

Gay Man, Evangelical at a Bar: Beyond Culture Wars

Most Americans are all too familiar with the battle over marriage and its angry activists, sound-bite slogans, and seemingly no common ground. That's why one church recently rented a night club in St. Louis for an evening of calm discussion over the red-hot topic.

The Journey Church, a non-denominational evangelical church, organized the event and billed it as "A Gay Man and an Evangelical Walk Into a Bar." The event featured LGBT philosopher and author John Corvino and Matthew Lee Anderson, author and lead writer at .

Corvino teaches philosophy at Wayne State University in Detroit and has debated **same-sex marriage** in the past with Focus on the Family's Glenn Stanton.

Anderson is author of *Earthen Vessels: Why Our Bodies Matter to Our Faith* and a philosophy graduate student at Cambridge University.

The two hope the St. Louis event will serve as a catalyst for others around the country. Their aim: Elevate the discussion and promote civil and thoughtful dialogue.

Old Debate, New Approach

"The conversation is very politicized," Anderson told CBN News. "It doesn't have a lot of substance to it."

"So much of the **marriage debate** that we see on the public stage involves the soundbite, the zingers, the how-do-I-slam-this-guy and get everyone to cheer and yell and clap. And we want to do something different," Corvino explained.

The event drew a younger crowd with wide range of beliefs.

Everyone, however, seemed to want a deep exploration of the issue.

"We're just wondering what both sides have to say. I'm happy that it's even happening, that it's something that people are talking about," Laura Gardner, a Journey attendee, said.

"I'm always interested in hearing the other side of the issue and so that's what I'm hoping to hear," Scott Wright, a supporter of homosexuality, said.

Equality and the Value of Marriage

As the evening progressed, it became clear that Corvino and Anderson, while calmly sipping tea, would not shy away from speaking to the hardest points.

Anderson spoke about equality.

"Concepts like fairness and equality are massively disputed here. The **LGBT movement** has done a very good job of branding itself and claiming equality, and I think there's just a fundamental disagreement over what the conditions of equality are," he explained.

Corvino talked about the value of marriage for gays.

"Relationships are good for people and marriage is good for relationships," he said. "It's a way of recognizing people as the family unit they recognize themselves to be."

Anderson addressed harassment of gays and intolerance for Christians.

"It may be the case in many rural and suburban areas (that) LGBT people experience repression and that's unfortunate," Anderson said.

"However, if you get into an elite context-in the academy, in Hollywood, in New York and some of these places, there are genuine social costs that people with conservative positions

on human sexuality pay,” he continued.

No More Us vs. Them

What seemed to make the evening work—Corvino and Anderson’s willingness to engage on all questions and their humor along the way.

By evening’s end, no one had converted to the other side but those CBN News spoke with said they felt better informed and grateful that neither side turned on the other.

“It’s good that there’s a dialogue going on, that it’s not an ‘us versus them,’” Eric Manske said at the end of the event.

“It’s natural to disagree with each other,” Joshua Ray said. “That’s just human nature. But to be able to be poignant but at the same time not offensive and to be open about that dialogue I thought was awesome.”

“I come from a Christian background,” Kim Tunnell said. “So getting to hear from both sides and especially John coming from an atheistic view and getting to hear his perspective was really enlightening.”

As the church seeks to find its voice in a culture that frequently dismisses biblical views, such forums could pave the way. Author and speaker Eric Metaxas said believers must explore different ways to thoughtfully articulate their positions.

The key he says is exhibiting both boldness and humility and above all, love.

“If your heart does not break for someone struggling with same-sex attraction, you have no business talking to them or even about them,” he told CBN News. “We’re called to love people so if people don’t see that love, how are they not going to tune us out?”

If it’s up to Corvino and Anderson, they’ll take this show on

the road. It's a small step but one that could model a new way of engaging on an issue that affects us all.