

## Queer and Catholic: A CLGS Oral History Project

### Archival Identification:

**Interviewer:** Emma Cieslik

**Interviewee:** Eve Tushnet

**Date of interview:** August 8, 2022

**Overview:** Eve Tushnet (she/her) is a lesbian Roman Catholic writer, speaker, blogger, and educator. She was born in Washington, D.C. to a Unitarian mother and secular Jewish father, and has remained in the area except for a brief stint in California as a child and in Connecticut attending Yale University. She came out as a lesbian around the age of 12-13 and converted to Catholicism in 1998 at the age of 19 during her sophomore year at Yale. She's published four books: *Gay and Catholic: Accepting my Sexuality, Finding Community, Living my Faith* (2014), *Amends: A Novel* (2015), *Punishment: A Love Story* (2019), and *Tenderness: A Gay Christian's Guide to Unlearning Rejection and Experiencing God's Extravagant Love* (2021). Along with these publications, she has written for the National Catholic Register, America Magazine, and the National Review. In this interview, Tushnet reflects on her experiences converting to Catholicism, her understanding of Catholicism and queer identity and relationships, her commitment to celibacy following the Church's law and seeking out other models of same-sex partnership, like covenant friendships.

Keywords: Covenant friendship, orthodox Catholic, Side B, Life on Side B, Catholic conversion, Queer and Catholic, Washington queer history

**00:00:02**

*Emma Cieslik:* Wonderful, there we go. I always like to double check.

**00:00:08**

*Eve Tushnet:* Yup.

**00:00:08**

*Cieslik:* So this is an interview conducted by myself, Emma Cieslik, on August 8th, 2022, starting at about 1:46 pm Eastern Standard Time for Queer and Catholic: CLGS Oral History Project. I use she/her pronouns. We are recording this oral history interview via Zoom while I sit on-campus at George Washington University and interview Eve Tushnet as you sit at your own independent location over Zoom. I wanted to sincerely thank you for your time and for agreeing to contribute to the Queer and Catholic oral history project. Could you please introduce yourself?

**00:00:45**

*Tushnet:* Sure, my name is Eve Tushnet. I'm from DC and here now. I am a writer and speaker, I guess, most recently author of *Tenderness: A Gay Christian's Guide to Unlearning Rejection and Experiencing God's Extravagant Love*. I came out, as gay in--mm, I don't remember, the year--when I was around 12 or 13 and became Catholic when I was 19 in 1998.

**00:01:18**

*Cieslik:* Wonderful. Would you like to share your personal pronouns?

**00:01:22**

*Tushnet:* Oh sure! She/her.

**00:01:24**

*Cieslik:* Wonderful. Thank you so much, and I know you mentioned that you converted to Catholicism a little bit later in your life. Would you mind sharing more about your religious identity growing up?

**00:01:35**

*Tushnet:* Sure, I was raised somewhere between secular and reformed Jewish. I had a smattering of Jewish religious experience and education, but I would say, mostly secular, in a very progressive environment. Mm-yup.

**00:01:54**

*Cieslik:* Wonderful, and I was curious. Do you know you mentioned that you converted to Catholicism. What prompted you to make that switch in your religious life and observance?

**00:02:05**

*Tushnet:* Yeah! Basically, I mean. I met people in college who were able to present their faith to me in terms that I really sort of fell in love with. I basically--it's hard to sort of cast my mind back at this point, but when they would talk about God as creator, the creator of the beauty of the physical world or the meaning of the incarnation and the crucifixion, when they would talk about the Eucharist and the physical reality of the bread and wine becoming the body and blood of Christ, it was very, it was simultaneously very alien to me and very different from what I had sort of associated with Catholicism and really attractive. It was a very sensual and merciful way of looking at the world and spoke to a lot of my own really deep feelings.

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*Cieslik:* Wonderful, and I was curious. I know you mentioned that you were attending university. What school were you attending at that time?

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*Tushnet:* Yale university. I was a freshman when I met these people and a sophomore when I converted.

**00:03:28**

*Cieslik:* Wonderful, wonderful! And I was going to ask you as well, I know you've explained a little bit about the family and the religious experience that you grew up with. Would you share more about your family of origin and where you grew up?

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*Tushnet:* Let's see, I grew up not far from where I am now, in Northwest DC [Washington,

D.C], just east of Rock Creek Park. Yeah, I mean, I think that I sort of--I'm not totally sure what--um, I don't know what you're looking for here.

**00:04:04**

*Cieslik:* I can rephrase that. That answers my question. I was curious if you have moved. I know right now you reside a little bit closer to Dupont Circle and some of those those northwestern Washington D.C. neighborhoods, but I was really curious, I know you mentioned that you were raised Jewish, if your parents identified as Jewish and what holidays you observed growing up.

**00:04:23**

*Tushnet:* Oh sure, so my mother [Elizabeth Alexander] is Unitarian, and my dad [Mark Tushnet] is secular Jewish and we would sometimes go to some things for some holidays, but I think very intermittent sort of base, you know, based on what was available, how people were feeling kind of vibes. I would not say that we had or particularly wanted a consistent Jewish practice and then I went to Jewish day camp for a few years.

**00:04:58**

*Cieslik:* Thank you so much, I really appreciate it and speaking currently now, I know you're a renowned writer and speaker. Would you mind showing more about what it means to you to identify as Catholic? How do you practice that, whether it be attending masses or specific youth groups or prayer groups? What does that look like?

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*Tushnet:* Yeah, I mean I just kind of try to be, you know, down the middle of the road Catholic. I go to mass. I do, you know, daily prayers. I usually do a daily Rosary. You know, just sort of praying, trying to lead my life in accordance with the Church to the best of my ability, and I guess I have little things that I do to try to learn more about the faith, like learning about new saints or what have you, new to me saints. But yeah, I would just, I don't know--I try to be kind of a basic Catholic. I don't try to do too much.

**00:06:06**

*Cieslik:* That sounds wonderful. Thank you so much and I was really curious, I know you mentioned that it was right around the age of 12 that you came out, would you mind sharing more about what that experience looked like and how your family and close friends responded?

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*Tushnet:* Sure, yeah, it was fairly straightforward. I had felt--this is a very standard story. I had felt a certain difference from other kids for a long time. When everybody hit puberty, I realized that the way that my close friends were talking about boys was very much similar to how I felt about a girl in my English class, and I think I was still sort of putting all the pieces together, that when I read a book that I had stolen from my sister--it was a mystery novel with a lesbian narrator--and when she described sort of her feelings, looking at the woman that she had a crush on, I immediately was like: oh my gosh, that is this girl, like that is how I

feel about this girl. So that was sort of kind of the click moment, and then I being in general an extremely impulsive person came out pretty quickly.

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*Tushnet:* And I will say, because of the background that I was in, even though this was the early nineties [1990s] and that was pretty young to start coming out, I was incredibly lucky in that this was not in any way a sort of traumatic realization for me. If anything, it was a relief. It was like: oh, there's a name for the difference that you've been feeling and there's a community of people. My parents, you know, I think--well, my parents already had gay friends who I knew growing up, and so it was not a huge deal for them either. I think they were sort of like, you know, I think for any parent at that time it's a little challenging to kind of know exactly how to navigate, but I think they were really, really gentle and kind of a good compass, and it probably helped that my best friend was also gay.

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*Tushnet:* And yeah, so I mean like obviously he didn't have a problem with it, and we ended up cofounding the Gay-Straight Alliance at our high school. So that brought us into some degree of minor conflict with the administration, but also at the same time, like it's a great way to meet all the people who are going to support you. So yeah, I think ultimately I was really lucky in having a pretty supportive world, especially for that time period, to come out.

**00:08:56**

*Cieslik:* I'm so glad to hear it. Thank you so much for sharing that, and I was really curious, do you remember the title or the author of the book that you had mentioned you read?

**00:09:07**

*Tushnet:* I do, it's Barbara Wilson, it's Murder in the Collective. It's a murder mystery. It's sort of a random book that I grabbed because I thought it was interesting.

**00:09:16**

*Cieslik:* Wonderful, thank you, and you mentioned that you had founded a club specifically around that identity at your high school. Would you mind sharing where you attended school throughout your primary, secondary and then high school?

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*Tushnet:* Sure, I went to elementary school at Shepherd, our local public school, through fourth grade, then I was in California for the first half of the year and then switched to Georgetown Day School and went there through high school.

**00:09:47**

*Cieslik:* Wonderful, and I know you mentioned a little bit of tension with the club. Were they responsive to allowing you to establish this club? I know--was it a religious affiliated school?

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*Tushnet:* No, no, no. It was very secular, progressive. You know, they had--my memory, and this is now a long time ago, but my memory is that they had sort of standard, early nineties [1990s], "we don't want young people to have to think about these questions before they're

ready" kind of objections, but ultimately did, yes, let us have the club, probably in part because they had already hired a whole bunch of gay teachers. So again, this was not a sort of repressive environment. It was just one where the people in charge were straight and navigating, sometimes clumsily, a changing environment. So yeah, I mean they had objections--my memory is that they had objections at first, which did not ultimately last all that long.

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*Cieslik:* Wonderful, and did you experience a high response rate of people and students that were eager to engage in the organization that you and your friend had put together?

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*Tushnet:* I would say so, sure. Yeah, I think I did pretty well for the size of the school.

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*Cieslik:* Wonderful! How many members would you say that you had at the peak or the height of your organization?

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*Tushnet:* Oh good grief, I don't--I'm so bad with this kind of thing. Maybe 10, maybe.

**00:11:30**

*Cieslik:* No worries, thank you [chuckle]. I always like to ask just to get clarity.

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*Tushnet:* I could probably name 10 people who I knew came to at least one thing, and my guess is that there's other people I'm forgetting.

**00:11:46**

*Cieslik:* That's really helpful. I really appreciate it, and along those same lines I know you mentioned that you grew up with a mother who was Unitarian and a father who was secular Jewish. Are there any relationships in your formative childhood experience or adolescence that impacted you in an important way?

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*Tushnet:* I mean in terms of my religious identity I don't know that I would necessarily say that there were a lot beyond my family. Yeah, um, yeah.

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*Cieslik:* That makes sense. Would you say that there was anyone, I know you mentioned reading the book growing up, engaging with your friend, was there anyone who was formative in understanding and in coming into realization of this identity?

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*Tushnet:* Oh, in terms of being gay, yeah. I mean definitely once I did start coming out and once I was in high school, I met other people who kind of shaped my sense of what that meant. There were people I met through Riot Grrrl, like a feminist organization at that time,

and then I dated a couple of girls--two people, one freshman year and then one, I think, mostly junior year of high school, and they obviously shaped a lot of how I saw that side of my life.

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*Cieslik:* That's wonderful and along those same lines I was curious, I know you mentioned that in college you converted to Catholicism, how did this conversion--did it and if so, how did this conversion impact your understanding of your sexuality?

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*Tushnet:* Yeah, so I should first say, you know, Yale, even at the time, I think this is more true now, had a reputation of being pretty gay as colleges go, and that was probably pretty protective of me, since even though I was becoming Catholic in an explicitly sort of self-identified "conservative" group. They were all, as far as I could tell, pretty comfortable with gay people. They all knew gay people, like it wasn't that big a deal, and they didn't make it a big deal in terms of my interest in God, in their faith. They did not do the well-meaning like "let's sit-down and have a chat with you about what God wants for your sex life," which is really good. I think that would have been a terrible idea and instead they just sort of talked to me as they would to anybody, about what was important to them in their own beliefs and their own experience.

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*Tushnet:* So that said, you know, I didn't know anybody else who was gay, who was, who was a practicing Catholic. Obviously everybody knows, I think, at this point gay lapsed Catholic or people who have like complicated relationships to the Church, but I was really in love and wanted to do it kind of--I wanted to go whole hog, to be as Catholic as possible under the circumstances, and I didn't really know anybody else who was in that position and didn't really know of anybody else, so I did not have a lot of roadmaps for that and that think that was very hard, more hard than I realized at the time. [cough] Excuse me. I'm getting over COVID [COVID-19]. The, um--I did ask, you know, I genuinely did not understand or like the Church's sexual ethic and that was a pretty big stumbling block for me in becoming Catholic, probably the biggest.

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*Tushnet:* And when I asked people about it, either my friends who were Catholic or asked a priest, I got answers that ranged from beautiful but unpersuasive to just like dramatically unhelpful in ways that I'm sure like are not that hard to imagine and as much as I, in general, love the priest, the guy who ended up doing my RCIA, I think his answer was probably the worst, which is sort of, which sort of gives you an idea of like, I was coming into the Church in a bubble where my friends were genuinely open minded, creative, interested. They didn't quite know how to shepherd me, but they had a good, they had not been badly formed in their attitudes; whereas, the rest of the Church as I encountered it, I began to find more people who, regardless of their incredibly good intentions, often had been badly formed with regard to gay people and kind of our experiences and needs.

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*Tushnet:* So, as I--so like I sort of wandered around and flailed around a lot and tried various ways of understanding what I was experiencing. Fortunately, I never tried to not be gay. I feel incredibly grateful that nobody ever pushed that on me and that I felt pretty secure that I didn't want it. I was just sort of like happy being gay and figured, well, you're going to have to find some way to make it work. But you know, I assume that I'm still on a journey of figuring out how to live a life that is genuinely self accepting, that's like extremely gay and also extremely Catholic, that is, you know, attempting to be obedient to the Church. That's still what I want. That's still the goal: to genuinely respond to the Church as mother and teacher and to be taught. But I think, hmm, I've learned a lot and there's a lot that I wish others had known and were able to show me at the time that I became a Catholic. I think that I was pretty isolated.

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*Cieslik:* Most definitely, thank you so much for sharing, and along that line I know you mentioned that you went through the RCIA program. Was that specifically at Yale University parish close to you?

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*Tushnet:* It was--no--it was not through the college chaplaincy, if that's even the term that they used, it was through the Dominican parish that's right next to the campus.

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*Cieslik:* Wonderful. Do you recall the name of the Dominican parish?

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*Tushnet:* Oh sure, Saint Mary's. It's not Dominican anymore. It's a parish church now. Saint Mary's on Hillhouse Avenue in New Haven [Conneticut].

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*Cieslik:* Wonderful, and I'm curious, I know you--it was an incredibly important part of your process of learning to become Catholic and also understanding how the Church's theology around sex and sexuality existed. How would you say that you responded to that in the first steps of your faith? I know you mentioned that there were people you encountered who who were more aware or less aware of how they incorporated that in your faith, but I was really curious. How did you first put the pieces together when you converted?

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*Tushnet:* Yeah, I mean it was all, so I should say also, I'm recovering alcoholic and at the time that I was converting--you know, I regret nothing about, basically nothing, about my conversion. I certainly don't regret becoming Catholic. It's one of the best thing that ever happened to me, et cetera, but also, like keep in mind throughout this whole time that I was basically drunk every day, so like a lot of stuff was going on, and I was dating a guy. We

broke up before I was received into the Church.<sup>1</sup> So I was sort of like trying on a lot of stuff and trying to figure out. I knew that, regardless of what happened with this guy, the Church's teaching on being gay would be important to me because that was such a big part of my experience.

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*Tushnet:* But I also just sort of didn't know and didn't really think very much about the future at the time that this was all happening. I'm generally not a very future-oriented person, which has benefits and drawbacks. You're not as anxious about the future, but you also like do a bunch of impulsive stuff without really thinking through like, "how am I going to make this work?" You just sort of assume that there will be a path, and sometimes there is, and sometimes you're just like wandering. So let's see, so while I was in college, I was really just kind of like flailing around, not thinking too much about it. Afterward I did start kind of asking myself: "well, how are you going to live, as--especially if you don't end up getting married?" Because I had had very like unrealistic, sort of fantasy-based crushes on guys now and then.

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*Tushnet:* One of the things that's actually been really powerful for me in sort of understanding my own identity, is that after I quit drinking that stopped, that these were clearly kind of, hmm, sort of imaginary crushes of trying on the persona of someone who could be this person and not rooted in reality. But then I was like, "oh well, maybe you'll marry one of these alcoholics that you get crushes on, but if that doesn't happen, which looks unlikely, what are you going to do with your life?" And for a while I was just sort of like, "oh well, I'm going to try really hard to understand the Church's theology of sex," and I was very diligent about trying to learn about that. I read the Theology of the Body, and all that, and I'm not going to date girls and that will be how I handle this, and that's like,

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*Tushnet:* ultimately, I'm not--I don't love theology, I'm not that good at it and I do feel lucky that I pretty quickly realize that you can't just be like, "what I'm doing with my kind of life and my longings for love and intimacy and sex and all that stuff is not dating girls," you can't really have it as a negative. So I asked myself: "well, okay, what do you want out of being a lesbian and what does it mean to love women? And how can you have that in your life if you're not going to do normal lesbian things, like dating girls?" At that point, I think, would have been pre-gay marriage [pre-2015]. But if you're not going to end up with a life partner, you know, what you do? And the first thing that I ended up doing about that was starting a volunteer job that was working with women.

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*Tushnet:* But ultimately, I think really the bigger thing in my long term journey with the Church is just that that was a question that no one had encouraged me to ask, and so just asking it like: "what are you going to do with your longings? What is the good that they're

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<sup>1</sup> On reflection on Monday, August 22, 2022, Tushnet does not remember if she broke up with her boyfriend before or after entering the Church.



driving you toward? How can they be a lamp for you instead of kind of an obstacle?" That was really the most important change. And then, since then, I've just tried asking that question in different ways and discovering that loving women can lead to very deep friendships, can lead to service to other people, especially in gay Christian communities. And then I'm currently exploring the possibility of covenant friendship. I'm seeing someone, and that's another possibility that I think is really beautiful and that it took me a while to discover as deeply rooted in scripture and in church history. I feel really grateful for having that open as a possibility.

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*Cieslik:* That's wonderful. I know you mentioned the volunteer job. Where were you working as that outlet to help and work closely with women?

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*Tushnet:* The Capitol Hill Pregnancy Center. It's a pro-life pregnancy center in downtown DC.

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*Cieslik:* Wonderful, and I really appreciate it. This is wonderful information speaking to your experience of how your understanding of sexuality engendered within the Catholic Church changed over time. When did you first learn about the Catholic church stands on queer identity? It's always a question I like to ask.

**00:25:01**

*Tushnet:* Yeah, well, I don't even know. So like definitely at some point, I developed a sort of stereotypical idea of Catholics as being anti-sex in general and anti-fun, anti-pleasure and afraid of or rejecting of the body, and that was definitely cemented by--high school, I just sort of like lumped queer stuff in with every other aspect of physical, sensual life. Certainly when I went to protests or marches, things of that kind, there would be Christian counter-protesters, but I don't know that I particularly thought of them as Catholic. I assume that most of them weren't. Yeah, I don't know. It was all sort of like because I really didn't have a ton of contact with the Church until college, it wasn't, hmm, I don't--it's hard to say there was--there were no like moments.

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*Tushnet:* It was just sort of it filters to you through the broader culture idea of what Catholics think. And then, and so I did know by college that the Church was against gay sex and I think that that was the terms that I would have put it in at the time. Again, I think, given the time period, I would not have articulated as like the Catholic Church doesn't have gay marriage or something like that. But I honestly don't know kind of where I heard that and there was not--I was not in the circles where there would be any of the weirdness around "identity language" that you hear sometimes now, that was just not on my radar for--you know, once I was out of college and working in the Catholic world, and I heard that people would use the term "same-sex attraction,"

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*Tushnet:* and I was like, "oh okay, interesting, I guess this is how Catholics say gay," which I feel like is more true than people want to really acknowledge, and so I use that for a little bit because it seems like well, that's what people say in this world that I'm in now, but also would just sort of like say "gay," because it's normal. It's like intelligible and referred to a community that I was still, you know, deeply indebted to. But yeah, so I mean that's sort of like fairly incoherent picture. But that is how it felt that it wasn't like you were taught things in a systematic way but more like you got a vague impression and tried to navigate within that, and then if you had questions, you would go and look them up somewhere and discover typically that a lot of the stuff that people fight about now is well, I don't know, hmm.

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*Tushnet:* You would discover that, hmm, some of the stuff that the Church teaches really is hard, but also that there's a lot of stuff you don't have to care about. The catechism doesn't care if you say "gay," I mean come on like I don't know, and then beyond that I would say there was a slow process of learning what, how much I hadn't been taught and how much isn't in kind of the official documents, and I would say honestly, probably the watershed for that for me there were two things: One was reading Andrew Sullivan's book, *Love Undetectable*, where he has this essay on friendship, where he cites Saint Aelred of Rievaulx, and I think it's through him that I found Alan Bray's book, *The Friend*, which is a history of same-sex friendship in England, and that shows kind of how deep and how embedded in Christian faith vows of friendship between typically two men could be.

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*Tushnet:* And then the second thing is really the Internet making possible a very small but slowly growing community of orthodox gay Christians, small-o orthodox gay Catholics, and discovering, I guess the Ron Belgau, was probably the one who was writing at the time, who was sort of the first person that I found, if memory serves, who was really writing about his experience as a gay Catholic who was trying to live according to the Church's teaching and those two together really opened my mind to the possibility of a category of same-sex love that was holy and honorable and something to kind of lean into which, like I said, I already sort have started doing instinctively in some ways, but it was really good to begin having models.

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*Tushnet:* I think it was Ron who showed me the models in scripture of covenant friendship and love [coughs] between two people of the same sex in the lives of David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, and then Jesus and John, the beloved disciple, and those have been like pretty huge touchstones for me as I try to work out what the possibilities are for my own life and also what are the possibilities for the Church. What are futures that she can offer gay people in the light of her own teaching?

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*Cieslik:* Wonderful, and I know you've mentioned coming into contact with other orthodox

Catholic groups online. How would you say that your Catholic identity has come to be? Do you identify as an orthodox Catholic?

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*Tushnet:* Like I try to be, I try to, I try to be a very basic Catholic. I try to be obedient but not crazy and you know to sort of hmm, trust. I just try to trust the Church to the best of my ability.

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*Cieslik:* Wonderful, and along those lines, where were you finding the orthodox Catholic groups online? Were they on social media, or where were you finding the sense of community?

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*Tushnet:* Probably I found Ron through Google and probably must have emailed him at some point. I started writing a blog again because, like I have no impulse control and would just sort of like pour forth my poorly thought-through ideas. And this was at the beginning of the 2000s, when blogs were a thing that were like there weren't that many, and so people kind of would find out who you were. If you did, you'd be in this network that was probably really good for me, and so I started to meet people through that. People would email me, reaching out and then the real--and then so slowly I began to meet other people. We sort of networked among ourselves. I think that Ron Belgau and Wesley Hill started Spiritual Friendship, the blog, I forget when, but that blog was a real kind of crossroads for a lot of people in these conversations.

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*Tushnet:* A lot of us met through that we had meetups. Notre Dame at one point did a conference called Gay in Christ that brought together a lot of people from that circle, which I remember very fondly, and then in 2014, I published my book, my first book, Gay and Catholic, and that was really, really good for me, to put it somewhat selfishly, because that meant that a lot more people were sharing their stories with me and I was beginning to notice patterns that I hadn't kind of put together before and to see kind of how protected and sheltered my experience had been in ways that made it harder for me to really understand what other people were going through, and so I think that experience ultimately opened my eyes to a lot of what other people have been dealing with for a long time.

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*Cieslik:* Yes, and along those lines, I know you mentioned finding patterns and reaching out and communicating with a lot of people who identified as gay and Catholic. What were some of those patterns that you came across?

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*Tushnet:* Yeah, I mean, I think the biggest thing is just well, hmm, there are two things which are probably related. One: the kind of traumatic realization that one is gay and the attempt to not be gay, neither of which I experienced, and yet that's obviously, as I'm sure you know, hugely common. It's the normative experience for people who grow up gay in the Church and

just how destructive that experience is to your relationship with God, your sense of yourself as a child of God, your trust in the Church, in yourself, like your ability to sort of accept yourself, really has huge ramifications for people's spiritual lives. And then the second thing, which is, if anything bigger; it's almost like it's part of what prompts the first problem, the silence about what a good gay future in the Catholic church might look like.

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*Tushnet:* That, I think, is ultimately the biggest challenge that people face. Simply not knowing like, "What could my life be like?", and the only answers that they see are, "Well, you could become straight, maybe it's just a phase, or you can leave the Church, or you can, you can dissent from the Church's teaching and live in your own way, and that's kind of what you get." And if those are the options, you know, people who are more self-respecting are going to go for the second one, and you know, people who are more docile are going to end up going through horrific stuff, trying to do the first thing. Umm, so where was I going with? Those are kind of the biggest patterns, and then everything else kind of flows out of that.

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*Tushnet:* I think a lot of us have also had a very hard time when we discovered that much of what we had to say about our own lives and experiences as gay people would be received with mistrust and suspicion by other Catholics, and that there was a sort of, when we proposed potential solutions or paths forward, that there would be knee-jerk responses, seeing only the ways in which it could go wrong and not seeing any of the problems it was intending to solve or, or sort of like, what are the good possibilities, what it looks like when it goes right. Again, a sort of disinterest in the idea of a good gay future in the Church. But ultimately, I think it's the absence of those models that's the most harmful.

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*Tushnet:* And what has probably been even more sustaining to me than I realize is the models that I have discovered and the kind of, and this is why I try to talk about them all the time and bring to people like no, there are ways that are already here. You know we are reinventing the wheel to some extent, but not completely. There is precedent, and I'll also throw out here, I think we underestimate how much the AIDS epidemic made this whole process harder. A lot of people who could have, potentially, you know, come into their faith, come to their faith later in life or at least explored what are the possibilities just died before they were able to make that journey and be that mentor. So yeah, that's kind of, that's a long-winded rambling way of saying that I think the biggest pattern is everybody's out there trying on their own to figure out if they have a future, and that's a terrifying place to be in.

**00:38:11**

*Cieslik:* And I know you mentioned that a lot of your understanding of sexuality within the Catholic Church's theology and dogma came from sometimes on a mishmash of things that you are exposed to in pop culture and things you engage with when communicate and are in contact with Catholic individuals. Along those lines, did you learn anything about what potential futures existed as part of your RCIA education?

**00:38:39**

*Tushnet:* So I should say, first of all, I don't remember hardly anything from RCIA, so like I'd be shocked, I think there's essentially zero chance that we actually talked about futures for a gay person in RCIA at that time, in that time and place. But also I don't remember very much of it. And I should say, you know, part of the problem here is that I didn't know that that was the crucial question to ask, so I wasn't asking it. I was asking stuff like tell me why the Church teaches what it does, and that's an interesting question. It's one that I still, you know, go back and forth on to what extent I feel like I have a good answer, for you know, but it's not the kind of--but I didn't know that there is a deeper question of like, "ok, I may accept that I'm never going to fully understand why the Church teaches what it does. That's fine. That's normal. You know, I don't know that I expected to understand every aspect of that. But how do I live?" But I didn't know that that was the question to ask and so the fact that other people didn't help me answer was not a 100% on them. It was more, I think, a problem of the culture that we were all imbedded in.

**00:40:00**

*Cieslik:* And then, along those lines, I know you mentioned that you were approaching many people with the question of why does the Catholic Church support this? What, where is this coming from and what guidelines or guidance, especially from biblical texts and other documents, are supporting this? What situations and what feedback did you get from individuals and who were you asking?

**00:40:22**

*Tushnet:* Yeah, so let's see. So I asked the guy who ended up becoming my godfather, my sponsor in the Church, and he gave me a very beautiful metaphor about sexuality being like the Communion chalice and that it was used for a particular purpose and that you wouldn't sort of like just randomly, you wouldn't mix like a giant margarita in the Communion chalice, that's not what it's for, and I was like, "that's very beautiful. That's sort of not what I expected you say, but it also doesn't tell me why a heterosexual marriage is the Communion wine and sex between two women, you know, like a life union between two women would be margarita." It doesn't really begs the question.

**00:41:07**

*Tushnet:* And then, I asked the priest who did my RCIA, and he--I am probably misrepresenting this in so far as I only remember the worst thing that he said, probably there was more wisdom in this, there's was at least more something in this than what I remember--but his answer was basically that the parts don't fit, and that the sex between two women is like trying to turn a doorknob or trying to open a door when the doorknob is wrapped in barbed wire and like, I know I was sort of like, [confused expression] but it's not though. [laughs] It really isn't and so those were sort of the early things, and I basically reached a point where I was like, "look, none of what people have said to me is persuasive, but I really need to be Catholic.

**00:42:12**

*Tushnet:* I believe that this is true, I need the Eucharist, and I'm willing to accept that there is

something here that I don't understand, that like something will be revealed or at least that I can take it on faith that even in this very personal area of my life, the Church is--what the word I'm looking for--a teacher who genuinely kind of can guide me, and I would say right now for me what is most persuasive, and I've sort of pieced this together over time for myself, is really looking at the pattern of scripture, which interestingly, virtually nobody in my life has tried first as an explanation. I think Catholics always want to think that they can do it from first principles and like I don't really know, that's never been persuasive to me, all the kind of natural law type stuff I just find really baffling.

**00:43:12**

*Tushnet:* Whereas if you say, "look, you know, we're Catholics. We take scripture as the word of God. In scripture, same-sex love is honored and holy, but when sex is presented as honored and holy, it's always marriage of a man and a woman." Fair, I feel like that's true. That seems valid, you know, and why is it like that? Well, you know, I don't know that anybody explained it in a way that I find particularly persuasive. But if you are on board with scripture for other reasons it seems like that's a way, uhh, it seems like that just is the pattern of scripture and one which gives actual guidance and correction to everybody instead of saying: you know, if your desires are heterosexual, "we have guidance for that." If your desires are homosexual like, "just don't."

**00:44:12**

*Tushnet:* I think you can see in scripture and in Christian history, paths of devoted love between people of the same sex that are not treated as sexual or marital but are like a genuine life shaping, God-honoring channel for the longings that people feel. And that is at least more believable and intelligible to me than, "oh, well have you tried not being gay," you know.

**00:44:51**

*Cieslik:* Yes, and along those lines as well, I was really curious to ask you, I know that the Catholic Church in some ways is different from how currently political systems understand marriage. So how do you fall along that spectrum? Where does your belief lie in terms of marriage within a church, outside of the church?

**00:45:12**

*Tushnet:* I'm not totally--let me gesture at what I think maybe you're asking, I would have liked for us not to have forgotten the possibility of other kinship forms, forms of kinship between adults that are not marriage. Given that we did forget that, I guess I'm not surprised that the only way that people have found to honor and protect same-sex love between adults has been through instituting same-sex marriage. I was involved--I talked about this in *Tenderness*--I was involved for a while in the political organizing against same-sex marriage. I really regret doing that. I think that I just wanted a different resolution that would neither--it would not be, "you guys are just legal strangers." I did not want there to be no form of kinship that was available to people who were loving and caring for one another.

**00:46:13**

*Tushnet:* I wanted some form of kinship that was not marriage, and I was slowly discovering

through this, during this time, that other societies had had other forms of kinship. But in the end, I think it's the way that you get there is by making the culture safe for people, and that was where I should have been putting my energy into, kind of protecting and sheltering the next generation of gay kids growing up and letting them work out how their relationships could be protected and structured and so like in terms of where I'm at now, again, I sort of hope that we get to a point where we are able to rediscover the models of alternative kinship forms: the covenant friendship or avowed friendship or adoptive brotherhood that other societies have practiced, and have that as at the very least,

**00:47:29**

*Tushnet:* the normative or a normative path for Christians, a good path for Christians that's respected by law and that helps people care for one another without having to shape those relationships or understand those relationships as sexual or marital. But I mean, given where we're at, I know a lot of people--I don't know "a lot" is the right word--I know a fair number of people who are living as celibate Christians, who have gotten civil marriages to their same-sex partner, because that is the way that our society allows you to protect that relationship and protect that caregiving. So like, if that's the only way, it's better than nothing. Let me put it that way; it's a lot better than nothing, having actual protection for the sacrifices that you're making for this person and that they're making for you, and I think that it took me a long time to accept that you have to kind of work with the options that are actually on the table currently, and not the ones that you would like in an ideal world where things have gone very differently for a very long time.

**00:48:48**

*Cieslik:* Yes, and I know you've mentioned several times covenant friendships. Would you mind sharing more about how you understand it? I know you had mentioned that you're you're getting closer to your own covenant friendship; what does that look like for you and how is that recognized in the Church?

**00:49:04**

*Tushnet:* Sure, so there are a lot of different models for how, uhh, vows or covenants between two people of the same sex can be structured. Obviously, you know, already said in the Bible, David and Jonathan make kind of the most obvious one where I think it is literally called a covenant, and the promises that Ruth makes to Naomi are interestingly really similar to a lot, to the the pledges or the expectation that you would have as a vowed friend in the English history that Alan Brayau is looking at. So Ruth says, "where you go, I will go," and the pairs of friends would expect to share household, they would live together. They would, you know, unite their lives in that way. "Your people will be my people."

**00:50:02**

*Tushnet:* They would have obligations to one another's kin, they would be kin to one another, care for one another's children. "Your God will be my God." So they would also share religious obligations. The person who survived of the two friends would have Masses said for the dead friend's soul and would continue to kind of honor that friendship even after death. So, hmm, on the other hand, it hasn't been--none of the stuff has been kind of codified, the

way that the Sacrament of Marriage has been to some extent codified and standardized in the Church. So there's a lot of freedom and there are a lot of different models that people have used, from scripture itself down to the present day. The people that I know who are living in this way have different terminology that they'll use.

**00:50:56**

*Tushnet:* Some will talk about celibate partnership, and they'll be drawing more from models of early monasticism. I have two friends who independently perceived a call to celibacy and then met one another and fell in love, and are now basically--the way that they have understood their partnership is that it is in some ways similar to a marriage and in some ways similar to two monks living together and sharing their celibate calling. And then for other people, you know, I think, like I find the model of friendship really inspiring. Basically, I think that there's that people are still working out and finding different ways to understand what they're doing and to live in this way and the degree to which it's recognized or not in the Church also is really shifting

**00:52:04**

*Tushnet:* and really depends in some ways on where you are and kind of [coughs] what you're willing to ask for, who you know, in a way that is unfortunate but again does leave people a lot of room to kind of work out what they need and what they find beautiful. There was a recent, fairly unfortunate Vatican intervention from, I want to say, the Congregation of the Doctrine of, on the Faith, where they said that priests could not bless same-sex relationships that were intended--I forget the exact phrase--basically, like they were understood as marriages or to be sexual and say nothing about what if they're not, you know what? What if there are other reasons that someone might want their life partnership blessed, and so in my--that I think probably will make priests wary of blessing these kind of partnerships,

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*Tushnet:* even though, in my opinion, none of this, like none of that, should apply to people who are attempting to live as obedient Catholics. Umm, the--where was I going with this? I had some other thing I wanted to add that. I should say that that's an interesting example of ways in which gay Catholics, regardless of our desire for obedience or ability to practice Church teaching, have a lot in common. There's things that are obviously very different in the relationship that I'm trying to have or hoping that I'll have, and someone who wants a gay marriage in the Church. But there are also things that are very similar in how we might be responded to and treated, and we can have solidarity in that and sort of try to, I guess, be grateful for the ways in which we can share one another's experience.

**00:54:22**

*Tushnet:* I sometimes think that outsiders assume that if you're trying to follow the rules, it will earn you some kind of protected place and they find that creepy. I too find that creepy, and I'm somewhat grateful that it doesn't actually work that way, and the place is not actually that protected, but that that is very tangential to what you are actually asking about, which is how do people understand what they're doing, and I think people are working it out. I did an article for American Magazine that was looking at people in a lot of different forms of what



they called alternative kinship, looking at godparenthood, intentional communities, celibate partnerships, and I can send you that if you want. I think that gives a sense of the range of what people are trying to do. Yeah, I think that we're still figuring it out, umm.

**00:55:23**

*Cieslik:* Wonderful! Thank you so much for offering to send that my way, and along those lines, I know you're thinking about moving into a covenant friendship. What does that involve? What experiences are you hoping, and kinship goes into that for you, personally?

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*Tushnet:* Yeah, I mean, I really think the Book of Ruth captures a lot of it: that we would share our lives together, that we would live together, that we would be family to one another, that she would be part of my family and that I would be part of her's, and that we would share our faith. At the moment we do, umm, we try to pray together every day, depends on kind of how we're able to make time, but that's really, I think, the bedrock. It's clear to me that the cliches about prayer and faith as the foundation of a happy home have a lot of wisdom, and we're sort of, we're discovering that. But yeah, I think a genuine life partnership that's devoted, that's emotional, that's intimate, that's two hearts, you know, two hearts united and doing our best again,

**00:56:41**

*Tushnet:* doing our best to be obedient Catholics without being weird about it, without being kind of like scared of each other's bodies or scared of desire, but accepting that we're going to have to work out to some extent on our own, how we live. The--it's, umm--if you're heterosexual, or if you're in a heterosexual partnership and you're not married yet, but you're moving toward marriage, you know, there's a lot of wisdom and guidance, and priests may be terrible, but they may also be pretty good at helping you navigate kind of how do I learn to live in the vocation that I'm moving toward? How do I prepare myself for that? How do I kind of deal with it when I mess up? How do I grow into being a married person and we're discovering that same process has to happen if you are going to be in covenant friendship. It's just that you have a lot less outside help.

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*Tushnet:* We've been incredibly lucky to have had very good priests, very gentle and helpful and kind of creative confessors who see the value of what we're trying to do and are trying to have that same attitude of like, "how do we guide them to become the people that they will be if they live this vocation well?"

**00:58:14**

*Cieslik:* And I was curious along with that, where do you currently attend church in Washington, D.C.?

**00:58:21**

*Tushnet:* It's a mix, probably mostly at Sacred Heart, which is the church closest to me, and then sometimes also at the Cathedral of Saint Matthew's. I think I'm if I'm a parishioner anywhere, I'm a prishoner at Saint Matthew's, like if I'm registered anywhere.

**00:58:38**

*Cieslik:* And where were you receiving guidance, and what did this guidance look like of of leading and preparing you for this covenant friendship?

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*Tushnet:* So, to be honest, that's been, for me, a lot more informal. My friend has a spiritual director who's been really really good, and I've had very good experiences, I would say, especially at confession at Saint Matthew's, but mostly I would say for me, it's been just asking people, asking other people who have lived in celibate partnerships or covenant friendships, how they do it and then sort of talking to a priest who I think has pretty good instincts, you know, just kind of again, patchwork.

**00:59:29**

*Cieslik:* Out of curiosity, what is the name of the spiritual director that's been really informative and helpful in the process?

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*Tushnet:* Oh, I actually don't--I'm going to get his name wrong. I don't remember his name.

**00:59:40**

*Cieslik:* No worries. I was curious along with that you mentioned it was incredibly helpful to seek community and seek insight in individuals and and partnerships that were already involved in the covenant friendship process. How were you put in contact or how did you find contact with other covenant friendship individuals?

**01:00:03**

*Tushnet:* Yeah, some of it, you know, was through these networks that have been growing slowly for a long time, and then I will say two things really made a big difference. One, is the Side B group on Facebook, which is like it's like a private, closed group for people who are Christians with a "traditional" sexual ethic. I don't love this language<sup>2</sup>, but a place for LGBT or same-sex attracted people, and then out of that has grown things like I don't know if you know, the podcast Life on Side B], but they have done, I think, a lot of good work in outlying--on exactly the sort of the central question of what does your future look like? What would a good future potentially? And then also, Revoice, the conference. As far as I know, they haven't yet had any kind of workshops or panels or what not, I think, on covenant friendship or celibate partnership specifically, which I think, which I'm 90% sure I've complained to them about. But if you go there and get to know those people, you'll inevitably meet people who are living in that kind of relationship because it's A, I think it's I think it's a real path that God calls people to, and B, it's a path that a lot of people deeply long for and are really trying to make work.

**01:01:48**

*Cieslik:* Yes, and along those lines, I know that you have a really interesting understanding of

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<sup>2</sup> As an additional note offered by Tushnet on August 22, 2022, she wanted to clarify that when she said, "I don't love this language," she meant the phrase "traditional sexual ethic" rather than "LGBT or same-sex attraction."

your sexuality and your religious identity. Are you openly out to your parishes, at St. Matthew's?

**01:02:00**

*Tushnet:* Yes.

**01:02:01**

*Cieslik:* When did you come out, and what did that process look like?

**01:02:06**

*Tushnet:* You know, I didn't really--I'm the co-coordinator of the gay and lesbian ministry at Saint Matthew's [Always God's Children] so I mean I've always just sort of like been out. I don't--it's been a while since I had the sort of standard coming out of experience. If you write a book called Gay and Catholic, right, you end up talking a lot about your own situation, and so yeah, I've just sort of--you know, I'm rarely in church in a situation where I have to kind of like come out in that sense.

**01:02:45**

*Cieslik:* That makes sense, and, on that note, have you ever encountered homophobia from individuals in the community in being openly out in that way?

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*Tushnet:* At the actual parishes that I go to, yeah, I don't think so. Yeah, I mean, I've been incredibly lucky. Yeah, not really.

**01:03:12**

*Cieslik:* Glad to hear it, and I know that you're a speaker and a writer about these topics as well. When did you first start writing about your experiences and what prompted that?

**01:03:25**

*Tushnet:* I probably first starting writing about it on the blog, and it was because I was writing about everything and then I did, I know I did at least one article. I did an op-ed for the National Catholic Register pretty early on before I really knew what I was talking about in any way. You know, I think that I just sort of was writing about it because I thought I had something to say. And one thing I do say now to people, my sort like universal piece of advice is, "you're not ready to write about gay, Christian stuff when you think you are," and I'm not sure anyone yet to this day, has actually taken this advice, which makes sense since I also would not have taken it. But yeah, I just sort of started started yapping and it turns out that it's a weird enough thing to be that people will give you some attention and be like, "Oh, tell us more," and you don't realize that you in fact know nothing. [chuckles]

**01:04:27**

*Cieslik:* [Soft laughter] And I'm curious, along with that, what has been your response to the material you put out there, both your writing and your books, as well as your speaker roles?

**01:04:38**

*Tushnet:* A pretty wide range. I think a lot of people out there in the Catholic world are

extremely hungry for realistic, non-judgmental, which I try to be--I don't know that I'm great at that part--creative guidance for gay people, not just gay people ourselves but like every--my experience is across the wide swath of kind of Catholic education, people know that they don't have the tools that they need to help gay people who come to them, and they're really hungry for something that goes beyond, "I don't know. Try your best," you know. So there's been a lot of that. You know, and a lot of standard negative response type stuff that I try not to feel like--that always happens. I try not to focus too much on that.

**01:05:47**

*Tushnet:* Some well-intentioned and interesting and probably helpful criticism of which I would say, probably you know, like pointing out that some of the ways that I deploy covenant friendship is relatively ahistorical. The stuff that people are doing now doesn't look in some ways like what David and Jonathan were doing, and maybe those ways are important too, and I'm like, "yeah, that's fair. I think it's true. We are working towards a sort of amalgamation or a new new thing made up of pieces of old things." That's fair, but yeah, I mean. And then the thing that I said before of a lot of people just telling me their own stories and kind of where they went on their journey, whether that journey has led them out of the Church or whether they're you know, also orthodox Catholics and are trying to figure out what that means.

**01:06:56**

*Tushnet:* You know, "how can I be genuinely self-accepting as a gay person and genuinely obedient as a Catholic? What does that look like? How can I fight for justice in the church? What does that require? Would that require a change in Church teaching? Or is there a way to live and promote--promote's the wrong word--but like live and teach the Church's sexual ethics in a way that isn't harmful to gay people?" These are the questions that people are wrestling with and that they kind of bring to me, and I think that's been the biggest by far, like most wonderful thing about writing about this stuff is that you get to know people and get to know their stories and discover, as I'm sure you're just going through this project, like, how amazing that is, like what a gift it is to hear people's journeys in that way.

**01:07:53**

*Cieslik:* Yes, and I'm curious along along the lines of who you've heard back from and heard stories about, are they typically younger Catholics, middle-age, older? I'm curious who's responding to the content?

**01:08:05**

*Tushnet:* It's a real mix, everything from very young and just at the beginning of trying to work stuff out to, "I've been a priest for 40 years. I wish someone had said some of the stuff when I was, you know, first discerning my vocation," like it's really--it's a place where it's easy to do good work because there's so little work of any kind, so like, if you're if you're one of, like two or three voices out there, you're going to get to hear a very wide range of people's responses because they really need it.

**01:08:43**

*Cieslik:* Yes, and I'm curious, I know you mentioned fighting for justice, for the future of the

Catholic Church and also for the future of LGBTQ+ Catholics. What does that look like for you? What are you aiming for the future of the Church moving forward?

**01:08:58**

*Tushnet:* Yeah, I really think there's an enormous amount of work to be done, just in kind of rescuing our history and using that to envision the future. I'm working now with a group that's trying to put together resources for Catholic educators that would treat LGBT lives with creativity, hope, you know, deep faith and trust in the Church and like historical knowledge that will help people to envision a future for gay kids and I do think, like if we're able to get to a point where it's normal, for gay kids growing up in the Church to know someone who is gay, who is a practicing Catholic, who's trying to do the things, trying to be obedient like that would be a huge, astonishing cultural shift in itself. So working to make it safe for people to come out, doing, you know very basic suicide prevention stuff, all of that, I think, really serves kind of the needs of the next generation.

**01:10:24**

*Tushnet:* I'm sure there's other stuff, the stuff that I do is mostly about trying to help people envision, a future for themselves and to some extent also--well actually would say, a big chunk of what I do now--is really helping people who are still within the Church, still kind of like obedient Catholics, especially well-intentioned straight people, see the good in what people are doing when they live outside the Church. I think that the inability to recognize those goods does a lot of damage to everybody and trying to find ways to kind of see and honor the love and the caregiving and the self-respect that people are trying to accomplish when they turn away from the church or from the church's sexual ethic is actually a pretty big part of living as a good Catholic. I know that seems paradoxical, but I think it's kind of like you have to see the good in what people are doing. You have to, if you want to educate people's loves or if you want to be loving yourself, you have to be able to see that.

**01:11:43**

*Cieslik:* Yes, I think that's incredibly powerful and important. I appreciate you saying that, and along that line as well, one question in closing that I wanted bring full circle was: how do you see your religious and your LGBTQ+ identity as compatible, or do you see it as separate? So it was really curious how you would categorize it.

**01:12:05**

*Tushnet:* Oh yeah, now that's really good. I really think they work together on a pretty deep-level. Partly they're both, you know, forms of longing, the longing for God, the longing for love of another person. They really do intertwine in that way and each one reflects and kind of guides and shapes the how I understand the other. And they are also both really deeply related to my response to the physical world. Even when I was first becoming Catholic, one of the sort of touchstone moments for me was when I saw--I was in like a darkened room--and I saw the face of the woman that I had a crush on, kind of emerging into the light and was just struck really powerfully by like this is the beauty that God creates. You know this is what He does, and that's like that's still true.

**01:13:04**

*Tushnet:* You know the response of gratitude and astonishment at the beauty of the physical world is a response to God, the creator, and also, very specifically, you know, a response to women and a particular woman, and I think that there is also a degree of kind of--I'm trying to think of how to put this. I know. I'm sorry, I don't mean to take up an enormous amount of your time.

**01:13:33**

*Cieslik:* No, no, not. I really appreciate it.

**01:13:36**

*Tushnet:* I feel like there is something about--I'm not trying to say that it always has to be this way, but for me, given when and where I grew up, there's something about queerness as an experience that throws into question a lot of social norms and a lot of the kind of, hmm, feeling at home in this world, and both of those are also very much thrown into question by Christianity. There's a way in which I think, if you are trying to live as a Christian, that does set you crosswise, that's opposed to--opposed to is the wrong word, umm--it throws into question a lot of what the world values in the same way that queerness can. That again, I think it's very much like you're hearing in that very like, "yes, I came out in the 1990s," kind of attitude. But I do think there's something there, that there's an experience of simultaneously coming home and belonging in queer communities and also realizing that there was value in your experience of not being at home, in your experience of being on the margins or seeing the categories of this world and our society from the standpoint of someone who is not expecting to fully fit them. That, I think, is like useful for Christians.

**01:15:16**

*Cieslik:* Yes, your experience is incredibly powerful, and I really appreciate you sharing it. I did have one more question and no worries about the timestamp. This is wonderful and incredibly valuable for the project. I know that you grew up and were coming into your own understanding of religion in the 1990s. Did you ever encounter--I know you mentioned that socially and just outside in the world, in pop culture you had encountered a little bit about how Catholics view sex and theology of the body--did you ever encounter purity culture?

**01:15:51**

*Tushnet:* I wouldn't--I had to learn about all that kind of later from people who, from other people. I wouldn't [coughs]--excuse me. I did not, I think, have much contact with that myself.

**01:16:06**

*Cieslik:* Yes, wonderful, I really appreciate it. This has been immensely helpful and just in closing up the interview, I just wanted to confirm, you identify as catholic within the Roman Catholic Church?

**01:16:19**

*Tushnet:* Um-hmm. Yup.

**01:16:19**

*Cieslik:* Wonderful. For this project, we're thinking about "catholic." and in all of the facets of c/Catholic identity with religion, so I always like to clarify.

**01:16:27**

*Tushnet:* Yup, yup, yup.

**01:16:29**

*Cieslik:* In bringing the interview to a close, I just wanted to thank you so much for your time and help and for participating in this interview for Queer and Catholic: A CLGS Oral History Project. I'm going to conclude the interview. It's about 3:03 pm Eastern Standard Time. I really appreciate your help and support of this project. Thank you so much.

**01:16:48**

*Tushnet:* Oh, thank you. I'll be very excited to see where this goes.

**01:16:52**

*Cieslik:* This is wonderful. Here I'll go ahead and pause the recording.