


Between Sodom and Babylon. Catholicism and homosexuality in Italy through letters to the Babilonia magazine

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ENG Abstract: This study delves into the critical moments of interaction and conflict between Catholicism and homosexuality within Italian society, through the unique point of view of the catholic homosexuals. The analysis takes into consideration a corpus of documents often considered minor: letters to the editor featured in magazine mail sections, particularly focusing on those sent to 'Babilonia', a monthly magazine catering to the homosexual audience, between 1983 and 2000. These letters provide a unique window into the social aspect of homosexuality in the deeply divided Catholic Italian context (Pasquini 2023). Furthermore, the corpus allows to explore coping strategies as social acts by Catholic homosexuals, including priests, to address stigma and reconcile their conflicting identities. This examination sheds light on their efforts to navigate between two worlds perceived as contradictory (O'Brien 2004; Arnone 2018).

Key words: Italy, Catholic Church, homosexuality, LGBTQIA+ magazine

ES Sodoma y Babilonia. El catolicismo y la homosexualidad en Italia a través de cartas a la revista Babilonia

Resumen: Este estudio profundiza en los momentos críticos de interacción y conflicto entre el catolicismo y la homosexualidad en la sociedad italiana, desde el punto de vista único de los homosexuales católicos. El análisis toma en consideración un corpus de documentos a menudo considerados menores: cartas al editor publicadas en las secciones de correo de revistas, enfocándose particularmente en aquellas enviadas a 'Babilonia', una revista mensual dirigida al público homosexual, entre 1983 y 2000. Estas cartas proporcionan una ventana única al aspecto social de la homosexualidad en el contexto italiano profundamente dividido por el catolicismo (Pasquini 2023). Además, el corpus permite explorar las estrategias de afrontamiento como actos sociales de los homosexuales católicos, incluidos los sacerdotes, para abordar el estigma y reconciliar sus identidades conflictivas. Este examen arroja luz sobre sus esfuerzos para navegar entre dos mundos percibidos como contradictorios (O'Brien 2004; Arnone 2018).

Palabras clave: Italia, Iglesia Católica, homosexualidad, revista LGBTQIA+.

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1. Introduction

The relationship between homosexuality and the Catholic religion has historically been marked by tension and conflicting dialogue (Boswell 1980), shaped by the clash between religious norms and the homosexual community's calls for recognition and acceptance (Torchiani 2021). This study delves into these dynamics within the Italian context, aiming to contribute to the academic debate on the intersection of sexual identities and religious institutions by analysing

a unique corpus of "minor" documents: letters to the editor featured in magazine mail sections. The research specifically focuses on 'Babilonia', a monthly publication aimed at the homosexual audience, and the letters sent to the editor from 1983 to 2000. These letters offer a rare perspective on how homosexual Catholics have navigated their identities within a religious framework that often marginalizes them, providing direct insight into their personal struggles to reconcile their faith with their sexual identity—a duality

often perceived as inherently contradictory (O'Brien 2004; Arnone 2018). In examining these narratives, the study also considers the historical developments and responses from the Vatican and broader Church, placing individual experiences in the context of larger ecclesiastical decisions and debates over time. In this scenario 'Babilonia' emerges as a crucial platform for articulating and negotiating these personal and public discourses on homosexuality in Italy (Pasquini 2023).

2. Status quaestionis

The Catholic Church has historically maintained a conservative position on homosexuality, often citing Biblical passages such as Genesis (19:4-11), Leviticus (18:22, 20:13), and Romans (1:26-27) that condemn homosexual acts. This conservative position was further reinforced in response to major societal changes during the 20th century, including the sexual revolution, abortion, divorce, and the burgeoning rights movements, notably marked by the 1969 Stonewall demonstrations (Duberman 2019). These events not only sparked a global awakening to LGBT rights, which resonated deeply in Italy, but also prompted the Church to tighten its doctrinal stance as it confronted these shifting societal values.

The declaration *Persona Humana* in 1975 reaffirmed the celibacy of priests, promoted chastity, and firmly condemned homosexuality, categorizing homosexual acts as "intrinsically disordered" (Torchiani 2020; 2021). This stance was further solidified during John Paul II's pontificate (1978-2005). Amidst these ecclesiastical responses, the LGBT community in Italy sought platforms for expression and debate. The launch of "Fuori!" in 1971, the magazine of the Italian Revolutionary Homosexual Unitary Front, marked the beginning of more overt editorial activism (Prearo 2015; Cristallo 2017), which continued through publications like Lambda magazine until the inception of 'Babilonia' in 1983 (e.g., Castellano 1979a; 1979b). These periodicals not only provided a voice for the community but also facilitated a broader dialogue on the relationship between the Church and homosexuality, documenting the evolving discourse (Torchiani 2021).

The existing body of research on this topic has produced a rich corpus of theological (Cheng 2011; Gagnon 2001), sociological (Yip 1997a, 1997b, 1998, 2002), and psychological studies (Rodriguez 2009), including regulatory and legal perspectives (Ferrari 2021). This paper aims to add to this complex field by offering new insights into catholic homosexual's self-perception and the journey towards internal balance between identity and faith, necessary for living authentically within a context that often presents stark contradictions (Geraci 2007; Arnone 2016; 2018).

3. Metodology

This study integrates both quantitative and qualitative analyses within an historicist approach to not only contextualize individual narratives within a broader historical framework, but also to examine how these narratives reflect and potentially influence broader societal and doctrinal changes.

The choice to limit the investigation to the Babilonia magazine alone derives first and foremost from the its unprecedented reach and impact, in contrast with the relatively limited circulation of its predecessor's fact, almost always remaining niche (see Casi 1986 ; Dall'Orto 2018). On the contrary, Babilonia was the first LGBT-themed periodical to reach newsstands and sell thousands of copies (Tosetto 2019). Because of its visibility the publications and letters hosted on the pages of Babilonia had an official and public dimension (Grillini 2003; Cavarocchi 2010) which makes them representative of the debate on various societal issues, including religion (Pasquini 2023).

A total of ca. 1,700 letters were systematically reviewed¹. The initial step involved a quantitative analysis of the annual volume of letters, cataloguing the number received each year and categorizing them by their primary topics. The frequency of letters concerning religious themes was tabulated annually. For years marked by an increased volume of correspondence on religion, a detailed contextual analysis was conducted to correlate these peaks with major events or declarations by the Catholic Church. Research on historical documents, Church announcements, and media reports from those years helped pinpoint potential catalysts that may have influenced the volume and nature of the letters. The analysis sought to identify specific periods of heightened activity or interest in religious discussions within the community, offering a macro-view of the interaction between public events and private expressions of faith and identity.

Following the identification of key years and contextual events, ca. 150 letters were selected for in-depth content analysis based on their relevance to key themes such as religious conflict, identity negotiation, and community responses to Church doctrines. The content of each letter was examined to recognize the specific structure and language, as well as to extract themes, sentiments, and direct references to the identified events or Church statements, to understand how the community interpreted and reacted to the Church's stance on homosexuality at specific times.

The decision to make a chronological delimitation of the corpus, taking into consideration the letters that reached Babilonia in the years from 1983 up to 2000, derives from two main considerations: firstly, 2000 is a significant year for both the Catholic and homosexual communities due to the Jubilee and World Pride events held in Rome. Secondly, 2000 is for Babilonia the year of its "moderate" turning within the editorial plan.

Regarding the characteristics of the documents considered, as already stated for the case of letters addressed to women's magazines and the so called 'piccola posta' (Buonanno 1975; Morris 2007), they constitute a unique textual genre that encompasses characteristics of public and private communication, since the letters between the writer and the publisher or a previous letter's author may be read by individuals other than the intended recipient.

The letters analysed here represent recurring structural elements and common characteristics (Lewandowska 2021), such as the sender's self-presentation and the

¹ The comprehensive analysis was made possible through a valuable collaboration with CIG Arcigay Milano, which provided access to the magazine's entire collection.

motivation for writing, sometimes linked to the person's autonomous needs, sometimes prompted by the same reading of letters and articles published in the magazine (Guntzville, MacGeorge 2013 ; Miller 1984). Dialogue across letters to Babilonia frequently transcends mere debate of opposing viewpoints. While such exchanges are common, they also encompass expressions of empathy, shared experiences, and the desire for a deeper private communication. In this perspective, the magazine become a collector for diverse individuals finding themselves as part of the same circle, fostering a collective identity and providing a platform for exploring strategies for everyday life amidst societal challenges (see De Certau 1980, p. 15; Beals et al. 2009).

The question of the value and reliability of the letters to magazines, has sparked some controversy among scholars, especially regarding their selection and authenticity: the limited number of letters that are published compared to those actually received by the editorial staff, the possible manipulation of the texts and the audience of magazines and especially those who write to the columns is small compared to the totality of society and/or the social segment considered (Buonanno 1975, pp. 75-80), are an undeniable limit. In addition, we must take into account that the corpus in question refers to an openly homosexual magazine and therefore relates to an even more restricted user base reduced to those who could more or less openly buy and read the periodical². Despite these critical issues, it cannot be denied that this kind of documentation, as already noted by Parca (1959) in relation to Italian women's letters to the editor, can serve as a barometer for the broader societal debate reflecting a range of perspectives within the LGBT community and beyond, as can be seen from the quantitative analysis of the data.

4. Results

The results of this analysis are presented both in descriptive and narrative forms. Numerical data from the quantitative analysis are displayed in tables and graphs that show trends over time, while the

qualitative findings are woven into a narrative that explores the themes in depth.

4.1. Data and "dates". Comparative reading

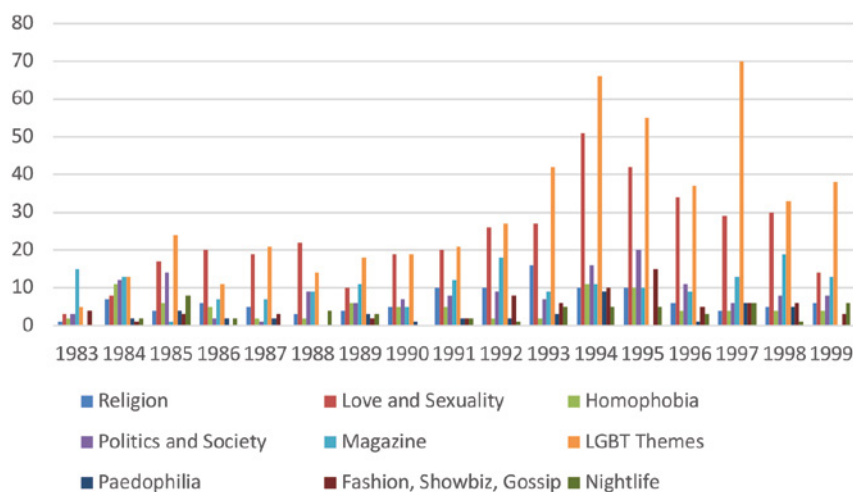
The quantitative analysis of individual letters sent to Babilonia reveals a discernible pattern in the topics discussed over time (Tab. 1). „Minor“ topics, such as nightlife and gossip, are consistently present across various issues and years of the magazine (Graph 1), with fluctuations that probably depend on editorial choices. The marked increase in letters dealing with romantic dilemmas, over the years, suggests a shift in editorial focus or reader interest.

In contrast, letters concerning politics, sexuality, homophobia, and broader LGBT community issues dominate the discourse, constituting the bulk of the correspondence (with respective percentages of $\pm 5\%$, $\pm 20\%$, $\pm 4\%$ and $\pm 15\%$). Religious discussions, accounting for 3% of the topics, seem to follow a wave-like trend, with at least three significant peaks tied to specific events, such as declarations and issuing of acts or provisions, that heightened tensions and spotlighted the challenge of integrating LGBT perspectives within the Catholic framework (Graph 2).

Tab. 1. Themes addressed in the letters to Babylon (1983-2000)

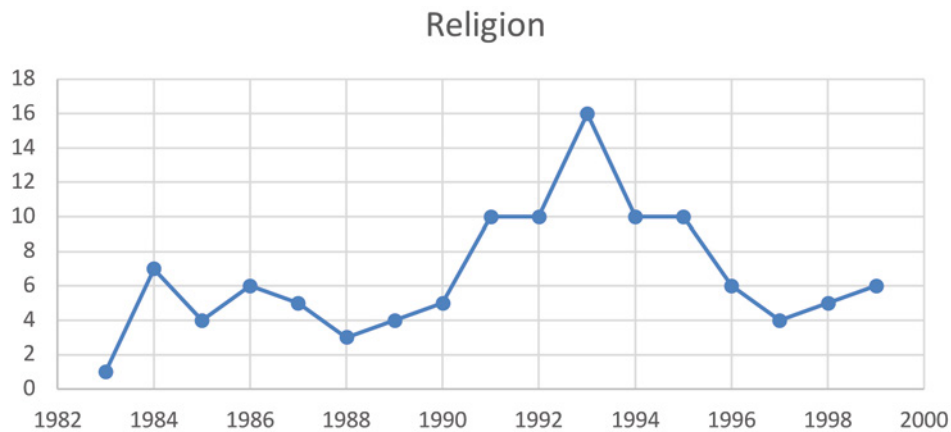
Theme	%
Love and Sexuality	20.10%
Fashion, Showbiz, Gossip	1.89%
Nightlife	3.41%
Homophobia	3.78%
Paedophilia	1.42%
Politics and Society	5.45%
Religion	3.0%
Magazine	5.31%
LGBT Themes	15.45%

Graph 1. Distribution over the years of the themes addressed in the letters to Babylon



² In the specific case, as emerges from the systematic reading of the letters, they are mostly homosexual men aged between 25 and 50.

Graph 2. Distribution over the years of letters to the editorial staff of Babylon that deal with the religious theme



Breaking down the data and diving into the timeline, key moments emerge.

The first concerns the appearance of the theme “gay and faith” in the *Babilonia* magazine. Initially, this theme surfaced through investigative articles and interviews (Dall’Orto 1983a; Dall’Orto 1983b), probably reflecting a broader curiosity and openness inspired by international movements towards inclusivity (McNeill 1979 ; Boswell 1980 ; cf. Torchiani 2020; 2021). Among the letters, however, the theme appears rather sporadically, focusing on Vatican beyond religious issues and as a political actor in Italian society, or Pope John Paul II’s statements, who in those years had given rise to a «neo-Christianity project [...] focused on the defence of natural law» and traditional moral values (Torchiani 2021, p 10; Menozzi 2012).

In the latter half of the 1980s, the Holy See began to directly address the “homosexual phenomenon” with significant documents. In 1985, a *Memorandum to Bishops* sought advice on issues concerning homosexuality and the admission to seminaries, prescribing the exclusion of openly homosexual individuals from monasteries and seminaries. Subsequently, in 1986, a letter signed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger to the bishops of the Catholic Church on the pastoral care of homosexual persons marked a turning point, intensifying reflections that began in 1975 with the document *Persona Humana* (Martel 2019; Torchiani 2020). These documents reflected a critical reassessment by the Church of its foundational, spiritual, and moral principles in the face of emerging social challenges such as sexual freedom, abortion, and divorce, condemning these as degenerations of traditional values (Kobyliński 2017; Ferrari 2021). The Church’s stance, previously more open to including homosexuals in the priesthood and pastoral care, significantly hardened, signalling a major doctrinal shift and redefining its perspective on homosexuality compared to 1975. The memorandum clarified that the previously held distinction between sexual orientation and behavior, which regarded orientation as temporary and potentially “curable,” was effectively dismissed (Brogliato and Migliorini 2014 , pp. 171- 180; Torchiani 2020; 2021), implicitly recognizing that sexual orientation constitutes an aspect of a person’s identity, determined by a multitude of factors (Brogliato and Migliorini 2014 , pp. 75-109; Fumagalli 2020, pp.

45-57), and not the result of “false education, lack of normal sexual development, contracted habits, bad examples, or other similar causes” (*Persona Humana*, par. 8; Ferrari 2021).

The LGBT community’s reception of this significant shift was mixed.

Babilonia’s coverage in 1987, through articles and letters, captured a spectrum of reactions. While many opposed the Vatican’s stance and especially the *Letter to the Cardinals*, others sought to reconcile these declarations with the broader Christian message attempting to justify the statements of Cardinal Ratzinger by giving them a rational reading starting from a theological point of view. The correspondence published in *Babilonia* fostered a vibrant exchange of views among readers and journalists, gradually amplifying calls for a dedicated space to religious discussions. This dialogue, enriched by contributions from people and clergy alike, positioned the magazine as a pivotal mediator between the LGBT community and the Church (cf. Kane 2013), highlighting the magazine’s role not just as a publication, but as a platform for nuanced debate and community building.

In 1987, responding to readers’ requests, *Babilonia* magazine launched a column dedicated to exploring the intricate relationship between homosexuality and religion. This initiative, named “Gay and Faith,” was spearheaded by Don Goffredo Crema, a priest already known for his commitment to the pastoral care of homosexual individuals (Crema 2000) whose involvement symbolized a progressive step towards inclusivity within religious discourse. However, Don Goffredo’s column was short-lived, concluding its experience in 1992. The public visibility and media attention gained by Don Goffredo, particularly through his television appearances, provoked disapproval from church hierarchy, leading to a formal admonishment and a directive to cease his contributions to *Babilonia* (Arnone 2017). A second peak, therefore, corresponds to the explosion of the so-called “Don Goffredo case”, a case that not only filled the magazine’s columns but also led to a protest, though it ultimately failed to effect change (Arnone 2017).

Despite increased engagement and calls for change, the Church’s continued silence highlighted its indifference to these discussions and its ongoing refusal to address pastoral care concerns for

homosexuals and their exclusion from the priesthood during that time³.

The latter topic, frequently addressed in letters to Babilonia, especially those from ordained homosexuals, delves into the complex interplay between their vocation and identity. Their narratives, expressing the tension between their spiritual commitments and personal truths, highlight the Church as a potential refuge from societal pressures, such as forced heteronormativity, discrimination, and harsh judgments (see Ferrari 2021). These insights not only shed light on the personal struggles within sacred spaces but also underscore the need for further scholarly exploration into the nuanced experiences of these individuals.

From the point of view of the sources regarding the question of the priesthood, the Holy See intervened again in the years following the controversy sparked by the Don Goffredo Crema affair, with an official document published between the end of 1989 and the beginning of 1990 and will address these issues again in 1996. The debate culminated in 2005 with Pope Benedict XVI's approval of a document firmly prohibiting homosexuals from entering the priesthood, aligning with the stance he had advocated from the start of his tenure as Cardinal (Ferrari 2021; Kobyliński 2017), reconfirmed in 2016 by Pope Francis. Nevertheless, the question remains a topic of active debate. As recently as May 2024, Pope Francis addressed this complex issue during a meeting with the Italian bishops highlighting the Church's ongoing discussions about its doctrinal stance on priesthood eligibility for individuals with homosexual tendencies.

A third peak in the graph, between 1991 to 1995, illuminates the broader societal attitudes towards homosexuality during the 1990s and 2000s. A letter to Babylon published in n. 97 of 1992, titled "Catholic Numbers", gives a rather good picture of the situation revealing public opinions on sinfulness, with homosexuality alarmingly ranked high on the list of sins:

«Recentemente sono stati pubblicati i risultati di un'indagine statistica dell'Ispes sui cattolici italiani. Tali risultati sono apparsi sulla rivista di cultura religiosa Jesus, numero di ottobre. Tra quesiti posti agli intervistati c'era anche quello che chiedeva quali comportamenti erano da ritenere peccato oppure no, compresa l'omosessualità. I risultati mi hanno fatto ribollire il sangue nelle vene. Su di una lista di sedici peccati diversi, l'omosessualità si trova al secondo posto, in ordine di gravità decrescente»⁴.

Nevertheless:

«Nell'articolo di commento a queste statistiche, però, è fatta notare la differenza di atteggiamento da parte dei giovani: solo il 25,1% considera l'omosessualità peccato grave»⁵.

This divergence underscores evolving perceptions, particularly among the youth: against the backdrop of the Catholic Church's traditional stance a notable generational shift is observed. Actually, while in the Catholic Church's approach to sexual orientation the ideal change of pace and the admission that sexual orientation is not a matter of choice (Moia 2010, p. 10; Brogliato and Migliorini 2014; Torchiani 2020; 2021), dates only back to 2013, with the question of Pope Francis „Who am I to judge?“⁶, among Catholic communities and believers the change started earlier (Garelli 2016).

Recent studies have shown that if it was still possible to establish a cause-effect link between Catholic education and a negative attitude towards homosexuality until the early 2000s (Moia 2020; Torchiani 2021), even in neutral contexts such as education and health care (Westwood 2022), and verify a significant impact of this type of training on the possibility of building a simultaneously Catholic and homosexual identity (Barbagli and Colombo 2001, p. 90), the situation has changed a lot in recent years. Research conducted on the new generations has demonstrated the absolutely *sui generis* aspect of Italy (Garelli 2016) which, despite remaining the most Catholic country in Europe, is increasingly less religious⁷, less practising and more tolerant of the LGBT+ issue⁸. This change is attributed to the diminished influence of the Church as an institutional authority on moral and faith matters among younger generations, (Giordan 2010; Dalla Zuanna and Vignoli 2021, no longer seen as the sole guarantor of faith and morality. On this point, for example, already in 1994, on n. 128 of Babylon a reader commented:

«I vertici cattolici, lo si nota, diminuiscono il loro potere mese per mese. Anche le chiese sono sempre vuote di giovani, perché le prediche oggi con la gioventù non funzionano più. Il vero dio sta in noi stessi»⁹.

4.2. Reflection on the contents

While the comparative analysis of data and historical events sheds light on key historical moments in the interaction between homosexual believers and

³ In any case, there is no shortage of significant actions on the part of some priests who have distinguished themselves for their ability to understand and deal with humanity with the issue of internal conflict among Catholic homosexuals, such as: Quaranta 2008; Fumagalli 2020.

⁴ «Recently, the results of a statistical survey by Ispes on Italian Catholics were published. These results appeared in the religious culture magazine Jesus, October issue. Among the questions posed to the interviewees was one that asked which behaviors were to be considered sinful or not, including homosexuality. The results made my blood boil. On a list of sixteen different sins, homosexuality ranks sixth, in order of decreasing seriousness».

⁵ «In the article commenting on these statistics, however, the difference in attitude on the part of young people is highlighted: only 25.1% consider homosexuality a serious sin».

⁶ The statement, reported by several newspapers, was released during an interview in July 2013.

⁷ A statistical survey carried out by Euromedia Research and published in July 2023 in the magazine *Il Timone* finds that only 58% of the sample interviewed declare themselves believers and that an even smaller number of these can actually define themselves as practitioners.

⁸ The studies by Garelli 2016 speak of a country still split in half on the issue, while those by Giordan 2010 revealed a difference in opinion regarding homosexuality between practicing believers and those less assiduous in attending religious functions.

⁹ «The Catholic leaders, we can see, are decreasing their power month by month. Even churches are always empty of young people, because sermons today no longer work with young people. The true God lies within ourselves».

the Catholic Church, a qualitative textual analysis reveals the tactics and strategies employed by homosexual believers to navigate the religious community. These strategies, documented by scholars such as Levy and Reeves (2011) and Arnone (2016, 2018; De Certau 1980), aim to carve out spaces for recognition and action while staying true to both their beliefs and identities (O'Brien 2004; Rodriguez 2009; Arnone 2016, 2017, 2018).

The narratives emerging from these texts are diverse, reflecting the varied experiences of being homosexual in the Italian Catholic setting. This diversity, consistently evident since the debate's inception (McNeill 1979; Castellano 1979a, 1979b; Ferrari 2021), is largely shaped by the cultural, social, familial, political, ethnic, and religious contexts. Moreover, sociological and psychological research have demonstrated that these factors not only influence the construction of homosexual identities but also impact their well-being negatively (Cox, Gallois 1996; Beals et al. 2009; McLean 2007).

Certain letters, such as the one published on n. 22 of *Babilonia* 1985, highlight the role of Catholic education in fostering guilt among homosexual individuals (Mahaffy 1996; Shbhi et al. 2011): «As a Catholic and homosexual, I often struggle to reconcile these aspects of my identity, which causes me considerable distress». Another reader's statement from *Babilonia* n. 141, 1996 reflects a similar sentiment: «As a 28-year-old practicing Catholic, gay and exploring my vocation, I face enormous challenges. My life is a constant battle with internal conflicts and exhausting fights with Jesus».

Other stories point to how Catholic education contributes to the stigmatization and discrimination of homosexuals, deemed „unnatural“, and raise questions about the reasons behind such aversion to a private aspect of human life (Yip 1998)¹⁰.

Yet, amidst these challenges, there are accounts of individuals who boldly embrace both their strong religious faith and proud homosexual identity (Subhi et al. 2011; Levy, Reeves 2011). Few choose to hide behind superficially conformist relationships or engage in homophobic behaviours to be seen as „true Christians“ (Yip 1998; Sumerau 2012; Dormer, Morris 2007). Instead, some adopt what Goffmann (1963) might call a stigma-reaction strategy, which, as highlighted by a *Babilonia*'s reader, often leads to personal and ecclesiastical conflicts (Quinn, Chaudoir 2009):

«I have thought a lot about the Church documents regarding homosexuality. I am convinced that the objective responsibility for the rejection by the Church is ours, it lies with Catholic homosexuals incapable of claiming the right to an identity. We have hidden ourselves in the cover-up marriage, we have become ashamed of the hypocrisy of the

sacristies, of the banks, where everyone knows we are, but no one says it, we have relegated our homosexuality to a part-time role, we have accepted the compromise of easy sex as the only alternative to loneliness. Faced with our inability to cohere, with the schizophrenia of double lives, it is not surprising if the Church condemns us. It takes direct protagonism, the desire to reclaim one's dignity».

Dialogue with the Catholic Church is strongly supported and claimed. As Giuliana Arnone points out, organized groups of Catholic homosexuals have become advocates for grassroots change, challenging stereotypes and pushing for inclusivity (Arnone 2018: 145). A letter from the Davide and Gionata group, based in Turin, published around the Jubilee year 2000 (*Babilonia* 188, 2000), calls for dialogue, a revaluation of human sexuality, and steps towards reconciliation with the Church, signalling a willingness to foster a constructive relationship:

«[...] The conversion and reconciliation that the Church places as key points of the Jubilee year require fundamental conditions such as the desire to listen, to understand, and the willingness to review one's opinions, if necessary. [...] confident in God's help, we ask the bishops of the Churches of the Piemonte pastoral region and, through them, the entire Italian Church: to demonstrate greater availability for dialogue and discussion with homosexual people and associations; to rediscover the positive aspects of human sexuality that allow us to live the relationship in the fullness of mutual gift [...]; to take a first step of reconciliation by identifying, especially in those dioceses where there are homosexual groups or associations, Christian or otherwise, one or more people with whom we can start a peaceful and fraternal dialogue. We once again renew our full availability to establish a constructive relationship with all those who want to help us and the whole Church to grow together».

However, as Yip (1997a; 2002) observes, the Church's rigid stance does not necessarily weaken the identities, convictions, or faith in God of homosexual Catholics, who often remain firm in their beliefs (Mahaffy 1996)¹¹. Instead, it tends to alienate a broader audience, not limited to the LGBT+ community, from the Church, challenging its role as a mediator of ethics and morality (Garelli 2016; Dalla Zuanna and Vignoli 2021).

The letters reviewed suggest that *Babilonia* magazine has served as a platform for dialogue, experimentation, and the reimagining of the Catholic homosexual identity. This, coupled with increased visibility and rights for LGBT+ communities, has facilitated a process—identified by Levy and Reeves (2011) and

¹⁰ In a letter to *Babilonia* 123, 1994, for example, a reader states: «I feel the same as all other human beings and why do they continually make me feel different?».

¹¹ A letter published in n. 115 of *Babilonia* (1993) allows this idea to emerge: «I don't think I have to change my religion just because the Church suppresses homosexuality: it does so out of pure and simple ignorance!». The words that are addressed directly to Pope John Paul II from the pages of the n. are not dissimilar. 180, 1999: «I was, am and will remain Catholic. I believe and will believe in one God, just as I believe that the Church is made up of men and, since the world began, men have made mistakes, are making mistakes and will continue to make mistakes. And for this reason, Your Holiness, with immense respect I hope that your mind will be enlightened by Heaven and that you can therefore with your word give all of us equal dignity and equal opportunities».

expanded by Bronwyn and Douglas (2018)—through which Christian homosexuals can reconcile their faith and sexual identity, resolving internal conflicts to achieve an authentic sense of self.

5. Concluding remarks

The study explores the intricate relationship between Catholic and homosexual identities, traditionally seen as incompatible within their societal context and often subject to stigma. This topic has attracted the attention of various scholars (Yip 1997a; 1997b; 2002; O'Brien 2004; Rodriguez 2009; Arnone 2016; 2017; 2018), who have approached it from theological, psychological, and sociological perspectives. Building on their insights, this research aims to contribute additional understanding by examining how identities and relationships are constructed by homosexual individuals and groups within the strongly Catholic Italian context, especially during periods of increasing visibility for LGBT issues. The study draws on a corpus of letters sent to *Babilonia*, a magazine for homosexual readers, during its peak circulation years, providing valuable qualitative and quantitative data.

A chronological analysis of these letters reveals a recurring theme: the positions of the Roman Catholic Church and the evolving stance of homosexual believers, marked by a cyclical return to debates over acceptance or recognition of homosexual orientation. Historical context illuminates how declarations or documents from the Holy See often disrupt the lives of homosexual believers, serving as catalysts for renewed controversy.

Despite the Vatican's more conservative reactions to society's growing openness toward homosexuality,

the letters to *Babilonia* suggest a cautiously optimistic attitude among Catholic homosexuals. They seem to respond proactively to the Church's negative stance, particularly its labelling of homosexual practice as "intrinsically disordered". Contrary to weakening their self-perception or faith, these believers attribute the stigma surrounding homosexuality to human error, maintaining a positive relationship with both God and the Church.

From this perspective, it is evident that despite the substantially negative approach of the ecclesial institution, by the late 1980s and 1990s, Catholic homosexuals were already forging a renegotiated identity, shedding guilt and the compulsion to maintain appearances, achieved through visibility and daily resistance. Their participation in organised groups and the community fostered by *Babilonia* magazine facilitated the development of strategies to preserve this positive identity (De Certau 1980, p. 15; Arnone 2017; 2018; Coley 2020), uniting Catholics and non-believers in a shared mission for constructive dialogue.

Interestingly, the involvement of non-believers in the dialogue initiated by Catholic homosexuals in *Babilonia* highlights an active position against prejudices of a society heavily influenced by Catholic doctrine, demonstrating that the reader's community shared the desire to address the LGBT's challenges and problems collectively.

Babilonia's pages reveal not just activism and subversion but a profound quest for recognition within a "hostile" environment. Homosexual Catholics advocate for reconciliation paths rooted in a shared faith, underscoring the importance of starting from common ground to explore new avenues of mutual understanding.

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