

*Dignity, Equality &
Inalienable Rights*



A lecture by Archbishop Desmond Tutu

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About Archbishop Tutu:

Desmond Tutu is Archbishop Emeritus of the Diocese of Cape Town and recipient of many honours and degrees worldwide, including the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize. He chaired the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which made its final report in 1998.

Archbishop Tutu is especially known for his courageous and outspoken opposition to the South African government's apartheid system. His life has been dedicated to fighting for justice, equality and racial harmony in South Africa and throughout the world. He recently established the Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation.

Archbishop Tutu's visit to Belfast in November 2001 was very timely, coming as it did at the height of the debate about a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. He was asked to share with the audience his thoughts on the importance of human dignity, equality and inalienable rights in the creation of right relationships and lasting peace.

About the Organising Groups:

The *Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ)* works for a just and peaceful society in Northern Ireland where the human rights of all are protected. In 1998, CAJ was awarded the prestigious Council of Europe Human Rights Prize in recognition of its long-standing work for the promotion of human rights.

The mission of the *Global Citizen's Circle* is to foster constructive change in our society by assembling diverse groups of concerned individuals – from world leaders to local activists – for challenging discussions that stimulate positive actions and lead to enduring resolution of our world's pressing concerns.

Opening Remarks

Martin O'Brien, Committee on the Administration of Justice

The Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) has had a long-standing interest in creating a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, dating back to the early eighties. We were particularly pleased to see that the broad political support for the concept of a Bill of Rights was articulated in the Good Friday Agreement, and in particular to see that translated into a public consultation about the content of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. CAJ thinks this consultation is particularly important because it gives us an opportunity to examine the values and principles that we, as a whole community and right across the community, feel should be at the heart of our society - the principles which should inform a Bill of Rights.

One is always conscious that the opportunity to really develop a vision for Northern Ireland, and to develop a vision for the kind of values and principles which should underpin our relationships with each other, could all too easily be squandered.



Martin O'Brien, CAJ and Archbishop Desmond Tutu

This risk is particularly great in the context of a deeply divided society, where very often the impulse is to see a gain for one side as a loss for the other, and to descend very quickly into win/lose politics. CAJ thinks that it would be a real shame if that were to happen in relation to the Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

We felt it would be particularly important if Archbishop Tutu were to join us given that he embodies the very best of human values, the very best of the kind of principles which should govern the kind of society that people would want to live in. We hope that he will help to elevate our thinking and the thinking of everyone in Northern Ireland. We very much hope, and we know, that his contribution will help to shape the debate, and to inform the debate, and in particular to remind us that at the heart of this debate lies a desire to build a society which respects the dignity of everyone within it.

Eleanor Dunfey Freiburger, Global Citizens Circle

A statement made previously by Archbishop Tutu describes the underlying mission of the Global Citizens Circle. After the apparatus of *apartheid* was taken down, Archbishop Tutu commented that it was the countless number of meetings, each seeming insignificant in itself, but together – across the world – that had forced the destruction of the evil *apartheid* system. Certainly it is that kind of spirit that motivates our organisation to bring people together, looking at issues that are of worldwide concern.



In the aftermath of the Sixties, with Vietnam, race riots and assassinations in the United States, we came together and felt that it was very important to bring people of different backgrounds around the same table. Dialogue was all that we could rely upon to move us forward out of that terrible era.

Eleanor Dunfey Freiburger, co-chair Global Citizens Circle

The two characteristics that the Circle has developed over the last thirty years are firstly that there must be discussion among people of different races, religions, opinions, ages and economic groups. Only in this way can we build a trust that leads to constructive change in our communities and in our world. Such a diverse discussion does not just happen. It must be intended and one must make the effort to bring people of differing opinions together. By focusing on that diversity, we have been privileged to bring to the tables of discussion in Boston, Washington and New York, incredible community leaders from around the world.

That then leads us to our second characteristic of wanting to bring recognition to ordinary people who have been doing extraordinary work in their own communities. So we have made it a habit over the years of honouring people - some very well known, like President Mandela and Archbishop Tutu, and some from your community, like May Blood and Liz Groves - all in an effort to give us further inspiration and motivation to keep working for change.

Another thing that Archbishop Tutu has said is that we should never tire of listening to one another's stories. They may seem the same but all are unique, and it is only in listening to one another's stories that we can bring a true meaning to constructive change. We have believed over these last thirty years that by bringing parties to all sides of a conflict together - whether in the United States, Northern Ireland, or in South Africa - we have been able to further our efforts to bring about constructive change.

Now we are here, in this hour, to listen again, and to move forward further. At this moment, I would like to call forth one note of hope, and that is the definition that says:

"Hope is believing, in spite of the evidence, and then working to make the evidence change".

Introduction of Archbishop Desmond Tutu

By Maurice Hayes

It is of course an enormous honour to introduce the Archbishop, and I am not going to introduce him to you in any sort of curriculum vitae sort of way. Rather, I want to say that we are honoured and privileged to be allowed to be in the presence of someone that the world, and we, recognise as being truly great.



Dr. Maurice Hayes

He comes to us of course having been through the fiery furnace – having had his experiences of work in Johannesburg, being Archbishop of Cape Town, his award of the Nobel Peace Prize and his chairmanship of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I think what he brings to us is himself, his innate sense of dignity and fair play, and the encouragement that he has been able to give to other people. He is uniquely able to encourage people to have the strength and belief in their own dignity and self worth as individuals, and to persuade people to respect the dignity and self worth of others. The first is a message which is delivered to the poor and the oppressed and the wretched of the earth, and the other is a message delivered with equal potency to people who are in power, both those who have abused it and those who can use it for good or for ill. There are very few people who can deliver that message to both those audiences with equal validity and with equal credibility, and we are privileged to have one of them here with us today.

Somebody told me, Archbishop, that you were on the radio this morning, telling a story about a drunk and it reminded me of a story about a drunk. A policeman comes across this man on his hands and knees under a

street light, scrabbling around and he says, "What's wrong?" The man replied, "I lost a five pound note." So the policeman gets down on his knees and scrabbles around too, and after about five minutes there is still no sign of the fiver. So the policeman says "Are you sure you lost it here?" "No," the man replies, "I lost it over there!" The policeman then asked, "So, why are you looking here?" The man answered, "This is where the light is!"

We are here today because this is where the light is. This is where the light is in relation to human rights and the dignity of the individual. We have here a person who, in Burns' words, is "a burning and a shining light to others". We are privileged to have you and I am deeply privileged to have the honour of introducing Archbishop Tutu, and I ask you now to address the audience.





Dignity, Equality and Inalienable Rights

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Thank you so very much Maurice, thank you very much Martin and to your friends in the Global Citizens Circle. Thank you for the privilege of speaking at this meeting. It is a hopeful time, and perhaps we should start by congratulating you Mr Deputy First Minister on your recent election.

It is a hopeful time, despite the horrendous outrage of September 11th in the United States, and the distressing response which - as in the United States - has killed innocent civilians in Afghanistan. So may I ask us to observe a moment of silence, and to think of all those who were injured or killed or who have been bereaved in an act of terrorism which we must condemn outright, and for all the casualties since then in the United States and elsewhere.

Thank you.

You do know, of course, that I come from South Africa and who I am? I say that because a few years ago in San Francisco, I had a dear lady rush up to me and greet me very, very warmly: "Hello Archbishop Mandela"...she clearly thought she was getting two for the price of one!

I come from South Africa, and you must admit that God has a huge sense of humour, for who in their right mind could ever have imagined South Africa as a beacon of hope? If you had said, just a few years ago, that South Africa would have been a beacon of hope in the world, then people would have thought that you really needed to see a psychiatrist or that you had a macabre sense of humour! For those people, South Africa would have been an example only of the most ghastly awfulness; an example of how not to deal with problems, and especially not problems between sections of a society who had daggers drawn, baying for one

another's blood, incapable of believing that any good could ever come from the adversaries' camp. South Africa, peopled as it were by those awful creatures who had no right really to a place in the sun, no right to be associated with other normal human beings.

Precisely. God chose us. He chose us because we did not deserve it, at all. We had hardly anything to commend ourselves. If anything, the situation was the reverse. We could not have been described as being particularly virtuous. Anything but, given that we had maintained as crazy and vicious a system as *apartheid* turned out to be, for as long as we had done. We certainly would not have set the tent on fire for our brightness either.

May I tell the story of two South Africans going to the United States and getting into trouble? They were found guilty on a capital offence, and then they were told: "well you could choose the electric chair or the rope as a means for your execution". The first South African went in and chose the electric chair. They strapped him into the chair and threw on the switch, but nothing happened. This was repeated three times and so they said "well, there you are, you are reprieved". As he was going out, the next in line was his fellow South African and he said, "choose the rope, that damn thing does not work".

God chose this unlikely lot – us – so that God could point us out to the other trouble spots of the world and say, "Hey, they had a nightmare called *apartheid*, and it has ended. Your nightmare will end too. They had a problem that was described as being intractable, and humanly speaking it was hopeless, and yet they have solved it". So now, nowhere in the world, could anyone ever again say that their problem was intractable, could not be resolved, or was a totally hopeless cause.

I come from South Africa, about which only a few short years ago - seven years to be precise - people were making dire predictions. They

said, “Oh they are going to be overwhelmed by the most awful bloodbath, overtaken by a ghastly catastrophe”. Right up to the eve of our historic election, violence was endemic in our country. We sighed with relief whenever the statistics for each day were announced and they said maybe five, six or even ten people had been killed. We would say “Oh only five, only six... only, only.” It was as ghastly as that.

People were being killed by anonymous assassins on the trains, and indeed as they travelled by other means of public transport. It was a bloody contest between the ANC and Inkatha for political turf, in the killing fields of Kwazulu-Natal, now one of the nine provinces of the new South Africa. There were drive-past killings and “necklace” killings - where they put a tyre round the victim’s neck, filled it with petrol and set it alight. Mayhem was seen right across the political spectrum, from extreme white right wing groups, to the extreme left. Nor were the security forces and the establishment merely innocent upholders of the law. They had units amongst them that were killing machines to assassinate those activists who were opposed to *apartheid* and were thought to pose a threat to the *apartheid* scheme of things. We have since discovered that arms caches had been stashed away everywhere, in different parts of our country, and we were indeed just a whisker away from the racial conflagration so many had predicted for our future. The future could not have been any bleaker. There were State sponsored massacres. We were teetering on the edge of the precipice, about to be hurled into the oblivion of utter chaos.

This is another story you certainly know about in Ireland - the man who was going to make his first parachute jump and was told, “Well, you jump and you’ve got the toggle on the left and you pull on that and the parachute opens. In the unlikely event of the parachute not opening, don’t worry, you’ve got this toggle on the right.” So he makes his jump. He pulls on the toggle on the left and nothing happens, and as he is hurtling towards the ground he pulls on the right and nothing happens. As he is

about to hit the ground, somebody passes going in the opposite direction, and the guy in the parachute says, "Help, do you know anything about parachutes?" "No", he answered, "do you know anything about pressure cookers?!"

We were in a real pickle in South Africa, and in a way it was because the vast bulk of the population were deliberately excluded from the political process. They had no political clout, which was necessary to have all kinds of political power. The political bosses made no bones about this. They were the top dogs and everyone else who was not white was *ipso facto* the underdog, downtrodden, deprived and oppressed. There was no subtlety at all. The underdogs were totally unequal to the top dogs, with inferior education, inferior health care – indeed, they did not even have access to clean water. Shoddy matchbox housing in segregated townships was their lot. As for dignity, the top dogs did not think blacks were persons with any dignity to be respected. They rubbed dignity in the dust and trod on it underfoot. It did not matter if you were educated or not - whatever your status was in the black community, every white person was your superior. So I might, as a schoolboy, accompany my father down to a store in town. My father was a headmaster of a school and the little slip of the girl behind the counter, because she was white, could and did address my father with, "Yes boy, what do you want?"

We were called Natives - natives with a capital 'N'. They had some wonderful signs along the roadside, for example, "Drive carefully, Natives cross here." Somebody thought to change one to read, "Drive carefully, Natives *very* cross here".

There were problems with jobs being set aside for whites only. Blacks were cheap labour. You could have gone to university and qualified, for example, as a doctor with your white compatriots. Yet from day one, if you were working for government, your white counterpart would earn a higher salary than yours just on the basis of race. Of course, *apartheid*

meant “separation”, as you know. They even tried to separate us praying - they did not want us to be in the same church services. On one occasion, a black woman was in church and she was on her knees. A police officer rushed up and asked, “What are you doing?” She said, “I’m cleaning sir” and he replied, “Oh that’s ok, I was about to arrest you because I thought you were praying.”



There was an obsession with race purity, and so they had some quite awful laws meant to prevent miscegenation. They had a law called the Immorality Act. Police would spend their time climbing trees to peep into windows - bedroom windows - to make sure that you did not have sex across the colour line. They would dash into a room and feel how warm the bed sheets were. That is where I come from.

It is not out of a kind of morbidity that I remind you of these things, but I tell you that our antecedents were ghastly, and it should have led to the most awful chaos. And that is not all - our history, apart from this racism which I have just been describing, was one that included slavery, colonialism and wars between the races. As you know, there was something called the Anglo-Boer War where they had concentration camps. Concentration camps are a South African invention - the camps in which the British collected Afrikaner women and children were called concentration camps.

Given this ghastly history, it should have been that we had no hope. We should have been for the birds! But this catastrophe, this blood bath that everyone had thought was coming our way, did not happen. We have had a remarkable transition, and we owe a very great deal to folks like yourselves, who have supported us so marvellously well.

We have had a negotiated revolution. Sworn enemies have actually sat around a table together, people who had given each other awful, awful, labels still sat around a table. People who had done awful things to one another sat down and talked, and then made a major scientific discovery. They discovered that their adversaries were actually human beings. Human beings who, quite extraordinarily, seemed to be longing for much the same sort of things as they themselves: a secure environment, a happy home, a good school for their children and so on. They thought, "Hey, we don't have the monopoly on wisdom and good sense and values." We began almost at daggers drawn and people would frequently do things just to score points. There was a great deal of brinkmanship, the negotiations were simple; we were not given to being reasonable people who were ready made to make concessions and receive concessions in return.

We had an extraordinary roller-coaster ride. The very moment we said, "Gee whizz! Hey, we have made a wonderful breakthrough" and were euphoric and found ourselves on cloud nine, the next moment we were plunged into the slough of despond because something had happened that threatened to derail the whole process.

Then we began speaking about a Bill of Rights, a Constitution, the sort of thing that we thought that we might want. Each, I suppose, initially approached it from the position of, "Well what is good for me?" Then people gradually discovered, "Hey the things that bind us, the things that are common to us, are many times more than the things that divide us".

Then they began - even the most prosaic of them - to dream. They began to be idealistic, and they began to talk about values. They went hammer and tongs at it, "No you can't have that, and we should have this". Then they



began to discover that in fact this Bill of Rights gives guarantees, unlike any other instrument we might have. What happens to our culture, to our language, what happens when we are a small minority, aren't we going to be overrun by this mass of people who are not really quite civilised? What happens? What happens? When they began talking, they found their eyes opening.

We are a homophobic society. South Africa is as homophobic a society as they come, and yet we now have a society in which unfair discrimination is outlawed on all sorts of grounds, including gender and sexual orientation. In South Africa, this is mind-blowing! After these discussions and when public appointments came to be made a little later after the adoption of these measures, it was notable that people found that they were beginning to aspire to things that they had never thought possible. So they would ask, "Hey, we are appointing judges, how many women are there on this bench? How many blacks? How many people with disabilities? What are we doing?"

Cyril Ramaphosa was the Secretary General of the ANC and he became a close friend of Afrikaner Rolf Meyer, despite the fact that their politics were radically different. Improbably, they discovered that despite their

very many differences, they had a good personal rapport, to the extent of enjoying great fishing trips together. These kind of personal and human relationships transcended differences, so that people began to move from win/lose situations to win/win scenarios.

Let's retell the old story of the Rabbi - a very, very wise man. Someone had friends, a married couple, who were always quarrelling and this man said, "I think you should go and see the Rabbi." So the husband goes off and he tells his side of the story and the Rabbi says, "You are right." The wife comes along and she tells her side of the story, totally different from that of the man. The Rabbi says, "You are right." Then the man who had recommended that they go and see the Rabbi comes along and he is quite flabbergasted. "Rabbi, Rabbi, Rabbi, how can you possibly say he is right and she is right?" and the Rabbi replies, "You are right too!"

Dear friends, do you know something? You are wonderful people. God loves you. You are very precious to God. God has given you an incredible gift in a wonderful, wonderful sense of humour. I have not met people who are able to take the mickey out of themselves to quite the same extent as you. Almost just for that attribute, you must succeed. So the burden of what I have come here to say to you is, "Hey, hang in there". Didn't you see a little bit of that magic at work in the kind of stuff that was happening around Stormont, when you said, "Well, we will change designation - and why not?"¹

You are precious to God and God loves you as if you were the only people around. Hang in there. The prize is too precious for you to allow it to be dissipated. God has placed high stakes on you, and God is not a loser. You know something - you are made for goodness, you are made for laughter, you are made for love, you are made for peace, you are made for gentleness, you are made for compassion, you are made for

¹ This is a reference to political developments at the Stormont Assembly in the previous few days.

sharing, you are made for being conciliatory. We belong together - there are no outsiders in this family. All are insiders. You are made extraordinarily for transcendence, for peace, for justice, for goodness. You know there is lovely little African story of the farmer who in his backyard bred some chickens. There was a strange looking chicken, behaving like other chickens, pecking away, and then someone who knew about these things came along and said, "No, no, no Mr Farmer, that is not a chicken, that is an eagle." So he says, "Please just give me that strange looking chicken" and the farmer agrees and gives him the chicken. The man carries this strange looking chicken away and he wakes up very early in the morning and walks up to a high mountain and then points the eagle to the sun and says, "Fly eagle, fly". This strange looking chicken shakes itself, spreads out its pinions and lifts off, and soars, and soars, and disappears way into the sun, into the distance.

God turns to you and says, "Hey, you are no chicken, you are an eagle. Fly eagle, fly."

God expects you to shake yourself, to spread out your pinions and to lift off and to soar, to soar. God expects you to move towards goodness and love, and justice and peace and compassion.

So - fly eagle, fly. Thank you.



**Excerpts from a press conference given by
Archbishop Desmond Tutu at the Wellington Park
Hotel prior to the lecture.**



Theo Dunfey, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Martin O'Brien

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

I know that journalists actually pay very little attention to preliminary remarks because they have already got their questions on the things that they are most interested in. I just want to say that I am hoping to underscore in my address the need for hope, hope, hope. When you are in a struggle for a new dispensation for justice, for human rights and for peace, sometimes you get bogged down in the slough of despondency - when you think that things are not moving as rapidly, or even in the right direction, as you would have hoped. I want to say that the South African experience, and its outcome, should fill people with hope in their own particular struggles, because it was one which was fraught with considerable despair. People were predicting that all sorts of ghastly things would happen to us, and yet they did not happen. That must give very considerable cause for hope to the different conflict situations in the world and to your own particular one here.

I also want to say that in a very unlikely kind of way, as people sat down to talk together and to debate and argue about the sort of society that they wanted to see replace apartheid, and in being able to concentrate on things such as a Bill of Rights, they soon got to a point of realising that, surprisingly, their erstwhile adversaries were human. They seemed to be longing for the same kinds of things as did those people whom they thought of as not normal. Very soon they were building a consensus about their common dreams.

One hopes that you too will replicate this same sort of experience. Hopefully, as you journey together, you may be able to move away from being adversarial to being surprised by the fact there is so much that you in fact do share - in your longings, in your aspirations, in your dreams. One just hopes that this visit, with many other initiatives, will give a push to the public debate on a Bill of Rights.

Q.: Archbishop, is there something of a roadmap of where we are, compared with where South Africa is? Is there a checklist of things that are happening in our society, which happened in South Africa post conflict?

Archbishop: Well, the one thing that seems to be common is the roller-coaster ride. You know, when you say, “whoopee we’ve made a breakthrough”. This is followed by a wonderful euphoria, and just when you are on cloud nine, something happens that brings you back very firmly to terra firma. That was certainly true in South Africa, and it seems to happen here. There will be times when things happen that fill you with despair, and you tear your hair out (for those who have any!). You really want to give up hope on people. What I want to say is that our experience was almost always on the edge, and nearly always risked toppling over into the abyss. Just hold on holding on, because I myself have no doubt

at all that the outcome is going to be okay. One wishes that we human beings could be slightly more sensible and short-cut all the unpleasantness, but unfortunately it does not always work that way! But we are wonderful, we are wonderful in our obduracy, and then wonderful too when we begin to be splendid people!

Q.: A leading psychologist is quoted in the newspaper today saying that a breakdown in society will lead to an increase in domestic violence, or non-'troubles' related violence. Is this a consequence that we are going to have to live with? Did that also happen in South Africa?

Archbishop: One of the things about transition is that, almost by definition, you have to recognise that it is going to be unstable and that parameters move. Road signs get shifted and people do have a sense of disorientation. You are going to have to be patient with yourselves and with others - because you are groping for new signposts and new parameters. In that situation there can be a kind of chaos. We experienced an upsurge of violence because sometimes people think that freedom is the same thing as licence. You have to remind people that freedom carries responsibilities.

Q.: On that point, as you said yourself, we are so close to the Assembly being re-established, do you think that this is the right time for change - is Northern Ireland ready for a Bill of Rights yet? While we may accept the Bill of Rights as a good thing in principle - are we actually ready to do anything with it just yet?

Archbishop: That is very like the kind of question that people used to ask of South Africa, "Do you think these people are ready for freedom?" I would say, "For goodness sake, if you have the opportunity, get in there boots and all!" All that you are actually saying is, "What kind of society do we want?" "What are the things that are bugging me?" "What makes me uneasy about you?" "What do we want that will actually ensure that we have a civilised society?" Certainly, one thing that we found in South Africa was that the Bill of Rights and the Constitution helped to inject new values in a society that probably had not had any previously.

Just by way of example, South Africa is one of the most homophobic societies there is, and it is a wonderful thing to have a Constitution and a Bill of Rights that outlaws discrimination on various kinds of grounds, including sexual orientation. That is mind blowing in a country such as our own, and yet people are learning to be tolerant because it is a new value. There are, of course, also the 'old' values around gender equality. Now, while most of us would be chauvinists, it is very different when you have particular values written as rights enshrined in your Constitution. You then start to have people beginning to have a shift in mindset. When appointments are being made, people start to ask, "Hey, on that bench, how many women have been appointed? How many blacks?" So it is something that I would hope would engage as many people in your society as possible, so that the sorts of values that you hold dear might be reflected in legislation, making for a more caring and more compassionate society.

The lecture by Archbishop Tutu was hosted by:



Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ)

45/47 Donegall Street, Belfast BT1 2BR

Tel: (028) 90 961122 (+44 2890 - Int'l)

Fax: (028) 90246706

Website: www.caj.org.uk



Global Citizens Circle

230 Commerce Way,

Suite 300, Portsmouth,

New Hampshire, NH 0380, USA

Tel: + 603 929 9851

Fax: + 603 926 5800

Website: www.globalcitizenscircle.org