

Tom Hanks' ministry in Brazil, May 12-22

Sparked by one of my former students in Costa Rica (1985), professors of gender studies and related subjects in three Methodist universities and one Lutheran seminary arranged for me to speak on Homophobia and the Bible, May 12-22 in three cities in Brazil (Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte and Porto Alegre with its suburb Sao Leopoldo). Due to last minute opposition from two Methodist bishops, organizers had to scramble to arrange for meetings to be held off campus, but with the accompanying free publicity attendance was excellent (30 profs and 120 students in the largest ones) and a 20-minute television interview provided a opportunity to communicate al alternate viewpoint to a wider general public.

In addition to speaking and teaching opportunities, the networking resulting from the trip is leading to Other Sheep collaboration in developing a number of projects .

- University scholarships for retraining pastors and other religious leaders who lose their employment due to discrimination for their sexual orientation—something that desperately needs duplication almost everywhere, including the USA.
- Lectureships that will provide dynamic academic spokespersons to combat homophobia in grade schools, high schools and every university discipline.
- Review and evaluation of library holdings and curriculum content in each institution. My few minutes with the computer in one university library revealed 67 titles (mainly in Portuguese) much to everyone's surprise. Term papers and theses should soon result that will increase understanding and concientización—perhaps even lead to some new courses.
- Children's books and literature focusing on Bible stories about alternate households in the Bible (the main kind—I have a list of 41 possible stories for children). Two professors were already at work in this area, but had not included any Bible stories.
- The formation of Other Sheep nuclei of professors seeking to network, strengthen gender-studies programs and transform sexual education in Brazilian institutions.

In my lectures I stressed the importance (1) of not giving away the Bible to our adversaries in the struggle against homophobia; (2) of not giving away the history of the church by ignoring/censoring countless documented heroic alternative voices, often martyred for teaching or incarnating alternate sexual views and practices; (3) of not giving away today's church to spokespersons (especially the Vatican) who pretend to speak for millions but often represent the ignorance and prejudice of relatively few. With students of marketing in one university we discussed the neglect of the booming gay market in their courses and homophobic mistranslation as a tool for marking Bibles.

My trip, of course, was not Other Sheep's first foray into what is not just "another country," but almost half of Latin America. John Doner and Pepe Hernandez included Brazil in their historic pioneer missionary journey in 1994 (by bus from Mexico to Argentina and back) and were able to arrange for seven resource-documentation centers in key institutions. Also, my participation in the meeting of the ILGA (International Lesbian Gay Association) in Rio in 1995 even resulted in having my photo published along with Boy George in VEJA, the national news magazine (equivalent to Time or Newsweek)! Since then MCC (Metropolitan Community Churches) has been able to establish dynamic congregations in several cities and one of their pastors has translated some of our materials into Portuguese (see our website: www.fundotrasovjeas.org).

