



At James Madison University

**"Goodness is Powerful"**

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Nobel Peace Laureate

Archbishop Desmond Tutu delivered his Gandhi Lecture on 21 September 2007 at the JMU Convocation Center, Harrisonburg, Virginia. He was introduced by Professor Sushil Mittal, Director of the Mahatma Gandhi Center for Global Nonviolence at James Madison University.

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Thank you so very, very much for your very, very warm welcome. I am sure you will join with me as we send our good wishes and assurances of prayer for God's blessings for the Muslim and Jewish communities who at this time are commemorating very holy seasons for them. We pray that God will pour God's abundant blessings on them so that they will become conduits of that blessing to the rest of us.

It's very wonderful to be here and to receive your wonderful welcome. I remember one day going through the security checkpoint at the Atlanta airport, and the senior security officer thought she recognized me. And she was gushing, "Oh, Archbishop Tutu." It was very nice. And then she called a younger colleague across, and the younger colleague came sauntering. And the older security officer says, "This is Archbishop Tutu." Blank stare. "You know, Bishop Tutu." Blank stare. So the younger officer saunters back to her post, and as she goes through she says, "He must have been before my time."

It is a very great honor to have been awarded this prestigious Mahatma Gandhi Global Nonviolence Award. I am so deeply aware that the people you really want to honor are the millions of my compatriots who are the true heroes and heroines of our struggle against the injustice and awfulness of apartheid's oppression. It is on their behalf in a representative capacity that I accept the award. I usually say what is so patently obvious, that when you are in a crowd and you stand out, it is only because you are being carried on the shoulders of others. I am so very cognizant of this. And don't go away thinking, "Oh, isn't he nice and so modest." I am nothing of the sort. We once visited West Point Military Academy, and at the end of the visit the cadets presented me with a cap to commemorate the visit. It didn't fit me. A nice wife would have said, "The cap is too small." My wife said, "Oh, his head is too big!" Thank you.

In our struggle against apartheid there were so many occasions when we seemed to have reached the end of our tether when the upholders of apartheid and all its injustice and evil seemed invincible. At such moments we would tell our people, "This is God's world, and God is in charge." Of course there were many moments when we wished we could whisper in God's ear, "God we know you're in charge, but why don't you make it slightly more obvious?"

Yes, we asserted categorically, "This is a moral universe. There's no way that injustice, evil, and oppression could have the last word. Ultimately right and goodness will prevail." This belief was vindicated when apartheid was toppled and freedom and democracy came into their own. I can hear the cynic say, "Well yes, it might have turned out that way in this exceptional case. The evidence almost universally points to a sadly unhappy picture." So, what in fact is the truth?

We shouldn't subvert our thesis by burying our heads in the sand. Only the willfully blind could pretend that our world is a paradise, that our world is an ideal one. There is almost overwhelming evidence that evil is real, that injustice,

oppression, suffering are prominent features of life as experienced by far too many in our world. In recent times there have been the ghastliness of the Holocaust in Nazi Germany, the gulags in Stalin's Communist Soviet Russia, there have been dictatorships in Spain, Portugal, even Greece, the cradle of democracy, there has been the repression in the former communist dictatorships behind the former Iron Curtain—the catalog is endless and depressing—just think of communist China, the military dictatorships in most of Latin America and in Asian countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Burma, not to mention Africa which sometimes has seemed to take the cake with its almost endemic conflicts and genocide thrown in for good measure. At present just look at Darfur, at the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe, Somalia, the excesses in Rwanda, Burundi, Sierra Leone, Liberia. Oh dear, it just seems to go on and on.

I have a book of cartoons by the late Mel Colman of the *London Observer*—charming line drawings in a collection titled *My God!* One shows God somewhat distraught and God observes, “Oh dear, I think I have lost my copy of the Divine Plan.” Looking at the state of the world in the recent past and in our day we might be forgiven for wondering if God had ever had a plan at all. I mean you have floods in one place and a drought in another. Couldn't God have organized it a little better that there was enough water for all everywhere? Look at the morass in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in the Middle East. Phew! You couldn't have better evidence that God had lost the plot, and my assertion about our inhabiting a moral universe being shown to be utter poppycock, baloney, unrealistic daydreaming. The ruthless, the aggressive, the macho rule the roost. The powerless cower impotently watching the powerful strut the world stage arrogantly as almost invincible cocks of the walk. It seems all so hollow, such a mockery to tell people who are suffering so grievously as they do in Darfur or Zimbabwe or in Burma. “Hey,” we say to them, “take heart, this is a moral universe. Your resistance to evil will succeed, your suffering will end.”

It seems like so much whistling in the dark, totally disregarding the harsh reality, which is their daily lot. But is it being totally unrealistic, is it to inhabit a cloud cuckoo land?

Is goodness impotent, destined to be dragged through the mud? Or does it ultimately, in fact, triumph?

The award that I am privileged to receive today is named for Mahatma Gandhi. He spent nearly two decades in South Africa, where he and other people of color

were discriminated against quite harshly with very few political rights. He was thrown off a train because he sat in a whites-only first-class compartment, even though he had paid the fare. Am I glad that he suffered this great indignity, he, a London-trained lawyer? I am glad because it aroused a righteous anger in him and provoked him to develop his Satyagraha methods of nonviolent resistance. He honed the methods in South Africa as he campaigned nonviolently to improve the lot of his fellow Indians. Then he returned to his motherland, India, which was ruled as a colony by the British Raj. Mahatma, the great soul, galvanized his people and took on the might of the British Empire. This slight figure, a slip of a man in his quaint garb, took on the British Raj without resorting to violence and prevailed. Independence came for India. Freedom and democracy prevailed where previously the hegemony of a colonial power had ruled the roost.

Gandhi was to influence greatly Martin Luther King Jr., the leading light in the American Civil Rights Movement, as well as the South African National Congress of Nelson Mandela. So many, many people expected our country to go up in flames, enveloped by a catastrophe, a racial bloodbath. It never happened. It never happened because in the struggle against an evil of injustice, ultimately it did not take recourse to violence, and because you and so many others in the international community supported the struggle.

I want to pay a very warm tribute to young people, for it was young people—not exclusively, but largely young people—at university and college campuses who nonviolently by demonstrations and protests actually brought about a change in the moral climate in this country. You had a president who was opposed to sanctions and divestment, but because of those who supported us in the anti-apartheid movement, your Congress ultimately passed anti-apartheid legislation with a presidential veto overnight. And today we are free. Today we are free.

And you, you young people, don't let us oldies with our cynicisms divert you and turn you away from the dreams that you dream. For you dream God's dream. You dream of a new kind of world. You dream that yes it is possible for there to be no war any longer. You dream of a world where poverty will be history. You dream of a world where there will be laughter and compassion and caring and gentleness. Go on dreaming. Go on dreaming.

And so you in the international community certainly helped us so that those who have formerly seemed so invincible almost all end up coming up cropper. Biting the dust and doing so ignominiously. Almost all without exception have had it.

Where are such as Stalin, Pinochet, Amin, Hitler, Mussolini, Marcos, the perpetrators of apartheid's injustice? They have become the flotsam and jetsam of contemporary history.

I was intrigued by the recent goings on in Pakistan. A few years ago General Mushraff staged a military coup and set up a military dictatorship and he seemed unassailable, ensconced in unaccountable power. Currently, he has been constrained to parley with Ms. Bhutto whom he had overthrown. His hold on power is quite tenuous, this one who was cock of the walk only fairly recently. The late Milosevic had seemed untouchable and likely to be in power for a long while, yet, when the end came, he was a shadow of the cocky ruler, as he had to defend himself in The Hague. Charles Taylor was master of all he surveyed in Liberia. He, too, is now in the dock as an accused in the International Criminal Court for the abuses and atrocities he presided over in Liberia. We could multiply examples that seem amply to support my thesis that mercifully we do indeed inhabit a moral universe. Right and wrong matter. That there is no way in which evil, wrong, injustice can have the last word. No, it is their glorious counterparts, right, justice, freedom, and goodness, which do indeed ultimately prevail.

It is quite wonderful, yes amazing, that in a hard headed, cynical world such as our own, those we admire most, indeed revere, are not as we might have expected, the macho, the aggressive, even the successful. No, amazingly, it is such as Mother Teresa, a Dalai Lama, a Mahatma Gandhi, a Nelson Mandela.

I was telling people that the Dalai Lama is quite mischievous, you know. He is almost like a schoolboy, wonderful for someone who has been in exile for many, many years. That he can bubble so with joyousness that is irrepressible, and sometimes I have to say, "Watch it, watch it. The cameras are on us, you know. Try to behave like a holy man."

There are many things we could say about Mother Teresa, but macho is certainly not one of them. Why do we revere such as these? If the Dalai Lama were to come here, this venue is too small for the people who would want to come and hear him. Why, why?

It is because they are good and our hearts rejoice, exult in their presence. They make us feel good about being human.

And because you know something, we, all of us, have been made for goodness. We have been made for laughter, we have been made for gentleness, we have been made for caring, for sharing, for compassion; for we do indeed inhabit a moral universe and, yes, goodness is powerful.

There is a story of a farmer, and one day in his backyard he sees a strange-looking chicken. A traveler comes by and says, "No, no, no, that's no chicken, man; that's an eagle." The traveler takes that chicken, and he goes and climbs a mountain. And he gets to the top of the mountain and waits for the sun to rise, and as the sun rises, he turns toward the rising sun and holds this strange-looking chicken, and he says, "Fly eagle, fly." The strange chicken shakes itself, spreads out his pinions, lifts off, and he soars and he soars and flies away to the distance towards the rising sun.

God says to you, to us, "Hey, you are not a chicken. You are an eagle. Fly, eagle, fly." God expects us to shake ourselves, to spread out our wings, to lift off, to soar, to soar toward goodness, to soar toward laughter and joy and compassion and caring. For you, you are made for goodness.