

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

August 29, 2006 at 7:32am

What Would Jesus Say?

by John Dear

On the Road to Peace

The other day, my friend Jack Marth said to me on the phone, "I wonder what Jesus would have to say about the U.S. government, about what the Bush Administration has been doing?"

I think Jack knows the answer. For years he has run a free legal clinic for the homeless in the Bronx and led a weekly anti-war vigil at the Army Recruiting Station on Fordham Road. His wife, Miriam Ford, niece of martyred Maryknoll Sr. Ita Ford, knows too. She teaches nursing and runs a free medical clinic for Central Americans. They read in the Gospels how Jesus wants only peace, love, healing and justice for the poor, how anything which oppresses the poor affronts Gods reign.

Alas, many Christians, many Catholics, presume Jesus would heap praise on our government.

He would be pleased, they say, because the United States has fulfilled its manifest destiny, brings freedom upon the world, dominates every heathen on behalf of God's chosen and hastens a global apocalypse through our righteous military might on behalf of a mighty and implacable God.

I've heard such sentiments for years. Hundreds have strenuously accosted me over the years in an effort to impress upon me a thing or two. For instance, the president makes for a fine Christian; the nation bears the marks of holiness; the government engages in sanctified work--all this, said one devout Catholic shortly after receiving communion, "despite the collateral damage."

I offer a contrary opinion. I certainly don't regard anyone in this administration as a Christian. Quoting scripture is a glib and facile skill. As Shakespeare pointed out, even the Devil was good at quoting the

scriptures -- to manipulate Jesus as he fasted in the desert. I regard our leaders as war criminals, offenders against humanity who should be impeached and tried. They serve a demonic system, which visits many multitudes with early death.

What, then, would Jesus have to say? A great deal. But first, I think, he would break down and weep. He would weep because he longs to give us peace, but his gift now, as then, is rejected. "If this day you only knew what makes for peace," he would say between sobs.

Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, according to the Gospel of Luke (19:42). But then he takes action. He turns over the tables of injustice. He demands its restoration as a house of prayer, a place of peace, where oppression and violence are banished. Jesus gives his life taking action, speaking out, loving everyone, practicing nonviolence, and leading us to the living God of peace.

I think he expects his followers to do the same today -- to weep, take action and speak out. Jesus wants us to see every human being on the planet as our very sister and brother. He wants us to stand in loving solidarity with everyone, even those named as enemies. He wants us to grieve with them and defend them. He wants us to stop every form of violence, to resist our government's unjust policies and wars, and to practice justice and peace. He would have us take action -- hold our peace vigils, write letters, pray and fast, serve the needy, and organize locally for justice.

And he would have us speak out, have us say a few basic things: Stop the war on Iraq. Make reparations, bring the troops home, let the United Nations resolve the crisis. Don't bomb Iran. Or Syria. Or anyone for that matter. Seek nonviolent solutions for peace.

Stop the militarization of the Mid-East, end all U.S. military aid to Israel; stop funding the occupation of the Palestinians and the war on Lebanon; stop supporting Israeli war criminals; support nonviolent peacemakers in Israel, Palestine and Lebanon. Pursue the Jewish vision of shalom, and pray that it brings peace to Palestinians and children everywhere.

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Jesus would have us declare a few more things: Welcome every immigrant, support the undocumented. Stop military aid to Colombia and the Philippines. Close Guantanamo, and close our terrorist training camps, such as the School of Americas in Georgia, and close the CIA, NSA, and the Pentagon as well. Leave the World Trade Organization, lift Third World debt, house the homeless, promote racial and gender equality, end poverty, offer free medicine to people with AIDS/HIV, provide universal healthcare, abolish the death penalty, end abortion, undertake treaties for nuclear disarmament, join the World Court, obey international law, sign the Kyoto accord, find alternatives to fossil fuels, end the Star Wars program, cut the military budget, abolish every nuclear weapon and weapon of mass destruction, and then spend those billions upon billions to feed every starving child and refugee on the planet, clean up the environment and fund the education of nonviolence throughout the world. He would have the earth itself restored as a house of peace and prayer.

This, I believe, is what Jesus would say. Indeed, he said as much already. "God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Here was Jesus' vision of a world without war, poverty, nuclear weapons. A jubilee era of justice, nonviolence, and peace.

We, like Jesus, do well to weep. But we must also take action for justice, and speak out for peace and

disarmament. We must say the words he would say and with faith, hope, courage and love, pay the price that he paid.

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