



Bono: "Let's Put Humanity Back on Earth"

By Bono, AlterNet

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Bono addressed 14,000 women in Long Beach, Calif., this week at The Women's Conference 2008. The following is an excerpt from his speech.

Rock stars have two urges. (No, really, just two.) They want to change the world, and they want to have fun. And I believe we can't do one without the other. It's like music -- no one trusts music that lacks joy. It's the life force in rock and roll that we love. Especially in serious times, in traumatic times. We need to dig deep to find joy.

So let me repeat, we are here tonight because we want to change the world in a tiny way in our 'hoods or in a grand way in our global community and in so doing, find our joy. But we can't change the world without first changing the way we look at the world. The way you behave in the world depends entirely on the way you view the world. *Weltanschauung* is what the Germans call it.

Californians call it *your attitude ... dude*.

My worldview was shaped by rock and roll. Growing up in the depressed Dublin of the '70s, music was like an alarm clock for me. It woke me up out of suburban slumber. It made me believe that my life could have some purpose outside of 10 Cedarwood Road.

It was the time of punk rock. No more flowers in our hair ... no more flowers, period. I was weaned on the Clash. The Clash's music was like a public service announcement ... with guitars.

Three teenage boys and me, made some music of our own. That was the plan.

But in the mid '80s my life -- not just my hairdo -- changed in unexpected ways.

U2 became part of the phenomenon that was Live Aid, We Are the World, Feed the World ... do you remember that?

My young wife Ali and I went to Ethiopia to see for ourselves what was going on. We lived

there for a month, working at a feeding camp and orphanage. The children had a name for me. They called me 'the Girl with the Beard.'

Don't ask.

Ali and I found Africa a magical place -- a place of big skies, big hearts, beautiful people, royal people. Ethiopia didn't just blow our minds, it opened our minds.

And it challenged our worldview.

A man begged us to take his son back with us to Ireland, because in Ireland he would live, and in Ethiopia, at that time, there was every chance he would die.

Ali and I have our own children now. Four of them. We could have had five.

Our daughters and sons mean more to us than any other thing.

They are the beauty that can take any pain away.

In my travels I have met kids the mirror image of my own and looked into their faces as they let go of life.

And it makes me even angrier that their eyes are always free of accusation. It humbles me beyond belief that they don't hold it against a world that couldn't spare the 20-cent immunization that would have them back in the bosom of their family.

Even their mothers and fathers ... their grief is pure. There's no blame, just acquiescence. ... I know my rage as a parent would have no end. In fact, it doesn't. I do hold it against a world that can accept such things as inevitable.

They're not inevitable. They're not acceptable. In fact, they're absurd.

History has a way of making ideas that are once acceptable, look ridiculous.

Let's not forget ... "no blacks, no Irish."

Let's not forget ... the back of the bus.

Let's not forget ... apartheid and Jim Crow.

Let's not forget ... women couldn't vote.

Ridiculous, all of it. Totally absurd. We know that now. Most people didn't back then. My trip to Ethiopia, considered in that context, told me what I needed to do. Not exactly what to do -- just something, anything, to end the absurdity of what I had seen. It changed my worldview.

That's how I became the least attractive thing in the world: a rock star with a cause.

Except this isn't a cause, is it?

Eight thousand Africans dying every day of AIDS, TB and malaria -- preventable, treatable diseases -- dying for lack of drugs we can buy at any drugstore. Twelve million AIDS orphans in Africa, 18 million by the end of the decade. A whole generation of active adults wiped out, children bringing up children.

That's not a cause, that's an emergency.

These are fires we know how to put out.

Yes. It's an absurdity. *An absurdity*. You know it couldn't happen here. If someone on our street was dying because they couldn't get medicine that we had in our cabinet, we'd get them the medicine. If a family was starving at the end of your block, you'd get them some food. You know you'd just do it. Because it was right.

You'd do it also because you *can*.

We can't fix every problem, but the ones we can we must.

And we can. We can. We have the know-how, the technologies, the pharmacologies, to transform public health in the developing world.

With small investments we can radically improve crop yields, dig wells and make the land fertile and productive.

Turning the desert into fertile land ... sound familiar? This is California, this is who you are. I don't have to convince you of the power of technology. California is the frontier of what's possible. The outer boundary of imagination ... innovation.

More people live off their imagination in this city than any other on Earth.

And surely, down the road from Silicon Valley, I don't have to tell you how connected we are. Connected in ways we never could have imagined -- our lives and our fates.

In a globalized world, Africa is our neighbor. It's right down the lane. We see, we know, exactly what's happening. A continent burns, and we smell the smoke. It stings our eyes; it sears our conscience.

But maybe not as much as it should. We live with it, don't we? We're used to it ... on a certain level, we've come to accept it. Men especially. A lot of men have developed an ability to live with this absurdity. Most women haven't.

Now, I see your expression. It says:

Oh, Bono, I'll bet you say that to all the girls.

No, really, you're the first.

Listen, I'm not saying this to flatter you. Not even I -- not even this rather indiscreet rock star -- would have the audacity to use gender stereotypes in the presence of the great *Gloria Steinem*.

I say it because it's true.

This emergency hits women where they live, more than most men.

As hard as it is to ask fans at a rock show to think about the value of a child's life far, far away ... or to ask boardroom America ... or political America ... you do not have to explain to the women of America, the mothers of America, the value of a child's life.

If you agree, well, why would that be? Why would women be more concerned? Biology? Does it have something to do with that second X chromosome? Do men, on the other hand, have some gene that makes them look the other way ... that narrows their vision ... that gives them a penis, but no conscience -- no balls?

I'm no scientist, but there's some anecdotal evidence here.

But of course it's crap ... biology is not destiny. But it does seem that women are more empathetic, more attuned to suffering, the reason may be obvious: I think women *care more* because women *bear more* of the burdens of life.

Where AIDS is rampant, women are the hardest hit. In South Africa last year, young women ages 15 to 24 accounted for 90 percent of new HIV infections. Over two-thirds of people with AIDS in Africa are women.

Where children are orphaned by AIDS, it's women who care for them.

Where schools are few, where education is poor, girls are more likely to go without.

Where women are shut out of politics, they're shut out of a lot more than that.

Where health systems collapse, it's women and children who suffer the most. In Africa, the likelihood of a woman dying in childbirth is 1 in 20. One in 20!

Where opportunity is scarce, women lag far behind men in income, in access to credit, the chance to start a business, the right to own and inherit land.

In developing countries, landowners are mostly men, but up to 80 percent of farmers are women. Eighty percent! So women can't own the land, but they work the land. They till the arid soil. They carry the water all those miles.

This, I know, is a strange time to come to America and talk about water wells in Africa. You might not mind my asking you to care -- but asking you to do something about it? That's another story.

The most reasonable response might be tell this Irish rock star to go back to his posh house in Ireland ... to come back when the Dow is up ... or when U2's next record is out. Bye-bye, see you then.

It's counterintuitive, at best, to ask this country to look outward at a time when it's so tempting to turn inward. Tempting to double-lock the doors, stop answering the phone, focus on your own problems for a while. I get it.

Clearly these are momentous times in America, times of crisis, times of chaos. Capitalism is on trial. Americans are struggling: losing homes, losing jobs, losing savings. The U.S. ... the world ... is changing shape in unsettling ways. You can feel it ... the tectonic plates are starting to shift. Can I say that in California? Maybe not.

But this is exactly the right time to think about the world. Even to change it.

All of a sudden, nothing is set in stone; everything's up for grabs.

Historically, it's times like these, times of challenge, strain, disruption, when America discovers its true greatness. Right when everyone's full of fear. You heard Maria (Shriver) today talk about fear. This is when Americans rediscover who they are. What they believe. What their values are. What they're really about.

These are the questions we ought to be asking.

Who we are, what we're about. And, by the way, what we're *not* about.

For example:

We're not about having our scientists come up with miracle drugs and then failing to get them to the people who need them.

We're not about mosquito bites or dirty water as a death sentence.

We're not about politicians making promises and failing to keep them, which is what they are doing right now.

One more thing we're *not* about:

We're not about charity; we're about justice. Justice and equality.

Aren't we? Do we actually believe that a child's life in Africa has the same value as a child's life in America? That they are equal before the eyes of God as it says in your blessed Declaration of Independence. Doesn't it say in the Holy Scriptures ... "love thy neighbor," and isn't that a command, not a suggestion?

And when Dr. King said, "I have a dream," was he just talking about an American dream? I thought it was an Irish dream, a Latin American dream, an African dream.

Dr. King's dream was a dream big enough to include all of us. All humankind.

If we really believe that, if we're really ready to say, yes, we are equal, yes, Africans are our brothers and sisters, then we're going to have to make some changes.

We're going to need some new ideas.

Or maybe just revisit some old ideas.

Like the two-centuries-old idea of America.

America, don't you know, is not just a country, it's an idea. Think about that for a second. Your country is not just a geographical location, it's an idea.

The idea that all men, and women, are created equal.

That the poorest matter as much as the richest.

That in a world of plenty, no one should die for lack of food in their belly.

That *where* you live should not determine *whether* you live or you die.

The idea that our dreams are one and our fates are one.

The idea that anything -- anything -- is possible.

That's the America the world needs.

That's the America I've always loved.

I've loved America since I was a kid ... watching you all on television ... on black-and-white television in my house on Cedarwood Road ... put a man on the moon.

You know I'm 9 years old ... and I'm thinking Americans are crazy ... "Hey honey, is that the moon up there? Let's take a walk on it. Let's bring back a piece." I love that America.

You know, the funny thing about the astronauts in the Apollo program ... When they came back home, the thing they talked about the most was not the moon. It was the Earth.

They marveled at the Earthrise. We've all seen that first picture. Taken Christmas Eve, 1968 -- America at war, cities in flames, but the Earth, from above, so serene ... so beautiful ... so very fragile.

The astronaut who took that photo, Bill Anders, said when he returned: "We came all this way to explore the moon, and the most important thing is that we discovered the Earth."

A trip to the moon changed their worldview. It changed America's worldview. It changed everyone's worldview. America, by its vision, its determination, its sheer ingenuity, changed the way we all saw ourselves. We saw that our planet is small. That it's adrift -- alone -- a light in the darkness. That it needs our protection. That we upon it are *one*, whether we want to be or not.

America enabled the world to step outside itself and look back.

To see ourselves as we truly are.

When America looks outside of itself, its view of itself is never clearer.

Its faith in itself is never firmer.

Its purpose is never stronger.

Today, at a time when America, again, is tempted to turn inward, turn away from the world and its troubles, it is more essential than ever that you look outward.

America: We are not asking you to put another man, or woman, on the moon.

America: We are asking you to help put humanity back on this Earth.

Bono is the lead singer of U2 and co-founder of The ONE Campaign and (RED). To watch the video of Bono's speech, or to sign the "Keep Our Commitments" petition, visit [The ONE](#). For more about The Women's Conference, click [here](#).

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