

LIVING IN THE LAND OF MAKE BELIEVE

A Response to the HRC's Article on the Brown/Knox Dialogue

By Pastor Scott Volk

Imagine how crazy it would be if, on the day after the New York Giants stunning Super Bowl victory over the New England Patriots, you find Patriot fans and ownership alike relishing the previous day's victory! Not only that, but on the Patriots' public website, you noticed how they were recounting how they outplayed, confused, and even caused New York Giant fans to question whether or not they should switch their orientation and become Patriot fans. You would be scratching your head in disbelief and be forced to admit that someone was willfully and very unfortunately living in the land of make believe.

On Thursday, February 14th, I had the pleasure of attending a public, two-hour dialogue between Dr. Michael Brown, Director of the Coalition of Conscience, and Mr. Harry Knox, Director of Religion and Faith for the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the world's largest homosexual advocacy organization. The topic was, "A Christian Response to Homosexuality," and after the debate, a number of the students in our ministry school engaged Mr. Knox in respectful conversation while Dr. Brown continued to dialogue with some gay activists.

Two days later, I was very surprised to read the following report on the HRC website:

Last year, Dr. Michael Brown, director of the conservative Charlotte-based Coalition of Conscience, picketed the HRC Carolinas Gala dinner and insulted attendees arriving at the Charlotte Convention Center with incendiary hate speech. The bullying presence of Brown and a small group of his supporters has been a disruptive and dispiriting presence in Charlotte for a number of years. Last year, Joe Solmonese [president of the HRC] decided enough was enough and that the people of North Carolina deserved better. He made it clear to Brown that his anti-GLBT hate rhetoric would not go unanswered. And he kept his word!

As both a local pastor, as well as one who has labored closely with Dr. Brown for over eleven years, I can unequivocally say that Dr. Brown had nothing to do with picketing the HRC Dinner! As a matter of fact, he didn't even know that people had planned to picket it. And under no circumstances has he ever bullied or insulted the attendees. (It's hard to bully and insult people when you're not even there!)

Everyone who has ever heard Dr. Brown speak knows that he never engages in "hate speech," let alone "incendiary hate speech." In point of fact, I was thoroughly impressed by his humble introductory remarks at the above mentioned dialogue, indicating his sincere desire to relay to the GLBT community his hope for ongoing open and constructive dialogue, **even apologizing to them** for those that did the very things in which the HRC is accusing him of participating! Just watch the video of the debate itself,

it's as plain as day – but, apparently, it seems that the HRC had to twist the facts in order to garner the support of people to oppose Dr. Brown. Someone is living in the land of make believe.

Interestingly, the leadership of the HRC was fully aware that Dr. Brown had nothing to do with the picketers – in fact, when Joe Solmonese challenged Dr. Brown publicly last year, he specifically made reference to Dr. Brown's lecture series, not any alleged picketing – but it appears that facts don't matter to the HRC. And the report gets worse from here. It goes on to state:

On Thursday, February 14th, Harry Knox, director of the Religion and Faith Program, went straight into the lion's den and debated Dr. Brown on his own turf. The event was attended by a mixed crowd of over 350 people, approximately half supporting Brown and half supporting Harry and the cause of GLBT equality.

Speaking from his heart and out of his deep faith, Harry electrified the crowd and transformed many...while those who came to support Harry were ebullient, Harry's words also seemed to leave Brown's students rattled as he clearly disturbed many of their set assumptions about religion and GLBT people. Indeed, Harry was nearly mobbed at the end of the event by students who found themselves unexpectedly wrestling with the power of his words and clarity of his vision of justice."

This is a complete fabrication!

According to the HRC report:

- Harry Knox's words "transformed many"?
- He left our students "rattled"?
- He "clearly disturbed many of [the students'] set assumptions about religion and GLBT people"?
- They left "unexpectedly wrestling with the power of his words and clarity of his vision of justice"?

I am privileged to pastor FIRE Church in Concord, NC, which is both the home church of Dr. Michael Brown as well as the students that are enrolled at his school of ministry. I am astonished by Mr. Knox's ability to interpret so inaccurately what happened that evening. Because of my shock at the HRC's rendition of the debate, I felt to take a couple of minutes in our Sunday service on February 17th, to read the HRC report to our congregation. They responded with laughter, gasps, and looks of incredulity and shock. People literally shook their heads in bewilderment as it became apparent to them that someone was living in the land of make believe.

Because the HRC report gave a completely mythical version of how the debate impacted the ministry school students and grads, (by the way, the crowd was not just students and graduates, but also representative pastors and leaders from many churches in the local Charlotte area) we asked those students and grads who attended to write up their impressions of the evening, asking them specifically if they were "rattled" or "disturbed" by Mr. Knox's comments. This is just a representative sampling of their responses:

I was part of the group that got to speak briefly with Mr. Knox after the debate. The only 'rattling' I got was that someone believes that you can be a Christian practicing homosexuality. – SL (Graduate)

I think Dr. Brown's presentation was very clear and convincing. Harry Knox's presentation was not very consistent and a bit pitiful, trying to use fear tactics, play victim, etc. Actually, I was quite disappointed - I thought he would argue his case more convincingly. – TL (Graduate)

Dr. Brown was very aware of the arguments. He quoted extensively from the homosexual viewpoint as well as his own. He constantly brought his arguments based on scriptural evidence. Harry Knox was a classic example of somebody approaching the Scriptures with a predetermined idea...I left much more convinced that homosexuality is sinful. – BR (Graduate)

My overall impression of the debate was solid scripture verses emotion. I really felt like Mr. Knox was more moved by his emotions than by actual biblical truths.. – SC (Graduate)

I want to thank God, for a clear presentation of the gospel this Thursday; a gospel that preaches I think Dr. Brown (of whom I am a student) presented the Word of the Lord. Clearly Mr. Harry Knox did not, as I found out, he does not even take the Bible, the Word of God seriously. I was not rattled after last week's debate...how can people read this awesome, clear Word of God, and think it's okay to be gay. – JM (Graduate)

Dr. Brown gave a clear presentation of biblical truth that confirmed the position I already held, namely that homosexual practice is sinful and cannot be reconciled with being a committed Christian. Mr. Knox on the other hand made an emotional appeal that had no foundation whatsoever in an objective interpretation of Scripture. – JL (Graduate)

Mr. Knox's overall presentation lacked substance and coherence. – BP (Graduate)

While I felt great sympathy for the emotional trauma Harry Knox has suffered over the years, not only was he completely unable to answer the biblical arguments Dr. Brown raised, he was confounded by the loving manner in which Dr. Brown presented them. – DM (Graduate)

I thought Dr. Brown's statements were sound and very stable. I was very disappointed in Knox's presentation. – JP (Current Student)

I was encouraged to hear Dr. Brown speak with such integrity, honesty, and humility to address these issues in a loving way...I can assure you that my viewpoint on homosexuality is only more clear and stronger now after hearing both speakers and my heart only goes out to those who are blinded from the truth even more. – LB (Graduate)

Dr. Brown did a very good job presenting and defending himself in love. I was very disappointed at Mr. Knox's part in the discussion. Knox showed his true colors when he raised his experience level above that of the Bible. – MR (Current Student)

I thought Dr. Brown did a good job engaging the topic biblically and maintaining a humble attitude. Mr. Knox's argument seemed to be more "victimization driven" than facts oriented. – GW (Current Student)

We did not visit with Mr. Knox but were "shaken" by the fact that Harry threw out slanders toward Dr. Brown. We thought that was a surprise and I was taken aback by the lack of love from their side. Everything that they want from us, they can't give themselves. – KS (Current Student)

My overall impression of the debate was that Dr. Brown's arguments were well researched and thought out. He used Scripture in its correct context, whereas Harry Knox's arguments (although they appealed to us to see the Scripture in context) were Scripturally weak when researched later. I left more convinced that the side for being a practicing homosexual and a committed Christian is not based on Scripture, but on emotions and actually seeks to trade Scripture for experience in the end. – CS (Graduate)

The debate made me feel very sad for Harry Knox. It showed me how deceived the homosexual really is. Dr. Brown used facts and quotes from homosexual theologians and scholars while Harry Knox used nothing but emotions and manipulation. If it takes using such tactics to prove his point rather than truth it's obvious Dr. Brown's position is the right one. – EM (Current Student)

So, to encapsulate, **every single student that attended** was deeply disappointed in Harry Knox's presentation, believing that he relied on emotional manipulation and twisting of the Scriptures, while at the same time they felt Dr. Brown's arguments were clear, biblically based, academically sound, and compassionate. And they left even more convinced that homosexual practice was sinful in God's sight. Yet in the mythical world of the HRC, they left "rattled" and "wrestling" with their belief system. It certainly appears to me that the HRC rendition, put in the best possible light, is simply willful self-deception and, in the worst possible light, an outright lie to garner support from people who weren't there.

The report also stated,

One woman in particular revealed to Harry the pain and fury she felt over her father's decision to divorce his wife and come out as a gay man. With compassion, Harry spoke to her about how a culture that encourages gay people to live closeted lives filled with deceit creates terrible pain that ripples through whole families. A light bulb went off for her, as it did for so many who attended.

What actually happened? As explained by the people involved: "The woman he spoke about actually was sharing her testimony of her father to try to show Harry the devastation of exchanging truth for experience, and how a family can be torn apart when someone (especially a pastor) leaves the truth of the Bible for an emotional experience not based on truth." So rather than "a light bulb" going off for this woman, the HRC had it completely backwards again: It was the woman trying to tell Mr. Knox how a whole family can be devastated when a father denies the clear teaching of Scripture and embraces his homosexuality – basing his decision on emotion not on truth. Apparently – and tragically – not only was this young woman's point completely missed, but it became part of the HRC's mythical report of the dialogue. (Just for the record, Dr. Brown did inform Mr. Knox of the errors in the report, "for the sake of truth and justice," but Mr. Knox responded by saying he stood by the report.)

The good news is that the DVD of the dialogue will soon be available for all to see, and that will help separate myth from reality. And let's remember to pray for Harry Knox, Joe Solmonese, and all those

involved in the Human Rights Campaign, believing that, in accordance with Jesus' words, the truth will set them free. After all, He already did that very thing for you and me.

“At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:3-7).