

New York Times September 18, 2005

The Statesman

By JAMES TRAUB

At 1:45 in the morning one day this past July, Bono, the lead singer for U2 and the world's foremost agitator for aid to Africa, was in a van heading back to his hotel in Edinburgh from Murrayfield Stadium; he had just performed in, and expounded at, a concert designed to coincide with the beginning of the summit meeting of the major industrialized nations, held nearby at the Gleneagles resort. Despite the hour, practically everybody in the van was on a cellphone. The bodyguard in the front seat was calling the hotel to see if a huge crowd would still be camped outside hoping to catch a glimpse of their world-straddling hero. (Roger that.) Lucy Matthew, the head of the London office of DATA, Bono's policy and advocacy body - the acronym stands for Debt AIDS Trade Africa - was whispering to some contact in the States. And Bono, who had been conferring 12 hours earlier at Gleneagles with President George Bush, Prime Minister Tony Blair and Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, was sharing an anxiety attack with a friend. The leaders of the G-8, as the group is known, were going to offer far less in aid and trade to developing nations in Africa than the activists had led their followers to expect. Thousands of bright-eyed young recruits to the cause were going to go home in disgust.

Bono, normally the most courteous of men, shouted an obscenity in Matthew's general direction, though the intended target was himself, or perhaps fate. "What's the point of coming back to talk to Chirac?" he said. "It's going to be too late then." The French president had reached Gleneagles late, and was probably sullen given that Paris had just lost out to London in its bid for the 2012 Olympics. (This was several hours before the terrorist bombings in London.) Bono was leaving later that day for a concert in Berlin and so would be unable to see Chirac until the day after. The thought was making him desperate: "Lucy, is it too late to call somebody with Chirac?" Matthew gently pointed out that it was, after all, the middle of the night for most people. Bono digested this unwelcome news and then said, "Look, let's call them tomorrow morning and say I'd be happy to meet with him any time he wants. I'll bring him breakfast. . . I guess I won't bring him an English breakfast." (Chirac had notoriously declared English food the worst cuisine in Europe, save Finnish.)

Bono did not, in fact, talk to the French president until the third and final day of the conference. But by then his despair had lifted. The summit meeting's final communiqué offered significant pledges on aid and debt relief for Africa, as well as new proposals on education and malaria eradication. Bono's own embrace of the package was treated with a solemnity worthy of a Security Council resolution. When I saw him the day after the summit ended, over tea in the courtyard of the Hôtel Plaza Athénée in Paris, he said, "I feel like I've got a right to punch the air."

And so he did. Bono had moved the debate on Africa, as five years ago he moved the debate on debt cancellation. This past week he was trying to move the debate set to take place at the big United Nations summit meeting, which he says he hopes will consolidate the gains made at Gleneagles, or at least not erode them. He's a strange sort of entity, this euphoric rock star with the chin stubble and the tinted glasses - a new and heretofore

undescribed planet in an emerging galaxy filled with transnational, multinational and subnational bodies. He's a kind of one-man state who fills his treasury with the global currency of fame. He is also, of course, an emanation of the celebrity culture. But it is Bono's willingness to invest his fame, and to do so with a steady sense of purpose and a tolerance for detail, that has made him the most politically effective figure in the recent history of popular culture.

I first met Bono last January at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, a gathering that answers almost perfectly to the conspiracy-theory view of global domination by a corporate-political-cultural elite. A core function of Davos is to mix different kinds of authority, which makes it the site par excellence of the Celebrity Prince and the one-man state. Bill Gates was there, as was George Soros - figures whose global currency, of course, is currency, and who deploy their philanthropy strategically, just as states deploy their aid budgets. Angelina Jolie, roving ambassador for the United Nation's refugee agency, showed up, too. Bill Clinton came, as did Jeffrey Sachs, the Columbia professor and unofficial economist to the third world. And a giddy nimbus of wannabes surrounded these regal figures and basked in their company.

When I went to meet Bono at the bar of his hotel, I saw Richard Gere seated at a table with a gorgeous woman in a little fur jacket and a leather cap. Bono, on the other hand, had removed himself to a quiet back room, where he was keeping company with a plump, middle-aged white guy in a suit and tie. (Bono was wearing a T-shirt and a fuzzy sweater whose sleeve needed mending.) This was Randall Tobias, head of the Bush administration's AIDS program. The administration had just announced that the program was providing antiretroviral drugs to 155,000 Africans with AIDS. Another kind of activist might have said, "That leaves 25 million more to go." But not Bono: he looked his cornfed interlocutor in the eye and said, "You should know what an incredible difference your work is going to make in their lives." Tobias looked embarrassed. Bono said various wonderful things about President Bush. Tobias beamed.

The glamour event of the following day, indeed of the whole forum, was a symposium on efforts to end poverty in Africa. The guests were Tony Blair and Bill Clinton, Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, Bill Gates and Bono. The heads of state, leading off, candidly acknowledged the obstacles to development - violent conflict, poor governance, corruption, lack of political will in the donor states and so on. It was all terribly somber and Davos. Then Bono was asked what he would like to see changed. "The tone of the debate," he shot back. The Celebrity Prince was wearing a black T-shirt under a black leather jacket, and he appeared to have shaved the stubble off his jutting, bellicose jaw. "Here we are," he went on, "reasonable men talking about a reasonable situation. I walk down the street and people say: 'I love what you're doing. Love your cause, Bon.' And I don't think 6,000 Africans a day dying from AIDS is a cause; it's an emergency. And 3,000 children dying every day of malaria isn't a cause; it's an emergency."

The crowd of C.F.O.'s and executive directors, silent until then, burst into applause. Bono had put music to the words; that's one of the things the rock-star activist can do. Moments later, an inspired Bill Clinton, throwing reason to the winds, cried: "The whole corruption and incompetence issue is bogus! And whoever raises it should be thrown in the closet." (Clinton later calmed down and said he meant that the corruption and incompetence of many African governments should not be used as a pretext to withhold aid.)

Bono gave Davos its music; but he also operated in prose. His chief goal was to win commitments, or the possibility of commitments, to be redeemed six months later at Gleneagles. A major item on the agenda for Gleneagles would be canceling \$40 billion of debt that the poorest countries owe to the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other multilateral institutions; and in Davos, Bono met with John Taylor, an under secretary of the treasury, to try to move the Bush administration's position on the issue. He huddled with Gordon Brown, the chancellor of the Exchequer and heir apparent to the British prime ministership, to strategize on financial mechanisms to "front load" the increased aid that donor states had promised. When Chancellor Schröder arrived to deliver a speech on aid to Africa as well as on the German economy, he met beforehand with Bill Gates and afterward with Bono.

As soon as the Schröder meeting ended, I was summoned to the war room in which Bono and his troops were camped. "Schröder just agreed to .7 by 2015," Bono cried. "It's fantastic!" In 2002, the industrialized states pledged to increase foreign-aid spending to 0.7 percent of G.N.P. by 2015, but the German economy was tanking, and Schröder, who faced a political challenge from the right, had been loath to lay out a timetable for increased spending. Now, to Bono, he had done just that. Of course, a skeptic might have noted that since Schröder was unlikely to be in power in 2006, much less 2015, this was not a pledge he would have to honor, but Bono is not a skeptic.

One night I went out to dinner with Bono and the gang. Richard Curtis, the British screenwriter responsible for "Four Weddings and a Funeral" and "Love Actually" and a prominent activist on poverty issues as well, told Bono that he and Bob Geldof had been talking about arranging simultaneous mega-concerts in major world cities for July 2, to focus attention on the Gleneagles summit - the germ of what would become Live 8. Bono, who was carving up a large steak, got more and more excited. Those eight leaders, he suggested, should think that the whole world will be watching. It wouldn't be, of course; but it should feel that way. "I'm a salesman," he told Curtis. "And I know I can sell this to NBC or CBS." Meanwhile, Jeffrey Sachs was crouched over in the corner, trying to make himself heard on his BlackBerry. Jamie Drummond, the head of DATA's Washington office, was running down a list of stars - George Clooney, Cameron Diaz, Brad Pitt, Mos Def - who had agreed to appear in a commercial for the One Campaign, a confederation of major development organizations that was assembling an army of activists to fight for increased aid.

Bono had started with a glass of white wine, but when I said I was drinking red, he switched over and ordered a bottle of Brunello di Montalcino. U2's manager, Paul McGuinness, is a wine nut, and Bono caught the bug from him. Bono has unabashedly bourgeois tastes, and he spends his money on the kinds of things most of us would spend our money on if we had as much as he does - a family-size Maserati, a house on the Riviera, a charming hotel in Dublin, great food and wine. I was raving about the Brunello, which was many stations above the norm for me. Bono was less impressed, but he didn't want to dampen my enthusiasm. "It is," he said, after some consideration, "a not immodestly great wine." This dash of wine snobbery, which would have been insufferable from a London banker, became somehow endearing when delivered from behind pink sunglasses in an Irish publican brogue.

When he is not lobbying heads of state on multilateral debt relief, Bono, who is now 45, still earns his keep as one of the most famous rock stars in the world. And in order to understand how he has come by his Celebrity Prince status, it's helpful to attend a U2 concert. In May, a few months after Davos, I saw the band perform in Madison Square Garden. First, the entire arena went dark, and then, in a cone of white light through which innumerable bits of confetti fluttered and danced, Bono materialized, twirling slowly, ecstatically, his arms raised to the light as if asking to be drawn up to the heavens. It was a gesture with intimations of the messianic. And yet what you felt, throughout the evening, as Bono pranced and hopped along the catwalk that extended out into the crowd in the pit, inviting girls up to dance with him, was that he was beckoning his fans to join him in the ecstatic place where the music came from. Even his political appeals, which he generally kept in check, felt like an invitation to the transcendent. Invoking the spirit of American courage and enterprise that once put a man on the moon, he called on President Bush to increase aid to Africa and thus "put mankind back on earth" (whatever that meant).

Bono may be a one-man state, but he is not a one-man band. U2 is a rock phenomenon because the Edge, the lead guitarist, the drummer, Larry Mullen Jr., and Adam Clayton, who plays bass guitar, are very talented musicians who share Bono's gift for conjuring a sense of rapture. But the voice of U2 is Bono's voice, which seems to rise up out of a great pool of naked yearning. It takes the form sometimes of an arena-enveloping shout, sometimes of a keening wail and sometimes of a piercing falsetto. The voice, like the stage presence, is easy to spoof, for as a performer, Bono generally does without the irony that he deploys as a bantering citizen. The ironist will not, however, touch a stadium full of hearts, as Bono does.

Bono, who was born Paul Hewson, had more than enough unhappiness and loss growing up to give a sharp edge to that wail, but not too much to kill his sense of delight. He was reared by a Catholic father and a Protestant mother in Dublin's ragged middle class, a smart boy who was playing in international chess tournaments at 12. But when Bono was 14, his beloved mother suddenly died, leaving him with an older brother and a father who, he has said, "would always pour salt - and vinegar - onto the wound." He was a very

angry teenager, but at 16, he and some of his angry, barely middle-class school chums began noodling around on instruments. By the following year, 1977, they were performing in local clubs. They weren't very good, but even then there was something fiercely affirmative in their music. At a time when many performers looked as if they'd just emerged from electroshock therapy and were wont to incite a crowd by pelting it with offal, U2 had a bond, a benevolent relationship, with the audience. "We were never adversarial," Adam Clayton says. "We were much more Irish."

The band has been together ever since. Even Paul McGuinness, their manager, has been with them from the beginning. This is not only rare in the rock business; it is just about unheard-of. U2 is also one of the very few bands in which all revenue is shared equally; Bono and the Edge could have claimed the songwriting revenue but didn't. Nor do any of them appear to have succumbed to drugs, alcohol or raging ego. Religion played an important role in the band members' lives, if not always in their music; indeed, the band's survival was threatened only when, early on, Bono, the Edge and Larry Mullen Jr. thought of leaving to join a Christian fellowship. Bono remains religious, and not in the cosmic, New Age sense you expect from rock stars. He describes himself as a "meandering Christian," and his four children attend the Church of Ireland, which is Episcopalian (and thus splits the difference between his mother and father).

Unlike his dyspeptic fellow activist Sir Bob Geldof, Bono is a hugger, a giver and seeker of affection. Geldof himself has compared the two by saying: "He is in love with the world . . . he wants to give it a cuddle. I want to punch its lights out" - as if Bono were an Irish John Denver. Bono understandably hates this crack, but in fact he doesn't want to punch the lights out of life. He's an extremely courteous, minutely attentive person who signs every object thrust at him by delirious fans and never forgets to thank everyone for everything. Though he has, over the years, written a great many aching ballads about women with "Spanish eyes" and so forth, he has stayed married to his first wife, Ali, whom he met at age 12 and started dating at 16.

From the outset, the members of U2 have been committed to rescuing the planet from various evils. Back in the 1980's, when the band was building its reputation, every tour seemed to come with its own moral sponsor - Amnesty International, Nelson Mandela, Greenpeace. Bono has since come to think of this as the era of Rock Against Bad Things. Should he ever want to mortify himself utterly, Bono need only cue up the incantation at the end of his 1987 song "Silver and Gold": "This is a song about a man . . . who's sick of looking down the barrel of white South Africa. A man who has lost faith in the peacekeepers of the West while they argue. . . . Am I buggin' ya? I don't mean to bug ya." But Bono has the saving grace of self-awareness; he keeps close track of his own absurdities. Like any pop star, he sorted through various personae over the years - brother of the oppressed, Christian visionary, ironic trickster, devoted husband and father - and ultimately arrived at the soulful, watchful, perpetually unsatisfied grown-up that he is. And at that point he was ready to take up issues that other rock stars were unlikely to bother with, since they couldn't be reduced to a songwriter's hook.

In 1997, Bono was approached by Jamie Drummond, then working with a church-sponsored campaign to cancel the debts that the most impoverished nations owed to the industrialized nations. (This was "bilateral debt," owed by one state to another, as opposed to the "multilateral debt" debated at Gleneagles.) Many countries, especially in Africa, were so crushed by foreign debt, often run up by long-gone tyrants with the happy connivance of Western banks, that scarcely anything was left over for schools, health care and the like. The movement made real headway in England, but was virtually unknown in the U.S. U2 played in the Live Aid concert to raise money for Ethiopia back in 1985. So did everyone else, of course. But Bono actually wanted to understand the problem he was sloganeering about, so the following year he and Ali spent several months living and working in a refugee camp in Ethiopia. He was ripe for a deeper involvement.

Bono agreed to spearhead the American debt-relief effort and began by educating himself on the subject. As a superstar, Bono had the advantage of being able to conduct his education at a very high level. Bobby Shriver, a record producer and member of the Kennedy clan, set up meetings for him with James Wolfensohn, who was the head of the World Bank, and with Paul Volcker, David Rockefeller and other colossi of the financial establishment. Bono traveled to Cambridge, Mass., to meet with Jeffrey Sachs, then at Harvard. But he also asked Sachs to find him an academic who opposed debt cancellation, a very peculiar request for a graduate of the school of Rock Agitprop. "I'm always attentive to the bearers of bad news," Bono told me, "because they're a little more reliable." They also, of course, sharpen your debating skills.

By the summer of 1999, Bono was ready to take on Washington. The Clinton administration was already committed to canceling two-thirds or so of the \$6 billion that the poorest African countries owed the United States, but Bono wanted 100 percent cancellation - not only because he thought it was right, but also because you can't sing about two-thirds of something. "It has to feel like history," he says. "Incrementalism leaves the audience in a snooze." Shriver arranged for Bono to meet with Gene Sperling, President Clinton's chief economic adviser, and with Sheryl Sandberg, chief of staff to Lawrence Summers, who had just been named secretary of the treasury. Summers himself was not about to waste precious time meeting with a rock star. He did agree, however, to "drop by" while Bono spoke to Sperling. Bono laid out his argument. "He was deeply versed in the substance," Sandberg recalls. "He understood capital markets, debt instruments, who the decision makers were."

Summers tried to give Bono the polite brushoff. "These are complicated issues," Summers told him. "I'll have to take it up with the G-7 finance ministers." And now this earnest, impassioned rock star with the accent of a racetrack tout issued a call to destiny. "You know what," he told Summers, "I've been all over the world, and I've talked to all the major players, and everyone said, 'If you get Larry Summers, you can get this done.'" It was, Sandberg says, "a really important moment. I think we were all inspired and motivated."

It wasn't Bono's belief in the issue that was so effective; it was his belief in others. One Sunday morning that fall, Bono called to ask Sperling if he could come to his office in the West Wing. There he put his hand on top of a giant stack of papers Sperling was working through and said: "I bet that most of the things in this pile feel more urgent than debt relief. But I want you to think of one thing: Ten years from now, is there anything you'll feel more proud of than getting debt relief for the poorest countries?" Bono understood something about people like Sperling: that in their heart of hearts, the chastened New Democrats of the Clinton administration yearned for morally resounding acts, but that they needed political cover, and they needed permission - the feeling that the thing could and must be done. When Bono left, Sperling called a treasury official and said that he wanted to insert something on debt relief into a speech Clinton was about to give at the World Bank. He and Summers got a few minutes in the presidential limo. Clinton instantly agreed to call for 100 percent cancellation of the debts owed to the United States by 33 impoverished countries.

But it wasn't enough just to pierce the hearts of guilty ex-liberals, for there was still the Republican-controlled Congress to attend to. In late 1999, Bono arranged to meet John Kasich, a wild-man rock-fan conservative from Ohio who was chairman of the House Budget Committee. Kasich might not have been the most obvious candidate for the job; one of his obsessions was getting rid of foreign aid, most of which he considered, he says, "a joke." But Kasich says he was impressed by the force of Bono's argument. The congressman was also a Christian, and Bono spoke of Biblical injunctions to succor the poor and downtrodden. Kasich enlisted. And this became a pattern: Bono was able to dislodge conservatives from their isolationist or free-market reflexes by reaching them as Christians. Conservative Christians in and out of Congress - mostly out - are now a key constituency in the debates over aid to Africa; Bono was among the first outsiders to help them across the ideological divide.

In mid-2000, Bono received an audience with Senator Jesse Helms, viewed by Bono's fellow lefties, including members of the band, as the archfiend himself. Bono quickly realized that his usual spiel about debt service and so on wasn't making a dent. So, he recalls: "I started talking about Scripture. I talked about AIDS as the leprosy of our age." Married women and children were dying of AIDS, he told the senator, and governments burdened by debt couldn't do a thing about it. Helms listened, and his eyes began to well up. Finally the flinty old Southerner rose to his feet, grabbed for his cane and said, "I want to give you a blessing." He embraced the singer, saying, "I want to do anything I can to help you." Kasich, who was watching from a couch, says, "I thought somebody had spiked my coffee." Bono later invited Senator Helms to a U2 concert, and Helms sat through the evening with his hearing aid turned down. Afterward he said to Bono, "I saw them all standing there with their arms in the air, blowin' like a field of corn."

During this period, Bono flew to Washington eight times, meeting not only legislators but also their aides - even though U2 was then in the last stages of recording a new album. The key holdout in the House was Sonny Callahan, a congressman from Alabama, and Bono and his little band ginned up the clergy members in Callahan's district. Callahan himself later said: "Priests and pastors sermonizing on debt relief on Sundays, telling

their congregations to tell Callahan to take care of this, including my own bishop. Eventually I gave in." In late October 2000, Congress appropriated the additional \$435 million needed for 100 percent debt relief.

Why Africa? Why not, say, global warming? Part of the answer is happenstance: Africa is what Bono got swept up into. But Africa, or so Bono feels, needs what only a certain kind of world figure can give - a call to conscience, an appeal to the imagination, a melody or a lyric you won't forget. The cause of ending extreme poverty in Africa speaks to Bono's prophetic impulse. Rock music, for him, is a form of advocacy, but advocacy is also a form of rock music. His definition of "sing" includes speeches and press conferences, and his arenas include Davos and Capitol Hill. Among his best work is the rallying cry. He often says, "My generation wants to be the generation that ended extreme poverty." There's not much evidence that this is so; but Bono has helped make it so, in part by repeating such resonant phrases.

God knows Africa could use a song or two. The reason that debt relief required such an excruciating effort is that foreign aid has virtually no constituency; a politician is only going to hurt himself by vowing to spend more money helping poor people in Africa. By the time the Bush administration took office, the percentage of G.N.P. devoted to development assistance had been shrinking for more than three decades. And the case for aid had dwindled just as drastically. Countries like Nigeria and Kenya had received tens of billions of dollars over the years with scarcely anything to show for it. Not only conservatives like John Kasich but also Clinton administration "neoliberals" argued that aid was powerless, perhaps even harmful, in the face of corruption, civil conflict, weak governance, self-defeating economic policies.

Whatever its merits, the neoliberal argument began to feel morally unsustainable as much of Africa retrogressed throughout the 90's. Was the West to offer nothing more than pious advice about free markets and small government while whole portions of the globe slid into misery? Did all African countries suffer from bad values, bad governance and bad policies? Liberal economists and activists formulated an alternative argument: a combination of "natural" factors - poor soil, high incidence of infectious disease, lack of access to ports - along with disadvantageous trade conditions and wrongheaded neoliberal policies had gotten many countries stuck in what Jeffrey Sachs called "the poverty trap." They could not escape, absent outside help. This view, which was widely accepted outside the United States, was given a global endorsement in 2000, when the U.N. adopted the Millennium Development Goals, pledging to radically reduce such problems as extreme poverty, child mortality and infectious disease over the next 15 years. Recipient countries pledged to reduce corruption and improve accountability; donor countries pledged to increase aid, lower trade barriers and grant further debt relief.

Bono passionately embraced this expansive view of the obligations of the industrialized world, and of the possibilities of Africa. In 2001, he went to Bill Gates and others to finance an organization that would lobby for action on Africa. DATA has offices in

London, Los Angeles and Washington, but it was plain from the outset that the real challenge lay in Washington, both because historically the U.S. spent so small a fraction of its budget on aid - one-tenth of 1 percent of G.N.P. as of 2000 - and because the incoming Bush administration believed so single-mindedly in free-market solutions to problems of development.

At the G-8 summit in Genoa in the summer of 2001, Bono managed to wangle a meeting with Condoleezza Rice, who was then the president's national security adviser. Rice is only a few years older than Bono, but her training in classical music and her rather forbidding public persona do not exactly suggest an affinity for rock music or rock musicians. Apparently, this is a misconception. "I'm a baby boomer," Rice pointed out to me when we met in her office in July. "I love rock music." She is, she says, "a U2 fan." And in Bono she discovered a potential partner. The administration, she says, was grappling with ways to "rebuild a consensus about foreign assistance." Rice was surprised to learn that Bono took the hard-headed view that "there's a responsibility for the recipient" as well as for the donor. In fact, Bono championed a new paradigm in which aid would be conditioned not only on need but on demonstrated capacity to use that aid effectively - which was precisely the kind of reform the administration had been thinking of.

After the meeting with Rice, the policy wonks at what would become DATA (it had not yet been formally organized) produced a proposal for a two-pronged strategy to "reward success" in six to nine well-governed countries and to keep others from "falling back" through major increases in funding on AIDS, TB and malaria. The proposal might have gone nowhere, but then 9/11 changed all contexts, including the context of development assistance. Aid became a national-security issue (if a rather marginal one), for it was clear that fragile states could not be allowed to become failed states, as Afghanistan had been. And as the administration geared up for war, it needed to prove that its new foreign policy would not be limited to routing terrorists.

In early 2002, Jamie Drummond recalls, he was "summoned to Washington and asked not to leave." In a series of closed-door meetings, he says, he worked with White House officials on the details of an aid program based on the principles Bono had proposed. (These officials bridle at the suggestion of Bono's authorship: Joshua Bolten, then Bush's deputy chief of staff for policy, will say only that Bono "was working with the president at a time when he was considering" such a program.) The administration vowed to put real money behind the Millennium Challenge Account, as the program came to be called. By the third year of operation, it was to be dispensing \$5 billion, which all by itself would increase the aid budget by nearly half.

But the administration wanted something from Bono in return - his imprimatur. The idea seems laughable on the surface, but the fact is that Bono had enormous credibility in an

area where the administration had virtually none; or, as Secretary Rice put it to me, "It's great to have a person who would not normally be identified with the president's development agenda as a part of it." Bono had bargaining power, and he now used it. Jeffrey Sachs had long argued that the AIDS epidemic was wrecking the economy and social order of the most affected states, so that development assistance could not work without a major AIDS campaign. Bono told Rice that he would appear with Bush at an event promoting the president's development-assistance program if Bush would also commit to "a historic AIDS initiative." The day before the planned appearance, in March, Bono learned that the president would not do so. He was now playing for dizzyingly high stakes. Virtually everyone around Bono despised Bush; and now some of his most trusted advisers urged him to deny the administration his precious gift of legitimacy. And Bono, in an uncharacteristic act of confrontation, called Rice and said he was pulling out of the joint appearance.

Rice was very unhappy. She recalls telling him, "Bono, this president cares about AIDS, too, and let me tell you that he is going to figure out something dramatic to do about AIDS." But, she added, "You're going to have to trust us." Bono accepted her pledge. According to Scott Hatch, a former aide to the Republican House leadership whom Bono hired to help him gain access to conservatives, "Bono really took it on the chin from the left for dealing with a Republican president." But Bono says he felt that the administration deserved praise for the aid package; and he trusted the Bush White House, though his friends thought him ludicrously naïve. He says that he has not regretted his trust. "I have found personally that I have never been overpromised," he says. "In fact, the opposite - they tell me they won't do something, and finally they do it."

As he was being taken to meet Bush, Bono recalls, he told the driver to circle the block a few times while he sat with a Bible in his lap, hunting frantically for a verse about shepherds and the poor. He was getting later and later. Finally he found a passage to his liking, and he went into the Oval Office. There he recited the passage he had chosen from the Gospel of Matthew: "For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in. . . ." Bono then presented Bush with an edition of the Psalms for which he had written the foreword.

Bono's most celebrated collaboration with the Bush administration was his African caravansary with Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill in May 2002. The two men, so oddly matched, had a striking effect on each other. In the course of the trip, O'Neill, a highly successful corporate leader who preached the gospel of "value for your money," came to conclude that small investments of public money could produce extraordinary value, at least in the exemplary countries on their itinerary - Uganda, Ghana, South Africa, Ethiopia. He became obsessed with the idea that donors could create a supply of clean drinking water for an entire country for a pittance. But he also tried to impress on Bono the liberating power of the global market. Bono was accustomed to prating about the evils of the I.M.F. and the stinginess of donors; he was taken aback when O'Neill escorted him through factory floors and explained that Africa would benefit more from even a modest

expansion of trade than from a radical increase in aid. An account in The Washington Post suggested that a "momentous. . .alliance between liberals and conservatives to launch a fresh assault on global poverty" was in the offing.

O'Neill returned to Washington with the fervor of a convert - and ran into a brick wall. The trip had provided great publicity for the White House, but nobody wanted to hear about water projects. When O'Neill took advantage of a one-on-one meeting with Bush to propose a \$25 million demonstration project to provide clean water to Ghana, the president "looked blankly at him," according to "The Price of Loyalty," an account of O'Neill's time in Washington written by Ron Suskind with O'Neill's extensive cooperation. O'Neill's impolitic enthusiasms and intellectual honesty marked him as a hopeless outsider in the Bush White House; he was fired at the end of 2002. And with him went hopes for a historic conjunction of soft hearts and hard heads.

The Millennium Challenge Account, announced with such fanfare, now proceeded to sink to the bottom of the administration's priority list. Only in early 2004, two years from the announcement, did the president sign the law creating the body. The first executive director, Paul Applegarth, was a complete unknown who impressed scarcely anyone. Congress appropriated only \$1.3 billion for the first year and \$1.5 billion for the second. This year President Bush asked for \$3 billion rather than the \$5 billion he had once promised; and Congress may appropriate little more than half that. Why should legislators do otherwise? Since the corporation has disbursed a grand total of \$400,000 to date, there's no evidence that it works.

Administration officials and legislators give various explanations, none terribly persuasive, for the dilatory pace. Senator Rick Santorum, who has been one of Bono's key conservative allies, says that he has tried to persuade White House officials that the M.C.A. is "part of our war on terror" and should be financed accordingly. But when Santorum tries to push the budget director, Joshua Bolten, he says, he hears "the 'Jerry Maguire' answer: 'Show

me the money.' " Bolten is another White House Friend of Bono, and he, too, speaks of aid as "an integral part of the national-security strategy." But when I asked him what happened to the Millennium Challenge Account, he said that it fell between budget cycles.

The Bush administration, critics say, has fumbled the opportunity to transform the aid debate. In March, Paul O'Neill said that he found it "unforgivable that we and other mature nations" have refused to do something as simple as providing clean drinking water. Many of Bono's own allies have lost what little patience they had. Jeffrey Sachs, whose moral sensibilities are comparable to those of U2 circa 1985, calls the operation of the M.C.A. "a disgrace." When I asked Sachs if he thought that Bono should stop cultivating the president and start denouncing him, he said, "Even aside from him saying it publicly, I'd just like him to say it to himself."

I saw Bono soon after my conversation with his mentor and sometime foil. In late May, U2 made a swing through New York for the Madison Square Garden concert. Bono insisted on having lunch at Balthazar, the downtown bistro, where the staff welcomed him as an old friend. He ordered half a dozen oysters, the filet mignon and a half-bottle - and then, sometime later, another half-bottle - of a Clos de Vougeot. When my lunch came, he ate the French fries off my plate, Bill Clinton-style. I told him about my talk with Sachs. Bono frowned and said: "I understand his rage; I share it. What I will not agree with is the belief that we can do this just by the moral force of our argument. We need the right as well as the left. We have achieved an enormous amount this way." Bono will not say anything that will drive the administration away, but it is not wholly a matter of tactics; he continues to believe, with what can only be described as a touching faith, that President Bush, while utterly indifferent to the political value of aid, is deeply committed to helping Africa according to his own lights.

And the proof, for Bono, is AIDS. Condoleezza Rice had promised him a historic AIDS initiative. Throughout 2002, Bono pressured the administration, lobbying key representatives, White House officials and, above all, leaders in the conservative Christian community. In the first week of December that year, he organized a bus tour through Middle America - the Heart of America tour - to demonstrate that ordinary Americans wanted action on AIDS. And the administration made good its pledge: in his 2003 State of the Union address, President Bush proposed a five-year, \$15 billion effort to combat AIDS in 15 hard-hit countries, 12 of them in Africa. The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR, has been fully financed every year. And because, unlike the M.C.A., it was built on existing programs, the AIDS initiative began operating on the ground within months - which is why Bono heaped praise on Randall Tobias at Davos. Bono did not, however, see fit to remonstrate with Tobias over the damage that may have been done by the AIDS program's ideologically inspired guidelines: a requirement that one-third of prevention funds go to programs promoting abstinence and sexual fidelity, stringent restrictions on the use of condoms and even a demand that groups receiving funds must formally oppose prostitution. An editorial in *The Economist* characterized PEPFAR as "too much morality, too little sense."

And the administration has been far less generous with international approaches to AIDS. When, in 2001, Secretary General Kofi Annan of the United Nations announced the establishment of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, President Bush offered only \$200 million as the American contribution. Congress has agreed to finance up to one-third of the fund's budget, but in each of the last three years, the administration submitted a lower figure and then Congress raised it. Rick Santorum offers only a middling grade to the administration on AIDS: "The president put up a very good number for bilateral aid, but didn't put up a good number for multilateral aid." Had Congress approved the administration's most recent budget request, Santorum says, thousands of people would have lost their supply of antiretroviral drugs.

The leader who deserves the greatest credit for placing Africa at the top of the world's agenda, or at least near it, is Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain. It was Blair, who, at the urging of Bob Geldof, impaneled the Commission for Africa, whose report, released earlier this year, painstakingly laid out the case for an enormous increase in aid to Africa. Blair seems actually to believe what the Bush administration only says, for he uses the same ringing tones to talk about the West's responsibility to Africa that he does to discuss the war on terrorism. But Blair also knows that his crusade enjoys broad political support. And for this he has Bono and Geldof, among others, to thank. Justin Forsyth, Blair's special adviser on development, credits Bono with making Africa an urgent issue in Britain, and with helping Blair "keep the bar very high" by insisting on big, breakthrough goals.

The Gleneagles momentum began building in the spring. In May, European Union development ministers pledged to double global aid from \$60 billion to \$120 billion by 2010. The following month, Paul Wolfowitz, the hawkish former Pentagon official who had just left the administration to become head of the World Bank, embraced the 0.7 percent target. The Americans and the Brits had worked out their differences on multilateral debt relief. But the Bush administration remained a conspicuous holdout. White House officials were mystified that they hadn't gotten the credit they felt they deserved for reversing decades of indifference to aid, and felt no pressure to do more.

When I saw Bono in late May, he was close to despair about Bush's intransigence. The next day he was going to Washington to see Rice, Bolten and the political mastermind Karl Rove. He planned to say, "I know that important programs are being cut, but this kind of momentum doesn't come along every year." He was going to suggest a major initiative on malaria, and another on girls' education.

Blair and Bono speak regularly, and the week before Gleneagles, Bono hatched a plan to visit 10 Downing Street when the eight "sherpas," who map out the summit for their heads of state, would be meeting there. Lobbying sherpas is simply not done, but Bono dropped in on their meeting as if he just happened to have been in the neighborhood. Once he was in the door, he started talking for all he was worth. "First I tried to get them to laugh," he told me. "And I did get them to laugh. Then I tried to inspire them. I think I inspired them."

The Bono operation in Scotland, quartered in a spacious suite in the Balmoral hotel in Edinburgh, was far larger than it had been in Davos. A planning meeting on Day 1 of the summit meeting included all sorts of unfamiliar young men in fashionable glasses, as well as George Clooney. Jamie Drummond was trying to come up with a crisp sound bite on debt relief for Clooney to use on the American morning talk shows. Bob Geldof, his ginger locks tucked under Andy Capp headgear, wandered into the meeting trailed by a TV crew and talking on the cellphone to a senior British treasury official. Geldof held out the phone so everyone could hear, if barely. The official was saying that Chancellor Schröder was balking at an airlines tax to be used to raise money earmarked for aid. Bono

said that he was trying to persuade Angela Merkel, Schröder's electoral opponent, to give the chancellor political space by agreeing not to raise the issue - a stupefying proposition. "We'll be working on that all day," he said blandly. (The idea was eventually dropped.)

Bono, Geldof and the key aides then choppered over to Gleneagles. Bono spoke with Schröder and Blair about the issues that were still up in the air - financing mechanisms and trade reform. He met with Bush, who had announced new initiatives on malaria and access to education the week before - the two issues Bono raised with the White House in late May. It was good, but it was all done in prose. "They keep saying, 'We're spending this much, and it's this much of a share of world spending,' " he told me the next morning. "I want them to say: 'Malaria just can't be allowed. We're going to get rid of malaria.' " That was how the president talked about terrorism; Bono conceded that if he didn't talk about aid that way, it was probably because he didn't feel that way.

The Live 8 concerts on July 2 had been crowded, star-studded and distinctly upbeat - Rock in Favor of Good Things. One last concert was staged on July 6, the first day of the G-8, in the Murrayfield Stadium. It was a fabulously bizarre event. One dressing room had been set aside for George Clooney, Susan Sarandon, Claudia Schiffer and the archbishop of Canterbury (who did not show, alas). The concert lasted five and a half hours, including inspirational addresses by Clooney, Schiffer, Bono and others, and was finally closed down, with magnificent incongruity, by James Brown himself, driving the crowd insane with "I Got You (I Feel Good)." At some point during the endless evening,

I sat down with George Clooney and quite a

few vodka-and-cranberries. Bono has enlisted some of the biggest names in Hollywood, including Brad Pitt, Cameron Diaz, Justin Timberlake and Clooney. For all his effortless charm, Clooney has serious aspirations, and he spoke of Bono with a respect that bordered on reverence. "He calls on everyone to be their best," Clooney told me. "If you fall short, you feel embarrassed. That's a unique thing. And we all want to be that person."

Clooney had been tasked to buttonhole Paul Wolfowitz and get him to press the administration to finance the World Bank's program to provide free public education. As Clooney and I were talking, the glass door separating our V.I.P. lounge from the roar of the stadium slid open, and who should emerge but the president of the World Bank himself. Wolfowitz, who had rolled up the sleeves of his dress shirt, seemed to be delighted, or at least amused, by this extraterrestrial environment. He and Clooney held a brief palaver and agreed to speak at greater length.

The next day, Bono flew to Berlin to rejoin the band for a gig at the arena Albert Speer built for the 1936 Olympics. There, standing in front of U2's towering electronic screen, with a vast crowd spread out before him on the playing field, Bono praised Chancellor Schröder's "leadership" on debt cancellation and fair trade but added that leadership also

required committing an additional \$50 billion a year in aid. "We are watching," he shouted. "We are waiting. If he can deliver this by 4 tomorrow, I believe you should welcome your chancellor back home a hero." He implored the crowd to send e-mail and text messages demanding action that very moment.

Bono flew back to Edinburgh that night in order to be at Gleneagles for the third and final day, when the communiqué would be issued. He finally met with Chirac and with Kofi Annan. During the afternoon, he started seeing leaks of the communiqué, which was drawing ever closer to his own agenda, the agenda he had tirelessly, and often fruitlessly, championed since 1999. After worrying for months, and as recently as a day or two before, that the summit would fail, and that he would look like a fool, the relief and the gratification had the force of epiphany. He remembers thinking, Oh, my God, this is really happening - and in real time. And he had one last coup de théâtre in him: he persuaded Blair, against G-8 tradition, to hold a formal signing ceremony so that each head signed a document with his own pen.

The "movement" did not, in general, share Bono's enthusiasm. Activists bitterly complained that the communiqué included no real progress on trade, no expansion of debt relief to additional countries, no movement by the Bush administration toward 0.7 percent. But when I saw Bono the following day in Paris, he was ebullient. The heads of state had promised that by 2010 they would increase aid to Africa by \$25 billion a year, and aid worldwide by \$50 billion a year. Schröder hadn't agreed to the airlines tax, but he had promised - perhaps not the world's most binding promise - that he would find a way to raise the money. They had extended debt relief to Nigeria, a goal activists had long sought. They had added to President Bush's commitment on malaria, so that the number of victims should be reduced by 85 percent by 2010. They had vowed to ensure that all children had free access to school by 2015. "I know how big this is," Bono said. "Even Jeff Sachs was emotional about it."

The next five years will offer Bono and Geldof and Sachs and Action Against Hunger and all the other activists the laboratory experiment they've been seeking. It's an experiment that needs to be tried, even if it seems likely to disappoint the advocates' hopes. In years past, aid has proved extraordinarily effective on issues like disease eradication (which makes the malaria initiative, for example, so important); the same cannot be said for promoting growth. In a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*, Nancy Birdsall, head of the generally liberal Center for Global Development, and two co-authors, asked why it was that Vietnam, long isolated from the West, has been growing so much faster than Nicaragua, a major recipient of aid. "The answers are internal," they wrote. "History and economic and political institutions have trumped other factors in determining economic success." The activists and the Bush administration now agree that large-scale aid should be directed not only at highly impoverished but also well-governed countries - those with strong "internals." But how many such countries are there? Quite a few, argues Sachs, who insists that it is poverty that causes corruption rather than the other way around. This debatable hypothesis will now receive its road test.

Bono left Gleneagles to meet the band in Paris. That night, before a sellout crowd of 80,000 in the Stade de France, he read a text, in French - a language he does not speak - listing the brave commitments of President Chirac, a figure few in the audience were likely to admire. The next morning, as motorcycle cops were leading Bono's van on a slalom ride through the Paris traffic, he turned to me and said, "Guess who called this morning to say he had seen the reviews?"

"I don't know. Blair?"

"No."

"Clinton?"

"No. Think what country we're in."

"Chirac?"

"Yeah. A lot of his people were at the concert last night. He said that he had heard about what I had said. He wants to work with us very closely."

No doubt he meant it. But then along came the *grande vacance*, and a few days after returning to Paris, Chirac was stricken with a mysterious illness that confined him to the hospital. It appeared that Chirac would not attend the United Nations summit meeting; nor could Chancellor Schröder, who was facing the fight of his political life in an election this weekend. With them went Bono's hopes for immediate progress on an airlines tax, or perhaps on trade. Things went from bad to worse. By the first week in September, Bono's friends in the Bush administration seemed fully prepared, even eager, to scuttle the long and windy statement on development prepared for the summit meeting. The White House prepared an edited draft that proposed to eliminate practically every pledge made by donor countries - even the very words "Millennium Development Goals."

And then Hurricane Katrina scrambled everything. When Bono called from his house on the Riviera in early September, he said, "I have to be sensitive about putting my hand in America's pocket at a time like this." He would, he said, be keeping a low profile in New York. He was feeling a bit more hopeful about the White House. The administration had climbed down just a bit from its rhetorical high horse, and it appeared that a face-saving compromise might be in the works. Jamie Drummond and his colleagues at DATA had also gotten a few choice bits about AIDS and education inserted into the American draft. But the whole episode was a reminder of how far the Bush administration remains from the rough consensus on development issues that obtains in much of the world. "I'm really bleak about the next six months," Bono said. "There could be a few black eyes for us and for our work, and criticism of working too close with these characters. But I'm sure it was the right thing to do."

It has been a frantic time, this year of Africa. The other members of the band love the cause, but they fret that Bono's hobby is eclipsing his day job. "The band has survived," Adam Clayton told me, "but there's been a price in terms of relationships." Bono has promised to let the world spin on its own axis for a while. But it can't be left alone for long; there's so much proselytizing still to do. Bono's next target is the American people: he expects to have an army of 10 million activists signed up for the One Campaign by 2008. He believes - he *knows* - that the American people would demand action on Africa if only someone would tell them the facts. "Middle America," he said to me one day. "Don't get me started. I love it."

James Traub, a contributing writer for the magazine, is at work on a book about the United Nations.