Angels in America

January 28, 2009 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

I stayed up late recently watching a rerun of Angels in America on Logo, the LGBT channel from MTV Networks. I was sluggish the day after, but I couldn't turn it off. Sadly, it's still relevant.

Sweeping in its scope, it tells the story of AIDS from Roy Cohn to AZT. In other words, from death to hope. The 2003 Golden Globe- and Emmy-winning HBO miniseries is based on the 1993 and 1994 Pulitzer- and Tony-winning plays by Tony Kushner, who also wrote the screenplay.

I've been relatively asymptomatic since my HIV diagnosis in 1992, but I continue to fear the potential onset of AIDS-related symptoms. Watching Prior Walter (Justin Kirk) and his friends wonder whether his visions of Angel America (Emma Thompson) and others are real or from dementia is never easy for me (and before anyone quips that it's really Justin's acting that causes me such pain, that's only a tiny bit true?his performance is entertaining, but thank goodness there's a plethora of acting prowess in the cast).

There are some things in the story that feel like history (death from AIDS still happens in America, of course, but it isn't as omnipresent), but other things still ring true (Mormon intolerance of LGBT people is just as true today as evidenced by that religion's funding of the Yes on Prop 8 campaign in California against marriage for same-sex couples).

As I watched it again for the umpteenth time, I couldn't help but admire how well it captures the drama of those times. Without that emotional connection, our prevention and destigmatization efforts will continue to suffer. Watching Angels in America should be required in every high school nationwide.

I am always uplifted by these words spoken by Prior Walter at the end:

> This disease will be the end of many of us, but not nearly all. And the dead will be commemorated, and we'll struggle on with the living, and we are not going away. We won't die secret deaths anymore. The world only spins forward. We will be citizens. The time has

come.

I’m waiting for the new Obama administration to show us a sign that the time has come.

Watch this clip from Angels in America (the Prior Walter quote starts at 4:46):

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