the church as unmarked “zones of innocence” standing not just apart from, but in contrast to, issues of politics, inequality, and sex. These latter three “zones” were understood as material realities from which one escaped in church through spiritual transcendence. Just as the home has been described as a “haven in a heartless world,” the church was a haven from the secular world for Moon’s respondents.

While Moon studied the inclusion conflict at the congregational level and I studied it at the denominational level, our findings are similar on several fronts. First, Moon (2000) found that church members shifted among discourses of Scripture, tradition, science, experience, and democratic ideals in their reasoning about homosexuality; I observed identical discourses at play in published literature, during interviews, and throughout my fieldwork at General Conference 2000. Second, we both found a tension between “the church” and “the world” that substantially informs how those opposed to full LGBT inclusion make sense of the struggle. Finally, we both concluded that this “church”-“world” tension creates a dilemma for the inclusionists, though we understand the dilemma in slightly different ways. Moon (2004) notes the improbability that “gay pain in church” will win congregations over to full inclusion, while I argue in this book that the political analysis adopted by the inclusionists, however reasonable, is similarly unlikely to lead to the end of denominational inequality.

THE PLAN OF THIS BOOK

The 2000 General Conference votes and protest do not exist in a historical or cultural vacuum. In order to make sense of these activities, it is necessary to understand the ideas that informed them, the events that led up to them, and the people that took part in them. I provide this background in Chapter Two, introducing the United Methodist Church, the contemporary Western LGBT identity, and the story of the UMC sexuality struggle. The chapter begins with a short history of the United Methodist Church’s development, a description of its current structure, and consideration of the “American-ness” of United Methodism. Highlights of recent LGBT history are then presented. A detailed account of the homosexuality struggle within the denomination follows, concluding with a description of selected LGBT-related outcomes of General Conference 2000.

The United Methodist Church is only one of many denominations and religious organizations in conflict over homosexuality. Understanding how its experiences are similar to, or different from, those of other U.S. mainline Christian denominations can further deepen our understanding of Christianity’s role in reproducing and transforming homophobia and heterosexism. Sociologically speaking, the two mainline denominations that

are most useful as comparison groups are the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), or PCUSA, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Both denominations have undergone variants of the sexuality struggle that are remarkably similar to that of the UMC, yet each denomination’s experience with the struggle differs in instructive ways. In addition, while the Episcopal Church may be more accurately characterized as a liberal Christian denomination, its experience with sexuality conflicts is worth comparing to the UMC for two reasons. First, both denominational structures include bishops as spiritual leaders; this is not the case for the PCUSA. Second, the “global church” beyond the United States (the Anglican Communion for the Episcopal Church; African, Asian and Latin American “central conferences” for the UMC) has an impact on the sexuality struggle not found in the PCUSA or the ELCA, both of which are located exclusively in the United States. Chapter Two ends with a comparison of all four denominations on key elements of the struggle.

To best understand the perspectives of those deeply involved in the UMC struggle, I used qualitative methods to collect and analyze data, combining fieldwork, in-depth interviewing, and extensive review of published materials. Chapter Three addresses the study’s methodology. In addition to discussing research practices and assumptions, I consider the extent to which the study can productively be thought of as an “autoethnography,” that is, a case of a social researcher studying her own experiences during the research process. Autoethnography has been the subject of increasing attention and controversy over the past ten years as qualitative researchers assess its value. My experiences during the research described here do play a substantial role in the analyses and conclusions of this book, and I approached the topic as an interested party from start to finish. At the same time, I would characterize the study’s methodology as falling between traditional social science research and full-fledged autoethnography rather than as an autoethnography *per se*.

In order to make the fieldwork experience more vivid, and to provide a deeper sense of the stakes for those on both sides of the struggle, I recreate selected field notes from the ethnographic component of the research in Chapter Four. I chose material that would capture some of what General Conference 2000 delegates, non-delegate evangelicals, and non-delegate inclusionists experienced, and that would document the reasoning used by both sides to try to convince any delegates in the “movable middle” to vote with their side. Because the emotional experiences of the inclusionists play an important role in their perspectives and actions, I have chosen to include fieldwork moments that show clearly how angry and pained the inclusionists were.¹⁸ Finally, a disproportionate amount of Chapter Four is devoted to the first homosexuality-related discussion of the committee that handled most of the relevant petitions. Virtually all of the key inclusionist and evangelical themes arose in this meeting, and reporting most of the verbal exchanges provides a good sense of the strenuous and exhausting work

done by the delegates while suggesting the tension experienced by those of us viewing the meeting.

Chapters Five through Eight describe and assess four analytic approaches to the UMC inclusion struggle (culture wars, mechanisms of homophobia/heterosexism, closure theory, and contradictory institutional logics). These analytic chapters draw on evidence from fieldwork, interviews, web pages, books, and other sources that demonstrate how those on both sides of the issue articulate their positions. Each side uses a variety of discourses, both in terms of their values and what they would have the denomination do on the sexuality issue.

The inclusionists focus on ending exclusion, becoming “first-class citizens,” overcoming discrimination, and obtaining justice. In some cases, these goals are stated explicitly; in other cases, they may be assumed from discussions about exclusion, second-class citizenship, discrimination, and injustice. Inclusionists rely extensively on their experiences. When they bring religious justifications into their claims, they keep “political” appeals close at hand, frequently interweaving Jesus and justice. They also appeal to Jesus as demonstrating God’s all-inclusive love, particularly for outcasts, while highlighting Jesus’ prioritizing of love over law. Finally, they envision revelation as present in Scripture but continuing past the writing of the Bible, even up to the present day. The inclusionists ultimately challenge what they see as exclusionary and homophobic rulings in order to eliminate the sexuality-related boundaries in the church. They strive to enable every United Methodist to attain full inclusion in the UMC without regard to his or her gender or sexual identity (Sample and DeLong 2000).

In contrast, the conservatives focus on maintaining what they call “classical Christianity.” They appeal to Scripture as authoritative, to tradition, to holiness, and to denominational identity, and they appear to have a sociologically sophisticated comprehension of the need for boundaries in the life of the church. Conservatives are much less likely than inclusionists to bring Jesus into their arguments, and much more likely to talk about the church as an institution. They explicitly reject the inclusionists’ claims, both theologically and politically. The conservatives ultimately seek to reinforce sexuality-related boundaries in the church. They strive to ensure that the current restrictive policies are upheld in the name of Scriptural and doctrinal standards and integrity (Heidinger 2000).

Each side’s position can be interpreted using a number of different theoretical perspectives. The first of these perspectives considered, culture wars, is the topic of Chapter Five. The phrase “culture wars” is familiar to many people from Hunter’s (1991) book introducing the concept, and because the Religious Right took up the phrase soon after the book’s publication.¹⁹ Hunter claims that cultural conflicts are best understood as a matter of competing systems of moral authority, “the basis by which people determine whether something is good or bad, right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable.” For Hunter, these “competing moral visions” are best

understood as “polarizing impulses or tendencies” toward what he calls orthodoxy and progressivism. Orthodoxy, according to Hunter, involves “commitment on the part of adherents to an eternal, definable, and transcendent authority,” while for progressives, “truth tends to be viewed as a process, a reality that is ever unfolding.” Hunter claims that the orthodox approach contains “certain non-negotiable moral ‘truths,’” while progressives tend “to resymbolize historic faiths according to the prevailing assumptions of contemporary life.” Moreover, “all progressivists maintain to a certain degree that the language and programmatic thrust of traditional faith . . . is no longer relevant for modern times.”

While Hunter focused on cultural struggles in the public sphere (gay rights, abortion, public education, the arts), his underlying concepts apply well to the UMC sexuality struggle. Extensive evidence shows that the evangelicals and conservatives approach the issue from what Hunter would call an “orthodox” stance, while inclusionists consistently demonstrate their commitment to “progressivism.” Indeed, comments from those on both sides suggest that they find the culture wars approach plausible in making sense of the conflict. Stephens (1997) and Oliveto (2002) both note the relevance of a culture wars analysis to the UMC sexuality struggle as well.

For all its value, a culture wars approach has certain limitations; among them is the fact that it does not adequately explain the inclusionist response to their situation. Why bring a denominational gathering to a halt if one’s opponent is merely guilty of a different type of moral commitment (even if that difference does foster conflict)? What fuels the depth of inclusionist pain and anger? Here, an analysis that takes seriously the inclusionists’ experience of sexuality-based inequality is needed. Chapter Six provides such an analysis. In it, I take heterosexism to be a social system based on the assumption that all people are or should be heterosexual, resulting in the exclusion of the experiences and concerns of non-heterosexual people. Because heterosexism assigns “sexual normalcy and moral legitimacy” only to heterosexuality (Ellison 1993: 155), homosexuality and bisexuality tend to be both invisible and stigmatized. Homophobia in turn describes the social devaluing and disadvantaging of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals through personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional means.²⁰

While inclusionists adopt definitions of heterosexism and homophobia similar to mine, evangelicals and conservatives strenuously reject the claim that the sexuality-based restrictions should be understood as parallel to racism (for example).²¹ In order to make the case that homophobia and heterosexism can be productively compared to racism, sexism, and class inequality, I take several sociological concepts and claims that have been used to elucidate those forms of inequality and apply them to homophobia and heterosexism.²² In doing so, I hope to show that both terms can be used descriptively and analytically, and need not be understood as epithets aimed at conservatives with whom one disagrees.

Sociologists who study inequality and social stigma have developed the concept of a "master status," the (devalued) status that overrides all of one's other attributes. A good example of race as a master status can be found in Ken Burns' PBS documentary on World War II, in which shipbuilders desperately needed in Mobile, Alabama, were prevented by a racist mob from welding metal because they were African American. LGBT people have often found that their sexuality, unless carefully concealed, can become a master status, rendering them unfit parents, soldiers, clergy, and spouses (among other statuses) in the eyes of society. The sexuality-based master status of LGBT UMs renders them suspect Christians and defines them as extremists, removing them from the "Methodist middle" no matter how moderate their values or daily lives may be.

Another sociological concept, "moral alchemy," was developed by Robert Merton (1949) to describe one aspect of how racism works: that which is approved of when associated with a socially valued group becomes magically transmuted into a problem when associated with a devalued group. A classic example is the strong-willed boss at work, who is appreciated as a "good leader" if male and castigated as a "bitch" if female. While examples of moral alchemy can be found for all out-groups, they abound for LGBT people. Homosexuality, after all, is a "lifestyle" while heterosexuality is simply "life." Moral alchemy is particularly important as a mechanism by which the church maintains sexuality-based inequality because the religiosity and spirituality genuinely experienced by LGBT UMs can be easily written off; clearly, if they were "truly Christian," they would know that homosexuality is wrong and would give it up.

A recent analysis of sexism in religion (Sered 1997, 1999) developed the concept of "Woman" as symbol, showing how women's symbolization in religion limited their ability to act as moral agents in control of their own lives. While the symbolization of "Woman" may or may not have originated out of a desire to limit women's religious opportunities, it has the effect of restricting women's access to religious authority. Here, LGBT UMs can symbolize a number of things, from "the world" (as opposed to "the church") to chaos (as opposed to order); the inclusionists face an important dilemma in the extent to which they symbolize politics to other UMs. Just as the women Sered studied struggled to move from being symbols to being agents, the LGBT UMs I studied try desperately to get out from under their own symbolization, working tirelessly to be seen as people rather than as an issue. However, the methods used by inclusionists to become agents instead of symbols may serve in part to reproduce rather than transform their situation.

Not only do these various mechanisms of inequality work together in the case of homophobia and heterosexism, they are compounded by an "ick factor" that does not appear in United Methodist responses to "sins" other than homosexuality (bearing false witness, stealing, failing to honor one's parents, to name just three commandments). Chapter Six unpacks these

various components of homophobia and heterosexism, providing examples of how they are at work in the UMC inclusion struggle.

Chapter Seven takes up the analysis developed by inclusionists in response to their experiences in the denomination. The discourse on which they rely is overwhelmingly political, driven by their definition of the problem as homophobia and heterosexism rather than the immorality of homosexuality.²² Moreover, their interpretation of the situation informs their conclusion that the solution must be political as well. Clearly, the best political outcome would have been if General Conference overturned the LGBT clergy prohibition, the prohibition on funding programs or organizations that "support" homosexuality, and the restriction on holy unions, as well as eliminating from the *Book of Discipline* the assertion that homosexuality is "incompatible with Christian teaching." However, after 28 years without change (at the time of my fieldwork), inclusionists increasingly felt the need to turn to other kinds of politics to be heard.

One component of the inclusionist analysis is the perception that the conservatives are trying to get rid of inclusionists in order to take over the denomination. This perception suggests that inclusionists have developed what sociologists call a "social closure" analysis, even if that language is unknown to LGBT UMs and their allies. The term "social closure," derived from certain comments of Max Weber (e.g., 1968: 341–343), describes a process in which one group monopolizes advantages by closing off opportunities to another group defined as outsiders, by definition inferior and inadequate. While Weber's description focused on class inequality, social closure is also applicable to status groups; it has been used to describe racial ghettos, for example (e.g., Murphy 1988: 8–9; Stone 1995: 397–399). Inclusionist strategy appears to be based in part on a perception that conservatives are trying to push them out of the church, resulting in an inclusionist commitment to fight as hard as necessary to remain in the denomination.

In Chapter Eight, I return to the question of the relationship between "the church" and "the world" from the perspective of conservatives and evangelicals (and, to a lesser degree, of moderates). How do other UMs respond to inclusionist analyses and actions? My research suggested that United Methodist moderates find the conservatives less problematic than the inclusionists; if so, why should this be the case?²³ Having considered culture and social structure in previous chapters, I draw them together here by bringing institutional theory into the picture.

Neo-institutional theorists Roger Friedland and Robert Alford (1991) have developed the concept of "contradictory institutional logics" to explain conflicts that take place within and between institutions.²⁴ Friedland and Alford claim that the "capitalist market, bureaucratic state, [democratic process], nuclear family, and Christian religion" play important roles in "shap[ing] individual preferences and organizational interests" as society-wide institutions. They propose further that each of these institutions

has “a central logic—a set of material practices and symbolic constructions—which constitutes its organizing principles and which is available to organizations and individuals to elaborate.” They identify these five institutions as “potentially contradictory” and as “mak[ing] multiple logics available to individuals and organizations.” For Friedland and Alford institutional conflict is best understood as a struggle “over the appropriate relationships between institutions, and by which institutional logic different activities should be regulated and to which categories of persons they apply.” I argue in Chapter Eight that both the inclusionist approach and the denominational response to this approach are productively understood as an example of contradictory institutional logics at work, with the two logics in question being democracy and Christian religion. Such an analysis explains United Methodist resistance to the inclusionist agenda, and sheds surprising light on the extent to which the situation is infused with social inequality. Chapter Eight closes by considering the connections between culture wars, homophobia and heterosexism, social closure and contradictory institutional logics, demonstrating that these processes work in concert, and not simply separately, to reproduce inequality in the United Methodist Church.

The final chapter, “Implications and Possibilities,” addresses broader implications of the study and suggests potential directions in which the UMC struggle might go. I first raise the question of how to characterize the “Protestant middle.” Despite the common use of terms such as “ambivalent” and “muddled” to describe those who are not actively involved on either side of the inclusion struggle, I argue that the “middle” is better understood as having integrated both religious and democratic logics in its thinking about these issues. This claim, if accurate, goes a long way toward explaining why full LGBT inclusion is more problematic in religious institutions (including, but not limited to, the UMC) than in civil society.

Americans, it turns out, look a lot like United Methodists in their simultaneous support of equal rights for LGBT people and rejection of the idea that “homosexual behavior” is moral. I draw on national poll data that demonstrate this distinction, arguing that it can be explained by multiple institutional logics at work in the public sphere as well as by the varying extent to which different homosexuality-related topics are symbolized. At the same time, poll data show increasing support for both LGBT equal rights and homosexuality as such since the 1970s, suggesting that the power of religious logic and symbolization in the public sphere may have decreased somewhat in the last thirty years.

The chapter then considers the prospects for the UMC inclusion struggle, discusses options for the inclusionists, and closes with a final comment on the stakes of the struggle for both inclusionists and those who oppose full LGBT inclusion in the church.

Appendix One presents the outcomes of selected homosexuality-related General Conference votes from 1972 through 2004. Appendix

Two provides sample General Conference 2000 petitions on homosexuality-related issues. Appendix Three reproduces a comparison of inclusionist and conservative/evangelical views of homosexuality.

Ultimately, I seek to demonstrate in this book that the inclusion struggle in the United Methodist Church is driven by a complex set of processes in which sexuality-based inequality, deep-seated personal identities, cultural conflicts about truth and moral authority, and differing responses to the church as an institution intersect with one another. The multilayered nature of these intersections, and the high stakes they raise for those on all sides of the inclusion struggle, suggest that the struggle is highly likely to continue in the foreseeable future.

A PERSONAL NOTE

Social science research that begins with one’s own perspectives and interests requires a frank and upfront acknowledgement of those perspectives and interests. My personal sympathies fall entirely with the inclusionists, and were I a United Methodist their struggle would be mine. I am a bisexual person in a committed same-sex monogamous long-term relationship (ten years as of this writing). Like many LGBT people, I have participated in protests, including civil disobedience in the case of one AIDS-related protest. I own my share of lesbian/gay paraphernalia, and during the May 11, 2000 General Conference protest, I wore a mock clergy stole in solidarity with the protesters though I remained iconographically neutral during all of the other days of General Conference. These commitments may also be inferred from the fact that I have written a book about homophobia and heterosexism in the church rather than (for example) a book commending the church’s current response to the “abomination of homosexual perversion.”

While not a Christian, I hope I could accurately be described as a seeker after faith. I found much that moved me in United Methodist worship but ultimately could not assent to UM doctrine. At the same time, I discovered that UMs on both sides of the LGBT inclusion issue have pastoral gifts that restored me frequently during my fieldwork, gifts for which I am grateful. Some readers might question whether such a strong personal commitment to one side of this struggle would render a researcher unable to study it fairly. I contend that a good researcher ought to be able to understand the perspectives of those with whom she disagrees well enough to report them accurately and to present them sympathetically where appropriate. In qualitative research, the balance between reporting what others say and do on the one hand, and situating it in a larger analytic context on the other, may always be a challenge, but it is the only way someone with a personal stake in a struggle can nonetheless study both sides successfully. The reader will have to decide whether I have succeeded in doing so.