

"That's not a cause. That's an emergency." by Bono

My name is Bono and I am a rock star.

Doctor of Laws, wow! I know it's an honor, and it really is an honor, but are you sure? Doctor of Law, all I can think about is the laws I've broken.

So I humbly accept the honor, keeping in mind the words of a British playwright, John Mortimer it was, "No brilliance is needed in the law, nothing but common sense and relatively clean fingernails." Well, at best I've got one of the two of those. But no, I never went to college, I've slept in some strange places, but the library wasn't one of them. I studied rock and roll and I grew up in Dublin in the '70s; music was an alarm bell for me, it woke me up to the world. I was 17 when I first saw The Clash, and it just sounded like revolution. The Clash were like, "This is a public service announcement - with guitars."

I was the kid in the crowd who took it at face value. Later I learned that a lot of the rebels were in it for the t-shirt. They'd wear the boots but they wouldn't march. They'd smash bottles on their heads but they wouldn't go to something more painful, like a town hall meeting. By the way I felt like that myself until recently. I didn't expect change to come so slow. So agonizingly slow. I didn't realize that the biggest obstacle to political and social progress wasn't the Free Masons, or the Establishment, or the boot heel of whatever you consider the man to be, it was something much more subtle.

As the Provost just referred to, a combination of our own indifference and the Kafkaesque labyrinth of *no's* you encounter as people vanish down the corridors of bureaucracy. There's a really great, truly great Irish poet; his name is Brendan Kennelly, and he has this epic poem called the Book of Judas, and there's a line in that poem that never leaves my mind: "If you want to serve the age, betray it." What does that mean to betray the age? Well to me betraying the age means exposing its conceits, its foibles, its phony moral certitudes. It means telling the secrets of the age and facing harsher truths. Every age has its massive moral blind spots. We might not see them, but our children will. Slavery was one of them and the people who best served that age were the ones who called it as it was, which was ungodly and inhuman. Ben Franklin called it when he became president of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. Segregation. There was another one. America sees this now but it took a civil rights movement to betray their

age. And 50 years ago the U.S. Supreme Court betrayed the age May 17, 1954, Brown vs. Board of Education came down and put the lie to the idea that separate can ever really be equal. Amen to that.

Fast forward 50 years May 17, 2004, what are the ideas right now worth betraying? What are the lies we tell ourselves now? What are the blind spots of our age? What's worth spending your post-Penn lives trying to do or undo? It might be something simple. It might be something as simple as our deep down refusal to believe that every human life has equal worth. Could that be it? Could that be it?

Each of you will probably have your own answer, but for me that is it. And for me the proving ground has been Africa. Africa makes a mockery of what we say, at least what I say, about equality. It questions our pieties and our commitments because there's no way to look at what's happening over there and it's effect on all of us and conclude that we actually consider Africans as our equal before God. There is no chance.

An amazing event happened here in Philadelphia in 1985, Live Aid, that whole 'We Are The World' phenomenon, the concert that happened here. Well after that concert I went to Ethiopia with my wife, Ali; we were there for a month and an extraordinary thing happened to me. We used to wake up in the morning and the mist would be lifting; we'd see thousands and thousands of people who'd been walking all night to our food station were we were working. One man -- I was standing outside talking to the translator -- had this beautiful boy and he was saying to me in Amharic, I guess it was, I said I can't understand what he's saying; and this nurse who spoke English and Amharic said to me, he's saying will you take his son. He's saying please take his son; he would be a great son for you. I was looking puzzled and he said, "You must take my son because if you don't take my son, my son will surely die. If you take him he will go back to where he is and get an education." (Probably like the ones we're talking about today.) And of course I said, I had to say no. That was the rules there and I walked away from that man.

And I've never really walked away from it. But I think about that boy and that man and that's when I started this journey that's brought me here into this stadium. Because at that moment I became the worst scourge on God's green earth, a rock star with a cause. Chrickey!

Except it isn't a cause. Seven thousand Africans dying every day of preventable, treatable disease like AIDS? That's not a cause. That's an emergency. And when the disease gets out of control because most of the population lives on less than a dollar a day? That's not a cause. That's an emergency. And when resentment builds because of unfair trade rules and the burden of unfair debts (our debts, by the way) that keep Africans poor? That's not a cause. That's an emergency.

So -- We Are The World, Live Aid, start me off. It was an extraordinary thing and really that event was about charity. But 20 years on I'm not that interested in charity. I'm interested in justice. There's a difference. Africa needs justice as much as it needs charity. Equality for Africa is a big idea. It's a big expensive idea. I see the Wharton graduates now getting out the math on the back of their programs; numbers are intimidating aren't they, but not to you! But the scale of the suffering and the scope of the commitment, they often numb us into a kind of indifference. Wishing for the end to AIDS and extreme poverty in Africa is like wishing that gravity didn't make things so damn heavy. We can wish it, but what the hell can we do about it?

Well, more than we think. We can't fix every problem -- corruption, natural calamities are part of the picture here -- but the ones we can, we must. The debt burden, as I say, unfair trade, as I say, sharing our knowledge, the intellectual copyright for lifesaving drugs in a crisis; we can do that. And because we can, we must. Because we can, we must. Amen.

This is the straight truth. The righteous truth. It's not a theory; it's a fact. The fact is that this generation -- yours, my generation -- we're the first generation that can look at poverty and disease, look across the ocean to Africa and say with a straight face, we can be the first to end the sort of stupid extreme poverty, where, in a world of plenty, a child can die for lack of food in it's belly. We can be the first generation. It might take a while, but we can be that generation that says no to stupid poverty.

It's a fact, it's a fact, the economists confirm it. I believe that this generation can do this. In fact I want to hear an argument about why we shouldn't.

So what's the problem that we want to apply all this energy and intellect to? Every era has its defining struggle and the fate of Africa is one of ours. It's not the only one, but in the history

books it's easily going to make the top five, what we did or what we did not do. It's a proving ground, as I said earlier, for the idea of equality.

But whether it's this or something else, I hope you'll pick a fight and get in it. Get your boots dirty; get rough; steel your courage with a final drink there at Smoky Joe's, one last primal scream and go. Sing the melody line you hear in your own head; remember, you don't owe anybody any explanations; you don't owe your parents any explanations; you don't owe your professors any explanations.

You know, I used to think the future was solid, or fixed, or something you inherited like an old building that you move into when the previous generation moves out or gets chased out. But it's not. The future is not fixed; it's fluid. You can build your own building, or hut or condo, whatever; this is the metaphor part of the speech by the way. But my point is that the world is more malleable than you think and it's waiting for you to hammer it into shape. Now if I were a folksinger I would immediately launch into "If I Had a Hammer" right now, get you all singing and swaying. But as I say I come from punk rock, so I'd rather have the bloody hammer right here in my fist. That's what this degree of yours is, a blunt instrument. So go forth and build something with it. And remember what John Adams said about Ben Franklin, "He does not hesitate at our boldest Measures but rather seems to think us too irresolute." Well this is the time for bold measures and this is the country and you are the generation.

Thank you.