



Openly gay bishop provides speech of hope

Speaks of the 'end of patriarchy'

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When New Hampshire Bishop V. Gene Robinson strapped on a bullet proof vest in preparation for his ordination as the Episcopal bishop of the small northeastern state, he did so because he believes in the gay community.

"We have something worth dying for here," Robinson told activists gathered Saturday afternoon for the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Creating Change Conference**.

Robinson, 60, spoke about what he called "a bunch of 'H' words." They included honor, history, humility, heroes, and chutzpah, which Robinson jokingly acknowledged was a "'CH' word." "The forces against us are fairly fierce," he said, adding that the root of the battle against the LGBT community is misogyny.

"We are about the end of patriarchy," he said, sending over half the room to their feet in a standing ovation. "For a very, very long time, white, straight, educated, Western men have been making most of the decisions for the world, and you know what, the jig is up."

"Look at your diversity," he said to discuss honor. "You're beautiful. You are G and L and B and T and letters we have not even thought up yet!"

"The thing I have been thinking about is how this could not have been thought of when I was growing up," Robinson said of the conference. "A gathering of 2000 out-and-proud gay activists - well it wasn't even dreamt of."

But Robinson acknowledged the gathering was not something without history behind it. "I stand on the shoulders of those drag queens of the Stonewall bar," Robinson said, referring to the Stonewall bar riots of 1969, widely thought of as the birth of the modern gay rights movement.

The riots happened when New York City police conducted a routine raid on the Stonewall Bar, a known gay bar. But what was routine turned into a riot when a crowd gathered to witness those arrested loaded up in vehicles for transportation to the jail. The crowd began throwing bricks and bottles forcing a confrontation with NYC police which lasted three nights. LGBT history records it was the drag queens of the community who lead the riots.

Robinson bemoaned the fact that many in the LGBT community do not know the history of the community. "We have accomplished so much in a short time," he said. "But we don't know where came from."

The openly gay bishop, whose ordination caused a schism between the Episcopal Church of the USA and the Anglican Church, also acknowledged that as a man of the church, he owed the community humility. "You have been badly treated," he said. "I am not sure a few years ago any leader of a church would have been invited to address this conference."

"Asking you to come back to us is like asking an abused spouse to return home," Robinson said. "Ninety percent of the oppression we face comes from the Abrahamic religions... There is no reason the LGBT community should trust us."

"You may wilt at the quoting of scripture," he said, "but that does not scare me."

He then told the story of sitting with six youth in a support group of LGBT youth he helped to form. None of the six were from religious families, yet each was certain, he said, what God thought about them.

"Take on those ancient texts and show us what they mean, rather than what they appear to be talking about," he said. "It (the misuse of scripture) affects even nonreligious people... We have to come out as people of faith."

"I think," he said, "it's easier to come out as gay than as religious... we have learned a lot of things they (religious communities) desperately need to hear."

He also called the activists heroes. "You are all people of uncommon courage," he said. "There is a risk to have a vision of the world as it should be, then living as if that vision were a reality." "God wants us to push the line so far there is no them, only us," he said. "It's not going to be easy. That means, gay men out there, what you say about women matters. What those of us who are white say about race matters."

"We know where this is going to end - with the full inclusion of all of God's people," Robinson said. "The reason we sing 'We Shall Overcome,' is not to beg, it is a fact. It is a proclamation. Whether you and I live to see it, we shall overcome."