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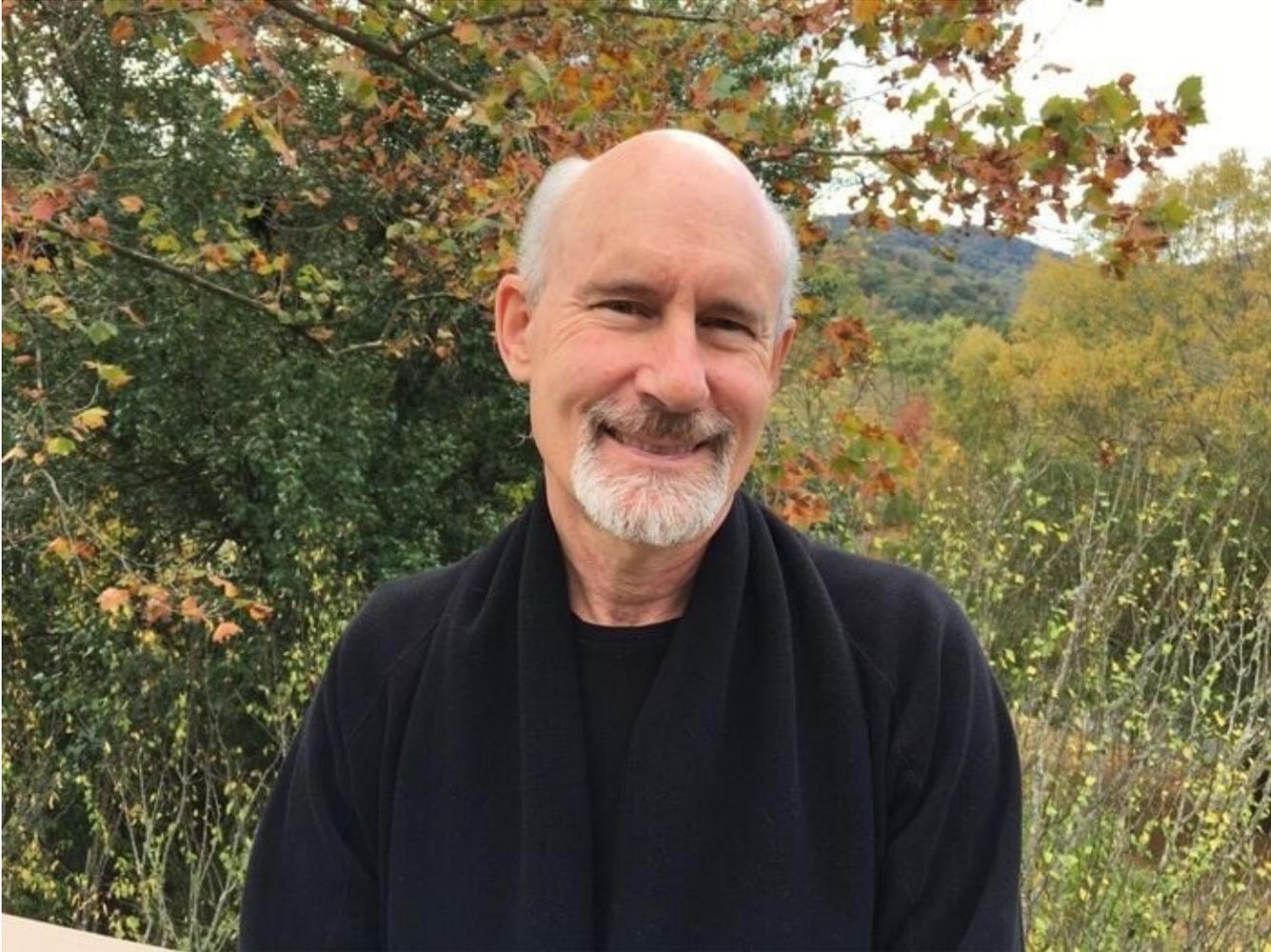
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Friendly Freethinker: Did Jesus Want Everyone to Live in a Christian World?

Chris Highland
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It was reported that the Jewish teacher Jesus of Nazareth instructed his disciples to “go into all the world, making disciples of all nations.” (Matthew 28). As a youthful evangelist, I believed this was my call to convert everyone to my Christian faith. Problem is, Jesus didn’t say the world should be Christian—he never used the word. A disciple is a student who is committed to learning from a particular teacher. Was Jesus ordering his students to make everyone in every nation a student? There are certainly people who learn from him across the world. Not all are Christians.

It may be wise to revisit other biblical passages used by believers in a Christian World. We could go all the way back to the Psalms: “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.” (Psalm 24) Some would claim this means everything belongs to the Hebrew God, so they would claim all lands as His possessions—it’s

all “holy land.” If this is true, who actually owns all those lands here on earth? Christians of course (this worldview of domination is behind claims made by Christian Nationalists—“America is God’s country”). We might keep in mind that most Jewish people would not interpret the Psalm in this way, and I’m not sure Jesus would either.

And yet, Jesus is recorded as saying the following: “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.” (John 12). The apostle Peter took this further in the Book of Acts: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12). This is an all-encompassing worldview—the end goal of all history, of everyone on the planet, is to be drawn to Jesus to be saved by him. Christians who follow Paul rather than Jesus (fairly pervasive in the faith) are not so interested in being practicing students of the Nazarene (for instance, following his clear instructions in the Sermon on the Mount). Once a disciple of Paul myself, I believed and preached what may be the central Christian World verse in all scripture: “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2).

It’s pretty clear what the Universal Gospel, preached by a wide number of believers, is all about. Everything everywhere, and everyone on earth, belongs to the Lord. The ultimate ultimatum is that all should, all must, bend the knee and confess Jesus of Nazareth—or the Christ he was transformed into—the Lord of Lords, King of Kings (as the old church hymn rang out: “Crown Him Lord of All!”).

Now that we have this worldview clearly in mind, we can begin to ask the most serious questions. Did Jesus truly intend the entire planet to bow to him? Did he expect that one day the entire world would be his students and he the only professor? Every Jew and Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist, indigenous tribal member, agnostic and atheist would change their mind and belief to join the knee-benders. And let’s think long and hard about this: If everyone on earth became Christians, what would that look like? Which Christians should we be—Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Charismatic, Evangelical? How would we know a person was the “right kind” of believer? Would there be a universal test, maybe a United (Christian) Nations faith-force in every land, enforcing conformity to the “correct” kind of Christian?



This may sound absurd. I think it is. But I’ve never heard one self-described Christian—or “follower” of Jesus—explain the End Game, the goal, the final vision for the belief that “every knee shall bow and tongue confess.” And, by the way, if this vision was actually fulfilled, what happens to the horrors of the Book of Revelation? Would hell be closed down? Would those bloody apocalyptic battles be called off? Would it be a peaceable kingdom on earth with every last soul serving the Lord by ... spending every day in church, singing hymns of praise, reading Bibles, “fellowshipping”? Does that sound like heaven on earth? Not for me.

Might it be that Jesus had no interest in making the entire planet Christian, but more loving and compassionate students and followers of the Good?

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