

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: Could you tell me a bit about your background? Like childhood and growing up in Nigeria?

Richard: Yes. I remained in Nigeria after my birth until I was eight when I was sent to school in Britain, but I think before I was eight, I did accompany my parents back to the United Kingdom on three or four home tours or home visits to England. So, they were leave for my parents involved coming back to Britain every two years for three months, I think. But I was and am an only son of my parents' first marriage. In fact, my mother's only marriage. My father subsequently remarried. I have step or half, I never know the difference, siblings, but they're much, much younger than me. And they don't live in Britain so I see very little of them and have never seen very much of them at all because by the time that my father remarried I had really begun to move away from home, although I still carried on seeing my mother and his second wife, my stepmother, from time to time.

Interviewer: Okay. And they remained in Nigeria? Or were you all...?

Richard: Well, as with any family ever, there are complications along the way. But no, my father stayed in Africa, in Nigeria, until independence in 1961. In fact, he came back in 1962. He worked in Britain for a while, about five or six years, hated it, wanted to go back to Africa where he'd been all the time since the end of the Second World War. He then found a job working in Lesotho. His first job after leaving Britain was in Lesotho, formerly Basutoland, and which meant that he was travelling around the former British territories, although Lesotho had only just become independent. He travelled to Botswana and Swaziland in his capacities working for the Ministry of Finance for the Lesotho government on a British aid programme. But that meant because of his move there, there was a period in which during some of the school holidays, I would go to Lesotho and might travel around southern Africa a considerable amount, hitchhiking from the age of about 16, 17 until my last visit which would have been in 1972 or 73 I think after I'd come back from working myself in Pakistan for a while.

So, I have Africa in my blood having spent my formative years there, childhood and formative years, well, part of my formative years, up until I was 13, 12, 13 in Nigeria. So, I identify very much with various aspects of African history and culture because all my friends were black and I was a very odd creature being white in an almost exclusively black environment.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. So, you were mainly living with your mother?

Richard: Well, once they divorced, the deal was half the holidays with each. So, unless they agreed otherwise. So, some of the time I would spend, my school vacation holidays with my mother and some with my father. But I've travelled an enormous amount during my adolescence and well prior to and after my adolescence, but travelling backwards and forwards from what we call prep school here from the age of eight and three times a year from Lagos to London and London to Lagos. Clocked up the air miles in the days when they were. Well, I began flying regularly before jets, so they were propelled journey flights, propeller driven flights, and I just couldn't remember being in an aircraft an enormous amount of time in my younger years, from the age of eight until my early 20s, I was in the air three, four or five times the year. Well, no, it was six or eight times a year sometimes. But they subsequently became jets and rather faster. But it meant that I travelled, or at least stopped over in places on route between Nigeria and then more latterly southern Africa and Britain.

Interviewer: Oh okay. How was, I mean from the earlier ages and your parents was there much of a religious background?

Richard: No. No, they didn't contaminate me with anything that approximated to Christianity. (Laughter) I acquired that bad habit from elsewhere.

Interviewer: Okay.

[0:05:36]

(Laughter)

Interviewer: May I ask where you acquired that bad habit?

Richard: I can't put my finger on the answer to that. Very clearly, other than the fact that just by a gradual and almost imperceptible process, I became acquainted with or interested in or had contact with Christianity in various forms. Principally, I suspect it was through public school religion which meant that because I was incarcerated in a boarding school from the age of eight until I left aged 19, it could not but rub off on you that the environment was one in which there was a claim or a veneer of Christian ethos and Christian values.

Interviewer: Was it Catholic?

Richard: No, no, no, no. I've never, no, I'm an Anglican. But that term really didn't mean very much to me until the latter part of my school days, if at all. I really only began to identify with Anglicanism and Anglican values right towards the end of my school days and earlier, and soon thereafter, when I began to explore the Christian faith beyond the context of what had been possible and in a school environment.

I had really rebelled against religion actually at school although I clearly had been given something to rebel against. But that was part of the adolescent rebellion against everything and everybody, I suspect, because the rebellion didn't last very long. I was one over or returned to an interest in Christianity. But nobody's ever made any effort to make me into a Christian or to overtly teach me any form of Christianity, for which I'm immensely grateful. I've been able to discover it my own way in my own pace what it is that drew me to an interest in Christianity.

But I think one of the formative factors in fact alongside the regular diet of public school religion worship and the opportunity which I did take to help a bit in religious services in chapel was my interest in politics, which I soon began to see was articulated by people much older than me, and in places such as southern Africa where I became aware of the struggle against apartheid. And having been brought up in a country, Nigeria, where I never thought for a moment that there was any difference essentially between the people I played with and became friends with of my own age and myself, although there clearly were, in retrospect many differences of class and income and status. At the age that I had all my friends that I can remember, with the exception of half a dozen at the very most were black. I was taught respect for people regardless of their colour from the outset, or at least if not deliberately taught respect, I soon found that it was the natural thing to do to play with a person who black, statistically speaking, far more than it was to play with a person who was white because there simply weren't white people of my own age to play with.

So, the shock of going to a culture, namely southern Africa or South Africa, in which I spent a considerable amount of time although I was never officially resident there, was one in which I was simply appalled at the horrible, grotesque and repulsive degree of

racism and contempt for black people that I encountered for the first time as a 15 or 16-year-old I think when I first went to southern Africa after a gap of only three or four years from when I was regularly in contact with black Nigerians. And I reacted very negatively against what I experienced far too frequently at the hands of white people in southern Africa to be, which was their racism. I just found it wholly and utterly repugnant and I began to wonder why this should be, what, if anything, was being done, who was resisting, how one could resist against something as contrary to the belief that all were created equal and should be treated accordingly.

So, that drove me to read around the lives of and the political movements that were taking place in the 1970s particularly and the late 60s in South Africa, which of course then was in the throes of being run by a white supremacist government whose ideological foundation was Calvinism and the tradition of the Dutch Reformed Church, which had been taken to southern Africa by some of the original settlers, some Dutch settlers.

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So, I became very aware that there were Christians who thought that apartheid was inevitable, right, just and fair. And I became aware of other Christians who thought the total opposite. And it was the lives and the arguments, the witness of those who were challenging apartheid in southern Africa who were Christian that gave me a sense that there were good Christians with whom I could readily ally myself without becoming thought of as an apologist for a Christian faith which I found totally unacceptable which was the Dutch Reformed Church's interpretation of Christianity and how to use and interpret the Bible and Christian tradition.

So, it was people like Alan Paton and Howard Latule(?) and the Caralos(?) Institute and many very, very strong Christian leaders who were predominantly Anglican in southern Africa. Trevor Huddleston being another who risked everything, including their lives, to try and dismantle the edifice that was apartheid, which of course remained in place for another 25 years.

Interviewer: So, could this mark the beginning? I mean, you were 15 at the time you said, the beginning of your interest in campaigning for equal rights?

Richard: Yes, I identify it insofar as having had no awareness of being gay when I was in Nigeria, although I was aware of an attraction to people of the same gender, even of my own age.

Interviewer: Eight?

Richard: Oh yes. Long, long before that or even before that. Yes. The first boy I ever had what we'd call sex with, although not, we didn't use words like gay, was an American boy actually from an American family working in Nigeria. But I had good reason to rebel against racism and even more to rebel against the idea that it could be justified in the name of Christianity, so that when I began to emerge as a gay man in my early 20s with at first a sort of faltering and rather unsure level of self-acceptance, I don't think it took a great leap of the imagination to realise that as I by then made a commitment to train for the ministry of the Church of England and had and had been accepted as a prospective clergyman and an ordinand, there had to be a lot of intellectual work done by myself to square the circle, which was that I felt as Christian as every other of those that I found myself training with. But my sexual orientation was at variance with the majority, although I was certainly not the only one of my college, my theological college at the time, who was gay. But we were clearly part of an institution whose outward appearance and official policies were what we'd call now deeply homophobic.

And that was clearly unsatisfactory if you were going to make a commitment to an ideology or a faith which had it in for you, that had devised various means, some of which were very insidious and others which were pretty crude, to try and keep you in line. And if not make you into a heterosexual at least make you into a silent and invisible homosexual. So, and I didn't find the attraction of being invisible or silent at all compelling. Therefore, I became increasingly unsilent and increasingly more vocal.

Interviewer: Did you stay within the ministry? Were you allowed to at that time? Or were you just studying to be in the ministry?

Richard: No. We were many of us, many, I would say more than 50% with some of the theoretical colleges in the early 70s had 90% of their intake who were gay. The one I went to we had about 40% were gay. And that was 40% of the next generation of clergy and the cumulative statistical impact of that on the church would clearly be felt over time if they stayed within the church and didn't either choose to leave it because they found it unpalatable, or if they weren't forced out of it because their employers and became intolerant or unaccepting of the presence of people who were gay. And the whole terms of engagement were altering in the 70s because gay liberation was having an impact on British society which inevitably was felt even within the churches.

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So, some of us began to identify with then a predominantly secular movement towards creating equality, although we would like to think we did bring to it insights from the Christian faith theologically to stand alongside those who owed no allegiance to Christianity, but owed total allegiance to the concept of equality and queer rights.

Interviewer: Okay, so, you realised early on that you were at least not fitting the norm of male/female. But when would you say the story of your coming out? When would you say you actually came out? You realised so early. I know it's very different because it can take a lifetime to come out.

Richard: Yes, well, I'm glad they didn't have that disadvantage. Well, there's so much can be said, obviously, because uniquely through a set of circumstances which I certainly could not have foreseen, but clearly I was a willing participant for the most part. It was only eight years after being selected as a as a potential clergyman in the Church of England, but having spent four years training and then three years in parishes that I ended up, and those three years working for the Church of England officially, that I applied for a job, which was working for the Gay Christian Movement which had been formed in 1976 which was about 18 months before I needed to look for another job, having been declared unsuitable by the Church of England for further employment because I was becoming vocal and unprepared to play the game of pretending to be somebody that I wasn't, which the powers that be thought they could probably live with so long as they managed to mould me into the shape they'd successfully moulded all previous gay ordinands or gay curates or gay vicars into, namely people who kept their sexuality entirely to themselves or shared very circumspectly with a carefully controlled and totally trusted group of an inner friendship circle. And I saw no need to do either of those. I wanted to, having learned that black people couldn't curry favour by pretending to be white, I wasn't going to start currying favour with heterosexuals by pretending to be heterosexual.

Interviewer: No, no. And that's what the church was trying to make you do?

Richard: Yes.

Interviewer: Even though they knew in the beginning.

Richard: Oh yes. Yes, yes.

Interviewer: But they thought they could change you.

Richard: Yes. Well, that's what they'd done for 2,000 years. I mean, it's only since it's since the 60s, 70s that any institution has really had to deal with the phenomenon, which is historically unprecedented, of people saying, "No, stuff your rules, stuff your regulations, stuff your demands. You've got to learn to live with me on my terms. I'll take what I want from the institution and my culture, my history and my family and what that I consider to be good and healthy and righteous. And I will reject all that I consider to be unhealthy and spiritually damaging".

So, the church just as teachers, I mean the teaching profession is just as bad as the church to this day. I mean, you can count more out clergy than you can out teachers. And yet teaching is upheld to be an environment in which you flourish and learn and in which you can be yourself. And the whole point of education, we're told, is to encourage people to flourish. But the minute anybody flourishes in a way which is deemed to be socially unacceptable, in other words, coming out as lesbian or gay or bi or transsexual, then the whole institution has a way of telling you you're unwelcome and you should, the very least you should do is shut up and probably the best thing to do if you know what's good for you is to leave because you'll cause us fewer problems and you'll cause yourself fewer if you decide to leave.

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So, I mean I don't single the church out for being particularly obnoxious in the way it deals with gay people, but I do think it has a particular reason for not treating people in a discriminatory and unreasonable manner. But it in fact does the very opposite. It goes to extraordinary lengths to try and, on the one hand, say we love you, but on the other hand say that we hate you in reality. And it's the hate which often wins out in the life of the church because it hasn't learned how to love or irrespective of sexual orientation despite many protestations that it is not a homophobic institution, it is at its very core, I think, profoundly homophobic.

Interviewer: Are you talking present as well as past?

Richard: Oh yes, I'm talking, oh I'm talking present. I think it's become more determinedly homophobic. Its homophobia in past generations has been more, has been passive. It's been more or less just a second thought. I mean it's just been able to take any sense of self-worth out of gay people long before they even knew that they were gay. (Laughter) So, the sublimation and the denial was that deep and lasted an entire lifetime in almost all cases.

But what the church as an institution since its leaders have felt it's had to defend itself against the charge that it was in part, if not even significantly homosexual because of the type of people it recruited and was using and was happy to use, it's put a huge amount of effort into trying to silence dissent. And where it's not being able to win the argument by a rational discourse, it has resorted to seeking legal justification and to do so, which is why in the late 1990s the churches, led by the Church of England in Britain, sought and was disgracefully, in my opinion, was granted dispensations, concessions, opt outs from key equalities and discrimination and employment legislation which has had the effect that in 2014, for instance, gay people and lesbian people in faith communities have far fewer rights than they had before the so-called arrival of equalities legislation in Britain. This is a fact which many people tend to overlook and

ignore and are not aware of because until the church invokes its legal entitlements to discriminate, you think you're never going to be on the receiving end of being told that you can't live the type of life you wish to, not just in the name of Christianity, but in the name of the law of the land. And the law of the land now permits the churches and all faith groups to discriminate quite blatantly and brazenly on grounds of sexual orientation. I think that is as great an inequity as apartheid. And it's one which Christians and many people in the gay rights movement and in many lobbying organisations don't wish to address. It's too problematic for them.

And there are people, you don't have to go very far without seeing stories in the newspapers of people whose lives have been blighted by the fact that the churches now have a legal entitlement to discriminate, whereas it was very unclear whether or not if they'd overtly discriminated in the past, they'd have simply been enforcing church teaching against which you might have stood next to no chance of being victorious if you attempted to sue or to seek redress legally. But now it's very clear that in certain circumstances, if the church doesn't want to hire you or wants to fire you or wants to deny you the opportunity to seek a change of employment on equal terms, if anybody else who might be wishing to apply for a job, then you are ipso facto by being gay at a disadvantage because you would either have to prove that you are not a practising homosexual, you don't want to be one, or if you were you, you've repented of that period in your life where you were in one.

I mean, it is absolutely frightful what the church is, it's closed all its loopholes, not just by refining and making clear its own abhorrence for gay people, most particularly those who are in same sex relationships, but it has managed to obtain opt outs from the law of the land which apply to everybody else other than those in faith groups.

Interviewer: What do you think of the American, I know it originated from America, but the MCC? Do you think they've made their own rules or have they changed it a bit or being an, well, I'm not an outsider anymore, but not being that knowledgeable of the background.

Richard: In Britain?

[0:28:17]

Interviewer: In Britain, even in America. I learned about MCC over here. So...

Richard: Oh, did you? Well, obviously I've been aware of MCC from the earliest days. I met Troy Perry way back in 1971, 72, 73 I think. Or it might have been a bit later than that. But I've never been a member of MCC and I don't think that MCC is the answer to the church's problems. I mean, I understand that there is a need for something called the MCC and its existence as an indictment on all the other churches who've made MCC necessary in the eyes of some. But I happen to believe that if you wish to change the dominant ethos and values and direction of policy of the mainstream churches, you have to stay in the mainstream churches because the MCC is essentially an irrelevance in Britain statistically and in terms of its culture. It's not, it will not ever have an impact or when arguments are on the scale and that the depth which matter, if you're going to effectively dismantle institutional faith-based homophobia. It provides a sanctuary and a safe place for those who have either never been a part of a mainstream church, or have been and no longer wish to be or who look at the mainstream churches and think that they are hotbeds of heterosexual prejudice and patronising condescension.

And I understand all the reasons why some people and find MCC a comfortable and helpful place to be themselves and to follow Christ. But in terms of what I consider to be most important, which is structurally altering the churches so that they can no longer obtain state resources or the backing of the state's laws to discriminate, then I prefer to

put my energies and when I was the Chief Executive of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, which I was for 30 years, we put our energy into trying to ensure that the mainstream churches to whom 99.99% of the population belong in one form or another, and for whom that the media considered to be the manifestations of Christianity for the most part in the British Isles, it's important that those bodies are challenged repeatedly because they employ 35,000 or 40,000 people, depending on how many you include, and the state through various ways puts a whole host of money in their direction, directly or indirectly, through granting charitable status almost by right and entitlement.

So, the MCC for me, it's never held a personal attraction. I've always worked with the MCC so far as it's seemed to be compatible with the overriding objective of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, which was to effect change theologically and politically where it mattered most, which was where the power resided in British Christianity.

Interviewer: Yeah. Interesting. Go backtracking a little bit, when I know you said you realised -

Richard: Are you all right for water? Sorry. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay.

Interviewer: That you realised and came out pretty early and all that. How about within the family? Were you able to open up with your family?

Richard: Well, I chose to open up after about a year of exploring my sexuality as an adult and which took place principally in my first year at a theological college where I happened to meet a person who I intended and he intended to be a lifetime partner with because the experience of his loving me and my loving him and being amongst others who, of a similar age, who supported us totally as we were learning to be lovers and learning to be prospective clergy in the Church of England. I didn't feel that there was any need to or any shame, any need to be silent about or any need to be ashamed of the existence of Michael in my life. So, I told my mother after about a year of being in a relationship with Michael. I told by father and stepmother, who by that time were back in Africa, a short while afterwards.

My mother's initial reaction was not very encouraging, but it so happened that without it having been planned on the occasion where that said to myself whatever Mother's doing on that day at that time, at the beginning of my college holidays, I was going to tell her. I didn't want to lead a double life any longer. I must have been probably 20 at that stage. I told my mother, but she was in the presence fortuitously of a friend of hers who was a Samaritan who, if you're familiar with Samaritans in this country, is an agency that takes telephone calls essentially from anybody on any issue and offers a sympathetic ear to them and was set up, as it happens, by an Anglican clergyman in the early 1950s who was absolutely appalled about a young woman taking her own life because of her period pains and who was unable to find anybody who would explain to her or accept that what was happening to her was natural. So, she committed suicide. And the clergyman in question who knew about what had happened and why this young girl had said committed suicide, set up the Samaritans.

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But by the by, the presence of the Samaritan with my mother at the same time, who I also knew, enabled my mother to take some comfort and receive some comfort from her friend because once I had said to my mother, "There's something ought to know," there was really very little I could -

[Phone rings]

Interviewer: Shall I pause?

Richard: Yeah, yeah.

[Pause]

Interviewer: There we go.

Richard: So, my mother was shocked, unprepared for it and there was no reason why she should have been either unshocked or prepared particularly for what I told her. But having said what I did, I really had no more reason or need to speak because the person was present with my mother was able to say all the things that I would have said because she was non-judgemental and trained and compassion counsellor.

Interviewer: Oh, so the Samaritan was supportive?

Richard: Yeah, they're very supportive. If she'd been a Samaritan or not, even though she wasn't on duty as a Samaritan, she would have been clearly acting out of the character that Samaritans were expected to act and belief, which was total acceptance of...

[Phone rings]

No, I'm just going to close it.

So, I didn't say very much for the rest of that evening and although my mother was in tears and completely confounded, confused and distressed about what I had told her, she was calmed down and some of the realities of life she obviously needed to come to terms with quite rapidly were passed on to her and accepted because they didn't come from me, but they came from somebody of her own generation who was also a mother and had sons. One of which, or a son whom I was friendly with.

So, my mother, it was very fortunate my mother was not on her own when I told her. I would have gone ahead and told her if she had been on her own, but I didn't stop telling my mother what I'd set out to say simply because she wasn't on her own.

Interviewer: Oh okay. So, she came around after a while?

Richard: She came round after about some years. I mean, she's still alive. She's 91. And I'm probably her best friend now. So, I've had a very good relationship with her over the years. A very good relationship. And I've been able to identify with some of the difficulties and dilemmas of her life, which hasn't been straightforward or easy in many respects, and she's been able to identify with some of mine, which has not been entirely straightforward.

[0:38:15]

[Phone rings]

Interviewer: Okay.

Richard: My father I told a short while after that. He was never reconciled to it until his death. Well, even up to his death, he was not reconciled to my being gay, and I really ceased to have any meaningful relationship with him from the point that I told him I was gay. I thought that was very regrettable, very sad. But it was his decision and most of my friends experienced, and elder and more experienced people than I just said, "Don't let it worry you. He's set his mind on rejecting you and he'll probably never come round. You can try as hard as you like". And I did for several years, but after being rejected

time and time and time again, I just said, "Well, that's it. I'm not going to let him, his inability to accept his son in a humane or realistic way". I wasn't going to let that hang over me.

And my mother more or less came to the same conclusion. She tried, although they were divorced, they still remained friends of sorts. She tried to get him to become a human being who didn't reject his offspring, but he chose not to take any notice of her or other people who prevailed upon him not to maintain his hostility to his death towards me. But it was his loss. He could have had a very good relationship with me, just as I've had a very good and continue to have a very good relationship with my mother. But he was of a mindset which considered everything and anything homosexual to be utterly and totally, although he wasn't a Christian, he accused me of all sorts of completely irrational things, like undermining the monarchy and the Empire and the law and order by being gay. So, once you begin at that point, you've really got pretty much of a challenge, a pretty huge challenge on your hands. But the children he produced, I'm glad to say, once they realised their significantly older brother was gay, made it clear they had no problems with me. So, the generation under mine and that his second wave of children didn't inherit their father's homophobia, although they're very absent and far removed geographically and...

Interviewer: But you're still in contact with them?

Richard: Well, just tangentially. Well, the oldest of my father's second marriage children I have the closest relationship with, but she lives in Egypt. She's 15,16 years older than me, I think so we live for all intents and purposes separate lives. But I do know that the two daughters and one son who my father had relatively later in life haven't become the standard bearers of their father's prejudices.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, when you, moving ahead again, when you didn't start what it was at the time, GCM, the LGCM, but you joined them within the year that they started?

Richard: Well, I was one of a group of people because it's a very long time ago. But the first entity, the first phenomenon that that hit the public's consciousness that things were changing after the reform of the Sexual Offences Act, which created a semblance of fairness towards gay people in 1967, although it did not absolutely did not fully decriminalise homosexuality, a mistake often made by commentators and historians who say that homosexuality was decriminalised in 1967. It was only partially decriminalised and a lot of people remained criminals in the eyes of the law if they were gay right until the early part of the current century.

Interviewer: And you're speaking Britain.

Richard: I'm speaking of Britain. It's rather complex to speak of the whole globe in any comprehensible manner. But so, the 67 Sexual Offences Act partially decriminalised homosexuality and very soon thereafter, thanks to the Gay Liberation Front and the ideas began principally in America, were brought over here and the press tagged on to the fact that something which gave them good copy and a chance to talk about sex from either quite a disinterested but benevolent point of view, or from a hostile and aggressively prejudiced point of view, began to get a lot of coverage, a lot of coverage. So, people, if they had half a mind, began to wonder if they wanted to, which side of the argument they'd like to be on, whether gay liberation. All it stood for or thought to stand for or portrayed as standing for was something they welcomed or which they deplored. Clearly unless you're a deeply self-loathing gay person, gay liberation or something, you would at least be interested in, even if you felt you couldn't afford to be as publicly associated with. You might even have ideological reasons for thinking you didn't want to, didn't really welcome it because it shone a spotlight on a part of your life or your

very being which you'd got rather used to nobody noticing other than the people you wanted to notice in the ways that you wanted to interact and socialise.

[0:45:06]

So, I couldn't but help to try and understand for myself what GLF meant for me and for wider society and the Christian faith.

Interviewer: GLF?

Richard: The Gay Liberation Front.

Interviewer: Oh of course.

Richard: GLF. Very potent symbols and letters which struck home deep into the psyche of people who were susceptible to the ideology, the ideas of the Gay Liberation Front. But some of us in Christian contexts and Christian environments were asking questions about, well, where does Christianity relate with the Gay Liberation Front? The ideas of equality and removing patriarchy and heterosexual power and normativity. We were challenged by GLF and thank goodness we were otherwise a Christian theology of same-sex relationships and same-sex loving would have been even longer in appearing and even would have been even more delayed. So, I think GLF should be given credit for acting as a catalyst, not just within secular environments, but also within Christian circles.

So, those of us who were open to new ideas and receptive to seeing how ideology which basically said queer is as good as straight, to use common parlance. We had to work out how we react as Christians and let alone whether we were gay or lesbian ourselves. So, we came, networked. We began to realise we weren't the only people. There were people in this college and that college and this place and amongst reforming and progressive Christian organisations who were busy looking at other issues of justice around race and trade and income distribution and poverty and housing and so on. We began to network and realise that it would be in our common interest to form alliances if pre-existing liberation organisations were open to forming alliances and if they weren't then it would seem good sense, notwithstanding that, to have an organisation devoted specifically to looking at the theology of same-sex relationships and the implications for that on the lives of the institution of which we were likely to be very much a part within a matter of weeks, months, years.

So, to cut a long story short, the Gay Christian Movement came into existence. It was formed just within a mile or so from here. Its first meetings were held in the city at Aldgate. Its inaugural meeting was held in Aldgate. And its first planning meetings were held at a church in the city, All Saints, Margaret Street. But it became associated with a church in the city called Aldgate where we eventually had an office. But my time as initially as a licensed lay worker and then as a curate working in a church in a parish in Hertfordshire, came to, as I explained earlier, an enforced end, an end not of my own choosing. I was sacked essentially and told that I was no longer thought to be suitable material for the ministry of the Church of England and that I ought to find another job. Well, I needed to find another job. They'd help me if I wanted to apply for jobs with the elderly, which was their way of saying, "Yes, we noticed you got on well with elderly people, you liked working with elderly people, which was fine, but it wasn't actually. It was just a part of what I was doing. It wasn't what I felt I had a primary vocational skills to do indefinitely for the rest of my life. So, I said thank you very much, but I'll look around for other jobs which I feel I'd been more well equipped, better equipped for. But probably feel more fulfilled in.

And the job that the Gay Christian Movement came along. But I have actually been formed part of its creation. I'd been on its committee right from the early days. But I resigned from being a committee member, a policymaker, obviously, at the point at which I applied for a job. I couldn't both be a policymaker and an employee. Or prospective employee.

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So, the organisation was only 18 months old when it employed me. It had employed somebody on a part-time basis for a few months previously, but she'd left. And I applied for a job, which thankfully was given, which I was chosen for on the grand salary of £1,500 per annum in those days and it was half time job and I was told, "Well, if you want to make this a full-time job and it's yours to do what you will with, because you'll only ever receive a wage which even in those days was far below what was necessary to live on". And unless you go out and raise the funds and make the organisation grow. So, there was a selfish incentive to make the organisation successful and to lead it and to enable it to grow, which it did exponentially.

Interviewer: How has it impacted the climate, obviously on you and on others? What kind of impact has it been?

Richard: Well, I'd leave other people to talk about the impact it had on them, yes.

Interviewer: Well, impact on the church here or...?

Richard: Yes. Well, I mean, enormously if you read some histories about the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement. It was a phenomenon and it's lost its way I think very unfortunately in the last five or six years and it's in a parlous state at the moment. But when the Gay Christian movement came into existence and clearly met a very pressing need because we were overwhelmed with interest and pastorally and from people who were wanting help to understand how culture was already changing and how the churches were likely to need to change in the face of this entirely new social phenomenon, which was homosexuals who would be satisfied with nothing less than total equality, and who would go to very considerable lengths to make sure that their birthright was not denied them. And that emancipation would mean what we hoped it should have always meant, which was total freedom both within the Christian family as much as outside it. We saw no reason why Christians who were gay or lesbian should be denied the potential to flourish and if they wished to enter into a loving same-sex relationship as those who were outside the Christian family. In fact, we could make a case for there being very much more reason why the churches should be the first to encourage and embrace loving relationships. And certainly not become an impediment or to penalise those who did as Christians enter into same-sex relationships. So, we were in the business of turning inside out the whole value system that the church had.

Interviewer: Yeah, so within the Anglican, within the Catholic or Christians?

Richard: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yes, we were entirely ecumenical and set out to be because not least of all we thought that there were absolutely no reasons to replicate the divisions of the Christian Church within a lesbian and gay organisation. Divisions between Catholic and Protestant, evangelical and charismatic paled into total insignificance so far as we are concerned beside the need for the church to demonstrate unequivocally that it loved, it understood human nature first of all and because it understood it, it accepted that there were people who needed to and would enter into a same-sex loving relationship, which as Christians would try and reflect their love to one another and God's love to them.

So, I mean that was and remains such a profoundly radical message that of course the churches acted very defensively and very aggressively towards everything we stood for and have spent the last 40 years trying to undermine and traduce us, to silence us and without going into all the many occasions on which they've demonstrated their contempt for us, some of which is documented, most of which there was never either the time or the resources to document because daily in my job I was dealing with prejudice and discrimination sanctioned and initiated by the institution, which of course made it very much more important that we remained defiant and as strong as we could be in the face of an enormous amount of institutional hatred.

[0:55:37]

Interviewer: Do you think you, I don't know the history at all, but do you think you were successful in reaching inside?

Richard: Well, we would certainly successful in upsetting the status quo to an extent because nobody could by the time that my 30 years for the organisation left, nobody who was an informed Christian could possibly have been under any illusion but that but that there were people who were known to be and willingly known to be as gay and lesbian Christians because so much of the debate in the 80s and 90s, particularly when the church was in or Christianity was in the newspapers or on the airwaves, it was predominantly in relation to the question of sexuality and sexual orientation. We generated a fantastic amount of media coverage which led to our having more coverage than organisations that employed 400 people, and we employed one and a half. We were driving the news agenda when it came to Christian issues time and time again because it brought together, actually it was actually a very easy thing to do. Once you have the nerve to say that you had a message to convey and you were articulate enough and determined enough to take some as much opportunity as you can that were provided to you, it doesn't require a great deal in terms of just to work out that because our message was part political, part sexual and part religious, and the issue, those three issues together are invariably volatile and can cause incendiary debates and strong passions to be heard for and against the political implications, implications sexually, and the consequences in terms of religion.

So, we had a winning formula because we were never afraid to mix all three together in whatever mix we thought was appropriate to advance our principle case, which was Christianity is at fault, it is doing damage and harm to people's lives. There's no need for it to do so. There's certainly no justification for it to do so. And here's how it can stop being a damaging and harmful institution. Not a message which the institution wishes to hear said of itself, but one in which more and more people began to believe we were right to be saying and needed to be said. Which is why the organisation had as much influence and drew as many people into its membership as it was able to do. Phenomenal, phenomenal, phenomenal impact because of our ability to use the media and to repeat time and time again a very simple message, but one which had not hitherto been heard.

And thanks to the media's interest, which was generally one of being sympathetic, although they had to be as objective and impartial in almost all their coverage as their code of ethics and professionalism required. But it was one which met an increasingly receptive audience taking the British public at large, but an increasingly hostile one within the church, which really got worried and perturbed about how often our arguments were being aired and how much support they were attracting because what the church has done in the last 40 years is reiterate an increasingly untenable, unconvincing traditional line, which doesn't wash for anybody other than that tiny percentage who control policy at the top, who are a very worried group of deeply inadequate leaders, in my view, who've been promoted way beyond their ability but

have got there because their principle gift has been one of defending the institution against any criticism rather than leading an institution to respond to credible and convincing critiques of its shortcomings, which if the churches had changed their policy in response to the clamour for change which has come from all sorts of quarters for a generation now, then it wouldn't be on its back foot in relation for gay issues. You know, it's perceived rightly but sadly to be the enemy now by almost every gay person in the country, or an irrelevance. And it needn't have come, neither of which is necessary for it to have become. It need not have become perceived as the enemy, and it need not have become an irrelevance.

But the institution has ensured that it has become both because it has not responded to the clamour for justice and equality and fairness in the name of a faith which proclaims that all are created equal but in reality fails to see us as equal in the eyes of God. It's a very simple theological case, very simple idea, one which all but those with hang ups over sexuality or are too hidebound to even conceive that if theology evolves, which of course they all know in their hearts it always has done and it always will do, the only people who resisted are frankly, although the ones who have got the most to lose ultimately, and they are destroying our churches in my view by failing to respond.

[Phone]

[1:02:05]

I'd better just deal with that.

[Pause]

Okay, that's all right, that's perfectly fine.

Interviewer: So, one question I had...

Richard: Yeah, you should ask me more.

Interviewer: In your time at LGCM, I know it started out as GCM, was it strictly lesbians and gay men, or did it incorporate bi and trans?

Richard: Oh yes, everybody.

Interviewer: Everybody?

(Overspeaking)

Richard: Yeah, we were the prototype exclusive community. I've always said that if anybody wanted to look at how a bunch of Christians could demonstrate, given the sort of mental outlook that we weren't going to, we were not going to start discriminating having come into existence because we knew what it was like to be discriminated against. So, we've always done everything we could to welcome all irrespective of all the distinctions and identities and labels that people with varying degrees want to have, need to have, are given flourish within. I've never been one that's unhappy with labels. I mean, I don't like people who go around saying, "Oh I don't want to label myself". Well, frankly, they probably do most of the time, but they're happy to label themselves when it's convenient and easy and provides rewards to do so. When it's a bit more challenging, when you don't know what the results are going to be and you're a bit fearful, then you might come up with this variant which is, "Well, I don't like to be labelled except when it suits me," or "I'll label myself except when it doesn't suit me". Which doesn't seem to be a very credible position to adopt.

Which is why we've never asked questions about denomination, gender, age even, sexual identity. We've had lots of heterosexual members. We always stress that we will welcome heterosexuals are welcome on exactly equal terms, although the reasons why we retained and would have fought to retain I think the identity of the name, the vocabulary of lesbian and gay, was that it was out of that particular experience that the organisation came into existence and our heterosexual members never tried to swamp us by imposing a heterosexual view or heterosexual values on us. So, we've never really confronted with the need to change the organisation into the inclusive Christian community, which of course some might have chosen to do because what we were trying to say, what I hope it still tries to say, is if you want to look at a Christian community of the future and what it might look like, look at us. But of course, that was too hard a message for most Christians to accept, because what they would in fact have found, at least superficially at least, well, very importantly but they might not have seen beyond the fact that most of us are lesbian and gay. What they wouldn't have been able to be reconciled with or would have found difficulties to encounter initially would have been the fact that most of us didn't care less about what your sexual orientation was just so long as those of us who were lesbian and gay or bisexual wouldn't be disadvantaged but we didn't wish to see anybody else disadvantaged at the same time. Which is why when I was an employee, I was answerable from time to time to a heterosexual chair and heterosexual members of our board and very happy to be so because I knew those people wouldn't have joined and made a commitment publicly to a lesbian and gay led organisation or identified organisation unless they'd been very happy being colleagues on equal terms.

Interviewer: Yeah. True. I know earlier you said how the church even today is still not accepted and...

[1:06:17]

Richard: No. It's very unaccepting.

Interviewer: That's what I mean.

Richard: Yes, it's very hostile. Extremely hostile. So, much so that, of course, the church has suffered greatly numerically and in terms of its public prestige and standing. It's become the laughing stock, the object of ridicule and contempt amongst most people because of its oppositions to gay and lesbian people. I mean, most intelligent people, even if they're not Christians, cannot comprehend of an institution now in the 21st century that wishes to be seen to be a persecuting church. What sense does it make? If you want to attract people, to insist and do so categorically that gay people are not equal. And that is what the churches are saying.

Interviewer: What are your hopes for the future regarding LGBTQ?

Richard: Well, in terms of the churches and faith groups and I'm not, although I've used the word churches it's for convenience and I think all faith groups are more or less equally culpable and all are or need to be held to account for their unwillingness to embrace unconditionally the whole human race. Or, if conditionally, at least to do so on the same terms as those who are thought to be or pretend to be or claim to be heterosexual. I don't think it's healthy. I don't think the faith groups are in a healthy position at all, largely because they have cornered themselves, they've positioned themselves in such a way as wider society now equates Christianity with gay hatred. So, from an evangelical point of view, to throw your arms open as a church leader and say, "You are welcome," is met with ribald laughter and guffaws of disbelief because of course for 30, 40 years people have seen time and time and time and time and time again how untrue that claim is.

Interviewer: So, you think we've made some headway since you started?

Richard: Well, only in exposing, only in making clear what was hitherto just a way of doing things which nobody was challenging.

Interviewer: But not changing the core of what you...?

Richard: No, no. If we'd not come into existence, the church would still be discriminating and persecuting, but it would be doing so in a way which was even more brutal and was even more extreme. And of course, the whole ex-gay phenomenon is a manifestation of the lengths to which Christian churches are prepared to go, and even the so-called and mainstream middle of the road churches in Britain and who eschewed and never officially or publicly embraced the ex-gay movement would still have a sympathy for the ex-gay concept, even if they couldn't quite bring themselves to be officially recommending them, which was a wholly dishonest position of course. I mean, either you don't believe in the ex-gay myth or you do and you should not try and hedge your bets as so many in this institute have done by saying to you, "Oh well, perhaps you would consider, are you really gay? Do you think there's an alternative?" which is in a milder form what the ex-gay movement begins by saying until it gets you in its clutches and tries to electrocute you and drive you to your death or seduce you as a lot of the ex-gay leaders were only too proficient in doing on the grounds that you needed a bit of same-sex loving affection to overcome your desire for same-sex. I mean, however totally illogical could that be? But it was and remains the standard methodology in many of these criminal outfits.

Interviewer: True. Okay, well, we've reached the end of the list. Is there anything you want to add there?

Richard: (Laughter) I don't know. I could go on for hours.

(Laughter)

[1:11:19]

Interviewer: Definite headway has been made, but still need a lot more.

Richard: Do you think so? Well, only headway in terms of isolating the problem, but the problem in namely a church which has power and influence and faith groups which are still given a wholly unjustified degree of deference in some circles have now got the legal power to discriminate, which they didn't have before. They did not have the power in law to discriminate. Nobody bothered to clarify the law. It hadn't needed the law to say whether you could or could not discriminate. It was just assumed that anybody could discriminate against homosexuals because homosexuals would never be taken seriously in the courts or would never be believed or would never have the temerity or the cheek to stand up and say, "You're not going to treat me like that anymore". (Laughter)

But because so many gay and lesbian people came along and said, "You are not going to treat me like that anymore. If you do, I shall sue you," that the church has realised that to avoid being sued successfully, they would have to seek legal protection to discriminate. And which they've got, which they've acquired.

Interviewer: Do you think the fight just continues?

Richard: Oh, it must, it must, yeah, but, well, the trouble is, we can't. There are so few Christians committed to eradicating the power and the legal privileges that the church has to

discriminate against gay people that unless we draw in our secular allies and unless we are able to convince them that there are a sizable number of people who are gay and lesbian going who they share their sexual orientation with, even if not their belief system, that you have to stand in solidarity with that group of oppressed people even if you don't like the idea of working alongside on behalf of gay Christians, you've got to do so otherwise they are going to carry on being driven into a place where they have even less rights and even fewer, even less security, even less equality, and are more and more discriminated against. I mean the case of these two clergymen, Jeremy Pemberton and his partner who got married. And are now finding that every road that the church can block is being blocked. And that's all being done in the name of the law of the land. The church doesn't have to say, "Oh, well, it's what we believe", it's what the church permits us to do.

But we do have some very bad drafting and some very, and Stonewall principally, to blame for this terrible state of affairs because when this has all been debated, we can see this coming, they took no interest in protecting lesbian and gay people of faith. They were only and solely concerned with secular people and secular values and defending the majority of people who of course are not going to be directly affected by a discriminating or persecuting church. But that's not the point. That is, if you have a discriminating or persecuting church in a culture which claims to be committed to equality and fairness, there is a canker, there is a cancer which has to be removed. And until the churches are made to live by their claim to respect all equally I believe they should be denied charitable status, which is this tax break. We're not trying to infringe their liberty. But what we are trying to do is to make sure we're not financially rewarded for discriminating. And since British society thankfully has got to the position of agreeing that it wishes to have equality for all, any organ, any institution, anybody which doesn't wish all people to be treated equally can continue to say that they dislike us and denounce us and don't want us to be members. But they're not going to be given a tax break on the back of taxpayers' money to do so. They can raise their money without getting the break which registered charities and churches automatically acquire to do so. It just doesn't make sense in public policy terms to be promoting equality with public money and promoting inequality with public money at the same time.

Interviewer: Okay.

(Laughter)

I think we're at the end.

[1:16:21]

Richard: Okay. Right.

(Laughter)

[End of Transcript]