

Timeless Transformations: Religious Literacy

I am with you always, even to the end of the age

The quote from Matthew's gospel, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age," is attributed to the Risen Christ, and is part of the first quotation in any source that was said to have been spoken by Jesus after his crucifixion. In the opening chapter of Matthew, the announcing angel says to Joseph that the baby's name will be called Emmanuel which means "God with us." The words attributed to the risen Jesus in Matthew's gospel are designed by that gospel writer to complete the circle and to demonstrate that Jesus accomplished in his adult life what the annunciation prior to his birth proclaimed that he would be. It is, therefore an attempt both to affirm and to defend the messianic claim being made for Jesus by his followers.

The end of time surely did not refer to the end of the Christian age because no one knew at the time Matthew was written, that there would be anything called the Christian Age. Most scholars believe the Gospel of Matthew was composed between 80 and 90 CE, with a range of possibility between 70 to 110 CE (a pre-70 date remains a minority view). The followers of Jesus when Matthew was written were still members of the synagogue. There is no evidence that Jesus meant to establish a new religion or that he would have or could have said or used the words "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

What did dominate the early Christian movement was the anticipation of the end of the world, which, they believed, would be marked by the second coming or the return of Jesus. This hope seems to have declined by the time the Fourth Gospel was written and John's version of Pentecost or the coming of the Holy Spirit begins to be substituted for the literal second coming of Jesus. Pentecost stories appear only in the book of Acts and in the Fourth Gospel, both of which appear to be works of the tenth decade.

Now, with that in mind, it is clear that Jesus did not promise to be with us to the end of the Christian era. The author of those words meant the second coming of Jesus, which would in that period of history mean the end of the world.

The Post-Christian era is a time in history when the Christian Church or the Christian faith no longer dominates the life of Western Europe and the United States. The erosion of this influence began with the work of Copernicus and was brought to full fervor in the Enlightenment with the work of such people as Galileo and Isaac Newton. Christianity's influence in Europe and in the United States today is minimal and, where it is influential, it appears to be so in the most negative of ways: Witness the Church's war on women, which includes not only its negativity to both contraception and abortion, but also its still widely voiced hostility toward those who want to have women be priests, bishops, archbishops and Popes. If that were not already enough, we could also point to the church's continued prejudice against homosexual persons and its ill-fated attempt to diminish the insights of Charles Darwin. Ours is today a secular society and hence a Post-Christian era.

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Did Jesus say he would always be with his disciples?

Yes	No
<p>Mt.28:20 "Lo, <i>I am with you always</i>, even unto the end of the world."</p>	<p>Mt.26:11 "For ye have the poor always with you; but <i>me ye have not always.</i>"</p> <p>Mk.14:7 "For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: <i>but me ye have not always.</i>"</p> <p>Jn.12:8 "For the poor always ye have with you; but <i>me ye have not always.</i>"</p>