

For four men of the cloth, an innocent excursion turns into a "trial by ire."

## **THE DEFENSE RESTS**

"Don't look now, Kaylie but we're about to be graced by four clowns who believe in ancient fairy tales."

"Forrest, please, that's not like you."

Head hunched between his shoulders, the leather jacketed young man turns to the young lady on his right; his voice, low and ripe with scorn.

"Why not? They worship 2000-year-old nonsense spawned by barely literate goat herders ...

... Face it, someone has to tell them the truth."

**Hi, Tony here. We're in Sebastians, the best bookstore on the Southside. A family business for three generations, the owners Robert and Mary Grace Sebastian pride themselves on their ability to get a copy of almost anything ever put to print. Oh, and their coffee shop is an extension of Sam's Bistro, with Sam supplying the coffee and the delicacies; making Sebastian's doubly attractive.**

**Today finds Reverend Williams, Mike Daniels, Father O'Malley, and Father Scanlon on a mission to find sources for an upcoming meeting of local churches. And it seems their clerical garb has drawn the attention of an "enlightened" onlooker.**

**Stopping for coffee, their appearance has raised both the antipathy and the arrogant condescension of a young man at the next table.**

**The university has just started its fall semester, and it seems our young friend, most likely a student judging from his tee shirt, is eager to impart his wisdom, not to mention his disdain of religious belief**

**Knowing the four objects of his contempt, I think Forrest is in for some rather telling insights.**

*Let's listen in ...*

Hearing the young man's remarks, Reverend Daniels turns to the source.

"Excuse me, son, what'd you say?"

Realizing his remark was overheard, young Forrest assumes a defiant pose; yet his tone belies a nervousness in his voice. Not to mention the embarrassment in the eyes of the lovely Kaylie.

"Well, I don't think people who believe in the nonsense science has disproven should be taken seriously," he says. "It's a two-thousand-year-old fairy tale told by barely literate goat herders in an attempt to explain life before science proved it a bunch of nonsense. There is one book that cites your Jesus' life, and it's full of historical inaccuracies."

Oh, and I'm not your son."

"Sorry," Mike says.

Surprised by the young man's vitriol, the clergymen remain silent.

"What's your name?" Father Bob asks after a momentary pause.

"Forrest."

"Well, Forrest, can I ask you a question?"

"Okay."

"Who was the first President of the United States?"

Shaking his head, the look on the young man's face suggests he feels almost insulted.

"You're kidding?" he says.

"No, I'm serious. Don't you know?"

"Washington, of course."

"How do you know?" Martin asks, joining the conversation. "After all, there's no one around who met him. Can you tell us George was anything other than an imaginary person dreamed up by people lining their pockets selling history novels and souvenirs?"

"C'mon." the young man sneers. "We have countless documents and narratives about him."

"Like what?"

**"Documents with his signature; newspaper articles, portraits, periodicals, and thousands of eyewitness accounts. History proves his existence."**

**"Forrest, can you produce just one of those eyewitnesses? Who wrote those newspaper articles? And who's to say those portraits aren't just some traveling whiskey salesman?"**

**Silence.**

**"No, no one today has first-hand knowledge of George. You can't prove those documents aren't forgeries and those people you cite were truthful. You exalt your contemporary scholars who attest to Washington, then denigrate as "goat herders" those who write of Christ. A bit duplicitous wouldn't you say?"**

**"Well, to follow that train of thought," Forrest says, his mood increasingly combative, "with your Jesus, we have none of the above. His name isn't signed to anything and there are zero contemporary writings by him."**

**"Well, besides the writers of the New Testament, there's numerous historical references and archaeological evidence," Father Bob says. "The gospels, the letters of Paul, the gospel of Luke, who, by the way, was a Greek, and early church fathers who actually knew the immediate followers of Christ. And there are many more not included in the Bible."**

"Those writers had an agenda," the lad retorts. "I'm talking about contemporary historians and none of them documented the story of an itinerant Galilean preacher who angered the Romans, was put to death and then came back to life. You're telling me that wasn't worth a mention in Roman history?"

"Forrest, Jesus didn't anger the Romans or Pilate," Martin says. "To the Romans he was an insignificant Jew. It's doubtful anyone in Rome even knew of Him."

"No, as long as they paid their taxes and remained peaceful, Judea was of little interest to Rome," Father John adds. "It was the Siberia of the empire."

"Forrest, it was contemporary religious leaders who brought him to the attention of Pilate, and trumped up the charges that got Him condemned. Pilate, being a coward, acquiesced to their demands. So, no; Roman historians would have had little or nothing to say about Jesus."

"And secondly, the leadership of the day removed all references of him from their writings," Martin adds. "They wanted no mention of Jesus in their history. Ergo, there was no one except one Jewish historian, and Christ's followers to write His story."

"Well, all mentions of him in the writings of Josephus have been studied and found to be forgeries," Forrest counters.

"Not true. Jesus is mentioned twice in Josephus' work, 'Antiquities of the Jews'," Father Bob says. "Now, one is recognized as an embellishment or a forgery; thought to be the work of later Christians; that is true. The second however simply mentions Jesus as the "alleged" Messiah, thus placing Him in a historical context."

"And by the way, Josephus was no favorite of Christ's enemies, as he was thought to be in league with the Romans. Still, he is a recognized historical authority; independent of the New Testament writers."

The conversation lapses.

Noting the lull, Father John looks at the young lady.

"Kaylie, is it?"

"Yes sir," she answers, her tone shy and slightly embarrassed.

"Are those textbooks yours," he asks, motioning to two books beside her.

"Yes."

"So, from the titles, you're studying Egyptology?"

"Yes, Ancient Egyptian history and archaeology; two minors I'm pursuing."

"So, Forrest, if you accept as truth what's in Kaylie's books, you're telling me from some stick figures and other scratchings on a five-thousand-year-old tomb, you

can tell the history of some minor Pharoah, but the writings of people three-thousand years later are the fairy tales of goat herders?"

Again, silence.

"Those who actually wrote the NT were learned men," Reverend Daniels adds. "Literate men; scribes and followers of those who had first-hand knowledge of Christ. Luke, who wrote one gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, was a physician; someone I'd hardly call a goat herder."

"And you mentioned science. Tell me, is the theory of Evolution a fact?"

"Absolutely."

"Forrest, by definition, theories are not facts, regardless of how much you want them to be or how many times you repeat them. Science is good, necessary, something we need, to continually add to our knowledge of our world. But it has not proved your points. In fact, there are constantly new discoveries pointing to numerous truths of the Bible."

"And there's one fact you're missing," Father Bob adds.

"What's that?"

"No one willingly gives up his or her life for a hoax or a fraud, especially one having no personal benefit."

"What do you mean?"

Martin joins the conversation. "Maybe the greatest proof of the reality of Christ lies in the Roman history you cherish," he says "Not to mention the actions of man himself."

"And that would be ...?"

"Those who willingly gave up their lives during the persecutions of the early Christians. Those who had first-hand knowledge of Jesus or His immediate followers and heard a narrative so compelling they were willing to die rather than offer one pinch of incense to some pagan idol. As Bob said, no one willingly gives up their life for a hoax or a fraud, especially one that has no personal benefit to them."

"Forrest, would you be willing to die for your belief in the Theory of Evolution?"

Again, no reply.

Standing abruptly, Forrest nods to the clergyman and takes Kaylie's forearm ...

"C'mon, Kaylie ... let's go ... we've got a class."

Watching the two disappear from view, Reverend Daniels chuckles ...

"Ah, the wisdom of youth ..."



**The question of the existence of Jesus of Nazareth is the subject of much derision among those who deny the existence of God, or His interaction with mankind throughout history.**

**Skepticism, doubt, and disbelief aren't evil. Quite the opposite. They are often the basis of new and expanding understandings of our world. But isn't it imperative to examine, critically, objectively and without prejudice, all the facts, all sides of an issue, and all that history offers us, and ...**

**,,, not simply accept biased opinion as the basis of one's belief system?**

**Thinkaboutit ... I'm Tony Baggz.**

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