

THE INTERVIEW

Leigh Nelson





Many people believe "Holy Books" are the inerrant word of God; others believe that when transcribed by humans, such writings may acquire errors from their scribes. Are such books still Holy? Can or should they be tested by facts and logic? This fictitious short story challenges the reader to consider the author's use of facts and logic in regard to Christianity. Will the reader agree or disagree? Will the reader believe or disbelieve?

The Interview

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ISBN 978-1-62646-379-0

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All Scripture references are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida.

Printed in the United States of America.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2013

First Edition

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND

This interview occurred over several days in a small Oklahoma town in September 1957.

When school started in September 1957 for my senior year in high school, all my high school buddies were making two-a-day football practices while I was working for the company which owned our local theaters. My job was ticket seller, doorman, concessionaire, janitor, and part-time film projectionist. To make enough money to go to college the next year, I also worked at a second part-time job in the local bank's basement filing filled up bank loan ledger sheets that had been removed from the current working tubs. To get around town to my jobs and school, I had bought a 1937 Dodge for \$75 that drank gas and belched smoke, but it almost always started and ran.

Although our town was small, we had a daily newspaper. In an effort to keep circulation up, fill space, and encourage advertising, the paper usually devoted a page at least once a week during the school year to articles written by students, which, for the most part, were about school events or issues of interest to students. The high school journalism class usually wrote the articles and laid out the page which the newspaper edited and changed as necessary.

School started Tuesday, September 3rd, the day after Labor Day. On that first day of classes, our journalism teacher gave us an assignment

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that had not been done in previous years. It was to interview someone we did not know, a kind of “person on the street” interview. If our interview article was selected by the newspaper for printing, we would receive a grade of “A” on this assignment and the “A” would replace our two lowest test scores during the semester. The interview had to be done and submitted in about three weeks.

I was thinking about this journalism assignment as I left the downtown theater late Saturday afternoon, September 7. I had just completed my shift as doorman and was headed to eat before reporting to the drive-in theater at dark as the projectionist. My shift there would end about midnight. As I walked toward a café, a man appearing to be between 50 and 60 walked out of the barbershop and asked me as I passed “Will you please tell me where the nearest café is?” I told him I was going there myself and would show him if he would give me a ride. He said “Sure, please get in.” We drove the three blocks to a barbecue joint. By the time we got there, he had offered to buy my dinner, an offer I gladly accepted.

As we settled into a booth and ordered, it hit me that, since I didn’t know this man, this may be my chance to get an interview. I blurted it out all in one breath: “I need to interview someone I don’t know for my high school journalism class project. If it gets printed in the newspaper I can get an A! May I interview you?” He looked startled but quietly responded “You don’t know me because I just arrived in town and probably won’t be here long. My name is Adam Christianson. What is your name?” I immediately felt like an idiot, realizing that I, as the “reporter” had not introduced myself or even asked my interviewee’s name. I sheepishly answered “I’m Leigh Nelson.” My mind had gone blank so Adam asked the needed

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questions: "Do you have a pencil and paper? About what subject do you wish to interview me?"

Fortunately, I did have a pencil and some paper for the homework I was taking to the drive-in. A projectionist had short breaks of "free" time between switching over and changing out a reel of the featured film until the next switchover. I used this free time to do my homework. The first thing that our teacher had said this first week of class about interviews was to get your subject's full name so I asked "Do you have a middle name?" "David" was the answer. I finally also remembered something about what, when, where, why, and how so I asked "What do you do, when did you arrive in town, where are you living, why did you come here and how long do you plan to stay?" Adam answered "This can be a short interview. I have a small construction company in Ft. Worth where I live. I am a finish carpenter and have a dozen employees, sometimes more, working for me. We work on both new and rehab construction projects. I arrived in town today, and I am staying at my uncle's house south of town on the highway. I am here because my uncle died and I plan to stay until I clean out his house and get it ready to sell. His wife died several years ago. His daughter is about my age, in ill health but trying to hold down a job in Memphis to make ends meet. She desperately needs the money from the sale of this house. Construction is slow right now in Ft. Worth, so I had the time to do this for my cousin. I expect to be here for only a short while." Our food arrived in time to spare me further embarrassment.

We ate dinner pretty much in silence. He finally repeated his earlier question. "Do you have a subject you want to talk about?" Since I had not thought about a subject, I answered "Why don't you pick a subject

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that will catch people's interest?" Adam smiled as he answered "If you want that, you need to get an interview with someone with knowledge about an interesting topic, not someone like me. " I silently agreed with him, thinking that surely I could find someone with more knowledge about interesting topics than this construction worker. At that moment, however, I remembered that I couldn't know my interviewee. This construction worker was probably the only person in town that I had not met before. Let's face it. Since the theater was about the only entertainment in town, I had probably sold a theater ticket or a bag of popcorn to everyone in town and knew their name.

"Do you have any controversial ideas?" I asked. Adam laughed. "Practically all ideas are controversial to somebody. Yes, I have thoughts, but I am not knowledgeable enough about any subject to be a good source for your interview." I persisted "You are the only one in town that I don't know. One of the requirements of this interview is that I cannot have known my interviewee before. If you will be my interviewee I would really appreciate it!" At this point, I was almost begging. Adam thought a minute before answering. "OK, I will do it. My uncle's house is adjacent to the drive-in theater on the south side. Come out some time and I'll take a work break and we can talk." I surprised him when I said "How about now? I work at the drive-in tonight and I don't have to be at work until nearly dark." Adam stood up and said "I'll get the check. Do you have a car? If so, I will drive you to it and you can follow me out there." I assured him I had a car, made a weak offer to pay my part of the check, and quickly thanked him when he repeated it was on him.

CHAPTER TWO

INTERVIEW -- SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 1957

I followed Adam's car out to his uncle's house. His car was much newer, nicer and faster than mine, so I had trouble keeping up with him. Fortunately, I kept him in sight until he pulled off the highway onto a dirt drive. The drive snaked through some trees back to a house that was on a lot right beside the rail fence of the drive-in. Adam had already gone into the house when I pulled up. I noticed a folding lawn chair leaning against the fence. It would be very easy to step between the rails and walk over to one of the drive-in speakers with your chair. Adam's uncle had probably seen more free movies than I had.

When I got into the house, Adam asked how long before I had to report to the drive-in. Since it was about 6:00 and I did not have to report until it got dark, which was about 8:00, we had about two hours. I found it interesting that although I was asking for the favor of an interview, Adam was seeking to fit my schedule, not his.

I asked Adam again to just pick any interesting subject he wanted to talk about. He thought for a minute and then said "Do you want to discuss different thoughts about the universe?" At this point, since I had no other ideas, I said "OK". I thought it could be interesting to talk about people's views on the current science fiction articles about the possibility of space exploration. It was certainly a big enough subject that I should be able to fill up a column with a few of the things Adam may say, and if it was his choice, so be it.

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Adam sat down on an old upholstered chair in the living room and waited for me to begin the interview. I did not know how to start except to say "Please start with any of your thoughts about the universe." Adam thought a moment before he spoke. "Let's start with what people might say when asked "How do you believe the universe began? People generally answer this question in one of three ways. The atheist's answer will be the universe was created by a cosmic event that occurred without a creative force's planning or design, and, with the passage of time, we have arrived at today's universe. A second group of people will say that a creative force, by its own planning and design, created the universe, and, with the passage of time, we have arrived at today's universe. This group may be divided, Deists saying the creative force only intervened at creation or for a short period thereafter, while Theists say the creative force has continued to intervene at various times. The last, and perhaps the largest group, will be agnostics, which will say "I don't know".

I immediately saw Adam was not taking me into science fiction and space exploration. Since I had asked for the interview, I decided to let him go down this path a little farther before I tried to shift the interview to the future of space exploration. I asked "How do you think it happened?" Adam seemed to think a lot before he opened his mouth. After a moment or two, he continued "I think everyone should try to apply their own logic to that question in order to reach an answer that satisfies them. Not all people will reach the same answer. In applying my thought processes to these three positions, I would consider them in reverse order. My logic forces me to discard the third answer of "I don't know", which is the position of an agnostic. Although it is a truthful response, we know that the universe does exist, and, analogous with everything else we know, it probably did

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have a beginning. Scientists seem to currently agree that this beginning was a “Big Bang”, a cosmic explosion. What caused the Big Bang? Was it a creative force or, if not, how and why did it happen? Furthermore, did not something exist prior to the Big Bang? These questions are valid even if we don’t know the answer. Agnostics choose not to make a decision, perhaps because they believe the correct answer is unknowable, and perhaps it is better to make no decision than a wrong decision. I, however, do not agree with this reasoning. I want to look for some logic in each of these positions, even if it is all based only on circumstantial evidence.” With that said, Adam paused again.

My new thought now was that, since this was a school assignment, the scientific “Big Bang Theory” may have more chance of being selected for publication than science fiction. “Have you found any answers to the questions you just posed?” Adam continued to pause before answering. “I find the second position, either Deism or Theism, as a logical answer as to what created the “Big Bang”. My belief of a creative force is founded on what I perceive as the observable features of the natural world. If I am correct and a creative force created the “Big Bang”, it would also be logical that this creative force existed prior to the “Big Bang”. The circumstantial evidence supporting my reasoning for a creative force creating this universe at a specific instant is the same whether you are a Deist or Theist. The universe has laws - the laws of nature, mathematics, physics, gravity, etc. Considering this in comparison to our known, everyday world, people might reasonably conclude that laws require a lawgiver. That lawgiver must somehow have existed at the creation of the universe to implement these laws. Another analogy to our everyday world is a construction project like the ones on which I work. These projects

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have architects to design them and engineers to draft specifications. For me, this presents some circumstantial evidence of the probable existence of an unknown architect and engineer at the moment of creation. There are many other analogies, but there is no reason to belabor the point. You get the picture.” At this point, I realized we would be talking more about religion than science, but I needed the interview and at least I could challenge him about his beliefs.

When Adam quit talking again, since I was not religiously inclined, I sarcastically said “So you believe in this little bit of circumstantial evidence for a Creator of the universe! Why don’t you think creation was by a cosmic event without any planning or design, i.e. it just happened?” Adam mulled this question over before answering. “This is the atheistic position, and some may say it also is supported by analogy in that, since no one has seen a Creator in our current, everyday life, one must not exist and belief in one is superstition. I would say this is an understandable belief, but I don’t believe it is logical because it is not intellectually supported by even circumstantial evidence. There is a very old saying that no one can prove a negative statement. If you say there was no Creator of the universe, you have made a negative statement. The absence of evidence of the existence of something is not evidence of its non-existence. Many things can exist, or have existed, without anyone’s current knowledge of their existence. To believe otherwise is to say, for instance, that there are no unknown species of plants or animals in existence today, and we know all those that previously existed but which are now extinct. Don’t you believe instead that we do not know everything that exists and there is much left to be learned and there is a good possibility that we may never learn it all?” When I didn’t answer, Adam continued, “I disagree with the atheistic belief that there is no Creator. It appears to

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me to be both an assumption made and a conclusion arrived at without the logical presentation of evidence; i.e. evidence which may prove the nonexistence of a Creator or evidence which may disprove the natural laws that at least provide some circumstantial evidence as to the existence of a Creator. Since I can't prove a negative statement nor find logical support for atheism, whether circumstantial or otherwise, I do not agree with the atheistic viewpoint. Although my logic for a Creator is based only on the circumstantial evidence that I perceive in nature and is not provable by any laboratory experiment, it appears to me to be the most logical and best supported of the three positions, and therefore, to me, is the most persuasive.

"So you believe in God?" I asked. For once, Adam immediately answered me. "I don't believe I have mentioned the word God. Do you have a definition of a God that you could believe in?" Adam stopped and waited for my answer. At this point, I got mad and wanted to end the interview. I couldn't answer his question because I had never really thought about what I believed or why I should believe it. Besides, I was supposed to be the interviewer, not the interviewee. I looked at my watch and then lied, "I better get to work. I forgot that I needed to get to work early to check out the projectors." I debated with myself if I wanted to come back for a second interview. At this point, I had no clue where Adam was going with this discussion. I felt that what we had discussed to this point was not sufficient to get printed by the paper, and, because he had taken this in the direction of religion, even if it were sufficient, it probably would not get published as school news. However, I was very curious as to what Adam might say next. Maybe he believed in a creator, but not God. I reluctantly asked for a second interview.

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Adam, polite as always, asked “What fits your schedule?” I answered “Tomorrow would be best for me after 4:00.” Adam answered “Tomorrow it is.” Surely, I thought, by then Adam will have forgotten his question to me about my beliefs, but, if he hadn’t, I would at least have time to get prepared.



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