



Interview with David Hayward

Claremont Journal of Religion's founder, Kile Jones, had the honor of interviewing David Hayward, otherwise known as the Naked Pastor, on issues surrounding sexuality and modern Christianity.

In what ways can Christianity and other religions grow out of their disdain for LGBTQIAA folks?

I used to hate vegetables. How do you stop hating vegetables? After years of learning about their value as well as their variety, I began to slowly acquire an appreciation and taste for them. Now I love vegetables and they are what I mostly eat. I can't believe I used to hate them so much.

How do members of one tribe eventually make peace with members of an enemy tribe? The same way: they learn about their value, their diversity and acquire an appreciation for them. But not from a distance! They intentionally commune with each other and actually become friends. Eventually they forget the legendary roots of their now irrational hatred.

So I believe the most effective way for people to overcome their disdain for LGBTQIAA folks is to learn about them, recognize their diversity and acquire an appreciation for them through communion with them. That is, it requires education, the erosion of destructive mythologies, and intentional community.

This is how it happened to me growing up in a conservative Christian home and culture and educated in evangelicalism where sexuality and gender held to a very strictly conservative and traditional line. My studies of sexuality and gender began because of people I knew who were gay, lesbian, transgender, etc. To actually know these people who became friends with me and loved me, forced me to study the issues seriously, which opened my eyes to see that the human race is a wonderfully complex diversity spread across sexual and gender spectrums. As long as people remain behind closed doors on the issues and on the people themselves, then their minds are in danger of being forever closed and their disdain will never evaporate.

What positive changes do you see taking place between religious leaders and LGBTQIAA persons?

It is impossible now for religious leaders to avoid the issues of sexuality and gender. It is simply too large and it is obviously not going away. I know of one

religious leader who told me he was glad he was retiring because he was certain this issue was going to have to be addressed and he didn't want to be the one to do it. It would be left to his successor.

The risks for religious leaders are enormous and real. Religious leaders, as the word "leader" suggests, should be guiding people into the future. Rather, what we more often see happening is that they are regarded more as guardians of tradition, which most critics would consider not a leading but a retreating posture. So whether they like it or not, religious leaders are being stretched on the rack between the past tradition that has defined them and the future realities that screams for integration. It takes a courageous leader who can keep his or her position long enough to lead the way out of this impasse and create new forms for the new content that is relentlessly emerging.

How can religious organizations become more open, accepting, and caring towards marginalized groups?

This is the problem: no matter how open, accepting and caring religious organizations are towards marginalized groups, if these feelings don't translate into policy then it's empty speech. It means absolutely nothing. As some young people I know exclaim, "I will pray for you is just Christianese for 'Fuck you!'" Intention requires action. It must turn into practical policies that make a tangible difference in people's lives.

Also, I think it is important to recognize that the "marginalized groups" are about to outnumber the center control group if they haven't already. The spectrum of diversity in the human race is wonderfully fascinating and I believe prophesies to

us that perceiving unity in our diversity rather than our compatibility is the only way into a just future.

We have closed groups on the right and open groups on the left and then there are those in the middle who are trying to build bridges between the two. But neither group is interested in using the bridges unless it means a mass immigration of all those from the other side to theirs. Toleration isn't enough. Acceptance isn't enough. It has to be full equality. If our vision isn't universal enough to include everyone then it is simply unjust.

Education as to what is going on in the world can be truly enlightening. I watched the fascinating documentary about Nick Karras' book "Petals." Karras has collected exquisite sepia-toned photos of 48 different women's vulvas, each one unique. It reminded me of a medical illustration of genitalia I came across recently where on the left is a vagina and a lot of images progress to the far right to a penis. The variety between was surprising and astounding, blurring the lines between what is male and female anatomy. Add to that physical diversity the emotional, psychological, spiritual and sexual diversity and it should disturb our neat and tidy categories that manifest themselves in unfair policies.

How do you see your project, as the Naked Pastor, in the shifts towards progressive values in Christianity?

I simply draw cartoons and write short pieces that are like SCUD missiles launched into the debate. I like to pose the question. That's all. I have pastored local churches where we've experimented with a universal vision and we had some amazing times. Chaotic, but amazing! I can't help but believe that what we saw on a

smaller scale could happen on a larger scale: the micro as prototype for the macro.

I've also started an online community called www.TheLastingSupper.com, "Help Yourself!" where members are free to seek, discover and explore their unique spiritual path in a safe, non-confrontational space. It is a delightful mixture of all kinds of people...an incredibly rich diversity. It is working marvelously. So I'm sure it can be done.

In fact, this is precisely what is happening. It used to be that the marginalized, tired of waiting for full integration, met in unofficial, unauthorized, underground groups as a temporary measure. But now these groups are no longer waiting for legitimization from the authorities and are just going ahead with it and forming their own self-legitimizing communities. Their voices are getting stronger, more recognized, and will eventually require full admission into the commonwealth.

As a person involved in issues surrounding the Church, what would you say to Church leaders about sexuality and LGBTQIAA persons?

As long as our equality is chained to an ancient book written by ancient men and canonized by ancient councils, we will never be equal or free. Therefore, many believe this is where the battle needs to be fought...the inspiration and inerrancy of scripture. Those who hold to the inerrancy of scripture, and its literal interpretation will have great difficulty agreeing to full and equal rights and freedoms. It reminds me of Martin Luther King's self-observation, that he really began to gain his courage and voice when the chains of fundamentalism fell from his mind.

But as I said earlier, this needs to be a part of our education. This is the only way we can hopefully free ourselves of outworn hermeneutics, destructive

mythologies and inhumane policies. If our vision doesn't include everyone then none of us is free.

David Hayward's Biography:

David was baptized Anglican as a baby, came to faith in a Baptist church when he was a teenager, changed to Pentecostal in his late teens, married another Pentecostal named Lisa, was ordained Presbyterian, pastored a Vineyard church, and planted others. He has a Masters in Theological Studies from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, as well as a Masters in Religious Studies and Ministry from McGill University in Montreal. But in 2010 David left the professional paid clergy. He is still passionate about how people can find and follow their own spiritual path with courage and joy, as well as in how people can freely gather and form community in healthy ways. David started a blog called nakedpastor in 2006, and initiated his public analysis of religion, religious community and spirituality through his writings, art and cartoons. Thousands of people are challenged and entertained by nakedpastor every day. In 2012, David launched The Lasting Supper, an online resource site and community for the spiritually independent. His art, cartoons, writings and book have found their way all around the world. David lives with his wife Lisa on the beautiful Kennebecasis River near Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada. They have 3 grown children close by.



