

ASK ME ANYTHING

PROVOCATIVE ANSWERS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

J. Budziszewski



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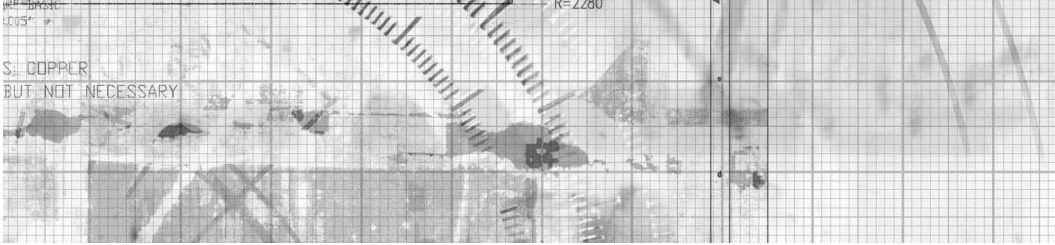
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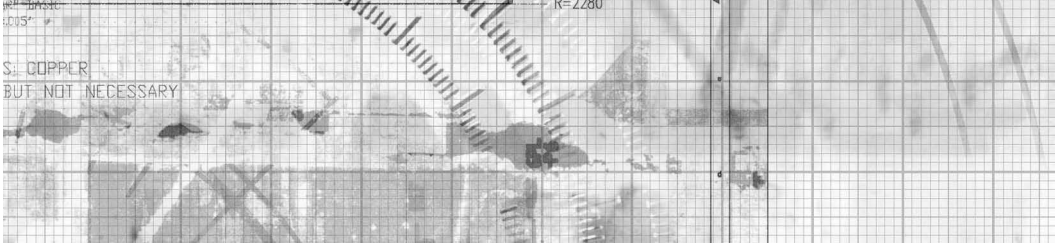
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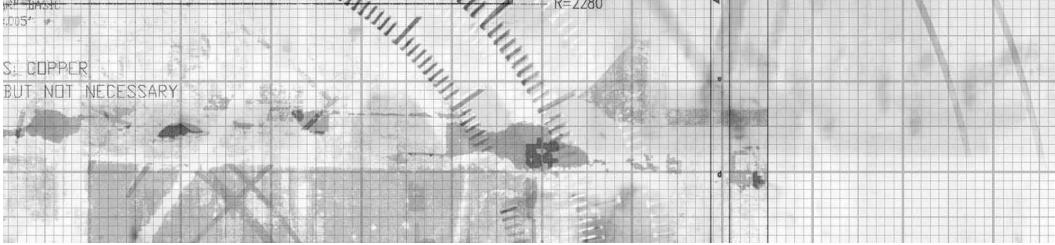
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My first thanks are to Sandra, without whom Theophilus would be mute. Gold there is and rubies in abundance, but lips that speak knowledge are a rare jewel.

I am grateful to all those who wrote to Theo, whether with questions or in anger, for they provided an opportunity to give back a tiny part of what has been given to me. Special thanks to those who wrote back, sometimes years later, to say that he had helped. They refreshed my spirit.

A monthly column in an online magazine is an odd thing for a professor to write. I owe the odd thought of doing it to the visionary founder of *Boundless* webzine, Candice Watters, who not only edited the column for the first three years but came back to edit this book.

This book is dedicated to all those I have never met who have become students of mine through Theophilus. May they become friends of the One from whose friendship he takes his name.



INTRODUCTION

Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus.

—LUKE 1:3

Dear readers:

Allow me to introduce my friend Professor M. E. Theophilus—Theo to his wife, friends, and a few of his older students. Theophilus is a college professor at Post-Everything University—not what you would call Christian-friendly territory. The division in which he teaches is called the School of Antinomianism, and he holds a position there called the Chair of Pre-Modern Studies.

Theophilus got his position by a fluke. When he was hired, he was a very different person than he is today. In fact, he was an atheist, and it was only afterward that he became a Christian. As you might guess, that changed the school's feelings quite a bit. Some of his colleagues would love to get rid of him. They wish now that they hadn't awarded him the PMS Chair. Lucky for him, he's tenured.

Students seem to be in his office all the time, confiding in him and seeking his advice. As a college professor myself, I can tell you that this is far from common. My students don't talk with *me* like that. Five years ago, I began publishing some of Theo's conversations in a student magazine called *Boundless*. It's online; maybe you've seen it at www.boundless.org. One thing led to another. Soon the published conversations were getting thousands of visitors, and mail began pouring in. As you can see from the table of contents, this book contains a fair sample of both his conversations and his letters.

I've called these dialogues Theo's "conversations." Are they word-for-word transcripts? Some parts are, but to make them suitable for publication I've had to take liberties. You can think of them as fiction in the service of real life. A lot of readers also ask if Theo and I are the same person. Let me set that notion to rest. As anyone who knows both of us can tell you, he's much cooler. I knew you'd want to know more about him, so the other day I passed on a few questions. Here's how our conversation went:

Budziszewski: What does the name M. E. Theophilus mean, and where does it come from?

Theophilus: Luke addressed his New Testament writings to someone named Theophilus. The name means "Lover of God." An early bishop named Theophilus was also known for enlightening the Goths—sort of what yours truly does, don't you think? But I don't know how my family got the name.

Budziszewski: You've only explained the Theophilus part. What about your initials, M. E.? I've always called you just Theo.

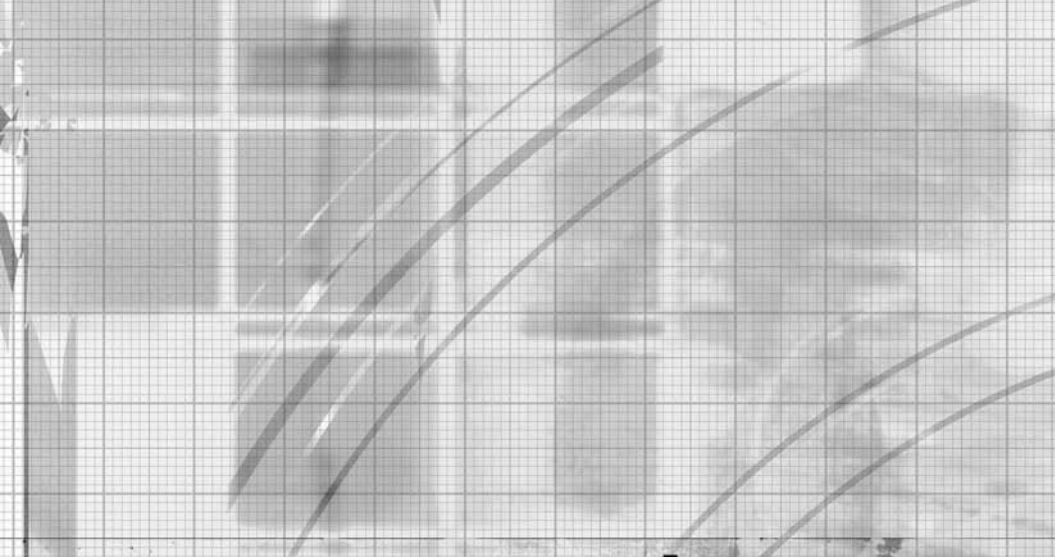
Theophilus: Are you asking about my first and middle names? Those were my father's idea. He happened to be reading Luke 1:3 when my mother announced that she was pregnant. Ha, ha, Dad.

Budziszewski: Then what do your students call you?

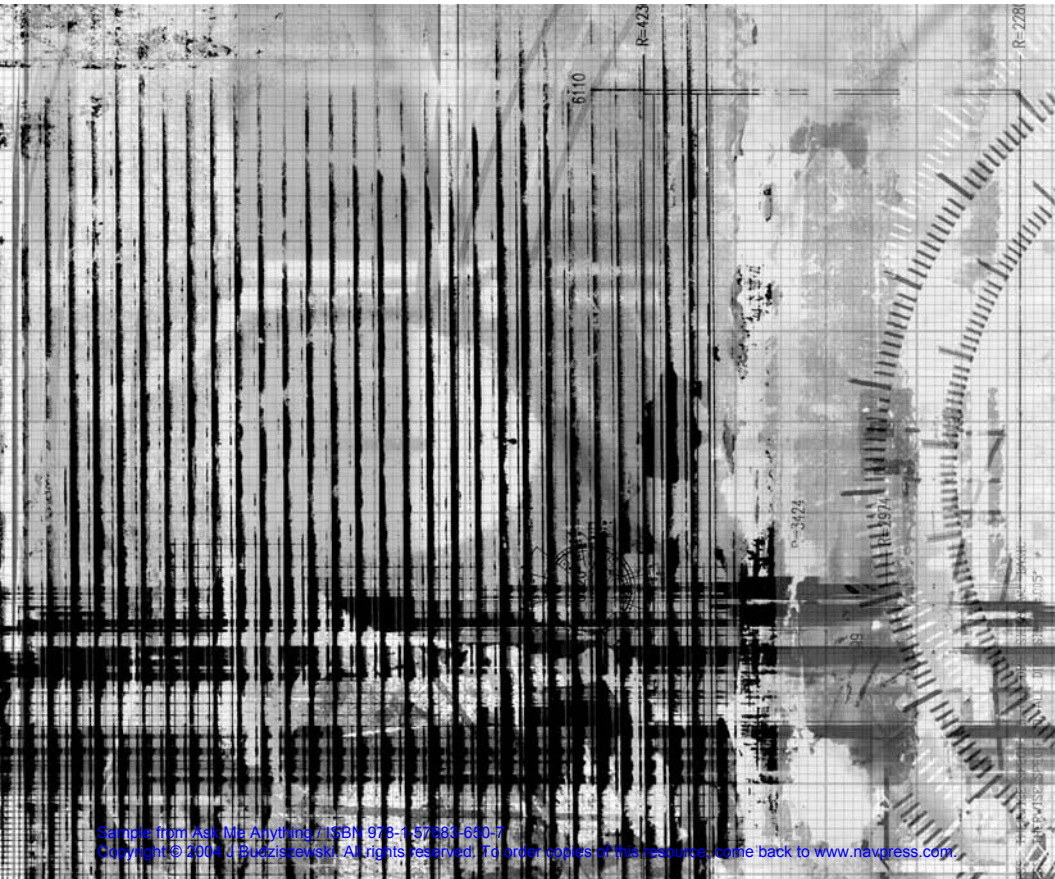
Theophilus: "Perfesser."

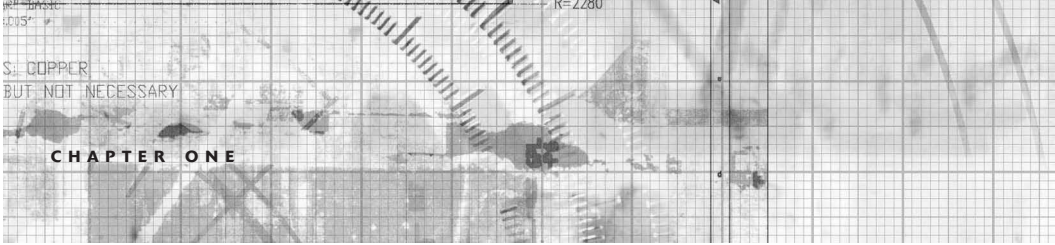
That's enough from me. I hope you like my friend.

Blessings,
The Author



GIRL AND GUY STUFF





COURTSHIP, PART 1: WHO'S ON FIRST?

WHY IS IT SO HARD FOR MEN AND WOMEN TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER?

It was only a little past eleven. The Union was almost empty. Expecting a quiet lunch, I chose a table where I could look out the window at the Quad. No sooner had I set down my tray than a familiar face materialized. "Expecting someone, Prof?" It was Mark Manasseh.

"Not at all. Pull up a chair." He sat down with a plate of something I didn't recognize. "What's that? Some kind of taco?"

"Haven't you ever had a gyro?" he asked. "It's like a Greek taco. Gyros have been around for a long time."

I shook my head. "Food has changed."

"Food's not the only thing that's changed," he said and lapsed into a moody silence. He chewed meditatively.

"So what else has changed?" I asked.

"Huh?"

"You said food's not the only thing that's changed. What else has changed?"

"Oh. The rules. They're always changing them on you in the middle of the game. I can't tell who's on first anymore."

"Who's 'they'? Has the Faculty Senate changed the graduation requirements again?"

"No. Actually I was thinking of a girl." He played with his gyro and then looked up. "I guess I'm not being very clear."

"Clear enough—girl changes terms of relationship, guy confused. You don't have to explain."

"Maybe I should. You and I've talked about this kind of thing once before, and I could use the perspective of an, um, older person. Do you mind?"

I shook my head. "I have time. Being so old, you know."

"I only meant—"

I laughed. "I know what you meant. Go ahead."

"There's this girl, Molly. She's a friend. But that's it—just a friend. You know, we talk and do things together. But I talk and do things with *all* my friends."

"Do you talk and do things with them the same way you talk and do things with Molly?"

"Not exactly. She's a *close* friend." He paused. "But *just* a close friend."

I smiled. "Just very close."

"Right."

"And a girl."

"Right."

"When you talk and do things with her, are other people included?"

"Sometimes."

"Uh-huh."

"But I do things *just* with other friends too. Like I told her."

"Like you told her? How did the subject come up?"

"I'm still trying to figure that out."

"Suppose you tell me what happened."

"Well, we were hungry, so we were having a pizza together at Molto Alimento."

"Just because you were hungry."

"Why does there have to be another reason? Can't friends eat a pizza?"

"Sure."

"Anyway, we were almost done when she said something about how we've known each other for almost two years. I said yes. She said we've had a lot of fun together. I said yes. And then she said some other

stuff . . . I don't remember what—you can't listen to everything a girl says or it would wear you out. I must have said yes to that, too, which was probably a mistake. Next thing I knew, she was talking about how a girl needs a commitment or something. I guess it took a few minutes for what she was saying to sink in, and I asked, 'What do you mean?' And she said, 'Commitment' and spelled the word. And I said, 'It's not like we've been dating or anything.' And she said, 'What do you call it when we've been seeing each other exclusively for two years?' And I said, 'What do you mean exclusively? I do things together with lots of other people.' And she said, 'Not with other girls you don't.' And I said, 'Girls and guys both.' And she said, 'What girls?' And I said I couldn't think of any and she asked me why I was holding back and I said I didn't know what she was talking about and then all of a sudden she was crying and she left the table and the waiter looked at me like I was dog meat and I couldn't find her so I went home. And I keep trying to phone her but she won't return my calls and it's all I can . . . I mean, I . . . well . . ." He looked embarrassed and took a deep breath. "So that's why I say she changed the rules."

"From what to what?"

"What?"

"What did she change them from, and what did she change them to?"

"From friendship rules to dating rules."

"But that's not exactly what she said, is it?"

"What do you mean?"

"You quoted her as asking something like, 'What do you call what we've been doing?' So she thinks you're the one who's trying to change the rules."

"But I *never* said we were dating!"

"But weren't you?"

"Don't I have to *think* it's a date for it to be a date?"

"Do you have to think a car is a car for it to be a car?"

"This isn't like that."

"Mark, when two people of opposite sex enjoy a social activity, it's called a date."

"But it wasn't *romantic*."

"Not all dates are romantic, but any date is potentially romantic. That's why steady dating produces expectations, especially among girls. Life is short. Why should they waste their time dating guys who aren't serious?"

"We were never romantic."

"She thought you were."

"Yeah, well, I guess that's true."

"And are you so sure that it makes no difference to you that Molly is a girl? Would you worry like that if some guy wouldn't return your calls?"

"But she didn't say we were dating either. Not before. Once someone asked if we were dating, and she answered before I even had a chance. She just laughed and said, 'Oh, no, we're just friends.' See? She *did* change the rules on me."

I sighed. "Mark, these days neither girls nor guys seem to want to admit that their dates are dates. But they have different reasons for not wanting to, and those reasons kick in on different occasions."

"What are you calling reasons? Start with girls."

"I think one common reason girls today don't call dates 'dates' is that guys today think 'date' means 'sex.' The idea of dating as courtship has almost disappeared."

"I don't pressure girls for sex."

"Does *she* know that?"

"She ought to. She knows I'm a Christian."

"I'm sure she knows that sexual intercourse outside of marriage is contrary to Christian principles. But a lot of so-called Christian guys *do* pressure girls sexually. How does she know that you won't?"

"I haven't pressured her *yet*, have I?"

"But you say you aren't dating, remember?"

"Oh. Well, yeah."

"She might think that one reason you haven't pressured her for sex is that up until now, she's gone along with the myth that you aren't dating."

"Maybe," he admitted.

"There's another reason."

"What is it?"

"Girls these days don't often call dates 'dates' because guys these days are so afraid of commitment. You won't say *that* one doesn't apply to you." Mark shifted uncomfortably in his chair. "You see, the girl may feel that the only way the guy will ever court her is if he doesn't have to admit that it's courtship."

"All right, I see your point. What do you say are the guy reasons?"

"We've already covered the first one," I said. "Girls are right—guys these days *are* afraid of commitment. It's part of their fear of growing up. And there's another reason: fear of failure."

"Fear of failure?"

"If you're 'just friends' and she says no to pizza, it's no big deal. But if you ask her on a pizza date and she says no, it's humiliating. To relieve the pressure, guys don't call dates 'dates.' That's related to another girl reason. Most girls don't *want* to humiliate guys, so if the guy doesn't call it a date, they go along with him."

"Stop. You're bringing back memories of junior high school."

"That's just it. Some guys never quite get past that stage."

"Are there any other girl reasons?"

"There's one more, but we've covered that one too."

"We have?"

"Sure. You mentioned it yourself."

"When?"

"Right at the beginning of the conversation. You said that the rules

of relationships have changed and that you can't even tell who's on first anymore."

"It's true."

"Of course it is. Pressure for sex, fear of commitment, fear of failure—all these things have changed the rules of relationships. Add to these things the feeling that men and women are adversaries, and things look pretty grim. No wonder guys aren't willing to call dates 'dates.' They don't know what they might be getting into."

"Right!"

"The problem is that not calling dates 'dates' doesn't work either."

"Why not?"

"Think of your dinner with Molly."

"Oh." Mark thought for a moment. "So does *anything* work? What *are* the moves of courtship?"