

ON THE ROAD TO PEACEMAKING: A CONVERSATION WITH JESUS CHRIST

Presented by Padraig O'Malley

Moakley Distinguished Professor of Peace and Reconciliation, and Director, The Iraq Project, UMass Boston
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We met, as it happened, in Harvard Square.

At the top of the stairwell to the Red Line where you come face to face with the hordes of homeless, the insanely indigent, professional beggars, whores masquerading as students, students masquerading as whores, pimps, pedophiles, fakes, phonies and the fathomless, the aimless and lost, the human imposters, a great glutinous glob of humanity in a single congregation, drawn to the distinguished ambience of Harvard University, sure that the generosity of its elite student population will empathize with their collective plight and yes,ignore them, concerned as all elites are with the infinite permutations of GLOBAL possibilities on which the theories of their lives are built.

I kinda bumped into HIM, the greatest spin-master of them all, the CHRIST CELEBRITY. If I had been in a car you'd say I'd sideswiped Him. But I was walking and he was preaching -- as always.

And since it was Harvard Square, no one, of course, took any notice.

I hadn't seen HIM since my last encounter with LSD, a mind-bending hallucinogen and preferred drug of choice for many during the counter culture in the late sixties and early seventies when we took our marching orders from the late great Hunter Thompson who taught us *Fear & Loathing* – that Wild Turkey or any mind-bending substance was an antidote to life.

But the counter culture took a right wing turn. These chemicals, snorted, sniffed or injected into every orifice the body could offer, and mainstreamed or streamlined, produced a generation of CEOs to grace the boardrooms of AIG, Bank of America, Citigroup, Lehman Brothers, Morgan Stanley and the vice presidential counterterrorism chambers of Dick Cheney.

Even counter culture revolutions with "love-ins" and "kill the pigs" sloganeering can take the most unexpected turns. One of HIS little gimmicks to amuse **HIMSELF WITH GUFFAWS OF GODLY MIRTH.**

It was a Friday evening, soft drizzling rain, I was coming from nowhere, coming from anywhere, was going nowhere, was just there. Kinda an impromptu *Being There*. Jerzy Kosinski would understand. Kurt Vonnegut would surely get the picture. When? God knows when.

I had been nursing figures in my head for some time. You might say obsessing; a kinda social disorder that a random genetic predisposition many of us are infected with, in varying degrees of intensity. I had been counting the dead of the last century. Some people do crossword puzzles or Sudoku. Me? I do DEAD. As in war dead. The slaughtered, massacred, butchered, the decrepitude of decaying bodies on little-remembered battlefields, the last farts that empty the bowels when one witheringly accurate blast leaves no memory for a last thought -- just a perfunctory expulsion of the last bodily bowel movements.

Last century's count was pretty awesome -- a tribute to our seemingly infinite capacity to devise new ways of obliterating ourselves, as if that alone had become life's overriding purpose. Our ultimate accomplishment: weapons of mass destruction that will, if used, annihilate every living being & deplete the planet of Man. **Note:** not life, just man. **Remember:** we are just a species. Life will go on without us!!

But here's what was on my mind that fateful evening.

From where the T arrives on the track to Harvard Square to the lobby, takes 45 seconds at a brisk pace if you exit from the last carriage of the train, two minutes and five seconds if you exit from the first. Now, since the train has seven carriages and each is twenty feet long, and it takes eight seconds to walk twenty feet, then the excess time it takes to get to the lobby is due to **people interference**, as people tumble out of the carriages in front of you, small inconvenient masses walking at random paces, veering into open spaces.

Time to navigate: 1minute and 35 seconds.

Now, you in the audience have the right to ask, "Hey! What the hell is going on here? This is a goddamn lecture in an august theological school, not a frigging dissertation on crowd control and the MBTA!"

Bear with me: there is a connection: **people interference.**

At the beginning of the 20th century, the ratio of civilians to combatants killed in any given war was *one civilian to eight combatants*; at the beginning of this century the ratio was *eight civilians to every combatant.*

In war, the safest place to be is in an army!

People have gotten in the way of war! They are a goddamned nuisance, collateral damage, **people interference** with the payloads that technologies of war had perfected. All humans were being asked to do was to show people all they had to do was show a little respect for the way of high tech weaponry and not bugger it up by being in the wrong place at the wrong time. I mean a Drone, that pilotless pimperl serenely caressing altitudes of 37,000 feet silently launching its lethal missiles of death, raining down oblivion, is a goddamn work of art!

In fact if people hadn't kept getting in the way of whimsical war weaponry for the last 100 years, the casualties might not look so bad!

But they are bad: At the lower boundary estimates of 167 to 175 million; at the upper bounds, 188 to 258 million, which could mean that one in every 16 people on this wee thing we call Earth were collateralized into damage that turned them into piles of worthless shit.

I mean a Just God and all that eschatological meandering of the best minds of our times! Shit!

Now, the God-Wonder and myself had been living with each other in my head for a long time and the opportunity to pin him down when he was out on one of HIS Self Inflating Street gigs was just too much to let slip by.

So, I jumped on HIM, no time for pleasantries or "how do you dos."

"Hey, there," I modestly confronted HIM, "I've been counting DEAD people, war dead, conflict dead, displaced dead, refugee dead, children dead, mothers dead, even the goddamn Grateful Dead, and things just get worse and worse and here you are blathering on about the same old things, turn the other cheek, love thy neighbor as thy self, which let me let me tell you is not one of your better lines, because a lot of us feel pretty shitty about ourselves, in fact a lot of us just plain hate ourselves and why should we believe in YOU and all this gobbledygook you spread around, which, let me tell you straight to your out-of-this-world face, is the cause of much of our meretricious dispositions to kick each others' asses from here to eternity. You're supposed to be a Just God? Where the hell is the justice here?"

He kinda made a half turn, gave me that beatific smile of insufferable complacency he uses to sucker you into liking HIM.

"Hey, hey, hold it there, young fella!" he starts, "I never said anything about being a Just God. Fact is, I never said anything about anything. It's you folk who keep putting words in MY mouth. It's you folk who created ME in the first instance and then, when you fuck up -- if you'll forgive my ungodly language -- you start yellin' at ME and sayin' it's MY fault."

What do you mean we created YOU? I mean it's YOU, who take the credit for creating everything, whether in six days or four billion years, whether evolution or natural selection or intelligent design..."

"There you go again!! I repeat: I take credit for nothing. You guys give me the credit. You're a little twisted in your logic here, young man. Just because you humans say in books YOU wrote -- YOUR Bibles and Korans and Torah and scriptures and gospels and other theological sophisms -- that I said this or that doesn't mean I said it!

Remember all these books are *man written*, they're books according to one fella or another, always a *man*, mind you, pretty telling that, if I may say so! I mean, you think it's my fault that one in three Americans literally believes that I created the world in seven days?

Now, if we're going to have a conversation here, let's get a few things straight, because frankly, I don't have all eternity to keep talkin' with you -- you're just one guy in a very long queue, **all** with the same questions, **all** trying to put the blame for every kind of human insanity on **MY** shoulders. So, let's cut to the nub of things: OK?"

"Well, OK? But I gotta tell you, I don't like the drift here. You're already giving me the 'I'm in charge, buddy, and don't you forget it!' crap."

"First, let's set the record straight: As I said: You guys created ME. That's right. You created me because you needed ME **in order to survive**. All I am really is a tool in your survival kit. **You had to create ME!!**

Your *prefrontal vortex* got a little bigger and suddenly one day, well, perhaps one million years or so on our time clocks, you got to the point where you became conscious of the fact that you were merely mortal, that one day *you were gonna die* -- **and you were terrified!**

Of all the creatures that share your Earth, you are the only ones who carry with you the knowledge that one day you will cease to exist. You just can't handle that. You can't imagine it. Can't imagine not being conscious of your own being. Go read Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*.

So: you created ME to take the terror away, because you guys, once your neurotransmitters began to hum, *had to believe you were immortal*, that once you'd drawn your last breath, you'd be whisked from here to THERE, wherever THERE is, kinda like a *Star Trek* maneuver, a body and being transfiguration, this thingamajig called a soul takes a trip once the body goes cold. A day trip? No. An eternity trip! A trip for all time!

But this immortality thing is your gig, not mine! It's your *ego* thing. Just because you can't imagine yourself *not* existing, you came up with ME & MY many mansions in my FATHER'S HOUSE.

You keep forgetting: you're just a species!!

But once your brain got even better wired, once you got equipped with better neurotransmitters, and the dopamine kicked in, you got language and thinking and worse still, with your fractured perceptions you began to create the past, to *remember, to compare; to resent. And resentments kill.*

And then you had another problem: If you were here on Earth, you reckoned *that surely you had to have a purpose* – and this part of the wiring hasn't quite untangled itself yet.

So, you came up with the idea of "meaning" to get yourselves out of your dilemma. You invented that dumbest of all questions that just keeps buggin' ye: **WHY AM I HERE?** This whole existential despair garbage, post-modernism, one damn school of something after another -- you guys, and I gotta say this, have invented the damndest nomenclatures to describe the simplest of things.

And of all of them... I have to tell you I'm a bit partial to Sam Beckett – loved that tart observation of his – '**Words stain my silence.**'

What a choice of word: 'stain.' It lingers on the tongue conveying just the right degree of contempt. Think what an outcry there'd be if the Vatican were to announce that MY image had stained Veronica's veil? I wish all of you who pray simply pray these words, 'Oh Lord, please do not allow words to stain my silence.'"

"Hold it, Lord, hold it right there. I don't like where you're going at all! You're not even trying to be fair. I mean over the centuries, you might say since the beginning of time, the best minds have been pondering some mighty heavy stuff; I mean way, way back, before your time – I'm talkin' about the BC era here – you know that time before the Judeo-Christian version of YOU went retail – the best minds have been trying to come up with answers to that question 'why are we here' so, easy on... Just because you're so cynical about YOURSELF or maybe it's YOUR self-deprecating wit and I'm just having a bad night... "

"Please, please! Let ME get, what you guys call "context" out of the way? OK? Then you can have your say. OK?"

"Well, OK, but we're supposed to be having a conversation and it seems to me to be all one-way traffic...."

"Ah, there you go again!! Can't keep that little EGO in place, can you? It's all about you! **You** have IMPORTANT things to say. **You** count. Blah, Blah, Blah, you humans sure test MY patience....questions, questions, questions... So, let's back up.

First you create ME, then, you go one step further. You come up with this notion of religion. You screw it up by dividing ME into all kind of MEs, one ME for each religion. I was Zeus, then Jesus Christ, then Mohammed, then Buddha, Shiva – God; I could go on and on!!

There's the Christian Me, the Muslim Me, the Buddha Me, the Hindu Me; the Jewish ME. But even *all* these divisions couldn't satisfy you. You had to subdivide ME – Catholic ME, Protestant ME, Presbyterian ME, Shia ME, Sunni ME, Orthodox ME -- MEs proliferating all over the place. Religions run wild, each with its own hierarchy of authority, each with its own set of entry rules, your individual beliefs, your rituals, your this and your that, etc., etc., etc...

But no, this wasn't enough for you. Then you guys had to take it one step further – you had to start fighting fightin' each other over which ME is the real ME because each of you said your ME was the real ME and that I had somehow given your guys the real Rules of the Game, the authentic Roadmap to the Hereafter and you wanted everyone else to follow your rules. Your rules, mind you, not mine. I had nothing to do with this kind of tomfoolery and you, young fella; you came from one particularly odious brand of ME, a brand I highly disapprove of: The Irish Catholic ME.

I mean you created a punishing ME! You had ME sending most of you to some nonsensical halfway house called Purgatory to stoke the fires for an indefinite stay, and the worst of you to hell, which had some phantasmagorical combustible contraption spewing out "hell fire" for all eternity. I mean, is it burning fossil fuels? Using Dirty Coal? Nuclear Power? Did anyone think about that? I mean who makes this shit up? Jesus! Forgive me; I don't usually call on MYSELF like that. You know, with an exclamation point. But that was really heavy duty stuff!"

"You'd better believe it was! Confessions every week.... trying to figure out whether it was a venial sin or a mortal sin.... I mean, you know, what all that did to us, going to bed every night, knowing that if you died in your sleep it was 50/50 that you were going to hell for all eternity!! Well, that's okay with me because YOU lost me a long time ago. I don't believe in that skullduggery any longer, haven't for over 40 years now. There are a lot of us, you know, who have rid ourselves of all that garbage, even if the old residuals kick in now and then it's because of the fear of YOU that was pounded into us. The priests, the brothers, the nuns – a whack of the strap even for missing questions in Catechism classes:

Who made the world?

God made the world?

Who is God?

God is Our Father in Heaven, the Creator and Lord of all Things.

Man, YOU really got to me. YOU know, that at one point, I was serving seven o'clock Mass every morning – doing the stations of the cross three times a day, five rosaries, and then, the special ones, St. Anthony, St. Jude, St. Theresa, the Little Flower, the first Mondays, the Nine Fridays, the novenas, AND I was writing a poem to YOU every day. Gee! Those poems!!"

"Yeah! Some versions of ME can get people into a lotta of trouble and if it's any consolation to you, I never took your stuff seriously; I mean your poetry was pretty awful stuff, I mean really awful;"

"Hold it there! I mean I don't give a damn who YOU think YOU are, but literary criticism is something we humans reserve for ourselves."

"Oh, come on now; don't be so prickly! Your stuff was all imitation -- Francis Thompson, John Manley Hopkins, William Blake, William Wordsworth, Alfred Lord Tennyson ... You thought you would follow in their footsteps... that you had a gift for the mystical. Really! It was all so *maudlin*. Remember the one that imitated Francis Thompson's 'The Hound of Heaven'?"

"Come on, yourself! That's not fair. I was only 14 years of age! But I got rid of YOU! I threw all that shit away; long ago. But YOU, YOU'VE a lot to account for! YOU could have done something about it."

"There you go again! I keep telling you: you created ME; you Irish created that IRISH ME, and yeah, you may have gotten rid of me, but what did you replace me with?"

First, there were the pints of Guinness -- AND the interminable conversations. About what? About ME, of course!

A pub philosopher dispensing your self-indulgent textbook of passionate nihilism! Then the switch to Jameson, then Glenfiddich, before you finally settled on Bushmills -- Black Bush, as I recall, a distillery of the stuff gargled every day, and every kind of pill you could lay your hand on to top it off with?

Always neat! Straight up! Right?

No ice to dilute the purity of the malt. No contaminants.

And what's that corny little joke you told *ad nauseum*: When you asked for a Bush straight up and the barman asked: *'Will that be a small one, sir, or a large one?'* and how you had looked him solemnly in the eye and even more solemnly intoned, *'There is no such thing as a large whiskey.'* Ah, great crack! But you stole that one, too! That wasn't your joke. Stole it straight from Flann O'Brien!

Are you listening? "

"Yeah, I'm listening!"

"Now, you've been one lucky human. And when I say lucky, I want you to remember the incredible number of occasions your life was literally saved: here in Boston, 40 years ago when in a drunken blackout you drove off the ramp at exit 15, and the car spun three times on the highway before coming to a halt on the median strip? *And you couldn't even remember it the following day?* And the Irish cops who got to the scene drove you home and not to station 9? And you didn't drive? Had no driver's license? What was your arrogant little punk mantra? Oh yes! *'Will drive but only when drunk?'* Right? And you did it again in Tampa, between Tampa and Clearwater, with your foot to the floor and your poor wife screaming like a hyena being torn apart by a mauling lion, you spun out of control? Right? Because you wanted to see an episode of *All in the Family* with Archie Bunker, right? And in Durban, South Africa, when you inched your way across a hotel balcony 16 floors to get to the balcony of the room next door up so you could get another bottle of vodka, with your girlfriend and the child you supposedly were foster father to, screaming her poor head off and crying like the baby she was and fire engines hauling up ladders. OR when you regained consciousness about three in the morning, blood soaked, outside your apartment in Cambridge with absolutely no recollection to this day of how you ended up there and what had happened. That one nearly cost you an eye and yet you rampaged on! Or when your mitro-valve went on the bleep and you were swimming in blood clots? Or the colon cancer? I mean, young fella, you think all this is just luck? Who do you think you are? Some kind of Black Swan?"

"No."

"So, what do you think of it?"

"Well, I never said there wasn't some power greater than myself, but it's not YOU, I can tell you that. No going backwards for me!"

"And where did you come to what I might ask, the profound deduction that there just might be a power greater than yourself? And I'm not being sarcastic -- sarcasm is not part of the God repertoire."

"I told you -- I'm out of that kinda Jesus Christ-God like business. I go to meetings -- AA and NA and they have these twelve-step programs, a spiritual program, and if you practice these steps, you stay clean and you come to believe that a power greater than yourself helps you stay clean because you can't stay clean and sober on your own. That's where I got it from. It takes away the fear..."

"Ah, how magnanimous of you! The great YOU comes to the conclusion that you may not be in control of the universe! That you can't control the people around you or their behavior or even what happens in the next 24 hours. A plane falls out of the sky near Buffalo. and BINGO! A plane falls into the Hudson and a different kind of BINGO! Swine Flu and what kind of BINGO can we expect? And yet, even with these meetings and all the other stuff, you're still looking for meaning?"

"No, wrong! I'm not looking for meaning. I'm looking for peace."

"Peace?? Peace for yourself? Or peace for others?"

"Well, maybe both. Get it for others and maybe it will make its way back to me."

"Well, that's kind of cocky of you!"

"Hey, give me a break, somewhere!"

"Listen up now: I have to move on to the next poor bugger who's been on hold and all the lines are flashing.

You humans are the only species that preys on itself. I know I'm repeating myself. But you won't find elephants preying on other elephants or tigers on tigers or cats on cats or dogs on dogs. I mean I not denying the food chain, but that's a different matter. Here I'm talking about *like turning on like*. Only you humans do that, and have been at it once you got a bit ahead of the other creatures. And now, you've even turned on the Earth itself and it is getting mightily pissed off. It won't take it much longer. We might even see one of those seismic upheavals that settles things out every half-billion years or so. I mean half-billion in your terms; in mine, just a nano-second. Think of the Neanderthals!! A run of 200,000 years and then, PUFF! GONZO! And to this day you guys haven't a clue what happened to them.

You cannot stop conflict. It's genetically encoded in *Homo Sapiens*. Part of everyone's genetic composition. Back to the old dopamine! It's an incurable condition that afflicts only the human species. You can't eliminate it. It comes with being able to think and vocalize your thinking, with the capacity to remember. You can't find a vaccine or a pill or any kind of antidote.

From your first pissy seedlings you guys have been at it; sticks and stones, bow and arrows, swords and lances, rifles and machine guns, tanks and hand grenades, bombs and blitzes, atomic and nuclear bombs, handheld missiles and now 'dirty' nuclear bombs -- one small bomb, with a mere 0.1 percent of kiloton, that you can send by Federal Express, would level everything and everyone within a half-mile radius of Times Square *instantaneously*. Just like that. BINGO! Over and out!

The current arsenal of your extinctive dreams comes to 2100 strategic nuclear weapons in the hands of five countries and between 23,000 and 32,000 tactical nuclear weapons in the hands of eight countries, with thirty countries biting eagerly at the nuclear cherry.

Your greatest accomplishment as a species: your serene ability to wipe yourselves off the face of planet Earth hundreds of times over.

And genocides? Remember the Rwanda one?

Man, those Hutu were ENJOYING themselves! Getting together in their villages every evening to celebrate the number they had killed. Communal dancing and singing and celebration, high as a kite on the lust of blood, only the arms wretchedly tired from swingin' and hackin', and hackin' that machete all day, every day until sheer exhaustion set in. Until the arms went limp, too tired to swing the machete one more time."

"I know! I know! Nothing here that I don't know. We're all mightily impressed that you can roll off these statistics, so what's the point, I mean you're beginning to sound a lot like me; if YOUR godly presence will forgive my no doubt impertinent comparison."

"Listen up son: **As a species you are addicted to violence.** Anywhere, any time, by any means, one-on-one, group-on-group, color-on-color, language-on-language, ethnicity-on-ethnicity, religion-on-religion, and when all else fails, self-killing, suicide bombers, the willingness to kill yourself so that you can kill others.

You can't stop the violence, can't end conflict; can't ever have people **not** killing one another. Not ever. *But you can learn to manage it.* You can do with societies steeped in conflict what you do in your AA or NA group. You can try and get people from what you call 'divided societies' together to share the narratives of their conflicts with each other.

Now, you're an addict and you know what it's like: you can never be cured. But you can get into recovery by sharing your experiences in meetings with others. You find out you are not alone. You get a sponsor, a fellow addict who becomes your counter self. By practicing simple steps and altering addictive behaviors you can earn yourself lasting recovery, *lasting but not permanent, only for as long as you follow the rules of the Game.* You guys support each other. You set up a buddy system, what you call sponsors. Your groups can do for you what you can't do for you. They keep you sober and clean. Right?"

"Right."

"The group is more powerful than you are. Right?"

"Right."

"If you ever forget that, you're done for. Right? "

"Right."

"What's the guiding principle? Addicts are in the best position to help other addicts. Right?"

"Right."

"Here are a few hints:

You addicts have a whole a set of behavioral characteristics that set you apart from more normal people. When you share with each other you find, 'hey, I thought I was someone special, that I had a problem like nobody,' and then you go to a meeting and bingo! You find that you are not alone, that you, the special you, is no different from every talking head in the room."

"So?"

"Well, I think you should try to apply that idea to people from deeply divided societies... don't they have special behavioral characteristics?"

"Yeah!"

"And don't they all think their conflict is special? That no one can really understand it except themselves?"

"Yeah!"

"And aren't their conflicts the last thing in the world they find possible to give up?"

"Yeah!"

"And don't they do the same thing over and over again, the same kind of bombings, the same assaults, the same bombings, the same door-to-door house searches, the same arbitrary executions, and every time they expect a different result? Right?"

"Right."

"And what do you call that? Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result?"

"Insanity!!"

"And who are they just like?"

"Friggin' addicts!"

"Right....!!!"

"Well, I gotta go now. But I want to leave you with this parting thought:"

"Yeah?"

"Don't stain MY silence with words."