

1. FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS: THE COUNCIL OF SOCIETIES FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION, 1969–2009

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My first encounter with professional societies in the field of religion was at Union Seminary, New York, in December of 1962. I was representing Fortress Press, newly minted by bringing under one roof the publishing arms of two Lutheran denominations that had merged. I had come on as one of two editors hired by the new press in September of that year.

The other new editor, Norman Hjelm (later Director of Fortress Press), and I had both graduated from university and seminary, had done some graduate work, and had been working as pastors. And we were white and male. In my case, it had been employment as a pastor in Princeton, after two years as a translator and editor at the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva following a year on a Fulbright in Göttingen. In these respects we were fairly typical of the students I surveyed in 1969–70 for the chapter on graduate students in religion for Claude Welch's *Graduate Education in Religion: A Critical Appraisal* (1971: 203–19): religious background and often religious commitment; college or university; ministerial training in a professional school; graduate study in a divinity school institution and/or a university often connected with such; and (not least) white and male.

Our backgrounds were also similar to those of the members of the National Association of Biblical Instructors (NABI) and the Society of Biblical Literature meetings that December at Union. But changes were in the wings. Welch's groundbreaking book spelled out those changes and why they were occurring. Following World War II education had become a growth industry. Included in the growth was the academic study of religion, distinct as a field from professional training in theology, with departments and programs of religion multiplying and expanding in both public and private institutions of higher learning (Welch 1971: vii). That entailed a move from teaching *of* religion (inculcation) to teaching *about* religion (in the phrasing of Justice Goldberg in *Abington vs. Schempp*), which became the assumed paradigm in the field, politically useful, if not necessarily academically defensible (Cady & Brown 2002: 91–2). These changes were evident

among some of the graduate students who returned our questionnaires and those whom I interviewed. Increasingly they were younger, entered graduate study immediately after receiving a baccalaureate degree in religious studies, and enrolled in a graduate program in religious studies at a college or university, whether private or (since Schempp) increasingly in a public institution. While the students were still apt to be connected with a religious institution, the tie was looser than in earlier generations and their interest in non-Christian religions was often greater (Welch 1971: 203–4).

These demographic changes were not evident at Union that December. Nor were the thousands present at annual meetings today presaged by the attendance at that 1962 gathering. The plenaries at Union were seated comfortably in a large lecture hall. The book publishers—who now fill up a huge exhibition hall at meetings—were accommodated in a small classroom at Union, with the six or so of us present laying out our wares on modest tables. However, the NABI, representing college instructors in religion, was at that meeting already on its way to reconstituting itself the following year (1963) as the American Academy of Religion (AAR). The Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) would soon also be in ferment, resulting in a sweeping reorganization initiated at its annual meeting in Toronto in 1969 and finalized in New York in 1970.

The numbers were growing in those societies as well as in other societies in the field, corresponding to the greater numbers of instructors in the field and of graduate students preparing to enter the field. For the six societies that came together to form the Council on the Study of Religion in 1970 that posed record-keeping problems: maintaining membership and subscription rolls. Today I still jot notes on the back of some 3" × 5" cards once used to keep track of members of a society that had been stored in a shoebox handed over early on to the newly formed Executive Office of the Council on the Study of Religion at Waterloo Lutheran (later Wilfrid Laurier) University in Waterloo, to be entered into the Council's electronic database.

Another concern was scholarly communication. How to get specialized monographs into the hands of those few hundred scholars (or less) who would order them for their institution's libraries or for their own libraries? The bottleneck was publishers who had to sell enough copies to break even; those monographs couldn't pass the numbers muster and the prices seemed burdensome to scholars. There was also the question of how to alert scholars to these new publications through reviews.

Also of concern was the nature of the professional societies. Did the way they and their national and regional meetings were constituted and managed meet the needs of the increasing number of scholars and the newer breed of scholars? Were the meetings set up to take account of new fields or subfields or reconfiguring of familiar fields? What was the relation, if any, between the societies, those gatherings, the research society members carried on, and the questions around publication?

There was the question of connecting institutions looking to fill positions in the now more numerous departments and programs of religious studies with graduates seeking employment. Already at the time of the formation of the Council in 1969, employment of graduates was becoming a concern (cf. Welch 1971: 97–110). Some form of placement assistance was needed.

Was there some way to have one newsletter serving all the societies in place of those published by each society? Economies of editing, production, and distribution were envisaged and, not least, a means of facilitating communication among the various societies and specializations—interdisciplinary thinking and planning—and advancing religious studies as a field in the academy and in the public mind.

How could the electronic technologies coming on stream help societies address some of these needs in record-keeping, in research and publication, and in the organizing and running of annual meetings?

Not least, how was the new field—or new old field—to be conceived in light of the ferment on campuses in the 1960s and the general dis-ease of the boomer generation with the social, political, and cultural status quo in the wake of significant civil rights actions in the United States and in the midst of a very unpopular war?

Both the larger and the smaller societies saw formation of some agency that could address these concerns as a desideratum. Six societies led the way, forming the Council on the Study of Religion in 1969: the American Academy of Religion; the Catholic Biblical Association; the Catholic Theological Society of America; the College Theology Society; the Society of Biblical Literature; and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion.

This brief history will plot some of these concerns as they came to be addressed, or not, by the Council. It will also note how the changing nature of religious studies and religious studies societies and the needs and opportunities they perceived led to attrition in the membership of the Council, to diminishing of its influence and functions, and ultimately dissolution. More attention will be devoted to the beginnings, where the foundation and directions were established, than to the subsequent history that ensued. Much of the history can and will be documented from the pages of the Council's newsletter, the *Bulletin*, to which this volume is devoted.¹

The mustiness, even quaintness, of much of this history may serve as a reminder that, once upon a time, time did not move as quickly as now or with so many digital resources to hand or as many pressures external to the field. Nonetheless, much that we today call "religious studies" and its current manifestations derive from those earlier decades.²

FIRST STEPS

The American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), notably in the person of ACLS Executive Associate James N. Settle, played a significant role in the

formation of the Council and, in general, in a fostering and encouraging of new directions for religious studies societies and in outlining what makes for a successful professional society.

In an address to the Society of Biblical Literature in December 1968, Settle noted the recent development of professional societies from mere "clubs of scholars" into "mass societies" dedicated to scholarly communication in "matters pertaining to their discipline" (Settle 1969: 3). He also noted "the increasing decentralization of scholarship," thanks to "modern air travel, the wide-spread use of microfilm, microfiche, and the like"—to the disgruntlement of some traditionalists (*ibid.*: 7). In response to such changes as these as well as those within academic disciplines, some societies had been "reorganizing in an effort to serve their growing memberships more effectively and more efficiently" (*ibid.*: 7). Those societies that failed to adapt to change would lose their members to new societies and remain scholarly clubs (*ibid.*: 4).

Essential to change was a paid, activist executive officer whose central office would provide information not available elsewhere, including opportunities for research and lists of recipients of research grants, a "personals column" on promotions and new hirings, announcements of scholars from abroad available for lectures, and updates on what was going on in government that would be significant for the field in question and which individuals in government were friendly to the field (*ibid.*: 5). Also essential would be a newsletter with an able editor ready to commit "time and effort to make it a good one" (*ibid.*: 5). Placement services, pedagogy, and the creating of good textbooks should also be of concern to professional societies (*ibid.*: 7). Academic standards, minimum library holdings for the various levels of instruction, and financial resources would also be part of the picture (*ibid.*: 6).

In words that would prove to be prophetic, Settle predicted (*ibid.*: 4) that serious response to change by a professional society would bring growing pains and evoke opposition:

Organizational problems will multiply. Membership dues will increase. The constitution will undergo strain. Opponents will accuse proponents. Members of essential committees will be classified as entrepreneurs. The executive secretary will be damned as an empire builder. But the association will grow in wisdom and prestige in size and effectiveness. And it will stumble into the last quarter of the 20th century, bringing its discipline along with it.

Flux was the order of the day, and in no field was "the pressure for reconstitution and redefinition more apparent than in the broad area of religion" seemingly characterized by "fragmentation" (*ibid.*: 8). Settle saw it otherwise, with a discrete discipline emerging and "humanistic scholars ... waiting to see whether or not the appropriate scholarly organizations will exercise the

degree of concern necessary to direct this foster child into its maturity" (*ibid.*: 8).³

Settle acknowledged (*ibid.*) that his observations drew on a background paper that Claude Welch had delivered at a conference of thirty-seven prominent scholars that the ACLS had convened in Princeton in 1968 "to discuss the coordination of the activities of academic organizations for the study of religion."⁴ In the inaugural issue of the Council's *Bulletin*, Welch, now the Chairman (as the terminology of the day had it) of the new Council, traced the steps leading to the formation of the Council, specifically a "constituting convention", in New York in May 1969 and the first meeting of the Council in October 1969 in Boston, with official delegates as well as executive secretaries of the societies in attendance and invited guests and observers (Welch 1970: 4).

The "paradoxical answer" to the question "Why still another organization in the field of religion?" was that there were already too many such, resulting in overlappings and redundancies, with areas untended "because they are assumed to be tended by everyone" (*ibid.*: 3). The new Council would not replace these, or "get in their way or threaten their identity." Rather, it would seek to assist them to meet their goals as well as to work together. Moreover, it would "provide some kind of unified voice for representing the still adolescent field of the study of religion to the various publics which need to understand it better" (*ibid.*: 3).

Not just a "unified voice," but "a unified concept of the study of religion" was envisaged, to replace the confessionally oriented studies or "transconfessional" or "ecumenical" approaches to the study of religion. The Council "arises out of a desire to recognize and shape a field of study, to find a new vision of the study of religion in which religious phenomena and religious traditions will be treated both in themselves, and in the widest possible cultural contexts" (*ibid.*: 3).

A set of specific goals as ambitious as these general ones addressed various of the concerns raised at the beginning of this chapter. Implementation of several of these goals was noted by Welch (*ibid.*: 5).

- The Council's *Bulletin*, as a successor to the American Academy of Religion *Bulletin*.
- A Publications and Research Committee that, *inter alia*, would "examine the whole state of scholarly publication in religion in America" and encourage the establishing of "a book review journal to try to remedy the present generally low estate of reviewing in the field of religion."
- A Liaison and Membership Committee to formulate "guidelines for membership in the Council" and "for liaison with other societies in North America and Europe."
- A Committee on Placement and Referral.
- An Executive and Finance Committee.
- Interpretation of the field to government agencies.

Welch concluded with a caveat about what he had set forth as the Council's objectives. The Council "is not going to seek to direct all new and important ventures itself but will be more concerned with setting policy, establishing priorities, clarifying functions and promoting joint efforts. We shall try to think less of grandiose organization and more of the dynamics of effective coordination and cooperation" (*ibid.*: 5). Tension was built into that statement, with the goals and operations of the Council and the constituent societies often meshing, other times not.

PERSONALITIES AND CHANGE

That these objectives and hopes for the fledgling Council were widely held in the newly emerging field is suggested by the caliber of the delegates elected to the inaugural meeting of the Council, a miniature Who's Who of the time and typical of the variety of places where religion was studied. Represented were public post-secondary schools, the Ivy League and other private colleges and universities, Roman Catholic institutions, and a theological college (*Bulletin* 1: 28):

John Priest and Jacob Neusner (American Academy of Religion); George MacRae and Joseph Fitzmyer (Catholic Biblical Association); Gerald Van Ackeren, Luke Salm, and Charles Curran (Catholic Theological Society of America); Mark Heath and Berard Marthaler (College Theological Society); F. W. Beare and Walter Harrelson (Society of Biblical Literature); and James Dittes and Benjamin Nelson (Society for the Scientific Study of Religion).

Over the years the number of both established and younger scholars across a spectrum of fields who contributed in various ways to various aspects of the Council also attests to the expectations and hopes regarding the Council. To name some among many:

Catherine Albanese, Ellen Armour, Lisa Sowle Cahill, Donald Capps, Walter Capps, Carol Christ, William Clebsch, Eva Dargyay, Carol Delaney, Brian Earhart, Arnold Eisen, Emil Fackenheim, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Robert Funk, Mary Gerhart, Sam Gill, Andrew Greeley, Giles Gunn, Robert Kraft, Barbara Hargrove, Peter Hodgson, Denis Janz, Diane Jonte-Pace, Luther Martin, Martin Marty, Russell McCutcheon, Colleen McDannell, Wayne Meeks, Robert Michaelsen, Jaroslav Pelikan, Charles Reynolds, Richard Rubenstein, Richard Sarason, Ninian Smart, Jonathan Z. Smith, Max Stackhouse, Douglas Sturm, Mary Ann Tolbert, David Tracy, Gene Tucker, Donald Wiebe, Robert Wilken, John Wilson, Glen Yocum.

Something similar was true in the societies as leadership changed hands, with very capable younger scholars, attuned to the changing times, assuming office and spearheading sometimes quite remarkable transformations of their organizations, with venerable scholars sometimes working hand in hand with the newcomers or, in some cases, looking on more bewildered than belligerent. An impatience with the status quo and a fervid, almost missionary spirit pervades James Robinson's report in the first issue of the *Bulletin* on the thorough restructuring of the Society of Biblical Literature's Committee on Research and Publications at the Society's annual meeting in Toronto in 1969 (Robinson 1970; cf. Funk 1973b; Saunders 1982: 50–53, 58–60). Subsequent reports in the *Bulletin* over the years by various society officers are often similar in tone and, together, offer a seismographic reading of changes in those societies and in the field generally.

As Settle had predicted, change was not painless. In his presidential report to the Society of Biblical Literature in 1971, Harry Orlinsky recounted the Society's annual meeting of 1970 that lasted from 9:00am to 11:59pm (allowing time out for lunch and dinner). With trademark Orlinsky wit, he quipped, "For a while I thought that we'd need another Chanukah miracle to make possible the burning of the midnight oil" (Orlinsky 1971: 21).

Ticking off the items up for a vote, Orlinsky commented that "all of us knew that unanimity was not going to be the order of the day": a revised constitution, increased dues, the financial structure of the Society, a differently structured annual meeting convened in various parts of the US and Canada, and the shape of the *Journal*. All of these followed from one basic question, whether the Society would continue on the path it had followed over the past decade or so, or whether it would "consider seriously such innovations as will ensure continued and perhaps even faster growth, and give new dimension and importance to its activities." The seventies would not be the same as the sixties any more than the sixties had been the same as the fifties (Orlinsky 1971: 21).

Sometimes such changes within societies were made in close cooperation with the Council, sometimes (and increasingly) quite independently of it as the societies worked out their changing identities and modes of operation in a maturing field.

The early years of the Council are in large part the story of individuals who stepped forward to provide leadership, some with outsized and out-front personalities, others behind-the-scenes individuals. Young Turks like Robert Funk, Robert Kraft, and Norman Wagner, working with Wise Solons like Claude Welch and Walter Harrelson to make the Council a functioning organization.⁵ Working quietly and mostly unsung were others like Joseph Jensen, who over the years served as Treasurer of the Council as well as Vice-Chair and then in various other capacities including editing the Summer Institutes submissions; he turned out to be the Council's most continuous society representative over its entire history, even as he carried

out the duties of Executive Secretary of the Catholic Biblical Association. At Wilfrid Laurier University it was young Hart Bezner, innovative (and often inventive) director of computing services when such were in their infancy (or at most adolescence), who set up the database for the membership and subscription services for the constituent societies of the Council as well as a system to keep track of all the publishers, books, editors, reviewers, and reviews involved in the publication of *Religious Studies Review*. At the University of Montana Printing Department, there was Al Madison, who enabled the publication of the volumes and journals that Scholars Press began to turn out (Funk 1973b: 24).

What's wrong with this picture? Noticeably absent are women. As the day-to-day staff in the places where the functions of the Council and its societies were carried on, they were in fact notably present, but almost always nameless.⁶ If one scans the list of Society officers in the directories of constituent societies that began to appear in the *Bulletin*, the names of women scholars are few in those early years. Symptomatic is a pair of articles in the *Bulletin*, one on the acknowledgment of "the wife" in prefaces to books by male scholars (Christ & Plaskow Goldenberg 1972), the other on the acknowledgment of "the husband" by women scholars (McDermott 1972). In the first case "the wife" appears as typist, as wife (for "all those wifely things"), as long-suffering, as mother, and as co-author, each of these revealing much about the authors of these tributes and the relation between "him" and "her." Taken together, they reveal "the problematic status of women in the academic world," even as "co-author" having "subordinate[d] their intellectual interests to those of their husbands" (Christ & Plaskow Goldenberg 1972: 12, 13). In short, it is "the wife as servant" (*ibid.*: 30). The problem, as McDermott saw it, was with society at large and "an educational system which often hinders even its best women in their pursuit of becoming practising academicians," as was tellingly evident from the fact that a bare 2 per cent of the books on his shelves were by women—a percentage already inflated by Agatha Christie's "prolificacy" (McDermott 1972: 15).

The directories of societies in the *Bulletin* over the years and the number of *Bulletin* articles by women shows a gradual increase in the number of women officers and authors.⁷ A Women's Caucus in Religion Studies was formed at the 1971 AAR/SBL meeting; it published its first *Registry of Women in Religious Studies* in 1976 (*Bulletin* 11 [1980]: 42). In 1973 proceedings of the AAR's newly established Working Group on Women and Religion at the International Congress in Los Angeles in 1972 were published and available from the Council (*Bulletin* 4 [1973]: 33). As women assumed more prominent roles in the Council and its societies,⁸ patriarchy in ethos and language began to diminish, as inclusive language came to be the norm in *Religious Studies Review* and in other journals, and in academic discourse generally. Women and Religion groups became common at annual meetings of societies. Societies published reports on "Women and" or "Women in."⁹ Still,

almost twenty-five years after the formation of the Council, the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession of the American Academy of Religion deemed it necessary to issue a "Survival Manual" for women religious studies scholars (1992), a gendered counterpart to Campbell's *Career Guide* noted below. By that time, however, the situation had also changed, as Michel Desjardins pointed out in advocating the desirability of a unisex version of the document (Desjardins 1997).

Racial minority representatives are not readily discernible from lists, but their presence—or absence—at Council meetings and annual meetings of societies and in graduate education in religion was. In reviewing his report five years after its publication, Claude Welch could "find no evidence that the proportion of racial minority students [in graduate religious studies] has increased significantly" (Welch 1976: 3; similarly Wilson 1976: 6; Handy 1976: 7). That too changed over the years, with scholars from various minorities serving on committees and as officers of the Council and of the societies and with program units such as Afro-American Religious History, Black Theology, Lesbian-Feminist Issues, Native Traditions in the Americas, and with sections in *Religious Studies Review* devoted to South, East, and Inner Asia. Symptomatic of some of these changes was the review in the *Bulletin* by Albert Raboteau and David Wills (1991) of the documentary project on Afro-American religious history.

Citing of administrative or editorial responsibilities in a professional society or a federation of societies like the Council is not a way to impress one's dean or a tenure and promotion committee. It was fortunate for the Council, its societies, and the field generally that many of those who labored in those capacities from the beginning were beyond tenure and promotion questions or were willing to take on those responsibilities even at a risk to their careers. The fruits of their labors are evident in the various ways the Council and its societies addressed the desiderata voiced early on by Welch and the Council's Task Force on Scholarly Communication and Publication (MacRae 1972¹⁰) and over the years by various individuals and organizations. Some of those fruits are outlined in what follows.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

The Council's newly formulated by-laws envisaged a national business office with an executive director (Reich 1972b: 35). The AAR's business office at Wilson College, Chambersburg, PA, had served in effect as the initial business office of the Council, *inter alia* compiling an integrated mailing list of some 8,000 members from the rolls of the constituent societies (*Bulletin* 1 [1970]: 21, 26). In establishing its Executive Office on the campus of Waterloo Lutheran University in 1972 and naming Norman Wagner as the Executive Director and Editor of the *Bulletin*, the Council acknowledged the key role played by the Academy and by Robert Wright at Wilson in providing

services to the Council (Reich 1972a: 18). It also noted that Waterloo Lutheran "had made a very attractive offer involving use of its Computer Center, office facilities, equipment, and printing and mailing services" (*ibid.*).

In selling the idea of locating the Executive Office at Waterloo Lutheran to the University's Board of Governors, Wagner pointed out how it would make the new Wilfrid Laurier University—about to emerge from its Lutheran chrysalis—a name known across the continent as society members and libraries remitted their annual dues or subscriptions and had other correspondence with the Office. The publishing facilities of the Office could also serve a new Wilfrid Laurier University Press, which would also put Laurier on the map.¹¹ Location of Scholars Press at the University of Montana would bring similar presence to a university known to many at the time perhaps chiefly (and simply) as the one-time home of literary critic Leslie Fiedler.

Similar kinds of arguments will have served subsequent Executive Directors of the Council in making the case to locate the Office on a particular campus: Watson Mills, Mercer University, 1985–92; David Truemper, Valparaiso University, 1992–2004; Nadine Pence Frantz (now Nadine S. Pence), 2004–06, located at Bethany Theological Seminary while serving the Office at Valparaiso; and Andrew Fort, 2007–09, located at Texas Christian University while serving the Office at Rice University.¹² Along with Norman Wagner (in whose train I followed), each of these executives fit Robert Funk's description of the "scholar-manager"—"scholars by instinct and practice and stringent managers by nature and necessity" (1973b: 23), of which he was an early exemplar as Executive Secretary of the SBL for six years alongside other positions in the Council and the field generally.¹³

In carrying out their responsibilities alongside their regular positions at their universities, each of the Council's executive officers made distinctive contributions to the Council: Wagner creative, resourceful, and determined in establishing the Council on a sound footing; Mills successfully moving the office to a new location at a critical time in the Council's history; Truemper managing still another transfer, launching the Council's website, in effect dying in office after twelve years of unstinting service (DeMaris 2004); and most recently, Pence, one-time editorial chair of *Religious Studies Review*, who took leave of her sabbatical to go to Valparaiso after Truemper's untimely death and sort through the correspondence and the books, both financial and those destined for *Religious Studies Review* and its reviewers. Appointed as Truemper's successor, she negotiated the publication of *Religious Studies Review* by Blackwell and managed the successful transition of the office to Rice (Pence Frantz 2005; McCutcheon 2006).

The executive officers of the Council's constituent societies, along with their executive bodies, increasingly fit the pattern of scholar-manager as well, with the result that the societies changed from the "clubs" that Settle noted into professional societies efficiently managing their own affairs, expanding their memberships, publishing their journals and other publications, and

organizing their annual meetings as very structured gatherings of the clans. It is difficult to imagine the history of the Council and its societies without these individuals and their cohorts.

PARADIGM SHIFT: SCHOLARS PUBLISHING FOR SCHOLARS

If there was one issue that more than any other occupied religious studies scholars and societies and the Council at the time of the formation of the Council, it was scholarly communication. Publishers were ready to publish money-makers like textbooks written by scholars, and some publishers were willing to risk short-run technical monographs now and then or even on a regular basis, with better-selling books subsidizing the technical ones. But even before the expansion of the field that did not come near to meeting the need for publication of scholarly monographs, bibliographies, editions of texts and/or translations, or even dissertations. Society journals were a constant drain on society resources, to say nothing of financing of innovative or experimental journals.

The Council's Task Force on Scholarly Communication and Publication (MacRae 1972) addressed these issues head-on and forcefully. Key to them all was "scholars publishing for scholars," a mantra intoned especially by Robert Funk¹⁴ and Norman Wagner in publications that underlay the Task Force's report (Funk 1971) or, retrospectively, in publications subsequent to the report (Funk 1973a; 1977–78; Wagner 1974; 1976).

"Scholars publishing for scholars" could mean scholar-managers negotiating with commercial publishers or printers for better deals, which could result in a 50 per cent reduction in the cost of printing a journal (Funk 1971: 12) or in composition and printing (Funk 1973a: 4; similarly SBL Minutes, *Bulletin* 11: 51). But especially, it meant producing camera-ready copy by means of cold-type composition, which was then farmed out to reliable, low-cost printing firms and published under the imprint of a scholars' organization such as the Council or Scholars Press or a society, and advertised in the Council's *Bulletin* or a society's journal as well as made available at annual meetings. An early, not-to-be-replicated example was the report of the Task Force itself. Composed on the computer at Waterloo Lutheran University, it was then run out on the line printer and sent to the University of Montana, where it was printed and bound (MacRae 1972: 126). All upper case, with big dots functioning both as commas and periods, it is not easy reading. But it appeared quickly and at a low price.

Using typesetting equipment and layout facilities (manual in those days) that it shared with Wilfrid Laurier University Press, the Council's Executive Office produced the *Bulletin* and *Religious Studies Review* as well as journals for several of its constituent societies¹⁵ and several other publications. It also served for a time as publisher or distributor of books for some of its constituent societies.¹⁶ However, the bulk of "scholars publishing for scholars"

soon devolved on Scholars Press, established in 1974 at the University of Montana (Wagner 1974). Sponsored by the AAR, SBL, and the Council with its other member societies (*Bulletin* 5 [1974]: 20), Scholars Press became the chief constituent of the Center for Scholarly Publication and Services at the University, whence the Press migrated to Chico, CA and thence to Atlanta and, ultimately, dissolution.¹⁷

Central to scholars-publishing-for-scholars was collaborative research among the members of a society present at and between annual meetings. Society members would serve as editors of series and as editorial boards to assess publications. Society members, along with libraries, would in turn constitute the basic market for the specialized volumes that would issue from this process. In the case of Scholars Press the paradigm shifted, with more traditional publishing concerns (selection and marketing of books, Cherry 1981; Kaufman 1982: 100) and efficiencies (distribution, *Bulletin* 13: 86) coming to the fore given its very ambitious publication program.

The Task Force's report on dissertations still provides salutary reading on selection of topics, writing for publication, and publishing of dissertations that meet certain criteria, thus freeing many authors from years of slavery to produce something "publishable" (MacRae 1972: 74–9, citing especially Ray Hart's report on the Council's Conference on Scholarly Publishing in 1971).

During the Valparaiso years, the Council's then Executive Director, David Truemper, thanks to his skill in desktop publishing and his connection with a local printer, facilitated the publications of various member societies. Over the years one society after another took to publishing under their own imprint, either on their own or together with a publisher, and whether monographs, texts, translations, aids for teaching, dissertations, or other series. Advances in technology have meant that production of digital copy for publication is second nature for scholars today, a latter-day version of that earlier vision of "scholars publishing for scholars." In the meantime, the advent of web versions of journals has meant that their production has increasingly passed to commercial, often transnational publishers.

THE BULLETIN

The Council's *Bulletin* (1970ff.) came into being as essentially a continuation of the AAR *Bulletin*,¹⁸ maintaining the same size and format and expanding the intentional umbrella nature of the latter to serve the even wider constituency of the Council. The Council's Task Force on Scholarly Communication and Publication saw a newsletter as "the major instrument of the socialization of the members of the profession" (MacRae 1972: 32). In 1977 the *Bulletin* was reaching some 13,000 of those members (Biallas 1977: 38). An early summary account of the *Bulletin's* features noted that, "besides serving as the information vehicle of the constituent societies on both the national and regional levels," the newsletter "provided details on grants and fellowships

of more than a dozen funding agencies, on more than forty conferences and symposia, and on more than 100 summer sessions and institutes."

Offprints of the *Bulletin's* annual Directory of the Constituent Societies were available on request (*Bulletin* 14 [1983]: 149). The Calendar on the back cover of every *Bulletin*, which listed upcoming meetings of the Council, its constituent societies, and various conferences, provided a ready point of reference. Limina, inaugurated in 1978 to track personal career announcements and deaths of society members, was a very popular feature for a time, with items submitted by the famous as well as the not-so-famous from all parts of the globe. As the "online" era was dawning, Robert Kraft's orienting article on computer literacy (1984) preceded his "Offline" columns initiated in 1984; as well as keeping the literate up to date, Kraft tutored (and encouraged) non-users and neophytes in the new technology and the opportunities it opened up. The *Bulletin* also provided space for Scholars Press and the Council's constituent societies to advertise their books and journals. During the Mercer University years, ads by commercial publishers appeared in quantity, informing scholars of new publications and, not incidentally, helping to offset the costs of publishing.

For a good many of the *Bulletin's* years, every word had to be typeset by Council staff from copy submitted in a considerable variety of forms ranging from professional to "casual." For many of those years the typeset copy was pasted up manually by staff. Along the way word-by-word proofreading was required. That so few typos or other errors occurred and that the format was so user-friendly is a tribute to the skill and dedication of Council staff. As the *Bulletin* entered the digital era, production became much simpler, of course (and proofreading less attentive).

As a recorder, voice, barometer, and shaper of the field—as well as ready provider of a cornucopia of news and information over several decades—the *Bulletin* performed an invaluable service, as is evidenced by its resuming publication in 1988 (Editorial, 17.1:2; 17/2: 43) after a three-year hiatus in favour of another such newsletter, *Religious Studies News*. That it will now find new life under other auspices is another indication of the same.¹⁹

RELIGIOUS STUDIES REVIEW

"The most bang for the buck" is the way Norman Wagner (1974: 2) characterized the change in the *Bulletin's* format from 6" × 9" to 8½" × 11", with a self-cover and saddle-stitch binding. By the same logic, *Religious Studies Review*, the new book review journal of the Council (1975ff.), appeared in the same format—a separate cover appearing only very recently. Walter Harrelson, who recruited and chaired the first set of area editors, provided a preview of the journal at its inception (1974). Dale Johnson (1999a), Mary Gerhart (1999), and I (Remus 1999) reviewed the origins and subsequent course of the *Review* in the 25th anniversary issue of the journal.

The *Review* was addressed to several concerns voiced by Welch and Harrelson as well as by the Council's Conference on Scholarly Publishing in Aurora, NY in 1971 and by the Council's Task Force on Scholarly Communication and Publication (MacRae 1972: 67-74). One was "the sheer volume of books being published by the growing number of religious studies scholars" (Remus 1999: 328). The book notes, numbering annually from 800 or 900 to 1,200 but in the late 1990s and early 2000s as many as 1,400, sought to bring a significant sampling of the annual outpouring of books to the attention of readers. State-of-the-art bibliographies were another means of tracking the profusion of literature. The regular listing of dissertations both completed and in progress addressed still another concern of the scholarly community—determining what was in the scholarly pipeline and avoiding duplication of research (MacRae 1972: 75-6). The review essays, which ran from 4,000 to 6,000 words, addressed another concern: lack of space for significant assessments, within fields, across fields, from more than one angle of vision, state-of-the-art, and retrospectively (Remus 1975: 63).

The journal also contributed to the recognizing and shaping of "a field of study" that Welch called for. The groupings of the book notes by fields and subfields both reflected and contributed to the way religious studies as an academic discipline was emerging. The book notes and the review essays reached across disciplinary lines; a persistent reading of the journal over the years would heighten one's awareness that there was a "field" of religious studies—"a field-encompassing field"—within which one practiced one's specialization (Remus 1999: 329). The professional affiliations of the editors, reviewers, and advisors marked the changing nature of the field, from confessional contexts to colleges and universities (*ibid.*). Their considerable numbers reflected the postwar expansion of the field (Johnson 1999b: 335-9).

The readiness of scholars to serve as editors²⁰ and reviewers, the growth of subscriptions both individual and library, the submission and supplying of review copies by publishers, and praise for the journal by various scholars (*Bulletin* 9: 7) indicated that the journal was filling a need.

By way of historical footnote,²¹ the use of computer technology, as noted above, was a *sine qua non* of the *Review's* functioning. Not surprisingly, given the volume of publications in religion and related fields, *Religious Studies Review* never replaced reviews in society journals, a possibility floated by some prior to its launching. Today, various websites offering reviews online, on a weekly basis constitute a latter-day successor to hard-copy book review supplements to society journals.

JOB AND PLACEMENT

Soon after the inception of the Council, the Academic Referral Service that the American Academy of Religion had been operating and had made

available to other societies (Reich 1970: 22) was discontinued except at its annual meeting (Reich 1972b: 35; 1972a: 19). In 1972 the Council initiated a job registry operated from the Executive Office: *Teaching Opportunities Information Listing (TOIL)*. Norman Wagner's ingenious, cost-saving method of publishing *TOIL* (with its whimsical covers) required institutions and individuals to type their camera-ready listing—offering or seeking employment or stating that there were no positions open—into a 1-3/8" x 5" box (brevity and succinctness were requisites), which they then mailed to the Office, where it was pasted into the 8 1/2" x 11" *TOIL*. Printed by a local firm, it was mailed to subscribers five times a year. Applicants and employers corresponded directly with one another. Among the advantages of *TOIL* noted by Robert Spivey, Executive Director of the Academy, was compliance with affirmative action programs as well as a signal that the field "desires an open job market" (Spivey 1973: 48). Later, at the suggestion of the AAR, a section entitled Faculty Exchange provided space for those wishing to teach temporarily in an institution other than their own to make that wish known (*Bulletin* 10: 163). The AAR and the Council early on sponsored a consultation to further the study of religion in Big Ten universities, which as a byproduct would (it was hoped) produce more jobs in the field (Spivey 1974: 1).

In 1980 the Council published a *Career Guide for Graduate Students in Religion* to assist graduates in finding jobs in a sellers' market. Bruce Campbell, the author, was a published religious studies PhD employed as a computer programmer. Employment outside the academy was one of the options explored in the booklet. Based on his survey of schools belonging to the Council on Graduate Studies in Religion, Campbell painted a grim picture of employment possibilities, tabulated openings by field based on *TOIL* listings, and then went through the A B Cs of job hunting (Campbell 1981). The steady sales indicated a persistent need as did the sundry *Bulletin* articles over the years on the job situation generally²² and on alternative vocations in particular²³ and the Council's plans to pursue the subject further (*Bulletin* 9: 134).

In time Scholars Press took over the listing of jobs and the running of a placement service at the annual AAR/SBL meetings. Job listings and placement services are today common on society websites and at annual meetings. *TOIL* and related initiatives sponsored by the Council can be seen as a tree scattering seeds, each sprouting and bearing fruit.

DEPARTMENTS AND PROGRAMS OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

In a new field, information on what was being taught, where, and by whom was crucial, to aid faculty and administrators in day-to-day work, to provide "comparative data for use in self-assessments and long-range planning," and to inform researchers of other persons working in their specialization

(Remus 1978: iii). For students weighing which institution to choose and for those counseling them, such information was also vital. Today, websites provide such information in detail. Before websites, hard copy in the form of a directory was needed; even into the web age, such a directory, in hard copy or online, has its uses.

A committee appointed by the Council drew on data from Claude Welch's studies of graduate and undergraduate departments and programs of religious studies (1971; 1972) to produce the Council's first edition of such a directory edited by Robert Wright based on responses to questionnaires sent to graduate and undergraduate departments of religious studies identified by Welch (1971: vii–xi; 257–65; Wright 1973: i–ii). To finance the next edition, only those institutions that purchased space for an entry were included (Remus 1978: iii). However, appendices gave the names and addresses of all the four-year schools in the United States and Canada with departments or programs of religion as well as those of the theological colleges. Faculty members listed in the entries for the participating schools appeared in an index. The thirty-eight pages of fine print devoted to these data (*ibid.*: 230–68) give an indication of just how significant the academic study of religion had become already in the early 1970s.²⁴ Subsequent editions provided similar tracking.²⁵

The response of two-year colleges to the questionnaire was meager at best, and subsequent editions did not attempt to canvas them (Remus 1981: iii). However, information on where to find listings and descriptions of these colleges and any religious affiliations was provided (*ibid.*). Also cited was the newly published Sleeper and Spivey study of such colleges, a project made possible through a grant to the Council and facilitated by the Council's Executive Office (Sleeper Spivey 1975: vii; cf. Brawer 1976).

Beginning in 1988, the Council for several years published a directory of faculty in departments and programs of religious studies in North America as a companion volume to the directory of departments.²⁶ The Council on Graduate Studies in Religion became an affiliate member of the Council in 1979, and the Council added to its publications *Graduate Studies in Religion: A Guide to the Programs of the Council on Graduate Studies in Religion* (*Bulletin* 11 [1980]: 33).

In at least one case the Council provided support to a department threatened by budgetary cutbacks (*Bulletin* 8: 125). In some cases the Council worked with university departments or institutes in publishing or in work on professional development.²⁷ In his first communication as President of the CSR, Walter Capps described departments as "the most important constitutive units within the field of religious studies" (1977: 37). Following the Wingspread Conference on professional development which he initiated (see below, Professional Development: Wingspread), articles on departments began to appear in the *Bulletin* (10.3ff.), and a standing committee of departmental chairpersons was instituted by the Council (10.5: 150), which

also began to convene an annual Caucus of Department Chairpersons at the AAR/SBL annual meetings.²⁸ Eventually, the AAR and SBL took over responsibility for the caucus (*Bulletin* 15 [1984]: 147; see below, Great Expectations: The "Super Society" and Identity).

ANNUAL MEETINGS

Only those of a certain age will have any memory of societies' annual meetings of yore, as described by eyewitnesses. There were giants in the land (i.e., the east coast), an elect few of whom held forth on their solo research projects and disputed their findings with one another while The Rest sat wondering at the erudite thrust and parry. As one of those giants put it, "Academic life is great, so long as they don't let in the riff-raff and don't raise the dues too much" (quoted in MacRae 1972: 13). As the historian of the SBL summed up the meetings of that society, "In substance it was an amplified faculty club, benevolently presided over by a cadre of senior and highly respected scholars who enjoyed proprietary rights among awed but ambitious junior colleagues" (Saunders 1982: 41).

The 1972 International Congress of Learned Societies convened under the auspices of the Council provides both continuities and contrasts. There were giants, but they came from all over the world and to a new land: Los Angeles. In addition to the giants, however, there were "others" on the program, in substantial numbers: thirty 9" × 12" pages of the elaborate Congress program book list solo papers as well as numerous collaborative research groups of the fifteen societies taking part in the Congress as well as forty-three pages of abstracts. It was a model already in place at the larger societies' meetings prior to the Congress. Present-day society members will recognize it as the current standard, whatever the society and the place. Members will expect to have seminar papers (or at least abstracts and/or detailed programs) in hand prior to their meetings, in contrast to the Congress where it was only the plenary addresses that were published by the Council, and that after the fact.

The Congress was envisaged as a harbinger of future joint annual meetings of all the societies in the field of religion.²⁹ It was not to be. Following the Congress, the Council organized two joint annual meetings of several societies (1974) and of the AAR and SBL (1975) with a single program book. From that point on Scholars Press organized the joint AAR and SBL meetings, having already taken over from the Council the maintenance of memberships and subscriptions for those two societies.

The *Bulletin* provided space for the programs of regional annual meetings of the societies, many of which were joint gatherings. The many pages devoted to these regional meetings indicated how important they had become—a confirmation of Settle's observation of "the increasing decentralization of scholarship."³⁰

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: WINGSPREAD

While the Executive Office looked after the Council's day-to-day business, it also worked with the Societies and the Council's committees in seeking to advance the development of the field. The committees varied in number over the years, from just a few at the beginning to as many as seven or eight at various times. Their names and functions also changed from one period to another. Liaison or Relations with Other Societies acquainted non-members of the Council with its work and extended invitations to join where the "fit" was right; it got serious attention because it administered the awarding of ACLS travel grants on behalf of the field. The Committee on Departmental Concerns and the Caucus of Department Chairs came into being in order to bring those involved at that level into conversation with one another through the *Bulletin* and/or at the joint annual meetings of the AAR and SBL.

The Committee on Research and Publications, the research aspect of which morphed into the Committee on Scholarly Development, played a key role in the Council's aim of fostering professional development. Very early on the Committee projected an ambitious state-of-the-art inventory of research instruments and resources in religious studies that would cover "traditional as well as emergent areas" and examine "whether established methodologies and conceptual foci in the several areas require modification"; the inventory was to be ready by December 31, 1974 (Funk 1973c).

It was not until 1975, when Walter Capps was appointed President of the Council with special responsibility for professional development, that that early vision began to take on substance (Capps 1975). Capps in many ways embodied "religious studies." Professor in an institution that became part of the California university system only in 1944, in a department avowedly distinct since its inception from divinity school models, Capps alongside his departmental duties had served as consultant and advisor to a number of religious studies departments. A theorist of religious studies, his teaching, research, and publications crossed disciplinary lines in order to understand "religion" in its diverse manifestations. His interest in the relation of the academic study of religion to the humanities as well as to the wider public sphere led in time to his hugely popular courses on the Vietnam War (noticed by the national media) and on religion and politics (taught with George McGovern)—often using technology to bring people into the classroom from far distances. He was appointed as Director of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Chairman of the California Council for the Humanities, President of the National Federation of State Humanities Councils (Biallas 1984), and, later, elected to the US House of Representatives, his term there sadly terminated by his untimely death (Lusby 1997; Reynolds 1997; Sturm 1997). Under his leadership, the Council joined the National Humanities Alliance, a lobby for the Humanities in Washington (Gerhart 1984) and established

various contacts between the Council and the academic bureaucracy in Washington, DC.

One of these contacts was with the National Endowment for the Humanities which, along with the Institute of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara and the Johnson Foundation, provided funding for a conference put together by Capps, a special task force he chaired, and the Council's Committee on Scholarly Development. Entitled "New Directions in Religious Studies," the conference would "seek to identify and explore present and future research needs in the field of religious studies and various subfields and disciplines, and then to share the findings with the CSR's constituent societies" (*Bulletin* 8: 94). It met February 16–18, 1978 at Wingspread, a Frank Lloyd Wright house converted into a conference center by the Johnson Foundation, near Racine, Wisconsin. Chaired by Jaroslav Pelikan, it resulted in a series of articles in the *Bulletin* by participants in the conference as well as supplementary pieces (*CSR Bulletin* 9/4; 9/5; 10/1; 10/2; 10/3; 10/4; 11/1; 11/3; 11/4; 11/5; 13/4; 13/5) and follow-up state-of-the-art reports by Mary Gerhart (1981) and Douglas Sturm (1981) on research in each of the Council's member societies.

The "new" in the title of the conference was not the "unified concept of the study of religion," loosed from confessional roots, that Claude Welch had called for at the inception of the Council. Nonetheless, as Capps saw it in reflecting on the conference, religious studies, now in its adolescence, was deliberately separating itself from "the fathers" (1978a: 42). That was evident in the reports from what Funk had called "emergent areas" in his 1973 proposal: Native American (Sam Gill), Women's Studies (Carol Christ), Afro-American (Jerome Long), New Religions (Robert Ellwood). However, most of the conference was given over to traditional areas "broadly conceived":

- Jewish and Christian scriptures (Gene Tucker, Wayne Meeks, Richard Hecht);
- history of religions (Ninian Smart, John Carman);
- anthropological and historical studies (Catherine Albanese, John Wilson, Jonathan Smith);
- interpretive studies, i.e., philosophy of religion, ethics, religion and literature, theology (James Wiggins, Max Stackhouse, Mary Gerhart, Bernard Cooke);
- social and psychological studies (Bernard Spilka, Donald Capps, William D'Antonio, M. Gerald Bradford).

Familiar issues such as the relation between theology and religious studies poked their head in the door as did one that was becoming increasingly familiar: the study of religion as seen by the social sciences and religious studies (Capps 1978a: 42). Religious studies was "alive and well," observed Capps, its practitioners with "more to do than they can do" and in many

fields evidently "clear about what they should or would like to be doing next" (1978a: 41). The field "has contributed—more than its proportionate share—to the vitality of the liberal arts programs of the colleges and universities" in which it is present.

In 1971 Welch had noted that "the educational escalator" that had been running in the late 1960s had slowed considerably (1971: vii). Participants at Wingspread were quite aware of "the present climate of the university, the 'public perception' of higher education, the vocational crisis within the humanities, the need to distinguish the foci of undergrad and graduate programs of study, the policies of funding agencies," and other externalities but retreated from addressing them directly (Capps 1978a: 42). Wingspread was thus a "needs inventory," asking how "the field might be strengthened from within."

The conference concluded with summary statements by Pelikan, Capps, Robert Michaelsen, and Jonathan Z. Smith. Harold Cannon, Director of the Research Division of the National Endowment of the Humanities, who gave the opening address, later stated that Wingspread "clearly ranks among our most successful, from many perspectives" (*Bulletin* 13 [1982]: 138). The conference addressed only one aspect of professional development, albeit with many facets. What its effect was, through what participants took home with them and from the *Bulletin* articles resulting from it, remains one of those unknowables.

Unknowable, too, is what direction the Council's efforts in professional development—or the Council itself—might have taken had Capps continued as President. His leadership had brought new life to the Council at a critical time in its history (see, e.g., his discerning outline of the roles and function of the Council and its identity in relation to its member societies; Capps 1977). However, there were structural and theoretical issues endemic to the Council since its formation that often kept it on the knife's edge of survival and went beyond what the best efforts of any one leader or group of leaders could achieve, as we see next.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS: THE "SUPER SOCIETY" AND IDENTITY

As the membership of the Council increased, the nature of its annual meetings changed, from a small group of societies of two voting delegates each, in which significant discussions were possible, to gatherings of thirty to forty delegates plus Council officers and staff. At the October 1980 meeting the by-laws were changed, reducing voting delegates to one per society with the possibility of one or two additional members from each society. The intent was that business matters would be dealt with more summarily and the remaining time devoted to substantive discussion of issues relating to research, to particular societies, the field as a whole, or "the academic community vis-a-vis various publics and government agencies" (Biallas 1980).

However, as chronicled in the *Bulletin* over the years, as Council memberships began to diminish, the meetings declined in frequency from biannual at the start to annual, in numbers attending, and in length of time, from good parts of two days to a day or half a day or less, with conversation given to recruiting other societies as members.

Member societies (including affiliates) came and went, peaking at fourteen in the late seventies and early eighties. Over the years a total of twenty different societies held membership (constituent or affiliate) in the Council:

American Academy of Religion; American Society of Church History; American Society of Missiology; American Theological Library Association; Association for the Sociology of Religion; Association of Professors and Researchers in the Field of Religion/Religious Education Association;³¹ Catholic Biblical Association; Catholic Theological Society of America; College Theology Society; Council on Graduate Studies in Religion; Institute on Religion in An Age of Science; National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion; National Council on Religion and Public Education; North American Academy of Liturgy; North American Association for the Study of Religion; Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, Society of Biblical Literature; Society of Christian Ethics (formerly American Society of Christian Ethics); Society for the Scientific Study of Religion; Theta Alpha Kappa.

For a number of years self-descriptions of these societies appeared in the *Bulletin's* annual directory of departments, fostering mutual understanding among the Council's members. The societies ranged in size from five thousand (and growing) to medium-sized societies counting one or two thousand to those with much smaller memberships.

Why these comings and goings? Personality differences were never far from the surface. Leaders also changed from one election or one generation to the next. More basic, however, was a growing sense of independence from the Council. As societies saw their memberships increase and their organizational structure became more rationalized,³² they found they could undertake, on their own, initiatives and functions once delegated to the Council.

The role of the two largest societies, AAR and SBL, has been prominent in this account. If they had reasons for leaving the Council, the medium-sized and smaller societies had reasons for joining and for staying. Despite (or maybe because of) their fewer numbers, these societies played essential roles in the Council, through their commitment to the vision and aims of the Council, their very significant contributions to the Council's annual meetings and its various committees, and the leadership provided by many

of their members. For these societies, sitting at table with equal voice with other societies both large and small brought recognition they would not easily have attained in isolation. As a member of one of those societies put it (e-mail 7.25.09), "For a small, new professional organization ... the collegiality and support we received from CSSR was of central importance to our final success." For the same society, "the greatest continuing benefit ... was access to the *Bulletin*. It was here that we were able to present ourselves" as well as "contribute our ideas to the profession." Similar views are voiced by a member of another society who played a prominent role in the Council (e-mail 7.15.09). Membership in the Council enriched the work of his society through interactions with other societies; but beyond that, collaboration with other societies extended and refined understanding of the role and study of religion in both the academy and society.

By 2009 only two societies—the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion and the North American Association for the Study of Religion—were still counted as constituent societies, with four others as affiliates (Catholic Biblical Association, Institute on Religion in An Age of Science, Council of Graduate Studies in Religion, and Theta Alpha Kappa).

Not coincidentally, the functions assigned to or undertaken by the Council also diminished over the years. The Council's role in managing the AAR/SBL annual meetings fell to Scholars Press beginning in 1976. At a landmark annual meeting in Washington, DC in 1984, where the role and function of the Council topped the agenda, the placement services represented by *TOIL*, the Council's publication, and the jobs registry operated by the Council and the AAR/SBL, were delegated to the latter and Scholars Press and any other interested societies (*Bulletin* 15 [1984]: 147; Harrelson 1985: 38). The Council's annual Caucus of Department Chairs, along with departmental matters generally, were handed over to the AAR/SBL and other interested societies (Harrelson 1985: 38). A profile of the field envisaged by the Council in cooperation with the AAR/SBL was also handed over to the AAR/SBL, which had the financial and administrative resources to pursue it (*ibid.*). Discussions following the meeting resulted in the suspension of the *Bulletin* on a trial basis in favor of a new newsletter, *Religious Studies News*, published by the AAR and SBL beginning in 1985 (*ibid.*) and then, after the *Bulletin* was revived in February 1988, continuing as their own organ, though most recently in separate AAR and SBL editions.

This diminution in the Council's members functions is reflected in the *Bulletin*. It grows thinner over the years as society reports and programs diminish in number and size. Two popular features—Summer Institutes and Limina pages devoted to who was doing what—shrink to almost zero along with paid ads. At the same time "think" pieces across a wide spectrum of the field increase in number, fostering dialog and exchange of ideas, one of the key purposes of the Council since its inception.

These developments stand in sharp contrast to the expectations—even excitement—felt at the inception of the Council. Robert Funk (1973b: 15–16) likely spoke for many at the time:

The weak position of Religious Studies generally among the humanistic disciplines has given rise, in turn, to the Council on the Study of Religion ... It is the time for high resolve and unprecedented cooperation in the field; CSR is the result of that sense of the time of the times ... It represents the end of an epoch and the beginning of a new one ... the end of isolated specializations, of confessional differences, of the pretense that the study of religion, to be respectable, must be hidden under the bushel of a neutral discipline, such as philology, psychology, or sociology ... the new willingness to identify the study of religion as a legitimate humanistic enterprise, with its own intrinsic merits and claim upon public support. It embodies the self-identity of the field in a new and vigorous form.

Claude Welch, as was noted above, envisaged the Council providing a "unified voice" for the field and coming up with "a unified concept of the study of religion"; he set down a long list of purposes and functions for the Council (Welch 1970: 4).

- (1) furtherance of scholarship in religion and encouragement of high scholarly standards;
- (2) exploration of and consultation on teaching in the field of religion;
- (3) development of nationwide placement facilities in the field of religion;
- (4) development of means for graduate and post-doctoral fellowship programs;
- (5) exploration of the needs of the field with regard to journals and search for ways to improve the situation;
- (6) maintenance of information on existing and planned academic programs in the study of religion;
- (7) encouragement for crossing of disciplinary lines and cooperative research in religion;
- (8) presentation of information on the scholarly study of religion to the various publics and to relevant private and government agencies;
- (9) fostering contact and cooperation with international and foreign organizations;
- (10) organization of professional meetings for serving needs both of constituent disciplinary and subject groups and the academic field of religion as a whole.

The Council's Task Force on Scholarly Communication and Publication added still another formidable list of "shoulds" (MacRae 1972: 9–11) for what it labeled "the Super Society" (*ibid.*: 36, 41). Expectations were great—almost hyperbolic.

At the same time, the Task Force cautioned against the Council's competing with its constituent societies (*ibid.*: 37–8), a theme that runs throughout the history of the Council as documented in the *Bulletin* over the years. If, beginning with the Welch report and iterated repeatedly in the *Bulletin*, an "identity crisis" in religious studies was on people's minds, with the field (or the discipline) variously assessed over the years as in its infancy, adolescence, or maturity, so also the Council struggled with the question of identity. It was to be:

- a full-blown service agency for its societies;
- publisher of books and journals; cataloger and catalyst of research, teaching, and professional development;
- shaper of religious studies as an academic discipline and advocate of such with university faculties and administrations, governments, and the general public;
- defender of departments during the perennial financial exigencies in post-secondary institutions and, more recently, their corporatization and the advent of "edubusiness"; and
- medium of communication among societies and their members.

Not least in thinking of itself, or in being thought of, as an "umbrella" organization (Capps 1977: 37; *Bulletin* 12 [1981]: 131; McCutcheon 2006: 5), the Council stood in tension with the AAR, a designation claimed for itself early on or attributed to it by others.³³

In the meantime, the member societies—large, smaller, or small—were learning, through membership in the Council and on their own, how to perform many of these functions themselves, thanks in no small part to the digital revolution. They learned, or re-learned, how to do membership services; publish books and journals; further research and teaching; conduct annual meetings that attended effectively to nuts-and-bolts as well as took note of and fostered growth of their particular discipline and subdisciplines; cooperated with related societies at national and regional levels; and engaged in various forms of advocacy.

As noted above, Walter Capps early on saw departments as the place where "creativity and expanding self-consciousness are nurtured"; they, rather than societies, were "the most important constitutive units within the field of religious studies" (1977: 37). Looking back at the forty years of the Council, one might not unjustly say that, alongside departments, it has been the professional societies in religious studies that were crucial, as they developed from what James Settle characterized as "clubs" into learned societies, with growth in numbers and functions that no one could have predicted and responding with creative initiatives to the challenges of ever-changing academic, cultural, political, and technological worlds. At the same time, in many cases it was within and because of the Council that its member

societies took new paths as they learned from and served one another and the field.

The Council itself had to learn, ever and again, what it was and what it was not in the view of its officers and its member societies. By the time of the annual meeting in Washington, DC in 1984 noted above, it had become increasingly clear that the Council was not in fact carrying out the many functions envisaged for it at its inception, nor could it do so. As Walter Capps had put it (1977: 39), the Council had "the capacity to become something of its own"; at the same time, as a federation of societies, it had "no true life apart from that secured for it by its members. Both situations pertain simultaneously." Put another way, as a creature of its member societies, the Council could command only secondary loyalties, with primary allegiance reserved for the societies themselves.

A change in name, setting the Council apart from any notion of its being a "society," soon followed the 1984 meeting, with *Council on the Study of Religion* becoming *Council of Societies for the Study of Religion*, by way of analogy to the American Council of Learned Societies (*Bulletin* 15 [1984]: 148). Council Chair Walter Harrelson summed up the Council's self-understanding at the time (1985: 38). It would:

function as a council of societies, providing a forum for the exchange of ideas, especially among the officers of the member societies, at the annual meeting. It would seek to stimulate discussion and debate on particular issues in the field of religious studies, not duplicating such debates as might better be carried out in one or another of the member societies, but watching that debate important to the whole field did in fact take place.

These aims characterized the Council during the Valparaiso years, pursued through the annual meetings, publication of the *Bulletin*, *Religious Studies Review*, and the *Directory of Departments and Programs of Religious Studies in North America*, and through its website, with membership services for those societies that purchased them. The Council's subsequent incarnation at Rice University was very similar. Ultimately, however, the many changes in the field, the seriously diminished number of members, and sheer economics led to the decision in 2008 to dissolve the Council, a process that Andrew Fort, the last Executive Director, completed in 2009 (Fort 2009). *Religious Studies Review* will be published by Wiley-Blackwell with editorial oversight at Rice. The *CSR Bulletin*, rechristened *Bulletin for the Study of Religion*, will be published by Equinox.

The Great Expectations set forth for and by the Council were likely not achievable by any single organization, especially a meta-organization, a loose confederation existing at the will of its member societies, and with internal goals and needs that could at times run contrary to the members'

goals and expectations, especially as these changed over the years. Yet, in the thicket of meetings, events, and initiatives that constitute the four decades of the Council's existence one long-time observer of the academic study of religion and its manifestations in professional societies discerned

the vital role of the Council, as both innovator and midwife. In a very real way, this role has meant that its departure should not be lamented, but accepted as part of the process that has seen member societies mature, not to mention the field itself. The very fact that in the end representatives of the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion and the North American Association for the Study of Religion could sit at the same table is a testament to the diplomatic role played by the Council, and also the inter-societal dialogue that the Council long supported.
(e-mail, May 1, 2010)

Camelot, the Council was not. But the vision of collaboration among societies representing quite disparate subject areas and interests and diverse ways of studying them, the ways in which the Council functioned to bring its member societies together to address the needs and aspirations of a nascent field as well as in quotidian matters of management, the Council's various publications including those with an afterlife such as the *Bulletin* and *Religious Studies Review*, and the many who worked to accomplish these various ends constitute a legacy that deserves to be honored—and remembered (like the Esther of old) for responding to such a time as this.³⁴

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

- 1969 Council on the Study of Religion founded (New York, May 10–11) and meets for the first time (Boston, October 6).
- 1970 Administrative matters handled for the Council by the AAR Business Office, Chambersburg, PA.
- 1970 First issue of the Council's *Bulletin*.
- 1972 Council's Executive Office established at Waterloo Lutheran (later Wilfrid Laurier) University; Norman Wagner, Executive Director.
- 1972 International Congress of Learned Societies, Los Angeles
- 1972 Council's job registry, *Teaching Opportunities Information Listing (TOIL)*, established.
- 1973 First Council *Directory of Religious Studies Programs Departments of Religion in North America* (Wright 1973). Subsequent editions, 1978ff.

- 1974 Scholars Press established at the University of Montana; subsequently relocates to Chico, CA and Atlanta.
- 1975 First issue of *Religious Studies Review*.
- 1975 Walter Capps appointed President of the Council.
- 1977 Harold Remus succeeds Norman Wagner as Executive Officer of the Council, Wilfrid Laurier University.
- 1978 Wingspread Conference, "New Directions in Religious Studies."
- 1984 Landmark meeting of Council, Washington, DC, resulting in significant restructuring.
- 1985 Name of Council changed to Council of Societies for the Study of Religion.
- 1985–88 *Bulletin* temporarily suspends publication, in favor of *Religious Studies News*.
- 1985–92 Executive Office at Mercer University, Macon, GA; Watson Mills, Executive Director.
- 1992–2004 Executive Office at Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN; David Truemper, Executive Director.
- 2004–06 Executive Office at Valparaiso University; Nadine Pence Frantz, Bethany Theological Seminary, Executive Director.
- 2006–09 Executive Office at Rice University; Andrew Fort, Texas Christian University, Executive Director.
- 2009 Council dissolved. *Bulletin* and *Religious Studies Review* find new homes with commercial publishers.

NOTES

1. In the course of its publication history, the *Bulletin* underwent a name change when the Council itself changed its name in the mid 1980s from *Council on the Study of Religion Bulletin* to *Council of Societies for the Study of Religion Bulletin*. In what follows it will be cited simply as the *Bulletin*.
2. Disclosure: I served as Research Associate for Welch's study *Graduate Education in Religion*, came to Wilfrid Laurier University in 1974 as assistant to Norman Wagner, Executive Director of the Council, while teaching part-time as well, and succeeded him in 1977 as executive officer of the Council and in 1978 as Director of Wilfrid Laurier University Press; I also served as Managing Editor of the *Bulletin* and as (first) Managing Editor of *Religious Studies Review*, 1977–85 (Remus 1975; 1997; 1999).
3. Norman Wagner (1979) provides a retrospective report on the circumstances of Settle's speech and the changes undertaken by the SBL and the AAR at that time.
4. Welch 1970: 4; see further MacRae 1972: 36–8.
5. Welch and Harrelson both later stepped in when steady hands, stout hearts, and wise heads were needed at critical points along the way (Mills 1991) as did Charles Reynolds.
6. Exceptions: the naming of the staff (all women) at the Executive Office of the Council when located at Wilfrid Laurier (Remus 1985: iii; 1999: 331, n. 23) and of Irene Palmer when the office was at Mercer and Pamela Gleason when it was located at Valparaiso University.

7. The increase in numbers and participation of women in the Catholic Biblical Association is noted by Jensen 2004: 15; Rossiter 2004: 7 notes the important role of Mother Kathryn Sullivan, R.C.S.J., after her election to the society in 1947.
8. For example, the ratio of women to men in the roster of editors of *Religious Studies Review* increased from zero in volume 1 to 48 per cent in volume 22; women authors of review essays increased from 7 per cent in volume 2 to about a third in volume 22 (Remus 1999: 329).
9. Catholic Theological Society of America: *Women in Church and Society* (*Bulletin* 11.2 [1980]: 47). Catholic Biblical Association: *The Role of Women in Early Christianity* (*Bulletin* 11.2 [1980]: 44–6).
10. Members of the Task Force besides MacRae, the Chair (p. 127): Harry Buck, Ronald Diener, Robert Funk, Robert Kleinhans, Robert Kraft, George Malone, Richard McCormick, David Moberg, John Peltz, Bruce Vawter, Norman Wagner, Claude Welch. Buck, Funk, Kleinhans, Kraft, and Wagner were credited with major responsibility for composing or coordinating the chapters (p. 126).
11. Wilfrid Laurier University Press became one of the leading university presses in Canada, marketing its wares globally. Waterloo became more than a nanospeck on the globe when two University of Waterloo graduates developed and brought to market a device called the Blackberry from an extensive empire located a few blocks from where I live. Ten minutes in the other direction (by car) are Old Order Mennonite farms and horses and buggies.
12. Mills, on retiring from the position, noted how dependent the Office was “upon the largesse of the host institution” (*Bulletin* 20.4 [1991]: 103); Truemper made similar observations (27.4 [1998]: 101–3); Pence Frantz, the next Executive Director, pointed to the advantages afforded the Council by moving to Rice University (2005).
13. See the tribute to him by Walter Harrelson in Saunders 1982: 64.
14. As Executive Secretary of the SBL (Funk 1971), as chair of the AAR’s publications committee (*Bulletin* 2.5: 22), and as chair of the Council’s Committee on Publication (*Bulletin* 4.3: 13).
15. *Horizons* (the journal of the College Theology Society), *Zygon* (for Institute of Religion in an Age of Science), the annual proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America and of the Society of Christian Ethics.
16. *Bulletin* 5.1 (1974): 19–20 provides a list. Robert Spivey, Executive Director of the AAR: “the learned society as publisher is now possible through the agency of the CSR” (1974: 30).
17. Saunders (1982: 91–2) provides some details on the early years. Some idea of the scope of Scholars Press’s operations at one stage can be gathered from the multi-page ads in the *Bulletin* and (from the announcement of a ten-day Institute on Scholarly Publishing at the University of Montana) its commitment to “firsthand experience in scholarly publishing” (*Bulletin* 8.1: 32).
18. John Schutz, the first editor of the Council’s *Bulletin*, expressed the gratitude of the Council to Gerald Larue and Robert Wright, the Editor and Managing Editor respectively of the AAR *Bulletin*, in getting the Council’s new publication launched (*Bulletin* 1 [1970]: 3).
19. Serving as editors or associate or co-editors of the *Bulletin* over the years were John Schutz, Norman Wagner, Leonard Biallas, Richard Busse, Russell McCutcheon, Timothy Murphy, John T. Strong, Craig Prentiss, J. E. Llewellyn, Scott Elliott, Matthew Waggoner, Rick Bohannon, Kristin Munk, and Craig Martin. Various society members stepped in at critical points as interim editors. The Council’s executive directors commonly served as managing editors, with staff of the Executive Office and Wilfrid Laurier University Press doing the typesetting and pasteup.
20. See the list compiled by Dale Johnson (1999b: 327) of editors, editorial chairs, advisory committee members, and the 61 area editors and 400-plus subeditors.
21. Also for the record, two societies expressed their faith in the future journal by providing seed money for the first year of operation: the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Christian Ethics (Remus 1975: 64).
22. *Bulletin* 10.5 (1979): articles by Lewis Solomon, Bruce Campbell, Walter Capps. Statistics and commentary from the Council on Graduate Studies in Religion, an Affiliate Member of the Council, on placement of Ph.D. graduates in *Bulletin* 13.1 (1982): 6–7; 14.1 (1983): 5–6. Later, Remus 1997; Desjardins and McCutcheon 1999.
23. *Bulletin* 9.3: articles by Walter Capps, Mildred Culp, Robert Spivey, John David Batsel, John Dart.
24. Included in the *Directory* over the years: type of institution; enrollment; name, address, telephone number, and (later) web address of department or program; name of chairperson and how to obtain a catalog or further information; degrees offered and number of religion majors and degrees conferred for the current year; brief description of the department; listing of faculty with data on rank and fields, on highest degree and institution granting it, year it was granted, and year of entry to the department. For institutions with graduate programs the *Directory* also provided data on kinds of degrees offered, kinds and numbers of degrees granted and kinds and numbers of graduates students in the current year; programs, requirements, financial aid, and research facilities; name of graduate advisor and how to obtain a graduate catalog and further information.
25. A Canadian *Guide to Religious Studies in Canada/Guide des Sciences Religieuses au Canada* (3rd edn, Anderson 1972) was published by the Corporation for the Publication of Academic Studies in Religion (now the Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion), a consortium of Canadian learned societies in the field of religion. The listings of religious studies departments and theological colleges are preceded by essays on religious studies in English and French Canada and in community colleges. With the appearance of the Council’s *Directory* no further editions of the *Guide* appeared.
26. *Bulletin* 17.2 (1988): 366: *The Council of Societies for the Study of Religion Directory of Faculty in Departments and Programs of Religious Studies in North America*, edited by Watson E. Mills: “complete biographical sketches of over 3,200 individuals who teach in the field.” For each: “1. Name, address, phone numbers; 2. institutions attended, degrees earned; 3. writings, honors, etc.; 4. employment history; 5. areas of specialization; personal information.” Discontinued in 1994 (*Bulletin* 23.4 [1994]: 95).
27. The Council in cooperation with the Department of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga published Thor Hall (ed.), *A Directory of Systematic Theologians in North America* (*Bulletin* 8.3: 68). The Institute of Religious Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, contributed to the Wingspread conference on professional development convened by the Council (*Bulletin* 9.2: 41), on which see Professional Development: Wingspread.
28. See, for example, the articles deriving from the third annual caucus by Lonnie D. Kliever, Steven T. Katz, Joseph W. Pickle, Jr., and Thomas H. Thompson (*Bulletin* 11.4).
29. For example, the College Theology Society reported in 1970, prior to the Los Angeles Congress, that its next annual meeting would be the last on its own (*Bulletin* 1.3 [1970]: 14); it later resumed the pattern of meetings of its membership alone.
30. Saunders (1982: 76) spells out how in one society (SBL) regional structures and meetings were no longer mere “appendages to the parent body” and through

decentralization fostered participation in the society; something similar was true in other societies, as a reading of the *Bulletin* over the decades makes clear.

31. These two societies merged in 2005 under the name Religious Education Association: An Association of Professors, Practitioners, and Researchers in Religious Education.
32. The annual Directory of Officers of the Council and its constituent societies in each February issue of the *Bulletin* is instructive in this regard.
33. Hart 1973: 5: "AAR is ideally suited to the morning that is dawning around us and hopefully within us. We are already an umbrella society ... the image of a huge tent commends itself ..." Funk 1973b: 15: NABI (AAR's earlier manifestation) "lost the character of a satellite group and became the most representative learned society in the field of religious studies ... AAR has endeavored to encompass all the major disciples and subdisciplines, including biblical studies in a humanistic context." Long and Gusdorf 2003: 57: "the presumptive parent group for all aspects of religious studies."
34. I am grateful to the following for reading a penultimate version of this piece and offering comments, corrections, and suggestions: Doreen Armbruster, Leonard Biallas, Richard DeMaris, Michel Desjardins, Scott Elliott, Andrew Fort, Mary Gerhart, Richard Hecht, Robert Kraft, Watson Mills, Nadine S. Pence, Charles Reynolds, Ladona Riegert, Douglas Sturm, and Catherine Wagner.

2. WHY A COUNCIL ON THE STUDY OF RELIGION?

Claude Welch

Why still another organization in the field of religion? The paradoxical answer is that there may already be too many learned societies in religion—too many to avoid overlapping in function and redundancy in action. Important areas are tended by none because they are assumed to be tended by everyone. There is no one to speak for the field as a whole, for the various scholarly approaches to the complex phenomena that can bear the name religion.

The purpose of the Council is not to replace these organizations, nor to get in their way or threaten their identity, but to assist them, to allow them to cooperate and coordinate, to identify areas of need not being met, to stimulate activities, and to provide some kind of unified voice for representing the still adolescent field of the academic study of religion to the various publics which need to understand it better—the academic, the political, and even the religious communities.

Beyond these pragmatic and organizational concerns there is perhaps an even more important function which a Council can serve. This is to assist in moving toward a unified concept of the study of religion. The unity implicit in Catholic- or Protestant- or Jewish-oriented studies is a thing of the past. A merely trans-confessional or "ecumenical" interest is also less than sufficient. The Council on the Study of Religion seeks something more. It arises out of the desire to recognize and shape a field of study, to find a new vision of the study of religion in which religious phenomena and religious traditions will be treated both in themselves, and in the widest possible cultural contexts. The Council, of course, is not a research agency but it will fall short of its purposes if it does not in some way assist its member societies and others with this large question.

Put more formally, the initial charter of the Council (which for purely practical reasons may yet need to be supplemented by articles of incorporation) states simply that the Council "shall initiate, coordinate, and implement projects designed to strengthen and advance scholarship and teaching

in the field of religion." From the early discussions, as many as ten different areas of concern have been specified: (1) furtherance of scholarship in religion and encouragement of high scholarly standards; (2) exploration of and consultation on teaching in the field of religion; (3) development of nationwide placement facilities in the field of religion; (4) development of means for graduate and post-doctoral fellowship programs; (5) exploration of the needs of the field with regard to journals and search for ways to improve the situation; (6) maintenance of information on existing and planned academic programs in the study of religion; (7) encouragement for crossing of disciplinary lines and cooperative research in religion; (8) presentation of information on the scholarly study of religion to the various publics and to relevant private and government agencies; (9) fostering contact and cooperation with international and foreign organizations; and (10) organization of professional meetings for serving needs both of constituent disciplinary and subject groups and the academic field of religion as a whole.

The Council emerged from a conference called by the American Council of Learned Societies to discuss the coordination of the activities of academic organizations for the study of religion. This conference convened in Princeton, New Jersey, in September 1968, with thirty prominent scholars in attendance. A "constituting convention" was held in New York City, May 10-11, 1969, with representatives from seven scholarly societies. Further details of the events leading to the formation of the Council have been reported in the October 1968 and May 1969 issues of the *Newsletter* of the American Council of Learned Societies, with which the CSR continues to work closely. The six learned societies, presently members of the Council, have now elected their delegates and pledged modest financial support. The first official meeting of delegates was held on October 6, 1969, in Boston, the second in New York City on May 6, 1970. Meetings were also attended by the Executive Secretaries of the societies and by other invited guests and observers (this pattern is expected to be followed for future meetings).

One outcome of the interests of the Council came even before its first formal session, viz., concurrent annual meetings in Boston in 1969 of the American Academy of Religion and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Those two societies, together with the Society of Biblical Literature and perhaps other societies, will meet jointly in New York City in October 1970. The Council is also taking a special role in planning for the International Congress of learned societies in the field of religion, to be held in Los Angeles in early September 1972. The planning committee for the Congress, of which Professor James M. Robinson of Claremont Graduate School is chairman, has been adopted as a committee of the Council. All the CSR constituent societies are expected to participate in the Congress, along with other American groups and several international societies.

This *Bulletin* is also a first-fruit of the Council. It is a successor to the *Bulletin* of the American Academy of Religion, which has agreed to invest

major support in the new *Bulletin*, and it will continue and develop the concerns of the former publication for a wider audience.

The Publications and Research Committee of the Council, chaired by Professor James Dittes of Yale, envisions the encouragement of other important organs in the field (including a book review journal to try to remedy the present generally low estate of reviewing in the field of religion). It is also charged to examine the whole state of scholarly publication in religion in America.

A Liaison and Membership Committee, chaired by Dean Walter Harrelson of Vanderbilt, is formulating guidelines for membership in the Council as well as for liaison with other societies in North America and Europe. There is no intention that the membership in the Council should be limited to the present constituent societies nor is it presupposed that all organizations in the field of religion would want to be members of the Council. The guidelines will be published in a forthcoming issue of the *Bulletin*.

A Committee on Placement, chaired by Dr. Harry A. Smith, Executive Director of the Society for Religion in Higher Education, is reviewing the difficult problems of placement and referral in the field of religion. An Executive and Finance Committee, chaired by the Council Chairman, will deal with housekeeping matters and will try to raise some additional funds for those activities that the Council seeks to encourage.

A further area of immediate concern for the Council is the development of more adequate interpretation of the scholarly study of religion to government agencies.

So far, the organization of the Council is simple and functional. It is my own conviction, and I believe also the judgment of the delegates, that the Council should strenuously avoid tendencies for its own structure and operation to become so rigid or highly formalized that other kinds of creative developments in the field will be hindered. The Council should combine a capacity for action with an openness to structural change and to new possibilities.

To put it another way, the Council is not going to seek to direct all new and important ventures itself but will be more concerned with setting policy, establishing priorities, clarifying functions, and promoting joint efforts. We shall try to think less of grandiose organization and more of the dynamics of effective coordination and cooperation.

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REINVENTING RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Key Writings in the History of a Discipline

Edited by
Scott S. Elliott

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INTRODUCTION

Scott S. Elliott

My, how times have changed (or stayed the same, perhaps). That is such a cliché, I know. But it is a phrase that has come to mind time and again as I have worked on this project. My first editorial for the *CSSR Bulletin* (2004) reflected on the break-up of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). Yet, in November 2011, following a trial separation, the two organizations again held their respective meetings on the same dates and in the same location (San Francisco, CA), albeit with very clear indications from both parties that the two organizations and their annual conferences were distinct. The oft-troubled waters of that relationship are symptomatic of a field that seems regularly out-of-tune with itself. This is not always a bad thing, necessarily, given the ways that such dissonance leads to critical reflection and fruitful production. Nevertheless, I suspect it is an aspect of the academic study of religion that causes our colleagues in other departments (to say nothing of those commoners wandering along the sidewalks outside our ivy-clad towers) to question, like the outsiders at Corinth (1 Corinthians 14:23), whether we are mad—and I dare say in more than one sense of the word.

Assembling this volume turned out to be a far more daunting task than I had imagined it would be when I first proposed it. The challenge only escalated when the publisher informed me that I was nearly 350,000 words over my limit. Tristan Palmer was very kind to extend me an additional 20,000 words, but I still had to do a good deal of paring down, and it was by no means easy. I was forced to let go some articles that certainly warrant a fresh audience, and that merit renewed consideration; essays that had remarkably astute things to say the first time they were published and that, perhaps, in some respects, have even more to say now. To my sincere chagrin, there now lay on the cutting room floor an essay by Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, on theology in the university (1993), to which Donald Wiebe offered a rather scathing but no less valid response (1994); a series of essays by Paul J. Achtemeier and Gene M. Tucker (1980), Walter Brueggemann and

Douglas A. Knight (1980), Ernest W. Saunders (1980), Gilbert Prince (1990), and Charles W. Hedrick (2002) on the Bible as literature and on the critical study and teaching thereof—issues of particular interest to me in light of my own areas of academic specialization (viz., Bible, early Christianity, and literary theory); a wonderful reflection by Burton Mack (2001) on the social role and even responsibility of religion scholars; and two essays by Robert Bellah (1998, 1999) taking up issues closely related to those raised by Mack. Similarly, there were memorable pieces by Walter Capps (e.g., 1978b, 1992) concerning matters of vocation, content, and message in the field of religious studies, which, like so many of the others I had to cast aside, would have enriched the conversation that is now only partly played out in the pages that follow. There were also pieces by Donald Wiebe on the politics of religious studies (1998) and Bruce Lincoln on “scholarship as myth” (1999) that first appeared in the *Bulletin* before being published subsequently in then forthcoming books. It is worth noting that the *Bulletin* offered, somewhat regularly, pre-screenings of soon-to-be-published work, as well as re-releases of previously published materials from other journals. This was never a matter of recycling so much as a concerted effort to broadcast and extend the reach of such work in order to fulfill what became, over the years, a fundamental objective of the *Bulletin*—namely, to facilitate dialog and conversation. It is important to point out that such discussion was not devoted solely to subject and content; countless articles devoted explicitly to the work of teaching had to be discarded. Pedagogy was a characteristic theme of the *Bulletin* throughout its history, and even those authors who did not address it directly almost always wrote with an awareness of both the classroom and the larger marketplace of ideas. The articles that populated the *Bulletin* exhibited a clear and consistent interest in guarding against so many forms of isolation that tend to mark the scholarly life, whether it be the separation of theory and practice, or of research and instruction, or of the academy and what some might regard as the “real world.”

It follows, then, that the *Bulletin* was also particularly adept at speaking to very contemporary issues from the perspectives of religious studies. Hence, it is unfortunate that I also had to cut a number of reflections on aspects of myth and ritual in and around the death of Princess Diana (see, e.g., Tite 1998). This event was yet another topic of keen interest to me because it occurred in the midst of my first semester in graduate school while taking my first course on—what else?—myth and ritual, with Russell McCutcheon, who instilled in me a deep fascination (if not an unhealthy obsession) with matters of method and theory. Fortunately, this trait of timeliness that was so typical of the *Bulletin* can still be seen, for example, in the essays responding to September 11, 2001, which, I think it is fair to say, left all of us (scholars of religion, that is) in a state of existential crisis pondering the seismic shifts that had been thrust upon our discipline, and which continues to impact our work.

But enough about what might have been. What you hold your hands is much more, in terms of quality rather than quantity, than a compilation of articles and essays previously published in the *Bulletin* as one of two serial publications of the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion (CSSR) over the course of its nearly forty-year history. These short pieces represent remarkably insightful snapshots highlighting important trends and developments in the field of religious studies, key debates that have influenced the shape of the field, and critical reflections on the practice of teaching within this discipline.

Although the book draws exclusively from the journal (i.e., aside from the history of the CSSR by Harold Remus, which was commissioned specifically for this volume), the collection is concerned only secondarily with celebrating the history and work of the Council itself. The primary aim is to put into wider circulation a treasure trove of articles that are historically significant in their relationship to the reinvention of the field (primarily, though not exclusively, in North America), and that also are of contemporary value on account of their engagement with topics of ongoing relevance. It does this in a format that will ease accessibility and encourage use in research and teaching. The scope of topics addressed in the pages of the *Bulletin*, and now put forward with new emphasis in this collection, demonstrates how this seemingly marginal publication has been at the center of ongoing debates. *Bulletin* contributors have weighed in on these debates in diverse and substantive ways, both directly and indirectly.

The main focus of the *Bulletin* was never research in the usual sense. Hence, the journal was not driven by limited areas of academic specialization. Rather, by virtue of serving a rather diverse consortium of scholastic societies, the *Bulletin* always covered a broad range of topics of relevance to a variety of readers. Now, republished in a collection such as this, these articles become primary sources in their own right and document a conversation spanning four decades, offering readers a unique opportunity to see what was deemed important at various periods, and what remains relevant and important today.

The question, of course, that one is faced with when compiling a “best of” collection, and the only means by which to evaluate four decades of material and to determine which makes the cut, is this: “The best *what?*” What exactly does “best of” mean? By what standard is this designation of “best” assessed and affixed? As someone who studies narrative theory, I am quick to recognize the fundamental relationship between narrative and selection, and between selection and ideology. In the end, my rationale for the selections was based on what I perceived to be their relationship to the field of religious studies itself and to one another in that regard. In other words, given the fact that the history of the CSSR as an organization closely parallels the history of the academic study of religion as a field in the United States, I sought to identify articles that reflect and/or address directly defining currents of our discipline, and that also, by extension, continue to shape its

identity. Curiously, a project like this, selecting the best essays from among hundreds, like picking teams on the playground at recess, causes me greater anxiety than publishing a monograph composed of my own thoughts and words alone.

The articles that follow were selected and are loosely arranged on the basis of their relationship to three themes—debates, trends and developments, and teaching religion. The academy is nothing if not a forum for debate, and the field of religious studies is a veritable hotbed in this regard. The *Bulletin's* style allowed writers to speak more freely than is often the case in more traditional academic journals. This has generated a lively discussion of the most fundamental concerns of the field. My intention has been to gather together articles that trace some of the most significant of these debates and thereby offer readers primary material for assessing how the field has taken shape. In thinking about trends and developments, I asked: after forty years, what lingers with us still, whether for better or worse, intentionally or unintentionally? The ongoing nature of the conversations woven throughout each issue of the *Bulletin*, the way certain matters surface time and again, indicates not only that there is an inherent complexity to the things we study in the field of religion, but also that our relationship to them, our identity as scholars of religion, is equally complex. Revisiting various matters at different times says as much about the nature of certain historical moments as it does about the matters themselves. Finally, with respect to teaching religion, I was not interested so much in assembling a collection of tips but a critical exploration of what it means to teach religion, particularly in a liberal arts curriculum, a consideration of how the introductory course, for example, positions the field, and how all of our courses often do as much to create the data as to convey it.

I quickly realized, however, that to limit myself to only three sections would not only be arbitrary and forced at times, but, more importantly, that it would be in fact problematic and counterproductive. The aforementioned themes are too thoroughly integrated in the *Bulletin's* contents. Contributors far more often than not wrote with an eye toward all three of these themes, and the breadth of discussion reflected the nature of the Council's makeup. Therefore, I decided to divide the articles into seven sections, organizing the articles within each section more or less according to the order in which they were published. In my judgment, these sections capture both the general themes mentioned above and some of the more specific aspects thereof. The chronological arrangement, meanwhile, will afford readers a fine opportunity to see recurrence, development, and change. Readers will, no doubt, discover a great deal of overlap between the sections, which befits the nature of the material. But the smaller sections will make the collection easier to navigate and more suitable for classroom use.

In the majority of these articles there is a clear sense of urgency and passion. That is not to suggest that one will not encounter similar verve

in journal articles focused on some disciplinary specialty. But it is rarer, given the inclination toward presumed objectivity, neutrality, and factuality. *Bulletin* articles, however, are almost always consciously and explicitly about something much larger, something to do with the field of religious studies itself, with the humanities in general, with the world of academia, and with the public intellectual *in* society.

Republishing these articles here not only invites a fresh appraisal of what they have to say, but also repositions them as data in their own right. Of all the many topics and themes touched upon by *Bulletin* contributors, the recurring interest in method and theory stands out to me most. This interest in method and theory is integrally intertwined with matters of definition, ideology, and so on. In a recently published "critical manifesto," authors Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood (2011) reflect on the life of theory and "methodolatry" in relation to biblical studies. At one point, the authors remark, "what defines the biblical studies discipline is less that it *possesses* method than that it is *obsessed with* method and as such *possessed by* method" (*ibid.*: 33). The same could be said of religious studies generally, as reflected in the essays that make up this volume. What is more, this obsession with issues of method, theory, and definition betrays a certain anxiety over self-identity. In their chapter on "The Invention of the Biblical Scholar," Moore and Sherwood point out that "biblical scholarship is itself a secret, or secretive, enterprise" wherein biblical experts "debate the *problems* of the biblical text" (*ibid.*: 79). "[T]he insistent positing of problems in the biblical text also became the incipient gesture of orthodox biblical scholarship and remains the signal trait of the biblical professional" (*ibid.*: 80). These problems "are also ... a delight to the biblical scholar, for the whole point about problems is that they require professional expertise" (*ibid.*). In other words, we make the problems that make us, and the present volume is very much about the making of us, a sort of collective autobiography, if you will.

These matters of method, theory, and self-identity go hand-in-hand with issues of language and definition. I just finished reading *Loaded Words* by Marjorie Garber (2012), which is a cross between Raymond Williams's *Keywords* (1983) and Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* ([1957] 2012). Garber takes up a diverse array of topics (e.g., *Mad Libs*, Shakespeare, "honey traps," and academia, to list just a few) in order to argue "that saturation of language and saturation of thought are qualities of paramount importance, and that teasing out the myriad and sometimes antithetical implications of the terms we use is part of the necessary, deeply pleasurable work of the mind" (Garber 2012: 5). It is, in other words, the work of criticism, which Williams rightly described as "a very difficult word" over thirty years ago (1983: 84), a sentiment that, I think, has been illustrated and argued both eloquently and persuasively by members of our own guild (see, e.g., J. Z. Smith 1998; Lincoln 1999; McCutcheon 2001).

The point I most want to make is simply that all of these issues are inextricably connected and interrelated. We cannot address one without positioning ourselves in relation to another. As they are assembled here, the essays that make up this volume are less about religion than about the field of religion and about those of us who occupy it. This is a volume of fieldwork. It traces the contours of the ongoing negotiation and transformation of land into territory (cf. J. Z. Smith 1978), the making of our field, whereby we have turned undifferentiated space into bounded and productive place. But with the agricultural dimensions of the term come also both military and ludic associations. The field is the ground on which a battle is fought, an area where something deemed valuable is either won or lost. There is something at stake here, and determining the stakes is itself part of the fieldwork in which we continue to engage.

I doubt it is a stretch to say that the majority of “proper” academic journals go mostly unread. Most of us, I suspect, peruse the contents, scan an article or two, perhaps read a couple of books reviews (at best), and shelve them, where they remain neatly stacked until research requires that they be consulted. In fact, when I moved into my new office three years ago, the first thing I did was to pitch three shelves worth of “proper” journals into the recycling bin. The *Bulletin* was the first journal I began reading regularly as a graduate student. For starters, I found the publication immensely readable. The topics and approaches of the articles were relevant and engaging. But most of all, to be quite honest, I found the tongue-in-cheek, often irreverent, satires of the fictitious “Reed M. N. Weep” delightfully refreshing in contrast to the stodgy writing that dominates our profession. But it was not simply a matter of having a good laugh. Rather, it was a challenge to not take ourselves quite so seriously, and yet at the same time to pause and consider so many of the assumptions we continue to maintain (e.g., concerning what counts as legitimate scholarship, professional activity, etc.). Weep’s comical spoofs epitomized succinctly what others writing for the *Bulletin* were already doing on a larger scale and (usually) with a straight face.

Historically, *Bulletin* authors have always written for their colleagues in the field of religious studies. The style of writing, however, lends itself to a diverse readership, in terms of both disciplinary specializations and career level. My hope is that *Reinventing Religious Studies* will be of interest to researchers (particularly those concerned with issues of method and theory, and with the history of the discipline), as well as to junior faculty still crafting their introductory courses. Furthermore, by functioning like a “reader” that surveys the last forty years of the field, the book will ideally provide a valuable resource for capstone courses with undergraduate majors in religion, and first-year seminars for graduate students.

Space requires that I keep this introduction short. Although there is a great deal more I would like to say, the articles will have to speak for themselves, both individually and as a collection.

I want to extend a sincere word of thanks and appreciation to four of my students at Adrian College—Autumn S. Hernes, Zachary Wilson, Sarah Selden, and Alex Noelke—without whom this volume might well have never seen the light of day. These four did an exceptional job of helping me to prepare the volume for publication, even while managing their coursework and other responsibilities. Autumn handled nearly all of the initial conversion of PDFs to Word documents; Sarah single-handedly developed a comprehensive style sheet job list that ensured all of us stayed on task and avoided unnecessary detours, mistakes, and whatever else; and she, together with Zach, devoted countless hours to proofreading and editing the articles according to style requirements. Later, Zach and Alex dropped everything the first week of the semester to review first proofs, and their keen eyes spotted plenty that may have otherwise been easily overlooked. I also want to thank Russell McCutcheon and Andrew Fort, the former for first introducing me to the *Bulletin* nearly twenty years ago when I was a graduate student wandering the halls outside his office, and both for their encouragement to do this project. I am deeply indebted to Harold Remus for his willingness to write such a rich, comprehensive, and astute history of the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion. Finally, I raise a glass to Janet Joyce, Valerie Hall, and Tristan Palmer of Equinox Publishing Ltd., and Hamish Ironside, Gina Mance, and Kate Williams of Acumen Publishing Ltd., for the opportunity to publish this book, and especially for their assistance and unbelievable patience throughout the process.