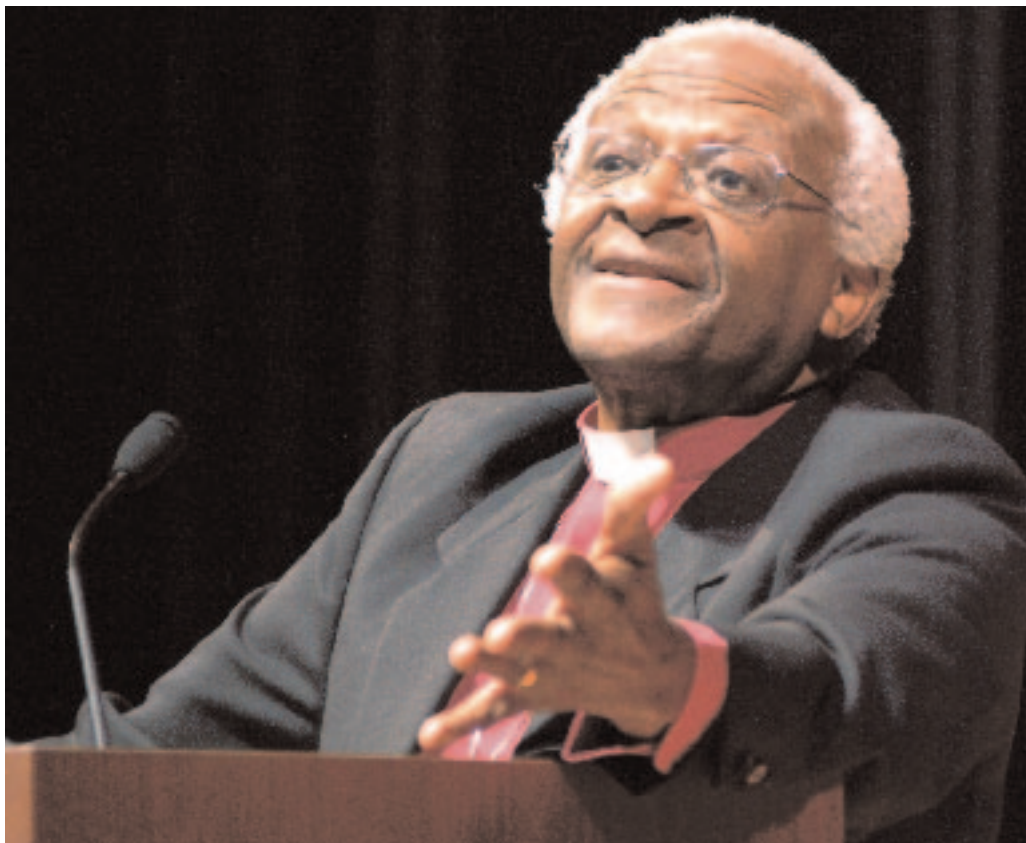




A R C H B I S H O P E M E R I T U S

Desmond M. Tutu

Conversations



*Remarks presented  
in Flint, Michigan  
June 9, 2004*



CHARLES STEWART  
MOTT FOUNDATION

## About Desmond M. Tutu

Desmond Mpilo Tutu was born in Klerksdorp, South Africa, in 1931, the son of a schoolteacher and a domestic worker.

He was a high school teacher for four years before deciding to enter the ministry. He was ordained to the Anglican priesthood in 1961. He became dean of St Mary's Cathedral, Johannesburg, in 1975 and was elected bishop of Lesotho the following year.

In the wake of the Soweto uprising of 1976, South Africa was in turmoil, and Bishop Tutu was named general secretary of the South African Council of Churches. While holding that post from 1978 to 1985, he became a national and international figure, speaking out against apartheid. In 1984, his contribution to the cause of racial justice in South Africa was recognized when he received the Nobel Peace Prize.

In 1985, Bishop Tutu was elected bishop of Johannesburg. In 1986, he was elected archbishop of Cape Town. He retired from that office in 1996 and was named archbishop emeritus.

In 1995 President Nelson Mandela appointed Archbishop Tutu to chair South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the body set up to probe gross human rights violations between 1960 and the president's inauguration in 1994. Archbishop Tutu and his fellow commissioners completed the Commission's Report in October 1998.

Before 1990, Archbishop Tutu's vigorous advocacy of social justice made him a figure of controversy. Today he is seen as an elder statesman with a major role to play in reconciliation, and as a leading moral voice.

In addition to many honorary degrees, the archbishop holds a bachelor's degree from the University of South Africa, and bachelor's and master's degrees from King's College in London, England. He and his wife, Leah, have three daughters, a son and several grandchildren.

*“God’s dream is that you and I and all of us will realize that we are family; that we are made for togetherness, for goodness and for compassion. In God’s family, there are no outsiders, no enemies.”*

# Desmond M. Tutu

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Archbishop Emeritus Desmond M. Tutu spoke to a nearly full auditorium of 1,500 people at The Whiting in Flint, Michigan, on June 9, 2004, under the sponsorship of the Mott Foundation. The audience was welcomed by Foundation President and CEO William S. White, who also presented the archbishop with a key to the city from Flint Mayor Don Williamson. Russell T. Ally, who is director of the Foundation's South Africa office and who worked for Archbishop Tutu, introduced the archbishop. After the talk, Archbishop Tutu answered questions from the audience. The University of Michigan-Flint Gospel Choir performed at the beginning and end of the event, under the direction of Carl Byerly. What follows are Archbishop Tutu's remarks and the question-and-answer session, edited slightly for clarification.



**T**hank you very much. Thank you. President White, dear friends, ladies and gentlemen. What a very great joy and privilege it is to be here with you today.

Thank you, choir, for your splendid renditions.

And thank you, Mr. Mayor. Now, what does this key actually open? I'm sure it opens the hearts of the people of Flint, and thank you so very much for allowing me into their hearts.

Thank you, Russell, for your very kind words of introduction. You needn't have been so effusive. I won't offer you employment again.

Frequently, in meetings of this kind, you will hear [people] say, "Oh well, you know, he is very well known. He doesn't need to be introduced." Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Well, one day I was in San Francisco when a woman rushed up to me and greeted me very, very warmly. "Hello, Archbishop Mandela." Sort of getting two for the price of one.

But it is wonderful to be here under the auspices of the Mott Foundation, which has been doing such splendid work here in the Flint community. But has not been satisfied to remain confined to the United States and, as you have heard, has been involved in South Africa and in other parts of the world. I think we want to give you a very, very warm hand, too.

In the dressing room, just before coming here, I found on one of the mirrors a wonderful greeting. It said, "Welcome, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, from the Flint faith community." Thank you, Flint faith community. I am deeply, deeply touched. Thank you very much. You who are gathered here are very quite wonderful people because you recognize that there is a scourge, which afflicts most societies, yours not the least. And that is a very good starting point. I gather that there was recently a survey, which indicated that about 90 percent of those who had been questioned said, "Racism is a problem."

They might not always articulate that openly. But it is important that most of you who are gathered here today are people who are aware there is a problem. That is, in fact, a very important beginning if you are going to, want to, work at the resolution of the problem. As you know, they say that when someone is an alcoholic, it is no use your telling him that. It won't help very much; it might make them worse. It is only when the person says, "I have a problem and I need to be helped." That's when they become very good candidates for a cure.

So, we start out splendidly because the diagnosis is a very important part of the cure. And, therefore, I want to commend you, very

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warmly, for being concerned. Because you see, there are those who have sometimes said about racism that it could be, well, benign. “It can’t be such a serious a problem. Why do these people keep moaning so much? And why don’t they keep to their own people? Why are they always out here?”

I am glad that I speak to those who know that racism can never be benign. That it isn’t nice, certainly not for those at the receiving end. You see, it is important that we recognize and acknowledge, remember, this [as a] vicious evil, for such it is, even in its most innocuous forms.

It was this vicious evil that spawned slavery, when human beings owned fellow human beings. Bought and sold them as if they were mere chattel. Mere beasts of burden. Transported them from their homes, way across the ocean. You speak of the Middle Passage, when many, many perished. Transported to a land they had not known. Mothers and fathers were separated from their children. Not allowed, really, to lead a reasonably normal family life, even as slaves.

And it was racism that gave rise to the lynchings that were such a regular feature of American life until very recently. It wasn’t so long ago, was it, when a black man was dragged to his excruciating death behind a truck, because he was black.

It was racism that made the horror of the Holocaust possible. When six million people were killed because they were Jews or gypsies or gay.

And, of course, I come from a country that languished under the bane of a racism that was botched up by legislation. It was a matter of public policy in South Africa’s apartheid.

So, racism is not nice, and we here are clear we should be united in opposing it, in seeking to rid our community, our society, our nation of this scourge. And we haven’t mentioned the fact that, very recently, in Bosnia, Kosovo, [there was] something obscenely referred to as “ethnic cleansing.”

Now, one of the things that I want us to be able to carry away from here is that this evil can, in fact, be defeated. It might not seem so. But remember, Nazism was defeated. We have been commemorating D-Day, when it hadn’t seemed like the Nazis would be defeated, but they were. Apartheid, which seemed so firmly entrenched. Ten — no, well, let’s say 12 — years ago, apartheid was firmly in the center. And, it didn’t seem as if it was going to be shaken. It was the cock of the walk. Well, it has bitten the dust. It has bitten the dust, thoroughly.

So, don’t walk about as it were, saying, “Oh, this burden. There is no hope.” No, no, no, no. Almost always, in the end, good prevails. Good prevails. Good prevails because — you might not always remember this — you are fundamentally good. Right? Yet you probably have forgotten that. When God created you, God didn’t say, “Oh, dear. Oops.” God said, “Hey, just look at this. This is very good. This is very good.” We are fundamentally good.

Now, I'm not going to preach. This is just a speech. We overcame the awfulness of apartheid, and we did that because you supported us. People prayed for us. Many people were ready to go even to jail for us. They demonstrated for us. People boycotted South African goods for us. And, others agreed when they said they must divest. And so, here we are today — free, free, free, free, free. And we are free because you helped us.

And so, one of the things that is really not a part of this speech — but it is part of the speech, yes — is being able to come and say to people, “You know, we asked for help. You gave that help and look at what it has done. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.” [light applause]

No, no, no, no. That is a lousy clap. That is not how you clap for someone who just, a few years before, had manacles. Your wrists and your ankles were manacled, and somebody came and removed the manacles. You don't [demonstrating a weak clap]. [loud applause]

Thank you, thank you, thank you. Wonderful, wonderful. That really comes from the heart. That comes from the heart.

Now, having got to that point, I want to suggest that although you think racism is a very, very serious thing, we ought not to be so serious, dead serious and solemn in taking it on. Because actually there is a great deal to be said for exposing the absurdities of racism. Poking

fun at it — at racists, and perhaps a little at ourselves — can be the best antidote.

We found that laughter was a very potent weapon in fighting the awfulness of apartheid. We shed tears, as Russell indicated, because of the anguish and the pain. But, we also shared tears because we couldn't stop laughing.

Do you know [this story]? When God created us out of dust, God put us — like you do with bricks — into an oven. God put in the first lot and, oh dear, God got busy doing other things and forgot. And then God said, “Oh dear,” and rushed to open. When [He] opened [it], there were cinders. That is how black people came about. And then, God put in a second lot. This time God was over-anxious. And God opened the oven too quickly. And this lot was underdone. And they say this is how white people came about.

Now, clearly, clearly, how in the name of everything that is good could we ever have thought that the color of a person's skin tells us anything that is significant about a person? You see, at home, when they had all-white elections, then to get people to vote for them, stampede them into voting, they would show a picture of an unkempt black and say, “Would you like your daughter to marry this man?” And then black people would say, “Show us your daughter first.”

And then, you know of course, they would say, “Well, this is reserved for white people.”

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Like universities — they said, “This university has a habit here. This university is for white people.” So I said, “Yeah, but supposing, because I have a large nose, I said, ‘Now [at] this university, the first qualification is not academic. The first qualification is you must have a large nose.’ So this is a university for large noses only. If you have a small nose, then you must apply to the minister of small nose affairs [and] ask for permission to attend the university for large noses.”

Tragic, tragic. It is baloney. What does the size of nose tell us of any significance?

Well, if size of nose doesn't, why should skin color? Why not invest someone with worth? It's not based on that external thing. No, it is intrinsic. It belongs to all without distinguishing.

It is the fact that you are created in the image of God. Whether you are tall, whether you are stumpy like me. Whether you are substantial or you have an hourglass figure. Whether you are beautiful, not so beautiful. Whether you are rich or poor, whether you are educated. It is a universal attribute that you and you and you are a “God carrier.” That you and you and you and I are God's viceroys.

When you are created in the image of God, it means you are God's stand-in. And to treat anyone as if they were less than this is not just evil, which it is. It is not just painful, as it frequently will be for the victims. It is veritably blasphemous. It is as if we were spitting in the

face of God. And that is why you and you and you and all of us because of our faith — not because of our politics, because of our faith — must oppose racism with every fiber of our being.

I want to suggest one or two other things as well. One is: Is it possible [for] people of different races [to] meet just as ordinary human beings? South Africans made a profound scientific discovery when they were thrown together in the first election. People who had never met each other, because the laws separated them, stood in the same lines and they began to talk — black, white, Indian, colored, whatever.

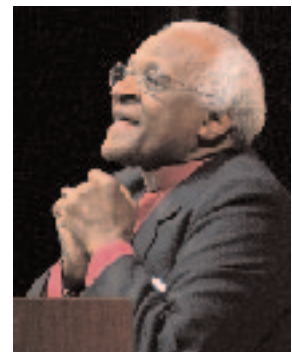
And they made the profound discovery that this other [person] is actually a human being. [Who] has exactly the same aspirations. “I want to have a good job. I want a safe environment for my family. I want good schools for my children.” Race and color? Totally irrelevant, totally irrelevant. You might then begin to discover. Yes. Hey, this is not a black person. This is a person who happens to be black. This is a person who happens to be white. This is a person who happens to be Indian. Whatever, whatever, whatever.

Can you imagine — had apartheid succeeded — today the world would not know that there was as great a man as Nelson Mandela. Can you imagine the impoverishment?

Racism actually impoverishes those who inflict it. Because, you see, they said, “No, we don't want to deal, we don't want any relationship

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“Now, clearly, clearly, how in the name of everything that is good could we ever have thought that the color of a person's skin tells us anything that is significant about a person?”



“Let people tell their story, and you will be surprised at how healing just telling the story can be.”



with this man. He is a terrorist.” Now they can’t have enough of him. I mean, he is an incredible man and maybe they have forgotten that he is black. They all want to have their pictures taken with him. Because he is good.

Remember where we come from. Each one of us is good. Isn’t it incredible that in a culture that sets such high store by success, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, the people who we admire most are not necessarily the successful, not necessarily the aggressive, not the macho? Now there are a lot of things you can say about Mother Theresa. You certainly would not say one of them was that she was macho. Anything but macho. But when we stand in her presence — we are aware that we’re in the presence of somebody that is quite special. The Dalai Lama, Mahatma Gandhi — remarkable people, not aggressive, not macho, but good, good.

As a small boy, I picked up a tattered copy of Ebony magazine. And it was describing how somebody called Jackie Robinson had broken into Major League Baseball. And I was in a ghetto in South Africa. I didn’t know baseball from Ping-Pong, but — yeah — but here was a guy who had made it. He got to play for something called the Brooklyn Dodgers. Well, he had made it. And I — sitting there, having our dignity trampled underfoot, humiliated at every turn — I got a lift. But imagine, imagine now how impoverished this country would have been without the likes of, say, a Martin Luther King Jr.

I have to finish by mentioning two things. The one thing is just another example of the fact that you know God created us for complementarity. Not a single one of us is really

self-sufficient. The self-sufficient person is subhuman. You need other human beings in order to be human. And a great African called Dr. [J.E.K.] Aggrey said you know, on a piano you can actually play music of some sort if you play just the white keys alone. You can play music of some sort if you play only the black keys. But if you really want music, harmony, you play black and white keys together.

I was quite taken by the gospel choir. I thought white men can’t jump. There is a guy there — he sang like he has a black voice. And if you shut your eyes and you listened to the women, you would think, well, this is a Baptist church service. But isn’t that fantastic? Isn’t that fantastic?

Now the very last point, very last point, very last point — really, the very last point. And I make this with a great deal of hesitation because one of the things that Russell will tell you, one of the things that used to annoy us most was when people came from other parts of the world and came and pontificated about how we should resolve our problems.

But having said that ... I believe that there is a lot to be said for this country to consider something like a truth and reconciliation commission. Because there is a pain that sits in the tummy of most African Americans, Native Americans and maybe white Americans, which needs to be articulated in a non-threatening setting. Let people tell their story. Let people tell their story, and you will be surprised at how healing just telling the story can be.

Thank you. ■

# Questions & Answers

**Q** How do you talk to God?

**A** Well, it differs at different times. There were times when in South Africa things were rough, and I would say, “Look here, God. If I am doing your work, you are jolly well going to have to protect me.” But that is I suppose part of the directness with which you find in the Scriptures God is often addressed.

But many times I addressed God really upset with him ... or her. Yes. Now when awful things were happening like say you have a massacre, I usually broke down and I think it was a wordless communing with God, just being there and saying “God, I really am upset with you. How in the name of everything that is good could you let such and such, and such and such, and such and such happen?”

Because I think many of us tend to think that we have to speak to God like a prayer book. And we don't accept the truth, which is that God is our father, God is our mother, and God loves us as if we were the only human being around.

**Q** What would you say would be the best advice for young people today and how should one's faith play a role in a young person's life?

**A** I hope young people are aware that they are some of God's best collaborators. When you read the Scriptures it is a Joseph, the last born, it is a David, the last born, it is a Jeremiah, who complains, that “God, please, I'm too young.” Mary is a teenager.

But God has a very, very soft spot for young people, and God has a very high regard for young people because they can dream. And they dream like God dreams. They dream that this world could be one where there is no poverty and so many times they will protest. They dream like God dreams that this world where there would be one where there is no war, so they protest against war.

And so I would say to young people, “Go on dreaming. Hold on to your high ideals. Don't let us oldies make you disillusioned.” That is why it is good to have young people like these who thought we were old dowdies and wanted to shake me up a bit.



“And so I would say to young people, ‘Go on dreaming. Hold on to your high ideals. Don't let us oldies make you disillusioned.’”



“We each have the capacity to be good, to be compassionate, to be magnanimous.”

**Q** What about the idea of truth and reconciliation of some type here in Flint? What would be some of the ingredients that this community could take to begin that informal truth and reconciliation process?

**A** I think one of the things is that you should somehow be able to get it accepted by the community. That it had that credibility. It is a frightening thing. You mustn't go away and think that it is a fairly straightforward thing.

Human beings are incredible, really. We were humbled many times when we sat and listened to accounts of some of the things that happened to people. And you thought that in the end of it they would be filled with anger. Hardly ever. You may have heard of the American girl – Amy Biehl, who was killed quite brutally in South Africa. And the young people who killed her applied for amnesty to our commission. Her parents, who had the right to protest and oppose the application, came from California and supported the application. But that was not all. They then set up an Amy Biehl Foundation, which was working in the township where their daughter was killed. Human beings are beautiful.

When people asked at the end of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, “How do you feel?” I say, “Yeah, we have been devastated by the revelations of our inhumanity to one another.” “We gave him drugged coffee, we shot him in the head, and we burned his body. And it takes about seven-

eight hours for a human body to burn and whilst he was burning we were having a barbecue. We were drinking beer and eating meat and this other meat and this side was burning.”

And you see what could have happened to a human being to sink so low. Yes, you were devastated by the capacity it revealed in each one of us.

Each single one of us could perpetrate that because no one can predict that if they had been exposed to the same circumstances as these people, they would not have become like that. The people in Germany who threw babies into gas chambers didn't have horns. They didn't have tails. They were human beings, ordinary humans, being like you and me.

So, each one of us has this horrendous capacity for evil but more wonderfully — this is the thing that we took away — we each have the capacity to be good, to be compassionate, to be magnanimous. The many times I was to say when I was presiding — frequently, I would say, “Let's stop now and let's just be quiet for a moment because we are in the presence of something holy. We ought actually to take off our shoes because we are standing on holy ground.” And so it is a frightening prospect. But once you sit down and you accept the integrity of the process, you are going to be — I am quite certain — surprised at how incredible all of you are.

It is traumatizing, yes. You will open wounds. And that is proper because those



“Have faith in yourself, you see, because God believes in you. Isn’t it incredible –God believes in you.”

wounds are actually not healing, they have closed over and they are septic. They need to be open and cleansed and pour a balm on them and then they will heal. Have faith in yourself, you see, because God believes in you. Isn’t it incredible — God believes in you.

**Q** What inspires you and keeps your spirits up?

**A** Well, I’ve been supported and we have been supported by the incredible prayers of people. I

sometimes tell the story of a nun. I met her in New York. And I said, “Could you just tell me a little bit about yourself.” And she said, “Well, I am a solitary, I live like a hermit.” At the time, she said, “I live in the woods in California and my day starts at 2 in the morning and I pray for you.” And I said, “Yeah, I am being prayed for in the woods in California at 2 in the morning. What chance does the apartheid government stand?” ■

*The full video and a slide show from the event can be accessed on the Mott Foundation’s Web site: [Mott.org](http://Mott.org).*

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