

Theatrical Activist Enacts Transgender Bible Stories

Monday, 26 January 2009

Article by Rev. Pressley Sutherland

Gender DynamiX and Good Hope Metropolitan Community Church recently sponsored theatrical performance activist Peterson Toscano's original play "Transfigurations - Transgressing Gender in the Bible".

In this one-person play, Peterson Toscano unearthed transgender Bible characters--those people who do not fit in the gender binary, and who in transgressing and transcending gender, find themselves at the centre of some of the Bible's most important stories.

Drawing on inspiration from one-on-one interviews with transgender and genderqueer individuals, Peterson wove their experiences with the stories and lives of transgender, genderqueer and gender-variant people right on the pages of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Hilarious and moving, Toscano deepened our understanding of well-known (and lesser-known) Bible stories as he presented an array of characters with an array of genders.

There was enthusiasm across the board in the standing-room-only crowd gathered in The Friendly Society at 125a Waterkant Street,

"There was not only the southeaster blowing with healing properties through Cape Town on Tuesday. In his gentle, entertaining way, Peterson Toscano breathed life into spiritual ancestors of many genders and varied expressions from the Bible. An ex-gay reparative therapy survivor, Peterson embodies what many transgender, lesbian, gay and bisexual people of faith offer our communities—a fresh way of understanding the breadth of God's love for everyone and Christ's mandate to love likewise. Toscano transcends the defensive and risks generosity."

Rev. Pressley Sutherland, Good Hope MCC

"Definitely fine food for provocative thought- I will read my Bible with other eyes since seeing the dynamic Peterson in action."

Gertrude Fester, Feminist Forum

"For some reason I was expecting some form of boring Church sermon (I grew up in the N.G Church) and was more than pleasantly surprised . He kept me on the edge of my seat and I left with sore stomach muscles from all the laughing. Had my mom in stitches when I telephoned her and told her about Joseph and the technicoloured Princess dress! Please bring Peterson back, and this time in a local theatre! action."

Gunther Dippenaar, Cape Town Pride

The proceeds from Toscano's performance were donated to support the ongoing work of Gender Dynamix and Good Hope Metropolitan Community Church. Both organisations support raising awareness of transgender experiences, providing positive ways forward through transgender advocacy, education and heightened visibility in South Africa and beyond. Reclaiming trans-cestors from sacred traditions is an important step in making visible the existence and contributions of transgender people throughout history.

As audience member, Lex, put it,

"The 'Transfigurations' theatrical play was a very positive experience for me as a transman, and I got a lot out of it. It is very educational, and gives a biblical perspective that I never ever came across before. This show would also be particularly helpful for persons who are struggling with bringing their religion and their trans-ness together, or for any other person who feels that to be transgender is sinful and against God's will."

Toscano is an international performer. He has performed his poignant, entertaining consciousness-raising plays around the world from the 2008 Lambeth Conference in England to Universities, conferences, churches and grass-roots human rights gatherings. He is also a co-founder of Beyond Ex-Gay, a survivor's support network.

"The work of Peterson is not to be taken only as comedy, or the likes. Because his work is well researched, drawn from experience, honesty and laced with a bit of glamour & it is edutainment at its best!"

Liesl Theron, Gender DynamiX For more information on the work of Gender DynamiX, Good Hope Metropolitan Community Church and Peterson Toscano see their websites @

- Peterson Toscano

<http://www.petersontoscano.com/> and <http://www.beyondexgay.com/>

- Gender DynamiX

<http://www.genderdynamix.org.za/>

- Good Hope Metropolitan Community Church

<http://www.goodhopemcc.org/>