

# introduction to bill t. jones

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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

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\* 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