



A must-read on the Christian faith! Not a dry dissertation, but a vigorous and immensely entertaining 21st Century "chat" between two insightful lawyers and authors, Steve Baughman and Ellsworth ("El") McMeen. Passionate, yet humorous; provocative, yet heartfelt. You'll be chuckling while you ponder deep spiritual matters in this engrossing dialogue. This vivid book also lends itself to Bible studies, and to studies in Christian apologetics, philosophy, and law.

Objection! Overruled!

Or, Two Lawyers Have a Little "Chat" About God and Hell

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Objection! Overruled!

(OR, TWO LAWYERS HAVE A
LITTLE “CHAT” ABOUT GOD AND HELL)



Steve Baughman & Ellsworth McMeen



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**(Or, Two Lawyers Have a
Little "Chat" about God
and Hell)**

Steve Baughman
and
Ellsworth McMeen

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There should be a readiness, on our part,
to investigate with candor to follow the
truth wherever it may lead us....

*Prof. Simon Greenleaf, Harvard Law School
(b. 1783 - d.1853)*

Introduction

Steve Baughman is a graduate student in philosophy at San Francisco State University. He has practiced law in San Francisco for over two decades. In addition to his law degree, Steve holds a Master's Degree (U.C. Berkeley). Steve is interested in philosophy of religion as it pertains to the central doctrines of Christianity. (Read: he is a skeptic about Christianity.) He lives in San Francisco.

El McMeen is a retired New York City lawyer. He is a graduate of Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania Law School. El has been part of church formation, governance, and outreach, has led Bible studies and fellowship groups, and has written numerous articles, tracts, and study materials on the Christian faith. (Read: El is trying to follow Jesus.) El lives in central PA.

These gentlemen are also internationally acclaimed acoustic guitarists and authors of books for Mel Bay Publications. They first met in

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a musical context in the early 1990's. They have taught together, and shared the concert stage in Berkeley, Sacramento, and the Washington, D.C. area.

In 2006, Steve and El engaged in a "spirited" (Read: slash and burn) exchange of correspondence regarding Christianity that became the "Passion Dialogues." For several years this piece was presented on the website of The First Presbyterian Church of Sparta, NJ, and stimulated Internet discussion and interest around the country.

They thought this would never happen again. They hoped, perhaps, that this would never happen again. In their impressionable youth (Steve is in his 50's and El in his 60's), they were wrong.

In a roughly two-week period in late February and early March 2013, they did it again. E-mails, at all hours of the day and night, flew back and forth from San Francisco to Huntingdon, PA. This took place during the Christian season of Lent. (El jokes that he gave

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up sleep for Lent.) When they stopped to catch their breath, and assembled the material, they discovered to their amazement that the e-mails had turned into over 100 typed pages of text!

Keeping It Real

The conversation recorded in this book does not have any substantive textual additions. The tone, words, and format—sometimes formal, sometimes highly informal—have been retained. The only changes involved correction of some typos, some streamlining, and some elimination of phraseology that, well, might have been slightly inappropriate or bordering on the defamatory. <☺ Boys will be boys after all (whether they are in their 50's or 60's). Chapter headings were inserted in mercy to the reader.

This document is not intended as a complete attack on or defense of Christianity. It is stimulating, to be sure, on those scores. At its core, however, it is not an attack or defense at all. Some heartfelt issues come up, and some heat (and hopefully light) occurs, but this document - - fortunately, perhaps -- does not even include all

the e-mails in the exchange. Moreover, in compiling this document, Steve and El were sorely tempted to add arguments that were missing, emphasize things that should have been better emphasized, and temper some of their statements.

But if they had done that, it would have ceased to be a conversation, and that's what it was. It was a chat via e-mail. And it was a conversation that took place over a period when both Steve and El were quite busy on other fronts.

What this book offers is a real-life example of people discussing deep issues regarding the Christian faith. To be sure, the protagonists are lawyers, and the discussion sometimes centers on the questions themselves, burden of proof, and similar matters. Those can be very important. (They, admittedly, can be a parry or dodge, too.) The conversation also reveals the players' intuition about when things have gone too far or too hot and heavy, when to take a break, when to offer a break, and when to talk about other things. None of that was calculated,

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and the result is not dominated by self-satisfied “gotcha” elements. (You will note some lecturing, and real or feigned finger-wagging, head-shaking, and patronizing, but lawyers have been known to do things like that.) The document preserves and honors the different styles of expression on the part of Steve and El.

The reader should not approach this document expecting that any major question will be fully resolved, or that every major question will even be raised, or, if raised, answered well. (Goodness, that sounds like a lawyerly disclaimer! Well, what do you expect; look at the actors in this little drama!) What it clearly shows is that a skeptic and Christian can actually have a good conversation on the Christian faith, honor their principles, their faith, and each other in the process, and still take their marbles out to play another day.

Chapter 1

Setting the Stage: Steve's Thesis Summary

The journey started innocently enough. Steve shared with El by e-mail the multi-page summary of Steve's proposal for a Thesis topic for the M.Phil. degree. The problem being considered --a serious one--was the philosophical question of how a loving God can permit eternal torment in Hell for temporal decisions. The context for this examination was an evolving argument by a prominent American educator, Dr. William Lane Craig. Steve reconstructed that argument as a series of propositions that Steve formulated based on the Christian faith (or what El might say were Steve's or Dr. Craig's views, for the purpose of argument, on the faith). Steve then provided an analysis on logical grounds of the strength of an important conclusion of Dr. Craig's, and supported his own conclusion that Dr. Craig's conclusion was weak.

The propositions, as reconstructed by Steve, included but were not limited to these:

God creates the saved.

God creates the damned.

A perfect being would not create the damned.

Therefore, God either is not perfect or doesn't exist.

The argument also contains a methodology for dealing with what seems to be a lack of "proportion" between the level of human sin/error in temporal life and eternal punishment imposed by God.

This is very summary, but it is important that the reader know this context to make sense of later discussion in Steve and El's exchange concerning Dr. Craig and the Thesis.

Steve's purpose in sharing was to show El where Steve's studies were taking him, rather than to elicit any thoughts from El.

El, however-- fatefully--decided to ask some questions. Well, the rest is our little history.

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[Note: In reading Steve's text throughout this book, the reader should realize that dealing with capitalization, punctuation, and other niceties can really be annoying on an iPad or smartphone. (E1 Note)]

From: Steve

To: E1

Sent: Tues., Feb. 26, 2013 [Late at Night]

see the head space i am in, major rush, ferry

[Steve currently lives on a houseboat, accessible by ferry. Remember, you are dealing with someone in California here. <☺ (E1 Note)]

will read yours later, no need to read this, just peruse

[Thesis summary omitted; a part is quoted below, for flavor.]

13. It is possible that due to the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, there were no feasible worlds which God could actualize only the saved without some overriding deficiency arising in the created order.

Chapter 2

El Has Idea; El Regrets Idea (Chickens and Foxes)

From: El
To: Steve
Sent: [Early Morning]

So, I'm up at 2:30 AM, get my coffee and have a thought for you. Our recent discussion arose, as we both recall, out of your thesis topic. I'd like you to consider --just ponder--a different format and emphasis. I hasten to say that what I am suggesting may not be appropriate for your course of study and I would completely understand if you said that, but here it is: not a debate, but a conversation between a skeptic and a Spirit-filled Christian about how each does life.

My impression (maybe I'm wrong) is that skeptics and Christians rarely talk with each other--they fight and grandstand. What your and my discussions reveal is at its core a different

way of doing life, each one defensible on its own terms, and, if the truth be told, each one "somewhat" understandable by the other, even if the other doesn't choose to admit that for fear of losing debating ground.

There is history to this, obviously in Greek philosophy, but also in a book I read once of a discussion between an evangelical Christian and a Jewish scholar --I'd have to look up the names.

[Note: the book is The Christian and the Pharisee: Two Outspoken Religious Leaders Debate the Road to Heaven (R. T. Kendall and David Rosen; Publisher: FaithWords (2007).]

Maybe there are a lot of books like this out there that I don't know of, but my suspicion is that there are not. Again, this is not about debate, Christian apologetics, or ranting or criticizing, but simply understanding each other.

[Note: the chicken is actually offering to open the chicken-coop door for the fox! (El Note)]

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I really need more coffee now. If this complicates your life, forget it and do what you were going to do. <☺

El

From: Steve

To: El

Say more. I am interested. But, other than trying to be less dagger-like, how will this differ from our previous exchange?

[Note: The Passion Dialogues, 2006]

I like the idea, not of course to replace my thesis, but as an additional project that may be widely read. And, yes, I would be glad to do it with you.

luv

s

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From: El
To: Steve

Greetings, at 2:50 AM, Eastern time. Dealing with you gets in the way of my sleep. God, if he exists, must have some purpose in this.

Your Thesis stuff is very interesting!! Thanks for sharing. Is this Dr. Craig's wording--"God is perfect," "God created the damned", "God created the saved", "overriding deficiency"? Your statement of Dr. Craig's argument? Are you just dealing with him (with his particular perspective on things), or anybody over time who has dealt with your issue? Thanks for sharing this. I am understanding your world better now, and it is a world in which I am comfortable in functioning to no small degree. Let me know on these questions before I comment further.

Before I forget it, some time I really would like to know your own beliefs on these matters--not just flaws in others' belief systems. You live, breathe and think in a belief system, not an unbelief system, and I'm curious what it is, since you are honest enough to admit limits in those

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systems, even secular humanism and atheism. What belief system are you willing to go to the mat for? No need to do this now.

El, running on coffee and fumes

From: Steve

To: El

This is not suitable as a thesis. It is not a philosophy topic, nor an academic one, but it is an interesting one and an important one and there is no reason I cannot do both. But I don't quite get how it would be different from the last round.

[Steve Beginning to Roll ("Rant," El Says)]

As for why I choose this thesis, the Memo Problem is one of many serious problems I see in Xtnty.

[Note: The Memo Problem is a term created by Steve to summarize the proposition that there are many, many people in the world who

never “got the memo” on Jesus, yet are in danger of hell for not responding to the Christian message, and that is unjust.]

Given such problems I see no prima facie reason to take Xtnty seriously, any more than Zoroastrianism or Islam or astrology. If these problems are solvable (or at least partially so in a way that I think is plausible and honest) it might make Xtnty a live option worth considering. But when I look at the Memo Problem, Hell, Human and Natural Evil, the lack of an account of why the 27 documents are considered Word of God [**Note: sometimes summarized as WOG in later e-mails of Steve’s**] etc., etc. and see that the Christian responses to these are unsatisfying (to say the least), I see no reason to take its claims seriously (and I think nobody else should either.)

One example (not necessarily the strongest, but surely one of them): you posit a just God, but also one who permits eternal suffering for temporal sins. Insofar as "just" implies proportionality, your God is not just. The believer's defenses of this strike me as desperate,

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ad hoc, and a bit dishonest (kind of what I would expect from defense lawyers with a very guilty client).

After racking up a few of these issues, one is fully justified in dismissing the religion as not a serious contender for belief, just as I have also done with astrology (after some careful study). But I want to make sure I am understanding the defenses and am fully justified in dismissing them.

And as with astrology, anecdotes about profound personal transformative experiences and the like mean nothing to me about the truth of the claims.

I think I see a greater connection between intellectual pursuits and religious belief than you do. Personally, my studies have freed me from guilt and uncertainty about my entitlement to unbelief. The more I study, the more I see unbelief as healthy, honest, and justified. That has been liberating for me.

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I need to have an outline and 5 pages commentary done today, and I am at the office....emailing you 😬

luv

s

From: El

To: Steve

From the tone of your e-mail, I'm not sure what I am proposing can be accomplished. Or at least now. That is OK! Do your thesis and then we'll see.

[Chicken re-thinking issue of opening chicken-coop door. (El Note)]

When you get that done, then maybe we can engage, if you are interested, on what makes people tick--which is always a combination of the intellectual, the emotional, the volitional and the experiential (and, in the case of a Spirit-filled Christian, the spiritual, or you might say what he considers to be spiritual). What differentiates thinking skeptics and thinking Christians (and,

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no, that is not an oxymoron<☺), I suspect, is the subjects to which the intellect is directed, and the weight given to answers/lack of answers in the mix of decision-making and achieving plain old peace and happiness. But you must be interested in that issue, and we both must be very honest about where we are coming from before we would start down that road. That's tough with guys, and we may not get there, but we still are dear friends, so it's OK.

I do want you to know that I have spent hours and hours reading and watching debates on these issues, and know of the Christian responses to the points you raise. I am actually capable of making a judgment on the strength and weakness of the various responses.<☺ That may be a fact that I haven't shared with you -- much of it since our big exchange in 2006. I didn't want to leave you with the impression that I was uninformed on these things, although I am sure that you are more knowledgeable on the views of various scholars.

The Bible addresses the Memo question in various ways (including a statement Jesus made

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somewhere implying that access to the gospel was a prerequisite for responsibility for decision-making), but not in great detail.

By the way, "anecdotes about profound personal transformative experiences" might mean something to you if you were raised from the dead. < ☺ Hahaha! Be well, E

From: Steve

To: El

<Quoting El: "From the tone of your e-mail, I'm not sure what I am proposing can be accomplished.">

oops, sorry, I think it was more being in a rush than being grumpy.

Yes, a personal anecdote of me being raised from the dead would mean a lot to me, but I would probably assume that I was never dead. <☺ I heard Sam Parnia on Fresh Air a few days ago, resuscitative doctor, making conclusions about post-mortem experiences, but

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not considering that maybe the "mortem line" just needs to be moved a bit.

I did not know you had knowledge of, or were interested in, analytic issues like the Memo problem. I am more interested in engaging on this than in personal encounter stuff, which I do not know how to deal with since for all experiences you may tell me you have had there are many other people with opposing beliefs to yours who claim the identical experiences. That kills most of their probative value, to me anyway.

nicer tone? 😊 luv s



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