

# Nine Things Jesus Would Refute

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Suppose for a moment that Jesus returns to earth tomorrow. How would he react to the church? To what the church has made of his story? Would he agree with some of the turns taken by theology? What about some of the things being done in his name?

My suspicion is that he would face palm and shake his head sadly. In an interview a few months ago, Richard Rohr said, “In the beginning, the Jesus movement was about having an experience of God. It moved into the Greek world and became a philosophy. Then it moved into the Roman world and became an official religion. Later, it moved into Europe and became a culture. Finally, it moved to North America and became a business.”

Like much of what Rohr says, there’s a little bit of hyperbole in this statement, but I think he points to something significant about what has become of the Jesus movement. We have largely lost any sense of a deep experience of God. Instead, faith has become a habit, a tradition, a set of doctrines, something we must believe to be saved.

It made me wonder how Jesus would respond to today’s church, so here’s a short list of nine things I believe Jesus would refute about contemporary Christianity. There are probably many more.

1) When Jesus was on earth, he proclaimed a vision of a society transformed by grace, compassion, and love. That message was twisted into a fantasy about heaven and what happens to us after we die. Jesus would refute that. Jesus proclaimed a deeply and profoundly this-worldly faith, which has been changed and degraded into an otherworldly escape from dealing with and healing the realities of this world and life.

2) After Jesus died, a religion was formed to worship his name. He desired instead a movement which would advance his message of life in all its abundance here and now and fostering a community of radical equality. He taught us to learn to love God and to express our love for God by loving all our neighbours. Jesus would refute what became of that movement.

3) After he died, the gospel became misinterpreted to focus primarily on Jesus’ death rather than his life. Jesus would refute that. We have changed his message of trusting that there is no separation from God into a word about Jesus dying to solve the problem of humanity’s separation from God. Jesus trusted a God who is always seeking us, a God who yearns for a deeper and more intimate relationship with all creatures.

4) The church also came to believe that Jesus was the only one who exclusively reveals God in the flesh. If that’s true, then his example is out of reach for us, and Jesus would refute that. He taught that we all share in the same spirit that empowered his character and his life. We all participate in the presence of God in the world, and we all incarnate the love and presence of God in the world.

5) The church also came to believe that the religion which claims his name is the only legitimate way to know truth and God. Jesus would refute that, for he understood that there are other ways of knowing God. Indeed, Jesus himself was not a Christian. As a faithful Jew, he understood Torah as a deeply faithful way of knowing God. His own teaching was to amplify the Torah, to deepen the intent of the Torah to develop a hunger for an experience of God.

6) As previously mentioned, Jesus would refute the idea that humankind stands condemned before God and deserves divine wrath and eternal torture. His deep trust was that we are deeply loved by God; God will stop at nothing to draw us ever closer to God's heart and to one another. God did not require the death of Jesus to fix some problem in the relationship between the human and the divine. Rather, Jesus was executed by the religious and political authorities because he was a threat to their status and power.

7) Some people believe that Jesus will return once more to save the world and end suffering, rather than taking responsibility for healing the world and solving the problems which lead to suffering ourselves. Jesus would refute that. St Teresa of Avila reminded us that "Jesus has no hands in the world but ours, no feet but ours, no mind but ours, no heart but ours." Jesus will not return and wave a magic wand to fix the world. Rather, God empowers us to do what we can to end suffering. Those Facebook memes which encourage us to type "yes" that God will fulfill our dreams and give us prosperity are a deep heresy.

8) Another practice Jesus would refute is the sense that there is some magical power in uttering the name of Jesus. Rather, he encourages and empowers us to access our own natural power and capabilities to effect change in the world. God empowers us instead to harness the gifts given to us to use the resources in community to make necessary changes in the life of our world and to alleviate its pain and inequalities.

9) Finally, Jesus would refute the way in which people of all kinds have come to associate Jesus with church or theology or politics or power rather than with courage, justice, humanity, beauty, humility, and love. Jesus is not tied to the church, or the proclamations of Christian leaders, or any other who confidently say they know what Jesus wants of us. Rather, the good news of Jesus is that the divine spirit works in the most surprising places and with the most surprising people to make life whole and good for all. No one is excluded, and all are welcomed.

Perhaps it's time for us to rethink what we are about!