WWJD   By Dr. Richard Youngblood

Question: I'm bothered by the cruelties committed by Christian groups of the past as they are recorded in history. What would Jesus say about this?

Anyone who has seriously studied what Jesus taught cannot help but be disturbed and saddened by historic events like the Crusades, the Inquisition, anti-Semitism and the Salem witch trials. In last two-hundred years, some who professed to follow Christ in the U.S. mis-used the Bible in efforts to defend racism. Within more recent times, other professed Christians have bombed abortion clinics and picketed funerals of soldiers killed in war. We cannot and should not attempt to deny that these things have occurred. But weak and flawed individuals in a sinful world have sometimes taken the name of Christ to do things that Jesus would not approve. As he once said, "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Matthew 7:21-23). Clearly, Jesus has not always had a relationship with everyone who claimed him.

Those who have aroused nominal Christians to destroy people with whom they disagreed were all taking actions totally contrary to the teachings of Jesus. Instead of "eye for eye and tooth for tooth," Jesus taught us to "turn the other cheek" and "not resist an evil person" (Matthew 5:38-39). He said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). The New Testaments teaches Christians to "Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. . . never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. . . Instead, if your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. . . Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good" (Romans 12:17-21). Genuine Christians deeply regret the evil that has sometime been committed in the name of Christ, but we can hardly blame Christianity as a whole for behaviors opposed by Jesus and by many faithful Christians.

In contrast to the cruelties of distorted versions of Christianity, consider the evidence of Christianity's impact for good throughout history. From the beginning, Christians following the teachings of Jesus (Matthew 25:31-46) have acted to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, rescue orphaned children and minister to the sick.

There is no way to measure the amounts of time, money and work contributed by compassionate Christians to alleviate suffering in our world. Many of our hospitals, orphan homes, homeless shelters and even schools are the result of Christian endeavors. Christianity's influence on the world's art, music, literature, laws and even scientific and medical research has greatly blessed us also.

All such atrocities as those mentioned above are deplorable and should be strongly disavowed by all believers in Jesus Christ. In fact, Christians are taught to acknowledge their sins in unselfish humility and seek forgiveness so as to help build a better and a more peaceful world (Philippians 2:1-11). But the teachings of the Bible acknowledge that all people have sinned. Christians are but people who are in the process of becoming more like Jesus. They have not all yet arrived at the goal of full maturity in Christ. Real Christianity is embodied in the life and teachings of Jesus, not in the imperfect people who are still in the process of becoming like him.

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