

The Conversion of Richard Dawkins?

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by Rev. Jeremiah Montgomery

“Richard Dawkins converts to Christianity.”

How many of us would be surprised to read that sentence in tomorrow’s headlines?

Imagine the reaction. NPR would feature the story on *All Things Considered*. Broadcast and cable news services would race to secure the coveted “first interview.” Experts would be lined up to weigh in. Talking heads would discuss, debate – and probably end by shouting each other down – trying to explain such a bewildering transformation.

It’s not that conversions never happen. As religious historian Philip Jenkins notes in his interesting book, *The Next Christendom: the Coming of Global Christianity*, religious conversions continue to be a regular and widespread phenomenon – particularly in the global south and the far east. Every day, all around the world, people come to faith in Jesus Christ for the first time – sometimes quite dramatically.

But the case of Dawkins would be different. Part of this difference would be due to the fact that he is a public figure – a person whose name we know and face we recognize. But that wouldn’t all of it. After all, the occasional “celebrity conversion” is not totally unknown. No, the main reason we would be so surprised is simply this: Richard Dawkins is an outspoken *opponent* of religion. What on earth could turn the author of *The God Delusion* into a follower of Jesus?

As Dawkins would no doubt rush to assure us, *nothing* on earth could make him a Christian. And though it may surprise my readers, I agree wholeheartedly. No power *on earth* could work such a change.

However, what if there is power *beyond earth*? What if this power is actually a *person*? And what if this person were to *confront* even the most antagonistic opponent of religion?

Impossible, you say?

Actually, the New Testament records just such an event. It happened to man named Saul. An intelligent and well-educated scholar from the university city of Tarsus in Cilicia (modern day Turkey), Saul was the last person anybody would have expected to become a Christian. In fact, he *hated* Christians. For Saul, the idea that Jesus Christ was the Son of God was the worst “god delusion” of them all. And he was determined to stamp it out...

But then something happened to Saul – something that changed him forever. You can read the story for yourself in chapter 9 of *The Acts of the Apostles* in the New Testament. Today we know this changed man as Paul – the greatest of the apostles of Jesus Christ.

What happened to Paul? What was it that literally made him a new man? Experts, skeptics, and talking heads will rush to give you their opinion. But why not investigate for yourself?

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