Opinion
Guest Voices



Cornel West speaks at Arizona State University in Tempe, Ariz., in 2018. (OSV News/Gage Skidmore, cc 2.0, Wikimedia Commons)



by John Dear

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On this episode of "The Nonviolent Jesus Podcast," John Dear speaks with Cornel West about the challenges of love and nonviolence.

"The country is in deep trouble," West has said. "We've forgotten that a rich life consists fundamentally of serving others, trying to leave the world a little better than you found it. We need the courage to question the powers that be, the courage to be impatient with evil and patient with people, the courage to fight for social justice. In many instances we will be stepping out on nothing, and just hoping to land on something. But that's the struggle. To live is to wrestle with despair, yet never allow despair to have the last word."

West is one of the leading public intellectuals of our time. He is the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Chair at Union Theological Seminary, former professor of the practice of public philosophy at Harvard University, and professor emeritus at Princeton University. He graduated magna cum laude from Harvard in three years and obtained his master's degree and doctorate in philosophy at Princeton. He has written 20 books and has edited 13, and is best known for his classics *Race Matters* and *Democracy Matters*.

"Every empire comes and goes," West said on the podcast. "They begin to decay and decline because of military overreach and end up reaping what they sow. There is a spiritual and moral vacuum right now. We are witnessing the collapse and implosion of the American empire in real time. The cause is organized greed and weaponized hatred. We have to try to tell the truth where we are, but all this is nothing new."

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"Herman Melville told us all this long ago," West said, arguing that the white whale is white supremacy and the ship is full of people around the world who will be destroyed by facism.

"Gold, status, position, spectacle, white power, all forms of idolatry lead toward self-destruction," West said. "We can never be surprised by evil or paralyzed by despair."

"To be a follower of Jesus means to take up your cross and follow him," he said. "Love means courage, integrity and honesty. We will always be viewed as foolish, but we lead with love, and love our way through the darkness and cruelty. Love requires tremendous risk and sacrifice.

"Nonviolence without love is just a strategy and a tactic. Love is the fundamental criteria. But love is never crushed, joy is never crushed, love is never eliminated. So, we will never forget, cave in, give up or sell our souls."

Listen to the full episode here.

This story appears in the **The Nonviolent Jesus Podcast** feature series. View the full series.