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The politics of resurrection

by John Dear

On the Road to Peace

I spent Holy Week serving in the little mission church of San Jose de Picacho along the U.S.-Mexico border. It was hot, nearly 90 degrees, with wind gusts over 50 mph. I took time to walk along the drought-afflicted Rio Grande, and found myself on retreat, with time to consider the events of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

"This is Eisenhower's military-industrial complex," one parishioner told me. The whole region is militarized by our troops on one side, and Jaurez on the other side, where tens of thousands have been killed in drug wars in recent years. They send us drugs; we send them guns. They cross the border to get away from poverty; we spend billions to keep them away, to send them back, or to arrest them and imprison them. "Love your neighbor" is not the standard down here.

A few miles away stands Fort Bliss, headquarters of the U.S. army, its second largest base. Next door is White Sands Missile Range, the largest army base, where every missile, rocket and bomb has been first tested and exploded, including the first nuclear weapon at the nearby "Trinity Site" beyond the nuclear town of Alamogordo.

During our Good Friday evening service, someone dumped a body along a desert road less than a mile away. This is not a land of resurrection, I realized, but a place of crucifixion and death.

At the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday Mass, I asked the congregation to think what resurrection means for them. Do we rejoice that Jesus has been raised from the dead? Are we glad that he's alive and well? If so, what then? Do we go about our day to day lives unchanged "even if someone should rise from the dead"? What does his resurrection have to do with our bombing raids, executions, drone attacks, nuclear weapons, global poverty and environmental destruction? If it makes no difference in our lives and our

violent world, then we might as well go Easter egg hunting on the White House lawn.

Walking along the desert border land and the Rio Grande, I found myself thinking about the politics of resurrection. We barely know what nonviolent politics might look like. Most of us, from Bush to Obama to our relatives, local priest and bishop, uphold the politics of crucifixion. We support our military, justify our war-making, advocate revenge, pay for our drones, even support executions. We honor those involved in the mass murder of war. Indeed, we kill people who kill people to show that killing people is wrong.

We are experts at the politics of crucifixion. We are told that our wars are necessary, our weapons defensive, our nuclear power plants safe, and our tax breaks for billionaires a sign of freedom. The mainstream media hardly ever points to another way. No alternative voices are permitted to speak. (I urge people to boycott *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, as well as the network news of Katie Couric, Diane Sawyer, Brian Williams, FOX and CNN. They are simply spokespeople for the culture of war and death.)

Not much has changed since that Good Friday long ago. The U.S. killing of Osama bin Laden epitomizes our politics of crucifixion. What will come from this latest public execution? Doesn't it just add to the cycle of death, justify our mad violence and insure future terrorist attacks against us? As Scott Wright wrote on www.paxchristiusa.org, the death of this one man came at the price of "ten years of war -- with no end in sight; hundreds of thousands of lives lost -- including 6,000 U.S. soldiers; trillions of dollars wasted -- and a military budget that has doubled from \$350 billion to \$700 billion; torture of prisoners and no accountability for those who torture. The global war on terror, which sought to end terror, has instead made war and terror a permanent fixture of our fragile planet."

But what about the politics of resurrection? As resurrection people, I told my parishioners on the border, we have nothing to do with death. We do not support the forces of death. We do not bring death to anyone. We resist militarism, seek to dismantle weapons, and try to transform our culture of death. We are people of nonviolence, forgiveness, compassion and peace. We see the coming of Christ's reign of life and resurrection where there is no more death, no more war, no more violence, no more tears.

The resurrection accounts that we read this Easter season offer clues about this new life of nonviolence. When the risen Jesus appears to the disciples, he says, "Peace be with you." They welcome his peace and rejoice in his presence. Despite the insanity of the nation and the world, as resurrection people, we too try to welcome that peace in our hearts and our personal lives, to become people of personal peace.

Then he breathes on them and gives them the Holy Spirit. So we breathe in the Holy Spirit and "conspire" with Jesus in this new life of love, nonviolence and peace. He commends forgiveness and community, then says, "You are my witnesses. Go and make disciples of all the nations." That's the challenge: to be his witnesses of peace, to go forth as his apostles of nonviolence, to invite everyone into discipleship to this new way of resurrection life.

The political implications of resurrection offer our only hope. If we believe in resurrection, and look toward Christ's reign of nonviolence, then we are summoned into a new vocation of peacemaking. We have to reject revenge, retaliation, killing and war, and join the global grassroots campaign to abolish war, poverty, executions, nuclear weapons and environmental destruction.

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While the Obama administration carries on the tired old politics of crucifixion, there are breakthroughs

happening every day that herald the hope of resurrection. We rarely see them in the mainstream media, but they exist in the movements of nonviolent resistance sweeping through the Middle East, where people are awakening from decades of fear and giving their lives to resist oppressive regimes -- in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, and Palestine. But these movements are growing in Africa and Latin America and around the world.

The people of Wisconsin caught that spirit in their recent fight for justice. That awakening needs to spread. We need a nonviolent revolution here at home that will push for the dismantling of our nuclear arsenal and our empire, reverse our senseless military spending, end our global domination, and guarantee housing, food, education, employment and healthcare for all. Then, as we educate one another in the ways of nonviolent conflict resolution, the healing of humanity can begin.

The resurrection of Jesus was ignored by the culture of war and death in his day, but it was an earthquake in reality. It marked the beginning of the end of the Roman empire and the beginning of a grassroots, community-based movement of loving nonviolence that continues to transform humanity. Our small efforts for peace seem to be ignored by the culture of war and death, but if we continue to build that grassroots movement, they build up the pressure for a seismic shift in the political plates that undergird our war-making world. We have to go forward in that faith, in that resurrection spirit.

As more and more of us begin to understand the nonviolence of Jesus and create more peaceful lives, we too let go of our fear, anger and despair. By withdrawing our cooperation in the big business of money and war, we take the steam out of the war machine and welcome God's reign of peace.

On *60 Minutes* the other night, President Obama said that anyone who opposed the U.S. killing of Osama bin Laden "should have his head examined." I think anyone who ordered it and supported it should have his heart examined. The voice of Jesus still cries out: "Repent of the sin of killing and war, and believe the good news of love, nonviolence and peace."

The resurrection of the nonviolent Jesus offers the best hope for ourselves and humanity. My advice -- reject the culture's bloodlust, vengeance, bombing raids, media hype and wars, and return to the risen, nonviolent Jesus who offers true peace, real hope and everlasting love.

Please join John Dear at the upcoming Wildgoose Festival, June 23-26, in Durham, NC, the first annual U.S. ecumenical Christian justice and arts festival. Richard Rohr, Jim Wallis, Shane Claiborne, Joyce Hollyday, Vincent Harding and many others will also speak. See: www.wildgoosefestival.org. John's latest book, *Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings* (Orbis), and other recent books, *A Persistent Peace* and *Put Down Your Sword*, as well as Patricia Normile's *John Dear On Peace*, are available from www.amazon.com. John's teachings on Gospel nonviolence are featured in the DVD film *The Narrow Path*, available at www.sandamianofoundation.org. To contribute to Catholic Relief Services' "Fr. John Dear Haiti Fund," go to: <http://donate.crs.org/goto/fatherjohn>. For further information, or to schedule a lecture or retreat, visit: www.johndear.org.

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