

*If the human race discovered other intelligent life, would the discovery change us?*



*By Ian Woodley*

Recently I watched a science TV programme which visited a radio telescope that searches for signals from alien civilisations. In his enthusiasm for this project the presenter commented: 'If alien life was discovered, it would change everything'.

Without thinking, I immediately responded back to my TV: 'Would it?' Now, this presenter is not alone: many people believe that, if the human race discovered aliens, then our outlook would completely change overnight. Suddenly, humanity would work together towards a new cause, a new purpose—to reach out and relate to this different life form.

My question, however, still stands. Would such a discovery change our behaviour? When the Americas were 'discovered' in 1492, Europe encountered new cultures and civilisations. This did put our world in a new light, which Europeans then decided to exploit and conquer. Many science fiction films create

# An alien hope

a fear of contacting alien life—as those beings then try to enslave us, or worse, eat us! But maybe these films have got it wrong. Perhaps the aliens are the ones who should be afraid!

I do understand why these scientists hope to change the hearts and minds of humanity. They recognise that the world can't go on like this. As I write, tensions between the United States and North Korea appear to be worsening. Could the frightening idea of a nuclear conflict be back on the world's agenda? Given this, the desire to make humanity focus on something 'bigger than ourselves' does make sense.

Yet, my question continues to haunt me. Why would the discovery of other intelligent life change us? If being alone in the universe doesn't prompt us to stand together, why would finding alien civilisations make any difference?

The question, of course, is not new. All periods of history have been full of wars, started for all sorts of reasons. Around 2,700 years ago, a man called Isaiah lamented over the state of the world: 'The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths' (Isaiah 59.8).

Interestingly, this same Isaiah was not all doom and gloom. He looked forward to a time when the world would see the arrival of someone he called the 'Prince of Peace' (Isaiah 9.6). Is it possible? Could someone arrive on this planet that could make such a difference?

Some 700 years after Isaiah, a man called Paul picked up this train of thought. But instead of looking forward, he declared that this Prince of Peace had already arrived! Paul stated that Jesus Christ had brought peace into the world. More than that, he insisted that this Jesus is the only

source of true peace and hope for the world.

Given that the last 2,000 years have seen no halt to our warmongering ways, perhaps Paul's pronouncement of peace seems very premature. After all, World War One was fought between nations that called themselves Christian. They all seized the opportunity to heap death and destruction on each other. Perhaps, though, the problem is that not many have really taken Jesus seriously.

In 2016, a project called Breakthrough Starshot was announced that hopes to explore the stars and search for alien life. It seeks to raise \$100 million; among the project's backers is the British physicist Professor Stephen Hawking. I find this project very exciting. The endeavour of discovering more about another solar system would be wonderful. However, can we really say that the same level of resource has been put into proving whether Jesus can be the true source of peace?

Hope is a fragile commodity. A project that offers to supply the world with hope is always worth investigating. I look forward to seeing whether Breakthrough Starshot ever becomes a reality. The downside is that the spacecraft will take 20 years to reach its goal—and it hasn't even been developed yet!

But while we wait, we can test out whether Jesus is worth looking into. The records of his life are freely available on the internet and the good old fashioned book of his life can be bought very cheaply. So, why not check out whether Paul was right, that Jesus can be our source of hope for today.

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