

God and Desire

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Presentation for the 2007 *Quest** Conference,
Sheffield (England), 21 July 2007

There's a lovely Italian word to which I'd like to introduce you so as to lead in to this presentation. The word is "Rovesciamento" and it means something rather like "turning everything upside down". It goes quite well towards describing what happens at the end of the first act of many two act operas from the early nineteenth century. Typically what has gone on during the first act is that the characters have come together, fallen in love, plotted, schemed, planned bold new enterprises, whatever. But at the end of the first act there comes a moment when the characters, and all their schemes and machinations, are completely caught by surprise as it is suddenly revealed that the nice young man who appears to be a steady but boring suitor to the leading lady, who has her eyes on an elder, richer man, who has his eyes on the governorship of some improbable chunk of the globe, but needs the money of someone else's aunt to buy the post,...this nice but boring young man is in fact the Czar of all the Russias, or maybe, Mary Queen of Scots in drag, or just conceivably, a wicked Eastern Potentate who is in fact the illegitimate child of the lady he is apparently wooing.

At the moment of revelation in the Opera, there is an outbreak of musical shock, where everybody gathers and sings, usually quietly and with a stunned quality, words like "Ah, qual colpo inaspettato!" – "What an unexpected blow!" – which it is, of course, since the silly dears haven't read their programme notes. After this moment of stupefaction there is then an increasingly mad and frenetic bit of singing as everyone falls out of shock, and begins to assess their new-found situation, which is entirely different from what they had imagined up until now. So each sings separately, and yet all together and with increasing hysteria words to the effect of "what the f...do I do now?" – delicacy requires that that bit of the libretto remain in the original French. This is of course the moment which the composer has been looking forward to. Often the best and most striking bit of music in the opera is this aggravated scene of three, or seven, or eleven characters, and along with them the chorus, seriously losing the plot and storming off in different stages of fury, rapture,

jealousy, despair and scheming, their differing feelings all being expressed simultaneously and yet all kept in harmony and rhythm by the composer.

This is what I mean by talking about “rovesciamento”. What the characters know, their ways of understanding each other, and all of their forms of interaction are suddenly turned inside out by the emergence in their midst of a sort of revelation: that someone who they had considered as part of their story in a certain way was in fact not part of their story in the way they had thought of at all, but was part of quite a different story, which they had not taken into account. In fact, the whole of the story of each one of them, their longings, intentions, relationships, schemes and plans, all of this, has now been undermined from within by someone who they took to be simply another agent within their own story, but who now appears as the protagonist of a different story, a story being driven by power lines quite other than they had imagined, one in which each of them is assigned a much more peripheral role than he or she had bargained for. In the light of this “turning upside down”, the stars of some characters will unexpectedly be in the ascendant, and others who seemed to be powerful will find themselves very much on the wane.

In an Opera, of course, the second act will be the story of how the characters learn to cope with this new reality, jostle together in a new set of relationships with each other, and eventually, if it’s a comedy, the leading lady will be led to the altar of marriage while all praise her virtue, and if it’s a tragedy, she’ll be led to the block or the pyre to be sacrificed, while all proclaim her heroism and innocence. Same difference, really, and you don’t need to be an old school feminist to wonder whether it isn’t the same altar at the end of both versions.

However, I’m going to ask you to suspend your need for the second act for the moment, and stick with the moment of “rovesciamento”, the “turning everything upside down” at the end of the first act. Because I want to suggest that one of the reasons for the poverty of modern discourse about God, whether it be to deny God, à la Dawkins or Hitchens, or to affirm God, in the way that so many of our religious representatives do, is that all of these people seem to be talking about a character who is evident in Act I of the opera from the beginning, someone who is absolutely part of the deal-making, schemes, and story-telling of the group, or is claimed to have set the boundaries within which such storytelling makes sense.

What I want to suggest is that this is a complete misunderstanding, both on the part of the deniers and the affirmers, since the God to whom at

least Christian, and I respectfully suggest, Jewish, theology is beholden, this God is only able to be talked about at all as the “rovesciamento” gets under way, that is, from within the losing of bearings of everyone involved in the opera.

It is from here that I would like to begin to talk about God and desire, and if you will allow me, I’ll stick with my operatic analogy a bit longer. What happens in the opera when the moment of revelation occurs is that all the characters start to become aware that their previous stories, their patterns of desire, their schemes, their relationships were all a lie. They were all based on taking for granted that what appeared to be the case, was the case, that the apparent holders of power were the real holders of power, that the character dressed as the Grand Duke was the real Grand Duke, and not in fact a valet dressed up so as to test them all while the real Grand Duke came amongst them disguised as a chambermaid. But as the moment of revelation dawns, so it becomes clear that each one of the characters has taken for granted something that was in fact false, and has based and staked their life and their love, who they are, and who they are to become, on this fake reality.

The important thing about the revelation which turns everything upside down is not that someone who did not have power now suddenly has it – which would merely be a change within the story, a dramatic one, and a shocking one no doubt, but not a complete turning of everything upside down. The important thing is that those undergoing the “rovesciamento” are becoming aware that someone who they “placed” in a certain way, as relatively peripheral to their plans and schemes, has *all along* been someone quite else, and that therefore it’s not merely a matter of their adjusting themselves to a new reality whereby someone who wasn’t important has become important, rather as newspaper owners switch sides when candidates they didn’t really like start to look unbeatable in the polls. Rather it’s a question of becoming aware that up till now they had been living a lie *all along* and that the only possible reactions to the revelation that has thrown their world are: on the one hand to storm off, determined to hold fast to the unreality of pretending that it hasn’t happened; or, on the other hand, gradually to allow the whole pattern of desire which ran them to be brought into question by the revelation. This will mean their learning to recognise their own vulnerability to the whims and intentions of the emerging protagonist, including their vulnerability to his memory of their previous contempt for him, when they thought he was the chambermaid, and their beginning to allow themselves to be reconciled to the new way in which reality is showing itself to be.

Now bizarre though it may seem, what I hope I have shown you here is an understanding of the relationship between God and creation such that the doctrine which we call “original sin” occupies its proper place within the scheme of Christian theology. The Christian revelation supposes that we start not at the beginning, or the end, of the opera, but in the middle. It presupposes that as the beginnings of the “rovesciamento”, the turning of everything upside down, comes among us, so we start to be able to look back and see that our stories up until now, the whole pattern of our desires, and how we relate to each other, has been based on a lie, and that all along someone who seemed to be a particular bit player in our drama was in fact the real protagonist coming into the midst of the story and beginning to tell it from an entirely different perspective. So what we call “original sin” is not a mere fact about us, tediously installed into the beginning of Act I of the opera, as part of the normal ordered setting within which we think we are acting. The doctrine of “original sin” points always towards a backwards glance, made available as the “rovesciamento” gets under way, a backwards glance provoked in us as we move out of what we thought of as normal into a new story, with a new protagonist. It’s the “Oh, so that’s what I was caught up in!” as we become aware of beginning to be carried off somewhere else.

Well, I’ve started here, not because I really wanted to talk to you about Original Sin (though no Catholic discussion about God and Desire can bypass the issue), but because it is my claim that the doctrine of Original Sin is an important piece of the grammar of how we talk about God. It is, or should be, a permanent reminder that we humans do not come to talk about God from a stable, fixed, starting place which we can dominate by our discourse. On the contrary. If God is true, then the starting place for our discourse is always as those in the midst of undergoing something. We always start as those who, having thought of ourselves (depending on our self-importance) as minor or major protagonists, in a narrative which we thought we understood, are always having that narrative blown apart by the emergence of another narrative in which someone else is protagonist, and we are peripheral in a way which turns out to be surprisingly reassuring. Or, in other words, the kind of “we” that has brought each one of us into having the unsteady and instable thing we call a “self”, an “I”, over time, *that* “we” is being radically restructured, and each of us is finding ourselves losing a certain sort of self so as to be given a quite different one in relationship to quite a different sort of protagonist.

I hope it will not come as too much of a surprise if I say that what I am trying to do here is to highlight the difference between “a god” and “God”. And I’m trying to do so in a way which makes clear that the

difference is not to do with the size and importance of the divinity in question. Rather the difference is between something which is part of the universe we assumed we were in, in Act I, on the one hand; and on the other hand, an emerging protagonist who is provoking the “rovesciamento” we are undergoing, and in the light of which Act II will look entirely different from Act I. So, for ease of description, “a god” is always a character in Act I, while God is in principle not a character in any Act at all. God is, from the standpoint of all of us involved in Act I, the entirely unexpected and random-seeming power behind the “rovesciamento” which led to the possibility of there being an Act II. An Act II which is an entirely different story from what could be imagined from within the confines of the characters’ view of what might happen starting where they are in Act I.

What I’m trying to do here is to bring out something odd about the difference between “a god” and “God”, since it is too easy, in discussions of “the advent of Hebrew monotheism” to find ourselves talking about different sorts of “it” – on the one hand gods, which are “its”, objects, projections of ours, or of our social groupings, slalom poles within our negotiation of the piste which is our universe; and on the other hand, “God” which is a much bigger and more definitive sort of “it”. One which sets everything up, gives rules to go by, and cannot be negotiated round. Well, the trouble here is that both the little “its” and the big “it” share in the same essential quality of “itness” – that is to say, they are objects which are, to some degree or other, within our ken.

However, the whole point of the advent of Hebrew monotheism is that it doesn’t fit into this picture at all: in fact it completely reverses it. What the advent of Hebrew monotheism looked like could, and can, only be detected in the radical reversal of desire which it produces. It is not that a new “It” begins to open up *before* our gaze, a gaze which has been brought into being by the relationships which have taught us who we are and shown us what we can see and desire. Instead, “I Am bringing everything to be” (Ex 3,14) starts to emerge as it were from *behind* our capacity for gaze, behind everything that is, by producing profound alterations of the patterns of desire which enable us to be “selves” at all, such that we find ourselves ceasing to be self-grasping “I”s who share in the creation of “its” by rivalry, defence, paranoia and projection.

So what it feels like to us to undergo “I Am bringing everything to be” is much more like a loss of all those sacred projections and “its” on whom we could depend and over which we could fight. And in their place, there is nothing at all in our gaze, no god at all. This is because the new pattern of desire which is calling us into being is without ambivalence, conflict,

scarcity or danger and so the new “I”s, the new “selves” which will be the embodied symptoms of this new pattern of desire, rest peacefully upon their own given-ness by another. It is not *what* we see, but our capacity for gaze itself that is undergoing transformation as we find ourselves being given an equality of heart so that we see as we are seen, we know as we are known (1 Cor 13,12; Gal 4,9), without distortion, because “I AM” is enlivening us into being.

Please just think of the difference between referring to God as “He” or “She” on the one hand – an object *about whom* we can talk, and referring to “I Am who causes all things to be”. The ancient Hebrew custom of not pronouncing the Name with anything like ease seems to me to be very sane: it is a protection against us instrumentalizing a protagonism which cannot be instrumentalized, for indeed we are part of the instrument, and something quite outside our range of protagonisms is at work. To use the familiar analogy (Isaiah 29,16): were a clay pot capable of being conscious, it might, with very great difficulty start to understand itself well enough to be able to posit something about its maker from its own shapeliness, beauty, contours etc. However it could not possibly grasp the creative intellect, skill, and power of the one who brought it into being since there is nothing of it that is not the symptom of that skill and power, and symptoms are always external to their causes. An eye can see everything before it, but it has no direct access to the structure of optical nerves behind it which enables it to see, or to the pattern of relationships which has informed its dwelling on this or that object as of value or importance

What I’m attempting to say is that “I AM” happens at, within, amongst us, and what that happening looks like is the emergence of a protagonism which is not from anywhere at all, so there’s no handle we can get on it to fit it into our scheme of things. “I AM” is not in any way part of the stories which we have been telling ourselves during Act I, part of the push and pull of power, success and failure. Rather it subtly relativizes all those things, and gradually unties us from being involved with them as we were before. In other words, it enables us to detect our own idolatry and start to relate to each other without idols.

I stress this, with all the awkwardness of language which comes with such things, because unless we undergo this very strange decentring, this “being born again from above” which Jesus described to Nicodemus, and was shocked when Nicodemus, a Master in Israel, did not know about it (John 3,3.10), then it is not God we are talking about. Because if it is God, then we are talking about an entirely new sort of protagonism which is showing us how completely contingent, dependent and peripheral we

are to what is being brought into being. And the more we realise this, rather than it diminishing us, the more we find ourselves and others, and everything that is, of worth.

Now you may have noticed that I said earlier that God is in principle not a character in any Act at all, but is the power behind the “turning upside down of everything”, and I hope that little bells might have gone off in your head causing you to think: “But what about Jesus? Surely Jesus was God and is a character emerging in Act I even if it is only to provoke the “turning upside down” which makes an Act 2 conceivable? Someone has to be the downtrodden valet in Act I and then be revealed as the Czar of all the Russias as the “rovesciamento” gets under way”. And I want to say: Yes that’s right, though curiously what Jesus was about was God coming into the world so as to give himself a Name by which we might know him. So Jesus, qua human is a character in Act I, a teacher and wonderworker condemned to a shameful death as a blasphemous and seditious wrongdoer. However he himself is the making present of the “rovesciamento” in our midst, the making available of the real Name and Presence of who God has been all along, and he is entirely consumed in that. So he is not a character in Act II at all, but has become the condition of possibility of *our* being characters in Act II. He has become the Name which God gave himself, the idea being that *we* become his person, his body, over time (John 16,23-28).

Now I want to make something very clear here, because it has been possible to talk about the “rovesciamento” as though it were a bad trick played by God on the Hebrew people – as though they are the Act I, and we Christians are the infinitely superior Act II. However, that is to miss the point completely: Act I is the human condition as we know it, and it is Hebrew monotheism that is the beginning of the “rovesciamento” of which we understand the full shape finally to have emerged when Jesus was given the Name that is above all other names, the same name, incidentally, which the High Priest wore on his tiara for the Atonement Ritual. The “rovesciamento”, which is sometimes referred to as the “inbreaking of the Kingdom of God” has always been a reality, palpitating just outside the human condition and, as it were, gathering shape so as to break in. Just so was the Holy of Holies in the Temple taken to be a place “outside creation” from which the Holy One might break out into the midst of Created matter.

In other words, the “turning upside down” began when the prophets and priests first began to suspect that the One speaking to them was not just another god, but was “the real thing” quite outside any of the existing categories, and that therefore nothing would ever be the same again, a

complete turn around was on the way. Naturally enough this “turning upside down” took time to emerge. It is rather as if each of the prophets were different tectonic faults, sensitive to the gathering power of “I Am” as “I Am” gradually began to make a volcanic eruption in the midst of a landscape, which would thereafter be totally altered.

And of course, each of the prophets gathered glimpses of the turnaround that was to come, which is why they associated its coming with wrath, and why so many of their prophecies do point towards the in-breaking of God as to do with wrath. It is why such care was needed in approaching the Presence in the Temple, since the potential for turning everything around was so threatening. And it was why the sprinkling of the faithful with the blood of the lamb in the Atonement rite, symbolically performed by the High Priest who “was” the Holy One of God, and bore his Name, was taken to be a covering, protecting the worshippers from Wrath.

In other words, it was as though throughout Act I there were constant, barely underground, rumblings of the great “rovesciamento” sometimes bursting through, and giving a sense of the shape of what was eventually to burst forth and turn everything round. I hope then that you can see something of the extraordinary quality of the explosion that is going on in the life and death of Jesus, and in that self-effacing gift being made available to the apostolic witnesses as the Name by which the artist formerly known as “YHWH” wants to be known among humans. The gift includes the Divine Presence, formerly known by the prophets and the people of Israel, glimpsed on a multi-wheeled chariot, having a face which shines and a presence which quickens, now being made available, ordinarily, to a whole people who have been ordained to the high priesthood, in and through the signs of self-giving to us which are the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

Now I want to point out something rather special about the “rovesciamento”. As people began to get a sense of it – they did indeed become aware that it would lead to a radical turning upside down of everything, and this of course is normally understood vengefully. Any of the actors in Act I of the Opera, as they begin to become aware of the fact that the apparent chambermaid, who they have been treating as a mere vassal, is in fact a heavily disguised Catherine the Great, knows that the normal thing that will happen when Catherine gets out of her wench’s weeds is mass revenge: – all the slights will be repaid a hundredfold. In other words, *because* they think of the turning upside down being part of a vengeful act by a formerly weak, and now powerful player, so they will take measures to protect themselves from that. Thus it is no surprise that any announcement by the prophets of the breaking in of “I AM” should

have assumed that the mode by which “I AM” would break in would be as one much more powerful than the powerful of the earth, but still on the same level as them in terms of acting in the same sort of way.

What was clearly inconceivable until after it had happened, and is still scarcely conceivable now, is that the turning upside down should not have been produced by a former victim now turned powerful avenger, but that the real, complete and utterly different level of power of the one breaking in should be shown not by a former victim now turned powerful, but by a contemporary victim kept alive as slaughtered victim so as to enable those who perceive him as such to be forgiven. That is, to be let go from their Act I roles so as to recover the chance of a quite new role in Act II.

To put this another way: the prophets were entirely right to see that the breaking in of YHWH would produce a total turning upside down of everything. The victim would indeed be King. It was the shape of the kingliness which was a complete surprise. What had previously been impossible to imagine was that something far more powerful than a mere act of revenge was taking place. Instead the form of strength which was revealed as incomparably stronger than anything known to any of the actors was that of an apparent weakness so strong that it did not need to show its strength, but by inhabiting weakness, shame, and death gently and deliberately, it pulled the plug on any story in which the story line was run by revenge, tit-for-tat, or ambition for power. All of those were revealed as futile. And the victim started, exactly as forgiving victim who refuses to hold onto any sense of victimhood, to become King of an entirely new story.

Thus does the “rovesciamento” take the form of inaugurating a quite new and unexpected Act II. Not one which is a simple reversal of Act I, but one where a quite new dividing line has started to emerge. One where there is an astoundingly strong presence, held weakly in being and which is the power line of the new story, inviting people into losing their old selves by undergoing being forgiven, totally deconstructed and re-structured, by the one who appeared to be a shameful dead transgressor and turns out to be I AM’s named criterion for himself. “You want to know what YHWH looks like, here, like this executed criminal who occupied the place of pain and shame and death so that you no longer need fear it, and no longer fearing it, need no longer put anyone else there ever again, but might yourselves start to live as if death were not”.

There is, of course, faced with the emergence of this destructuring protagonism, also the presence of an increasingly futile and pointless

wrath going nowhere at all since unable to escape from the meaninglessness of a story whose only powerline is identity grasped over against the other, which is to say, revenge. But the wrath is not the wrath of the protagonist, it is the wrath produced by those bumping up against the protagonist and yet not accepting that the storyline of Act I has been irremediably and absolutely brought to an end.

Now what I want to stress is that we are living in a world in which this strange form of presence, that of the artist formerly known as YHWH who has come amongst us giving himself the name IHS, this strange presence made alive to us through signs which constitute what we call the Church, this presence is just there, just there as stronger than anything else which can be imagined, such that the whole world is, as it were apparently unchanged, but in fact with its axis completely reversed¹. And the Presence, the Chariot Throne, the Lord seated on the Mercy Seat, which is the Crucified One shining out as live communication from our Altars, is Presence as One forgiving, which means untying people from the way of being involved in futility which was ours before, and instead finding ourselves re-programmed from within because we are daring to allow ourselves to be looked at with love by the One who is the victim of all of our stories.

As I understand it, the extraordinary and unique thing about being a Catholic is just this finding ourselves, through no merit at all of our own, being sucked through a veil which allows us to see and participate in the beginnings of an Act II that is already well under way, and which shows itself to us as being what Act I was really all about all along, but while we were involved in it, we were too frightened ever to really get what it was about.

And of course, what this means is that we find ourselves having, as it were, our inner workings, the way our patterns of desire were structured, being sucked out of us, often somewhat painfully, so that they can be turned around and given to us anew. The quiet, gentle, permanently forgiving regard of one who likes us is just there, and this is deeply disconcerting as we find that so much of us is formed by the need to run away from just such a person. We would love to be given hope without letting go of our security. However, in fact our holding on to security so dims our imagination and darkens what we can long for, that we can only hope as we let go of our security, because hope is the habit formed in us when another habitually inducts us into daring to want more because trusting that we will get it. We would love to be able to be loved without

¹ It is this that we celebrate on the Feast of the Ascension.

letting go of our resentment, but in fact our holding on to what has been done to us, to “whatever I am, I’m not like that”, to comparison and rivalry so as at least to “be someone”, this makes it impossible for another to speak us into being, to join us in a journey of delight becoming something much more than we could dare to imagine.

My guess is that, as gay and lesbian Catholics, we may have found it particularly confusing to work out which bits of our lives are the remnants of Act I, still biting at us even though we know they are futile and going nowhere², and which bits of our lives are the being summoned, nudged, called, gazed, into being by the Presence, empowered for Act II. One of the reasons for this is that part of the Act I of all of us has been Church authority of one sort or other making it quite clear that being gay or lesbian belongs to the mirage of false meaning proper to Act I, and that any of our desire that is gay or lesbian will be left behind as we find ourselves sucked through the veil into taking part in Act II. This was an Act I in which Church authority insisted that it was the gateway to Act II, it was itself part of the fruit of the “rovesciamento” which led to there being any Act II at all, and it was giving us clear lines to discern what it was like to be in Act I, going futilely nowhere, and what it was like getting sucked into Act II, being quickened into real existence. And, very properly, we treated this with respect.

Part of the problem has been that, not for the first time, it is beginning to look very much as though Church authority has been too quick to consider itself the fruit of the “rovesciamento” and too slow to consider that elements of itself might also be part of Act I, and in the process of undergoing the “turning everything upside down” which the inbreaking Presence provokes, such that those whom it considered sinners were in fact guiltless (Matthew 12,7), and people it considered morally dangerous defects were in fact sisters and brothers, as capable of light and of darkness as everyone else. This is, after all, the way the turning upside down has been working since the breath of the crucified criminal was revealed to be the Spirit of God (John 19,30; Mark 15,37; Matthew 27,50; Luke 23,46).

So the confusion has been: how do we know? How can we know? How do we know if the possibility of our being involved in Act II depends on us being *forgiven for being* gay or lesbian, meaning that in the story that is opening up we will not be gay and lesbian, our pattern of desire will work in quite a different way, we will have become human in spite of being gay? Or on the other hand is it true that the “rovesciamento” is

² The traditional name for these remnants of Act I going nowhere is “concupiscentia”.

beginning to make clear that it is not our repenting of being gay or lesbian that is the sign of our finding ourselves in Act II? Is it not rather the fact of our becoming able to forgive those who have hated us without cause, those who have blamed us and diminished us which is that sign, the sign of our being sucked through the veil? And will we therefore be characters in Act II as humans, whose story of having had the whole structure of our desire turned round has a pleasingly gay or a lesbian shape to it, rather than that happening in spite of our being gay and lesbian people?

The only answer I know to this, and it is the answer urgently suggested in the first epistle of John, is to look for the testimony of the Spirit, and this is what I want to ask you, Quest members, here, to consider. We have amongst us an extraordinary range of years, of stories, of talent. What is the testimony of the Spirit? What sort of protagonism has it suggested into being in our midst? Has the Spirit which is not one of timidity, but enables us to receive ourselves in that gentle power of self-control which enables us to be brave, has the Spirit had to put to death our being gay or lesbian in order to emerge, or has it given us back being gay or lesbian in a far richer way than we could have known as part of what we were invited into being so as to accomplish?

Has the Spirit confirmed in us that, unlike in our straight sisters and brothers, our sexual desire is not merely disordered, but is quite simply a dead end. Not simply something in need of a process of humanization so that it can be part of a relationship of bodily presence to another tending to build the partner up, enrich and delight them as well as care for them, tend to them, and be stretched into age and death alongside them. But instead something that must simply not be allowed to be associated with any human other at all, not as a matter of a free choice, but as a matter of an intrinsic obligation? Or has it been through such intimations, disordered, and insufficiently humanized as they may have been, of a process of bodily involvement with another that we have found ourselves being sucked into being given a self we did not know, but rejoice to see as something we are becoming, something holy?

And for me, perhaps the most important of all, and one which I find it very difficult to answer in my own case: has the Spirit prodded us, nudged us, into imagining new things to do, into longing for new projects to create, into desiring much much more than we desired, into seeing more good in our enemies and being more sensitive to needs which we might satisfy as we have come to accept ourselves as Gay and Lesbian? Or when we were reticent about accepting ourselves as Gay or Lesbian, thinking that that was only part of Act I, was there a livelier, more quickening, deeper longing, more attuned to others, more available for

others, such that we can begin to glimpse that accepting ourselves as Gay and Lesbian has been an act of self-indulgence, a darkening of our minds, a diminishment of our horizons, a muddled retreat into Act I by people who might otherwise have been stars shining in the firmament of Act II?

This is the question which I would ask us to consider, through considering and sharing stories, allowing each other to be penitent where we find ourselves undergoing being forgiven, and peacefully joyful where we have been given joy and find ourselves flourishing. What are the signs of the New Creation in our midst? What is coming into being through us which is new, and solid, and for others? What is the testimony of the Spirit? How do we test the spirits? Because it is this testimony that is going to carry us through this strange, confusing stage in the history of the Church. A stage where it is genuinely not easy to tell whether, in matters related to being gay or lesbian, Church authority has been acting as a properly stern emanation of an Act II which is indeed a real upheaval of desire. Or whether we aren't finding ourselves being given places and names of surprising honour (cf. Isaiah 56) in the Act II which Jesus inaugurated, while some parts, at least, of Church authority, thinking themselves the owners of Act II, are refusing to let go of something which was in fact an element of the cruelty and futility of Act I, and are vainly struggling against the "rovesciamento" which is breaking in amongst us all?

Please do not answer on both sides of the paper at once.

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* *Quest* is a British group for lesbian, gay and bisexual Catholics.