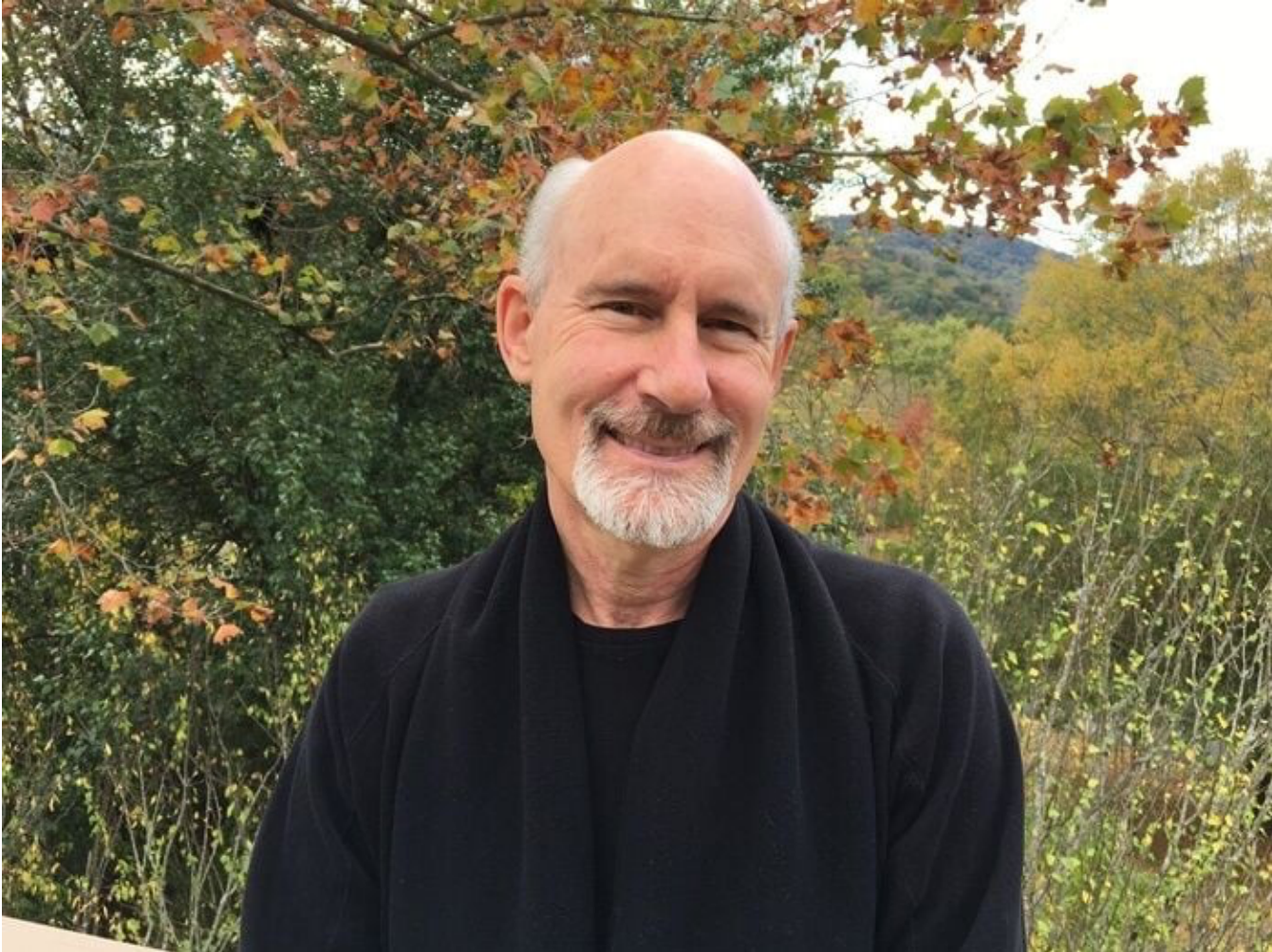


https://www.blackbeltnewsnetwork.com/religion/friendly-freethinker-believers-are-known-by-their-clothing/article_37f06124-6d2a-45e2-928c-1248b8dc7c4c.html

Friendly Freethinker: Believers are known by their ... clothing?

By Chris Highland
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In lively youth group days, singing brought us together for faith and fun. One of the most popular songs for a campfire or living room was “They will know we are Christians by our love.” With tears and harmony, we held hands while guitars strummed and voices seemed to reach into heaven. Those times taught me the true meaning of “fellowship”; we felt the words became our prayers, not only believing in unity but feeling it, seeing it. The warmth was a wonderful thing to experience.

That particular folksy song has a flowing melody almost like a Native American chant. It could be mesmerizing. “We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord ... and we pray that all unity may one day be restored.” The unity of our Christian Family was central, but we knew it wasn’t complete until the rest of the world was united with us in faith. “We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand ... and together we’ll spread the news that God is in our land.” As brothers and sisters in Christ, we felt called to share our faith across the land—our land. “We will work with each other, we will work side by side ... and we’ll guard each one’s dignity and save each one’s pride.”

I'm not sure we understood the full meaning of those lyrics. We never actually worked side by side, except maybe to serve a meal or learn a new song, and it's difficult to see how we would guard the dignity of one of our faith family. Saving pride wasn't something we considered important since we were taught that "pride comes before a fall"—pride was a sin to be avoided. The final verse of this song is the capstone: "All praise to the Father ... all praise to Christ Jesus ... all praise to the Spirit, who makes us one." A trinity of praise calling attention to the primary reason we sang and prayed for unity: our Christian faith.

The chorus of this song raises an important question about faith itself. "And they'll know we are Christians by our love." Give that some thought. The message is: "See our love, and you'll see our faith." When we observe someone expressing love to another, does that tell us what they believe?

Carol and I noticed a group of women at a restaurant. Several had shirts with Christian messages. While shopping later, I made Carol laugh when I started singing: "They'll know we are Christians by our shirts, by our shirts." We see Bible verses on clothing, as well as images of crosses, Jesus or Mary (often framed by flags). This is nothing new, and there's nothing necessarily wrong with it. Proclaiming one's beliefs has become quite literally fashionable.



Of course, this includes political themes too. What I wonder though is: Do people somehow think a clothing item printed with a catchy message truly tells us what they think or believe? "They'll know we are [of a particular faith or a specific political party] by our flag, our hat, our jewelry."

When someone wears a cross, do we immediately think: "Oh, there's a Christian"? Do we know if they're Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Charismatic, Evangelical? Do we know what "kind" of Christian they are, what denomination, what church they attend? "They'll know I'm a Christian by my shiny gold cross."

Reflecting on this, I was curious: is this actually about "spiritual sports," advertising "My Team"—Team Jesus, as opposed to the opposition Team Buddha, Team Moses, Team Muhammad? Is it a form of proclaiming we're on the Best Team, the Winning Team? Could one of these teams claim to love the most, love the best, beat all the rest? This Faith FanClub kind of marketing sometimes seems to announce: "See how we love (our group)—we're good people, we're God's People!"

By the way, when the song says "they will know," who are "they"? I'm fairly sure when we sang the song, we meant non-Christians, non-believers, the rest of the world that doesn't believe what we believe—those people who aren't God's people. As we read in our Bibles, these are the people "of the world," the sinful world we wanted desperately to be separate from, distinguished from. Our songs, our fellowship, our clothing, (our love), all showed we were different ... but how exactly?

I wonder how our enthusiastic youth group would have responded if we heard a different group of young people singing: "They'll know we are [Buddhists; Muslims; Jews; Atheists] by our love"? How would we know what they really believed?

If a song, or an item of clothing or jewelry, simply proclaimed "Love", would that be enough of an invitation to sing along, maybe even enjoy some fellowship?

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