

ROBERT GELDOF DCL

Mr Chancellor,

I don't like Mondays. Sorry, I had to say it. It was a moment that would never come again. Bob Geldof introduced his autobiography with another line from his iconic pop song; at 12 46pm on 13th July 1985 he raised his arm and stopped the song at the line "The lesson today is how to die"; fellow humans in their billions fell silent and cared together about the children who were dying, who continue to die, one every 3 seconds. Some say Live Aid made no difference, that the money raised by the Band Aid song which preceded it was of little importance.

Those same naysayers will refuse to be impressed by its successor, Live 8, which galvanised politicians attending the G8 conference to act on the madness of poverty induced by crippling interest payments on international loans.

But something did change that day 21 years ago for all who remember it, not least for its unlikely architect, a dishevelled outspoken young musician who has described himself as pop star, poet, open-plan politician, living saint and big-mouthed gob-shite.

You couldn't make it up; a little boy rebelled against the institutional violence of his poor but respectable Catholic

upbringing in the suburbs of Dublin, slid to academic failure and on through pea tinning, road building, abattoir labouring and hot dog selling to near destitution in a London squat. Then the glimmer of hope with the discovery of purpose as a music journalist working as an “illegal” in Canada and on to a meteoric rise to fame as a New Wave singer songwriter in front of a band of misfits he called the Boomtown Rats, then on to leadership of a popular uprising against poverty and a knighthood and a phone call from the pope which interrupted him watching Dynasty.

I can identify closely with part of his story; we are the same age and survived as the youngest with two much older sisters, little boys revered and patronised by their family in equal measure. I too was beaten by well meaning teachers colluding with a father who thought I wasn't trying. There we diverge. My experience was for only a few months and I had a mother who shared my tears of injustice until I chose to win by achieving academic success. He faced physical beatings for years not months, and he faced them alone because his mother died suddenly when he was 7, leaving a scar which never fully healed. He survived those therapeutic assaults by withdrawing spiritually when he was 11. His intelligence and extrovert personality buried in the silent fury of adolescence. When he eventually emerged a decade later he had absorbed experiences which made him a man with whom countless young people wanted to identify.

Pop stardom is impressive, Live Aid was awesome but to have survived celebrity for two more decades and to still receive accolades from the music industry, have the ear of world leaders and be declared the person 4000 young people in the Prince's Trust survey most admire, is truly unique.

It has not been achieved by hiding behind a wall of publicists. He has continued to live his life in the real world. Anecdotes abound, like having to be asked by Margaret Fay, then station manager, not to change his baby daughter's nappy in the ladies toilet at the Tyne Tees Studio because it upset the female staff.

He remained accessible even through the agony of the desertion by his wife and first love Paula Yates and, for several years, loss of access to his daughters. His trauma was faced and defeated in the public gaze. He rebuilt himself and spoke out for all fathers presumed to be the inferior parent because of their gender.

The secret of his survival and continued success is his total honesty. As a young pop singer he rejected the fashionable disdain for success in the punk era by announcing that he wanted to get famous, get rich and get laid.

When asked recently about a health check he gave a graphic description of what it feels like to have your prostate examined. Apparently it's not pleasant despite the KY jelly. In a world

where truth is regarded as a dangerous luxury he stands alone. He can and will continue to make a difference but he will have to tolerate for several more decades being told by people like me that they don't like Mondays.

Mr Chancellor, on behalf of the people to whom he has given a voice, I ask that you award Bob Geldof a Doctor of Civil Law *honoris causa*.

Citation by Professor John Burn