

introduction to bill t. jones

emilie m. townes*

i have always been amazed at those who think life should be
simple

oh, there are simple things about living

but life, itself

it's like what my partner says:

life is full of beautiful complications that sometimes makes us
say "ow"

how we move the air around us

either with a look

a wave of the hand

a torque of the foot

the longings in glances

how we move in history—in time and space

* emilie m. townes introduced Bill T. Jones at the Inaugural Lecture of the Sexuality and Religion Series, held in the James Memorial Chapel, Union Theological Seminary, 4 October 2000.

tells us that life is both simple and complex
to come to this place
this night
to begin this lecture series on sexuality and religion
will bear witness to this fact to some in this audience
some will remember frank reed's suicide
some will remember ray mesler's dismissal
some will remember closets that were really coffins of
the soul and the spirit
that were hewn right here at union theological seminary
you see, our liberal heritage
has never made us immune from small-mindedness and bigotry
masquerading as faithfulness or prophecy
and even as we celebrate the beginning of this new lecture series
we cannot congratulate ourselves too heartily
for there are still members of this community
who experience the ugliness of hatred
for no matter how much we try to dress it up
with big words like "heterosexism" or
"homophobia"
in the end, it is hatred
it is movement away from the spirit of hope that fills so
many of us

in our journeys of faith

the very journey so many of us have come here to
explore and to grow into

perhaps there can be no better person tonight to push along
this journey of faith

of life filled with complexity and simplicity than bill t.
jones

as an artist

he has asked of himself *and* of us to look at the worlds in
which we often spin our lives

the worlds that shape us even as we shape them

his work challenges us to explore whether we believe enough

to never give in and never give up

on living in the fragments of our lives as we piece
ourselves together

sometimes despite the odds or what "common sense"
might tell us

his work challenges us to explore hope and healing and anger and
violence

not because they are contradictions in living

but because both good and evil are part of living

and it is through the movement that we often call dance

that bill t. jones gives us a glimpse at the realities *and*
the possibilities

through his work as a dancer and choreographer jones has been
recognized

as a genius (the macarthur fellowship)

as thoughtful and provocative

as a man who cared for his partner, arnie zane, as he lived
his life into dying

as a man who is willing to show his explorations into faith with
thousands

jones' work is both awe-ful and beautiful

and he shares this with us tonight