

THE  
ECONOMIC  
CLUB OF  
CHICAGO

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The Club was honored to host Bono for the Second Dinner Meeting of the 2018-2019 Program Year at the Hilton Chicago Hotel on December 6. Club Chair Mellody Hobson moderated a conversation with Bono, to an audience of over 1,600 attendees. As Ms. Hobson noted in her opening remarks, “Tonight’s speaker is the first person we’ve ever had with just one name. We’ve heard a lot over the years from rock star CEOs. We’ve heard from rock star politicians. This is our first time hearing from a rock star rock star.”

Below are excerpts from the conversation that evening.

***On the longevity of U2 and his bandmates...***

“Sticking together is probably the most difficult thing for anybody in an series of relationships: family, business, band, marriage [...] When we walk onstage together, the four members of the band, a strange thing happens. People, maybe some in this room, will tell me that they experience the hairs going up on the back of their neck when the four members of the band walk out. This does not happen when I walk out, or two of us. The four of us have to walk out. But what they don’t know, and I tell people this, is it’s happening to us. [...] What it is, is that it is impossible to stay together, and when our audience looks at us, knowing that we’ve probably waded through shite, and we’ve gotten onto that stage, it’s very powerful. It’s alchemical. We’ve turned our shite into gold.”

***On whether performing ever gets old...***

“Oh no. We just finished a tour a few weeks ago in Europe and it took me more to prepare for that tour than any tour we’ve ever played. I think it was partly the subject matter, and it was very demanding physically and mentally to go through this. I would wake up, 50 percent of the shows, on the morning of the show, feeling nauseous, feeling sick and just wondering about the show and if could I pull it off. Could we pull it off? And it’s not [about] can you get through the song list or are you going to make it to the end of the show. It’s nothing like that. Unfortunately, our drug of choice in our band is that this has to be the greatest night of our life. That’s tricky on a Tuesday in fucking God knows where.”

***On the meaning of his quote “a singer is someone with a hole in his heart as big as his ego”***

“There is no way we can put [artists] on a pedestal, because we become artists usually as an attempt to fill a void. Some hole in our heart, some ache. Because you don’t really start writing songs or

painting pictures or films or poetry unless there is something missing from you. And so that's what I was trying to get at.”

***On what is missing for him...***

“I think it's changed over the while. When I was younger I didn't understand where, perhaps, my rage came from, but now I do. Now I have rage for the right reasons. I think the thing that offends me, and makes me angrier than anything in the world, is the squandering of human potential, including my own. I think that love, if we had to define it, is the realizing of potential in others and indeed in yourself. [...] You never see human potential more squandered than in the dire despair of poverty and extreme poverty. And to realize, and I've said this before, but I hope it's still not a cliché, that where you live can never decide whether you live.”

***On what inspired his activism around human potential and extreme poverty...***

“On stage in Dublin a few weeks ago, I apologized to my father. He passed away 10 years, but I apologized to my father. His credo was that to dream is to be disappointed, so don't dream. I thought he wasn't encouraging me. I thought he wasn't interested in me realizing my potential. He actually just saw what he thought – that I was on the way to nowhere, and he was trying to be practical, because in Dublin when he was growing up, in the '50s and the '60s, it was true that to dream was to be disappointed [...] But my father did have a sense of justice, and I remember him say on the troubles in Ireland, everyone would get very worked up about the troubles and he [...] would say, ‘What is Ireland, but the place that keeps my feet from getting wet?’ [...] He was suspicious of nationalism. He saw nationalism as different from patriotism, which it is.”

“[And] I started to read the Scriptures and it was strange, because he wasn't religious, my family wasn't religious really, so it wasn't anything shoved down my throat. But I started to understand the stuff that was underneath the Scriptures, and later I'd figure out, apart from personal redemption, the second biggest theme across new and old testaments was the way we treat the poor. And that was built into it. There's, I think, 2,103 verses of the Scriptures about the way we treat the poor. So that kind of also got me going a bit.”

***On his pragmatic nature versus his idealistic vision...***

“Our manager, Paul McGuinness, used to say to me, ‘The job of the artist, Bono, is to point out the problem, not to fucking solve it.’ I was like, ‘No.’ [...] My least favorite John Lennon song was ‘Imagine,’ and that's strange because it's such a beautiful song and such a brilliant lyric. But I came from punk rock and I didn't like the hippie, ‘Let's all hold hands, man. We're going to just imagine the world and going dream it into being.’ [...] My relationship with the word dream is complicated because I'm more like the Nike commercial, ‘Just do it.’ Do it. Stop fucking dreaming about it.”

***On what he envisions for ONE...***

“Whatever you feel about the NRA, and I don't like them very much, they're a very, very well organized group and we want ONE to be the NRA for the world's poor. So the ONE Campaign [...] if you're getting in the way of legislation that'll make lives easier for the world's most vulnerable populations, we're going find out where you live. We're going camp outside your office. We have 10 million members, 3 million of them in Africa now. It will eventually be more. [...] The ONE campaign works on the left and on the right, all candidates. In the last election they were at every town hall meeting. You had everyone on the conservative side and on the left up on stage campaigning with people.”

***On the advice Warren Buffet gave him on how to galvanize people for a cause...***

“He said ‘People don't trust you if you ask them to do something simple [...] You have to ask people to do something that costs them more, that involves them more.’ [...] And then I said, ‘Anything else?’ [...] He said to me ‘Don't appeal to the conscience of America. No, no. Appeal to the greatness of America, and you'll get the job done.’”

***On why ONE landed on “poverty is sexist,” for its campaign...***

“Extreme poverty hits women first, and worst. It just does. Whether it's education – 130 million girls don't go to school, largely because they're girls. Mother's health – HIV/AIDS is still the number one killer of women in the world. And in sub-Saharan Africa, young women are twice as likely to get infected, than young men. In fact, if you can accept this, it's 7,000 young women a week. That's 1,000 a day, getting infected. So, no time for complacency, fighting this little virus.”

***On the current political environment in the United States and Europe...***

“Anger is pain made public. It's when people are anxious and angry they are vulnerable to hucksterism, to being tricked. Three-card Monte, right? The thing we know about Three-card Monte is, wherever you think the card is, it isn't. So unmanaged migration is a problem. Of course it is, but it's not *the* problem. China's trade relationship might need an upgrade. It could be a problem. It's not *the* problem. What's the problem? [...] We gotta be very careful of simplistic solutions.”

“The reason why Europe and the European Union was invented was to bring peace and keep the peace. It's like we've forgotten it, and we've forgotten why. This nationalism is backed with its simplistic solutions, and all that happened is the same thing that's happened here. The project of globalization, which is largely a success, started to fail significant communities. And you had NAFTA here. NAFTA grew the regional trade by, I think, \$1.1 trillion in 20 years. You started at \$290 million and you ended up at \$1.1 trillion. It's an amazing thing for America, except some communities paid a price for that. [...] And the anger and the anxiety I talked about has come out

of that since globalization isn't working for everyone the way we thought it might. I still think it can, but we need to learn from it.

Then you had, of course, the financial crisis. Which business leaders, who people look to as the firemen, started to look like arsonists. Now we're in this situation in Europe and in America where we've got to stop, be calm, reboot, and reimagine what capitalism is capable of. [...] Capitalism is not immoral, but it is amoral, and it requires our instruction.”

*Speed round – what did Bono learn from...*

*The band?*

“You're as good as the arguments you get.”

*The fans?*

“You work for them.”

*Children in Africa?*

“That where you live should not decide whether you live.”

*His own children?*

“To shut up.”

*America?*

“To never shut up.”

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*Please note: This content was edited and condensed for clarity. To see the full interview, visit our [YouTube Page](#).*