

Nothing Could Be Further from the Truth

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Collected Columns of Reed M. N. Weep, 1997–2011

Reed M. N. Weep

Edited by Alumno Sinllanto

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From the Publisher to the Reader

It may be difficult for us now to understand how and why the book before you achieved such astounding sales when it was first published by my family's firm nearly a century ago, back in 2016. Even by the lax standards of the day it would have been considered sub-literary. Nevertheless, today as then, we need not demand sophistication or decent copyediting from everything we read and—as time and tireless investigation has revealed—there was more to these rambling jests than my forebear Janet Joyce, founder of our firm, originally suspected when she offered Weep a contract (author royalties of 0.00005% net receipts after the first half a million units).

As we reissue this collection as part of our centenary year, we are struck by the enigma that will forever be Reed M. N. Weep. The story of how he cracked the “real” Da Vinci code and used his columns to both mask and subtly disclose his achievement was first revealed by Julian Assange. As the news spread, sales skyrocketed. Three days after the first print run ran out, Weep's student Alumno Sinllanto and Joyce were abducted by angry fans during a book signing. Though intimacies ensued when they were confined together for six weeks—we have that from her diaries—we are certain that had no bearing on Sinllanto's decision to name my great-aunt his literary executor and sole heir. Thus was ensured the inevitable and enduring prosperity of Equinox Publishing Ltd. We trust that we have used the wealth generated by this book in a way that Sinllanto would have approved, buying Bentleys for everyone in the family for three generations.

It is fitting therefore that we are today reissuing Weep's book, including all the original prefatory material by Sinllanto and colleagues that accompanied original publication. For the benefit of the modern reader, we have introduced consistency into the spelling and normalized a number of formatting oddities but otherwise the text remains unchanged from the day it was first launched.

Janet Sinllanto Joyce II
Chief Executive Officer
Equinox Megamedia Worldwide, Inc.
April 2116

Introduction: Reed M. N. Weep: The Man, the Legend, the Columnist

Alumno Sinllanto

This book is composed of columns published over fifteen years, from 1997 to 2011, in the journal first known as *Bulletin of the Societies for the Study of Religion*, which later went on a diet and changed its name to the *Bulletin for the Study of Religion*. The author of those columns was identified by the hilarious and original pseudonym, Reed M. N. Weep. His first editor, Russell T. McCutcheon, suggested pseudonymity, lest the author face retribution from some academic administrator skewered in one of the columns. Little could McCutcheon have anticipated that these would be works of such grace and profundity that those pencil-pushers would die for the barest mention. After Dr. Weep disappeared in 2011, I, Alumno Sinllanto, undertook the responsibility of collecting the columns into this book, not so much because of the demands of devoted readers, but to add a line to my resumé. Preceding the columns are reminiscences of Reed Weep by his four editors at the *Bulletin*. Their limited recollections will leave you only more hungry to know who was this towering, yet enigmatic figure—this man, this legend, this columnist? Here I will pull back the curtain to reveal something of my own experience with him.

Before introducing the author of these columns, a word of background is in order. The *Bulletin of the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion* began its life in 1970, when it was just the *Bulletin of the Council on the Study of Religion*. This was a crucial time for that madcap pursuit, the study of religion, especially for state universities in the United States. Colleges had offered classes in theology since the colonial period, with some of the first institutions of higher education being founded in part to train ministers, as well as computer programmers. And religion remained an element of the curriculum, despite the putative separation of church and state established by the U.S. Constitution. Recent studies have shown the wall of separation between religion and government in America is quite porous. In fact, the Founding Fathers should go back to the contractor who built it and ask for a refund. By the 1960s, a common expedient to maintain this separation

in state universities was that students would take classes about religion in independent, denominationally affiliated schools that would routinely be transferred back to their home institutions. But then courts began to look at this arrangement with a jaundiced eye, as coming too close to state sponsorship of religion. In swept *Abington v. Schempp* to save the day.

Abington v. Schempp is not a clothing store in the mall, but a case decided by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1963. Schempp was a godless Unitarian Universalist who sued the Abington, Pennsylvania, school district for forcing his son to be subjected to Bible reading in public school. Up to that point the lad had only been exposed to the scriptures of Rabindranath Tagore. The Supreme Court did find that compulsory Bible reading and prayers were a violation of the separation of church and state. However, in a concurring opinion it was added that teaching about religion in a government-sponsored school was permissible, “when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education.” Another concurring opinion made a distinction between the sectarian and prohibited “teaching of religion” and the nonsectarian and allowed “teaching about religion.” This is similar to the common differentiation that is made between laughing at someone and laughing with someone, though less funny.

Whatever the legal technicalities, just as independent institutions for teaching religion classes were closed down in the 1960s, new departments of religious studies sprouted like mushrooms in state colleges. So the founding of the Council on the Study of Religion in 1970 came at the time of a new flourishing of the field. The long and tawdry history of the Council, renamed the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion in the mid-1980s, and then disbanded in 2009, need not detain us here, mainly because I don’t know anything about it. Suffice it to say that it was the site of an ongoing struggle over the critical as opposed to the confessional study of religion. The ghost of *Abington v. Schempp* still haunts the discipline. The columns reprinted in this book only comment on this struggle obliquely. In fact, they are generally oblique. But the main subject of this note must be, who was their author?

I can still remember when I first saw Reed M. N. Weep. It was the inaugural day in the world religions survey class that I took as an undergraduate at Large Midwestern University. Six foot three inches tall, his gray beard parted in the middle and flowing back, Dr. Weep—no, after twenty-two years of classes with him I will call him Reed—Reed gave a perfectly organized introductory lecture on the comparative study of religion, though he had to speak quickly, since it took him fifteen minutes to figure out how to turn on the overhead projector. Yes, Reed used an overhead projector throughout his long teaching career, well into the digital age. How can you

make shadow bunnies using a projector mounted in the ceiling, he asked ruefully? It is hard to comprehend that he is now gone. He left the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature in San Francisco in 2011 “to check out the Haight,” and he hasn’t been seen since.

It was in that initial class that my fascination with Shinto was born. What an intricate religion! What a long and profound history! How can I sell my expertise in Japan to U.S. corporations? This is what I used to say to myself back in those days. Since Reed was the Religion Department’s expert in Shinto (as well as in Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Chinese religions—he was nothing if not spread too thin), I was to take several classes with him while working on my bachelor’s degree. This included not only the world religions survey, but an introduction to the religions of Japan, modern Shinto, the Japanese language, and origami. I can still picture him now, five foot three inches tall, his black hair slicked back, folding cranes, with the word “Dark” tattooed on the fingers of his right hand, and “Ligh” tattooed on the left. But he is no longer with us, since he was last seen in 2011 leaving the stage of *Dancing with the Stars* on a stretcher.

So compelled was I with Reed’s approach to the study of religion that I resolved to continue in the master’s program at L.M.U. That I was not admitted into any of the other eight programs to which I applied had, of course, no bearing on my decision. On the graduate level I was privileged to be able to take most of my classes with Reed one-on-one, as the topics were narrowly focused, and the other students avoided him like the plague. This was several years before the nervous breakdown that Reed was to suffer as the new millennium dawned, but he was already team-teaching with Professor Jack Daniels, as he pluckily describes it in a column included in this book. Despite his occasional inebriation—it only happened on days ending in the letter *y*—Reed was always well prepared to sleep through my translations of Shinto religious works. That I still pronounce Japanese with a slight slur is a small token of my debt to Reed. And now he is with us no more, the last images of him taken in 2011 by the dashboard camera of a police cruiser, Reed outside a bar on the South Side, reaching out to the patrolman squared up to face him, pleading, “Don’t taze me, bro.”

Yet this is not an article about me, but about Reed M. N. Weep, actor, model, dancer, whatever. I regret that I was only able to take master’s classes with Reed for eleven years, completing my M.A. in 2003. I progressed through the program so quickly thanks to a generous graduate assistantship. I still remember fondly all those delicious ramen dinners—this was during the good old days when, because of a downturn in state appropriations, the assistantship stipend was paid not in cash, but in Chinese noodles. Often I

had the pleasure of being joined in these feasts by Reed, who would show up unannounced when his beloved wife Constance had kicked him out of the house. Though L.M.U. doesn't have a doctoral program in religion, I continued to take classes with Reed even after the master's, as he assured me that he'd "be able to swing a Ph.D.," and he had no other students. We just don't leave a respected teacher high and dry in my culture, American.

But enough about me, what about Reed? Who was this lion, this bull, this jack rabbit? We already know from what I've written above that, as a teacher, Reed M. N. Weep was inspirational: he inspired many students to leave the field altogether. From the columns published here, the reader will learn that as an author Reed was aspirational. No less than eight books are mentioned: *The Two Habits of People Like Bill Gates*, *What Are They Saying about the Department Secretary?*, the radical vegetarian manifesto *Human Soup for the Chicken's Soul*, *Radical Islam in Afghanistan: I Don't Know Anything about It* (to be published by Suppress the Subtitle Press), the contrarian *Thinking Inside the Box*, *I Was Starting to Believe in Intelligent Design Until I Turned on the Radio to the Song 'Everybody Was) Kung Fu Fighting,* a novel with the title *Atlas Assessed*, and a five-hundred-page commentary on the biblical book of Philemon, which conveniently includes 450 blank pages for taking notes. The reader need not click over to Amazon to pick up one of these tomes, because though all are described in the columns as forthcoming, none ever actually forthcame. I, Alumno Sinllanto, am confident that I will be able to fill this painful gap in the scholarly record by reconstructing at least four or five of these works on the basis of twelve pages of handwritten notes found on a yellow legal pad in Reed's papers. He was a man who was full of potential as an author—empty of actual, but full of potential.

Some insight into the deep regard in which Reed was held as a colleague can be gleaned from the near-reverential comments included in this book by the four men who were his editors at the *bulletin*. The influential methodologist and shadow boxer Russell T. McCutcheon hails Weep as an author who "made no spelling mistakes." A "man in need of serious psychiatric help" is how Reed is exalted by Craig Prentiss, historian and ratemyprofessor hottie. In his tribute, Scott Elliott, biblicist and Bitcoin mogul, hypothesizes that Reed "had been denied tenure, perhaps more than once." And Craig Martin, theorist and other guy whose name is Craig, expresses his appreciation for the columns Reed submitted that "seemed like gibberish." With friends like this, it is no wonder they responded enthusiastically to my request that they write something for this book along the lines of a Festschrift. To a person each replied, "OK, I'll write something, but don't call it a Festschrift. You can call it a Schrift, if you want to, but not a Festschrift."

By the way, the reader will note that following the columns in this book is Craig Martin's announcement that Reed Weep would no longer contribute to the *bulletin*, because he was retiring from teaching at L.M.U. Of course this was nonsense, but Dr. Martin had to provide some explanation to readers clamoring for Reed, and he was too devastated to admit the truth, that Reed was last seen climbing into the It's a Small World ride at Disneyland.

What do we learn from these columns about the parlous state of the university, with its declining appropriations and rising proportion of contingent faculty? What do we learn about the crisis in the humanities, given that students are voting with their feet to abandon existential questions in favor of job-training? What do we learn about the inherent contradiction in religious studies, a field sometimes called the scientific study of religion, but which is neither scientific nor religious? What do we learn from these columns? Not much. Here we encounter fatuous administrators, cynical teachers, and annoying students. Reed has held up a mirror to us. If you read these columns and say to yourself, "Hey, I know that administrator," or "Hey, I've been to that meeting," then Reed's reflections, however otherwise random, have hit their mark.

I, Alumno Sinllanto, have lost a teacher, a mentor, a minor annoyance. I have gained a bachelor's degree, and a master's, as well as coursework towards a nonexistent doctorate. I may not have gained wisdom, or knowledge, or fear of the Lord from Reed, but I have had a few laughs. And, with the publication of this book, I will gain a line on my resumé. And that's what I need. Maybe my eight applications to Ph.D. programs were all rejected last year, with the comment about my recommender "Reed Weep, who is he?" But once those institutions see this on my record, then I'll ride it right to the top.

Reminiscences of the Editors

He Packed a Punch

Russell T. McCutcheon

It is somewhat embarrassing to admit that I have never actually met Reed Weep in person. Although associated with him since the mid-1990s, when I began publishing him regularly in the *Bulletin of the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion*, it would be an understatement to say that he has proved somewhat elusive over the years. In hindsight, and only after coming to know something about his style and the way that he—despite this elusiveness—made his presence known, can I say that I think I first caught sight of him from the back at the crowded bar during the opening reception at the 1995 congress in Mexico City of the International Association for the History of Religions—that is, I was unable not to overhear someone loudly ordering “Margaritas..., like mom used to make ’em!” Having failed to realize that “Don’t drink the water” also meant not gargling while taking a shower, I was preoccupied with issues of my own at the time and so I paid no further notice of the fellow in the comically large sombrero swaggering away from the bar with two oversized lime-green drinks. But then, some years later, I realized that I must have also noticed the same guy again the following year—if “notice” is the correct word for hearing the loudly aggressive and repeated throat-clearing, coming from somewhere near the back of the hotel ballroom, throughout the presidential address of the American Academy of Religion, held that year in New Orleans; poor Larry Sullivan, that year’s speaker, and his attempt to get us to see—well, better put, feel—the study of religion as being all about these mysterious things he called “authentic place” and “defining experiences”—he didn’t stand a chance with that hack at the back of the room.

That year, 1996, was also when I moved to what was then called Southwest Missouri State University, from the University of Tennessee, and when I also began editing the *Bulletin*, a periodical that by then had become a mere wisp of its former self, back when it was one of the publications of record in our profession, going to the homes of virtually every scholar of religion in the USA and Canada (inasmuch as the Council was, back in its heyday, comprised of virtually all the professional associations of religious

studies scholars). Filled merely with summer workshop announcements and the minutes of various inconsequential meetings, it no longer had the pithy but punchy pieces that it did back in the 1970s, when its pages were filled with articles trying to hammer out what the publicly funded study of religion in the USA ought to look like (given that it really only got up and running in the late 1960s and early 1970s). My goal in agreeing to take it over was to recover some of that relevance by recovering some of that punch—something I know I was talking to friends about during that late November conference back in 1996, specifically talking about publishing pieces “with a punch,” working out my ideas in hallway conversations between meeting rooms, in whispered exchanges during lamentable paper presentations on yet another “religion and ...” topic (music? film? science? nature? food? pop culture? You name it, we got it, since an undefinable somethingness can be latched onto virtually anything, of course), but also, more than likely, over a drink (or two) in one of the French Quarter’s many, shall we say, earthy-smelling and poorly lit establishments.

But like I said, I’ve never met Reed in person, and all this is hindsight supposition, to make sense of the fact that a month or so later, once back in Missouri, I received in the mail an unsolicited submission to the *Bulletin*. The return address on the envelope was in the name of a certain “Herr Dr. Professor Reed M. N. Weep, Esq”—so odd a mix of Germanic and British pretension that I became all the more curious to see what was being sent to “That Chap Who Now Edits the Bulletin” (or so the envelope said). Inside was a neatly typed—and, yes, I believe that it had been typed, not word-processed, given the sometimes uneven and differently inked letters, likely on one of those old cast-iron Underwoods that you sometimes see displayed on literary wannabes’ bookshelves—manuscript accompanied by a handwritten note, with impeccable penmanship, that said merely: “How about a nice Hawaiian punch?”, signed simply with the initials “RMNW.” I know it’s not much to go on, but it then took a year or two more, some additional cryptically brief correspondence, and a few additional chance encounters at conferences—there was that man hurriedly striding through the busy hotel lobby, clearing his way by bumping into people, while decked out in a floor-length cape (at the Society of Biblical Literature meeting in San Francisco in 1997), a fellow in tweed arguing loudly with a theme-park employee who was himself dressed in costume with a large, hollow, mouse head and who kept replying, in a muffled voice, “I just work here, Mister!” (that might have been the AAR meeting in Orlando, FL, back in 1998, but I’m not sure), or that guy I saw, from a distance, over my shoulder, sighing audibly, almost theatrically, from near the back of that never-ending morning line at yet another hotel’s Starbucks in yet another conference city, the one with countless sleepy scholars all reading

program books and scanning each other's chests to read their name badges ("I'm up here" I can imagine Reed retorting, pointing to his eyes)—for me to piece together that these appearances were all more than likely Reed, and that he'd probably overheard me a few years before, back in New Orleans, talking about "putting some punch" back into the *Bulletin*. ("Was there anyone ordering margaritas in that bar in the Big Easy?" I've often asked myself...) And he did just that, making a sly reference, in his first submission, to that classic 1960s television commercial where the oblivious tourist in the flowered shirt is laid low by the fellow with the drink in his hand. Although I'm guessing that he is usually decked out in elbow patches and probably smokes a pipe—or at least points the business end of one at people when he aims to make a point that at least he takes to have grave consequence—I've come to think of Reed as wearing a striped shirt, like that little guy in the commercial—Punchy, the Madison Avenue guys called him, as I recall—strutting around, drink in hand, typewriter nearby, ready to pop anyone who needs to be awakened from their dogmatic slumbers.

"Wasn't that a refreshing submission?" his second note said, this time riffing off of that same Hawaiian Punch commercial's closing line, on a handwritten card that came along with his next unsolicited piece, which arrived a couple of months later, in a plain manila envelope once again, after I'd already published his first. By now it was clear that I had a reliable contributor who submitted on time, made no spelling mistakes, and knew what a split infinitive was. But more importantly, he also had no fear of poking fingers in the eyes of those who likely deserved it—in a word, he had tenure. I didn't, back then, and was in a department where I was once warned by a senior colleague that Peter Berger's work set the limit for what counted as theory in the study of religion, and so Weep seemed an ideal addition to the reinvented *Bulletin*. So, by return mail, and after reading over his second submission, I took the leap and asked him to sign on as a regular columnist. He agreed—"I thought you'd never ask" was all the third note said, accompanied by his third submission—and the rest is, as they say, history.

But why, you may ask, has Reed been so private, despite the success his work has had in probing the tender spots of the field? I have no idea. Given his provocative posture in public—again, assuming it's Reed who has flitted in and out of my professional path these past twenty years—his reclusive publishing persona, at least when it comes to me and a few others whom I know (those who are all keen, for their own various reasons, to meet up with him), is puzzling. Not a few people have thought that I was Reed, to be honest, complimenting me in the bathroom at conferences—you'd be surprised how jovial and outgoing otherwise uptight men can be when they're in public bathrooms—over my keen insight, as evidenced in this or

that recent column. I've always deferred the praise to Reed, however, from that second column on how to write a book note—in which he advised that, somewhere in your text, you always ought to cite Amitai Etzioni, saying:

You may wonder if Etzioni is going to have written anything that is germane to the book under review. I've heard his name on NPR, so I think that it is a pretty safe bet that he has. If he hasn't, that won't matter. Most readers will not have read his work. Some will have seen an essay or two. They won't know what you are talking about, but they will still pat themselves on the back for having read something by Etzioni.

—to his, at least in the minds of his more careful readers, mildly offensive series on the world's religions. Without disclosing the details of the agreement, I should add that such deferral was, admittedly, mandated under an agreement that settled a silly little misunderstanding that we had in the late 1990s, which resulted in Reed's (as my lawyer suggests I should now characterize it) unfortunate suspension and then (again, as I would now describe it) rightful reinstatement at the *Bulletin*, back when his legal counsel wrote a letter to me which closed as follows:

If you would like to avoid a costly and messy legal battle, we request the reinstatement of my client's column. We would also like to see this letter published in full in the next issue of the *Bulletin*, but we are reasonable and will not require a formal apology. In conclusion, my client looks forward to a time when he can renew his acquaintance with you. Don't forget those pictures from New Orleans.

All of which brings me back to that dimly lit bar on Bourbon Street, which seems as good a place—an authentic place, if you will—as any to end this trip down memory lane; for Reed soon became Craig Prentiss's problem—or, perhaps I'd better say collaborator—and then Scott Elliott's, and finally Craig Martin's. And after all, who really needs to rehash what's best left forgotten? Besides, the court papers on those defining experiences are sealed.

Hitting Rock Bottom with Reed M. N. Weep

Craig Prentiss

I came to write these brief reflections on Reed Weep in almost precisely the same way my relationship with Reed began: with a message hidden in my “junk e-mail” box. This time around, it was an e-mail from his assistant. But in the year 2000, the lost e-mail came from Reed himself. It was followed

by an angry phone call. “Is this how it’s going to be?!” Reed yelled. “My new editor ignoring me from the get go?!” I had been warned about Reed’s volatile behavior by Russ McCutcheon the day I agreed to co-edit the *Bulletin* with the intention of assuming the role of sole editor within a few issues, but nothing could have prepared me for what I would soon face.

Reed Weep’s darkest period coincided with the beginning of my tenure as *Bulletin* editor. It was a time he rarely alluded to in print, save for a fleeting reference to the nervous breakdown he suffered after a brief separation from his wife, and his having “team-taught [his] classes that semester with Professor Jack Daniels.” The adulation he was receiving for his essays had convinced him that he was a superstar, a true investigative journalist whose sole objective was to expose the rancid underbelly of the field of religious studies. That his most frequent targets were his own students and a Keystone Kops collection of incompetent administrators did nothing to blunt this conviction. Of course, he was unspeakably talented, profoundly insightful, and deliciously acerbic. Yet my years with Reed revealed him to be a man in need of serious psychiatric help—help Reed only sought after major damage had been done.

In my four years editing the *Bulletin*, Reed and I remained in a nearly perpetual state of conflict. It started with the misunderstanding over his e-mail being sent to my “junk” box, but only intensified thereafter. He was furious that I refused to submit his Christmas essay from the perspective of “Fidelio,” his household dog, to the Pulitzer committee for consideration. Between his tears and his assertion that I betrayed him (his Christmas cards to me continue to be addressed to “Judas Prentiss”), I began to regret accepting the position as editor.

The following autumn, his column on “The Torpedo Rec” triggered outrage among non-tenured faculty members across the country. His strategies for undermining the prospects of talented young professors seeking better positions at other universities sparked a sea-change across higher education in the manner letters of recommendation were written. His methods garnered so much attention that they were soon being used to stifle the careers of graduate students before they had even had a chance at employment. It was said that anger toward Reed’s column single-handedly generated the support necessary for the creation of graduate student unions at Michigan State, Temple, the University of Washington, and the entire University of Illinois system between 2002 and 2004, and the mail I received on the column filled an entire shelf in my office.

Drunk with his newfound power (and a great deal of whiskey), I began getting reports that Reed was out of control. Tantrums in the classroom, verbal abuse toward colleagues, and an alleged attempt to bite the registrar

of Large Midwestern University (LMU) when she insisted on his getting the Dean's signature prior to granting a student an "Incomplete" in a class almost put his tenured status in peril.

The lowest point came at the American Academy of Religion's annual meeting in Toronto in 2002. The trouble started when he stole over a dozen free-drink passes (the sort they send us in the mail) for the AAR reception. The eight people in attendance asked him to leave after he began loudly reading erotic passages from a book by Wendy Doniger while badgering the banquet staff at the Hyatt to act them out with him.

The next morning he attended the "Buddhist Critical-Constructive Reflection" group session, still drunk from the night before. He heckled the speakers, challenging them with what he insisted were Zen koans (which amounted to his repeatedly asking "Who's your daddy now?" to which none of the panelists had an enlightened response). Before he could be ushered out of the room, Reed managed to vomit in the lap of Donald Lopez. Years later he would unjustly refer to Lopez as "cranky" in one of his columns, scarred by Lopez's harsh words as the revered scholar left to clean his suit.

I will always remember the Thanksgiving following the Toronto meeting for two things: first, the furious phone call I received from Bob Orsi demanding that Reed be fired, after he had been subjected to hours of harassment from Reed for failing to laugh at his oft-repeated joke about the siddha, the pandit, and the yogi walking into a Waffle House (Reed is the only person who finds this joke funny). Second, the bill I received for over \$3000 to cover the cost of the hotel room Reed had trashed, which was nearly enough to put the *Bulletin* out of business (we were only bailed out when Reed agreed to sell his "Precious Moments" figurine collection to repay the damages). While I could deal with Orsi, the near-insolvency of the *Bulletin* forced my hand.

In early 2003, with the help of his then-estranged wife, some of his colleagues at LMU, and the staff of the *Bulletin*, we staged an intervention on his campus. We tricked Reed into coming to the meeting room by convincing him that he was chairing a new committee aimed at capping administrative salaries—a strategy most of us assumed would be too grounded in fantasy to work on Reed, but by then the alcohol had blunted some of his natural skepticism. Remarkably, the intervention was a success.

Tensions between Reed and I never fully dissipated during the remainder of my tenure with the *Bulletin*, and if he had not disappeared, I suspect he would have instructed his assistant to cut me out of this project. Despite all he put us through, however, I come to this book with a deep sense of awe toward Reed's scholarly legacy. Who but Reed could have possessed such insight into the Vedic tradition to say: "They are especially known for the

discovery of the formula *atman = brahman*, which is a good deal like the formula $E = mc^2$, but only in the narrow technical sense that I don't understand either of them"? (February 2004). Who but Reed could have critiqued President George W. Bush's 2003 State of the Union address so powerfully in the most nuanced and poetic use of Esperanto to appear in print since the language's creator, L. L. Zamenhof, penned the prologue to his 1887 classic, *Unuo Libro*? Through all of his personal and professional problems, Reed Weep succeeded in holding up a mirror to the field of religious studies and to higher education as a whole, while forcing us to engage truths that many of us would prefer to ignore. This honesty and perspicacity was, and forever will be, his special genius. Though I may have lost years of my life from the stress, the passing of time has made me grateful for every moment I spent with Reed.

Who Was Weep? The Reviewer

Scott S. Elliott

I'd been tracking the work of Reed M. N. Weep since my early days in the academy, when his snarky columns appeared regularly at the back of what was, at the time, little more than a pulp rag whose name few ordinary blokes would ever remember. Truth be told, his "work" was about all I had been reading in those days. Of course, just like everyone else, I was learning to play the role of a proper literary cognoscente, a process of "re-education" that entailed shoving Xeroxed copies of the most recent article by some hot new theorist into our satchels like they were wads of freshly minted bills and we were destined for Vegas. But his rants resonated with my grad student angst in a way nothing else could.

We all had our theories about who the mysterious Reed M. N. Weep really was. His writing hinted of medicinal influence. His esoteric commentary intimated that he was someone conversant with eastern religions. There were signs that he perhaps suffered from having been dropped as a child. Certain tendencies of style suggested a mild case of ADD, or OCD, or dementia, or perhaps just a second-rate education. Much of his writing suggested that he had been denied tenure, perhaps more than once, but the possible reasons why were too numerous to risk a bet on just one. He was, in short, someone on the fringe, and how he'd managed to land a standing publishing gig with the *Bulletin* was beyond me.

Finally, an opportunity presented itself to get the drop on who he really was. It was during the annual gathering of disenchanting theologians employed to meet quotas for funding purposes at various state and private

institutions of higher learning. I was contemplating bad life decisions after delivering a paper on the influences of Gnostic thought in second-century Alexandrian recipes for unleavened bread, and then spending three hours milling about the cattle lines of the Employment Center in search of, well, anything. I was knee-deep in small talk at the Equinox reception and well into my third glass of scotch when a drop-dead gorgeous publisher's rep sidled up to me like the social director on a fantasy cruise.

"Mr. Elliott. It's a pleasure to meet you. I've been following your work for some time."

"What work?"

"Oh, don't be coy," she said, with an awkward glance at the name tag of the woman standing two conversations to the left of us.

"Anyway," she continued, "I was wondering if you might be interested in taking over editorship of *The Bulletin*. Perhaps you and your handsome colleague here could edit it jointly."

She was speaking of my friend, Shane, whose work had nothing whatsoever to do with either the Bible or religion. He attended the conference every year for sport, using money he made on the side selling desk copies of his textbooks on eBay. Now, of course, I was doubly annoyed: not only was she sucker-punching me into a thankless editing stint, but I was suddenly playing wingman.

"What's the catch?" I asked.

"Why nothing at all! We're certain you would be just the one to help us expand our readership, especially among certain coveted, hard-to-reach demographics, like octogenarian expats who write academic fan fiction. Besides, wouldn't a line like this on your vita be such a boon to your blossoming career?"

"Fine. I'm game. But only on one condition: I get to meet Reed M. N. Weep face to face."

"Oh, absolutely," she replied, and then mumbled something about being in touch as she handed Shane her business card.

The next day, through a series of exchanges via the "Find-a-Friend" corkboard outside the exhibit hall, we arranged to meet that night in the lobby of the conference headquarters' hotel. Upon arriving, I noticed immediately, thanks to their matching T-shirts, the current editor, a couple of past editors, and the publisher's rep gathered by the door leading to the parking deck. Someone said to me, "Let's go. Weep has insisted on meeting us off site."

We piled into a grey Econovan and proceeded to meander all about the greater metro area for the next forty-five minutes. Finally, we pulled up behind the dumpster at some shady motel twenty-six blocks south of the convention center.

I got out of the van as casually as I could, pulled a cigarette from my pocket, and lit it with the Chi-Rho-embossed Zippo my ex gave me when I finished my translation of Malatesta's *Manoscritti Perduti*. In the shadows created by the flame, I caught a fleeting glimpse of a hulking figure just as he darted around the corner of the building. I ran after him, but by the time I arrived he had vanished and was nowhere to be found. Looking down, I spotted a manila envelope lying on the pavement. I opened it to see what was inside, and I couldn't believe my eyes. It was nothing less than the handwritten notes for the only review ever to have surfaced of my critical edition of Malatesta. They were scribbled, almost illegibly, on letterhead that said "From the Desk of R. Menachem Naftali Weiner."

His remarks were illogical and rife with *ad hominem* ramblings aimed less at me or my work than at what seemed like phantoms. It was a confusing rant that read as if it presumed to be some grand theory of everything. This wasn't original scholarship. It was something greater, something more important than that. It was a review. And in that moment, it became immediately clear to me that Weep was not merely a reviewer; he was The Reviewer. Like The Monk, The Puzzler, and The Collector (a.k.a., Comic Book Guy), he was an irrepressible villain, without which there would be no academic superheroes. His secret identity was for our own good, a necessary and brilliant ruse to keep us in hot pursuit of red herrings lest we inadvertently awaken to our own manufactured identities and cease the ongoing production of knowledge on which the world so desperately depends. His pseudonymity was the very essence of academic freedom, the perfect embodiment of tenure.

I tucked the folder inside my coat and returned to the van. As I approached, one of the others apologized. "He said he'd be here. I don't know what happened."

"No worries," I said. "I need to be getting back. I'm on a book review panel tomorrow, and I need to make a few changes to my notes."

Brilliant Obsessive: A Reed Weep Comedy

Craig Martin

The first time I met Reed Weep was at the annual AAR/SBL meeting soon after I was appointed as editor of the *Bulletin*. We were to have a breakfast meeting on Sunday morning and discuss our plans for his column; when emailing back and forth to make our plans and decide which hotel we would meet at, we had discovered we were staying in the same hotel. During our

exchange I mentioned—mistakenly, in retrospect—my room number at the Hilton. I was surprised that Sunday morning to be awoken at ten minutes before 5 a.m.—hours before we were supposed to meet—by a heavy pounding on my hotel room door. I stumbled out of bed, looked out of the door’s peephole, and saw a disheveled man I didn’t recognize. I cracked the door, leaving the chain on so the door would only open a couple of inches. “Can I help you?” I asked. The wide-eyed and excited man at my door put his hand on the doorframe, leaned in, and said, “I think I’ve figured out J. Z. Smith.” Thus began the best anecdote I will ever have to tell.

“Order some coffee; it’ll wake you up,” said Reed as we sat down in the hotel restaurant a half-hour later. It was clear that he hadn’t yet gone to bed from the night before, and he was visibly jittery from apparently having consumed so much coffee over the last few hours. While I sipped my coffee and attempted to wake up as we waited on our omelets, Reed proceeded to explain why he had found it necessary to disturb my sleep. “It doesn’t make any sense, right? J. Z. Smith is one of the most intelligent, precise, and sophisticated scholars in religious studies, and yet he can’t figure out that ‘data’ takes a plural verb? ‘There is no data for religion’? That can’t have been a mistake.” Reed leaned toward me and whispered, “It’s got to be a code.”

Of all the things I expected to discuss with Reed that morning, this was clearly not one of them. Yet none of my attempts to redirect the conversation were successful. Clearly, Reed had fixated on this idea and was not going to let it go. “It came upon me yesterday afternoon when I was walking around the book display. I noted the irony that Smith’s *Imagining Religion* was right across the aisle from *The Bible Code* and it hit me: someone as smart as Smith must have intended the bad verb conjugation on purpose. I just need to figure out what that purpose is.”

Smith’s work of course merited commentary, and I told Reed that I would by all means invite columns reflecting on Smith’s corpus, but that conspiracy theories about secret codes in academic works were not something I felt should be published in the *Bulletin*. Nevertheless, over the next three years Reed sent me no fewer than six columns attempting to suss out the code he believed might lie within Smith’s grammatical error. His submissions were fascinating, as Reed had clearly done a great deal of research in both ancient and modern numerology and cryptography. He had read through *Imagining Religion* looking for anything, from simple things like messages coming from the first word of every paragraph to messages that could only be read using computational algorithms. I returned every one of those columns, each time with the comment that while the subject was interesting the ambiguous results—for the codes he always discovered seemed like gibberish—didn’t yet warrant publication.

Mother India eventually turned Reed's attention away from his obsession with Smith's grammatical errors. He spent two years doing ethnographic research near Delhi, and during that time he produced some of the best columns of his career. Among other topics, he wrote on how the legacy of British colonialism had shaped the economics of sewage treatment and the varying use of cell phones and beepers by Hindus and Muslims. However, these golden years were coming to a close; Reed was coming closer to retirement and I began to see fewer submissions.

"Is it true you intend to retire next spring?" I asked Reed at our last AAR/SBL breakfast meeting. "Yep; I'm getting too old for this," he replied, before pausing and staring off into space for a moment. Turning back to me, shaking his head slightly as if in frustration, he said, "But I feel a bit like I never captured my white whale. I never solved Smith's code."

"So frustrating!" he exclaimed, while I tried to hide my smile. Since he was no longer sending me columns on the subject, it humored me rather than stressed me out to hear that he was still on Smith's trail.

"*Cosmic order*. Cosmic order was the key, or at least I thought so for a while. *Everything* he wrote about had to do with how people imagine their own cosmos. I ran those terms through the decryption program so many times ..." he trailed off. "I even went to the University of Chicago library to see if I could get his library records; maybe if I found out what books on cryptography he had read I could figure out the code. It turns out that librarians are better at spotting fake Secret Service badges than I suspected. The night in jail would have been worth it if I'd found anything, but I came away with nothing."

"No, you are not serious?" I asked.

"One of the reasons I'm going into retirement a bit before I wanted to," he retorted, but then quickly changed the subject.

Can you imagine my surprise when, late that evening, I received what appeared to be a series of drunken text messages from Reed, asking me to join him outside the Russian Tea Room, where he had spotted Smith having dinner with some other conference-goers. I called Reed and tried to get him to quit stalking Smith and to make his way back to his hotel and sleep it off.

"Map your way here on your fancy phone," he responded and then quickly hung up, clearly dead set on confronting Smith. Partly out of concern to save Reed from himself and partly because I knew I would have a fantastic story to tell for years, I made my way to the restaurant. When I arrived, Reed had already confronted Smith and his one remaining companion, a young woman who appeared to be attempting to contain her laughter.

Her eyes were fixed solidly on the sidewalk, and her jaw was so tightly sealed shut that it looked painful. As far as Reed was concerned, she

apparently didn't exist, as he stood in front of Smith, so close to her that he was invading her personal space. Reed's speech was slurred as he pointed his index finger at Smith's chest: "Datum, data, what's the code? *I know* there's a code." Smith gave him a wry smile. With a wink, Smith delivered the *coup de grâce*.

"Territory, water, fruit, *data*—these are *mass nouns* that designate undifferentiated units and take singular verbs ... like *yo mamma*." Smith and his companion burst out laughing, as if this was an old joke he never tired of telling, and walked away while Reed stood there in shock, speechless. I'm not sure if Reed was upset that there was no code, upset that there was a code but Smith hadn't told him, or upset that Smith had made a "yo mamma" joke at his expense. Whatever the case, Reed slumped away without speaking to me and, since then, our relationship has gone on as if the event never happened. I'm not sure anyone will believe this story—perhaps it's unbelievable—but I can assure you it did happen. In any case, I have Reed Weep to thank for the most entertaining experience of my life.

Many thanks to Reed for allowing me to share this story, which I sent him before his disappearance, and for helping me recall some of the details. However, I should note that he edited my draft so heavily I suspect he put a cryptic message in the text, which I haven't been able to discover.

The Columns

1. The McCutcheon Decade, 1997–2001

It Sure Seemed Like Ten Years

1.1 The AAR/SBL Annual Meeting: Mission Review

So another annual meeting has come and gone, and the question that you have to ask yourself is: What do I have to show for it? Your answer depends on what you had planned to achieve in the first place, of course. In other words, to assess your effectiveness at the annual meeting, you should measure the outcome against the goals that you had set forth in your annual meeting mission statement. In case you are so backward that you didn't even have an annual meeting mission statement, then you need my forthcoming book, *The Two Habits of People Like Bill Gates*. Because my goal is not just to sell books, but also to enlighten the general populace, I will summarize some of my crucial insights in this article. I figure that if you like what I have to say here, you'll probably buy the book.

You may know that there is a book about *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by some bald guy. In my own work, I have improved on some of his insights by streamlining the process of self-improvement. In the current cultural impasse, who has time to cultivate seven habits? If readers had that much self-discipline, they wouldn't need a self-help book. After extensive reading in about two popular works in the field, I have boiled the whole thing down to only two habits. I have decided to call the book *The Two Habits of People Like Bill Gates*, because I judged that I would have to outdo other books not only in the parsimony of my habits, but also in the grandiosity of the outcome.

Earlier I had considered writing a book that would be intended exclusively for scholars in religion, and then the title was *The Two Habits of People Like Martin Marty*, but then I changed my mind. Now I am going for a general audience and I'm focusing on the richest life form in the cosmos.

By now you are probably on the edge of your seat saying, "Dr. Weep, please tell us. What are those two habits?" And I am ready to put you out of your misery. The first habit of people like Bill Gates is that they don't go to important meetings with gobs of spaghetti sauce on their shirts. And the second habit of people like Bill Gates is that they have mission statements. Now, the thing about mission statements is that they proliferate like rabbits, because you need different mission statements operating on various levels. For example, your general statement might be: "My mission is lifelong physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual development so that I can leap tall buildings in a single bound." But for the next two minutes your statement is: "My mission is a dynamic and meticulous teeth cleaning which will promote lifelong dental health and optimal oral hygiene." See what I mean?

One of the virtues of mission statements is that they enable you to scientifically evaluate the outcome of your activities, which is precisely why you

need a mission statement for the annual meeting. Even if you didn't have one before reading this, you can certainly make one up now. For a scholar conversant with such sophistries as realized eschatology, this shouldn't be too difficult. Take a few minutes to do that, and then come back to this article.

I hope that you didn't write down something like "My mission for the AAR/SBL annual meeting is to be the first to the bathroom after those long, bladder-busting panels," or "My mission for the AAR/SBL annual meeting is not to fall asleep in the sessions immediately after lunch." Those are very worthwhile goals, mind you, but they are more tactical than strategic, and, therefore, do not belong in your mission statement. Also, I certainly hope that you didn't put down "My mission at the AAR/SBL annual meeting is to become conversant with the latest research in my field." Since the papers presented at the meeting are so short, often poorly organized, and occasionally well-nigh incomprehensible, their purpose cannot be to convey information. If you go seeking that, you are bound to come away disappointed. You can't harvest peas in a cabbage patch. (Nice folksy touch, don't you think?) So what should your mission statement have been? "My mission at the AAR/SBL annual meeting is to make a favorable impression on the leading figures in my field, so that they'll invite me to participate in their next lucrative grant proposal."

In the unlikely event that you didn't take the course in graduate school on how to identify researchers who will one day give you a large bag of money, I have just enough space left in my column for a few pointers. Let us say that you are in a panel with an older woman whom you don't know much about, and you need to determine if she is someone that you must favorably impress, as per your mission statement. Since several thousand people attend the meeting, you can't impress everybody. So what about this woman? How can you tell if she is a big gun? You are sitting at the table waiting for your turn to present, and you notice that she is marking up a big stack of papers. After a couple of minutes, you realize that she is editing down an essay that is long enough to be a speech given by Fidel Castro. By contrast, you had your spouse time your paper with a stopwatch, as if it was in a qualifying heat for a race at the dog track. This is a clear indication that she is someone to reckon with, while you, I'm afraid, aren't.

The chair of this section of the AAR/SBL stops grading the papers that he brought with him as soon as your colleague stands and gets ready to speak. Dead giveaway; she is somebody. Then she begins her remarks with a couple of off-the-cuff comments. She is smiling, and everyone laughs warmly, but you realize that these comments weren't even understandable, much less funny. You guessed it—you had better get in line for a little apple

polishing. Finally, while the respondent complained just before the panel began that he didn't get your distinguished colleague's paper ahead of time, he still talks about it for fifteen minutes. Your presentation, however, only merits thirty seconds, though you sent it to him two months ago. You see where this is going, I presume.

The bad news is that you didn't work out the proper mission statement for yourself for the annual meeting. The good news is that you'll have a chance again next year. And with the help of *The Two Habits of People Like Bill Gates*, you won't go wrong.

This is the first in a series of articles that will be written for the bulletin by Reed M. N. Weep, who is an associate professor of religion at a large mid-western university. In this series Dr. Weep will offer his insights as a service to the field and to build his campaign to be elected president of the AAR in ten years.

1.2 How to Write a Book Note

So you have been approached by a colleague about writing a book note for *The Journal of the Society for Anglican Theology in the Irish Republic and England*, and you have reluctantly agreed. (Did I mention that this invitation came from a senior colleague?) This task can be made less stressful if you keep in mind something that a senior colleague once said to me: Writing a book note is so formulaic that you could program a computer to do it. I assume that the reader of this article is not so computer-savvy, since if she was she'd be playing on-line solitaire instead. So I have provided a hard-copy template for a book note in the next paragraph. A few points about style: (1) the text of the note is in boldface; (2) alternative verbiage is supplied in parentheses; and (3) helpful explanatory notes are enclosed in brackets. Here is the note:

The book is (a. a major new work; b. interesting, though flawed; c. not worth the paper it is printed on). The author is (a. a leading researcher in this area; b. a promising younger scholar; c. a worm and no man). The book is (a. a substantial contribution to the field; b. an interesting new departure in the field; c. Hey, did you just see that guy in the clown costume?) of x. [For the x substitute the discipline that the book is in. You can usually find this out by looking on the back cover. You weren't actually going to read the book, were you? If you have lost the dust jacket, then just say "culture studies." I have been reading in culture studies for years, and I am still not sure what it is, but I am pretty confident that it covers just about every book.] **Among other things this work covers the following topics: y.** [For y substitute the chapter titles, but reword them. You'll need a good thesaurus for this assignment. I should warn you that you may find that the book has allusive and elusive chapter titles such as "From Becoming to Hope" or "The Meaning of Meaning." In that case, you still don't need to read the book. On the contrary, it is safe to assume that the reader of a note on such a tome has a nonsense detector which is not operational, so you can put down anything you like.] **The book (a. has been carefully edited; b. contains a world of typographical errors).** [The downside to including this sentence is that you actually have to read some of the book in order to choose one of the alternatives. On the other hand, book notes often mention this kind of thing, so it must be of some significance for future intellectual history.] **It is regrettable that the author did not take advantage of recent breakthrough scholarship by Amitai Etzioni.** [You may wonder if Etzioni is going to have written anything that is germane to the book under review. I've heard his name on NPR, so I think that it is a pretty safe bet

that he has. If he hasn't, that won't matter. Most readers will not have read his work. Some will have seen an essay or two. They won't know what you are talking about, but they will still pat themselves on the back for having read something by Etzioni. There is a very slim chance that you may get an inquiry about your sources from someone who identifies himself as the author of the definitive work, *Amitai Etzioni, Bull among Men*. Now, you may think that this is the time to throw your hands up and admit that you don't know Etzioni, but then you should realize this isn't just an innocent request for information. No, it's a challenge. You should think of Simba facing Scar at the end of *The Lion King*, or, to take an example from the late medieval period, Ronno versus Bambi. You don't have to back down. Crucial to this strategy is that the message from the Etzioni scholar came via email. Wait about two months. Set the calendar in your computer back to the day after you received the initial email, so that it appears as if you replied right away. Then send the following message: "A#\$VVVV **&&BBBB. ZZZZ??—++++%&—*())###—VVVVVVV." This message will elicit one of two responses. If the addressee is good with a computer, he'll assume that you don't know anything about computers and are, therefore, unworthy of his time. If the addressee is a computer novice, by contrast, he'll assume that the mistake is his, but he'll be too embarrassed to contact you again and admit it. Either way you're off the hook. Etzioni excursus: You may be asking yourself why not substitute someone at this point in the review who is in religious studies, say Paul Tillich, e.g., "It is regrettable that the author did not take advantage of breakthroughs in the later works of Paul Tillich." The problem with this approach is that there is an intricate set of rules about who you can invoke. For example, if you are a theologian, you should never mention Tillich, because other theologians will only react with shock and revulsion: "What's she dragging out the carcass of that dinosaur for?" Then again, if you are a historian of religions, you should cite Tillich at every opportunity. When the theologian reads this, it will only serve to confirm the conclusion he drew in graduate school that historians of religions don't know anything about theology and are, therefore, morons. The royal road to a successful review is to confirm the prejudices of your readers. Taking on their ignorance is too much work and will probably prove unavailing. Better to stick with Etzioni. Excursus on criticism: You must say something critical in your book note—there is nothing more dismal than a laudatory review. But then what do you do if the book is by a leading scholar in your field who also happens to be famous for being a vindictive psycho (a common problem)? Best in this case to take the high road. Write a review that sounds at least mildly critical, but which is actually incomprehensible. For example, a book that I wrote was characterized as "cybernetic." You

have my permission to use this term: e.g., “Dr. Quackenbush’s book, significant albeit cybernetic, is...” And now for the big finish.] **The reader should be mindful that, as (a. Chaucer; b. Shakespeare; c. Proust) once said, (a. “Very wise we seem (our jargon’s so weird and technical) in the laboratory where we practice this recondite science of ours.” b. “The expense of spirit in a waste of shame is lust in action.” c. “Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana.”)** [It may seem that ending the note with one of these quotes is not relevant to the book being reviewed but that is entirely immaterial. People go for this aesthetic stuff, the more irrelevant the better. But one word of caution: Be careful to match up the quotation you choose with the correct author. You don’t want to be caught saying that Shakespeare said, “Fruit flies like a banana,” when everybody knows Proust said it. You don’t want to look like an idiot.]

Reed M. N. Weep, who is associate professor of religion at a large midwestern university and a regular contributor to the bulletin, was the subject of the recent Time magazine cover article, “America’s Fascination with Reed Weep.” This article is a part of the media frenzy stirred up by the major motion picture Seven Years in a Large Midwestern University, in which the part of Dr. Weep is played by Pee-Wee Herman.

1.3 The Cost of Messiahship (with apologies to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, not to mention the Gospel of Mark)

You've seen it. Someone sent you an email copy. The ninny down the hall may even have it posted on his office door. Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" and so forth, and the disciples reply with questions such as, "Do we have to write this down?" and "Will this be on the test?" Now that you have recovered from convulsions of laughter, I would like to point out something very suspicious about this jocund message: The questions which the disciples ask sound quite a bit like our students' queries. I submit that the humor here turns at least in part on a thinly veiled disparagement of our young charges. While the apostles were earnest seekers, or so the insult goes, our students are grade-grubbing dolts. Rather than take on this canard directly, in this column I would like to flesh out the New Testament analogy, putting the shoe on the other foot.

* * * * *

Hokey scene change. Fade out on me in my office, complete with suede elbow patches. Fade in on you, wearing one of those tired bathrobes that passes for New Testament attire in the popular imagination.

YOU: [*approaching the Sea of Galilee*] Come, take courses with me and I will make you a religious studies major. In addition to learning the relevant subject matter, you'll gain valuable oral and written communication skills that will serve you well in any field from accounting to zoology.

SIMON: [*looking up briefly from his nets*] Can't you see I'm fishing here?

* * * * *

DISCIPLES: [*waking you up on a boat in a raging storm*] Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?

YOU: What do you expect me to do about it? You'd better call somebody from the Department of Meteorology.

* * * * *

YOU: Who do people say that I am?

DISCIPLES: Some say that you are a bore who should show more videos in class. Some say you are a sadist who requires too many papers. Some say you are a weirdo who cracks jokes that nobody gets.

YOU: But who do you say that I am?

PETER: You're not a bad guy, but you're a pretty hard grader.

[*And you sternly order them not to tell anyone about you.*]

* * * * *

JOHN: Teacher, we saw someone using your course materials without your permission.

YOU: Do not stop him. I'll call my attorney and sue the pants off of him.

* * * * *

JAMES AND JOHN: Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.

YOU: What is it you want me to do for you?

JAMES AND JOHN: Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory, in endowed chairs at Harvard and the University of Chicago.

YOU: I can promise you years of penury as a graduate student. As for the endowed chairs, they are not mine to grant, but they are for those who are chosen by the boards of regents at the respective institutions.

* * * * *

YOU: Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.

PETER, JAMES, ANDREW, AND JOHN: Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that these things are about to be accomplished?

YOU: When you hear of university degrees being offered over the World Wide Web and enrollment dropping like a rock, then you will know that the time has come to pass to tear down the university and build a shopping mall. But about the day or hour no one knows, neither the president of the university, nor the faculty in Computer Sciences, but only Bill Gates. Therefore keep awake and take some computer courses—for you do not know when the time will come that you'll be unemployed.

* * * * *

YOU: Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is taking this class with me.

DISCIPLES: Surely, not I?

PETER: Even though all become deserters, I will not.

YOU: Truly I tell you, this very semester you will betray me, before the third unit test, squealing to the Dean that I haven't been showing up for my office hours.

* * * * *

YOU: Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake even one class period? Keep awake and take notes, because this material is definitely going to be on the final.

* * * * *

YOU: [*in a white robe, backlit*] Do not be alarmed; you were looking for me, who was fired for that office-hour thing. I have been reinstated after a rather messy lawsuit. Go tell my students and Peter to go to Jones Hall 210; there they will see me.

* * * * *

YOU: Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole of creation. The one who endures years of academic training, living in a roach-infested studio apartment, stands a one-in-ten chance of getting a tenure-track job, moving into a cramped house on a tight budget. On second thought, you'd better keep mum about all of that.

* * * * *

Another hokey scene change. Fade out on you in your bathrobe. Fade in on me in my elbow patches.

So there you have it. To paraphrase former vice-presidential candidate Lloyd Bentsen, let's face it, you're no Jesus of Nazareth. In other words, after working out the other side of the New Testament analogy, I'm not sure that the teachers come out looking much better than the students. When you put the shoe on the other foot, it pinches, doesn't it?

Reed Weep is an associate professor of religion in a large midwestern university and a regular contributor to the bulletin. He has not been the recipient of a MacArthur "genius" grant, but that is no doubt due to some clerical error.

1.4 The Groups Are Where It's At: A Guide to the Annual Meeting

I don't know how else to tell you this, so I am going to give it to you straight: The AAR high command has done away with the "Madame Blavatsky and Nineteenth-century Religious Thought" seminar. They realized that, other than you, the only people who have been attending its panels have been homeless guys looking for a warm place to sleep. And there aren't going to be any of the homeless at the meeting in Orlando, because Disney doesn't go in for that sort of thing. So Blavatsky is history, and you will have to find some other panels to attend. Whatever you do, don't try reading through the program. I attempted that a couple of weeks ago, and I still haven't recovered my self-esteem. You'll find that 50% of the panels are on things that you haven't got a clue about. It's like being back in graduate school all over again, and you're the only one in the seminar who doesn't get the professor's joke about how many Tillichs it takes to screw in a Schleiermacher. My purpose in this column is to spare you an encounter with that buried and traumatic memory by guiding you through the program for the meeting in Orlando.

Before I do that, I must explain the structure of the annual meeting on the AAR side. There are panels conducted by four different entities: sections, groups, seminars, and consultations. The essential thing that you need to know about these entities is that they are hierarchically related to one another. To take a developmental analogy, seminars and consultations want to be sections when they grow up. To transpose my explanation into a register with which you may be more familiar, sections are the full professors of the annual meeting; groups are the associate professors; seminars are the lowly assistant professors; and consultations are the supply faculty, where there is much wailing and gnashing of teeth. Like full professors, the sections are established and, frankly, a little boring. The most charitable thing to do with them would be to take them out and shoot them. As with assistant professors and supply faculty, you can find plenty of energy and new ideas in the seminars and consultations, but they are still a little tenuous institutionally. Better to stick with the associate professor-level groups, where there are at least a few new ideas, and where there is grant money to be had. (You may have been so cynical as to note that the author of this column is himself an associate professor, but I refuse to dignify such an *ad hominem* aspersion with a response.)

So what is going on with the groups at the meeting in Orlando? Like I said, you could try to wade through the program book, but I just happen to have pulled some strings and gotten an advanced copy, and I'd be happy to summarize some of the interesting panels for you.

**Saturday Afternoon
November 21**

**Religion and Popular Culture Group
1:00pm–3:30pm Mickey Mouse
Ballroom**

Pope John Paul II, The Vatican, Presiding
Theme: The Religious Meaning of Scoobydoo
Mark C. Taylor, Williams College
Scoobydoo and Foucault’s History of Speech Pathology: Scooby and Astro Have the Same Speech Impediment
Edward Said, Columbia University
Scoobydoo and the Absent Arab American: Doesn’t Casey Kasem Do Shaggy’s Voice?
Rebecca Chopp, Candler School of Theology
Valerie’s Miniskirt: Scoobydoo and the Male Phallogocentric Gaze
Donna Haraway, University of California, Santa Cruz
That Thelma Is Definitely a Cyborg
Respondent: Jonathan Z. Smith, University of Chicago

Womanist Approaches to Religion and Society Group

3:45pm–6:15pm Minnie Mouse Ballroom

The Womanist Approaches to Religion and Society Group is proud to announce that its annual workshop on “Madonna: Religion, Gender, and Popular Culture” has been renamed “The Spice Girls: Religion, Gender, and Popular Culture.” Collectively absorbed in reflecting on the momentous historical shift that this name change signals, we are not yet ready to identify

the facilitators of the workshop, but look forward to a stimulating discussion.

**Sunday Morning
November 22**

**Reed Weep Group
9:00am–11:30am Dopey Ballroom**

William Jefferson Clinton, The White House, Presiding
Theme: Reed Weep: The Man of the New Millennium
Gustavo Gutierrez, Instituto Bartolome de Las Casas, Rimac
Reed Weep: The Greatest Liberation Theologian in History, with the Possible Exception of Jesus and Myself
Jerry Falwell, Liberty University
Reed Weep: A Right-thinking American
bell hooks, City University of New York
Reed Weep: A Man Whose Name I Am Not Ashamed to Capitalize
Jerry Seinfeld, New York City
Reed Weep: Is This Guy Funny, or What?
Respondent: Jonathan Z. Smith, University of Chicago

**Sunday Afternoon
November 22**

**Religion, Peace and War Group and Men’s Studies in Religion Group
1:00pm–3:30pm Bambi Ballroom**

The Religion, Peace and War Group and the Men’s Studies in Religion Group are jointly sponsoring a panel discussion on the theme “Mahatma Gandhi Was a Little Wimp.” We want to inform potential attendees that anyone who disagrees is going to get a punch in the nose.

There are a number of other interesting panels scheduled, but I think that Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride is a better bet. Besides, haven’t you had just about enough?

An associate professor of religion in a large midwestern university, Reed M. N. Weep is a member of the American Academy of Religion, the Society for Biblical Literature, the American Association of University Professors, and the J. C. Penney Bra and Panty Club.

1.5 The Department Secretary: Master of the Universe

Congratulations! You not only survived the job interviews *cum* meat market at the meeting in Orlando, but you actually managed to secure a plum position at Northsoutheastwest State College. State is a highly selective institution which only admits students who were in the top 98 per cent of their graduating class, with exceptional admissions, of course, for applicants who can add to the diversity of the student body (such as those who can shoot from three-point range). I've heard through the grapevine that your interviewers at State were admirably candid about many aspects of the job, such as workload ("We're planning to work you like a dog") and collegiality ("We stab each other in the back every chance we get"), but there is one area in which you were positively misled. You probably came away with the impression that it is the chairperson who actually runs the department. Nothing could be farther from the truth. No, the department is actually managed by the department secretary.

On the basis of your ten years' experience as a per-course faculty member, you may already know that the secretary is in charge of things like phone messages and photocopying, but that is only the tip of the iceberg. If you want to succeed at Northeast southwest, then you must realize that she is also responsible for your evaluation by your superiors (secretary overheard on the phone to the dean's secretary: "Oh yeah, he's never around. I think he's hanging out in some crack house. Ha, ha, ha.") and for the enrollment in your classes (secretary overheard talking to a student shopping around for a class to take in the department: "She's surprisingly nice, given that she's famous for being a bear of a grader."). The question is: How did the secretary manage to accumulate so much power?

And you have come to the right place for the answer, since I just happen to be the author of the forthcoming monograph, *What Are They Saying about the Department Secretary?* in the well-known series by Paulist Press. In my book I begin with a historical survey. Chapter One is entitled "The Department Secretary in Ancient Times through the Hellenistic Era: There Weren't Any." This is followed by Chapter Two, "The Department Secretary in the Middle Ages: There Weren't Any." Then the *coup de grâce* comes in Chapter Three, "The Department Secretary Today: Master of the Universe." How did the department secretary go from being nonexistent to being a superhero? Certainly one reason is simple longevity. Some interesting data on this was reported by the Study of Technological Innovation in Nonresearch Contexts (known as STINC for short), which is supported by—you guessed it—the Pew Charitable Trust. Anyway, STINC found that the average age of the secretaries in religion departments in Canada and the US is 120 years. The fact that your secretary was probably forcing people into early retirement before

your mother was born gives her a certain advantage. By the way, the main problem that STINC is working on is the apparent paradox that your secretary can maintain the Web site of the local Harley Davidson club, but she can't figure out how to print an envelope for you on the laser printer. Results aren't out on that yet, but with a budget of \$7 million over five years, they should be able to come up with something.

Where was I? Oh yes, the rise of the department secretary. I could also argue that the rise of the department secretary reflects a certain epistemic shift. Just as the capitalist was the key player in the rise of capitalism in the nineteenth century, so, too, at the dawning of the information age the department secretary becomes critical, as she has her thumb on all the information. The advantage to this argument is that it makes me sound like a real smarty-pants. The disadvantage is that it is absolute drivel.

No, the key here is a change in the role of the department chair. Have you ever noticed that the chair is never in his office when you want to talk to him about trying to get travel money from the dean? In fact, the only times when you see him are in department meetings and in the washroom. You may have thought that this is because he is afraid of you, given your history of arrest for felony assault, but that isn't it. Rather, the chair is just practicing good time management. Since the collapse of university budgets in the 1980s, department chairs have had to spend more and more of their time on fund-raising. It used to be that this job was handled by overdressed sharks in the administration building. Then the chair had plenty of time to regale new hires with stories about how he didn't get any travel money from the dean for his first twenty years at Southnorthwesteast, but now he is too busy for that. He has to spend all his time taking the wife of the local chicken magnate out to lunch. This is why having an office with a window is such an important indicator of status among department chairs. They need it so that they can jump out rather than waste time on the likes of you.

Now, you could insist that the chair should be busy running the department—somebody else can take out the dowager empress of chicken. But who in the department is going to do it? The vegetarian? The guy with the ponytail? The woman with the foreign accent? No, I think we had better stick with the present arrangement. And don't forget National Secretary's Week.

Reed M. N. Weep is associate professor of religion at a large midwestern university and a regular contributor to the bulletin. These days you can find him in the Xerox room, because the secretary has just been too busy to copy anything for him since this column appeared.

1.6 Next on Oprah: Lives Ruined by Student Evaluations

The camera pans over the audience clapping diffidently. Though these men and women are dressed rather casually, they still look uncomfortable. Cut to a camera focused on Oprah.

OPRAH: It's happening right now in colleges and universities across America. Students are sauntering out of classrooms singly or in pairs. Most are wearing the blasé expression which is their trademark, but a few look positively angry. One woman is heard to remark, "This evaluation thing is a complete farce. Nobody pays any attention to what we have to say." Little does she know the emotional havoc that her comments may have wreaked. That's the focus of today's show: lives ruined by student evaluations. Back in a moment with just one tragic story.

Cut to a commercial. When the show begins again Oprah is sitting on a low stage next to a man in clown costume. Actually, his clothing is a parody of usual academic attire. He is wearing a tweed jacket, but it is in yellow and orange. His bow tie is two feet wide. He is wearing suede bucks, but they are also two feet long, ending in bulbous toes.

OPRAH: My first guest is on the faculty of a small, liberal arts college. Tell us how you became known as the clown prince of academia.

PRINCE: It all started at the end of my first semester at the college. I made the mistake of sitting down and reading my evaluations along with my wife. I assumed that they would be positive. After all, I had been trained to treat students with contempt at one of the best graduate programs in the country.

OPRAH: But the evaluations weren't positive?

PRINCE: No, they were incredibly negative. I was shocked, but the worst part of it all was the reaction of my wife. She was a successful investment banker, who was always a little skeptical about the sacrifices that we had to make to get me through school. Now I could see in her eyes that she had lost all respect for me.

OPRAH: So what did you do?

PRINCE: I began a desperate struggle to make myself more popular with my students. I showed videos and told jokes, but it didn't seem to work. I pandered more and more until I was left wearing this. [*The Clown Prince breaks down, sobbing.*]

OPRAH: And how are things with your wife?

PRINCE: She left me after a couple of semesters for a venture capitalist. [*The audience gasps.*]

OPRAH: There you have it, a life ruined by student evaluations. And there is more after this message.

Cut to commercial. The show resumes with a man and woman holding hands alongside Oprah. Their paper hats and ill-fitting polyester clothes betray that they work in the convenience food industry.

OPRAH: My next guest was on the faculty at a state university. Tell us why you quit.

BURGER WOMAN: After years of living in cramped apartments while I was doing graduate work, my husband and I bought a house as soon as I was hired by State. The payments were steep, but I thought that we would be able to handle them. You see, State has a merit pay plan, and I was sure that I would earn regular salary increases.

OPRAH: But that isn't the way things worked out, is it?

BURGER WOMAN: No, it isn't. My student evaluations were abysmal. I tried to change my courses, improve them, but it didn't help. Half the students wanted multiple-choice tests. Half wanted essays. No matter what I did, I couldn't please them. And because State is a "teaching university," my merit pay evaluations depended mostly on teaching, which depended mostly on the evaluations. So my salary took a major hit. I had to quit the job at State for a better-paying position. Fortunately, there were openings with my husband's employer.

OPRAH: Well, at least you are still together.

BURGER WOMAN: Yes, my husband has been wonderfully supportive. He quit school and got a job so that I could afford to go on with my career. He's my hero. [*The Burger Woman looks over at her husband with an admiring smile. He continues to stare straight ahead, with the same catatonic look that he has had throughout the segment.*]

OPRAH: Friends, if you think that story is shocking, wait till you meet my next guest.

Cut to a commercial. We return to find Oprah facing a large television monitor. On the monitor there is the backlit silhouette of a man, whose face is too dark to be recognizable. His image is entirely black, except for an occasional red glow as he takes a drag on a cigarette. As he brings his hands up to take the smoke out of his mouth, the audience realizes that he is handcuffed.

OPRAH: My next guest used to be on the faculty of a city university, but now he is holding office hours at the state penitentiary. Why don't you begin by telling what you are in for?

PROF IN THE POKEY: Assault with a deadly photograph.

OPRAH: Tell us your story.

PROF IN THE POKEY: As you said, I used to teach at City. I thought that my first semester went pretty well. But then my department head called me in for a conference at the end of the semester. He wanted to discuss how things had gone, he said. I figured that was OK, because things had gone well. But then he sits me down and starts reading to me all the negative comments on my student evaluations. At one point he pauses and says, "We should remember that there *were* a number of positive comments, too." But had he written down any of those positive comments? No. Instead he just went back to a litany of all the critical ones.

OPRAH: And what was your response?

PROF IN THE POKEY: Response? He wouldn't give me a chance to respond. He wouldn't let me get in a word in my own defense. He just kept on reading those damn comments. [*The Prof in the Pokey is obviously becoming increasingly agitated, rocking back and forth in his chair.*] And I snapped. I really don't remember what happened after that. My department head says that I tried to bash him with the picture of his wife that he keeps on his desk. All I know is that when I came to, the department secretary had wrestled me to the floor.

OPRAH: I bet you'd do things differently, if you had it to do over again.

PROF IN THE POKEY: [*recovering his composure, taking a long pull on his cigarette*] Nah, I wouldn't; I figure it would've been justifiable homicide.

OPRAH: When we come back, some advice from an expert for dealing with student evaluations.

Cut to a commercial. There is a man sitting next to Oprah, when we return to the program, wearing black jeans, a black tee shirt, and a black leather sport jacket. The Clown Prince and the Burger Woman and her husband are sitting on the other side of the host.

OPRAH: My next guest is Dr. Trenchant Analysis. Under the auspices of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Dr. Analysis is the author of the influential book, *Scholarship Reassessed: One More Grant Like This and I'm Going to Buy a Boat*. Dr. Analysis, what is your advice for our troubled guests?

ANALYSIS: [*motioning to the Clown Prince and the Burger Woman*] My advice would be to get a life. Stop your whining and get on with it. [*This prompts a strong reaction from the audience. One guy stands up and yells, "Right on, Dr. A!" But a woman in the audience replies, in a British accent, "Are you mad?"*]

BURGER MAN: [*roused from his catatonia*] If you're so smart, how do you deal with critical student evaluations?

ANALYSIS: I've never had to deal with them.

BURGER MAN: You mean you've never had a negative comment.

ANALYSIS: How would I know?

BURGER MAN: You don't mean ...

ANALYSIS: That's right; I never read my student evaluations. There's the truth, would you like fries with it?

OPRAH: [*shouting over the outcry from the audience*] That's all we have time for today. Join us tomorrow when my guest will be that King of Social Commentary, Professor Reed Weep.

A regular contributor to the bulletin, Reed Weep has spent the last ten years at a large midwestern university poring over obscure apocalyptic literature in an eight-by-eight-foot, windowless room. He managed to send us this column just before the A.T.F. [Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms] agents stormed his office.

1.7 Higher Education Among the Nacirema

Since I have already confessed in a previous article that I am a member of the American Association of University Professors, I might as well let the other shoe drop—I also am a regular reader of the AAUP’s journal *The Ivory Tower*. Now, ordinarily I would keep such bizarre behavior to myself, but I have decided to come right out with it in this column, because there is a puzzling trend that I have noticed in recent issues of *The Ivory Tower*. That otherwise estimable rag betrays a surprising ethnocentrism. Hardly a number goes by that does not contain some triumphalist assertion about the glories of the American system of higher education. These assertions are generally hidden within sentences which superficially appear to be about something else altogether. For instance, a recent defense of academic job security included a sentence that read something like ‘We must be careful to protect tenure, a practice which has made American universities the envy of academics around the world.’ [The lawyers of *The Ivory Tower* should note the single quotation marks around that last sentence. Translated they mean: I was too lazy to actually try to find the sentence in question, so I just made one up.] And there is that old gray mare “academic freedom,” which is said to be “the cornerstone of the world’s greatest university system.” I have become suspicious about this orgy of self-congratulation. Who says that college professors around the world are anxiously ogling American universities? Where is the empirical evidence? Unwilling to accept rash generalizations, I decided to investigate this problem further. For, ask anyone and they will tell you, “Reed Weep is a man of science.”

Specifically, I decided to do fieldwork among the Nacirema, whose repugnant body rituals were so painstakingly described by Horace Miner some forty years ago. What kind of institutions of higher education do we find in their villages, and how do they stack up against our own? These are the questions that I seek to answer in this column.

Consistent with the confessional tone in much recent anthropological writing, I must admit from the outset that this column would have been impossible without the assistance of my chief native informant, Deer. With dark, penetrating eyes, Deer is a middle-aged teacher in one of the Nacirema schools called an *egelloc*. Having instructed several generations of the initiates, each of whom is known among the faculty informally as a *niap*, Deer has risen to the exalted social status of a kind of elder known as a *cossa*. Yet he has the weary air of someone who has encountered too many *niaps* who had not memorized the tribal lore because they had consumed too much of the popular malt beverage *reeb*. [ARE YOU STARTING TO GET THE JOKE NOW?] Despite his insouciance, Deer was a knowledgeable guide to

the traditional system of education among the Nacirema, giving generously of his time and insight. His name, by the way, is doubtless a reference to some totem ancestor, though when I asked him to confirm my theory on this point, a wry smile was all the reply I received.

In his important book, *Dig Those Hippies*, the renowned author Victor Turner noted that trial by ordeal is a major component of initiatory training in many cultures, and the same is true for the Nacirema. In their *egellocs* the initiates are periodically subjected to a ritualized form of torture known as the *tset*. The elders maintain that the purpose of these exercises is to determine how well the *niaps* have mastered the traditional lore of the tribe. However, the initiates themselves reported to me that the *tsets* were actually intended to humiliate them, since they had not been exposed to any of that lore at the *egelloc*. No doubt the *tset* contributes to the *communitas* among the initiates in their collective despair, despite its sadistic character, or perhaps even because of it.

In fact, the teachers in the Nacirema *egellocs* are hardly concerned with the training of the initiates, which they manage to toss off with considerable dispatch. Rather, their focus is on a desperate struggle for social status. The most concrete indication of their elaborate status hierarchy is a system known as *krapping* [no snickering, please], in which the big chiefs of each *egelloc* are flattered with desirable places to berth the expensive canoes which they paddle to the *egelloc*. There can be no doubt that the surest means to attain higher status in these institutions is through a complicated ritual involving sticks and small spherical stones which the Nacirema call *flog*. Deer informed me that there are some poor teachers who think that they can climb up the status ladder by laboriously producing *koobs*, but, he added, no one really cares about them.

From time to time the elders of the Nacirema *egellocs* leave off what minimal instruction they impart to initiates to attend large gatherings called *ecnerefnocs*. Here status differentiation is once again paramount. At the bottom end of the pyramid are those who are forced to spend the *ecnerefnoc* in a small pen known as the *tnemecalp retnec*, which reminds the visiting American of nothing so much as a funeral home, since the Nacirema there must wear somber costumes and glum expressions while milling about silently. The elders of middling status spend the *ecnerefnoc* rushing from one room to another to observe a ritualized form of combat in which the competitors try to outdo each other at chanting in a rapid-fire monotone. I should point out as a footnote to Miner's earlier study of the Nacirema that there are public shrine rooms at the *ecnerefnocs* like the private home bathing shrines which he described. They are much visited by the ritual actors and audience between these oratorical competitions. It is interesting

to note that the big men of the *egellocs* would not be caught dead attending one of the contests. Rather, they spend all of their time in dimly lit rooms called *rabs* consuming prodigious quantities of the aforementioned *reeb* and another fermented beverage called *nig*, while discussing *krapping* in hushed tones.

In this brief survey I have only been able to scratch the surface in describing the strange but fascinating world of the traditional Nacirema educational system. Still, I must break off that description to rejoin Bronislaw Malinowski on the verandah of the planter's bungalow for a whiskey and soda. In *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*, Malinowski wrote:

I do, however, want to emphasize the fact that anthropology should not only be the study of savage custom in light of our mentality and culture, but also the study of our mentality in the distant perspective borrowed from Stone Age man.

And that has been precisely my goal in this column. Clearly, the Nacirema *egellocs* are educational institutions in name only. They do not successfully impart learning to the initiates, which is the primary reason why Nacirema culture is so backward. So, the contributors to *The Ivory Tower* can rest easy, knowing that they are a part of the *ne plus ultra* in higher education.

An associate professor at a large midwestern university and a regular contributor to the bulletin, Reed M. N. Weep is the author of the radical vegetarian manifesto Human Soup for the Chicken's Soul, forthcoming from Furismurder Press.

1.8 The Bible in Bean Town: A Guide to the Annual SBL Meeting

A year ago I dedicated this column to recommending some of the more interesting panels scheduled for the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion. As a service to the profession—and “service” is my middle name—I thought I would perform the same operation in this column for the Society of Biblical Literature. The problem is that the AAR/SBL sends out this program book that is, like, 350 pages long! You can’t possibly wade through all of it. While you are in Boston, you’ll have to spend a good deal of time prowling the book display, hoping to pick up free tote bags, so there’s no time for that massive program.

Not to worry; I have gone through it and I have selected the panels that are sure winners. As a preface to “Reed’s Picks,” let me explain an important principle that I was working with, that is, stick with the groups. All the sections are too boring to bother with, and the seminars and consultations are just too weird. What you’ll find below is a selection of the more choice group meetings, plus one very worthwhile plenary session.

Saturday Afternoon November 20

Bible in Ancient and Modern Media Group

1:00pm–3:30pm **George Washington
Ballroom**

Theme: Apocalyptic Literature and the End of the World

Papers will be presented in this session about the end of the world. If this event has not occurred, then the session will be postponed until next year.

Saturday Afternoon November 20

Computer Assisted Research Group

3:45pm–6:15pm **John Adams
Ballroom**

Theme: The Cutting Edge of High Tech Scholarship

Al Gore, Washington, DC, Presiding

Michael Drosnin, New York City
*Using the Bible Code to Find Monica
Lewinsky in the Torah*

Bill Gates, Redmond, WA
Bow to Me, Master of the Universe
Steve Jobs, Cupertino, CA
It Comes in a Nice Lime

Terri Hedegaard, University of Phoenix
*I May Not Know Much about the Bible,
But I Know How to Make Money*

Respondent: Billy Graham, Billy Graham
Training Center

Saturday Evening November 21

Plenary: How My Thinking Has Changed/Remained the Same/Been Clouded by Senility

7:30pm–9:00pm **Thomas Jefferson
Ballroom**

Paul F. Evans, Boston Police
Commissioner, Presiding

Philip R. Davies, University of Sheffield
*Yes, There Was a King David, Just Stop
 with the Death Threats*

David Noel Freeman, University of
 California, San Diego
*The Book of Jeremiah Was Composed
 Using a Pencil*

**Sunday Morning
 November 21**

Frank Moore Cross, Harvard University
I Say It Was Composed Using a Pen

**Ascetic Impulse in Religious Life and
 Culture Group**

Hans Dieter Betz, University of Chicago
It Was a Pencil

**9:00am–9:00pm Sally Hemmings
 Ballroom**

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Harvard
 University
Pen

The Ascetic Impulse in Religious Life and
 Culture Group will be having a special
 marathon session for a full twelve hours,
 because we believe that suffering is good
 for you.

Water Brueggemann, Columbia
 Theological Seminary
*Hey, Most of These People Aren't Even in
 Old Testament*

Reed M. N. Weep, Large Midwestern
 University

**Monday Morning
 November 22**

*Knock It Off, Brueggemann, or You're out
 of This Column*

**Composition of the Book of Jeremiah
 Group**

Respondent: Billy Graham, Billy Graham
 Training Center

**9:00am–11:30am James Madison
 Ballroom**

**Monday Afternoon
 November 22**

**Theme: Current Debates in Jeremiah
 Studies**

Study of Peace in Scripture Group

Jerry Springer, New York City, Presiding

**1:00pm–3:30pm James Monroe
 Ballroom**

The Study of Peace in Scripture Group has
 disbanded because we discovered there
 wasn't any.

These are just a few of the many fine panels that you can partake of while at the SBL meeting in Boston. Even on the basis of this small sample, I think that you would have to agree with me that the criticisms you hear about college professors engaged in narrow research with no connection to the interests of their students, or society at large, are entirely unfounded.

An associate professor of religion in a large midwestern university and a regular contributor to the bulletin, Reed M. N. Weep takes strong exception to the characterization of his articles as "ramblings" in the April 1999 editorial in the bulletin. He is considering legal action.

1.9 **Letters to the Editor**

Editor's note: As already suggested in the editorial, due to a certain recent unpleasantness, the editor of the *bulletin* regrets that the regular column by Reed Weep will not appear in this issue. In its place the *bulletin* publishes the following correspondence that it has received concerning earlier Weep columns.

In response to the September 1998 issue of the bulletin, the following letter was received:

To: The editor of the *Bulletin of the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion*

From: William Jefferson Clinton

It has come to my attention that I am mentioned in a column by the so-called humorist, Reed Weep, as presiding over a panel at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion. I did not attend that meeting, of course, and I object very strongly to having my name used in that way. An inappropriate use of the President's name such as this undermines the moral authority of the Office of the Presidency. Weep should be advised that I have at my ready disposal an elite guard of trained killers wearing sunglasses.

In response to the September 1999 bulletin, we received this letter:

To: The editor of the *Bulletin of the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion*

From: Al Gore

What he said.

Below we reproduce a letter which we received from the Vatican concerning the Weep column in the bulletin of September 1998. The reader should note that the original letter was in ecclesiastical Latin. Since the Latinist in the editor's department recently resigned to become a producer at the Shroud of Turin cable channel, the letter was translated through the World Wide Web.

Respected Editor,

It was with dismay that the Holy See encountered a mention of the Holy Father in your produce section. Your article indicated that Pope John Paul II presided over a twister game at the annual meeting of the American Dog Training School of Religion, when His Holiness did no such thing. The author of that article, Mr. Sobbing, should take care in future columns, as the Pontiff controls the eternal fate of his soul.

Sincerely yours,

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

A letter came in from Paul Tillich, via a psychic in San Francisco, concerning Weep's February 1998 column. It read in part:

I must protest the article you published in which referring to my work is disparaged as "dragging out the carcass of that dinosaur." Here on the other side we had a recent theology conference in which there was general agreement that *Systematic Theology* is cutting-edge.

In response to the February 1999 column, there was a letter including this from an inmate at a correctional facility which shall remain nameless:

That column. You know that column. About student evaluations. That guy, the one who attacks the department chair with his wife's picture. That guy. That was me, wasn't it? I know it was me. I was framed. I never touched the guy. It was the massage parlor. I saw him going into a massage parlor. He had to get me out of the way. I am telling you I was framed. That guy. That Weep guy. He'd better watch what he writes, see? I'm not going to be in here forever.

Michael Drosnin, author of The Bible Code, who is mentioned in the September 1999 issue, wrote in part:

I am working on a new book which is tentatively titled *Using the Bible Code to Prove That Reep Weep Is a Little Jerk*.

And, finally, from Bill Gates's attorney we received a letter which ran as follows:

Mr. Gates is really mad because of jokes about him which occurred in the articles by Reed Weep in the *bulletin* in November 1997, April 1998, and September 1999. He says, "Get a life, will you?" And he wants Weep to know that he isn't going to let him play with his operating system anymore.

1.10 Letter to the Editor

Editor's note: The following letter was only recently delivered by courier to the tastefully furnished suite of offices the *bulletin* occupies on the top floor of Trump Tower. Prior to carefully reading the letter, I thought that it was only fitting to drop it into the wicker circular file over by the hibiscus plant. After all, I thought to myself, “tolerance” is the theme of this issue. However, after carefully scrutinizing its complex metaphors and reading between the lines, it became clear to me that this letter is a thinly veiled cry for help from a dear, dear friend with whom I share many memories—the kind of almost photographic memories whose bouquet only he and I can fully appreciate. But I digress; having pondered the consequences of ignoring Weep’s mournful plea, I have decided not only to print the following letter but also (i) to reinstate Professor Weep’s marvelously incisive column as of the next issue of the *bulletin*; (ii) to make my corner office overlooking Central Park available to Weep; and (iii) to purchase a soon-to-be-agreed-upon number of hardcover copies of Weep’s forthcoming collection of columns. (Did I say he was my dear, dear old friend?)

FROM: Horace B. Hoongadoonga
Hoongadoonga, Hoongadoonga, Hoongadoonga, and Windshield
Wiper, P.C.

SUBJECT: Breach of Contract Concerning Professor Reed M. N. Weep

DATE: 6 January 2000

I am writing to express my client’s displeasure over your decision not to publish his column in a recent issue of the *bulletin*. He regards this as a breach of a verbal contract and is prepared to take legal action, if necessary, to see the column reinstated.

Despite this recent unpleasantness, my client has asked me to emphasize his continuing personal regard for you. He recalls very fondly the evening you spent together studying local popular culture in New Orleans during the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature. He particularly wanted me to mention a very interesting visit you made to a cultural center named *The Bontemps*. My client has some amusing photographs of that visit, which he is anxious to share with you once the status of his column is resolved. I am sure that the officers of the CSSR would be interested in seeing them. Perhaps he should scan them

and publish them on the Internet. Then they would be available for the edification of the general public.

Regardless of these fond memories, my client still takes umbrage at your recent editorial, in which you characterized his columns in the *bulletin* as “ramblings.” Rather, those columns have been an important contribution to the field, as is evidenced by the three or four grateful letters which my client has received from his readers. In fact, my client already has a contract with the prestigious Edwin Mellen Press to publish his collected columns as a book. Of course, given the very concise style of my client’s writing, there will not be sufficient material for a book until approximately 2015, but that does not in the slightest diminish the fact that this book will be eagerly awaited.

We take a dim view of the alleged letters criticizing my client in another recent issue of the *bulletin*. These letters are such patent forgeries that I am not even bothering to send a private detective to go through your garbage. However, I have been instructed by my client to contact the counsel of the supposed authors of those letters to see about the possibility of joint legal action, though so far we have only heard from Paul Tillich’s attorney.

By the way, my client was shocked to witness the decline in the editorial standards of the *bulletin*, evidenced by the publication of “Scholarly Writing Under Siege” by a certain Mr. I. M. D. Pressed. My client takes it that this was an attempt at levity, but “I. M. D. Pressed”—please.

If you would like to avoid a costly and messy legal battle, we request the reinstatement of my client’s column. We would also like to see this letter published in full in the next issue of the *bulletin*, but we are reasonable and will not require a formal apology. In conclusion, my client looks forward to a time when he can renew his acquaintance with you. Don’t forget those pictures from New Orleans.

Thank you for your attention to this unfortunate matter. We look forward to its prompt resolution.

1.11 A Sorry Excuse for a Major: Religion

You may have seen a recent notice in *Religious Studies News* 15/1 (2000) concerning the AAR's Strengthening College and University Religion and Theology Programs project, which is being supported by the Lilly Endowment. Not to be outdone, the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion is proud to announce the inauguration of a major new academic initiative, the Supporting Worldwide Educational Leadership Liaison Project. Directed by the sagacious and yet humble Reed M. N. Weep, the SWELL Project has been made possible by financial assistance from the Constance Weep Educational Foundation and the Petey Weep College Fund. It is a sign of the dynamism of its Director that the *bulletin* is not only announcing the commencement of the SWELL Project in this issue, but also publishing the first of its reports.

The Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Excuses for the Religion Major

Expressing concern with the number of students who ask, "What can you do with a religion major?", in 1999 the Director of the Supporting Worldwide Educational Leadership Liaison Project established an Ad Hoc Committee to look into this problem. The Committee was particularly charged with coming up with rationales for majoring in religion which would be useful to academics throughout North America who are confronted with this question. After a number of meetings (one) and spirited deliberations, the aforesaid Committee is pleased to report on the conclusions which it reached. The Committee considered several different ways to sell the religion major to undergraduates, but eventually came around to the consensus that the best method would be the chart provided on the next page. This seemed the obvious conclusion once we realized that the students were actually not asking "What can you do with a religion major?" but "How much do you make with a religion major?" Someone once said, "Patriotism is the last refuge of cowards" (the Committee believes it was Marine Colonel Oliver North). We would like to change that to "Narrative is the last refuge of the innumerate." Or, if one cliché isn't enough, money talks, bullshit walks, if you'll excuse the expression. Our report begins with the chart and notes upon it, and then will conclude with a brief commentary.

Average Salaries Earned By Religion Majors

Source

The website of the Congressional Budget Office at: <http://www.cbo.gov/stats/religion/humpback.humpback.i.crookedletter.crooked.letter.i.htm>^a

<i>Profession</i>	<i>Annual salary (US \$)</i>
Cardiothoracic Surgeon	300,000
Operation-Game, Funny-Bone-Removing Surgeon	52
General Practitioner	— ^b
Tobacco Industry Lawyer	200,000
Tobacco Industry-Suing Lawyer	200,000
Divorce Lawyer	175,000 ^c
Legal Aid Lawyer	40,000
Indian Chief (with Casino)	222,000
Indian Chief (without Casino)	312
Unscrupulous Television Evangelist	340,000
Ethical Television Evangelist	— ^d
Episcopal Priest	100,000
Baptist Minister	57,000
Catholic Priest	720 ^e
Psychotic Cult Leader	666
College Professor (Business)	90,000 ^f
College Professor (Physics)	90,000 ^g
College Professor (Religion)	32,000 ^h
Cab Driver with a PhD Looking for a Job in Religion	32,000
College Instructor (Religion)	900
Graduate Assistant (Physics)	33,000 ⁱ
Graduate Assistant (Religion)	-10,000

- a. The SWELL Project Executive should note that no such website actually exists. After spending a very arduous thirty minutes looking for relevant statistics, the Committee decided to do what a statistician would do and just make the numbers up. Since readers who look for the site and don't find it will assume that they typed the address incorrectly, the downside risk of such a procedure is minimal.
- b. Extinct. The last GP was reportedly seen going into a health maintenance organization in Iowa in 1997.

- c. This figure does not take into account the very substantial expenses involved for personal protection from disgruntled spouses.
- d. Null set.
- e. This figure does not include the frequent delicious tuna casserole dinners provided free by parishioners.
- f. This figure includes an average annual income of \$45,000 earned by pandering to big business.
- g. Ditto.
- h. A recent article in *Religious Studies News* suggested that college educators in religion make an average of \$55,000 per annum, but this Committee believes the author of that report made up a number that is too high.
- i. Including tuition waver and access to really cool lab equipment.

Commentary on the Chart

The SWELL Project Executive should note that professions included in the chart are divided into three groups. First are listed professions outside the field of religion altogether. These are followed by professionals working in religious communities. Finally the chart lists professions in the academic study of religion. Organizing the data in this way makes four conclusions painfully obvious. (1) Religion majors who leave the field and bolt the door behind them make substantially more money than religion majors who stay in the field, in either the church or the academic world. There is a danger that this might suggest to students considering a religion major that they would do well to bolt the door before even entering (if you will excuse the contorted metaphor).

The other three conclusions that are suggested by the chart are: (2) Religion professors make peanuts. (3) Religion professors make peanuts. And (4) religion professors make peanuts. Given that our students are the products of a culture that knows the price of everything but the value of nothing, this is a fact which is bound to lead them to regard us with contempt. Under the circumstances, the Committee has changed its mind. Forget about the chart. In its place the Committee recommends the following excuse for majoring in religion, with the appropriate insertion in place of the variable:

The faculty of the Department of Religion at X College includes scholars who know a lot about religion. If you want to know a lot about religion, then you should major in religion.

An associate professor in a large midwestern university, Reed Weep returns as a regular columnist in the bulletin in this issue. He enjoyed his recent hiatus from that awesome responsibility, dedicating time to organizing some old photo albums.

1.12 Video Vignettes for the Concerned Teacher

Recently I had the opportunity to attend an advising workshop at my university. (This opportunity presented itself in the form of a note from my Dean which read, in part: “It’s either the workshop, Weep, or the 7:30 a.m. section on the intro course, the course which is also known as ‘Religion for Students Who Registered Late, Who Couldn’t Get into the Courses They Wanted, and Who Don’t Want to Be There.’” I chose the workshop.) The central organizing concept of the workshop was the distinction between the prescriptive and the developmental advisor. As far as I understood this, the prescriptive advisor tells the student what to do. On the other hand, the developmental advisor tells the student what to do, but then adds, “Do you have any other questions?” But seriously, among the many worthwhile features of the workshop were video vignettes that were used to illustrate different advising styles. I am working on a script for a similar set of vignettes for teachers of religion, and in this column I’d like to run them by you to get your feedback. Please send comments on these vignettes and vignettes of your own to the editor of the *bulletin* at <russellmccutcheon@ua.edu>. (The < and > signs are not part of the e-mail address, by the way. They are there to indicate [1] that this is something that you type into your computer and [2] that I want to get on my university’s Information Technology Committee. But I digress.) Those who contribute the most helpful suggestions will be invited to help revise the scripts, all expenses paid, at the International Conference Center on the shore of beautiful Lake Como in Italy, thanks to a generous Boondoggle Grant from the Lilly Endowment.

The reader should note that these vignettes present an encounter between a student, identified as “s” in the script below, and a “concerned teacher,” identified as “CT.” But before the response of the concerned teacher, I have written the reaction of a teacher who is a very bad person, whom I have identified as a “curmudgeon terrible,” or “CT.”

Vignette 1a

s: I missed class last Friday. Did we do anything?
 CT: [*sarcastically*] Oh, nooooo! We were so bummed you didn’t come that we just decided to cancel class.

Vignette 1b

s: I missed class last Friday. Did we do anything?
 CT: Well, I’m sorry to hear that you couldn’t be here. We did begin to

discuss the religion of the Hellenistic period. You might want to get the notes from another student in class, and then come by my office and we can discuss what we went over.

Commentary on Vignette 1: The response of the CT was predicated on the assumption that the student was literally asking if the class did anything, which is obviously not the case. What the student was actually concerned about was if there had been a pop quiz that he missed, because, if there had been, he was going to drop the course. Under the circumstances the appropriate response was to offer the student reassurance, as the CT did. By the way, the CT is never sarcastic. On the contrary, she wears a pained expression of concern with such constancy that people have begun to suspect that she suffers from Irritable Bowel Syndrome.

Vignette 2a

S: [handing the instructor some loose sheets of paper] You wouldn't happen to have a stapler on you, would you?

CT: [affecting a Mexican accent] Stapler? I don't have to carry no stinking stapler. [dropping the accent, taking a penknife out of his pocket, and jabbing it through the student's papers and into the podium] There—I think that should take care of it.

Vignette 2b

S: You wouldn't happen to have a stapler on you, would you?

CT: No, I'm afraid that I don't, but if you'll put your name on each page, then I'll make sure to keep them together and to give you credit for your good work.

Commentary on Vignette 2: Again, the student is clearly seeking reassurance, which the CT provides. However, there are several problems with the response of the CT. For one thing, the student is liable to miss the reference to the Humphrey Bogart classic film, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, at the beginning. (You got that, of course. Didn't you?) Under the circumstances, she could only conclude that the CT suffers from Multiple Personality Disorder. Producing the penknife immediately afterwards is bound to cause a crisis, with the Military Sciences majors diving under their desks to cries of "Charlie's got a live one." It should also be noted that the Vice President for Office Furniture is sick and tired of faculty jabbing knives into the podia. If you don't want to wait another ten years for that extra file cabinet

in your office, you'd better chill. In addition, the Vice President for Inappropriate Humor begs to point out that using a foreign accent might be offensive to some students, and, hence, it is expressly forbidden by university policy. For the full text of the policy go to www.largemidwesternuniversity.edu/vpih/cheesyaccents.htm.

Vignette 3a

S: *[interrupting a tightly organized analysis of Kwakiutl religion]* Is this stuff going to be on test?

CT: You'd better believe it, baby! In fact, you'll have to write an essay in which you reproduce the whole lecture word for word. *[Breaks into maniacal laughter.]*

Vignette 3b

S: Is this stuff going to be on test?

CT: Well, certainly this material will be a part of what you'll be responsible for. Of course, you won't have to know everything. When it comes to the short-answer questions on the test, the list of terms that I gave you last week would be a good place to begin your review, and you should also take a look at the words in boldface type in the textbook. Now, for the essays, those review questions that I gave you should be a helpful guide, and you should also go over the questions at the end of each chapter in the textbook a bit. We'll talk more about this next week before the test, and you're welcome to ask me questions anytime, of course.

Commentary on Vignette 3: This is yet a third plea from an anxious student, which the CT handles very badly. In fact, you wouldn't be going too far out on a limb to conclude that the CT is in serious emotional trouble and should see somebody at the Counseling Office immediately. But the insightful reader will have already realized that the student's question also puts the CT on the spot. It is patent that the only response that would really satisfy the student would be, "Of course not, none of this stuff is going to be on the test. There'll be nothing on it. I've decided not to have a test at all—I'm just going to give everybody an A." Clearly that won't do. Alternatively, the student would like the CT to say, "The only thing that is going to be on the test is this," and then to give the student a sentence of not more than five words. This is obviously not going to work either, because the result would be the

same as the first response: all the students would get As. Here the CT takes the only route open to her, giving the student an answer that is way longer and more elaborate than he was seeking, making some reassuring noises without betraying any crucial information. As every experienced instructor knows, sometimes a little obfuscation goes a long way.

Vignette 4a

- S: [coming up with a test that has just been returned, shaking and obviously upset] I want to know why I got an 87 on the essay on this test. I got an 89 on all my essays in high school, and I think that this is definitely an 89 essay.
- CT: [insouciant] Well, I threw them all down the stairs, and yours ended up on the 87 step. Can't be helped.

Vignette 4b

- S: I want to know why I got an 87 on the essay on this test. I got an 89 on all my essays in high school, and I think that this is definitely an 89 essay.
- CT: I remember your essay. You did a good job overall, but I thought that your comments on the synoptic problem were not quite clear, as I said on the second page of my printed notes at the end of your essay. That resulted in some movement along the cosine wave, which is why you got an 87. But you should read over your essay again with those comments in mind. If you still think that the grade isn't fair, then write out a defense of your position, indicating what you think the strong points of the essay are, and make sure that you respond to my criticisms. Then we'll set a time to go over the essay and your defense of it in my office.

Commentary on Vignette 4: The CT is obviously just a big jerk, and we can forget about him. On the other hand, the CT again faces a difficult situation. The response that the student is seeking is, "Oh, you think it should be an 89? Well, you're the boss. In fact, why don't we just make it 100?" Now, this is unacceptable. But the CT does a couple of things which are really remarkable for their astuteness. One thing is that he throws in a little mathematical mumbo-jumbo. Instructors in religion suffer a distinct disadvantage, because they can't just test students by using objective questions and computer-coded answer sheets. Those things seem so scientific

that they make it easy to buffalo students. Under the circumstances, the best we can do to buffalo students is by using incomprehensible jargon (hence the mention of the “synoptic problem” above) and trying to make our grading sound scientific (hence the “cosine wave”). Secondly, the CT here says things that sound accommodating to the student, but involve so much work that she is probably saying to herself before the CT is even finished, “OK, whatever—just forget it.” See the commentary on Vignette 3 for the value of obfuscation.



Now, you are probably wondering just what the deal is with all of this commentary. Is that going to be part of each video vignette, or what? No. Rather, it will be published in a companion booklet for “Concerned Teaching in Religion” workshop facilitators. It would then be the job of the facilitator not to make the comments herself, but to elicit them from the faculty attending the workshop. For developmental facilitators that should be no problem, since they have access to the kind of mind-control techniques that would make the former East German secret police green with envy.

Reed Weep, an associate professor of religion in a large midwestern university and a regular contributor to the bulletin, was disgusted by the surrender to political correctness on the part of the Southern Baptist Convention in its recent decision to allow only women to become pastors.

1.13 The Minutes of the May Meeting of the Faculty Senate

You undoubtedly saw the recent article about The Minutes Crisis on the front page of the *CHE* (*The Chronicle of Heavy Equipment*). Colleges around the country are being warned by their attorneys about a coming financial crisis. It seems that these distinguished counsels have been forced to read the minutes of meetings of various committees in connection with suits against the colleges by which they are so handsomely paid, and they have been bored stiff. Their prediction is that future historians are going to be suing colleges big time when they are harmed as a result of such dull minutes. Just picture it, some woman doing research on the history of the Religion Department at your college is lulled to sleep and falls on the floor, sustaining massive injuries. You can see why the attorneys are recommending that colleges sequester large sums to prepare for substantial damage awards. Why, at my own university we haven't had raises for faculty for the past two years because the administration is sagaciously prepared for just such an eventuality. (Some conspiracy theorists think that the tight budgets have had something to do with putting Italian marble in the football coach's office, but let us not descend to that level.)

It is within this context that I have been manfully searching for a solution to The Minutes Crisis. Specifically I have been experimenting with various alternatives to the usual style of taking minutes. The problem with the run-of-the-mill minutes is that they don't include any of the interesting stuff. Sure, they say what resolutions were passed, but who cares about that? Typically, the minutes are completely devoid of the human dramas that make a meeting interesting, which is why they are going to result in those big law suits. The senior faculty member whose head is bobbing because he is falling asleep, the nervous younger colleague who accidentally sends a cup of hot coffee cascading across the table, the department chair whose coughing jag culminates in a gripping demonstration of the Heimlich maneuver—do you find these in the minutes? No, you do not. What we need is a new style for the minutes that includes some of these fascinating details, and I have been groping toward developing just such a style. As a service to the field, I am devoting this column to reproducing one of the better examples of my new minutes style from the May 2000 meeting of the Faculty Senate.

The Minutes

Chair: I would like to call this meeting of the Faculty Senate to order for the last time this academic year. We will begin with old

business. [*responding to a hand raised*] The chair acknowledges the Senator from the Religion Department.

Religion: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to bring up the Senator from the Chemistry Department.

Chair: In what connection?

Religion: If anybody's old business, he is.

Chemistry: [*addressing Religion directly*] You better watch that, you punk.

Chair: [*in response to another hand*] The chair acknowledges the Senator from the Math Department.

Math: Mr. Chairman, do we have a quorum?

Chair: [*ignoring the question*] Let's move on to the minutes from last month's meeting. I didn't receive a copy of those ahead of time.

Religion: [*aside to History*] You know, I didn't receive a copy either.

History: [*aside to Religion*] You're the secretary, Einstein. You're the one who was supposed to have written them.

Religion: [*aside to History*] Oh, yeah, silly me. [*rising and addressing the chair*] Mr. Chairman, I have those minutes now and I would like to read them for the record.

Chair: Please, do so.

Religion: [*picking up a blank piece of paper, pretending to read*] The minutes of the April meeting of the Faculty Senate. No one interesting was in attendance. Nothing significant was decided. Respectfully submitted, blah, blah, blah.

History: [*speaking up quickly*] I move approval of the minutes.

Music: Second.

Chair: I don't think that we have to go through the charade of approving those so-called minutes.

Politics: Excuse me, Mr. Chairman, but the motion has been moved and seconded.

Chair: Alright then, let's have a vote on the motion.

Chemistry: [*waking up*] What's the motion?

Religion: [*Begins a sort of stirring with his arms in a pathetic attempt at dancing.*] I believe this is the motion.

History: [*Accompanies the dancer by singing.*] Roller coaster of love. Say what? Roller coaster, ooh ooh ooh ooh ooh ooh.

Music: [*as Religion climbs up on the table*] You go, girl! Are you tabling the motion?

Religion: [*Jumps down sheepishly.*] Oh, no.

Chair: Let's forget the minutes. What about other old business? Does the chair of the Information Technology Committee have a report?

Computer: Yes, Mr. Chairman, we do have a report, but you wouldn't understand it.

- History: [*aside to Religion*] Ouch!
- Chair: How about the Gender Equity Committee? Does the chair have a report?
- Sociology: Yes, Chuck, we do have a report, but we aren't giving it if we have to follow Information Technology.
- Religion: [*aside to Sociology*] Right on, sister!
- Chair: OK, I've had it with old business. Any new business? [*acknowledging a hand*] The chair recognizes the Senator from the Math Department.
- Math: Mr. Chairman, do we have a quorum?
- Chair: [*ignoring the question*] Any other new business? [*reluctantly calling on Religion*] What now, Reed?
- Religion: Mr. Chairman, I would like to read a resolution to be considered by the Senate. Insofar as the current chairman of the Faculty Senate has rendered yeoman service to the university in that very demanding position, be it resolved that the Senate and the entire university community render him their sincere thanks as his term draws to an end.
- Chair: Reed, this is only the end of the first year of a two-year term. I'll be chair again next year.
- Religion: That's what you think.
- Politics: Is the Senator from the Religion Department implying that he is going to unseat the Chair from his office?
- Chair: [*ignoring a general murmur, and calling on one of the Senators*] The chair acknowledges the Senator from Military Studies.
- Military
Studies: [*rising and perorating*] Mr. Chairman, I just want you to know that I am behind you 100 per cent. [*Music begins to hum "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," but Military Studies continues.*] I plan to oppose the illegal and unjustifiable actions of the Senator from the Religion Department with every fiber of my being, for I have sworn to uphold the Constitution and Bylaws of this Senate at the cost of my very life.
- Music: [*breaking into song at the end of Military Studies' speech, still to the tune of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"*]
Glory, glory hallelujah,
Teacher hit me with a ruler.
I stood behind the door
With my trusty forty-four,
And you don't see teacher anymore.
- Education: [*shooting up his hand*] Mr. Chairman, the Education Department

takes strong exception to the lyrics of this song as they glorify school violence.

Music: What would you prefer, "To Sir with Love"?

Education: That would be lovely.

Religion: So, what about it, Mr. Chairman? What are the procedures for impeachment for incompetence?

Chair: [*turning to Math*] Madam Senator, do we have a quorum?

Math: No, Mr. Chairman, we do not.

Chair: Well, then I'm afraid that we won't be able to make any decisions as a body today. Meeting adjourned.

History: [*aside to Religion as other Senators are filing out*] I thought it was a good meeting today.

Religion: Yes, very productive.

The meeting began at 3 p.m. and adjourned at 3:10.

Respectfully submitted,

Blah, blah, blah.

Reed Weep, who is an associate professor of religion at a large midwestern university and a regular contributor to the bulletin, would like to take this opportunity to express his regret for not citing Constance M. Weep, R. N., for her assistance with the medical references in his last column. Dr. Weep is grateful to Ms. Weep's attorney for bringing that oversight to his attention. Finally, Dr. Weep sends his greetings to Master Peter Weep, whom he has not been able to see for some time.

1.14 A Letter from Fidelio

Dear friends,

Hi, it's me, Fidelio the Dog, with the Weep Household's annual late Christmas letter. This year The People tried to get somebody else to write it, but it didn't work out. They asked their fish, Fin the Eskimo, but he's just too stupid. All he could say was, "Glub-glub, glub-glub, glub-glub." Fluffy the Cat is no dummy, but she claimed she was too busy. Too busy? Does she take the people out for exercise? No. Does she bring back the sticks they keep losing? No. She just sits watching Fin all day and "doing her hair." It's a cat's life.

This year was a little different than last year. It started in about the middle of the year, when The Missus and The Professor would get together each evening and bark at each other really loud. It looked like fun, so I tried joining in, but they put me out in the backyard. After that I kept quiet. The Boy didn't do much barking. Instead, he'd go up to his room and put these things on his head plugged into the stereo. I don't know what they were for, but I don't think that it was good because they made his head jerk around, sometimes his whole body.

One day The Boy came home with all the fur shaved off his head and some new markings called a tahtoo. This really made The Missus and The Professor bark a lot. Then the Professor must have taken The Missus and The Boy to the kennel, because they weren't around for weeks. I don't know what The Professor does every day, but whatever it is it made him really thirsty, because he would come home and make himself a big bowl of water with some ice and some yellow stuff from a bottle he keeps over the refrigerator. Once he spilled a little of the yellow stuff, and I tasted some—it was awful. It must be good medicine, though, because The Professor would really shake until he had a bowl or two of it, but afterward he seemed okay. When he had finished his water, The Professor would turn on the stereo, with a man howling "Take This Job and Shove It." Pretty soon The Professor would howl along. And people say dogs can't sing!

Around the time that the people usually give me turkey leftovers The Professor put me in a kennel for a few days. He said he was going to a konferenz. He told me he presented something there called a paypah, with the tietal "Living Water in the Gospel of John, Or, What I Really Think of All You Bastards." I don't know what a tietal is, but whatever it is, it must be very funny, because whenever The Professor told me this he'd always laugh so hard that he'd start to choke. A few weeks after the konferenz The Professor must have gone to the kennel himself, because he took me to Uncle

Fred's. It's not too bad there, but Uncle Fred has got too many kids. And that poodle is so stuck up, she rather die than let me sniff her.

Then The Professor brought me back to the house, and The Missus and The Boy, too. Things are a lot quieter since we all came back, not as much howling and barking. The Professor still makes himself a bowl of water in the evenings, but he doesn't put the yellow stuff in. Maybe he is feeling better. The Boy isn't spending as much time with those things on his head and his fur is growing back. I am taking him out for exercise more, which is fun, but he hasn't tried to start Fluffy on fire since we all came home, like before he went away, and I kind of enjoyed that.

Since we were all out of the house, our Christmas letter is late. My trouble with typing has made it even later. But everyone in the Weep Household wants to wish you a happy new year, at least for what is left of it. Fin says, "Glub-glub." Fluffy offers her greetings by snarling, "Get away from me, you drooling oaf." The Missus sends her love, and The Boy adds, "Yeah, whatever." The Professor shrugs his shoulders.

Yours faithfully,

Fidelio

Fidelio is the best friend of Reed M. N. Weep, who is an associate professor of religion in a large midwestern university and a regular contributor to the bulletin. Best friend, that is, if you don't count Ms. Constance M. Weep and Master Peter Weep.

1.15 The Torpedo Rec

Last spring the young pups in the department went interviewing. Not to worry, though, I put a stop to that. It is not that they are good friends whom I will personally miss—I make it a point not to fraternize with my juniors. And it is certainly not that they were making a valuable contribution to the department, the welfare of which will be diminished by their departure. If you’ve read this column before, then you know that I am beneath such considerations. No, the problem was just that I didn’t want people moving on, leaving me with the feeling that I had when I was the last kid picked for the kickball team in the third grade. So, what did I do to prevent these departures? Well-turned letters of recommendation.

Now, if you want to scuttle someone’s ambitions, you can’t write a recommendation that goes over the top for two reasons. The first is that if you say something like “Bill gives new meaning to the word incompetence,” then the members of the search committee will tend to dismiss your remarks as based on personal animus. Your rec will result not in murder, but in suicide. We can’t have that. The other reason why you can’t just say, “To call Mary a cretin would be to insult those unfortunates who suffer from that condition,” is because Mary might just get her hands on a copy of your letter, in which case if you say something critical, even if God forbid it is true, you’d better get yourself a good lawyer. The unintended consequence of this latter condition is that all letters of recommendation have become insufferably insipid, saying only vaguely positive things. But scholars of religion are nothing if not master hermeneuts, adept at reading between the lines of letters of recommendation to detect negative messages even in the most apparently inoffensive comments. To make a long story short, if you want to sink someone with a recommendation, you must rely on stealth. Your letter must not come screaming like a bomb dropped from overhead. No, it must attack unseen, like a torpedo.

As a service to the field, and my middle name is Service, I have given a couple of examples of just such torpedo recommendations below. You’ll find that they follow the standard form, with paragraphs on teaching, research, and service, plus one more paragraph containing a more personal comment. (If you didn’t know that this was the standard form, by the way, then you need to move on to administration along with the other numskulls.) I have loaded one torpedo in each paragraph. Read them carefully and see if you can locate it.

Recommendation for John Q. Public

I have known Dr. Public for two years, since he joined the Department of Religion here at Huldrych Zwingli College. It has been a pleasure to watch him develop as a teacher over that time. When Dr. Public joined the department, he seemed nervous in the classroom, but now I would have to say his teaching style has progressed to the point that it could be characterized as tentative. I have every confidence that he will become a decent teacher within the next twenty years or so.

Dr. Public shows great promise as a researcher and writer. Though none of his scholarly essays are quite finished, his column on olive oil in the local newspaper has proven wonderfully popular. And while he has not yet presented at the national meeting, his paper for the neighborhood Society of Biblical Literature gathering was judged marvelously soporific by the small yet somnolent audience.

Here at Zwingli we don't require a heavy service commitment from new faculty. Especially given that, it is remarkable that Dr. Public was asked to be advisor to a student organization in just his second year here. I am sure that the college chapter of the Grand Knights of the Ku Klux Klan is a much more active and effective organization due to his vigilant assistance.

Finally, I should add that Dr. Public deserves high marks for collegiality. In a department that is riven by factional infighting, he is to be commended for the way that he has stayed out of the conflicts. In fact, he has stayed out altogether—I can't say that I have ever actually seen Dr. Public. Which of us wouldn't like to be able to say that about our colleagues? In sum, John Q. Public would be a strong addition to any department of religious studies.

Recommendation for Jane Doe

(Alright, alright, next time you make up the names!)

I have known Dr. Doe for five years, since she joined the Department of Religious Studies here at Pico della Mirandola University. She deserves particular credit for not compromising in her commitment as a teacher to challenging our students, which is why they affectionately call her "The Hanging Judge." Over the course of her years here, Dr. Doe's teaching has been marked by increasing sensitivity to our largely Catholic student body. Her evaluations almost never mention her offensive use of the term "mackerel smacker" anymore.

In scholarship Dr. Doe has already distinguished herself as a rising star in the field of ethics, especially contributing to the emerging discourse on religion and environmental issues. Her particular innovative contribution

was the use of promiscuous capitalization. If you've read recent work in this field, then you know how much more profound it is to speak of "the Heart of the World," rather than "the heart of the world." And we all have Dr. Doe to thank for that.

In the area of service, I must admit that female faculty are presented with something of a dilemma here at Pico. Since there are so few of them, the demands on their time to serve on committees and to advise student organizations are very great. Dr. Doe has distinguished herself in this area by managing to do absolutely no committee work at all over the past five years. This is something that bodes well for her future as a teacher and a scholar, I think.

Finally, I cannot complete this recommendation without mentioning what a distinctive personal contribution Dr. Doe has made to our department. When she first came, I have to admit that she seemed a bit odd—people used to sing that immortal line from the Talking Heads as she walked down the hall, "Psycho killer, qu'est que c'est?" But over the years, we have gotten used to Dr. Doe such that it will be difficult to see her go. It is something that we could live with, mind you, but it will be difficult. In sum, Jane Doe is a dynamic and unusual person who would be an asset to some other department of religion.

There you have a couple of examples of torpedo recs. You should feel free to copy any part of these letters the next time you are called upon to do the dirty work. Heck, you might as well copy the whole letter. Nobody's going to notice. All letters of recommendation read as if they were copied from each other anyway.

Professor of religion at a large midwestern university and a regular columnist for the bulletin, Reed M. N. Weep has boldly proclaimed that he will not seek any mandate from the local bishop regardless of Ex Corde Ecclesiae. The fact no one is likely to require him to do so, since he is Lutheran, teaching about Shinto, at a state university, does not in any way diminish our awe at his moral courage.

1.16 Retiring, But Not Shy

Did you see that article in a recent *Academe* comparing university retirement programs? Maybe it's just that I'm getting old, but I thought that was really a swell read. And this is an area in which I can claim some expertise, thanks to my department chair. In the past few years his concern has advanced from avuncular to paternal in giving everybody financial advice and requiring everybody to attend seminars on the magic of compounding. In this column I want to share with you some of the pearls of wisdom that I have collected due to this happy experience.

The first rule is that you should have begun saving when you turned eighteen. According to the law of the magic of compounding, \$13 invested at 5 per cent when you were eighteen will be worth \$3 billion when you retire. Now, you may complain that you spent a dozen years in college and graduate school after that age, years during which you could barely afford macaroni and cheese, much less investing for retirement. There's no use whining about that now. The seamy underside of the law of the magic of compounding is that \$0 invested at 5 per cent when you were eighteen will be worth, well, \$0 when you retire. I hope you see my point.

Now, once you do begin to invest, you have a few major options to consider. For one thing you can put your money in a 401(k). The advantage to this is that you can invest money from your paycheck for retirement before the tax is deducted. Once you cash in on that investment, you will have to pay tax on the income, of course, but presumably that will be at a time when your income will be diminished so that you'll be in a lower bracket, so that the tax bite will be less. I should note that the IRS has mandated penalties for cashing in on a 401(k) before you reach retirement age which include, but are not limited to, jabbing you with a pencil. By the way, the equivalent of the 401(k) in not-for-profit entities is the 403(b). And Formula 409 is used to clean kitchen countertops, which has nothing to do with anything.

Another, less attractive, investment option is a Roth IRA. While you get the benefit of the tax break on the 401(k) now, the tax break on the Roth IRA comes when you cash it in after retirement, since you only invest in the Roth IRA after taxes are deducted now but then the income from it after retirement is nontaxable. I say that this is a less attractive option than the 401(k) because that is what the investment advisor said at a workshop I attended. I didn't understand his explanation for why it was less attractive, but he seemed to know what he was talking about, and I'm willing to go with that.

When it comes to long-term financial planning, I wouldn't recommend those accounts to save for your children's college tuition. There are some tax advantages, but the restrictions may prove onerous. That is particularly

likely in your case, since the only higher education your kids are liable to qualify for is that clown school in Florida.

Now, it may be that you will have some money left over even after you've maxed out your 401(k). This is particularly likely for the instructor in religion with a spouse earning a decent income. What's that? You say your spouse doesn't work? Then you'd better get your lecture notes laminated because you are going to be using them until you're eighty. Fortunately, there are a number of opportunities for scholars of religious studies to earn additional income beyond their regular salary. You should consider yard work during the summer. Where was I? Oh yeah—if you have money left over, then two major investment alternatives are stocks and bonds. Bonds earn so little that you shouldn't waste your time on them unless you earned your money the old-fashioned way, inheriting it from Mumsy. Historically, on average the stock market has yielded a return of 11 per cent ... 10 per cent ... 9 per cent....On second thought, you might be better off putting your money in a shoebox under your bed. If you do invest in stocks, it is wiser to invest in a diversified mutual fund than to buy individual stocks. Studies show that if an infinite number of monkeys bang on an infinite number of typewriters for an infinite amount of time, one of them is eventually going to type *Hamlet*. See what I'm saying?

One question that you need to ask yourself as you work on your retirement planning is: How much money am I going to need? That depends on a number of factors. First, take Social Security and Medicare. The Republicans say that they will both be bankrupt by next March if the Democrats are in charge, and the Democrats return the compliment. The problem is the Baby Boomers, who will crush the next generation under their feet like Godzilla. Best not to count on any help from the government. Another factor to consider is your medical condition. If you are a smoker, I'd say to stick with it, because that will mean more money for the rest of us after you're gone. Keep in mind that the Cancer On-Line Orientation Network (or COLON) recommends flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years for men over fifty. If this sounds draconian, think of what our forefathers had to endure, inflexible sigmoidoscopy.

An important factor to consider in your investment planning is your risk tolerance. All the investment pooh-bahs tell you this, but none of them actually says how to figure it out. That is until now. Introducing Reed Weep's Patented Risk Calculator. Go to the nearest car rental agency and get yourself a vehicle. Then take it out on a highway on which the speed limit is sixty-five and step on it. If you can't bear to go over fifty-five (which probably means that you rented a station wagon), then you'd better stick with T-bills. At the other end of the spectrum, if you pushed the needle beyond

one-eighty, the maximum on your sports car's speedometer, then you should be investing in cocaine. And while we are on the subject of cocaine, this is something that I should have mentioned among the health tips in the previous paragraph. If you develop a cocaine habit, then you are going to have to start dealing, because you sure aren't going to be able to support it on a religion professor's salary.

Columns like this usually conclude with the boilerplate disclaimer that nothing in the article should be taken as financial advice, and that you should consult your attorney, your tax advisor, and your sister-in-law the accountant before making any investment decisions. But I think we can dispense with that disclaimer in this case, since nothing in this column is fatuous enough to be taken as investment advice.

Reed M. N. Weep, a professor of religion in a large midwestern university and a regular contributor to the bulletin, would like to take this opportunity to express his best wishes to the outgoing editor, whom he considers not only a valued colleague but also a trusted friend. Look for his forthcoming tribute essay, "Russell Who?"

2. The Prentiss Decade, 2002–2004

I Could Have Sworn It Was Ten Years

2.1 The New Testament Mystery Solved

When I started to cook dinner recently, I turned on the radio and confronted a disaster. Not only was National Public Radio not broadcasting, but instead I picked up one of those evangelists who crowd the lower end of the FM spectrum. There had been a storm that had knocked the local N.P.R. member station off the air, which is a common occurrence in my neck of the woods—they must be spending too much on pledge-drive mugs and polo shirts and too little on hardware. As I dived to change the station, I heard the evangelist say that it is providential that Matthew is the first book in the New Testament, since it relates the life of Jesus to the religion of the Hebrew Scriptures. Of course, the radio preacher was not politically correct enough to use that term, saying “Old Testament” instead, but you get the idea. Now, it struck me as I turned the dial that there was a problem with this explanation, that is, it was theological. I have a colleague who would tell you that the phrase “theological explanation” is an oxymoron, since what theologians are really about is obfuscating the machinations of the power elite, so they don’t explain anything. Now, I wouldn’t go that far, but I do have to confess that I find theological explanations, well, pretty darn boring. So I began to ask myself: Is there another way to explain the ordering of the books of the New Testament? And then it hit me: Alphabetical order. The books of the New Testament are in alphabetical order. This column will be dedicated to explicating this daring, nay, earth-shattering thesis.

We start with Matthew and then Mark, and it might appear that I am in trouble right off the bat. But that is only the case if you don’t know anything about the history of the Roman world. Recent discoveries in the Nag Hammadi library have conclusively proven that the evangelist now known as Matthew was called “Bob” by the early Christians. So you have the Gospel according to Bob and then the Gospel according to Mark. So far, so good.

Then we run into Luke, which might appear to contradict my thesis, but which actually doesn’t. You have to realize that the books of the New Testament were initially written not in King James’s English, but in Greek. It is true that the letter ☉, the first Greek letter in Luke’s name, precedes the letter ☼, the first letter in Mark’s name, yet that has only been true since the late Roman period. You see, you have to keep in mind Constantine’s alphabetic reform, not the early-fourth-century emperor Constantine the Great, but the later Constantine the Lesser. Constantine the Lesser is also known as Constantine the Alphabetic precisely because of his famous reordering of the letters of the Greek alphabet, which historians believe he effected to curry favor with his mother-in-law Zelda. At any rate, although ☉ has come before ☼ for a millennium, the exact reverse was true in the first centuries of the Christian era.

And what about the Gospel according to John? Again, you have to turn to the pages of history. Until recently the regnant theory in biblical studies was that the authors of the New Testament composed their books by scratching them on whalebone. (I'd say that this is a technique known as scrimshaw, but I don't want to look like a show-off.) Now this theory has been conclusively disproven as a pathetic attempt by New Testament scholars to make it look like they have read some anthropology. No, the books of the New Testament were composed on vellum, a material which is a good deal like foolscap, but only in the narrow technical sense that I don't know what either is. The New Testament authors used sheets about fifteen centimeters wide and two centimeters long, writing generally on the obverse and sometimes on the reverse. (They never wrote on the recto, since three-sided paper was only invented in 1900 by the Wizard of Oz.) So you can see how this explains John's Gospel.

By the way, the last meeting of the *bulletin* board opened with the new editor saying, "This Reed Weep thing is getting a little old, don't you think?" To which I replied, "No, I don't think." Particularly given his hostile attitude, I figure chances are pretty good that he hasn't made it to this point. So this is a good time to appeal to you, dear reader, to send my editor "unsolicited" expressions of your regard for this column. "Profound," "dynamic and meticulous," "changed my life"—that sort of thing. You might want to mention something you particularly enjoyed. (Think of when you used to clap for Tinkerbelle when you were a kid.) The editor's e-mail address is <Craig.Prentiss@rockhurst.edu>. And remember, don't tell him I told you to write to him.

Next we come to the Acts of the Apostles, which again may seem to belie my theory, until you realize that Acts was originally considered a kind of appendix to the Gospel according to Luke, which was only removed when the evangelist experienced severe stomach pain.

And how about the epistles? In this case a distinction must be made between the major epistles and the minor ones, if for no other reason than the fact that this joke is beginning to wear pretty thin by now. After all, it was Martin Luther who compared the epistles of James, Jude, and Philemon to the three little pigs, saying that the first was made of straw, the second of sticks, and the third of bricks, to which Philemon replied, "Oh yeah?" So, if we stick with the major epistles, they are already in alphabetical order: 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus. Q.E.D.

As for the book of Revelation, also known as the Apocalypse of St. John, about all that it proves is that the early Christian community included some real cuckoos. So the less said about it the better.

The reader will have to admit that I have already marshaled impressive evidence to prove my thesis that the books of the New Testament are

arranged alphabetically. I could go on to develop my argument further, but dinner is about ready, so I'll quit for now.

Reed M. N. Weep is professor of religion at a large midwestern university and a regular columnist for the bulletin. A frequent local media commentator following the crisis of September 11, Weep is author of Radical Islam in Afghanistan: I Don't Know Anything about It, forthcoming from Suppress the Subtitle Press.

2.2 The Students of Generation A': A Major Disappointment Executive Summary of an Important, Swell Study: Enough Already with the Titles

Recently the chairperson of the Supporting Worldwide Educational Leadership Liaison (SWELL) Project had occasion to read *Religion on Campus* by Conrad Cherry, Betty DeBerg, and Amanda Porterfield, a book jam-packed with entertaining descriptions of college religious services and refreshingly free of any kind of analysis, which otherwise so weighs down contemporary academic work. Quoting the immortal Dire Straits, "That ain't working. That's the way to do it," the chair proposed that SWELL undertake a similar venture. Specifically, an ad hoc committee was formed to study the culture of today's students, composed of Reed M. N. Weep (chair), R. Mixon N. Weep, R. M. Nilhous Weep, R. M. N. Weep, and Reed Mixon Nilhous Weep. What follows is a preamble and then the executive summary of that committee's report.

You may be asking yourself, "Generation A'? Wasn't it Generation X just a few years ago?" That is true, but since then we have been through Generations Y and Z and moved on to Generation A' (that's A-prime for you mathematically challenged). It may be that a generation lasted for twenty-five years when you were in college, but now they are only about three-and-a-half years long. This is not because of MTV or bovine growth hormone, as some boneheads have suggested. Rather, it is simply a function of a kind of planned obsolescence of academics (I could have written "academicians," but I won't since I'm a native speaker of the English language—the same goes for "theoretician"). If it takes twenty-five years to get through a generation, then a sociologist would only be able to write a major book interpreting the emerging trends once or twice in her scholarly life. In the old days you might have been able to get promoted on a book or two, but that just doesn't cut the mustard now.

A' was the label adopted for the contemporary generation at the last meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. There was a proposal there to switch to Greek, now that the Latin alphabet has been exhausted; going with "Generation Alpha." But there were objections to this because no one knew what comes after beta. This would make sociologists of religion dependent on their New Testament colleagues, a dismal prospect, since most sociologists swore that they'd never have anything to do with the Bible again when they left the seminary twenty years ago. The debate on this question was called after some guy with a beard condemned the ethnocentrism of the SSSR, recommending instead a switch to

the Sanskrit alphabet, and hence using Generation Buyah (*buyah*, of course, being the first Sanskrit letter).

Before we present our own data, let's review some other findings about our current students. Studies show that the average American eighteen-year-old has seen 3.7 million sex scenes and five times that many gruesome murders in movies and on television. Given those numbers, if you think that you are going to make a class interesting by throwing a couple of cartoons on the overhead, you can forget it. In fact, we'd recommend you forgo "interesting" altogether in favor of making the course "easy," to increase its popularity, though even that is a challenge after the students' minds have been turned to mush by all that TV. Recently the trend-watchers have claimed that, since they were raised in an era of great prosperity, the A-Primers don't buy the disinterested pursuit of knowledge—you've got to demonstrate to them within the first ten minutes of the first class how your course is going to enable them to upgrade to a bigger SUV. This claim is completely bogus, because it is based on the presumption that earlier generations were dedicated to the disinterested pursuit of knowledge. This is merely a false-consciousness fig-leaf that impecunious academics use to cover the reality that their low salaries are based not on principle but on two factors: 1) they want summers off; and 2) they are social misfits ill-suited to gainful employment. By the way, another trend which has been demonstrated to our satisfaction is that, unlike past generations, a tattoo today is not a certain indicator that a student is a sociopathic member of a motorcycle gang who has done time in a federal penitentiary. Multiple piercings are another matter, of course, so if one of those pincushions is coming by your office for a conference you'd better contact security. Very recent research shows that post 9/11 students are no longer bowling alone, but are instead bowling with metal detectors.

The executive summary below is based on an extensive survey of the students of Generation A', which has not been undertaken. A survey was mooted, but since the AAR has got all the Lilly money, it seemed prudent to eliminate the middleman and just report the results without messing with all that data. Of course, this is not actually the full report of the results (which has never been written, naturally), but the executive summary. Now, what makes something an executive summary in religion is not that it was written for executives, because we don't know anything that an executive would care to read. No, what distinguishes an executive summary is that it is brief, superficial, and has bullets. The executive summary below represents the culmination of the evolution of knowledge management in the information age. No data, no report, just one bullet—staggering in its elegance.

Executive Summary

- The students of Generation A' are into spirituality. They are not into religion.

Explanation: What's the difference? The relationship between religion and spirituality is like the relationship between cheese and Cheese Whiz. In other words (to get some credit for all that structuralist nonsense we had to read back in grad school):

religion : spirituality :: cheese : Cheese Whiz

This in the sense that both spirituality and Cheese Whiz are made of the left-over bits, they are full of hot air, and they're more squishy.

Action Plan: Our university used to have a lecture series in which we invited to campus major religious leaders, such as the Dalai Lama or the head of the Presbyterian General Assembly. In view of our students' spirituality, this year we have dispensed with that in favor of John Edward, the cable channel channeling guru. Edward will present lectures from beyond the grave by Dionysus the Areopagite, the Baal Shem Tov, and Nostradamus. We thought about asking Edward to channel Jesus, but after his head spun around three times and fire came out of his ears, we decided against it.

A professor of religion in a large midwestern university and a regular columnist in the bulletin, Reed M. N. Weep is a contrarian and author of the forthcoming book Thinking Inside the Box.

2.3 President Bush, Meet Emperor Meiji

As of this writing (in the middle of September), it definitely seems that the hot air is escaping from the Bush Administration's Iraq balloon. The tough talk about teaching the schoolyard bully a lesson has given way to the political rhetoric of consulting with Congress and the diplomatic language of getting the allies on board. What's the fun in that? No, if the president wants to stay in office, he is going to have to shore up his political base by throwing some red meat to the right. And I think I have just the thing: Why not take another crack at a violation of the separation of church and state?

The president's outreach to faith-based groups was a step in the right direction, but somehow it has failed to capture the imagination of the American public. I believe more radical measures are called for. Specifically, the federal government needs to step in and straighten out the mess that is Christianity in America. Have you ever been driving through town, and seen two churches right across the street from each other, and said to yourself, "Where was the business plan? Where were the marketing surveys?" If not, then you need to stop reading this column right now, and go and read Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* instead. (That is a really good joke, by the way, if a little inside. If you didn't get it, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: Holy Joke, c/o Reed Weep, Religion Department, Large Midwestern University, Medium-sized Town, Midwestern State, xxxxx, and I'll get back to you with an explanation.) If you have said that to yourself, then you know what I'm talking about.

The Americanist know-it-all might reply that these churches have perfectly sound business plans, appealing to different markets because they are different denominations. But that is precisely the problem. My students can't figure this whole denomination thing out. They come to my classes and say, "What's up with all these different churches?" And you know what I have to reply? "Beats me." Just look at the names of the churches. There are churches that are named for saints, such as St. Paul Catholic Church. Then there are churches named for the streets they are on, such as St. Paul Street United Church. And there are the churches named for the cities they are located in—St. Paul's United Methodist Church, for example. Why, there could even be a St. Paul Church on St. Paul Avenue in St. Paul. No wonder my students are confused.

This is where the Emperor Meiji fits in. If you've ever had to take a world religions class which included Shinto, then you probably know where I am going with this. Of course, many of these courses do not include Shinto, regarding it not as a major religion, but only a minor irritant. But if the one you took did include Shinto, then you've probably heard the old chestnut

that Japan has been the locus of intense social innovation in recent centuries, with new religious movements emerging at an alarming rate. In the late nineteenth century, the Emperor Meiji established Shinto as the official religion of his government. A regular bureaucracy developed on the basis of the theory that there are two kinds of Shinto, shrine and sectarian, with the latter further subdivided. Despite the fact that the imperial system never really covered the religious diversity that existed in Japan, and regardless of the fact that it was scrapped almost six decades ago, most world religions textbooks use this relatively simple system to describe Shinto. For not having to wade into the morass of actually existing religious movements in Japan, I think that you'll join me in saying, "Thank Amaterasu for the Emperor Meiji."

What we need is a Meiji Restoration for Christianity in America. You might object that this would require establishing Christianity as the state religion, but if you have lived in the United States since last September 11, then you'd have to agree with me that this is no problem since it already is established. No, the real problem is how to reorganize Christian churches into some kind of logical system. I will be conducting an ongoing consultation about this at the Maple Leaf Lounge in the Sheraton Centre, Toronto, during the AAR/SBL. (You didn't think I'd actually be going to any panels, did you?) In this column I only want to suggest some of the lines along which such a reorganization of Christianity in America might be undertaken.

I propose that the government should assign every church a name which immediately, simply, and scientifically conveys the kind of church it is. The name might include a list of numbers indicating how the church has been graded on a series of standard scales. For example, since I'm from down South, it seems to me that one of the ways that churches should be ranked is in their views about the authority of the Bible. So, we could assign a 1, say, to churches that teach that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. At the other end of the spectrum, a church would be labeled a 5, if it taught that the Bible is a really nice book on a par with Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* and *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. Traditionally, Americanists have made much of the division between Protestants and Catholics, but I would opt for a more general rubric: assigning a 1 to churches with kneelers, a 3 to churches with pews, where people sit and stand but never kneel, and a 5 to churches with seats like the ones in movie theaters, where on an odd Sunday morning you're liable to find yourself wondering if there is still time to run out for some popcorn before the show starts.

Probably the most important scale would involve separating out the churches that are attended by people like us from the other churches. Again, being from down South, I think first of race, with a 1 for the churches that are all white and a 5 for the churches that are all black. But because class

trumps race in contemporary American society, I think that we'd have to go with a scale reflecting that. Someone once told me that when you are in the real estate market, the way to tell if a house is in your kind of neighborhood is by looking at the cars in the driveways. We could do the same thing for church parking lots, with 1s for those that are full of Escalades and 5s for those crowded with beat-up pickups. We might call this the B.C.—A.D. scale, from big Cadillacs to anything that says Datsun. So, instead of the St. Paul Catholic Church, we might end up with the 3.1.2 Church. Damn scientific, no? If any of the readers of this column are big oilmen who have the ear of President Bush, I'd say, "Run, don't walk, to the Oval Office."

Reed M. N. Weep, professor of religion in a large midwestern university and a regular columnist in the bulletin, is proud to announce the addition of his name to the Templeton Foundation Blacklist of Character-destroying College Professors.

2.4 The View from the Head: An Interview with Hyrum N. Rollment, Reed M. N. Weep's Department Chair

BULLETIN: Professor Rollment, how is your department structured and why?

HEAD: [*to the waiter*] I'll have the rib eye, well, and the parsleyed potatoes.

[*to the bulletin*] Please call me Hy. We are a medium-sized department with seven permanent faculty. In terms of specialization, I think that our arrangement is fairly typical. We have an expert on Matthew, one on Mark, one on Luke, one on John, one on Paul, and I do James. Then we have one person who does Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Chinese religions—you know, everything else. One thing that is unusual about our department is that we employ an average of about forty adjunct faculty each semester.

BULLETIN: Does it concern you, Hy, that so many of your instructors are not full-time?

HEAD: Not at all. The department employs almost all the ministers in town, which makes for great community relations. They teach the Bible-as classes—"The Bible as History," "The Bible as Literature," that sort of thing. So this is an area in which the instructors generally have some competence. And we can tailor the class topic to the instructor to a certain extent. For example, we recently offered a class on the Baptist interpretation called "The Bible as a Stick to Beat Your Enemies." And we are developing a Catholic class, "The Bible as a Book Protestants Read." Of course, you have to have some standards. When the local imam learned that if he taught for us he'd have to teach a Bible-as class, and he suggested "The Bible as Not as Good as the Qur'an," we had to turn him down—just not in the spirit of things. Still, overall this has worked great for us, allowing us to deliver a low-quality product at a low cost to Large Midwestern University. Ask any manufacturer and he'll tell you that lowering cost per unit of production is the way to a successful business.

By the way, the *bulletin* is picking up the tab for this dinner, isn't it?

BULLETIN: Yes, of course we're picking up the tab. But if you see what you're doing as a business, what are you, as a department that calls itself a Department of Religion, selling?

HEAD: [*to the waiter*] In that case, I'll have a glass of the Kendall-Jackson, the chardonnay. [*to the bulletin*] What we are "selling"

are classes in which students reflect upon the great existential questions that have been addressed by cultures worldwide and through the long arc of human history. Classes such as these are popular with students, and they also can count toward LMU's core curriculum.

BULLETIN: So, your classes are aimed at reflecting on existential questions. Are you concerned that your curriculum might be aimed more at religious "appreciation" rather than a critical analysis of human thought and behavior?

HEAD: The postmodernists would say that is a false dichotomy. I haven't actually read any of that postmodernist nonsense, but I'm still pretty sure that they'd say that. I'm all for a "critical analysis" [*making quotation-mark signs with his hands*] as long as it doesn't have a negative impact on enrollment.

BULLETIN: Speaking of enrollment, what kind of students are attracted to your program?

HEAD: LMU has a very diverse student body, and we see quite a range of students in our classes, especially those that count in the core curriculum. Everything from conservative Methodists, to conservative Presbyterians, to conservative Lutherans—even a few conservative Catholics. We once had a Muslim in our intro course, "The Bible as the Introduction to Religion," but he dropped halfway through. Of course, Reed Weep is another story. I believe you know Reed. He is the one who teaches all the way-out stuff, Judaism, Shinto. He gets students in his class who dress all in black, lesbians, even atheists.

BULLETIN: How is it that one person, like Professor Weep, could really have expertise in such diverse areas like the ones that you've mentioned?

HEAD: There are two reasons for that. One is that Weep is an individual of staggering breadth—at least, that is what he keeps telling me. The other reason is that we are willing to go with a fairly broad definition of "expertise" when it comes to the more obscure religions, Islam, Hinduism, and so forth. You can't really expect a small department such as ours to have specialists on these minor religions. Unless, that is, someone offers you a pile of Saudi oil money. That's a horse of a different color. How's your salad, by the way? Mind if I try a bite?

BULLETIN: So, do you really feel that it's appropriate to refer to the religious movements of the other two-thirds of the planet as "minor religions"?

HEAD: The other two-thirds of the world aren't signing up for classes at LMU. Tip O'Neil famously said, "All politics are local." And I'd say the same goes for the characterization of religions, wouldn't you? Hey, how about a bite of that salad?

BULLETIN: [*sliding the plate across the table*] Here, have the whole thing. [*standing up*] You, sir, are a pompous idiot, and this interview is over.

HEAD: [*calling out*] Hey, don't forget the check. [*tucking into the salad and muttering*] Bright young man. Tad high-strung though.

A regular columnist in the bulletin, Reed M. N. Weep is a professor of religion in a large midwestern university, or at least he was until this appeared.

2.5 War and the State of the Union in Esperanto

For years it has rankled with the AAR apparatchiks that the International Association for the History of Religions is all mobbed up with that Parti Critiquois, the North American Association for the Study of Religion. This has led to proposals for establishing a parallel organization, which would be mobbed up with the AAR as a World Academy of Religion, hence the rather unfortunate acronym WAR. (Yes, I do hear the members of the Parti Critiquois singing, “WAR—good God y’all—what is it good for? Absolutely nothing,” but let’s ignore them, shall we?) The author of this column has never had a dog in this fight, having approached the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion (CSSR) through membership in the National Association of Bilius Professors of Religion. On the contrary, he has unselfishly offered the services of the Supporting Worldwide Educational Leadership Liaison (or SWELL) Project, of which he is executive director, to facilitate the WAR initiative, in exchange for a few measly international plane tickets, first-class, of course. Since my offers have yet to bear fruit—repeated e-mails to Barbara DeConcini, but no reply—I have decided to turn to this column instead. (Note to self: If you do want to get a reply, lose the “apparatchik.” Note to Garrison Keillor: You can’t sing.)

You may have run into those fatuous suggestions about translating the discourse of the academic study of religions across cultures. “How would the field be different if we spoke of dharma rather than religion? Of kami rather than gods?” Here I am going to kick it up a notch by actually translating this column into the language that was invented for the purpose of international communication, Esperanto. This dialog should begin with a recent religious document of obvious international interest. Why not George W. Bush’s 2003 State of the Union address? (If you didn’t know that this speech belongs in the religion category, you obviously fell asleep before the end of it.) So below I will provide the text of passages of the speech, along with a commentary. My source for the speech is the White House Web site, but I have eliminated their frequent “(*Applause*)” notes. These struck me as insufficiently ethnographically detailed. At some points it would have been more accurate to insert “(*Applause from Republicans, scowls from Democrats*),” but since I don’t have comprehensive audience reaction data I have decided to eliminate those notes altogether. Finally, the reader will find that I begin my analysis with the end of the president’s remarks and then work my way toward the beginning. Since we are talking about advocating an invasion to secure world peace and cutting taxes for the wealthy to help the unemployed, it seemed to me that the speech was already backwards.

E-thay Ate-stay of-ay e-thay Union-yay

Ext-tay 1

Americans-ay are-ay a-ay ee-fray eople-pay, o-whay ow-knay at-thay eedom-fray is-ay e-thay ight-ray of-ay every-ay erson-pay and-ay e-thay uture-fay of-ay every-ay ation-nay. E-thay iberty-lay e-way ize-pray is-ay ot-nay America's-ay ift-gay o-tay e-thay orld-way, it-ay is-ay Od's-gay ift-gay o-tay umanity-hay.

E-way Americans-ay ave-hay aith-fay in-ay ourselves-ay, ut-bay ot-nay in-ay ourselves-ay alone-ay. E-way o-day ot-nay ow-knay—e-way o-day ot-nay aim-clay o-tay ow-knay all-ay e-thay ays-way of-ay Ovidence-pray, et-yay e-way an-cay ust-tray in-ay em-thay, acing-play our-ay onfidence-cay in-ay e-thay owing-lay Od-gay ehind-bay all-ay of-ay ife-lay, and-ay all-ay of-ay istory-hay.

Ay-may E-hay ide-guay us-ay ow-nay. And-ay ay-may Od-gay ontinue-cay o-tay ess-blay e-thay United-yay Ates-stay of-ay America-ay.

Ommentary-cay 1

E-thay end-ay of-ay e-thay esident's-pray eech-spay urns-tay on-ay e-thay ord-way “Ovidence-pray.” Ow-nay, e-way are-ay ot-nay alking-tay about-ay a-ay ity-cay in-ay Ode-rhay Island-ay ere-hay, ut-bay about-ay e-thay idea-ay at-thay Od-gay is-ay irecting-day istory-hay. Ough-thay Esident-pray Ush-bay oesn't-day ecify-spay ich-whay Od-gay e-hay is-ay alking-tay about-ay, I'm-ay etty-pray ure-say E-hay is-ay an-ay evangelical-ay. It-ay ight-may eem-say at-thay e-thay esident-pray expresses-ay an-ay admirable-ay umility-hay, admitting-ay at-thay e-way annot-cay ow-knay e-thay ays-way of-ay Ovidence-pray. Actually-ay e-hay ays-say at-thay e-way annot-cay ow-knay *all-ay* e-thay ays-way of-ay Ovidence-pray, ich-whay implies-ay at-thay e-way an-cay ow-knay ome-say of-ay em-thay. And-ay ich-whay ones-ay an-cay e-way ow-knay? Or-fay e-thay answer-ay o-tay at-thay, e-way ave-hay o-tay ackup-bay a-ay it-bay. Ust-jay efore-bay e-thay end-ay of-ay e-thay eech-spay, e-way ind-fay e-thay ollowing-fay assage-pay.

En-whay it-ay ame-cay o-tay e-thay edious-tay ask-tay of-ay anslating-tray is-thay olumn-cay, all-ay I-ay an-cay ay-say is-ay ank-thay Od-gay or-fay aduate-gray assistants-ay.

Ext-tay 2

Americans-ay are-ay a-ay esolute-ray eople-pay o-whay ave-hay isen-ray o-tay every-ay est-tay of-ay our-ay ime-tay. Adversity-ay as-hay evealed-ray e-thay aracter-chay of-ay our-ay ountry-cay, o-tay e-thay orld-way and-ay o-tay ourselves-ay. America-ay is-ay a-ay ong-stray ation-nay,

and-ay onorable-hay in-ay e-thay use-yay of-ay our-ay ength-stray. E-way exercise-ay ower-pay ithout-way onquest-cay, and-ay e-way acrifice-say or-fay e-thay iberty-lay of-ay angers-stray.

Ommentary-cay 2

Ou-yay ight-may ot-nay ave-hay ealized-ray at-thay e-thay U.-yay S.-ay overnment-gay as-way acrificing-say or-fay e-thay iberty-lay of-ay angers-stray, ut-bay it-ay is-ay, or-ay at-ay east-lay it-ay is-ay etting-gay eady-ray o-tay. At-whay e-way are-ay alking-tay about-ay is-ay a-ay anned-play invasion-ay of-ay Iraq-ay. If-ay ou-yay ade-may e-thay istake-may of-ay inking-thay is-thay operation-ay ad-hay omething-say o-tay o-day ith-way oil-ay, or-ay ith-way aking-tay are-cay of-ay ad’s-day unfinished-ay usiness-bay, onsider-cay e-thay ollowing-fay assage-pay om-fray e-thay eech-spay.

At-whay ith-way e-thay ole-whay “Esperanto-ay” ing-thay, I’m-ay ure-say o-nay one-ay is-ay ill-stay eading-ray is-thay y-bay ow-nay. It’s-ay iberating-lay in-ay an-ay odd-ay ay-way. I-ay an-cay ay-say anything-ay I-ay ant-way. It’s-ay as-ay if-ay I-ay am-ay alking-tay o-tay y-may og-day.

Ext-tay 3

And-ay onight-tay I-ay ave-hay a-ay essage-may or-fay e-thay ave-bray and-ay oppressed-ay eople-pay of-ay Iraq-ay: Our-yay enemy-ay is-ay ot-nay urrounding-say our-yay ountry-cay—our-yay enemy-ay is-ay uling-ray our-yay ountry-cay. And-ay e-thay ay-day e-hay and-ay is-hay egime-ray are-ay emoved-ray om-fray ower-pay ill-way e-bay e-thay ay-day of-ay our-yay iberation-lay.

Ommentary-cay 3

Ere-hay e-thay esident-pray appears-ay o-tay e-bay aking-may an-ay absurd-ay aim-clay. If-ay e-thay United-yay Ates-stay invades-ay Iraq-ay at-thay ill-way e-bay ot-nay o-tay ake-tay it-ay over-ay, ut-bay o-tay et-say it-ay ee-fray om-fray its-ay oppressive-ay uler-ray. E-thay eople-pay of-ay Iraq-ay ould-shay ook-lay upon-ay e-thay U.-yay S.-ay ilitary-may ot-nay as-ay eir-thay enemies-ay, ut-bay as-ay eir-thay iends-fray, inging-bray ot-nay ubjugation-say ut-bay iberation-lay. And-ay at-whay about-ay ose-thay o-whay on’t-day urvive-say e-thay initial-ay onslaught-ay o-tay enjoy-ay eir-thay ew-nay ound-fay eedom-fray? Y-bay e-thay esident’s-pray ogic-lay, ey-thay ould-way ot-nay ace-fay eath-day, ut-bay its-ay opposite-ay. Ew-nay ife-lay? Of-ay ourse-cay, ere-thay is-ay a-ay Istian-chray eological-thay argument-ay o-tay e-bay ade-may in-ay avor-fay of-ay at-thay osition-pay. En-thay again-ay ost-may Iraqis-ay are-ay Uslims-may. Opps-ay, on’t-day ant-way o-tay o-gay ere-thay.

Ather-ray an-thay acing-tray e-thay esident's-pray implied-ay ajectory-tray, et's-lay ollow-fay e-thay explicit-ay argument-ay. Ile-whay e-way annot-cay ow-knay all-ay e-thay ays-way of-ay Ovidence-pray, e-way o-day ow-knay at-thay iberty-lay is-ay ot-nay ust-jay Od's-gay ift-gay o-tay us-ay (ou-yay are-ay an-ay American-ay, aren't-ay ou-yay?), ut-bay "Od's-gay ift-gay o-tay umanity-hay." I'm-ay ot-nay ure-say ow-hay e-way ow-knay it-ay. E-way ust-jay ow-knay it-ay. In-ay invading-ay Iraq-ay, e-way are-ay inging-bray iberty-lay, Od's-gay ift-gay. O-say e-thay U.-yay S.-ay ilitary-may is-ay an-ay instrument-ay of-ay Ovidence-pray. As-ay I-ay aid-say earlier-ay, e-way an't-cay ow-knay all-ay e-thay ays-way of-ay Ovidence-pray, ut-bay e-way an-cay ow-knay ome-say. E-way an-cay ow-knay at-thay is-thay attle-bay against-ay Addam-say Ussein-hay is-ay Od's-gay uggle-stray.

All-ay of-ay ich-whay eads-lay o-tay e-thay onclusion-cay at-thay if-ay ou-yay on't-day upport-say e-thay esident-pray on-ay is-thay one-ay, ou'd-yay etter-bay et-gay out-ay of-ay e-thay ay-way. Ecause-bay ith-way is-thay ind-kay of-ay ogic-lay, eace-pay oesn't-day ave-hay a-ay ayer-pray.

Ere-thay ere-way other-ay ood-gay okes-jay in-ay e-thay Ate-stay of-ay e-thay Union-yay, ut-bay I-ay ink-thay I'd-ay etter-bay op-stay ow-nay, efore-bay y-may aduate-gray assistant-ay ues-say e-may or-fay epetitive-ray otion-may injuries-ay in-ay is-hay and-hay and-ay ingers-fay.

So there you have it. If nothing else, I am confident that this analysis has convinced the reader that the 2003 State of the Union address was very much about religion. More importantly, I hope this column has advanced the cause of international understanding, demonstrating how WAR can lead to peace.

A regular columnist in the bulletin and professor of religion in a large mid-western university, Reed M. N. Weep learned Esperanto at the feet of the famed Gypsy guitarist D'Jango Reinhart.

2.6 Scheduling Innovation at Large Midwestern University

LMU News and Information Services

Forwarded to the *bulletin* by Reed M. N. Weep

At the June meeting of the Large Midwestern University Regents, the administration reported on a breakthrough in scheduling for the spring semester. In order to better serve the citizens of this state, LMU will offer courses in a number of different formats in addition to the standard sixteen-week semester. For a number of years LMU has scheduled classes for an eight-week summer semester. Recently, a three-week mini-semester was developed, in which classes generally meet for about three hours per day, four days a week. And then there is also the one-week interim schedule, with classes meeting for about seven hours per day for five days. Now LMU offers the new day-and-a-half semester, in which classes meet continually for forty hours.

“In order to better serve the citizens of this state, Large Midwestern University has offered courses in a number of different formats in addition to the standard sixteen-week semester,” explained LMU Provost Ralph Smiley. “The new day-and-a-half semester will enable more students to take advantage of the fine education offered here at LMU, students whose life styles do not permit them to come to campus for a full sixteen-week semester.”

Steve B. Counter, Vice-President of Enrollment Management, elaborated in his report to the Regents: “We had initially hoped to be able to offer a twenty-four-hour semester, but the State Office of Higher Education requires three credit-hour classes to include about forty instructional hours. LMU is currently working with Arthur Andersen on ways to compress forty hours into twenty-four, and we feel confident that something can be worked out. But in the meantime, we decided to offer the next best thing, a course meeting for the legal minimum, forty hours. These courses will be especially appropriate for today’s busy student on the go, whose lifestyle does not permit him or her to come to campus for a full sixteen-week semester.”

In the spring semester a forty-hour version of “Introduction to the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible/Hebrew Scriptures/Jewish Bible” was taught by Throckmorton T. Throckmorton, an adjunct instructor in the Department of Religion at LMU. “It was a great experience,” he noted. “I know that some faculty were worried that students might be sleeping through the end of the course, but I had already found that to be true during the normal sixteen-week semester. So I didn’t have a particular problem on that score. Of course, the forty-hour format did not allow me to assign the students any reading, but that actually wasn’t much of a change—my students have never done the reading

assignments anyway. Papers were also out, but they are so much work for the students to write and for me to grade, this was an innovation that made everybody happy. Some have objected that the forty-hour format doesn't give students much time to think, but I've found that thinking is way overrated. At the end of the course I want students to be able to tell me Methuselah's age and the name of Moses' second son. That doesn't take a whole lot of thinking. No, you let students start thinking, and pretty soon they are asking questions, and the situation goes from bad to worse. The less thinking the better, in my book," Dr. Throckmorton concluded.

"I did have to make some changes to my course," Dr. Throckmorton admitted. "The class met from 8 a.m. on Monday until midnight on Wednesday. After about 5 on Monday I had to begin showing some films and breaking the class up for group work to hold the students' attention. From about 2 a.m. on Tuesday, the only movies that would work were *Gone in 60 Seconds* and *The Fast and the Furious*. I had quite a time relating them to the Old Testament. Then I let the class go at about 10 in the morning on Tuesday. If you walk around campus at 9 p.m., you'll find that everybody with classes scheduled from 7 to 10 is already leaving. So this was standard operating procedure."

Reed Weep, a colleague of Dr. Throckmorton in the Religion Department, expressed some concern about the new format. "This is another sign of the corporatization of the university. LMU is trying to earn its way out of the budget crisis caused by state cutbacks. It had already increased tuition as much as it could without driving potential students away. So the only way to earn more money was to attract new enrollment by any means possible. A class meeting for forty straight hours is a joke educationally, but this isn't about education, it's about the bottom line. Next thing you know, LMU will be offering these forty-hour courses on-line, which will increase the niche marketing potential and cut down on the faculty oversight."

Dr. Smiley responded, saying, "Don't pay any attention to Weep. He's the Jim Traficant of the LMU faculty." "Yeah," added Vice-President Counter, "the guy's a lunatic."

In the conclusion of his report to the Regents, Vice-President Counter said that the initial success of the day-and-a-half semester was so great that the university is considering adding the format to its LMU On-Line course offerings. In an unrelated action, in June the Regents approved a change of title for Dr. Counter. From the beginning of the fall semester he will no longer be the Vice-President of Enrollment Management, but the Senior Vice-President of Customer Satisfaction.

So this woman got up in church and said, "May God strike down those priests who are sexually abusing innocent children." You won't believe what

happened next. Hold on, I've got to finish this column. Reed M. N. Weep is a professor of religion in a large midwestern university and a regular columnist in the bulletin. Now, where was I?

2.7 The Origins Of Religion Revealed

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scholars were fascinated by the question of the origins of religion. They devoted learned tomes to this topic, which even today make handy doorstops. Religion was not alone in this regard. This was a period in which everyone was obsessed with the origins of everything. Still, religion attracted particular attention, since people naturally said to themselves, “This whole religion thing is so weird, who made this up anyway?” Attempts to explain religion by its origins have been doomed to failure, in part because its beginnings have been lost in the impenetrable fog of prehistory. That is, until now. With the help of the physicists at Maharishi International University, I have invented a method utilizing brain waves and cosmic rays that will allow us to travel through time, to finally settle matters.

So let’s climb into our mental time machine and venture back to the caves of early man to get his opinion on the question. These rude savages live a primitive life, without the benefits of central air conditioning or those chairs at the mall that massage your lower back. (While we are on the subject, what about those machines at the mall that you lie down inside for a full body massage? Do they look like coffins, or what? Talk about creepy. But I digress.) However, we should not presume that these benighted barbarians do not have a rich inner life, despite their crude material conditions. On the contrary, it is entirely possible that they spend hours meditating on philosophical problems and reading Reed Weep columns as they stare into their campfires. In other words, I think they are absolute beasts, but it seems unkind to admit it, so I am throwing in some stuff to make it sound like they aren’t too bad.

When we reach the cave, we are surprised to find that Codrington and E. B. Tylor have already arrived. Like Tylor, Codrington had some initials, but I can’t be bothered. We climb out of our time machine to find Codrington explaining his theory of *mana* to the natives. *Mana* is an unseen force that can be found in extraordinary places, things, animals, and Johnny Depp. But the cave persons are concrete thinkers, naturally, and can’t tell what Codrington is talking about. Then Tylor steps forward to adumbrate his contention that religion arose from ideas about spirits that were in turn born from encountering the dead in dreams. This is a topic to which the primitives warm and we while the night away telling ghost stories and roasting smores on the fire.

We are awakened early the next morning, after a good night’s sleep on a pile of bearskins, by the appearance of Freud and Malinowski. Sigmund Freud rapidly launches into his argument that religion all started with totemism. For the purposes of this exposition, he drops the subject of taboo,

which he says has lost its analytical value since it became the name of a line of piercing jewelry at Hot Topic. In totemism the savages show a brief interest as Freud talks about the dirty bits, but his discussion of the incest prohibition, according to which the men of phratry A.I.a' could only marry the women of phratry B.I.a', strikes us all as a little too mathematical and makes us long for our bearskins. Finally, Coleslaw Malinowski describes his fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands, near Cape Cod. Malinowski maintains that the Trobrianders make a clear distinction between magic, science, and religion. Under science they categorize the things that they do that actually work. They reserve the term "religion" (no, of course, they don't use the English word, but the equivalent in their language, which is *pikelnoze*) for the things that they do that don't work, although they wish that they did. And, finally, magic (or *stinkifeat*, in their rude tongue) covers those things that they do that don't work, and that they feel ashamed about the morning after. I'm afraid the subtleties of this presentation are largely lost on the natives, as they fall to snickering over the Trobrianders' vocabulary. However, Malinowski does recapture their attention when he describes how he tested his theories by offering the odd Trobriander a pack of matches. Luckily he has a few extra packs with him on this trip, too, or he won't make it out of the cave alive.

Now let's travel back to the present. So, what can we conclude from our researches? Only that primitive man is as bored by the problem of the origin of religion as generations of modern grad students have been. Is that all we have to show for our labor? No—there are always the free matches.

Congratulations to Reed Weep, a professor of religion in a large midwestern university and a regular columnist for the bulletin, who has been nominated for the Templeton Prize in Science and Religion for his invention, the mental time machine.

2.8 The World Religions: Hinduism

“Hinduism is not a religion, but a way of life,” the textbooks say. To which my students respond, “Hinduism is not a religion, but a confusing mess.” I mean, there are so many gods and books and ideas, and they are all so unpronounceable. What they fail to appreciate is that there are two great advantages to this. One is that it makes it easy to get a nice, broad distribution of grades—students can’t possibly question a grade when they are terminally confused. The second great advantage is tolerance. In the Hindu tradition you find polytheism, monotheism, monism, henotheism, atheism, pantheism, and Sheilaism. Those Hindus will tolerate anything. And if you’ve ever been to India, then you know that it is a lucky thing, because they have to.

Of course, Hinduism is not a term that is native to the history of the Indian subcontinent. There the word Hindu (or its variants, Sindu, Indu, and Rikki Tikki Tembo) has been used for millennia, but simply as a geographical designation. It was only in the nineteenth century that the British colonial administration decided to canonize the term as a religion, which they did by adding the dreaded “ism.” And Hinduism has been dreaded ever since.

The oldest surviving Hindu religious books are the Vedas, which is a Sanscript word meaning “the oldest surviving Hindu religious books.” Recent archeological researches have discovered the remains of an even more ancient culture, dubbed the Indoor-Outdoor Civilization because of their unique and enduring carpet. Unfortunately, little is known about the religion of the Indoor-Outdoor people, because they all died three thousand years ago and are keeping mum on the subject. About the Vedic religion, by contrast, we know too much. The ancient Vedic Hindus were polytheists, and their deities were closely associated with the forces of nature. There was a god of the rain, a goddess of the dawn, and a god of suntanning.

At the end of the Vedic period, a new type of religious literature emerged, known as the Upanishads. The very name of these books gives an indication of their social origin, since the word “upanishad” could be translated as “Sit as far away from me as possible.” Thus, the authors of these books withdrew from society to ruminate on the mysteries of the Vedic religion. They are especially known for the discovery of the formula *atman = brahman*, which is a good deal like the formula $E = mc^2$, but only in the narrow technical sense that I don’t understand either of them. (Yes, I know that I have used that joke before—you try writing four of these columns a year and coming up with fresh material.) During the period when the Upanishads were composed, Buddhism originated in South Asia, but I don’t have to pad this column with it, because it will be the subject of a future padded column.

After the Upanishads, Hindus began writing books like crazy, epics, law codes, philosophical treatises, you name it. The two great Hindu epics are the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The latter is as long as Proust's *The Remembrance of Things Past*, but suffers by comparison from a lack of veiled references to homosexuality. The central character of the former epic is Rama, who was a righteous king, but a lousy husband. And, while we are on the subject of lousy husbands, there is *The Law Code of Manu*, which, among other things, tells women who is the boss. About the philosophical treatises suffice it to say that, contrary to the popular American understanding, yoga is not just about twisting your body into a pretzel. It is also about breathing in through your right nostril and breathing out through your left.

This brings us up to the medieval period and the Puranas, books slamma-jamma with Hindu mythology. It is important to include the Puranas in any course about Hinduism, because they are the basis of a good deal of contemporary popular religious practice. Also, the stories they tell are so alien to American students that this is where the instructor has the maximum opportunity to stretch out that curve. By the way, some things that should not be included in the course if there are Asian Indian students are hook-swinging and other forms of self-mutilation, fire-walking, phallus worship, and demon possession, because they will be deeply embarrassed and offended. On the other hand, if there are no Asian Indian students in the class, anything goes. And what about sacred cows? I say, why not?

After the medieval period comes the epoch in which the politics of the South Asian subcontinent was dominated by Muslim emperors. If you want to spice up the class, you can present this as an era of mutual religious understanding and syncretism. Take Sikhism, for example. Or, if you want to get good evaluations, then you can play to the students' prejudices by representing this as a dark night of religious bigotry and violence. Take Sikhism, for example. Then comes the modern period, when Indians began to wear British-style hats, speak English, and win Nobel and Booker prizes. Of course, the most important figure in modern Hinduism is Mahatma Gandhi, who agitated for India's independence while wrapped in swaddling clothes. About contemporary India, the less said, the better, since if you want to say anything, you have to go to the trouble to learn about it. Just make some noises about the tragic betrayal of Gandhi's vision with the rise of Hindu fundamentalism and the testing of nuclear weapons. Your students will have no idea what you are talking about, but they'll like the romantic tone—you might as well leave them in the mysterious East.

With this column, Reed M. N. Weep, a professor of religion in a large midwestern university and a regular contributor to the bulletin, begins a

year-long series on the religions of the world. As it will not be possible to cover all of the world religions in this series, Professor Weep will limit himself to the humorous ones.

2.9 The World Religions: Buddhism

Buddhism is a really nice religion. The founder was full of compassion and so are his contemporary followers. Why, even the scholars who study Buddhism are nice, with the possible exception of Donald Lopez, who seems to be a bit cranky. Buddhism developed out of Hinduism, but since, as I explained in my last column, Hinduism makes no sense, you'd better forget about that in your introduction to Buddhism. Instead, start with the life of the Buddha. The word "Buddha" is actually a title, of course, which could be translated "The Big Cheese." The Buddha's name was Gautama (Pali: Gotama; misspelled: Guatama). He was also called Siddarya, Siditya, Sidhappa—we'll just call him Sid. Sid was raised in a palace surrounded by Cameron Diaz, until he encountered the true human condition in the four sights: (1) a sick man; (2) an old man; (3) a corpse; and (4) a per-course instructor. Traumatized by this experience, Sid left the palace to begin several years of ascetic practice, dining only at Denny's. This culminated in Sid's breakthrough discovery of the four noble truths. They are: (1) life is full of suffering; (2) desire is the cause of suffering; (3) no one is still reading this column; and (4) the way to stop suffering is the eightfold path. Sid then embarked on a career preaching the Buddhist gospel and sponging off wealthy merchants, dying decades later upon consuming a psychotropic mushroom. If you want your students to pay any attention to this story, you can present it to them audiovisually by showing the film *The Little Buddha*. It includes a long digression on the Buddha's life, starring that guy from *The Matrix*. He gives a singularly wooden performance, but that seems oddly appropriate, since the Buddha himself never took an acting lesson in his life.

After the Buddha's death, there were a series of councils. The first council was marked by the codification of the founder's teaching in the Tripitaka, also known as the Pali canon (and, no, I'm not going to make any jokes about Pali cannonballs, not because it is beneath me, but only because I can't think of any). Then there was the Second Vatican Council, in which the cardinals confessed that they didn't know jack about Buddhism. This was followed by the third council, when a major split developed among the followers of the Buddha over where to put the "h." According to the Hinayana, the vehicle of the narrow-minded, hidebound, bigoted numskulls, it had to come after the two "ds." On the other hand, the Mahayanists, the tolerant, laid-back, devil-may-care liberals, concluded that you can put it wherever you want. Buddah, Buhdda, Bhudda, it's all good. And ever since then most students have followed the Mahayana.

From Mahayana, a third major form of Buddhism developed, Vajrayana, the vehicle of the little rain cloud. From the standpoint of the instructor,

the bad news is that this kind of tantric Buddhism is absolutely incomprehensible. The good news is that it's got something to do with sex—any museum with a halfway decent Asian art collection will have statues of Vajrayana Buddhist deities going at it. This is good for a class field trip, if you aren't afraid of the sexual harassment charges. Of course, the home of Vajrayana Buddhism used to be Tibet, until those dirty commies from China took it over. Now, the only surviving Tibetan Buddhists are to be found at the coffee shops around the University of Virginia. This includes the Dalai Lama, naturally. Despite the fact that his predecessors were theocratic despots, what's not to like about the current Dalai Lama, smiling beatifically and wearing a comfy-looking bathrobe?

No introduction to Buddhism would be complete without a discussion of its present incarnations in the west. A few years ago an added benefit of introducing this topic was that it allowed you to play it cool by pretending that you know who the Beastie Boys were, one of whom was into Tibet. Unfortunately, pop culture is fickle, and now the currency of the Beastie Boys is equal to Duns Scotus. Be that as it may, you could throw in that Uma Thurman's father is the redoubtable Robert Thurman, Buddhologist and all-around raconteur. You could even go and see *Kill Bill*, but I wouldn't advise it.

Finally, what about the status of women in Buddhism? You might as well try to conjure that up. From my students I learned that an early advocate of women in Buddhism was Sid's cousin and leading disciple Amanda (if you didn't get that one, you'll have to yell at the Buddhism guy in the next cubicle). Historically, women have had a raw deal in Buddhism. More often than not, they've been denied the right to renounce the world altogether, and when they have been given that right, they have still been treated as second-class citizens. Witness the rule that says that every nun, however senior, must greet every monk, however junior, by saying "Yes, boss." Yet if anything is clear from a careful study of the historical record it is that this gender discrimination is due to the latent sexism of the various cultures in which you find Buddhism, and can't be blamed on the Buddhist religion itself. The Buddha, for example, is famous for saying, "Now this, oh monks, is the noble truth concerning women. They're swell." Didn't I tell you he was really nice?

Reed M. N. Weep is a professor of religion in a large midwestern university, a regular contributor to the bulletin, and a former dharma bum. Now he is just a regular bum.

2.10 The World Religions: Christianity

Once I was in church and my attention was drawn to a six-year-old girl in the pew in front of me. She poked her mother, pointed at the ceiling, and whispered, “Mommy, there’s a cross.” The mother and I both looked up, and, sure enough, the lights in the ceiling were more or less cruciform. Mom looked down at her daughter, proud that she knew not only theology but also her shapes, and said, “That’s right, honey.” And the girl replied, “Jesus is going to be ’lectrocuted on that cross, Mommy.” Her mother’s alarmed denials only added to the child’s insistence, “Jesus is going to be ’lectrocuted on that cross!” Like those moth-eaten historical re-enactors you avoid like the plague at the Fourth of July picnic, I tell stories not just to amuse but also to edify. And the moral of this story is that the girl put her finger on it: Christianity is about death.

(Stylistic digression: Though this is a true story, I’m not 100 per cent certain that the little tyke elided the first syllable of the word “electrocuted.” I just wanted to Huck Finn things up a bit. Stylistic digression II, the sequel: Note that story contains two subliminal messages. First, to get the religious Christians off my back, I telegraph that I have been to church, at least once. And for those who are not religious, surely the majority of the *bulletin*’s readers, I wink and say that I wasn’t actually paying attention.)

But to return to the main thread of my narrative. Look at Jesus. He died. As far as his earlier followers were concerned, this was a big mistake. You would think that the fact that he rose from the dead would have made them feel better, but the Gospels prove conclusively that this was not the case. They spend hardly any time on the Resurrection (Resurrection, Resurrection, Resurrection); they want to talk about death. This is where Mel Gibson got it wrong in his here’s-blood-in-your-eye version of the story. For him the message of the Christ’s life is: He really took a beating, and if you want to take a beating you’ll become his disciple. Wrong. Mel, it’s not about the beating, it’s about the death.

Since this is a world religions intro, I should take a step back and say that the place to learn about Jesus’ death and other incidentals such as his preaching is in the Christian holy book, the King James Version. The Christian scripture is named after a city on the Thames, King James, where they used to make books a long time ago before Ronald Reagan was president. The KJV is divided into two parts. It used to be that Christian churches didn’t want to have anything to do with the first part, but now they have chucked the other part, too, in favor of fundraising.

The second most important person in the history of Christianity was a man named Saul, who changed his name to Steve after an encounter with a

horse. In letters to the editor of the KJV, Steve explained that Jesus died so that we wouldn't have to. That is, of course, unless you don't believe that, in which case you are S.O.L. I am aware that according to *The Da Vinci Code*, the second most important person was Mary Magdalene. However, since Dan Brown wrote that book to make money and not in the disinterested pursuit of tenure, it is beneath our consideration.

Skipping over the Dark Ages, when people were always bumping their shins because the lights were out, the third most important person was Martin Luther. Raised a Roman Catholic, the reformer joined the Lutheran Church as an adult, since they had better hot dishes. When he wasn't showing the devil his backside, Luther was arguing with the Pope. And death figured into this argument, too. You see, the Pope was selling indulgences so that big donors would not have to suffer in Purgatory after they died. Luther's response to the Pope was, "I don't know about the big donors, but you are definitely going to Hell." And the Catholic Church has been going to Hell ever since. (While we are on the subject of the Pope, I have heard that since he is too old to kneel down and kiss the earth when he arrives in a new country, now they just give him a glass of dirt to kiss. Do you think that is true, or just an urban myth?)

The fourth most important person in the history of Christianity is John Ashcroft. Son of a Pentecostal minister, the Attorney General is famous for having prayer meetings and singing "Amazing Grace" before a busy day, denying everybody their civil liberties. I have to admit that my decision to put Ashcroft in the top five is novel. You can find everything else in this column in any world religions textbook, but here I have decided to part company with the other lemmings and to step off this cliff all by myself. In my book, the reason why John Ashcroft belongs right up there with Luther and Steve is that he is a kind of test case for contemporary Christianity. Some of the critics of the Bush Administration say that they view their own petty warmongering in apocalyptic terms. They are a part of the cataclysmic battle between good and evil that will usher in God's righteous kingdom. Personally, I don't think Ashcroft is that nutty, but maybe I'll go out and buy some duct tape just in case I'm wrong. We'll all die sometime, but I would like to postpone my own demise for a while, if the Attorney General doesn't mind.

A professor of religious studies at a large midwestern university and a regular columnist in the bulletin, Reed Weep would like to take this opportunity to express his appreciation to the outgoing editor, a valued colleague and close personal friend, Chris Prentiss.

3. The Elliott Decade, 2005–2008

It Was a Short Decade

3.1 The World Religions: Islam

[The editor has ordered me, Alumno Sinllanto, to omit from this column anything that could offend any reader, including lame jokes, dated pop culture references, and the occasional angry zinger.]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A regular contributor to the bulletin and professor of religion in a large midwestern university, Reed Weep is not really into religion, but he is a deeply spiritual person.

3.2 Meeting with the Special Assistant to the Provost

What follows is a transcript of the 12 September 2005 meeting of the Department of Religion with the Special Assistant to the Provost (SAP) for External Research.

Thanks for inviting me today. This semester I am meeting with all the departments on campus to let you know what the Office of External Research can do for you. The new provost is a visionary change agent with a paradigm shift. He wants to take the university to the next level, promoting cutting-edge interdisciplinary work. And he is reaching out to all the constituencies of the university to create a strong foundation for future progress. The Department of Religion has a vital role to play in this brave, new world.

[Cell phone rings.]

Excuse me. I've got to take this.

Hey, Cyndi, I'm in a meeting. Yes, I'll call you as soon as I am done. Great, talk to you then.

As I was saying, the provost realizes that the university faces a significant challenge in funding. State support has been declining for years, and that trend is likely to continue. Initially, this was the unavoidable consequence of tight budgets in lean economic times. Now, even with some improvement in the business climate, it seems that our legislators have decided that the state's colleges and universities can get by on less. You and I may feel that this is short-sighted, but it is the reality. In this context, when the university must turn to other sources for support, external funding is becoming increasingly important. And here the Religion Department has a contribution to make.

[Cell phone rings.]

Nobody ever calls me usually.

Hi, hon, I'm in a meeting. Yeah, I talked to Phil and he and Kitty are coming at seven. OK. *[Makes a motion as if he writing to borrow a pen and paper.]* Tortilla chips and a six of Heineken. You think a six is going to be enough? You know Kitty. Right, I'll get a case. Bye, bye.

There can be no doubt that the faculty in this department have been productive in the area of research, and I commend you for that. Several of you have had awards to underwrite that work. In the future, there will be less and less support for research from within the university. So we are all going to have to work harder to try to attract external funds. And that is why I am here today. The Office of External Research is here to help you to secure those external funds.

[Cell phone rings.]

I can't believe this.

Earl, I'm in a meeting. Yes, I do have a complaint. I left the bag in the locker in the bus station just like I always do, and you want to know how much merchandise I found there? That's right, none. You need to talk to Junior about customer service. In fact, the business school's got an online program in customer service that Junior should take a look at. Heck, yeah, Junior'd be able to keep up with the classes even while he is down in Colombia. Alright, tell Junior to give me shout.

The kinds of grants that you managed to get in the past just aren't going to cut it anymore. The university isn't interested in support for your individual research. That doesn't help our bottom line. The magic words are "indirect costs." If you get a big institutional grant with substantial indirect costs, then we are talking business. And speaking of business, that's where the real money is, in public-private partnerships. Businesses love it when they can get university researchers to do their research for them on the public's nickel, and so they are only too happy to let us write budgets with inflated numbers claiming that some of their assets are ours. Everybody wins. When it comes to federal money, the only chance a university has these days is in defense and homeland security. If you've got an idea about anthrax or body armor, then they'll come running. Friends, there are buckets of money out there. We just have to reach out and stick our hands in them.

Where does the Religious Department fit into all this? That's what you have to tell me. What are the latest business developments that are related to your expertise? How would your research help the Defense Department? Once I know the answers to those questions, then the Office of External Funds can help you plan a strategy for success. So, how would you answer those questions?

[Cell phone rings. Faculty thank God for the interruption.]

Reed Weep, a professor of religion in a large midwestern university and a regular columnist in the bulletin, is going to go right out and shake the money tree, as soon as he recovers from his hernia repair.

3.3 Managing Stress

What's the administrators' secret? How is it that they manage to manipulate the faculty so effectively? Is it because they are the only ones who are willing to stay in their offices past three in the afternoon? No, it is because they read self-help books. Sun Tzu said, "Know your enemy." (Sun Tzu? Clausewitz? Donald Rumsfeld? What's the difference?) With that in mind, I whiled away some lazy afternoons this summer reading *So You Want to Be Department Chair When You Grow Up?* Much of the wise counsel there was specific to chairs, such as the proposal that, if someone has made a charge of sexual harassment, you should suggest that the alleged victim carry a small audio recording device (actually, this advice would work not just for a chair, but for any nutty conspiracy theorist). However, there was one part of the book helpful for every faculty member on the go, a list of suggestions for managing stress. In this column I will share that list, as well as some comments about operationalizing it.

1. *Set attainable goals.* No doubt a significant source of frustration for many faculty members is that they have goals that are unrealistic. After all, only one in ten million people can win the Lotto. You've got to face it, it can't always be you.

2. *Avoid procrastination.* Stop reading this column right now.

3. *Get plenty of exercise.* Staying chained to your desk for hours on end is dispiriting, as well as being bad for your health. Take the time in the middle of the day to have a walk around campus. Or, if you can't get away, just go down the hall and yell at the department chair for a few minutes. You'd be surprised what a fine aerobic workout that can be, but you do have to yell really loud.

4. *Find a way to relax.* I have two alternative suggestions here. If you want to move into administration, take up golf. It is a good way to get outdoors and enjoy the fresh air. Of course, it is also a time-consuming and expensive hobby, but that keeps out all the riff-raff. If you do not have administrative ambitions, I would recommend that you become a Civil War re-enactor. When it comes to career advancement, it's the kiss of death. Plus, you'll have an excuse to buy a muzzle-loader.

5. *Develop a healthy lifestyle.* My university recently adopted a wellness plan, under which you can reduce your health insurance premiums by making a healthy lifestyle a priority. Since smoking cessation is heavily favored in

the plan, many employees are taking up smoking annually, so that they can then kick the habit and get the insurance break. You could improve upon this practice by doing this once a day—then you’d feel great about yourself all the time.

5. *See your physician.* Please note that this is not the same as actually having an appointment with your physician. If you have an appointment, you’ll sit around in the waiting room for an hour, and then they’ll make you put on a hospital gown. No, what you need to do is hang out in the health center parking lot. You’ll see your physician eventually.

6. *Share your frustrations with your spouse or a trusted friend.* Constance Weep thinks that this is a capital idea. She has never been happier than since the divorce. If your budget can’t handle a break-up at present, why don’t you go down and talk to the department secretary? She loves to hear faculty whine for hours on end, and she won’t breathe a word of what you say to the chair.

8. *Plan time for yourself and your family for entertainment.* Since Constance and Petey moved out, I’ve been spending a lot of time instant messaging my nieces and nephews. This is a treat, but it has been hard to keep up with them. They constantly change their addresses and then they forget to tell me.

9. *Attend a conference.* This is a great idea. I went once, and they even had free ice in the hotel.

10. *Examine and evaluate your workload.* Since committee work can be such a drain on your time, you should strictly limit this. However, committee assignments are often offers you can’t refuse. To avoid that in the future, you should find something about which you can disagree with the chair of the committee, and then yell at her. Soon everyone will avoid you like the plague. Also see the aerobic benefits in item 3 above.

11. *Teach a class.* Note that this was a suggestion in a book by someone already a department chair. Since you are currently carrying a nine-hour load, I’m betting that teaching *a* class is sounding pretty good around about now.

12. *Get involved in a research project.* They say that there is nothing as satisfying as making an important contribution on a major intellectual

challenge in your field. Never having done that, I wouldn't know, but it sounds good. I'd recommend getting a grant, something over half a million would be impressive. Or you can see about writing a book review.

13. *Get ready for Mondays.* The main reason why Mondays are such a bear is because the eager beavers are busy sending you e-mails over the weekend. You have to find a way to disable the university's mainframe when you leave the office every Friday. Of course, this is liable to lead to a contretemps with Homeland Security. On the bright side, your e-mail load is liable to decline dramatically while you are serving your sentence.

14. *Learn to tame the paper tiger.* To do this you need to learn to use the calendar feature on your computer. And you need to get a PDA. A Black-Berry would be really swell. However, since Electronic Services don't support any of this stuff, you are liable to be eaten by the virtual tiger.

15. *Analyze what is causing your stress.* For example, studies show that one of the primary causes of stress is trying to reduce stress. So, to reduce stress you need to stop trying to reduce stress. And I need to stop reading the *Tao Te Ching*.

A professor of religion in a large midwestern university and a regular contributor to the bulletin, Reed Weep advises you to go directly to your physician's parking lot, if this column causes you to laugh for more than four hours.

3.4 True That

Buy the dean three drinks, and he'll agree to anything.

Your state is forty-eighth in the nation in funding higher education. They all are.

The health plan doesn't cover it.

The single guys in grad school are needy, lonely, and creepy. I know I was. We are in it for the money, actually.

Graduate assistants deserve health insurance.

The coffee here [wherever you are] isn't very good.

Look at it this way: When you are chair, then it will be your turn to be a pain.

The private lives of your colleagues are none of your business. They may be complicated, bizarre, and infinitely fascinating, but they are still none of your business.

You do use technology in your classroom. You turn on the lights, don't you?

There isn't enough money in the world to fund the merit pay plan so that people get what they think they deserve.

It would take too much time to put my lectures on PowerPoint. Half an hour a week? Exactly, too much time.

While it is true that the new guy is a wanker, you don't have to keep telling everyone.

The people who shouldn't retire, do. The people who should ...

On the basis of its information session for prospective students, your college provides an academically serious but fun environment in which students make lifelong friends. At least, that's what all colleges say.

It is not true that all of your single colleagues are gay and lesbian. That guy? Well, yeah, I'm pretty sure he is, but not everybody.

Doctors have trophy wives. Academics' wives have husbands who are no prize.

You can live comfortably on a college professor's salary as long as your significant other is highly paid.

The movie *Dreamgirls* is like an opera, only with more annoying music.

It is not true that there is an inverse relationship between how important something is and how much academics argue about it. Actually, the relationship is random. Sometimes academics argue about something important.

There is an inverse relationship between the length of e-mails and the importance of their writers.

Never loan a book to an ethicist. She won't return it.

There is no widely accepted theoretical basis for the academic study of religion, just like every other discipline.

The weather here [wherever you are] isn't very good.

That fat portfolio you meticulously put together? Nobody ever read it.

Short-answer tests objectively assess the acquisition of insignificant information.

Essay tests assess the acquisition of important information subjectively.

Based on the prevalence of obscure papers delivered rapid fire at conferences, academics lecture worst when it matters most.

Your school spends too much on athletics.

It is not true that people fear change. On the other hand, it is true that they don't like the change that you are proposing.

There would probably be more support for academic bills of rights if people thought that something important is happening in college.

No academic program was ever improved on the basis of an assessment plan.

Tuition is going up.

College costs too much, but so does everything else.

Your smartphone is too smart for you.

There isn't enough tech support at your institution. Of course, the only way that there would be enough is if the tech guy was always waiting for you outside your office.

While the people you'd like to hear from are taciturn, those who have nothing to say are loquacious.

The bad news is that you will never know how many students' lives you've changed. The good news is that you will also never know how many students you had no impact on whatsoever.

You are more likely to have a life-changing effect on a student in a class with less than seventy-five of them.

If you can't remember a female student's name, trust me, it's Jennifer.

Even the most worthless of your students is too valuable to be sent to Iraq.

You can't ask about the private lives of job applicants. You can find out, you just can't ask.

We aren't manufacturing widgets here. We don't even know what widgets are.

This column [whichever one you are reading] isn't very good.

A regular columnist in the bulletin, Reed Weep is professor of religion, department chair, and automatic for the people at a large midwestern university.

3.5 Desert

Name withheld; Waterville, Maine; Kuwait; 20 March 2003. Name withheld; Bloomington, Illinois; Kuwait; 20 March 2003. Name withheld; Houston, Texas; Kuwait; 20 March 2003. Name withheld; Baltimore, Maryland; Kuwait; 20 March 2003. Name withheld; Harrison County, Mississippi; southern Iraq; 21 March 2003. Name withheld; Los Angeles, California; southern Iraq; 21 March 2003. Name withheld; Buffalo, New York; Iraq; 22 March 2003. Name withheld; hometown not available; Iraq; 22 March 2003. Name withheld; La Mesa, California; died at sea; 22 March 2003. Name withheld; hometown not available; Kuwait; 22 March 2003. Name withheld; Smithville, Missouri; Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Roswell, Georgia; Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Mobile, Alabama; Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Ventura, California; An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Lee, Florida; An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Orange, California; An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Los Angeles, California; An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Brazoria, Texas; An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Nye, Nevada; An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Adams, Colorado; An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Barnwell, South Carolina; Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Cleveland, Ohio; Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; El Paso, Texas; Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Amarillo, Texas; Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Tuba City, Arizona; Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Cleveland, Ohio; Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Kansas City, Missouri; Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Brownsville, Texas; Highway 7 in Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Cedar Key, Florida; vicinity of An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; San Diego, California; vicinity of An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Yuma, Arizona; outskirts of An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Nashville, Tennessee; outskirts of An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Casper, Wyoming; outskirts of An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Buffalo, New York; outskirts of An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Sparks, Nevada; outskirts of An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Boiling Springs, South Carolina; outskirts of An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Macon, Illinois; outskirts of An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Waterford, Connecticut; outskirts of An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Erie, New York; outskirts of An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Wagoner, Oklahoma; outskirts of An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld; Washoe, Nevada; outskirts of An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 23 March 2003. Name withheld;

Scott, Iowa; Saddam Canal, Iraq; 24 March 2003. Name withheld; Indiana; Iraq; 24 March 2003. Name withheld; Boise, Idaho; Kuwait; 25 March 2003. Name withheld; Little Rock, Arkansas; Iraq; 25 March 2003. Name withheld; Richmond, Virginia; vicinity of the Euphrates River, Iraq; 25 March 2003. Name withheld; Sonoma, California; vicinity of the Euphrates River, Iraq; 25 March 2003. Name withheld; Los Angeles, California; vicinity of the Euphrates River, Iraq; 25 March 2003. Name withheld; Union Lake, Michigan; Iraq; 26 March 2003. Name withheld; Queens, New York; Euphrates River, Iraq; 27 March 2003. Name withheld; San Jose, California; no location; 27 March 2003. Name withheld; Escondido, California; no location; 27 March 2003. Name withheld; San Luis, Arizona; vicinity of An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 28 March 2003. Name withheld; Fayetteville, North Carolina; Iraq; 28 March 2003. Name withheld; Roy, Utah; no location; 29 March 2003. Name withheld; Palm Bay, Florida; no location; 29 March 2003. Name withheld; Howell, New Jersey; no location; 29 March 2003. Name withheld; Conyers, Georgia; no location; 29 March 2003. Name withheld; Highland, New York; no location; 29 March 2003. Name withheld; Brooklyn, New York; Iraq; 29 March 2003. Name withheld; Troutville, Virginia; southern Iraq; 30 March 2003. Name withheld; St. George, Delaware; southern Iraq; 30 March 2003. Name withheld; Sherwood, Oregon; southern Iraq; 30 March 2003. Name withheld; Roscoe, Illinois; Ayyub, Iraq; 31 March 2003. Name withheld; Wellsville, Kansas; Assamawah, Iraq; 1 April 2003. Name withheld; Lansdale, Pennsylvania; Kuwait; 1 April 2003. Name withheld; Durham, North Carolina; west of An Nasiriyah, Iraq; 2 April 2003. Name withheld; Ohio City, Ohio; southern Iraq; 2 April 2003. Name withheld; El Paso, Texas; northern Iraq; 2 April 2003. Name withheld; Mesa, Arizona; Iraq; 2 April 2003. Name withheld; Springfield, Virginia; central Iraq; 2 April 2003. Name withheld; Dracut, Massachusetts; central Iraq; 2 April 2003. Name withheld; Bennington, Vermont; central Iraq; 2 April 2003. Name withheld; Granbury, Texas; central Iraq; 2 April 2003. Name withheld; Flint, Michigan; central Iraq; 2 April 2003. Name withheld; California; central Iraq; 2 April 2003. Name withheld; Coahoma, Texas; east of Ash Shahin, Iraq; 3 April 2003. Name withheld; Erie, Pennsylvania; Iraq; 3 April 2003. Name withheld; Longmont, Colorado; Iraq; 3 April 2003. Name withheld; Pentwater, Michigan; Iraq; 3 April 2003. Name withheld; Utah; Iraq; 3 April 2003. Name withheld; Seaford, Delaware; Iraq; 3 April 2003. Name withheld; Colorado; Iraq; 3 April 2003. Name withheld; Burlington, Vermont; central Iraq; 3 April 2003. Name withheld; Chula Vista, California; Iraq; 3 April 2003. Name withheld; Alaska; Iraq; 3 April 2003...

SOURCE: icasualties.org and the news releases of the Department of Defense. A complete list would be more than thirty times longer than this one. According to the figures reported at iraqbodycount.org, the list of “civilians reported killed by military intervention in Iraq” would be more than eighteen times longer than the complete U.S. military list.

From *Webster’s Third*: **des’ert** “more or less barren tract; a desolate or forbidding prospect (as from pathless emptiness, bleak unrelieved changelessness or monotony, futility of effort)”; **desert’** “the quality or fact of being worthy of or deserving of rewards or recompense or of requital or punishment”; **desert’** “to abandon (military service) without leave.”

A regular contributor to the bulletin and professor of religion in a large midwestern university, Reed Weep has taken a turn in the direction of moral seriousness here. Not to worry. In future columns he will return to the inane style that you have come to know and, well, know.

3.6 ESTPPPMFC

In August the Vice President for Academics met with the Faculty Council to take questions about the new tenure and promotion policy. The following is an Executive Summary of the Tenure and Promotion Policies and Procedures Meeting of the Faculty Council.

Question: Last week the dean reported that applications for tenure and promotion will have to include evaluations from two external reviewers. Then in yesterday's Admin Advisory three reviewers were mentioned. Is it two or three?

Answer: Decisions about tenure and promotion are among the most important decisions that we make, and so it is important that they are made on the broadest basis possible. Especially as we are attempting to improve the reputation of Large Midwestern University, the participation of external reviewers in these decisions is critical. They provide us with the opportunity to benchmark our standards against those of other institutions nationally, and even internationally. In this context it is important to choose external reviewers with care. Of course, we have to avoid the bias that comes from conflicts of interest, but we must work with external reviewers who are willing to make the effort to familiarize themselves with our applicants and who are respected authorities in their fields. I hope that I have answered your question.

Question: The academic Vice President's tenure and promotion calendar on the Web says that applications are due on 15 January. The personnel committee's work calendar on the same Web site gives 15 December as the deadline. Which is the correct date?

Answer: I think that you'll agree with me that decisions about tenure and promotion are among the most important decisions that we make, and so it is important that they be made deliberatively. After an application is submitted, it must be carefully reviewed by the department personnel committee, which then must communicate its recommendation to the department chair, and it must contain an acknowledgment from the applicant that she has had the opportunity to review the recommendation. In most cases the chair will agree with the committee's recommendation, but she is also free to disagree, so she must have the time to make an independent judgment. The same is true for the college personnel committee, the dean, the university personnel committee, and for myself. Since this is a time-consuming process, it is important for applicants to respect the deadline. Next question.

Question: Is a summary of teaching evaluations sufficient, or should applicants submit all of the actual evaluations themselves?

Answer: Among the most important decisions that we make are decisions about tenure and promotion, and so we need the best data possible. Large Midwestern has committed itself to growing research, but quality teaching has always been a high priority and that has not changed. My office's financial support for the Office of Learning and Teaching/Teaching and Learning is just one indication of that. Among our probationary faculty there are many fine teachers. However, we must maintain and expand our efforts to document their successes. And, since there is always room for improvement, we must mentor them in evidence-based best practices. Good question.

Question: I know that there is a system being developed to submit tenure and promotion recommendation forms electronically. Will that system be implemented this year?

Answer: Let's face it, tenure and promotion decisions are important, but we also need to communicate those decisions efficiently. The half of last year's operating budget that went for the new administrative computer system was well spent, since it puts us on the cutting edge in information management. The Facilities Utilization Committee estimates that 95 per cent of the space in department offices is taken up by file cabinets. In the brave new world of electronic record-keeping, all the university's documents can be stored in a server the size of a nano. A new day is dawning not only of expeditious processes, but also of limitless space. I know that you share my excitement about that. Time for one more question.

Question: Could you tell me where the nearest restroom is?

Answer: After tenure and promotion, one of the university's highest priorities is the health of its students, faculty, and staff, and so the campus is liberally supplied with facilities that meet the highest standards of hygiene. We are in the midst of a multi-million-dollar, five-year plan to update the restrooms in the classroom and office buildings on campus, installing the latest in automatically flushing toilets and motion-sensor faucets. This will enable us to meet the needs of the campus community while also preserving precious environmental resources. We are not only taking care of the health of our students, but also using their tuition dollars wisely.

Thanks for taking part in today's meeting. I know that you come out of it armed with the knowledge that you need to implement the university's vision, especially in tenure and promotion.

Reed Weep is a professor of religion and department chair in a large midwestern university and a regular contributor to the bulletin. Among the articles that appear in the bulletin, his column is one of the most important. Though humorous, the column shines the spotlight of irony on the great problems that face the discipline of religious studies. By exposing the mechanisms of oppression in academe, Weep is a pioneer in the practice of "telling jokes to power." He is constantly working to improve the quality of the column, doing research on the latest humor trends. Hardly a day passes when he doesn't read the cartoons in the newspaper. Since the bulletin goes out to all the members of the constituents and affiliates of the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion, Weep's column goes unread by thousands of scholars every year. It is one of the most important columns in religion that no one reads. Thanks for asking.

Weep would like to express his appreciation to outgoing bulletin editor Scott Elliot, for his professionalism and his friendship. "Scott is easily one of the top three bulletin editors with whom I have had the privilege of working," Weep avers.

4. The Martin Decade, 2008–2011

OK, So Maybe It Wasn't Exactly Ten Years

4.1 The Candidates' Religion

On 6 December 2007, Mitt Romney, running for the presidential nomination of the Republican Party in the United States, attempted to exorcise one of the demons haunting his political campaign by speaking openly about the M word, Mormonism. In his speech Romney affirmed that he believes that "Jesus Christ is the son of God and the savior of mankind." But he also insisted that "no authorities of my church, or of any other church for that matter, will ever exert influence on presidential decisions." Romney went on to explain that the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints does teach that contemporary Native Americans are descendants of the Lamanites, one of the factions of the Israelites who traveled to the Americas in the sixth century BCE. He was adamant, however, that this would not affect his oversight of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Political commentators judged the speech generally effective, but thought Romney could have left out the Lamanites.

This suggests a significant problem confronting the Republican presidential candidates. To win their party's nomination, GOP candidates have got to satisfy the evangelicals who make up a significant proportion of the party faithful. Yet this would leave the nominee too far on the right to win the general election. The Romney candidacy presents an interesting solution to this dilemma, since he is a candidate from a frighteningly conservative religion, but one that is different from the evangelicals' frighteningly conservative religion.

Rudy Giuliani presents another fascinating case. He was raised Roman Catholic, but encountered problems with his third marriage. Giuliani's first marriage was annulled by the Church when it was learned that his first wife was his second cousin. Documents revealing this were discovered by Church officials in an envelope that coincidentally contained a large sum of cash. When a second annulment was not forthcoming, Giuliani took a page from Henry VIII's playbook and founded a church of his own. The theology of the Church of New York is murky, but everyone knows that its most important holy day is 9/11.

The Republicans' evangelical problem is most painfully evident in the campaign of John McCain. Running for president in 2000, McCain alienated evangelicals by criticizing the likes of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, saying "we embrace the fine members of the religious conservative community. But that does not mean that we will pander to their self-appointed leaders." Since then, McCain has attempted to kiss and make up with evangelicals, for example, by speaking at Liberty University, which was founded by Jerry Falwell. However, the candidate's Straight Talk Express has continued to be the scene of embarrassing revelations, as when McCain

admitted that he still can't stand evangelicals, adding, "Just because you kiss somebody doesn't mean that you have to like him."

The Republican with the strongest evangelical bona fides is, of course, Mike Huckabee, who is not only as conservative as all get out, but is also a Baptist minister. The Democrats are pulling for Huckabee to become the Republican nominee. While polls show 100 per cent evangelical support for Huckabee, the percentage of non-evangelicals who have ever heard of him is zero. Plus the Dems like to make fun of his name. Hickabee, Hockabee, Huckabee.

Speaking of the Democrats, it is not as if they don't have problems with religion also. The stereotype that the Democratic base is jam-packed with godless communists is actually true, but to win a presidential election a Democratic candidate will have to garner the votes of at least six or eight religious people. Barack Obama deserves attention in this regard. There is speculation that the monster in his closet starts with an H, which stands for Hussein, which rhymes with terrorist. The bad news public relations-wise is that Obama's Kenyan father had been raised a Muslim. The good news is that he was alienated from that religion by the time that Obama was born. The bad news is that the elder Obama went from being a Muslim to being a "confirmed atheist." The good news is that he separated from Obama's mother when the lad was the tender age of two. In his book *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama describes how he was led from an upbringing inimical to religion to being baptized in the Church of Christ as an adult, inspired by the religious faith of African American community organizers with whom he worked. And they say John Kerry flip-flopped! It could be argued that there is in all of this a compelling personal story. Since Obama hasn't actually done anything, that's the best you can hope for.

And then there is Hillary Clinton. (I was going to try to find a way to start this paragraph, "Take Hillary, please," but I couldn't figure out how. Oh, wait, now I've got that joke in anyway.) Wikipedia says that her religion is United Methodist. Then again, NPR reported that when shock jock Don Imus returned to the airwaves, he said, "Dick Cheney is still a war criminal, Hillary Clinton is still Satan, and I'm back on the radio." Now the claim that Hillary is Satan is absurd on its face, because the Prince of Darkness definitely would have been able to get health care reform passed. However, that Monica Lewinsky doll with pins in it is clear evidence that the senator from New York is no stranger to the dark arts.

As for John Edwards, no one knows for sure what his religion is, but they figure with that southern drawl he is probably OK. And Dennis Kucinich looks to be a Rastafarian, because if he thinks he is going to be elected president, he must be smoking something.

So what can we conclude from this survey of the candidates' religion? Something about the rise of religious rhetoric since the 1980s in American politics? No, I would aim for a deeper insight. Religion in the United States is pretty absurd. And politics in the United States is pretty absurd. So, when you combine them, you get a Reed Weep column.

Professor of religion and department chair in a large midwestern university and regular contributor to the bulletin, Reed Weep says yes to chai and OK to tofu. Yoga pants? Not so much.

4.2 Death of a Professor

Please see below notes from the last meeting of Large Midwestern University's Writers' Collective, which is working on a contemporary re-visioning of Arthur Miller's masterpiece *Death of a Salesman*. The Collective's labor on this project is nearly complete, as they are working on Charley's famous speech from the "Requiem" at the end of the play. First the speech itself is quoted.

CHARLEY: Nobody dast blame this man. You don't understand: Willy was a salesman. And for a salesman, there is no rock bottom to life. He don't put a bolt to a nut, he don't tell you the law or give you a medicine. He's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back—that's an earthquake. And then you get yourself a couple of spots on your hat and you're finished. Nobody dast blame this man. A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory.

OK, let's work on this sentence by sentence. "Nobody dast blame this man." Dast? Those with a limited vocabulary can substitute "dare." Alright already, I dast not protest further.

Next is: "You don't understand: Willy was a salesman." Willy? Why does the name have to be so First World? Yeah, why can't it be Abdullah? Or Gustavo? Or Gayatri? Wait a minute, isn't Gayatri a girl's name? Yes, Gayatri is a woman's name. What of it? It's a play about a father and son, for God's sake! It's 4:45, call the question. The vote is one for Abdullah, one for Gustavo, one for Gayatri, and two for Willy. It stays Willy.

"Willy was a salesman." Let's make him a professor. Yes, a college educator. Why not make him an adjunct faculty member? That's where the real struggle is. And the play would be called *Death of an Adjunct Faculty Member*? I don't think so. Besides it would too depressing. But it's a play about a guy who commits suicide! My point exactly, it's like the Woody Allen joke about the restaurant where the food is terrible and the portions are too small. First he's an adjunct faculty member and then he commits suicide, too depressing. OK, we'll make it a professor.

"And for a salesman, there is no rock bottom to life." "And for a professor." OK, "And for a professor, there is no rock bottom to life." That's not quite true, what about the Faculty Concerns Committee? You're right, that is rock bottom.

Can we stop joking and move on? "He don't put a bolt to a nut, he don't tell you the law or give you a medicine." Yes, he don't make much money either, unlike the ones with the law and the medicine. Spoken like a true humanist.

“He’s a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoe-shine.” Looking under this table I see hiking boots, Birkenstocks, and bare feet. Nary a shined shoe among them. OK, maybe that doesn’t work for a professor. I’m not sure about the smile part either. You don’t see too many faculty around here smiling. How about “riding on an air of distracted affability and sensible shoes”? That sounds really good.

“And when they start not smiling back—that’s an earthquake.” How about, “And when the students start not smiling back”? Start not smiling back? When did they start smiling back in the first place? Yep, that’s setting the bar way too high. Maybe “when the students start not stopping texting”? Double negative, too confusing. I’ve got it, “when the students start going to the University of Phoenix.” That’s the ticket.

“And then you get yourself a couple of spots on your hat and you’re finished.” Who wears a hat anymore? Well, there’s that guy in anthropology. Indiana Jones? The less said about him the better. And there’s that guy with the wool cap, I think he’s in physics. With the earflaps? Thinks he’s a sherpa. OK, we’ll lose the hat. Let’s try: “And then your PowerPoint crashes and you’re finished.” Yes, excellent.

“Nobody dast blame this man. A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory.” Other than changing the “salesman” to “professor” again, that is all fine. Read back the whole thing.

“Nobody dast blame this man. You don’t understand: Willy was a professor. And for a professor, there is no rock bottom to life. He don’t put a bolt to a nut, he don’t tell you the law or give you a medicine. He’s a man way out there in the blue, riding on an air of distracted affability and sensible shoes. And when the students start going to the University of Phoenix—that’s an earthquake. And then your PowerPoint crashes and you’re finished. Nobody dast blame this man. A professor is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory.”

A work of startling profundity. Yes, and luminous beauty. And done in time for happy hour.

Professor of religion and department chair in a large midwestern university and regular contributor to the bulletin, Reed Weep invites Collective members to bring chainsaws to the next meeting, in which we’ll be tweaking A Remembrance of Things Past.

4.3 The Commencement Address I Wish I Could Give, If They'd Ask Me (Which They Won't)

I hope that those three of you who are religion majors are aware that in our discipline we define a ritual as an action that is repetitive, pointless, and boring. Just think of the last religious service that you attended. It is by just this technical definition that the commencement address can be considered a ritual. Among the faculty ranged behind me there are individuals who can recall minutiae about the atomic weights of elements and the orthography of the Dunhuang manuscripts, but none can remember the commencement address at their college graduation. The only exception to this rule is the professor who said that her commencement speaker tripped as he traversed the proscenium and broke his leg. This professor could not remember the speaker's name, but did remember his very concise address: an expletive, including the Lord's name, and uttered at a startling high decibel level.

Now, you could argue that this is the reason why we faculty are all such abject failures, because we missed out on the important keys to success that were communicated in those addresses. Despite its appealing *schadenfreude*, I am skeptical about this argument, since I doubt that you can make someone successful by telling them your secret. The reason why last year's commencement speaker was chosen was because he made millions in building supplies. About building supplies I am sure that he has much that is cogent to say, but not about success. I would submit that the keys to success are being lucky enough to be born in a middle-class or wealthy family, being relatively healthy, and without encountering any major disasters. The fact that you are graduating today indicates that you likely already have all of these accomplishments, upon which I heartily congratulate you! If the idea that someone else can tell you how to live a successful life is preposterous, the idea that anyone can tell you how to live a happy life is even more bizarre and obnoxious. Hopefully, over your college career you have developed the critical faculties to recognize a lie when you hear it.

It would make more sense for me to address my remarks to your parents. This is not just because they are my peers in age, but also because there is nothing like regret to sharpen the attention. I am not talking about the second thoughts that they may be having as you prepare to depart the ivory tower, though I'll come back to that in a minute. I'm talking about the regret they are feeling over the tuition, room, and board that they have paid. Mom and Dad, let's face the question you were asking yourself as you saw your daughter or son in cap and gown: Is *this* worthy \$70,000? No doubt administrators here would bring out the old chestnut about the differential between the salaries of high school and college grads. According to an article by some

bozo on Wikipedia, you go from \$23,000 to \$51,000. Of course, this does not control for the fact that the students who go to college and, once again, especially those who graduate are smarter, more ambitious, more well-off, healthier, and so forth. Attributing their higher salary to college graduation is an example of the fallacy known as *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. But, even if the salary differential is chimerical, at least your child has learned to use words like “proscenium,” and “*post hoc ergo propter hoc*,” and “chimerical.” That’s worth something. On the other hand, there is the magic of compounding. If you invested that \$70,000 and it earned 7.5 per cent interest, you’d have almost \$300,000 by the time you are ready to retire.

While we are on the subject of money and investments, let me assure you, Mom and Dad, that your children will not turn out like the twits they like to watch on reality TV shows. The label notwithstanding, they differ from any reality that I know in that all the women are young, petite, and tanned and live in southern California, and all the men are the same, except with hair that you’d like to take a comb to. There is something else noteworthy about this televised alternate reality—nobody has to go to work. So, unless your son lands a job on one of those shows, he is not going to be sitting around all day conversating with a bunch of losers. He’s going to be at work.

Back to the benefits of a college education, it is true that we managed to keep your child out of trouble. No alcohol-related traffic fatality for your son. No dropping out with an unplanned pregnancy for your daughter. But this isn’t because of anything that we did here at the university, though we did try to keep an eye on them. It is because, despite what you see in the media about Michael Jackson or Britney Spears, the proportion of people who mess up their lives in dramatic ways is actually pretty small. And there is that 20 per cent of students who matriculated six years ago, but haven’t graduated yet. I’m not sure where they are now, but they aren’t here.

Mom and Dad, about that other regret, that your baby is leaving the nest. We in the faculty go through this every four years. We get to know a student, and observe his development with pride, and become emotionally invested in him, and then, poof, he’s gone. Let me reassure you, you get used to this. And they never really go away. Our old students write back to us, to let us know what they are up to, to ask us for letters of recommendation, to let us know how we’ve ruined their lives. And you can anticipate no less from your kids. You can expect them to call you to ask how you are doing, or to ask to borrow some money, or to tell you how you have ruined their lives. They don’t really go away.

But let’s deal with the question that you are really asking yourself, as you contemplate the future: If ten years from now, or twenty years from now, I become debilitated or destitute, will this youngster take care of me?

I think that, more often than not, the answer is yes. This is not because we have done anything to make them more ethically sensitive or more humane. It is just that a lot of people will do the right thing even when it does not appear to be in their self-interest, because they want to think of themselves as people who do the right thing. This may be a slender thread, but it is the sturdiest lifeline I can offer you.

In conclusion, if in this address I have said nothing that is funny or memorable or wise, I have perfectly accomplished my object. If I did say anything of note, I apologize. But don't worry, you won't remember it in a month anyway.

Professor of religion and department chair in a large midwestern university and regular contributor to the bulletin, Reed Weep has a message to the faculty he's been seeing jogging around campus lately: For God's sake, put a shirt on, would you?

4.4 Bloom's Taxidermy

Welcome! I have the honor of facilitating this workshop on behalf of the Committee on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and Learning and Teaching. Before we begin, a word about history. We used to be known as the Committee on Teaching until the publication of Ernest Boyer's epochal work *Scholarship, We Don't Have to Show You No Stinking Scholarship*. Then we became the Committee on the Scholarship of Teaching. But we began to ask ourselves, "What about learning? The focus should be on student learning, not on instructor teaching. No more sage on the stage for us. No more chalk and talk. Wait a minute, I'm talking to myself." The committee met for a year to consider the burning question: Should it be teaching and learning or learning and teaching? Chicken or egg? Lime or coconut? Unable to come to a consensus, we decided to be inclusive. Hence our current moniker.

Hardly a meeting of the committee goes by without a mention of that old chestnut, Bloom's taxonomy. But there are junior colleagues unfamiliar with this crucial term. Why, one of the young whelps once stopped me after a meeting and asked me, "Hey, what is this Bloom's taxidermy?" I laughed so hard I had a heart attack and they had to use the automatic defibrillator! It isn't "taxidermy," of course, but "taxonomy." A taxonomy is a system of classification. It is known as a tax for short, as in the federal income tax classifies you as having too much money, despite your penury. And who is this Bloom that came up with this system of classification? It's not Harold Bloom. Harold Bloom is the literary critic who wrote the classic *The Anxiety of the Administrator*, which is all about how deans oedipally knock off their predecessors so that they can have sole possession of the college widow. It isn't Harold Bloom, but the educational psychologist Benjamin Bloom.

Though most of his own and later scholarship has been about what Bloom called the cognitive domain, there are actually four "domains" in his theory: (1) cognitive; (2) affective; (3) psychomotor; and (4) Canadian. As the name suggests, learning that takes place in the affective domain works through emotion. The psychomotor domain includes the mastery of manual skills, such as dancing the Soulja Boy. The cognitive domain concerns the acquisition and organization of knowledge. And the Canadian domain is where they mispronounce "project" and "about." Again, with the possible exception of the departments like Turf Science and Elephant Insemination, most of us don't get a chance to work with students much in the psychomotor domain. I have tried origami in my Shinto class, but that's about the extent of it. The affective domain does impinge on our work more substantially, of course, as when a

student tells me that he couldn't study for the test very effectively because he hates my guts, but that only happens ten or twelve times a semester.

Again, the focus of much of the scholarship has been on the cognitive. In Bloom's work the acquisition of knowledge was understood as a kind of hierarchy. At the lowest level is knowledge, then come comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, then comes love, then comes marriage, then comes Benjamin in a baby carriage. In the original theory these levels were mastered sequentially, with students progressing from knowledge, up to comprehension, then application, and so forth. The objectives are often illustrated by a pyramid, like the food pyramid, only without the delicious salt and fat. On the knowledge level students do things like memorize discrete facts. With comprehension they learn to put facts together, for example, comparing them with each other. Students have advanced to application when they apply for a job in a gas station so that they won't have to think about Bloom's taxonomy. Analysis involves going to a psychiatrist to find out why anyone would be crazy enough to have read this much of this column. Students are ready for synthesis when they find Hegel standing on his head, but think he's doing yoga. And finally there are the course evaluations students fill out at the end of the semester, in which they all suggest that the class should have more audio-visuais.

Bloom was interested in educational testing and developed this taxonomy to demonstrate that he was smarter than most college professors, since they only assessed students' ability on the lower levels (e.g., in what year was the Buddha born), not on the higher levels (e.g., do you find convincing the claims made in the cognitive science of religion, or do you feel that they are limited in that they can only explain ritual behaviors in small-scale societies and not the advanced theological constructs of the great world religions?). On the higher levels of the cognitive domain we are really talking about critical thinking, as in "I'm going to criticize you for not thinking if you only assess your students on the knowledge level." On the other hand, it is difficult to design assignments that will assess students' higher-order thinking if there are fifty of them in the class. This is an appropriate moment to plug another upcoming workshop of the Committee on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and Learning and Teaching, on "Having Students Grade Their Own Papers, Teach Their Own Classes, and Other Techniques for Higher-Level Learning and Getting Out of Work."

I shouldn't conclude without noting that there have been various critiques of Bloom's taxonomy. For example, researchers have shown that students do not progress through the cognitive levels in a strict sequence, but tend to move back and forth between levels or to be operating on more than

one level at the same time. In other words, Bloom's taxonomy doesn't really explain anything. And neither have I. Have a pleasant afternoon.

Professor of religion and department chair in a large midwestern university, Reed Weep has been writing this column for the bulletin for more than ten years, and he's run out of ideas.

4.5 Banner Roll-Out

TO: Principalities, Powers, Thrones, Dominions, etc.

FROM: Simon, known as Peter, Chair of the Banner Implementation Team

SUBJECT: Banner Roll-Out

DATE: 1 September 2009

Excitement is building for the Roll-out of the Banner Communications Module, which is scheduled for 1 December 2009, just in time for the Christmas season. A word of background: In 2008 the Almighty, in consultation with the Heavenly Court, decided to purchase a new ERP. ERP is an acronym that stands for... stands for ..., well, I don't remember what it stands for, but I do know that, contra Lucifer, the R is not for rectum. I was charged by the Totally Other to put together the Banner Implementation Team. A team is like a committee, except that it gives out free pencils. The BIT has been meeting nonstop for a year, except for Sundays for the Christian angels, Saturdays for the Jewish angels, Fridays for the Muslim angels, and Tuesdays for the minions of Satan who worship Hanuman. We have decided that the utilization of Banner will be broken into several parts, called modules, in order to make the Banner transition as lengthy and painful as possible. A module is not anything like a nodule, but I just wanted to throw that in because I think the word sounds funny. Nodule. Nodule.

Where was I? Yes, the first module that will be implemented is the Communications Module, which will go live on 1 December. Beginning on that date, members of the Church Militant will be required to submit all their prayers using the new system. The Church Triumphant will not entertain any prayers submitted by the old method, that is, locking yourself in a closet and mumbling to yourself. We are certain that this change has been communicated to every member of the Church Militant, since we sent the word out through that woman in Sierra Leone who needs to get three and a half million dollars out of the country. Everyone gets her e-mails. For the time being, only prayers of thanksgiving will be accepted, since Banner cannot accommodate prayers of petition or prayers of praise. The Banner Troubleshooting Team is working with the software provider on a patch that will enable us to receive prayers of petition. As for prayers of praise, who cares about those suck-ups anyway?

Members of the Church Militant will be able to submit their prayers on the intuitive, Web-based, and user-friendly Self-Service Banner. You in the Church Triumphant will access those prayers on Internet-Native Banner. While the team is willing to admit that this is less user-friendly, it is not true that Prime Mover has decided to reopen Purgatory. In Banner, individuals

will be identified by an eight-digit M-number, so-called because it is impossible to remember. In the new system, reports will be written using Argos. It is like the messianic secret, in that no one knows anything about it. By the way, to access Argos reports all supervisory angels will have to use Windows, with those smug Mac bastards cast into everlasting perdition.

Speaking of everlasting perdition, on 1 April 2010, just in time for tax day, the Banner Accounting Module will go live. Since this is the module in which people's final destiny will be decided, we like to joke that it will go eternal life. It was our original plan to exhaustively record the thoughts and actions of all mortals, but Banner will not allow that. Instead the Banner Implementation Team has decided to assign fates to individuals on the basis of their religious preference during life. So evangelicals will go to a heavenly city with pearly gates and streets paved with gold, while humanists will go to a comfortable living room to listen to NPR. Because of a software glitch, it appears that Baptists will be sent to the Scientologists' heaven, where they will be experimented on by space aliens, but the Troubleshoot-Team is working on that.

Look for an announcement soon about the implementation of the third Banner module, Financial Services. The Church Triumphant has taken on a bill for twenty million dollars for the new ERP, with another ten million dollars for computers, and five million to correct the mistakes that we make with the first thirty million. This will necessitate the generation of what the Church Militant calls money for the first time in the history of creation. We are planning to begin by suing author Dan Brown, director Ron Howard, and the companies Victoria's Secret and Precious Moments for infringement of our angels trademark. We will rely on Banner to keep track of this income, using account codes that are so long it's a sin.

We look forward to working with all the members of the Heavenly Host on this exciting improvement to our business processes. Watch for opportunities for training soon, so that you can sit for hours waiting while techs run around the room getting everyone on the same screen. Maybe it is Purgatory after all.

Out-of-Office AutoReply: Reed M. N. Weep will be out of the office in Banner training until January 2010. After that he'll be so stupefied that he won't be worth a darn for another six months at least.

4.6 To Betty Purdy, Department Secretary, upon Her Retirement

Dear friends, let me start by saying how glad I am to see that you have all come out for this celebration of the remarkable career of Betty Purdy. We were going to have dinner at the Steak Barn, but the university's financial situation has forced us to cut back a bit. While we are on the subject, finger food is available in the vending machine by the elevator downstairs, and just in the hallway outside there is a fountain dispensing punch. Well, water. We've got some plastic cups on the filing cabinet.

I thought I would say a few words about Betty's career and life, since many of the younger faculty may not have had the chance to get to know her remarkable story. Betty was raised in a tiny town in the eastern part of the state, where her father ran a small grocery store. After she graduated from high school, Betty moved here to University City, to attend community college. After graduating with an Associate of Science degree in Industrial/Vocational, Betty was hired to be the secretary in the newly founded Department of Religion here at Large Midwestern University in 1965. Now, after forty-five years of exemplary service, Betty is retiring.

Betty has played a crucial role in the development of this department. She has always been ready to help faculty. When students in trouble have come to the department office, she has been a calming and consoling presence. You may not know that Betty has also enjoyed a full life outside work. This summer, Betty and her husband Lazlo, who were high-school sweethearts, will celebrate their forty-sixth wedding anniversary. Their son Percival was recently laid off after twenty years in auto manufacturing, but that is good news, because he is back home now, living with Betty and Lazlo.

Betty is also something of an artist. You may not know that she self-published a volume of her own poetry. Don't worry, she doesn't reveal any secrets about the department. They are all about the home folks back in that tiny town where she grew up, aunts and uncles who have long passed. And who could forget the handmade toilet-paper-roll covers that she gave each of us for Christmas a few years ago? I still remember seeing her in her truck in lot G4 during lunch hour, listening to country music, knitting furiously, and coyly refusing to tell me what she was making. Betty and Lazlo are also pillars of our local Full Gospel, Foursquare, Primitive, Notputtingupwith-anycrap Nondenominational Baptist Church.

You all know the dedication that Betty has shown day after day here in the department office. You may not know that about ten years ago, when George Wheeler was chair, she saved him from ruin. George, you'll recall, was a great guy—give you the shirt off his back—but he wasn't

the hands-on manager type. That's how we ended up with \$10,000 missing from the dry erase marker budget, which old George couldn't account for. When the state auditor came calling, figuring that it wasn't poor George's fault, Betty rallied to his defense. Forging some back-dated invoices was surprising enough, but when Betty telephoned the auditor impersonating the governor and forced her to call off the probe, we just didn't know she had it in her.

It was because of this experience that the State Bureau of Investigation contacted Betty during the unfortunate incident when Harriet Scroggins was chair. Harriet, along with three other chairs in the college, had embezzled \$75,000 from the state before the cops got wind of it. Realizing this time that Harriet was guilty as sin, Betty worked as a mole for the S.B.I., collecting a banker's box full of incriminating evidence. In the end, Harriet flipped on the other chairs, turning snitch. They are all doing a nickel in the state penitentiary, while Harriet, as you know, moved on to that Ethics Chair at Emory.

It was after this that Betty went on to covert ops for the National Security Agency. Those postcards she sent us from her vacation in Destin, Florida, last year were all fakes. She was actually in the Tora Bora Caves. I can't really say more about what she was doing there. But remember those pictures in the news of that big traffic "accident"? The one where the guy died who is on one of the Defense Department's playing cards—I can't pronounce his name? Look at those pictures more closely. I think that you'll recognize that toilet-paper-roll cover.

When I asked Betty what she planned to do with her time now that she is retiring, she replied that she is going to be plenty busy. She and Lazlo just adopted an Australian shepherd, and he's proven to be a handful. And Betty is looking forward to finally having the leisure to take up scrapbooking, something she's always wanted to do. And there will be travel, too. Betty said something about another trip to Destin, but just in case I'd stay away from nuclear facilities in Iran, if I were you.

So raise a plastic cup with me: To Betty Purdy.

Reed Weep is a regular columnist for the bulletin and a professor of religion and department chair at a large midwestern university. "My proudest accomplishment?" he reports. "Never having attended a Webinar."

4.7 Opera Mundi

Just sit right back and you'll hear a tale,
 A tale of a fateful trip
 That started from this tropic port
 Aboard this tiny ship.

The mate was a mighty sailing man,
 The skipper brave and sure...
 [*Music fades.*]

Listeners of a certain age will recognize the theme song from the popular 1960s situation comedy *Gilligan's Island*, about an unlikely group of stereotypical characters marooned on a desert island. Every week the hopes for rescue of the bookish Professor, the sizzling starlet Ginger, Ricardo Montalban, and the rest were dashed because of the buffoonish first-mate Gilligan.

Tonight's opera has nothing to do with *Gilligan's Island*.

I'm Lisa Simon, and this week NPR's *Opera Mundi* will present a lavish production of Bizet's *Carmen*. We will witness the stirring comeback of Placido Domingo, in a 2009 performance with the Placido Domingo Opera Company at the Placido Domingo Center for the Performing Arts in Placido Domingo, Maryland. This will be Maestro Domingo's first starring role since his tragic 2007 weed-whacker accident. Of course, Domingo has often played the opera's hero Don José as a tenor, but this is his debut as counter-tenor in the title role, *Carmen*.

Act One opens with Don José, associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, standing outside the library. Feminist theologian Carmen exits the library with a rose in her teeth and delivers a sensual lecture on inclusive language, throwing the rose at José's feet. A fight soon breaks out in a meeting of the Women's History Month Committee, in which the fiery Carmen stabs the chief diversity officer. José is ordered by the dean, Escamillo, to effect Carmen's involuntary reassignment to non-teaching duties on a satellite campus, but the associate dean decides to run away with her instead to the campus Starbucks.

The second act opens in that same Starbucks, but some days after the events in Act One. Carmen meets Don José for the first time since he has returned to the main campus. He had been given involuntary reassignment himself for his refusal to reassign Carmen. A group of rabble-rousers enlist Carmen's support for a campaign to unionize the faculty. She invites José to join them, but he refuses. But then Escamillo enters, and confronts Carmen, threatening to name her to the Faculty Handbook Revision Committee. José leaps to Carmen's defense, and when a fight breaks out between him

and Escamillo, the hot-headed former associate dean is forced to flee. As the curtain falls, Carmen and Don José are running offstage with the trade unionists.

...

I'm Scott Simeone. Welcome back to *Opera Mundi's* broadcast of Placido Domingo in the title role of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*. At the end of Act One, Pinkerton, the representative of a prestigious university press, was reassuring a young scholar, Cio-Cio-San, nicknamed Butterfly, that he would publish her revised doctoral dissertation. Act Two opens in the exhibitors' hall at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, where Cio-Cio-San has been patiently waiting for three days for Pinkerton's arrival at his publisher's booth. Butterfly's friend, Suzuki, whom she met in her master's program, gently suggests that she may not be able to trust Pinkerton's promises. Cio-Cio-San responds to this with the touching aria, "Un bel di," "One Beautiful Day My Dissertation Will Be Published as a Monograph."

Sharpless, a member of Butterfly's doctoral committee, stops by. He has a letter from Pinkerton, saying that he has decided to ditch Cio-Cio-San's dreary tome in favor of another pot-boiler by Stephen Prothero. Sharpless cannot bear to tell Butterfly the truth. Instead he introduces her to Prince Yamadori, of Edwin Mellen Press, recommending that Cio-Cio-San could have her book published by them with only a slight subvention. Yet, Butterfly cannot be moved, explaining that her manuscript is called "Trouble" now, but that it will be retitled "Joy" when Pinkerton returns.

...

I'm Lisa Scotteone. Welcome back to NPR's *Opera Mundi*, for Act Four of Verdi's *Otello*, which is just an H shy of Shakespeare, starring Placido Domingo as the university president, Desdemona. As Act Three ended, the football coach Iago had managed to convince Otello, the chairman of the Board of Regents, that Desdemona had applied for a job at Georgia State, by finding a stuffed panther in her office, a panther which Iago planted there himself. Act Four opens in the administration building, where Desdemona is talking with Emilia, Iago's director of athletic academic advisement, about Iago's increasingly threatening behavior. Desdemona says that she has been having nightmares about removal for cause, and she sings the renowned "Willow Song," about being forced to return to her tenured line in the Department of Botany.

Otello quietly enters Desdemona's office. He clears his throat three times before Desdemona looks up from the spreadsheet she had been studying. And they sing a duet together, in which Desdemona's fond reminiscences of the latest capital campaign are met with violent denunciations of perfidy

from Otello, who finally shouts, “You’re fired.” The commotion causes Emilia to rush in, and she confesses that it was Iago who planted the panther in Desdemona’s office. Otello realizes how wrong he has been, but it is too late, and he collapses in remorse. The opera closes with the chairman of the Board of Regents crawling across the floor muttering, “One More Curriculum Reform,” recalling a love duet that he and Desdemona had sung in Act One. And Don José bursts onstage to say that he has taken a job at the University of Phoenix. And Cio-Cio-San is denied tenure because her book never appears.

[*Curtain falls.*]

Reed Weep is a regular columnist for the bulletin and a professor of religion and department chair at a large midwestern university. He is working on a memoir entitled I Was Starting to Believe in Intelligent Design Until I Turned on the Radio to the Song “(Everybody Was) Kung Fu Fighting.”

4.8 Assessment Is a Journey: Or, the Last Column I Will Ever Write about Assessment

You can't throw a stick at my campus without hitting someone who is talking about the assessment of academic programs. As beguiling as that image is, hitting people with a stick who are talking assessment, let's not allow ourselves to be distracted. Assessment is designed to simultaneously accomplish two goals: (1) to improve teaching and learning and (2) to mollify the bean counters from accrediting agencies and the government, by ostensibly demonstrating that our students are learning something, despite the fact that their teachers are a lazy and conniving bunch. These goals are antithetical: the second must always undermine the first. Because this is the case, assessment cannot be accomplished or mastered. It can only be manipulated. It can only be gamed. I was in a meeting recently at which an administrator explained that developing an assessment regime is a long and arduous process. "Assessment is a journey," he concluded sagely. Correct, I said to myself. It's a journey to nowhere.

When you've been around for as long as I have, you realize that there are only three kinds of faculty who are involved in assessment. First are the saps. These are generally younger faculty, who are just encountering assessment for the first time. "We are going to identify what we want our majors to learn, and we are going to make sure they are learning it." This sounds reasonable on its face, the saps think, and they are looking forward to workshoping it. The second category are the assessment anarchists. They tend to be more senior, and they have tried assessment in the past and found it to be, at best, a huge waste of time. If they get the chance, they will raise fundamental philosophical objections. If they don't have that opportunity, because the vice president for academic life is in the meeting, then they will throw up more subtle roadblocks. If you've come out of a meeting wondering why there was a half-hour argument about changing the phrase "student learning outcomes" to "student learning results," you've met an assessment anarchist.

The final category is the associate deans, which is to say, the liars. Now, I am not saying that associate deans lie about everything. On the contrary, most of the associate deans that I have worked with have been perfectly decent people. But they are often the administrators who chair the college assessment committee, which means that they have a professional responsibility to talk as if the quality of our programs will improve with a little more work on our assessment plans, when they know that is utter nonsense. I should add that faculty can switch between the second and third categories. The anarchist can appear to be a great believer in assessment, if she thinks that will advance the interests of her department. And privately the associate dean will tell you what he really thinks.

But, no, Virginia, there isn't a fourth category. There are no faculty who are true believers, who have done assessment and have come to a positive conclusion. There are people who appear to be true believers, of course, but they all fall into the associate dean/liar category. There is no academic, even in the Construction Management Department, who is so dense as to actually believe there is something worthwhile to be gained from assessment.

So you are a second-year, tenure-track assistant professor, and you've been assigned the task of revising the Religion Department's assessment plan. What should you do? I don't think that you have the option of saying that the emperor has no clothes, that assessment is meaningless, not if you've got administrators at your institution like the ones at mine. No, you've got to play it like an associate dean. When the assessment coordinator sends you the form to report your student learning outcomes, wait until a week before it is due and then send her an e-mail saying that you've lost the form and asking her to resend it. Ignore the place on the form that says your student learning outcomes should be limited in number, and put down twelve of them. Of course, there won't be any space on the form for that many, so turn it in handwritten, with a couple of extra pages, also handwritten. If the original form is eight and a half by eleven inches, make sure that the additional pages are on legal-size paper.

If the form says that your student learning outcomes should include active verbs in the future tense, the passive voice should have been used. If the form allows for two assessment measures for each student learning outcome, put down one for some, three for others. Make sure that some of your assessment measures are illegible. If your assessment director has emphasized that some of your assessment measures must be direct, enter "student self-reporting" as often as you can. If the form says that the assessment measures must be, in fact, measurable, write in "cognitive benchmarking." I don't know what it is either, but it sounds good. As for the column on the form about the forums for the analysis of assessment data, leave that blank.

Then turn all this in, along with a couple of pages of print-offs of unrelated e-mails (as if you placed them in the stack accidentally), about a week after the due date. Trust me, the chance that your department chair is going to get any negative feedback about this is way less than fifty-fifty. And, even if she does, at least she'll make some else fill out the assessment plan next time.

A regular columnist for the bulletin and a professor of religion and department chair at a large midwestern university, Reed Weep is writing a sabbatical application to spend next year on his novel, with the working title Atlas Assessed.

4.9 Among the Orsians: The Revolutionary Discovery of a New Religion!

Let's face it, the last original thing that you and I wrote was our doctoral dissertations. Oh wait, your doctoral dissertation wasn't that original either. Granted Philemon is a really important book, but after thirty-five years you kind of run out of things to say. It's only twenty-five verses long, for God's sake. That's a year for each verse, even if you do subtract the period I was hospitalized after that unfortunate incident.

You can understand why I'm jealous of the woman down the hall who does ethnography. She doesn't have to come up with something original. She doesn't even have to think at all. She just exposes herself to the natives and she's off and running. I was so envious that I thought about doing fieldwork myself. But then I'd have to go over to Kinko's and get a new passport picture. Who has the time for that? And the shots. Why, I might have to wear a hospital gown. Imagine that. No, wait, don't imagine that.

It was at this point, when I was wearing a bathrobe backwards, that I walked by the graduate assistants' office, and realized that I don't need any shots. I can do fieldwork right here. I don't even need to leave the Religion Department office suite (if you can call this dingy collection of repurposed coat closets and bathrooms a suite). All I need to do is to expose myself to the grad students, and write up my ground-breaking discovery of a new religion: the Orsian faith.

In the present dispensation the founder of this new religion is known as Robert Orsi the Orsi. But an elaborate mythology has developed in which Robert is only the most recent manifestation of the Orsi. He was preceded in the previous generation by Wilfred Cantwell Smith the Orsi. (Cantwell. If only I had had a middle name like Cantwell, maybe then my mother would have loved me.) There is some talk that even before him was a yet earlier Orsi, Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye the Orsi. Others insist that Chantepie is the name of a Pokemon character. The more radical grad students look forward to a future Orsi, but claims that this is Stephen Prothero have so far only elicited the response, "Your mom is Stephen Prothero."

The principal scripture of the Orsians is a book entitled *The Madonna of 115th Street*, which is said to be about the 1980s pop star turned yogini turned Kabbalist of the same name. There is hot contention over another book entitled *Between Heaven and the Deep Blue Sea*. Some of the Orsians claim that this is authentic late Orsi, while others dismiss it as the rankest form of deutero-Orsi. A schismatic group insists that Robert the Orsi also revealed a book entitled *Crossing and Smelling*, but that group has been silenced by a restraining order secured by Thomas Tweed's legal counsel.

Robert the Orsi sports with the other gods and goddesses in a Mount Olympus known as Evanston in the Orsian mythology. The lesser titans of a cheesy Valhalla, Hyde Park, contend against the Evanstonians, but are crushed in their giant and powerful talons. The goal of mortal Orsians is to pass out of this vale of tears to dwell in Evanston forever, or at least as long as it takes to earn a Ph.D., which is the same thing.

Among the graduate students, some have taken to worshipping the Anti-Orsi, who in this dispensation is, of course, Russell McCutcheon. There is an interesting sociological dimension to the Orsi/Anti-Orsi split. The leaders of the Orsian faction all have graduate assistantships, and are thus a community of painfully exalted status, while the Anti-Orsians are all among the servant caste non-GAs. This division is reflected in the geography of the religion. Robert the Orsi's shrine is ensconced in the palatial graduate assistants' office, while Russell the Anti-Orsi's shrine is relegated to the department's student lounge, frequented by the lowest of untouchables, the undergrad majors. You might as well belong to Slytherin.

The central ritual of the Orsians is the seminar. Each participant prepares for this ritual for twenty-four hours by sitting in a cheap recliner and "reading" five hundred pages, taking breaks only to consume upwards of forty-eight ounces of caffeinated beverages. At the seminar the Orsians sit around a rectangular table. The ritual is ostensibly conducted by a high priestess, but her sole function seems to be to occasionally rise from her chair to add to the Runic inscriptions on the whiteboard. The substance of the ritual consists of the Orsians taking turns to make long vocalizations. Perhaps this is a form of glossolalia, because although the vocalizations sound like speech, they make no sense. Despite the nonsensical nature of these vocalizations, if an Orsian manages to say "Pierre Bourdieu" or "Michel de Certeau," this generates expressions of deep satisfaction. Less Francophone vocalizations seem to have little effect.

The Orsian religion is not limited to Large Midwestern University, but has spread among graduate students in the United States and even Canada, the country otherwise known as America's hat. Members of the Orsian cells gather secretly at meetings sponsored by the American Academy of Religion. These assignments must take place without the AAR's knowledge, since that organization, as everyone knows, is dedicated to the promotion of a very different religion, Deep Ecology. While caffeine is the mind-altering substance of choice at local seminar gatherings, Bacchus rears his ugly head at these regional and national get-togethers. Fortunately, the Centers for Disease Control have realized what a threat to public health these grad student melees are, sleeping six or eight students in one crash pad, and they have begun to spray the grad student Orsians with DDT to prevent the spread of communicable

diseases. There are reports that this has had the additional unintended salutary effect of suppressing the rumored tantric rituals as well.

It is always hazardous to predict the future of a social movement, because although some call our field “the science of religion,” we are all basically just bullshitting. And reasonable observers may disagree over what the effect will be when the Department of Homeland Security gets wind of this new religion. Will the enhanced pat-downs decrease membership, or increase it? Only time can tell. Suffice it to say this new religion is a fascinating phenomenon and a major discovery that should secure the author of this article an endowed chair at least in Hyde Park. Hopefully, a recliner.

Reed Weep is a professor of religion and department chair at a large mid-western university, as well as a regular columnist in the bulletin. Look for his forthcoming five-hundred-page commentary on the book of Philemon, which conveniently provides blank pages for taking notes, 450 of them.

4.10 Keeping Up with the Kollege Professors: The Pitch

“Brian, can’t say how grateful I am that you’ve agreed to meet with me.”

“Look, Mike, it’s the least I can do, especially after the incredible success of your last reality show, *Eyes on the Ophthalmologists*.”

“I’m glad you brought that up, because I have a new concept that I’ve been working on, and I wanted to see what you think.”

“Fire away.”

“The working title is *Keeping Up with the Kollege Professors*. It’s a reality show about the Religion Department at Large Midwestern University. I’ve got a brother-in-law who works there, so I’ve got an in. In fact, we’ve already shot the pilot. Maybe the best way to spell out what we’re going for is to describe the pilot. You game?”

“Yes, I’m intrigued already. A Religion Department, that’s a killer!”

“OK, so first scene. You hear an alarm going off. The Japanologist opens the door and steps into the hall, he’s tying up his robe. He goes into the bathroom. There’s an old cassette tape player/radio on the counter. He turns it on. Before he closes the door we hear, ‘This is Steve Inskeep on *Morning Edition*.’”

“NPR, eh? This guy obviously has a rich inner life.”

“Obviously. Second scene. The sociologist of religion parks and walks over to the Starbucks in the campus union to pick up a latte.”

“Does he get a grande?”

“Oh, no. God, no! All that caffeine. He sticks with a tall.”

“A tall, right, that makes much more sense. Too excessive otherwise.”

“Precisely. Third scene. The department office. The sociologist walks by. He talks with the department secretary about the weather. Mild fall, but most of the leaves are off the trees. He proceeds to his office. A few minutes later the Japanologist arrives. They talk about the weather. Nights are really getting cool. He leaves and the Americanist comes up. They talk about the weather. A little overcast today.”

“Just goes to show you, everybody is interested in the weather.”

“Just goes to show you. Fourth scene. The Reformationist walks into the workroom. She’s got a handout for her class to copy. But the machine is out of staples!”

“What does she do?”

“She walks back to her office and closes the door.”

“There’s some real human drama.”

“Exactly, gripping, isn’t it? Fifth scene. This one might a problem for the network. The department chair walks into the Old Testament guy’s office and sits down. They talk for a minute about the homecoming potluck. The

Old Testament guy must be feeling expansive because he leans back in his chair, and puts a foot against the edge of his desk. And you see that he's wearing toe shoes."

"Toe shoes?"

"Yep, toe shoes. You know, they're like aqua socks, only with a separate thing for each toe."

"I know what toe shoes are, Mike, I'm just trying to get my head around it. We might have to run this by Legal. Not that I have anything against toe shoes, mind you, they're perfectly fine with me. But you know the suits."

"I'm with you. Wouldn't want to tangle with the FCC. Sixth scene. The New Testament woman is sitting at her computer, working on an e-mail. She types for a minute. Leans back and reads what she's written. Types for a minute more. Hits send."

"Whoa, must have been an important message."

"Undoubtedly. Seventh scene. A student walks into the Buddhologist's office for what he calls a "Get to Know Me Chat." He asks where she's from, what her major is, how things are going this semester. She replies that things are going OK."

"They are communicating on a deep level."

"It's existential. Eighth scene. We're at the Americanist's home. She has the New Testament woman and her husband and the sociologist over to dinner. They're sitting around the table chatting. Most of the guests are drinking water, but the Americanist has a glass of red wine. They discuss whether the university president could really be that fatuous. Then the Americanist has *a second glass of red wine!*"

"She's really going all out."

"Yes, it's almost too much. Ninth scene. The Old Testament guy and his wife are at the kitchen table, talking about their day. She is a nurse or something. Had a patient in respiratory distress, had to send him to the hospital in an ambulance."

"Booring!"

"I know, right? But then he reports on his big news. He's been appointed to the department's Curriculum Revision Committee."

"Curriculum Revision, now that's more like it."

"Couldn't agree more. Tenth and final scene. The Japanologist and his wife are in bed. She's reading *Eat, Pray, Love*. He's got a big paperback with a yellow and black cover, *Writing a Humor Column for Dummies*. He reads a couple of pages, chuckles to himself, reads again, his head bobs, and he's asleep."

"Good night, Dr. Japan."

"So what do you think?"

“What do I think? I think, how soon can we get the contract signed? That’s what I think.”

A professor of religion and department chair at a large midwestern university, as well as a regular columnist in the bulletin, Reed Weep wrote this column as an experiment. Can the story of boring people still be an interesting story? It can be, if it’s about us.

4.11 Announcement: Reed M. N. Weep Retirement

Many readers were no doubt disappointed upon seeing that the Reed M. N. Weep column did not appear in the last issue of the *bulletin*. Weep has given the editors permission to officially announce that, following some “really mean student evaluations,” he recently retired from academia in order to pursue a career as a professional mime. Future columns can be found on YouTube (look under the name “CMNWeep”) and will consist exclusively of hip thrusts, wild gyrations, and related moves of the sort banned by the little town in *Footloose*. Internet trolls and YouTube commentators suggest he is not actually a very good mime, but—like matters within the field of religious studies—these are subjective judgments, matters of faith, not reason.

Weep reported that his university threw him a surprisingly joyous retirement party, which was well attended by graduate students from other disciplines who heard that there would be free food. Also in attendance were his dean and provost, who were overheard mumbling something about “getting the sand out of the Vaseline.” Weep’s department chair gave a memorable toast, praising Weep’s service to the department and the field, and thanking Weep for his “discretion,” whatever that means.

In any case, the editors will miss Weep, as we’ll now have a more difficult time doing what Weep did best—fulfilling our word count for each issue. We wish him well in his latest endeavor, and find ourselves in agreement with the YouTube commentator who put it well: “Yo dawg them some dam fine moovs.”

*Of course this “announcement” of Weep’s retirement is entirely a fabrication. The editors had to provide some explanation to the columnist’s many fans, after Weep disappeared on his way to film a documentary about the religion of the orcas at SeaWorld with the working title Whitefaith.—
Alumno Sinllanto*

Original Publication Information

Note: The name of the *Bulletin of the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion (BCSSR)* was changed to the *Bulletin for the Study of Religion (BSR)* in 2010.

- 1.1 The AAR/SBL Annual Meeting: Mission Review
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- 1.2 How to Write a Book Note
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- 1.3 The Cost of Messiahship
BCSSR 27, 2 (April 1998): 46–47.
- 1.4 The Groups Are Where It's At: A Guide to the Annual Meeting
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- 1.5 The Department Secretary: Master of the Universe
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- 1.6 Next on Oprah: Lives Ruined by Student Evaluations
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- 1.7 Higher Education among the Nacirema
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- 1.8 The Bible in Bean Town: A Guide to the SBL Annual Meeting
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- 1.9 Letters to the Editor
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- 1.10 Letter to the Editor
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- 1.11 A Sorry Excuse for a Major: Religion
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- 1.13 Minutes of the May Meeting of the Faculty Senate
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- 1.14 A Letter from Fidelio
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- 1.15 The Torpedo Rec
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- 1.16 Retiring, But Not Shy
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- 2.1 The New Testament Mystery Solved
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- 2.2 The Students of Generation A': A Major Disappointment
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- 2.3 President Bush, Meet Emperor Meiji
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- 2.4 The View from the Head: An Interview with Hyrum N. Rollment, Reed M. N. Weep’s Department Chair
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- 2.5 The War and the State of the Union in Esperanto
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- 2.6 Teaching for the New Millennium
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- 2.7 The Origins of Religion Revealed
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- 2.8 The World Religions: Hinduism
BCSSR 33, 1 (February 2004): 20.
- 2.9 The World Religions: Buddhism
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- 2.10 The World Religions: Christianity
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- 3.1 The World Religions: Islam
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- 3.2 Meeting with the Special Assistant to the Provost
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- 3.3 Managing Stress
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- 3.4 True That
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- 3.5 Desert
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- 3.6 ESTPPPMFC
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- 4.1 The Candidates’ Religion
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- 4.2 Death of a Professor
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- 4.3 The Commencement Address I Wish I Could Give, If They’d Ask Me (Which They Won’t)
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- 4.4 Bloom’s Taxidermy
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- 4.5 Banner Roll Out
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- 4.6 To Betty Purdy, Department Secretary, upon Her Retirement
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- 4.7 Opera Mundi
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- 4.8 Assessment Is a Journey, Or the Last Column I Will Ever Write about Assessment
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- 4.9 Among the Orsians: The Revolutionary Discovery of a New Religion!
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- 4.10 *Keeping Up with the Kollege Professors: The Pitch*
BSR 40, 4 (November 2011): 28–29.
- 4.11 Announcement: Reed M. N. Weep Retirement
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