



At James Madison University

Presentation Speech at the Public Award Ceremony

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Dr. Sushil Mittal delivered his Presentation Speech on 21 September 2007 at the JMU Convocation Center, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

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Good Evening.

We know and we respect that Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu is a much-honored man. In fact we appreciate that the many honors (and more) are very

well deserved. Not only is he a Nobel Laureate, he is one who received the Peace Prize. Among his other noteworthy awards are the Dr. Jean Mayer Global Citizenship Award from Tufts University, the Père Marquette Discovery Award from Marquette University, the Pacem in Terris Peace and Freedom Award, and the Light of Truth Award recently presented to him by his friend and fellow Nobel Laureate the Dalai Lama.

Time would run out before we could reach the end of the list of the awards and honors that he has received. And, in addition to the awards that he has received, there are awards bestowed on others that are named after him! Among these are the Desmond Tutu Award given annually by South Africa Partners to an individual “whose work aspires to the values so powerfully illuminated by this man” and the Desmond Tutu Footprints of Legends Award underwritten by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation with the purpose to “celebrate African leaders who strive for social justice and equity through service to their communities.”

Several organizations that seek to make significant contributions to peace and human welfare honor his name, too. These include the Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation, the Desmond Tutu Peace Centre and Peace Trust, the Centre for War and Peace Studies at Liverpool Hope University, and The Tutu Foundation UK, established in order “to tackle violent gang culture by transforming gang leaders, their existing and potential followers into agents for positive change.”

It can be said with deepest respect and highest regard: “This man has no need for another award.” He is well supplied already.

Instead it is we who need him. He is a rare kind of human being—the kind of human being who enables us to change our point of view, to shift our perspective at the most basic and vital level, to understand ourselves more appropriately and anew. We might well say that he helps us to understand ourselves as intended by our creator and our own true nature. Clearly, Desmond Tutu is not here primarily to take something from us. He is here to help to restore something to us—as he has been doing for people around the planet for more than a half-century.

This “something” is communicated, it is sparked, and it is shared freely and immediately by his very presence. It comes through what he says, and we should listen carefully to him. It comes through his actions. They have been a series of examples and reminders of our greater and higher potentials. His speech and actions have the capacity to awaken, to enliven, and (I am happy to say) these

qualities are contagious. We want to “catch” the spirit and the creativity in action that he has embodied for so many years in Africa and worldwide. When he led the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, even while he acknowledged the depth of human cruelty, he spoke on behalf of “restorative justice” rather than “retributive justice.” He has been a religious leader and spiritual advisor for most of his life. He has served his nation and the United Nations. And now in his most mature years, he has joined a band of elders who have no “elections to win and constituencies to please” (seniors like Jimmy Carter, Nelson Mandela, and Kofi Annan) who will apply their hard-won wisdom to world problems.

Desmond Tutu gives us a word that we need. It complements and supports Gandhi’s word “*sarvodaya*” (action for the good of all). His word is “*ubuntu*.” He has described the meaning of the word in this way:

“It embraces hospitality, caring about others, being able to go the extra mile for the sake of others. We believe that a person is a person through another person, that my humanity is caught up, bound up, inextricably, with yours.

When I dehumanise you, I inexorably dehumanise myself. The solitary human being is a contradiction in terms and therefore you seek to work for the common good because your humanity comes into its own in belonging.”

Now, as we recognize and honor Desmond Tutu, we would do well to keep in mind these two words (*sarvodaya* and *ubuntu*) as well as a few more that come from a speech that was given by the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.:

If you want to be important, wonderful
 If you want to be recognized, wonderful
 If you want to be great, wonderful

But recognize that he who is greatest among you
 shall be your servant
 That’s a new definition of greatness. . . .

It means that everybody can be great
 because everybody can serve

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To serve, you need only a heart full of grace,
a soul generated by love,
and you can be that servant.

We deeply thank Desmond Tutu for being with us today, for bringing these thoughts to mind, and for graciously agreeing to accept the very first international award, Mahatma Gandhi Global Nonviolence Award, presented by the Mahatma Gandhi Center for Global Nonviolence at James Madison University.