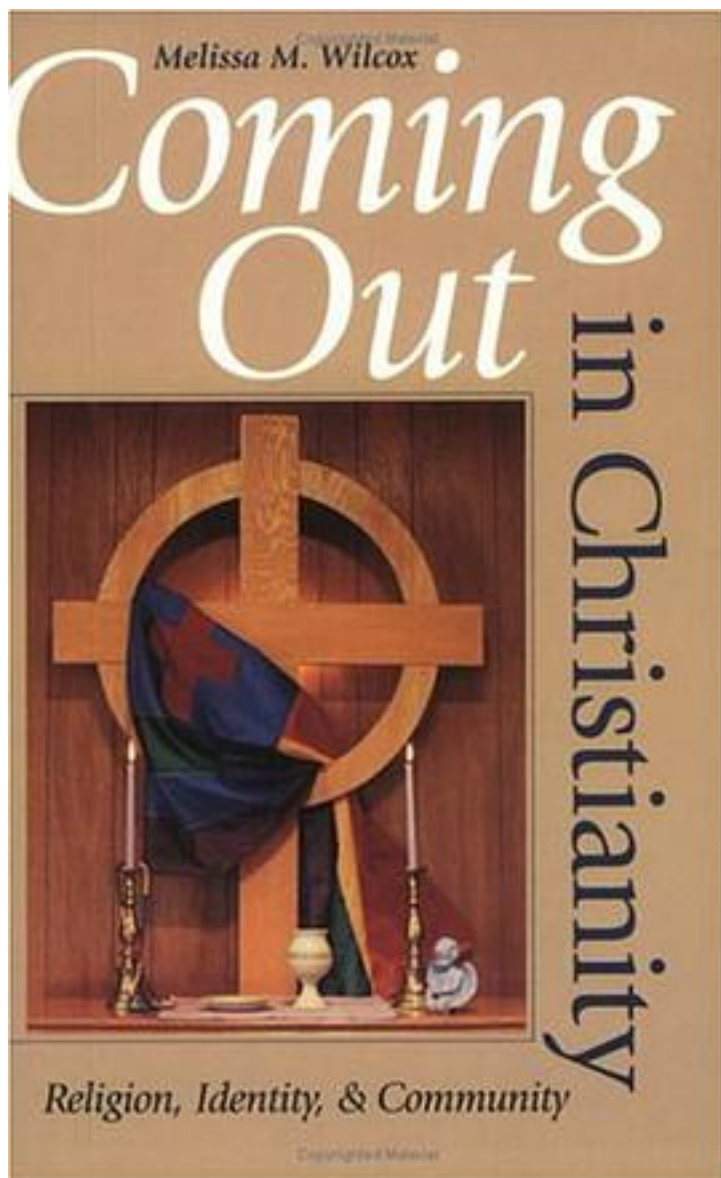


Coming out in Christianity



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This is not a book about homosexuality. It is not a book about religion, or spirituality, or churches. It is a book about people. Today in the United States, 'homosexuality' is a hot button topic: the military's 'don't ask, don't tell' policy, debates over what rights should be accorded same-sex couples, and same-sex marriage, though barely on the legal map, has become the topic of conversation in religious organizations, on talk shows, and in homes across the country. For Christianity, the issue of 'homosexuality' threatens to create a yawning chasm within several mainline denominations. But there is a problem with these debates: each takes place primarily over the heads of the actual people whose lives are affected. No matter how vocal groups like the Human Rights Coalition or the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force become, no matter how visible the LGBT activists are within mainstream religious organizations, ultimately these are still debates conducted by an 'us' about a 'them'. In many religious groups the situation is worse: the debate is not even about a 'them' but about a behavior, like drug abuse or swearing, that 'we' do not consider intrinsic to anyone's identity. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people angrily refute such assumptions, but their protests fall on deaf ears. For LGBT Christians, the challenge to their religious and sexual identities is acute. "Coming Out in Christianity" examines this identity conflict and the strategies employed to help resolve it among current and former members of two Metropolitan Community Churches in California-churches that predominantly serve LGBT Christians. Based on original research, including over seventy in-depth interviews, the book explores the life histories, current beliefs, cultural settings, and community influences, in an attempt to understand the variety of factors that affect the constructions on an integrated LGBT Christian identity. In the course of this analysis, Melissa M. Wilcox links her findings to recent studies of religious individualism, identity construction, and ritual symbolism to show that the lives of religious LGBT people provide powerful case studies that can deepen our understanding of both religion and identity.

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