

Interviewing Vampires and Apostles

I have followed with great interest this past month the unfolding story of author Anne Rice. How did the author of “Interview with a Vampire” and many other books with Halloween type titles come to a compelling personal faith in Jesus Christ? I had just caught bits and pieces of a few television interviews, and I wanted to know more. So when I saw her latest book, “Christ the Lord,” in a bookstore over Thanksgiving, I bought it right up so I could read for myself!

I enjoyed the book immensely, devouring it in less than a week. It was obvious Ms. Rice had done a ton of research into the era that Jesus was born into. The book fictionally presents Jesus in the first person, as a child, coming bit by bit to the realization of who He is as the Son of God. Reading the book will thoroughly acquaint a person with the religious and cultural and political world that Jesus grew up in. I especially appreciated the sensitive and reverent tone Anne Rice took in writing this novel, and I found myself saying several times, “yeah, it could have happened that way!”

Of course there are a few things I would quibble with. Catholics in general view Jesus’ half brothers and sisters as older than He was, perhaps from another marriage Joseph may have had prior to being betrothed to Mary. In that line of thinking Mary remains a virgin her entire life. As a Catholic Ms. Rice takes that point of view. I would join most Protestants in believing that Jesus was the oldest, and the rest of the children were the physical children born to Mary in later years of marriage to Joseph.

The author also includes a few of the speculative stories of Jesus’ childhood from well after the gospels were written as an example of what may have happened during his childhood. She does a great job explaining her decisions and research dilemmas in the Author’s Note at the end of the book. And from my perspective her note at the end is itself reason enough to buy the book. It is there she describes her lifelong quest for meaning, finally fulfilled in knowing Jesus.

And that is the reason a Baptist Pastor is recommending to skeptics the work of a Catholic writer who is known for writing about vampires. In her journey to Jesus Anne Rice reminded me of my own desperate search for meaning. During Christmas time in 1984 I was a professing atheist consumed with discovering the answers to the great questions that haunt mankind:

Why am I here?
What happens when I die?

Because I believed that there was no God, I thought there would be no life after this one, and I had decided that life was pretty well just pointless. You just make the best of it, and then you die. Just like the ancients said, “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die.” That’s what I professed to believe. But inside I knew there had to be something more. There’s a Bible verse that says, “God has set eternity in the hearts of men.” Inside I knew there was something, or Someone, I was missing.

Like Anne Rice says in her author's notes, back then I just kind of assumed that since so many scholars have written against the reliability of the gospels, the Christian faith was probably a sham. Rice writes:

“Having started with the skeptical critics, those who take their cue from the earliest skeptical New Testament scholars of the enlightenment, I expected to discover that their arguments would be frighteningly strong, and that Christianity was at heart, a kind of fraud.” Christ the Lord, Page 312.

What I have discovered over the years is that the evidence against Christianity is not nearly as well formulated as those who profess to be intellectuals assume. Rice again:

“What gradually became clear to me was that many of the skeptical arguments-arguments that insisted most of the gospels were suspect, for instance, or written too late to be eyewitness accounts- lacked coherence. They were not elegant. Arguments about Jesus himself were full of conjecture. Some books were no more than assumptions piled assumptions. Absurd conclusions were reached on the basis of little or no data at all. In sum, the whole case for the nondivine Jesus who stumbled into Jerusalem and somehow got crucified by nobody and had nothing to do with the founding of Christianity and would be horrified by it if he knew about it- that whole picture which had floated in the liberal circles I had frequented as an atheist for thirty years- that case was not made. Not only was it not made, I discovered in this field some of the worst and most biased scholarship I'd ever read.” Christ the Lord, Pages 313-314.

What Anne Rice did find compelling was the gospels themselves. And so did I! At Christmas time in 1984 I met Jesus in the middle of a sermon from the gospel of Matthew. A short time after that, someone gave me a Living Bible. I read the New Testament in 3 weeks, the whole thing in 3 months. And the sense of meaning I had longed for became as clear as the stars on a crisp December night. Thank you Anne Rice for reminding me of the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ!