

Interview with Seán ÓLaoire

(This interview was conducted on March 8, 2008 with the German translators of *Souls on Safari (Seelen Auf Safari)*. A version of the interview was published subsequently in the German magazine, *Visionen* in December 2008)

Seán, you grew up in Ireland and lived, later, as a Catholic priest in East Africa. Both countries are typical story-telling cultures. What do stories mean to you? And to what extent do you believe, that old stories, myths and fairytales are relevant to our contemporary world?

Homo sapiens flourished around 200,000 years ago in East Africa. They were anatomically modern and would pass unnoticed (if you put them in contemporary clothes) in any street in Munich or Cork or Palo Alto, but they didn't, as yet, have language. That would only come about 150,000 years later with the advent of Homo sapiens sapiens. Language involved a huge evolutionary jump. Whereas Homo sapiens could think, Homo sapiens sapiens could think about what he was thinking – he could self-reflect. Only now could humans entertain the notion of the Transcendent, and only now could they begin to pass on their experiences and their wisdom to their peers and to their progeny. And the vehicle for their wrestling with transcendence and tradition was – Story-telling.

Around countless camp fires in Africa, and then in Asia, Europe, Australia and the Americas, awe-struck listeners paid wrapt attention to the tales of the shamans, of the druids and of the myth-makers. In time story-telling came to fulfil three functions for tribal peoples. Firstly, it helped each individual to remember an experience; secondly, to interpret and understand it; and thirdly to pass it on.

Each individual's personal identity was the sum of the stories she told herself about herself; history was the sum of the stories the group told itself about itself; theology was the sum of the stories a god-aligned group told itself about it's

relationship to this god; and cosmology was the sum of the stories the entire species told itself about its origins.

Stories, myths and fairytales, then, are the creative core of humanity's search for meaning. I grew up in a story-telling culture; my grandfather was the nearest thing you could meet, in the 20th century, to an old Celtic druid. He filled my eager ears and my thirsting soul with the folktales of Ireland.

Allegedly sophisticated people fall into one trap – they claim that all stories come from the infancy of our species and need to be left in the kindergarten of life. And fundamentalist types tend to swallow stories as factual accounts of actual events. Both fail to understand the essence of story-telling. The true function of story is to put us in touch with truth, not with factoids or data. And I define truth in the following way: truth is that which transforms me and aligns me with Source. And I, then, define Ultimate Truth as, that which transforms me *radically* and aligns me *permanently* with Source. The function of story is not to inform the listeners but to transform them. And the “sophisticated” ones and the fundamentalists both miss that reality.

As a young man in the seminary, I had the privilege of meeting Séamus ÓDuillearga, who, in 1922 had founded the Irish Folklore Commission. Within 15 years it had collected one and a half million manuscript pages of Irish mythology! He once told me that two friends of his, Scandinavian mythologists, had spent 20 years surveying the folklore of the planet and had isolated 120 basic motifs or archetypes that repeat again and again. The details and the names differ from culture to culture but the underlying wisdom is the same.

So, do I believe these old stories, myths and fairytales? They make my intellect glow, they make my heart dance and they make my soul sing! Do I believe them literally? No! That was never their intent. Their intent is to create a numinosity in which the listener can have a mystical experience.

What happens, if nobody tells these stories anymore? Does our soul miss something?

As long as there are people, there will be stories, because there has never been a better vehicle to understand, remember and transmit experiences. The real problem is that the media for story-telling are becoming more and more technical and remote from community. When you get two billion separated viewers, each one sitting in an isolated garret, chomping on pizza, guzzling beer and watching Reality TV – you have wrenched story-telling out of the interactive arena of community and reduced it to, at best, vicarious living and, at worst, mere entertainment.

Great story-telling is hugely entertaining, but equally it is about community-creating and about initiation into an active search for ultimate purpose. Humanity is going through a period of adolescent rebellion, where “life is boring” and “parents are dumb.” But we will transcend this period and become mature adults who will, once more, dance with life and honor ancestral wisdom. Then story-telling will undergo a revival. In the interim, we will dabble in cyber-stories.

Some stories are told in the form of songs. You told me once, that every lovesong is also a lovesong for God. Can you explain that in more detail?

There is an old saying that goes, “He who sings, prays twice” – once with the lyrics and once with the music. Sound is, perhaps, the most creative energy of the Cosmos. I remember once hearing of a town in Belgium which was celebrating its one-thousandth anniversary as a chartered city. They commissioned a famous composer to write some music for the occasion.

Instead, he opted to conduct a series of sound-experiments. In one such experiment he took a sheet of plate-glass (two meters long by one meter wide by two centimeters thick) and clamped it upright. Then he poured buckets of hot soapy water along the spine, so that it flowed down both sides of the glass. Finally, he invited musicians to come and play their instruments near the glass. Each instrument, each sound, each pitch, each tone created different geometric designs on the soapy-water-soaked glass!

There is a reason why the beautifully mystical prologue to John's Gospel says, "In the beginning was the word and the word was *with* God and the word was God; all things were created through him...." Indeed, sound (not just a dry theologically pedantic Logos) may well be the origin of the universe and of all its forms. After all, even science claims it all started with a "big bang"!

So what does it mean for the word to "become flesh"? And why did Jesus say, "You shall be held accountable for every idle word"? Because *every* word becomes flesh; God's words, your words, my words – since words create mindset and mindset creates paradigms and paradigms create our "realities." And Jesus admonished us to be careful how we use words, not because God is a punitive accountant who keeps a record of all our mistakes, but because the law of karma pertains – sow a thought and reap an act, sow an act and reap a habit, sow a habit and reap a character, sow a character and reap a destiny.

Thus, our sounds-making may well be the most creative thing we do. Apart from the cognitive import of the words, the vibrational energy in which they are wrapped is what plugs us into the information-field, cosmic consciousness or the matrix for life-making.

Properly understood, then, a love song is using both cognition *and* vibration that harmonize the singer and the listener with the very ground of their being. It soothes the soul because it taps into the very resonance of Spirit. And soul is nothing less than that bite-sized piece of God which each one of us calls, "Me." A true love song, whether or not we are consciously aware of it, is the cry of two emigrants in a foreign land who have found each other and recognized the

homeland in each other's eyes and accents. It is a pining for origins. All love songs sing of our nostalgia for the place from where we've come, the pregnant womb of God's creative urges.

One of the greatest „lovesongs“ for me is the Sermon on the Mount. Is that also for you one of the stories, that must be told again and again?

Two thousand years ago, after Jesus came and taught us about love, even allegedly Christian nations are still operating from the ancient “lex talionis” (the law of the talon), the eye-for-an-eye mentality. I watch in sadness as the USA, with its vast resources, both financial and intellectual, could think of no better response to 911 than to go on a rampage of revenge. I see fundamentalist Christians, those who claim that Jesus is the only way to salvation and that his teachings must be followed to the letter – I see them vociferously insist that America must, once again, become a Christian nation. But for them, “Christian” has to do with a fixation on sexual issues: abortion, contraception, homosexuality and stem cell research. I have never heard even one of these preachers or politicians rail against America's refusal to “forgive your enemies” or insist that Jesus' declaration, “Blessed are the peacemakers” become a feature of our foreign policy. And “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice” – in which political party or evangelical sect is that a cornerstone of their mandate for international trade?

The Sermon on the Mount is an extraordinary love song, a mantra in the style of ancient Hebrew poetry – semitic parallelism, in which the same form is repeated, with similar themes and teachings building upon each other. Luke's version balances the “blessed are you...” statements with the “but woe to you...” condemnations. But this is not about comparing the “good” group with the “evil” group, nor yet about comparing the “good” individuals with the “evil” individuals, but rather it is about the recognition of the shadow in each one of us, a shadow

that creates the inner war between narcissistic, ego-driven impulses and compassionate, all-embracing soul-searching.

There will come a time in human affairs when the Sermon on the Mount will fully reflect human behavior – intra-psychic, interpersonal, international and even inter-species. It is a love song which created the morphogenetic field for the advent of the next great quantum leap in our evolution. All of the great avatars are meant to be prototypes of where the human race is headed. They sang their songs into the deafening cacophony of tribal violence, and, in time, that level of love-sound will dissolve all dissonance and lead to a cosmic symphony. Then, truly, we will see that we live in a *Uni*-verse. In the meantime, the Sermon on the Mount must be sung again and again, as a mother sings a soothing lullaby to her fever-ridden baby.

Khalil Gibran once wrote: „Every thousand years Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus Christ meet. And they come apart and both say: I never will understand you.” Do you believe, that the human being Jesus of Nazareth can be unified with the image of belief Jesus Christ? Can we see the human being Jesus as a Christ, without ascribing him a “divine super-nature”?

I am not familiar with that particular saying of Kahlil Gibran’s, but I will give you my instinctive response to it. Poetry, song, story and parable are all siblings. The deepest teachings of all can never be articulated, merely experienced. So, many mystical traditions concur with the Taoist statement, “Those who say don’t know and those who know don’t say.” But since we are meant to help each other on the journey home, we will inevitably need to share our experiences. Theologians and philosophers tend to try to create left-brain models and theories to force some kind of consistency on our experiences, but the artists never

attempt such a foolish exercise. The artist will never stray further from experience than the use of symbols, whether these symbols are paint marks (e.g. Rembrandt), sounds (Beethoven), metaphors (Gibran) or movement (Riverdance.)

There is a Gnostic quality to all of these – an inner knowing, unmediated by reason; an ability and a willingness to hold paradox as being essential to mystery. Gibran’s statement strikes me as such. So here is my response to it. Every millennium there is a confluence-conflict between the mystical and the mundane, between the sacred and the secular. In the Christian tradition, fundamentalist insistence on belief in Jesus of Nazareth as the only son of God and the only path to salvation, finds its toes bathed in an underground reservoir of mystical waters that speak of Jesus, the anointed one, a fully human avatar who reached Christ consciousness and recognized his own Buddha nature. Jesus the man and Jesus the Christ are not at all incompatible, but the Jesus-movement-of-Nicaea, with its Constantine-driven creedal formulations, is utterly intolerant of the Christ-consciousness core of each one of us. Inevitably the champions of Jesus-as-the-only-way will use all the brutality they can command to obliterate the Christed-inner-way group.

It’s a great pity because there really is no essential conflict between them. Jesus the carpenter from Nazareth discovered through prayer and silence and meditation who he truly is: at his Spirit level he is pre-existing word; as the carpenter he is the word become flesh. And you, also, are such a word-become-flesh.

I believe that there are four great epochs to our understanding of God. Firstly, beginning about 50,000 years ago, we began to speak ABOUT God; then we began to speak TO God (in prayer, ritual and sacrifice); thirdly, we began to speak ON BEHALF OF God e.g. “chosen race”, prophets, “infallible” popes; and, finally, we are meant to speak AS God. This is the journey from theologian to priest to prophet to mystic.

Of course each stage is fraught with danger – evolution always is – but Spirit is committed to evolution, so we have no choice except to join the safari. The danger of stage one (speaking about God) is that we quickly confuse the map with the territory (the theology with the mystery.) The danger in stage two (speaking to God) is that we try to arm-wrestle God into becoming a mere personal, cosmic servant. The danger with stage three (speaking on behalf of God) is that individuals or groups grandiosely claim a unique relationship with the divine, while the rest of us must rely on hand-me-downs for a connection. And the danger with stage four (speaking as God) is that the ego is very happy to hijack a project for which only a soul, with a sense of Unity consciousness, is adequately equipped.

This is an epigenetic journey – each subsequent stage incorporates but transcends all of the previous stages. By the end of his life Jesus of Nazareth had accomplished all four, and was truly Christ conscious. Unfortunately, most of his “followers” claim that he is the *only* avatar ever to have reached stage four, while they, alone, have reached stage three and will rain on the parade of us poor plebs who remain at stages one and two. And God forbid that any other religion should attempt to elevate *their* avatar to stage four. That would be blasphemy most-wicked, deserving of a violent rebuke.

But the simple truth is that *everyone* of us is pregnant with stage four, but it takes a lot of mindfulness to carry the baby to full term. Yet, that is exactly what we are here to do. In the words of Meister Eckhart, “Each one of us is meant to be the mother of God.”

Jesus came across with the people at eye level. He taught through his parables, through stories according to the circumstances of his listeners. For me, the Divine “happens” in these encounters. Martin Buber said: “Real life is taken place in encounters.” Is this also your experience, that God become manifest in interpersonal encounters? What is God for you?

We learn language by hearing it. There is a unique developmental window of opportunity in the life of a child during which they must be exposed to language or else remain mute for the rest of their lives. “Wolf boys” and “Closet children” are radically handicapped, not just in their inability to communicate with others but even to hold internal dialogues. A healthy child who has learned, in interpersonal encounters, how to speak, can then go on to think and self-reflect.

The same holds true, I believe, for our ability to encounter the divine. This is an innate faculty which is first ignited in interpersonal encounters. These allow us to extrapolate and “imagine” what deeper and greater encounters might feel like. There is a nascent numinosity in the “dialogues” between an infant and his mother that trigger the archetype for experiences of the divine – for two reasons. Firstly, in his preverbal symbiosis, his mother *is* God; and, eventually, when, as an adult, he has a mystical “knowing”, he will realize that she is, indeed, God, as is he, as is his enemy, and as is his dog. There *is* only God. To use a crude image, God is the mycelium and we are the mushrooms. We are not separate from the mycelium, nor even from the other mushrooms, but simply separate articulations of it, like different words spoken from the same tongue.

There, I have given you a simile that Jesus himself might have used! For indeed part of his genius was his ability to use their own common experiences of everyday life to elevate his audience’s understanding of their own essential nature. In the holographic universe of the mystic, inner and outer are interchangeable aspects of the One. In the Unitive consciousness of the avatar, parables and similes, analogies and metaphors are not just clever tricks that speak symbolically, they truly are based on the hidden truth that everything that exists, whether it be a hippopotamus or a mathematical formula, all things are facets of the One – as surely as a single rose can produce visual, olfactory, tactile, auditory (if you are a bat) or gustatory (if you are a honey bee) aspects of itself.

The divine happens, then, in *all* encounters – encounters with another person, with a singing blackbird, with a poem or with my own soul in deep meditation. But it is a paradox because, ultimately, all encounters are an exquisitely choreographed dance between the Source and Itself. So, really, it only takes One to have an encounter; and all encounters are with the One.

And who is God for me? God is the artist who just painted the sunset over Bald Mountain to the west of me across Pena Creek; God is the cosmic dancer who choreographs the orbits of the planets and the wild careening of comets and meteors; God is the sculptor who chiselled out the Himalayas; She is the writer who leaves traces of Her penmanship everywhere, holographically concealing Her entire Magnum Opus in every line of the text; He is the musician who makes flutes of the willows at the lakeside and who drums ecstatically with His raindrops on the sun-parched plains; She is the mathematician who loves to play with binary codes and with base 4 and 6 and 8; He is the physicist who quantum leaps from the impossible to the possible; the biologist who whirls ecstatically around Her own image in the double helix of life-making; the architect who silently whispers the secrets of home-building in the hearts of weaverbirds and ants, in the hearts of spiders and mice, in the sacred geometry of the temple-makers and in the wombs of mammal mothers; She is the great awakener Who patiently calls forth more and more complete images of Herself until a species is born that remembers fully.

He is that which I have said and He is that which I have not said. She is that which cannot be said but only experienced.

Many Christian meditation-teachers don't speak about God as a person, but as a non-personal numinous "something" – an ocean, where we (as single waves) dissolve into. Isn't there a divine opponent missing, a "contact person"? How can I encounter the Divine?

In our hubris as humans we cannot imagine anyone as advanced as ourselves. I smile when I hear scientists claim that the human brain is the most complex structure in the universe. Suchchutzpah! When are we ever going to learn? Have we forgotten how long we believed in a flat Earth? How long we held to the Earth-as-the-centre-of-the-solar-system theory? The belief that the human body was a unique creation of God rather than the product of elegant evolution? The belief that the ego was the centre of the psyche rather than merely the executive officer of daytime consciousness? We have tenaciously clung to an ever-shrinking raft of self-importance in the infinite ocean of this universe.

So, when we finally had language, which allowed us to experience the transcendent, and we began to create gods in our own image and likeness, we couldn't think of any greater compliment to pay them than making them as exaggerated versions of ourselves. Can we love? God *is* love! Can we kill? God wiped out all of creation in a flood! Can we be compassionate? God can do it much better. Can we exact revenge on our enemies? God enjoins genocide as a response to heterodoxy!

So we need to navigate very carefully here. If we meet the Buddha on the road, we must kill him. We have to realize that anything we say about God is merely metaphor; that each attribute we ascribe to Her is made up. With Eckhart we say, "I pray daily to God to rid me of God." With the Greek fathers we have to resort to Apophatic statements that parallel the "Neti, Neti" of Eastern mysticism.

But we also have to be in *relationship* to that mystery! Mystery loves paradox, so here is one: we have to be in dialogue with the Unsayable; we have to *be* the expressions of the Unknowable; we have to recognize the signs of the presence of the Unseeable; and we have to do all of that without ever contradicting ourselves!

There is, then, one possible way to deal with this. The ineffable Unity of Godhead is experienced in three modalities: a first-person modality, in which I

recognize the divine within myself. This is the path of Vedanta. A second-person modality, in which I experience God as the utterly transcendent Other. This is the path of the monotheistic religions. And a third-person modality, in which I see the divine in Nature (all creation.) This leads to the Namasté of Deep Ecology.

All three modalities are needed in order to bring some semblance of completeness to our God-consciousness. The monotheists have erred by denouncing, as blasphemers, the mystics in their midst who espoused a first-person relationship with God; they also erred, grievously, by regarding Nature as an enemy and then either dominating or despoiling it or else merely regarding it as a resource for us humans.

The Vedantists erred, I believe, by neglecting to prostrate themselves before Transcendence, and by regarding Nature as maya (illusion.)

And the Deep Ecologists have erred by seeing humans as the problem (“if only humans would ‘go away’ Nature would be fine”), and by regarding God as a fairytale which we need to outgrow.

Perhaps the greater Hinduism said it best in its notion of the Four Yoga’s (the four paths to God), namely: Jnana Yoga (the path of the mind); Bhakti Yoga (the path of the heart and the second-person modality); Karmic Yoga (the path of right action and the third-person modality); and Raja Yoga (the path of meditation and the first-person modality.)

Would you agree, that we could replace the term “sin” by the term “alienation”? Can we see “sin” as an illness? What could be the healing?

I have my own definition of “sin.” I do not believe that sin is the breaking of a commandment or the infraction of a precept. Rather, I believe, sin is the unwillingness to wake up. There is a reason why Gautama Siddharta gave himself the name, Buddha. According to the story, after he had begun his public

preaching, the priests got very upset with him. After all he was of the Kshatriya caste (the Warrior-Ruler class) and not a Brahmin. So they sent emissaries to challenge him. These asked, “Why do you preach, are you a prophet?” “No!” “Are you an angel?” “No!” “Are you a sage?” “No!” “Then give us some answer that we can bring back to those who sent us. What do you say of yourself?” So he replied, “I am Buddha” – which means, “I am awake.”

The greatest virtue in the spiritual arsenal is not love or compassion, but being awake. And the only sin on the journey is to cling to sleep and refuse to wake up. All infractions of the law are merely symptoms of this underlying illness.

So, yes, alienation or misalignment might be better words, to pry us away from the notion of sin as transgression of precept.

Sin, then, *is* an illness. It is a very serious illness; it is the coma that confines us to the ICU (Intensive Care Unit) of the cultural trance – because it is a species-wide epidemic. If you don’t mind me mixing my medical metaphors, it is the narcissism which has empowered the inmates to take over the governing of the Insane Asylum. Even our terminology has been twisted to shore up the charade: we talk about “waking consciousness” and labor under the huge misconception that when we “wake up in the morning” we are *truly* awake; that we have left the illusion of our dreams and are now ready to engage with “real life.” In fact, we are simply re-engaging with the mass hypnosis which claims that physical form is the only reality. To avoid confusion, I simply call this, “daytime consciousness.”

And what of healing? Firstly, it demands the courage to venture into *all* states of consciousness, while holding the Witness stance. Some of these states are: the daytime state, the dream state, the deep dreamless state, meditative states and mystical states. Secondly, we have to create our own maps of reality to include the terrain discovered on all these safaris. Cartographers who dismiss all states of consciousness except daytime consciousness, and then attempt to draw maps of reality are like the 15th century Europeans who tried to give us

accurate maps of “the New World” while having little or no personal experience of the Americas.

Evagrius was the first who spoke about the “Seven Deadly Sins”. Do these sins mean something to us today? Could you contrast them with some virtues, which would be good to realize?

If you work in an ICU you quickly begin to see clusters of symptoms; problems that tend to recur across populations e.g. breathing difficulties, irregular heartbeat, lack of bladder control etc. While there may also be idiosyncratic symptoms in any individual patient, many of them tend to be features of most people in the unit. So if sin is basically the coma that confines us to the ICU of the cultural trance, we might expect to see some common symptoms here. And the Christian community has identified seven of these which it, rightly, regards as deadly. But for me, “deadly” does *not* mean that they carry an after-life sentence to hell, but rather that they create hell on Earth, for the person involved, for his relationships and for his community.

I learned these, as a child, in the catechism. The list was as follows: Pride, Covetousness, Lust, Anger, Gluttony, Envy and Sloth. Interestingly, these are *not* breaches of law, but rather inner *tendencies* which society has attempted to keep in check by creating laws to punish their indulgence. So what they identify are innate proclivities – and they are psychologically and sociologically accurate. And while all seven are internal predispositions, they cluster into two subgroups – a group (Covetousness, Lust, Anger and Envy) which, typically, is acted out in interpersonal or inter-community relationships; and a second group (Pride, Gluttony, and Sloth) which identifies personal habits.

And, of course, there are several lists of antidotes that spiritual teachers have come up with e.g. the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, which Isaiah first

proposed (Isaiah 11:2-3) and which Christianity adopted (Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge, Counsel, Fortitude, Piety and the Fear of the Lord); and the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit (found in Paul's letter to the Galatians – chapter 5:22-23) which are: Charity, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Generosity, Gentleness, Faithfulness, Modesty, Self-control and Chastity; and the Eight-fold path of the Buddha (Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.)

But, again, I will claim that all of these virtues are simply the natural results of being awake. The cultivation of any virtue, in the absence of being awake, is tantamount to attempting to develop athletic ability by merely watching the Olympics on TV, but never getting outdoors to train.

Many problems on our planet are the result of reckless profit seeking of some big business companies. Do you see a chance, that a spiritual view on the world, an understanding of our mutual conditionality (inter-being), can take place in the business world?

In nearly four billion years of biological evolution on this planet, nature has always thrown up prototypes in advance of major shifts. Sometimes the shifts *didn't* happen, but no shift ever happened without the prototype which acts as a morphogenetic field so that eventually many individuals will make the journey into the new manifestation. The more individuals make the leap the easier it becomes for others to follow; and the latecomers actually have an advantage is so far as the path is, by now, very well sign-posted, so they can telescope the distance and accelerate the speed of development. For example, the journey from the first single-celled organisms (bacteria) to the hominids took almost four billion years, but the average zygote-embryo-fetus manages that feat in just nine

months! And whereas hominids to Homo erectus took some six million years, your average human infant manages that in about 12 months. And where Homo erectus to Homo sapiens sapiens took about two million years, the average human toddler manages that in about another 18 months. So you can notice two patterns here; firstly the radical telescoping of timelines: four billion years to nine months; six million years to 12 months; two million years to 18 months. And, secondly, that the *rate* of telescoping slows down a little. The reason for the “go slow” is that far fewer creatures have made the journey from Homo erectus to Homo sapiens sapiens than those who managed the journey from bacteria to the hominids.

The next great phase of human evolution is from Homo sapiens sapiens to Christ consciousness. This is a journey of less than 50,000 years. So, although far fewer beings have, as yet, made this journey, the timeline to be telescoped is much much shorter. Within another generation we could witness this leap. In the meantime there are, literally, ten million groups, with memberships ranging from 50 to 10,000 people, on the planet right now dedicated to the raising of human consciousness. And these groups are found in all human pursuits and professions, from anthropology to zoology and from the business community to the legal profession. Spirit informs all disciplines. Organizations like the “Bioneers” and the “Institute of Noetic Sciences” have chapters that deal specifically with the changes in our economic models and business systems that come from and lead towards a new consciousness.

So the solutions to the planet’s problems will not come so much from the addressing of specific issues, as much as from a raised consciousness looking at how we do life on Gaia from a Buddha-nature perspective. In the same way that the seven deadly sins are merely the *results* of being asleep, and that virtues are the result of being awake, so, also, the solution to business greed (and warfare and ecological degradation etc.) is not just to address the specific problems individually but, much more importantly, to engage with life on Earth from a Christ-conscious altitude.

When I look at the biblical story of the “purification of the temple” (I don’t know the right idiom for it) I ask myself: Is there something like “holy wrath”? A wrath, that is justified and that includes maybe legitimated violence?

I believe that Jesus’ “purification of the temple” was a highly symbolic action. To fully understand its significance we have to understand Judaism of his time, the collaboration of the priests with the Roman occupiers, and the ongoing protests of the Pharisees, the Zealots and the Essenes against abuses of the temple. I, personally, do not believe that a man who preached, “those who take the sword will perish by the sword,” who asked that we turn the other cheek and whose final breath was dedicated to forgiveness of those who were responsible for his agonizing death – I don’t believe that such an avatar would then countenance violence in either physical or mental contexts.

Once violence becomes a valid way to deal with violence, then violence has been elevated to a valid way of resolving disputes. It has been my experience on reading world history and in living in Africa for 14 years and in the USA for 21 years, that any violence does as much damage to the perpetrator as it does to the victim. Jesus got it right, Gandhi got it right, Martin Luther King got it right. We’ve tried organized violence for 5,000 years. It hasn’t worked; it still isn’t working and it never will work. The “war to *end* all wars” (1914-1918) was the spark that ignited the most war-filled century in human history. When we have really tried pre-emptive *peace* for at least 100 years, we will be in a better position to comment on the relative merits of violence and cheek-turning.

“Justified wrath” sounds to me like the frustrated response of a long-term victim, and while it is understandable, it is the first step on the slippery slope of eventually making perpetrators of the victims.

Let us assume, Jesus would come back today... Do you think, he would have better chances to spread his message or would he experience the same difficulties and obstacles? Who would crucify Jesus today?

If Jesus were to come back today? I am convinced that he *is* back; that the entity that once incarnated as a mystic-carpenter in Nazareth, had previously been on Earth in other prophetic roles for other cultures; and has since come back to continue to move Spirit-mission towards enlightenment. But he does not just appear as a *public* figure – he may very well be an old grandmother in a remote village in Africa, or a fisherman off the west coast of Ireland or a taxi-cab driver in Freiburg. Who he IS is much more important than what he DOES. By the way, that is true for all of us. We are meant to be conduits for Love and Light and Life to flow into our planet and into our times. And our greatest accomplishment is *who* we become not *what* we become. There is a beautiful teaching in Judaism called the “Lamed Vav”, the 36 righteous ones who live on Earth at every stage of our history. I believe, however, that there are now many more than 36 of them. A few months ago I had a vision in which I saw planet Earth from outer space. It was enclosed in a lattice of light-points, one at each of the intersections of the lines of latitude and longitude, and one at each of the two poles – a total of 64,442 beings holding Gaia in an embrace of light.

I believe that “Jesus” is now spreading his message much more effectively, because the center of gravity of human morality and spirituality has moved forward significantly. In spite of lots of data showing ongoing violence and warfare, there has been definite progress: democracy, women’s rights, civil rights, animal rights, ecological sensitivity, ecumenical dialogue and truly global thinking. These are the building blocks of a deep spirituality which may or may not be associated with religion.

And in spite of their abuses, modern technologies, would afford him a much wider audience in “real time.” He would no longer send his disciples to borrow a donkey on Palm Sunday, but perhaps a helicopter! And we wouldn’t be dependent on gospel records of his teachings and of his adventures, written forty years after he died – we would have live footage on YouTube that could be simultaneously downloaded to several million computers.

Of course, the lookers and the listeners would still only be able to unpack his message in accordance with their own level of evolution. So he would still be susceptible to assassination attempts by fundamentalist psychopaths who see him as the antichrist, or by corporate interests who see him as a “communist.”

The very good news, however, is that this phase of our evolution is not being orchestrated or organized by a single charismatic individual, but rather is an organic network of millions of communities. You can crucify a Christ but you cannot crucify the Spirit.

Jesus points at God, like the finger points at the moon. It seems, that Jesus didn’t think about himself as “so important”. To stay with the image: The moon is important, not the finger, who points at the moon. Why do we concentrate so much on Jesus? Shouldn’t we, to follow Jesus, concentrate fully on God?

Yes, we should follow Jesus’ *example*, rather than simply follow Jesus. That was his mission; that is why I say he is a prototype. This is why he famously said during his last meal with his disciples, “the same things I do, you will do, and even greater...” He was a way-pointer whom we have turned into a “terminus ad quem.”

He must be frustrated to find that while his enemies killed him, his followers did even more damage to his mission. Firstly, they eviscerated his

teachings (e.g. “love your enemies” became “lead crusades against them”, and “go first and be reconciled with your brother and then come and offer your gift at the altar” became “burn him at the stake for his heresy”); then they offered a sanitized, domesticated Jesus to subsequent generations; and, finally, they wiped out those “pagans” who wouldn’t accept this diluted, plastic hermaphrodite of theirs.

Until spiritual people can transcend their own traditional “champions,” we will be stuck in mere *cultural* faith. Different teachers in different places may all appear to be pointing in different directions, but when you gain a higher perspective you realize that they are all pointing at the same mountain. So the apparent differences in their pointing was because they were at different sides of the same mountain! So cultural faith divides us by elevating dogma (e.g. Virgin birth, parting the Red Sea, Mohammed’s night journey to heaven...) to the status of divine truth. If spiritual people of *all* backgrounds cannot accept an article of faith held by one tradition, it must mean that the article in question is merely of sectarian origin. A true article of faith (e.g. Unity consciousness, Compassion...) will resonate in the hearts of all believers of all traditions. At the level of the mystical, all the avatars are in harmony; but at the level of dogma, we attempt to set the avatars at each other’s throats.

We are like small boys whose parents are best friends, trying to set our fathers at war with each other, because we, their sons, have had a disagreement with each other.

All true avatars, when speaking of the transcendence of God, will proclaim with John the Baptist, “He must increase and I must decrease.”

Should we follow „a way“? Or does the way unfold by itself for every wayfarer? Which value does tradition have? How can my experiences find their place within a tradition? What happens, if my experiences are incompatible to the tradition?

When you set out to build a cathedral, you first have to erect the scaffolding. Unfortunately, often building the scaffolding is as far as we get, and there is no cathedral inside it. So we wind up worshipping the scaffolding. This is the case with many religious traditions. Either they have only the scaffolding, or else they *did* manage to build the cathedral but insisted on leaving the scaffolding in place, and continue to devote the majority of their energy into maintaining the scaffolding rather than the cathedral. Now, the scaffolding represents religion, while the cathedral represents mystical spirituality.

Many religions insist on keeping their members fixated on the scaffolding and on punishing any efforts to remove it. A healthy tradition is like a family that creates a stable, loving environment for its children, but is eager to learn from the children who have grown up and left home and come back to visit and who report what they have seen of other families, of other cultures and of other traditions of child-raising. The parents incorporate these experiences into their care of the little ones still in the nest.

Every vital tradition must develop organically, making room for the experiences of all its members. Thus, it stays relevant, alive and evolving. When my tradition can no longer welcome me home, it has become too small for me. I must then have the courage to move on, initially seeking a more compatible tradition and, eventually, transcending all tradition in order to meta-perspective.

I believe that we have to become serial killers in order to reach enlightenment. Firstly, we have to kill the ego, in the sense that it needs to be confined to its appropriate tasks (ensuring that I pay my taxes on time, stop at red lights and tie my shoe-laces) but not become my identity. Then I have to kill my father, by which I mean that I have to outgrow the cultural traditions into which I was born, and, instead, embrace a global identity. Thirdly, I must kill my guru. Here, I mean the religious traditions through which I have journeyed. Kabir, the great Indian poet of the 15th century is a model of this. Born to a Hindu widow, he was adopted by a Muslim couple and went on to transcend all religious

traditions, challenging them all but honoring their avatars. He quoted Jesus at once stage, “Jesus, blessed be he, once said, ‘life is a bridge, cross over it but do not tarry on it.’” No guru can take you all the way, for *you* have a way which is all your own. And the final murder is that you have to kill your God; for all notions of God are made up.

At the beginning of our search we may set out together on a common path. At some stage, if we persevere long enough, we will each chose a path less travelled. And for the final stretch of the journey you will “go where no man has gone before.” You will forge a brand-new path in the trackless, uncharted wilderness that leads into the very heart of the Mystery.

We who have followed the footprints of God will, ourselves, leave no footprints.

The mystic, finally, outgrows even the stories, since even the best stories are simplistic efforts to capture ineffable experiences. The mystic will still, however, carry a quiver full of stories to share with wayfarers who need encouragement on their journeys. He will sit across the campfire from the tired traveller and say, “Once upon a time...” but, in reality, he knows that there *is* no time, there is only the eternal NOW, the utterly fertile God-womb awaiting a lover to impregnate Her and bring forth a being of light.

Seán ÓLaoire

Tír na nÓg, California

March 6, 2008