

Navigating uncharted waters: the gift of faith and growing up LGBT

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(Please note that in this transcription, '...' indicates a pause, not a cut or an edit)

The first point which I'd like to make, in a sense, is a big sigh of relief. And the sigh of relief is as follows: if faith were an ideology, and gay were a pathology, how easy this conference would be! Because if faith were an ideology, it would merely say "nyet" to us, and if being gay were a pathology, then we would merely go "oh poor little me"; and the matter would be over. Unfortunately for people who try to present things in the way that makes faith into an ideology, and being LGBT into a pathology, this world has collapsed. The world in which faith is an ideology, and 'LGBT' is a pathology, has collapsed. Our ability to have survived into what might pass as adulthood in some of our cases, seems to have borne witness to this. We're no longer run by the world in which faith is an ideology, and being LGBT is a pathology. But getting out of some of the tracks of thinking, to which many of us have got used, which did rather regard it as though we were perpetually stuck between those two, has taken time.

So what I want us to do today is to start in the morning by looking forward, and looking back, a little bit. This is, remember, with a view to being able to think more creatively this afternoon. So I'm not asking you to look back for reasons of nostalgia – though that can be important – but it's because a healthy looking back is what empowers a looking forward. This is one of the things which is very important for us. We are all autobiographical animals – we tell stories. And our stories are not based on fixed memories from the past, read towards us; all our stories are told from where we are now, looking backwards. And what I think inspires us

to be able to think about these stories, is the gift of hope. And I want to make – this is my second point: the difference between hope and optimism. Often the two are confused. Optimism is, if you like, a strategic matter: I try and examine what the forces in play are, in the society in which I live, or in the church, or whatever, and I ask myself, ‘am I optimistic or am I pessimistic?’. But this proposes that, or this imagines that, one is in a battle with something, on one’s own level, and one is optimistic or pessimistic depending on who gets elected pope, what the bishop is like, etc etc – things like this. Hope is something entirely different. Hope is a gift, given us by Someone Else, who is pulling us out of where we are, into something bigger. Hope is actually compatible with a great deal of non-optimism, with quite a sanguine assessment of the reality of our situation. But hope is a theological virtue, a gift – we’re going to be looking at how faith is a gift in just a second – it presupposes Someone Else, to wit, God, pulling us out of a situation, and opening us up into something bigger. It’s that that I want to focus on, because it’s in the degree to which we are able to imagine someone else doing that for us, that we are able to retell our stories, in more open, more critical, more relaxed ways, in such a way that they will open our trajectories out to open and more creative futures. Does that make sense? [pause] Good.

What I’d like to start with is to think, if you like, of some of our autobiographical details; and I’m going to mention some painful things here, remembering that we’re talking about areas which have been difficult for many of us. Words like love, and shame, and hell. Just think about the places words like those have played in certain parts of our life. Think of, maybe, the first time you fell in love. I remember the first time I fell in love: I was nine. He was beautiful; astounding, astoundingly beautiful – I’m not sure that I’ve had such an experience of falling in love as I had at the age of nine; and of course at the age of nine you don’t have the words, you don’t know what to compare things with. You’ve actually got very little sense of what sex is all about – reasonably enough – most of us are pre-pubertal when we’re nine. But what comes along with falling in love: you not only find yourself falling in love, you find yourself knowing how wonderful and beautiful someone is and how much you long to be with them, and if you could be with them forever,

would that not be the most glorious thing that God could give you? So you know that it's *good* – and yet at the same time there are suggestions in the air, from classmates or whatever, that this may be a bad thing. So along with love, shame and fear may be born as well. And how difficult it can be to disentangle these – how difficult it can be to disentangle first love from first disapproval of oneself. 'What would they do if they knew?', phrases like this: I presume I'm not the only person in this room who has been through things like this. Shame – and fear: this is the age, after all, when one has been given, maybe, the broad lines of Christian faith, so one knows about heaven and hell; and such little as one knows, and such little as one is able to interpret, suggests that this, although it is love, is somehow linked to the word hell. I think that one of things which our discussions in the public sphere, along with bishops, pastors, politicians – one of the things which very rarely gets raised, but we ought to remember, is that many of us have grown up with the fear of hell inside us. The fact that nowadays the church chooses not to try and talk about that in public, because it sounds silly, doesn't in fact mean – and I should say, this is not simply a Catholic thing, at all: I remember meeting a young man in Roscoe's in Chicago, a young African-American from a Pentecostalist background in St Louis, Missouri, and he'd actually come along to the AGLO¹ Mass in Chicago, quite why I don't know, but he told me that the reason he was alive was because someone had convinced him that there was a worse place in hell for suicides, than for gay people.

Now – and he is alive, thank heavens – part of the strength of our having had to work through these things is because that fear, that shame, has been there. And dare I say it, one of the reasons why no amount of political manoeuvring – or ecclesiastical manoeuvring – is going to make this issue go away is because people who have received the gift of faith and been able to work through such fears, are not frightened of *anything* any more. That's one of things that doesn't appear in the discussions. And I think that it's well worth while that we should remember that, and not allow ourselves to think that this is all at some sort of 'meta' or political or acceptable discourse level. Very often indeed, we are people who have dealt with – or are dealing with – the fear and the shame,

¹ Archdiocesan Gay and Lesbian Outreach.

utterly bound up with our love, in ways that we couldn't disentangle. So part of our experience of navigating uncharted waters, has been allowing someone to get through to us that he is loveable, trustable, and will take us into a bigger space than we were frightened of.

Scandal – in the technical sense – a *skandalon*, a stumbling-block – is when what we desire, and the obstacle to our desire, come together, and get married, as it were, within us. So our ability to love, and that which is forbidding us to love, become the same thing. It's one of the most terrifying things that can happen to us – of course, this is not purely an LGBT thing: any of us is capable of falling in love with our obstacle, of finding ourselves pursuing, remorselessly, windmills, and constantly failing to perceive that they are windmills. But it comes to us in a particularly difficult-to-unentangle form, which is the love, the 'thou must love' and the 'thou art forbidden to love' coming together, and locking themselves within us. And we all know the effects of trying to deal with that – the running around that we do, kind of skating over the surface of things, the various forms of anaesthesia which we are capable of self-medicating with, in order to get beyond dealing with that. These are ways in which uncharted lives require navigation.

It's in the midst of this, and particularly in relating to the world of scandal – that sense of the object of my love, and the prohibition to love, coming together – it's in the middle of this that the gift of faith is so important. And I'd just like to take a little time to remind you of, if you like, '101 Catholic theology' concerning the gift of faith: how it is different from an ideology of beliefs, which is very often how it's depicted. Very often when we talk about faith, we talk about it as though what is being required of us is some sort of, what I call a 'moonshot' – 'You must believe, you must fire off a rocket at the moon, whether it's there or not, and if you don't you'll go to hell'. This is the 'moonshot' picture of faith – it presupposes that one is a blob with a will, a desire, in here, and there is the moon, which is God, and one must somehow shoot off a rocket, saying 'I believe I believe, yes, yes, I believe', shut one's eyes very hard, cross my heart and hope to die. But it's amazing how this understanding of faith leaves us open to what's basically a form of emotional blackmail – because that's what it is, it *is* a form of emotional

blackmail. But this is not the traditional understanding of the gift of faith. The traditional understanding of the gift of faith *takes it for granted* that rather than us being ‘blobs’ who have to produce ‘arrows’, on the contrary, we are people who are built up by what is other than us over time, very slowly, and habitually. We are called into being by what is other than us, at the level of parents, society, friends, education, political structures, whatever. From our tenderest – from the very first time an adult sticks its tongue out at us after birth, when we imitate it without realising what we’re doing by sticking our tongue back out at it (as all current studies of mirror neurons show), actually the other is ‘inside’ us giving us our identity – the social other. Always: in other words, we’re more symptoms of what is surrounding us, than we are lonely little individuals fighting against it. This is something we can rest on – if you like, long before we talk about the gift of divine faith, it’s worth remembering that we are ‘swimming in a sea of certainty’. It seems a bizarre thing to say. But few of us this morning, even though we are in what is for most of us a strange building, one we haven’t been in before – few of us as we opened our hotel bedrooms checked, as we stepped out, to make sure that there was not a hole in the floor. Is this not right? Instead we checked and to our horror saw yet another copy of *USA Today* [laughter]. But the point is this: without even thinking about it, we’re aware of things that will not have changed in the night. We would think mad someone who was so utterly lacking the ability to rest on certainty that they had to check everything each time. Most of us, most of the time, have been brought into a space of relative certainty about most things. And that relative certainty *includes* the ability to be able to doubt and question! So that for instance, we are able to distinguish between being in a hotel like this, and being in a building site where we would be very sensible to check whether there was a floor on the other side of the door. In other words, we’re able to doubt. But the reason we’re able to doubt is because of the huge seedbed of certainty as to what is normally there. Right? The huge seedbed of certainty is prior to, and makes possible, the capacity to question and to doubt. That’s absolutely vital.

Now what the church teaches us about the gift of faith is that *in addition* to all of this, and working *in exactly the same way* – in other words, through us little symptoms of the extraordinary certainty which is human

culture – in addition to that, the one who made all that, wants to get through to us that he is utterly trustworthy, and without ambivalence. Because, yes, the social other which surrounds us and brings us into being – and here I’m talking in purely anthropological terms – is safe, but it’s also got its bits of danger. It’s also risky. Things can go wrong. What is amazing is how much of the time they do not go wrong. And, as part of our growing up, we do get mixed messages, so that we find ourselves locked into and against ourselves, in scandal at ourselves. What the gift of faith is, is someone trying to get through to us, that we can trust them. The emotion responding – if you like, if we’re talking about emotion here – the emotion corresponding to the gift of faith is not stress, as in the moonshot, but relaxation. The ability to be able to relax in the presence of someone who is holding everything. We know this perfectly well when we’re dealing with interpersonal relations, don’t we: if you know that someone is your friend, and is not out to get you, you don’t need to put up any masks in their presence. You relax. You’re able to be vulnerable and weak, when you know that someone is not out for you. Well, that is the fruit of the gift of faith. And what we are taught by the church is not that we must believe in something, but rather that God, realising how susceptible we are, came into our midst so as to try and get across to us that we *can* believe. You all know the phrases in St John’s Gospel: “I came that you might have faith”; “I write these things so that you may believe”; “believe in God, believe also in me”. This is not a discussion of a ‘screen out there’: this is someone trying to come through to us and saying, ‘come on – you can make it, you know. It’s going to be OK. Do dare to get up on your two legs rather than hobbling around on all fours. You are going to be able to walk; I know it doesn’t look like it now, but it is going to be possible. Look at me – see if – *that’s* it...’ And the little baby starts to walk across the floor. But the presupposition behind the Catholic understanding of faith is not, ‘this is a demand that you make a moonshot for the unprovable’, but on the contrary, that someone has come into our midst in order to try and make it possible for us to do something. To believe; to overcome our susceptibility, our scandal.

So when we talk about ‘what Jesus did for us’, one of things he was doing by going to his death, and allowing himself to be seen on the third

day, one of things he did was to create for us the possibility of believing in one who is not run by death, who is not run by scandal, who is not run by shame, who is not run by disgrace, and therefore who makes all of those realities non-toxic for us. The whole purpose of being able to accompany Jesus to Jerusalem, as it were, to be able to live through Holy Week, is so that we can see – what for me is the equivalent of Evel Knievel going in a motorcycle across the Grand Canyon. It can't be done – until you see it done. And then once it's done, it gets gradually easier and easier, and the record keeps on being broken more and more easily, as we learn how to imitate, because we believe it can be done. We forget this – that we are being given the gift of faith, not as a demand to be stressed, but because someone wants us to be able to cope with all those dark places, without being run by them.

Now, let's go back to scandal, because this is my – how are we doing for time incidentally? Can I go for ten minutes more? Let's go back to scandal, because scandal for us is one of the places, or one of the ways of describing what we have been working through. Faith was created, by Jesus, in the midst of the apostolic group, a group of humans. What he did, he did so as they could believe and bear witness to it so that *we* could believe. So in fact the gift of faith, which comes from God, is transmitted to us horizontally. This is the life of the church. And yet, as you know, in the life of the church, we are at least as capable of being witnesses to faith, as scandalisers of faith. We're at least as capable of passing on God's love for us so that we can relax, as we are of tying each other up in knots so as to try and force other people to behave as we think they should behave. In other words, there is built into the way in which we receive faith, the possibility of scandal. It's one of the things which our Lord talked about most seriously – about how wrong it is to scandalise people. And one of the things he did of course as he taught, was to give really rather a lot of references to people for how they should avoid being scandalised. This is one of the things that makes life difficult – let's remember this makes life really difficult for bishops, teachers of the faith, for anybody, is the fact that always they will come back to someone standing in our midst and saying things like, "How well you put aside the commandment of God in order to hold onto your tradition". It's awfully difficult for anybody not to come away from a phrase like that,

trembling. How do we distinguish between the commandment of God, and what is our tradition? One of the things which we have all been working through – and we know that, in working through it, we are being obedient to the one who first threw us that curveball, because it is that curveball that is the word of God. “They sit on the *cathedra* of Moses: do what they say, but not what they do”. How awful for any authority structure to have to survive in a body of people whose principal source of truth makes the distinction between what is said, and imitation – given that we all know that imitation is a far, far stronger way of growing than merely listening to words. And in fact we will only hear the words, according as we imitate. And then of course we know that there is no *cathedra* of Moses for us, because as a few verses later he goes on to say, “you have only one rabbi, you have only one master, the Christ”. These are some of the ways the one who gets through to us, enables us to relativise our scandal. It is because he inhabits a much, much bigger space, so that he’s not immediately locked into the sorts of ‘tautness’ that we get into, when we think we must fight against this authority or that authority. ‘No! You can allow yourselves to lose, because you’re in a bigger space; you’re not in a zero-sum game. You’re in a space in which you’re floating free – the one who is holding you in being gives you the time to work through being scandalised. You don’t have to win, because someone else has already won’. The truth is already beginning to become available. The life of faith in that sense is a learning how to relax better, rather than a learning how to win battles.

Let’s think of what that might mean for us. Part of our growing up might have been to link the various forms of how we were scandalised especially with LGBT issues. Now I think back to some of my own moments of scandal – and I think this is going to vary enormously from generation to generation – but in fact, to what extent were the shame, the fear, not perfectly normal parts of adolescence, given a particular touch by the historical moment at which we were at the time that I was nine, or that you were nine, or whatever age these things started to come: such that in fact I might have much more in common with my own contemporaries for whom the gay issue was not an important issue, in terms of how we navigated what it might mean to grow up in that world. How much of the shame was in fact to do with matters LGBT, and how

much of it to do, at least in my case, with the knowledge that I was dropping out of my father's world (my father being a Conservative politician)? And the sense of loss and feeling that I would never be able to fit in and aspire to any of the things which he did, which might be typical of other people from political families, rather than anything to do with anything gay? How much of the sort of fear might have gone along with the realisation of a certain generation in my country, being aware that it was never going to be as privileged as the generation before it, which I would have had in common with other adolescents of my cohort. In other words, things that are not in fact to do with matters LGBT at all, but all of which were coloured pink, as it were, by the fact that my perfectly healthy affections were headed towards a male classmate aged nine. Relativising, beginning to see that what seemed like 'the issue' might not have been a particular way in which scandal, and who I was, and who I was becoming, 'tightened things together', when the gift of faith allows us to relativise them out. Just as tightening around the gift of faith, making church into ideology and power structure, rather than enabling us to imagine ourselves as all people on the same level, to whom someone is desperate to get through, to show us that we live in a much, much bigger, healthier place, and would we *please* dare trust him to carry us over, and through, the shame, the fear, the scandal, the toxicity, so that we can flourish, which is what he really wants and what gives him glory.

Questions and answers:

Q – I was wondering if you could throw a little more light on your concept of scandal – like, you used that term and it's helpful in one sense but how would that relate to Jesus saying "Blessed is the one who is not scandalised in me" or who calls Peter a scandal – because that's central to the [??]. That would be very helpful.

JA – Yes – does that seem a plausible...? I'm, as some of you know, a 'one-track pony' – is that the right thing? – meaning that all my thinking is thanks to the thought of Rene Girard, a French thinker on desire and violence. And I think this is one of his most illuminating insights, which is the way in which we become scandalised and we scandalise each

other: that how our scandal, which is the way in which our desire, and the obstacle to our desire, become locked into each other so that we can't get out of it, we become paralysed. And I think actually, the example which Bert gave, of Jesus saying to Peter, "Get thou behind me, for thou art a scandal to me" – "*skandalon eis emou!*" he says – it's quite clear: Jesus has a project. He knows what the project is: it is going to Jerusalem and giving himself in a particular way, and Peter, as it were, is flattering him into thinking, 'no, surely that won't happen to you'. And when Jesus says, "You are a scandal to me", he's actually recognising how liable he is to being as it were deflected, by the possibility of something else. In other words, how easy it is for us to scandalise each other. I think it's also one of the reasons why he goes off and prays by himself, especially after he's been with crowds who treat him in messianic ways, because if you are with a group of people, who encourage you to think in a certain way, it can so flatter you that you are distracted from what you want to do and what you know you must do. And it's not just distracted from the outside, as it were, you're distracted from the inside, you are given the desire by someone else. And that's actually what we're talking about when we're talking about scandal: we're talking about this way in which we can 'infect' each other's desires, and how that can paralyse us. And if you like, the reverse of it is the being able to relax, the being able to lose – did any of you see the Harry Potter films? I know, it's 'my age group' [laughter] – thank you... In the first one, do you remember, there's a big game of chess, where Harry Potter's friend – I forget what he's – what's the boy called? [audience calls out] Ron? [mock American accent] Ron! *Ron?! Pronunciation please!* [laughter] Next time you'll be saying [accent again] 'Gahd!' [laughter]. Ron – Harry and Hermione disappear down some sort of hole, where there are kind of creepy-crawly branches – do you remember? – and they fall through. When Ron gets there he struggles against the branches, and the more he struggles, what happens? [audience answer] The tighter they get – and what do Harry and Hermione say to him? [audience responds again] – and what happens? He falls through. *Ecco!* He's able to go through. And that's the sense in which the gift of faith enables one to sift through the ways in which what seemed to be our desires are in fact scandals, and ways in which we have infected each other, rather than things that allow us to flourish. Is that the beginnings of an answer? But I think that that's – as it were, precisely

because for many of us these things come together in particularly taut forms, it's so important that we be able actually to sit and work out, 'where here is shame? Where here is fear? Where here is adolescence? Where here are changes in society? Where here are generational issues? Because seeing where each of those are allows one more of those branches to – what's the word? Unwrap, if that's the word, and allows us to find ourselves called into being, with 'the gay thing' in its proper place: as a small, lovely, but not all-determining and all-encompassing, part of who we are. Does that make sense? Its proper place does not mean something that can be put down, but something that sits and is enabled to find flourishing within a broader network of forms of belonging, forms of being, ways of participating. Does that make sense?

Q – Hi – my name is Tony.

JA – Are you audible, Tony?

Tony – [microphone closer] Am I audible?

JA – Now you are.

Tony – I just want to say thank you for the gift of your words, and I'm really touched to hear the idea of clarifying – of understanding – how this, how one's life's scandals and where they – where it – in relation to what it is to be gay, what it is to be a young person coming through in the journey that is life. I remember myself coming out and talking to my parents and saying things like 'it's not all of who I am, it's just a part of who I am'. But those words had never – I never had the language to, to express that until I started hearing what you're saying just now, and I'm really pleased. To be able to offer these words – it's simply – an understanding and a clarification of what it is when I tell a person that – when someone is struggling with coming out, you know, that it is just a part of who you are, but to clarify further the way that you have just said is – can make amazing things happen. Thank you.

[silence for a few moments]

JA – One of the reasons I wanted to bring this up so much now is because of the sense in which we're dealing with something where generational pictures are very different. I'm sure you've read studies, as I have, showing how young, quote unquote, gay teenagers are self-identifying, or not self-identifying, the ways in which they're dealing with these realities – and I think that because it's easy for us to get into

an ideological way of dealing with these things, rather than sitting with the sheer complexity of what forms allow people to develop an identity at any given time, will enable us – I hope – to be rather richer in our extending of fraternity, or ‘siblingicity’, to them. It doesn’t mean to say that, if you like, an older generation’s rather tight and ideological self-definition were wrong, and that a more young, what’s the word, ‘huey-fluey’ type – whatever I call the, ‘whatever-ista’ [laughter] kind of way of defining oneself is somehow right. I don’t think that’s true because few of us aged ten, eleven, or twelve were asked about what we thought about these things, were able to give answers, and few of us now would give the same answers as we gave then – and if we did, a shrink is needed [laughter]. We wouldn’t’ve grown up – in other words our autobiographies are always starting from where we are and working backwards, over time. But I just think we need to be aware, of how much needs to be unpicked in order for healthy storytelling to develop. Does that make sense?

And it’s not only – this is something we’ll be looking at more this afternoon – it’s not only generationally specific, it’s culturally specific as well. That’s one of the things which is important for us as Catholics and which I try to ram home, which is that we’re part of a worldwide church, and the reality of being gay, coming out, or however one likes to describe it, is not only limited to white, Anglo-Saxon, English-speaking countries. It’s far broader than that, but it’s broader than that in rather different ways than what we’re used to, so as it were our mission, which is to live and spread the Catholic faith worldwide, is one thing. But we don’t necessarily have a mission to spread a 1980s’ understanding of being gay worldwide [quiet laughter] – if that makes sense, because in doing that we will fit very nicely into the world of people for whom faith is an ideology and gay is a pathology. Neither is true. Does that make sense? The more I think of dealing with this particularly we become aware of how much – how much what I would call ‘pre-heterosexual’ societies: pre-heterosexual societies, societies which haven’t gone through the strange thing which made our societies heterosexual societies, starting in the late 17th century. It sounds a weird notion, doesn’t it? Heterosexuality is a relatively recent newcomer to the Western ‘canon of things’ – it’s not that people didn’t have babies before, or that most of them were brought

by storks (most of them were, of course) [laughter] – but that people were not expected to have significant emotional relationships with people of the other sex, as their primary emotional source of life. In other words, companionate marriage, understanding things in an individual sense, without responsibility to kin, clan and tribe, these are strangely new things; and we forget easily, and how much, words like ‘gay’ are part of the same world as ‘heterosexual’, and what it is going to look like to be children of God as we deal with pre-heterosexual and post-heterosexual societies, is going to be a very interesting...

Q – The experience I’ve had has been probably a little more indirect than yours: as the father of two lesbian daughters, I came to the belief that – and the empirical understanding that, these girls were *good*, they were wonderful, they were God’s gift to me. And then I looked for validation of that in my faith – and where I look for Christ to say ‘well, that’s good, you come’, I hear from where I look for that validation in my faith, just the opposite, that ‘no, you’re wrong, this is bad, you should teach them [so]’. So it’s – it’s – it’s a scandal there for me, a paradox of where I look for faith, I don’t find it. I have to look within myself, and almost directly to the Gospel of God, and hope that the decisions I have come to, the faith I have found, are true, are of the Gospel.

[applause]

JA – [as applause continues] Yes, I think you’re exactly right. I think that’s a very exact representation of many of our journeys, as the applause would indicate. Yup, we have often looked for fish and bread, and been given stones and scorpions – unlike what it says in the Gospel as you so rightly say. I think the key thing there – and this is part of overcoming scandal – is not to confuse the one who gives us faith and the ‘mediating pool’ of our brothers and sisters. The one who gives us faith is not on the same level at all, as the spokespersons – which includes us – of that faith, in our ability to give and cause and receive scandal. So here’s the challenge if you like – I think this is a challenge – I find this, as a foreigner, I find this particularly strong in this country: you (and please excuse me the inaccuracy of the term ‘you’) seem to depend very strongly on people liking you, and particularly on the idea that bishops, that your bishop should like you [laughter]. As it were, bishops liking you is not a condition of being a Catholic! [laughter then applause] Their

job – you know, they have a job, and they will answer for their job, and it's a good job – and if it weren't for them many of the important things that we do in fact receive, we wouldn't receive, but it's the same thing – once there is a scandal, we only notice the scandal, rather than all the other things. We get very easily blown off course. Now let's just suppose, as has happened, that the local Ordinary has asked us not to celebrate a Eucharist [quiet laughter]. The reason given is so as to avoid scandalising the faithful. Now, rather than thinking of ourselves as the faithful who might be scandalised, let's just imagine that there are, in this great city, Catholics for whom the pathological characterisation of homosexuality is so important to their understanding of faith, that they would feel seriously bereft if they felt that the church was leaving them behind. These are people who are, in Pauline terms, absolutely horrified to see other Christians eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols – “brethren of weak conscience”. Now it is quite right that we should not scandalise those. It's also reasonable that we should say to the Archbishop, ‘yup, we will obey you, but because we don't want to scandalise people of weak faith we do hope you are educating them so that they're not so easily scandalised in future’ [laughter then applause]. But we're not run by that and there's no reason why we should be run by that; the one who is giving us faith and calling us into being is asking us to create church in which we ourselves have to learn how to avoid giving scandal, rather than thinking of ourselves as people who are somehow the scandalised ones. This is the challenge which I always try to give. In this picture, we are the adults – it seems difficult – but we think of ourselves – we're the adults. We've won. This issue is not going away; nothing is going to go backwards in terms of scientific understandings of things that have developed. How do we exercise that adulthood in a charitable and body-building – not gay body-building, you know what I mean [laughter] – ecclesial body-building way so that we aren't causing scandal to our brothers and sisters? That's a real Catholic question, and it's something that can only be relaxed into when we've got beyond having our buttons pushed. So that seems to me to be a central part of what we're about.

Voice – is there one more comment?

Q – James, if you could speak a little bit, maybe, if it’s personal, or not too personal I hope, but maybe – obviously the journey of coming to learn that God was trustworthy, you came to know that something through being gay, as I would say I did through being lesbian – but it wasn’t the only teacher, it wasn’t the only struggle – how as adults, and I think the previous gentleman talked about the Gospel, how, how did you come to trust that God more and more deeply, in your adult experience. In other words I guess I’m looking for those ways we experience God in community, and as church, in a way that’s trustworthy, that allows us to live in that larger arena, that we can learn to – we can lose and know that we’ve already won. But there’s something of the spirituality of that that I’m looking for, if that’s not too broad a question that you might want to say something to.

JA – I’ll try – in a sense this will be a muddled bit of autobiography – I’ll share it in the sense that bits of autobiography spark off other people’s bits of autobiography. I think that for me there was... there was a dramatic side to this happening, when I was in Chile; this was thirteen years ago – and discovered that I’d been denounced to a whole bunch of superiors of the religious congregation that I was with; not for having done anything – you know how these things work in the church... Actually I think they accused me of being an ‘internationally known homosexual activist’, which always seemed to be a wonderful thing [laughter] – and behold, it seems to have come true, doesn’t it [laughter, applause]. At the time it merely meant I had a friend in more than one country [laughter]. But there was a shock for me, as I realised – and this was on a retreat, a Jesuit retreat – that all the violence that had been involved in all that was simply a human mechanism, a bunch of people for whom me as a person – I wasn’t a real person, most of them had never met me or knew anything about me at all; I was a cardboard cut-out that fitted to their scheme of what was [mock gasps] ‘terrifying – sisters, sisters’, you know how clergy are... But anyhow it was the difference between that and the realisation that God had nothing to do with any of that. Now, the difficulty about that is the trickle-down effect – the trickle-down effect is that it takes a long time to cope with all the things that I hadn’t worked through in the previous years – and I think that that for me has been part of it; it’s one of the things, you know,

famously – I got my phrase, ‘uncharted waters’ from a book that was out about ten or fifteen years ago called, I think it was, *Uncharted lives*. Does anybody – do any people remember that book? I can’t remember the name of the author, can... It seemed to me a very good book but it showed how it is that many – at least, gay men – live adolescence entirely at inappropriate times because they haven’t lived it before – of a certain generation, I think things are changing, with that. But I think that there’s actually, in terms of our faith development, it means actually having to work through ways in which I did not discover myself loved, and safe, and held before – in fact had protected myself from undergoing all that. So yes, if we can talk about the trickle-down effect of an experience of grace into starting to fill out spaces where I had thought I was so unsafe that I needed to grasp everything. Does that – does that...? And I suspect that that’s part of any of our storytelling, finding, you know, the old, rather awful, boring story of the two footprints in the sand, and finding out that – it’s true – that the footprints in the sand weren’t mine, they were someone else’s. It’s all very nice afterwards, but at the time it’s a bloody pain [laughter].

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