

## The Fulcrum of Discovery or: how the “gay thing” is good news for the Catholic Church

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What I would like to share with you is a sense of fun. I think being Catholic is huge fun. A huge roller-coaster ride into reality propelled by God, borne up on safe wings, gestated by the loving self-giving of Our Lord in his crucifixion, watched and smiled over by his Holy Mother, played into being like a virtuoso first performance of an unknown masterpiece by the adventurous coaxing of God’s Holy Spirit.

And right now one of the best places from where we can get a rich sense of how much fun this adventure is, is by looking at matters gay and their incidence in the life of the Church.

I want to share with you a way of looking at these things that I hope may make some sense to you. So I’m going to start by stressing that we are in the presence of a *discovery*. Then, in the light of the discovery I want to look at how we now relate to the *map of the world* that existed before the discovery. Because a discovery, once made, becomes a *fulcrum* from which to understand the passage from an old way of seeing things to a new way of seeing things. From there I want to proceed to identify and respect the shape of the *vacuum*, the space about which the previous map makers knew nothing at all, and what this teaches us, and from there very quickly to begin to suggest some dimensions of the Catholic shape of living with the *tension* between the discovery and the vacuum.

## Discovery

So, to my first point. In the last fifty years or so we have undergone a genuine human discovery of the sort that we, the human race, don't make all that often. A genuine anthropological discovery: one that is not a matter of fashion, or wishful thinking; not the result of a decline in morals or a collapse of family values. We now know something objectively true about humans that we didn't know before: that there is a regularly occurring, non-pathological minority variant in the human condition, independent of culture, habitat, religion, education, or customs, which we currently call "being gay". This minority variant is not, of course, *lived* in a way that is independent of culture, habitat, religion, education and customs. It is lived, as is every other human reality, in an entirely culture-laden way, which is one of the reasons why it has in the past been so easy to mistake it as merely a function of culture, psychology, religion or morality: something to get worked up about rather than something that is just there.

We still have a great deal to learn about this regularly occurring minority variant in the human condition. However we know enough about it now to recognise that it is something like a category mistake to talk about homosexuality, or heterosexuality for that matter, as though we were talking about a sort of desire. It seems to be closer to the mark to talk about these things as being particular configurations, a minority and a majority configuration, of the conditions of possibility of desire being human. It is starting from these configurations that it makes sense to begin to talk about different ways of living, relating and loving which may or may not be healthy or pathological. In other words, ethical issues only arise in the "how" this configuration is lived out. That someone has this or that configuration is only an ethical issue at all in as far as any minority experiences certain ethical challenges in fulfilling their potential in the face of majority incomprehension, indifference or hostility.

Now it is comparatively easy for us to imagine how "making a discovery" works when that discovery is a matter of finding something objectively new and true, "out there" in the field of exploring new continents, or coming across new species of animals. It is rather more difficult to imagine a new discovery in the anthropological sphere, since we are talking about things that disclose themselves to us through and within pre-existing human relational patterns. But that doesn't make the

objectivity of the truth any less real, or the effects of a discovery of this sort any less striking.

Nevertheless, have you ever noticed how difficult it is, when you find something that is true, just to stick with it? I mean just to stand back and say “wow!” To start to allow whatever it is that is true to unfold itself for you independently of your immediate interests, your “must do” list, how you fit it into whatever you were doing before to your greatest possible advantage and with the least possible effort? We seem to be primed to deal first with things we find to be true in terms of their immediate opportunity for us, and we tend to leave the richer substance of whatever is true on a backburner, more or less confident that if it really is true, then whatever of truth and of meaning it has, it will impose itself on us over time, and if it isn’t, then, well, let’s see what we can get out of it for ourselves now, in the short term.

Three examples, of differing degrees of seriousness: a few weeks ago, the activist blogger Mike Rogers “outed” Lt. Gov. André Brauer of South Carolina as a closeted gay man, one in an apparently limitless supply of politicians who gain traction by attacking publicly what they love privately. What was astounding to behold was that the question of whether or not what Rogers alleges is *true* disappeared almost immediately – despite Rogers’ rather impressive record of accuracy in this sphere, and Brauer’s classic non-denial denial. Immediately the matter was put to use in a different sphere: as an allegation that the supporters of embattled Governor Sanford, who has had his own ethical difficulties resulting from an “Appalachian hike” in Argentina, had stooped to a new low in smearing Sanford’s potential rival for the Governor’s mansion. In other words: who cares whether it’s true or not, here’s something we can use in a pre-existing battle!

More seriously, we have enough witness statements from the White House meetings in the immediate aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 to be aware of the astonishing speed with which the principals moved from the question of “what has happened and why?” to the question of “how can we use this to advance our war plans with Iraq?” Once again a limited ability to spend time contemplating what had happened, whose meaning would surely percolate through over time, and an immediate ability to grasp an opportunity to advance something in a pre-existing wish list.

And a richer example still: just think of the hugeness of what happened

when Europeans made landfall in the Americas in the late fifteenth century. The sheer vastness, otherness, of what they had stumbled across by mistake, while looking for a fast trade route to China and Japan, would take decades, even centuries, to sink in. Every single feature of the way Europeans saw themselves underwent a radical shift of perspective in the light of the geological, anthropological, botanical, zoological and cultural “thereness” of something that had of course “always” been there, but of which Europeans had previously had no knowledge at all. But that shift of perspective didn’t happen immediately. What happened immediately was: “Where’s the gold? How can we use this discovery to advance the interests of the Spanish Crown, of the Catholic Faith, of our families and friends?”

This is not to say that there were not some attempts to try and see “what was there” rather than merely “how can we profit from this”. There was a self-critical element that was part of the Spanish conquest of the Americas. People like Bartolomé de las Casas, Bernardino Sahagún and others less sung gave what modern investigations have shown to be remarkably accurate, sympathetic and realistic accounts of the cultures that were disappearing with their arrival. They also stood up for the vulnerable in the face of the depredations of their compatriots. And it is these self-critical elements, elements of genuine learning from the experience, which have stood the test of time as rare moments of glory in the history of European colonialism. Nevertheless, even with these more reflective and critical examples, the only capacity for taking on board what was new, and true, and just there, was starting from where they were, with their interests and capacity for seizing opportunity.

Just so the new anthropological truth about the human condition concerning matters gay, the “wow” factor at its true dimensions, its shape and size, as it were, takes a long time to sink in. And as with all such discoveries, the first reactions to it tend to get played by all of us in terms of opportunity grasped from a pre-existing wish list. For some of us, the emergence of matters gay is a marvellous fund-raising opportunity for conservative causes, spreading fear and keeping alive an endless culture war. For some of us it’s a chance to get laid more easily and more often. For some of us it’s a chance to have a tame, and comparatively undemanding, political constituency on tap which we can rally to our side when *we* need *them*, and yet for whom it is never politically expedient *for us* to meet *their* needs when they ask for them to be met. For some of us it’s a good opportunity to attack organised religion. You

could go on in this vein indefinitely.

However, what I would like to do here is stand back a little from our tendency to opportunism, and try to sketch out part of the shape of this discovery about the human condition in such a way that we can see that, like all such discoveries of things that are true about being human, this is good news for all of us as humans. Later on I'd also like to show why it is a piece of good news for us as humans that is going to be particularly good news for us as Catholics.

I won't go on too long here about the rather obvious reasons why it is good news for gay and lesbian people. Suffice it to say, that it makes an enormous difference to someone's personal sanity and all round healthiness if you discover that you aren't a mistake, a cruel joke. If you are used to being told that your feelings are all wrong, sick, distorted, and your attempts to tell the truth about your life are so many delusions and lies, then the relief that is felt when you find the truth is very well brought out in the famous Hans Christian Andersen story *The Ugly Duckling*. Anyone who has undergone this relief will resonate with these words of Pope Benedict from his most recent Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*:

“Each person finds their good by adherence to God's plan for them, in order to realise it fully: in this plan, each one finds their truth, and through adherence to this truth, becomes free (cf John 8,22). To defend the truth, to articulate it with humility and conviction, and to bear witness to it in life are therefore exacting and indispensable forms of charity.<sup>1</sup>”

Again, the discovery is rather obviously good news for the parents and families of those who are gay and lesbian, since it means that the false guilt trips which have been laid on them can be shrugged off. Just because you turned a blind eye to little Freddy playing with the Sarah Palin doll when he was growing up didn't make him gay. He wouldn't have grown up straight if you'd forced him to play with the Rush Limbaugh doll instead. That your brother or your sister, your daughter, your son, your mother or father is gay is no failure of honour on your part. Rather it is a field of opportunity for you to share in the creation of

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<sup>1</sup> Para 1, with the translation slightly altered by me so as to moderate the gender bias of the official English Translation of the Encyclical.

what honour is all about, to look forward to what the shape of your extended family is going to be like, and so on.

However, it is other dimensions of this piece of good news that I would like to look at. The European encounter with the Americas did not affect only those who made the trip and those already living in the Americas when the Europeans arrived. Over time it altered every dimension of the lives of those who stayed at home, and those of all their descendents forever. It altered the way they were able to conceive of themselves in space, in time, in relation to other humans. Quite apart from the plants, animals and minerals to which they were introduced, the existence of a previously unimaginable “outside” to the European world meant that thereafter everyone from, and within, that world received themselves, looked at themselves in a different way.

Just so, we are only now beginning to be able to tell what are some of the knock-on effects of having discovered that what we call being “straight” or “heterosexual” is not the normative human condition, but a majority human condition. This means that while it is true that human *reproduction* is intrinsically a two-sex matter, and that the vast majority of humans are heterosexual in orientation, it is not true that humans are intrinsically heterosexual. And this has important consequences for understanding the relation between the emotional, the sexual, and the reproductive lives of those who *are* heterosexual. If there are some humans in whom, as a normal and non-pathological minority variant, the emotional and the sexual elements of their lives are not linked to any possible reproductive element, then the link between the possible reproductive element and the emotional and sexual element in those in whom these elements *are* linked is of a somewhat different sort than was previously imagined. We are talking about something within the sphere of the free, the intentional and the deliberate rather than the mechanical and the fated. The relationship between that which is simply “biological” and that which is available to be humanised has changed.

In other words, being “straight” gets to be a lot more interesting, varied, in some ways much harder work, and in some ways vastly easier and less frightening, than heretofore. More interesting, in that customary templates and identities can be put aside much more easily. More varied in that a whole range of personal styles and ways of being in relation to others can flourish without the fear that developing this or that trait might make me suspect of being “one of them”, since it is quite clear that

“being one of them” is in the huge majority of cases something you are or you aren’t, is quite independent of your styles and your personality traits, and is in any case perfectly fine.

Being straight also becomes much harder work in that there isn’t such a thing as a natural way to be, to date, to get married, to have kids and which “is just the way things are”. Something which anyone can just follow and then get amazed and devastated when the whole thing falls apart and seems so complicated. Instead, from the get-go it is clear that all the apparently “natural” things taken for granted by a world in which heterosexuality is assumed to be normative have to be learned, negotiated, and some appropriate skills and habits developed. The humanization of desire is an arduous task from which no humans are exempt.

However, being straight is also going to be vastly easier in that the varied forms of same-sex love between people who are not gay – a hugely significant part of the life of anyone at all - need no longer be such an arena of fear and suspicion. There is, as women tend to manifest much more easily than men, a whole range of healthy and passionate forms of love, endearment, friendship and physicality between people of the same sex which are quite independent of sexual orientation. A straight man with a man-crush is not someone teetering on the brink of being gay. He is a straight man with a man-crush, and such same-sex affections are vital building blocks of normal human togetherness. He can even have a man-crush on someone who *is* gay with both parties being serenely aware that there are no erotic connotations or complications to this love. These dimensions of love require their own working through when forms of bonding move into “omertà” or group think, and there is of course the ever-present danger of jealousy and rivalry that lurks just beneath any loving relationship. Such matters have, however, nothing to do with being gay and it is a great relief all round when they are able to be expressed and analysed without being misinterpreted.

Well, once again, we are in the early stages of discovering what the knock-on effects of our new knowledge will be on these fairly basic forms of human togetherness, and I won’t pretend to be able to predict much more. But so far, the signs are very encouraging. Where I would like to take this further is in the really very interesting field of how this is affecting, and going to affect, the Church. So, let’s look at the alterations in the *map of the world* which the discovery is producing.

## Map of the world

There was a time, in the not too distant past, when loud voices from Rome, along with their local amplifiers, would tell people like us that the only acceptable form of discussion about, or pastoral work with, gay and lesbian people was one that was strictly in accordance with the truth, and that truth was properly set forth in the teaching of the Roman Congregations. This truth, as it turned out, was that “although the homosexual inclination is not itself a sin, it constitutes a more or less strong tendency towards behaviour which is intrinsically evil, and thus the inclination itself must be considered objectively disordered”<sup>2</sup>.

If we were all relativists, people who thought that there isn’t such a thing as real truth, just things that are “true” according to people’s perspectives, then we could leave the matter at that. We could say: “Well, that’s it. This, the current definition of the Roman Congregations, is the Church’s truth. If you don’t like it, go join a Church whose “truth” suits your temperament better”. But curiously, the very Church whose apparent “truth” in this area I’ve just recited for you, teaches very strongly indeed that relativism is false, that there is such a thing as something that is true independently of the perspective and wish list of any of us, and that that truth in some sense imposes itself on us. In other words, the same authorities who told us that we have to go along with their understanding of the homosexual inclination because it is true, are also, thank heaven, insisting that the truth doesn’t depend on them, and that they and their teaching are receptive to that which is discovered to be objectively true in whatever field it should emerge.

So let us go back to their definition. If we were relativists we could interpret that definition as being a rhetorical flourish, so that when it says the “homosexual inclination must be considered objectively disordered” it doesn’t mean by that to make any truth claim that might have any bite, any incidence, on what we know about the reality of people who are gay. Thus, if we were relativists, that definition couldn’t be falsified by any scientific learning about the non-disordered nature of the homosexual inclination. It would merely be a “philosophical” remark, a way of triple underlining with an indelible marker what it really wishes to say, which is to denounce all homosexual behaviour as intrinsically evil.

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<sup>2</sup> *Homosexualitatis Problema* CDF 1986 (Paragraph 3).

However, if we are faithful to the Church's teaching and *reject* relativism, then we must interpret the definition as really depending on something being true, as evoking an underlying truth claim that is being defended here. After all, the claim that something is objectively *disordered* suggests that there is something objectively *ordered* behind it, as it were, starting from which we can detect the disorder. The truth claim behind this definition is that all humans, by the mere fact of being human, are intrinsically heterosexual and that there exists an unique proper expression of sexual love for humans, that within marriage which is open to the possibility of procreation. It is from this presupposition of the intrinsic heterosexuality of all humans and the corresponding goodness of marital sexual love that it can properly be deduced that those with a homosexual inclination are objectively disordered, that they are in fact defective heterosexuals, and that any sexual relations between such people must be judged lacking according to the degree to which they fall short of those between married heterosexuals.

Well, what has emerged with ever-greater clarity over the last twenty or so years is that the claim underlying the teaching of the Roman Congregations in this sphere is not true. It is not true that all humans are intrinsically heterosexual, and that those who appear not to be heterosexual are in fact defective heterosexuals. There is no longer any reputable scientific evidence of any sort: psychological, biological, genetic, medical, neurological – to back up the claim. The discovery that I talked about earlier, backed with abundant evidence, is that there is a small but regular proportion of human beings – somewhere between three and four percent – across all cultures who are hardwired to be principally attracted to members of their own sex. Furthermore there is no pathology of any psychological or physiological sort that is invariably associated with this sort of hardwiring. It is not a vice or a sickness. It is simply a regularly occurring minority variant in the human species.

It should be said, in fairness to the Roman Congregations, that in coming up with the definition I quoted to you, they were not doing anything other than giving a formula for a state of affairs that the vast majority of human sources of wisdom over the preceding centuries would have agreed with. Their definition would have been no more shocking than a European map of the world made in 1491 showing a globe-shape, but with nothing but a few whales and sea-monsters between the Western-most reaches of Europe and the Eastern most shores of Asia. We would be faced with a world map ignorant of the existence of America. One whose

cartographers had perhaps heard of ancient accounts of northern Europeans in coracles or Viking longboats who had made it to what we now call Canada, but dismissed them as being tavern-talk and impossible to verify.

However, an America-free map drawn up in 1526, the year in which agents of the Spanish Crown founded Universities in Mexico City and Lima, would have been something of a curiosity. It would be a sign either that someone hadn't heard the news of what had happened in the intervening thirty-five years, or was so obstinate as to deny that it was really real, opting instead for a private reality. Future generations will be better placed than we are to tell whether the definition of the Roman Congregations I quoted to you before, which dates from 1986, was more akin to an honest late edition of a 1491 map or to a deluded attempt to pretend that something wasn't there in 1526. However, now, in 2009, there is even greater clarity: the old definition was mistaken. To try to keep alive a mistake long after it has been shown to be false is a sign either of delusion or of mendacity.

It is not just that a 1491 map was accurate as far as it went, but was lacking certain pieces of information. If after 1526 you were seriously to believe it worth using a 1491 map to navigate, you would be missing out on so much of what had changed in between concerning ships, sails, currents, winds, stars, distances, and so forth that you really had better not stray very far from shore. The advances in technology would actually have made it much more dangerous for you to navigate according to a 1491 map, since your boat could go further and do more, so that you would be much more vulnerable to the consequences of deliberate ignorance. It's not that in the light of the 1526 map the 1491 cartographers had been shown to be liars, or cheats, or stupid. But with the new discovery the whole framework of knowledge of what really existed, and what its existence enabled people to carry out, had changed completely. The discovery of something new turned out to be a fulcrum in whose light a whole series of ways of knowing turned out to be insufficient to newly emerging tasks. Critical self-learning about, for instance, navigation and cartography became possible, to the enormous strengthening of both disciplines.

## **The Fulcrum and the Vacuum**

I would like to suggest that we are beginning to become aware of an objective fulcrum of new anthropological knowledge which is going to be a very enriching place of learning for how we are Catholic. For the fulcrum of the new discovery enables us to describe a vacuum in the previous map of the world. Let me explain this vacuum. Given that all Church teaching in this sphere has depended on, been a deduction from, the Church's teaching about marriage, and has depended on the presupposition of the intrinsic heterosexuality of all humans, it is fair to say that the Church has nothing at all to say about a reality of which its teachers were entirely ignorant. It is properly speaking true to say that, appearances aside, the Catholic Church has no teaching *at all* about homosexuality.

If this sounds improbable, then here's an analogy: let us suppose that northern zoologists have long known of the existence of horses, and know how important they are, and how worth protecting. Let us suppose also that news reaches them through travellers' tales from Africa of dangerously elusive horse-like animals which have a single horn on the forehead. This sounds mythical, and so they teach against it, proclaiming that unicorns don't exist, and that any animal tempted to think of itself as a unicorn ought to get over its delusion and behave like a horse. Let us suppose that later still some intrepid explorers do indeed discover a large four-legged mammal which does appear to have a horn on its forehead: they have discovered the Rhinoceros. It would be true to say that previous non-African zoologists had no teaching at all concerning the Rhinoceros. Their attempt to include the gossip they had heard about what turned out to be the Rhinoceros in the category of the horse by means of the fictional unicorn is only marginally less inaccurate than a 1491 map of the world with sea monsters in the place where the Americas now are.

Now please notice what a fun thing this is: here we are in the early twenty-first century, a period where, as Pope Benedict pointed out early in his pontificate, we may well still be in the early stages of the Church's history, and Christianity still a young religion. And we have discovered an area of genuine human anthropology about which Church teaching is a complete vacuum. Strong views about unicorns derived from a teaching about horses tell us nothing at all about Rhinoceroses. So here is a splendid, splendid opportunity for us to be able to say "yippee"! "Just in

time”! Just as it was becoming clear that the whole way of talking about being human which has sustained official Church teaching for much of the time between the apostolic period and now is in deep trouble, here at last we have an objective fulcrum from which to be working out what it is to be Catholic. And by objective, I mean something that is just there, real, and which, having been discovered, can’t be gone back on. We’re not in this instance talking about some incremental moral argument, which is the normal way moral theology works, and which in this sphere would mean, for instance, a gradual process of better and better navigational equipment enabling fifteenth century Portuguese sailors to sail more safely further out from the North West African coast while still in an America-free universe.

No, instead we find ourselves facing up to the fact that we have discovered something objectively true about being human which is going to re-write our maps. In exactly the same way that the discovery of the Americas meant that the currents and weather patterns experienced on the Atlantic coasts of Africa and Europe started to have a completely different explanation, and to be able to be navigated in completely different ways, when it was known that there was a huge landmass beyond them.

Now, I would say the fun lies in the challenge to discover Catholicity from within this process of learning, which is as it should be. Rather than thinking that God did something rather small a long time ago, and we’ve got to hold onto its increasingly fragile carapace if we’re to get any benefit from it, we can relax into the discovery that God did something very big a long time ago, and is continuing to do exactly that thing, and that we are surfing the very big waves which are continuing to flow out from this in hugely creative ways.

A further element of this big thing is that it is, thank heavens, not a function of us. And the best thing about this is that objective truth, however much we may try to turn it into something rivalrous, is ultimately a rivalry-free zone. No amount of squabbling is going to make the slightest difference. No amount of ideological rows, of career moves, of constitutional amendments, of mitred politicians navigating the political landscape with 1491 maps so as to save equine marriage from the threat posed by disobedient unicorns. What is, really is.

I would like to stress this very firmly: in an ideological row, you need to

get involved with debating and fighting with people so as to cause this or that “take” or “spin” on things to prevail. Because the row is ultimately all about the authority and the prestige of the one who speaks. However, here we are dealing with something that is true independently of the positions and the authority of those speaking. Which means: its truth doesn’t depend on us, so we needn’t be in rivalry about it. And there is something marvellously freeing about this.

Just think of the way in which our religious authorities are trying to get us Catholics all worked up about same-sex marriage in different countries. If there had been no new discovery, then all we would be talking about is a row about the authority of the ones speaking. However, since there has been a discovery of something that is true independently of the positions of anyone, the moment you perceive that, then you can relate to the authority claims of various bully pulpits in quite a different way. There is a cleanness and a freedom to the realisation that what is true sets us free from certain sorts of row. Someone who uses their apparent authority to teach something that is not true, or that is premised on something that is not true, more than hurting *you* is doing *themselves* no favours at all. It is their own authority that they are destroying. It becomes increasingly evident to all concerned that they are behaving like the guild of copyright owners of the 1491 World Atlas: desperate to try and make people stick with something which boosts their own prestige as they sense that prestige ebbing away since people have begun to realise that those maps are no longer adequate. The only interesting question for them, if they could dare to ask it, would be: “If we are going to be faithful to our mandate to speak authoritatively and from the truth, how are we going to adjust our understanding to what is showing itself to be true? After all, no one teaches authoritatively without bearing witness to having undergone a process of learning.”

Now if we look at these officials not as people with whom we must be in rivalry, but as people who have a difficult job to do in the face of emerging truth, we can also learn to be much more sympathetic to them, without going along with their falsehoods. After all, their vacuum is real. They have no built-in mechanism for dealing with a discovery of this sort which alters their world and ours. There is quite genuinely no firm tradition of Catholic discussion or teaching about human love and partnering other than that which is derived from the presupposition of universal heterosexuality and the goodness of marriage. Any one of our office holders who chooses to speak concerning the new reality in a way

that recognises it and recognises that the shape of possible goodness flowing from it needs attending to, is doing so without any support from the usual sources – Patristic texts, Conciliar decrees, backing from Bishops, Papal utterances. There is no obvious precedent. The fulcrum of the new really does reveal the vacuum in the old.

## **The Tension**

This is where we all come in. We are faced with a situation for which our Church authorities have no precedents, no mechanisms available to them, and if we can avoid the temptation to enter into rivalry with them, rather than seeing them for where they are stuck, with merciful eyes, then we can attend to what is really fun about being Catholic. This is the realisation that being Catholic is not so much, as our more frightened representatives proclaim, sticking to a bunch of definitions, come hell or high water, as it is learning a quite specifically Catholic shape to creative and exploratory navigation in a vastly changing world. The Catholicism is much more in the “how” than in the “what”. And this is something that Pope Benedict has emphasized recently in more or less subtle ways in his teaching. For instance, the moment you take on board what he sets out in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* concerning the relation between truth and charity<sup>3</sup>, you see that something claiming to be truthful but not being charitable *is not really true*. Just as something claiming to be loving, but not being based on what is true *is not really love*. So the Catholicism is to be found in keeping alive the tension between what is true and what is loving, which is what leads us into discovering what is really true, and how to be really loving. A tension in which we are pulled into being something bigger, more human, than ourselves.

Another part of this shape of the Catholic “how” which Benedict has been emphasizing is his repeated insistence on the way that faith and reason purify each other. It is not that faith imposes on us a list of things that must be held to be true independently of reality. It is rather that faith enables us not to be frightened of being drawn into inhabiting a larger world than we could have imagined. Faith dares us into exercising our reason because it enables us to trust that over time, and through that use of our reason, God will show us what is true and how it is good for us. In fact, Benedict, far more than either his boosters or detractors allow, seems quietly aware that his job is to remind people that Catholicity lies

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<sup>3</sup> Paras 2-4.

in the shape of the parameters of change that we undergo together.

This seems to me to be the challenge for us now, and as I say continually, it seems to me to be a fun challenge: are we going to dare to be Catholics, not in rivalry with our office holders, grateful that they're there, aware that they're pretty stuck, but delighted to be beginning to take on board the contours of the new discovery about being human that goes with the term "gay"? Are we going to allow ourselves to be empowered to discover ways in which God is much more *for us* than we had imagined, that God really does want us to be free and to be happy, and to rejoice in what is true as we are stretched toward and stand alongside the weakest and most vulnerable of our sisters and brothers wherever we may find them? Are we going to allow ourselves to discover the potential for Catholicity that is opening up alongside the discovery of the new richness in Creation that shimmers within the little word "gay"?

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