



Debate Without Hate

Discussing our differences while valuing each other

Mr. Abdu Murray

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Thank you very much for that warm reception and also for your presence here. What a tremendous honour it is to be amongst all of you. It's my second time. Last year my colleague Os Guinness and I had the opportunity to address some of you, but also if you weren't here, it's a pleasure to meet you for the first time. And we discussed some pretty important issues over lunch on religious freedom, the freedom of conscience, the ability to just vote your conscience and to live in a world where we have that freedom.

This topic this afternoon will hopefully be as important as that. The idea of "Debate without Hate." We live in a world where that is not the norm. It used to be the default, where you could debate someone without hating that person. You could disagree without being disagreeable. And in today's climate, we find that to be very rare nowadays. And how can we do that?

Now in one sense, talking about this topic is kind of easy. If you just want to create bumper stickers that say "Coexist", or if you want it to say "Love your brother" or whatever it is, you can talk about these things. But if you want to actually talk in a way that respects the person who has a certain idea, while disagreeing with that idea, it becomes a little bit more difficult.

We come from different backgrounds. Different religious backgrounds. We come from different political backgrounds. We come from different ethnic backgrounds. Even our behavioural backgrounds are different: the things that we think are acceptable behaviours because of customs or whatever it is. There is this diversity of opinion in this very room and of course in this country and around the world. And so it becomes very difficult, I think sometimes, to bring those differences and discuss them in a way that is cordial, but also respecting the person.

And in a gathering such as this, we have that diversity, which I think is a glimmer of hope. I really do think it's a glimmer of hope, because many of us come from very differing world views because of religion or otherwise, and yet here we are sharing a meal together, looking each other in the face, in a way that I think will help to foster respect. It's very hard to look someone directly in the eye, or shake their hand, feel the skin of their palm and say you are someone who is less than me. Because it's very easy to do that from a distance, but it's very hard to do it over a meal. That's I think one of the wonderful blessings God has given us: the blessing of

food—one of my favourite things in the world, as Sanj's parents now know, with some degree of consternation. So it is wonderful to be with you here.

The Golden Rule: Do to others what you would have them do to you.

Now many of you may have been to the UN building. And you see that the most popular attraction at the United Nations is a mosaic that is there called *The Golden Rule* mosaic. It's based on a painting of American artist Norman Rockwell. Norman Rockwell had a painting that depicted people of different religions and ethnic groups and races, all standing shoulder to shoulder, doing various things from their countries. And they were all standing shoulder to shoulder and that painting was made into a mosaic of stone and in that inscription was the word *The Golden Rule*. In that description, the caption of the painting. The Golden Rule, of course, many of us know, despite our different backgrounds. We know that version of the Golden Rule that is so often said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Now what's interesting about this mosaic is that it has become cracked over time. The mosaic—the stone edifice itself—had become cracked. That by the way is very poetic isn't it? It's an interesting word picture of what I think is happening in our political and our social climate today. What we once thought was the ideal of standing shoulder to shoulder, despite our differences and doing unto others as we would have them do unto us, that itself is cracked. And that's the world we live in today. But because of the importance and the popularity of that attraction at the UN, they had restored it. They had fixed the cracks and restored it.

Jan Eliasson, the former UN Deputy Secretary General, made the comment about it when it was unveiled. He says about the work *The Golden Rule*, "It reflects the very essence of our mission as set forth in our charter here at the UN. At its core, the work is about narrowing the gap between the world as it is and the world as we want it to be."

The idea of the Golden Rule, of doing unto others as we would have them do unto us, narrows the gap between the world as it is and the world as we want it to be. And the question we have to ask ourselves, despite our differences is this: "Can we fix the cracks? Can we narrow the gap? And how do we do it?"

Oftentimes we forget where that Golden Rule came from. That statement to do unto others what you would have them do unto you, came from the lips of Jesus—Jesus of Nazareth. He said in Matthew 7:12, "So in everything—not in some things—in everything—including our debates and our public discourses—do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets."

Now it's interesting as well that at the UN, you have this wonderful attraction, but there's also another gift that was given. You can go see this as well. A gift that was given to the UN by the interfaith society. It's a poster of the Golden Rule and it says *The Golden Rule* in the middle of it

and surrounding it in the graphics of the poster, are the various cultures' different versions of the Golden Rule.

Christianity doesn't have the only Golden Rule out there. There are many different versions and other religious systems and other cultures. But many of them say something like this: "Do unto others as you would have them do to you."

Others say, "Don't do unto others what you wouldn't want them to do unto you."

Some say, "Don't harm people because you won't be harmed."

Others say, "Do kind things so that people will do kind things to you."

The reason why we see such animosity in the world today is because we've lost that sense that every individual, despite their differences, has an inherent dignity and worth, even if they disagree with us sharply.

But there are some very fundamental differences in the way those things are formulated.

But there is a commonality that I think brings us here together today, but also needs to be the glue that binds our cultures despite our differences and that is this: every version of the Golden Rule makes the assumption that human beings, in general and in specific, every human being has an inherent dignity and worth.

And I think the reason why we see such animosity in the world today is because we've lost that sense that every individual, despite their differences, has an inherent dignity and worth, even if they disagree with us sharply. And sometimes one of the pointed errors of that sword where we don't actually see people that way.

I remember when I was 11 years old, my cousins and I had gone to a local pizza shop. And we got on our bikes and went to the local pizza shop. And it was one of these kinds of places that was a store front. You couldn't actually get your pizza and eat it inside the shop. You had to leave the shop and go outside. But we get our pizza and we walk outside and being 11 year old boys—that's definitely worth discussing. We would take our pizza and sit outside by a trash can. A trash can right outside the pizza shop. And there was this large window from the pizza shop where we would eat our pizza all the time.

Well on this particular occasion, we got our pizza and were eating it and as 11 year old boys tend to do, my imagination begins to wander. And I was looking at the glass through which you could see into the shop I just came from. I'm seeing the cars and the reflection of the cars whizzing by in the mirror and I look through the reflection and the guy who had just given me my pizza, who I had given my order to and he had just given me my pizza, was looking at me

with a level of anger in his eyes that I couldn't even believe. And as I looked through the reflection, I saw his hand was raised directly at me in an obscene gesture.

And I walked in. I was shocked—11 years old—and I walked right into the shop and I couldn't believe it. I was shocked into asking him a question, "Are you doing that to me?"

And this 19 year old man said, "That's right camel-jockey. What are you going to do about it?"

Now the reason why he knew I was from the Middle East was because I gave him my name for the order. I gave him my name and he had put it together. This was an Arab. He got mad just by virtue of where I came from.

What does that do to an 11 year old? It shocks the system to say, "You don't even know me. And yet you feel it's ok to denigrate me based on my heritage."

And that's the experience of many people. And that was a mild experience compared to what some people go through in other parts of the world and right here in Canada because of religion, because of race, because of ethnicity. Yes we are different, but we have to treat each other with that dignity of who we actually are. And this man, who I now think about and pray for when I think of him. I don't know what's happening in his life, but that deep seeded anger that says, "You are not as good as me based on your ethnicity" has to stop.

How do you get along and work together despite your deepest differences? Since that day when I was 11 years old, 33 years ago, I have since thought about that quite a bit. Now I came from a background where I was not a Christian growing up. I came from a different religious heritage. And I became a Christian after a nine year search into the historical, philosophical and even existential—the things that matter to me, in terms of relevance in my life—search. I did a nine year search into why I should be a Christian. Having found it to be credible—not only credible, but I think uniquely credible—I gave my life to Christ.

One of the reasons why this was particularly important to me was because I was a part of a minority religion in North America and a minority ethnic group. Then when I became a Christian, I was part of the "majority" in terms of the people who are nominally Christian. So I had some understanding of what it means to come from a majority and a minority background. And in some ways, having converted from my former faith into Christianity, I was in a very decided minority, because people don't usually convert from my former faith to Christianity. So I see very very seriously the differences we all have with each other and how we are ugly toward each other. But I also see glimmers of hope, like this very meeting itself.

Engaging in the Debate without Hate

Let me give you a couple of ways in which I think we can engage in the *Debate without Hate*: a way to actually discuss our differences by acknowledging that they are real and to do it with dignity and with respect.

The “Dignity of Difference”

The first thing I would offer to you is that we need to engage in what I call “*The Dignity of Difference*.” To recognize that there are actual differences and take those differences seriously. Nowadays in our sort of post truth culture, what we want to say is that everything is basically the same. We are all fundamentally the same. And in one sense that’s true. Because from the Christian perspective, I believe we are all made in the image of God. That’s what the Bible actually says. Each one of us, no matter what our backgrounds, genders, whatever it might be, bear God’s image and because we bear His fingerprints, we cannot have the right to violate one another.

But there are very real differences in our ideas, our opinions and our religions. And if we don’t take those things seriously, we are actually insulting one another. If you come from a background—for example, I come from a Christian background—I believe that God is one. There’s only one God, but that God exists in three divine persons: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Now in other religious traditions, they think that that’s not right. It’s not correct. In fact they might consider it blasphemy to say such a thing. I would never insult that person by saying that you and I believe exactly the same thing about God.

We have very serious differences. I want to take their religious views seriously because I would ask them to take mine seriously. And sometimes that means acknowledging the differences. And if we don’t do that, how would you respect someone, from a Muslim background for example, and say that 1400 years of Islamic tradition means nothing, because we all believe the same thing? No! There is an Islam for a reason. There is a Christianity for a reason. There are different political backgrounds: left, right and all these things for a reason.

We need to recognize the differences and come together and say I can disagree with you without disrespecting you. We need to afford that dignity.

We need to recognize the differences and come together and say I can disagree with you without disrespecting you. We need to afford that dignity. Now the reason we have to do that, is because oftentimes, not only do we not engage in a respectful dialogue with each other, but we also lose our ability to actually act rationally when we say everyone’s the same in every way.

Let me give you an example of what I’m talking about. I was speaking at a men’s breakfast, a very large gathering of men, about my conversion experience and why I became a Christian. And I gave all the philosophical reasons for all these things and I compared some religious

systems to Christianity as well. And there was a man sitting in the front row. He was writing notes. Writing notes at a furious pace. I thought that his paper was going to explode into a ball of flames, he was writing so fast! Well what's typical of that kind of thing, that person will almost always be the first person in line to speak to me afterwards, which I love.

Well he was in fact one of the first people. And as he came up he said, "I appreciate that you didn't disagree with other religious systems, you just talked about yours."

I said, "Well not that that's exactly true, I want to respect people for their beliefs, but I also want to acknowledge differences. What's your question?"

He said, "My worldview says this: all of us have a version of the truth. None of us has the whole truth. There is a truth out there, but none of us has all of it."

And I said, "Okay, I agree with the part about there being an entire truth and none of us knows all of it. Because if I knew all the truth, well I would be omniscient and that's what God is. And I'm clearly not omniscient, which means I'm not God. So so far, we are on the same page: I'm not God. I agree with you."

He said, "Well all of us have a version of the truth, no matter what our worldview is."

I said, "Everybody?"

He said, "Yes, everybody."

I said, "Like Stalin? [?] Adolph Hitler? These men had versions of the truth?"

And he said this. This is what he said to me: "I can't say that I prefer their version of the truth, but I also can't say that I disagree with it."

I said, "So you agree?"

He said, "No I'm not saying I agree, I'm just saying I can't disagree."

Which, what does that mean? I said, "Are you telling me that in your effort to respect all the [?] you can't disagree with anybody?"

He said, "That's right, I can't disagree with anybody."

I said, "Sure you can."

He said, "No I can't."

I said, "You just did."

See I set him up. And I think it's a fair way to show that our desire for people with dignity is modelled. We want that. But at the same time we can't say that everything is all the same and actually respect each other and actually think rationally about this.

But the problem comes in when we do the opposite. When we say we're so different, that they're the enemy. And that because they disagree with me politically, or socially, or religiously, they—whoever they are by the way—must be treated with disrespect, or I immediately suspect others are out to get me. That's the other part.

Now we run into what is now called the politics of anger. We no longer have the politics of the common good, or the politics of truth, or the politics of community. We talk about the politics of anger. Jonathan Sacks made this amazing assertion. Bear with me for a moment as I read this quote from Jonathan Sacks, where he talks about when we do the opposite. When we want to say that everyone is so different that they are the enemy. He says:

What we are witnessing throughout the West is a new politics of anger.

There is anger at the spread of unemployment, leaving whole regions and generations bereft of hope.

There is anger at the failure of successive governments to control immigration and to integrate some of the new arrivals.

There is anger at the financiers who brought the global economy to the brink of disaster and yet continued to reward themselves as if nothing had happened.

There is anger at CEOs using public corporations for private benefit.

There is anger that while a few have benefited disproportionately from the global economy, most people have seen their standards of living stay static or decline.

There is anger at the perceived impotence of governments to control the spread of extremism and terror.

There is a widespread feeling that the world in the 21st century is running out of control. This has led in France, Greece, Austria, Hungary and Poland, to a resurgence of the Far Right. Elsewhere there is an emerging alliance of the Far Left and radical political movements. These are dangerous forces, the Far Right seeking a return to a golden age that never was, the Far Left in pursuit of a utopia that will never be. They are both enemies of freedom.

Because we are polarised now. We have gone to both ends of the spectrum and said, “If you are on the left, only the right tells lies. If you are on the right, only the left tells lies. And if you’re a centrist, the right and the left tell lies.”

We don’t trust anybody anymore. We’re engaged in what I call the “Hitlerization of social and political commentary.” If you don’t agree with me, somehow you’re Adolf Hitler. Now understand what I said: I didn’t say if you disagree with me you’re Adolf Hitler. You can’t even be neutral anymore. If you’re neutral you’re like him. You have to agree with me. If you don’t agree with me, somehow you’re less than me. That’s the danger.

The biggest problem facing the United States, for example, is this polarisation now, where everyone is the enemy, no matter what side of the field you’re on. Those who have sought for social justices, or at least perceived social justices, have gotten laws changed. It used to be to level the playing field so that everyone had equal opportunities and fair share. Now the problem is, that once the field was level, they tilted it so that the faux, those who oppose certain ideas, are now the enemy and they are being vanquished.

We’ve lost the common good and instead are more interested in winning, rather than building each other up.

We’ve lost the sense of the common good, because we have either said all of us are the same, which led to an irrational belief, or we’ve said that we’re so different, that now it’s a hateful belief. We’ve lost the common good and instead are more interested in winning, rather than building each other up.

Very parallel, Mark Twain, the American writer said, “History doesn't repeat, but it does rhyme.”

And he was right about that. So many things we see today are what happened not too long ago. Think of the French revolution where the common folks, who were actually the oppressed, suddenly gained power and quickly became the oppressors and subjugated those who were not only guilty. But those who were associated with the guilty, or who I didn’t like and therefore associated with the guilty so they could be subject to the judgement.

That’s happened in our decade. Rather than engaging in the civil public square, we’ve entered into something that looks more like the Roman Coliseum. And it’s up to us, a body like this, to bring something back of that foundation for human dignity. To say that our differences are real, but our dignity still exists. We have to engage in discussions that allow someone to say some things we don’t agree with, and in fact vehemently don’t agree with.

Ideas are not all equal, but people who have them are created equal.

But saying that ideas are not all equal—because they’re not all equal—but that people who have them are created equal.

And that brings me to the Christian message in the minutes that I have remaining. I come to you from a Christian perspective. And I want to present that to you in a way that I think actually makes some kind of sense of our shared values. You're here because of a shared value in human worth and dignity, despite differences.

The Christian message says that every single human being, no matter what their situation, is made of the image of God that He has put in us.

The Christian message says that every single human being, no matter what their situation is, is made of that image of God that's on them. That He has put that on us. Not a divine quality that makes us little gods, but that we somehow bear that ability of relationship.

God is a relational being and that we have that ability to relate to one another. But whereas He is harmonious in His relationships, we break them. We fracture them. But we still bear that image. I therefore have no right. I didn't put that image on you. Your dignity does not come from Abdu Murray. Your dignity does not come from the state and your dignity does not come from power. Your dignity comes from the Source of all being. And in Christianity of course, that is God Himself.

This has ramifications, because think about the people who decide our fates. Whether it's in political arenas, or judicial arenas. There's a very famous judge—his name is Richard Poser—in the United States. He's a federal judge, Richard Poser. I studied many of his opinions: a brilliant man, a very thoughtful man. Many of his opinions on the law I studied greatly in law school and actually cited him quite often in my legal briefs, since I was a trial lawyer before I'd been put into full time ministry. When he was asked what human beings actually are, where our dignity comes from, he says, "As far as I can tell, we're just monkeys with big brains."

Now here's the problem. Here's a man who has dedicated his entire life to the practice of law and being a judge who judges between the affairs of men and women. [A judge] who tries to say, how can we take a look at something and say what is the fair and right thing to do? If he thinks that we are just monkeys with big brains, how was he a judge and not a zookeeper? He's just keeping the animals from biting each other.

You're here in Ottawa from the various places you come, because I think that you believe you are actually contributing to a greater good, not only for your own country, but in the global community. You are not zookeepers.

And the Bible says that each one of us is made in that image. King David, pondering on the world itself and on the creation of humanity, he makes that statement:

What is man that You are mindful of him and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory

and honour. You have given him dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

In Psalm 8, “What is man that You are mindful of him?” Because there is not much in us that is worthy of God’s attention and yet He does this for us. We don’t deserve it, but He does this for us. He places us in these places. Why is that? Because we bear that image that He puts on us.

We have that objective value. You see, if value is not given to us by an objective standard, by a god, or by a creator being, then the state does determine your value. Then the state does determine if you’re a human person. The Roman Empire, in the Roman Empire before pre-Christian times, you were not conferred personhood by virtue of being born. You had to be given personhood by the state. In fact the word *person* is the word *persona*, which means mask. Something artificial to you, you didn’t have it inherent.

You don’t prove yourself to God. He shows you your worth and value by paying a price that you and I deserved to pay. It is the great equaliser.

But the Christian message was this: all people are created in God’s image, all have fallen short of God’s commands, His purity. So we are all equal in that sense. But there’s also this equality that the Christian message gives to you and to me. It says that God Himself picks you up. You don’t prove yourself to Him. He shows you your worth and value by paying a price that you and I deserved to pay. He did that at the cross. It is the great equaliser: everyone is equally a sinner, but everyone’s equally offered that redemption.

That is what I think some of the greatest achievements in the world—that sense that we’re all equal—which didn’t even occur [...]. David W. Hart says, “It would not even have occurred to our pre-Christian ancestors that human beings were equally valuable, no matter what their station in life was.”

He says as a historian, that those ideas were unintelligible to our pagan ancestors. It was the Christian message that suddenly said everyone is equal and deserves to be treated with dignity. In fact, it was so powerful that it’s led to many of the changes we see in the world. And as much of a chequered history as the Church has had—and it’s not been a good one 100%, it’s had some great moments, but also some very deep and dark valleys—men like Marcello Pera, an atheist philosopher and former politician in Italy, makes this statement:

“You recall of course the visions of the French Revolution and the statements *liberté, égalité, fraternité*—liberty, equality, unity—and the picture of it is Marianne the actress singing these words of liberty, equality and unity. As if the Enlightenment had created these ideas in the 16th and 17th centuries and 18th centuries.”

But Marcello Pera looks back and says, “That is not the source of those ideas.”

He is not a Christian, he's an atheist. He says,

“Had the concepts of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* by any chance been invented by Marianne, or is it rather the case that the pretty French actress decided in her own way, lines read for example in the Gospels. Does not this old-fashioned booklet teach that men are the creation of God, created in His image and therefore free, equal and united by the same destiny? True, it took a long time and many troubles and tragedies to understand this message, but that means the Enlightenment was late, not that it was new.”

All people are created in the image of God and are therefore free, equal and united by the same destiny.

It was this message of the Gospel, that all people are created in the image of God and are therefore free, equal and united by the same destiny. When you recognize that in someone else, despite the religious, political, or other differences, how do you look at someone? [...] than just the heart in saying you are somehow less than me and I hate you for disagreeing with me, whether implicit or explicit.

Do I treat other human beings with dignity as if I believed they were created with God's fingerprints all over them?

Now I'm not advocating that our governments have to be religious in nature. History has taught us something that whenever religion and politics mix, both suffer. What I'm saying is we as human beings ourselves have to take this idea in and ask ourselves, “Do I treat other human beings with dignity as if I believed they were created with God's fingerprints all over them?”

The way Jesus actually formulates it when He says, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” doesn't guarantee that they will do good things unto you. It's a great risk. He says do unto others in a good way, even if they never treat you well, because that changes hearts and minds.

So the Golden Rule has many forms, as I began: “Do unto others so that they will do unto you.”, “Don't do unto others so that they won't harm you.” and all these things. But in many of these ways, these other variations of the Golden Rule, as valuable as they are, are self-defensive. Don't do things bad to people so that they won't hurt you. Or do things to people so that they will repay you with goodness. Those are either self-defensive, or self-seeking.

If I can be so bold as to tell you that the way Jesus actually formulates it when He says, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” doesn't guarantee that they will do good

things unto you. It's a great risk. He says do unto others in a good way, even if they never treat you well, because that changes hearts and minds.

When Christians were fed to the lions in the Coliseum, Christ and Caesar had met in the arena and Christ still won [...].

Not all ideas are equal, but everyone who has those ideas is created equal.

That message of the Golden Rule has been cracked. It has been cracked. We need to restore it. We need to bring it back. There are some bad ideas out there. We have to engage with each other on whether or not there are good ideas to be had. We need to do that though, with the dignity and respect that human beings deserve. Because not all ideas are equal, but everyone who has those ideas is created equal. That seems to be something to do that's more and more difficult in our day. That's why it's all the more important that we do it and we do it now.

Thank you for the honour of speaking before you. Thank you for gathering together in this wonderful meeting. I see the diversity here. It's like looking at a beautiful spice rack; everyone is flavoured differently. That's my hope that we come together and talk about these things in a way that brings true flavour and an aroma that is pleasing to the world. We need it. We need you. Thank you so much for giving me a hearing. God bless you all.

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