

## Anne Rice "Quits" Christianity

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### In the News

For most of her adult life, author Anne Rice was, as she described it, "a pessimistic atheist." She became famous as the author of a widely read series of novels about vampires, at least two of which were made into movies. She also wrote stories about witches and even penned some dark erotica.

In 1998, however, after nearly 40 years of denying God, Rice returned to the Catholic Church of her youth. Eventually, she announced that from then on, she would write only for God. She has since produced two novels about Jesus -- *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt* and *Christ the Lord: The Road to Cana* -- and one called *Angel Time: The Songs of the Seraphim*. In 2008, she published her autobiography, *Called Out of Darkness: A Spiritual Confession*, in which she detailed her journey back to Christ and her decision to become a Christian.

Late last month, Rice announced on her Facebook page that she has "quit being a Christian." In her fuller explanation, she said she isn't leaving Christ and that her faith in him remains "central to my life." What she's abandoning is Christianity, which she's come to see as a "quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious and deservedly infamous group."

As an example, Rice posted an article about comments made by the head of a youth outreach ministry, who reportedly described Muslims who call for the execution of homosexuals as "more moral than even the American Christians." Rice commented, "This kind of thing makes me weep," and added, "Maybe commitment to Christ means not being a Christian." She later posted a comment attributed to Mahatma Gandhi: "I like your Christ; I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."

In announcing her decision to leave Christianity, Rice said she refused to be anti-gay, anti-feminist, anti-artificial birth control, anti-Democrat, anti-secular humanist, anti-science and anti-life in the name of Christ. "Following Christ does not mean following his followers," she said.

Rice said she is still "an optimistic believer in a universe created and sustained by a loving God."

Rice's announcement has drawn both sympathy and scorn from within the Christian community.

Brian McLaren, a pastor and author of *A New Kind of Christianity*, said that although he's chosen to stay in Christianity, he had stated in his book a conclusion somewhat like Rice's: "I do not believe in Christianity the way I believe in Jesus. I am a Christian who does not believe in Christianity as I used to, but who believes in Christ with all my heart, more than ever." McLaren went on to say, however, that no group of people is free from the "bigotry, intolerance, violence, stupidity and pride" that are part of the human condition, and that all religions fail in the practice of their faith. But he saw the possibility of solidarity between "failed members of failed religions ... and ... people who have dropped out of failed religions as well." (See the *CNN* link below for context.) McLaren said, "Those who leave religion and those who stay can work to expand that gracious space of solidarity, which, I think, is what Jesus called 'the kingdom of God.'"

Another pastor, Timothy Merrill, who is senior editor of the preaching journal *Homiletics* (and is a member of **The Wired Word** editorial team), took a more contrarian view of Rice's announcement. Calling her decision "narcissistic," Merrill wrote: "A few years ago, she foreswore the fangs and blood genre, and decided to try swimming in a different pond, and now, decides she doesn't like it. She doesn't like the bullies, she doesn't like the other kids splashing her in the face, she doesn't like bumping up next to people she abhors, she doesn't like

the fat guy doing belly flops off the low board, she doesn't like watching lethargic youths climbing out of the pool with their trunks halfway down their butts. These people are not True Swimmers, she says. Well, maybe not, but I guess I'll leave it to the LifeGuard to toss these people out when the time comes."

Merrill continued, "Rice wants to be a Christian without being known as a Christian. Well, you don't get to do that. What you get to do is to be a voice in the pool saying to the bullies and splashers, 'Hey, cut that out, will you?! For Christ's sake!'"

And he didn't mean that last phrase as profanity.

More on this story can be found at these links:

['Vampire' Author Anne Rice 'Quits' Christianity. \*The Christian Post\*](#)  
[My Take: Why I Support Anne Rice but Am Still a Christian. \*CNN\*](#)  
[The Narcissism of Anne Rice. \*Homiletics\*](#)

## **The Big Questions**

1. What practices or prohibitions promoted in your church as "Christianity" embarrass you? Why? Do some appear to be "bullying"? Are those practices and prohibitions the essence of the gospel as Jesus presented it? If not, how should we regard them?
2. What do you think Jesus would say to people who want to be his followers but not be part of the church?
3. What is the *primary* message of Christianity? Is it basically anti-something or pro-something? What is that "something"?
4. To what degree is being happy in Christianity related to finding the "right" church? Is there such a thing?
5. Some churches interpret Christian living and practice quite conservatively. Others interpret it quite liberally. Still others are somewhere in between. Is anything gained for the kingdom of God by indicting other Christians as misunderstanding the faith? Explain.

## **Confronting the News with Scripture**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

### **Colossians 2:6-7**

*"As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."* (For context, read 2:6-15.)

These verses present a good definition of what it means to be a Christian -- having received Christ, continuing to live our lives in him, rooted and built up in him, established in the faith, as the result of teaching by the church.

**Question:** What else needs to be added here to make this a complete definition of what it means to be a Christian?

### **1 John 5:1-2**

*"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments."* (For context, read 5:1-5.)

The first sentence above is straightforward in its declaration that believing in Jesus as the Christ (the Messiah) brings one the second birth -- that is, brings one salvation. But John goes on to talk about loving the children of God and obeying God's commandments. In this context, "children of God" means other believers in Christ, and John connects loving God with loving fellow believers (which isn't the same as agreeing with them on every point).

In the previous chapter, John, still talking about fellow believers, said, "Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also" (4:20-21).

**Question:** In John's view, love flows in a continuous circuit, originating from God and flowing to the individual believer and then on to fellow believers who, in turn, love God. What happens when we take fellow believers out of the loop?

### **1 Corinthians 12:14**

*"Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many."* (For context, read 12:12-27.)

Paul uses the human body as a metaphor for the church, and he makes a lot of the fact that no part of the body exists in isolation from the other parts. Continuing the metaphor, he says, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you'" (v. 21).

**Questions:** What occurrences have made you feel that you didn't want to be identified with Christians in general? How did you deal with that? How should you have dealt with that?

### **Hebrews 10:24-25**

*"And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching."* (For context, read 10:19-25.)

Apparently Rice isn't the first follower of Jesus who chose to disassociate from other believers. The writer of Hebrews noted that such disassociating was "the habit of some." He said believers shouldn't do that, however, because they need to "provoke one another to love and good deeds."

**Questions:** It sounds as if Rice sees some Christians as engaged in self-righteous judgmentalism (or at least unloving pronouncements). What could she do to provoke fellow Christians to love and good deeds? How do you do that?

### **Matthew 5:16**

*"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."* (For context, read 5:13-16.)

In the context for this verse, Jesus says that his followers should be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The verse above, which is the concluding statement of this section, indicates that the way we let our light shine is through good works. The way we let our light shine is through good works. (It's worth repeating.)

**Question:** What pronouncements and/or actions from your denomination or church do you feel need to be challenged in light of Matthew 5:16?

### **Questions for Further Discussion**

1. What do you make of the fact that most of the messages Rice has received in response to her announcement have been positive?

2. What do you make of the comments made by the head of a youth outreach ministry, who reportedly described Muslims who call for the execution of homosexuals as "more moral than even the American Christians"?

3. The same week that news broke about Rice leaving Christianity also included news about a church in Gainesville, Florida, that plans to burn Qurans on the 9/11 anniversary. Does that promote the gospel? Is it likely to make people feel invited to follow Jesus?

4. Comment on this: C.S. Lewis' classic book *The Screwtape Letters* is written as though one devil were giving advice to another. In one place, the master devil advises the apprentice to trip up the Christian assigned to him by getting him to notice his fellow worshipers. The master devil says, "Make his mind flit to and fro between an expression like 'the body of Christ' and the actual faces in the next pew. It matters very little, of course, what kind of people that next pew really contains. ... Provided that any of those neighbors sing out of tune, or have boots that squeak, or double chins, or odd clothes, the patient will quite easily believe that their religion must therefore be somehow ridiculous."

### **Responding to the News**

This is a good time to review how your church portrays Christianity to those outside its walls.

### **Closing Prayer**

O God, help us let our light shine before others so they may see our good works and give glory to you, our Father in heaven. Amen.